

Coumba TOURE

BAMA's TWINS





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By Coumba TOURE



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Dream big !

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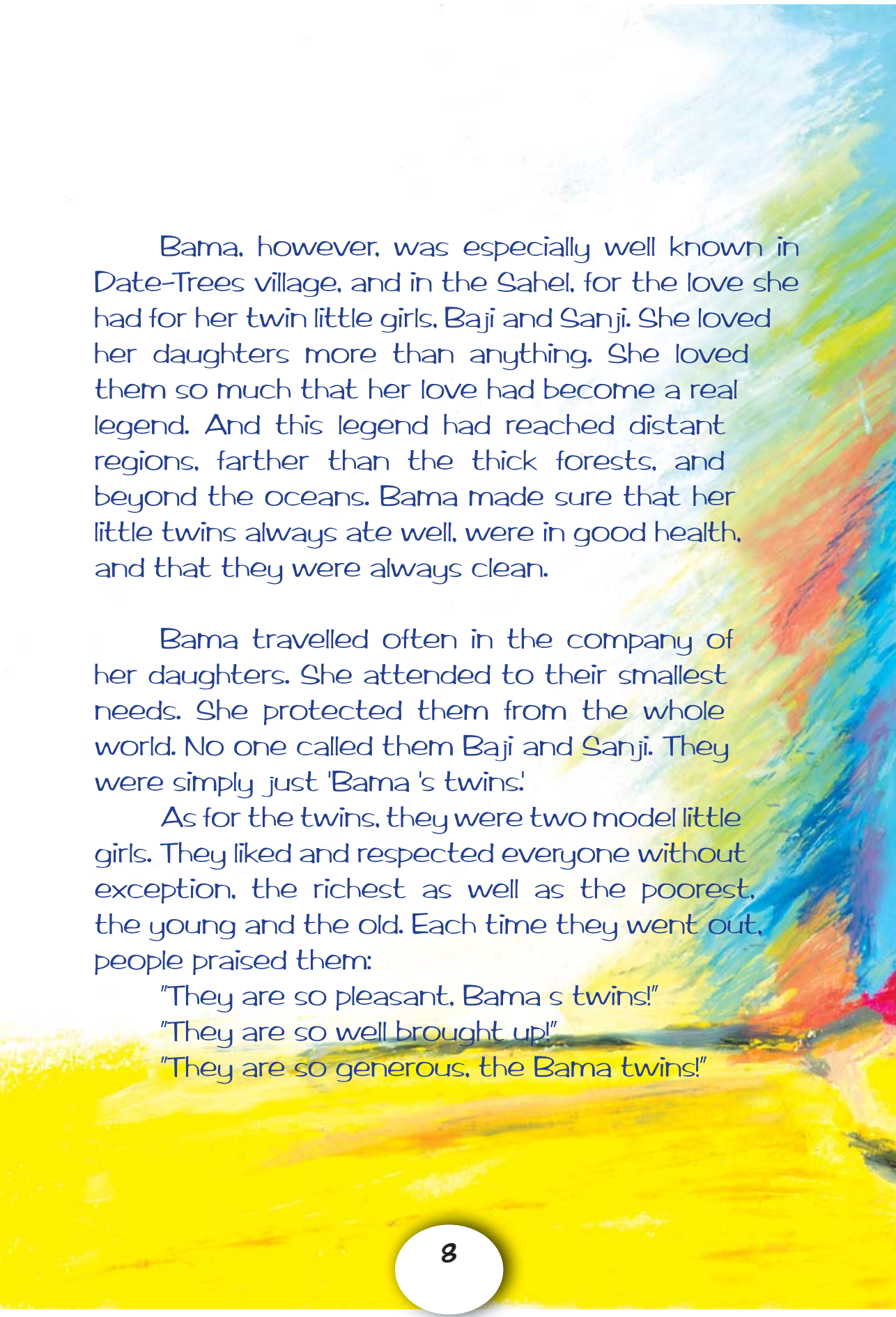
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To Jeneba KEITA and Abdoul Aziz BA,
Hank Oumar BA and Seydi BA,
to the children of Sigidolo;
This book is a gift inspired by the stories
from my childhood.

Once, there was a pair of twins, Baji and Sanji. They were the daughters of the beautiful Bama. Bama was an extraordinary woman. She was very dark-skinned and always had a smile sparkling upon her lips. She was also known and admired for her courage and hard work. She traveled often to sell woven cloth. Bama lived in Date-Trees village, the only village with date trees, in all of the Sahel.





Bama, however, was especially well known in Date-Trees village, and in the Sahel, for the love she had for her twin little girls, Baji and Sanji. She loved her daughters more than anything. She loved them so much that her love had become a real legend. And this legend had reached distant regions, farther than the thick forests, and beyond the oceans. Bama made sure that her little twins always ate well, were in good health, and that they were always clean.

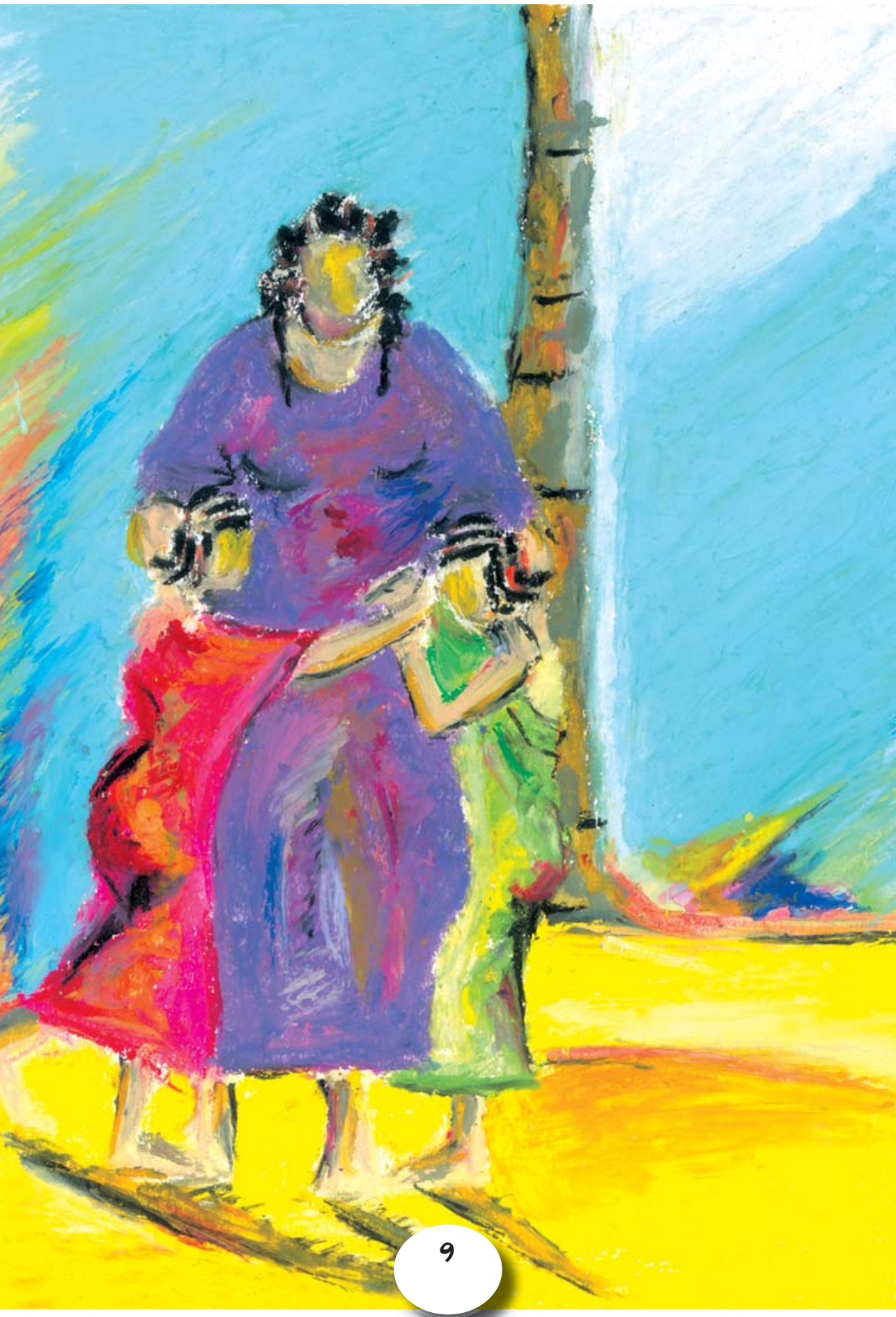
Bama travelled often in the company of her daughters. She attended to their smallest needs. She protected them from the whole world. No one called them Baji and Sanji. They were simply just 'Bama 's twins.'

As for the twins, they were two model little girls. They liked and respected everyone without exception, the richest as well as the poorest, the young and the old. Each time they went out, people praised them:

"They are so pleasant, Bama s twins!"

"They are so well brought up!"

"They are so generous, the Bama twins!"



One day, Bama called the twins
and said to them:

"Baji and Sanji, you are no longer children. I have a
secret to reveal to you. But, promise me, first of all,
that you will always love me."

These words worried the twins.

"Mama, we will always love you"
replied Baji. "You are our mother,
nothing can erase our affection
for you!"

Bama breathed deeply and said:

"My darlings, I am not the
mother who carried you in her
womb. I am your mother all
the same, and I love you. I have
raised you with love since you
were born."

The twin girls stayed silent for a
long moment. They were shocked.
They didn't know what to think.
They approached Bama, took her by
the hands and asked:







"Who, then, is our mother?"
Baji spoke with much sorrow.

"I don't know her. That's why it was difficult to tell you this news."

"We must try to find her." Sanji said, with tears in her eyes. "Why didn't you ever tell us this before?"

"How are we going to find her? We don't know anything about her!" Baji added. "We do not know her name or her face."

"I would like to help you very much, but I don't know anything about her." Bama replied sadly. "However, I have the piece of indigo cloth in which you were wrapped, the day that I found you in my path. I waited until you were old enough to understand. In the meantime, I searched a great deal for your mother but, eventually, I had to abandon all hope, of finding her."





Bama took a pretty indigo cloth out of her wooden trunk and presented it to the twins.

Baji and Sanji touched the piece of cloth and felt a rush of emotion.

"Tell us how you found us," Baji whispered.

Bama did not have to be asked twice.

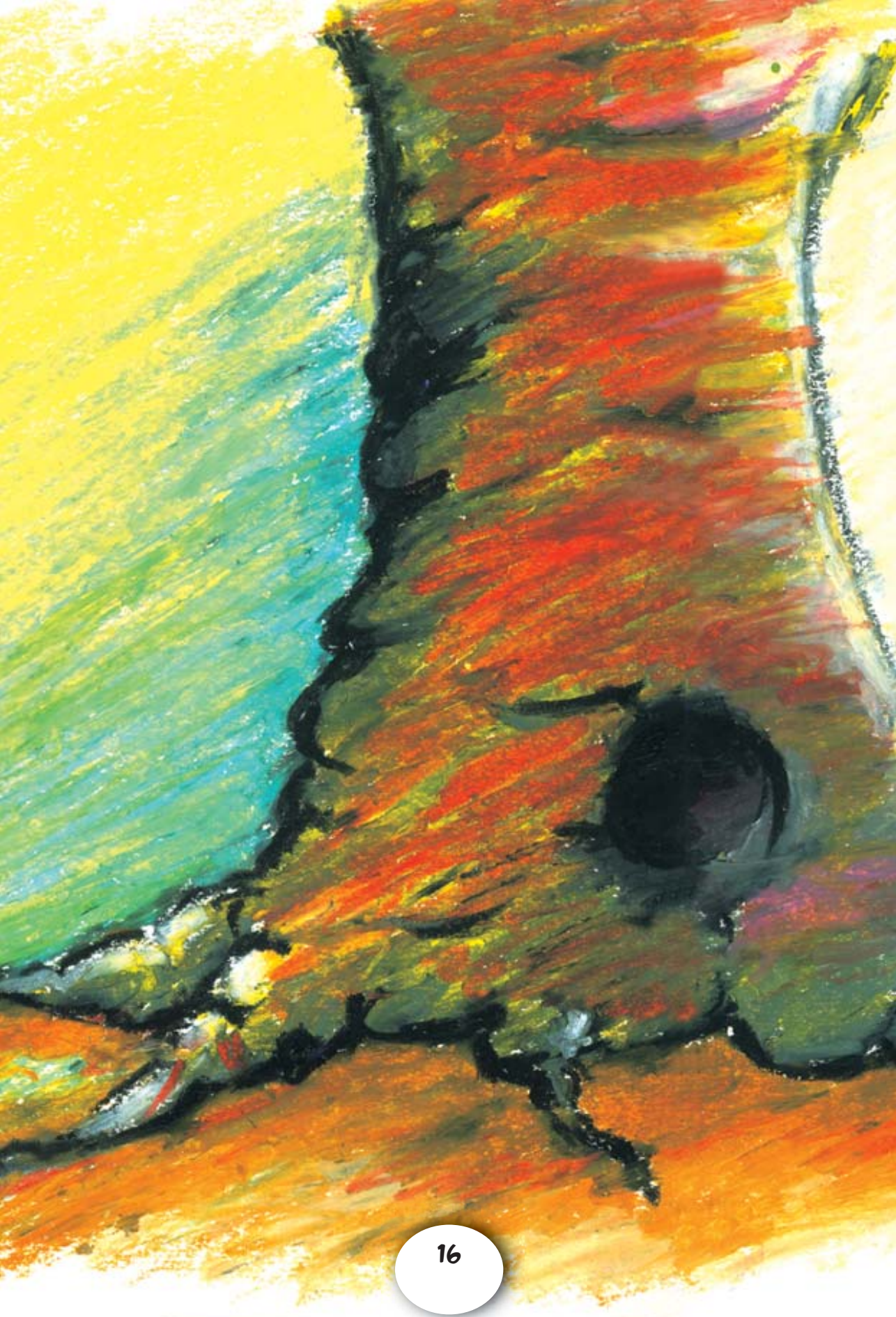
"I was on my way to sell cloth at the central market in the town of Segou.

I had left the village of Kani at dawn.

It had rained all night. All was calm and clean. The trees had become beautiful again. I found you there, on my path, wrapped up warmly in this beautiful indigo cloth. It was as if someone

knew that I would pass by there, and had decided to trust you to my care.

I did not see your mother, but I saw that she had been sleeping inside the trunk of an old baobab tree."





"We will go looking for her, and we will find her," Sanji declared.

"We will leave Kani village, and we will take the same path as you, all the way to Segou," Baji planned.

"And we will seek she who can tell us exactly where we were born, she who will have the other half of this indigo cloth," Sanji added.

"You can go looking for her. Promise only, that you will return!" Bama requested.

"We promise we will return," the twins replied together.





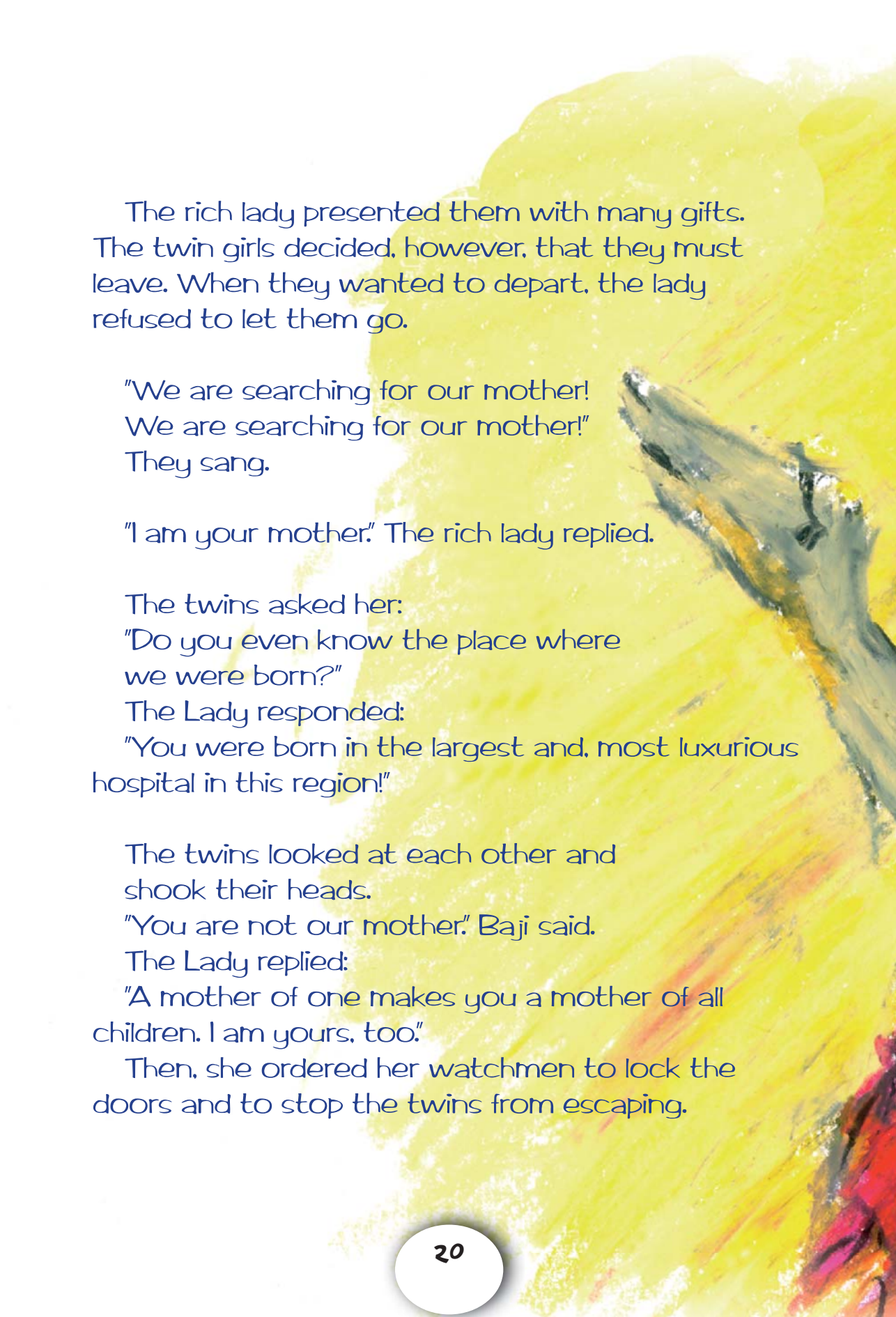
And so, Bama's twins left to search for their mother, singing on their way:

"We are searching for our mother!
We are searching for our mother!"

They stopped in the first village, and it was not long before they were surrounded by a crowd of curious people. Many women and men wanted to become their parents, because Baji and Sanji were so well brought up. The twins were generous, and they were respectful to everyone.

A very rich lady approached them and invited them to come and rest at her home. She wore a head-scarf of golden thread and a gown decorated with precious stones. She lived in a house so big that the twins thought they could get lost inside. The faucets were made of gold, and the brightly colored carpets came from far away countries.

She offered them dozens of dishes to eat, each more succulent and delicious than the next.



The rich lady presented them with many gifts. The twin girls decided, however, that they must leave. When they wanted to depart, the lady refused to let them go.

"We are searching for our mother!
We are searching for our mother!"
They sang.

"I am your mother." The rich lady replied.

The twins asked her:
"Do you even know the place where
we were born?"

The Lady responded:
"You were born in the largest and, most luxurious
hospital in this region!"

The twins looked at each other and
shook their heads.

"You are not our mother." Baji said.

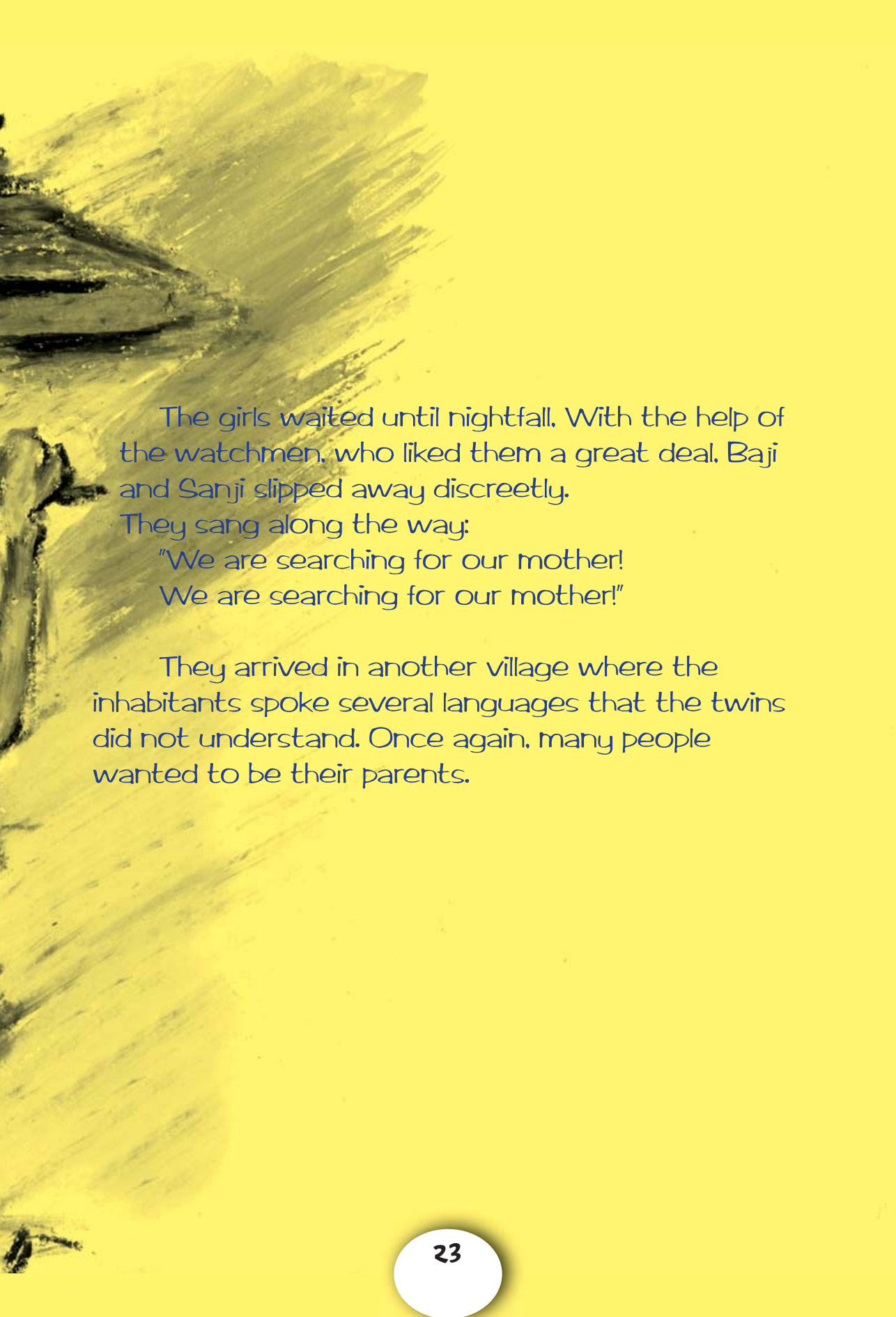
The Lady replied:

"A mother of one makes you a mother of all
children. I am yours, too."

Then, she ordered her watchmen to lock the
doors and to stop the twins from escaping.







The girls waited until nightfall. With the help of the watchmen, who liked them a great deal, Baji and Sanji slipped away discreetly.

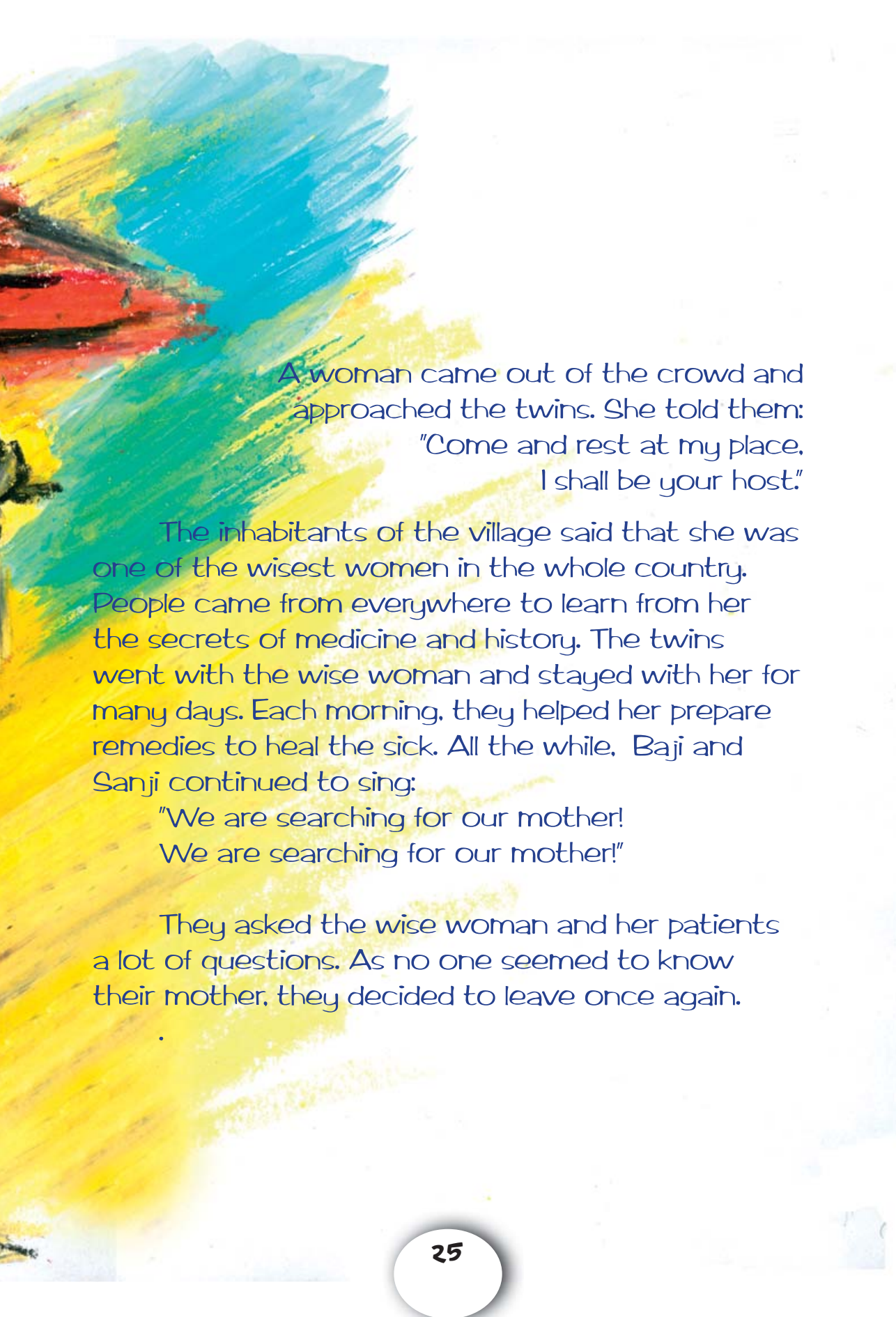
They sang along the way:

"We are searching for our mother!

We are searching for our mother!"

They arrived in another village where the inhabitants spoke several languages that the twins did not understand. Once again, many people wanted to be their parents.





A woman came out of the crowd and
approached the twins. She told them:
"Come and rest at my place,
I shall be your host."

The inhabitants of the village said that she was
one of the wisest women in the whole country.
People came from everywhere to learn from her
the secrets of medicine and history. The twins
went with the wise woman and stayed with her for
many days. Each morning, they helped her prepare
remedies to heal the sick. All the while, Baji and
Sanji continued to sing:

"We are searching for our mother!
We are searching for our mother!"

They asked the wise woman and her patients
a lot of questions. As no one seemed to know
their mother, they decided to leave once again.



"I am your mother," said their hostess, trying to keep them from leaving.

"Do you know where we were born?" asked the twins.

"You were born in a very simple house like mine," she said.

"No, you are not our mother," the twins responded, shaking their heads.

The woman said to them:

"I am a woman, and I am the age of your mother. No one needs to give birth to have children. You are my children, because you help me, learn with me, and care for me. But, if you want to leave, I will not try to stop you. My door will always be open to you. A mother of one is a mother of all."







Baji and Sanji continued their journey. Eventually, they arrived in a big village.

A drought had done terrible damage there. The weary and exhausted inhabitants did not pay much attention to the twins.

They sang their little melody, without much hope, this time.

"We are searching for our mother!

"We are searching for our mother!"

"I am your mother," a woman by the side of the road sang very softly.

She was not very old, but youth seemed to have departed from her eyes. The severe hardships of life had left deep wrinkles on her face.

The people of the village could not stop themselves from bursting out and laughing at her.

One young man said:

"Mother, is something not right in your head? How can you pretend to be the mother of these twins who are so beautiful and well brought up? Can you not see that these twins are not from our village?"

Baji and Sanji did not listen to the comments of the young man. They approached the woman and asked her,

"Do you know the place where we were born?"

Without hesitating, she replied,

"You were born in the field, when I was out looking for firewood. I gave birth inside the trunk of a big baobab tree. I hid there for a long time, while waiting for someone that I could trust."

She pulled out a piece of cloth from her little bag and said:

"I covered you with half of this cloth. I never expected to see you again."

Baji and Sanji hugged her, ecstatic with joy.

"You really are our mother!"

Sanji was thrilled.

"You really are the one that carried us in your womb!"

Baji beamed. "There is no doubt about it."




Then, she told them the story, her voice breaking with emotion:

"I am your mother. I gave birth in the field, because I knew that I was carrying twins. In those days, the chief of our village was a terrible tyrant, a wicked man, who killed all newborn twins. He was convinced that the birth of twins would make him lose his power.

I had heard people talk of a marvelous woman named Bama, who passed by here every day to sell cloth in Segou. They spoke so highly of her. I knew that she would take very good care of you. She is your mother. If I gave you life, it is she who made sure that you would survive and thrive."





The twins not only decided to keep both of their mothers, but also determined that, from that day on, all women would be their mothers in some way.

They kept their respect for all people, rich or poor, old and young. They had many mothers for the rest of their lives.

Ever since then, in all the regions of the Sahel, children have many mothers.





Born and raised in West Africa, Coumba Toure is a changemaker and an artist. She writes and publishes children's books and other educational materials through 'Sogoba.' Sparking imagination and strengthening citizenship in children is linked to a broader effort to enable young adults to contribute to decision-making and problem-solving in society.

Coumba focuses on educational media as a means to spread social justice. She has facilitated hundreds of educational workshops worldwide on gender, race, economic justice, and AIDS. Coumba speaks regularly at universities and conferences and contributes as a board member for several citizen organizations.

BAMA'S TWINS

One day, Bama tells her twin girls that she is not their birth mother... The girls embark on a journey to find their mother and discover many mothers along the way.

"Who, then, is our mother?"

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"I don't know her. That's why it was difficult to tell you this news."

"We must try to find her," Sanji said, with tears in her eyes. "Why didn't you ever tell us this before?"

"How are we going to find her? We don't know anything about her!" Baji added. "We do not know her name or her face."

Coumba Toure shows us, through adaptation from a traditional tale, why children in the Sahel have many mothers.