

THE STAIRS





THE STAIRS



"Well, isn't there anything we can do?"

"Yes I understand, but can't they reconsider?"

While Sarp was playing in his room, his mother was talking with the next-door neighbour. From what he overheard, he could understand that something was wrong.



When his mother came in, Sarp asked her what was going on. His mother told him that Aunt Merry had to move out. This was why she was upset.

Nobody knew her real name, but everyone called her Aunt Merry, and she didn't mind that at all. She was the oldest resident of the building, the first one to have moved in there. So many people had come and gone over the years... She knew everyone. She always greeted everyone with a smile and she was especially fond of children. Whether young or old, she would make everyone laugh with her little jokes. After all, she was Aunt Merry.

Sarp's mother told him that Aunt Merry had gone to a doctor a few months ago because of the pain in her knee. The doctor had told her that she needed surgery. She would have to use a walker for a long time after the surgery.

"A walker? What is that?" Sarp asked his mother. He found out that it was a frame with wheels, which was designed to help people who had trouble walking. It looked like a four-legged walking stick.

Sarp still didn't understand why Aunt Merry had to move out.



"Because our building is not convenient for her to freely move around, she can't climb up the stairs at the entrance with a walker. We would need a ramp there," explained his mother.

"So let's remove the stairs then..."

"It doesn't work that way. All the residents in the building have to decide together. Some of our neighbours think that the ramp will take up too much space and that it will cost too much."

Everybody loved Aunt Merry, but not all of the neighbours were willing to make changes in the building. This is why Aunt Merry was going to move to another place that had no stairs at the entrance.



"Why don't we go and tell the local authority to come and remove these stairs," suggested Sarp. His mother could see that Sarp was trying to find a solution, but she told him that this wasn't possible.

"The local authorities can't do whatever they please. We elected them, so their duty is to listen to us and help us according to our needs. But they can't come here and make changes in people's living space without those people's consent," she said. Besides, the city had its rules and laws, which everyone had to obey.

The following day on their way to school, Sarp told all of this to his classmate Özge. "Let's talk to our teacher, I'm sure she'll show us a way," said Özge excitedly.

After listening to the children, their teacher realised how much Aunt Merry mattered to them. Sarp and Özge really wanted to do something about this. The teacher started thinking about how she could help them.



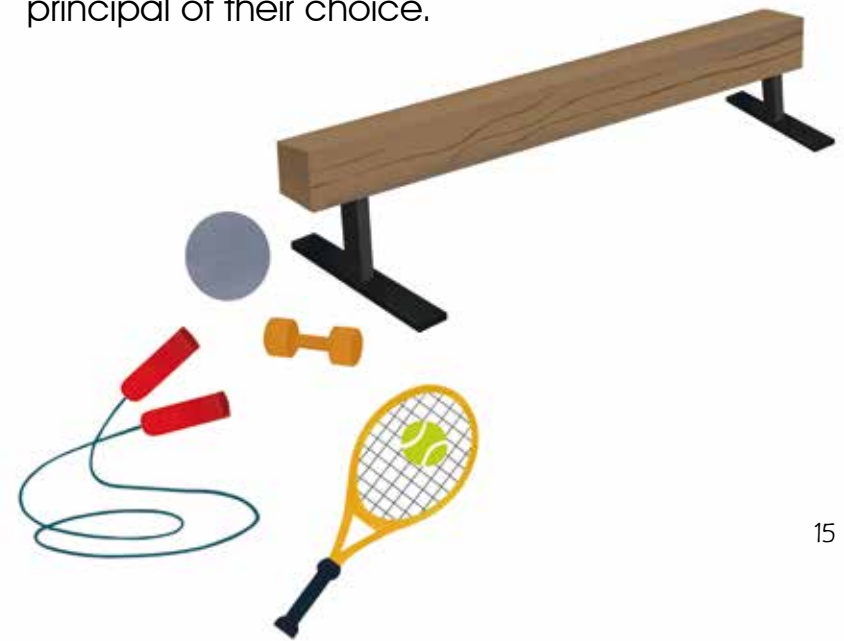


Just then, everyone in the classroom was sitting at their desks waiting for the lesson to start. The teacher told her students that an important poll would be held at the school. There was a need for new gym equipment and the school administration wanted the students to decide what to buy.

Each class had a certain budget. So the students were going to vote among themselves and choose a couple of sports equipment that fitted their budget. His teacher chose Sarp to lead the voting process in his class.

"Sarp my dear, I'm confident that you will get the opinions of all your friends and hold a fair poll. If you want, you can get some help from your classmates," said the teacher.

Sarp immediately started working with Özge. First, they prepared small ballot papers. The ballot papers had the names of the equipment taken from the catalogue of the company that sold sports equipment. Each student chose and marked the sports equipment they wanted. Once everyone had voted, they opened the ballot box together and counted the votes. The most preferred equipment in Sarp's class was the balance board. Their teacher notified the school principal of their choice.



The children were very happy that their opinions were asked for while taking decisions about their class. They felt they were important. This poll gave Sarp and Özge a good idea. "Teacher!" called Özge. "We'll hold a poll in our building. Let's see what our neighbours have to say."



"That's a good idea. But don't forget, people living in a building make up a small community. So you should also consider the opinions of your neighbours who don't want the stairs to be removed. It's important to understand why they think that way," said their teacher. The teacher was pleased that Sarp and Özge were taking action by taking the class poll as an example.

As soon as they went home, the two friends gathered all the children in the building. They all really wanted Aunt Merry to stay there. They went to see the building manager and told him about their idea of organising a poll. The building manager also liked this idea, so he announced the date and time of the poll to all residents.

Sarp and his friends decided to visit the residents in the building to tell them about their ideas. They would visit the neighbours one by one.

They started from apartment number one, where retired tailor Mr. Akif lived. "I don't want Ms. Merry to move out either, but a ramp would take up too much space".



Your playing ground will also become smaller. Besides, it can be very costly. Our building doesn't have enough budget this year," said Mr. Akif. There were a few more neighbours who agreed with Mr. Akif.

When he thought about it, Sarp realised they were right. "We first have to find a solution for this," he said to his friends.

The children first checked the stairs at their own building, then they went to look at other buildings in the neighbourhood... Finally, they put their heads together and pondered.



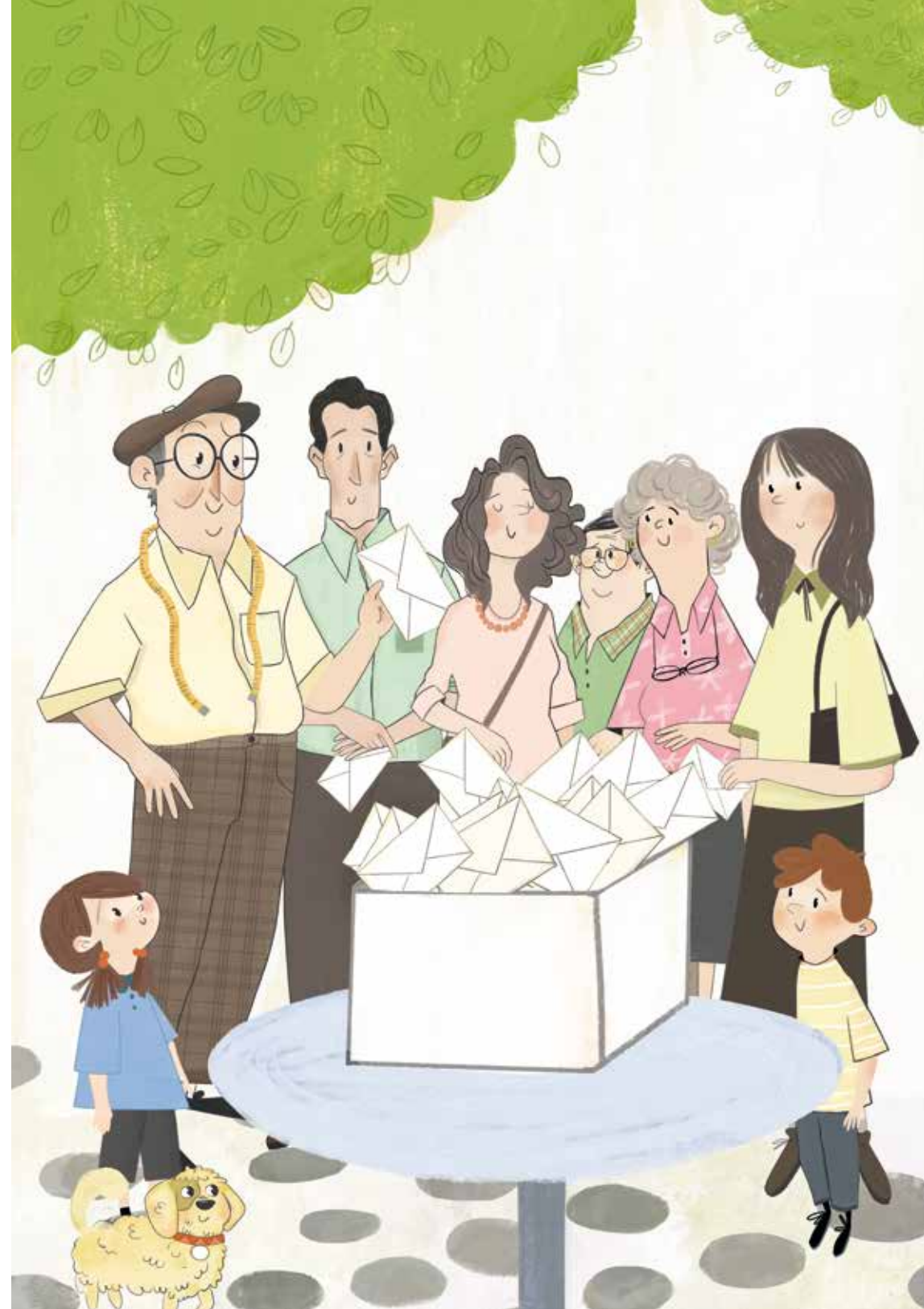
They came up with some suggestions that could ease the neighbours' concerns about the space and expenses: A metal ramp could be added next to the stairs, without having to demolish the stairs. This way, it would take up less space and cost less.

That evening, the children went to visit their neighbours one by one and told them that they wanted to have a ramp built next to the stairs. They also explained some of their suggestions about safety. The children reminded the neighbours of the date and time of the poll.

The neighbours were pleased with the children's suggestions. But, a poll would be held anyhow. All of the residents had to agree in order to make changes.

The time had come. The residents started gathering under the gazebo in the garden on the day and time announced by the building manager.

Everyone took turns, going behind the cardboard on the desk to mark their votes on the papers that said "Yes" or "No" and placing them in the ballot box. This way, they could not see each other's votes. While the voting continued, the residents were sitting and chatting at the picnic tables around the gazebo, sharing cakes and pastries they brought from their homes and drinking tea.



When the poll was over, they started counting the votes. These were exciting moments for Sarp and his friends. The building manager opened the envelopes one by one, taking out and showing the paper to everyone, while Mr Akif, the tailor, was writing down the results on a paper.

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."



All of the residents had voted "yes" for the construction of a ramp. Even those who didn't want the ramp before had changed their minds and trusted the solution the children had come up with.

All the neighbours were happy about the result. They chatted and had a good time around the gazebo that day until it got dark. The children were cheerfully playing jackstones. "What a pleasure it is to live together," thought Sarp.



The next day, Aunt Merry was ready to go to the hospital with her family. Her neighbourhood friends were waiting in front of the building to bid her farewell. "See you soon," she said with the warmest smile on her face, and headed for the hospital.

The construction works were completed while Aunt Merry was away. A nice ramp was built next to the stairs and a combination lock was placed at the garden gate.

Two weeks went by and it was Aunt Merry's homecoming day. The children were waiting for her with flowers in their hands at the same place where they had bid her farewell.



Aunt Merry got out of the car with the help of her husband and her children. She was walking a little slow but she looked just fine. She easily went up the ramp with her walker. "I am so grateful to all of you, my dear neighbours. You made me very happy. Thanks to you, I can continue living peacefully in my home," she said.



Sarp and Özge responded, “We hope you get better soon Aunt Merry. The ramp works for all of us; now we can easily get our bicycles up and down.”

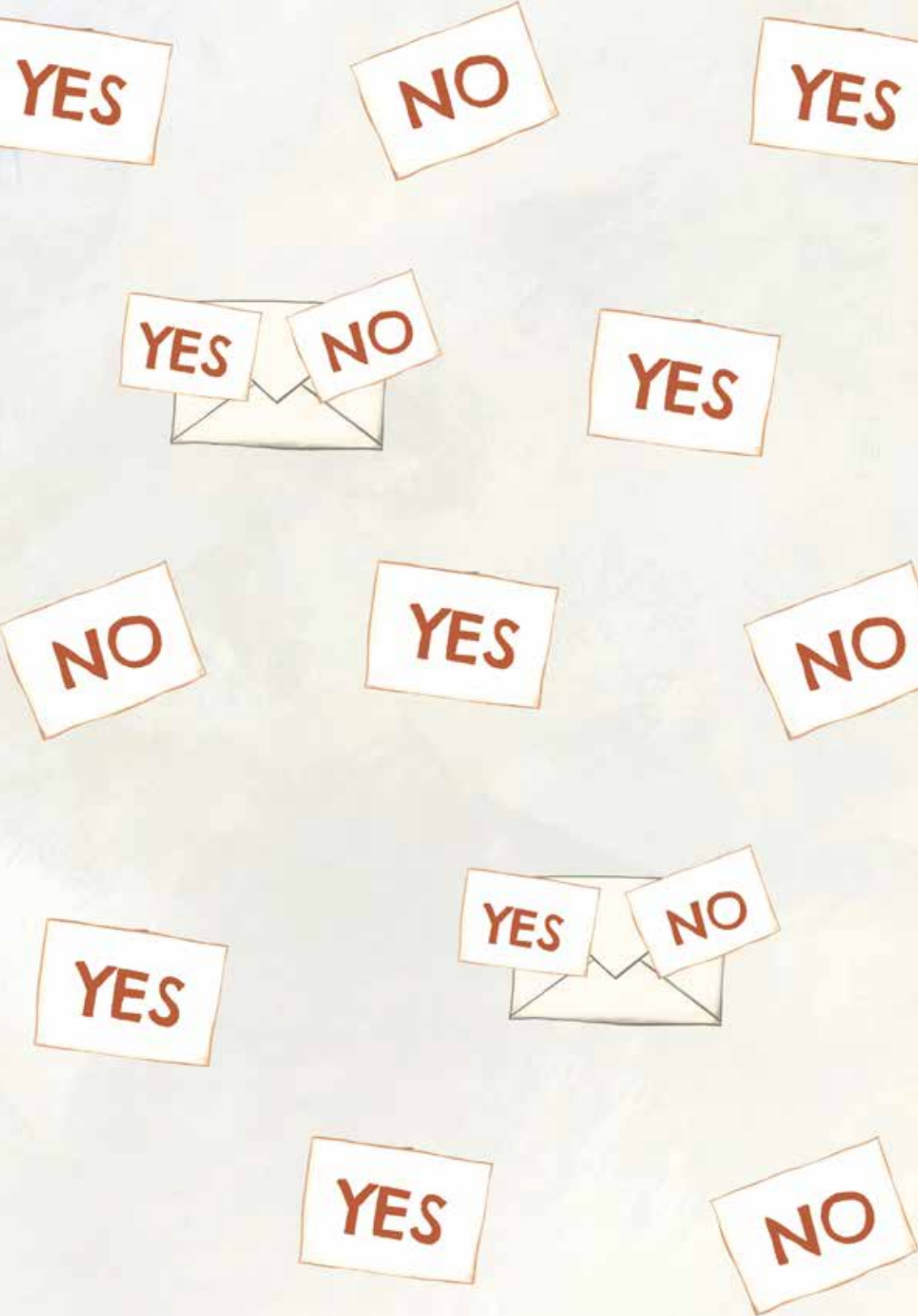
“Yes, and we can easily bring down the baby strollers and market trolleys. Actually, we should be the one thanking you,” added Sarp’s mother. The ramp that the residents had unanimously decided to build was being used by everyone and had set an example for the other buildings in the neighbourhood.

Aunt Merry was very happy that she didn’t have to move out. As she was entering her home, she turned around and called out to the children:

“You just wait and see, I’ll be going down this ramp on a skateboard soon.”

Again, she had made everyone laugh.





YES

NO

YES

YES NO

YES

NO

YES

NO

YES

YES NO

YES

NO