NEHRU
BAL PUSTAKALAYA

The Broken Wing And Other Asian Tales

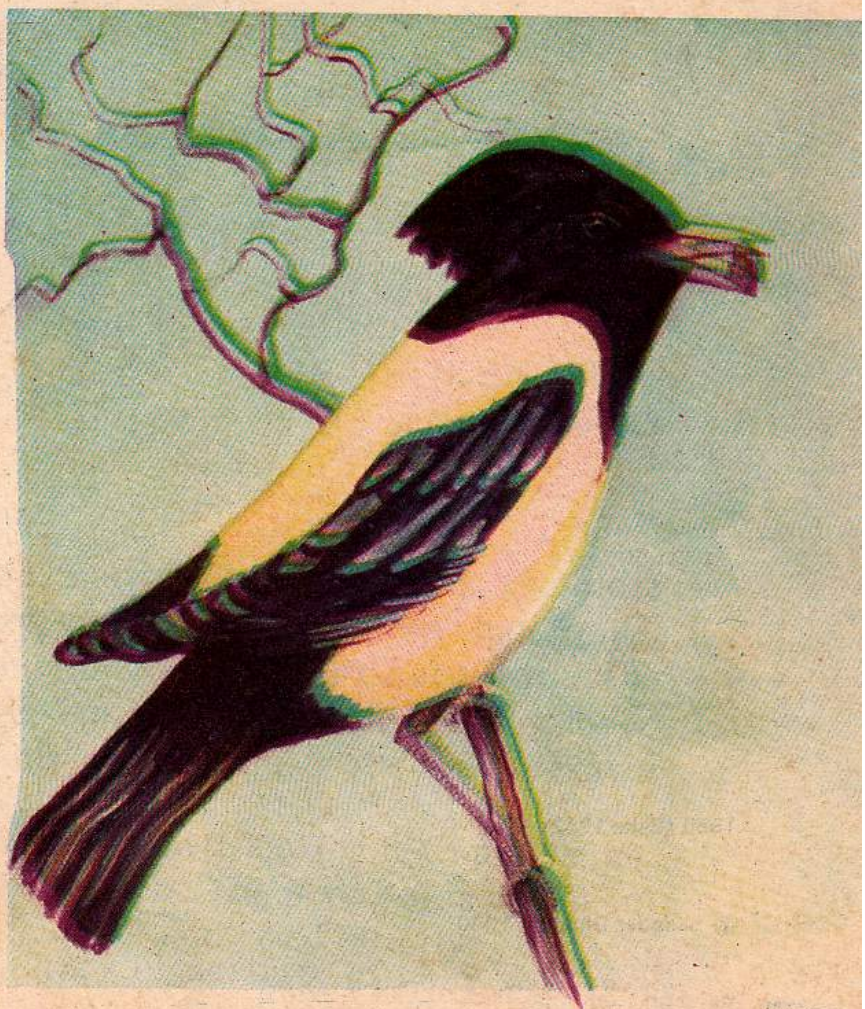
Belinder Dhanoa

Nehru Bal Pustakalaya — 50

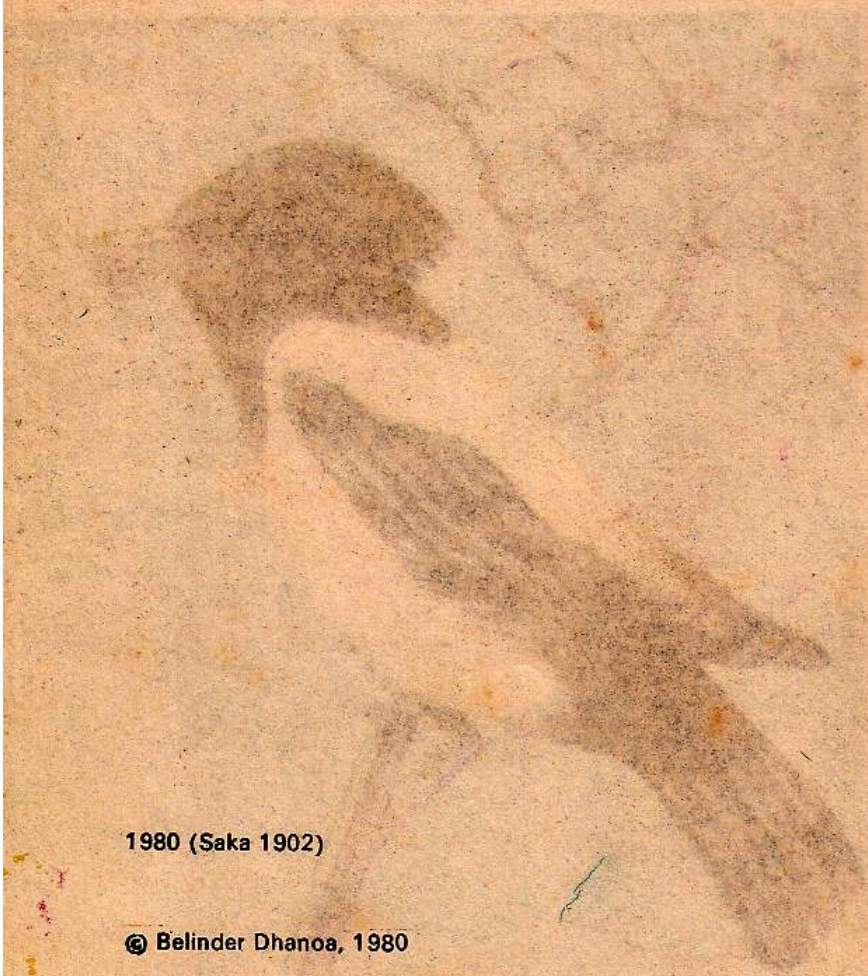
The Broken Wing And Other Asian Tales

Written by
Belinder Dhanoa

Illustrator
Pauline Dhanoa



National Book Trust, India



1980 (Saka 1902)

Rs. 2.50

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India A-5, Green Park,
New Delhi-110016 and printed by Kuldip Press, New Delhi-110028

THE BROKEN WING

a Korean fairytale

There once lived an old man who had three sons. The older two were ugly and lazy, while the youngest was handsome, good and hard-working In fact. young Il-Chung worked so hard that he was only skin and bone. The old man loved Il-Chung the most of his sons and this made the other two angry and jealous.

Alas. one day the old man died, leaving Il-Chung to the mercy of his two vicious brothers. The poor boy was shaken with griet at his father's death and cried bitterly.

"Oh do stop your snivelling!" said Tong-Tongi, the eldest brother.

"Yes, stop your snivelling!" Sal-Saree repeated. Sal-Saree was very stupid and could not think for himself, so he always repeated what Tong-Tongi said.

"I can't bear to see your miserable face anymore," Tong-Tongi continued rudely.

"I can't bear . . .," Sal-Saree began, but before he could finish the sentence, Tong-Tongi had picked up Il-Chung by the scruff of his neck and thrown him out of the house. He threw a crust of dry bread after him saying, "Take this, for it is as much of our father's property as you are likely to get."

The two brothers walked into the house arm in arm, chuckling at the plight of poor Il-Chung.

Knowing that it was useless to plead with his wicked brothers, Il-Chung wandered into a nearby forest. He was a sensible and intelligent boy and soon gathered some wood and straw to make himself a little hut. It did not take him long to build four sturdy walls and a neat roof for his shelter.

Being cheerful by nature, Il-Chung lived quite contentedly for a while, eating whatever roots and berries he could find. But winter was drawing near, and he knew that he would be cold and miserable in his little dwelling.

One day Il-Chung was very, very hungry. He searched all morning for berries but by afternoon he had gathered only a handful. He gazed at them sadly, knowing that they could hardly satisfy his hunger. With a sigh he turned homewards, when suddenly he noticed an injured bird lying in his path.

As Il-Chung bent to look, the bird fluttered its wings pathetically, afraid that the boy would harm it. But Il-Chung only stroked its head gently. On looking closer, he saw that one of its wings was broken.

Il-Chung picked up the little creature and hurried home. He made a soft bed of grass for it and without a thought for himself fed it the berries he had collected for his own meal.

Under his care the bird soon recovered, and early one morning it flew away. Il-Chung was sad to see it go for it had been his only companion and he had come to love it.

The next morning he was surprised to hear a familiar chirping outside his door. He stepped out and saw that his friend, the bird, had returned.

In its beak it had a small seed, which it dropped at Il-Chung's feet, saying, "I wish to thank you for your kindness. Plant this seed and it will bring you good fortune."

The bird flew away before Il-Chung could ask any questions. He picked up the seed and planted it outside his door.

When he woke the next morning, the room was still dark. Wondering if he had woken up too early, Il-Chung hopped out of bed to see if the sun had risen. As he looked out, a large, soft leaf brushed against his face. He moved it aside, but all he could see was a mass of green leaves. As he pushed his way out between the leaves, thin tendrils curled over his face, and tickled his ears.

"Why, it's a pumpkin plant!" he exclaimed.

The plant was larger than anything he had ever seen before. It sprawled over the hut, and under it, and spread as far as Il-Chung could see. Among the thick, green leaves lay many large, juicy pumpkins.

Delighted that he would not have to go into the forest to look for food, Il-Chung plucked a pumpkin and carried it into the house

A bright light seemed to glow as he began to cut the pumpkin. As the two halves fell apart, Il-Chung gasped in

wonder, for a stream of gold coins poured out of the pumpkin and tumbled onto the floor.

And there were countless pumpkins to be gathered yet — each filled with a fortune in gold!

Il-Chung was so happy at his good luck that he picked two of the largest pumpkins and rushed to his brothers house. In spite of their cruelty to him, he wished them to share his joy.

Tong-Tongi and Sal-Saree were still lying in bed and snoring loudly when Il-Chung appeared with his gift.

"Look what I have for you," he cried excitedly, placing the pumpkins on a table.

Tong-Tongi opened one eye, and when he saw the pumpkins, he raised his eyebrows haughtily and laughed.

"Why, they're only pumpkins," he said.

Sal-Saree yawned and lazily raised his eyebrows too. "Why they're . . .," he began to say.

"We don t need your pumpkins," Tong-Tongi said to Il-Chung. "We have plenty in our own fields."

"Only pumpkins . . .we don't . . .have plenty in our own . . .," Sal-Saree mumbled trying hard to keep up with what Tong-Tongi was saying.

"But Tong-Tongi," Il-Chung insisted, "they're not ordinary pumpkins. Look!"

And with that he cut open one of the pumpkins and the gold came rolling out.

Tong-Tongi and Sal-Saree had never moved so fast in their lives as they did then. They rushed towards the gold and began to pick it up greedily. Eagerly they cut open the second pumpkin and let the gold run through their fingers.

"He! he!" they chuckled. "This means less work and more play."

Il-Chung told his brothers about the bird with the broken wing. When they heard the story they were consumed with jealousy.

Tong-Tongi scratched his head thoughtfully. He was deep in thought when he noticed that Il-Chung was still standing there. He pushed him aside saying, "Away with

you. We don't need you anymore than we did before."

Il-Chung turned away sadly. He had hoped that his brothers would let him return home, but it seemed that they still hated him.

"Sal-Saree," Tong-Tongi called, when Il-Chung had gone away.

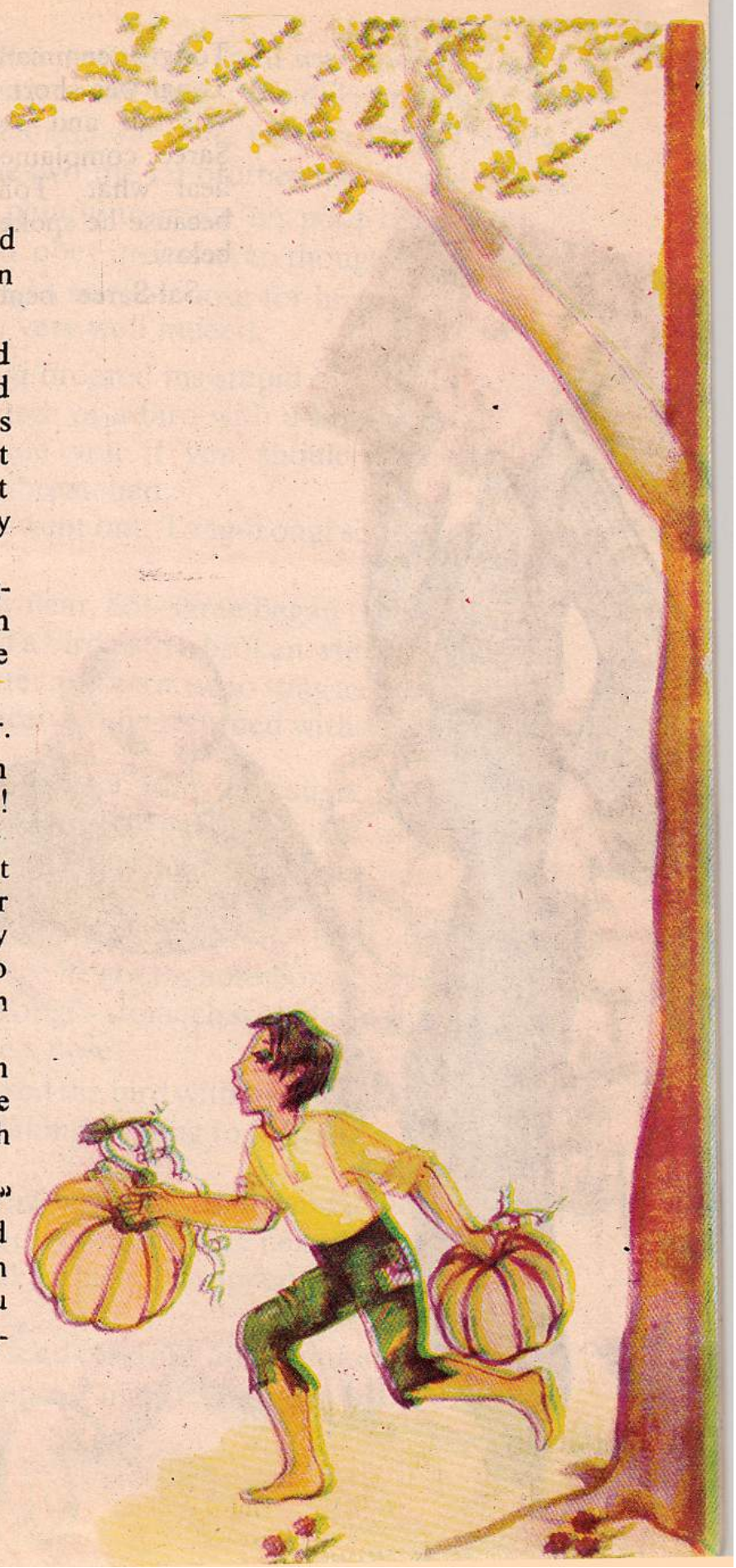
There was no answer.

He shouted again angrily, "Sal-Saree! Where are you?"

He heard a faint grunt from the floor and saw that his lazy brother had gone to sleep with his head on the gold.

He kicked him on the side and Sal-Saree jumped to his feet with an indignant squeal.

"Now listen, stupid" Tong-Tongi said, and Sal-Saree grunted in reply. "Bend so you can hear me," Tong-



Tongi commanded. You see, Tong-Tongi was short and fat, and Sal-Saree was tall and skinny, and often Sal-Saree complained that he could not hear what Tong-Tongi was saying because he spoke from such a distance below.

Sal-Saree bent down obediently at

Tong-Tongi's shouted instruction, and was rewarded for his pains with a punch on his nose. He did not object to this rough treatment for he was quite used to Tong-Tongi's ways. You see, of the two the fat brother had all the brains. Sal-Saree finding it painful to make his poor brain work, was quite content to obey orders even though they were often accompanied by a swollen nose for him. In fact, the two brothers got on very well indeed.

Now Tong-Tongi ordered his stupid brother to go out into the forest in search of a bird with a broken wing.

"And woe betide you if you should return home empty-handed," he threatened.

When Sal-Saree went out, Tong-Tongi settled down to count the gold.

As evening drew near, Sal-Saree began to get worried. He still had not found a bird with a broken wing. Already his eyes had begun to water and his nose to sting as he thought of the blow he would receive if he returned without an injured bird.

At last in a flash of inspiration, he caught the next bird that flew by and broke one of its wings. He triumphantly took the bird to Tong-Tongi and explained how he had come by it.

"We could break the other wing too," he said helpfully, for which piece of advice he got his nose boxed anyway. But, dear me, how Tong-Tongi's stomach wobbled as he jumped up to reach Sal-Saree's nose!

The brothers nursed the bird with herbs and berries but, when angered by its taking so long to heal, they frequently cursed it.

At last the poor bird was ready to fly and it did so to the delight of the two greedy brothers. The next day it returned with a seed in its beak, which it dropped at Tong-Tongi's feet.

They planted the seed carefully and, thinking about the harvest could not sleep all night. The next morning they

were delighted to see that the plant had grown even bigger than all their expectations.

Gleefully they began to bring the pumpkins into the house. When they had gathered as many as they could, they took the large kitchen knife and hacked open the first pumpkin.

Imagine their horror when instead of gleaming gold, out crawled the slimiest of snakes, lizards and frogs! Shuddering at the awful sight they threw the pumpkin away and cut open another. Pumpkin after pumpkin revealed the same creatures writhing inside.

Soon the snakes began to crawl all over the room and curl around their ankles. The two brothers shrieked in terror and ran out as fast as they could.

They ran out of the house and through the forest. Perhaps they ran out of the country, for they were never seen again.

THE ANGRY KING

a folktale from the Philippines

In the mountains of southern Luzon, there is a land of tobacco-growers. Many, many years ago, this land was ruled by a king named Hari Ka Buskid. He was a wise king, and during his reign the people of his kingdom were rich and prosperous.

The king did not scorn to go among the tobacco-growers and advise them on the best methods of tending their crops. It was not surprising, therefore, that this kingdom was known to have the best and largest crop in the land. From miles around, the people of neighbouring kingdoms would come to barter their goods in exchange for the rich, golden tobacco of King Hari Ka Buskid's kingdom.

One day, the king called a meeting of all the elders of his kingdom. "I am off on a long voyage," he told them. "I do not know when I will return, for my journey is a long one as I have much work with the kings of neighbouring and far-off kingdoms."

All the men present expressed sincere regret that their king would not be present at the great occasion of the tobacco harvest.

"I regret too," said the king, "that I cannot be here for the harvest celebrations. But I am sure that I can depend upon all present here to see that everything goes well. If I do not return soon, you must see to the planting of the next crop. It must be done, as always, in a way that will ensure a healthy crop, so that our land remains known for its good tobacco."

The very next day the king set off. Everyone wondered where the king's travels would take him.

"He is going to the other side of the mountain," said some. "No," said others. "His path carries him across the seas to lands that lie further than the eyes of an eagle can see."

But nobody could say exactly where the king had gone, for he had told no one of his plans.

Harvest time came and the crop was beyond the expectations of the people.

"Our good king has taught us well," they said.

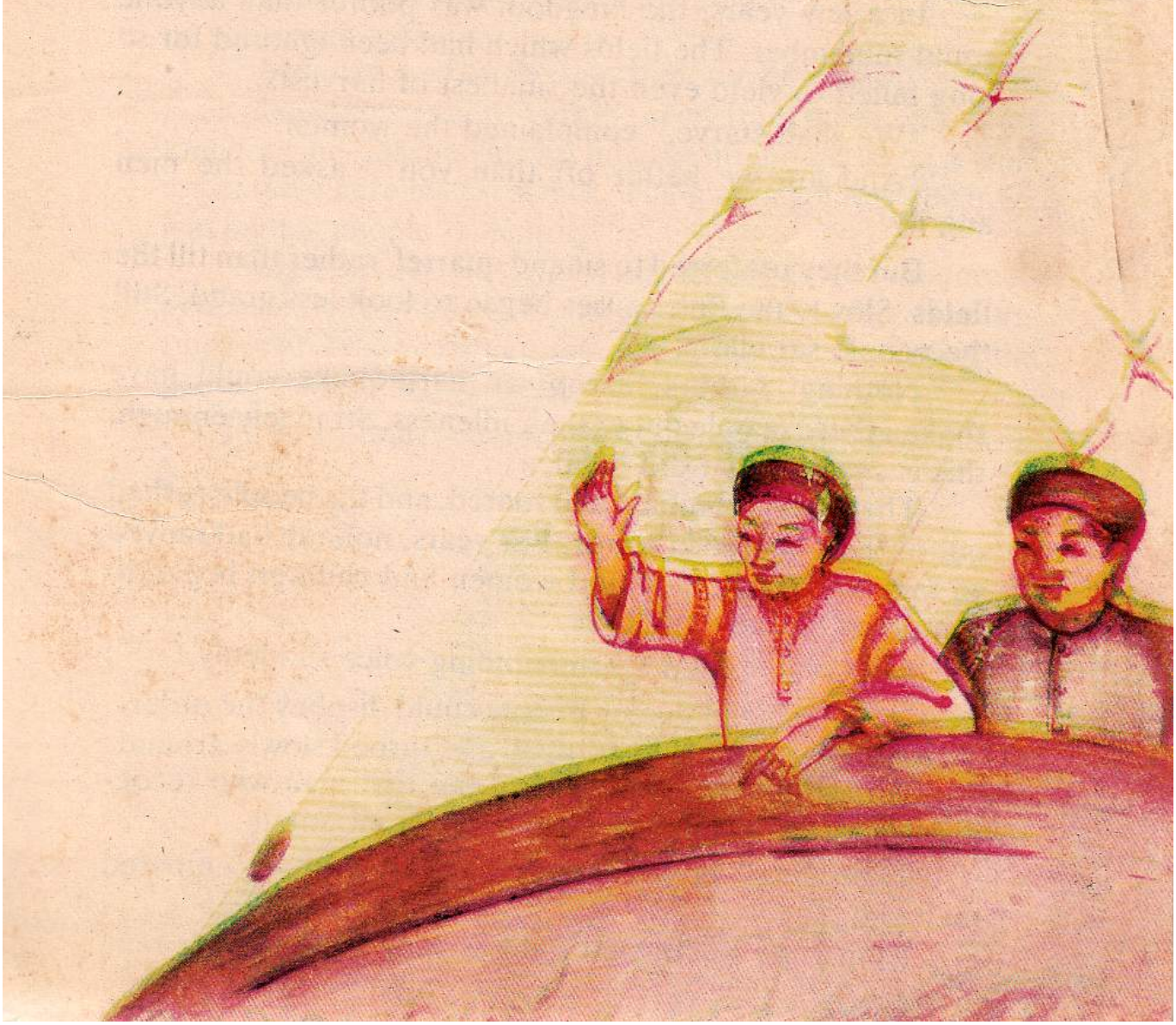
That year, the tobacco was greatly praised by everyone, and the good folk of King Hari Ka Buskid's kingdom became richer than ever before.

"This is excellent," said the elders. "But we must not forget the king's instructions."

At once they began working on the mountainside so that a new crop could be planted. If the king could have seen them then, he would have been proud of their diligence and labour.

For ten years the people worked hard, and each year the crop was better than it had been the previous year. But the king still had not returned from his journey. Slowly he became no more than a memory to the people.

If the king had returned to his kingdom then, I wouldn't have been surprised if he didn't recognise it at all. For it was ten times richer than when he left. What had been small cottages, were big houses now. And the people dressed in finer clothes.



Perhaps this is what changed the course of events. For now the tobacco growers began to scorn working in the fields.

"Is it right," they asked, "that we should go out into the fields and ruin our fine clothes by working in the mud?"

The tobacco fields began to take on a neglected air. What had been virtually a garden of golden plants now looked dry and dusty. Not surprisingly, the harvest was poor.

"It has been a bad year," said the people to the merchants who came to buy the tobacco.

It had been a bad year indeed, but nobody did anything to improve matters. The people still continued to worry about protecting their clothes and riches, and the tobacco fields continued to be neglected.

In a few years, the kingdom was poorer than anyone could remember. The fields which had been ignored for so long failed to yield even the smallest of harvests.

"We shall starve," complained the women.

"And are we better off than you?" asked the men angrily.

But they preferred to sit and quarrel, rather than till the fields. Slowly the fine houses began to look less grand. Still the people sat idle.

Nothing, I think, except an earthquake could have shaken these people out of their idleness. Strangely enough, this is exactly what did happen.

The ground rumbled and roared, and the people rushed out of their houses in terror. For years, nobody had moved so fast. Shrieking, men and women and children began to run down the mountainside.

"STOP!" roared a commanding voice suddenly.

Not one of the fleeing people could disobey the order.

As one person they stopped and turned slowly around.

An astonished gasp escaped the first man who recognised the figure standing on top of the mountain.

"The King!" he cried, and then everybody remembered their old king.

King Hari Ka Buskid did not hide his towering rage

from his people.

"You have betrayed me," he shouted. 'Did I not command you to look after your fields in my absence? Do you think those dry patches of ground are fields worthy of being in this kingdom?"

There was silence all around. Even the mountain had stopped its massive rumbling.

"Bring me the tobacco you have harvested this year," commanded the king.

Several men hurried to obey him. With great shame they placed the meagre harvest before their king.

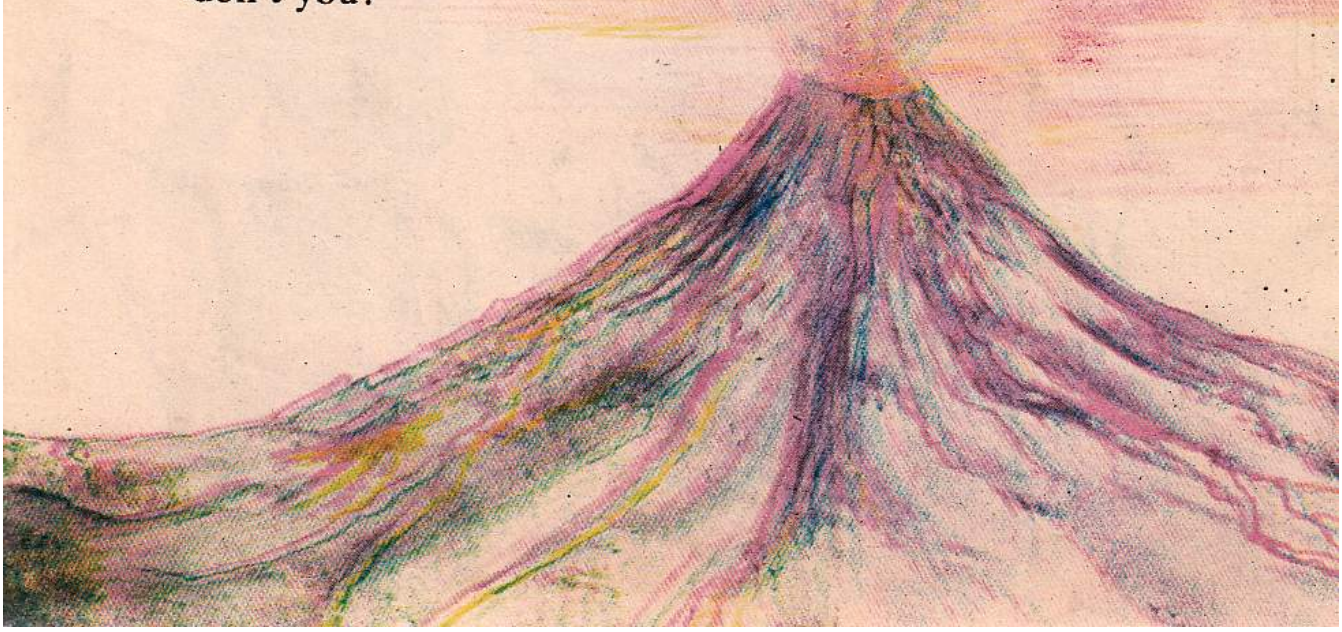
King Hari Ka Buskid looked at the tobacco for a long while.

"I shall not forget your disobedience and idleness," he said at last,"until once again I see a good crop of tobacco on the mountainside."

He then picked up the small amount of tobacco that had been placed before him. Turning away from the people of his kingdom, he smashed his fist into the mountain. A huge hole appeared where his fist struck. The king leapt into the hole, leaving his people lamenting.

King Hari Ka Buskid is still waiting in the mountain. When he is in a good mood, he smokes some tobacco and the smoke can be seen rising above the mountain, reminding the people that he is still there.

I hate to think what happens when he's in a bad mood, don't you?



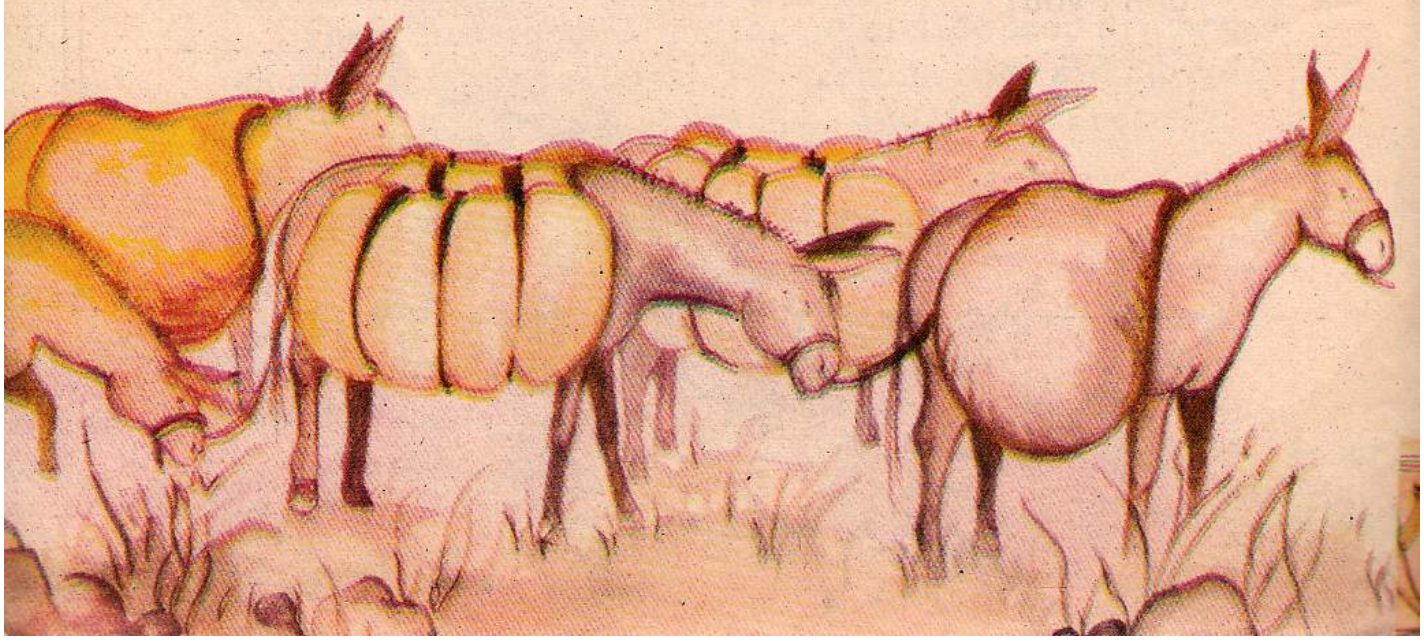
THE WIDOW'S DONKEYS

a Chinese folktale

Once upon a time there lived a clever young merchant in China. He was a brave man and travelled far and wide. At night he would rest at roadside inns, but he always kept his sword close at hand in case robbers attacked.

One day, he was tired after a long trip through the hills. His donkeys too walked slower and slower under their burden.

The merchant urged the beasts on. "You poor things," he said gently. "You are old now, and it is time you were given a rest and set to graze in the green fields."



Just at that moment an old man appeared. He stopped at the merchant's bidding.

"Good-day," said the merchant, bowing low. "I am tired after a long day of walking. Do you know of an inn where I can rest the night?"

"You have only to turn that corner," said the old man, pointing down the road. "You will then come to the widow Chiang's inn. She has the best food for many a mile around."

He paused for a moment, gazing at the merchant's tired old donkeys. "She sells donkeys too," he said. "And they are as famous as her food."

The merchant was delighted to hear that rest and comfort were so close. He thanked the old man courteously and hurried on.

When he came upon the inn, it looked clean and had a neat garden running all around it. A door slid open as the donkeys clattered up the cobbled path. A pleasant-faced woman stood at the doorway. "You are welcome," she said in a musical voice.

She showed the merchant the stables, where he saw to

the needs of the animals himself, as the widow had no servants to help her.

When the donkeys were comfortably settled, the merchant entered the well-lit parlour. Several people were already seated there, eating and drinking and relating stories of their travels.

"I have travelled far into the mountains, north and south," said one of the travellers, "but nowhere have I found an inn as comfortable as this."

"The widow's cooking is unrivalled, too," said another, patting his belly in appreciation.

"In all my travels through India and Persia I have never been so well looked after," said yet another to the merchant.

Truly the food was the best that the merchant had ever tasted!

At dinner everyone ate heartily of the widow's wonderful cooking. When they had eaten their fill, the men leaned back on their silken cushions, licking their fingers.

The widow then placed a plate of wheat-cakes at the table. The travellers ate happily — all but the young merchant, who was more tired than ever now. He took leave of the company and went into the large room where he was to spend the night. There were several beds placed in a row. Choosing one in the corner, the merchant fell into it and was soon fast asleep.

He had not been asleep more than a few hours when a strange, grating sound awoke him. He leapt out of bed with his sword in his hand. All around him the other travellers lay sleeping peacefully. He stood still for a moment, and once again heard a faint scraping.

"Robbers in the inn!" he thought. "I shall soon deal with the cowards who would stoop to robbing a defenceless widow!"

He made his way out quietly and peeped through the window of the next room. His mouth fell open in surprise at what he saw. There was just one figure in the room and it was a woman!

She had dragged out a huge trunk from under the bed and was stooping over it. Her long black hair flew loosely around her shoulders and curled in the air like snakes.

The merchant stepped back in fright as the strange woman turned towards the window. He moved further back into the shadows as her piercing eyes raked the darkness.

"Why, it's the widow Chiang!" he gasped in surprise as he recognised the face that swung away from the window. "But what an evil look she has on her face. I must watch and see what she is doing."

The widow turned back to the chest. As the bewildered merchant watched, she took out a small wooden horse, a wooden man and a tiny plough. Then, bending low, she fiercely muttered words that the merchant could not hear clearly from where he stood.

As her voice grew louder, the wooden figures began to move. Soon the room was being ploughed in straight furrows.

When this was done, the widow replaced the wooden creatures in the chest, and scattered handfulls of seeds all over the ground.

We cannot be surprised at the merchant's astonishment, for I am sure that none of us have ever seen such a sight. The magic seeds had hardly touched the ground when tiny wheat plants began to sprout. Soon the whole room was filled with the golden heads of the plants.

As swiftly as all the events that had unfolded so far, the busy widow harvested her crops and ground the grain in a mortar.

"Ah!" said she, with satisfaction. "Now I have more flour to make my magic wheat-cakes."

The merchant returned thoughtfully to his bed. He fell asleep wondering what magic the wheat-cakes contained. He was glad that he hadn't eaten them, all the same.

The next morning the merchant was rudely nudged out of bed. As he bumped into the floor, loud braying filled his ears. He jumped to his feet and gaped at the sight around him. The room was full of donkeys of all shapes and sizes!

"But where are all the travellers?" he asked himself.

Suddenly he remembered the happenings of the night before. "Why, the cunning old widow!" he exclaimed. "She's turned all the men into donkeys by feeding them her magic wheat-cakes."

He thought hard for a long time. Then, collecting his belongings he went to take leave of the widow.

"I have no time for breakfast," he told her. "But perhaps

you will allow me to take a few of your marvellous wheat-cakes with me so that I can eat on my way."

The widow eagerly packed a few of the magic cakes for the merchant. He thanked her for her kindness and promised to return to the inn on his way back.

Now, if *I* had been in the merchant's place, I would have thanked God for a lucky escape, and kept away from the inn in future. But the merchant was a lot braver than I am, and cleverer too, no doubt.

A few days later he returned to the inn. He knocked smartly at the inn door.

The widow gasped in surprise when she saw who stood there.

"Ah well!" thought the merchant. "Now it's my turn to give a few surprises."

He greeted her merrily. "I am glad to be back," he said. "I have missed your cooking. Why even the wheat-cakes that you packed for me were eaten by some travellers that I met on my way."

"I am sorry that you had to go hungry," said the widow in sympathy, now no longer surprised why the merchant had not turned into a donkey. "I have baked some fresh cakes," she said, and smiled her sly smile.

"Wonderful," said the clever merchant. "But you must taste the cakes that I have here with me. They are said to have been baked by the best cook in the country. You shall be the judge of that."

"Certainly," said the widow and went off to fetch some tea. "There is time yet," she thought, "to feed the silly fellow some of my magic cakes."

While she was away the merchant took out a dozen wheat-cakes from his bag. They were the same ones that the widow had packed for his journey. Among these he placed an ordinary cake.

They sat together drinking tea, and then the merchant offered the widow the cakes. When she had taken one, he carefully selected the ordinary one, and began to eat.

"They are excellent," said the widow in surprise. "I

would be proud to claim to having baked them."

The merchant smiled as she reached for another cake.

"Well Widow Chiang," said he when she had eaten the second one, "I am glad that you like them so, for it is indeed your own cooking."

"How can that be?" asked the widow, terrified out of her wits.

"I know the secret of your wheat-cakes," replied the merchant. "I know how you always have fresh young donkeys for sale in your stables."

He paused as the widow choked with anger. "Well," said the clever merchant, "now you are eating what you deserve."

The widow screamed with rage and fright. But already her ears were turning long and grey. Soon, her angry voice became a loud bray.

It must be admitted that the widow made a truly beautiful donkey!

THE WOODEN ELEPHANT

a folktale from Sri Lanka

There once lived a rich and greedy king called Chandapajota. He spent most of his spare time gazing at his possessions. Nothing interested him more than counting the money in his coffers, or the number of elephants he owned. For, you see, in the days of King Chandapajota a man's wealth was measured by the number of elephants he had.

One day, as he was walking with one of his ministers, the king said, "I am a lucky man indeed, for I must be the richest king in the world."

Now, the king was a proud and ill-tempered man, so it must have taken a lot of courage for the minister to reply, "No, Your Majesty, King Udena of the neighbouring kingdom is so wealthy that in comparison all others look poor."

The king was very annoyed when he heard this, and frowned with displeasure. "How is that?" he asked peevishly. "Am I not the greatest warrior among the kings? Surely no one has more wealth than I?"

"The young king knows a magic charm that can capture any elephant in the world," the minister answered. "The music from his magic lute has stopped many a fleeing elephant."

King Chandapajota could not bear to think that any man had more elephants than him. At once he began to think of a plan by which he could learn the charm.

Many days later he called all the wise men in his kingdom and ordered them to build a hollow wooden elephant that could move faster than any live elephant or horse.

When the magic elephant was ready, the king went to see it. "Perfect," he said. "Sixty of my strongest soldiers will fit into the hollow elephant."

The elephant with sixty soldiers inside was then moved to the outskirts of King Udena's kingdom.

It was not long before the strange creature was seen by one of King Udena's men. He rushed off to the royal palace to report what he had seen.

King Udena's interest was aroused. Taking his magic lute with him, he set off at once to capture the elephant.

As soon as he caught a glimpse of the creature, however, it began to run towards King Chandapajota's kingdom.

King Udena recited the charm and played his magic lute, but all in vain. Nothing stopped the swift flight of the wooden elephant.

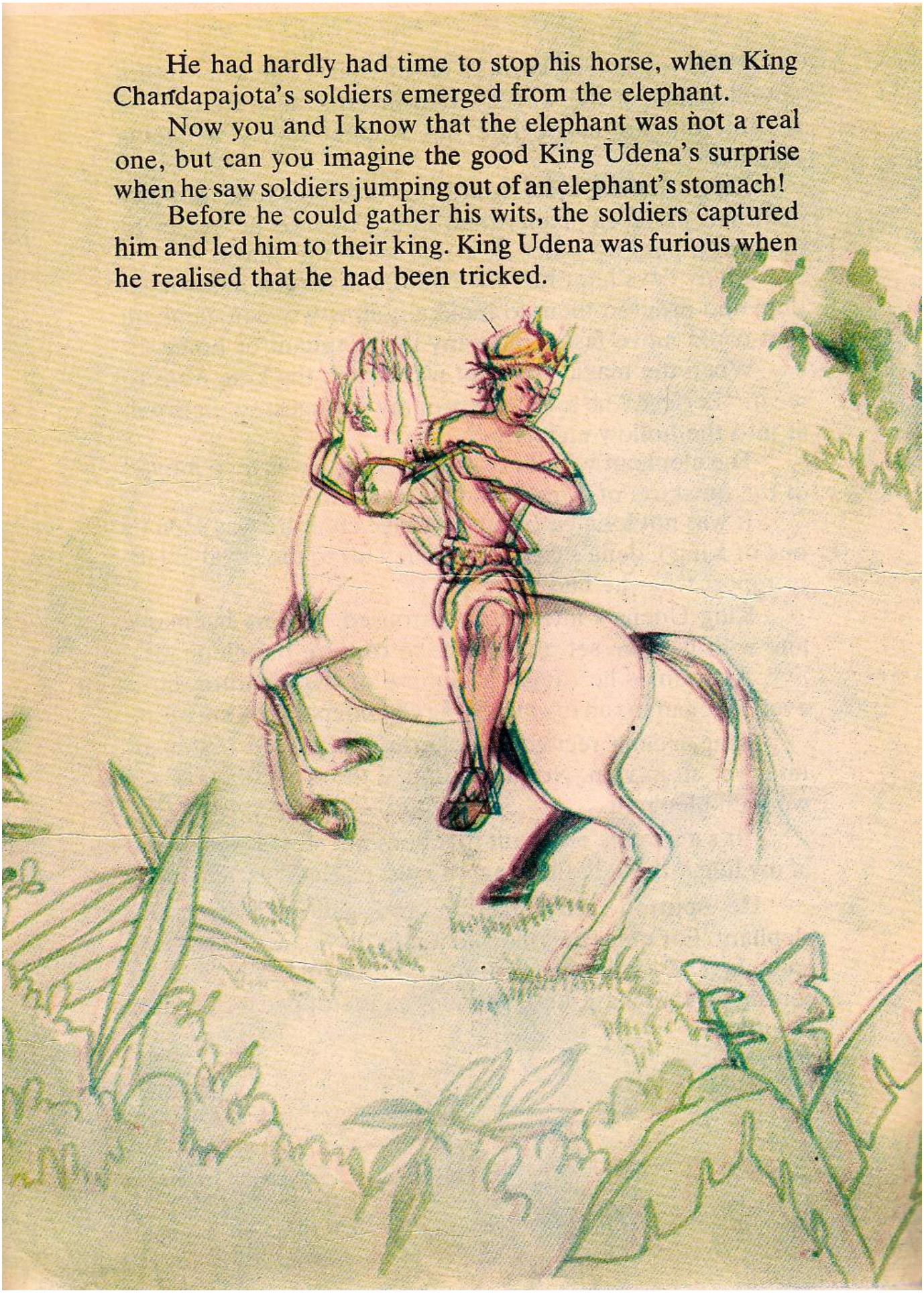
"It's a strange elephant that does not stop at the sound of my lute," thought the king. "I must not let it escape me."

He spurred his horse on and galloped after the elephant. For miles he followed it, but his horse was not fast enough. The king was not a man to give up easily, and he continued the chase until the elephant stopped of its own accord.

He had hardly had time to stop his horse, when King Chandapajota's soldiers emerged from the elephant.

Now you and I know that the elephant was not a real one, but can you imagine the good King Udena's surprise when he saw soldiers jumping out of an elephant's stomach!

Before he could gather his wits, the soldiers captured him and led him to their king. King Udena was furious when he realised that he had been tricked.

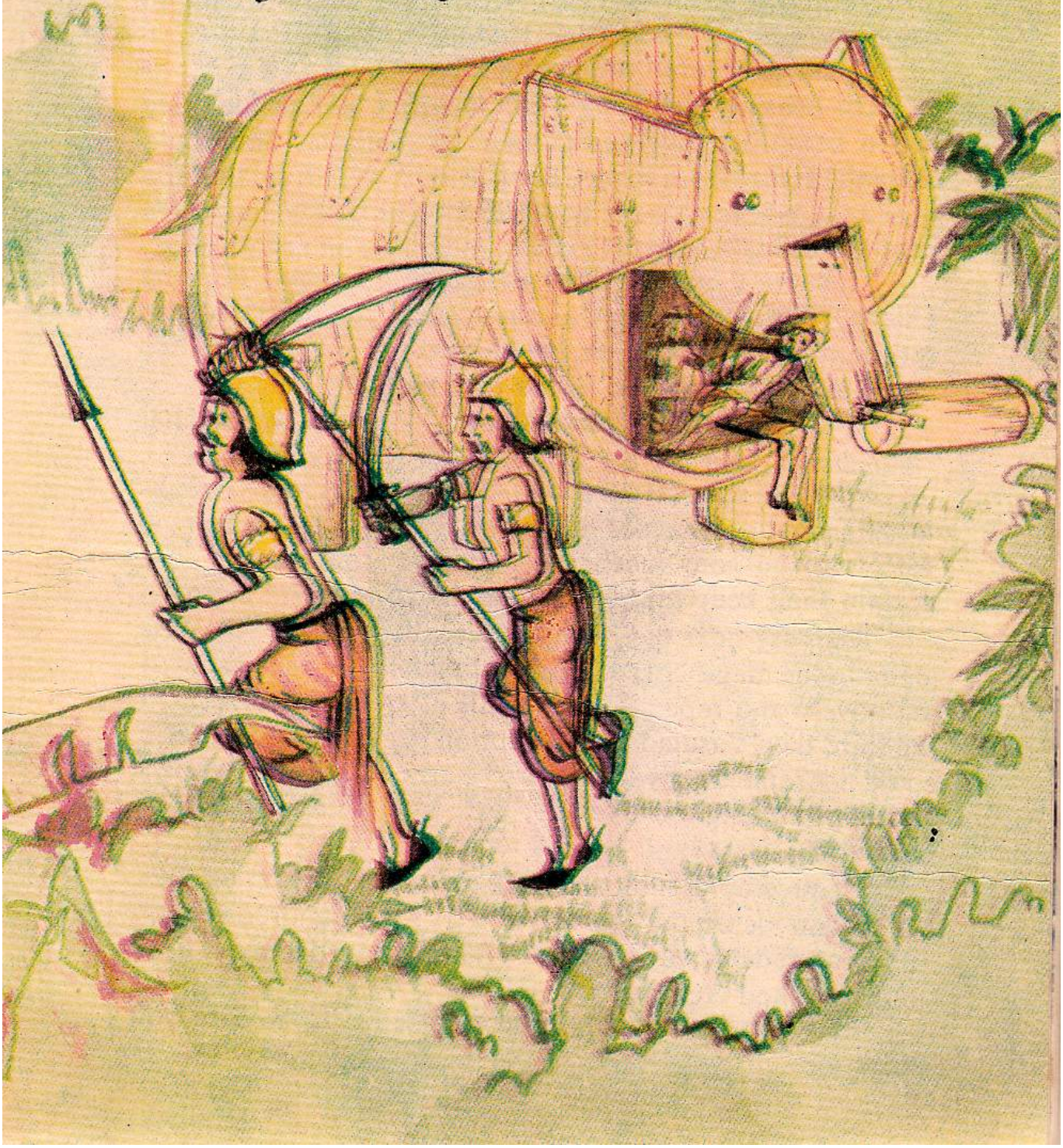


"Why have you captured me in this base fashion?" he asked his captors.

King Chandapajota was delighted that his trick had worked

"You know a charm," he said, smiling wickedly at the handsome young king. "If you teach it to me you may return to your kingdom unharmed."

King Udena thought for a few moments before he



answered. "I will teach you the charm," he said, "but you must treat me with the respect that you would show the wisest of your teachers."

King Chandapajota's mouth fell open in astonishment. In all his life as a king, he had thought that everyone was beneath him, and showing respect to any man was as alien to him as flying might be to an elephant.

"Will you teach the charm to anyone who is willing to respect you?" he asked King Udena.

"Yes," answered the young king.

On hearing this, King Chandapajota had an idea. He had a beautiful daughter named Vasuladatta. She could learn the charm from King Udena. But he was afraid that she would fall in love with the good-looking king. Tugging at his beard he thought hard for a while. Finally he hit upon a plan.

"I have a hunchbacked daughter," he said to King Udena. "She will give you all the respect you desire, and in return you must teach her the charm."

King Udena agreed to the plan willingly.

"But," said King Chandapajota, "she is ashamed of her hunchback, so a curtain will hide her while you teach."

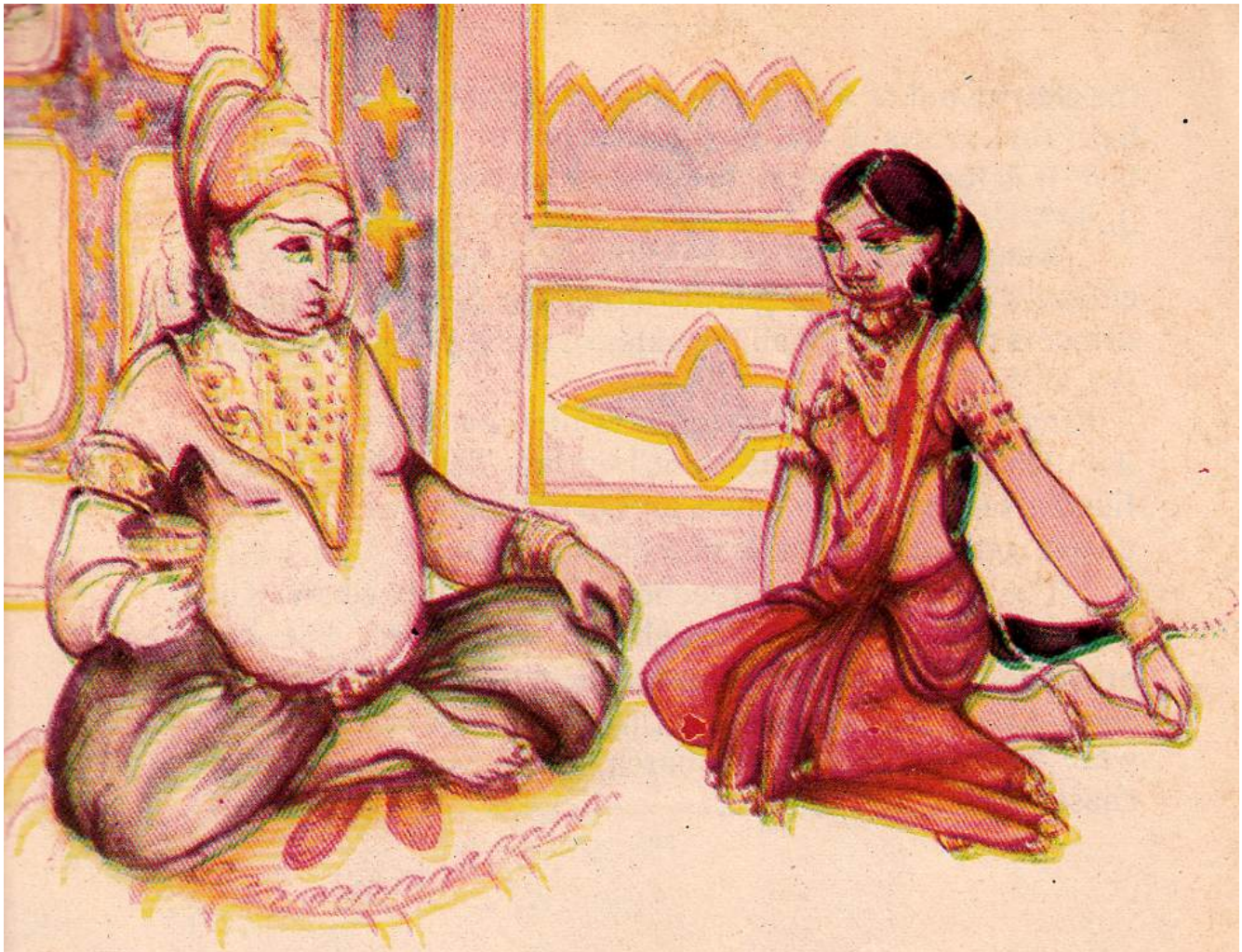
When all this was agreed to, the king went to his daughter and told her what she must do. "But," he said, "the man who is to be your teacher is suffering from leprosy, so a curtain shall keep him from your sight while you learn."

The very next day, King Udena began to teach Vasuladatta the magic charm. For the first two days she listened attentively and repeated the words after King Udena. On the third day, Vasuladatta's attention began to wander. She could not remember what she had learned the previous days and kept making mistakes. At last, King Udena could not bear it any more, and lost his temper.

"You stupid hunchbacked creature," he cried out. "You won't learn the charm if you try for a hundred years."

Vasuladatta was horrified when she heard him call her a 'hunchbacked creature'.

"You horrible leper," she retorted. "How dare you insult me."



Now King Udena was equally horrified at being so addressed. He tore aside the curtain between them, ready for a quarrel.

When they saw each other, the king and Vasuladatta were amazed. Neither of them was deformed as described by King Chandapajota. In fact, Vasuladatta was the most beautiful maiden that King Udena had ever seen, and he fell in love with her immediately. It was the same for Vasuladatta, for King Udena was a truly handsome young man.

They soon realised what the wily King Chandapajota had done, and Vasuladatta promised to do all she could to help King Udena escape.

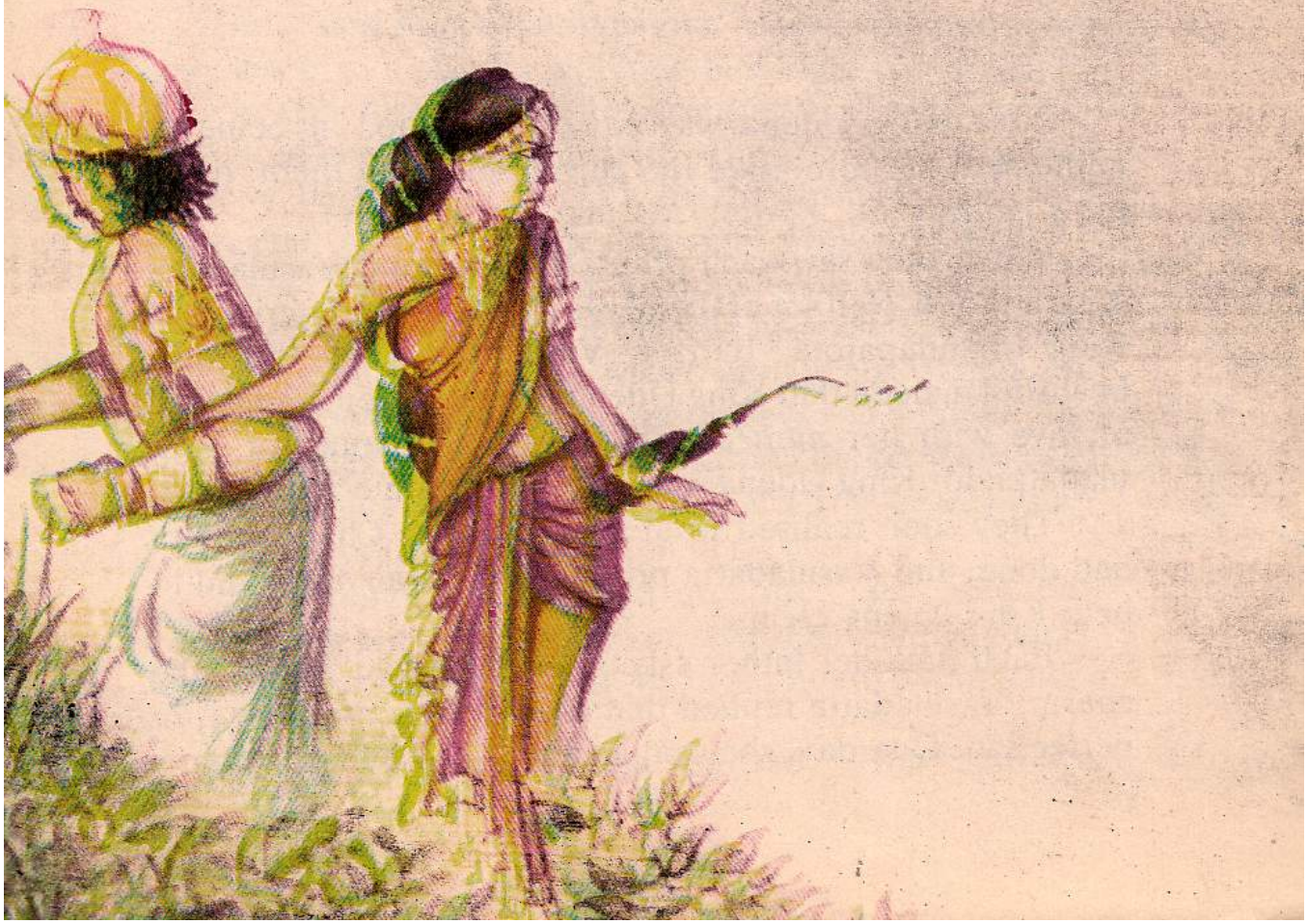
Each time her father asked her if she had learned the charm, Vasuladatta replied that she would soon know it to perfection. One day, she said to him, "Father I now know

the charm, but so that it may be most effective I must find a herb that grows in the furthest corner of this kingdom. In fact, it is found only on the borders of King Udena's kingdom."

King Chandapajota was greedy to make use of the charm so he told the guards along the borders to let the princess pass through all the gates of the kingdom whenever she wished.

King Udena and Vasuladatta waited patiently until, one day, King Chandapajota went hunting. Then, they quickly filled a sack with gold coins and made their way out of the palace gates on the back of a strong horse.

They had almost reached the border when King Chandapajota's soldiers caught up with them. The king opened the sack of gold coins and began to scatter it around him. As he had expected, King Chandapajota's soldiers were as greedy as their monarch, and at once gave up the chase to pick up the gold.



Vasuladatta and King Udena were left to make their way to safety.

King Chandapajota was furious when he learned of what had happened. He stamped his foot in rage and frustration, but he could do nothing to harm King Udena now.

In his place I would have been happy with my riches, instead of hankering for more.

THE VANISHING RICE-STRAW COAT

a Japanese fairytale

Long, long ago, in a far-off land of the East, there was a strange village and the people who lived in it were a strange-looking lot. Not one of them had the size or shape of head of a normal man or woman. Some had heads which were bald and long, others were big and round, while yet others were so peculiar-looking that it appeared as if they had potatoes growing on their shoulders instead of heads. Moreover, they were renowned for being rather weak-witted.

One young man among them was a lazy good-for-nothing, whom we shall call Otoko. He was always up to mischief and loved to annoy his neighbours. They usually gave him as good as they got, but one day Otoko's mischief landed him in trouble. This happened when the foolish rascal decided to play a trick on a Tengu.

Now, a Tengu is an odd creature. Its name means 'a

long-nosed goblin' and it really does have a rather long nose. On its back it has a pair of feathered wings and it dresses in a most unusual way. And it has magical powers. Only a very foolish person would ever try to trick a Tengu. Well, Otoko was one such person.

One day he made a pipe out of a piece of bamboo, and wondered what he could do with it. At first he thought that he would blow stones through it, and then he thought that it would make a fine telescope.

He raised it to one eye and through the corner of the other he saw a Tengu goblin flying towards him.

"Whoopee!" said Otoko to himself. "Let's see if I can trick that Tengu into giving me his fine rice-straw coat."

He began to look through the bamboo with a show of great interest, exclaiming, "Ooh!" and "Aah!" with excitement every now and then. Like all Tengus this little goblin was very curious. He hopped down close to Otoko to see what he was doing. In a squeaky voice he begged for a peep.

"What?" roared Otoko. "Let you look through the telescope that was made especially for me? Never."

Then he peered through the pipe again, murmuring, "What a lovely sight the moon is. Don't you wish you could see it Mr. Tengu? I can see every plain and valley on it "

The poor Tengu was tortured with curiosity.

"Please," he begged. "Please let me have a peep. For just one peep you may have my lovely boots or my shiny black hat."

"No," replied Otoko rudely. "But maybe I would consider letting you have a peep if you gave me your coat."

Before Otoko could change his mind, the silly goblin grabbed the bamboo and thrust the coat into Otoko's hands.

Otoko ran off as fast as he could and the Tengu was left wondering whether his eyesight or his wits were weaker, for all he could see through the telescope was a little round patch of blue sky.

As soon as he was out of the Tengu's sight, Otoko put on the coat. And what do you think happened! Pouf! He became invisible. Delighted with himself, he skipped down the road until he came to the village.

"What fun I shall have," he thought. "Oh! What joy! What joy!"

He had a marvellous time knocking against people, tweaking their noses, and frightening them out of what little wits they had.

As luck would have it, just at that moment a proud lord walked down the street, admiring the large ring he was wearing on his little finger. He had just reached the middle of the street when he felt a violent tweak on his left ear. He turned around angrily and was grabbed by his right ear and swung around in an undignified manner. He whirled around twice and landed with a bump on the ground. What a funny sight it was to see the proud man sitting in the mud! Even the frightened village folk burst out laughing.

Pleased with himself, Otoko continued on his way, whistling a merry tune. He had hardly gone a few steps when he saw a workman with a parcel under his arm. Otoko ran up to him and, grabbing the parcel, drew out a pair of bright, white socks. Imagine the workman's terror and amazement when his brand new socks were wrenched away from him and went flapping away to land in a muddy puddle.

"My socks are possessed," he shrieked and fled down the road.

Otoko was delighted with his tricks. He looked around eagerly to see what else he could do. His eyes alighted on the nursery school, and he slipped nimbly into the classroom. The teacher had his back to the door and was writing on the blackboard. 2+2, he wrote slowly, and before he could write

the answer, Otoko had scrawled 5 on the board.

The teacher scratched his head in surprise. The children gazed at the board and then at their hands, and then at the board again. Some ot them counted on their fingers.

"I think the answer is four," muttered the teacher. "But it says on the blackboard that it's five."

He scratched his head again. "Shall I believe what my head says, or what I see in black and white?"

"The answer is five," Otoko whispered in his ear and ran out of the room giggling helplessly.

Oh what confusion he left behind in the classroom! What quarrelling and tears followed as the children screamed at each other—"It's four " "No, it's five", "Rubbish it's six"

One fat little boy held up two fingers on each hand and asked, "Well how many is this?"

"It's eight," yelled another boy. "Your fingers are so fat that each one is equal to two." He stuck out his tongue and the fat boy screamed in rage.

Wicked little Otoko ran off home to take a rest from his wickedness. He took off his coat and decided to take a little nap so that he would be fresh for further adventures in the evening. While he was asleep, his mother came in and saw the rice-straw coat hanging on the back of a chair.

"What a dirty coat," she said in disgust. She picked it up and holding it away from herself, went into the kitchen and pushed the coat into the fire

Otoko was furious when he discovered what his mother had done. Angrily he gathered the ashes and stalked off to a corner of the garden. Once there, he began to rub the ash all over himself. Sure enough , he slowly began to disappear. When nothing of him could be seen he skipped off towards the village. He could hear laughter and chatter from the inns. The aroma of food reached his nostrils and his stomach rumbled with hunger. He entered the noisiest inn and waited patiently until everyone had helped themselves to the most delicious smelling soup, then he crept up, and putting his mouth to the soup tureen began to drink greedily. The landlord's dog sniffed at him curiously, and licked his chin.

Everyone turned around to look at the dog that seemed to be licking the air. They could hear a gurgling sound from somewhere very close to the tureen. Suddenly, a pair of red pouting lips appeared at the tureen. The soup trickled down from the lips, and to the amazement of the watching people, what looked like a chin began to appear below the lips. And then—a very, very red nose.

"It's a devil," someone shrieked.

"Well, no devil is going to get away with drinking my

soup," said the landlord, and picking up a stick he brandished it under the faceless red nose.

Otoko jumped and rushed out with a frightened

squawk. Everybody rushed out behind him, the landlord leading the way.

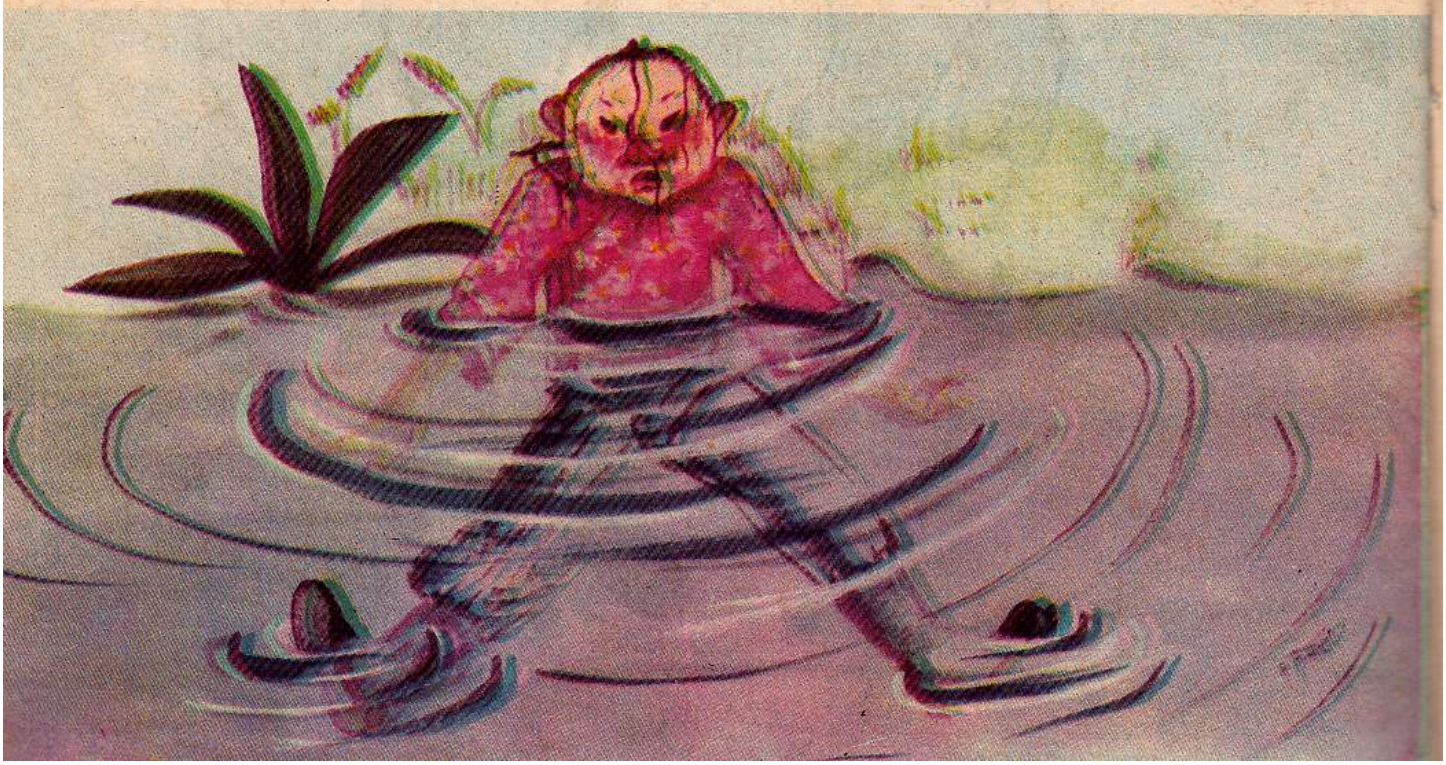
Otoko began to sweat as he ran down the road. The result was disastrous. You see, the ash was fine as long as it was dry, but as soon as it got wet, it lost all its magical powers.

Soon the fleeing Otoko, streaked with sweat, began to look like a half-painted picture. Frightened out of his wits, he began to run faster and faster until he came to the bridge over the stream. He threw himself into the stream, and immediately the people peering over the side saw that their soup-drinking devil was Otoko.

Poor, wretched Otoko was pulled out and made to tell the story of the rice-straw coat. How everybody laughed!

"You crazy nit-wit," they roared. "Don't you know that you can't play tricks on a Tengu? You should keep your nose out of their business. Yours isn't half long enough."

The village folk laughed over the incident for days. Poor Otoko stayed at home hoping that everyone would soon forget. Perhaps they have, but I'm sure that you and I, and the Tengu will laugh at him for a long time yet.



2.50