

What does it mean to be fair?
Jigme, his sister Karma, and their friends learn
all about it at home, in school, and at play.

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དུང་བདེན་ཟེར་མི་ག་ཅི་སྟོན་?
What's fair?

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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY



Dedicated to the children of Bhutan
on the occasion of the Royal Wedding, 2011

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Illustrated by Chand Kumar Bhattarai, VAST



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Breakfast at Home

“Hey!” said Jigme, as his mother put another spoonful of egg fried rice in his sister’s bowl, “Karma Dema’s got more than me! That’s not fair!”

“Yes it is,” said Jigme’s little sister.

“Is not,” said Jigme. “And anyway, I bet you don’t even know what ‘fair’ means!”

Karma Dema was only six, four whole years younger than Jigme: a fact that Jigme never failed to point out! Their mother paused, with her spoon raised.

“Alright, Jigme. Why don’t you explain what it means to your sister?”

“Well, it... I... um... I can’t exactly say,” stuttered Jigme, frowning at his bowl, “But I do know that she’s got more than me, and that’s just not right. We should have the same.”

He wouldn’t have minded if it was their usual bread and jam, but today was Jigme’s favourite; egg fried rice with fresh coriander and the season’s first chillies... yummy. Actually, he thought he should have more as he was bigger than her, but even Jigme knew that would be going too far.

“Just be thankful that everyone in this home has enough to eat,” said his mother, adding another small spoonful to Jigme’s bowl, “and for goodness sake, stop fighting. You’ll be late for school.” Jigme quickly washed down his breakfast with a gulp of delicious, hot, butter tea, and dashed out of the door.

“Wait for your sister!” called his father.

“Ooof, Apa, she’s so slow! It’s not fair. Why should I be late just for her?”

“Jigme,” said his father sternly, “now you’re not being fair. You know very well that Karma Dema is too small to walk to school by herself.”

Their mother looked out of the kitchen window to see the city bus that had come by to drop off the morning crowd of office-goers and students. “Anyway, you’ve still got time.”

So Jigme stood hopping from one foot to the other, while his sister finished her breakfast, got her laces tied, found her backpack, found her favourite butterfly clip for her hair, and finally, they were off to school.







School Rules

Jigme and Karma Dema went to Mebar School in Thimphu. It was a short walk from their house to the school. Jigme kicked a stone along the pavement, pretending to be a famous footballer. When they reached the gates to the playground, he gave a final, running kick and - “Gooooaaaaa!” he yelled as he ran around with his hands in the air.

Unfortunately, what he didn’t see was Lopen Ugen, their class teacher, standing in the playground watching. “Jigme!” he shouted. “Uh oh”, thought Jigme, hanging his head, “School hasn’t even started and I’m already in trouble!”

“Don’t you know it’s against the rules to kick stones around inside the school grounds?”

“But I wasn’t inside...exactly. And anyway, school hasn’t started yet...” Jigme faltered a bit, looking up and seeing the expression on his teacher’s face.

“You know, everyone has to follow school rules. Don’t you think that’s fair? Or should we make an exception for boys who want to practice their football skills using stones, even though someone else might get hurt. Hmmm?”

Jigme thought about this.

“No la,” he mumbled.

Just then the bell rang, and he was saved from any further interrogation.

When the bell rang at break time, Jigme and all his friends ran out into the playground, yelling and shouting. Soon the yard was full of kids playing hide and seek, tag, marbles, high jump, but Arun, Jigme’s best friend, had other ideas.

“The new slides are ready!” he said. “Come on, let’s go try them out!”

They raced to the slides, but it looked like about a hundred other children had exactly the same idea.

Jigme pushed his way to the front.

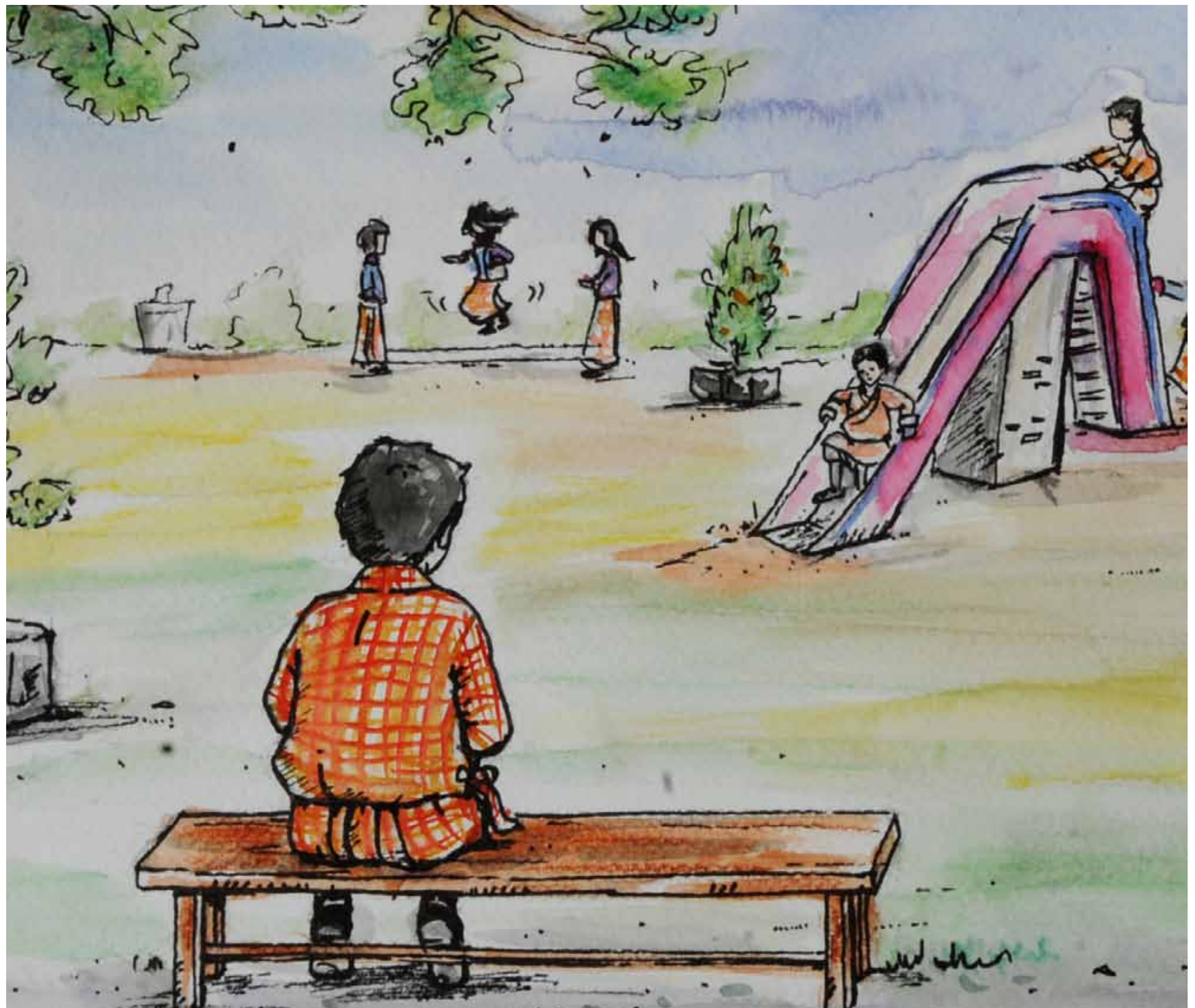
“Hey, can’t you see there’s a line for the slides?” said one of the girls.

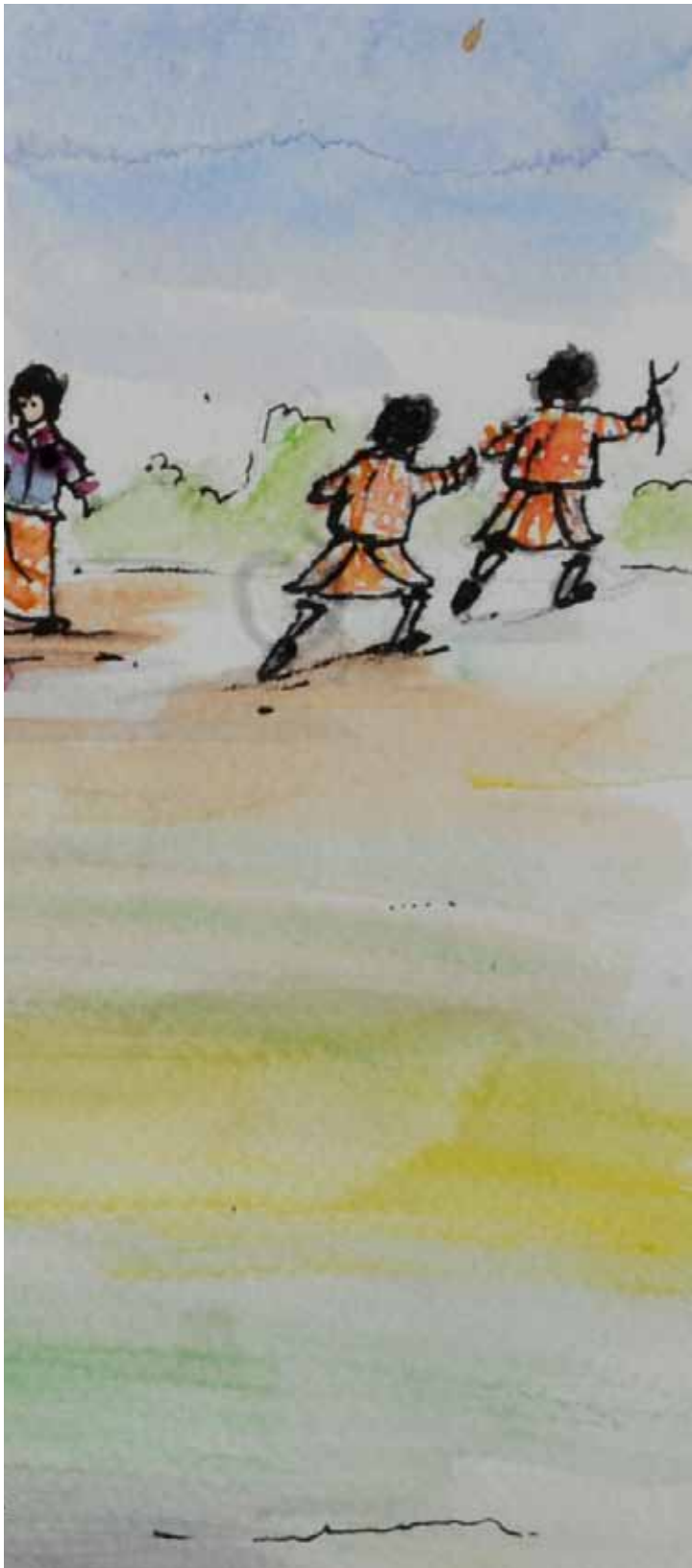
“Jigme, go to the back and wait your turn like everyone else,” someone shouted from the back of the line.

“Yeah, wait your turn!” The other children joined in soon and Jigme found his gho being tugged and pulled and he finally found himself pushed out of the line altogether.









He was just about to push himself back in, when he heard a familiar voice.

“What’s going on here?” Lopen Ugen asked.

A girl pointed at Jigme. “He cut in the line. He won’t wait his turn.”

Lopen Ugen looked at him. “You again, eh?” And he stood shaking his head, frowning.

“But I’ve been waiting for ages,” spluttered Jigme. “And besides,” he carried on, “they let me in!”

“That’s not true!” the children yelled.

The teacher looked at Jigme.

“I didn’t hurt anyone!” said Jigme, “I was just tired of waiting.”

“Do you think you were fair to others who have been waiting for their turn?” the teacher asked him. “What do you think you should do? You know the school rules.”

So, Jigme didn't get a turn at the slides. He didn't get to play once. He had to sit on the bench all during break; that was the school rule. Jigme felt awful. He decided he would never cut in line again.

That night, Jigme lay in his bed, a knot in his stomach. It felt like everyone was out to get him. He pounded the pillow three times as hard as he could, and with each punch he said "It's not fair! It's not fair! It's not FAIR!"

But then Bokto, their dog, came and licked his face. The moon came out bright, silver and calm. A breeze made the leaves of the tree outside rustle ever so gently, and Jigme found the knot getting looser and looser and drifted slowly off to sleep.







The Picnic

The next day dawned clear and bright, and the family decided to head off to the mountains for a picnic.

Jigme's father, who works at an office in Thimphu Dzong, had taken the day off and his mother decided to keep the shop closed that day. Uncle Bhim and his kids, Tara and Arun, were also joining them. Even the dog was excited, and dashed around getting under people's feet as they bustled around getting the car packed.

"I hope the weather stays fair," said his mother, looking at the sky.

"Fair?" said Jigme, puzzled. "You mean even the weather has to follow rules?"

His mother laughed. "No, silly! 'Fair' also means nice and sunny."

"It also means 'beautiful' just like you!" laughed his father, hugging his wife and making her giggle.

"It's a good job we're going in the car," she replied.

"Why, apa?" asked Jigme, puzzled.

"Well, because we can't afford the bus fare!"

“Just as well we’re not going to the fair! We wouldn’t be able to go on the rides,” his mother and father collapsed laughing.

“Are we very poor?” asked Karma Dema, puzzled.

“Apa’s just being silly,” explained Jigme. “It’s just that ‘fair’ can mean lots of things.”

It was a terrible joke, actually, but no one really minded.

Everyone was in a good mood, even the sun, smiling and sparkling all the way from Thimphu, past Hongtsho, and along the lazy, winding mountain road right up to Dochula.

Suddenly it seemed as if the entire Himalayas were spread out before them. This was the top of Dochula pass, the family had arrived. Everyone got out and, for a moment, stood to admire the unending mountains, their tops still lightly dusted in white snow. The air was crisp and cool. All around, the forest glowed a beautiful green. Hundreds of prayer flags were strung along the trees on the side of the road.

Just then, another car came and pulled up right next to theirs. Out tumbled Jigme and Karma Dema’s friends, Arun and Tara, and their parents, Uncle Bhim and Aunty Pushpa.









“Hello everyone!” boomed Uncle Bhim, stretching and rubbing his hands together. “What a glorious day! Now, where’s the food?”
“There’s a good spot just beyond the mani wall,” said Apa.

The adults got busy about getting the picnic stuff out of the cars, while the children dashed off into the forest to play.

“Don’t wander off too far,” called Ama, “and don’t climb trees.” But they were already out of earshot.

“Wait for me,” Karma Dema called. The children had a great time playing catch. The sun rose high in the sky, and Jigme’s tummy growled like a tiger.

“I’m hungry,” he said, “what have you got in your basket, Tara? Anything to eat?”

In her small bag, Tara had brought a container full of golden corn, freshly picked from their kitchen garden and boiled that morning. She had planned to eat it all herself. Her tummy grumbled too, as if saying, ‘Yes, good idea!’ but then she looked at her brother and her friends.

It wouldn’t be fair if she ate it all while they went hungry, she decided. “Who wants some corn?” she cried. “Come on, let’s share.” And the smile on the other children’s faces was enough to make her realise that she had made the right decision.









The kids ran back all the way to the picnic spot, where the adults had laid out a feast on the blanket, kewa datsi, shamu datsi, shakam aezay, rice and salad.

“I want a plate full of rice,” someone said. “Two for me,” Jigme yelled.

“Shouldn’t we wait for Uncle Bhim?” said a little voice. It was Karma Dema.

“Yes, where has he disappeared to?” asked Apa.

“You’re right, Karma. It wouldn’t be fair to start without him.”

“But we’re hungry!” cried the other children.

“I know,” said Jigme suddenly, “why don’t we vote on it!”

“Good idea, Jigme,” said his father. “All those in favour of tucking into this glorious, delicious, mouth watering food right now this very instant, raise your hands...”

But before they could, Uncle Bhim appeared on the scene. “Wai, wai, wait for me, you kids!” he cried. “I’ve been busy getting something special for you!” He was carrying a basket full of wild strawberries he’d picked in the forest.









After the delicious lunch, Jigme dished out the strawberries.

“Apa, you get a big cup. I will get a smaller cup. And Cheche Karma, you get the smallest cup,” said Jigme.

“Why do I get the smallest cup?” cried Karma. “Why don’t I get a big cup like Apa? That’s not fair!”

“Not again!” said their mother.

Jigme burst out laughing. “I was only teasing. Here, help yourselves. Eat as much as you want.”

And as they drove back towards Thimphu, everyone agreed that the strawberries, especially because they shared them together, were the best-tasting fruit anyone could have on a summer’s day!

Glossary

Honest: Having the character of a person who does not lie, steal, or cheat.

Fair: 1. Treating people equally (treating people the way you want to be treated) e.g. a fair decision, a fair judgement, to play fair.

2. An event with games, shows, food and other amusement.

Vote: To choose to give your support to someone, or something, rather than another. For example, to vote for a class monitor, to vote for a candidate, casting your vote. This means that a decision is arrived at democratically - the person with the most votes (the majority) wins.

Rules: The guidelines for behaviour or conduct. For example, the school rules say that all children have to do their homework; you cannot use your hands when you are playing football - it's against the rules.

Laws: These are the rules set out by the government that apply to everyone in the country. Laws are enforced by the police, lawyers and judges, and people who break the law can be punished. For example, it's against the law to steal.

Responsibility: Living your life unselfishly, putting the needs of other people, and the environment, over yourself. For example, not throwing trash on the street, caring for family members and the people around you. It also means being trustworthy and honest in your dealings with others.

Sharing: To divide what you have among you and your friends or family. Eg, if you have ten sweets and some of your friends do not have any, you should give some from yours instead having all of them for yourself.







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