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MATU-POSAKA :

PARAGON OF FILIAL PIETY

By

G.K.Ananda Kumarasiri

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Jataka Kathas

Jataka Kathas, meaning "life stories" form a popular part of Buddhist scriptures culled from ancient Indian folklore. They were compiled after the *Maha Parinibbana* (Passing Away) of the Buddha, 2,500 years ago and represent an important corpus of moral and ethical instructions imparted in story form. They are purported to be based on the past lives of the *Bodhisatta* or aspirant Buddha, primarily to sanctify the noble teachings underlying each past life story.

Whilst it is true that the genesis of the *Jataka Kathas* can be traced to Indian folklore, the point to appreciate is that they carry important life-ideals which have universal relevance. In fact, *Jataka Kathas* are primarily aimed at presenting essential principles, values and practices such as cultivating *Brahma Viharas* (virtuous abodes or virtuous mental states) and developing one's *Paramitas* (perfection of virtues) in daily life.

Jataka Kathas are particularly important for instructing children on morals and ethics. Adolescents, youths and adults are reminded to strengthen their practice of important moral and ethical principles in order to enrich their lives here and now in this life.

Buddhist scriptures are replete with instructions and moral stories on filial piety. The Matu-posaka Jataka is one such inspiring parable that stresses one's filial duty towards parents. The parable graphically reminds us to observe filial piety out of deep gratitude for the profound love and sacrifices our parents have made to bring us into this world. The moral story aims to enthuse the reader to emulate the underlying principle of eternal indebtedness to one's parents, during their 'living years' as personified in the principal character Matu-posaka.

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Ancient Historical Places in India

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Mata pitu upatthanam,
Putta darassa samgaho,
Anakula ca kammanta,
Etam mangalamuttamam.

Attendance on mother and father,
Cherishing of wife and children,
Right livelihood
This is the highest blessing.

~Mangala Sutta~

Many *Kalpas* (aeons) ago, there lived a virtuous monarch named King Vedeha who ruled the renowned kingdom of Kasi, in India. Since the kingdom was located close to the Himalayan Mountains, it enjoyed a cool, invigorating climate for most of the year. Its ancient capital city, of similar name, (now known as Varanasi or Benares) was a thriving trading centre. It bustled with local merchants and traders from far away lands who converged to exchange goods and many exotic products. Traders came from as far as China in the East and Europe in the West. As a result, Kasi became renowned as a multi-ethnic, picturesque metropolis.

At that time, it happened that a large herd of elephants lived in the dense forest in Chandragiri, located at the foot of the Himalayas. The region was well-watered by the mighty Ganges River which had its source in the Himalayan mountain range. The leader of the elephant herd, named Saccaka (Truthful One) was an exemplary personality whom the members respected unreservedly. He was well-built and strong, both in terms of his physique and character. He possessed commendable leadership qualities and displayed great courage. He always had a deep concern for the welfare of the community.

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Saccaka's far-sightedness and sagacious leadership were highly appreciated even by the elders. His profound insight and wisdom acquired from the cumulative knowledge of his ancestors and from his own vast experience in life were widely acknowledged. He was also well versed in the ancient science of developing one's body and mind. This understanding on how to maintain a harmonious balance between one's physical and mental well-being was passed down from his forefathers from generation to generation.

Saccaka's opinion was therefore much respected among the herd. Even those who were older than him sought his views on many matters. Whenever a member of the herd encountered a problem or crisis, it would go to him for advice and guidance. Among species in the animal kingdom, elephants are known to be highly intelligent. They are reputed to possess excellent memories so much so that this ability has become proverbial.

Saccaka was also a most caring sire. He loved his mate, Kanthi (Patient One) very dearly. Being a very devoted spouse, he always showed concern for her feelings. Despite his many duties and responsibilities as leader of the herd, he never failed to spend time with her and looked into her every need. Likewise, Kanthi was a most loving mate. Her loyalty and devotion towards Saccaka were beyond reproach. She regarded him as her most trusted companion in life. Indeed, they portrayed the picture of a truly happy couple, enjoying a blissful partnership in life.

Unfortunately for the loving couple, they did not have any offspring. For years, they yearned to have a calf of their own

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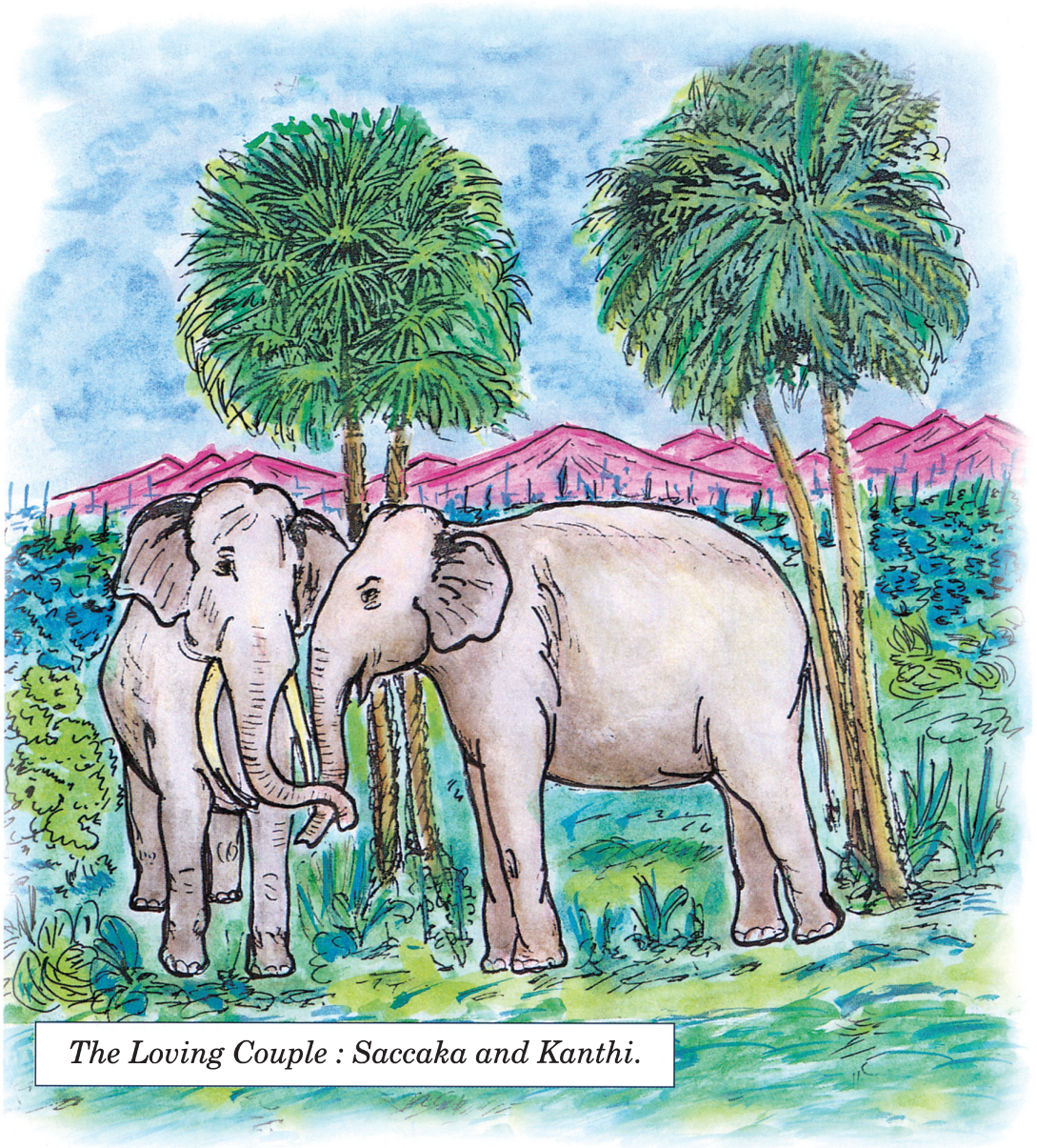
to crown their deep love for each other, but without success. Nonetheless, their commitment for each other remained steadfast as ever just like the insurmountable Himalayan mountains because their love for each other was pure and unconditional.



The Loving Couple : Saccaka and Kanthi.

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One day, Saccaka said to Kanthi with heart-felt concern:

> *My dearest, it's been many years we have been together, but you are still unable to conceive. I know it would make you very happy to become a mother and be able to give your love and devotion to our calf . I too, would be extremely happy to be a father. I earnestly wish to bring up a calf with noble qualities. Moreover, when I am no longer around our calf will be able to look after you and keep company in your old age.*

Kanthi responded lovingly,

> *"Dearest Saccaka, I know deep inside me that a calf will make you proud and extremely elated. This is my ardent prayer. But perhaps it is not meant to be that we are to be blessed with an offspring. Even so, my love for you will remain eternally pure."*

Saccaka felt greatly reassured by Kanthi's comforting words. He was all the more determined to do his best to help his mate conceive. In the silence of the night, when all the elephants were asleep and he could hear the breathing of his dear mate, he resolved to collect certain herbs, believed to enhance fertility among she-elephants.

The next morning, Saccaka eagerly told Kanthi that he was going to search for fertility herbs and asked her to wish him good luck. The sun was shining bright. Its rays filtered through fluttering leaves and created dancing shadows on the forest floor. The air was fully scented with young pines and wild flowers. Saccaka tracked deep into the forest and

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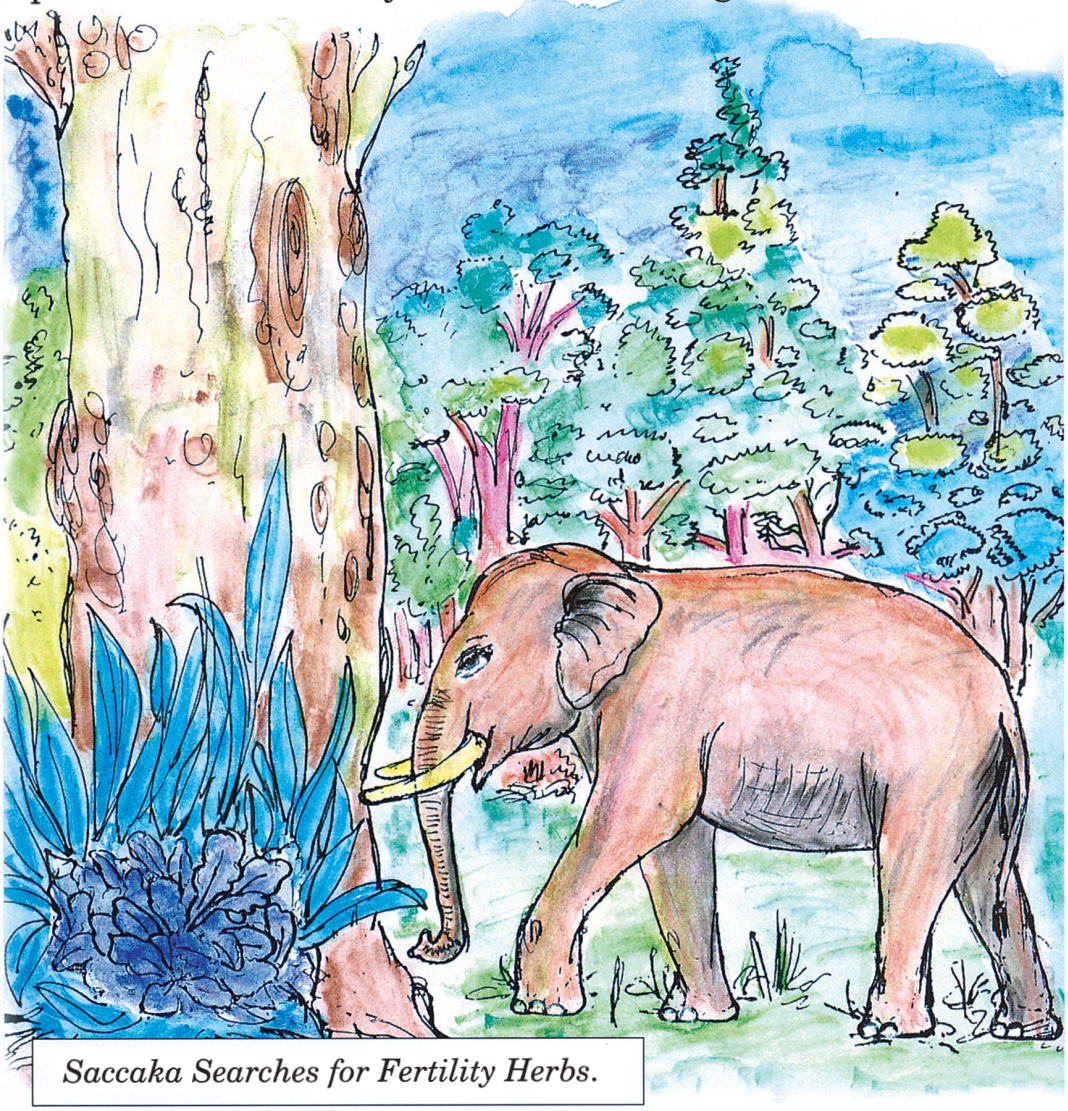
began searching hard for fertility herbs. He found some and brought them for Kanthi to eat. They waited anxiously for some positive results, but there was no sign of her being pregnant. However, the loving couple did not give up hope and effort. They tried many different herbs to induce a successful pregnancy, but nothing seemed to produce a positive result. They also observed age-old rituals and



Saccaka Searches for Fertility Herbs.

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customs of dos and don'ts in order to be blessed with an offspring. Still there was no sign of pregnancy for Kanthi.

After several years of anxious anticipation and false alarms of pregnancy, one day, Saccaka stumbled upon a clump of the rare bluish fertility herb which grows only in the shadows of trees in the forest. He beamed with excitement over this fortunate find. He quickly gathered the rare clump of fertility herbs and raced back home so that Kanthi could eat them while the leaves were still fresh and succulent. After about a month, Kanthi began to feel early symptoms of pregnancy. At long last, the loving couple's ardent prayer for a calf of their own was being answered.

Saccaka felt so jubiliant with the happy news of Kanthi's pregnancy that he pranced around with great elation. He trumpeted loudly as he wanted the whole world to know his joy that finally, his mate was expecting. The elephant herd was delighted with the wonderful news and was happy for the couple. Elephants possess a most noble and indeed beautiful culture of close kinship. The entire herd rejoices over the pregnancy of a she-elephant.

Saccaka understood fully the ancient science of holistic mothercare which focused not only on the physical growth of the unborn calf, but also the development of its mind. He was mindful about the direct impact of Kanthi's emotional, psychological and spiritual state on the development of their unborn calf. He strove to ensure that she was able to provide a healthy foetal environment for their unborn calf to grow. He was also well aware about the critical importance of life before birth,in particular the influence of pre-birth experiences in later life.

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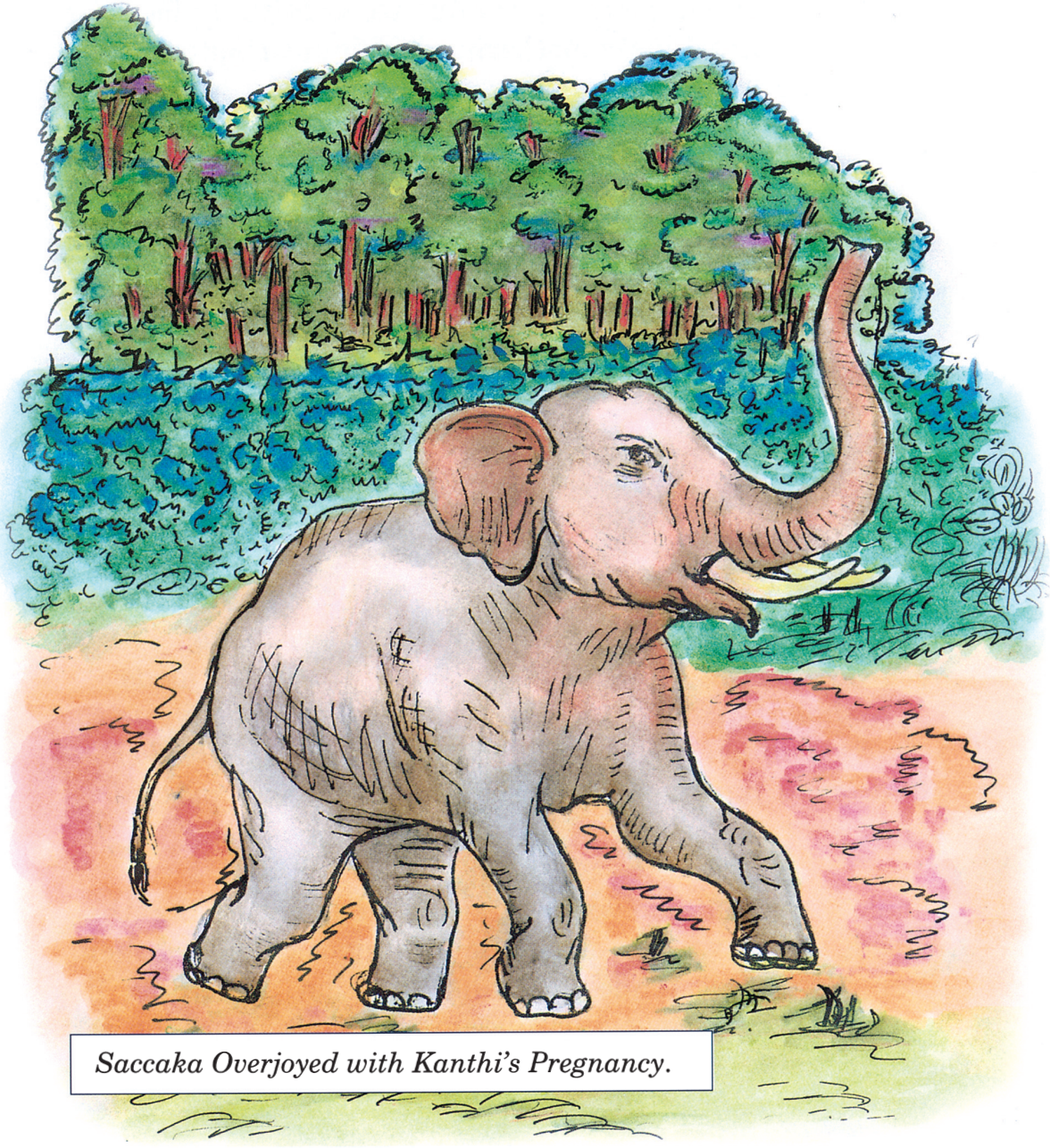
Hence, ever since Kanthi's pregnancy, his mind was absorbed with ensuring that their unborn calf was provided holistic mothercare. He conscientiously gave her much encouragement and support throughout her pregnancy. His deep patience



Saccaka Overjoyed with Kanthi's Pregnancy.

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and understanding was without question a great source of courage for Kanthi. His devout attention helped to calm her mind and allay anxieties expectant mothers normally experience. He was thus able to fortify Kanthi with *Saddha* (*Sanskrit: Sraddha*, meaning confidence or faith) to face the troubles and hardships of motherhood. This gave her immense inner strength and determination. Her *viriya* or positive effort to go through the incredible experience of bearing a calf was greatly reinforced.

Saccaka was also eager that Kanthi's pregnancy would be as natural, smooth and painless as possible. He attended to her needs as a loving, caring husband and father to be. In particular, he made sure that she was free from stress which is common for an expectant mother to encounter, especially when experiencing pregnancy for the first time. Despite her mood swings and periodic irritable behaviour caused by aches and pains due to hormonal changes, he would mindfully remain calm. He would comfort and advise her,

> *"My dear Kanthi, now that you are expecting, you should take more rest and eat more nutritious foods. You should also eat more so that our calf growing in your womb will be well built and strong. I will gather and bring you the necessary foods to nourish you and our unborn calf."*

To make sure that she was well-nourished, he would gather the foods she craved for such as sour mangoes and feed them to her with great tenderness and affection. He would lie down beside her, especially during meals to ensure she ate well for herself and for their unborn calf. Daily, just before retiring for the night, he would place his trunk gently on her

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belly and transmit *Metta* (Loving Kindness) to their unborn calf. He would then stroke her body gently until she fell asleep. From time to time, he would massage her limbs to relieve her of pains and stress. In this way, he provided her the relaxation and rest she needed to ensure a holistic nurturing of their unborn calf throughout her nearly twenty-two month-long pregnancy.

Loving Couple Observing Holistic Mothercare.

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Saccaka would encourage Kanthi to frequently express her *adhitthana* (strong resolve or aspiration) to have a healthy and well developed calf. He too would, place his mouth on her belly to express how anxiously he looked forward to the birth of a magnificent calf. He would say to their unborn calf regularly:

> *My dear child, may you grow strong and healthy inside your mother's womb. May you be born handsome and grow up to be a magnificent elephant. May you be a noble elephant and become the pride of the herd. You must be strong, both in body and mind and aspire to be a personification of virtue to be emulated by all beings. Your mother and I will do everything possible to ensure your well-being, success and happiness.*

In order to reinforce their *adhitthana,* Saccaka guided Kanthi to visualise daily the birth of a truly wonderful calf. Both of them would sing lullabies to their unborn calf to calm him and enter into deep sleep.

Saccaka's abiding concern and thoughtfulness about Kanthi pregnancy was a great source of strength for her. She would bask in contentment knowing that she was safe and that she could rely on her sire's unfailing support, devotion and unconditional love. She would think to herself, *"My sire is full of love and concern for me and our unborn calf. I will make sure that our calf will be a healthy, exceptional offspring so his efforts will not be in vain."*

The loving couple thus ensured that the foetal environment was wholly conducive for their unborn calf to develop. Their

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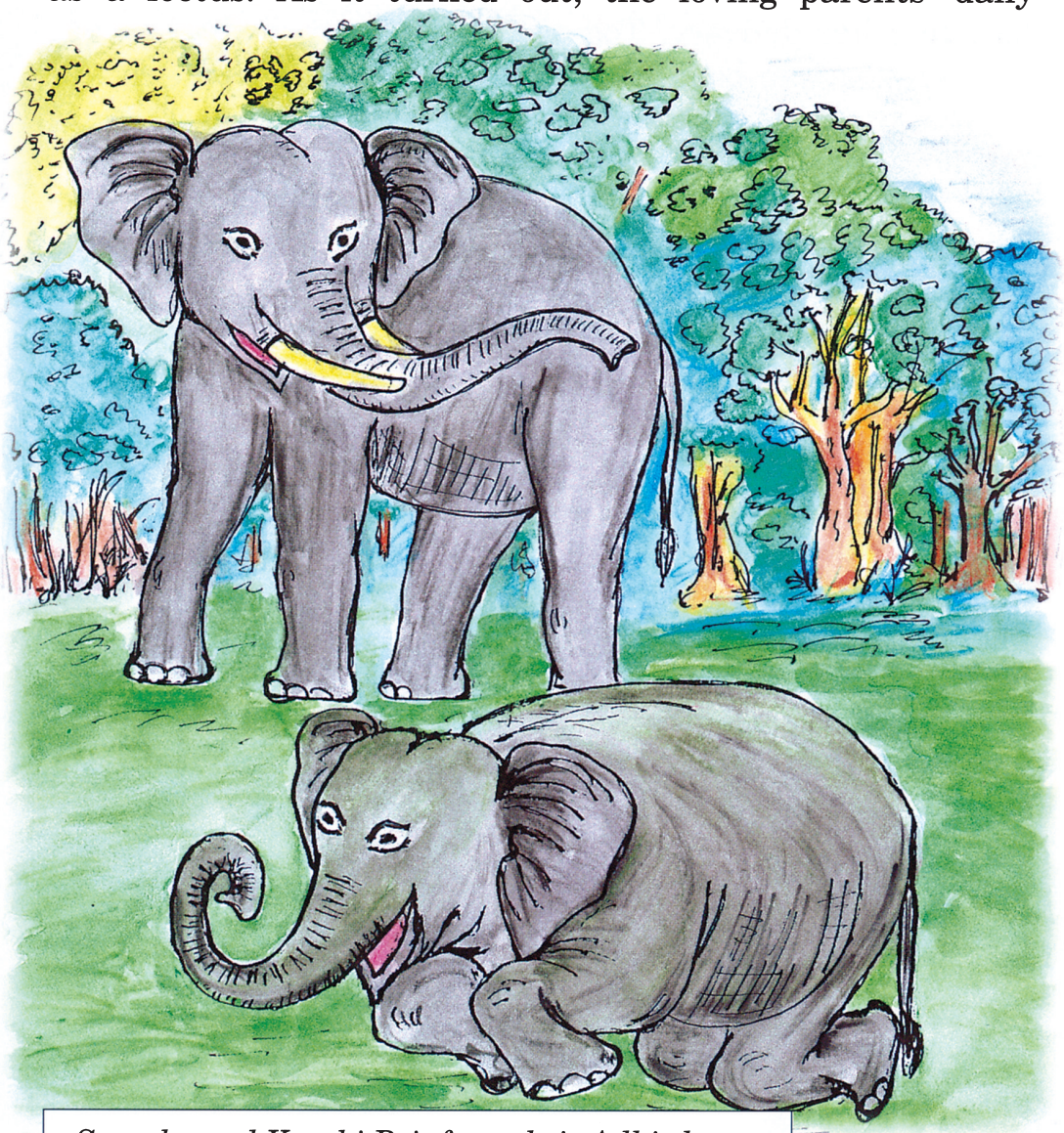
positive aspiration and deep feeling of love for their unborn calf were etched in his foetal mind. Later, when their calf grew up, he often recalled joyfully, the wonderful things his loving parents had expressed about him even while developing as a foetus. As it turned out, the loving parents' daily



Saccaka and Kanthi Reinforce their Adhitthana

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adhitthana to have a calf who would bring joy and pride, bore in addition, a powerful impact on him to excel in life.

In the mornings, Saccaka would take Kanthi out for leisurely walks to ensure that she had the daily exercise she needed to facilitate her delivery. Together, they roamed the habitat, indulging in the beautiful sights and sounds of the forest. Kanthi found the fragrance of the forest in the early morning invigorating. The beauty of the flora appealed to her. She was charmed by the sight of luxuriant plants and the beautiful overhanging trees with their many different colours, textures, shapes and sizes of leaves. She eagerly looked forward to the walks through the forest with her sire and feel the fresh morning breeze.

Kanthi thoroughly enjoyed the natural sounds that resonated as insects greeted the dawning of a new day. The enchanting songs of warbling birds and their merry chirping in the morning sunshine had a soothing effect on her and their unborn calf. She listened to the hypnotic rush of cascading water as it descended from the waterfalls on the hilltops, flowed into silvery streams and ended up in little ripples further downstream. This had a distinct therapeutic effect for it made her and their unborn calf feel restful and tranquil.

Kanthi felt relaxed as she walked with Saccaka and relished his love, devotion and comforting companionship. In the course of their daily strolls, she would rest for a while and soak in nature's beauty. She particularly liked to watch the day break over the hills. As the sun rose in the distant horizon, the sky would light up with bright beautiful colours.

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Kanthi enjoys her morning walks.

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In the evening, together with Saccaka she would lie down and relax while admiring the sky brazen with bright, colourful splashes. Saccaka would also take her out to the river and bathe her. She felt so refreshed and primed after each bath. This helped her to eat well and enjoy sound sleep. Mid-way through Kanthi's pregnancy, their unborn calf began to move about in the womb. Saccaka was so thrilled to feel for the first time their unborn calf kick when he gently placed his trunk on Kanthi's belly to feel its movments.

The anxiously awaited birth of the loving parent's calf had the markings of a supernatural happening. When the big day came, Kanthi delivered her calf without any difficulty. She experienced minimal labour pains. The throes an expectant she-elephant goes through to give birth were virtually absent. Indeed, to the amazement of the elephant herd, her delivery was what one might describe as a velvet-like calfbirth. Saccaka, however, was the least surprised. He knew from his insightful wisdom that because of the great care and attention he and Kanthi had provided their unborn calf from the outset of conception, such a smooth, untroubled birth would come to pass. He was equally confident that their offspring would be a remarkable calf. As the loving parents had fervently prayed, their newborn calf proved to be a truly magnificent creature – in fact, later in life, he proved to be a *Bodhisatta* (an aspirant Buddha).

Saccaka felt thoroughly gratified with the birth of an radiant calf. Just as they had aspired for and visualised daily, the loving parents were blessed with a healthy and handsome calf. He was well built and was the size of a full grown billy goat. He was simply adorable with golden hair sprouting around the head and back. His eyes were bright and

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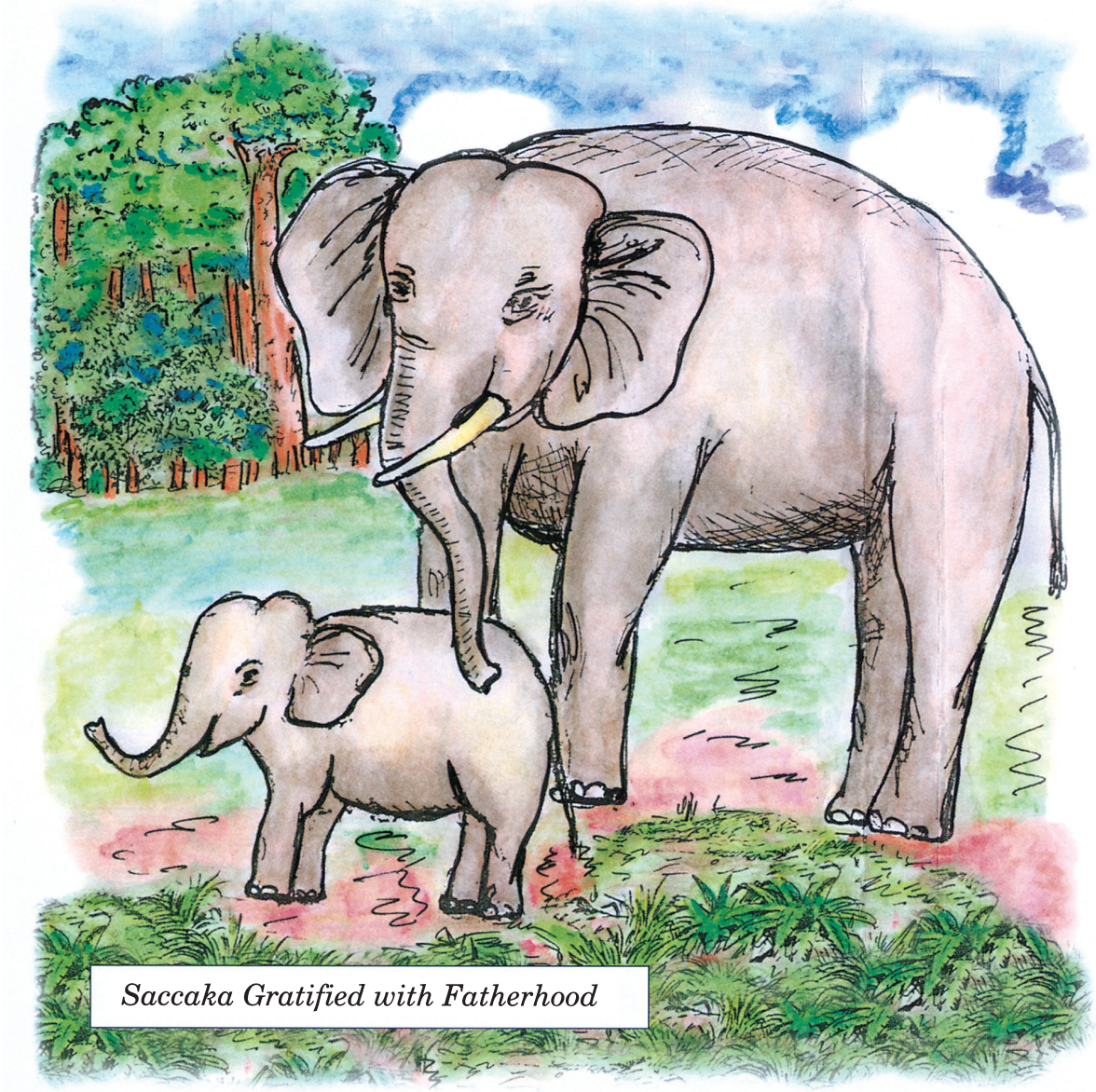
beautiful. They stood out like two large lotus petals and had a strange sparkle. The proud parents could not have hoped for a better fulfillment of their *adhitthana*. Their calf was truly a fitting tribute to their abiding love for each other and the great care and attention they gave to nurturing him from the very outset of conception. They were so delighted that they wept tears of joy as they caressed their little one



Saccaka Gratified with Fatherhood

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tenderly. The birth of their calf was beyond question the happiest day of their lives. He brought such great joy into their lives. The whole elephant herd too was delighted with the new addition to the community.

The happy parents chose an auspicious day to celebrate the arrival of their newborn calf and to name him. They discussed various suitable personal names. Finally, they decided on the name "Dhanapala", formed by combining the root words "*dhana*" and "*pala*" (meaning a receptacle of virtue and one who manages or controls respectively). So Dhanapala means one who manages virtues, or a virtuous one.

The whole elephant community turned out in full force to celebrate the newborn calf's formal introduction to the community, till late into the night. The herd sang and danced merrily along with the proud parents. After following the various customs and traditions observed in conjunction with the Naming Ceremony, Saccaka announced Dhanapala's name to the community for the first time. The herd exclaimed with glee the announcement of Dhanapala's name. They all welcomed the name as appropriate for the adorable calf. Before taking leave, their guests extended the traditional elephant hug. They once again congratulated the happy parents and wished baby Dhanapala good health and happiness.

Saccaka, Kanthi and their newborn calf were a perfect picture of a wholesome family. Dhanapala was such a bundle of joy. His parents spent a great deal of time playing joyfully with him from the very first day he was born. These were

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Perfect Picture of a Wholesome Family.

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indeed most delightful moments not only for them but also Dhanapala. Their avid playful interaction and early communication with their infant simultaneously facilitated his development. Both parents were firmly committed to bringing up a good natured offspring. In the same way as they had mindfully nurtured him during the process of life before birth, they nursed infant Dhanapala with boundless love. Just as before, during Kanthi's pregnancy, Saccaka would go and collect her favourite foods so that she would receive adequate nourishment to replenish her body tissues and the loss of hormones as a result of bearing Dhanapala. He was also mindful that she had to be well nourished to produce sufficient milk to feed their infant well.

Kanthi would feed infant Dhanapala on demand without fail. This meant she having to be awake practically every two hours. This task was understandably very taxing for her, especially during the initial months of nursing her calf. However, despite her tiredness and lack of proper sleep she nursed Dhanapala tenderly without the slightest complaint for a period of eight long months. As he suckled her udder for milk, she would lovingly stroke his body with her trunk and sooth him. Later, when he was weaned from mother's milk, she fed him tender grass and shrubs. Gradually, she introduced other foods into his meals.

Both Saccaka and Kanthi were aware of the vital importance of the initial years of learning and skill training for their infant in later life. They understood that the early learning experiences were critical in nurturing Dhanapala. They paid particular attention to the first three years of his grooming since experiences during the early impressionable years

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Kanthi Nursing Dhanapala.

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would have the greatest impact throughout his life. So they took special efforts to instil in him wholesome thoughts and values right from infancy. The initial years of learning indeed left a lasting positive impression on him, and simultaneously, stimulated his mental development.

A close bond was forged between Dhanapala and his parents from infancy and they spent many wonderfull times together. Kanthi had an abiding influence on him. She nursed him with utmost devotion. She would regularly take him to the nearby stream and give him a good bath and play with him in the cool, refreshing water. They would splash around and playfully spray water at each other with their trunks. Sometimes they would have the company of other mothers and calves. Dhanapala would play water games with other calfs while Kanthi and the mothers chattered and exchanged notes about their respective offspring and on matters of common interest.

Kanthi also taught Dhanapala many important things about life and how to look after himself as he faced the world. She constantly advised him to emulate the noble qualities of his father and aspire to be the leader of the herd when he came of age. Every time he did something correctly, or accomplished a good deed, or expressed a noble thought, she would readily complement him.

Through this process of positive reinforcement of wholesome thoughts and actions, she effectively moulded his character and personality. She helped him build his self-esteem and self-worth. She also constantly urged him to follow in the footsteps of his much admired and honoured father. Apart

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Kanthi and Infant Dhanapala Enjoy their Bath.

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from this, right from infancy, she imbued in him the elephant code, customs and traditions as well as inculcated, herd values and a strong sense of responsibility and accountability. As a result, even from a young age, he learnt the culture, ethics and way of life of the elephant community.

Likewise, Saccaka had a great impact on Dhanapala. When he was about six months old and able to walk more steadily, he would take him out for strolls around the forest. As they walked, he would teach him about the realities of life and also impart important lessons pertaining to life-skills and decision-making. These skills were essential for him to survive in the forest. He would guide him on how to gather food and to distinguish between edible and poisonous plants and fruits. In addition, he introduced him to various herbs which had medicinal value.

Saccaka taught Dhanapala to be always alert to the dangers that constantly lurked in the forest such as being prey to ferocious animals, especially tigers and panthers which were carnivorous and fed on other animals. There was also the danger of getting trapped in bogs and marshes and because of their great weight perish. Drawing from his vast experience, he would train him in the art of self-protection from these dangers. He warned him to be especially wary of human beings who mercilessly hunted down elephants out of greed for money from the sale of their tusks, hide and other body parts. He advised that humans were also driven to capture elephants and exploit them as beasts of burden. That since ancient times, elephants were employed to lead armies into battle; traders and merchants purchased them to carry heavy loads on their backs; and farmers and landlords

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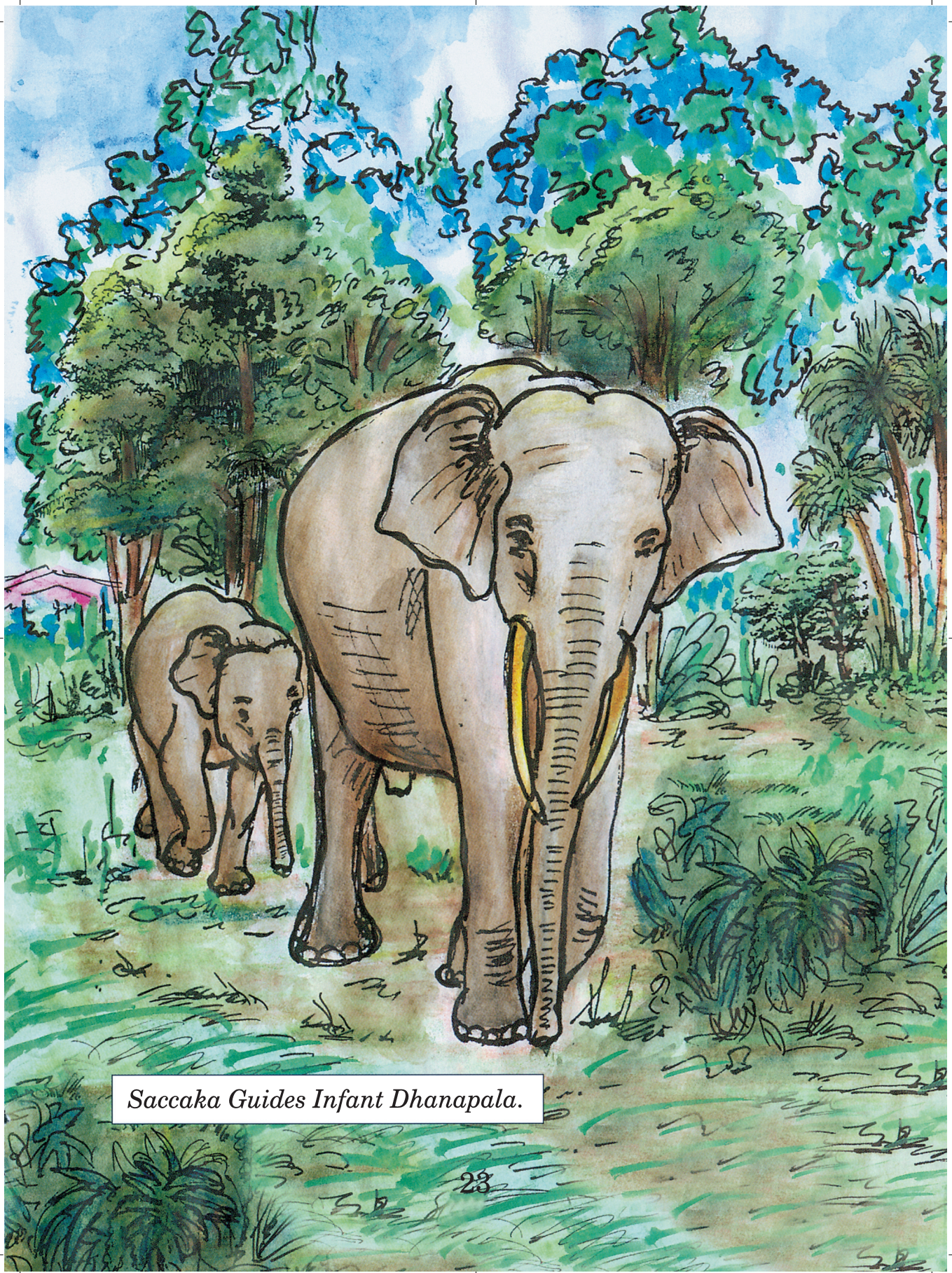

Saccaka Guides Infant Dhanapala.

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harnessed them to pull trees and lift bulky items from one place to another.

Young Dhanapala proved to be a highly intelligent and enthusiastic learner. Even as an infant, he showed a keen sense of intellectual curiosity. He possessed an inquiring mind and constantly probed about matters pertaining to life and nature. Whenever he came across a strange phenomenon, he would ask his father, *"Pappa, why is this so? why is this not so? How is this so? How come this is not so?"* and so on. He would also seek his guidance on the correct way to think and behave. Often he would ask:

> *Pappa what would happen if we did such a thing? What would happen if we did not observe this practice? Why must we conform to this custom and tradition? Can we not do this in another way?* Once he asked him: *"Pappa, we have lived and roamed in the forest all the time. What is it like to go beyond the woods?*

Saccaka reflected for a while and explained to young Dhanapala thoughtfully:

> *Son, out there are villages and towns where people work and live. But elephants are not welcome. Rather, they will be either killed or captured. As far as elephants and most other animals in the forest are concerned, human beings cannot be trusted. It is always safer for us to remain here where we can roam without fear and worry. For now son, just remember Pappa's advice. Later, when you are older, Pappa will explain to you more about the dangers from human beings.*

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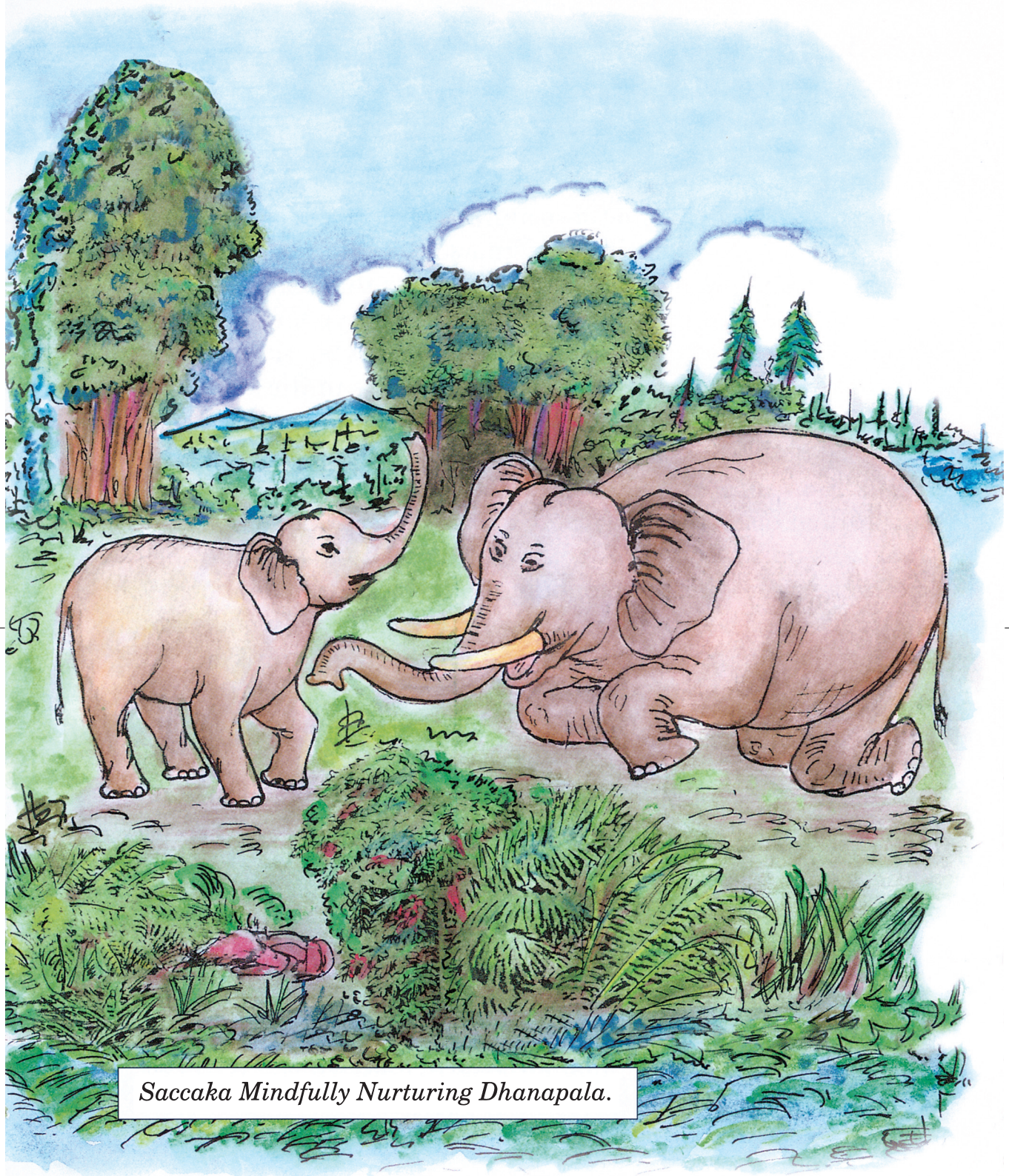

Saccaka Mindfully Nurturing Dhanapala.

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Both father and son spent many interesting moments discussing numerous subjects, particularly about the realities of life and nature. The wise Saccaka would listen carefully to Dhanapala's pointed questions. With great patience, he would explain to him important details. Young Dhanapala benefited greatly from these animated discussions for he was able to pick his father's vast knowledge and experience. He learnt from him how to recognise sounds that could forewarn about potential dangers. He mastered decyphering signs of danger such as the sudden flight of birds, screaming of monkeys and scampering of other animals in the vicinity.

Saccaka also took pains to ingrain in Dhanapala wholesome qualities such as the importance of honouring parents and fulfilling one's filial duty. He explained that he was already aging and that someday, he would have to leave this world. Furthermore, life for elephants in the forest is fraught with uncertainty because of the numerous risks they encounter. This renders life even more unpredictable. In any case, like all beings, elephants too grow old and are subject to death. They could also die as a result of serious injury or sickness.

One day, while they were discussing matters of life and death, his father placed his trunk on Dhanapala's back and paused for a while. He gazed at him with fatherly affection and told him in a low, tender voice:

My dear son, like all living beings, we grow old and some day will have to depart from this world. Elephants normally live up to around sixty years. I am already fifty. Should anything untoward happen to me, you must be filial and take care of your dearest mother. She

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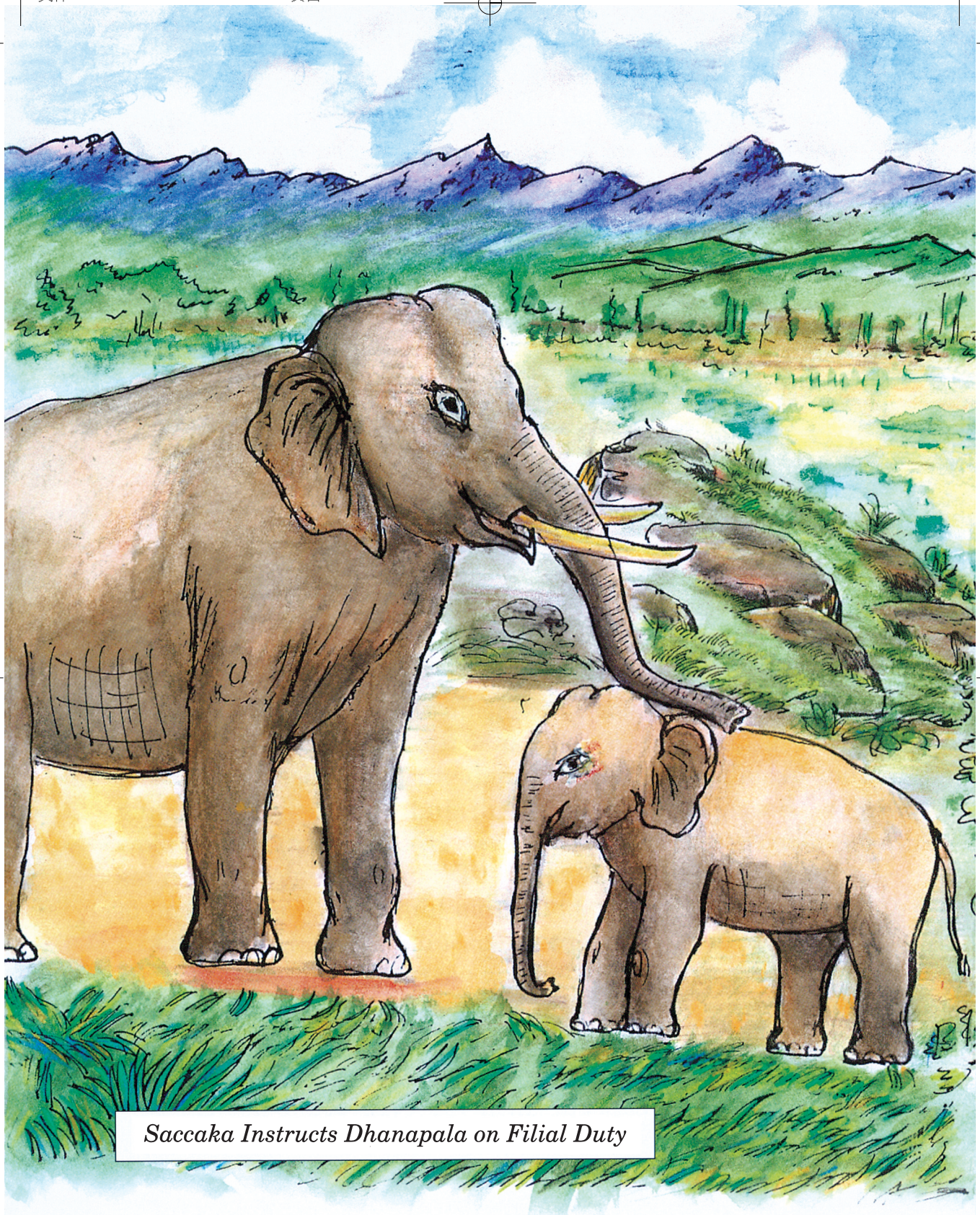

Saccaka Instructs Dhanapala on Filial Duty

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has been so loving and caring from the very moment you were conceived in her womb. There are no words to describe her deep love and devotion for you, dear son. Your mother loves you so much that she will readily give her life for your happiness and well-being.

Dhanapala responded reassuringly to his father's advice:

Dearest Pappa even while I was forming in Mamma's womb, I felt and understood the profound love you and Mamma had for me. You both have been such wonderful parents. I could not have asked for better set of parents. I too love Pappa and Mamma very dearly. I promise you upon my very breath that I will attend to both Mamma and Pappa when I grow up. I cannot think of any other way of repaying my eternal gratitude than by devoting my life taking care of you both in your twilight years.

Just as Dhanapala was growing up and enjoying the company of his father, and at the same time, acquiring invaluable knowledge and wisdom, tragedy struck with a devastating blow. Saccaka suddenly fell ill and after a few agonising days, he succumbed to his illness. His death was a cruel blow to the family. The close rapport Dhanapala enjoyed with his father was suddenly robbed from him. They were so fond of each other that they were the best of friends. He had looked forward to spending many more years of bonding with him. It never ever occurred to him that his father would die so suddenly, especially since he had always been so hail and hearty. He felt his whole world had crumbled. He sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed, until his eyes could not cry any

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Saccaka's Tragic Death.

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more. As he stroked his father's lifeless body with his trunk, he cried out:

Dearest Pappa wake up! Wake up dearest Pappa! Why must you leave us so suddenly? Why should this tragedy happen to us? You have been such a wonderful father. It is unfair that you should be taken away from us so abruptly. How can life be so cruel? Life will no longer be the same without you, dearest Pappa. Please don't leave us, dearest Pappa! Please wake up, dearest Pappa! Please wake up!

There was of course no response from Saccaka as he lay motionless on the ground. After allowing Dhanapala to pour out his grief, the elders took him aside and consoled him. They expressed their heartfelt sorrow over the death of his father and advised him to bravely accept the reality of death:

Your father's death is a great loss not only to you, son, but also to our whole herd. Death is unavoidable, son. It is a manifestation of the Law of Nature. All beings born into this world will die some day. Some even die at a young age. This is the reality of life. Therefore, you should be strong and accept this reality of the impermanence of life. You must be grateful that your father enjoyed a full life and lived to a ripe age. He has left behind a noble legacy of kinship and leadership. You must strengthen your fortitude and face the future with courage. You still have your mother to think of. So stop crying, son, and think of the future as life must go on.

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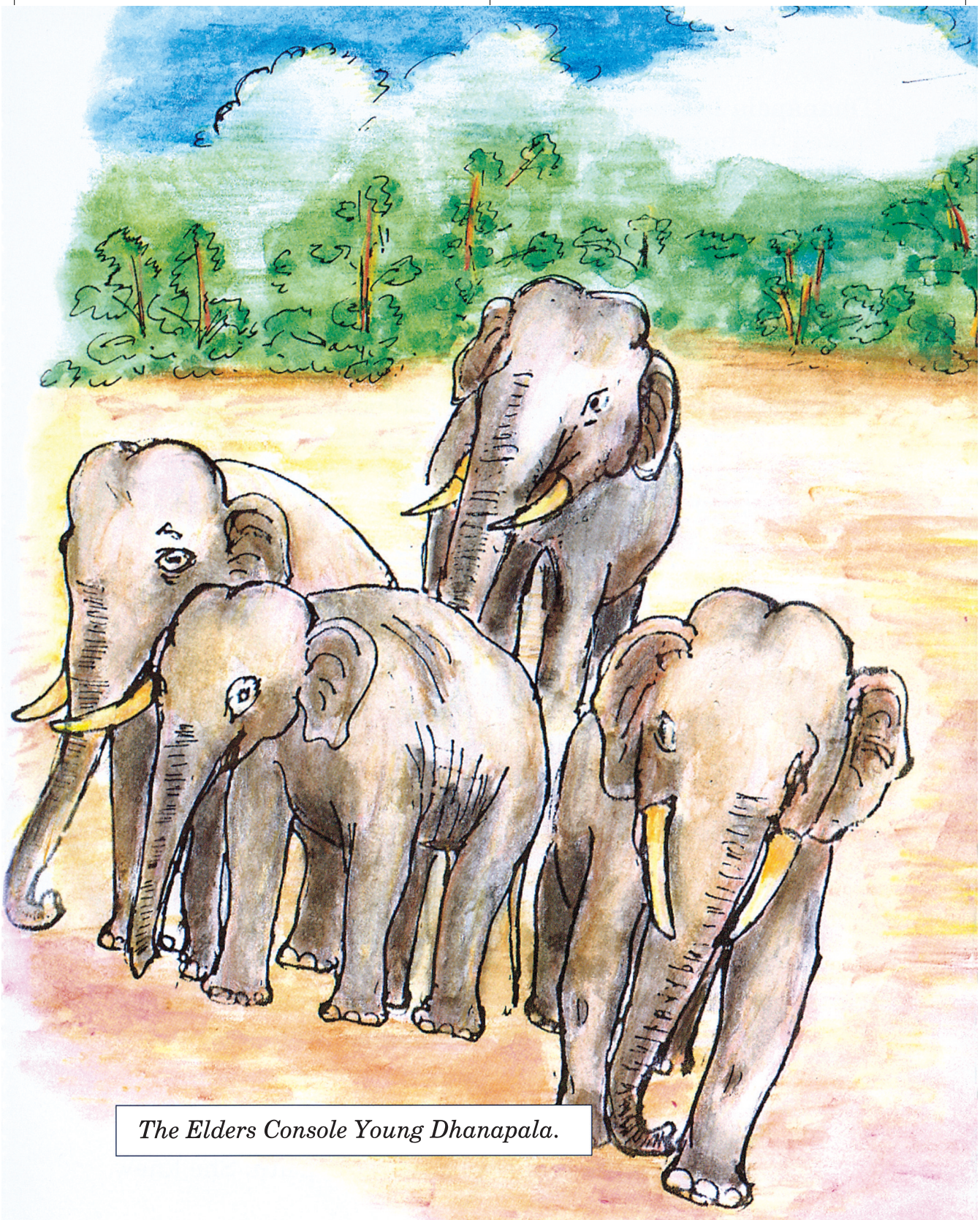

The Elders Console Young Dhanapala.

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Dhanapala listened intently to the advice of the elders and vowed to himself to get on with life and look after his widowed mother. He prayed that he will have the necessary strength and resolve to live up to his father's illustrious life.

Kanthi too took the death of Saccaka with great grief. His death came as a great shock. She had nursed him day and night throughout his sickness and had never expected him to die. So attached was Kanthi to Saccaka that she felt devastated. In deep sorrow, she stood beside his corpse and stared at him. She simply could not take her eyes off him. As she looked at the corpse of her beloved partner in disbelief, she moaned silently:

> *How can life be so cruel and rob me of my dear Saccaka? He has been a wonderful partner in life and a most loving and caring father. He was also such an exemplary leader. He had never done anything to hurt or harm anyone and treated everyone like his own kith and kin. Indeed, he was such a noble and compassionate being who cared more for others than for himself. Why must this tragedy happen to me? How am I going to live without my beloved Saccaka?*

The other she-elephants gathered around Kanthi and consoled her. They sympathised with her and told her that they understood her grief over the loss of her beloved sire. However, she had a lot to live for. Most importantly, she had to be strong and look after Dhanapala who was still a youngster.

It took Kanthi several days to get over her trauma and to come to terms with the reality of Saccaka's death. She knew

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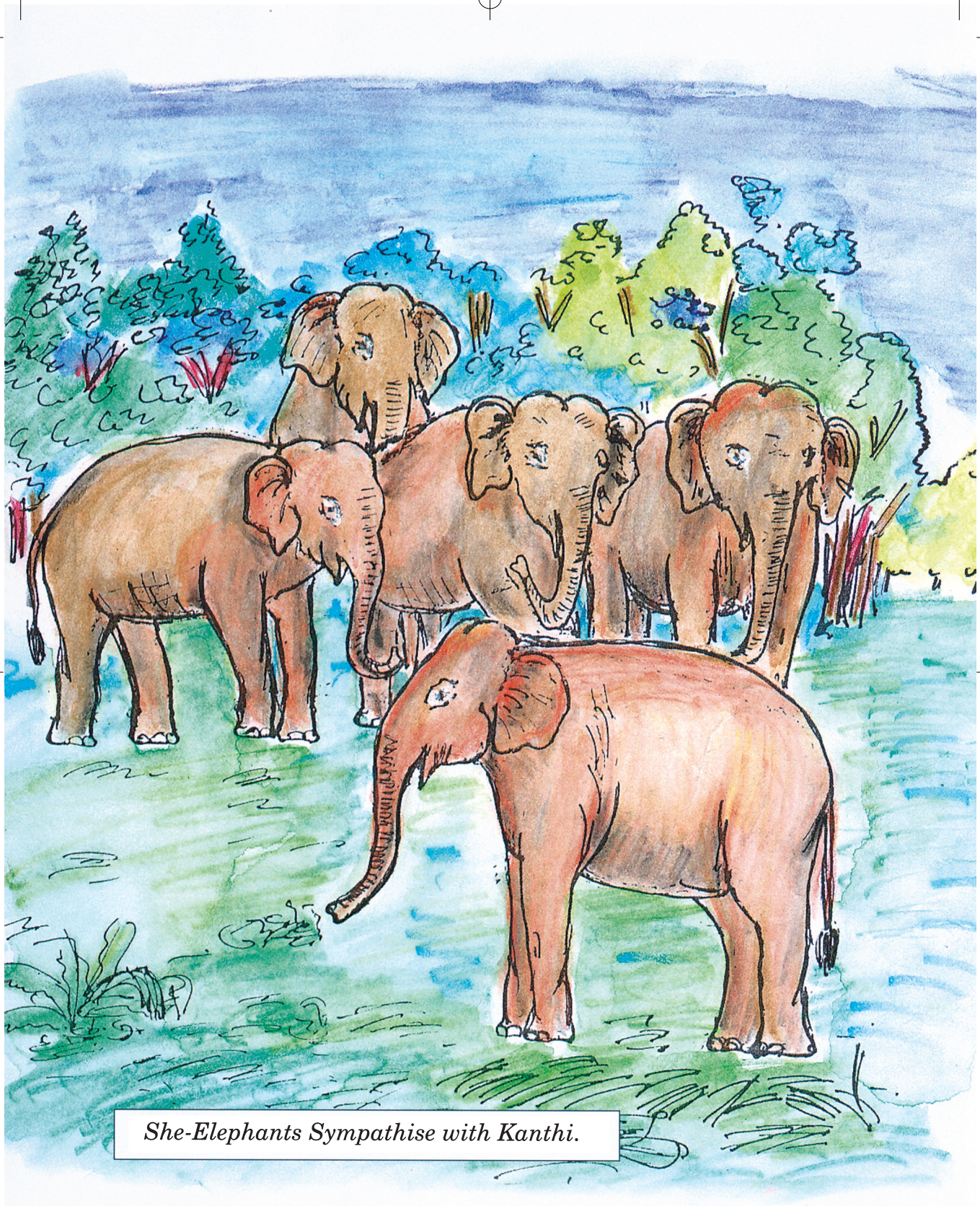

She-Elephants Sympathise with Kanthi.

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that no one could fill the void her departed sire had left. She realised that life must go on despite the tragic loss of her loving and ever devoted companion in life and resolved to shoulder the responsibility of bringing up Dhanapala. After performing her late sire's customary funeral rites and rituals, she picked up her courage and focused her love and attention on raising her youthful son.

From thence onwards, Kanthi accompanied Dhanapala everywhere he went. The deep rooted herd mentality among elephants was indeed a great source of strength and comfort to her as a widowed mother. The elders of the herd volunteered their help without solicitation. They looked after Dhanapala as if he was their own offspring. Such is the beauty of the elephant herd culture. Elephants observe a wonderful custom of collective responsibility of the whole herd taking care of young ones in their fold. This entrenched elephant culture of oneness and deep feelings for each other's joys and sorrows, commonly referred to as "herd mentality" was a tremendous source of strength to Kanthi in facing the future without her beloved Saccaka. The elephant herd mentality is most certainly a unique quality which humans could well do to emulate.

True to the meaning of his name, Dhanapala grew up to be an outstanding personality. He was physically well-endowed and was larger in size than the rest of his peers. His built and physical strength was the envy of the other youngsters especially since physical prowess is given high importance in elephant culture. He was very athletic from the time he was an infant and had progressively developed exceptionally strong muscles. On occasions, the young elephants would

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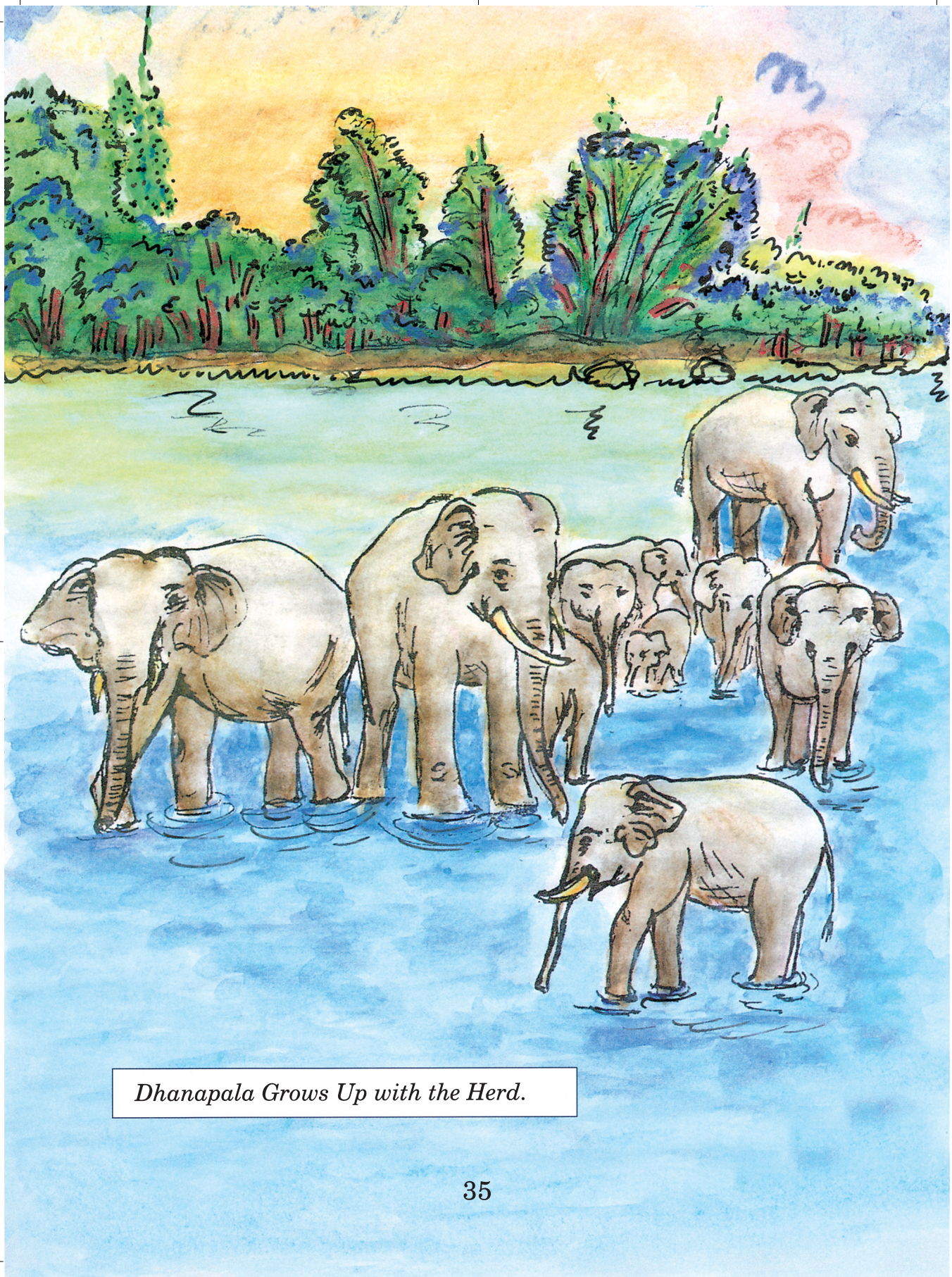

Dhanapala Grows Up with the Herd.

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have friendly contests to test each other's physical strength. For example, they would engage in the popular sport of tug-of-trunks with him. But he proved too strong for all of them. Even the combined strength of three of his peers was not sufficient to pull him. Two of his friends would lock their trunks around his. The third would grab hold of his front leg. Although they pulled with all their might, they could not move him forward even an inch, let alone pull him across to their side. He would hold his ground steadfastly until his friends had exhausted their strength. Then, he would drag them all across to his side almost effortlessly.

Dhanapala was very popular among his peers. He spent a lot of time playing elephant games and chatting with them. They were appreciative of his noble qualities and genuine friendliness. Although he was easily the strongest among them, he was never boastful or arrogant. On the contrary, he was modest to a fault and extremely kind and helpful to everyone. Apart from being outstandingly strong, Dhanapala had developed an alert mind. The elephant herd acknowledged his intellectual brilliance and were keen to draw on his vast knowledge and skills which he extended unreservedly. He gave good counsel to his peers without any discrimination. Many an evening one would find him advising them on various problems and issues they brought to him.

There was, however, one young elephant who was not enamoured by Dhanapala's outstanding qualities and the wide popularity he enjoyed. This was a youngster, nicknamed Korodha meaning, the angry One. As it turned out, he was the sworn enemy of the *Bodhisatta* throughout *Samsara* (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth which all living beings are

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Peers Playfully Test their Strength against Dhanapala.

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subjected to). He too was well built and physically strong. But even so, his physical strength could not match that of Dhanapala's. Furthermore, unlike Dhanapala, he was ill-mannered and a big bully to the little calves. He would often harass and ill-treat them and other innocent animals in the forest for no rhyme or reason.

Since he was uncouth and unkind, the other youngsters avoided his company. He had only a few friends, who like him, were rude and haughty. Just as birds of a feather flock together, they kept to themselves and rarely mixed with the rest of the youngsters.

Korodha refused to acknowledge Dhanapala's exceptional strength and popularity. He was bent on proving that he was the strongest among the younger elephants. One day, while Dhanapala was chatting with his friends, he confronted him with his rowdy clique and challenged him to a contest in uprooting trees. He walked straight up to him and stared daggers. Then he grunted haughtily:

> *Dhanapala, I heard that you claim to be the strongest among the youths. I too have the strength of many elephants. I insist we have a contest to see who is the stronger between us. I challenge you to a tree uprooting contest to establish who is really stronger.*

Being the modest, humble person he is, Dhanapala ignored Korodha's challenge. He had no interest in proving himself the strongest among his peers. Furthermore, he did not want to trigger rivalry within the herd. His late father had taught him that this would go against the grain of the elephant herd

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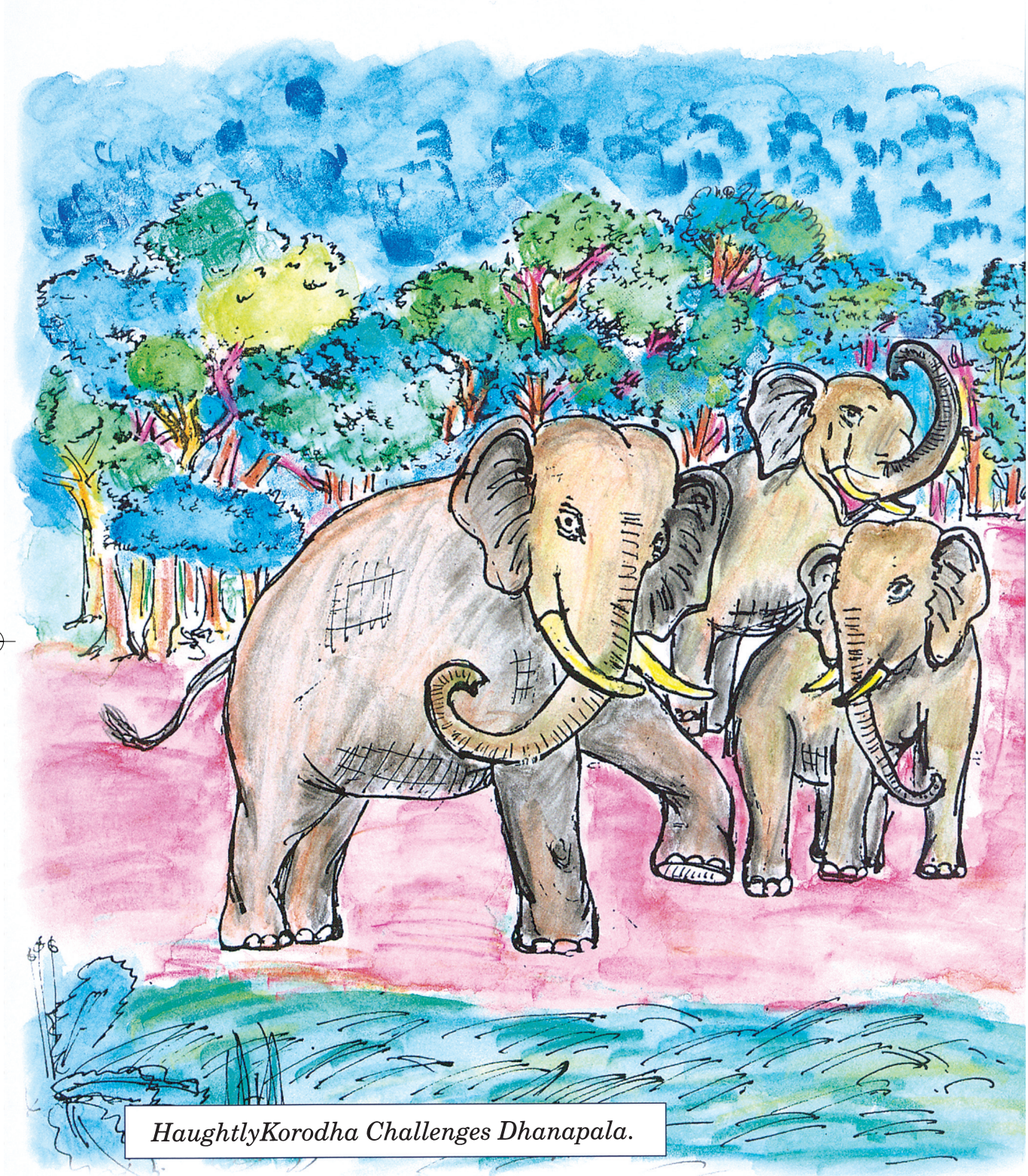

HaughtlyKorodha Challenges Dhanapala.

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culture. He had guided him to honour the principle that instead of causing dischord he should uphold the elephant community's spirit of camaraderie. Bearing this advice in mind, Dhanapala responded politely:

> *Brother Korodha, I have no intention of proving my physical strength. Proving that I am stronger than you is not important. It will only lead to rivalry among us and consequentl to disunity. As a herd, we must always be united and promote kinship within our community.*

Seeing that Dhanapala would not take up his challenge, Korodha and his trouble rousing friends began to mock him saying that he was afraid of losing the contest and that he was a coward. Dhanapala ignored the taunts hurled at him. His friends, however, were very upset and became agitated over Korodha and his clique's rude remarks. Unable to tolerate their caustic utterances and provocation any longer, they prodded Dhanapala to take up the challenge and discipline Korodha and his good-for-nothing associates once and for all.

Dhanapala's friends implored him that in the larger interest of safeguarding peace and harmony among the herd, he should not dismiss Korodha's challenge. That this was a good opportunity to chastise the belligerent Korodha and his rotten associates. They urged that it was perfectly alright for him to take up the challenge. Moreover, in the spirit of sportsmanship, he should not turn down the contest. In response to his friends' impassioned pleas, Dhanapala eventually relented and agreed to the tree-uprooting contest.

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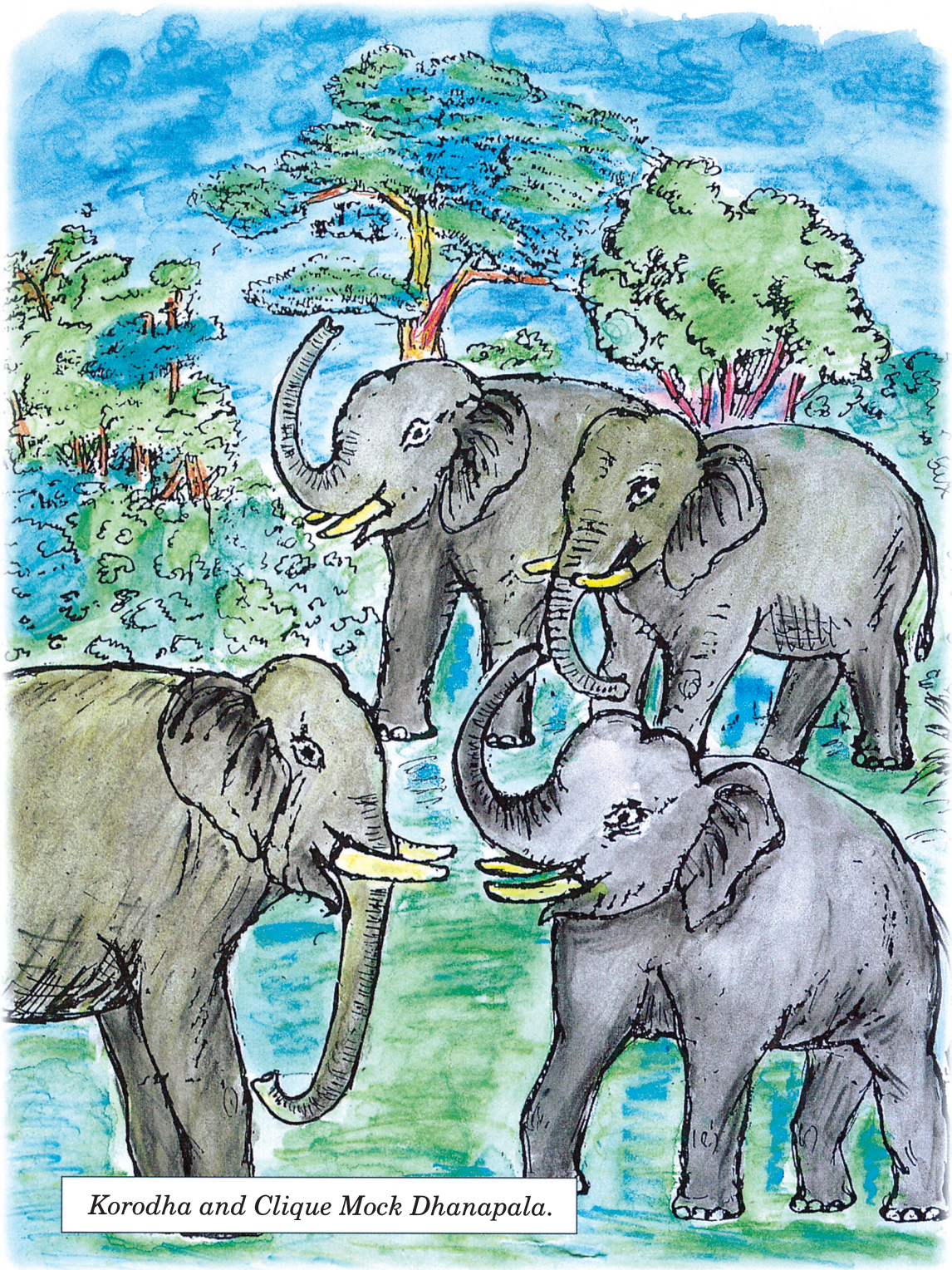

Korodha and Clique Mock Dhanapala.

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The two groups of young elephants gathered around their respective contestants. The cunning Korodha selected a tree for himself to uproot. He quickly singled out another tree nearby which was larger than the one he had chosen for himself, for Dhanapala to uproot. Dhanapala's friends protested against the unfairness in the selection of the trees since obviously the larger tree would require more strength to uproot. Dhanapala, however, pacified them and agreed to proceed with the contest.

The two contestants circled their respective trees with their trunks in readiness. When the signal was given by one of Korodha's friends to start the contest, both heaved their respective trees upwards with all their might. Dhanapala was able to uproot his tree in an instant. But Korodha needed more time to uproot his. Terribly disappointed and embarrassed over his defeat, he left the place muttering angrily to his cronies.

Such a spoil sport was Korodha that he refused to congratulate his victorious opponent. Instead, he dashed out in search for his father, nicknamed Agnika (fiery or hot-tempered One). When he found him, he sobbed on his shoulder like a little calf who had tumbled on the ground and hurt itself. In between sobs, he lamented that he had lost in a tree uprooting contest to Dhanapala.

Agnika put his trunk around Korodha and consoled him:

> *Son, you are still a youth. You have plenty of time to build up your muscles and be stronger than Dhanapala. I will personally train you to enhance your physical*

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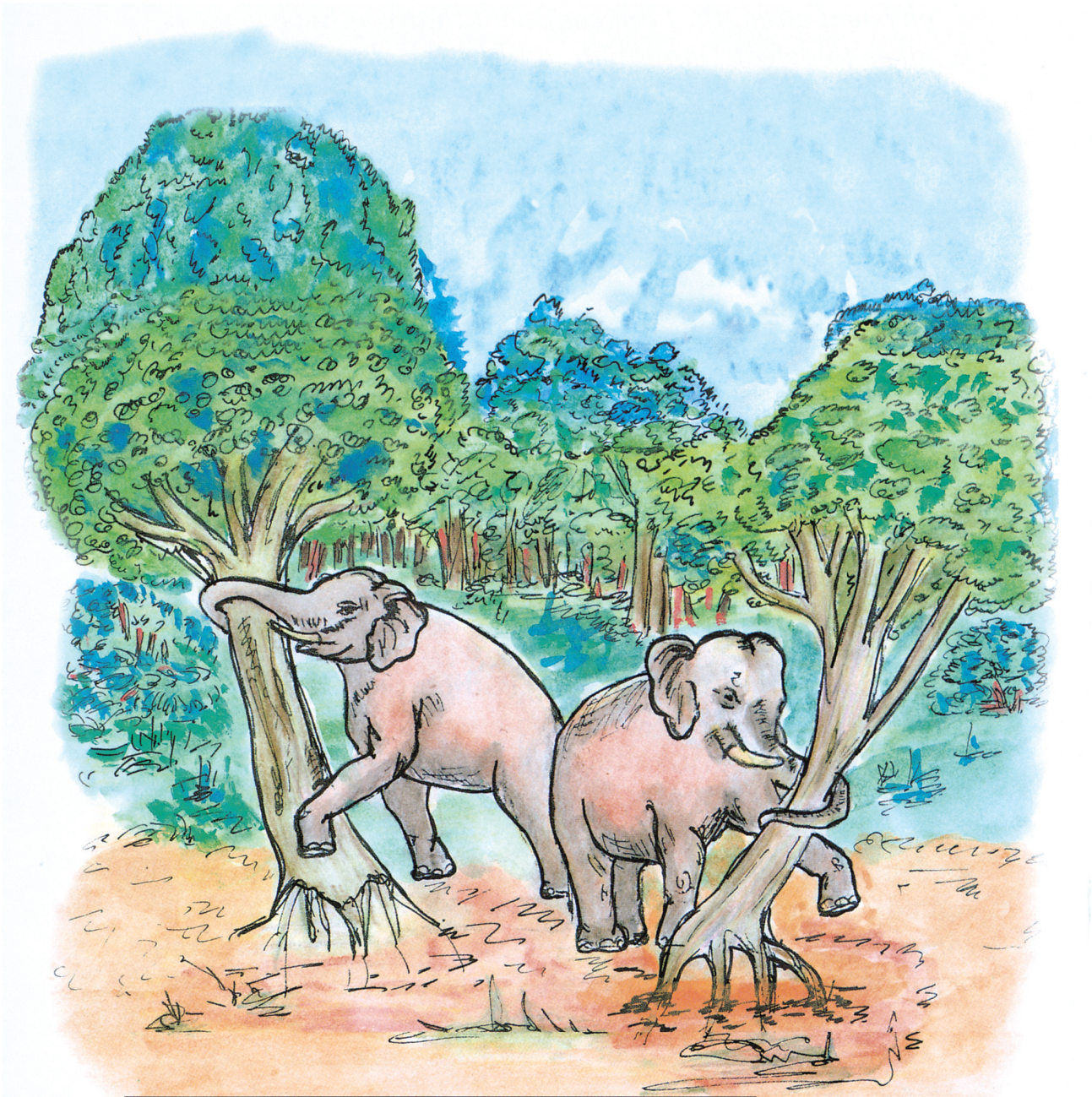

Korodha Defeated in the Tree-Uprooting Contest.

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prowess as I am well versed in the art of developing physical strength. I am confident that you have what it takes to defeat Dhanapala and be the champion in the very near future.

The incumbent leader of the herd is already old and will soon have to make way for a new leader. I want you to become the next leader of the herd. So stop crying, my son, for these tears of yours will take you nowhere. Also, should anyone see you in this pathetic state, it will be embarrassing and damaging to your reputation. Your chances of becoming the next leader of the herd will be seriously jeopardised.

Now go and have a bath and freshen up yourself. I will start you off on the physical training programme first thing tomorrow morning.

A few years later, the incumbent leader of the elephant herd was seriously incapacitated. In accordance with the elephant tradition, a new leader was to be selected through consensus among the elders. According to their code, the selection had to be done confidentially. A Meeting of the Council of Elders was convened hurriedly by the Chairman at a secluded area to choose a new leader. After a brief discussion on the Agenda of the meeting, he proposed that Dhanapala who has come of age, be appointed as their leader. He cited a number of sound reasons in favour of his candidature:

Fellow Members of the Council, there are many cogent reasons why Dhanapala should be our new leader. Firstly, he is recognised as the strongest among our

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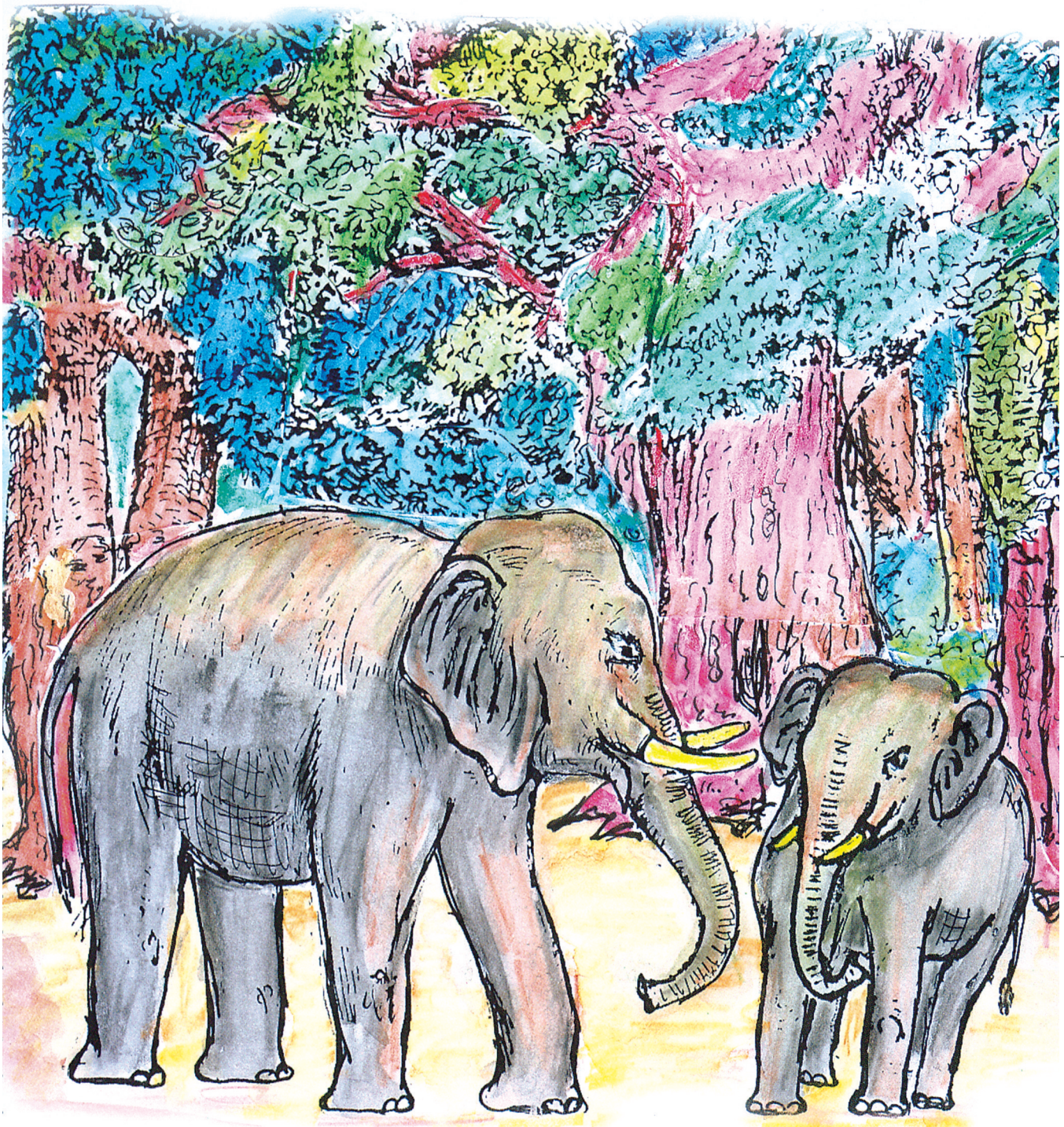

Agnika Pacifies Koradha.

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community. Secondly, he displays outstanding leadership qualities. Thirdly, he commands wide respect because of his noble qualities. Fourthly, just like his father who was our leader not too long ago, he has consistently promoted the larger interest of the herd. Fifthly, he is vested with profound wisdom which is an invaluable asset for a leader. Finally, he possesses great charisma.

Based on these very cogent reasons, I feel strongly that he is eminently suitable to take on the mantle of leadership of our herd. I am absolutely confident that he will continue to show a sincere, caring attitude towards members of our herd.

All the members of the Council agreed in chorus to the Chairman's remarks and raised their trunks up in support of Dhanapala's nomination. However, Agnika who was a senior council member vehemently objected to Dhanapala's candidature. He declared that although he was the only member who differed, in accordence with their code, his objection nevertheless had to be heard.

Agnika stepped forward and claimed that his son was more competent than Dhanapala to assume leadership of the herd. There were murmurs of surprise among the council members. They looked at each other in disbelief. Even so, they had to allow Agnika to present his case. In his submission, he contended:

My son, Korodha is certainly stronger than Dhanapala. For the past several years, I have personally trained

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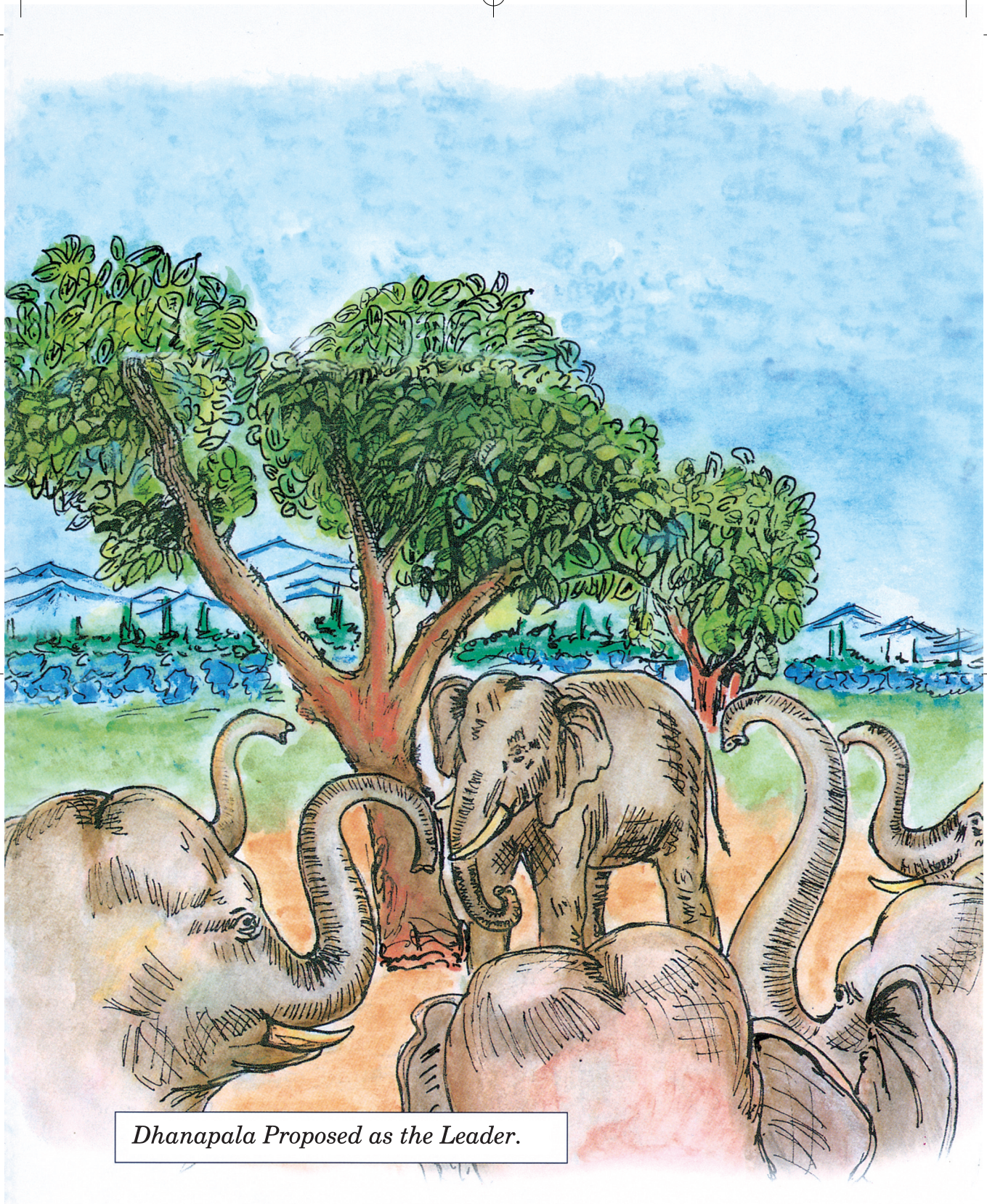

Dhanapala Proposed as the Leader.

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him in enhancing his physical prowess. He is also brave and capable of providing effective leadership. It is only proper that he assumes leadership of our herd. Our leader must be strong and courageous. I insist that the new leader must prove his physical strength through an open contest.

I propose, therefore, a tug-of-trunks be held to determine who is the stronger of the two candidates to lead the herd.

Let the victor of the contest be declared our new leader. Such a contest is only fair and in the best interest of our community. It is also in keeping with our tradition of open contest to select a leader of the herd.

The Council had no choice but to accede to the objection raised by Agnika. The meeting accordingly confirmed a tug-of-trunks between Dhanapala and Korodha to determine the new leader of the herd.

On the appointed day of the contest, the Council of Elders and the two contestants gathered at an open area in the grasslands. The referee drew a horizontal line on the ground separating them. Dhanapala was requested to stand on the right of the demarcation line while Korodha took his position on the left. They were then requested to lock their trunks and stand in readiness for the referee to signal the start of the contest. There was a tense silence in the air as the two contestants dug their feet into the ground to secure their footholds.

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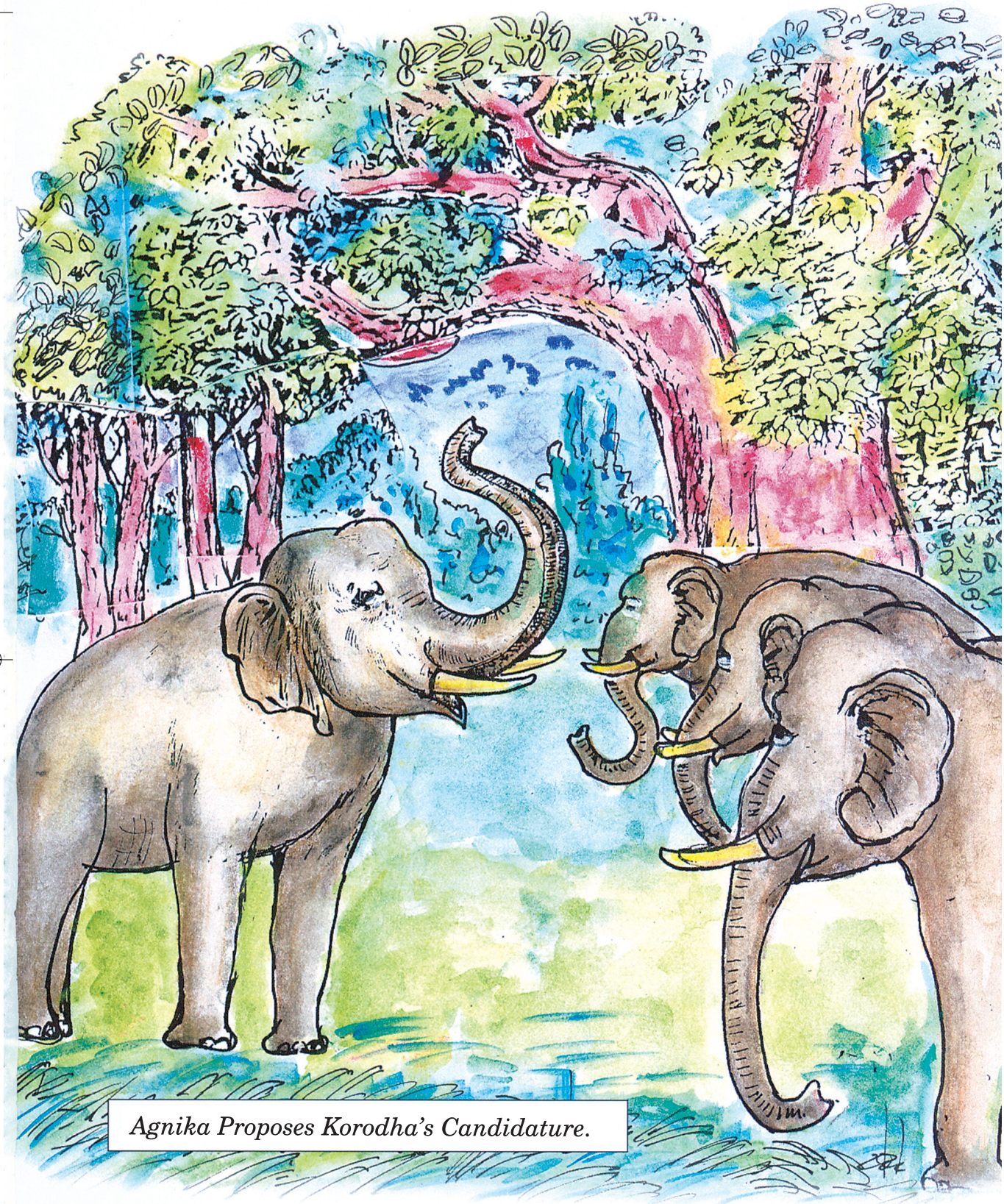

Agnika Proposes Korodha's Candidature.

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The referee raised his trunk up and began to count to three to signal the start of the contest. But before he could count three, Korodha fouled by giving a strong jerk. This caught Dhanapala by surprise. The unexpected tug caused him to lose his footing momentarily. The elders lost a heartbeat. Korodha's father gave a hearty laugh of jubilation. Fortunately, his outburst of joy was short-lived. Dhanapala quickly regained his composure, retrieved his balance and dug his heels firmly into the earth. Then he took a deep breath, swerved his body and heaved a mighty tug. The force of his pull sent Korodha tumbling forward as if being swept by a hurricane. He had no clue what propelled him forward way across the demarcation line. He was in a daze as he lay flat on the ground.

Like the true sportsman he was, Dhanapala went up to his defeated opponent and offered to help him back to his feet, but the crude Korodha rejected his goodwill gesture. Instead, he vexed and left the scene with his father and viscious clique in embarrassing haste.

The elders were so relieved that Dhanapala had won the contest notwithstanding Korodha's attempt to cheat. The contest over, the Chairman of the Council of Elders stepped forward and declared Dhanapala the decisive victor and new leader. He then summoned an assembly of the elephant herd to officially announce Dhanapala as their new leader. All the elephants trumpeted joyfully in approval of Dhanapala's appointment. Their loud cheers were taken as unequivocal endorsement of the Council's decision. The Chairman declared a feast that evening to celebrate the joyous occasion of the ceremonial installation of Dhanapala as the new leader of the herd.

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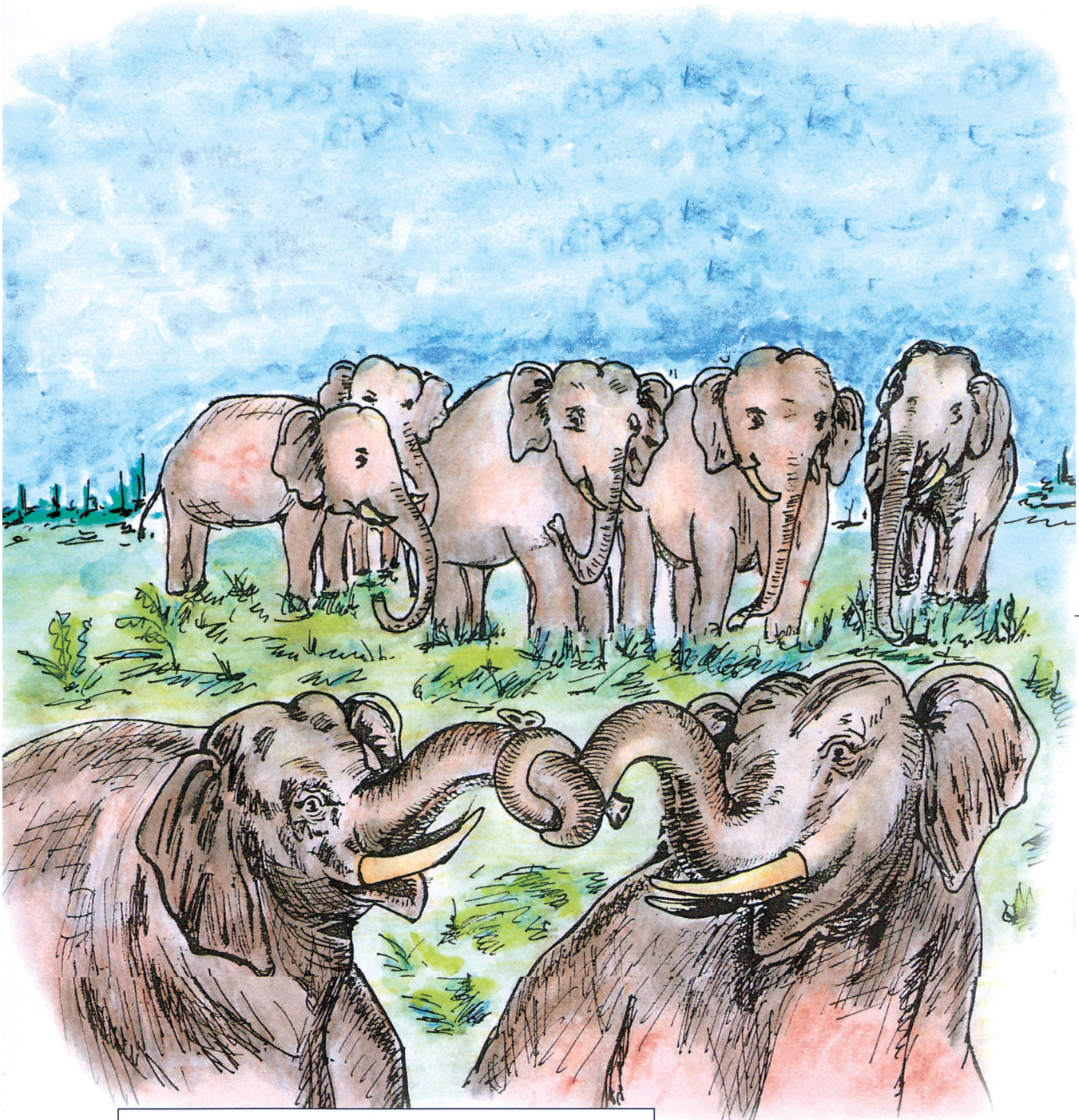

The Tug-of-Trunks Leadership Contest.

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Kanthi was thrilled beyond measure as she watched Dhanapala officially assume leadership of the herd. Her *adhitthana* that her calf would become a leader while still in her womb had finally come to fruition. As she reflected proudly about his exemplary qualities, tears of joy dribbled freely down her cheerful face. She gazed in admiration as he was ceremonially handed the mantle of leadership by the Chairman of the Council Elders and garlanded with flowers. She could not help rejoicing in her heart how much he resembled his late father. She was glad, and indeed proud, that her son had grown up to be a remarkable elephant just like his father. He was in fact, a classic example of the old adage : a chip of the old block. Her only regret was that Saccaka was not around to share this moment of glory and happiness. How she wished her dear sire was alive to witness and feel gratified by the great honour their son had brought to the family.

Dhanapala was mindful of the high expectations placed upon him as leader of the herd. He too wished dearly that his father was around to celebrate his crowning glory on being appointed leader. He recalled the many wonderful years he had spent with his late father. He remembered vividly the fatherly advice he had imparted to him not to be intoxicated with power and high position, but to instead cultivate humility towards friends and foes alike. In spite of the years that had passed, his father's wise counsel still resonated in his mind:

> *Son, do not allow any personal achievements in life get into your head. Always remember, pride comes before fall. So, instead of being swollen-headed and proud, you*

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Dhanapala Garlanded as Leader of the Herd.

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should always endeavour to live up to the high honour of the family. By following this principle, you will not go wrong in life. Rather, you will be successful, and at the same time, be respected and honoured.

Dhanapala vowed to himself to uphold the high reputation his father had earned for himself during his tenure of leadership. He pledged to honour and safeguard the respect and admiration he had earned among the herd by following diligently his fatherly advice.

Fortified with the wisdom and sound advice his late father had passed on to him, Dhanapala carried out his leadership role and responsibilities with excellence. He did not allow personal preferences and differences with individual members of the herd influence his judgement and relationships with them. He adopted the principle of *Brahma Vihara* – the four virtuous mental conditions, comprising *Metta* (Loving Kindness), *Karuna* (Compassion), *Mudita* (Sympathetic or Altruistic Joy) and *Upekkha* (Equanimity) as the moral platform of his leadership.

Thus, as the leader of the herd, Dhanapala was impartial and treated everyone fairly, including Korodha and his quarrelsome clique. He was hopeful that by extending *Metta* and *Karuna* instead of criticising or condemning them, they could be transformed and become more refined. In accordance with this positive leadership spirit, he took a personal interest in the welfare and well-being of all the members of the herd. Just as his father had lived and taught him, he made "Leadership by Example" his motto. He resolved to live

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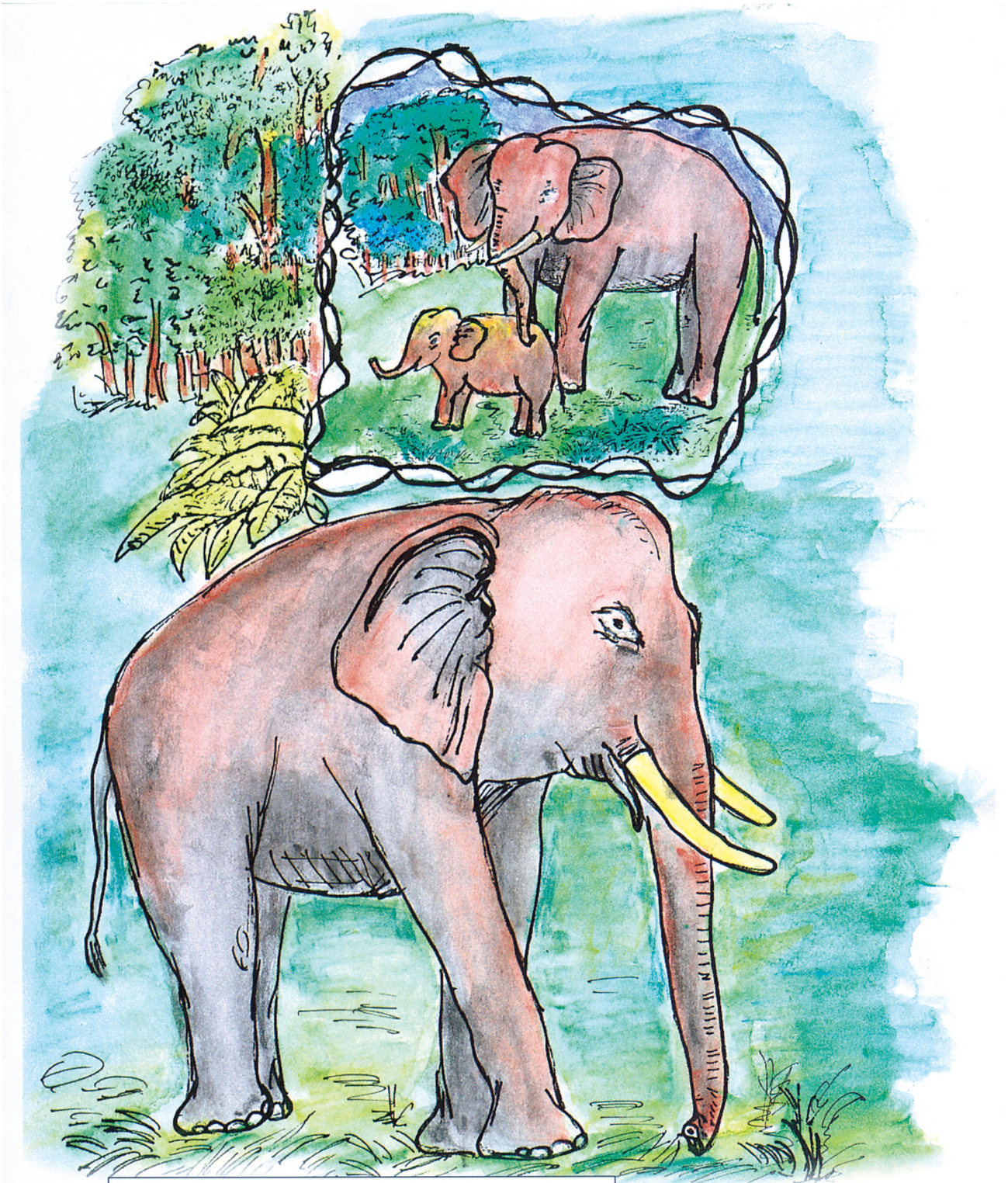

Dhanapala Recalls his Father's Advice.

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by his father's cardinal leadership principle, namely, *"I say what I do; and I do what I say"*. Members of the herd were naturally pleased with the high watermark of his philosophy of leading by example.

Dhanapala was also highly respected for his bravery. Typically, according to their entrenched herd mentality, elephants move about in groups of families. The female and young ones travel in front while the males follow from the rear. At the threat of danger, however, their positions are reversed. The males move to the front and form a protective cordon against any attack. But Dhanapala was an exceptional leader. Whenever danger arose from any corner, he would order the herd to seek refuge in the thick foliage of the forest. He would insist that the males too follow the females and their young ones. While the herd raised their tails and scampered into the forest for safety, he would courageously stand his ground and stall the adversary all by himself.

On one occasion, while the herd was grazing in their favourite pasture, Dhanapala observed a sudden flight of birds at the far end of the plains. As he focused his eyes on the horizon, he observed some movements among the tall kussa grass that was about knee-high. He knew that danger was lurking. Soon, he recognised three tigers advancing stealthily. Immediately, he signaled to the herd to run for safety into the forest. He requested the other males to follow the herd while he confronted the tigers single-handedly. Following Dhanapala's instruction, the whole herd bolted into the forest for safety.

As the pack of tigers approached closer, Dhanapala made a quick assessment of the situation and prepared himself for

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The Herd Scampering for Safety.

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their eventual attack. They were all big and ferocious. As they advanced menacingly, he studied each of their movements carefully to see which one would make the first onslaught. The tigers decided to mount a three-pronged attack. Two of them moved sideways to the right and left. The third stood facing Dhanapala squarely. Then suddenly, the one in the middle gave a loud, ferocious roar, sprung forward and sprinted towards Dhanapala with savage ferocity. Dhanapala, however, remained calm and maintained his concentration. His eyes focused on the charging tiger. As it came within striking distance, he raised his trunk skywards and just at the critical moment, gave it a thundering smack. The force of the blow lifted the tiger several feet in the air before it fell to the ground with a loud thud a few yards away. It moaned in severe pain for it had suffered a few broken bones.

While Dhanapala focused his attention on the tiger that came charging at him, the one that crept to his left had quickly moved to his rear. It pounced on him from behind and landed right on his back. It clawed its paws deep into his hide. Just as it was about to sink its sharp teeth into his neck, he quickly grabbed hold of it with his trunk and flung it into the air like a missile. The tiger landed on the ground with an even louder thud. Since it tumbled in the air and crashed on the ground head first, its neck broke and it laid unconscious on the ground.

The third tiger was so awe struck by Dhanapala's courage and strength, it virtually froze when it saw its companions being tossed around like toys. Dhanapala calculated that it was now best for him to take advantage of the tiger's jitters

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Dhanapala Charges at the Tiger.

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and attack before it regained its composure. He trumpeted loudly, fanned his large ears outwards and charged straight at it. His sharp pointed tusks were directed like two large daggers about to pierce through the stunned tiger. As he had anticipated, the tiger was so stunned that it quickly turned and fled for life. Before leaving to rejoin the rest of the herd, Dhanapala made a careful survey to make sure there were no more tigers lurking around. He thought to himself, *"None of these tigers will ever again pose a threat to the herd. From now on the herd will be able to enjoy the juicy grass carpeting the valley."*

Unaware to Dhanapala, blood from the wounds he suffered from the tiger which had attacked him from his rear began to stream down his head and back. This did not worry him at all. His thoughts were fixed on the safety of his mother and the herd. So he calmly turned around and headed into the forest to rejoin the herd. When he met up with them, they all rushed to him and hailed him as a hero. They were thoroughly grateful for the courage he had just demonstrated in risking his life for their safety.

Kanthi was both happy and sad to see her brave son Dhanapala. There was much reason to be proud of the exemplary courage he had displayed. But she was sad that in the process, he had suffered some severe injuries that caused him to lose much blood and suffer great pain. She hugged him with her trunk and held him tight. She then remembered about his injuries and quickly released her warm motherly embrace. She asked him to lie down while she went in search for some herbs known to possess healing qualities. She chewed the leaves into a thick paste and applied the herbal

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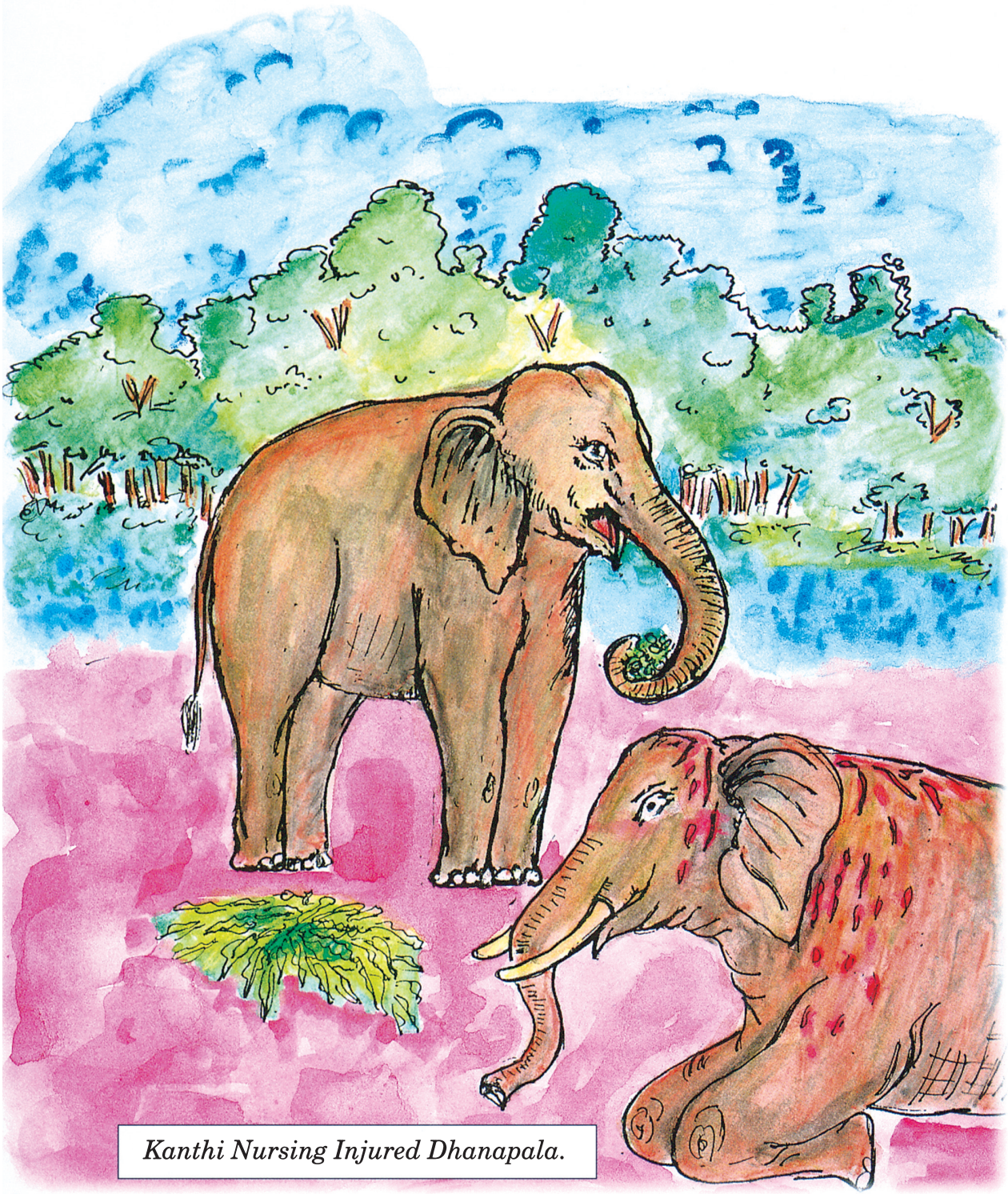

Kanthi Nursing Injured Dhanapala.

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pack on the gaping wounds on his head and back. She then led him home to rest.

Kanthi nursed Dhanapala tenderly and applied fresh herbal packs daily. So Dhanapala was compelled to rest for a week. Once his wounds were healed, he rejoined the rest of the herd and resumed his leadership duties and carried out his responsibilities as usual. Everything was going well for Dhanapala and his mother. But after a couple of years, tragedy struck. Kanthi unfortunately contracted an incurable eye disease. Dhanapala nursed her with every possible herb he could think of, but her sight deteriorated with each passing day until she was completely blind.

Kanthi could not walk on her own too far and depended on Dhanapala to lead the way. Apart from performing his leadership duties and responsibilities, Dhanapala now had to look after his blind mother. He kept a close vigil and took care of her needs. He never failed to feed her daily and bathe her regularly in the nearby river. He also led her to wherever she wanted to go. He was so devoted to his mother that he would not take even a morsel of food until he had fed her. This was no mean task for unlike humans, elephants are huge eaters. They consume over a hundred times more food than humans daily.

Like a prayer, every morning he would collect heaps of foods his mother relished. He would go in search for the sweetest grass and fresh leaves to feed her. When mangoes were in season he would gather several varieties of them and serve Kanthi as it was her favourite fruit. She also loved sugarcane and juicy palm leaves. He would go into the upper reaches of river and carefully select the choicest stems for her meals.

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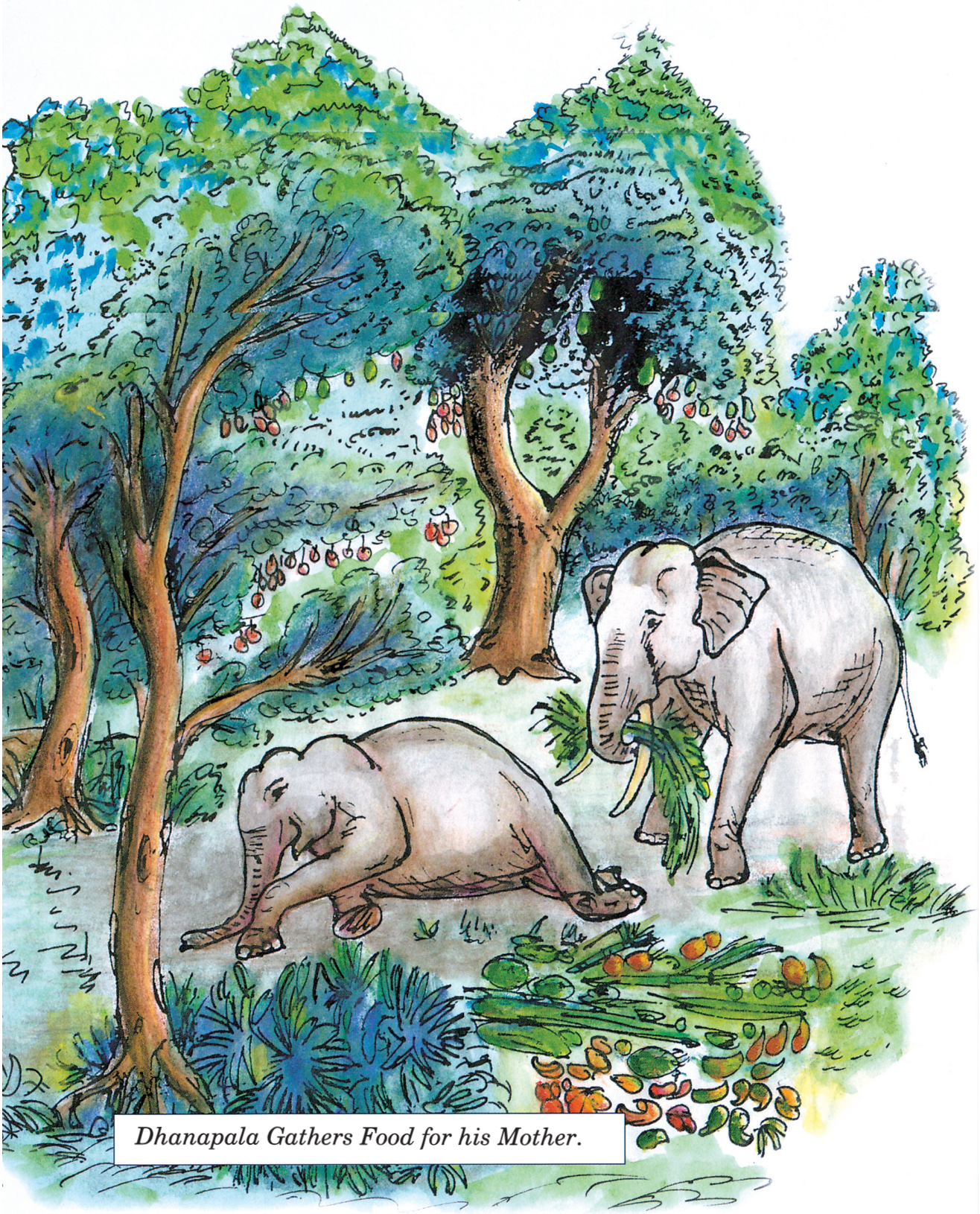

Dhanapala Gathers Food for his Mother.

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Korodha and his father shrewdly took notice of Dhanapala's intense devotion towards his blind mother. They saw this as an opportunity to undermine his leadership. They connived with their clique to cast aspersions and criticise him for lacking commitment towards the herd. They jointly plotted to poison the elders in the herd with the evil thought that Dhanapala was more concerned with his mother than attending to the interest of the herd. They spread the vile suggestion that he should be relinquished of his position as leader. They began to openly harass him and nicknamed him, *"Matu-posaka",* meaning one who provides for or one who supports his mother. They began to rebuke him about his pre-occupation in looking after his mother and instigated other elephants, in particular the youngsters, to mock him by his nickname. As a result, the nickname, Matu-posaka, stuck with him from then onwards.

Matu-posaka ignored the cruel provocations levelled at him by Korodha and his hostile clique. He continued to go deep into the forest daily to bring his mother her favourite foods. He would tell her fondly, *"Dear Mother, I will fetch you some fresh food from the bank on the other side of the river and return as soon as possible."* Kanthi did not like this idea, thinking that the rest of the elephants would dislike her son's excessive attention towards her welfare and well-being. She would often advise him:

> *Dear son, there is no need to go to the other side of the river in search of choice fruits for me. I can manage with whatever food that is available in the vicinity. You have a heavy responsibility as leader of the herd. You must fulfil this responsibility diligently. Do not worry about me, dear son. I will manage somehow.*

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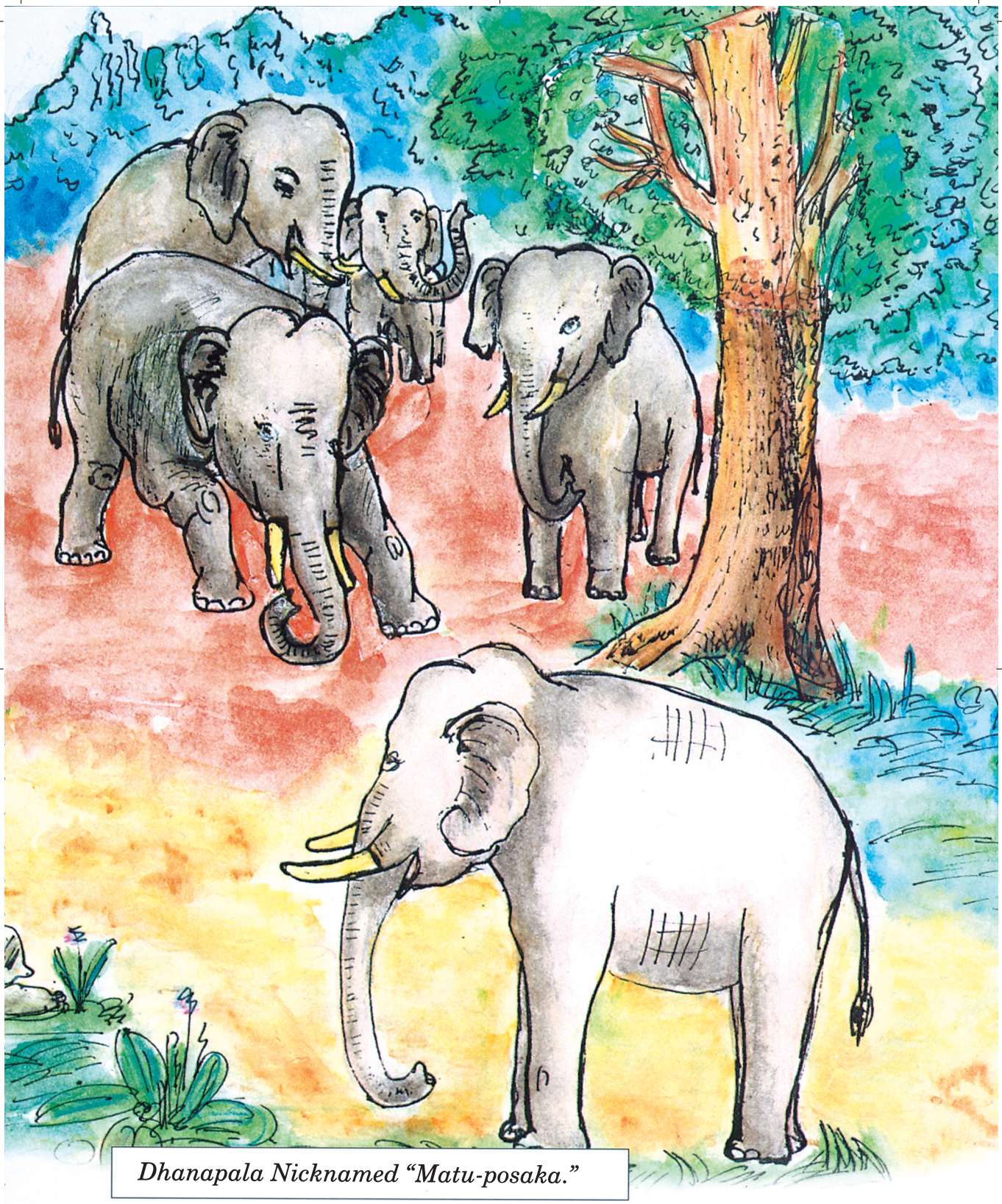

Dhanapala Nicknamed "Matu-posaka."

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Matu-posaka, however, remained unperturbed over the possibility of a repercussion arising to his leadership. As weeks passed, critical comments against him increased. At first, some of the elephants merely murmured among themselves about his over zealous devotion to his mother. Later, they began to grumble about his unwavering attention. After some time, they too began to criticise Matu-posaka's zealous devotion towards his mother. Not long after, together with Korodha and his clique, they lodged complaints against his leadership. Eventually, they openly protested to the Council of Elders that Matu-posaka's behaviour compromised his duties as leader of the herd.

Matu-posaka realised that the crisis over his leadership was about to boil over. Korodha and his father thought that their opportune moment had come to oust him as leader. They schemed to press for his immediate dismissal as leader of the herd. The crisis came to a point where Korodha and his malicious gang told him bluntly that he had to choose between the prestigious leadership of the herd and attending to his mother. For Matu-posaka, of course, taking care of his mother was far more important than the prestige of being the leader. Rather than get embroiled in a conflict, he thought it best to leave the herd and devote his time and attention to looking after his blind mother. He calmly explained to his mother the crisis that had cropped up and informed her of his painful decision to leave the herd and find for themselves a new habitat in the interior of the forest.

With a heavy heart, Matu-posaka told his mother:

Mamma dearest, we can no longer live with the herd. There are a good number of families who are kind and

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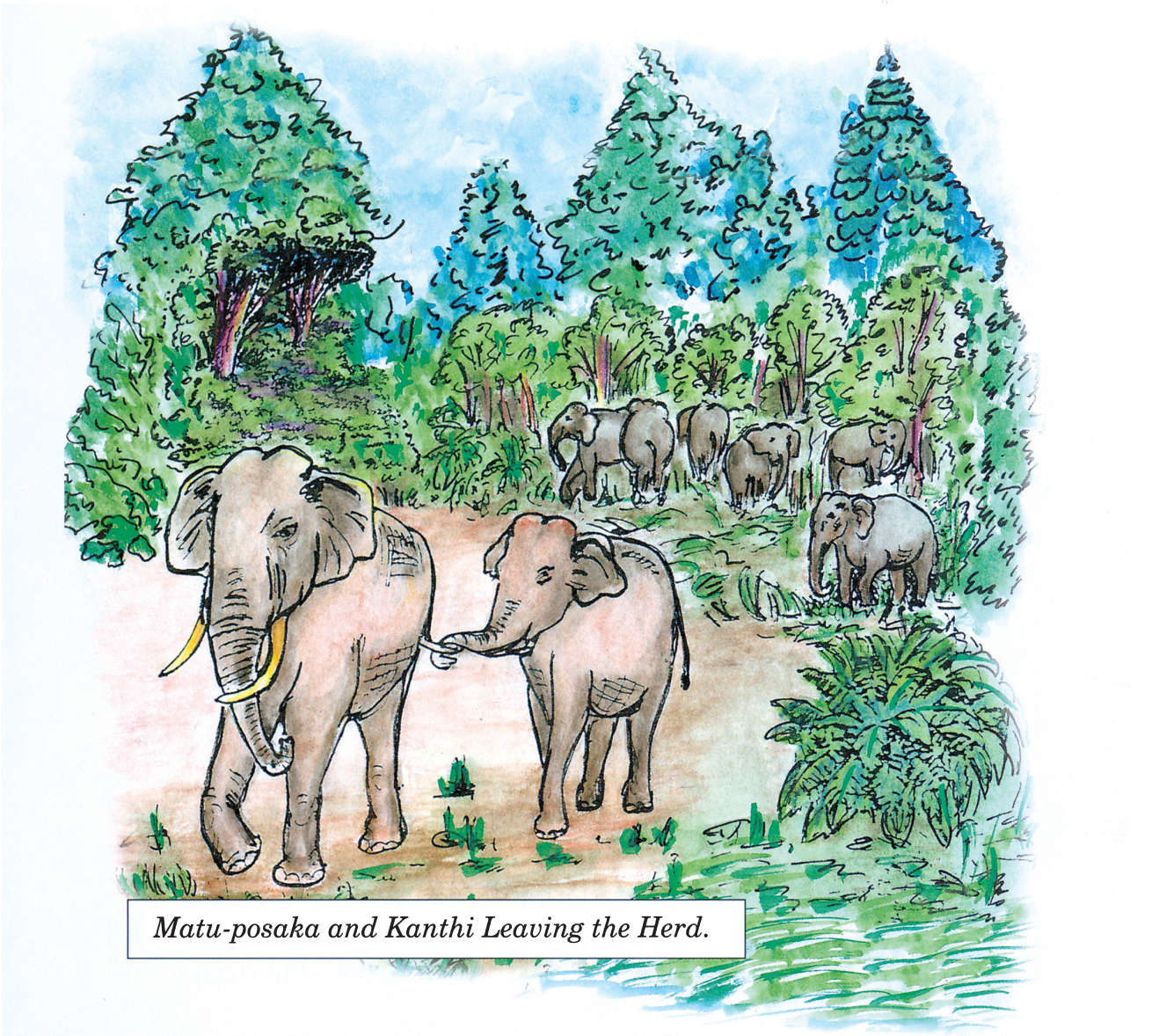
grateful to us. But Korodha and his father have managed to deceive and instigate a group within the community to challenge my leadership. It does not bother me to relinquish the leadership of the herd. Looking after you, is far more important to me. Once we find a suitable abode, I'll be able to devote my time and attention fully to taking care and nursing you dearest Mamma. In a



Matu-posaka and Kanthi Leaving the Herd.

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sense, this crisis is truly a blessing in disguise. I will from now onwards be able to fulfil my filial duty without any distraction.

Very early next morning, Matu-posaka and his mother bid farewell to their close friends. It was a sad moment as they tearfully bid goodbye to their wonderful friends who had treated them as family. Kanthi and Matu-posaka were overwhelmed by their love and affection. Finally, they turned around and parted company. They walked a long distance deep into the forest until they came to a quiet, secluded pasture at the foot of a commanding mountain. The place was indescribably beautiful. It was endowed with luxuriant groves of deodar trees (Himalayan cedar regarded as 'divine tree'). There were acres and acres of open grassland. A huge lake filled with pink lotuses embellished the scenery. The surrounding area was carpeted with beautiful, blossoming flowers of every colour. The sweet, ambrosial scent of flowers perfumed the air. Multi-coloured butterflies fluttered around gaily among the flowers. Birds chirped merrily as they darted from tree to tree. A variety of fruit trees in season stood prominently amongst the huge canopy of towering trees that engulfed the valley.

Matu-posaka could not take his eyes away from the breathtaking sight. He was completely mesmerised by the beauty of the place. Instantly, he felt that this would be the ideal habitat for him and his dear mother to spend the rest of their lives. So fully absorbed was he in admiring the charm of the new found pasture that he forgot his mother was blind and was unable to savour the enthralling beauty. Once he realised this, he felt sad that she could not feast her eyes on the beauty of the place they had stumbled upon. He turned to

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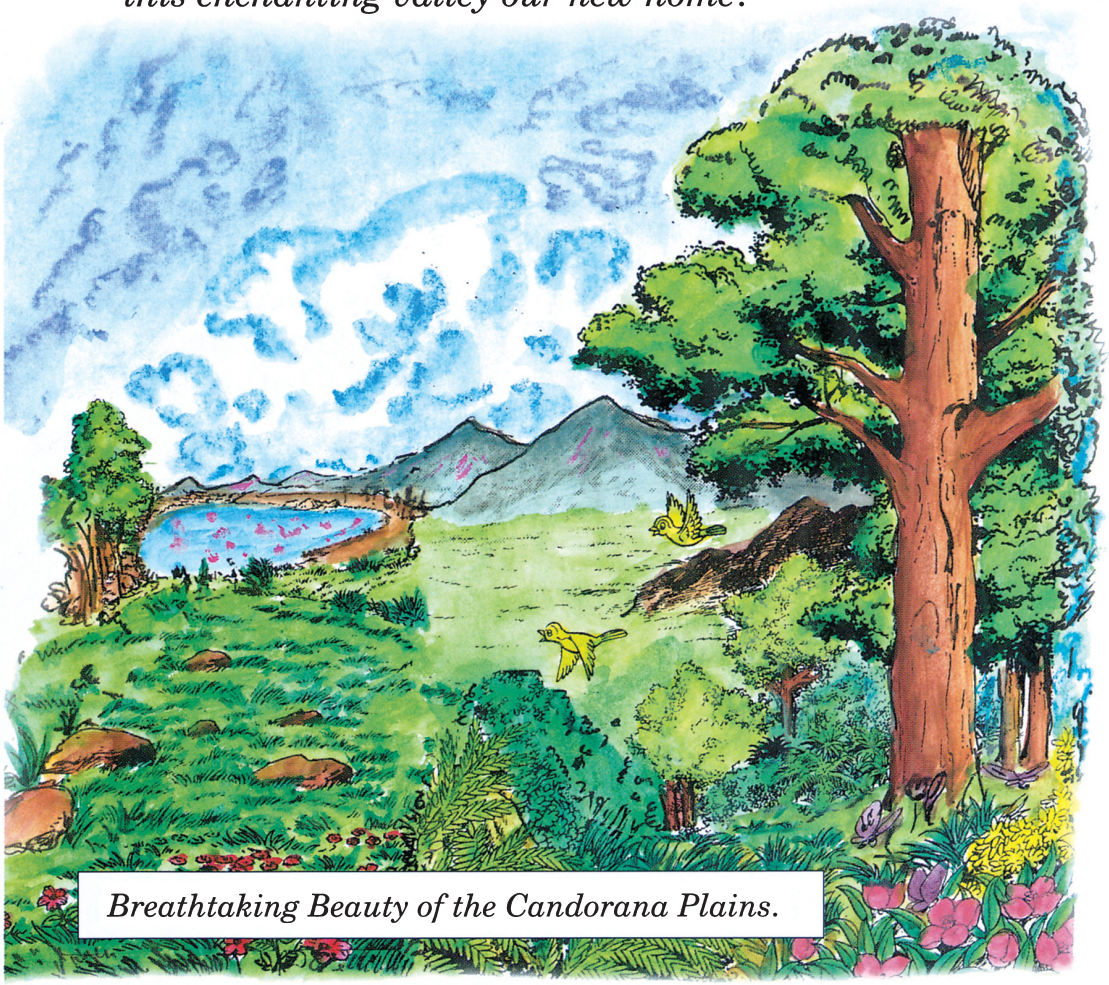
her and patiently described the place so that at least she could visualise its beauty and tranquility:

Dearest Mamma, this is a most fascinating place, we have stumbled upon. It is like paradise. It has everything we need to live a comfortable and peaceful life. There are many delicious fruit trees all around, especially mango trees. There is also a crystal clear lake nearby where we can bathe. This place is incredibly serene and peaceful. Would it please you, Mamma dearest, to make this enchanting valley our new home?



Breathtaking Beauty of the Candorana Plains.

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Kanthi replied in her characteristic motherly love:

> *My dear son, you may choose whatever place you fancy as our habitat. Your contentment is all that matters to me. That is all I am concerned about. So long as you are happy, I will be happy for you. There is nothing more pleasing for me than to know you are in good health and spirit and happy with yourself.*

Matu-posaka and Kanthi decided to make the newly discovered secluded pastures their home. Matu-posaka then led his mother to a shady grove. He asked her to rest while he gathered some fruits and tender leaves for her to eat. After a restful *siesta* (afternoon nap) to help reduce their weariness from the long track through the jungle, he took her to the lotus lake to bathe and freshen up. The water in the lake was simply refreshing. She felt so relaxed that she did not feel like getting out of the lake. Matu-posaka sprayed water on her body and washed off all the dirt and grime that had collected on her hide. After an hour or so of bathing, they decided it was time to leave.

On the way back, Matu-posaka gathered more delicious fruits and juicy branches of leaves for his mother. By now, the sun was about to set. The sky was liberally splashed with brilliant hues of red, saffron, orange and yellow. When they reached the grove of deodar trees, they were pleasantly surprised by a welcome reception. A large group of animals had gathered to greet them. They included deers, bucks, antelopes, monkeys, squirrels, birds and rabbits. Although in comparison, Matu-posaka and Kanthi were formidable in size, this did not cause them to fear the newcomers. Unlike other wild beasts and humans, elephants are herbivorous so

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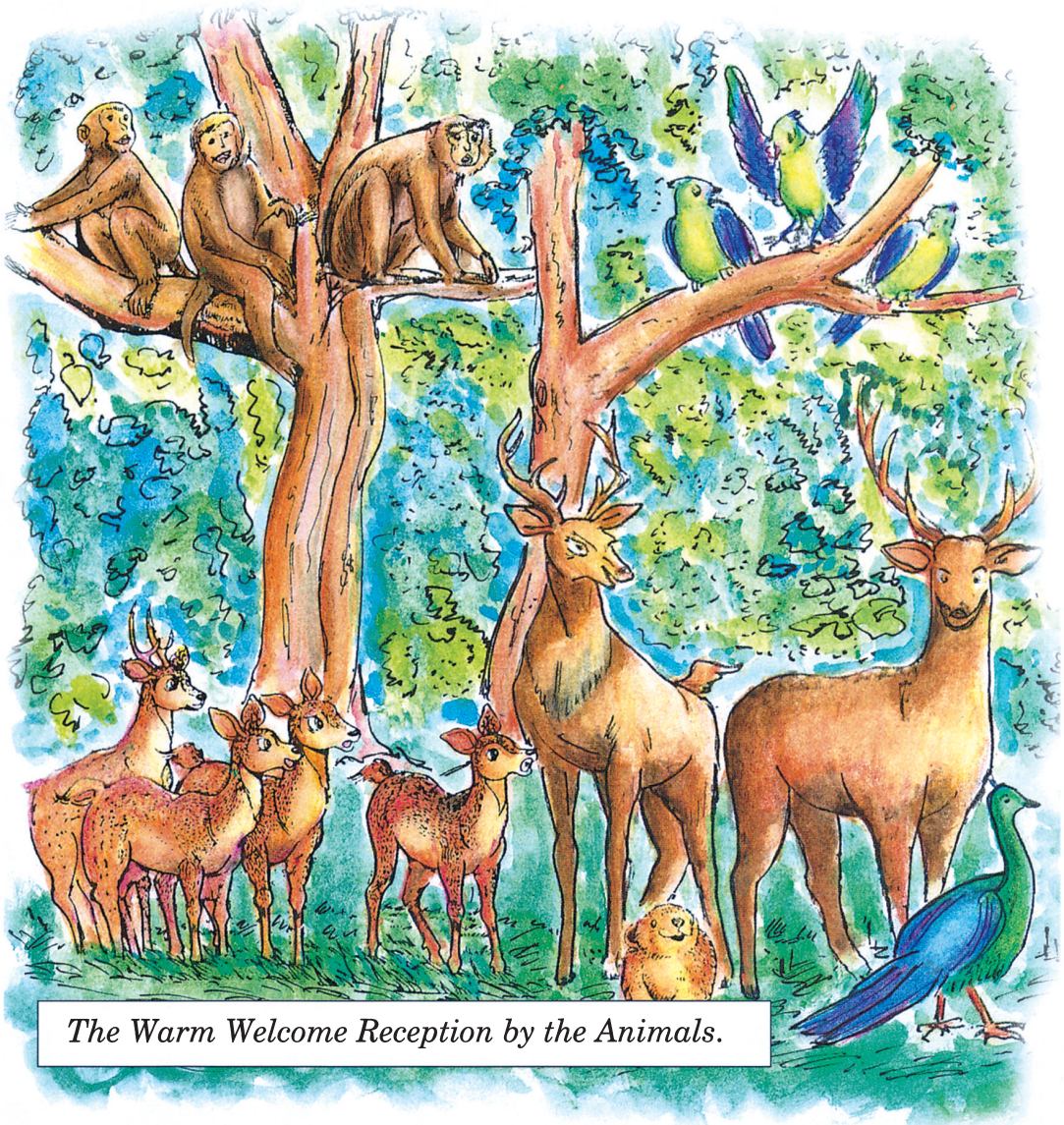
there was no question of them hurting, even much less killing other animals for food. Further, they did not feel intimidated by Matu-posaka and Kanthi for they had easily sensed their deep compassion. As they walked closer the animals gathered greeted them in a loud chorus, *"Welcome to the plains of Candorana! Please make yourselves at home. Welcome to our friendly neighbourhood."*



The Warm Welcome Reception by the Animals.

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Matu-posaka and Kanthi were deeply touched by the very warm reception they received from the friendly gathering. Thus from the very first day of their stay in Candorana, they were extended sincere friendship and goodwill by the community of animals. They spent many wonderful years in Candorana for their new habitat was not only scenic but also blessed with friendly company. They did not encounter any disturbance from any quarter and they were never alone as the animals of the forest frequently visited them and spent many pleasant times together.

Matu-posaka and Kanthi lived such a harmonious life with the rest of the animals that they were like family although they belonged to different species. Often in his pensive mood, Matu-posaka would wonder to himself:

> *Why is it that other animals cannot live in peace and harmony like one community? What a wonderful world it would be if everyone could regard and respect each other without causing hurt or injury to others in accordance with the principle of ahimsa of not hurting or killing other beings.*

Life went on pleasantly for Matu-posaka and Kanthi until one fateful afternoon, Matu-posaka sensed the presence of a strange being in the vicinity. He strained his ears to pick up the unusual sounds that came from the bushes some distant away. He heard the rustle of leaves increase in volume. He knew from the sounds that emerged that it was not a tiger or any other wild beast. So he decided to charge straight in the direction of the sound. Lo and behold, to his amazement, he came face to face with a man. He had heard so much about

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human beings from his parents since childhood. But this was the first time that he had set eyes on a real specimen.

The man was startled. He felt he was going to be trampled to death by the elephant. He went completely white as soon as he saw Matu-posaka. The colour drained from his face as if he had seen a ghost. Fear was written all over his pale face. His whole body trembled. He immediately knelt down on the ground and paid reverence to Matu-posaka.

The Startled Woodsman.

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With quivering lips, he begged:

Oh, mighty elephant, praise be your great compassion! Show mercy on this helpless one. I am a poor, innocent woodsman. Please spare my life as I have a wife and three children who are solely dependent on me. Please spare my life, I beg you, Mighty One.

Matu-posaka noted that the man was frail and weak and about to collapse at any moment. His hair was unkempt and his whole body was badly covered with cuts and scratches from the thorns and shrubs. To the woodsman's great relief, Matu-posaka asked him to relax and not be afraid as he had no intention whatsoever of hurting him. He then inquired from him the cause of his plight. The woodsman slowly regained his composure and declared in a feeble voice:

Oh, most compassionate elephant, I am a humble woodsman from Kasi. I came to collect wood and some forest products to sell in the city's market place. I have lost my way in the forest. For seven long-days, I have been trying to find the way out of this dense woods. But it looks so circuitous and I am completely lost and exhausted. Please help me find the way out of the maze of trees.

My wife and children must be worried about my safety. Since they have had no news whatsoever about my whereabouts, they might think I have been killed by some wild animals. I need to get home immediately and look after their needs. They are helpless without me. Oh please, great elephant, I beg you, help me find my way back to Kasi.

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The Woodsman Begs Matu-posaka for Help.

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The compassionate Matu-posaka thought to himself,

> *"This woodsman is really in distress. His wife and children too must be in dire straights. He desperately needs help. He can do no harm."* With these kind thoughts, he pacified the pathetic looking woodsman, *"Fear not woodsman, you have my assurance that I will lead you through the forest and help you rejoin your family soon. But first, you must have some food and rest to regain your strength. You are weak and you have a long journey ahead."*

Matu-posaka then signalled the woodsman to follow him to where his mother lay resting. He woke his mother gently and introduced the woodsman. Kanthi was alarmed that Matu-posaka had trusted a human being and brought him right to their abode. She frowned for she knew intuitively that he should not have trusted a complete stranger. Matu-posaka, however, pacified his mother and explained the grave plight of the woodsman.

The kind-hearted Matu-posaka then offered the woodsman some food. In addition, he collected some fruits and gave them to him to take home to his anxious wife and children. After a brief rest, he informed his mother that he had to take leave to lead the woodsman out of the forest. He requested the woodsman to follow him through the maze of trees and bushes. Finally, they arrived at the cart track that led to Kasi. The woodsman felt so relieved that he could now return home. He thanked Matu-posaka profusely for his kindness before journeying back to Kasi hurriedly.

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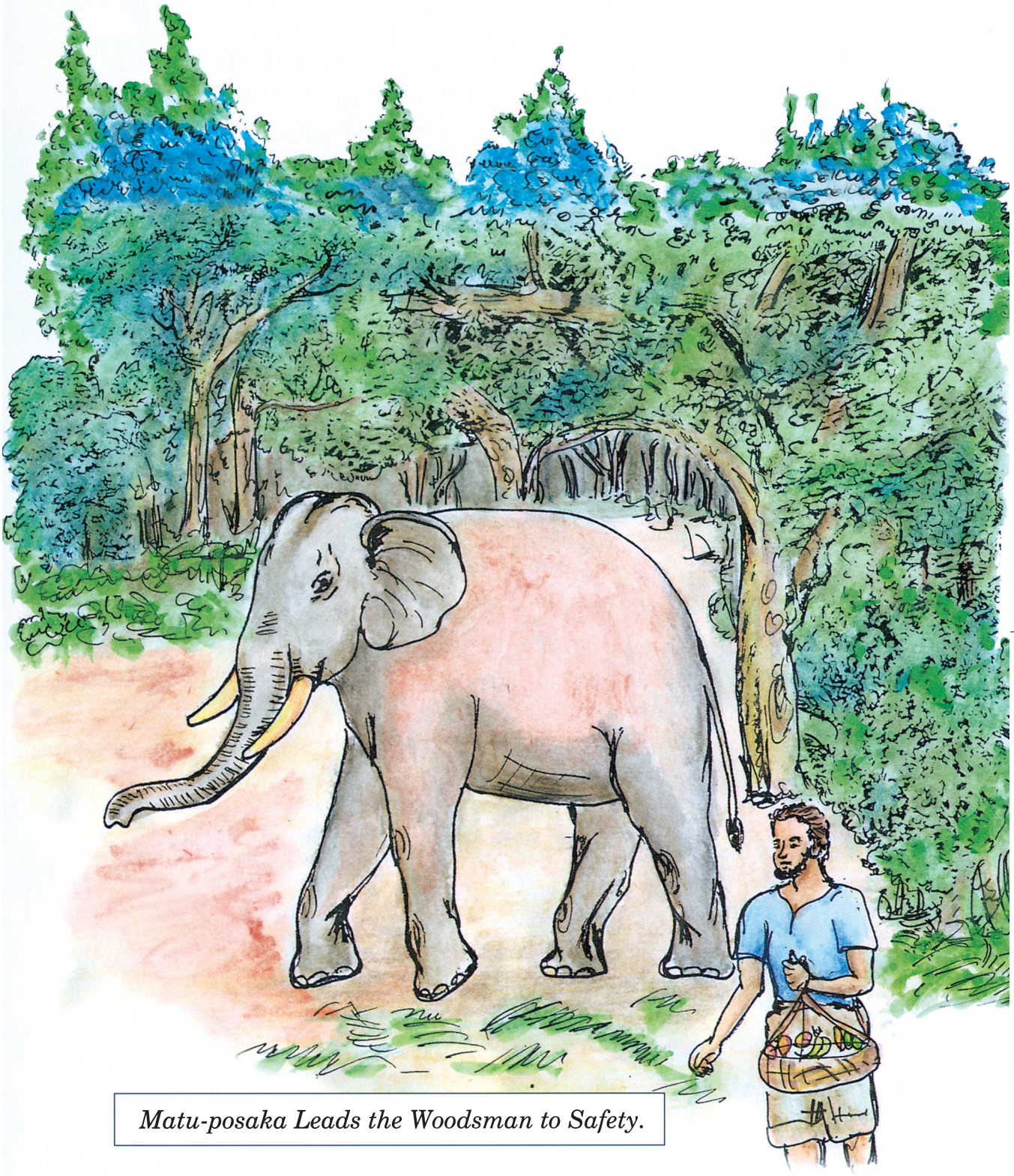

Matu-posaka Leads the Woodsman to Safety.

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At first, the woodsman's family thought that the figure resembling him in the distance was a mere illusion. But soon, as the figure walked closer towards their home, they realised that it was real. That indeed the figure was that of the woodsman. They all rushed out of the house to greet the him. The family was so delighted to see the woodsman alive. They hugged him with great joy. Tears flowed freely from their eyes. His wife and children had spent sleepless nights worrying about his whereabouts. They had all assumed he was dead. When they got into the house, the woodsman narrated how the compassionate Matu-posaka had saved him from certain death.

Meanwhile, a gloomy silence prevailed in the royal palace in Kasi. The much loved royal elephant of the kingdom had died after a short illness. King Vedeha was devastated over the death of his favourite mount. The kingdom was in need of a suitable elephant to replace him. A court messenger was dispatched to announce to the city folks, King Vedeha's proclamation to capture a special elephant for his mount. The court messenger bellowed out the King's proclamation to the people who had gathered around the city square:

> *Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! City folks, His Majesty, the King, has proclaimed that if anyone has seen an elephant fit to be the royal mount, let him inform the royal palace of its whereabouts. The subject will be handsomely rewarded for his effort with a hundred pieces of gold.*

The royal decree came to the notice of the woodsman. Straightaway, he thought about the magnificent Matu-

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Royal Messenger Reads Out the Proclaimation.

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posaka who would easily meet the criteria for the King's mount. Greed for the reward of a hundred pieces of gold consumed his mind. He thought to himself, *"This is an excellent opportunity for me to get rich. With this reward, I can live a comfortable life and abandon my back breaking livelihood as a woodsman forever."*

So great was the woodsman's craving for the King's reward that, not even for a moment, did he care it was because of Matu-posaka's compassion that he was still alive. Instead, he sped to the royal palace to report to the King about capturing Matu-posaka as the new royal elephant.

After waiting at the main gates to the royal palace for an hour or so, the woodsman finally gained an audience with King Vedeha. When he was presented at the royal court, the *Maha Bhandara* (Grand Chamberlain) requested him to state his plea. The woodsman bowed respectfully to the King and submitted :

> *Your Most Gracious Majesty, I humbly bring good news to the royal court. I have set upon a splendid elephant in the forest with my own eyes. He possesses all the signs that easily qualifies him as a royal mount. He is even fit for a Raja Chakkravati* (King of Kings). *He is truly a majestic beast and only one of its kind ever set upon by human eyes.*
>
> *Your Most Gracious Majesty, this majestic tusker is incredibly imposing and indeed eminently suited to be the royal mount and lead the kingdom's royal processions.*

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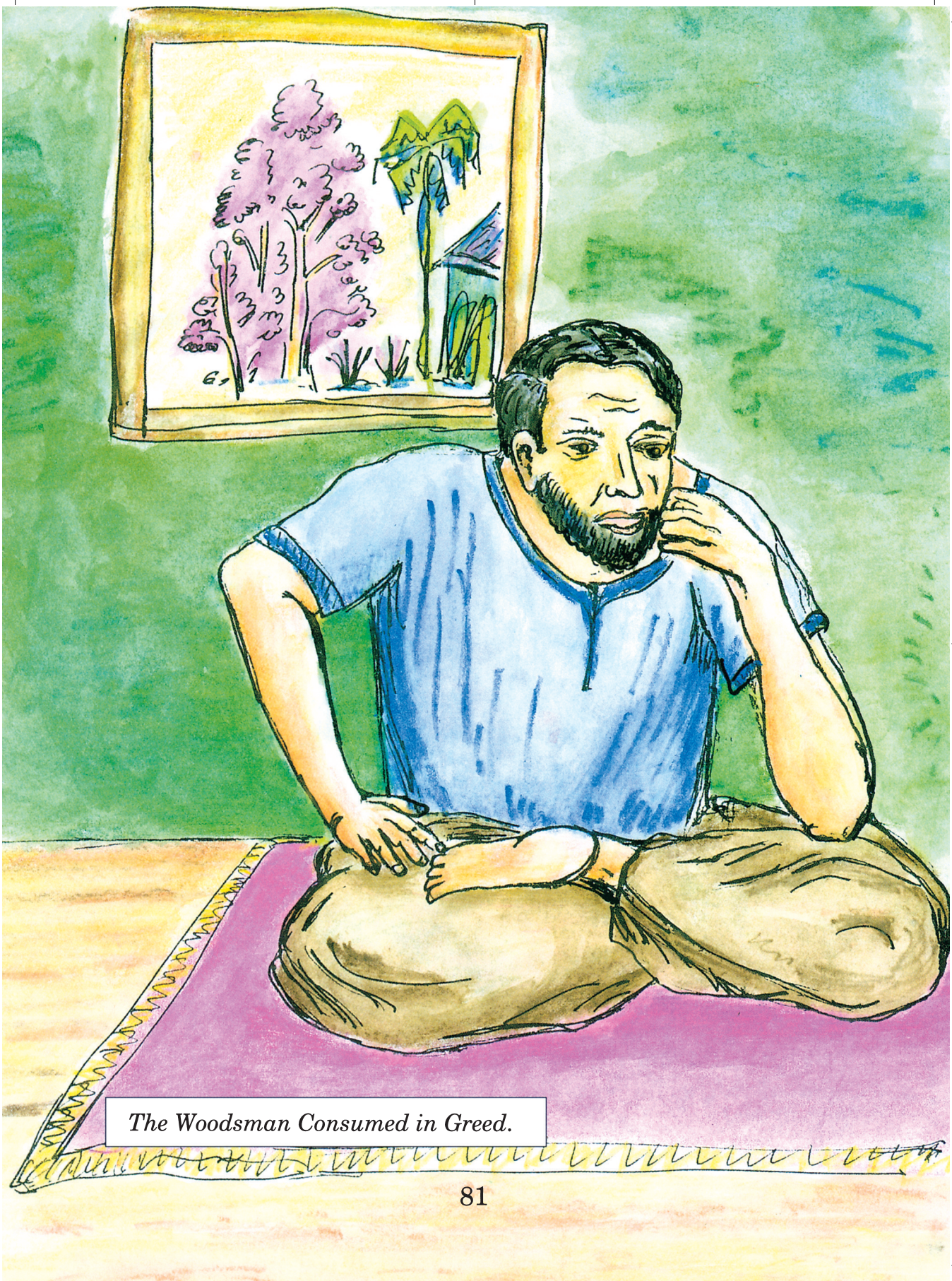

The Woodsman Consumed in Greed.

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King Vedeha was filled with excitement about the magnificence of the elephant the woodsman had just described. He eagerly sought more details from him regarding its whereabouts. The woodsman responded gleefully:

> *Your Most Gracious Majesty, this imposing elephant lives at the slopes of Mount Candorana beside a large lotus-filled lake. The habitat is cut off from the rest of the forest. I know the way to his secluded abode and I can help locate this majestic creature.*

King Vedeha commanded a team of mahouts and elephants to be assembled at once to capture the elephant. He ordered the woodsman to guide the way for the royal hunt, declaring, *"If the beast is as magnificent as you claim woodsman, I will duly reward you with a hundred pieces of gold and more."*

The woodsman was extremely thrilled to hear the King assure him an even greater reward. He could not wait to see the capture of Matu-posaka. The whole night through, he dreamt of the King's handsome reward.

The next morning, the Keeper of the Royal Elephant Stable assembled a team of mahouts, hunters and elephants. The hunters were well-armed with spears. They were also equipped with iron chains and ropes that were as thick as an adult's wrist. The woodsman guided the royal team through the dense forest.

After trekking for several hours, they eventually reached the edge of the secluded valley. As they approached the Mount Candorana, Matu-posaka sensed danger lurking ahead. He

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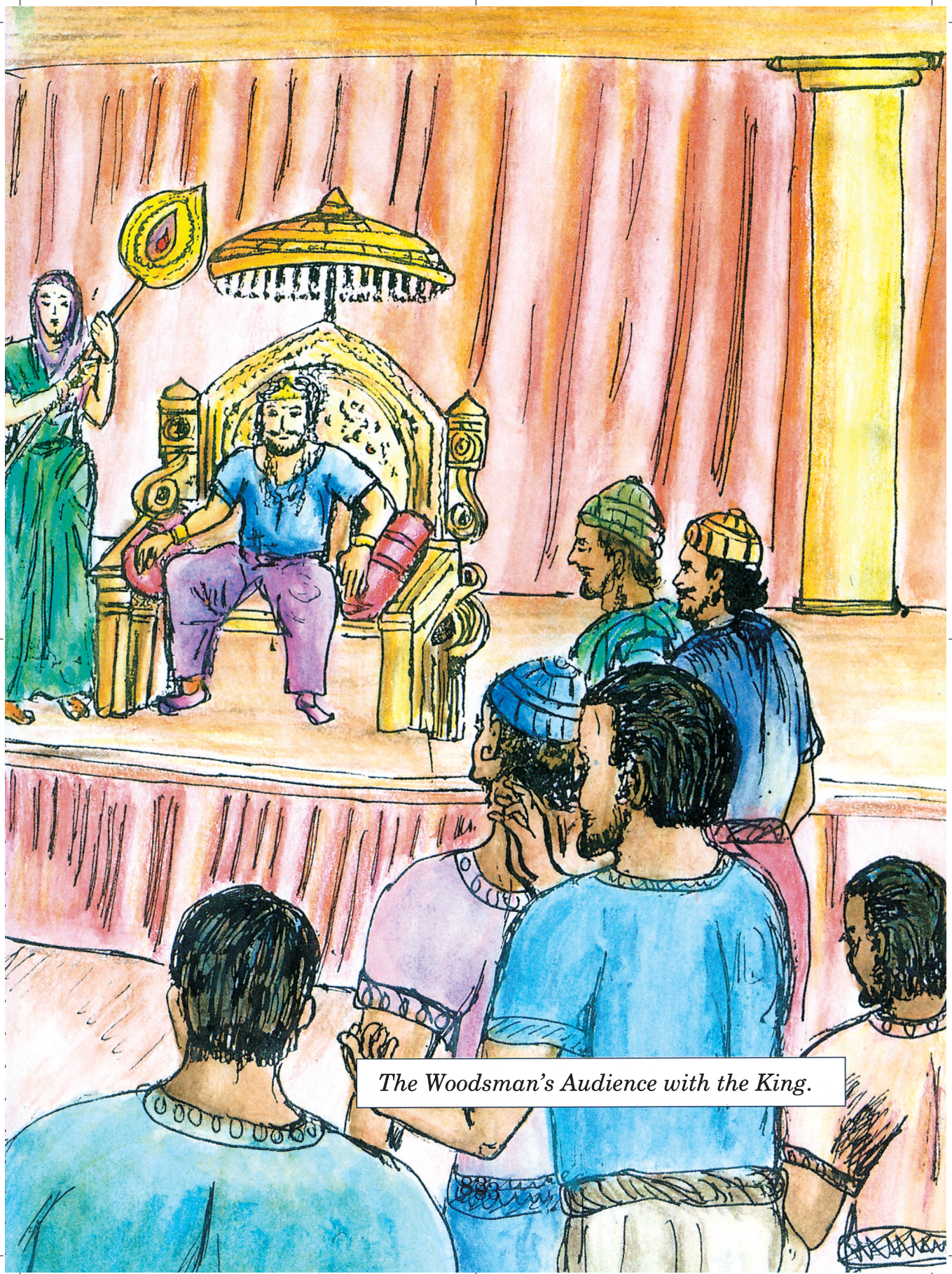

The Woodsman's Audience with the King.

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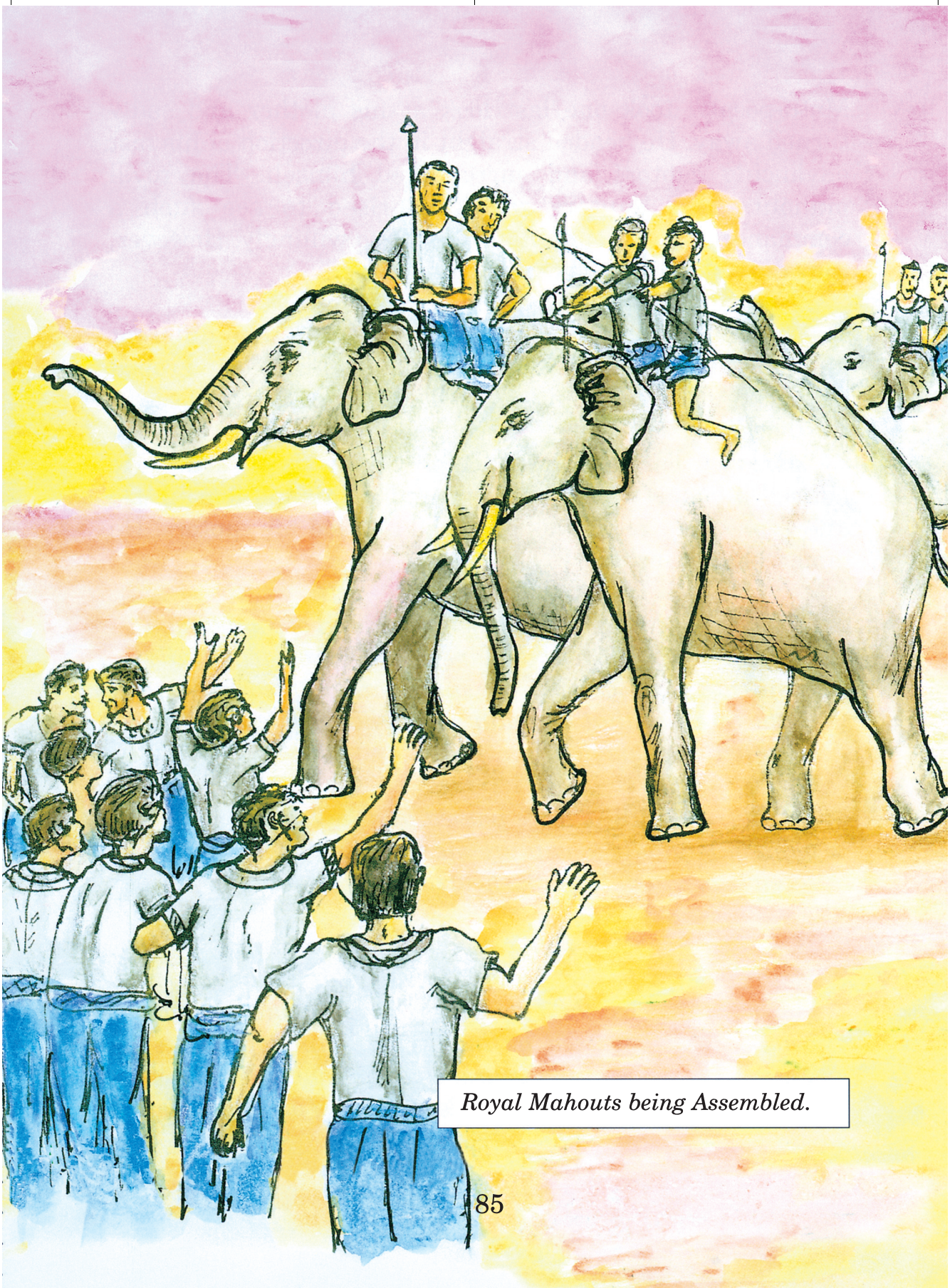
noticed a flock of birds suddenly taking flight. They squawked loudly to alert him about the imminent danger. The monkeys scampered to warn him about the steadily advancing team of captors.

However, Matu-posaka thought it best not to alert his mother about the advancing danger. He knew that this would upset and worry her terribly. Instead, he led her quietly to a canopy of trees situated close to the lotus lake and asked her to take her usual afternoon nap.

As the royal team advanced nearer, Matu-posaka reasoned that it would be pointless to try and fend them off. His animal friends warned him that his would be captors were well equipped and there were far too many of them to contend. Besides, his mother too would be captured if he were to put up a resistance.

He calculated that if he offered himself to them well before they reached their secluded abode, he would be able to prevent his mother from also being captured. With these thoughts in mind, he turned to his mother and said with a heavy heart:

> *Dearest Mamma, I am going to search for some fruits for you. Please don't worry if I am late. I will somehow or other return and take care of you, Mamma dearest. In the meantime try and have a restful siesta under this cool, shady grove. May the Devas (celestial beings or gods) bless and protect you always, dearest Mamma.*



Royal Mahouts being Assembled.

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Matu-posaka took one last look at his mother and sadly turned away. He headed straight in the direction of his fast advancing captors and surrendered himself. The royal mahouts and hunters were surprised to see such a commanding bull elephant surrender so willingly. However, they did not want to take any chances.

The hunters pinned their spears on him from different angles while the mahouts quickly chained his legs and roped his neck. As he was being chained and roped he could see in the background, hiding himself behind a large tree, the woodsman whom he had helped only a few days earlier. He noticed that the woodsman appeared guilty and fearful. He knew for sure that it was him who had led his captors. He lamented to himself:

How ungrateful can human beings be? Out of compassion I had helped the woodsman who was so frightfully desperate. I saved him from sure death and led him out of the forest so that he could return home safely and be reunited with his family.

Hardly, seven days have passed and he has directed a team of mahouts to capture me. This is the gratitude I receive in return from the heartless woodsman.

How can one be so ungrateful? He knows my blind mother is totally dependent on me. But without any qualms he has led these mahouts to capture me. Human beings are recognised as intelligent, superior beings. They claim to be humane and compassionate. Yet, how is it that they do not care for the feelings of other beings?

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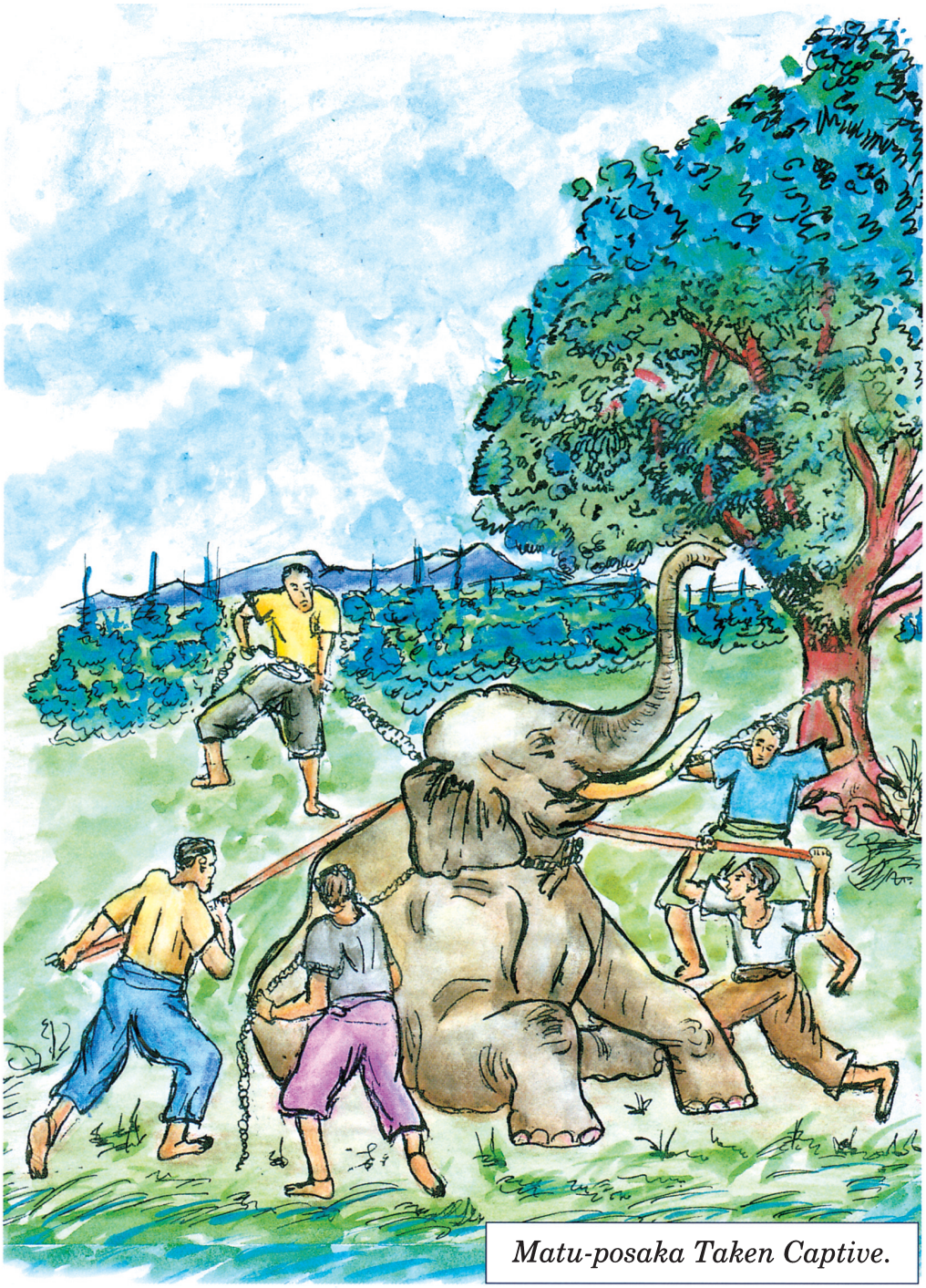

Matu-posaka Taken Captive.

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As Matu-posaka reflected on the gross inhumanity of the woodsman, he recalled his father's advice. On several occasions, he had cautioned him about human beings being the deadliest enemies of elephants and other animals in the forest. He had repeatedly told him to be very wary of humans because their greed knew no bounds. It also dawned on him then as to why his mother first frowned when she was told of the presence of the woodsman in their secluded habitat. Now, however, it was too late to regret his misplaced compassion for the woodsman. He had no choice but to face the future as mindfully as possible.

Being a captive was indeed a traumatic experience for Matu-posaka. He had lived a free life and was able to roam the forest undisturbed ever since he was an infant. But now, his legs were heavily chained and his body bound by thick ropes. The heavy iron chains strapped around his feet made walking uncomfortable. He wondered what would become of him; whether he would be killed for his tusks and hide as his father had warned him. Also, while his captors led him to Kasi, he pondered with deep anguish and pain in his heart about what would become of his destitute, blind mother.

Just before the sun was about to set, the royal team of captors entered the city gates. King Vedeha was informed in advance by the royal outrider about the capture of the royal mount. The city folks had all gathered along the main street to catch a glimpse of the newly captured royal elephant. As Matu-posaka trudged slowly and wearily through the city, the crowd watched in awe at his imposing size and majestic bearing. He was truly a sight to behold as none of them had ever seen such a magnificent elephant.

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Matu-posaka Being Led to Kasi.

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The people of Kasi cheered jubilantly as Matu-posaka pasted by. They shouted boisterously, *"Long live the Royal Mount! Hail to the Royal Elephant! Let glory shine upon the Kingdom of Kasi. Long live King Vedeha!"*

It was only then that Matu-posaka realised the reason for his capture. He now knew that he would not be killed or harmed. Even so, he grieved over his separation from his poor blind mother.

King Vedeha was extremely delighted when he set his eyes on Matu-posaka. He was completely captivated by his uniqueness and thought to himself, *"This magnificent elephant will be a splendid mount. Indeed, he possesses all the necessary bearings of a distinguished royal elephant."* The King was so charmed by Matu-posaka that he declared the ceremony to anoint him as the royal elephant be held without procrastination, the next day.

The following morning, the *Purohita Brahmana* (Royal Chaplain) organised a major *puja* (religious ceremony) to invoke the blessings of the *devas* for the long life and well-being of Matu-posaka. The city of Kasi wore a gay, festive look. Banners, festoons, buntings and flags fluttered along the main streets of the city centre. Matu-posaka was dressed up in regal attire. He adorned the insignia of the royal elephant. Resplendantly caparisoned over his body was a beautiful silk cloth, elaborately embroidered with gold thread, glittering sequins and glass beads of every imaginable colour.

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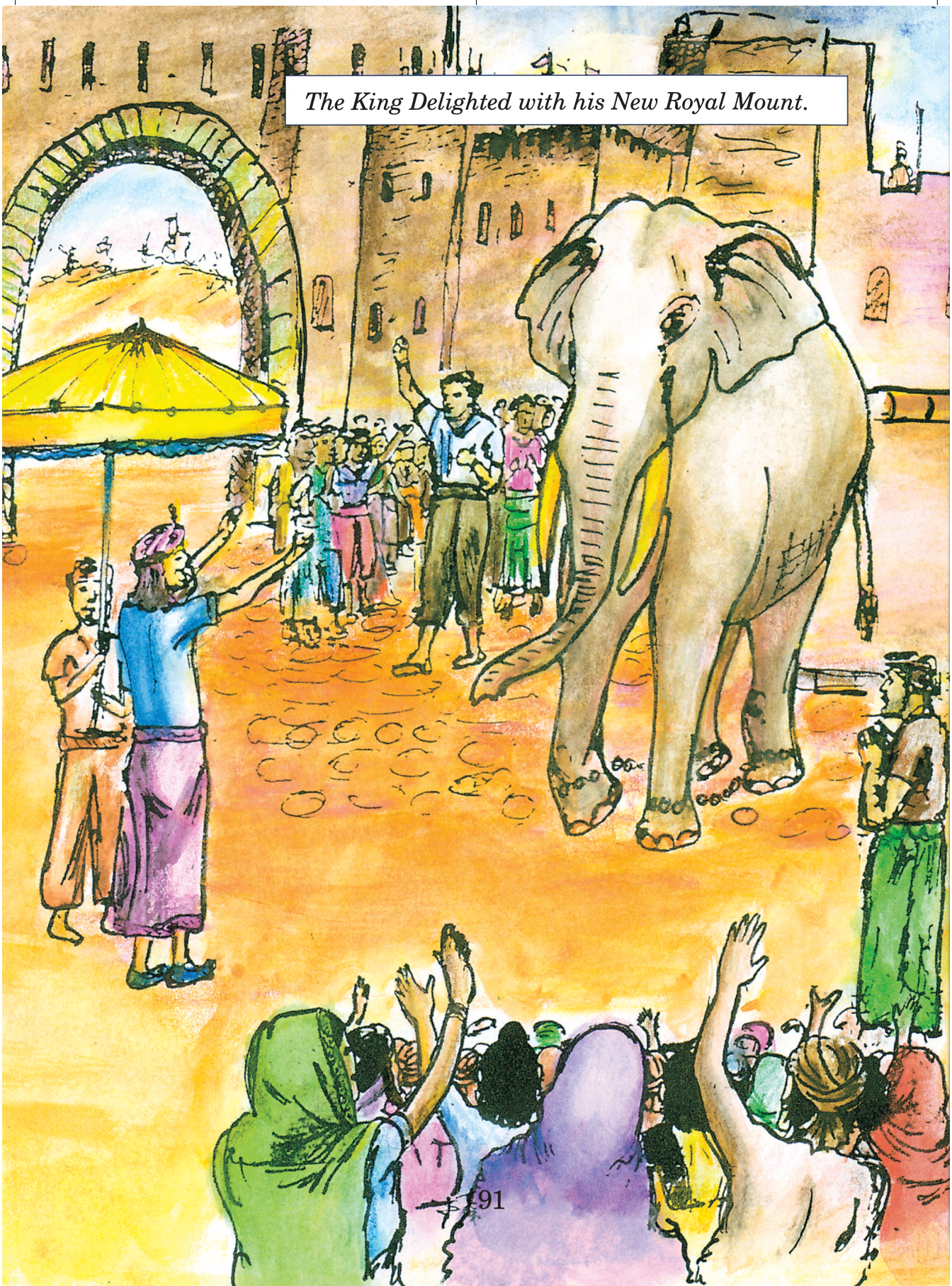

The King Delighted with his New Royal Mount.

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The people of Kasi cheered vigorously as he passed by. Matu-posaka, however, was not in any way moved by the special attention showered upon him. His mind was completely absorbed with thoughts of his blind mother. After parading through the city's main thoroughfare, he was taken to the royal courtyard for the King to ceremonially garland him as the royal elephant. He was then led to the royal elephant stable in a stately procession.

King Vedeha ordered the Keeper of the Royal Stable to serve Matu-posaka with the finest food available in the kingdom and to sprinkle his body with sweet perfumes. However, Matu-posaka did not respond to any of the royal rituals and acts of adulation customarily showered upon a royal elephant. He refused to partake the delicious food served. He refused to trumpet the sound of merriment that befitted such major festivities.

Instead, Matu-posaka looked forlorn and was totally disinterested in the many special treatments accorded to him as he remained engulfed with concern for his mother's fate. He was unable to sleep for his mind was filled with worries over her well-being. All day long, his heart was enveloped with sad thoughts and feelings for his mother. He grew thinner and weaker each day.

King Vedeha summoned the royal veterinarians to examine Matu-posaka and establish what exactly ailed him. All of them pronounced that there was nothing physiologically wrong with him. They concurred that for some reason or other the elephant was emotionally disturbed.they concluded that he seemed to be stricken by a deep feeling of sadness.

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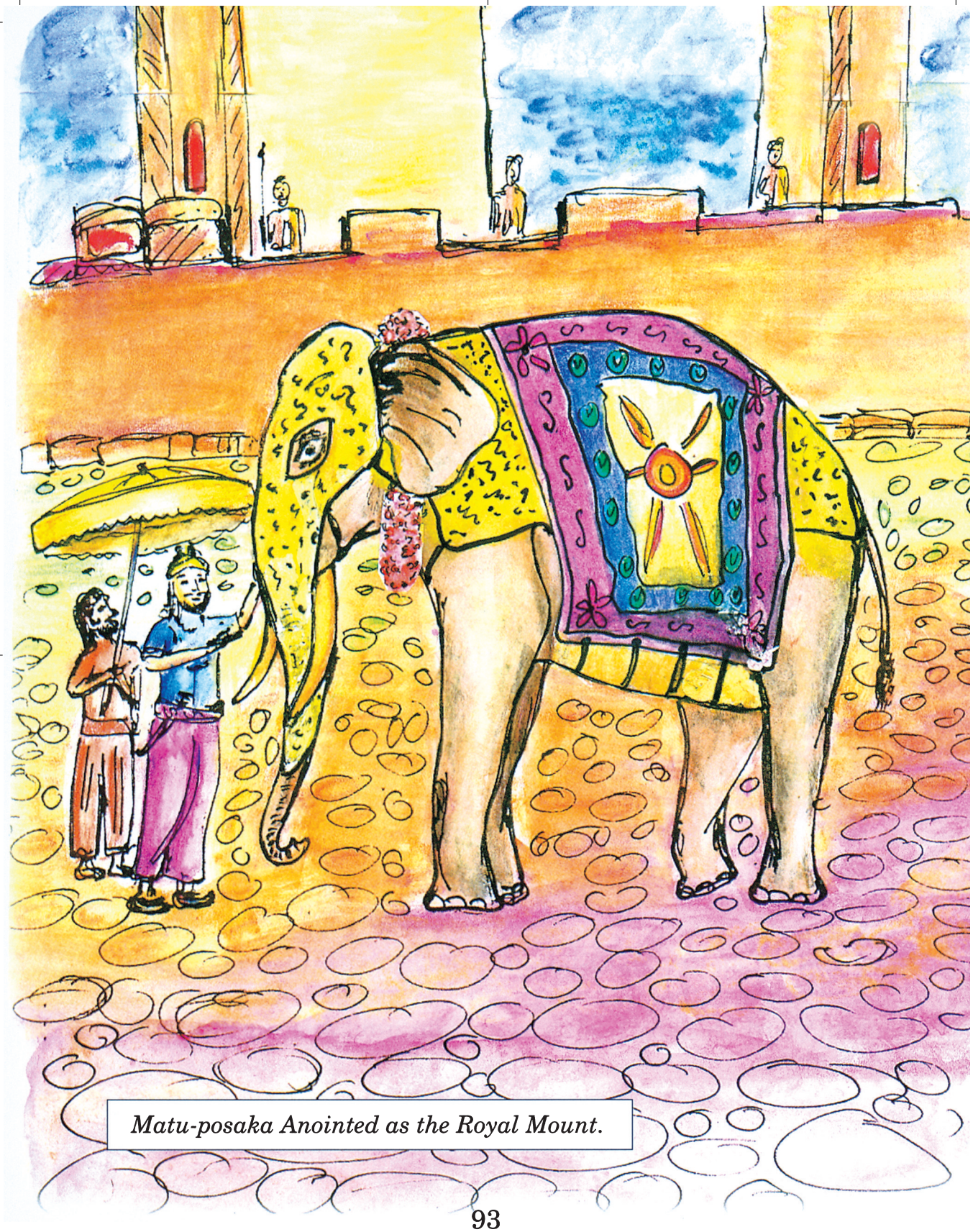

Matu-posaka Anointed as the Royal Mount.

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But none of them were able to fathom the exact cause for his unhappiness.

As each day passed, Matu-posaka grew increasingly worried over his mother's fate. He feared that she was starving since the food he had gathered for her would have finished. He thought to himself in deep agony:

> *I am sure my dear helpless mother must be deeply worried about my long absence. She must now be starving. I can no longer attend to her while I remain in Kasi. Cannot this great king who is renowned as a virtuous and noble ruler consider my mother's precarious state and free me so that I could return home and look after her?*

King Vedeha became greatly concerned over Matu-posaka's rapidly deteriorating health. He thought that his low spirits could possibly be due to the fact that he was unaccustomed to staying in an enclosed stable having been so used to living in the wild. So he ordered the Keeper of the Royal Stable to allow him to be in the open courtyard of the palace hoping that his health would improve with the change of environment.

That night, King Vedeha was unable to sleep the whole night. He was restless and he tossed and turned in bed worrying about Matu-posaka's health. He was anxious to find out whether his suggestion to leave him in the open courtyard had any positive effect on him. Just as dawn was breaking, he leapt out of bed and rushed to the open courtyard.

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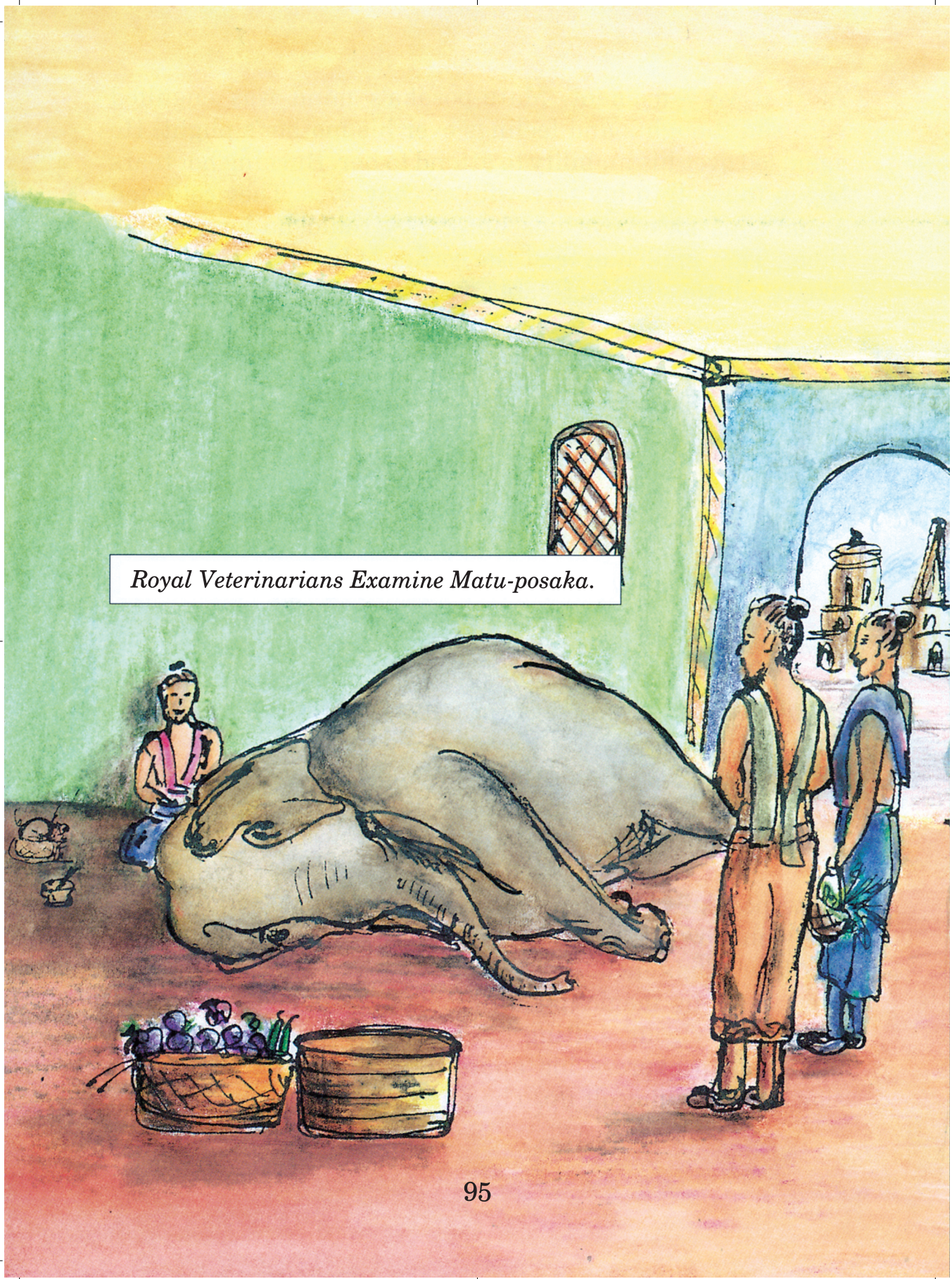

Royal Veterinarians Examine Matu-posaka.

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At that very moment, Matu-posaka's mind was engulfed with sad thoughts and feelings over his mother's plight. He agonised over his inability to attend to her. Burning hot tears began to swell in his sorrowful, droopy eyes. They collected around his lower eye lids until they could no longer hold them. They spilled over at the corner of his eyes and flowed like two little silvery streams on each side of his sad face.

King Vedeha noticed the streams of tears flowing down Matu-posaka's face. He was deeply moved by his grief. He walked up to him, gently stroked his head and asked him kindly:

> *What is troubling you, dear elephant? Why do you refuse to eat all these special foods served to you? Why are you so unhappy despite the royal treatment and all the special attention I have accorded you? Why are you not enamored with the august status of being the royal elephant of my kingdom? Is there anything wrong that I can set right? It pains me to see you unwell and crying.*
>
> *Do let me know the reason for your sadness. I will do everything possible in my power to remedy it immediately.*

Matu-posaka recognised King Vedeha's sincerity. He felt confident that his prayers were at last going to be answered. His face brightened. There was a delightful sparkle in his eyes. As if by magic, his whole being was electrified with new-found vigour. Lifting his head slowly, he knelt before the King to express his appreciation for his *Karuna* and slowly raised himself up. Then he gathered all the strength

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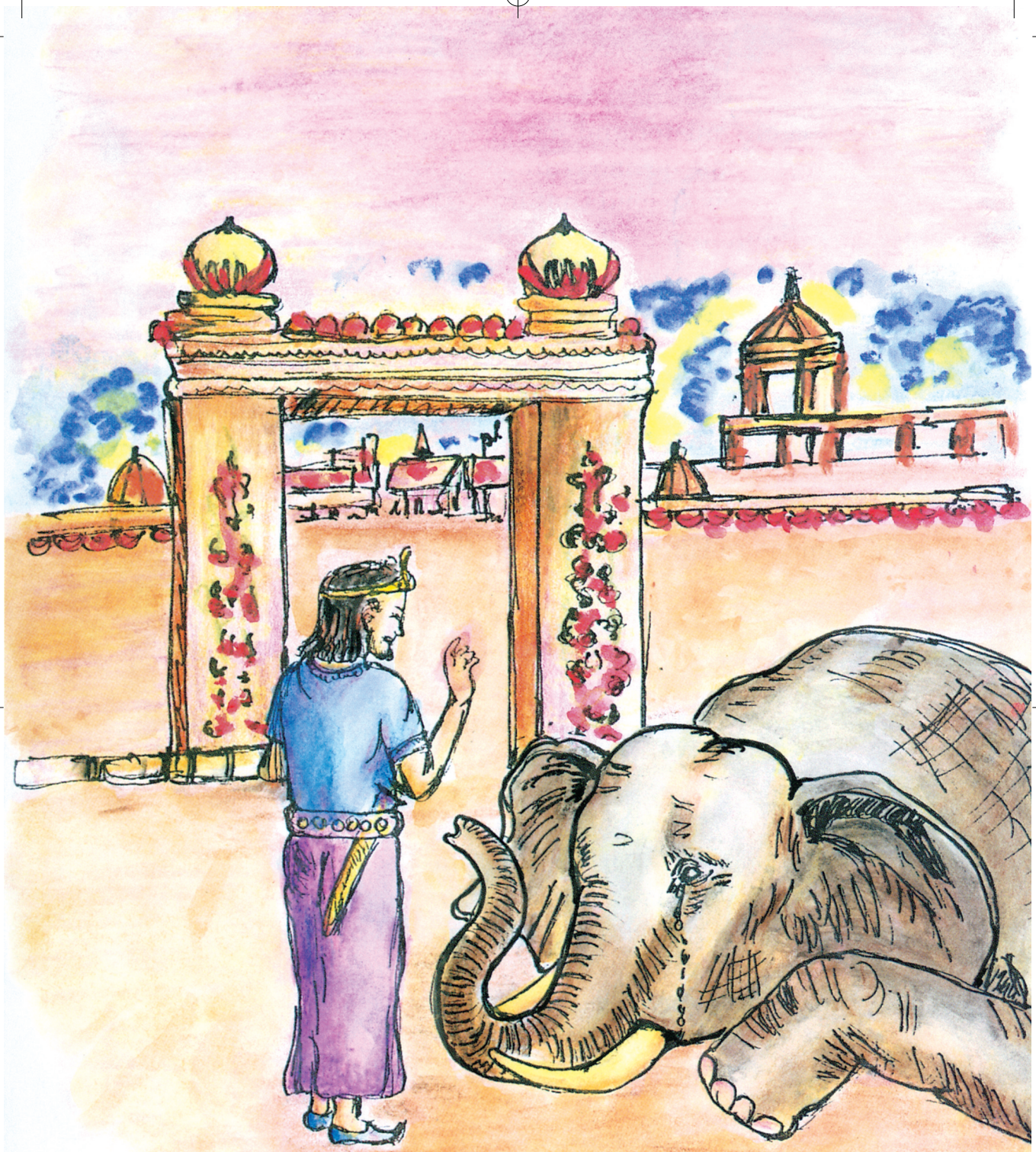

The King Notices Matu-posaka Crying.

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his body could muster and sounded a loud trumpet. This was the very first time he had trumpeted since he set foot in Kasi. His trumpet was so loud that it blasted through the city and shook the buildings as if it had been struck by a tremor.

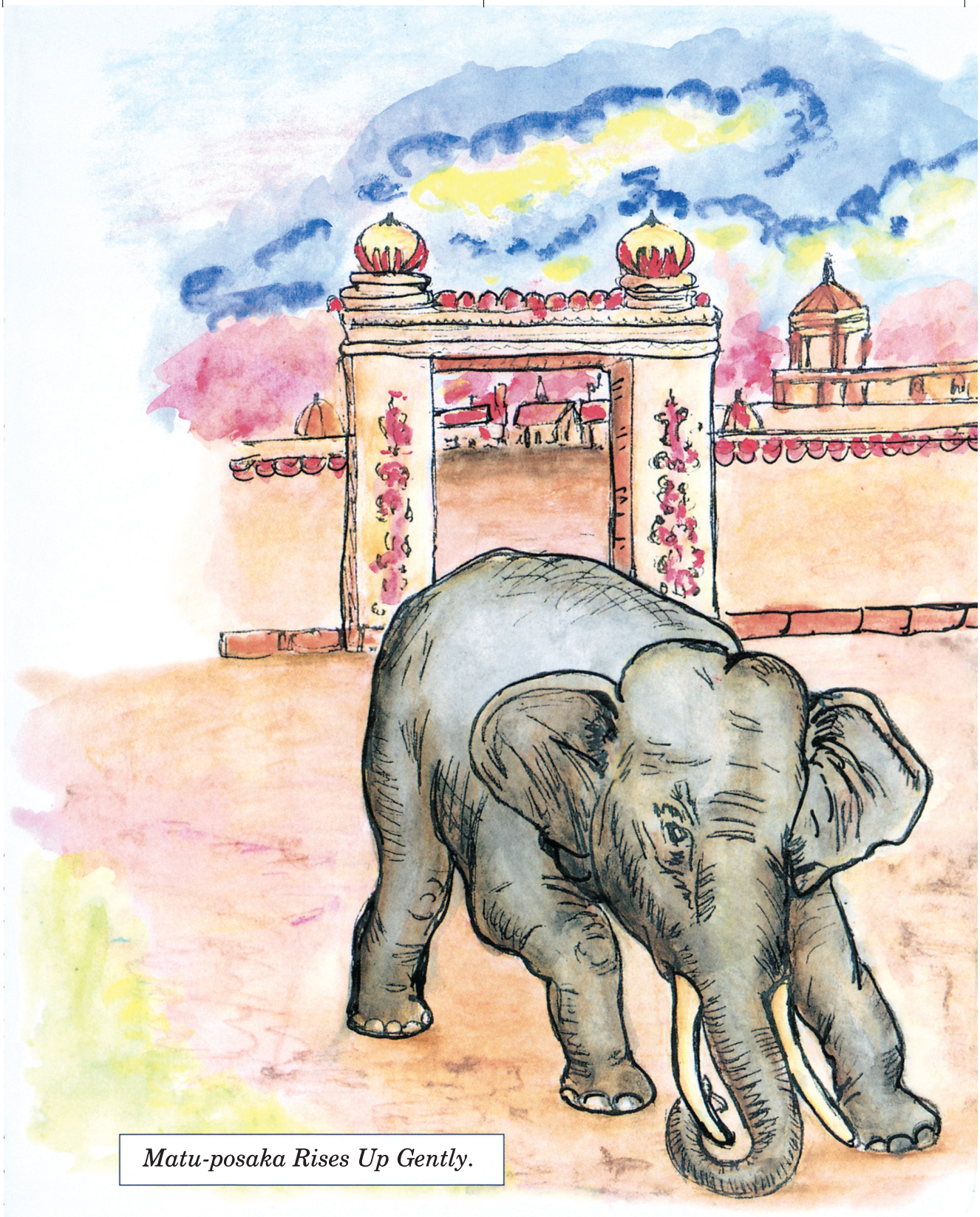
The city folks who were still asleep jumped out of bed and rushed out of their houses. They feared that an earthquake had hit the city. The King too was startled. For a minute he thought that his royal mount had gone berserk and was about to attack him. His fears, however, were soon allayed.

Matu-posaka turned his head and once again respectfully paid homage to King Vedeha. He then pleaded:

Oh, great and virtuous king, you ask me why I am unhappy? How can I eat or sleep when my mother who is aged and blind is all alone in the forest. I have been looking after her ever since she became blind. It pains me that she is starving. What use is all this special food to me?

Since my mother went blind, I have never taken even a single morsel of food before feeding her first. Even if I were to die of starvation, I will not eat until I have fed my dear mother. That is why I was nicknamed 'Matu-posaka' by my herd. This is also the very reason I was compelled to renounce my position as leader of the herd and live separately with my blind mother.

Your majesty, what use are sweet-scented, beautiful garlands decked on me? What use are these royal decorations and the high position and recognition



Matu-posaka Rises Up Gently.

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extended to me? None of these can bring me joy when I am unable to fulfil my filial duty and attend to my helpless blind mother. My thoughts are forever about her well-being and safety.

Your majesty, you are widely respected and honoured throughout the kingdom for your virtues and Karuna. I ask of nothing from Your Majesty and your subjects except to allow me to be with my dear mother. I beg Your Majesty to please free me so that I can continue to fulfil my filial duty and look after my helpless mother.

The virtuous and benevolent King Vedeha was deeply touched by Matu-posaka's fervent commitment towards fulfilling his filial duty. He exclaimed delightfully:

What a virtuous creature we have before us! This is indeed no ordinary elephant! He is truly a noble being! If only humans were half as virtuous as him, this world would be a much happier and glorious place to live in.

King Vedeha at once summoned the Keeper of the Royal Stable and ordered him to free Matu-posaka. He declared with gratification in his heart:

This elephant is indeed a most admirable being who deserves the highest respect and admiration of the people of Kasi. He is truly a paragon of filial piety. Everyone in the kingdom should emulate his fine upbringing. Even though an elephant, he places his filial duty towards his mother higher than personal glory, status and comfort.

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The King Moved by Matu-posaka's Filial Piety.

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Keeper of the Royal Stable summon at once the royal mahouts and instruct them to lead him to the Himalayan foothills where his blind mother pines for his urgent return. Let the name 'Matu-posaka' be immortalised as a paragon of filial piety for future generations to emulate!

Upon hearing the monarch's compassionate pronouncement, Matu-posaka's heart was filled with joy. He was thrilled to the core of his being with the real prospect of being reunited with his mother. His face lit up, signalling a new-found zest to live. Happiness was distinctly evident all over his beaming face. For the first time after several days since his capture, did he speak and show good cheer. He trumpeted merrily over the very thought of being with his mother once again.

The Keeper of the Royal Stable assembled a retinue of mahouts and elephants to escort Matu-posaka back to his mother. The curious city folks who had by this time gathered at the royal courtyard could not help feeling happy for him. They loaded the elephants with a variety of delicious fruits to be offered to his mother. The huge baskets resting on the elephants' backs brimmed with all kinds of fruits relished by elephants such as wood apples, bananas and mangoes. Juicy stems of sugarcane and a variety of palm leaves were also loaded.

The city folks cheered after Matu-posaka as he left for the Himalayan foothills. By mid-day, Matu-posaka and the royal retinue reached the forest. They advanced steadily towards Mount Candorana where Kanthi lay frail and helpless at the edge of the lake waiting anxiously for Matu-posaka's return.

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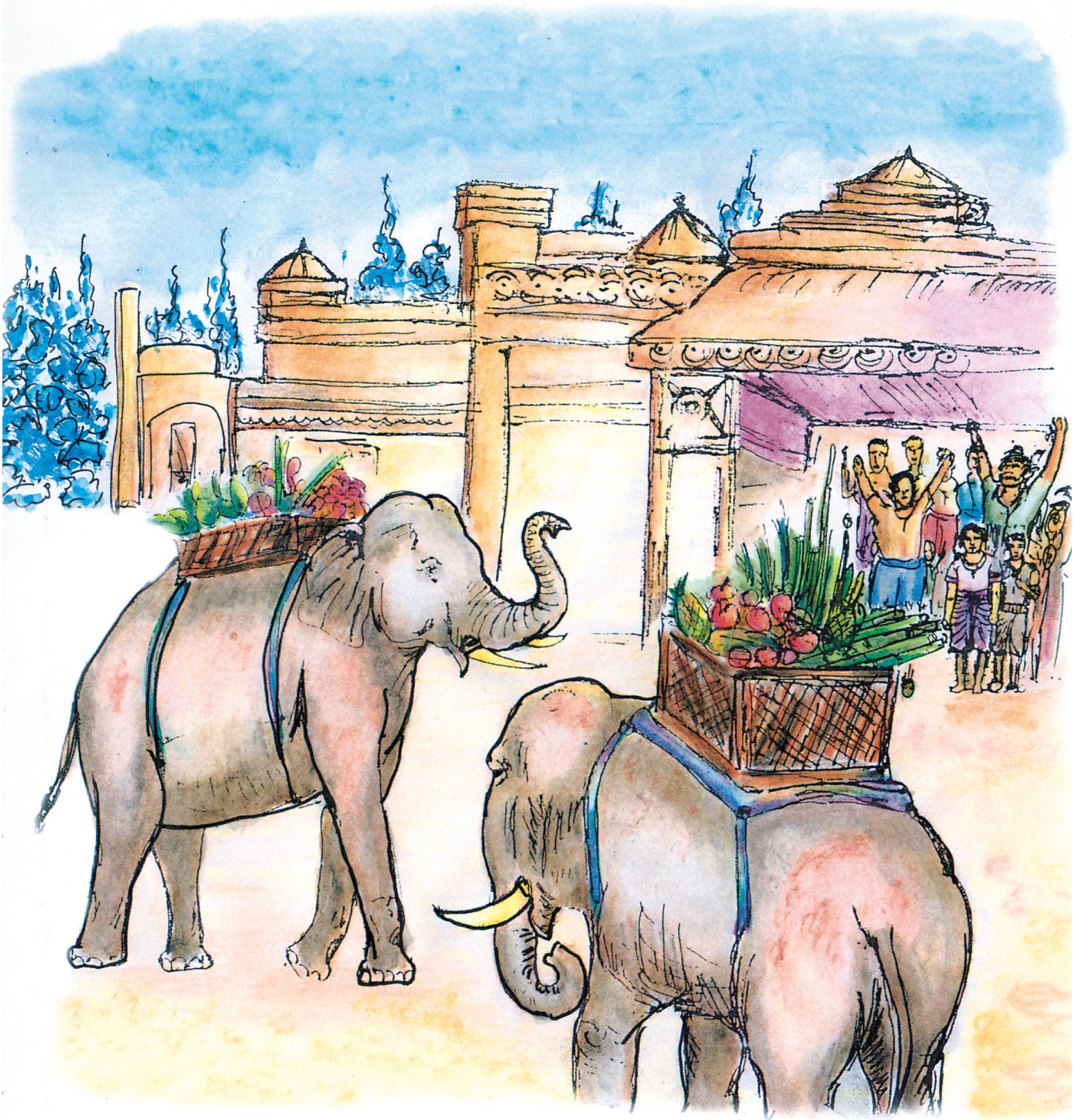

Royal Elephants Loaded with Food Baskets.

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She had pined for him and had grown weaker and weaker with each passing day. She had managed to stay alive with the help of the kind animal friends who had stood besides her and looked after her like they would do their own mother. They took turns to keep a close vigil over her and attended to her in every possible way they could. In the mornings some of them gathered food for her while others fed her and provided her lots of water to drink from the nearby lake.

When Matu-posaka arrived close to the plains of Candorana, he could no longer hold back his excitement. His heavy tread accelerated to a fast trot. Then suddenly, he broke away from the royal team and sprinted towards his dear mother. He trumpeted merrily so that she could hear him from a afar.

As soon as Kanthi heard Matu-posaka's loud trumpets, her confidence was instantly rekindled. She sprung up to her feet with a sudden burst of happiness. She was so relieved to learn that her son had finally returned. She trumpetted with joy in response to his loud calls.

When mother and son finally met, they posed a truly moving sight. Kanthi smothered Matu-posaka with her deep love and affection. This time around, Matu-posaka shed tears of happiness which flowed freely on both sides of his cheerful face. The chance to be together with his mother gave him immense joy. The royal attendants were moved to see how overjoyed the once forlorn Matu-posaka had become the moment he was reunited with his mother. After spending sometime chatting with Kanthi and the other animals they, departed for Kasi.

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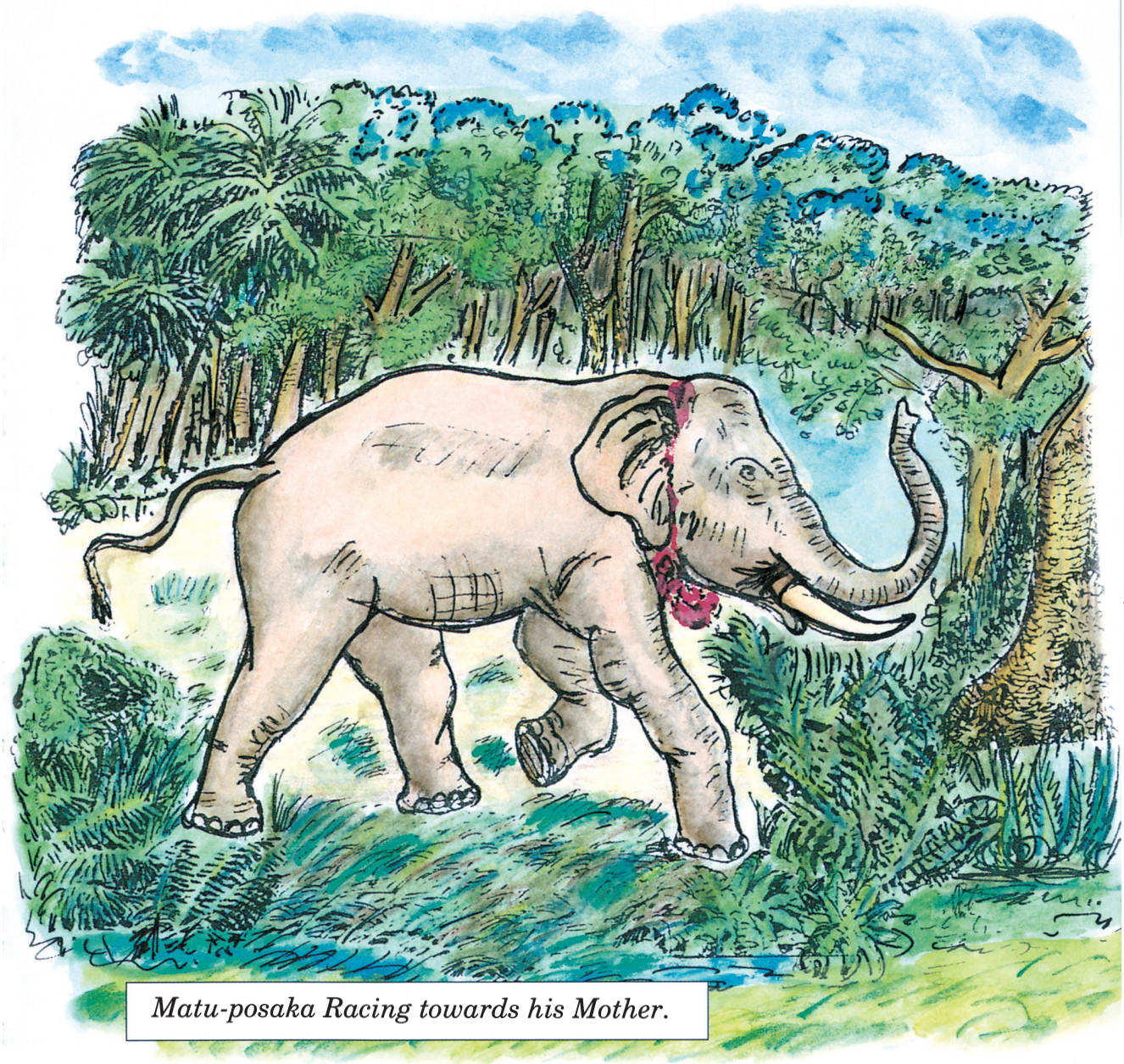

Matu-posaka Racing towards his Mother.

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Matu-posaka noticed that his mother's body had been mired with layers of earth for she had not had a bath since his departure several days ago. He broke off some branches of leaves from a nearby tree and used them to dust her body. He then led her to the lotus lake and joyfully bathed her with ivy. He was so happy to be able to nurse his mother once again that he wept like a little calf.

Words could not express his joy in tending to his mother. As he bathed her tenderly, he recounted what had happened since his capture as the royal mount of King Vedeha; how he was offered the best attention and privileges in Kasi; and finally, how he was freed by the compassionate King.

Kanthi was moved by the righteousness and benevolence of King Vedeha. With profound gratitude in her heart, she sang in praise of the King which is remembered to this day:

Long live the compassionate King Vedeha of Kasi.
Long may he bring his realm prosperity.
Who freed my son who hath showed so great respect to me!
May he rejoice just as I rejoice to be with my noble son.

Kanthi then turned to Matu-posaka and said with deep gratitude in her heart:

My dear son, I pray that all mothers may give birth to noble off-spring like you. People all over the world will delight in the greatness of your compassion and nobleness. The world would become a heavenly place as it fills with the virtues of the likes of you, my noble son. You are indeed a Bodhisatta! May you attain Nibbana!

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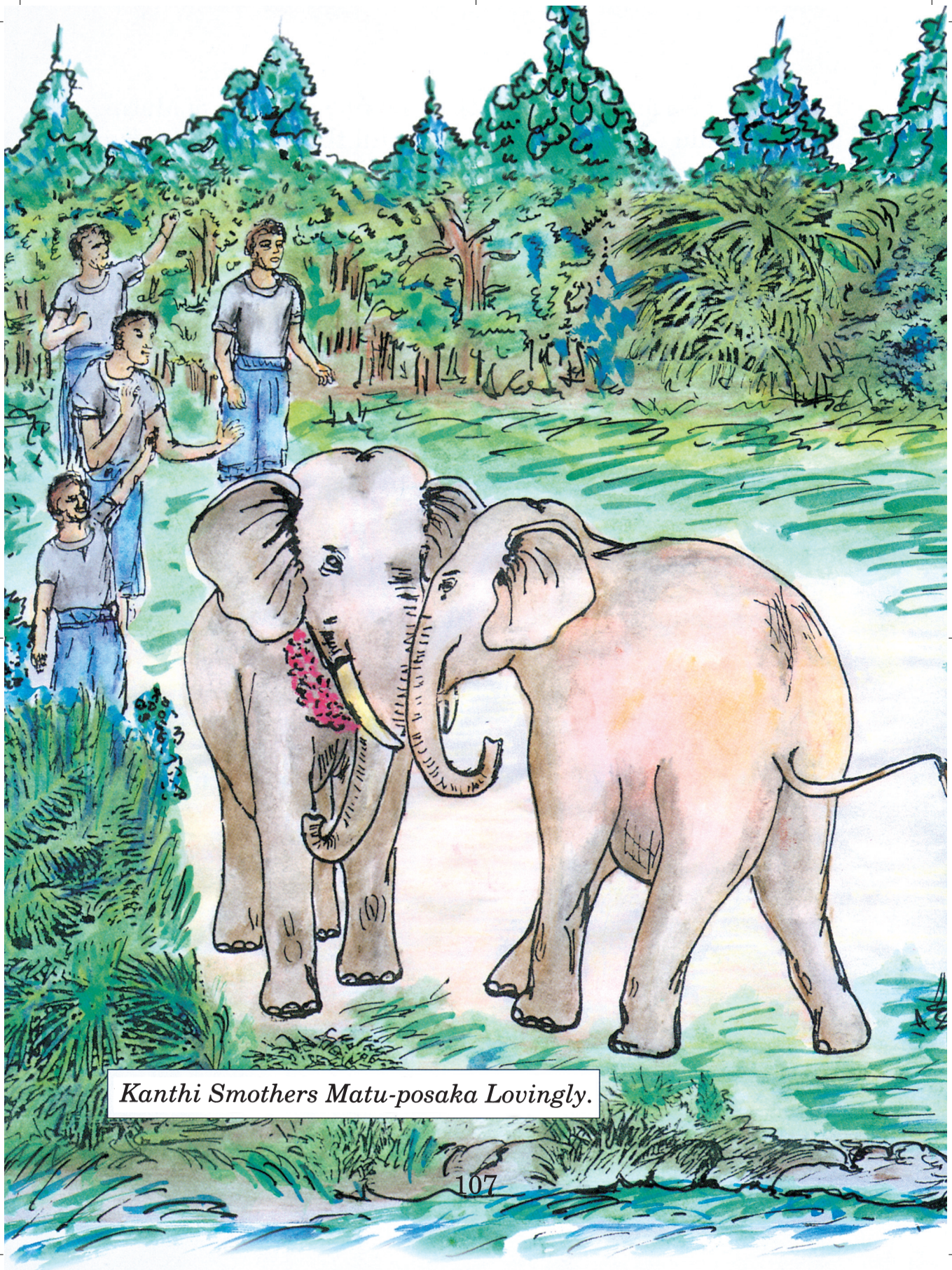

Kanthi Smothers Matu-posaka Lovingly.

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King Vedeha's fervently hope that the fine example of Matu-posaka would encourage people to fulfil their filial duty. He believed strongly that children must be sowed the seeds of moral fibre and filial piety from a young age as epitomised by Matu-posaka. He was so inspired by his boundless devotion to his blind mother that he built a stone image of him to pay great honour as a paragon of filial piety.

Ever since, people from different regions of the kingdom as well as from neighbouring states gathered each year in Kasi to venerate Motu-posaka and perform what came to be known as the *"Matu-posaka Festival"*. The celebrations included a grand procession carrying the statue of Matu-posaka through the main streets of Kasi.

Throngs of people lined up on both sides of the city streets to offer flowers in veneration of the *Bodhisatta*, Matu-posaka. Parents told the heart-rendering story of Matu-posaka's indomitable filial duty to their children who then told it to their children and so it has passed on through the centuries to present times. Beyond question, the parable of Matu-posaka will continue to live and inspire people all over the world, for generations to come.

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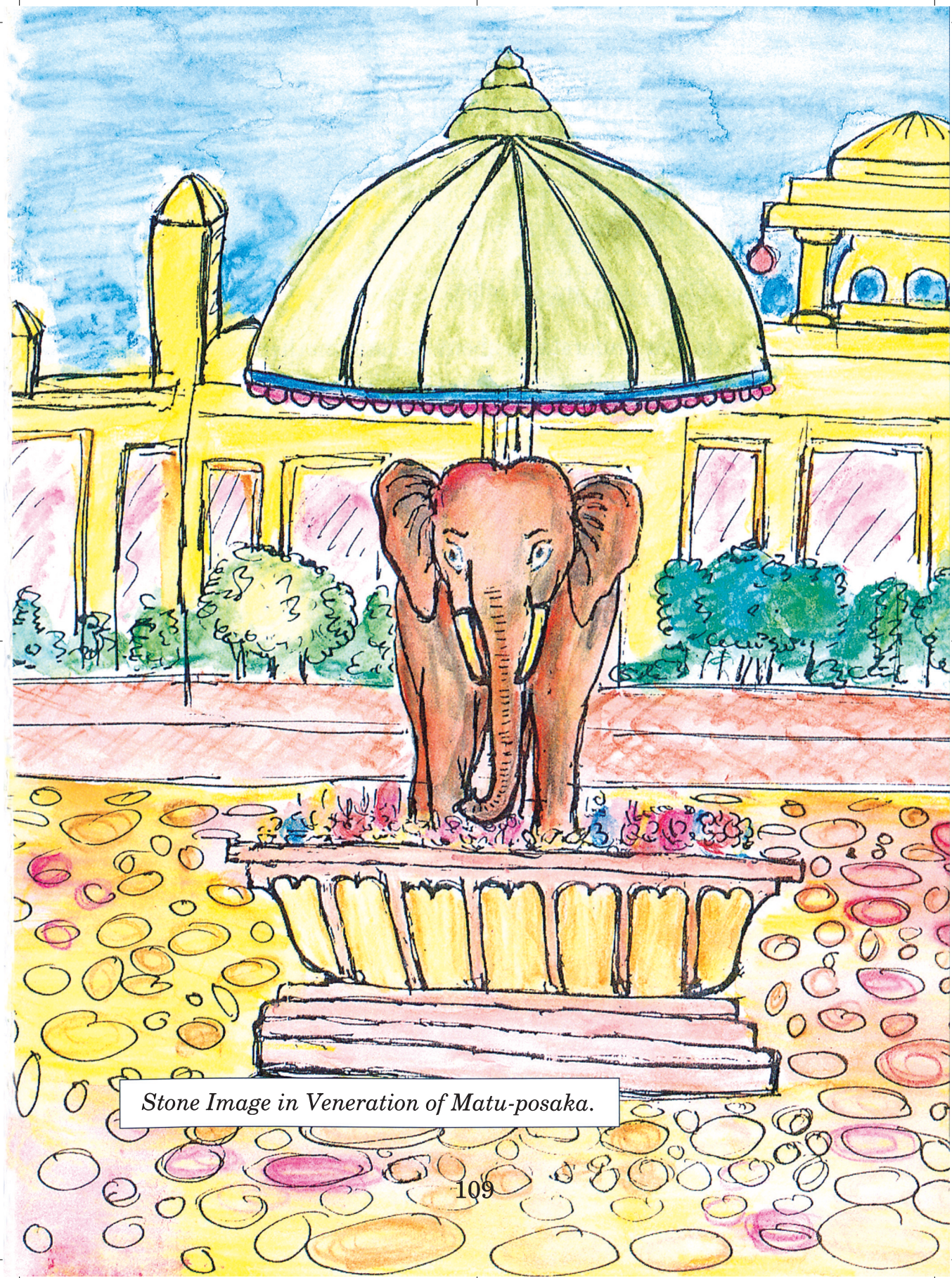

Stone Image in Veneration of Matu-posaka.

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COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

1. What impresses you about Dhanapala's parents?
2. Describe the nature and way of life of elephants.
3. What can human beings learn from elephant culture?
4. What do you understand about holistic motherhood?
5. Why is nurturing life before birth important?
6. In what ways can you provide care and attention to your Mother.
7. Describe and comment on Dhanapala's childhood.
8. What do you understand about human nature from the moral story?
9. Compare and contrast the two characters: Dhanapala and Korodha.
10. What do you understand about filial piety?
11. What is your impression of King Vedeha?
12. What lessons can you draw from the Matu-posaka Jataka Katha?
13. How would you like to fulfil your filial duty when you grow up?
14. What qualities in Matu-posaka endeared him as a *Bodhisatta*?

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About the Author

Ambassador Dato' Dr. G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri has had a distinguished diplomatic career spanning almost 30 years (1966-1995). He also has the rare distinction of setting up and heading the Centre for International Relations and Strategic Studies (1979-1981) for the Malaysian public service. The challenging assignment was taken up with much trepidation. On hindsight, he regards the assignment a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Among other things, it stimulated his interest in education, human resource development and professional training.

In 1984, he was appointed High Commissioner to Nigeria with concurrent accreditation to Ghana. He retired in 1995 as Director-General ASEAN. He is married and has three children.

Ambassador Dato' Dr. G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri does not believe that one should cease being active on retirement. Apart from being appointed Adjunct Professor at University Utara Malaysia, he has authored several noteable books. They include:

- Professional Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management: The Malaysian Experience
- My First Word Book: Buddhist Pedagogical Approach;
- A Compendium of Buddhist Personal Names: Heritage and Significance of Adoption
- Living Buddhism the Way Forward
- Living Buddhism: Advancing from ***Knowing*** to ***Being***
- My Alphabet Book: Buddhist Pedagogical Approach
- Professional Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management: An Ambassador's Insight
- The Terrifying Drug Menace: Relevance and Role of Buddhism
- Welcoming the Birth of a Child
- Angulimala
- Mothercare and Parenting:Cornerstone of Social Structuring

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The Matu-posaka Jataka is an edifying parable highlighting filial piety that has touched the hearts of millions through the centuries. This moving story epitomising the filial duty of a bull elephant who was the leader of the herd is an apt lesson for humans to emulate. It underlines a number of important life ideals and wholesome values for nurturing a truly harmonious and peaceful society. They include the sanctity of motherhood, profound love and sacrifices of parents for their offspring, holistic mothercare, significance of pre-birth experiences and the importance of infant learning to a child's thinking and behaviour in later life.

The importance of fulfilling one's filial duty towards parents in their 'living years' forms the central lesson. This age-old moral principle is more relevant today in this so-called modern age than ever before in the history of humankind. For centuries, filial piety has been a pillar of Asian culture, and was deeply rooted, particularly in China and India. Today unfortunately, filial duty has eroded so dramatically in the fast paced, modern materialistic world that countries have found it necessary to pass laws compelling children to attend to their parents in their twilight years. The way Matu-posaka nursed his blind mother should inspire humans – who are far more intelligent to likewise fulfil their filial duty.

The book is designed to cater to a wide readership. Parents can spend enjoyable times bonding with their child as young as three years, by reading in sequence the captions of the illustrations and narrating the events depicted. In fact, the illustrations themselves graphically capture the essence of the *Jataka Katha*. Older children, youths and adults can enjoy reading it as a classic and at the same time benefit from the gems of wisdom in the moral story. Schools can use it for staging a drama, for encouraging the reading habit and also as a text for promoting English and comprehension. A set of questions are provided at the end for this purpose.

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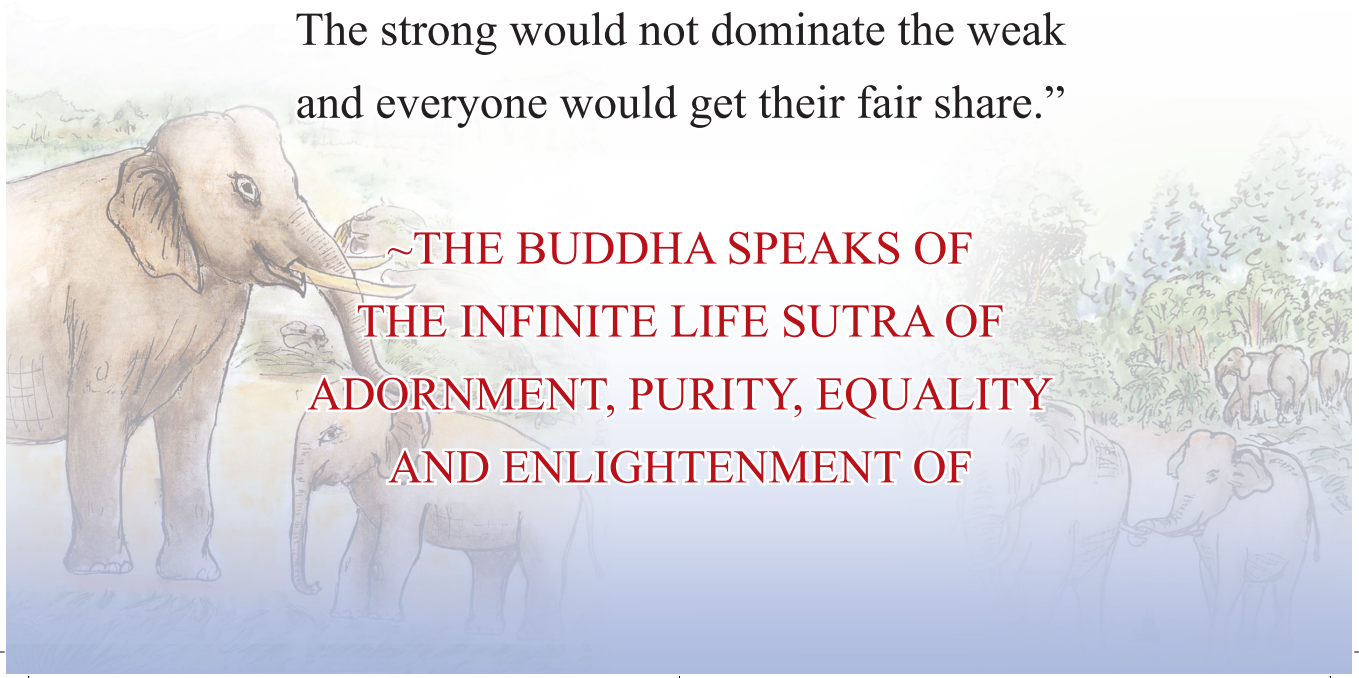
"Wherever the Buddha's teachings have flourished,
either in cities or countrysides,
people would gain inconceivable benefits.
The land and pepole would be enveloped in peace.
The sun and moon will shine clear and bright.
Wind and rain would appear accordingly,
and there will be no disasters.
Nations would be prosperous
and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons.
People would abide by morality and accord with laws.
They would be courteous and humble,
and everyone would be content without injustices.
There would be no thefts or violence.
The strong would not dominate the weak
and everyone would get their fair share."



~THE BUDDHA SPEAKS OF
THE INFINITE LIFE SUTRA OF
ADORNMENT, PURITY, EQUALITY
AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF

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Praise of Amita Buddha

Amita Buddha,
The Lord with the greatest vows,
His mercy, compassion,
delight and abandonment immeasurable,
Between His eyebrows always emits white-curled radiance.
He delivers sentient beings so they may enter His
Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss,
Where the pond of eight-virtue water
grows lotuses of nine grades,
And where marvelous seven-jewelled trees form rows.
If the Tathagata's sacred epithets are propagated,
He will receive us and lead us to his
Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.
If Amita Buddha's holy name is invoked and praised,
We all vow to go to his Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Amida Buddha all in golden color,
With form, features and radiance unequalled,
White curls winding like the five Sumeru Mountains,
And purple eyes as clear as the four great seas.
In His aura are transformed Buddhas in countless millions,
And transformed Bodhisattvas, also, in limitless number;
Forty-eight vows He made to enlighten sentient beings.
And to enable all nine grades to reach the other shore.
Blessed be the Most Compassionate One
of the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss,
Amita Buddha.

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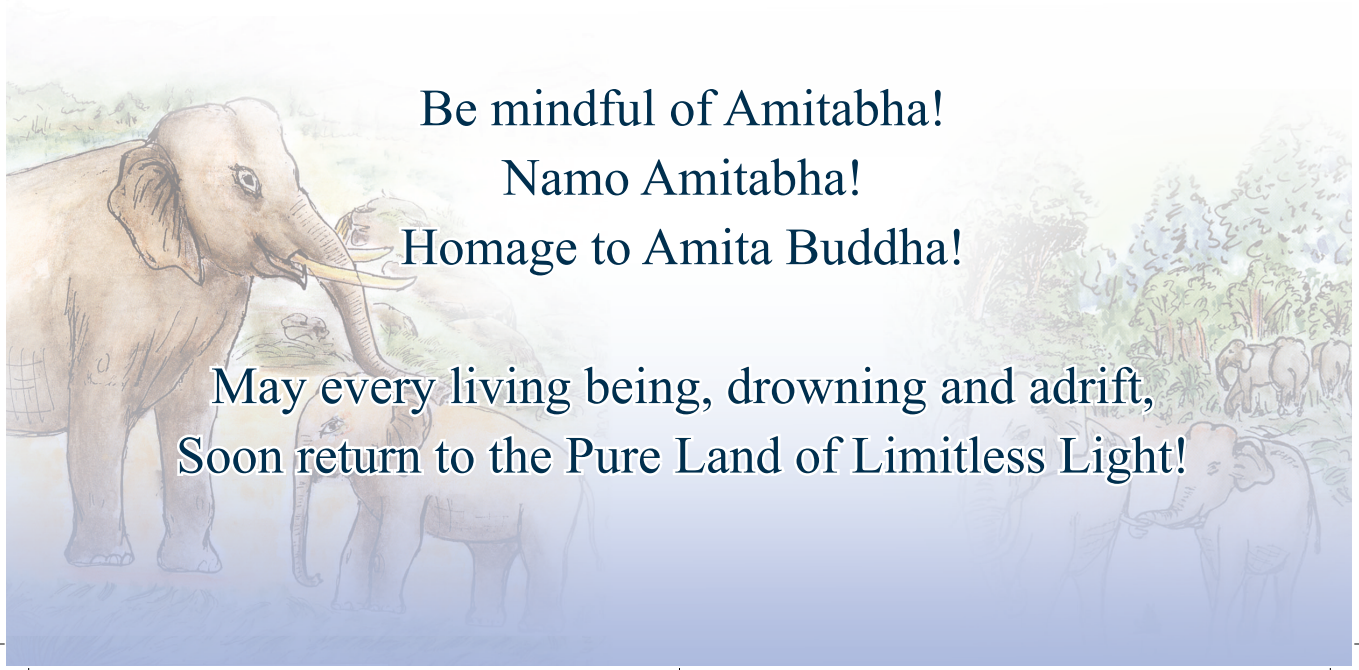
TAKING REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE JEWELS

To the Buddha I return and rely,
returning from delusions and
relying upon Awareness and Understanding.

To the Dharma I return and rely,
returning from erroneous views and
relying upon Proper Views and Understanding.

To the Sangha I return and rely,
returning from pollutions and disharmony and
relying upon Purity of Mind and
the Six Principles of Living in Harmony.



Be mindful of Amitabha!
Namo Amitabha!
Homage to Amita Buddha!

May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of Limitless Light!

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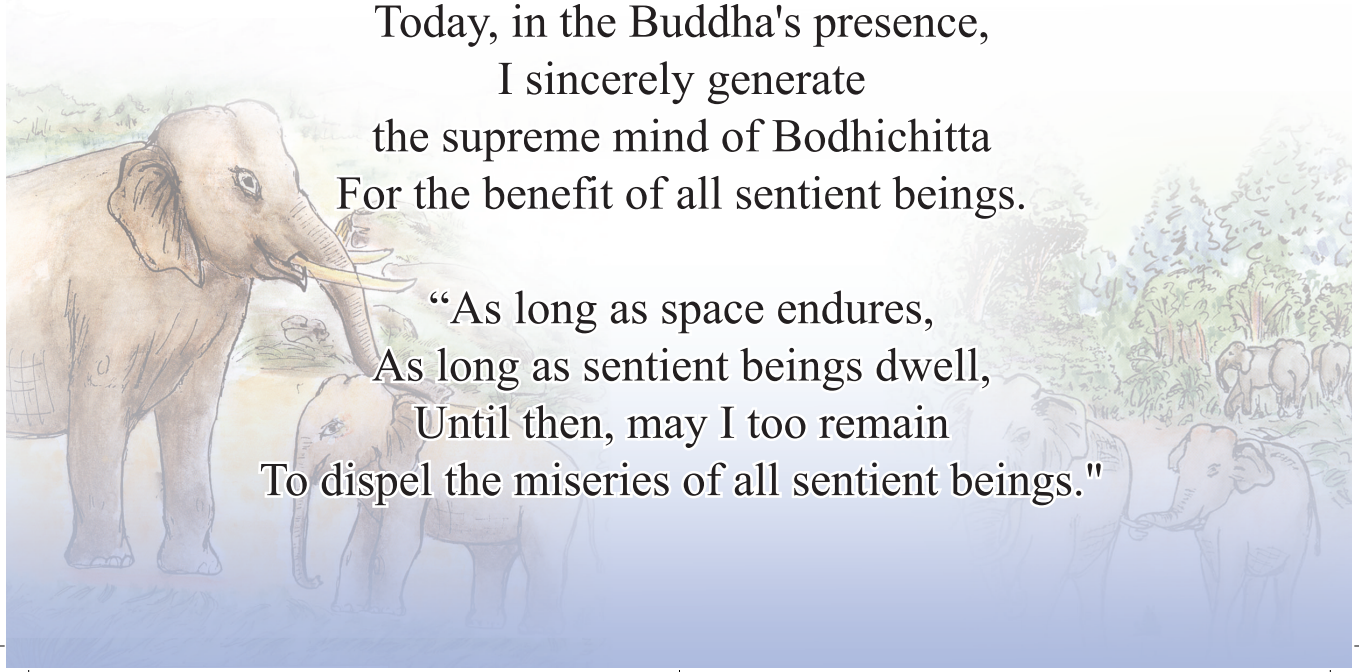
Taking Refuge with a mind of Bodhichitta
In the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha,
I shall always take refuge
Until the attainment of full awakening.

Through the merit of practicing generosity
and other perfections,
May I swiftly accomplish Buddhahood,
And benefit of all sentient beings.

The Prayers of the Bodhisattvas
With a wish to awaken all beings,
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
Until I attain full enlightenment.

Possessing compassion and wisdom,
Today, in the Buddha's presence,
I sincerely generate
the supreme mind of Bodhichitta
For the benefit of all sentient beings.

“As long as space endures,
As long as sentient beings dwell,
Until then, may I too remain
To dispel the miseries of all sentient beings."



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LIVING IN A GRATEFUL WORLD

Be grateful to those who have
hurt or harmed you,
for they have reinforced your determination.
Be grateful to those who have deceived you,
for they have deepened your insight.
Be grateful to those who have hit you,
for they have reduced your karmic obstacles.
Be grateful to those who have abandoned you,
for they have taught you to be independent.
Be grateful to those who have
made you stumble,
for they have strengthened your ability.
Be grateful to those who have denounced you,
for they have increased your wisdom and concentration.

Be grateful to those who have made you
Firm & Resolute
and Helped in your Achievement.

From the Teachings of
Ven. Master Chin Kung

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With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~

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DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

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