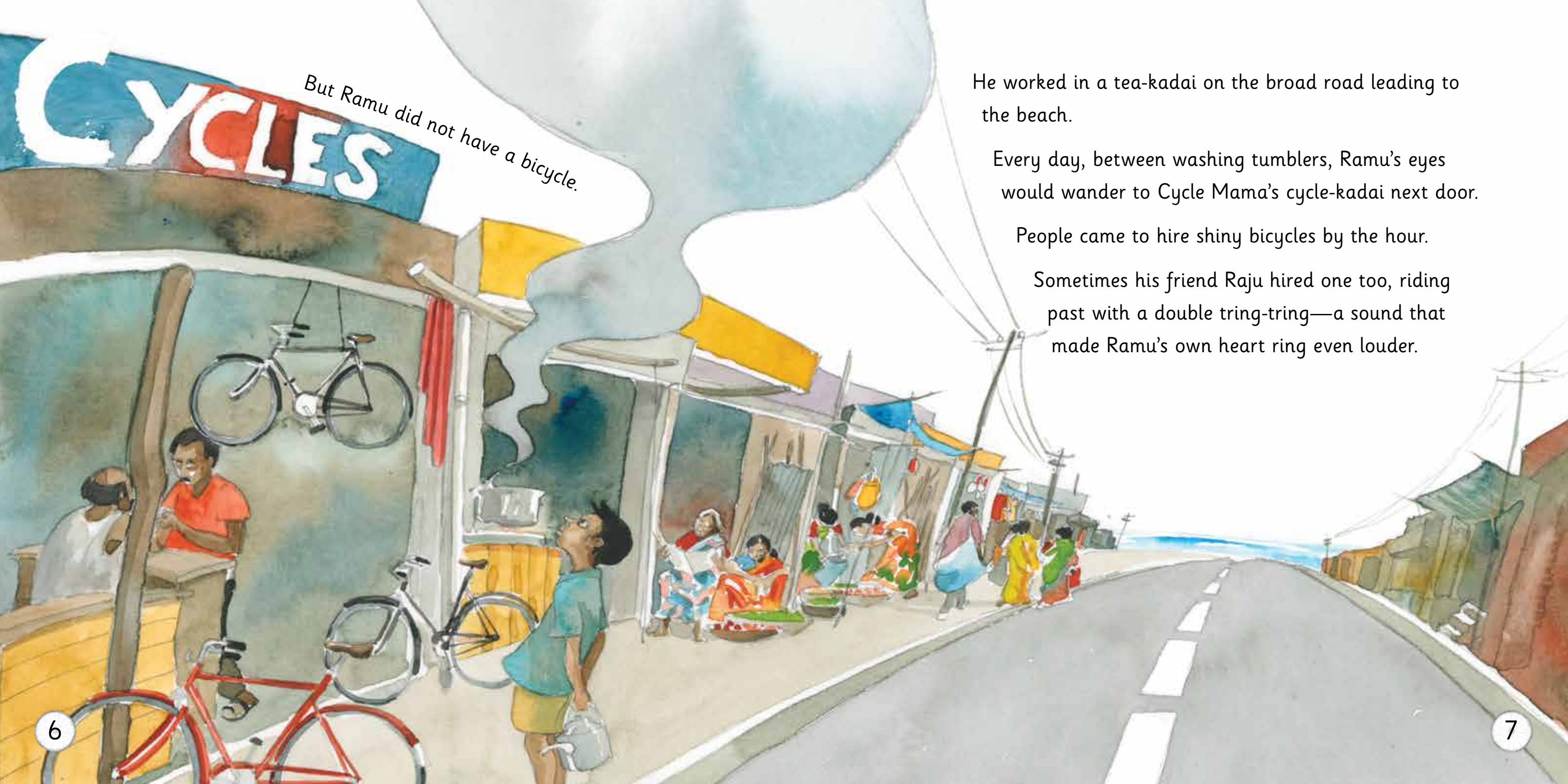


*Imagine! thought Ramu.  
Imagine me on that bicycle!*



*The wind on my face,  
the air rustling my eyelashes,  
as I pedal faster and faster and faster.  
Just imagine!*



*But Ramu did not have a bicycle.*

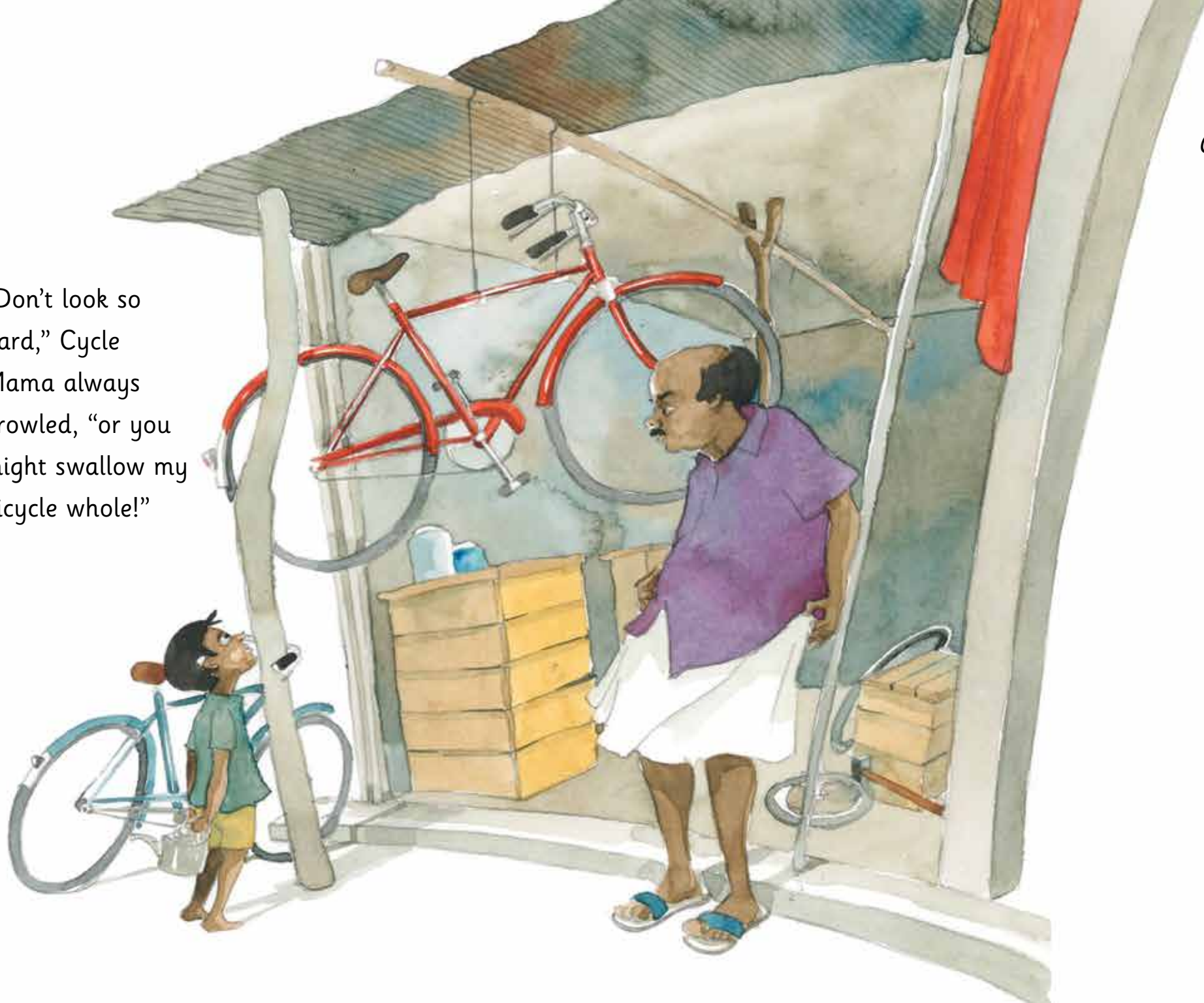
He worked in a tea-kadai on the broad road leading to the beach.

Every day, between washing tumblers, Ramu's eyes would wander to Cycle Mama's cycle-kadai next door.

People came to hire shiny bicycles by the hour.

Sometimes his friend Raju hired one too, riding past with a double tring-tring—a sound that made Ramu's own heart ring even louder.

“Don’t look so hard,” Cycle Mama always growled, “or you might swallow my bicycle whole!”



Ramu smiled shyly.

*Could I ask him? Maybe just once?*





Ramu's eyes went  
from bicycle to bicycle . . .

big ones, small ones . . .

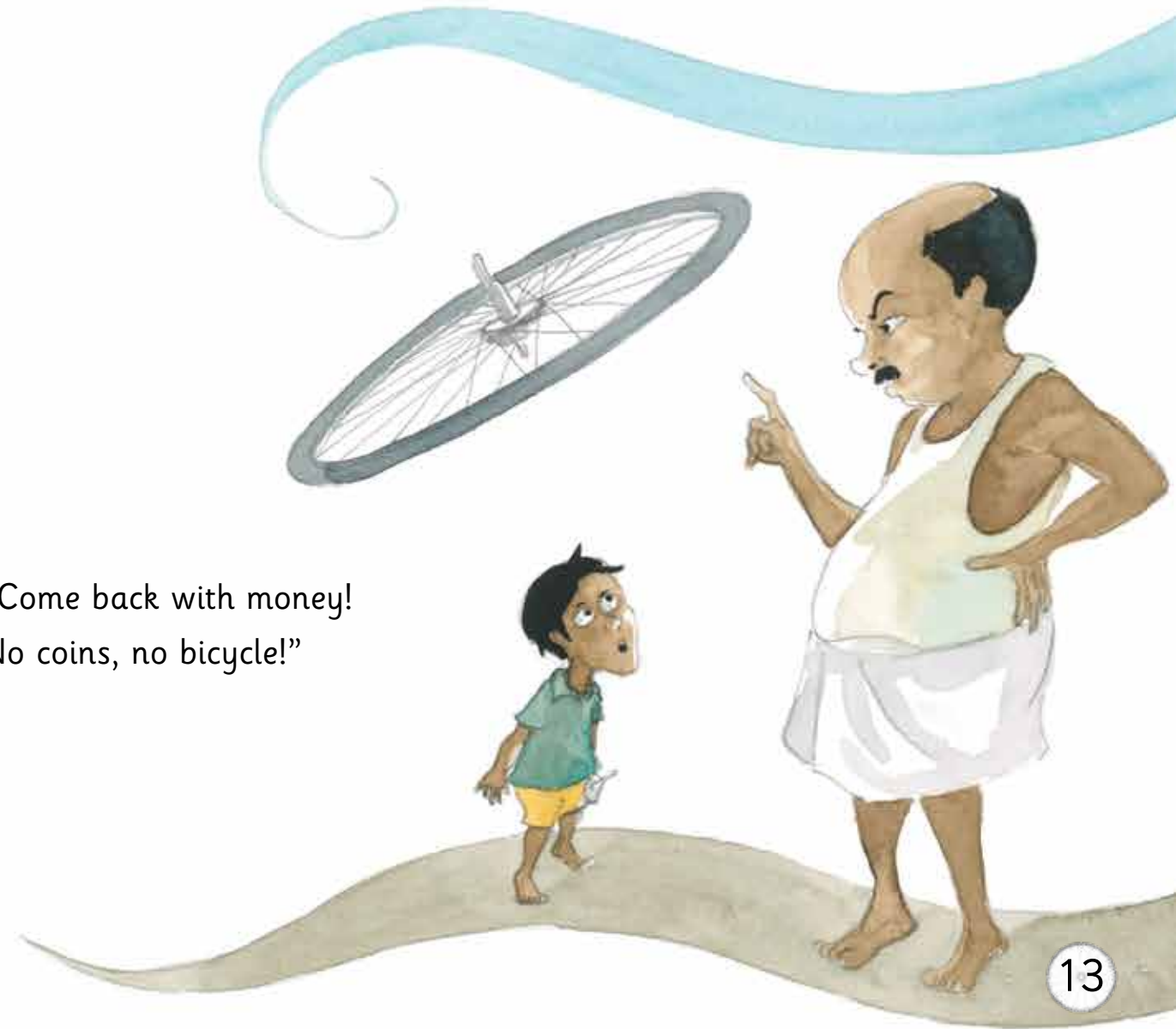
one with a carrier, one with a  
slightly bent handlebar . . .

another with a rusted lamp . . .

And his favourite—the one with a pink basket painted with crooked yellow flowers!



“Oi! Next time I will charge you for looking!” Cycle Mama said, with a quick glance at him.



“Come back with money!  
No coins, no bicycle!”