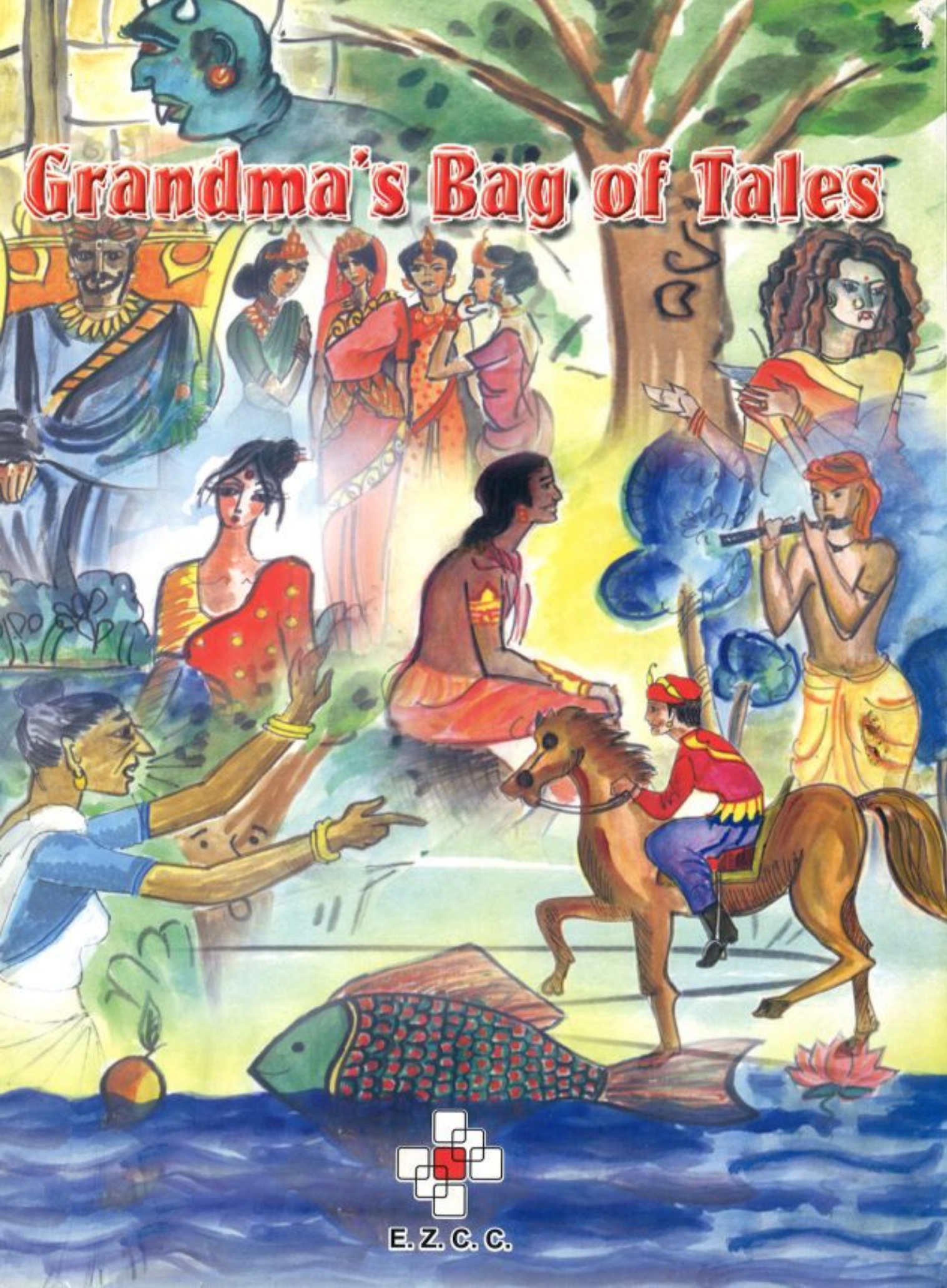


Grandma's Bag of Tales



E. Z. C. C.





Grandma's Bag of Tales

Translated from Bengali

by

Gouri Basu

Illustrations

by

Kaveri Chatterjee



E. Z. C. C.

**EASTERN ZONAL CULTURAL CENTRE
KOLKATA**

Grandma's Bag of Tales

Translated from Bengali by
Gouri Basu

Illustrations by
Kaveri Chatterjee

Published by :
Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre
Kolkata

© E.Z.C.C., 2007

Printed in India by :
Ranico Trade Works
387, Rabindra Sarani
Kolkata-700 006

Design & Layout by :
Kanad Dhar & Ranico Trade Works
387, Rabindra Sarani
Kolkata-700 006

Price : Rs. 450.00



E. Z. C. C.

The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC) established in 1985, covering the states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal and the Union Territory of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, is one of the seven Zonal Cultural Centres set by the Government of India with a view to culturally integrate the States and Union Territories as a part of the programme of national integration.

EZCC has been projecting the diverse cultural heritage of India, transcending territorial boundaries. Indeed, the opportunities of cultural exchange among people of diverse ethnic and cultural characters living in a vast country like India strengthens the centripetal force of national integration.

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India has impressed upon the ZCC's and also provided grants in aid to document, preserve and to sustain the vanishing art forms and oral traditions. The EZCC has initiated an extensive documentation of folk tales, myths and legends of the different states of Eastern India - beginning with a translation of Folk Tales from Orissa. The translation of Thakurmar Jhuli marks yet another milestone in this endeavour.



FOREWORD

Yes, *Thakurma* is technologically challenged, and her *jhuli* is no glitzy gizmo. But if this enchanting world is lost on our children, we have only ourselves to blame for it.

As this classic turns 100 this year - also, coincidentally, the 50th death anniversary of its author, Shri Dakshinaranjan Mitra Mazumdar - we, at EZCC, thought of coming out with a translation of some of the tales in this collection.

We hope this book will enchant our little readers from all parts of our vast country and not only the children from Bengal - to this magic land of demons, queens and princesses, curses, spells and a life larger than anything they have been shown or induced to imagine. The tales are for children, but there are lessons to be learnt that take a lifetime to internalise; values like loyalty, integrity, love and the conviction never to break another's trust.

The history of fairy tales, fables, myths, legends and other traditional stories is difficult to trace as only the literary forms can survive. Still, the evidence of literary works indicate that the tales have existed for thousands of years and are found through out the world. Enchanting as they are, communicative about important social and cultural messages as they continue to be, these are still being written today and relished by the young globally.

This book of translated stories for children is an effort, keeping with the EZCC's endeavour and commitment to perpetuate and sustain our extremely rich cultural heritage.

We have tried to capture the essence of the stories, and to make the leap from one language to the nuances of another language as smooth as we could. We hope that not much has been lost in translation and the little ones enjoy them and learn from them.

Anuradha Mookerjee
Director
EZCC



From the Translator

The year 2007, marked the centenary year of the publication of Bengal's favourite assortment of fairy tales - Thakurmar Jhuli.

There are few Bengalis of my generation who have not grown up on Thakurmar Jhuli. As a child, the fairies and demons that populated Shri Dakshinaraman Mitra Majumdar's classic, were as real to me as characters from history or everyday life.

When my daughter Amrita was growing up, both her grandmothers brought alive the same world for her. As she worked with me on this project, it was childhood revisited for her, just as it was for me.

As adults, these stories challenge our rigid ideas of logic and veracity, freeing our imagination to function more creatively. This is what motivated me to translate these stories a hundred years after they were written. While I battled the obvious handicaps of translation, the need to present these little gems to children unfamiliar with the Bengali language egged me on.

As a tribute the author of Thakurmar Jhuli, whose 50th death anniversary is also being observed this year, let us help our children remain children, and enjoy vicariously the pleasures of this charming fantasy world.

This celebration would remain incomplete without acknowledging our debt to Mrs. Anuradha Mookerjee, Director, EZCC, whose initiative and boundless enthusiasm ensured the translation of this ever popular book.

It is our fervent wish that this translated and illustrated version of Thakurmar Jhuli will cross the borders of Bengal and India and become a part of every child's imagination.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gouri Basu".

Gouri Basu



From the Illustrator

The name 'Thakurmar Jhuli' evokes memories of a distant childhood and a sonorous voice, that of my mother's often lapsing into a nasal twang, mimicking what was thought to be the speech of a 'rakkhosh' the demons that peopled the timeless tales. I would listen in wide eyed wonder and lose myself in this world of unadulterated magic, wish fulfilment and happy endings. A world where wit met with wit, the good got rewarded and evil always got punished, often in the most bizarre ways!

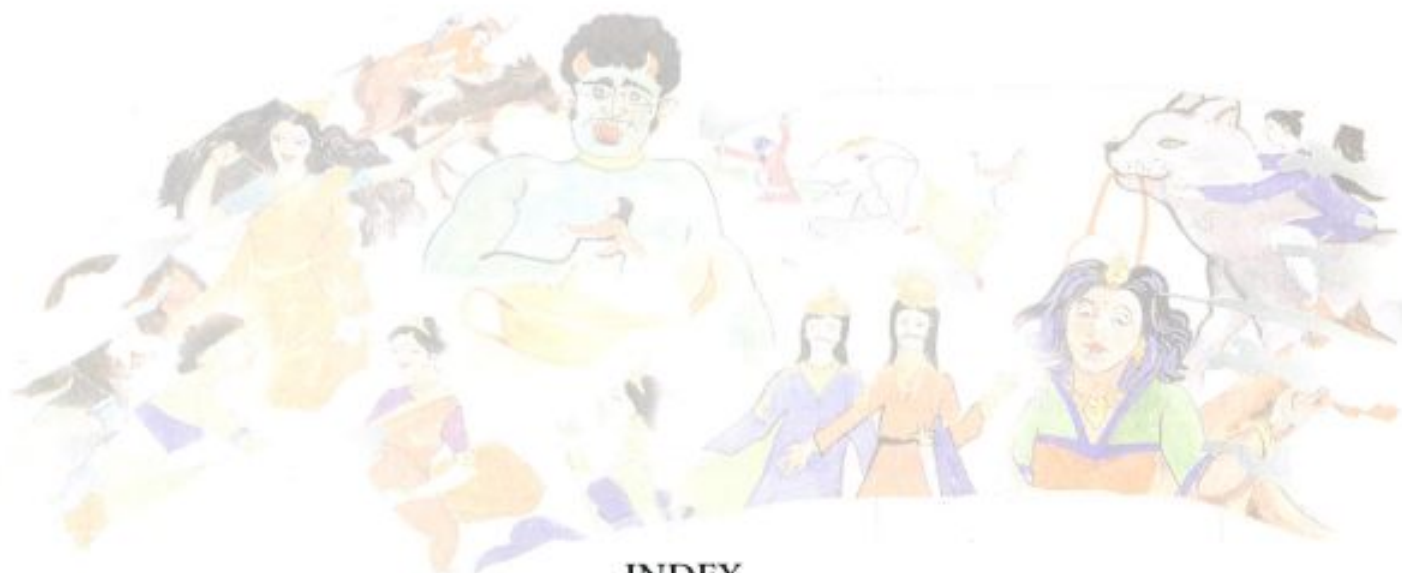
I would call Thakurmar Jhuli a Bengali institution, not just a story book. It was thus with a sense of awe and reverence that I started out on the journey of imaginative illustrating, giving full rein to my creative urges. It was fun making the demons and sorceresses as I could let my imagination take wings, there being no known prototypes!

I have used bright colours remembering the kind of pictures that attracted me in my own childhood. The pictures are simple and uncomplicated, rather like the mind of a child which is uncluttered. Sticking to the Indian style of painting I have used vibrant colours in the garments and ornaments while doing away with detail in the background. To a child the main protagonist is important and not the background.

I would like to thank Mrs. Anuradha Mookerjee, Director, EZCC, for publishing this translated volume to commemorate the centenary celebrations of the publication of this classic book of fairy tales and for giving me an opportunity to work on this project.

Kaveri Chatterjee

Kaveri Chatterjee



INDEX

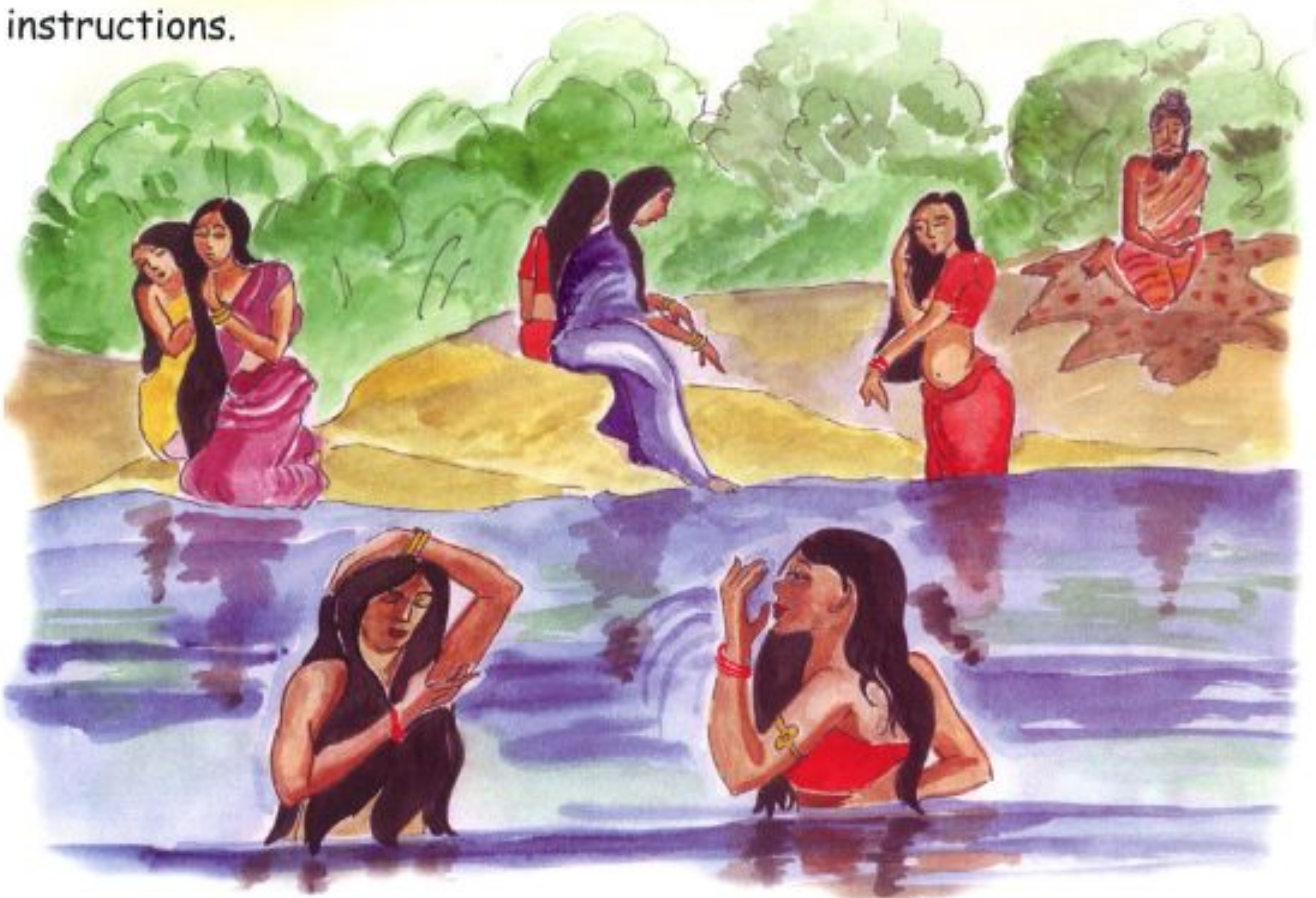
	Page No.
Princess Kalabati	1
The Sleeping Kingdom	19
Kanchanmala and Kakanmala	25
Seven Brothers and a Sister	31
Winter and Spring	37
Kiranmala	53
Lalkamal and Neelkamal	69
The Pomegranate Prince	81
The Land of the Snakes	95
The Demon Queen	105
The Clever Fox Master	117
Two Sisters	125
The Lucky Brahmin	135
The Finger and a Half Tall Boy	145



Princess Kalabati

Once upon a time there lived a king who had seven wives. He reigned over a large kingdom and lived in a magnificent palace. There were elephants and horses and precious gems and jewels in abundance in the land. He had wise ministers and brave soldiers and every courtier led a life of luxury and happiness. But despite having every material comfort one could wish for, the king was deeply unhappy. None of his seven wives had borne him an heir.

One day, the seven queens went to bathe in the river. There, they met a priest who handed the root of a tree to the eldest queen and told her to share it with the six other queens. The queens rushed through their bath and hurried back to the palace to follow the priest's instructions.



The eldest queen decided to prepare rice and the second sat down to cut vegetables, which would be cooked by the third queen for the meal. The fourth queen went to fetch water, the fifth laid the table and the sixth sat down to put together all the ingredients that would be required for cooking. The youngest queen went to cut fish for the meal.

The eldest queen gave the root to the sixth queen and asked her prepare it before she got the ingredients ready. But while preparing the root, the sixth queen ate up a portion of it. She then put the root into a golden bowl, placed it on a silver platter and took it to the eldest queen, who ate some of it and passed it on to the second queen. The second queen tasted it and gave the bowl to the third queen, who ate her share and passed it on to the fifth queen. The fifth queen finished whatever little was left in the bowl. When the fourth queen returned after fetching water she saw that there was hardly anything left for her. She scraped off the bits of root that stuck to the sides of the bowl and licked it clean.



The youngest queen finished cutting the fish and came for her share, only to find that the other six queens had left nothing for her. She threw herself on the floor and started wailing. Feeling sorry for her, the elder queens started blaming one another for not sparing anything for her. The youngest queen's tears drowned the courtyard where the fish she had been cutting, lay. The sixth queen then helped the youngest queen up from the floor and made her drink the water with which the golden bowl had been washed. Weeping, the younger queen did as told.

Ten months and ten days went by. The five queens gave birth to five beautiful sons. The boys were so perfect that it seemed as if the moon herself had borne them. But the fourth and seventh queens were not as fortunate. The fourth queen had given birth to an owl, while a monkey had been born to the youngest.

Amidst much fanfare, the king came to see his sons and wives. But he did not even enquire about his two younger queens. As the days passed, the fourth queen was reduced to a maid working in the zoo while the youngest became the cow dung girl.



Over the years, the young princes grew up. Along with them, the owl and the monkey grew up too. The five princes were named Hira, Manik, Moti, Shanka and Kanchan. The owl was named Bhutum and the monkey Budhu. The princes spent their time riding their magnificent horses under the protective eyes of royal guards. Bhutum and Budhu used to sit together on a small tree and spend their time playing with each other.

The five princes rode around in the kingdom, killing whatever and whoever they laid their eyes on. The people of the kingdom began to turn bitter because of the princes' wayward ways.



Bhutum and Budhu used to come straight home to their mothers once they finished playing. Some evenings, the two roamed the forests to the west of the royal palace. As the two younger queens did menial jobs, there were times that their little ones went without food. At such times, Budhu gathered fallen fruits from the forests for the two mothers and Bhutum collected betel nuts.

One day the five princes went to visit the zoo. On the way, their eyes fell on an owl and a monkey sitting on a tree. Immediately, the princes shouted to the guards to capture them. The guards threw a net over the tree which poor Bhutum and Budhu were unable to tear. Thus the two became captives of the princes and were taken away to the palace. On returning from the zoo, Bhutum's mother found that her son was missing. Budhu's mother, too, returned to an empty house. Both the queens burst into tears and wept bitterly.

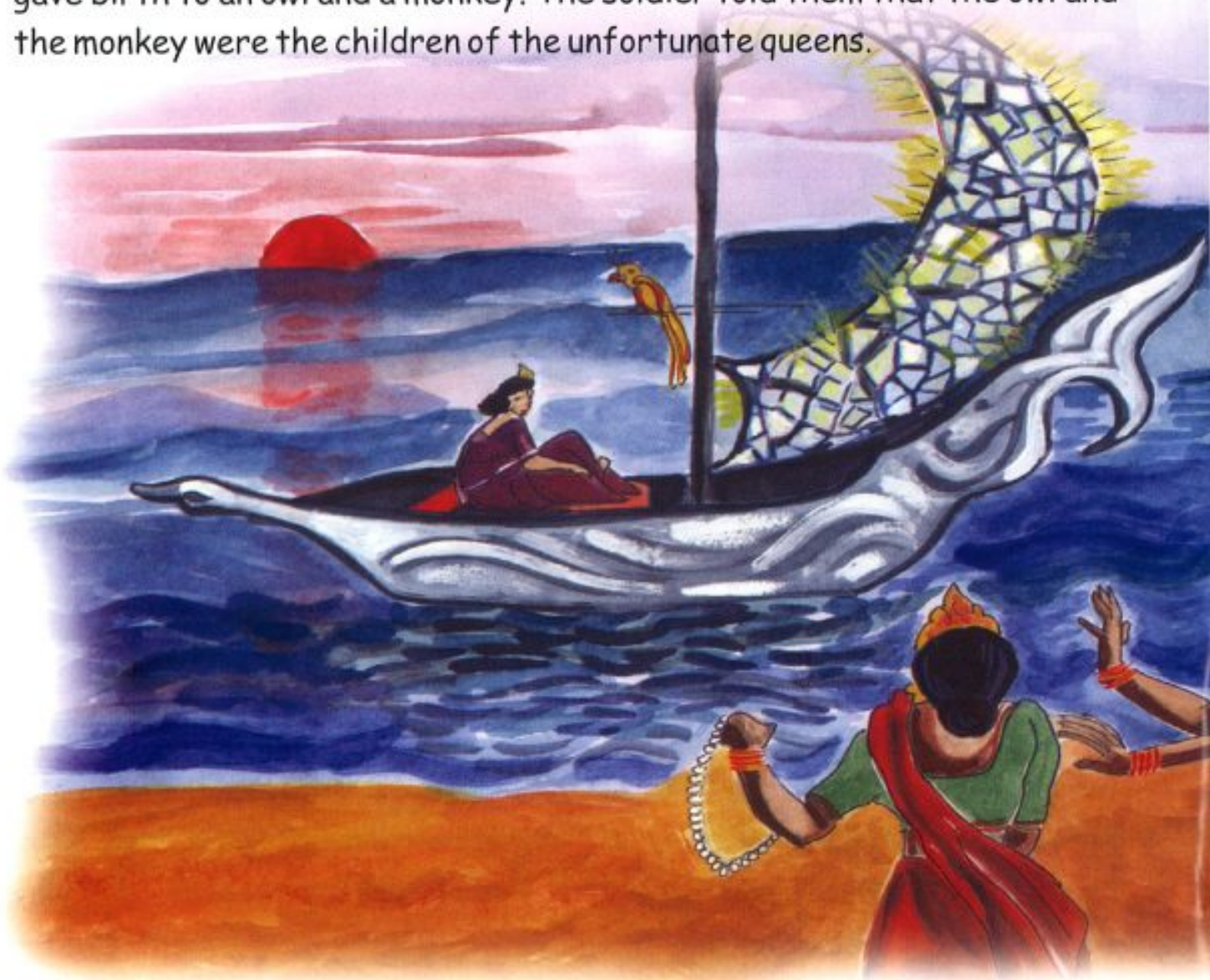


In the royal palace, Bhutum and Budhu's surprise knew no bounds. Everywhere they looked, all they could see were people, elephants, horses and soldiers. Seeing the grandeur around them, the boys wondered why they spent their time playing on tree branches and why their mothers lived in penury.

The owl and the monkey then requested the princes to have their mothers brought to the palace. The princes were astonished to see animals talking and agreed at once. But when Bhutum and Budhu told them who their mothers were, the princes roared with laughter. They could not believe that human mothers had given birth to animals.

The princes were not aware of the sorrowful stories of the two younger queens.

Then, one of the soldiers revealed to the princes the true story of the king's two younger queens and how he had disowned them after they gave birth to an owl and a monkey. The soldier told them that the owl and the monkey were the children of the unfortunate queens.



Hearing the story, the cruel princes kicked the cage in which Bhutum and Budhu were imprisoned and instructed the guards to get rid of them.

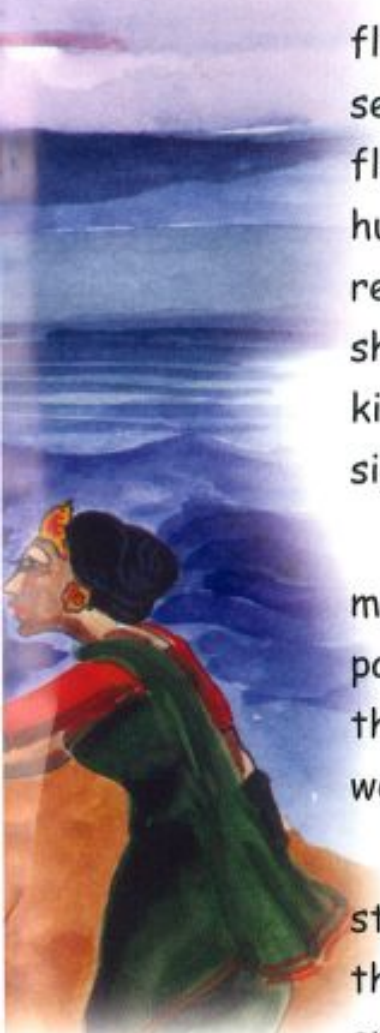
Bhutum and Budhu had overheard the story and realised that they, too, were the king's sons. The two decided to talk to their father, the king.

The five queens who had borne the heirs to the throne sat chatting amongst themselves when a handmaiden ran into the room. She told them that a silver boat with a mast made of diamonds had sailed into the river. Inside, was a beautiful girl who sat talking to a golden parrot. All the queens went to the river to see the girl but the boat set sail as soon as they reached.

The queens called out to the maiden, offering her a flower made of pearls. The maiden then told the queens to send their sons to the Kingdom of Kalabati with the pearl flower. As the boat was moving away fast, the queens hurriedly asked her which kingdom she belonged to. She replied that she was Kalabati, the princess herself, and that she would marry the queens' sons if they could reach her kingdom with the pearl flower. Soon, the boat went out of sight.

The queens sent for the princes. Hearing their mothers' command, the five young men returned to the royal palace as fast as they could. The queens hurriedly narrated the entire incident to the king. He gave a few commands and went to take care of the royal court.

When Bhutum and Budhu reached the court, the guards stopped them. But when the two introduced themselves as the king's sons, the guards made way. Bhutum ran in and sat on the king's lap and Budhu flew in and perched on his



father's shoulder. Both the boys addressed the king as their father. A stunned silence fell over the court. When realisation dawned on the king, he cried tears of joy and hugged the animal boys. He then left the court with his two sons.

Outside, there was great commotion in the kingdom. Five beautiful ships had sailed into the river to take the five princes to Kalabati's land.

With great fanfare the queens wished their sons luck as they embarked on their journey. When the king reached the river with Bhutum and Budhu, the two boys asked for a large ship so that they could follow their brothers.



This angered the five queens and they slapped the two boys. They were furious that the king had accepted the owl and the monkey as his children and went back to the palace in a huff, taking their husband with them. But Budhu and Bhutum were not disheartened. They decided to make their own ship and follow the princes to the kingdom of Kalabati.

Meanwhile, the two younger queens spent their days crying for their missing sons. Word about the princes' departure reached them, only to increase their sorrow. The two younger queens walked all the way to the riverbank and set afloat small boats filled with flowers and fruits as offerings to the Gods. Both women stood crying, wondering what sins of the past they were being punished for. After offering prayers, they went back to their humble huts.

On the way to the shipmaker's house, Bhutum and Budhu spotted the tiny boats their mothers had sent as divine offerings. But unaware of their origin, the two boys got into the boats and left for their destination, the Kingdom of Kalabati.



The five princes had by then reached the kingdom of three old women. As soon as they threw their anchors into the water, the husbands of the women surrounded their ships. The men put the ship's crew, including the princes, into a large sack and took them back to their wives.

For the next three nights, the women feasted on the flesh of the princes and their soldiers and fell into a deep slumber. Late at night, the princes started talking amongst themselves from within the walls of the women's stomachs. They lamented that their fate had brought them to such a pass that they could never see or hear their parents again.

While the boys were talking, they heard voices calling out to them. The princes wondered who had come to rescue them. In reply, the voices outside instructed the princes to catch hold of the tail that was being offered to them. One of the princes did exactly as he was told and climbed out through the nose of one of the old women. There, he saw Bhutum and Budhu who told him to kill the women and rescue his companions. As soon as he did so, all the princes and their attendants clambered out of the stomachs of the women. They hurried back to their ships, but no one so much as enquired about Bhutum and Budhu.

Travelling through the night, the ships came to the Red River which had no banks. All they could see was red water all around. The sailors lost their sense of direction and all five ships ended up in the immense ocean. For seven days and seven nights the ships were tossed about in the sea. By the end of the seventh night, the ships had all but turned into wrecks. The five princes cried out for help and wished that their animal brothers could bail them out again.

Hearing their brothers' cries, Bhutum and Budhu rowed in the direction of the ships. Fastening their boats securely, they climbed aboard and directed the captains to steer their vessels north. In no time, the ships had moved out of the ocean, into a river.

On its banks were countless mango and jackfruit trees. The princes satisfied their hunger by feasting on the fruits. Then, the haughty princes had their animal brothers thrown out into the water as their presence would spoil the magnificence of their ships.

Sailing ahead, the five royal ships got sucked into a whirlpool. The princes and their crew drowned without a trace. Soon enough, Bhutum and Budhu reached the same spot. Budhu sensed that something was amiss and suggested to his brother that they should dive into the water to make sure everything was alright. Bhutum refused to do as his brother requested. He said that if the princes had drowned, it only served them right for being so ungrateful. Budhu admonished his brother for speaking thus and dived into the water himself. He tied a string round his waist and instructed Bhutum to pull him out only when he tugged at the string.



Swimming into the depths, Budhu reached the Kingdom of Hell. There he saw a staircase, which led him to the royal palace. But the only person he could see was a very old lady, who sat huddled in a corner stitching a quilt. When the lady saw Budhu, she threw the quilt at him. Instantly, thousands of soldiers arrived and tied up the boy. The soldiers carried Budhu into the palace and pushed him into a dark room. Then, he heard someone call him. Turning around, he saw his five brothers with all their sailors.

The next morning, Budhu pretended to be dead. The girl who brought food to the princes saw the dead monkey and kicked it out of the palace.

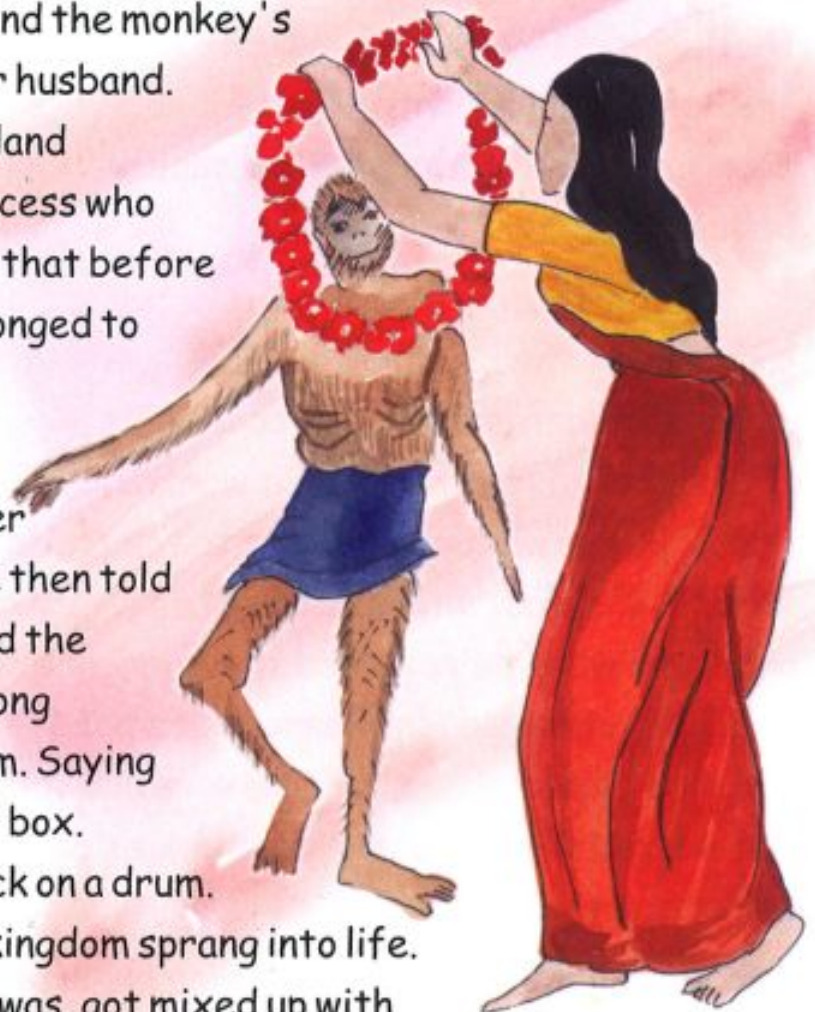
Once outside, Budhu opened his eyes slowly. Looking up, he saw a beautiful maiden talking to a golden parrot. Climbing up trees and balconies Budhu reached the place where the maiden was standing and overheard what she was saying to the bird.



He heard her complain that the prince of her dreams had not yet come to take her away. The maiden's hair was adorned with a flower of pearls. Budhu stealthily took the pearl flower out of her hair. Immediately the parrot drew her attention to the missing flower. The maiden touched her tresses and found that the flower had indeed been taken out of her hair. Suddenly the golden parrot cried out to her owner that the one who would wed her was standing right behind her. Turning around, she saw a monkey with the flower in his hand.

Heartbroken, the maiden started weeping, but being a woman of honour, she put a garland round the monkey's neck and accepted him as her husband. Budhu laughed after the garland ceremony and asked the princess who she belonged to. She replied that before she belonged to him, she belonged to her parents.

Budhu begged her to free his brothers and told her to accompany him home. She then told him that she lived in a box and the only way he could take her along was to carry the box with him. Saying so, she climbed back into her box. The golden parrot then struck on a drum. At that moment, the entire kingdom sprang into life. The box in which the maiden was, got mixed up with all the other boxes moving around in the kingdom.



Budhu looked at the drum which the bird had struck, with interest. He noticed that the moment the right side of the drum was struck, the people disappeared and when the left side was struck, they reappeared. He sat down, shut his eyes and started playing the drum. The people were so annoyed that they handed over the box in which the princess was and asked the



monkey to leave them in peace. Budhu then struck the left face of the drum and made all the people disappear. Only the princess' box was left behind.

Without letting go of the drum he called out to his wife. The maiden came out of the box and told Budhu that she was hungry. With the drum on his shoulder and the box containing his wife in his hand, he set off to find fruits which the maiden wanted. He soon found a tree laden with fruits. But he was unable to get to the fruits as a python was guarding the tree. This did not intimidate the brave monkey. He walked round the tree once, and when he returned to his original spot, he started running. The snake got entangled in the mesh of string that was around Budhu's waist and died. Budhu then called his wife and told her to eat as many fruits as she wanted. The princess said she was only testing him and agreed to go back home with him.

But Budhu insisted on freeing his brothers first and said he had to get the quilt from the old woman down in the dungeon.



The princess agreed. Then Budhu took the princes and their sailors along with him, slung the drum on his shoulder, lifted the box, and draped the quilt around himself. Nibbling on the fruits he had got, Budhu tugged at the string that was tied to his waist.

Bhutum realised that Budhu was returning and began to heave his brother up. All of them surfaced from the water.

The sailors immediately set sail on their boats with Budhu and Bhutum. Soon, they

noticed that Budhu spent a lot of time talking to someone inside the box he carried, and told the princes about it. In the dead of the night when all was quiet, the princes

quietly removed the box and threw Budhu overboard. Then they shot an arrow at Bhutum and killed him too.

The princes hastily opened the case to unravel the mystery of the talking box and out stepped Princess Kalabati. When they asked her, she told them that she belonged to the person who owned the drum. The princes understood that she was married to Budhu and held her captive.

The ships finally docked in their own kingdom. The king, queen and every courtier came to welcome the princes. The queens were glad to see that their sons had brought back the beautiful maiden as their daughter-in-law and took her home.

Back in the palace, each time the queens asked her who had married her, she said her husband was not one of the princes, but the one who owned the drum. The queens were furious and threatened to cut her to pieces. The princess requested them to give her a month's time as she was fasting, and they agreed.

The two younger queens could not bear their sorrow to find that their beloved animal sons had not returned and decided to drown themselves in the river. As they prepared to plunge into the deep waters, they heard voices call out to them. Their happiness knew no bounds when they saw that the voices were of Bhutum and Budhu. A tearful reunion followed.



The people of the village were surprised to see a drum with the two poor women. They were even more astonished to see that every tree around the two women's huts was laden with fruit. The very next day, millions of soldiers stood guard in front of the huts. The villagers were dumbfounded. News of the women's prosperity reached the king.

The princess told the king that her fast was over and he could kill her if he so wished. Seeing her, the king realised the mistake he had made. He ordered his guards to bring his two younger queens back to the palace. The princess herself accompanied the guards.

Full of jealousy and rage, the five elder queens and their sons locked themselves up in their rooms and refused to join the festivities.

Kalabati returned with the two younger queens and their sons. Budhu and Bhutum touched their father's feet as a sign of respect.

The very next day, Budhu and Kalabati were married and Bhutum was married to Hirabati, a princess from another kingdom. The five queens and princes still refused to step out of their rooms. In anger, the king sealed their rooms forever.

Days went by. One night Kalabati and Hirabati suddenly awoke to find that their husbands were missing. Lying next to them were the skin of a monkey and the feathers of an owl. The princesses realised to their relief and joy that their husbands were not animals after all. Looking around, they saw their husbands, as handsome as sons of Gods, guarding the royal palace. Both maidens were struck by the beauty and youth of their husbands. They burnt the monkey's skin and the owl's feathers. When the smell of the burning skin and feathers reached the two princes, they rushed back to their rooms. Aghast at what their wives had done, they said the skin and feathers had been given to them by a priest so that they could go to the kingdom of Gods anytime and also guard their father's kingdom. But the princesses were too happy to pay heed to their words.

In the morning, when the courtiers saw the king sitting with his two sons as radiant as the Gods themselves, they were sure that nothing short of a miracle had happened. The two princesses enlightened the people about what had happened the night before. The names Budhu and Bhutum were changed to Budhkumar and Roopkumar. Happiness reigned in the kingdom. The king, along with his sons and daughters-in law, lived happily ever after.



The Sleeping Kingdom

Once upon a time in a distant land there lived a very wise and handsome prince. Every courtier sang his praise and he was loved by one and all. One day the prince decided he would go on a world tour. Everyone in the kingdom was unhappy and the queen refused to let him go. Only the king, his father, understood his desire to travel the world.



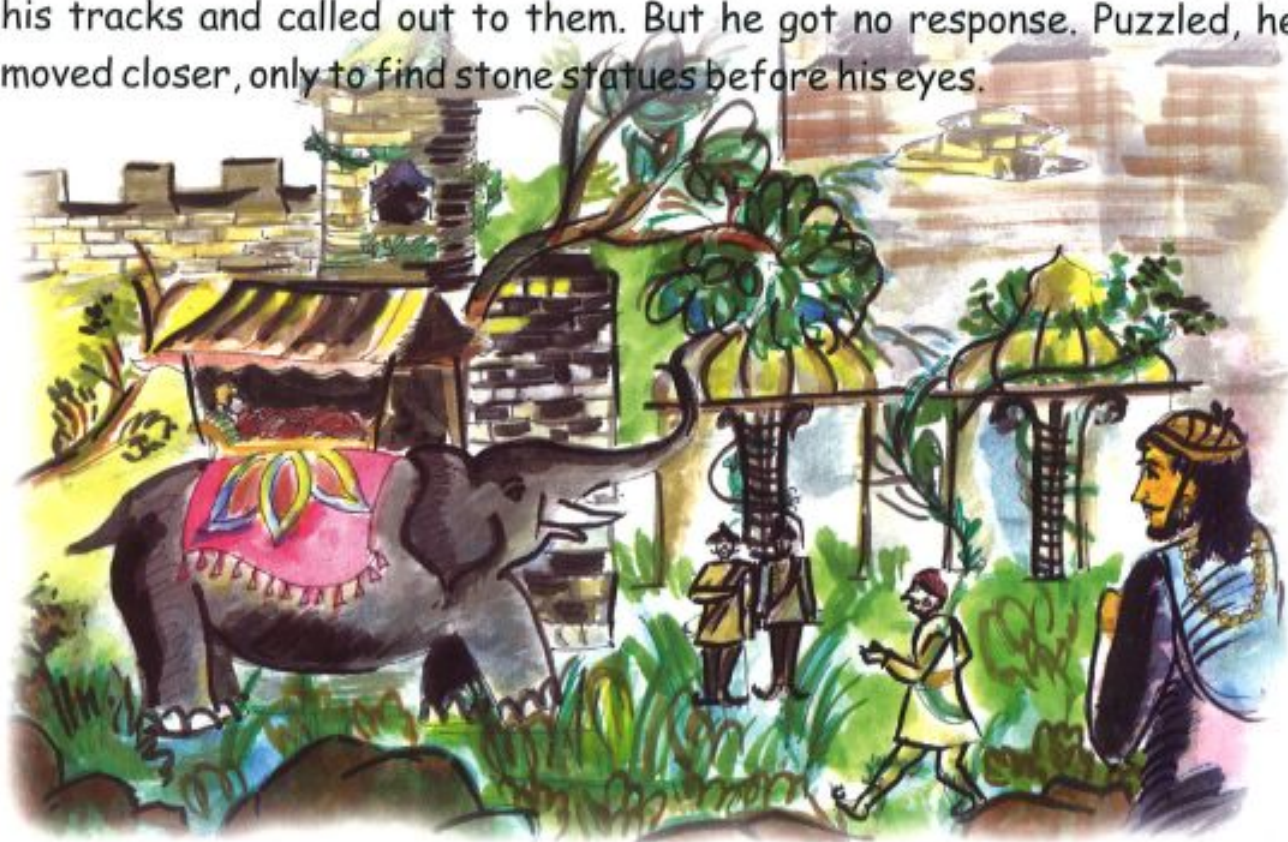
Learning that the king had given his son permission to go, the people of the kingdom donned their best clothes in the hope of accompanying the prince. The queen, too, brought a chest full of precious jewels for her son to take with him. But the young prince refused to take anyone or anything with him. Dressed in new clothes and armed with a glistening sword, he set off on his journey.

He crossed many a country, mountain, river and kingdom until he came to the middle of a forest. All was quiet around him and no sound could he hear of birds or animals. Surprised, the prince continued walking. On his way, a sight greeted the prince. A palace towered above him, its gate touching the sky. He had never seen anything like it, and gazed at it astonished. Creepers grew thick over the entrance and there was no sentry to guard it.

Making his way through the foliage, the prince slowly walked inside but no music welcomed him.

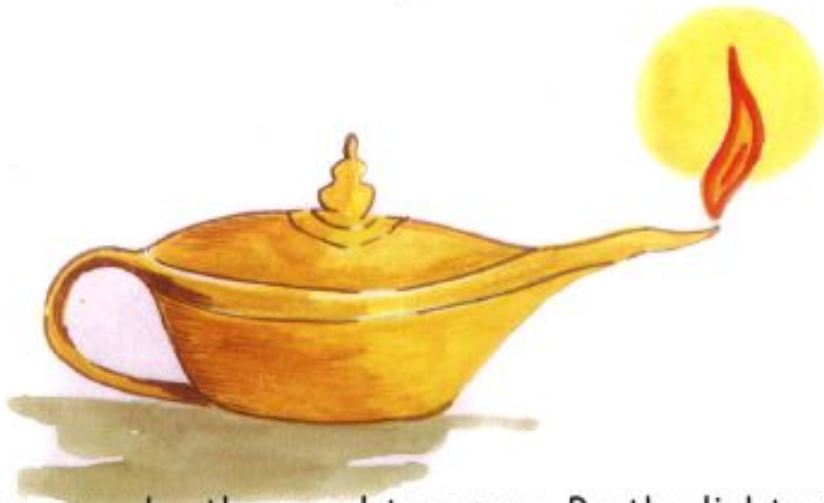
What he saw within the walls of the palace left him speechless. The kingdom was spotless as if it had just been washed with pure milk. But not a soul was there to receive him and a deathly silence prevailed all around.

Moving on, the prince saw royal elephants and horses. Then, seeing royal guards, common people, the gatekeeper and soldiers, he stopped in his tracks and called out to them. But he got no response. Puzzled, he moved closer, only to find stone statues before his eyes.



He walked past them as if in a dream, and found a small hut housing artillery for war. For guards, the hut had lifeless statues of stone.

The prince moved on and reached the royal court. An oil lamp burnt there silently, but all it illuminated was a room full of statues - the king, his ministers and courtiers were nothing but pieces of rock. The whole kingdom was frozen into stone. The prince bowed his head and walked away.



He then came by the royal treasury. By the light of thousands of lamps, gems, precious stones and jewels gleamed at him. But the prince simply moved on to the next hut without even laying a finger on them.

As he approached the hut, the fragrance of a thousand flowers wafted towards him. Walking inside, he saw millions of lotus flowers in full bloom, but there was no water to feed their roots. Then, his eyes alighted on a beautiful maiden asleep on a bed of gold at the centre of the garden. Only her face, as radiant as the moon, could be seen. Taken with the beauty of the maiden, the prince stood and gazed.

Days passed, but the prince could not take his eyes off the princess as she lay sleeping. Suddenly one day, he noticed a golden stick lying by her pillow. As he bent down to pick it up, he found a silver stick on the other side. He leaned over to pick up the silver stick, when the golden one touched the princess' head, and, before he knew it, the beautiful maiden awoke.



No sooner did she open her eyes than everything around her, too, seemed to wake up. Birds chirped from every tree, elephants trumpeted and horses neighed. With the clang of the guards' swords, the king and his ministers awoke in the royal court. Everyone wondered who it was that helped the kingdom break free from the grip of the curse of eternal sleep.

Soon the king and his entourage made their way to the garden, where they saw the young prince and princess engaged in conversation. The king enquired which kingdom the prince belonged to, and who his noble father was. Everyone in the kingdom showered the prince with blessings. To express his gratitude, the king offered the prince his daughter's hand in marriage and gifted him his entire kingdom.

All around, flowers were in full bloom and melodious music played to celebrate the joy the prince had brought to the kingdom, which had passed from a state of motionlessness to one of happy awakening.

With much fanfare, the king crowned the prince as the new sovereign. As the whole kingdom celebrated, the prince and princess were joined in matrimony.

Meanwhile, the prince's mother pined for him relentlessly, sick with worry. The king went blind, crying for his son. This kingdom was in complete darkness. It was as if the light had gone out of the land as the prince left it.



But then one day, the kingdom came to life again. Laughter and music filled the streets and reached the king and queen's ears. At long last, what they had been longing to hear, had come true. Their son had returned, and with him, was his wife - as beautiful a maiden as they had ever set eyes on.

Their hearts overflowing with happiness, the king and queen welcomed the happy couple into the palace which reverberated with music.

The young prince then touched his father's eyes with the golden stick and the king could see again. The queen too, gained back her health.

Seeing their rulers so happy, the people of the land rejoiced and from that moment on, everybody lived happily ever after.

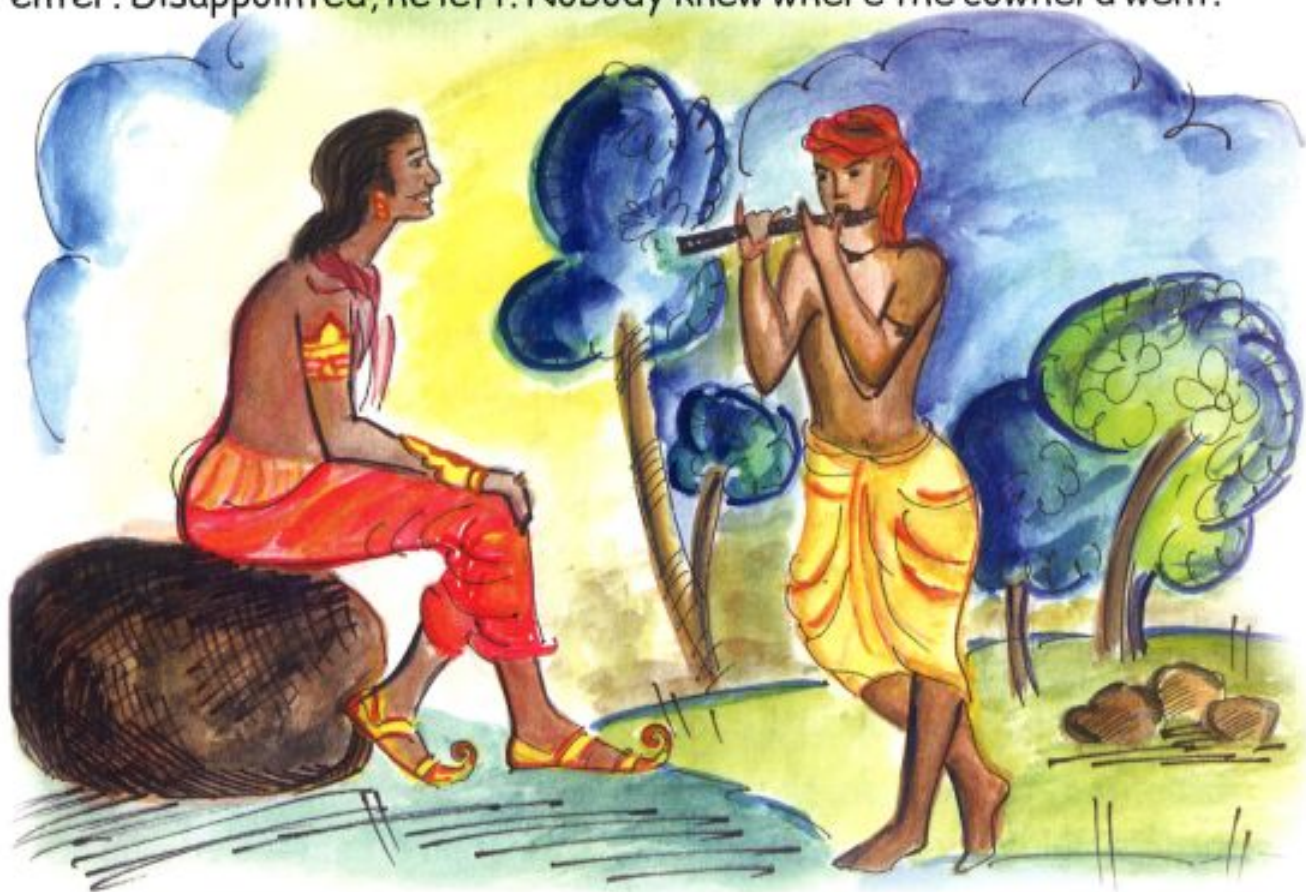


Kanchanmala and Kakanmala

Once upon a time there lived a prince and a cowherd who were the best of friends. The young prince promised his friend that when he became king, he would make him the minister. The cowherd agreed to this proposition.

Both boys lived in harmony, the cowherd playing his flute and the prince listening enchanted.

Soon, the prince was crowned king and inherited a treasury full of gems and jewels. He was married to a princess named Kanchanmala. Months passed and slowly he forgot all about his best friend, the cowherd, and the promise made to him. One day the cowherd came to see the prince, now the king, and his bride. But the guards did not let him enter. Disappointed, he left. Nobody knew where the cowherd went.



The next morning, when the king awoke, he was unable to open his eyes. There were needles all over his body. Even his hair had turned into needles. The entire kingdom was upset seeing the king's condition.



The unfortunate king could not eat, sleep or talk. He then realised that misfortune had come his way because he had not kept the promise he had made to his friend, the cowherd. But he could tell no one about this. The king whiled away his days in misery while the queen took over the reins of the kingdom.

One day, the queen went to the river to bathe. There, she saw a beautiful maiden who came up to her and asked if she could serve her. The queen told her that she could serve her only if she took the needles off the king's body. The maiden agreed. The queen gifted her bangles and made the maiden her servant. The young girl told the queen to bathe in the river but she refused. She then forced the queen to step into the river, after taking off all her jewellery. She proceeded to oil the queen's hair saying it was knotted and matted. Finally she left the queen in the water and put on the royal clothes and ornaments.

From that moment on, the servant girl became queen and the queen became her maid.

Kakanmala, the beautiful maiden who had tricked the queen, came back to the palace and demanded to know why no one had come to escort her back from the river. The new queen even beheaded the minister for this. Everyone was stunned in the kingdom. Out of fear, every courtier kept his opinion about the change in the queen's behaviour to himself. The king knew nothing of the new development.



The real queen, on the other hand, spent all her time crying. She cursed herself for being tricked so

easily. The king spent his days in severe pain. Flies buzzed around him and the needles made him go numb with pain.

One day, the real queen went to the river to wash her clothes. There, she saw a man sitting under a tree with a bundle of multi-coloured thread. The man was singing about what he would do if he had needles. He sang that if he had thousands of needles he would buy himself a watermelon, if he had five thousand he would buy things from the market and if he had a lakh of needles he would offer prayers at the king's temple. The queen went up to him and asked him who he was. She told him that she could give him as many needles as he wanted. Hearing this, the man quietly put his thread into a box and began to follow the queen.

On the way, Kanchanmala revealed her sad story to the man. Though he listened carefully, he did not say much. Once they reached the royal palace, the man told the maiden who was posing as the queen that the day was auspicious and that she should observe a fast along with him. He requested the queen to decorate the palace and prepare rice cakes, which would be eaten to break the fast. He said he would decorate the kingdom with brightly coloured thread. Taking Kanchanmala with her, Kakanmala went into the kitchen to follow the man's instructions but she made terrible rice cakes whereas the real queen made delicious ones.

With this incident, the man became sure about the identity of the real queen. He was only testing the veracity of the story Kanchanmala had told him. Now, he decided to help the real queen.

After making the rice cakes both women went about decorating the house. The maiden pretending to be the queen made a mess of the decorations whereas the real queen, reduced to the status of a servant, made splendid designs.

The man then called out to Kakanmala and asked her whether she was the queen of the kingdom, telling her to speak nothing but the truth. This angered Kakanmala. She called the royal guards and instructed them to kill the man and the real queen. She told them that she would not rest until she had bathed in their blood.

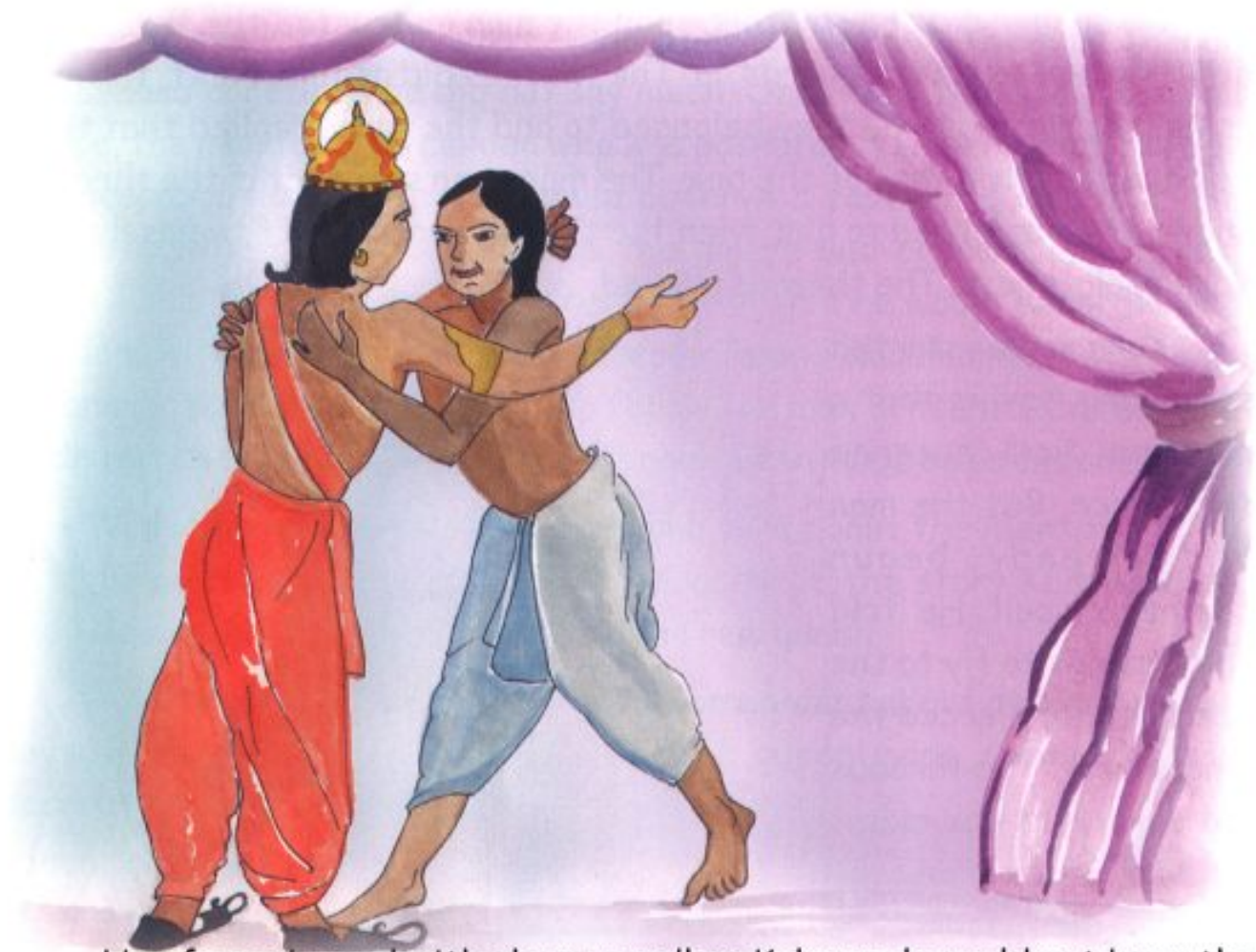


No sooner did she say this, than the man instructed the threads in his little box to tie the guards up. The threads did as told. Next, the man asked the threads who they belonged to and the yarns replied that they belonged to the owner of the box. The man then said that if the threads and the box belonged to him, then the threads would stuff themselves in Kakanmala's nose. The threads obeyed.

Kakanmala started screaming, saying that a madman had entered the palace. But the man had already begun casting a spell. He told the threads to fly to the needles that pierced the king's body. The threads did so, and at the man's bidding, they removed the needles from the king's body relieving him of the pain he had suffered for so long. The needles and threads then got together to stitch up Kakanmala's mouth.



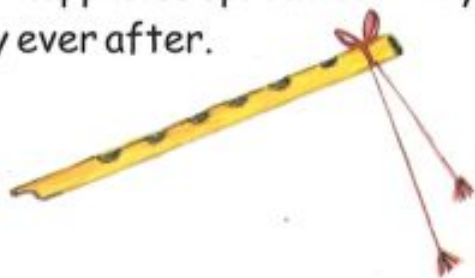
The king opened his eyes and saw his old friend, the cowherd. Their happiness knew no bounds. The king realised that the cowherd had been his true friend and had relieved him of his misery. As promised so many years ago, the king made him the minister of the kingdom. The simple cowherd only demanded a flute from the king, who presented him with a golden one as a sign of love and friendship.



Her face pierced with sharp needles, Kakanmala could not bear the pain and died a lonely death.

Kanchanmala was restored to her royal chamber, and her sad days came to an end.

Back in the royal court, the cowherd took on his duties as minister. The king and his minister spent the whole day working for the uplift of the kingdom. At the end of the day's duties, the two friends sat under a tree as they used to as children, the cowherd playing his flute and the king listening appreciatively. Their happiness spread to every home in the kingdom and everyone lived happily ever after.



Seven Brothers and a Sister

There was once a king who ruled a distant land with his seven wives. The six elder queens were arrogant and conceited, but the youngest was a gentle and calm lady. It was thus no surprise that she was the king's favourite wife.

The king was noble and brave and treated his subjects as his own kin. The kingdom had much to be proud of - a large number of people, royal guards, animals and precious jewels. But its ruler was an unhappy man. What made the king sad was that there was no heir to the throne.



Time went by and one day, the youngest queen told the king that he was going to become a father. The king's happiness knew no bounds. He instructed the royal guards to announce the good news all through his

kingdom. He opened the royal storehouse to the public and told the people to take anything, from sweets to jewels, that their hearts desired and treat it as a gift from him. Hearing this the elder queens grew jealous of the youngest queen and started plotting against her.

The king tied a golden chain and a bell around his own waist and around his youngest queen's, instructing her to pull the chain when his son was born. Saying this he left for the royal court.



The elder queens offered to stay with her at the time of the birth of her child and deliberately pulled the chain as soon as the king reached his court. The king rushed back to the youngest queen's chamber, entourage in tow, only to see that no child had been born. He returned to the royal court but before he could begin the day's business he felt another tug at the chain. He hurried back but there was still no child. Angrily, he threatened to punish all the queens severely if the chain was pulled before the baby was born.

In the meanwhile, the youngest queen gave birth to seven sons and a daughter. The children were as beautiful as flowers and as radiant as the moon. Their presence lit up the whole room.

The young queen requested to see her sons but the elder queens told her that she had not given birth to children, and that only mice and frogs had been born out of her womb. Believing this, the young queen collapsed. The hardhearted, cruel and unfeeling elder queens did not pull the chain. Instead, with great secrecy, they hid the newborns in big pots and buried them in the royal garden. After committing this heinous crime, they pulled the chain.

Once again the king arrived amid great fanfare. The elder queens had caught some frogs and mice by then. They showed these to the king. Mad with anger, he banished the youngest queen. This is exactly what the elder queens had hoped for and in their evil hearts, they rejoiced.



Thrown out of the palace, the youngest queen roamed the streets collecting dung cakes. Seeing the misfortune that had struck her, Mother Nature grew sad and shed tears of sorrow.

A long time elapsed. There was no happiness in the king's heart or in his kingdom and no flowers blossomed in the royal gardens.

One day the royal gardener approached the king and told him that there were no flowers in the garden except a single Parul tree with seven beautiful Champak blooms. The king ordered the gardener to pluck the Champak flowers for him so that he could offer prayers to the Gods. The gardener obeyed.

But the moment the Parul tree saw the gardener, its flower called out to the seven Champak flowers. The Champak flowers responded. The Parul flower asked the seven Champaks if they were willing to give themselves to the gardener. Hearing this, the Champak flowers climbed higher into the tree and said they would give themselves only if the king himself came.





The speechless gardener ran to the king to report all that he had seen and heard. The surprised king left the royal court to see for himself if what the gardener said was true. He reached the garden and tried plucking the flowers. But again, the Parul flower called out to the Champak flowers asking them whether they would give themselves to the king. The seven Champak flowers climbed even higher and replied that they would do so only if the eldest queen came.

The king called for his eldest queen but the flowers refused to be plucked. One by one, they called for all the evil queens but kept climbing higher and clung to the tree, shining like stars in the night sky.

The seven Champak flowers finally said they would give themselves only if the lady who collected dung cakes in the kingdom came to pluck them. The king sent all his royal guards to find her. The guards spotted her soon enough and brought her to the garden.

The youngest queen came clothed in a tattered saree, her hair matted with dung.

She went forward to pick the flowers.

Immediately, the seven Champaks lowered themselves to within her reach and the Parul flower joined



them. From each of the seven Champak flowers jumped a prince and the Parul flower opened her petals to let out a beautiful princess. The seven princes and the princess gathered around the lady, calling her their mother.

Everyone was shocked but the king understood all. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he thought about how he had wronged his favourite queen. The other queens trembled with fear when they understood that the king was aware of their crime. He then banished the elder queens and, taking with him his sons, his daughter and his youngest queen, returned to the royal palace.

The music of drums greeted them as they entered the palace and joy returned to the kingdom once again.

Winter and Spring

There once lived a king who had two queens. The elder queen did everything possible to make the younger queen's life miserable. If the younger queen made the smallest mistake, the elder queen would make a mountain out of a molehill just to bother her. This saddened the younger queen.

The elder queen had no children. The younger queen, on the other hand, had two sons, named after the seasons, Winter and Spring. The two young princes spent their days listening to the curses of the elder queen, their stepmother.



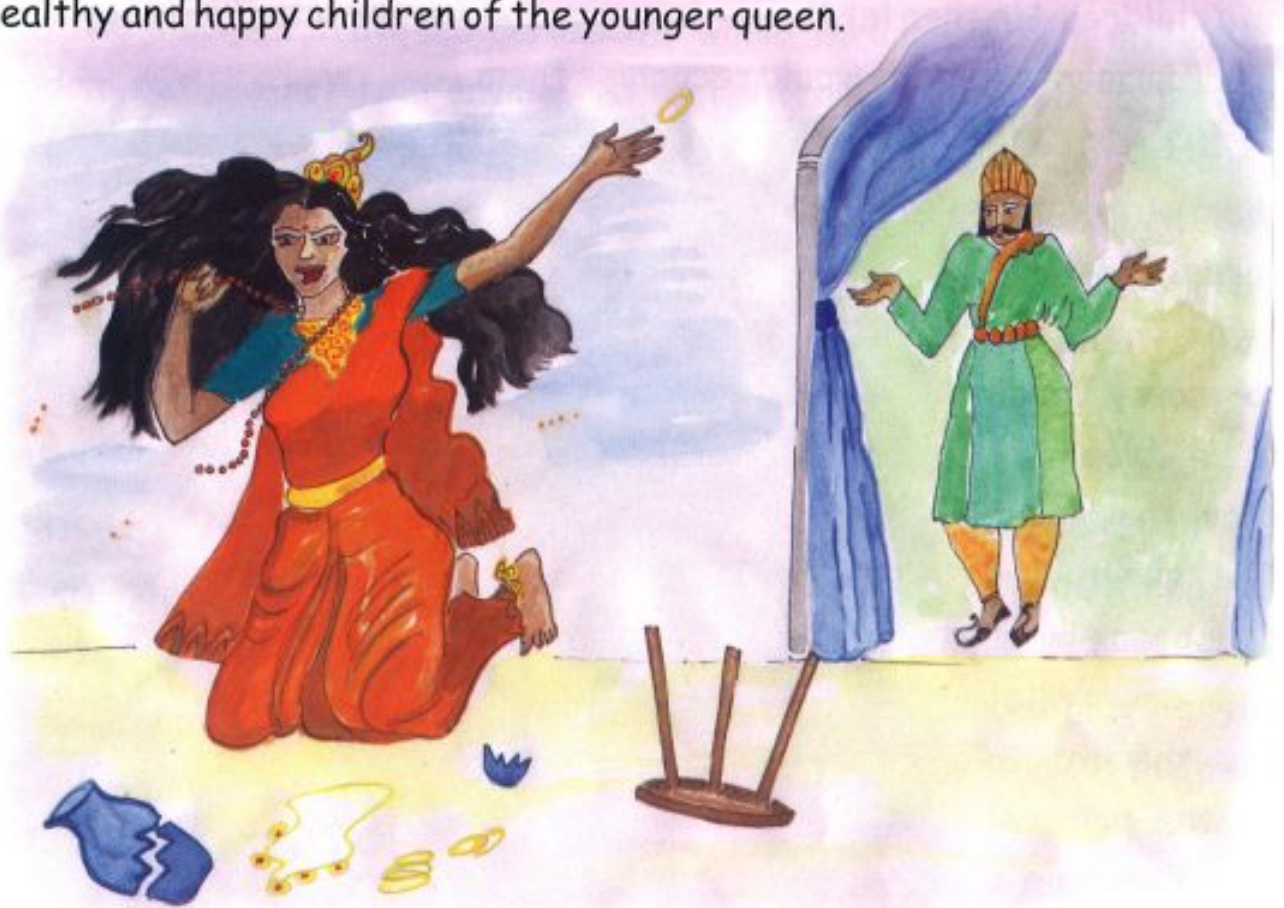
One day, when the two queens went to bathe in the river, the older queen told the younger one that she would oil her hair. But while applying the oil, the elder queen placed a magical pill on her head. Immediately, the younger queen turned into a golden parakeet and flew away. The elder queen returned to the palace and told everyone that the younger queen had drowned. The king believed her and the entire kingdom went into mourning. The young princes' sorrow knew no bounds.

The younger queen, now a parakeet, flew into another kingdom. The king of the land was amazed to see the golden bird. He had a beautiful little girl, who asked for the bird to be captured and brought to her. Thus the younger queen became captive in a gold cage in the king's palace.



Days went by, months turned into years. The elder queen gave birth to three sons. But all three were as thin as bamboo leaves. If the wind blew too hard the boys would fly off and if anyone touched them, they

would double up in pain. The elder queen's heart brimmed over with anger and jealousy. She gave her own sons platefuls of food, but the younger queen's sons got almost nothing to eat. She could not bear to see the healthy and happy children of the younger queen.



One day, the two princes, Winter and Spring, went to school. They knew nothing and the boys refused to pay attention. This further angered the elder queen and she beat them mercilessly. She then beat her own sons and started breaking the things in the room. She pulled out her hair and took off her jewellery, throwing them at everyone.

Stunned to see the queen behave in this manner, the maids in attendance called the king. When the king came, the queen demanded the death of the younger queen's sons saying that she would bathe only when she got their blood. The king immediately asked the royal guard to take the princes away to be killed.

The boys were taken into the forest, where the guard made them exchange their royal garments for barks of trees. He told the princes that he would not be able to take their lives as he treated them like his own children. He then let the boys escape, telling them that without their royal garments, nobody would recognise them.

He led them out of the forest and killed a fox and a dog to carry back their blood to show the queen. The queen was delighted when she saw what she thought to be the princes' blood and arranged for a lavish feast with her three sons.



Making their way out of the woods, Winter and Spring sat down to rest under a huge tree. Spring was very thirsty and Winter went in search of some water. He then came by a large lake. He wondered how his brother was and thought of ways to carry back water for him. Winter stepped out of his tree bark garments and entered the lake.

The lake was part of a kingdom which had just lost its king. The king had no heir and so the throne lay without any ruler.

The people of the kingdom allowed a white elephant to run through the kingdom, believing it would spot and bring back a suitable person to ascend the throne.

The elephant travelled across the world through many a different kingdom but did not find anyone. At last, it came to the forest where Winter and Spring had been taken. Reaching the lake, he saw the young prince trying to carry water in his clothes. No sooner did the elephant spot royal blood, than he extended his trunk and lifted Winter onto his back. The prince cried out for his brother but the elephant made its way towards the palace.

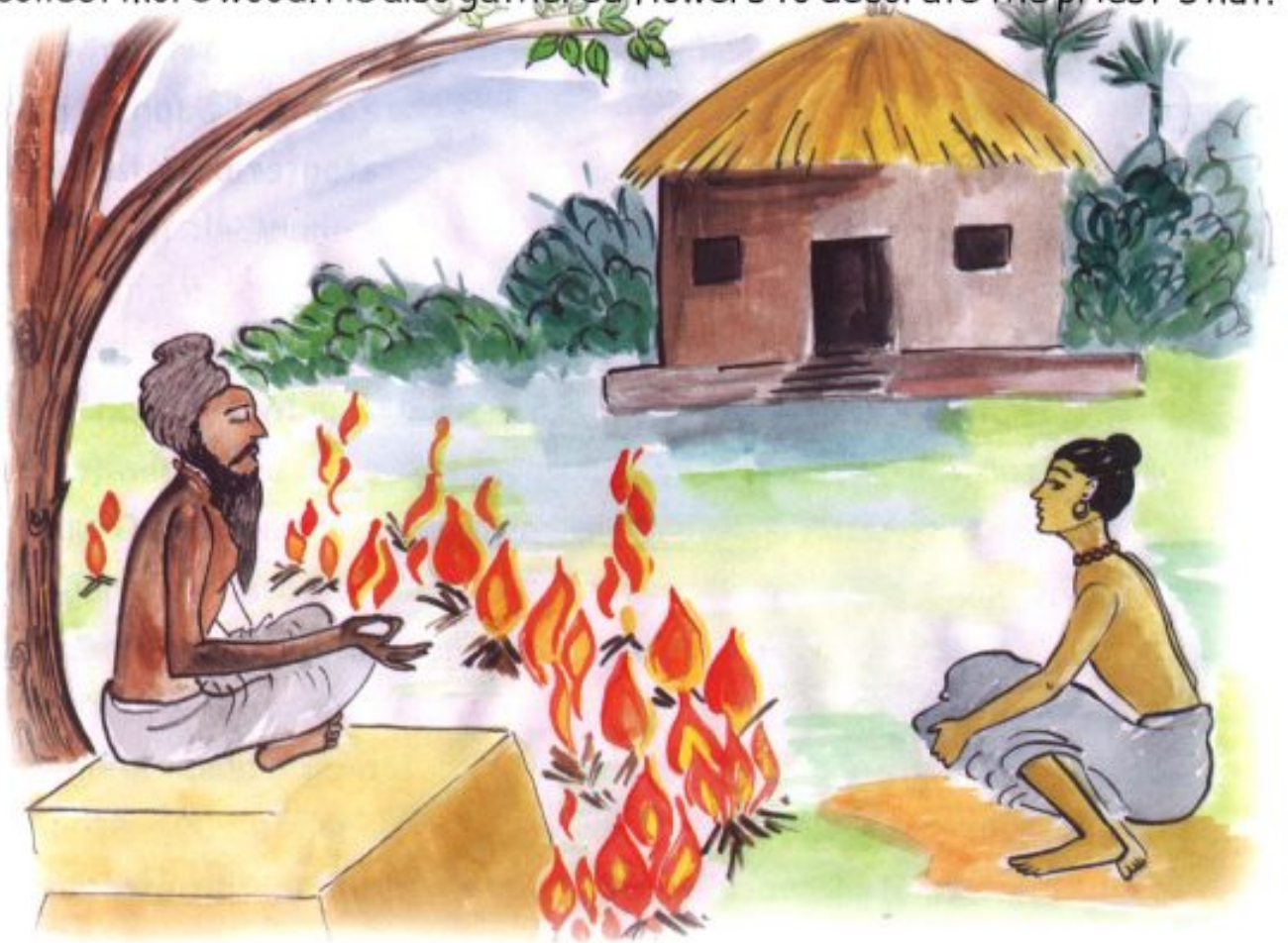
Seeing that his elder brother had not returned, Spring scoured the entire forest. Unaware of his brother being picked up by an elephant on the lookout for a ruler, the boy's sorrow knew no bounds when he couldn't find him. The sun rose high in the sky and finally set. Hungry, thirsty, and completely exhausted after the frantic search, Spring fell asleep under a tree. The apple of the younger queen's eyes lay in the mud and dirt.

In the morning, a priest passed by the tree, and, spotting the sleeping boy, took him to his home.

Meanwhile, Winter reached the palace riding on the elephant's back. Every courtier came to pay his respects to the newly crowned king. Winter did not know where his brother was and their mother did not know either of her son's whereabouts. The younger queen's family had fallen apart.

After becoming king, Winter started ruling the kingdom that overflowed with treasures and gems, courtiers, and horses and elephants. He started expanding his kingdom by taking over neighbouring lands. In his free time, he went hunting. Winter's life seemed to follow a routine and the young king became used to the schedule.

Spring, on the other hand, started living with the priest. He ate fruits from trees, sucked nectar from flowers and bathed in the water of the lake. The priest spent his days meditating within a ring of fire and when the firewood came close to depletion, Spring roamed the forest to collect more wood. He also gathered flowers to decorate the priest's hut.



When evening fell, birds would fly back to their nests and Spring would sit with the priest, listening to tales and rhymes. His life, too, fell into a routine. Both boys found happiness and forgot all about their past.

Three nights went by, when disaster struck the kingdom ruled by Spring and Winter's father. The entire land was bearing the brunt of the evil elder queen's behaviour. The king lost everything he had and refused to even look at the elder queen's face. He renounced his worldly possessions and took to the life of a hermit.

Brought to the streets, the elder queen and her three sons roamed aimlessly. No courtier was prepared to give them shelter. Traversing one kingdom after another, the elder queen and her sons reached a vast ocean. Before she knew it, a high wave drowned all her sons. Her loss drove her to insanity and she took her own life by hitting her head on a stone. None of the people shed a tear for the queen and her sons as they disappeared without a trace.

The kingdom where the younger queen lived as the caged parrot was in a state of great excitement. The princess was going to choose her husband in a ceremony and the entire kingdom was preparing for the festivities. Princes from all over the world came to the kingdom, their hands full of gifts and their hearts full of hope.

In her chamber, the princess prepared to choose the man she would spend the rest of her life with. Dressed to look her very best, the princess turned to her parakeet for an honest opinion. The younger queen responded by saying that the princess would look prettier still if she wore



golden anklets. She also helped the princess choose the saree she wore, the diamond necklace that adorned her neck, the nose pin she slipped on and the ornaments she placed in her hair.

But the parakeet told the princess that she should marry the prince who brought her the pearl of an elephant's head.

Hearing this, the princess refused to go ahead with the ceremony, saying that she would give her hand in marriage to the prince who could produce the pearl. She also warned the princes that if they failed to lay their hands on the pearl, they would end up as her servants.



The princes departed on their mission. Many an elephant's head was cut off, but in vain. No pearl was to be found. The princes then learnt that the pearl could be found lodged in the head of elephants that roamed a land skirted by the great ocean.

When they reached the margins of the ocean, a herd of elephants trampled most of the princes. Some of them lost their lives, some their limbs. Scared, the princes who survived, retreated and returned to serve the princess.



News of this reached Winter. He was taken aback by what the princess had ordered and instructed his courtiers to capture her kingdom. The princess then became a prisoner in Winter's kingdom.

Days went by and Spring continued to stay with the priest, completely shut out from the world outside. In the hut, there was a pair of parrots. One day, Spring heard the two birds talking among themselves. They started to discuss the cold weather and their talk soon shifted to the elephant with a pearl in its head. Spring heard them say that in the place where the elephant could be found, was a garden where millions of golden lotuses bloomed.

Spring was tempted to get the pearl and lotus and asked the birds how he could get the things his heart desired.

The parrots advised him to ask the priest for a trident and told him to don royal attire before he started for his journey. Spring did as bid and the priest gave him the trident along with his blessings.

Spring then went to a silk-cotton tree which gave him royal garments and a crown when he requested for them. Donning the royal attire and placing the crown on his head, Spring went in search of the pearl and the golden lotus.

On his way he passed endless mountains, forests and kingdoms. It took him twelve years and thirteen days to reach his destination. What he saw there left him speechless.



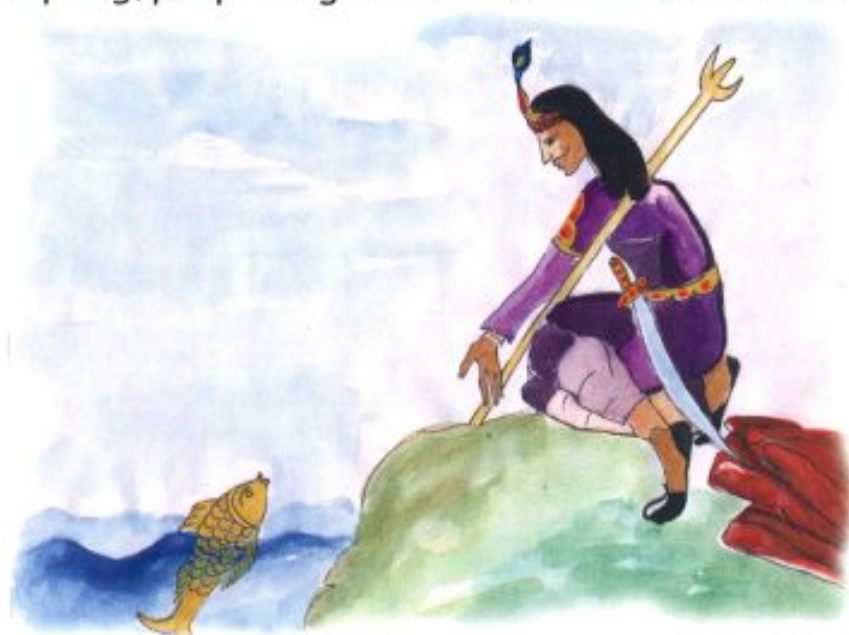
In the brilliant light of the sun he saw millions of golden lotuses floating in a pond of thick, creamy milk. At the centre, lay the head of the elephant that contained the pearl. Spring saw that every lotus contained a milk-white elephant, each of which was capable of producing the pearl. He stood and watched the elephants at play. But as soon as he



approached, the milk dried up, taking all the flowers with it. One of the elephants took the form of a lotus and asked the boy which kingdom he belonged to. Spring replied that he belonged to no kingdom but lived with a priest in a humble hut.

Blessing him with a happy life, it told him to take the pearl along with a lotus from the pond and go to the princess. Spring followed the instructions and started for home.

Suddenly, he heard voices begging him to take them home. When he realized that the voices were coming from beneath the ground, he dug up the earth and found a huge golden fish. He took it with him and went on his way. Wherever he went, the light of the pearl lit up his way. Seeing Spring, people began to think that God himself had descended on earth.



In the meantime, Winter went on a hunt, but found no animal in any of the kingdom's forests. Tired, he stopped to rest under a tree along with his soldiers. As he sat down he felt he had been in the same spot before.

Suddenly, memories of him and his brother lost in the forest came back to him. The thought of his lost brother was too much for the young king to bear. He broke down and threw off his crown. The soldiers had never seen their king in such a state of distress. Not knowing what to do, they carried him back to the royal palace.

Spring had arrived at the princess' door and the light of the pearl illuminated the entire land. The courtiers came running to see the unknown prince. The young prince announced his name and declared that he had brought what the princess demanded. They then informed him that a king called Winter had taken their princess captive.

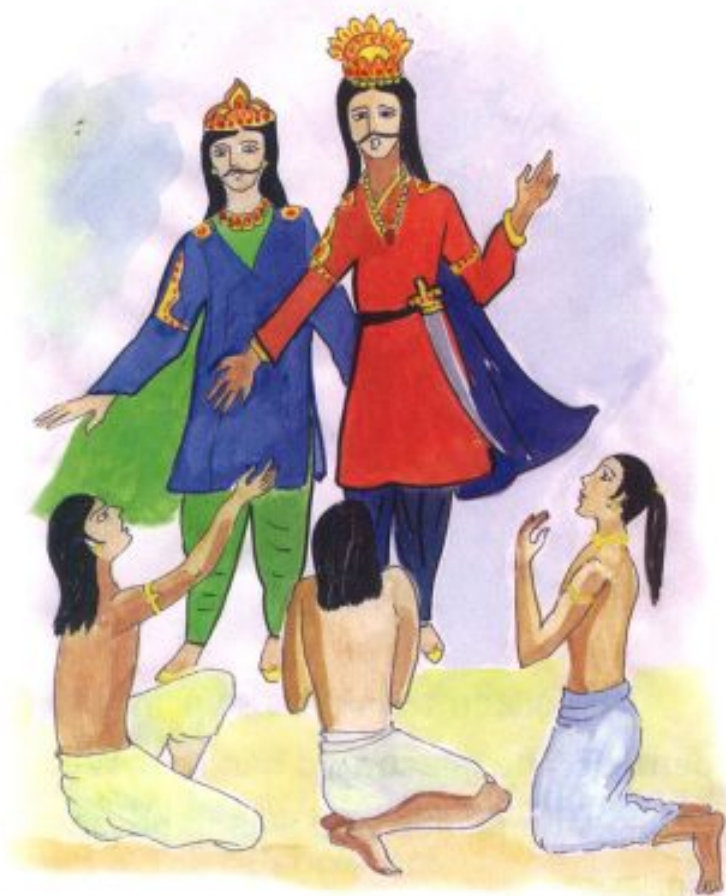
Spring left for Winter's land. He sent the golden fish to the king and asked him to open the doors to the princess' chamber. People in the kingdom started talking about how a youth had come with the pearl and how unfortunate it was that their grieving king would keep the doors closed for seven days and seven nights. But this did not deter Spring. He sat outside the gates for seven days and seven nights, lighting up the place with his pearl.

On the eighth day, when the king felt a little better, a servant of the palace sat down to cut open the golden fish. But the fish cried out saying that he was the brother of the king and his life should thus be spared.

Frightened, the woman went straight to the king and narrated the incident. Winter then told the servant to bring the fish and its bearer to him.

When Spring entered the room with the fish, Winter's happiness knew no bounds. The brothers embraced each other and tears of joy rolled down their faces. The fish was forgotten altogether.

Winter and Spring realised that they had been separated because of the elder queen. Suddenly, before their eyes, the fish turned into their three stepbrothers and they begged the two brothers to forgive their mother.



The brothers relented and soon learnt that the elder queen had died and their father had renounced the world. Heartbroken, Winter and Spring returned to their palace along with their brothers.

The golden parakeet had by then informed the princess that a prince had arrived with the pearl. The princess rejoiced and asked the servants to bring her some water so that she could bathe her beloved bird. As she poured water on the bird, the effect of the magic pill wore off and the parakeet took the shape of the younger queen.



The queen thanked the princess for her kindness and revealed her identity. The queen told her that Winter, the king, was her elder son and Spring, the prince who was in possession of the pearl, was her younger son.

The next morning, the princess requested the king to open the doors of her chamber, and Winter complied. With much fanfare, the princess wed Spring.

Winter left the kingdom to his brother, telling him that finding him was reward enough.

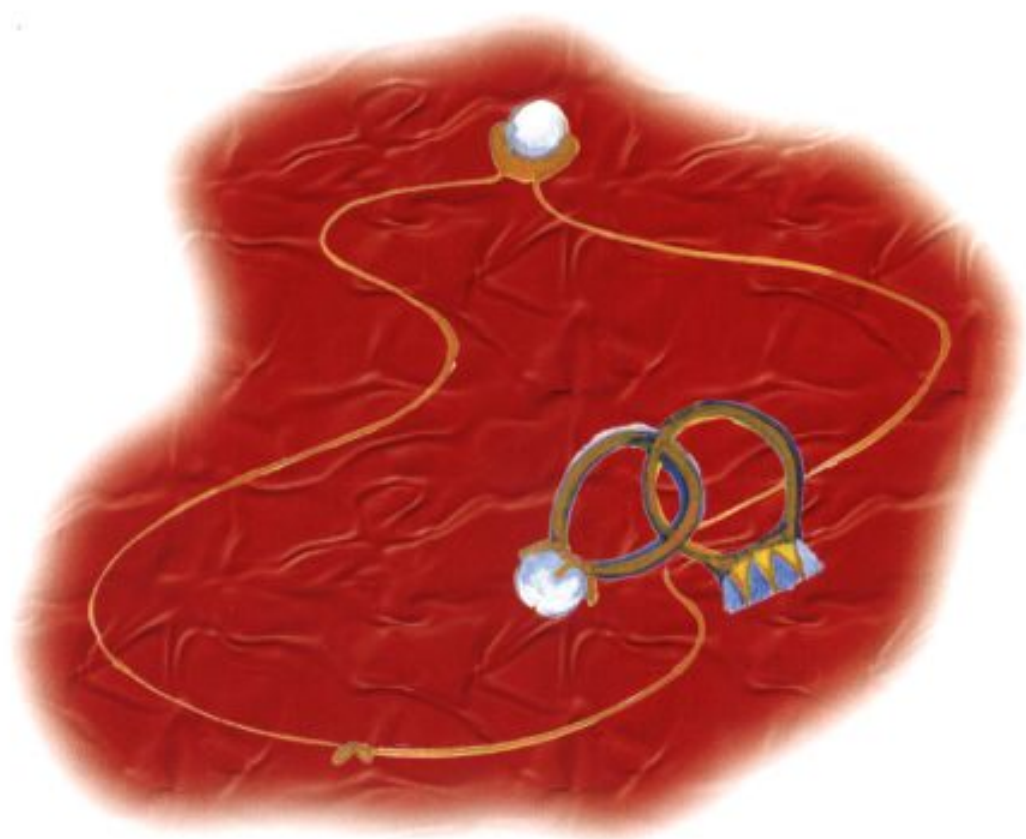
The guests had gathered in the courtyard. They were surprised to see another lady, as beautiful as a Goddess, walk beside the bride. The sight left Winter and Spring speechless. Before them stood their mother, whom they had given up for dead. As they wept tears of joy, the kingdom came alive to the music of instruments. The good-natured brothers even regretted that their father and stepmother could not be part of their happiness.



But news of the happy reunion had reached the old king and he returned to the kingdom to take part in the celebrations.

All the kingdoms were put together to create a large, prosperous land that was the envy of all nations around.

The pearl found its pride of place at the princess' neck. The younger queen was finally able to bid her sorrows farewell. The king, queen, Winter, Spring, the three sons of the elder queen and the beautiful princess lived in peace, happily ever after.



Kiranmala

Once upon a time there lived a king and his minister. One day the king asked his minister whether every courtier in his kingdom led a happy life. Afraid of the king's reaction, the minister asked him whether he wanted to hear the bitter truth or a fancier version. Keen to know about the state of his courtiers, the king said that he wanted nothing but the truth. The minister then informed the king that earlier when the king regularly went for his hunting and then in the evening socialised with his courtiers, they were a happier lot. But, now ever since the hunting and bonding has stopped the mental state of the courtiers has deteriorated. Learning about the state of his people the king decided to go for hunting the very next day.



The whole kingdom was excited to hear about the king's decision to resume his hunting trips. Dressed in their best garments the king's party left for the hunt. The king hunted elephants and tigers and in the evening bonded with his courtiers. On one such occasion the king passed the house of one of the courtiers. Inside, he heard three girls talking. The king stopped to hear what the girls were talking about. The eldest sister claimed that if she were married to the gardener of the king she would lead a happy life. The second sister declared that she would lead a happy life if she were married to the royal chef. The youngest sister did not say anything. However, her two elder sisters were not going to let her get away without saying anything. The youngest sister gave some thought to the question and replied that she would like to marry the king, because if



she did so, she would be made queen. The two elder sisters laughed at the youngest sister, telling her that she should not even dream of it. The king heard the entire conversation and left.

The next day the king sent his soldiers to bring the three girls to the royal palace. The terrified girls accompanied the soldiers to the royal court. The king asked them about the conversation they were having the night before. The girls remained mute. When the king realized that no one was going to say anything he threatened the girls by telling them that if they did not tell him the truth they would meet with severe punishments.

The two elder sisters then decided to tell the king about their conversation. The youngest sister still did not say a word. The king confessed to having heard the entire conversation. He told them that their wishes would be granted. The next day he married off the eldest sister to the gardener, the middle sister to the chef and wed the youngest sister himself. The sisters were happy to have achieved what their hearts desired.

After a few years, the queen was with child. The king in utmost delight dressed his wife from head to toe in beautiful jewels. The queen requested her husband to bring her sisters to the palace. She told him that as they were the only family she had, she wanted them to be there for the birth of her child. The king granted her wish and sent for the queen's sisters. Both women came for the birth of their youngest sister's child. However, on reaching the kingdom, they saw how the king spoilt their sister. Their sister was covered with jewels and had to do no work at all. They became very jealous of their own younger sister.

The queen knew nothing about her sisters' jealousy. Both the sisters walked into the different rooms, looking at the luxurious lifestyle of their sister. The youngest sister asked them whether they required anything. Both sisters denied wanting anything. Instead they told their sister that they were getting things ready for when the baby arrived. In the middle of the night, a baby boy was born to the queen. The boy looked like the child of the moon. The two sisters took away the beautiful baby, put him in a pot and left the pot in the river for it to float away. Next,



they got a little puppy and told the king that his wife had given birth to a dog instead of a son. The king said nothing when he heard the news. The next year, the queen had another beautiful son. Her sisters did the same with this baby. When they returned to the palace they showed the king a kitten and claimed that the queen had

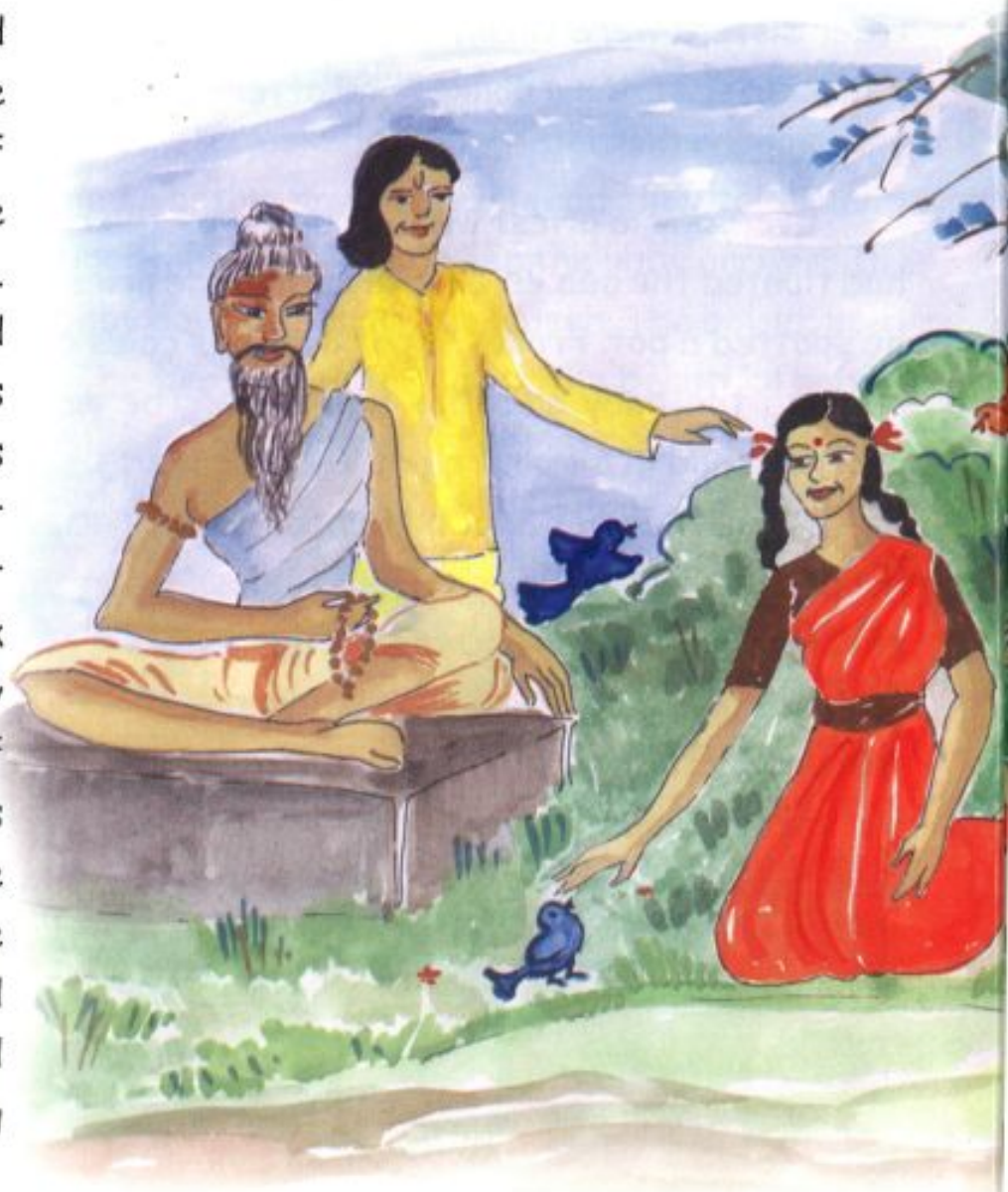
given birth to it. The king could not understand what was happening. The next year the queen had another child. This time she had a baby girl who resembled a flower. The jealous elder sisters subjected this child to the same fate as her brothers. This time the sisters told the king that the queen had given birth to a wooden doll. The entire kingdom went into mourning. People started saying that the queen had to be an evil spirit to have given birth to a dog, a cat and a wooden doll. The king heard what the people were saying and suspicion crept into his mind. He decided that the queen was evil and refused to give her the respect of a wife. The two

elder sisters were finally happy. Their jealousy disappeared as the king put their sister on a donkey and after shaving her head threw her out of the palace.

Everyday, a priest went to bathe by the river where the evil sisters had floated the babies. One day, when the priest was praying in the water, he spotted a pot. From the pot a child's cries could be heard. The priest rescued the baby and took him home. The next year the priest found another child in a floating pot. He rescued this child, too. The third year he saw another pot and in this pot there was a baby girl. The priest's happiness knew no bounds. The childless man gave shelter to all the three children. He thanked God for the beautiful sons and daughter. Though the jealous aunts had tried separating the three children, all of them got rescued by the priest and started living with him. They brought light into his life and lived happily. On the other hand, a pall of gloom descended upon the kingdom of the unfortunate king.



The priest lived happily with the three children. The four of them had a lot more than they required. They had fields filled with crops, trees filled with fruits, pots filled with the purest water and a cow that gave them all the milk they needed. Money did not concern any of them. The priest was so happy to have the three children that he forgot to eat and sleep. He could spend his entire day staring at the three beautiful



and healthy children. He named the two boys Arun and Barun and named the little girl Kiranmala. Days went by and the children started blossoming into young adults. Every time the three children laughed, the birds of the forests would come and sing along with their laughter. If any of the children could be heard crying the deer of the forest would come running to see whether they were alright. When the three children played in the courtyard of the priest it seemed as though the Gods had made earth their abode.



Kiranmala had grown up to be the perfect housekeeper. She kept the priest's hut clean and shining. The boys used to go get fruits from the trees. In the evening the brothers and the sister together decorated the hut with flowers. Ever since the three children entered the priest's life he was a happy man. He no longer had to bother about getting food and cleaning the hut, his sons and daughter took care of everything. The priest spent his days meditating and teaching the children. One day he called his three children and told them that he would be entering the next stage of his life. The three children then bid a tearful farewell to their father as the priest left for his heavenly abode.

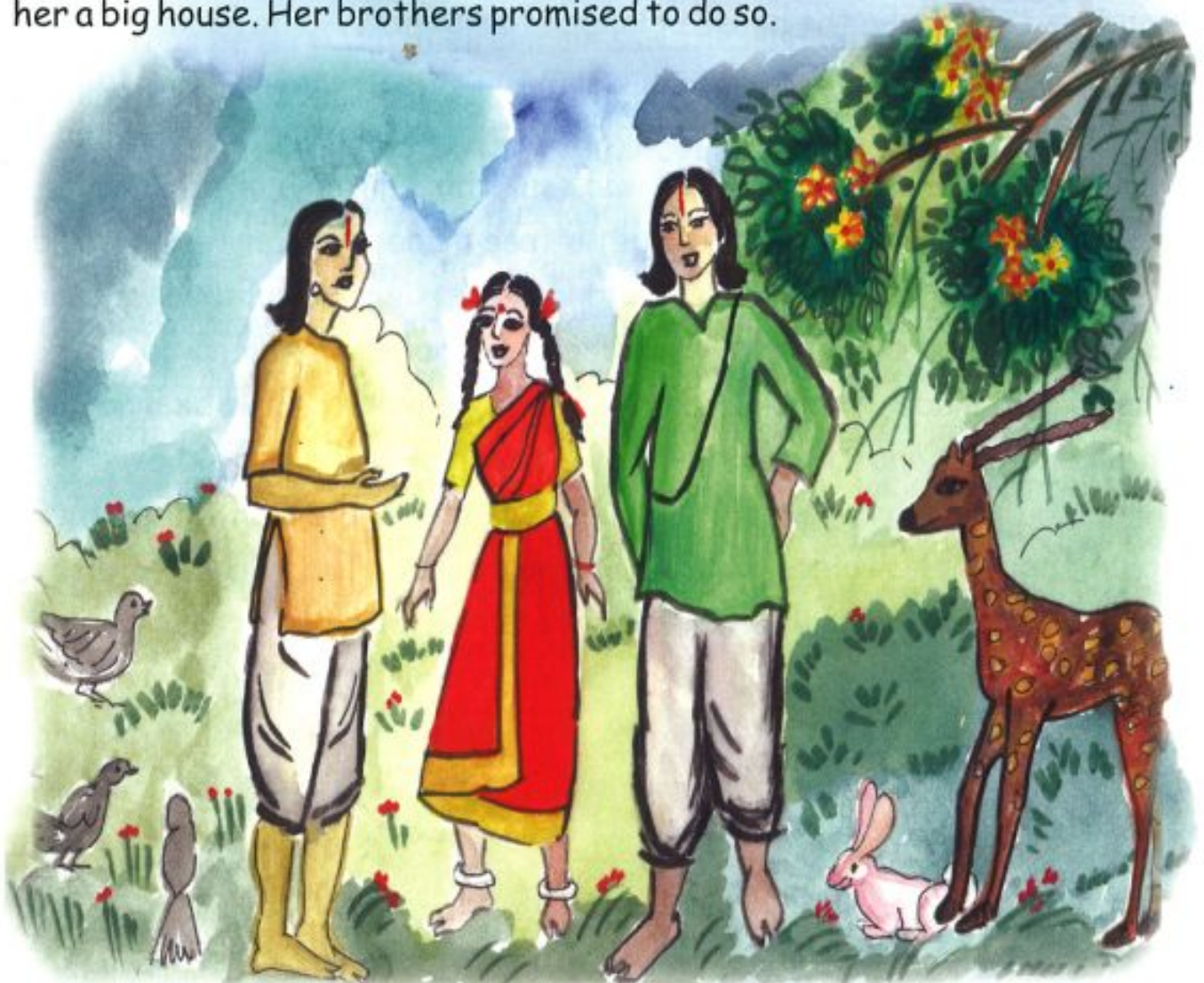
However, all was not well at the king's kingdom. Thinking that an evil spirit had taken over his kingdom the king decided to bring back happiness. He then decided to resume his hunting trips. Sounds of instruments could be heard all through the kingdom proclaiming the hunt of the king. But, even the weather gods turned against the king. Claps of thunder could be heard, lightning could be seen and the entire world

seemed to drown in water. The king lost all his companions and was forced to spend the night in the forest by seeking refuge under a big tree. The next morning he started walking along a path. The path seemed endless and the king had no idea of where he was heading towards. In the distance he saw a small hut. Exhaustion and thirst got the better of him and he decided to go and see whether he could get any help.

Seeing a man walking towards them the three children stared at him in complete amazement. Kiranmala inched closer to her brothers while watching the stranger approach them. The king then called out to them and asked them for water. The three children went to fetch water for

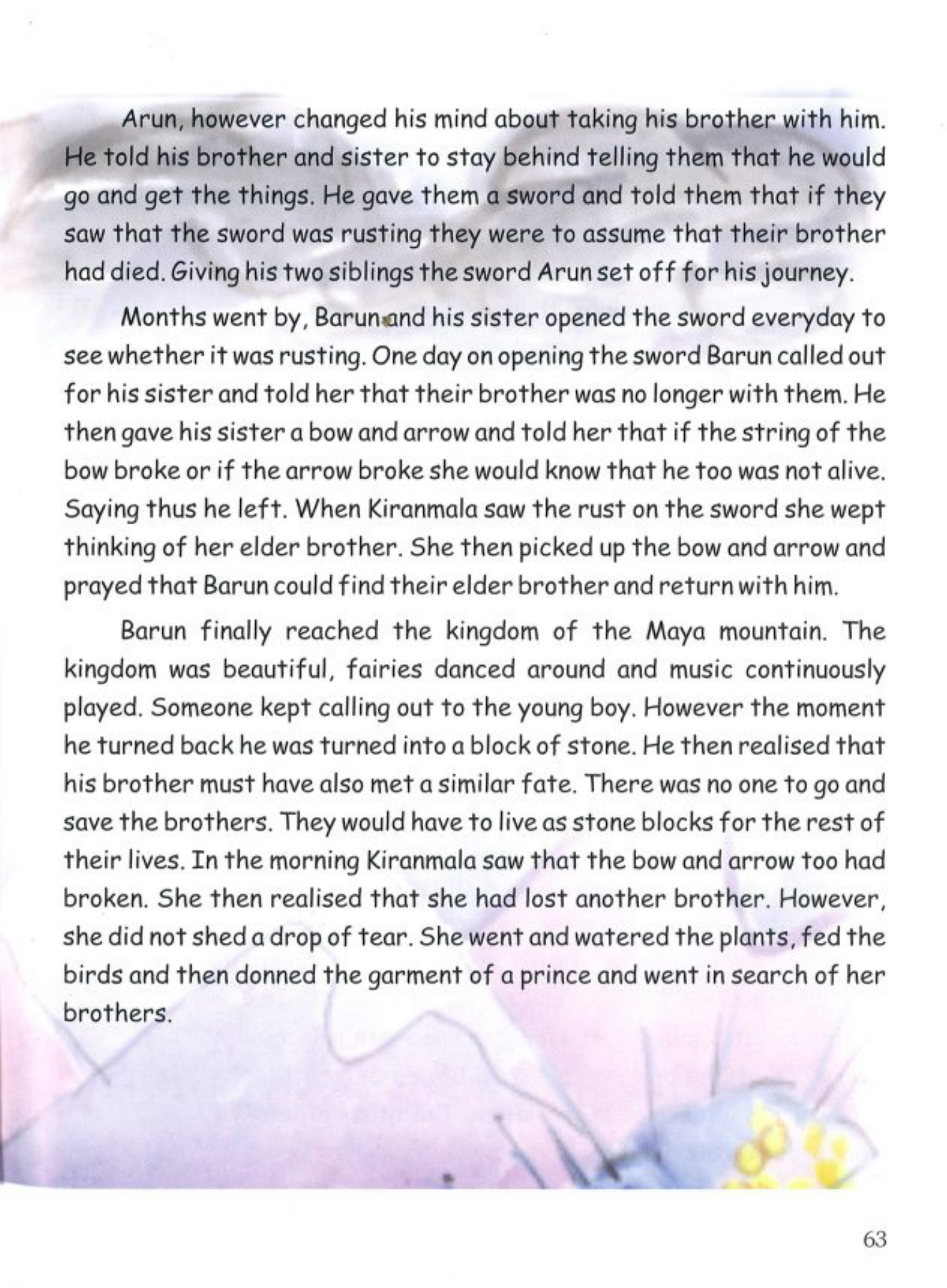


the king. When the king asked them who they were the children replied that they were the children of a priest. The king wondered how a priest could have children who looked like Gods, however, he did not tell them anything. Cursing his luck the king started to cry. He told the three children that they had given him something more than just water. He told them that he was the unhappy king of the kingdom and that if they ever needed anything they should come to him. The young girl asked her brothers what a king had and in reply they said that a king had a large house, horses and elephants. The girl in surprise asked where a king found the horses and elephants. Next, she asked her brothers to make her a big house. Her brothers promised to do so.



The boys spent days and nights building a big house for their sister. Kiranmala helped them by carrying water. When the house was done it looked breathtakingly beautiful. The house was covered in white marble and had precious gems and jewels all around it. The doors of the house were made in silver and the tip of the house had a beautiful golden pot on it. The house was surrounded by beautiful gardens that bore the sweetest smelling flowers and the tastiest fruits. The house was always filled with the smell of honey and the sound of chirping birds. The house caught the eyes of every God and demon.

One day a hermit came to the river for a bath. Seeing the house he wondered aloud who the house belonged too. Suddenly the hermit heard a voice from inside the house telling him that the house belonged to two brothers and a sister. The priest told the three children that they had a beautiful house, however, there was something missing in their house. He told them that if they could get a tree made of silver which would give golden fruits, their house would look prettier. He further went on to say that they should also get a tree of diamonds on which would sit a singing bird made of gold. The stones in the garden should be made of different gems and a water fountain of pearls should also be there. The three children, Arun, Barun and Kiranmala asked the man where they would find all the things that he had mentioned. The hermit told the children that they would find the silver tree, diamond tree, the gold bird and the pearl fountain near the Maya mountain. The hermit also told the three children that the one who would find the mountain would have to be very brave and courageous. The boys promised their sister that they would bring everything for her.



Arun, however changed his mind about taking his brother with him. He told his brother and sister to stay behind telling them that he would go and get the things. He gave them a sword and told them that if they saw that the sword was rusting they were to assume that their brother had died. Giving his two siblings the sword Arun set off for his journey.

Months went by, Barun and his sister opened the sword everyday to see whether it was rusting. One day on opening the sword Barun called out for his sister and told her that their brother was no longer with them. He then gave his sister a bow and arrow and told her that if the string of the bow broke or if the arrow broke she would know that he too was not alive. Saying thus he left. When Kiranmala saw the rust on the sword she wept thinking of her elder brother. She then picked up the bow and arrow and prayed that Barun could find their elder brother and return with him.

Barun finally reached the kingdom of the Maya mountain. The kingdom was beautiful, fairies danced around and music continuously played. Someone kept calling out to the young boy. However the moment he turned back he was turned into a block of stone. He then realised that his brother must have also met a similar fate. There was no one to go and save the brothers. They would have to live as stone blocks for the rest of their lives. In the morning Kiranmala saw that the bow and arrow too had broken. She then realised that she had lost another brother. However, she did not shed a drop of tear. She went and watered the plants, fed the birds and then donned the garment of a prince and went in search of her brothers.

She braved all types of weather conditions and reached the mountain in thirty-three days. No sooner did she reach the mountain she got surrounded by demons, bears, snakes, elephants, lions, ghosts and spirits, who started threatening her. The fairies called out to her. Just then a thunderstorm broke out. However, none of this affected Kiranmala. She was not a prince and therefore no harm could come to her. She kept moving towards the mountain. The stones started melting under her and no one was there to stop her. She reached the diamond tree which had gold fruits. Immediately the golden bird sitting on the tree called out to her telling her to take everything in sight. The bird told the young girl to take the tree, the water fountain and instructed her to go and ring the bell that was hanging near by. The bird kept telling the maiden about the different things she had to take with her and every time the bird said something new Kiranmala went and picked it up. After she was done taking everything, she went and struck the bell. Not a sound was heard. The bird next instructed her to sprinkle the water from the cold fountain all over the place. Wherever the drops of water fell a prince arose. All the princes who had been turned into stone blocks were restored back to life. Within minutes millions of stones turned into princes. Every one of the princes came and bowed before the young girl as a token of appreciation. The two brothers were proud of their sister.





Once the two brothers and sister returned home they went about doing their daily chores. They watered the trees, fed the animals and cleaned the house. Next they planted the seed of the silver plant and planted a branch of the diamond tree. Then they requested the golden bird to go and sit on the tree. The diamond tree grew overnight, the silver tree sprouted leaves and golden flowers could be seen on every branch. The golden bird sat on the diamond tree and sang songs for the three children. Peace and happiness returned to the lives of Arun, Barun and Kiranmala.

The courtiers of the kingdom came to the forest and saw the beautiful house. They went running back to the king to narrate the sight to him. They told the king that it seemed that God's palace had come down to earth. The king was surprised to hear how the children of a priest could build such a house. That night the golden bird told the two boys and the girl to invite the king to their house. The children were hesitant to do so as they did not know how to prepare a feast fit for the king. The bird told them to go ahead and invite the king. The boys did as bid. The bird next told Kiranmala that she should place the bird in the room in which the king would be entertained. The girl readily agreed to do so.

The king arrived in great style. Reaching the house he stood outside in complete awe. One corner of the house had more jewels than the entire royal palace. The king was speechless. The king started smiling in joy and happiness and the next moment sadness crept into his heart and he wished that the children were his own. The king next went and saw the garden and the sight astounded him. On entering the house he was amazed to see that every tiny corner of the house had precious gems and jewels decorated. The king next went into the room where a

table was laid for him. The room was filled with the smell of delicious food. The king finally sat down to eat. When he did so he picked up the plate to see what it was made of and to his astonishment he saw that the plate was made of gold.

Talking to himself the king said out loud that it was not possible for him to eat any of the food. Immediately a voice responded asking him why he was unable to eat the food that had been offered to him. Surprised, the king turned around to see who had spoken to him. He asked the three children whether they were trying to make a fool of him. He asked them how he was supposed to eat food made out of different gems and jewels. The voice that had spoken to him earlier asked him whether it was possible for a human to give birth to a dog, a cat and a wooden doll. This



made the king realise the mistake that he had made years back. He swiftly rose from the mat on which he was sitting. The bird informed him that the three children were actually his own flesh and blood and that the priest had given them shelter. The bird told the king the truth about the jealous sisters who could not bear the happiness of their younger sister. Astonished to hear this, the king burst into tears realising the mistake that he had made. He cried out for his wife. The golden bird then called the three children and told them that their mother lived in a hut near the river. The bird instructed them to go and get their mother. Shocked to hear this, the three children went to fetch their mother, who was overjoyed to see her husband and children.



The king shifted his royal palace to the house that had been built by his children. Happiness returned to every courtier. Then one day the soldiers went to the house of the gardener and chef and burnt the two houses. Next they caught the two evil sisters and buried them alive. The king with his wife and children ruled the kingdom and they lived happily ever after.

Neelkamal and Lalkamal

Long, long ago, there lived a king who had two wives. But alas, one of his wives was a demon in disguise. No one, not even the king, knew about this.

Each of the queens bore the king a son. The good queen's son was named Kusum and the demon queen's son was called Ajit. The stepbrothers, Kusum and Ajit were the best of friends.

Each time the demon queen laid eyes on Kusum, her mouth would water dreaming of the day when she would feast on his tender flesh and bones. But she could never lay her hands on him as the brothers were always together. This infuriated her and her greed only got stronger.

The frustrated demon queen then cast her evil eyes on the good queen, who, unable to withstand her black powers, grew weaker and weaker and eventually died.

The death of the good queen sent the kingdom into mourning. But in her chamber, the demon queen silently rejoiced. Soon, her vicious nature began to surface. She started mistreating not only Kusum, whom she wanted to gobble up, but also her own son Ajit as punishment for befriending his stepbrother. But much as she tried, she was unable to separate the boys. As all the queen's evil plans failed, she also managed to alienate her son and Ajit grew distant.



One night, all the elephants, horses and cows of the royal palace

went missing. This left the king surprised and put him in a fix as he did not know how to rule a kingdom without them.

The next night, the sleeping king was rudely awakened by some unnatural sounds. Pulling out his sword from the sheath, the king went out of his chamber to investigate. Reaching his sons' room, he saw both the boys in deep slumber. But what he saw next left the poor king in shock and despair. The king watched a huge demon pick Kusum up from his bed. The

sleeping boy was no more than a rag doll in the arms of the monster. The demon queen had by then rushed forward and cast a spell on the king that left him motionless.

The two demons devoured Kusum right in front of his father's eyes. The devastated king cried his heart out but his hands would not move; not even to wipe away the tears that rolled down his cheeks. The demon queen found the king's sorrow amusing and her cruel laughter awoke her son Ajit.



Instinctively, the boy sensed that something was wrong and his heart grew heavy. He reached out to his brother, only to find that Kusum was not beside him. When Ajit saw the demon feasting on his brother, he got up and impulsively struck the demon on the head. The demon fell over and a ball of gold rolled out of his mouth.



When the queen saw her son hit the demon her anger knew no bounds. She lost her senses and swallowed her own child. From her own throat, a ball of iron rolled forth and fell on the ground. The queen picked up the two balls and rushed to the rooftop, where a crowd of demons was engaged in a gruesome feast.

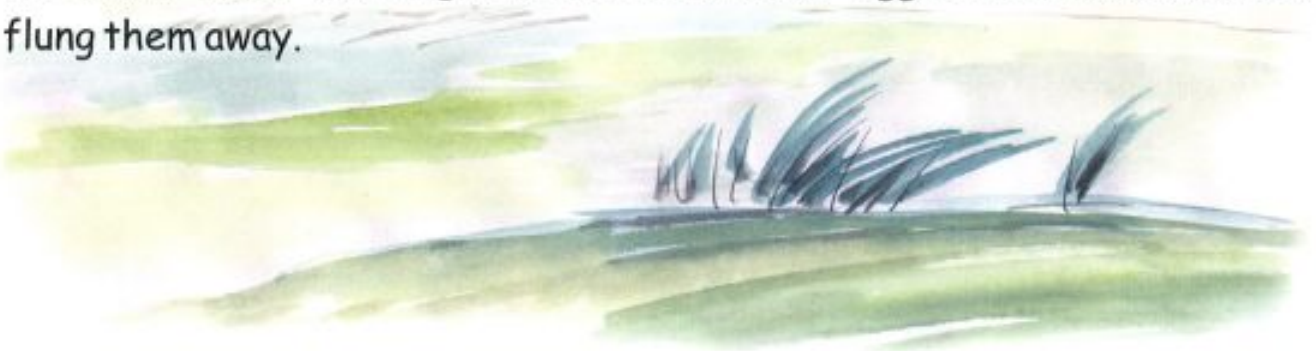


Some of the demons were full to their necks, having feasted on the king's animals and were ready to leave, while some wanted to stay on. The demon queen ordered the monsters to leave and at her bidding the demons left the royal palace. They left behind a trail of destruction. The palace was damaged, its gardens and pathways badly trampled upon, and all its trees uprooted.

The demon queen returned to her room but could not sleep. She tossed and turned and the night seemed endless. Then, the queen got up and climbed up to the roof. There, she sat astride a cloud and flew to a high bamboo grove by the river. Here, she buried the gold and iron balls and returned home. A crow perched on a bamboo branch crowed, and a fox hiding in the grove howled all night, but the queen heard nothing.

The next morning, there was great commotion all over the kingdom. The streets were littered with human bones. The demons had taken over the kingdom. People were shocked when they heard that the young princes, too, had fallen prey to the rampaging devils. The peace-loving people began to flee. The king continued to be under the evil queen's spell and was unable to take any action against the havoc that the monsters were wrecking.

Meanwhile, in the bamboo grove, the plants grew strong and healthy, swaying only when gentle winds blew. One morning, a farmer came to cut some bamboo. As he took out his axe, he noticed two large eggs; one red, the other blue. Thinking them to be snakes' eggs, the scared farmer flung them away.





The eggshells cracked and out came two handsome princes, with crowns on their heads and swords in their hands. Kusum and Ajit had come back to life in the form of these two princes-Lalkamal and Neelkamal. This was too much for the old farmer to handle and the poor man fainted in shock.

When the farmer came to, he got up and inspected the eggshells. He saw that the red shell was made of gold and the blue one of iron. He used the iron to make farming implements and the gold to make jewellery for his daughter-in-law.

Meanwhile, the young princes reached a kingdom, which was being terrorised by demons. Every single day, the king appointed a minister, who was devoured by the demons. The people of the kingdom lived in constant fear of being gobbled up by the demons.



The king said that if the twin princes could save his kingdom, he would marry off his beautiful twin daughters Ilavati and Leelavati to them and even offer them his kingdom. Many princes came to try their luck, but ended up as the demons' dinner. Then came the two young princes, Lalkamal and Neelkamal. They assured the king that they would free his kingdom and make it a safe haven once again. In his heart, the king wanted to believe the brave words of the princes but his mind refused to let him do so. As the king had nothing to lose, he gave Lalkamal and Neelkamal a chance to fight the monsters.

The two brothers hid themselves in a room and waited for the fiends to come. It was past midnight and there was no sign of the demons. Both boys were tired. Neelkamal told his brother that he would take a short nap and when he awoke, he would keep vigil while his brother Lalkamal took a nap. He also told Lalkamal that if the demons came and asked who they were, he should mention Neelkamal's name and not his own. Then the young prince went to sleep.

A little while later, the demons arrived. Lalkamal immediately became alert. As the monsters do not see too well at night, they asked Lalkamal to blow out the oil lamp. The young prince refused to do so and this angered the demons. They demanded to know who was awake in the room. The prince replied that



Neelkamal, Lalkamal, their swords and the oil lamps were awake. As advised, he took Neelkamal's name before he mentioned his own. The demons knew that Neelkamal was the son of a demon in his previous birth and were scared of him. But they wanted to make sure that Neelkamal was indeed who he claimed to be. They asked to see the tips of Neelkamal's nails. Lalkamal showed them the tips of Neelkamal's crown. The sight of Neelkamal's crown frightened the demons, but they resumed their questions.

The demons next wanted to examine Neelkamal's spittle. Lalkamal took some hot oil from the burning lamp and threw it at them. The oil singed the hair on their bodies and they ran away in fright.



But they returned, demanding to inspect Neelkamal's tongue. Lalkamal showed them the point of Neelkamal's sword. The leader of the demons wanted to outsmart the princes and started pulling the tongue to tear it off. He asked his fellow demons to pull him backwards as he tried his strength against the sword. The more he pulled, the more the demon cut himself against the sharp blade of the sword and black demonic blood started oozing out. The fiend cried out in pain and ran away, leaving his followers behind.

Not to be deterred, the demon leader returned once again. This time, Lalkamal was very sleepy and forgot to follow his brother's advice. He gave the demon his own name and immediately the team of fiends broke open the door, entered the room and pounced on Lalkamal. The oil lamp was put out and Lalkamal's crown toppled to the floor. The boy called out to his brother in agony. Disturbed, Neelkamal asked who was interrupting his sleep. On hearing Neelkamal's voice, the demons fainted. Neelkamal then lit the lamp and slit the throats of the demons with his sword. After slaying the demons the boys went back to sleep.

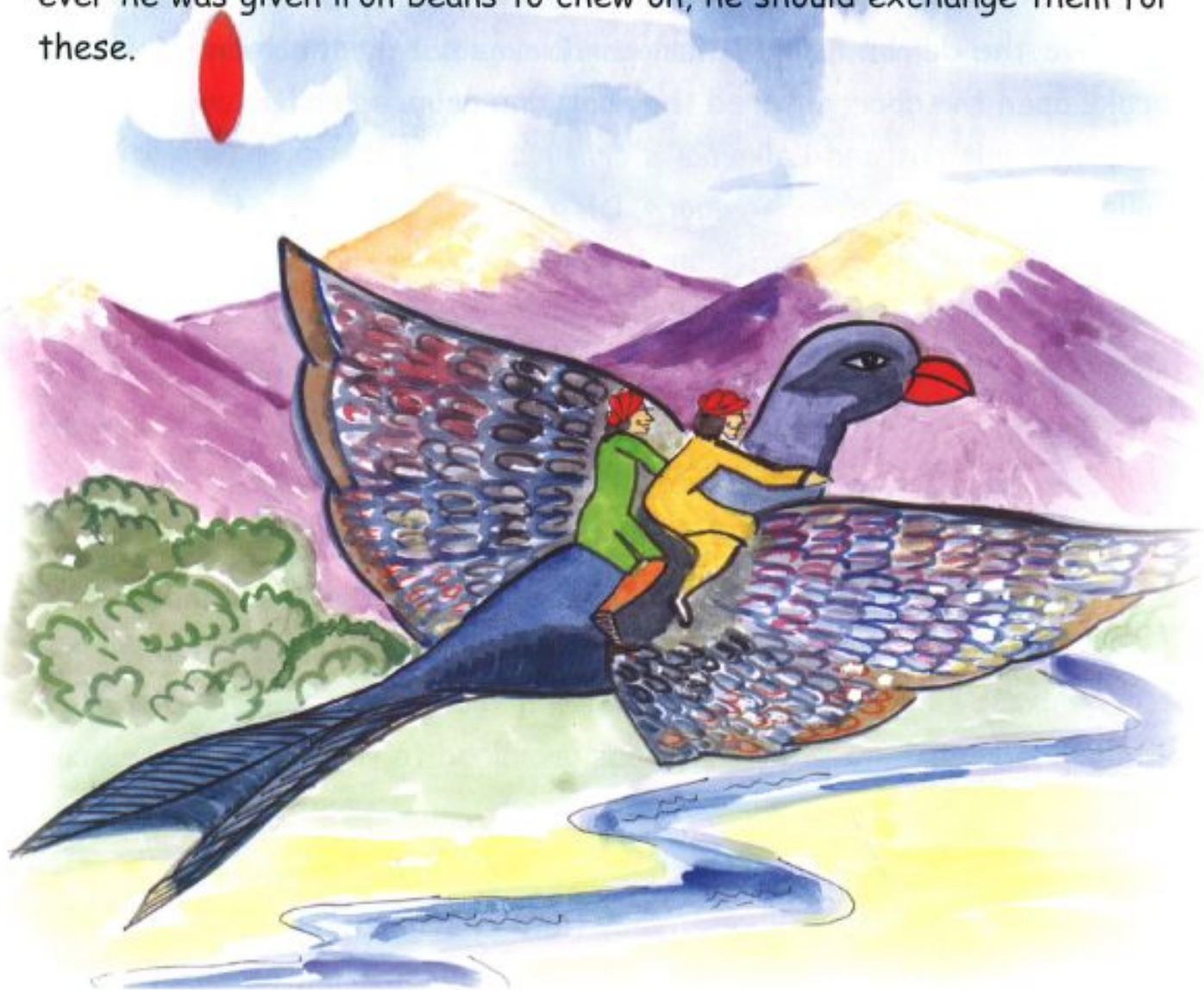
In the morning, the king was delighted to find his kingdom rid of the evil demons. In a lavish wedding, the princes accepted the princesses' hands in marriage and started ruling the kingdom.

The evil queen who was still guarding her husband's kingdom heard about the slain demons. She sent her messengers to Lalkamal and Neelkamal's kingdom to ask for some oil from a demon's head to cure their king's ailment. The young kings promised to find oil from the head of a demon for the messengers who had taken on the guise of soldiers.

The two then set out on their journey. At the end of the day, the tired kings took shelter under a holy fig tree. In the tree, lived a pair of talking Bengama birds. The birds requested Lalkamal and Neelkamal for a

few drops of human blood, which their newborn young ones needed for their vision. The brothers immediately obliged. Grateful, the birds flew down from the tree and offered to carry the young kings to the land of the demons.

Carrying the brothers on their backs, the birds flew over mountain ranges, rivers and clouds for seven days and seven nights and finally descended atop a mountain. Below, was a large field, beyond which was the land of the demons. Before setting out for their destination, Neelkamal gave Lalkamal some beans. Neelkamal told his brother that if ever he was given iron beans to chew on, he should exchange them for these.



The minute they set foot on the demons' land, a mob of monsters ran towards them. Neelkamal calmly called out to his grandmother who lived there. Seeing Neelkamal, she stopped the other demons and took him up in her arms. She however, looked suspiciously at Lalkamal. Neelkamal then introduced Lalkamal as his brother, but his grandmother was not satisfied, as she could smell human blood in the young prince.

To test him, she gave him some iron beans to chew. The boy quickly exchanged the beans with the ones his brother gave him and crunched away. Satisfied, the old demon took the boys back to the grand palace.

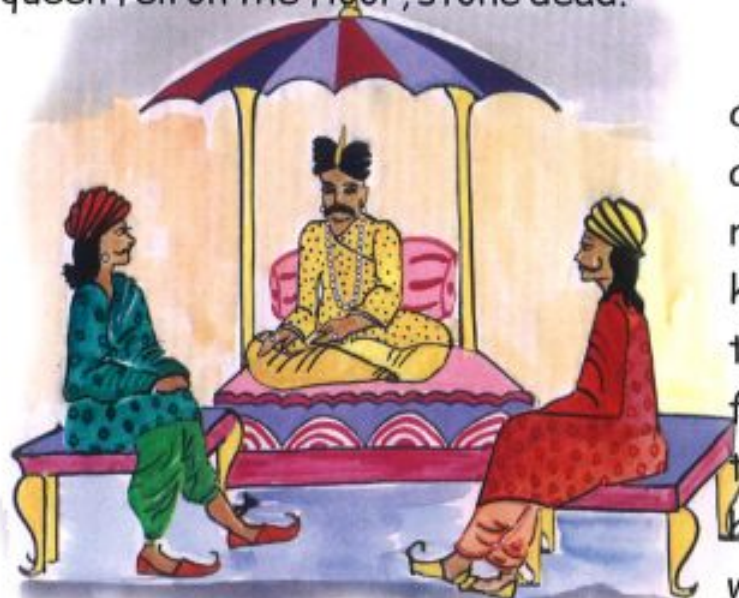
At night, the demons left their kingdom in search of human flesh. Neelkamal had been waiting for this opportunity. He took Lalkamal to a well and asked him to wait there. He then went into the palace and came back with a sword and golden box. Inside the box were two hornets Jiyonkati and Moronkati.



Jiyonkati held the key to the lives of thousands of demons and Moronkati held the key to the life of the demon queen. Neelkamal kept Jiyonkati with him and told Lalkamal to keep Moronkati. As soon as the hornets came out of their box, the demons felt a stir. The evil queen fell asleep in her kingdom.

Neelkamal then pulled off two legs of the hornet Jiyonkati. Immediately, the legs of all the demons fell off. The demons continued to run, dragging themselves with their hands, but Neelkamal tore off the remaining limbs of the hornet. Feeling its impact, the demons' hands fell off. Determined not to give up, the fiends started rolling over their backs, all the way to their kingdom. Using his sword, Neelkamal cut off the hornet's head. Immediately, all the demons were beheaded. Lalkamal and Neelkamal carefully wrapped the demon grandmother's head in a new piece of cloth, and, taking Moronkati with them, made their way homewards.

The young kings sent the demon grandmother's head to the evil queen. The infuriated queen rushed to Lalkamal and Neelkamal's kingdom. On hearing of the arrival of the demon queen, Lalkamal opened the gold box and killed the hornet, Moronkati. Instantly, the demon queen fell on the floor, stone dead.



The death of the demon queen cured the king of his ailment. Lalkamal and Neelkamal returned home to their father's kingdom. The young kings unified the two kingdoms - their father's and the one they won through marriage - and lived happily ever after with their wives.

Pomegranate Prince

There was once a king who had a queen and a son. A pair of dice controlled the queen's life. But not a soul knew this except a demon who lived in a palm tree on the palace grounds. The demon wanted to get hold of the dice but could not manage to lay her hands on them.



One day, the king was out hunting and the young prince was playing a game of dice with his friends. The demon disguised herself as a beggar woman and asked the little boy for the dice. The unsuspecting prince gave it to her. The demon ran back to the palm tree and blew on the dice thrice. This made the queen swoon and collapse and the demon took her place in the royal palace.

When the king returned from his hunt, the demon queen did everything to make him comfortable so that he did not suspect her. However, the young prince noticed that when the demon queen was serving the king food, her mouth was watering. This frightened the prince and he left the table hastily. The young prince did not speak about his fears to anyone.

Over the years seven princes were born to the demon queen. The king was very happy with the birth of his sons. He celebrated their arrivals with lavish feasts. Only the eldest prince noticed that the palm tree in the king's garden was shrivelling and no longer gave shelter to birds.

When the seven princes grew up they wanted to go on a tour of the country. The king called his eldest son and asked him to accompany his brothers.

Riding a magnificent horse, the eldest prince joined his brothers.

From the terrace, the demon queen saw the eight princes leaving. She immediately sensed danger and rushed to her room where a small box was kept. Inside the small box was a snake. The demon queen asked the snake where the life of the eldest prince was stored. The snake told the queen that the prince's life was stored in the seed of a pomegranate fruit. Next, the demon queen instructed the snake to carry a letter to a





lady named Pashavati. She wanted Pashavati to give herself and her six sisters in marriage to her seven sons. The snake did as told.

The demon queen then took a pomegranate in her hand and muttered a spell. She wished that the prince's horse would fly to Pashavati's kingdom and graze and drink water there. After casting the spell, she rushed to the grand staircase of the royal palace. She asked the staircase who it belonged to. In reply, the staircase said it belonged to any person who used it. Hearing this, the queen instructed the staircase to split into half. She wanted to hide the seed of the pomegranate fruit inside the staircase. The seed of the fruit thus became captive under the majestic staircase for eternity. Satisfied, the demon returned to her room and fell asleep.



Far away, in the forest where the princes were taking rest, the eldest prince suddenly lost his vision. He cried out in pain thinking a scorpion had stung him. The sun set. A terrible thunderstorm rent the sky. But the princes could see nothing, hear nothing. They did not even hear the cries of their eldest brother and rode off, leaving him in the forest.

The demon queen dreamt that the snake had crawled into the kingdom where Pashavati was to be found. But the snake had not really reached the kingdom. As the sun had set, the snake had decided to rest in the royal garden. It crept into a fruit hanging from one of the trees and went to sleep.

The princess of that kingdom used to eat fruits from the very same tree in which the snake was resting. The gardener used to pluck fruits from the tree and take them to the princess everyday. This time, the gardener unknowingly plucked the fruit with the snake and presented it to the princess. As she bit into the fruit, the snake and the demon queen's letter, too, was eaten up.

The young princes knew nothing about their mother's letter. They continued on their journey. At sunrise, they discovered that their eldest brother was not with them. They thought he had fallen far behind and stopped to wait for him.

The day drew to a close and the night gave way to another day, but there was still no sign of their brother. One of the princes suggested that their brother could have moved ahead. As this seemed likely, the princes rode forward.

The spell-cast horses arrived at Pashavati's abode. Pashavati had decorated her house and was sitting in wait for someone to defeat her at a game of dice. If any man did so, she and her six sisters would marry him. Seeing the princes, she enquired who they were and what they wanted. The princes informed her that they were out on a country tour. Pashavati then asked the princes if they knew who she was and what the prize for winning her was. The princes said they had no idea about it. She then told them that to win her, they would have to play a game of dice. If they won, she and her sisters would wed the princes, but if they lost, they would be eaten alive.

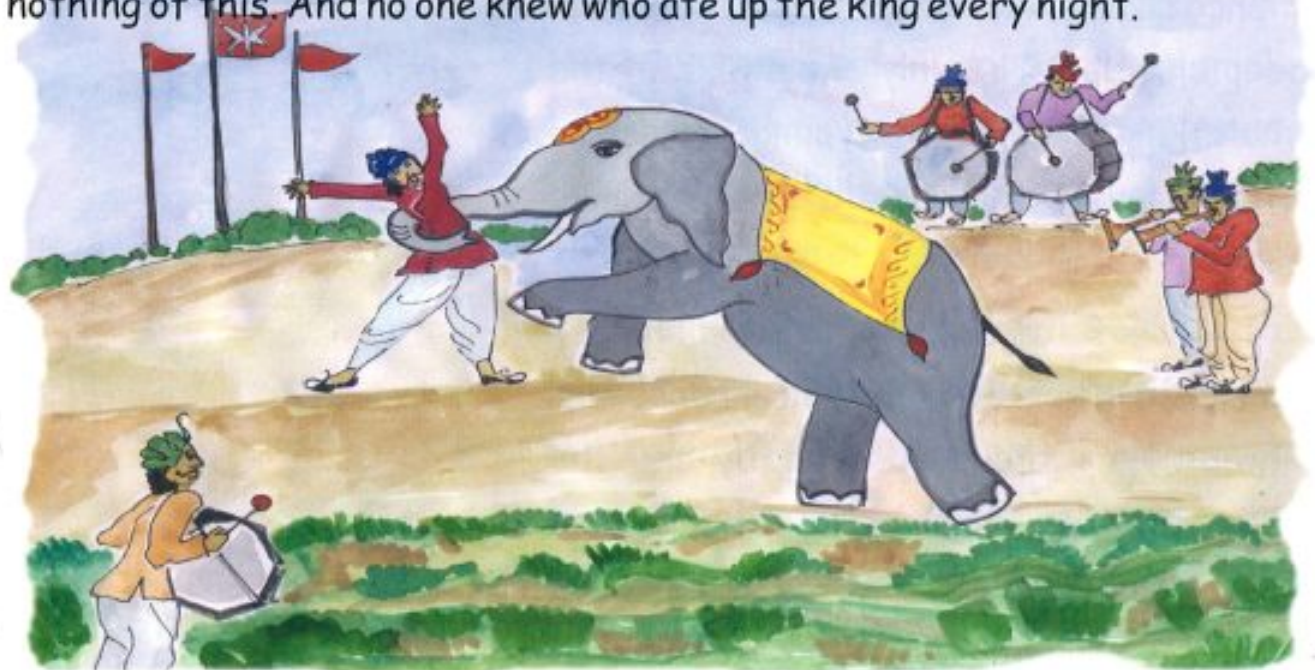
The princes claimed to be demons to avoid playing the game but as they could not prove that they were even one-half demon, they finally had to agree to play. The young princes lost the game and their lives came to an end as Pashavati and her sisters gorged on them.

Carrying the blind prince on his back, the magnificent horse kept galloping on into the thunderstorm. Unable to hold on to the reins, the prince lost his grip and fell off. The horse trotted ahead and fell off a precipice. There, he became a stone statue and lay at the bottom of the mountain.



The place where the young prince fell, was a part of a large kingdom. In the evening, the kingdom resounded to the sound of drums and flutes. Fires were lit in every house. The atmosphere turned festive. But once the night was over, everything became still. The only thing that could be heard was the sound of people crying and screaming. The entire kingdom seemed to drown in tears. Towards early afternoon, the atmosphere began to change again.

When the king left the palace, his subjects seemed to heave a sigh of relief and went about their daily activities. All the people came out of their homes and lined the streets. Elephants were sent out on the streets and any person they picked up with their trunks was made to sit on the royal throne, crowned king and married to the princess. A joyous mood filled the land and the sound of drums, flutes and conch shells could be heard. But the next morning, only the bones of the newly crowned king were found in his chamber. This was the fate of all those who were crowned king. Yet the process was repeated everyday. The princess knew nothing of this. And no one knew who ate up the king every night.



The next afternoon, the elephants were made to run out again. Hearing all the commotion, the young prince gained consciousness. He had no idea where he was, how he got there or what was happening there. The poor boy stood baffled, trying to understand what was happening.

The elephant did not choose any of the people standing around him. Instead, it ran up to the blind prince and placed him on the throne. The people of the kingdom hailed him as king and the young prince became the new ruler of the kingdom. Every courtier was happy. At night everyone went to bed. There was pindrop silence all around. The princess, too, was in deep slumber. The only one awake in the whole kingdom was the young prince. In one corner of the room a small oil lamp burnt.

All of a sudden, the princess screamed in her sleep and fell unconscious. The oil lamp flickered abruptly and the walls started to crack. The prince instinctively grasped his sword and called out, wondering who was in the room.





The princess's body turned as hard as a log of wood and a threadlike snake began to crawl out of her nose. The snake kept growing until it became a fullgrown python. The prince cried out that even though he did not know who, or rather, what was in the room, if he was a true prince and had never caused any harm to anyone, his sword would touch the object in the room. But this was easier said than done. The python grew thirty-two heads, each of which began to spew fire. As the prince swung his sword around he broke a chandelier and finally his weapon struck the python. Immediately, the prince regained his eyesight. He saw that his opponent was a huge snake that was towering above him. Through all the smoke that filled the chamber, the brave prince took aim and killed the monstrous snake with one stroke of his sword.

Back in the demon queen's palace, the magnificent staircase under which she had concealed the seed of the pomegranate fruit collapsed and the seed that bore the life of the young prince grew into a gold pomegranate tree. Soon, the land began to

shake and a massive earthquake struck the kingdom. The demon queen fled in fear.

The dead queen came back to life but she still remained unconscious. The kingdom was in turmoil.

The next morning, the courtiers came crying as they thought their king was dead. To their amazement, they saw that the king was alive and well. Everyone was overjoyed.

When the courtiers entered the king's chamber they saw the huge dead python, which was then removed and burnt to ashes.

As the snake burnt, the courtiers noticed the letter in its stomach. They took it out and carried it to the king. Reading the letter, the king took his leave from the princess, telling her that he had to rescue his brothers who had been eaten by a demon.

The people were saddened to see their king leave.

The king started on his journey. On the way he saw the statue of his horse. With one touch of the king's fingers, the horse came alive. Carrying his master on its back, the horse galloped off where the king bid him to go.

The king and his horse reached a mountain of bones, below which flowed a river of blood. The young king urged his horse to move forward, reassuring it that no harm would come their way.

In the distance the young king spotted Pashavati's kingdom. As he approached her house, he read the message affixed to her gate that whoever defeated her in a game of dice would marry her and her six sisters. The king called out to her, saying that he was willing to play.



While playing, the king noticed that a mouse turned the dice around in favour of Pashavati. The young king started losing game after game. He gave away his horse as the price for the loss and told Pashavati that he would play again the following day. Saying this, the king left and Pashavati ate the horse.



The next day, the young king went to the village and brought a little kitten, which he took with him to the game. During the game, the mouse tried to come out to turn the dice around but as it had smelt the kitten, it was too scared to do so. Within minutes, Pashavati lost the game. She returned the king's horse as the price for losing the game. They played

once more and she lost again. The young king then asked her for a horse like his and demanded a prince just like himself as the price for losing. Pashavati returned one of his brothers and his horse. They played again. Each time Pashavati lost, the young king rescued a brother. By the end of the game the young king had won back all his brothers and their horses and gained claim to the house and kingdom of Pashavati.

In the end, Pashavati asked the young king what else he wanted. He took the opportunity to ask for the pair of dice and the mouse. When Pashavati refused, he let the kitten loose. The kitten tore the mouse apart and made a meal out of him. Just then, the oil lamp burning in the room stopped burning. Pashavati and her six sisters turned into worms and died right before the king's eyes.

The pair of dice advised the young king to return home. The eight brothers mounted their grand horses and headed homeward.



In the kingdom, the unconscious queen came back to life and asked for her son. The joyous beat of drums could be heard in the kingdom once again as the eight princes returned. They touched the queen's feet to seek her blessings and the dead kingdom came back to life.



The people from the other kingdom soon came in search of their king. The princess merged her kingdom with her father-in-law's. The king was very surprised to see his son's wife and his huge kingdom.

The next morning, thousands of flowers bloomed on the golden pomegranate tree. By afternoon, the palm tree collapsed, leaving no trace of the demon that once inhabited it.



The Land of the Snakes

Once upon a time there lived a prince who was best friends with the son of his father's minister. One day, the two boys decided to go on a tour of the country together. On their way, they reached a forest under a mountain, where they decided to rest before continuing their journey. The sun was about to set. The boys decided to climb one of the trees and spend the night perched on its branches. They tied their horses to a tree and chose a larger one growing next to a lake as their resting place.

But in the middle of the night, a terrible sound awoke the boys. As they opened their eyes, they were stunned by a brilliant light that enveloped the whole forest. Nothing could have prepared the boys for what they saw in that blinding light - a huge python devoured each of their horses in a single gulp and swallowed everything else that came in its path.



The poor prince trembled with fear but the minister's son whispered to him not to be afraid. He said the light that had been cast over the forest was emanating from a jewel embedded in the snake's head, which they would have to possess.

The prince then asked his friend how the mission could be accomplished without risking their lives. The minister's son told him not to worry and began to climb down from the tree to get the jewel himself. Once on the ground, he picked up a handful of mud and threw it on the jewel. He then dug his sword into the mud such that its sharp blade stuck out, and climbed back up as quickly as possible. Both boys sat in the dark in absolute silence.



The moment the snake realized that the light of its jewel had been extinguished it rushed to the tree where the two boys hid. It found that the jewel had been dislodged but could not find it anywhere. The serpent then began to vent its anger on the sword, but the sharp edges cut into its flesh. With fire in its eyes and poison in its mouth, the snake went mad. Seeing that the biggest snake of all had gone mad with anger, the trees in the forest started to crack and fall apart and the water in the lake became completely still. Finally, out of immense frustration, the snake bit itself and ended its life.

Petrified, the two friends stayed high up in the tree for the rest of the night. In the morning light, they made sure the python was dead and came down from the tree.

The boys picked up the jewel that was caked in mud and immersed themselves in the water of the lake to rid themselves of the horrific memories of the previous night. But the more they washed themselves, the more the water of the lake dried up.

Then, in the light of the jewel, they saw a long road leading to the Kingdom of Hell. They started walking down the road, but had only gone a small distance when they came upon a beautiful house. The house was surrounded by fragrant gardens.

Finding the door open, the boys ventured in but were greeted by strange noises. The noises frightened the prince, but his friend told him not to be afraid, comforting him with the assurance that no evil could befall them as long as they had the jewel in their possession.

They crossed millions of snakes of different shapes and colours on the floor, and stamped over another few million snakes before they reached a room. Inside the





room every article was made of snakes. At the centre of the room Princess Manimala lay in deep slumber on a bed made of snakes. Stunned at the sight, the prince asked his friend what lay in front of them. The minister's son told him that they were standing in the Kingdom of Hell, and the maiden who lay before them was its princess.

The prince could not take his eyes off the princess. But the minister's son quickly took the jewel they were carrying and placed it on the forehead of the sleeping maiden. No sooner had he done so, than the princess awoke and sat up. She was scared to see the two boys and told them that the house belonged to a monstrous python. The minister's son informed her that they had got rid of the python and introduced the prince as her husband. The prince and the young princess blushed and bowed their heads.

Laughing, the minister's son unclasped a necklace from Manimala's neck and placed it round the prince's neck. Then, he took his friend's necklace and put it on Manimala's neck.

The millions of serpents that lay sleeping in the house awakened and lifted their heads cautiously.

After becoming king in the land of the snakes the prince started living there with his wife and his friend.

But the minister's son was wondering about what was going on in their own kingdom and told his friend so. He told the prince he would go to their old kingdom and that he would return amidst fanfare to take the young king and queen back home. The king agreed. The jewel lit up his path as the minister's son made his way back home.

After bidding farewell to his friend, the king returned to his Kingdom of Snakes. The king and his new queen spent their time exchanging tales from their native places. While he told his wife about the world outside, she revealed to him the stories of the land of snakes.

One day, Manimala expressed the desire to see the rest of the world but her husband did not respond to her request.

Manimala, however, was determined. One afternoon, while her husband slept, she took the jewel and left the house. The jewel showed her the way to the rest of the world. The new sights and sounds left the young queen amazed. She could not believe how much beauty existed outside the only land she knew.



She requested the jewel to fill up the lake so that she could bathe there. The jewel granted her wish and water gushed into the lake, as if by magic. Shiny marble steps led into the water, where a flock of milk white swans swam. Manimala placed the jewel on one of the steps and immersed herself in the water.

At that time, the prince of that kingdom was out hunting. He saw everything that happened. Unable to resist the beauty of the young princess, the prince, too, jumped into the water. As soon as Manimala saw the prince, it dawned on her that he was human. Picking up the jewel, she hastily immersed her whole body into the water and right before the prince's eyes, the lake, with all its beauty, disappeared. The astonished prince returned to the palace.

But there was another pair of eyes that witnessed the whole incident. This was a lady with an evil spirit and she did not breathe a word about what she saw to anybody.

The people of the kingdom thought their prince had lost his sanity after returning from the hunting trip. They tried to cure him with medicines, but to no avail. The whole land was in despair.

Finally, the king made an announcement. He proclaimed that whoever could cure his son would win half his kingdom and his daughter's hand in marriage. No one dared to take up the king's challenge and the courtiers knew they would not be able to restore the young prince's sanity.



Word about the king's offer finally reached the evil old woman and she ran to the royal court as fast as her legs could carry her. She asked the king whether he would keep his promise of giving his daughter's hand in marriage if she was able to cure the prince. She told the king that she possessed the antidote to the prince's illness but would cure him only if the princess was given to her for her son beforehand. In complete despair, the king agreed to do so.

The lady then took a whole bundle of cottonwool along with a spinning wheel and started talking to the wind. She told the wind to go to the land where princess Manimala lived. The wind did as told. The lady sat by the side of the lake and kept spinning the yarn.



Meanwhile, Manimala stole the precious jewel once again, and came to the same lake to bathe. Seeing the lady sitting there spinning, she asked for a saree. The lady quickly wove one and handed it to the princess. But she asked for money in return. As Manimala had no money, she offered to give the lady the jewel she stole from her husband. But before she could do so, the lady grabbed the princess and took her straight to the palace. Leaving her there, the woman kept the jewel for herself.

Soon enough, the prince was cured and married to Manimala. Everybody wondered whether the king's daughter would now be married to the evil lady's son. The evil woman's son had been missing for seven years. Every effort to trace him had been rendered futile.

In the meanwhile, Manimala claimed that she was bound by a vow to give up her usual activities for a whole year.

The Kingdom of Snakes was in a state of stupor with both its princess and jewel gone. The young king tumbled into a bed of snakes in his sleep and lost consciousness because of all the poison. All the snakes wrapped themselves around his limp body as he lay oblivious to his surroundings.

When the minister's son came back from his trip he received no news of his friend. He waited day and night to receive word of his friend but there was nothing. Stationing a few men by the lake, the boy took off in search of the king, his friend.



He had only walked a small distance when a group of people came up to him, asking him if he had seen the evil lady's son. They told him that the boy they were looking for would soon become their king's son-in-law. The minister's son said that he had indeed seen the youth they spoke of, and asked why he was supposed to marry the princess. The courtiers enlightened him about the situation in the kingdom. The minister's son heard everything and asked the men how the boy looked. Hearing the boy's description, he left.

The next day, the minister's son shed his royal garments and donned tattered rags. He smeared soot all over his face and body and landed up at the evil lady's hut. Thinking that her son had returned, the lady was overjoyed. She told him that she had hidden away numerous priceless items only for him. She then gave him the jewel she had stolen from Manimala.

When the minister's son received the precious jewel, he jumped with happiness, exclaiming that he had suddenly become a handsome youth. The lady scolded him for having run off when he could have married the princess.

The very next day, the evil woman went to the king demanding the marriage of the princess with her son. The poor king had no choice other than to give his daughter's hand in marriage to the evil lady's son.



On their wedding night, the minister's son confessed his true identity to his bride. Hearing the story, the princess heaved a sigh of relief and told him that her brother had imprisoned Manimala in the royal palace. The minister's son told his wife that she had to give the jewel to Manimala and whispered some instructions to her.

Three days went by. Manimala told her husband that the last day of her vow had come and to end it, she would have to bathe in the lake. She requested her husband not to send courtiers with her. She said the only people she wanted around her, were his sister and her newly married husband.

Everything went according to plan and the three of them left for the lake. As soon as Manimala took a dip in the lake, she requested the jewel to take them all back to her kingdom. The lake divided itself into two, showing the trio the way to the land of the snakes.

The king, queen and prince cursed themselves for having been tricked so easily. The evil old woman died of shock.

Back in the Kingdom of Snakes, the serpents fell away from the young king's body. The king opened his eyes to see Manimala, his beloved wife, and his trusted friend, who too, had a wife now.

After the happy reunion, the jewel lit up the way and the two couples returned to the kingdom of the young prince's father.

Behind them, in the kingdom of snakes, the serpents turned into wind and flew away.

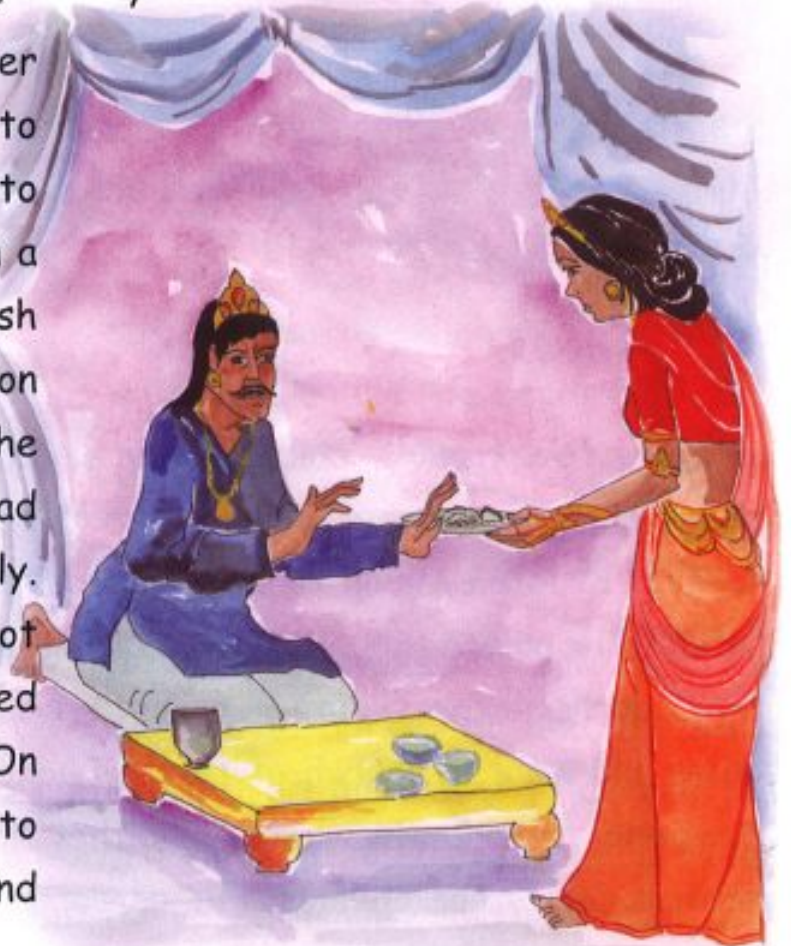
The Demon Queen

Once upon a time there lived four boys who were great friends. One was the son of a king, one the son of a minister, the third was the son of a merchant and the last was the son of a watchman.

The boys spent all their time together, riding horses all over the kingdom. They led very lazy lives and this annoyed their fathers.

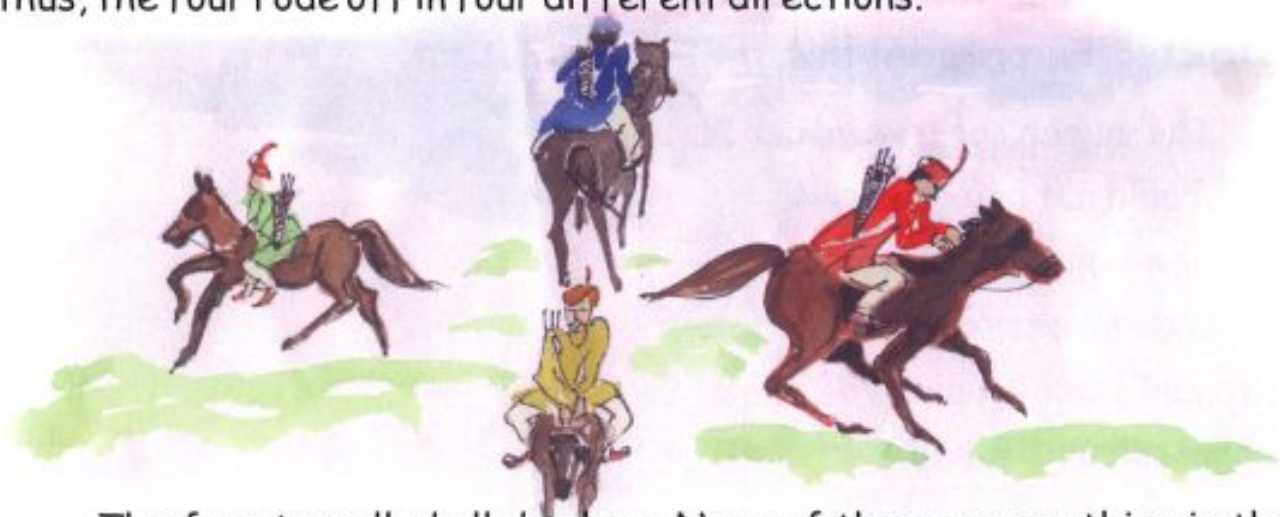
One day their fathers, the king, the minister, the merchant and the watchman ordered that their boys be fed ashes instead of rice. The minister's wife, the merchant's wife and the watchman's wife suppressed their tears and served their sons ashes just as they had been instructed. Surprised at this, the boys did not eat.

The queen, on the other hand, could not bring herself to give her hungry son ashes to eat. So, she served food on a plate and placed a pinch of ash in one corner. When her son asked her about the ashes she lied and told him that it had fallen on his plate accidentally. The young prince did not believe his mother and pried the truth out of her. On hearing what his mother had to say, he touched her feet and left the food untouched.



The four friends met at their usual place and asked one another how their meals had been. In reply, they just looked at each other without saying a word. The prince then decided that they should all leave the kingdom. His three friends agreed and all of them rode off.

The four friends reached a vast stretch of wilderness where four paths diverged in four different directions. The watchman's son decided to go south, the merchant's son north, the minister's son decided to go west and the king's son moved to the east. All four friends tore a piece of cloth from their turbans and placed it at the crossroads, deciding that whoever came back first would wait for the others to return. Saying thus, the four rode off in four different directions.



The four travelled all day long. None of them saw anything in their paths. There were no villages, streams, fields or houses, there was nothing. By late evening, all four friends returned to the same place, the forest. The prince thought they had caught the fancy of a demon and said they had to be careful in the forest. The four boys tied their horses to trees and went in search of food as none of them had eaten anything throughout the day. Nowhere could they find anything to eat. There were neither fruits nor animals. For as far as they could see, there were stones and huge banyan and silk-cotton trees.

But at a distance, the four boys noticed the head of a deer. They were relieved to find something to eat and the watchman's son went to collect firewood, the merchant's son went to fetch water and the minister's son went in search of flint stones. The prince rested his head on a root and fell asleep.



When the watchman's son came back with the firewood he saw that none of his friends had returned and that the prince was still sleeping. So he went about cutting the deer's head open. The moment the boy's sword touched the head, a demon emerged and swallowed both the boy and his horse. The demon then turned back into the deer's head.

Carrying the water, the merchant's son saw the firewood lying on the ground but his friend was nowhere to be seen. He thought to himself that his friend must have left the firewood and gone somewhere. He, too, began to cut open the deer's head and met the same fate as his friend.

On his return, the minister's son saw that the firewood and water had been brought, but his friends were not around. He decided to cook for his friends but no sooner did he try his luck than the demon appeared. The minister's son screamed and shouted but was gobbled up by the demon.

Hearing the screams, the young prince awoke. He saw that the demon had eaten up the minister's son and his horse, too, and was about to eat his own horse. The young prince drew his sword to avenge the death of his friend. His horse warned him and told him to run, as there was no escape from the demon. But the young prince would not listen.

The demon then turned his attention to the prince. Everything in the forest, the trees and the stones, asked him to leave to save his own life. Finally, paying heed to their warning, the young prince took to his heels. He ran from one kingdom to the other but the demon was still on his track. In front of the prince was a mango tree. In complete despair the prince begged the mango tree to protect him from the demon. The mango tree split open and the prince climbed in, heaving a sigh of relief.



The demon pleaded with the mango tree to release the prince but it paid no heed. When the demon saw that she could get nowhere with the tree she took on the guise of a beautiful maiden and sat there crying.

At that time, the king of the land was hunting in the forest. He heard someone crying and enquired about it from the members of the hunting party. The people followed the sound and came upon the crying maiden. Enchanted by her beauty, the king took the girl back to the royal palace.

Within a few days, the king married the beautiful maiden. But the only thought swirling in the new queen's mind was how to eat the king, her husband.

She placed cork sticks under her mattress and lay in bed tossing and turning, pretending to be sick. The king came to her room, troubled to see her so unwell. She complained that her bones were causing her great pain. As she moved, the cork sticks broke under her weight with a crackling noise. The queen told the king that the noise was coming from her bones. Believing his wife, the king had all the medicines in the kingdom brought, but nothing could cure her. In the end, the queen said she would recover only if the mango tree she was sitting under was cut down, brought to the palace and set on fire. The fumes of the burning tree would drive her illness away.

Following the royal orders, thousands of woodcutters went to fell the mango tree. The young prince begged the tree to conceal him in a mango and throw him into the waters of a nearby pond. The mango tree did as the prince requested. But, as soon as the mango dropped into the water, a big fish gulped it down.

The woodcutters took the mango tree back to the palace and burnt parts of it and fumed the queen's room. The queen, however, came to know about the prince's escape. She now said that her illness would leave her only if she ate the mango that had been swallowed by the biggest fish in the pond where the mango tree stood.

All the fishermen of the land set about the task of catching the fish. The young prince begged the fish to turn him into a small snail and release him into the water. The fish did as bid and got trapped in the fishermen's nets soon after. Its stomach was torn open for the mango, but it was found to be empty.

In despair, the king thought his queen would never recover.





One day, a woman went to bathe in the pond. Her feet touched the snail and she picked it up and threw it away. Once the snail struck the hard ground, its shell broke and the prince emerged. He asked the lady not to be frightened of him and revealed his story to her. The young prince started staying with his newfound friend.

The queen found out about all this. She told the king that her ailments would disappear only if certain things, which were almost impossible to find, were brought for her from the land of her father. When the king asked her who would bring these things, she promptly replied that a prince who lived in the house of a courtier would be suitable for the job. The royal guards went in search of the young prince.

The guards surrounded the courtier's house. Seeing that his friend was scared, the prince said he would leave the kingdom immediately as misfortune had come her way because of him. He then left the house, only to be arrested by the royal guards who were waiting outside.

He was brought to the king, to whom he narrated his whole story. He told the king that his wife was a demon and that he, the prince, needed to be protected from her. The king did not believe a word the young prince had said and sent him off to get the things the queen had ordered. The unfortunate prince left the kingdom not knowing where to go and took the first road he came to.

After travelling a long way, the prince reached another kingdom. There, he found no sign of human life. He entered a palatial house and on walking into one of its rooms, he saw a princess fast asleep. She had a silver stick by her head and a golden stick near her feet. He tried waking the princess up but she did not even open her eyes. He then picked up the two sticks and switched their positions. No sooner had he done so than the princess awoke and asked him who he was and how he had reached the kingdom.

She advised him to leave the kingdom as it belonged to a demon. He had managed to escape from one demon only to fall right into the hands of another. He told the princess his story and asked her how she lived in a demon's kingdom. She then replied that the kingdom belonged to her father. The demon and his army had destroyed everyone and everything but had kept her alive. Every time the demons left the house they switched the sticks so that she would sink into a deep slumber.

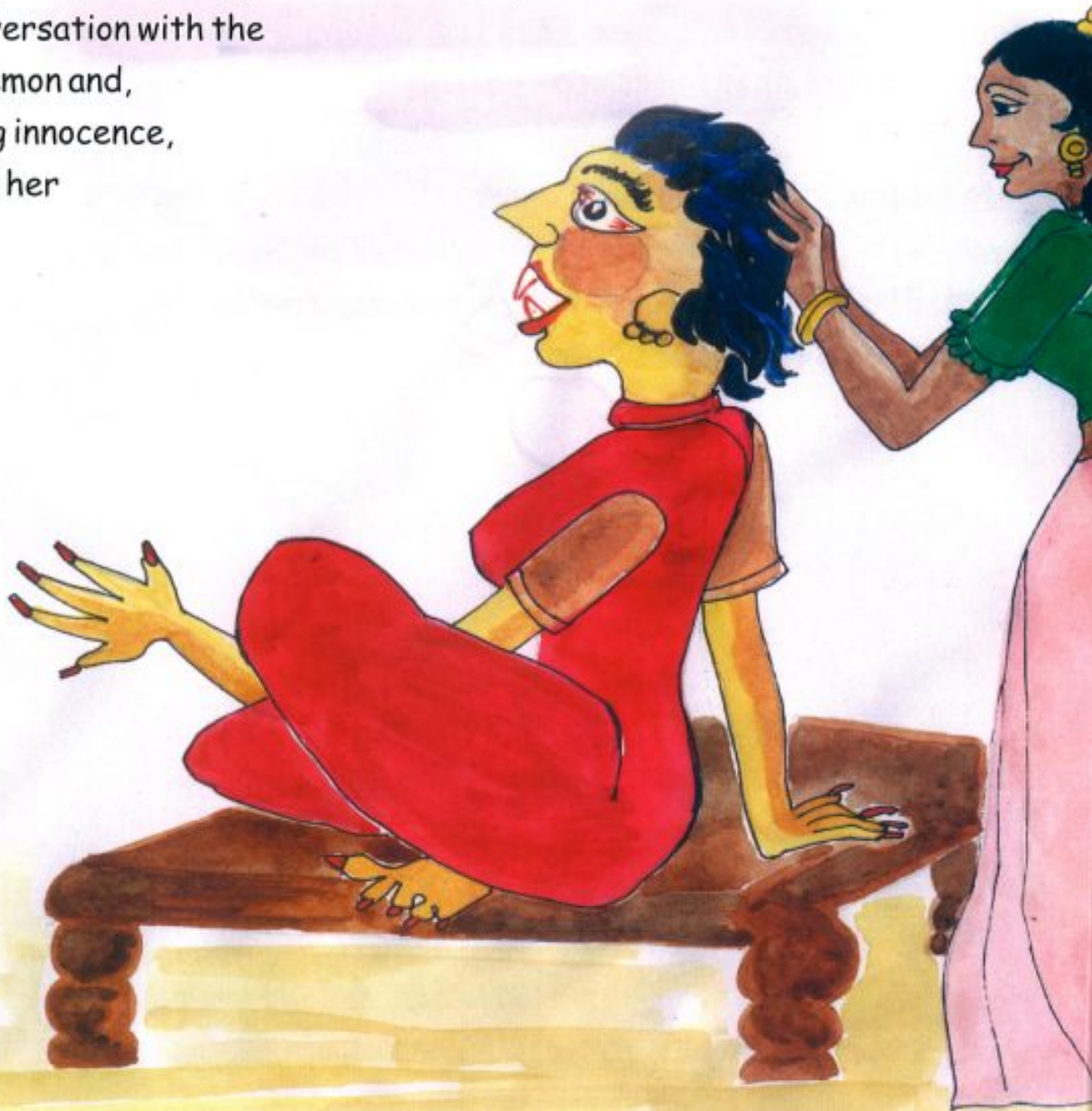
The prince began to think of how he could escape along with the princess. Just then, they heard the demons returning. The princess told him to put her back to sleep and hide himself in a small temple in a corner of the room.

By the time the demons stepped into the room, the princess was asleep and the prince was nowhere to be seen. The demons brought the princess back to her senses. They fed her and then, putting mustard oil into their ears, they fell asleep.


While they slept, the princess plucked white hair from the lice-infested head of the eldest demon. This was how the princess spent every night. In the morning, the demons left putting the princess back to sleep. The prince came out and awoke the princess. He instructed the princess to ask the eldest demon how they could die.



Once again, the demons returned. Pretending to be very nice and thoughtful, the young princess struck up a conversation with the old demon and, faking innocence, asked her



how they could be killed. The demon told her she had no reason to worry, as killing her was a very difficult task. There lived a seven-headed snake in a lake. She would die only if that snake was killed. But if even a tiny drop of blood fell on the ground, seven thousand demons would be born. For

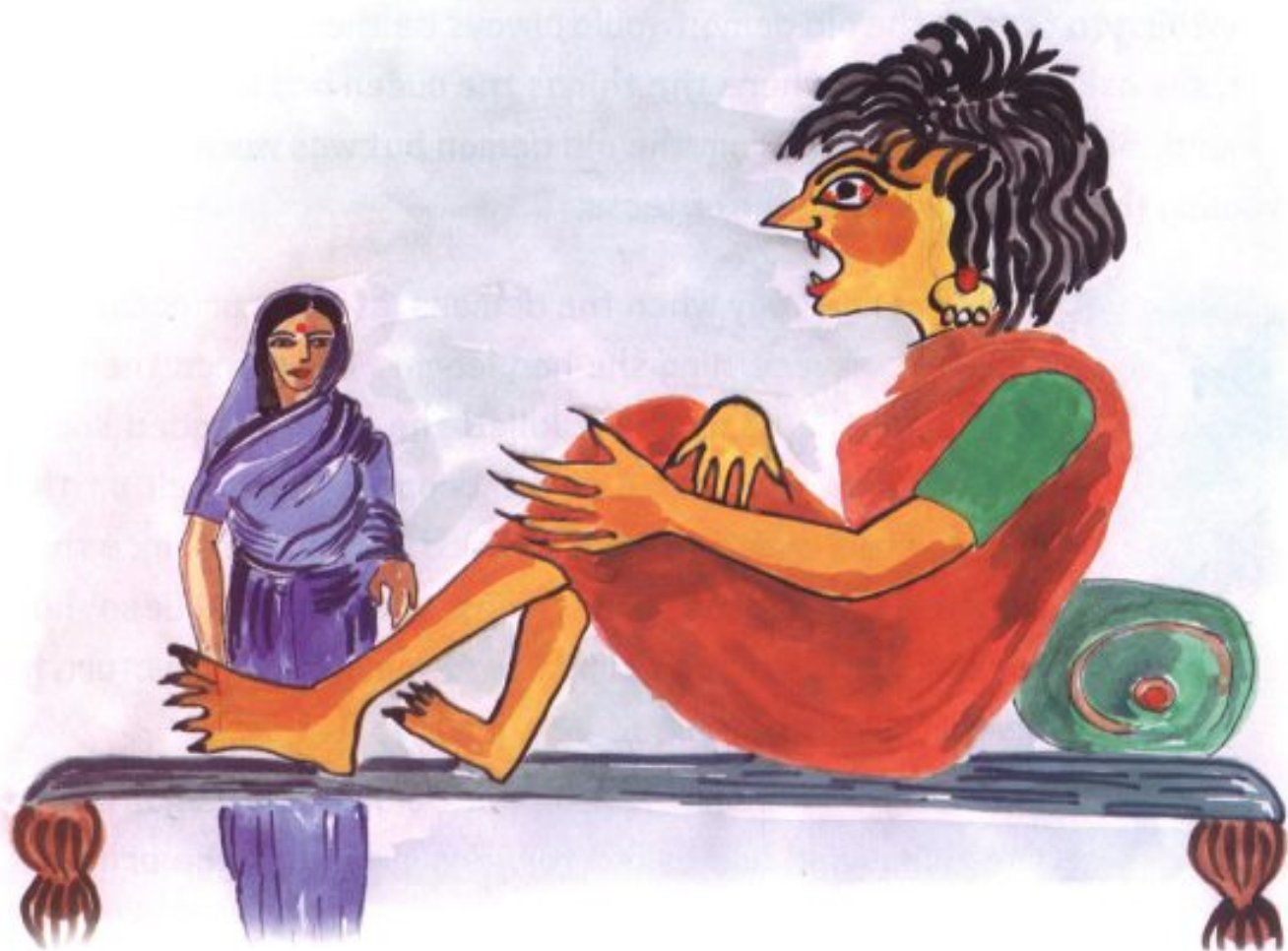
A partial illustration on the left side of the page shows a person wearing a long, flowing pink robe. Only the lower half of the person is visible, from the waist down to the feet. The person is standing on a yellowish ground. The robe has a wide, flared hem.

every drop of blood that fell on the ground, seven thousand demons would come into existence. Hearing this, the princess told the monster that she had nothing to fear as the old demon would always be there to protect her. Next, she asked the demon where the things the queen had ordered could be found. She got the answer from the old demon but was warned against revealing the whereabouts of the objects.

The next day when the demons left, the princess told the prince everything she had learnt. The prince then set off to kill the demons. He killed the seven-headed snake and ensured that not a single drop of blood fell on the ground. This ended the life of the demons. The prince then went and collected the things the demon queen had ordered and asked the princess to join him on his return to his own kingdom.

On the way back he stopped to give the demon queen the things she had asked for. Ensuring that the princess was safe, he went to the palace to meet the king. He told the king to convene the royal court and demanded that the queen should come to get the things herself. The demon queen walked into the court with every intention of eating up the prince. But seeing that the prince was a step ahead of her and could kill her if he wanted, she said she would not eat him.

Seeing the true form of the queen, everyone in the royal court trembled with fear. The young prince ordered the queen to return all his friends and their horses. One by one all his friends were returned to him and the young



prince revealed the queen's real identity to the king. By then, the demon had pounced on the king but the prince killed the monster and saved the king's life.

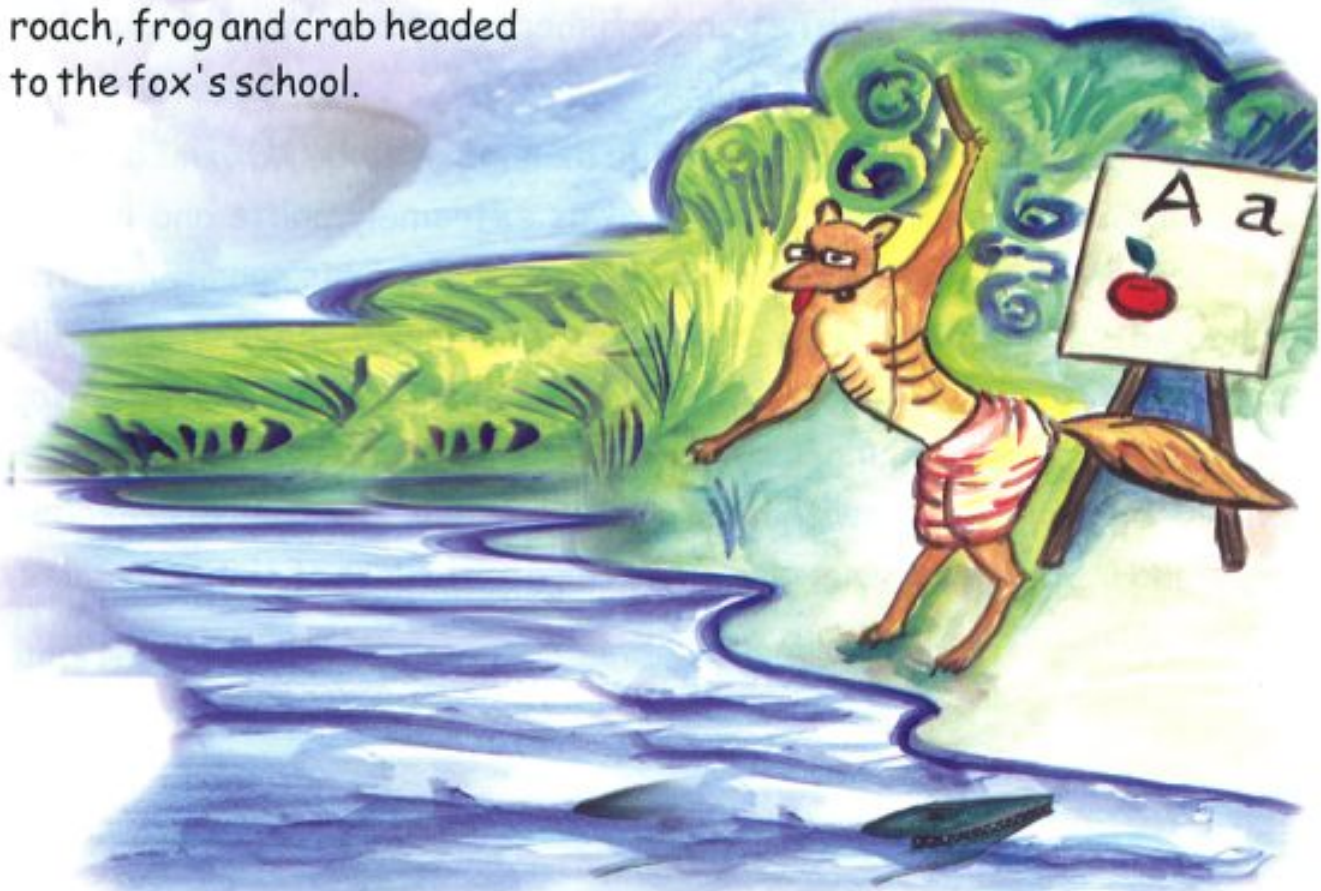
The king thanked the young prince profusely and opened his treasury for him to take whatever his heart desired. The young prince declined and told the king that all he wanted was to return to his homeland.

The prince, accompanied by his princess and three friends, returned home safely and all the demons that existed in the world met their end.

The Clever Fox Master

Once upon a time there lived a very clever fox. One day the fox decided to open a school in the middle of the forest. He turned his dream into reality and his school became a great success.

Every insect, tortoise, centipede, roach, frog and crab headed to the fox's school.

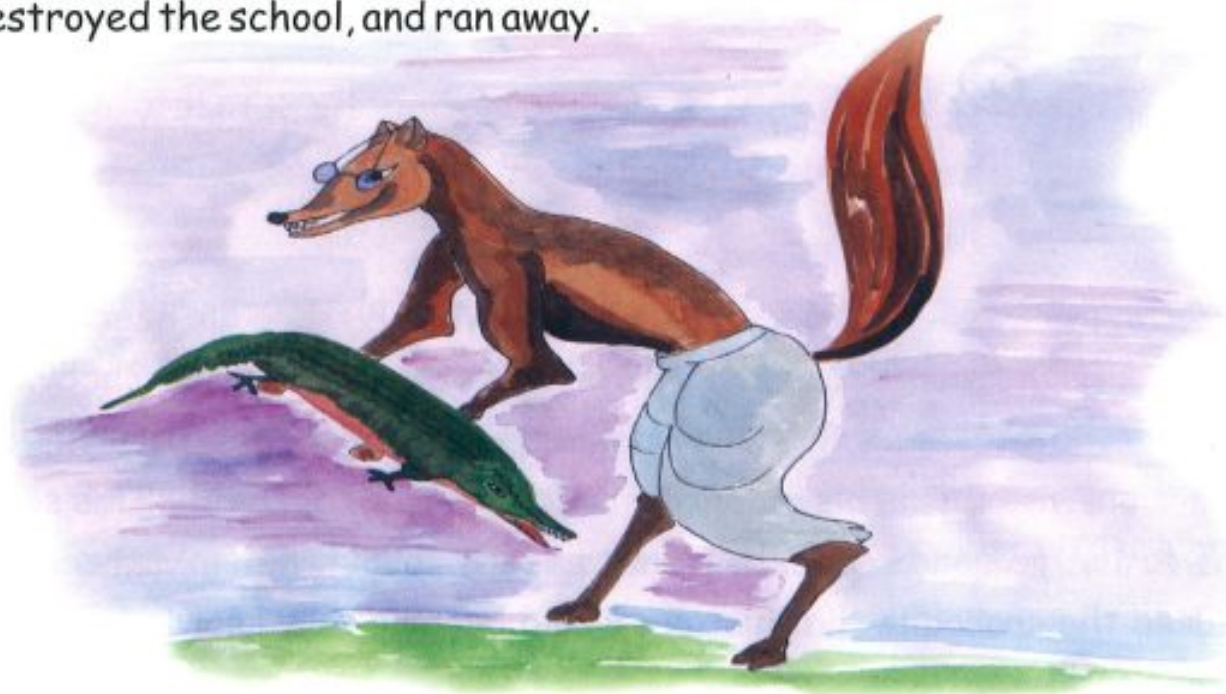


The fame of the school spread far and wide. A crocodile heard about the school and wanted to send his children there. He reasoned with himself that if every baby animal of the forest was receiving an education, why should his offspring be left behind? So he took his seven sons to the fox and requested him to teach them. The fox agreed and assured the crocodile that his sons would become very knowledgeable in no time at all.

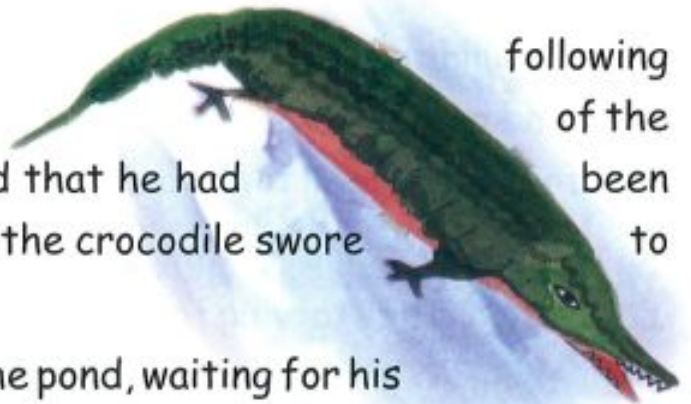
The fox used to teach his pupils during the day and eat one of the baby crocodiles for supper. Six days went by with the fox following the same routine.

The crocodile, in the meanwhile, sat daydreaming about how educated his sons would become. On the seventh day, he decided to pay a visit to his sons. He gave instructions for delicious food to be cooked for his sons when they returned home. He then put on his finest garments, took with him a torn fishing net and a fisherman's boat and left for the fox's school.

Reaching the school, the crocodile demanded to be informed about the progress of his children. The fox was extremely polite and invited the crocodile to sit down while he went in search of his sons. Since the fox had eaten six of the baby crocodiles, he showed the last crocodile seven times to satisfy their father. The cunning fox told the doting father that he was working very hard on the boys and requested him to leave the baby crocodiles with him for another day. The foolish crocodile agreed and left. The very next day, the fox ate the last of the crocodiles, destroyed the school, and ran away.



When the crocodile came the morning, there was no sign either school or of its master. He realised that he had tricked. Mad with rage and sorrow, the crocodile swore to take revenge on the cruel fox.



following
of the
been
to

The crocodile lay patiently in the pond, waiting for his chance to catch the fox. But the fox was too clever. He passed by the pond but knew that the crocodile was lying in wait for him. He did not go near the water for a drink even though his throat was parched. He also wanted to lay his hands on the crabs that carelessly crawled about in the sand.

In the end, he gave up and jumped into the water for a drink. Immediately, the crocodile grabbed hold of the fox's leg and a struggle followed. The fox held out a log of wood and began to laugh at the crocodile, saying that it had caught only a piece of wood thinking it to be the fox. The foolish crocodile believed the fox and let go of its leg, snapping his jaws shut on the log instead. The fox leapt out of the water and fled to the safety of the land. He mocked the crocodile, saying he would open another school where the crocodile should send more of his children.

Days went by. The fox proved too clever for the crocodile.

Then one day, the crocodile came up with an idea. He lay near the pond pretending to be dead. The fox was fooled and thought that the crocodile was dead. But he was still suspicious and decided to test whether the crocodile was actually dead.

He said aloud that if something was dead, its ears and tail would twitch. The imprudent crocodile fell into the fox's trap and twitched his ears and tail. The fox understood that the crocodile was only pretending.

Around the same time, a few cowherds who saw the crocodile lying by the pond got weapons to kill him as he had been attacking their livestock. The fox bid farewell to the unfortunate crocodile and left.

Walking some distance the fox found himself in an eggplant cultivation. The starving fox satisfied his hunger by eating the eggplants.



Suddenly a thorn pricked his nose. He yelped in pain and a stream of blood flowed down his chest and soaked his fur.

Writhing in pain, the fox went to a barber to get the thorn removed. Reaching the barber's house, the fox very politely asked him to come out.

The good-natured barber took pity on the fox and agreed to help him out. The teary-eyed fox told the barber that no one but him could lessen his pain. The barber got his instruments ready and started to pull out the thorn, but cut off the fox's nose by mistake.

The fox grew furious and threatened the barber with dire consequences if he did not fix his nose. The barber begged for forgiveness but the fox snatched his tweezers and left the scared man trembling in his house.

On his way, the fox passed the house of a potter. The potter called out to know who was crossing his courtyard. The fox introduced himself and said that he had a pair of tweezers with him. It so happened that the potter was in need of tweezers. He asked to see the tweezers and the fox gave it to him. As the potter examined the tweezers, it broke. This infuriated the fox and he demanded the tweezers back.

The village had no blacksmith who could help the fox and the potter. When the potter begged for forgiveness, the fox told him that only a pot could replace the tweezers. The potter gave the fox a large pot and heaved a sigh of relief. Taking the pot with him, the fox left.

On the next street, a groom was on his way back home with his new bride. The celebrating guests burst firecrackers to make the atmosphere festive. One of the firecrackers landed in the fox's pot and it cracked into a million pieces. The fox told the people who were part of the marriage procession that if they wanted to continue on their journey, they had to return his pot. The groom did not know what to do. Everyone begged for forgiveness. The fox demanded that the bride be given to him. In fear, and not knowing what else to do, the groom agreed to give his young bride to the fox.

Carrying the bride with him, the fox reached the house of a drummer. He informed the drummer that he was going to get married and instructed him to play the drums for the wedding. The fox then went in search of a priest who could perform the marriage ceremony.

In the meantime, the wife of the drummer sat down to cut vegetables. The tired young bride was half asleep and fell on the big sharp knife with which the drummer's wife was cutting the vegetables. Before anybody could react, the young bride had been sliced into two. Terrified, the drummer's wife picked up the two halves of the bride's body and hid them in the barn.







The fox came back with a priest but was immensely surprised to find that the bride was nowhere to be seen. He shouted at the drummer and his wife, demanding that the bride be returned to him. But when they failed to do so, the fox demanded the drummer's drum. The couple parted with the instrument, happy to have been able to save their lives.

Taking the drum with him, the fox climbed a palm tree and started singing and dancing on its branches. Just then he slipped and he fell off a high branch of the tree. Thus ended the life of the clever fox.



Two Sisters

Once upon a time there lived a weaver who had two wives. Both wives had a daughter each, called Shukhu and Dukhu. The elder wife and her daughter were the favourites of the weaver and he showered them with love and affection. Neither wife nor daughter ever helped with the housework. But the younger wife and her daughter spent their days slogging and getting shouted at, and at the end of it all they got hardly anything to eat.

Suddenly, one day the weaver died. His elder wife took possession of everything he had and hid it for herself and her daughter, leaving the younger wife and her daughter with nothing. She bought the best food available while the younger wife suppressed her hunger pangs.

The younger wife and her daughter made sarees from the thread the weaver left behind and sold them for small amounts of money to keep themselves going.

But it seemed misfortune would never leave their side. Mice gnawed at the thread they used for weaving and the bales of cotton went damp.

One day the younger wife went to take a bath putting the cotton out to dry in the sun, when a strong gust of wind blew it all away. Her young daughter, who had been told to keep an eye on the



cotton, could not retrieve it and started to cry bitterly in despair and frustration.

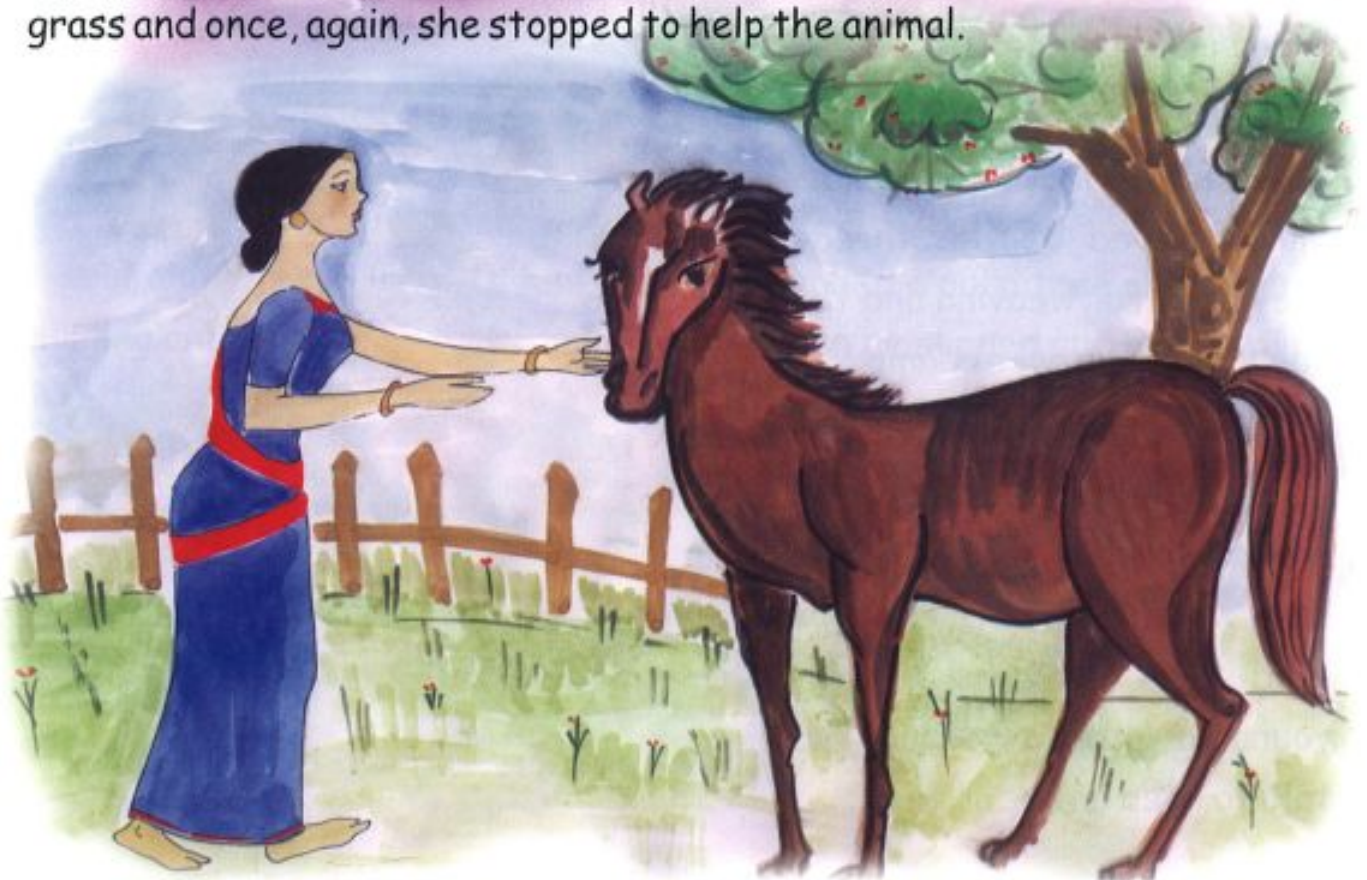
Taking pity on the girl, the gust of wind told her to follow him and promised to return all her cotton. Still crying, she followed the wind.

On her way, she passed a cow. The cow requested her to clean the cowshed. Dukhu being a kind-hearted girl, stopped and cleaned the shed. After bringing more hay and water to the cow, she continued her journey.

After a little while, Dukhu passed a banana plant overgrown with creepers. The plant pleaded with her to rid it of the climbers and Dukhu happily obliged.

Next, a very large tree stopped her and begged her to clear away a heap of rubbish at the base of its trunk. Dukhu followed the tree's instructions and continued her journey behind the wind.

Walking further ahead, Dukhu met a horse in need of a bundle of grass and once, again, she stopped to help the animal.



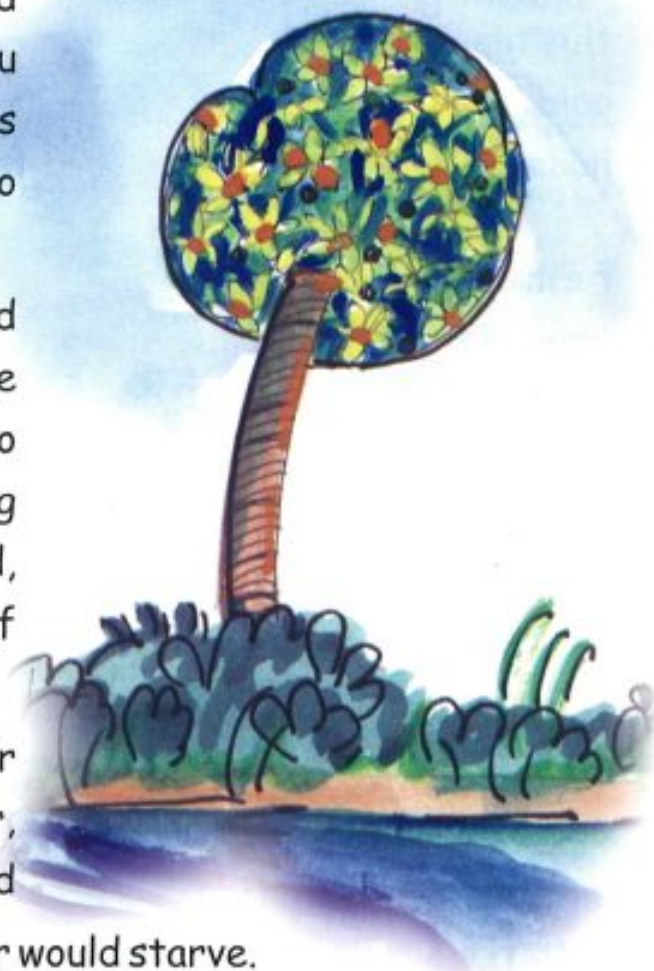
Finally, Dukhu reached a house. The cottage appeared empty, though the things inside were sparkling clean. Then, she saw an old woman sitting and weaving. To her astonishment, Dukhu saw that the thread the woman was working with, magically turned into sarees in no time.

The old woman, the wind explained, was none other than the mother of the moon. He told Dukhu to ask the lady for her cotton. Obeying the wind, Dukhu went forward, and, touching the lady's feet as a mark of respect, asked her for some cotton.

She told the lady that the cotton her mother had asked her to watch over, had been blown away by the wind and without it, both she and her mother would starve.

The lady had snow-white hair and exuded the radiance of the moon. Looking up, she saw the girl who had spoken to her with a voice sweeter than sugar. The lady told Dukhu that in one of the rooms of the house, there were all the objects required for a bath. She instructed the girl to take a bath in a pond and eat something when she returned. The lady promised to give her cotton afterwards.

Dukhu went in search of the things. She came to the room about which the lady had told her and saw a variety of towels and clothes. But Dukhu chose a small torn towel and made her way to the pond.



Dukhu immersed herself in the water. When she surfaced, her beauty was breathtaking. There was no maiden or Goddess who could compete with her beauty. As Dukhu could not see herself she did not know she had been transformed. She bobbed down in the water again, and this time, when she surfaced, her entire body was covered with exquisite gold jewellery. Her body covered with gold, she slowly went back to the house.

D u k h u remembered the lady's instructions and began to look for the room where she would have to eat. Soon, she saw food of all types overflowing from all corners of the room. D u k h u was overwhelmed at the sight but was satisfied with the simplest meal there.

She then went back to the old woman and asked for her cotton.

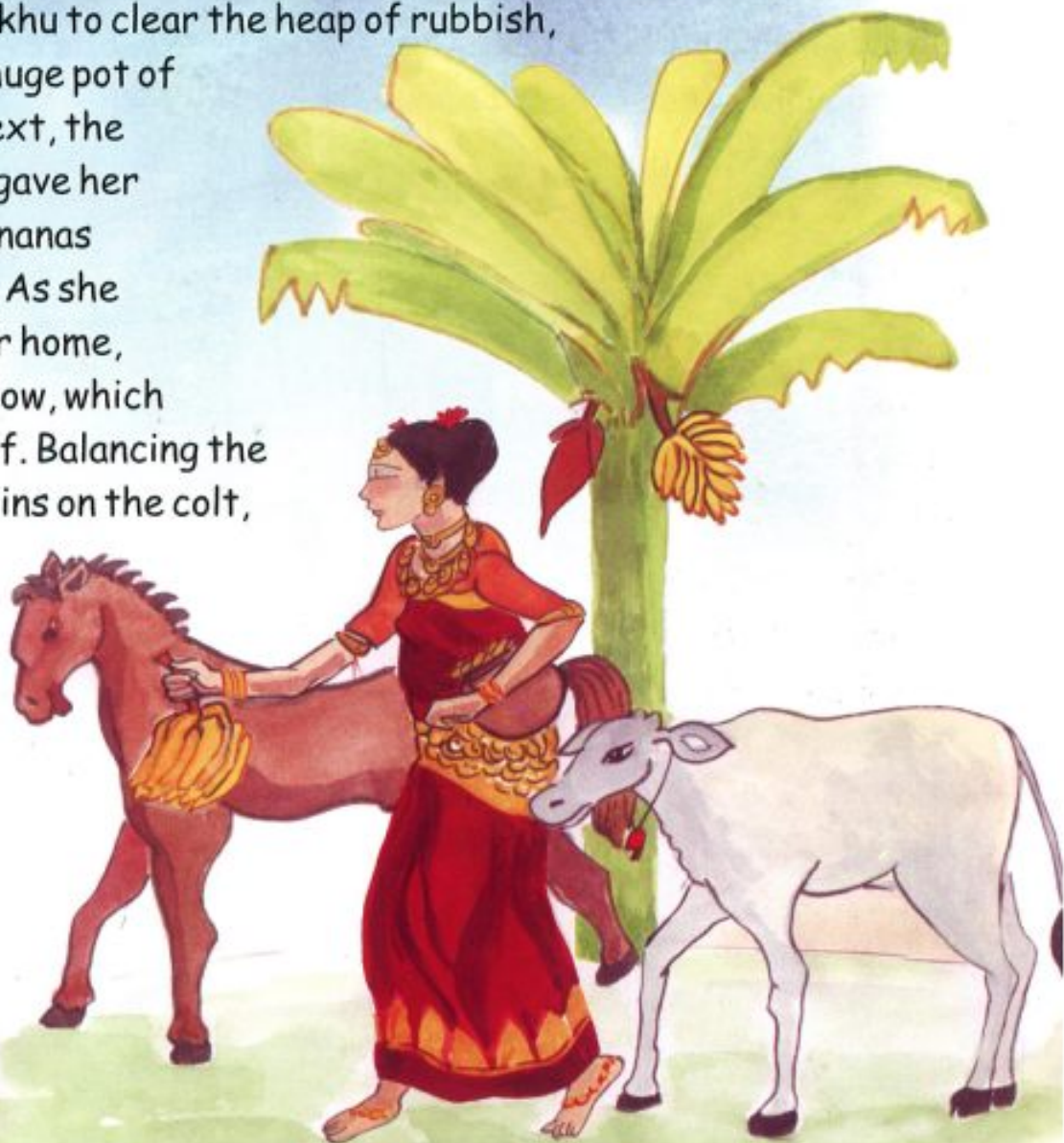
T h e l a d y instructed Dukhu to go to another room and



take her cotton. Dukhu did as she was told. On entering the room, she saw shelves stacked with boxes of cotton wool. Dukhu picked the smallest box and took it back to the old lady.

The lady told her to return home to her mother. Touching the old lady's feet, Dukhu set off for home.

On her way back, she met the horse again. But this time, instead of asking her for a favour, the horse presented Dukhu with a colt. The tree that had asked Dukhu to clear the heap of rubbish, gifted her a huge pot of gold coins. Next, the banana plant gave her a bunch of bananas made of gold. As she came near her home, she met the cow, which gave her a calf. Balancing the pot of gold coins on the colt,



Dukhu took the young calf and slowly continued her journey back to her mother.

Meanwhile, Dukhu's mother had come back after her bath, and finding neither her daughter nor the cotton, she became sick with anxiety.

On seeing Dukhu, her heart soared with happiness and she let out a sigh of relief. Surprised to see the presents, the widow enquired where Dukhu had been. The girl narrated everything to her mother but the foolish lady revealed everything to the elder widow. She even shared the gifts her daughter had brought back with her.



But instead of being thankful, the elder widow was very rude to the young girl and her mother. Disappointed, the mother and daughter left.

The elder widow was very jealous of the good fortune that had befallen the younger widow and her daughter. She told her own daughter, Shukhu, that the following day she should follow the same route that Dukhu had taken and come back with the same gifts.

Later that night, when Dukhu and her mother opened the small box of cotton wool, a handsome prince stepped out of it. He was Dukhu's husband - to - be.



The next morning, the elder widow spread out her cotton to dry in the sun just as Dukhu's mother had done, and went to bathe in the pond. Soon after, a gust of wind blew the cotton away. Shukhu followed the gust of wind, just as her mother had told her.

On the way, the cow called out to her. Shukhu did not stop to listen. The banana plant, the large tree and the horse all asked for help but she paid no attention. Instead, she yelled at them saying that as she was going to meet the mother of the moon, she had no time to spare.

Following the wind, Shukhu reached the old woman's house. Seeing the old lady sitting and weaving, she demanded everything that Dukhu had received and pushed the spinning wheel so hard that it broke.



The old woman was angry, but all she told Shukhu was to bathe, have her meal and come back. Before the lady could finish her sentence, Shukhu had left the room. She picked out the best towel and saree and proceeded to the pond.

The first time that she immersed herself in the water, her beauty became breathtaking, just as she expected. The second time, her body was adorned in the finest of jewels. But her greedy mind wanted more and she thought that if she kept immersing herself she would get much more. But as soon as she took another dip in the pond, her beauty and all her jewels were replaced by warts and boils. Shukhu became a picture of ugliness. She went back to the old lady, with tears streaming down her face.



Seeing her, the old lady simply told her that she should not have taken a dip for the third time. But she told her not to worry and sent her to eat something.

Shukhu ate the choicest of dishes on offer and returned to the old lady's room to demand her cotton wool.

The lady then showed her the room where the boxes of cotton wool were kept. She picked up the biggest box she could see and started for her house.

On the way, whoever saw the warts and boils on the girl's body, turned away in disgust. The horse kicked her as she passed. The large tree dropped a huge branch on her head and the banana plant flung a bunch of the fruit at her. The cow chased her and Shukhu took to her heels, running all the way to her house.

Her mother was waiting anxiously for her to return. At the sight of Shukhu she fainted. Once she recovered from the shock, she told her daughter to take the box of cotton wool into the house and see whether her groom-to-be was concealed inside.

They opened the box. But almost immediately, Shukhu began to feel unwell. Her mother told her to wear jewellery to rid herself of the weird sensations.

Next morning, the elder widow knocked on the door of her daughter's room but got no response. When she forced the door open, there was no sign of Shukhu. Instead, in the middle of the room, lay some bones and the skin of a cobra. A cobra had consumed her daughter.

Unable to bear the shock, the old widow struck herself with a heavy piece of wood and ended her life.

The Lucky Brahmin

Once upon a time there lived a Brahmin and his wife. Being a very clever lady, the Brahmin's wife used to take care of everything in the household. The Brahmin on the other hand just sat around doing nothing.

The lady was terrible to look at. Her nose had torn under the weight of her nosepin, her hair was dry and rough and her skin cracked and wrinkled. She spent her days begging and when she returned home, she had to listen to the ungrateful words of her husband. She lived in utter misery.

One day, the Brahmin instructed his wife to make rice cakes. This was the last straw. The angry lady yelled at her husband and asked him to leave the house and let her live in peace. The birds flew away from the trees and the trees themselves shook in fear when they heard the angry voice of the Brahmin's wife. The Brahmin thought that he, too, had had enough and left the house to become a hermit.



The Brahmin used to roam the forests in search of food. On one such day, the Brahmin came across an ascetic. The man heard the Brahmin's story about his wife refusing to keep him and took pity on him. He then took the Brahmin to his ashram.

In the ashram, the Brahmin learnt how to read and write and gained a lot of knowledge. Once he had learnt all that he could, he thought to himself that since he was now a learned man, everyone would be willing to keep and feed him and he would never have to listen to his wife's abuses again. This thought gave the man immense satisfaction. Without telling the ascetic anything, the Brahmin left the ashram and returned to his own village.

It was the peak of summer and the pathways had cracked in the intense heat. The trees lining the streets were laden with fruit.

Reaching the outskirts of the village, the Brahmin decided to go to the king's palace but on his way there, he thought of paying a quick visit to his wife.

The sun had just set when the Brahmin reached the courtyard of his house. From outside he heard his wife cooking. She made twenty-one cutlets and he stood outside counting. After she was done, she washed her hands and came out of the hut. When the Brahmin heard his wife's footsteps, he called out to her.




Stunned to hear her husband's voice she came out of the hut immediately. She demanded to know where he had been all the while that he was missing from home. He told her that he had become a very educated man and that he had stopped by only to tell her so.



His wife did not believe a word of what he said. To prove to her that he was indeed educated, he told her that she had just made twenty-one cutlets. She was stunned. She went running to tell the other villagers that her husband had become a very knowledgeable man. The villagers were as amazed as she had been.

Many days went by in celebrating the Brahmin's new found knowledge. Word about the Brahmin's superior intellect reached kingdoms far away.





One day, the washerman of the village lost his donkey. He came to the Brahmin begging him to tell him where he could find the animal. The Brahmin told him he was busy and that he could attend to him only after his prayers were done. The poor man waited until the Brahmin finished his prayers. The Brahmin went back to his wife and asked her for advice. Taking an umbrella with him, he left in search of the lost donkey. But nowhere did he find the animal. Returning home, he told the man that he would not be able to find his donkey, as the Gods were angry. However, he told him to return the following day as the donkey would be found by then. The man did as bid.

The sun set. The Brahmin sat deep in thought, trying to come up with a way to find the missing donkey. He knew nobody would believe in his knowledge if he failed this test. He cursed his bad luck as he went to bed.

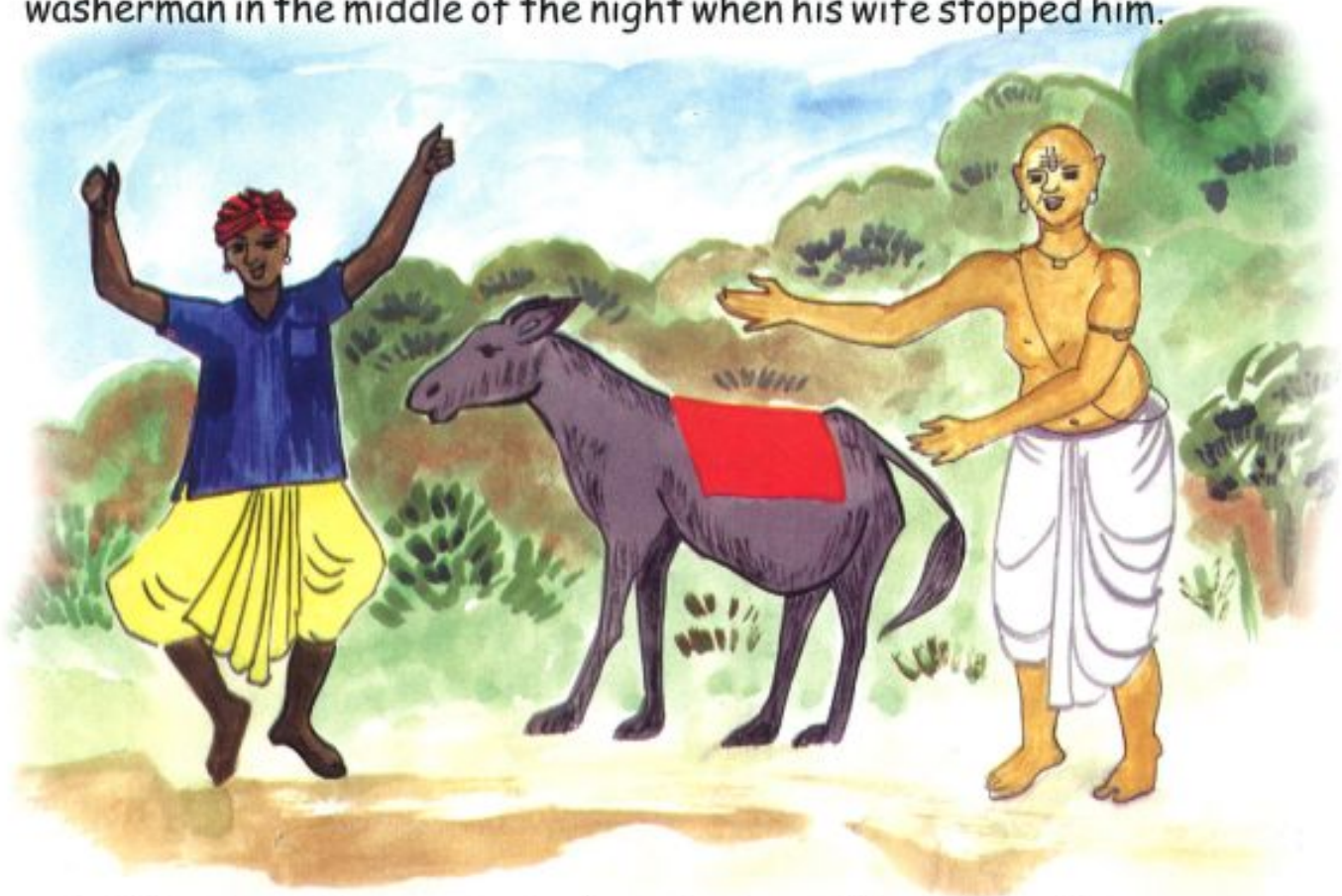
In the middle of the night, a sound outside woke him up. He awoke his wife and asked her if she, too, had heard the noise. She thought there was a burglar outside and decided to teach him a lesson for trying to rob them. In a scared voice, the Brahmin asked her if he could hide himself somewhere. His wife shot back at him saying that since he was a learned man he ought to help her nab the robber. She said she would hold the light up for him while he tackled the intruder.

Chanting the Lord's name, the terrified Brahmin stepped out of his house. But lo and behold ! Instead of the robber they were expecting, stood the washerman's donkey.

Hearing all the commotion, the people of the village gathered outside the Brahmin's house. The Brahmin's wife calmed the people down and explained that nothing was wrong. She told her husband to go to bed and, taking the donkey to a corner of the courtyard, she tied it there.

She then told the villagers that her husband had brought back the lost donkey with his prayers. This astounded everybody.

In his room, the Brahmin suddenly woke up screaming that he was being burgled. His wife told him there were no robbers and reminded him that the donkey had returned. He was about to go looking for the washerman in the middle of the night when his wife stopped him.



She requested everyone to go home as it was late. Once everyone left, the Brahmin asked her what they should do about the donkey. The next morning, the poor washerman's happiness knew no bounds when he saw his old donkey.

News about the Brahmin finding the donkey through prayers travelled far and wide. Everyone sang praises of the Brahmin. Finally the news reached the king.

The princess of the kingdom had lost a very expensive necklace. Every effort to trace it had proved futile. In the end, the Brahmin was called upon to find the necklace for the young princess. The king sent his soldiers to escort the Brahmin to the royal palace and soon enough, the poor man realised that he was better off being uneducated.

The king warned him that he would be imprisoned for life if he could not prove his knowledge by retrieving the necklace. The scared man begged the king to give him two days to find the precious piece of jewellery. The king agreed to the Brahmin's terms.

The day rolled into night. The Brahmin cursed his luck and asked Goddess Jagadamba why she was making him go through such trials and tribulations.





While the Brahmin was talking to himself, a gardener in the king's palace by the name of Jagadamba was passing by. Hearing her name, she begged the Brahmin not to tell the king anything. The Brahmin had no idea of what she meant. She then confessed to the Brahmin that greed had prompted her to steal the necklace.

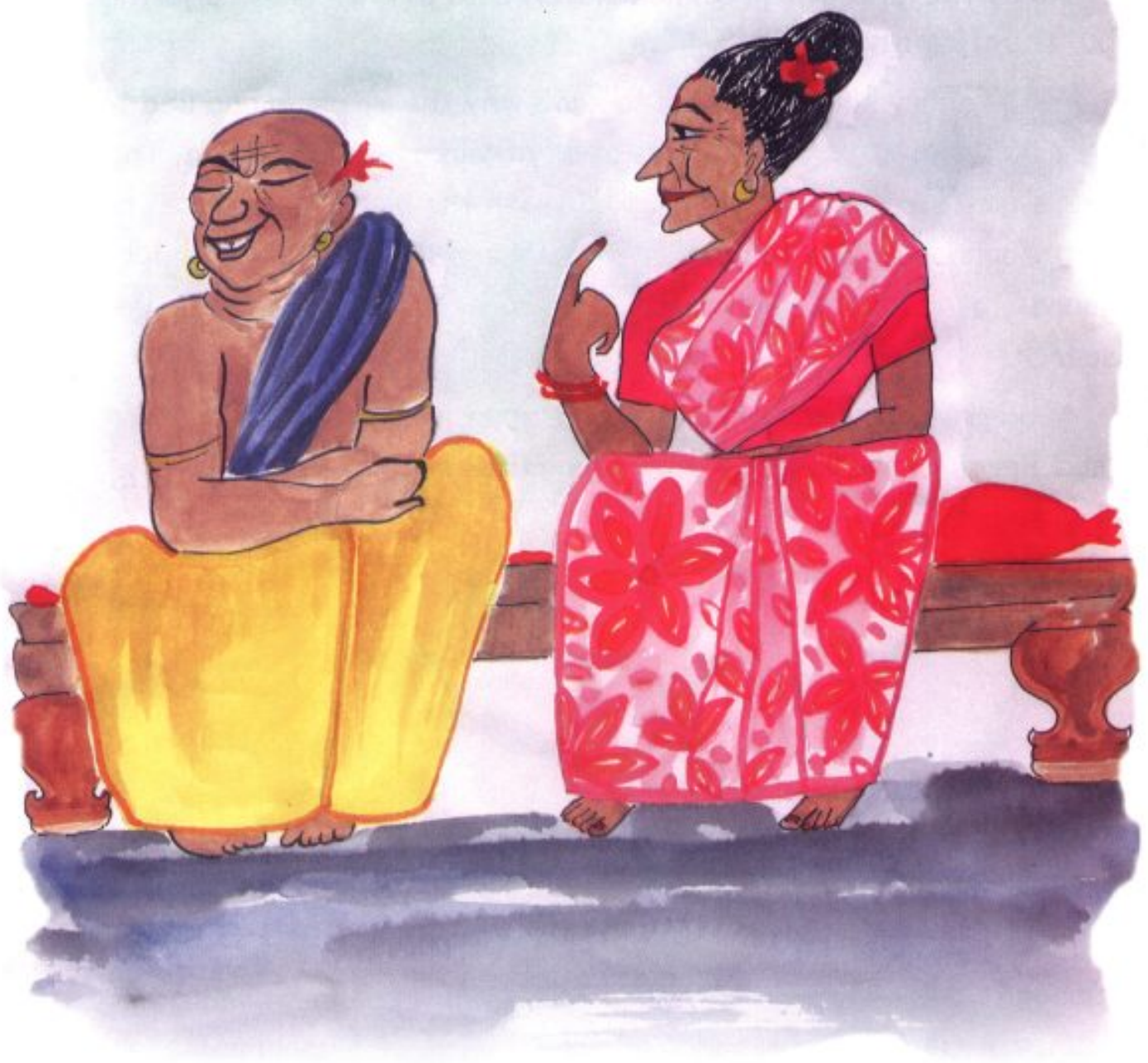
The Brahmin realised that the gardener must have heard his appeal to Goddess Jagadamba and mistakenly thought that he was talking to her. He said he would not tell a soul that she was the thief if she returned the necklace to him. He instructed her to place the necklace in a pot and leave it by the side of the lake, threatening to expose her to the king if she tried to double-cross him. The young woman heaved a sigh of relief and did as told.

The next day, the Brahmin went to meet the king with a spring in his step and prayers on his lips. He told the king that the necklace could be found by the lake. The king immediately sent off his soldiers to the spot but they found nothing.

The angry king demanded to know why the Brahmin had lied to him. He asked the Brahmin if he was at all afraid of losing his life. The poor man swore that he had nothing to do with the missing necklace and said that Jagadamba was to be blamed for everything. The king ordered his guards to tie up the Brahmin and sent some more people to resume the search.

When the guards went a second time, they found a pot caked with mud. Breaking the pot open, they found the beautiful necklace.





The king was so happy that he made the Brahmin the official learned master of the royal court. The Brahmin almost fainted with joy when the honour was bestowed upon him. He spent the rest of his life in the luxury of the royal court. Happy with his success, the Brahmin's wife became a very devoted wife and the couple lived happily ever after.

A Finger and a Half Tall Boy

Once upon a time there lived a woodcutter. But as the poor man had no children, he was the butt of every villager's jokes and spent his days in complete misery.

His wife used to fervently pray for a child, fasting and following numerous rituals to seek the blessings of the Goddess of Fertility. She begged and pleaded with the Goddess to fill her empty lap.

One night, the Goddess appeared before the woodcutter's wife in her dreams. The Goddess told the lady that she should dress like a newly wed bride and take a dip in a pond within the temple compound. Once she took a dip, she would find a cucumber which she would have to eat. Only then, a child would be born to her.



The woodcutter's wife did as instructed. When she left the house in the dead of the night, everything was still. It was as if all life around was in deep slumber. Dressed like a newly wed bride, the woodcutter's wife went on her way silently. Reaching the temple, she immersed herself in the water of the pond and returned home.

The next morning, the woodcutter heard everything that had happened the night before. A song in his heart, he went to the forest hoping to find the cucumber.

In the woods, there was a mighty waterfall. Next to it sat a hundred-year-old, wrinkled and shrivelled old lady. She called out to the woodcutter and gave him a small cucumber to give to his wife. The old lady warned him that no part of the cucumber should be wasted and told him that his wife should eat the fruit after seven days. If the instructions were followed, she said, he and his wife would be blessed with a beautiful little baby. The old lady then disappeared into the forest.

The happy man forgot all about woodcutting. He ran home to give his wife the cucumber he received from the old lady and told her all the instructions. He then went off to bathe. But as luck would have it, he forgot to tell her the most crucial thing - that no part of the fruit was to be wasted.

The woodcutter's wife did not pay heed to the instructions. The Goddess had told her to eat the cucumber when she got it, and so she disregarded the woman's warning about eating it after a week. She cut the cucumber, and, after throwing away the top of the fruit, ate it.

The woodcutter came back after his bath and sat down to eat. He then noticed the top of the cucumber lying on the floor. His anger knew no bounds and he threw away his food. Shouting at his wife, he made her eat the discarded part.

In due course, a child was born to the couple. But it was born with the hair and beard of the old woman. The baby measured only about a finger-and-half but had hair that was three fingers long.





As the woodcutter and his wife had not followed instructions, the old lady had cursed them.

Blind with rage, the woodcutter picked up his axe and left. If they had listened to the lady, they would have been the proud parents of a beautiful baby, but what they had now was a child that looked like a lizard. The woodcutter's wife cried her eyes out when she saw her newborn.

The little baby cried out for his parents, but neither of them was around to hear his wails. The woodcutter had left his wife, child and house and had gone away. His wife was on her way to drown herself and her sorrow in the pond.

The little baby, a finger-and-a-half tall, suddenly sprang up and ran towards his mother. He stopped his mother from drowning herself by tripping her with his long hair. He then asked his mother for a drink of milk.



His mother was more amazed than ever. She had never heard a newborn baby talk before and realized that her son was no ordinary child. She picked her little baby up and returned home. After drinking his fill of milk, he requested his mother to let him go so that he could find his father.

The little boy then started on his journey. He defeated everyone who tried to come in his way. Soon the boy reached the palace of a king. There, he saw his father cutting wood under the scorching sun. The little boy went running to his father and asked him why he had left him and his mother. The woodcutter was stunned. He, too, realised that his son was no ordinary boy and embraced him. However, he told the boy that he would be unable to go back with him as he had sold himself to the king.

Hearing what his father had to say, the little one went to the king and asked him who the woodcutter of the land was. The king replied that a woodcutter who belonged to a different kingdom was working for him. When the boy asked him if he could take the woodcutter back with him, the king said he had bought the man at a sale in the market and would only relent if the boy paid for him.

The boy, a finger-and-a-half tall, promised his father that he would be back soon to free him.

The small boy left the palace and went in search of money. He came by a thin stream of water. He sat down on the banks, wondering how he would cross it. Suddenly, he felt someone tugging at his hair. The stranger demanded to know who he was and



pulled his hair even harder. This angered the boy, and he swung around, only to see a frog pulling his hair. The frog told him that the prince of the kingdom looked exactly like him. This did not impress the small boy and he threatened to chop off the frog's nose, ears and legs. Hearing the threat, the frog laughed and told the boy that he had neither a nose nor ears. Saying thus, the frog started dancing, leaving the boy speechless.

After the frog finished his dance he asked the boy who he was. The boy replied that he was a woodcutter. In surprise, the frog asked him where his axe was. The finger-and-a-half tall boy replied that he did not have one. The frog then told him about a blacksmith who lived nearby, saying that the man would be willing to make an axe for him in exchange for some money.

The small boy told him that he would have been able to buy back his father if he had the money. He requested the frog to lend him some money. But the frog said he had very little money and struck a deal with the boy saying he could lend the money if he got an axe in return.

After giving the boy directions to the blacksmith's house, the frog went and sat under a lotus leaf.

The boy followed the directions given by the frog. He saw a small hut, inside which an old man, two-and-a-half fingers tall with a three-finger long beard, sat making axes. The boy tried to think of a way by which he could get an axe for the frog without having to pay for it.



Suddenly an idea struck him. He tied his hair to the old man's beard, and shrieking out loudly, jumped on his back. The poor man was terrified thinking he was in the grip of evil spirits.

The small boy could not control his laughter seeing the scared man. He then told him not to worry as he was a friend. This angered the old man. He scolded the boy and asked him if he had the money to dare to enter his house. The boy was surprised at how everyone wanted money. The man told him that he had to pay and demanded that his beard be untied from the boy's hair.

While untying the knot, a strand of hair was plucked off the boy's

head. The angry boy demanded money for the lost strand of hair. Taken aback, the man started grumbling and told the boy to take whatever he wanted instead of money. The boy picked up an axe from the room and told the old man that they had now officially become friends.

The boy returned to the spot where he had parted with the frog and handed over the axe, demanding the money promised to him.

The frog then told him that he was the son of the king of the land of frogs. He narrated how he had married a frog who never left



her abode. The frog wanted the boy to cut down the tree in which his wife lived in a large pot and thus bring her back to him.

The boy immediately got to work and within minutes the big tree tumbled over. Once the tree fell, the boy and the frog peered into the pot but could see nothing.

The frog was very upset thinking that his wife had gone missing. The boy, being more practical than the frog, jumped on to one of the branches and let his hair down into the pot. He told the frog that lived inside to come out. Clinging on to the boy's hair, the frog's wife came out of the pot.

The frog was overjoyed to see his wife and rewarded the boy by giving him all the money he had. The frog's wife gave him a bit of spittle and told him it would help cure the blind daughter of the king. Then the pot in which the frog lived asked the small boy to take it with him. Taking all the gifts and the money, the boy made his way back to the kingdom in which his father was prisoner.

Reaching the kingdom, the boy gave the king the money and asked him to count it. But after counting the money, the king pulled the boy's hair and spanked him. He then instructed the boy to go and get all the robbers from the Kingdom of Thieves, as he wanted to give his daughter's hand in marriage to them.

The boy went back to the frog once again, seeking his help. He needed more money to go to the Kingdom of Thieves. After finding his wife, the frog had become very rich. He gave the boy all the money he needed. Taking the money, the boy left in search of the Kingdom of Thieves.

He searched high and low but could not find the place. The small boy had not been able to free his father yet. He had gone without food and water the entire day. Exhausted, the boy decided to take a break. Within moments he fell asleep.



In the middle of the night, seven thieves were crossing the spot in which the boy was sleeping. It was so dark that nothing could be seen and the youngest thief's foot touched the shoulder of the sleeping lad. The boy immediately awoke and hit out with his axe. The small thief howled in pain. The other thieves were stunned. They could not see anyone and thought that spirits were talking to them.

Their assumption made the boy happy and he asked them who they were. They replied that they were thieves. Next, they asked the boy who he was and the boy replied by saying that he was just another human.

Struggling to see who was talking to them, the youngest thief finally caught hold of the tiny boy. The boy's size became a source of amusement for the thieves and all of them threw their heads back and roared with laughter.

Once the thieves stopped laughing, they decided to go to the house of the man who was two-and-a-half fingers tall. The boy told the thieves that the man was a friend of his and requested them not to attack his house.

He told them that danger lurked near the house and that they should instead go to the king's palace to win his daughter's hand in marriage. The thieves laughed out loud. They were about to become a part of the royal family and started throwing their weight around. They even demanded to be paid for going to the palace. The boy gave them the money that the frog had lent him.



Taking the boy with them, the thieves caught hold of a man to guide them to the river, beyond which lay the kingdom. They paid him the money the boy had given them to mend his broken boat and ferry them across.

The man helped them cross the river, but the thieves robbed him of the money they had paid earlier. The boy requested the thieves to return the money, but no one paid heed to his words.

The group finally reached the royal court. The boy complained to the king that the thieves had robbed the person who helped them cross the river. This angered the king and all seven thieves were hanged.

But the king had ordered their execution without giving it a thought and regretted his decision soon after. The whole kingdom went into mourning as the princess was supposed to marry the thieves.

But the boy wasted no time in asking the king to release his father as his part of the deal had been fulfilled. This infuriated the king and he ordered his guards to kill the boy. Before any of the courtiers could react, the boy disappeared.

The king of the land of thieves heard about how seven of his courtiers had been killed. He called upon all the remaining thieves and instructed them to unleash misery and crime on the kingdom where the seven thieves had been killed.

The thieves wrought havoc in the kingdom. The soldiers were no match for the thieves. They looted every household and nobody felt safe any longer. The boy who was hiding in the royal garden went to the king and offered to help him get rid of the thieves who had invaded the kingdom.

In return, he asked for his daughter's hand in marriage, the royal cat and a trunk full of royal garments and jewels. The king gave the boy everything he asked for. However, he said he would allow the boy to marry his daughter only when the thieves left the land.

Slipping on the royal garments and making the royal cat his ride, the boy invaded the kingdom of thieves. The cat sneaked into all the kitchens of the kingdom, eating up all the food. The women were becoming extremely weary of the cat.

Then, all the thieves remaining in the kingdom surrounded the boy and the cat and made escape impossible for the two. The boy asked the pot he got from the frog's wife to help him. Immediately, the pot turned into a hornet and wasps started flying around all over the kingdom. The people of the kingdom were in shock. They fled in fright.



The small boy captured the king of thieves and brought him back to the king. The king was satisfied. He sent his soldiers to free the woodcutter. The boy used the spittle that the frog's wife had given him to restore the eyesight of the young princess.

The frog, his wife and the old man who had given him the axe, all joined the boy in his happiness. Everyone blessed the young couple.

Happy days returned for the woodcutter and his wife. The king and queen of the kingdom renounced the world, leaving the throne to their new son-in-law.

The finger-and-half tall boy spent his days taking care of the kingdom and helping his father cut wood.







E. Z. C. C.

EASTERN ZONAL CULTURAL CENTRE
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, GOVT. OF INDIA

Bhartiyam Cultural Multiplex, IB-201, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700 106
Tel : 033 2335 1028/1029/3093/6796, Fax : 033 2335 0262
E-mail : directorezcc@yahoo.co.in Website : www.ezccindia.org