

# ONE

*My name is Xer—*

Xerxes paused as he recalled his first day at his new school.

Boisterous boys had yelled in his face.

'Xerox! Hey, Xerox!'

'Hey, Xerox what's your surname—Xero?'

Pushing aside the memory of their taunts, he finished writing his name in the first page of his new notebook.

*My name is Xerxes Noshir Wadia.*

His father, Noshir, ran a bakery-cum-café. Xerxes loved spending time there, sitting in the cosy warmth of the café and inhaling its smells of old wood and baking.

Xerxes wrote carefully in his notebook.

My father, Noshir Wadia, runs a bakery. My mother, Sonji Wadia, is a vetary

Xerxes rubbed out the last word, then wrote again, rubbed, wrote, rubbed, wrote, till with a sigh he finally wrote,

My mother, Sonji Wadia is a pet trainer. I study at St

Xerxes pictured himself in different school uniforms and badges—St Alban, St Henry, Ava Petit, Jeejebhoy High—as Sonji towered over him, saying: ‘You’re going to a better school to help improve your grades!’

Xerxes looked down at his latest badge and wrote the name of the school.

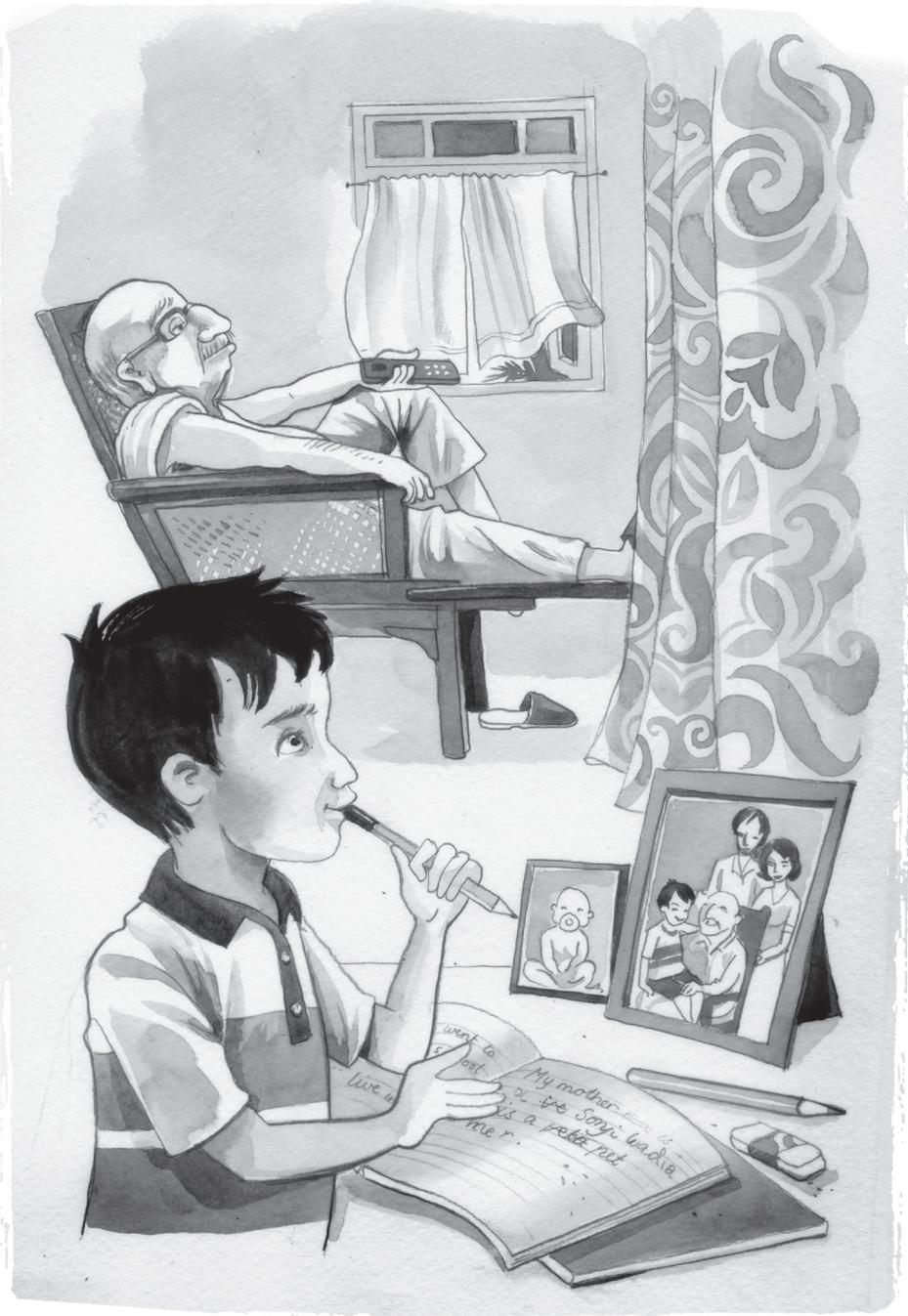
I study at Paranjyot Academy.

I stay at

He shut his eyes trying to recall the twisty metal letters—*Chez Wadia*—on the name plate that hung on the gate of their home. Sonji had explained it to him. ‘*Chez* is French for “in” as in “I stay in” ...’

I stay at *Chez Wadia*. When I grow up I want to be like my Mamaraji.

He glanced at the photo frame on the desk. His parents, Noshir and Sonji, stood stiffly behind



Xerxes who was seated on an old man's lap. Xerxes underlined the word 'Mamavaji', then craned his neck to glance at the old man seated in the adjoining room, watching a film on television. On the screen, he could see an alien creature walking backwards.

Xerxes almost fell off his chair as his notebook was suddenly snatched away. Sonji loomed over him, looking furious as she saw the page.

'How untidy you are, Xerxes! Can you not write without rubbing endlessly! And what is this? I'm not a pet trainer. I'm a vet—a veterinary doctor who treats sick animals. You know that. Why did you write pet trainer?'

'I didn't know the spelling.'

'I taught you, Xerxes. Why can't you say it aloud, then you will get the spelling. Repeat after me—V-E-T ...'

Sonji's eyes fell on the last line.

'Mamavaji?! You can't write that you want to be like your Grandpa!'

Sonji tore out the page neatly, sharpened a pencil and handed Xerxes the notebook.

'What will you write, "When I grow up I want to be ..."?'

'A dog trainer.'

'Don't act smart! Write "I want to be like JRD Tata."'

'Look, Mama, Grandpa wants to be like Alien!'

Sonji looked out of the window and saw Grandpa jumping backwards on the pathway outside their home, his arms windmilling as if to give him momentum.

Sonji darted out and looking around quickly to see if her neighbour Preeti was watching, she pulled Grandpa back into the house.