

World Vision



**It takes me**  
to end gender-based violence against children



suffeRing!



## National Director's Foreword

As I pen this foreword for 'SuffeRing', it is heartbreaking that child marriages are still a reality in this 21st century. This publication is telling in that we have failed thus far in our efforts to keep children from becoming victims of this curse. Even as you read this, 22 underage girls are being married off globally per minute. That is 12 million girls married off each year before their 18th birthday. This is a particular challenge here in Bangladesh, where the current rate of child marriage stands at 51 percent as per the UN!

In the past 1.5 years, the coronavirus pandemic has devastated almost every facet of human existence for the most vulnerable children and families. In the midst of this human suffering, we need to remind ourselves that some of those most affected are underage girls in Bangladesh. As more families slip into poverty, with no opportunities for formal schooling, families are forcing these girls into marriage in order to stave off starvation and thus depriving them of the future they deserve.

World Vision is committed and has always stood for the protection of children. During the pandemic, we maximized our efforts to address this humanitarian crisis. Our Child Forum members, in the face of resistance and harassment, have stopped more than 800 child marriages across our programs/projects in the last three years. Our priority is to ensure the continued protection of the Child Forum members and all girls.

This is an endeavor we cannot undertake alone. Although the child activists have proven themselves capable time and again, now, more than ever, they need our support. We call on our donors, partners, government agencies, community leaders and all stakeholders in Bangladesh and around the world to join hands with us to eradicate this crisis once and for all. To echo the sentiment of one of our heroic leaders, 16-year-old Dola: "Girls are not a burden, they can fly like birds. Girls are not a burden, they can go further than we can imagine."

**Suresh Bartlett**

National Director - World Vision Bangladesh



**Editor**  
Tony Michael Gomes

**Executive Editor**  
Humaira Sultana

**Special Thanks To**  
Suresh Bartlett  
Chandan Z. Gomes  
Sagor Marandy  
Lima Hanna Daring  
Jenny Mildred D' Cruze  
Strala Rupa Mollick  
Sonjoy A Mondol

**Photo Story Tellers**  
Md. Golam Ehsanul Habib  
Falguni Mazumder

**Graphic Design**  
Aminul Islam

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# FATEMA A lonesome bride

Falguni Mazumder

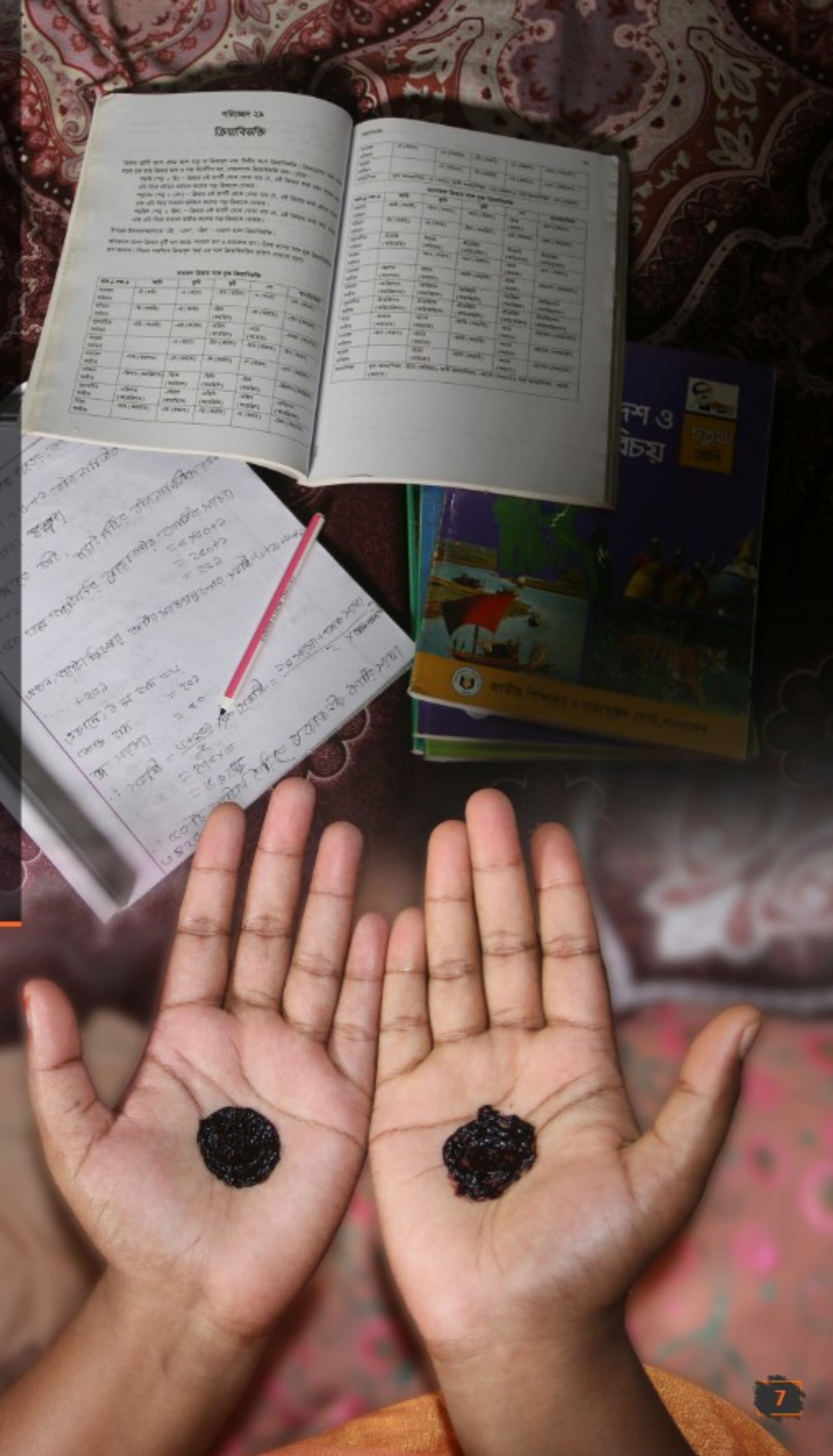


Fatema's family members are firm believers of existing cultural practices and customs that promote child marriage. They consider a girl child as a burden and the only responsibility towards a girl child is to marry her off to a well-to-do family. They are not interested in girl's education as the belief is that girls should stay home and carry out household chores.




Towhidul Islam, Fatema's father is an affluent businessman and her mother Rihana Shiek is a housewife. Fatema is the eldest child. Two months back, she got married when she was in class 10 continuing her education online. Since school has been closed for more than a year because of the COVID -19 pandemic, her parents decided to marry her off. She tried to persuade her parents at first, but was not able to resist the pressure!


Her family committed to letting her continue her education even after marriage. It was on this basis that Fatema reluctantly submits to the family decision.





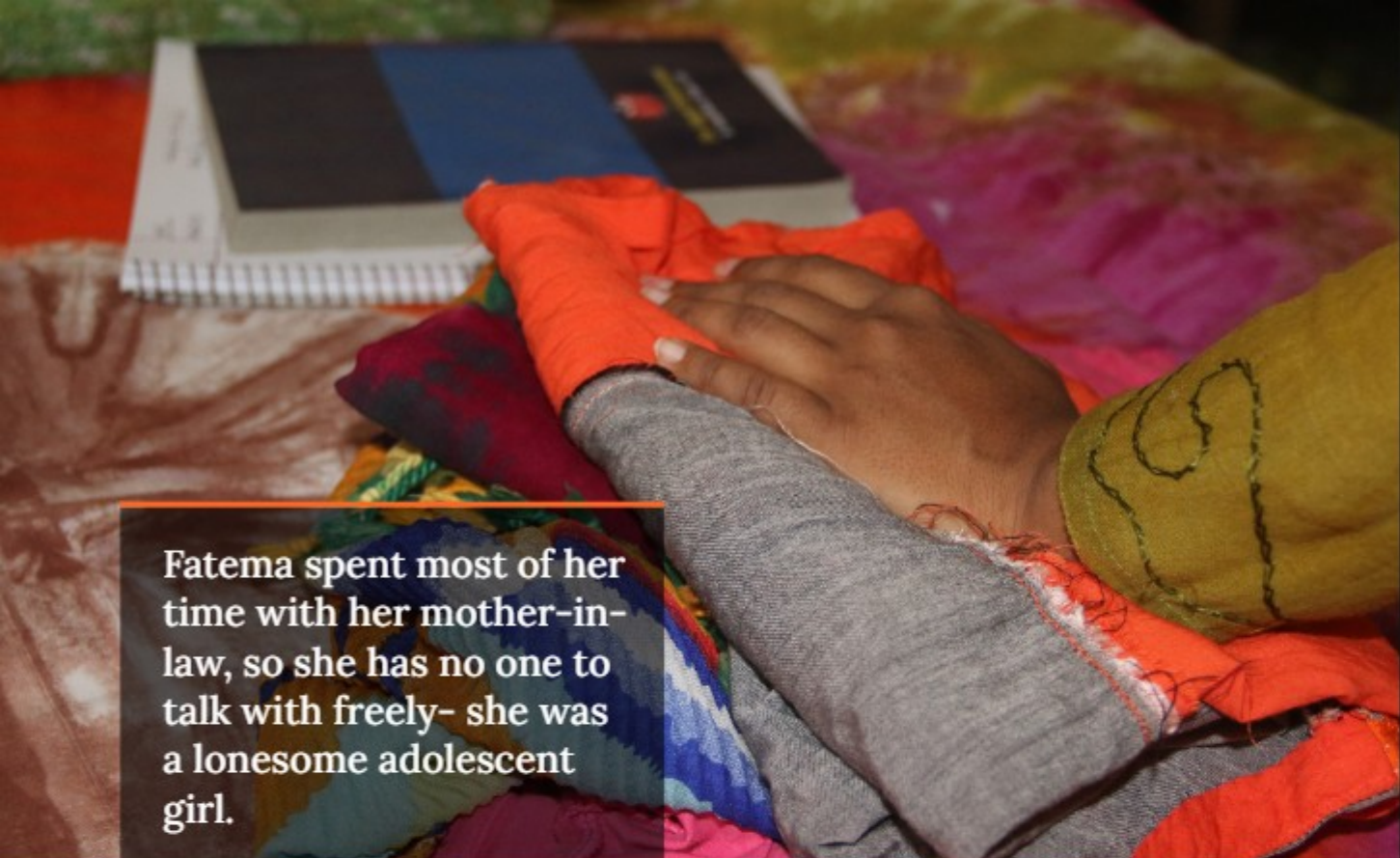
A close-up shot of a person's hands cooking in a large, dark, heavy-duty pot on a gas stove. The pot is filled with a thick, greenish-brown curry or soup, and a wooden spoon is visible inside. The person is wearing a bright orange garment, which is visible in the foreground and background. The lighting is warm and focused on the cooking process.

She carried her books to her in-law's house with the dream of continuing her study. However, there was no support whatsoever from her in-law's for her continued studies.

A woman is seated on a concrete step, looking out of a window. She is wearing a bright orange sari and a white face mask. Her hands are clasped together in her lap. The window looks out onto a bright, hazy outdoor scene, possibly a garden or a street. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

“ Every day when I look out of the window after completing all of my household chores, I can only see the dusk of the night.





Fatema spent most of her time with her mother-in-law, so she has no one to talk with freely- she was a lonesome adolescent girl.



She recalled how she used to spend time with her friends, wandering around town and playing games. She used to enjoy applying make-up and gardening in the courtyard, but now, she finds it difficult to find time for herself due to the burden of household chores and family responsibilities.



Yes, sometimes I feel lonely. There is no one to whom I can open up. It frightens me that if I make a mistake or someone feels that I am disobeying them, it might affect my relationships and my parents will be questioned.



It is uncertain now whether she can start her studies again. She still dreams of becoming a teacher or doing a simple job. Thus far however Fatema hasn't experienced the persecution that thousands of child brides experience every day in Bangladesh. ■





# MAFIZUL 17 years old breadwinner

Falguni Mazumder

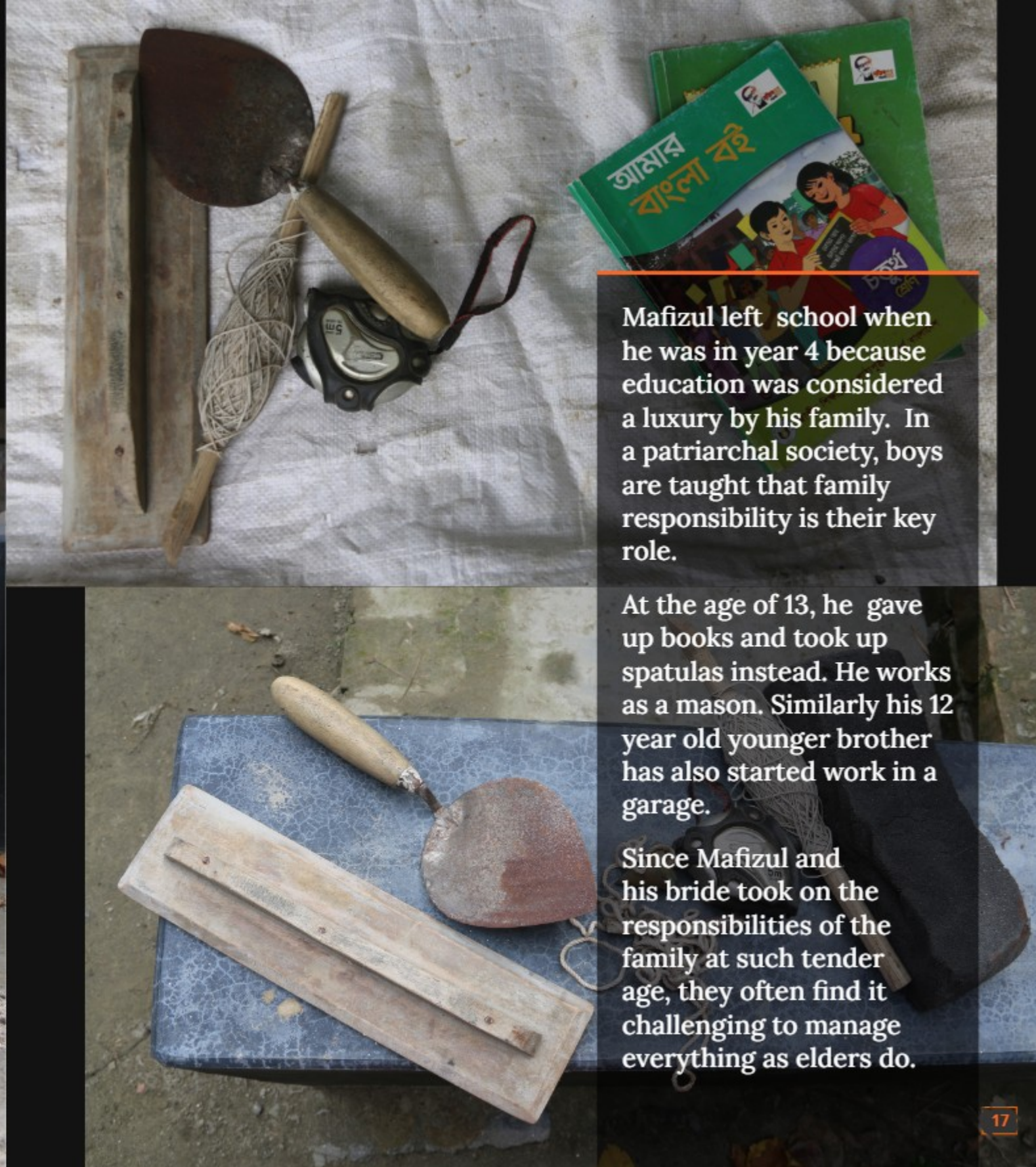


**M**afizul is a 17-year-old boy who is a victim of child marriage. Mafizul's mother wanted a helping hand in the family, thus she married off her son, to a 15-year-old girl. Little did she know, she's ruining two lives by this decision. The general perception is that girls are the only victims of child marriage. This perception often undermines the reality facing boys as well.





Mafizul is the third child in the family and the main breadwinner. His father Hosen Mia had an accident a few years back and lost his capacity to work. His mother Rahima Khatun suffers from a senile disease and is mostly bed-bound. Since, there was no one to look after his ailing parents and younger siblings, the family married Mafizul off with a teenage girl.



Mafizul left school when he was in year 4 because education was considered a luxury by his family. In a patriarchal society, boys are taught that family responsibility is their key role.

At the age of 13, he gave up books and took up spatulas instead. He works as a mason. Similarly his 12 year old younger brother has also started work in a garage.

Since Mafizul and his bride took on the responsibilities of the family at such tender age, they often find it challenging to manage everything as elders do.

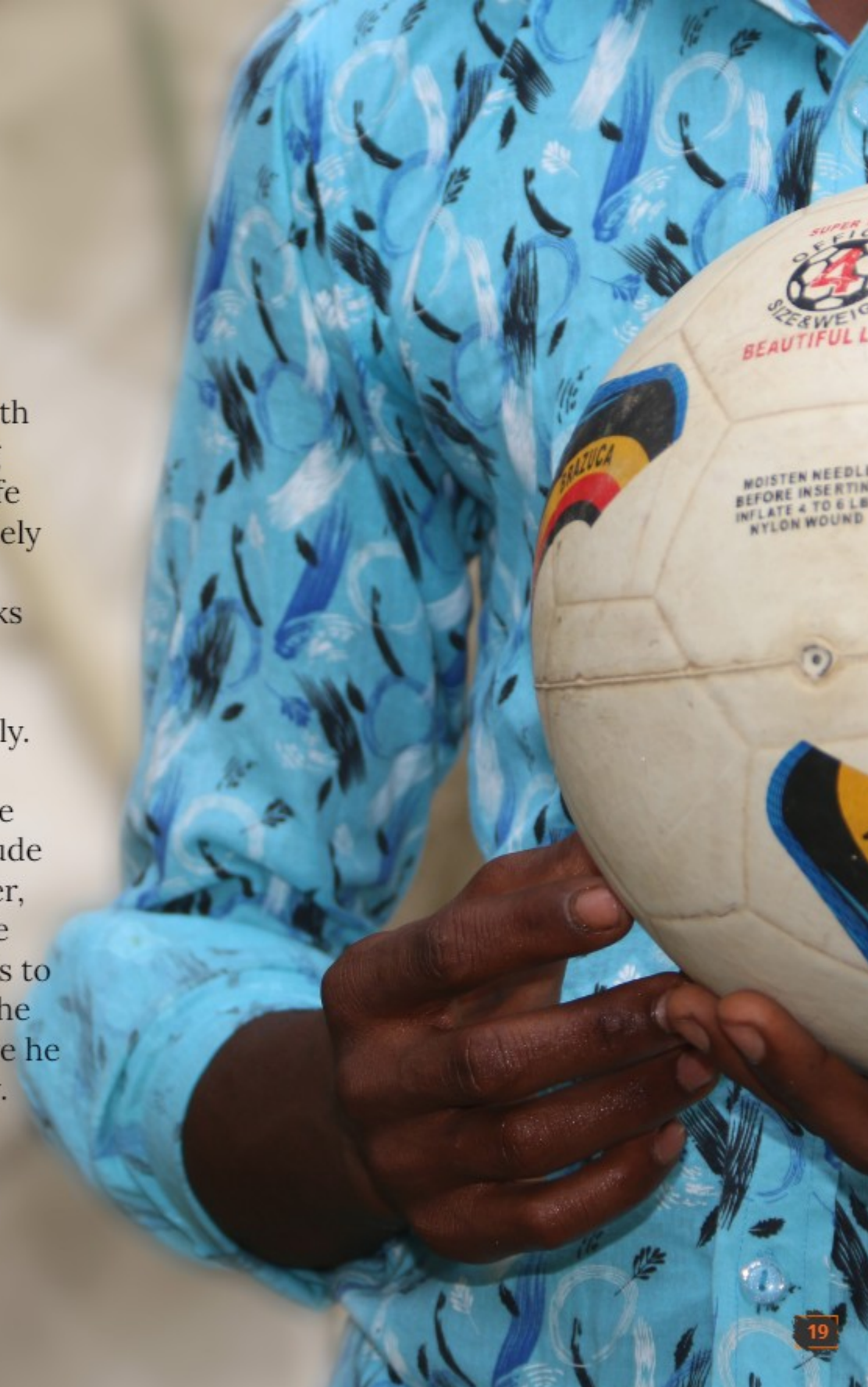


Sometimes, I consider myself the unlucky. Boys of my age have the freedom to interact and can get around the village. I on the other hand, have to think about how to earn a living and put food on our table. There is also another member added to our family further increasing my responsibilities.

”



Before marriage, Mafizul enjoyed playing football, spending time with friends, watching movies. But his life changed completely after marriage. Mafizul now works 7 days a week to earn money to maintain his family. When he finds any spare time, he spends it in solitude sitting by the river, seeking peace. He desperately wants to break free from the immense pressure he experiences daily.







Though there are many underlying factors associated with child marriage, poverty is the most dominant. In some parts of the country, 25% of people are living in abject poverty. The story of Mafizul's life reveals the consequences of deprivation which often triggers a vicious cycle.



Mafizul's 11 years old younger sister's life is now in jeopardy. Since his youngest sister has not been contributing to the family earning, his family are keen to get her married as well.

“

There is another mouth that needs feeding. So, the family would like to marry off our sister.





Though Mafizul and his family suffer from the adverse impact of child marriage and destitution, they have not learnt the lessons from their experience. They soon plan to start another story of child marriage. ■





# **NILU**


## **A story of unfulfilled dream**

Falguni Mazumder

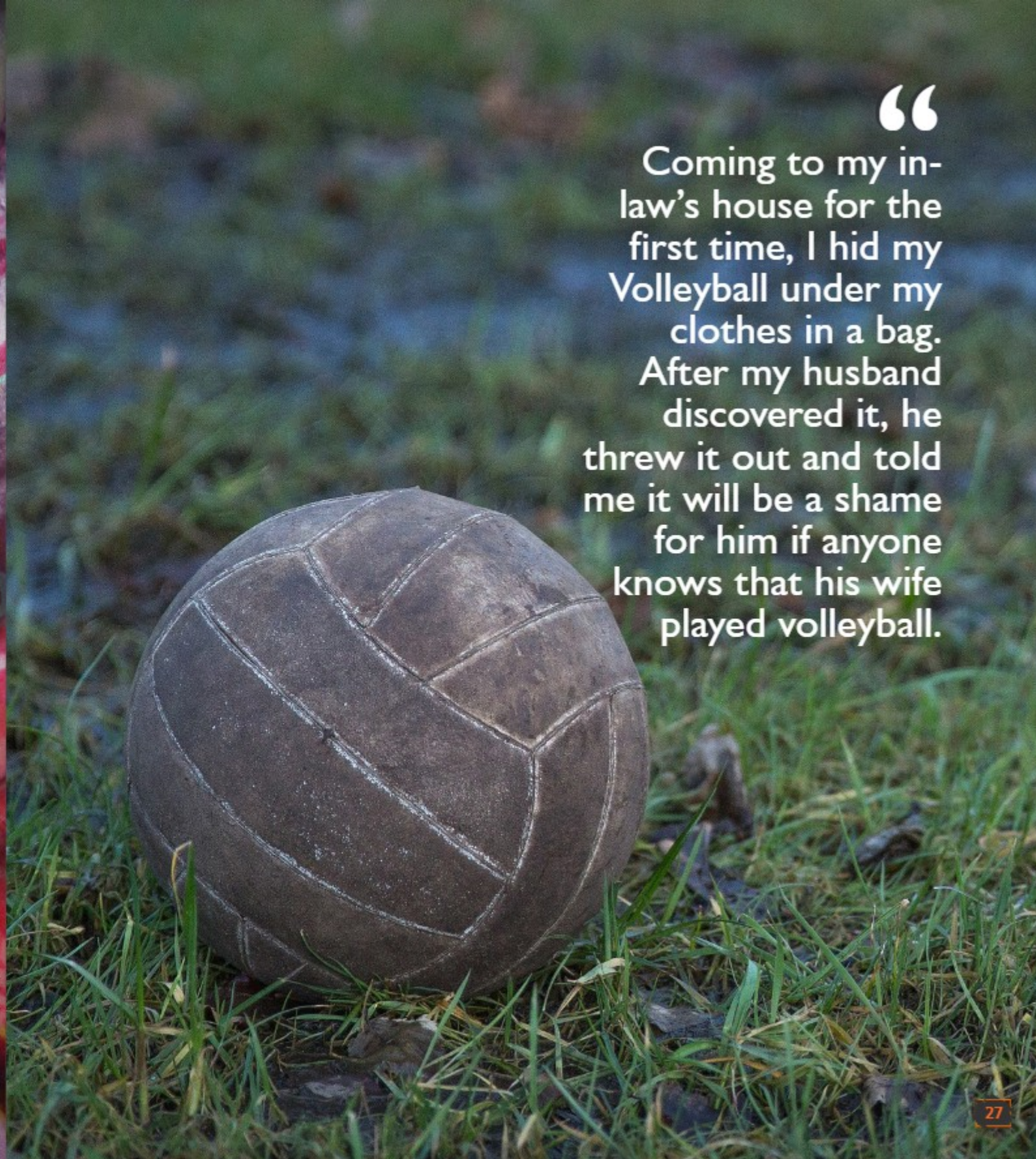
Nilu is a 15 years old girl and a bright student. She is the fourth daughter of Sheik Noor, an extremely poor day labour from Baniakhali village in the Muktagacha Upazila. The pressure of extreme poverty compelled Sheik Noor to marry off his three daughters between the ages of 13 to 15 years.

Nilu's turn came when her parents arranged her marriage to a person she never met. Nilu had high hopes of becoming self-reliant, she pleaded with her parents not to marry her off, but they didn't listen.





A year back, she was forcibly married off to a fisherman just when she was about to attend the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) examination. She was popular with her teachers and classmates for being not only a good student but also a promising volleyball player. Even, a day before her marriage she played and won a tournament. With teary eyes, she considered it her last achievement.



“Coming to my in-law’s house for the first time, I hid my Volleyball under my clothes in a bag. After my husband discovered it, he threw it out and told me it will be a shame for him if anyone knows that his wife played volleyball.”



Life became more challenging for her. While a pregnant woman needs nutritious food, bed rest, proper care, nursing, and regular check-up, she barely managed regular meals each day. Sometimes she had to get through the day eating biscuits and never got an opportunity to go for any ante-natal check-ups.



In spite of the challenges, she alone takes care of six members of the family, helps her niece with her studies, makes time to play with her, and styles her hair.





My only companion is my niece. When there is no one at home we sit together and gossip. I listen to her funny stories; stories of her friends and what she did in school. It makes me remember my school days.

”



Her in-laws made it clear, that she would not be able to continue her studies. She still tried to convince her husband, but it resulted in scolding and physical abuse. Now she only cherishes the dream of being a good mother, educating her child to becoming self-reliant. ■








# DOYEL Two realities

Md. Golam Ehsanul Habib

**D**oyel is 16 years old. She looks tired and exhausted, like the leaves of a tree dried up in the hot sun.



Her days passed with happiness. She used to like gossiping, playing with friends, and reading books. Her favorite subject in school was biology. She wanted to be a doctor. However, her dreams have been destroyed by the decision of her family members.

Doyel recalls with a sigh, “It was mid of February, 2020, I woke up on that cozy morning. My

mother wanted me to hurry-up and prepare myself, to go to my grandmother’s house for a big gathering. I was murmuring songs and preparing myself. I was dreaming of playing with my cousins for a few days and having a good time. However, my dreams turned out to be a nightmare and my life was ruined in those few hours.”



“I will rise up;  
and I will do  
it again.” Rope  
skipping was her  
favorite game.  
She wanted to  
be a doctor.

”



That morning, Doyel and her parents went to her grandma's house. There she found a big gathering. Children were dancing and playing. She also joined the children and started playing. After a while, she found a groom coming into her grandma's house. Children ran to see the groom while she also joined that crowd.

Doyel continues sadly, “Suddenly, my elder sister held my hand and dragged me inside the house. All the attention turned towards me and the women cheered saying it was my wedding ceremony. I wept and screamed that I will not marry. My elder sister slapped me on my cheek, I fainted.”





When Doyel woke up, she found herself in a wedding saree. Everybody was joyous and no one listened to her. She adds with tears, “I begged my father on my knees. I said, Baba, I want to be a doctor. Please cancel my marriage. Give me a chance to live. But my words did not change his heart of stone!”

On that day, her marriage was completed with 150 thousand

taka of dowry. In her husband’s house, her day starts at 6.00 am and ends at 9.00 PM. She is solely responsible to take care of all the household chores. She feels tired and sleepy but only goes to bed after her husband comes home from work. She is living a life where she works hard throughout the day, while all her efforts are taken for granted by her husband and mother-in-law.

Eight months after her marriage, she felt nausea and fatigue. She visited the doctor and her pregnancy was confirmed. Doyel adds in frustration, “Now, I feel fatigued, severe headaches with blurred vision, abdominal pain, the difficulty of breathing, and fever. My legs are swelling. I feel sleepy always.” According to the diagnosis, she has anemia, high blood pressure and low birth weight of the fetus.

Ref. By	Self	Date
SG of	Pregnancy Profile	22-05-21

**Gravid, single, Cephalic at Present.**

About 30+ wks As BPD = 76.1mm. FL = 54.9mm

- # Placenta : Posterior Fundal, grade = II
- # Amniotic Fluid : Optimum
- # Heart Movement : Regular
- # **EDD** : 30/07/ 21  $\pm$  2wk
- FWT : 1520 gm(+300)

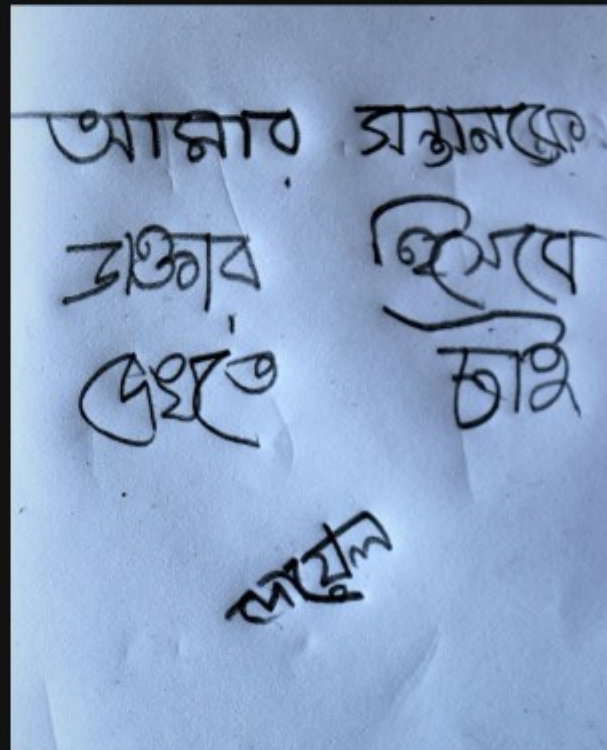
COMMENT: Pg of about 30+ wks with Cephalic at Present.

22-05-21





Doyel's days still pass with household chores. She is also stitching Kantha and a pillow for her baby.



Doyel adds with sparkling eyes and a loud voice, "My dreams have been destroyed. But I would like to promise that my child would have the opportunities to become a doctor. At least my child will fulfill his/her dreams. I wish no one has to ever experience my unfortunate fate." ■






# ANKHI Broken wings

Md. Golam Ehsanul Habib

**1** 5-years-old Ankhi's dream was shattered when she heard the news of her own marriage. She was extremely upset with this news as she was kept in the dark and taken by surprise!

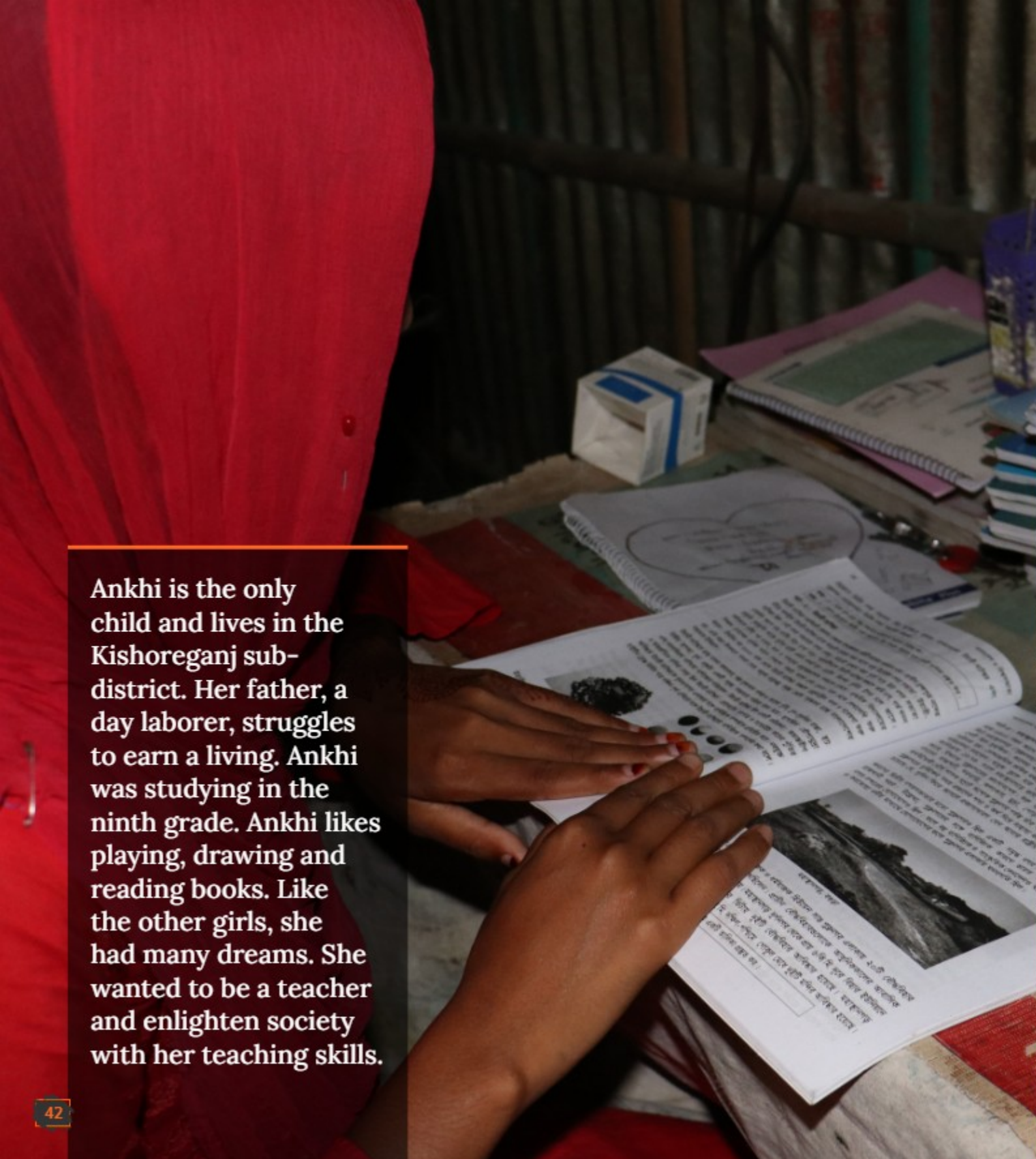


"It was mid-day on April 5, 2021, mother cooked my favorite dishes- lentils, small fish, and rice. The aroma of boiling lentils made me hungry. I quickly finished my bath and brushed my hair."


Meanwhile, my father said, "We have fixed your marriage. What

is your opinion?" I thought he was joking and a few seconds later I realized that he was not. I was shocked and shut myself in my room. My parents were knocking on the door and calling me to have lunch, to which I didn't respond," Ankhi recalls with sadness.





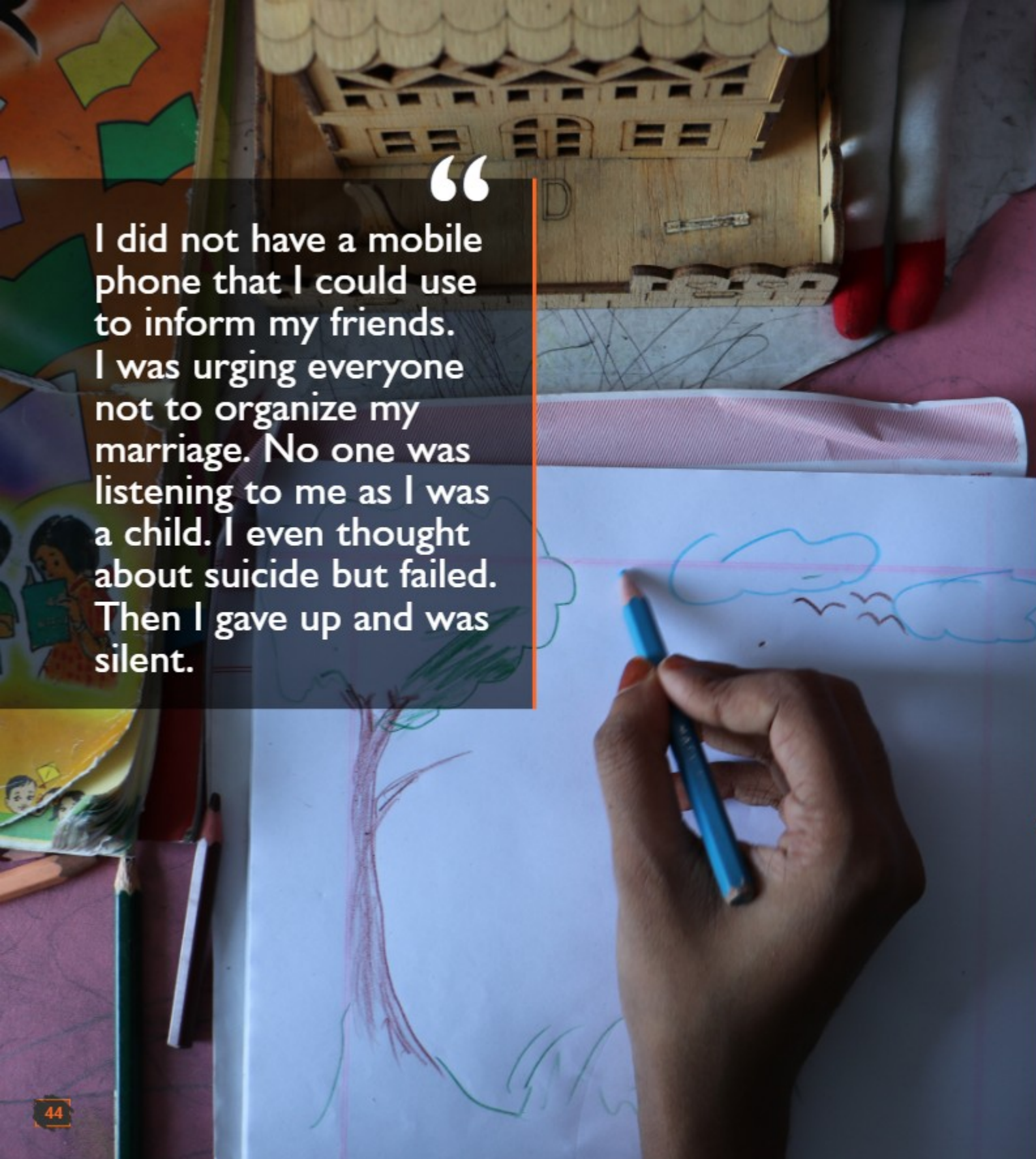
Ankhi is the only child and lives in the Kishoreganj sub-district. Her father, a day laborer, struggles to earn a living. Ankhi was studying in the ninth grade. Ankhi likes playing, drawing and reading books. Like the other girls, she had many dreams. She wanted to be a teacher and enlighten society with her teaching skills.



But the sudden decision of her marriage changed everything. Her dreams crumbled, she felt like a caged bird, and emotionally numb like a doll. She wept alone. She recalls, "I started to throw books, and shattered all my favorite toys. I felt like a broken doll. Then I fainted."

Afterwards, she went to her aunt for help. But Ankhi was disappointed as she advised her to prepare for the marriage instead. Ankhi was not even allowed to talk with others in her community.





“

I did not have a mobile phone that I could use to inform my friends. I was urging everyone not to organize my marriage. No one was listening to me as I was a child. I even thought about suicide but failed. Then I gave up and was silent.



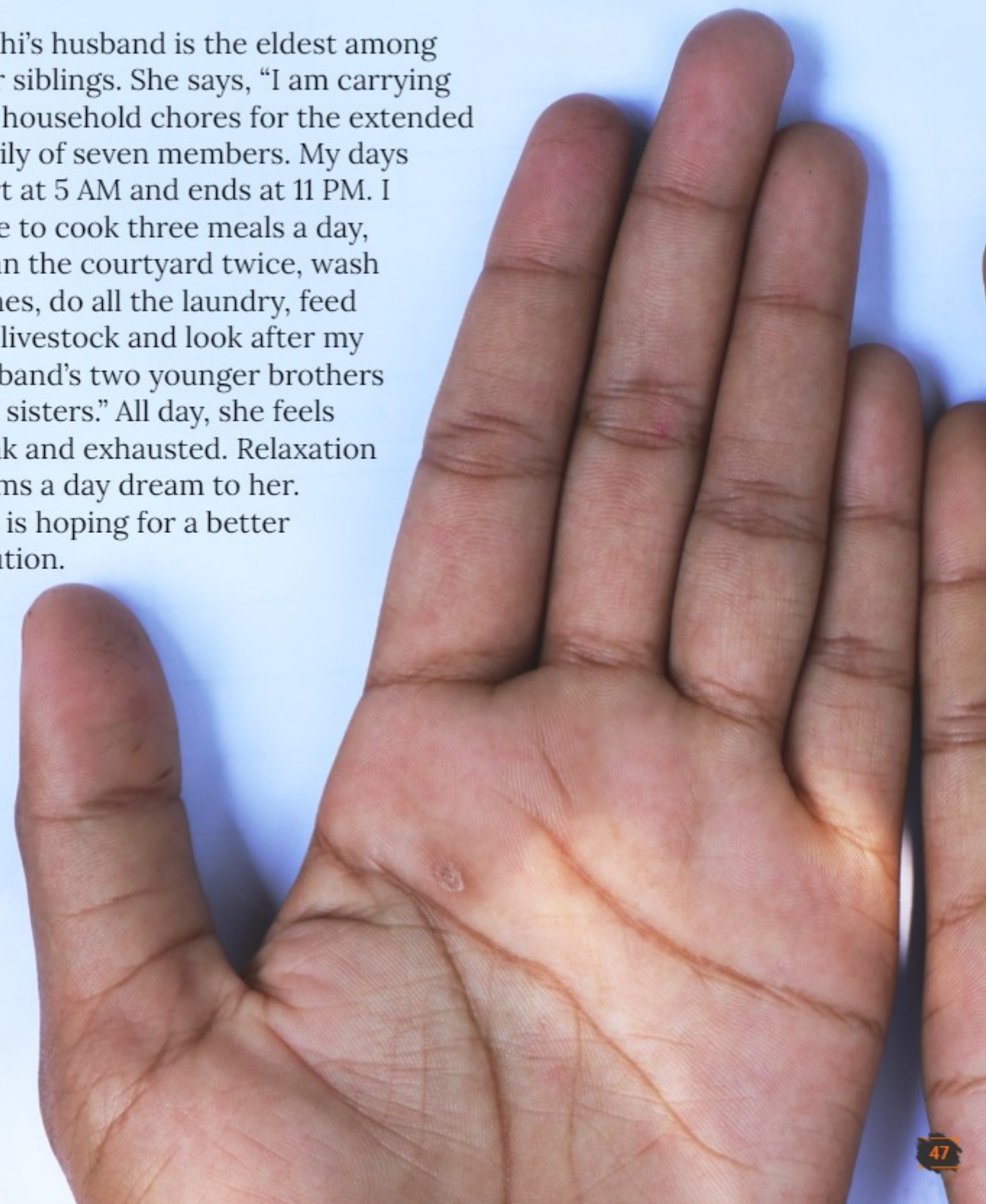
Seven days passed, Ankhi did not take proper meals except water. She adds, “I was crying a lot on my wedding day. I collapsed on the ground. My heart was in pain. No one listened to me. I fainted.”

Her marriage was completed with a 170-thousand-taka dowry. Her father manipulated her age and collected a false birth certificate from the local Union Parisad. She moved to father in law's home on her wedding day.

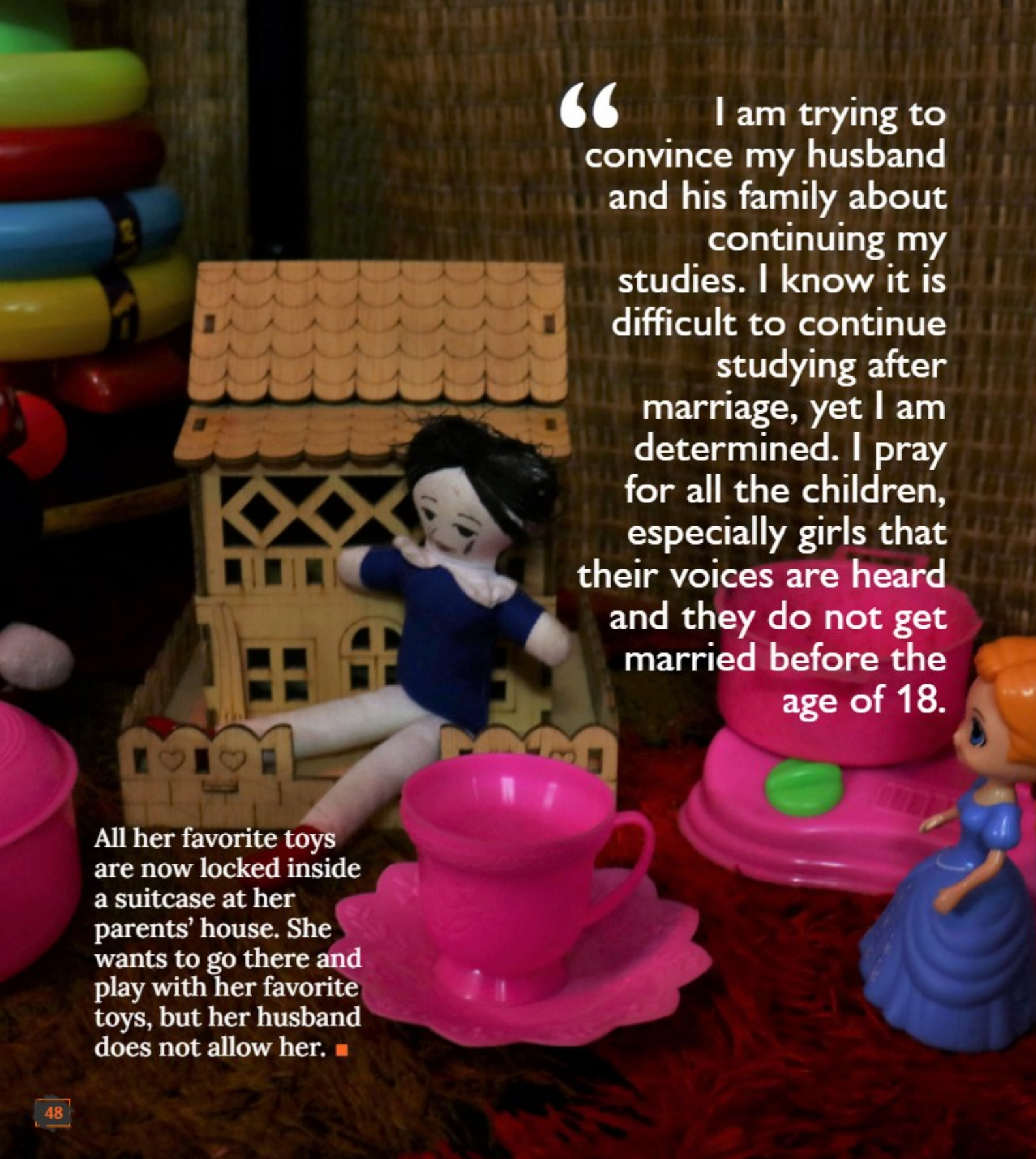




Ankhi's husband is the eldest among four siblings. She says, "I am carrying out household chores for the extended family of seven members. My days start at 5 AM and ends at 11 PM. I have to cook three meals a day, clean the courtyard twice, wash dishes, do all the laundry, feed the livestock and look after my husband's two younger brothers and sisters." All day, she feels weak and exhausted. Relaxation seems a day dream to her. She is hoping for a better solution.





A collection of childhood toys is displayed on a dark, textured surface. In the foreground, there is a large pink plastic teacup on a matching saucer. To the right, a Barbie doll in a blue dress stands next to a pink plastic pot with a green lid. In the background, a wooden dollhouse with a tiled roof is visible, with a doll in a blue dress sitting inside. To the left of the dollhouse, there are several colorful plastic tubes or toys stacked vertically.

“ I am trying to convince my husband and his family about continuing my studies. I know it is difficult to continue studying after marriage, yet I am determined. I pray for all the children, especially girls that their voices are heard and they do not get married before the age of 18.

All her favorite toys are now locked inside a suitcase at her parents' house. She wants to go there and play with her favorite toys, but her husband does not allow her. ■





World Vision Bangladesh  
Head Office, Abedin Tower (2nd Floor),  
35, Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Banani, Dhaka 1213, Bangladesh  
Phone: +88 02 9821004-11, Fax: +88 02 9821055  
🌐 [www.wvi.org/bangladesh](http://www.wvi.org/bangladesh)