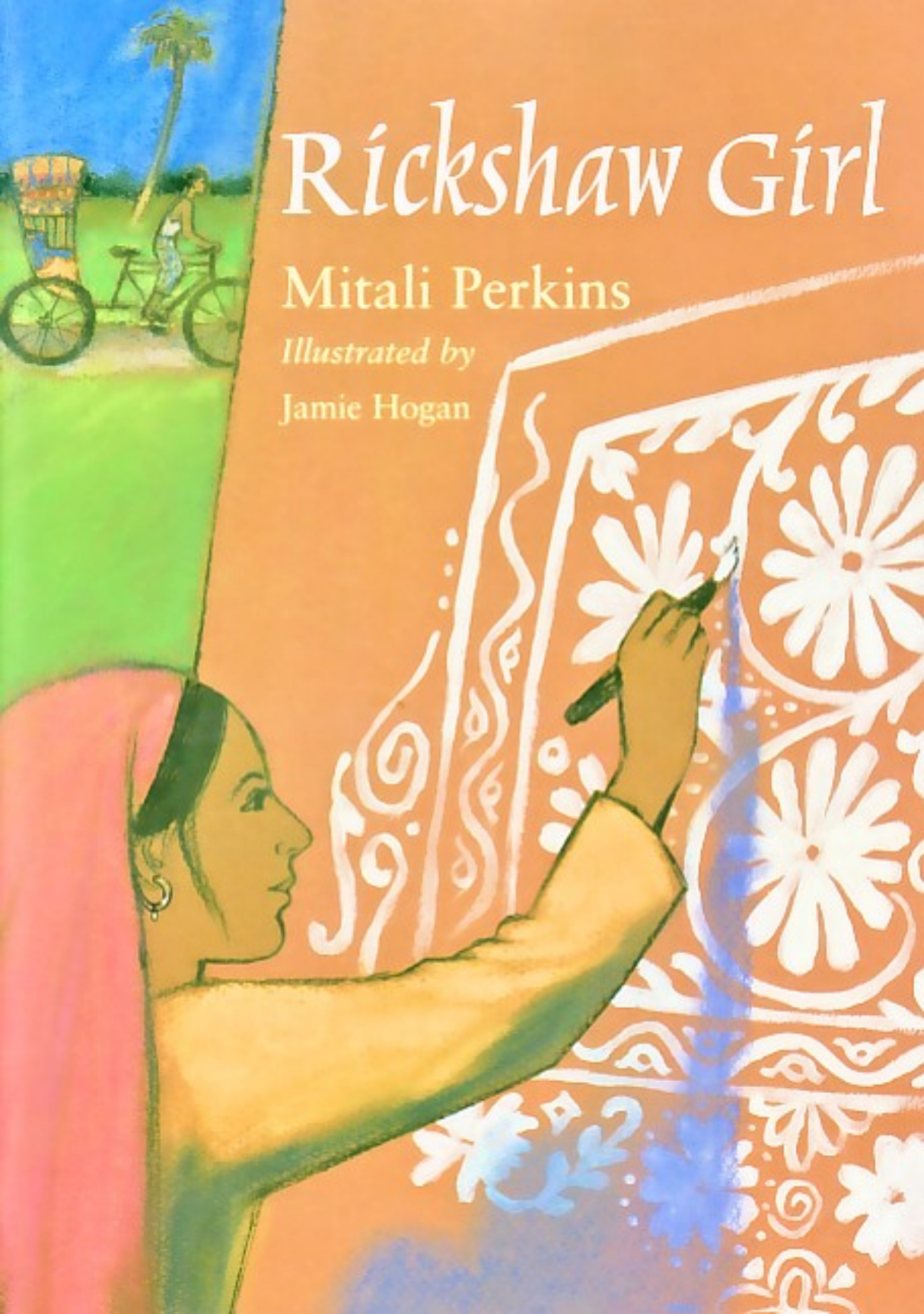


Rickshaw Girl

Mitali Perkins

Illustrated by

Jamie Hogan





NAIMA RACED THROUGH her morning chores, trying hard to be careful. She washed the laundry in the river, making sure she didn't break any buttons this time. The other girls lazily sloshed clothes around, giggling and gossiping, but today Naima didn't stop to chat. She pumped four pails of water at the well, just as Mother had asked, and hauled them back one by one. She sliced eggplant, chili peppers, and onions in tiny, even cubes the way Mother liked them, instead of chopping them quickly into thick chunks the way she usually did.

"I've already wiped four banana leaf plates," Naima announced.

“Without tearing them?” Mother asked, her eyebrows rising like crows’ wings.

“Not a rip in sight.”

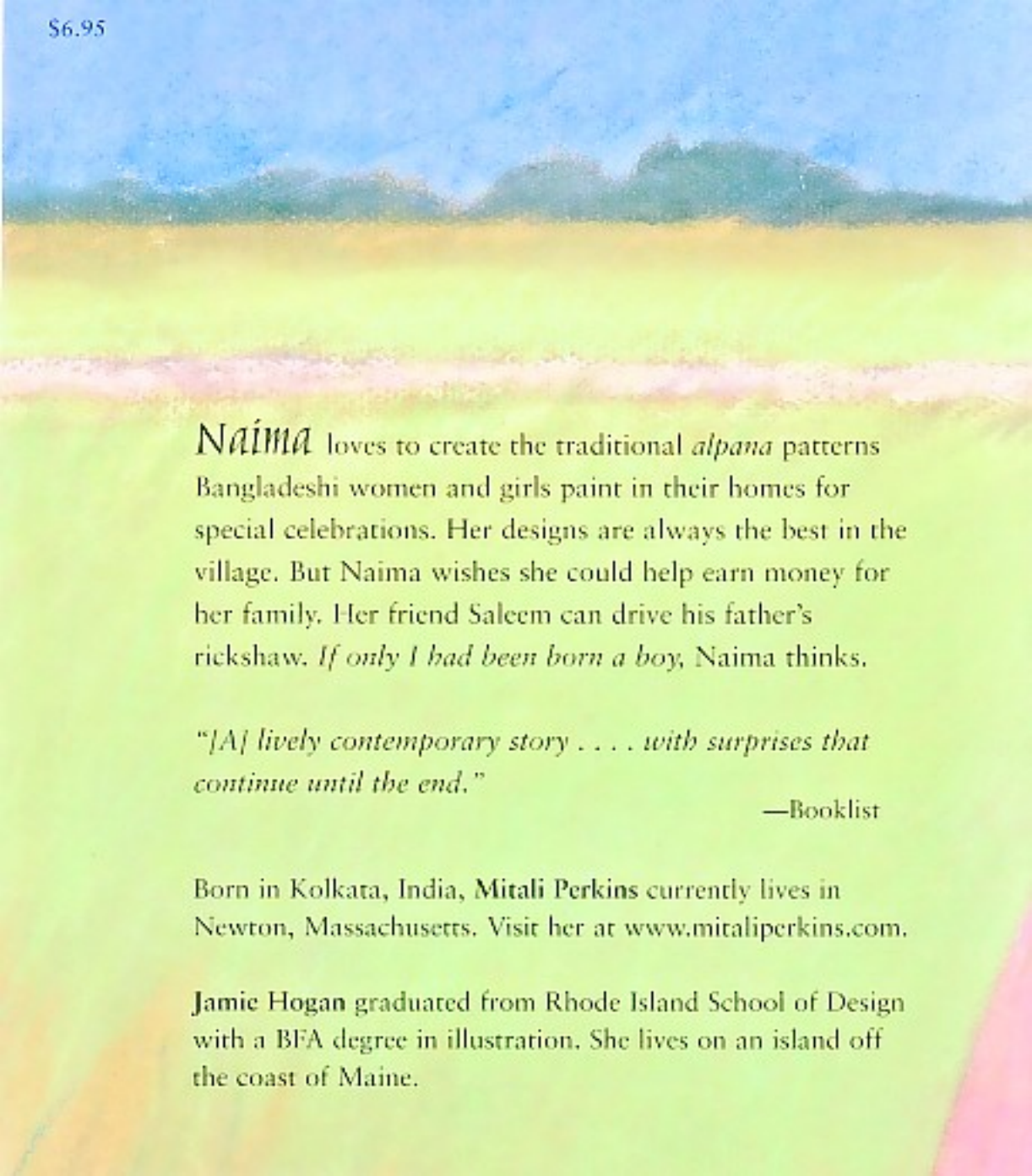
Mother smiled. “Well done, Naima. You may wait outside for Father.”

Naima went quickly to the flat, wide stone just outside the doorway of their hut. Most of the homes in the village looked the same, with smooth clay walls, thatched roofs, dirt paths, and large stone thresholds. They only looked different on holidays, when girls decorated their family’s paths and thresholds with painted patterns called *alpanas*, just as their ancestors had done for generations. In Naima’s village, on International Mother Language Day, when the whole country celebrated the beauty of their Bangla language, the leaders gave a prize to the girl who painted the best *alpanas*.

Humming under her breath Naima carefully mixed up a batch of rice-powder paint. She’d invented a new pattern of curves, lines, and squares in her mind while doing her chores. Before she started painting she had to wipe off

her last practice design. "Stop and *think* before you act," Mother often reminded her. But she never needed to warn Naima to be thoughtful when it came to painting *alpanas*.





Naima loves to create the traditional *alpana* patterns Bangladeshi women and girls paint in their homes for special celebrations. Her designs are always the best in the village. But Naima wishes she could help earn money for her family. Her friend Saleem can drive his father's rickshaw. *If only I had been born a boy*, Naima thinks.

"[A] lively contemporary story . . . with surprises that continue until the end."

—Booklist

Born in Kolkata, India, **Mitali Perkins** currently lives in Newton, Massachusetts. Visit her at www.mitaliperkins.com.

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