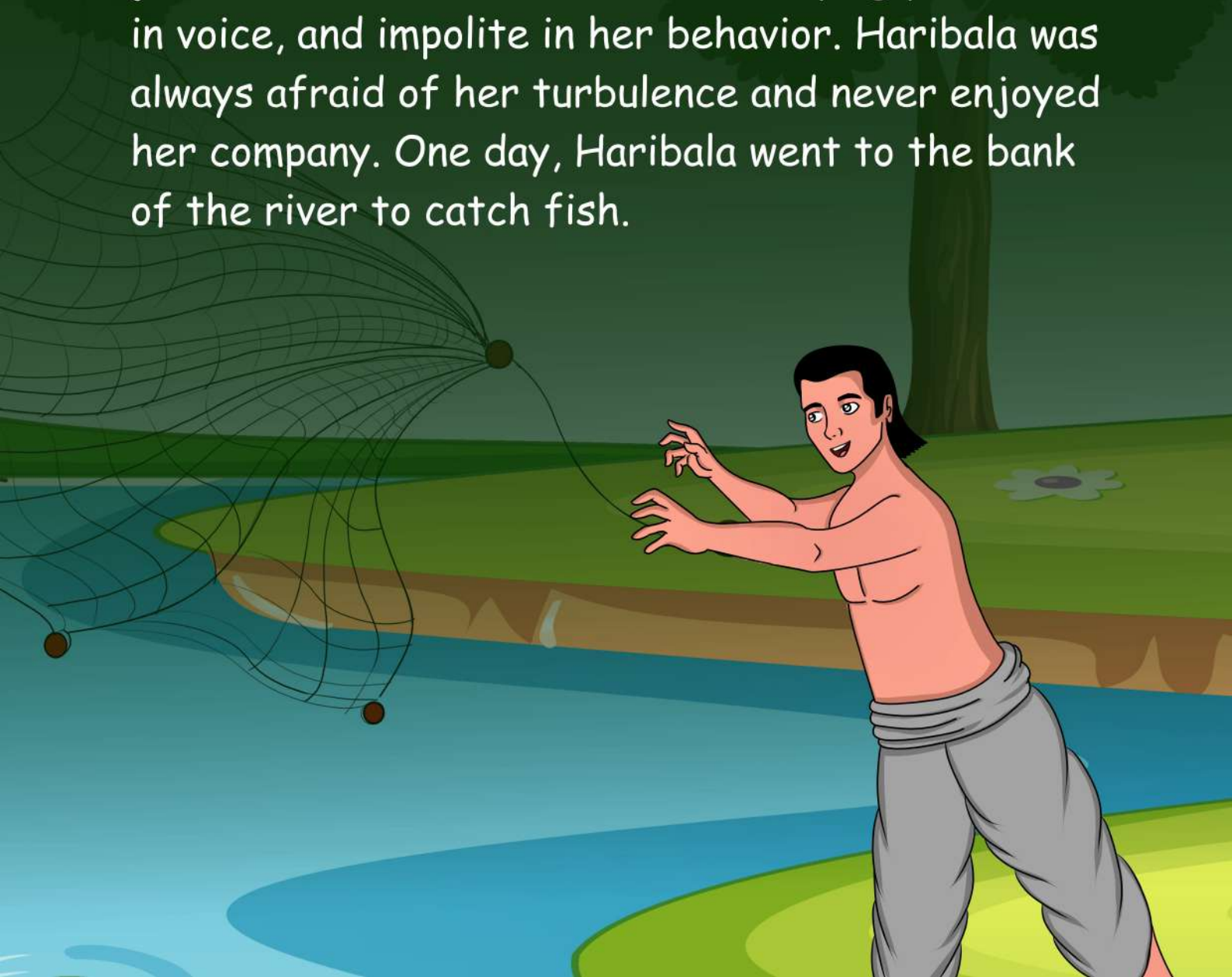


Haribala



Vasantsen was the king of Kanchanpur. His chief queen was Vasantaseni. After a long gap following their marriage, a daughter was born to them. She was named Vasantashri. She was a notable mixture of beauty and intelligence. When she attained her youth, the royal couple became anxious to settle her in marriage. In the same city, there lived a fisherman named Haribala. He was very simple, polite, and industrious, and was happy even in his poverty. His wife Prachand (meaning violent) fully justified her name, and she was very ugly, harsh in voice, and impolite in her behavior. Haribala was always afraid of her turbulence and never enjoyed her company. One day, Haribala went to the bank of the river to catch fish.



A Muni was just then passing by that way. As if induced from within, Haribala bowed before him. The Muni blessed him, but, finding him engaged in an impious profession, he said,

"Friend, do you also practice pious deeds?"

"I view my family profession as a pious deed, and, believe me, Sir, honestly do I fulfill it. Daily I come to this riverbank and spread my net. I view it as my own whatever catch I have. I don't know any other pious deeds."



The Muni, who had a natural serenity on his face, charm in his voice, and equanimity in his eyes, said,

"Oh fisherman! The family profession is not the only pious deed one should perform. These professions vary with individuals. Dharma is based on Ahimsa. Anything that strengthens Ahimsa is Dharma, and everything else is a sin. Every living wanting to live. Life is dear to all. So don't torture anyone, give no pain to anyone. What you call your family profession is at every stage a sinful act. You need to take a look at yourself."



Haribala felt a stir within himself. His thoughts got encouragement. The seed of piety hidden in him came up. As if spontaneously, the following words mixed with awe came from his mouth :

"Oh great Muni, save me. I am deeply immersed in acts of killing. It is not possible for me to get out of them. Show me the way."



The Muni looked at Haribala. Pity was taking shape on his face. The Muni wanted him to desist wholly from acts of killing, but this was too much to expect. So he found a way out for him, and said,

"Fisherman, I suggest that you spare your first catch. Don't kill it. This should be easy for you. Don't you think so?"

Haribala thought for a moment and then, mustering courage, he said,

"Oh Muni, I accept this. From this day on, I shall not kill my first catch."



The Muni went on his way, and Haribala turned to his work. The power of spiritualism, when it is awakened, knows no limit and is capable of washing away all sins. Haribala threw his net in the river. As he pulled it, he felt it to be heavy. The catch was a big fish, but he remembered the vow, so he tied a shell around its neck and restored it to the stream.



He cast his net for the second time, but as luck would have it, the catch was the same fish. This happened several times, and on each occasion he restored it to the stream. It was already noon, and the fisherman had no catch for himself. So he changed the place. But the fish too did the same, and even there he caught the same fish in his net. He changed the place several times, but with no better result, as if at every point in the stream there was no other fish. The sun was now on the western sky, but the fisherman had not earned his day's subsistence. But he remained steadfast in his vow and did not repent for it.



Even a small vow sometimes becomes pretty difficult, but the difficulty is resolved by steadfastness. Seeing that Haribala would not deviate, the fish said in a human voice,

"Oh pious man, I heartily congratulate you for your steadfastness. You did not care for your daily bread in fulfilling your vow. This has impressed me very much. Ask for a boon."

Haribala was surprised.

"You are only a fish,"

he said.

"What boon can you give me? Between man and fish, you should know, one does not help the other."



"Oh lucky man, why do you see only a fish in me? I am the Master of the Salt Ocean. I came here to test your steadfastness, and I am happy to declare that you have successfully got through. Most people don't take any vow. Few take but don't fulfill. There are very few like you who are truly steadfast. So I urge you again to ask for a boon. I will deem it a great privilege to be able to help you."



Haribala was very happy to notice the instantaneous effect of a vow. Thinking for a while, he said,

"Oh great one! I am grateful to you for your kindness. I pray that whenever I am in difficulty, you extend your help to me."



It was already evening, but the fisherman had no money in his hand and was hesitant to return home. So he went to a temple and lay there in a corner engrossing himself in his own thoughts : I have fulfilled only a fraction of a vow and what a good return it has given me. Fortunate must be those who practice Ahimsa to the full. It was a striking coincidence that on the same night fisherman Haribala took shelter in the temple, a young merchant with the same name was scheduled to meet Princess Vasantashri at the same temple.



This was desired by the princess herself who, while seated one day at her window, had seen the young merchant Haribala passing by that way and fell deeply in love with him. She at once scribbled a brief note suggesting the meeting and dropped it from her window. The note from the princess suggested the meeting at the temple on the fourteenth night of the dark half of the month wherefrom, it was suggested, and the two would proceed to some unknown destination.



On the plea of visiting the temple for purposes of worship, Vasantashri started from the palace on the appointed night. She was in the best of her clothes and jewelry and carried many other essential things. But merchant Haribala did not turn up on account of a mental conflict. He had never known the princess before, and her love was only at first sight.



This, he apprehended, might be a cause for trouble later on. Besides, he believed that women are by nature crafty, and secretly they perform many things. When Vasantashri reached the temple, it was very dark. She called out,

"Haribala, Haribala !"

There was no response except the echo. The princess called out again. Fisherman Haribala heard it, and finding somebody calling him by his name, he responded from where he lay. The princess said,

"Hurry up, my dear.
We have to go a long distance."



Fisherman Haribala did not take much time to understand the situation. He understood that somebody bearing the same name as him had failed to turn up. So he thought of playing the necessary role. He at once came up and mounted the chariot. The chariot proceeded at top speed. In his hurry, Haribala had left his fishing net behind. After they had gone some distance, the princess discovered that the man accompanying her had hardly any clothes on. Did he come in disguise, or did some miscreant rob him of his wear, she thought ?



When the princess asked him about his clothes, he said,

"Hmmm."

So she gave him some out of her own stock. Then the princess induced him to enter into conversation with her and conveyed her deep love to him, but he would only repeat as previously,

"Hmmm."



Now, the princess felt some doubt about the man in whose company she had eloped, and many questions disturbed her mind. Is he proud? Doesn't he understand what I say? Is he angry? Why doesn't he talk with me and convey his love to me? She was now sure that she had come out with a different man that she had taken a wrong step or she had been deceived. She was pretty sure that this was not the man whom she loved.



When it was dawn, she could clearly see the man seated beside her. Her dreams now vanished and the ground almost slipped from beneath her feet. She had only scorn and remorse for what she had done. Her mind went back to the palace, to her parents, the king and queen, their great affection for her, her own comfortable life all these were left behind and for good, and she had stepped into a great uncertainty.



The princess could no longer bear it and fainted. When she regained consciousness, she bewailed and lamented, to become senseless again. Haribala didn't know what to do. He read into her mental agony. He realized that he couldn't live with her in peace and comfort. He wondered of the Dev if he could do something to save the situation. Time is the best healer. With the passage of time, the princess became somewhat consoled. She could blame none to save herself. All that had happened was her own doing.



It was no use lamenting for what had been left behind; wiser it would be to look ahead and build up the future. If an arrow, haphazardly cast, hits the target, it becomes a source of joy for the archer. Such a thing now happened to the princess. She opened her tired eyes to look at the man and wanted to ask him about his family, profession, residence and many other things. Just at that moment she heard a voice from the sky:

"Princess, you are lucky. It would be a folly on your part to look down on this man. His luck is to take a favorable turn very soon. Who can be a better consort for you except him?"

Now a feeling of joy replaced her remorse, and she began to feel love for the man.



She looked at him again and tried to read into his mind. But Haribala sat calm, grave, and placid. With hesitation, the princess said,

"I am thirsty. Please fetch me some water."

Haribala got up at once and proceeded toward the jungle. After a short time, he came back with a jar full of water. The princess drank to her heart's content. Then she looked at him again. She was convinced that a man who could bring water within such a short time in such a lonely place could not be just ordinary.



The sun was now high up in the sky, and Vasantashri could fully see the man. What wonder, the ugly man was totally changed and was now all beauty and youth. Vasantashri was immensely delighted. She said to him,

"My dear, it is time you accept my hand. The desire that goaded me here in your company may now reach its fruition."



The two were married there as per the Gandharv rites. It was the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Haribala and They resumed their journey and reached the city of Vishala. As they entered the city, they met with a merchant from whom they came to know all about the city. They decided to settle there. They purchased a seven -story mansion for their residence, took four horses and many attendants to make their life comfortable. Their was a very happy life. All along with a man of active habits, Haribala maintained them even now.



Daily, he would receive the needy at his house, listen to their difficulties and extend whatever help he could, including financial. Though a newcomer, he soon became well known on account of his generosity, a much-respected citizen of the city of Vishala. Stories of his charities soon reached the ears of king Madanbeg, who invited him to his court and honored him. He was admitted to a high rank by the king and soon became his friend and favorite Vasantashri. To strengthen the ties of friendship, the king one day invited Haribala and his wife to dinner.



As the couple came to the palace, they were duly received by the king, who served them food at the table with his own hands. But Vasantashri's beauty captivated the king's eyes, who lustily longed for her company. From that day on, the only thought that haunted the king was how to get her. He conceived many stratagems, but none helped him to realize his end. At last, he took his chief minister into confidence. For the chief minister, this was a good chance, since he was very jealous of Haribala's popularity.



Within three or four days, he submitted his plan, which the king liked and accepted. When the court assembled the next day and all the courtiers were present, the following announcement was made by the king:

"You all know, gentlemen that the princess is now grown up, and I have to arrange for her marriage in the very near future. This will be a nice opportunity to establish contact and friendship with leading kings in countries far and near. Now, it will be the responsibility of our courtiers to go and extend invitations personally.



I have in mind to invite the great king Vibhishan of Lanka with the members of his royal household to grace the occasion by their august presence. Someone from among you is, therefore, to go there as my envoy. May I know from you who may be entrusted with this very important and responsible mission?"

There was silence all over the court. Courtiers were looking at one another, but none was ready to shoulder the mission.



Then the chief minister stood up and said:

"Your Majesty! You are a favorite of fortune. You have in your court assembled people of all calibers. Going to Lanka to invite king Vibhishan is indeed a difficult job, but we may have someone to fulfill even this."

Then the minister looked all around and suggested Haribala's name. He spoke about him in very glowing terms. The king now turned to Haribala, who felt elated. So, even though he was not keen, the mission fell on him. The king was delighted at the success of the plan.



Haribala returned home and narrated the events at the court to his wife. Vasantashri at once saw in it a trap. She said,

"My dear, you have been deceived. There must be a plot behind all this. The king has some evil design. Ever since we went to dinner at the palace, he must have been hatching it. He wants to remove you forever so that he can have me. It will be better if you somehow get out of it."



Haribala's pride was hurt. He said,

"I may die, but I can't decline an assignment that I have accepted. So I must go. The outcome is in the hands of destiny, but to make the best of exertions is within my capacity."

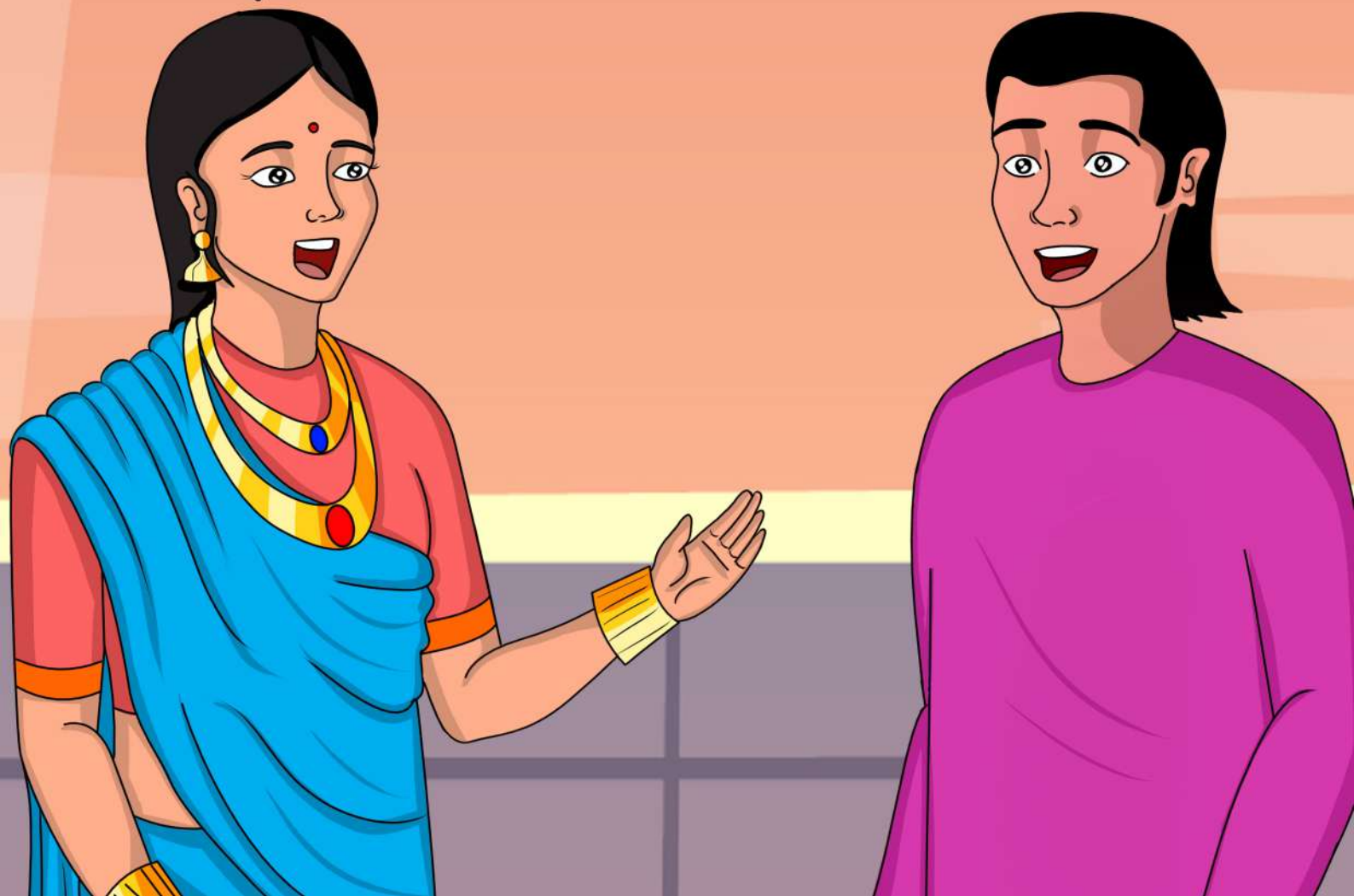
Then, casting a deep sigh, he added,

"I am not as much worried about myself as I am for you. I don't know what may happen to you after I leave."



Vasantashri on her part was not prepared to show any weakness. She said,

"My dear! May you safely return after the fulfillment of your mission? May there be no difficulty in the way. Please don't be anxious on my score. I am fully capable to guard my purity. All the designs of the king will be baffled."



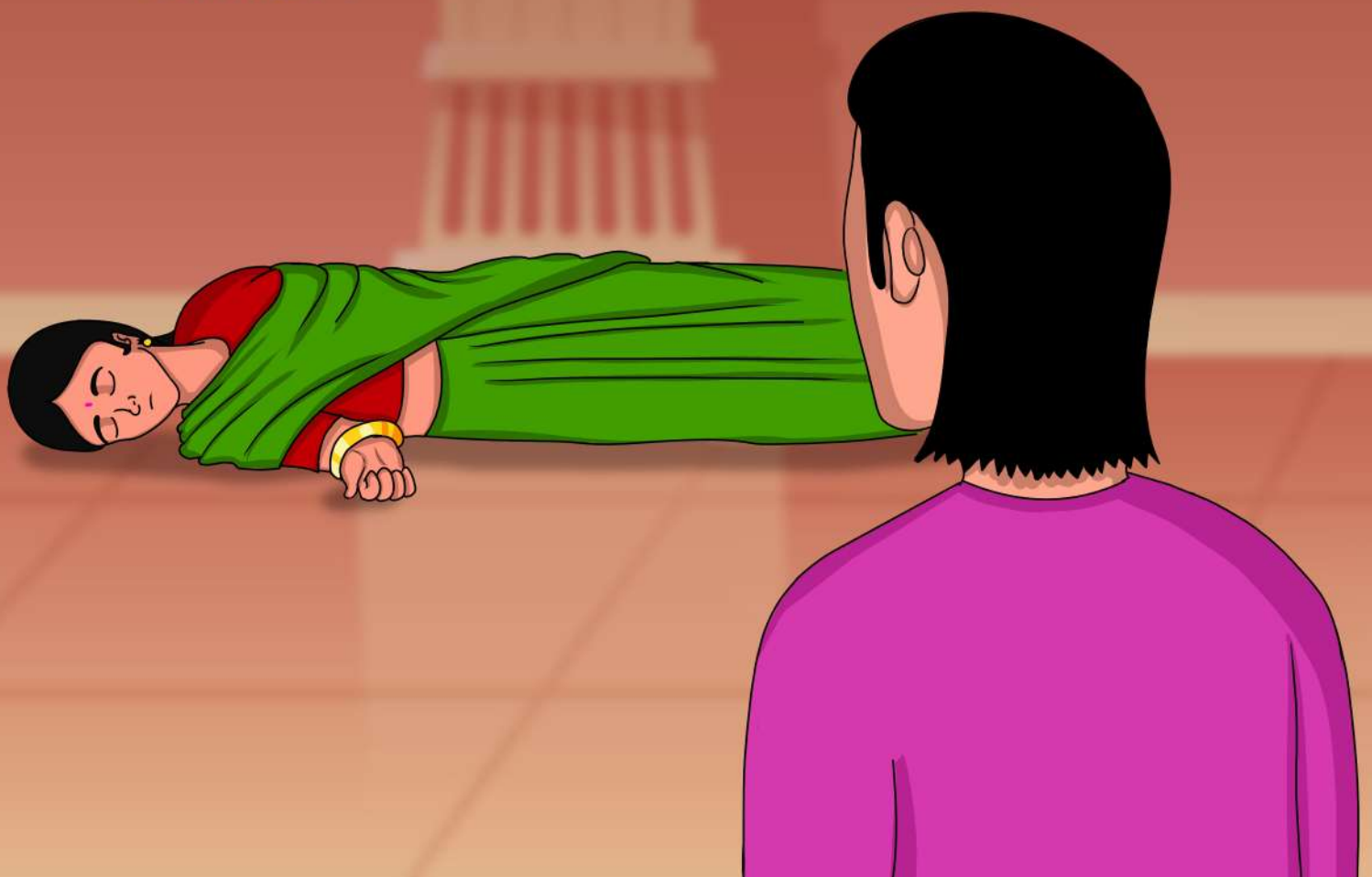
Haribala started on an auspicious day. He passed through many villages, towns, and countries; he crossed through many rivers, forests, and mountains. At last, he reached the seashore. He had to cross it to reach his destination, but there was no ferry, nor did he know how to swim. He was now convinced that it was a plot to kill him. In this difficult situation, he remembered the Dev who appeared at once, and on hearing about the difficulty, he turned himself into a fish to carry Haribala through the sea.



Comfortably seated on the back of the fish, Haribala now enjoyed the first experience of a voyage. Swimming through the limitless waters, the fish at last reached the shores of Lanka. Haribala's joy knew no end. He had never thought that such a difficult job would be so easily accomplished. He thanked the Dev for his services and bade him good-bye. From the shore, Haribala moved into the city. It was a different world altogether which presented itself to him.



Lanka was a magnificent city with wonderful buildings and parks, the like of which Haribala had never seen before. There, inside the city, he came across a wonderful mansion, which, however, wore a deserted look. He entered the mansion and freely moved through its chambers. On the sixth floor, in one of the chambers, he saw a young woman lying senseless. This surprised him all the more. He looked around, and in one corner he saw a jar full of nectar. He sprinkled a few drops from it on the woman, and what a surprise, the lady sat up as if awakened from a deep sleep. She was, however, somewhat surprised and abashed at the presence of a stranger and foreigner in her chamber.



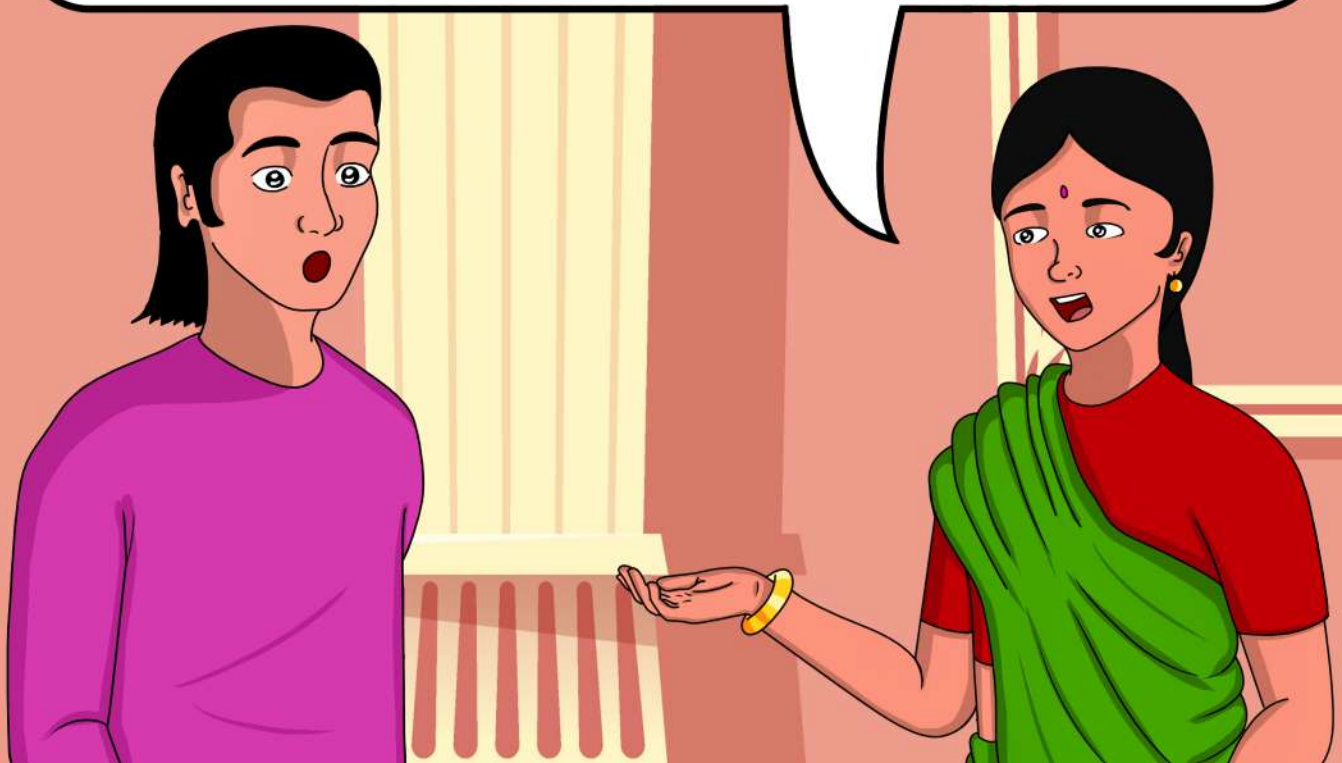
She asked him who he was and how he got there. After Haribala had narrated his part of the account, the lady gave the following account about herself :

"My name is Kusumshri. My father Pushpbatuk is a gardener to king Vibhishan. The king has much wealth and grains, but his ideas are not lofty. My whole family is unfavorably disposed toward him. The quarrel has gone so far now that no one from my family, except me, can go to the king. As for myself, I don't want to go to him, but I can't help. It is my father who has made me the pivot of the whole game."



Haribala's curiosity was fired. Kusumshri continued:

"Once my father had consulted an astrologer about my future. The fellow had predicted a bright future for me and said that my husband would be a king. My difficulties really started from that day. My father has been dreaming now of the arrival of a king and doesn't arrange for my marriage to any other young man. What a dilemma for me and ignominy for my father! For this very reason, everyone in the family is now opposed to him. When he goes out, he makes me senseless, and when he comes back, he restores my senses by sprinkling this nectar. Mine is a miserable life. It is good that you have come and I may now have the fulfillment of my wishes."

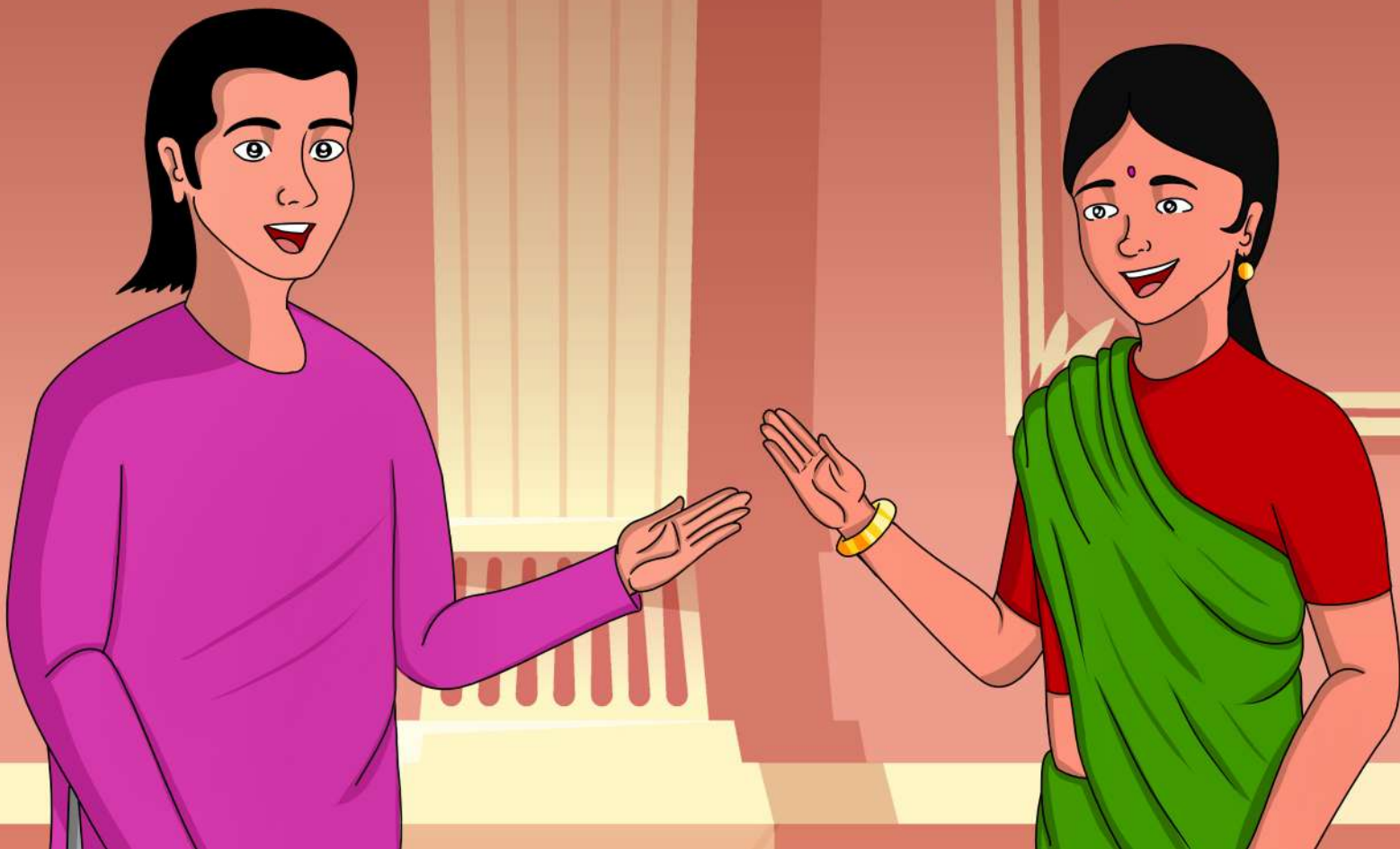


Thus concluding her account, she looked at Haribala. The four eyes met. Kusumshri proposed, and Haribala accepted. The two were married right there. Now Kusumshri said,

"My dear, it is not safe for us to stay here any longer. If my father returns, we shall be in trouble."

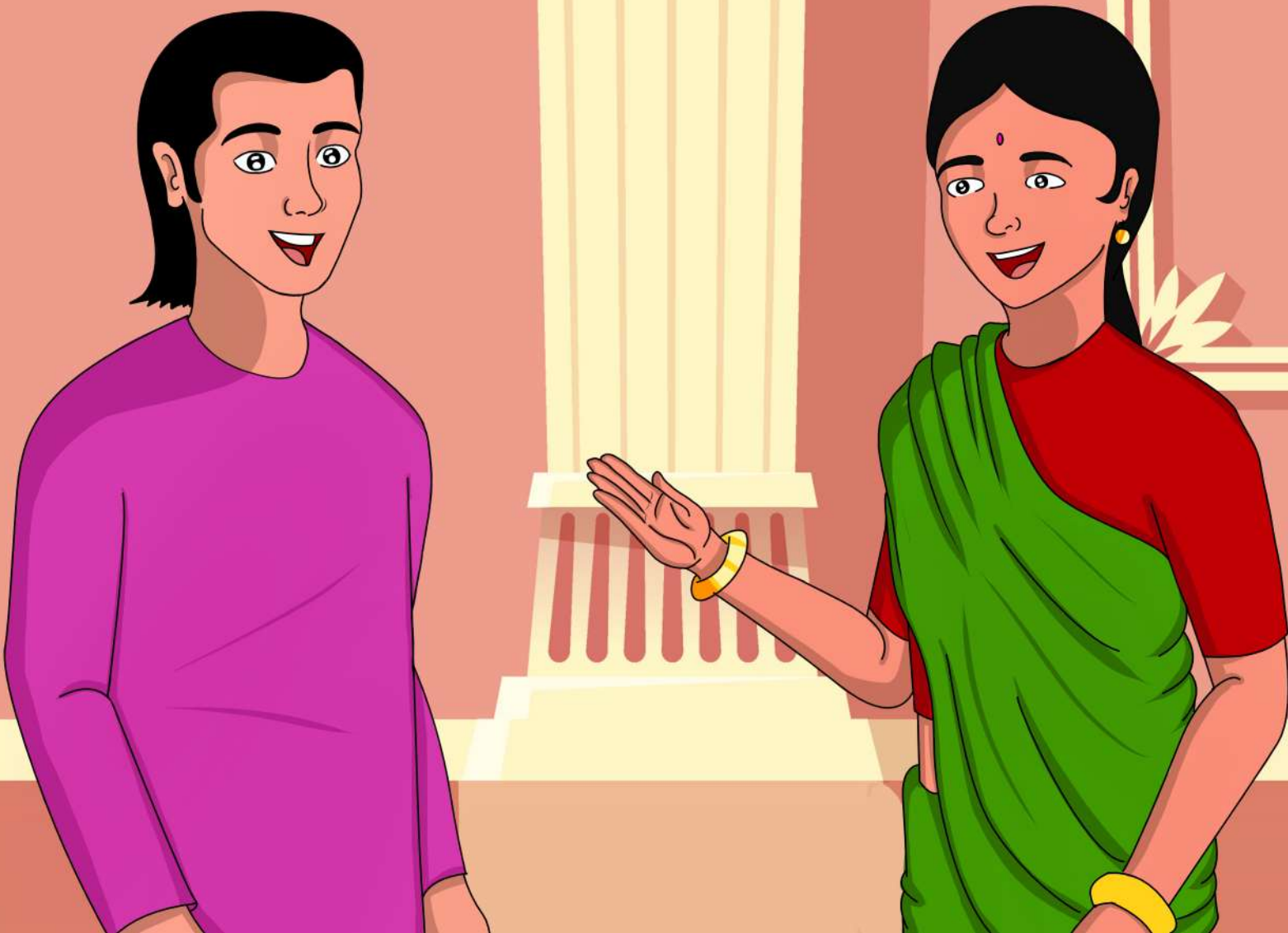
Haribala said,

"But the purpose for which I have come remains unfulfilled."



" My dear, you dropped the idea of inviting King Vibhishan. Your coming to the country has been as good as inviting him. King Vibhishan will never leave Lanka. You may say so to your king,"

said Kusumshri.



She managed to procure the Chandrahas sword which belonged to the king and gave it to her husband to carry as a token of his having come to Lanka. Then they collected all useful things from that mansion, including the jar of nectar, and hurried to the seashore. The Dev was remembered again and he arrived, helped them to cross the sea and placed them right in the park in the city of Vishala.



After Haribala's departure, the king became active again to win over Vasantashri. Daily he would send his maids to bring her to the palace, but this had no effect. So one night, the king himself arrived. She could not be discourteous and so received the king. The king now tried his best to attract her. He told her that he had sent her husband to Lanka on an important mission, and his return was likely to be delayed. On his own part, he could not leave her alone. So he proposed that she should go with him to live at the palace. Vasantashri silently listened. This was a trap to catch her, and she did not know how to keep out. The king continued his overtures and denounced Haribala openly as a bad man.



Vasantashri bore all silently. But as the king was about to transgress the limit of decency, her whole purity burst forth:

"Whatever you do, I shall not deviate from my path."

The king too raised his voice and said,

"You foolish girl! You are unaware of the consequences of transgressing my order. If you don't favorably respond to me, I shall not hesitate to apply force."



Vasantashri was terrified, but to save the situation, she said,

"Your Majesty! What is the hurry about it? If there is no good news about my husband, I shall do as Your Majesty will suggest."

When all this was happening, Haribala, who had already returned, was watching the whole thing from behind a pillar. He had left his newly wedded wife in the park and had come to see Vasantashri when the king was there. He was happy at the purity and steadfastness of his first wife. Now he stood before her.



It was a moment of great joy for Vasantashri. She reported all that the king had tried to do during his absence and that all have been in vain. Haribala was boiling with rage, but this was no occasion to take revenge. On his own part, he narrated his journey to Lanka, his voyage, his experience at the capital of the demons, and his marriage with Kusumshri. Vasantashri now made preparations to receive her co-wife. When the two met, they were locked in deep embrace. The news of Haribala's return from Lanka spread with the speed of lightning, and the king came to know of it. He had not only come back after inviting King Vibhishan, but had won his daughter's hand.



This was highly disheartening, but the king suppressed his real feeling and informed the court as follows:

"Gentlemen ! It is great news today that our good friend and courtier Haribala has returned and will enter the metropolis today. This is a great personal honor to me, to the people, and to the country at large. We have to accord him a fitting welcome, for which the city has to be properly decorated. I shall myself receive him in the full audience."



Within a few hours, this announcement reached every corner of the city. People were happy, and they thronged the park to celebrate the homecoming of the hero. He was duly received there by the king, who then brought him to the palace. The court was overflowing with the people. The king said cordially to Haribala,

"My worthy friend! How did you perform this most difficult job? We are waiting to receive the full account from you."




The following account was given by Haribala:

"Your Gracious Majesty ! The course of events is too long to be narrated within such a short time, but I shall make the long story short. I started for the south, and after having left behind many dense forests and difficult mountains I, at last, reached the sea. As I had no aid to cross it, I stood on the shore thinking. At that time, a terrible giant who was very hungry came to me to use me as his food, but I could read his intention and so humbly said that it would be a great occasion for me when my mortal frame would serve as his food, but, I said, my only regret would be that the body would end before it had fulfilled a promise.



The giant became impatient and shouted, "What is your promise ? I shall help you to fulfill it." But when I told him about it, even the giant was taken aback. "It is not easy for a human being to cross the sea, but let me think." With folded palms, I waited. At last, the giant said, with his dreadful tongue visible, that a pyre is burning in the forest. Go there and jump into it. You can't go with this body into Lanka. That may be the only way. I got alarmed, but I held my assignment above everything, even life; so without thinking, I jumped straight into the pyre. Soon my body was turned into a pile of ashes. The giant then collected my ashes in a piece of cloth, carried them himself to Lanka and placed them before king Vibhishan.

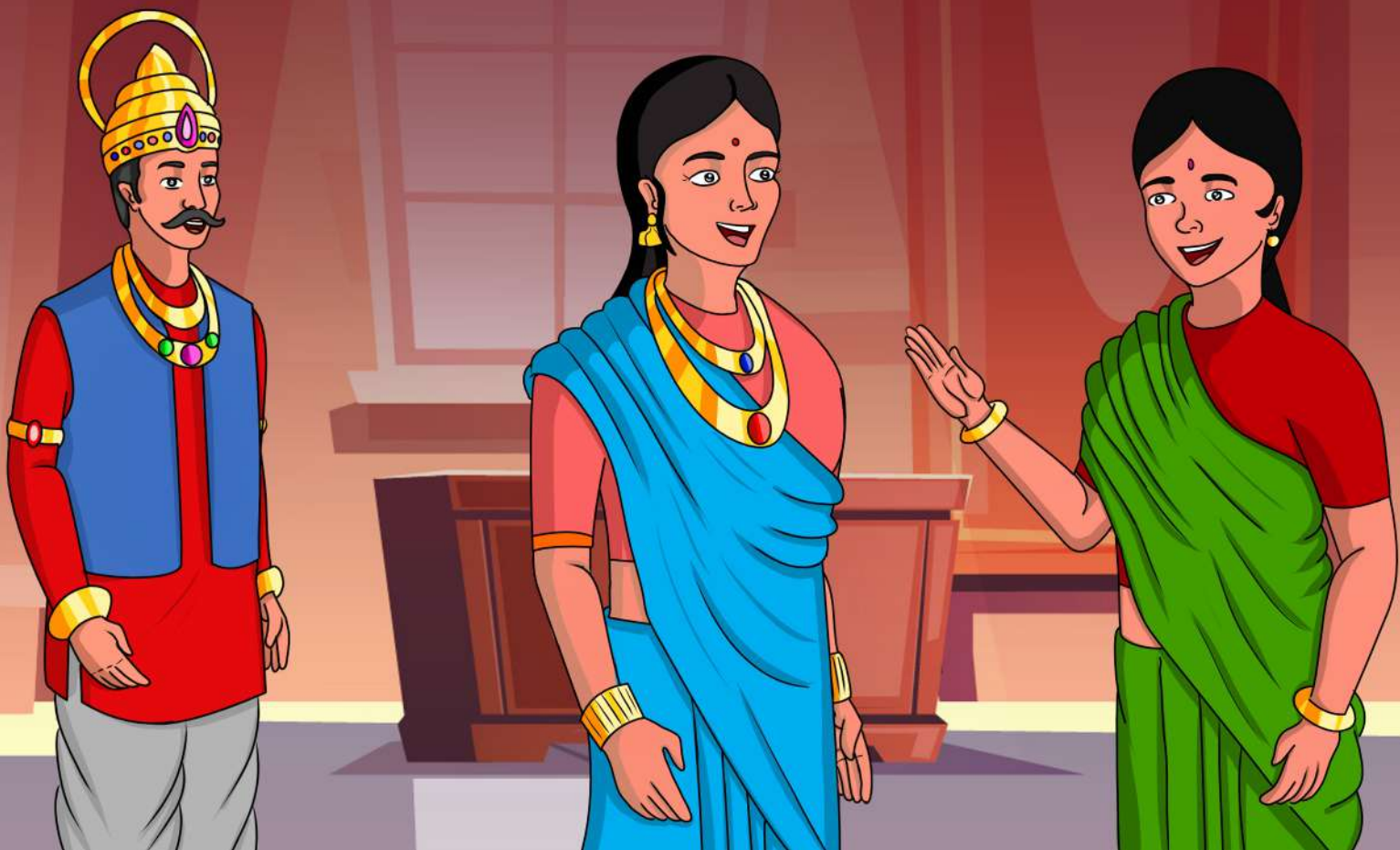




When the king heard the whole story from the giant, he was amazed at my devotion, and at once restored me to life, imparting in the process more beauty than I had before. I bowed before the king, who received me very cordially and at once proposed his daughter's marriage with me. When I sought audience with him to unfold the purpose of my mission, he was pleased to let me go. After I had suitably done it, the king accepted invitation from Your Majesty and promised to be here at least two days before the ceremony." Haribala added before concluding, "With great eagerness, he gave me his daughter's hand and bestowed on me this Chandrahas sword which belonged to him. When I was making preparations to return, he lifted both of us up and sent us here in a moment."



Everywhere there was a murmur of praise and joy. All spoke highly of Haribala's ability, personality, and shrewdness. The solitary exception was the chief minister, who had no doubt that the king had fallen victim to a humbug. So he started hatching another plot against him and of course, he had the king's knowledge and consent. He arranged a reception for the king at Haribala's residence, which Haribala couldn't decline. On the appointed day, the king arrived with his ministers. Wonderful dishes were served to the guests. The king saw the two ladies, and his lust was again aflame. He was now anxious to invite both of them to the palace.



Impending evil changes men's ideas. The king again held consultation with the chief minister, who suggested that the king alone was entitled to the best things in the kingdom. If the king would so desire, Haribala would have no other alternative but to send the two ladies to the harem.

"But he is my friend,"

said the king,

"Besides, he has rendered important services to the state. It will not be fair on my part to issue such a rude order."



The minister said,

"Your Majesty may again give him an assignment more difficult this time than previously and thus get rid of him."

The minister gave him a plan which was to send Haribala to invite Yam, the king of death and Haribala had no other alternative but to agree.

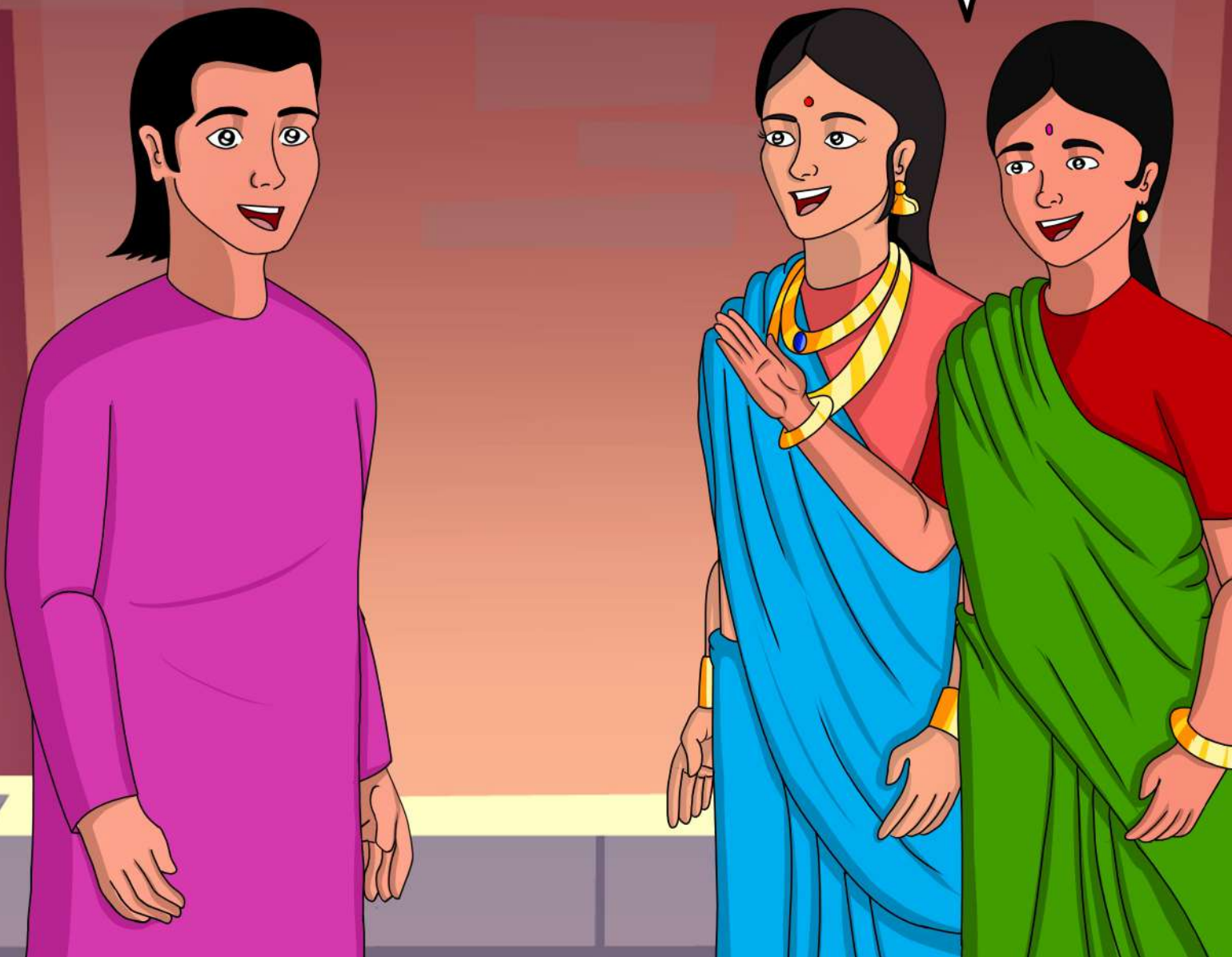


Haribala came home and narrated the whole thing to his wives. He was very sad, but the wives consoled him.

"Even though this time it will be a play with death,"

they said,

"Everything will be okay. The king will be taught a lesson, and our purity will remain unmolested."



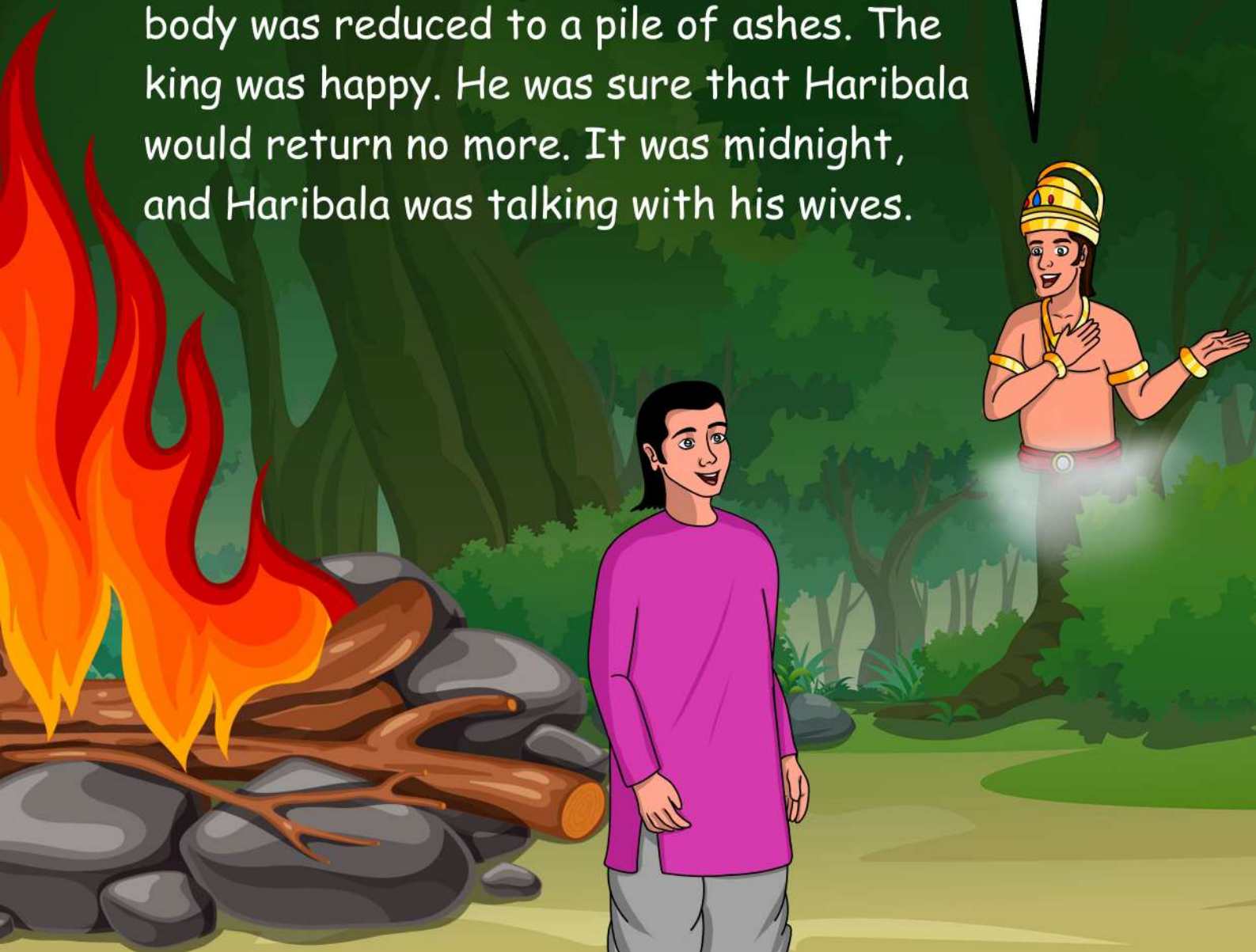
A huge pyre was erected outside the city. At the right moment, the king came there followed by all the people of the city. Haribala too was there. Everybody was unhappy, and there was a suppressed discontent about the king's behavior. No one had any doubt that the king was intent on killing a very capable man. Haribala had become a hero in the eyes of the people, who praised him in all directions for his merits, for his charities, and for his keen intellect and personality.



The Dev was invoked by Haribala at the right moment. He arrived at once. He heard about the new difficulty and said,

"You go back to your own mansion, and I shall replace you here. I shall jump into the fire, and the mean ideas of the king will not materialize."

This was immediately put into effect. At the proper time, a figure looking like Haribala jumped into the pyre. Soon the body was reduced to a pile of ashes. The king was happy. He was sure that Haribala would return no more. It was midnight, and Haribala was talking with his wives.



The king unexpectedly arrived. Haribala hid himself in an antechamber, and the two ladies got ready to receive the king and teach him a proper lesson. The king came in and said,

"Now Haribala has returned to the city of Yam, and there is no one to protect you here. So I have come to invite both of you to the palace. You are very lucky, for you shall be my queens."



The two ladies now shouted with rage,

"The king is expected to suppress the wicked. But when the king himself is a rogue, who is to suppress him? You are not our savior. You want to ruin us. We don't even want to look at you. Why do you then come here again and again?"

But the king would not see the right way. He went on repeating his overtures, but they were repeatedly turned down by the two ladies.



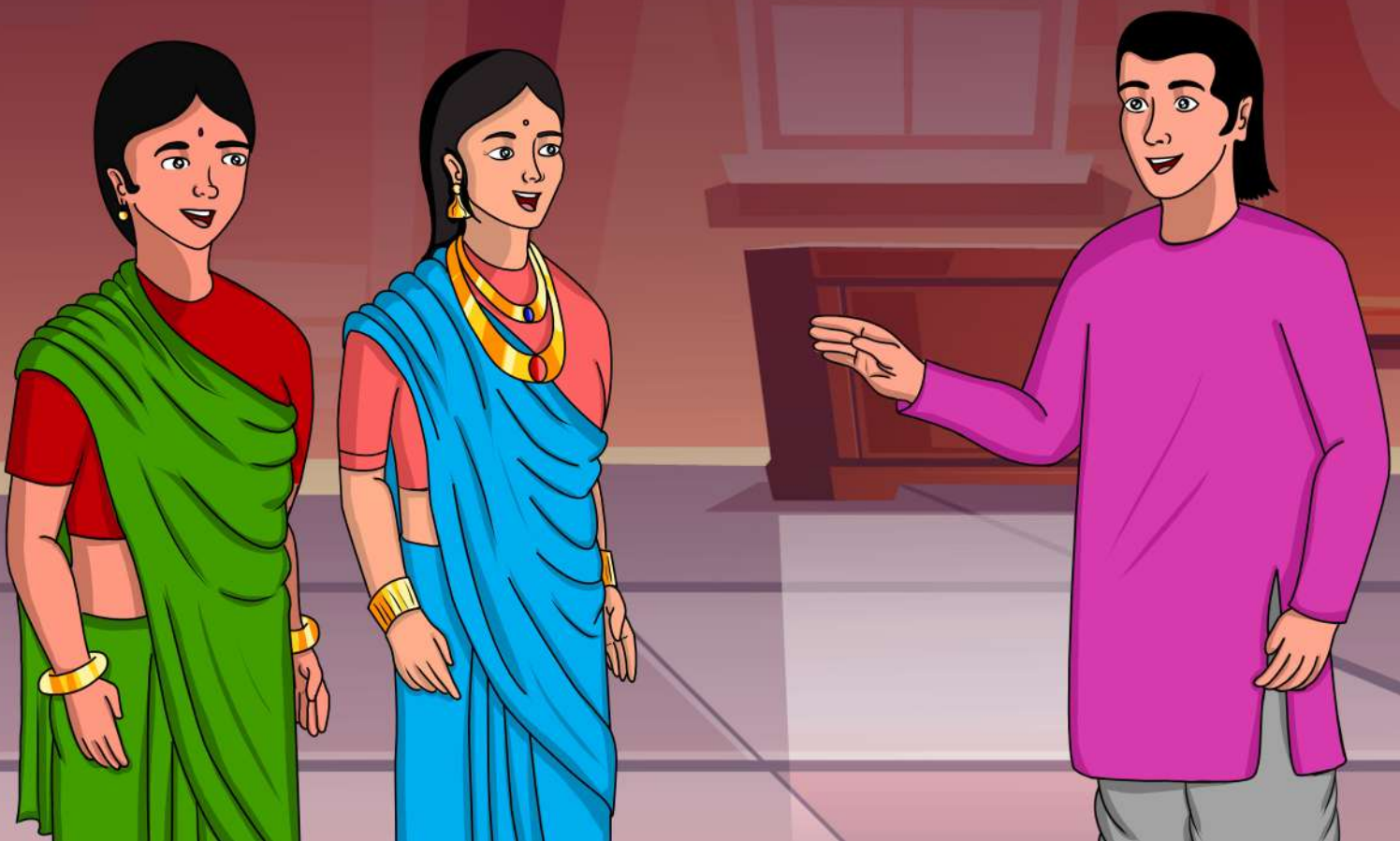
Kusumshri gave a final warning. The king was now ready to apply force. She at once invoked her special powers, tied the king up, and hurled him headlong down. The king lost some of his teeth. The king lay there helpless and unattended for several hours. He was in extreme pain with blood and saliva oozing from his mouth. But much more than that was the humiliation to which he had been put. When he had somewhat recovered, the women took pity on him. They made him promise not to repeat such behavior in the future, and then he was set free.



Wounded and humiliated, the king returned to the palace. In the morning, he took the chief minister into confidence and narrated the whole thing to him. The chief minister was now afraid for his own safety and resolved never to tender any more counsel to the king. Haribala was highly pleased at what his wives had done. He said,

"Never tolerate any torture. If it is there, get rid of it. Otherwise, it gets prolonged."

Haribala now remembered the Dev for consultation, and he appeared at once. They prepared a plan as to how best to present the whole thing at the court the next morning.



The Dev imparted a great glow to Haribala's body and dressed him in divine robes and ornaments. A dreadful attendant was created to accompany him to the court. In the morning, Haribala, duly attended, appeared at the court. The king was taken aback to see Haribala come back to life from the other world. The whole court was astonished. Hadn't everybody seen Haribala turned into ashes the previous evening?



On behalf of everyone, however, the king said,

"Haribala, we are all very happy to see you back. We are now anxious to know how you reached the abode of Yam, how you were received there, what special things you noticed, if the king of death has been kind enough to accept our invitation, and who is this man with you?"

Haribala now displayed the marvel of his intellect and imagination.



He started his narrative,

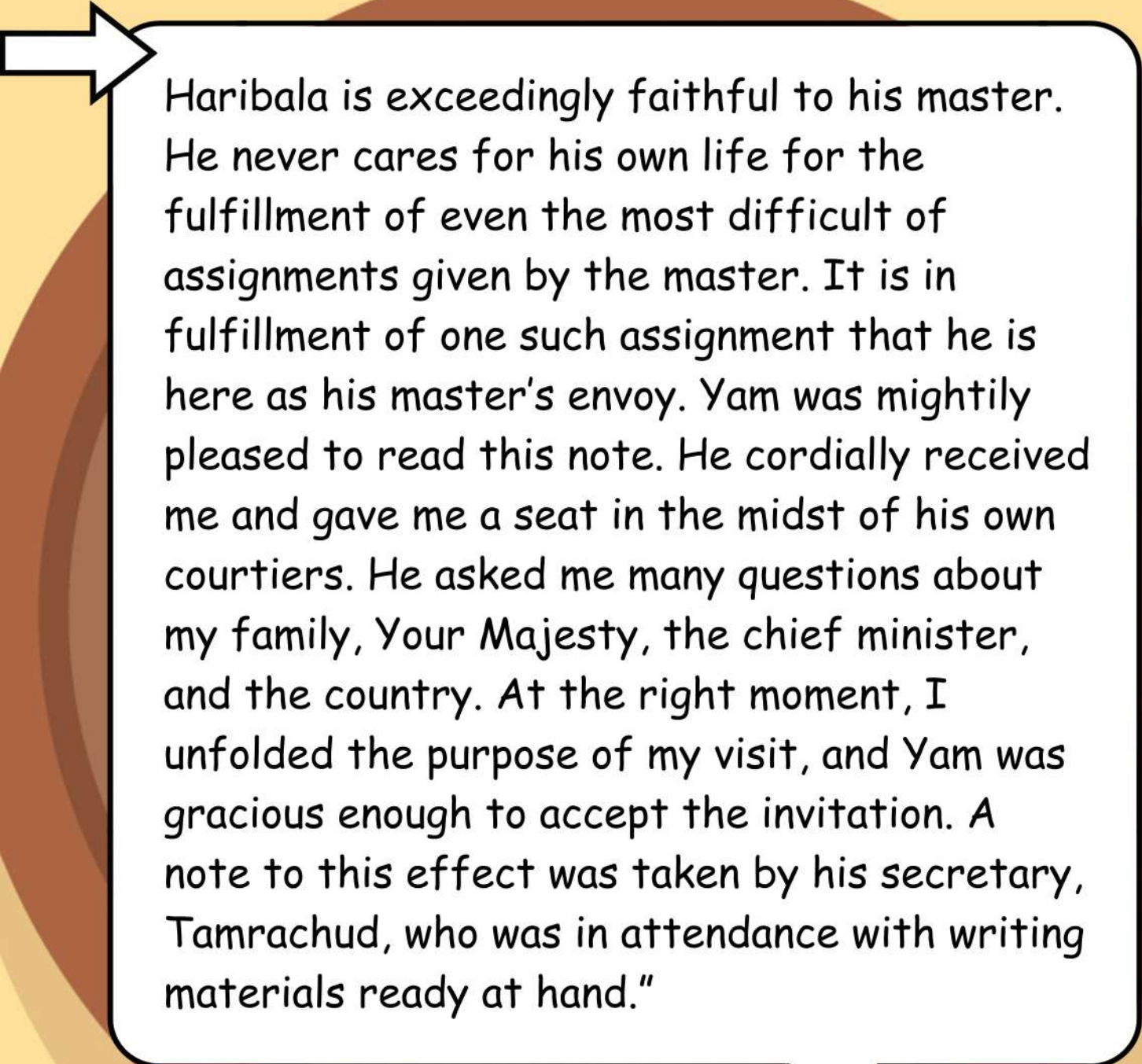
"Your Majesty! After my mortal frame had been turned into ashes, I went to the abode of death, where at the main entrance I met its keeper, Baidhata. He announced my arrival to Chitragupt, the keeper of records. Chitragupt was somewhat surprised to see me there before my time. When I told him the purpose of my coming, he welcomed me and arranged an interview with Yam. I was conducted into the presence of His Majesty the Yam by two attendants named Chand and Mahachand."

Taking meticulous care to provide the details, he continued.



"One who goes on a mission to an auspicious man gets unexpected results. This happened to me. Death usually never looks at a stranger with grace. His big and red-shot eyes, his curved brows, long teeth, curled hairs, pitch-dark complexion like a new moon night, fat limbs all generate fear. If he emits a shout, that causes instantaneous death to many. I was very nervous to see all this. But in a moment, when his eyes fell on me, he was a changed person. His eyes showered nectar on me, and he was in a happy mood. At once, I and the two attendants bowed before him. Then the attendants submitted my file before him for his perusal. Its top flap contained a note as follows:





Haribala is exceedingly faithful to his master. He never cares for his own life for the fulfillment of even the most difficult of assignments given by the master. It is in fulfillment of one such assignment that he is here as his master's envoy. Yam was mightily pleased to read this note. He cordially received me and gave me a seat in the midst of his own courtiers. He asked me many questions about my family, Your Majesty, the chief minister, and the country. At the right moment, I unfolded the purpose of my visit, and Yam was gracious enough to accept the invitation. A note to this effect was taken by his secretary, Tamrachud, who was in attendance with writing materials ready at hand."



To make the story even more fascinating, he added,

“Then Yam introduced me to the members of his royal household. His parents, Surya and Sanjnavati ; his principal queen Dhumorna ; his brother Sani ; and his sister Jamuna were all present. They were very kind to me and gave me company for several hours. Then I was shown around the capital city. I saw so many things in such a short time that it is difficult to recount them all. When after this it was time for me to return, Yam was gracious enough to send through me an immediate invitation to Your Majesty, the chief minister, and the dignitaries of the state to see him in his own citadel. He was keen to bestow on Your Majesty much wealth and the hand of his daughter.



He offered me very valuable gifts of robes and ornaments and hundreds of dancing girls, of which I accepted only very few. Yam was insistent to make me accept at least one dancing girl, the very best of the lot. To guide me in my return journey and to convey a formal invitation to Your Majesty on behalf of himself, Yam has commissioned me this envoy of his own."

As previously arranged the envoy now came forward and repeated the invitation. He requested the king to honor it without delay. The courtiers didn't know what to make of it, but at last, with the consent of all, the king accepted the invitation.



At the king's order, a big pyre was set ablaze outside the city around which were assembled the king, his chief minister and other ministers, high dignitaries of the state, and the citizens. Now, who was to plunge first into the flame and be the first to reach the citadel of Death? After much consideration, the chief minister became the recipient of this signal honor and was soon turned into a pile of ashes. Next was the king's turn.



As he proceeded toward the pyre, Haribala could no longer contain himself. He was sorry to think that so many would die in ignorance and foolishness by simply relying on his words.



He caught the king's feet and said,

"Your Majesty ! The culprit has been punished and Your Majesty need not take the plunge. All the wrong steps you took were at the advice of the chief minister, and he can no longer do any further mischief. Repent not about what is dead and past ; strive to make the future glorious."

The king was thus humiliated in public and was deeply ashamed for all that he had done.



Gradually, he found a profound indifference overtaking him. He returned to the palace and married his daughter with Haribala. Then he gave charge of his kingdom to him and renounced the world in order to spend the remaining portion of his life worthily in spiritual pursuits. When Vasantsen, Vasantashri's father, came to know the happy turn in the fortune of his daughter, he had no more reason to remain angry with her. Besides, he had grown old and wanted to retire, and none was more suitable than Haribala to take charge of his kingdom. So he entrusted his kingdom to him and renounced the world.



Despite so much good fortune, Haribala never forgot about his vow. Often his mind went back to the day when the Muni had induced him to accept a fraction of a vow. It was this small thing that had helped him to rise to the pinnacle of glory and earthly prosperity. So, he thought if he would practice the whole vow how much more would he achieve! Although a king, he always cherished high thinking, he would not only himself remain immersed in lofty things, he would even inspire his three wives to do the same. He brought his first wife Prachand, to live at the palace. In his old age, he renounced the world and through the practice of penance and austerities attained a very high degree of knowledge.

