



## **The Absent Boy**

Rajib has nightmares and hides a secret that he doesn't know how share. Will anything change when his brother visits?

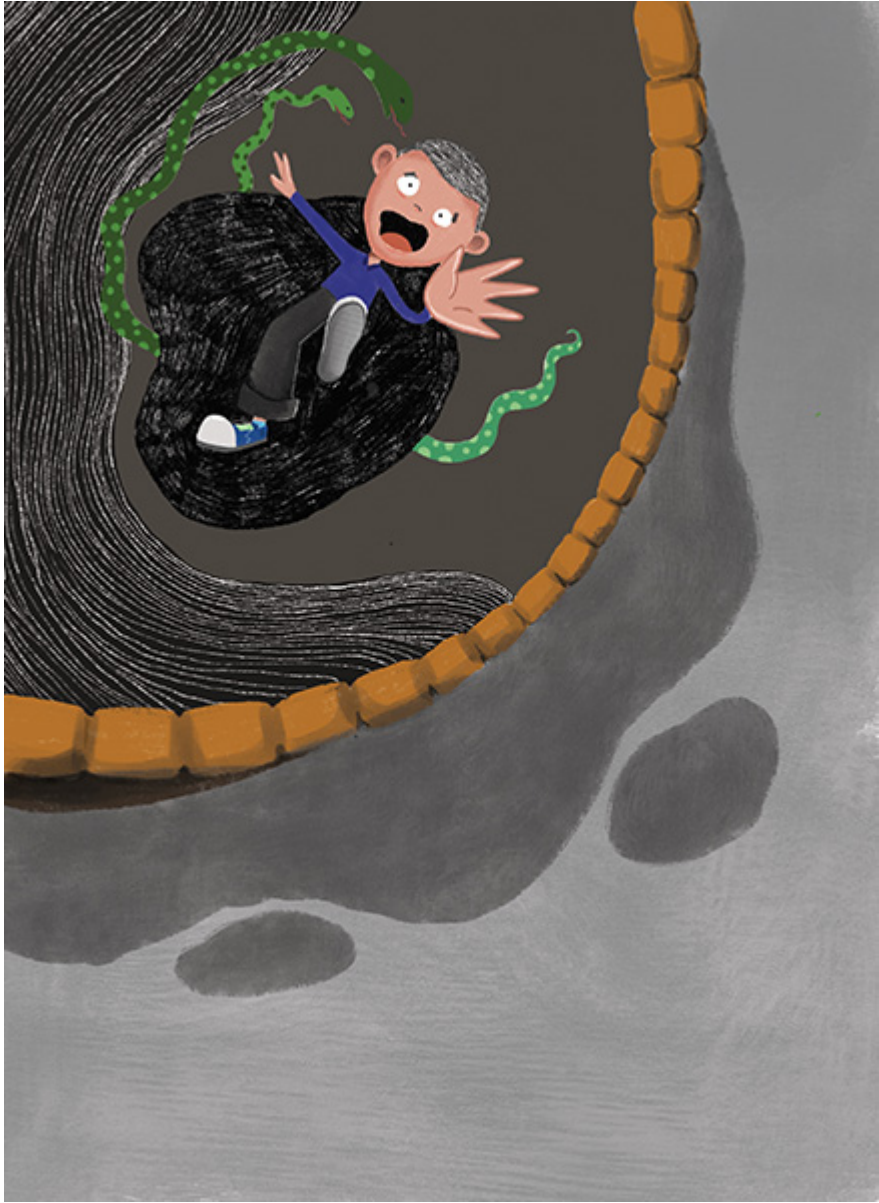


The Absent Boy  
Bina Theeng

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# Let's Read

 **The Asia Foundation**





“Rajib! Rajib!”Rajib hears someone call his name. When he lifts his head, he sees that he is lying in the bottom of a deep well. His mother is looking down at him and screaming his name.



“Mommy!” Rajib yells out in a panic. He takes deep breaths. “Babu, what’s wrong? Why do you look so frightened? Was it a nightmare?” Rajib’s mother asks.





Rajib looks around. He realizes he's in his bedroom. "Babu, it's time for school. Wash up and come eat something." His mother combs through his hair with her fingers, then walks towards the kitchen.



“Rajib! What's taking you so long?”





“Mom, is it true that I look like my grandfather?” asks Rajib. “Yes, your nose, ears, and mouth are like his,” she answers. “And did people tease grandfather?” he asks. “Not that I know of. Why do you ask?” she says. “No reason,” replies Rajib.



After breakfast, Rajib heads out to school, but he only makes it to the front of the schoolyard. Something makes him turn around. He goes back into his room and shuts the door. He spends the entire day in his room. When Rajib's mother asks him why he isn't at school, he says he feels unwell.



In the evening, Rajib finally leaves his room. He goes up to the terrace and stands there for a long time. The sun is setting. He feels like he is drowning. He holds his breath.





The next day, Rajib goes to school. But...





...he spends most of his time by a creek next to the school. He picks up small rocks and flings them across the surface of the water. As soon as he hears the last bell ring, he heads home.



In the evening, Rajib does his schoolwork. “Mom, when I’m older, I will grow my hair out,” he says. “Why do you want longer hair?” His mother asks. But Rajib doesn’t say anything.



Rajib starts skipping school.



Rajib's mother notices that he stands in front of the mirror for long periods of time. He sometimes pulls at his ears and twists them. Sometimes he pulls at his hair to try and cover his ears. When he's alone, she finds him staring off into space.





Every evening, Rajib goes up to the terrace and stands there until dark.

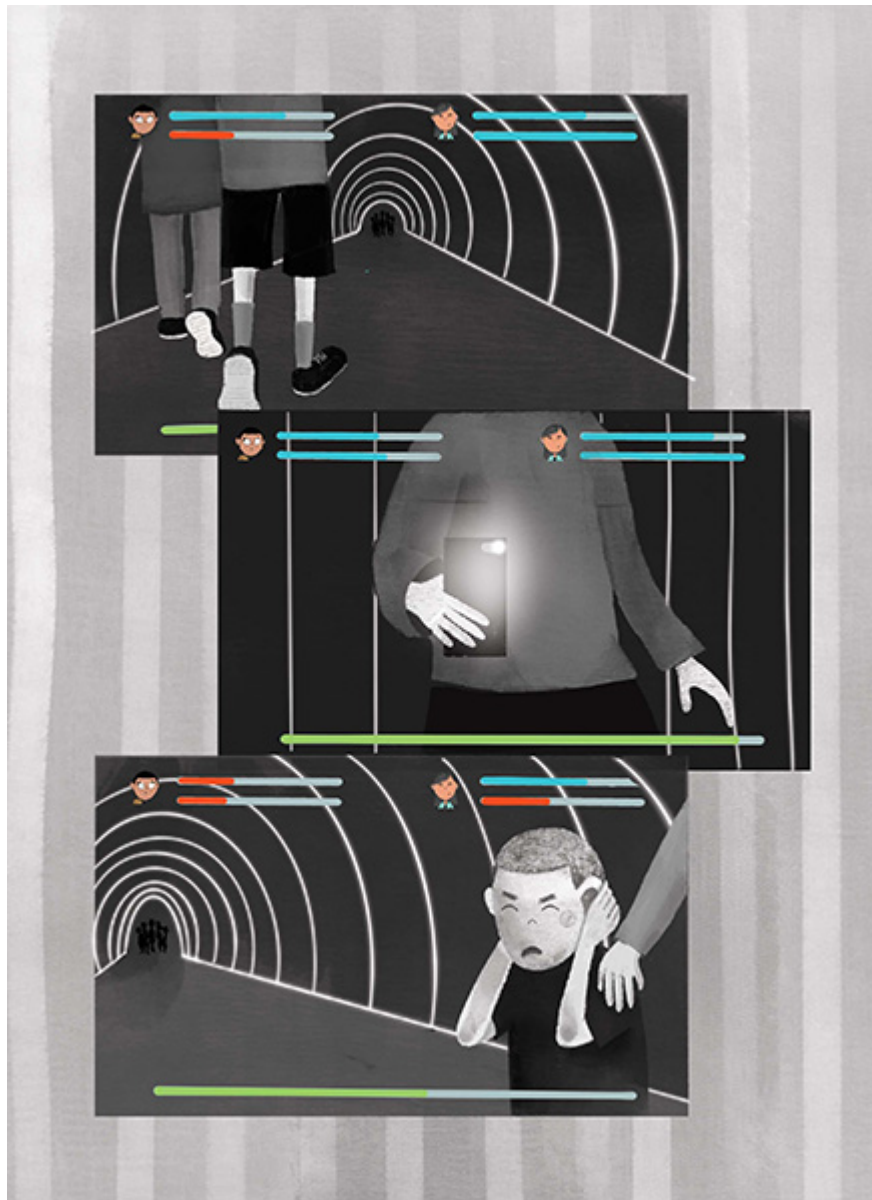


One day, Rajib's brother comes to visit from Australia. He brings a gift for Rajib.



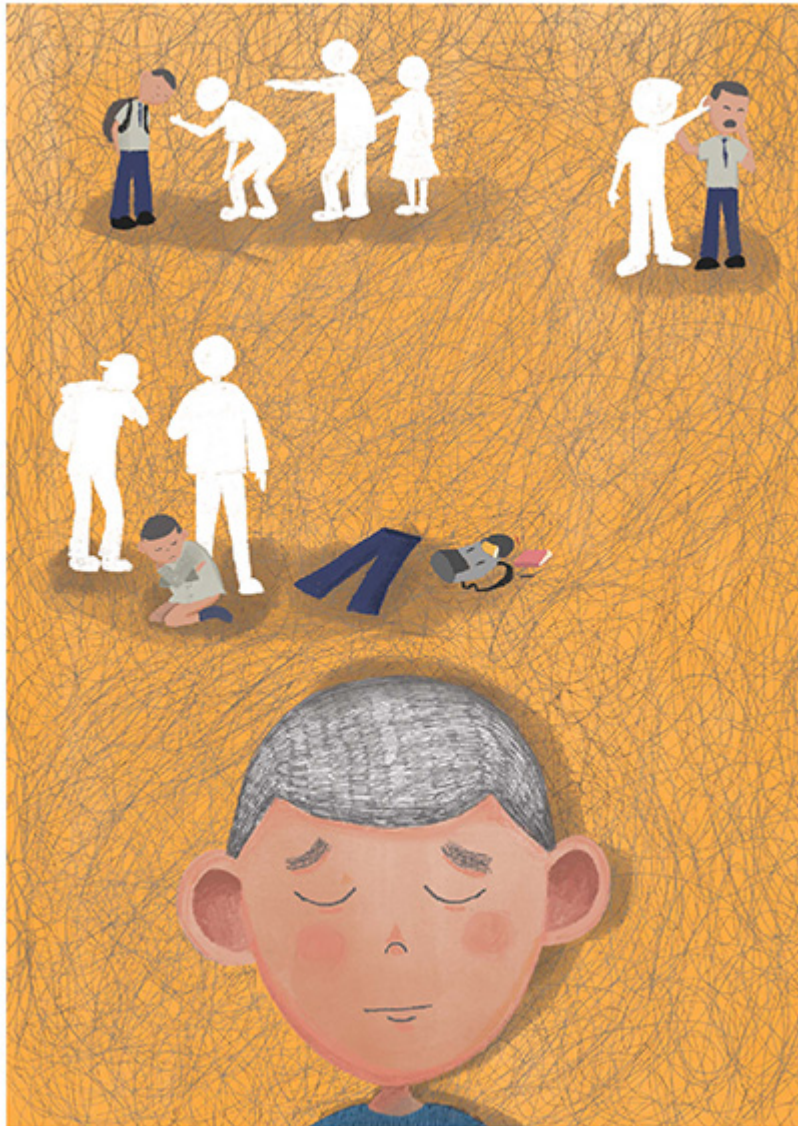
The brothers play video games late into the night. In one of the games, they enter a tunnel. Rajib's brother holds Rajib's hand. "Bhai, it's pretty dark in here, are you scared?" he asks. "No, I only get scared when I'm at school..."





Rajib's brother turns on the flashlight on his phone. Suddenly their enemies appear. Rajib is shocked. Their opponents are his schoolmates! "Nooo! How did you guys find me here?" Rajib screams.

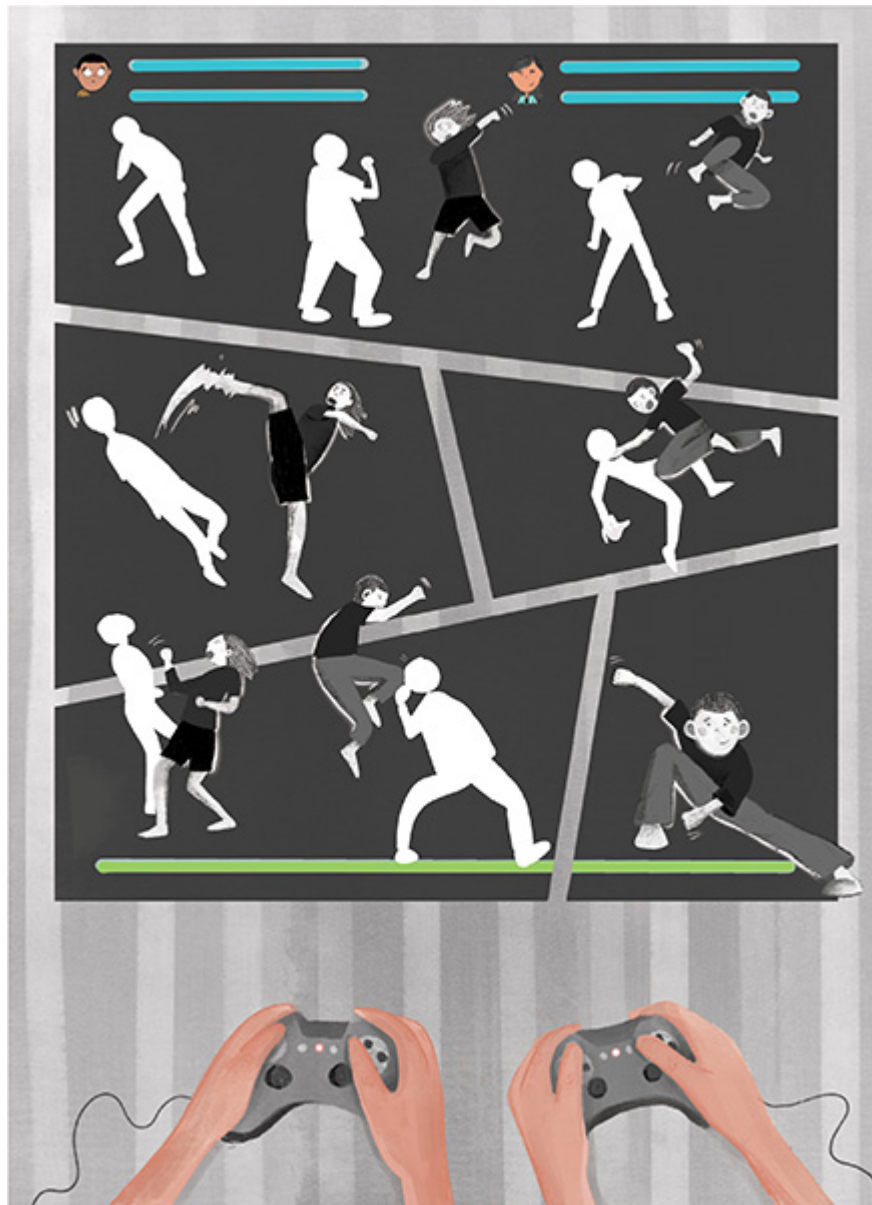




“Bhai, what happened?” Rajib’s brother asks, worriedly. “Dai, these kids pull my ears and call me ‘rabbit.’ And that boy named Bhola over there, he makes me take my pants off whenever he finds me alone in the bathroom.” Rajib begins to tremble.



Rajib's brother opens his mouth to speak but no words come out. Shaking his head, he finally manages to say, "This is horrible! My little brother is having such a hard time and I have been so far away." He hugs Rajib and says to him, "But don't worry, bhai. You no longer have to be afraid. I will go to your school first thing tomorrow."



"For now, come, let's get these bad guys!"





Rajib and his brother fight in the tunnel. When they beat the enemies on screen, they celebrate.





The next day Rajib's brother goes to school with him. Together they tell the teacher about all the bullying and mistreatment that Rajib has been enduring at school. The teachers call Rajib's classmates into the office. "Sorry, Rajib. We won't hurt you again," they promise.



After that, Rajib goes to school regularly. A month later, his brother leaves for Australia. Every Saturday, Rajib and his brother meet online to play video games. While they play, they talk openly about their day and the good and bad times they experience.



Wonderful Wordsbabu - a term of endearment for a little child, especially for a little boy, in the Nepali language  
bhai - younger brother in Nepali  
dai - older brother in Nepali

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