

Prince Singhalsingh



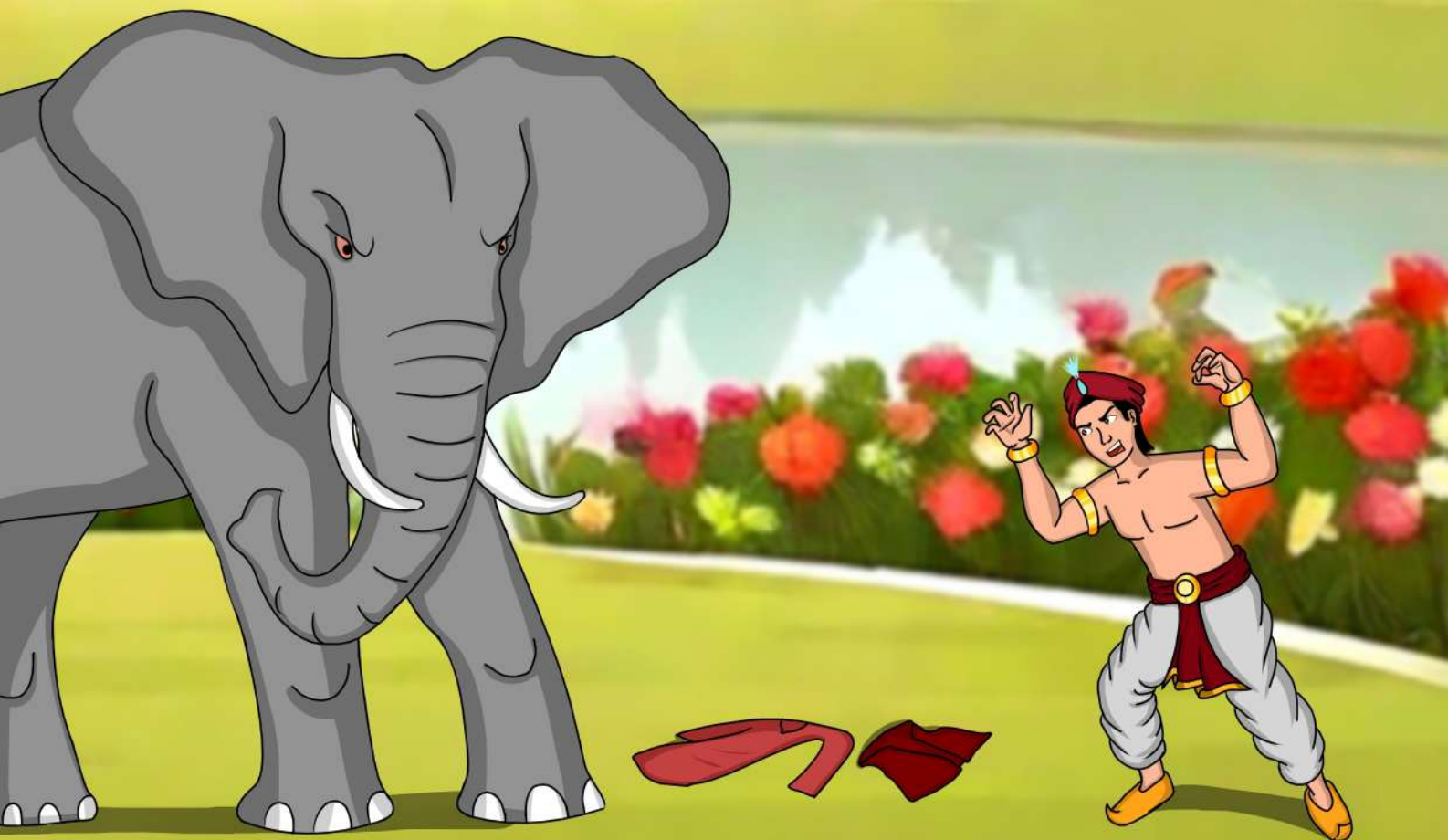
Singhaleshwar was the king of Singhal Island. His queen's name was Singhala, and that of his son Singhalsingh. One day the prince had gone to the garden-house. It was spring, and the trees were in full bloom.



As the prince was pacing through, admiring their beauty, he heard a pitiable cry, which appeared to be that of a woman. The prince at once rushed toward her and saw that a young girl was held by an elephant in its trunk.



He asked the elephant to release the girl at once and come forward to meet him if he was really strong. On hearing this, the elephant released the girl and rushed upon the prince in full fury. The prince at once took out his wrapper and raised it like a wall with both his hands.



The elephant struck on it with its tusks. The prince now caught hold of the tusks and jumped on them, and in no time he was seated on the crest of the elephant striking it severely with an iron hook.



This soon pulled the elephant down. The prince then tied him to a pillar. When the king heard the account, he became happy at the prince's bravery.



This soon became the talk of the whole city. The girl saved by the prince happened to be the daughter of a merchant named Dhana. Her own name was Dhanavati. She was charmed by the prince's bravery. The merchant, her father, took this chance to settle her in marriage with the prince.



Now, it so happened that the prince's physical grace and manliness was a pet topic for gossip among the ladies of the city. This was very much detested by the business community. To get rid of the prince, therefore, the merchants made false allegations against him, and, at their suggestion, the king prohibited his open movement in the city.



This was an encroachment on the prince's freedom of movement, which he bitterly detested, the more so since he never cared to look at women-folk and had no weakness for them. He preferred to leave the city and regain his freedom once again. He took his wife into confidence, and she approved of the idea and offered to go with him.



So the two left the palace one night, and, reaching the seashore, they went on a voyage. Unfortunately, the ship was caught in a terrible storm. The captain tried his best to save it, but then a gust of wind sealed its fate, and the ship was broken to pieces.



Most of the people on board were drowned. Separated from her husband, Dhanavati, supporting herself on a floating plank, was washed ashore to a place near the city of Kusumpur. In that city, there was a temple dedicated to a Yaksha named Priyamelaka.



His specialty was that, if propitiated, he helped to bring together people separated by accident. Dhanavati heard about this temple, went there and started her penance to propitiate the deity.



Meanwhile, her husband, prince Singhal, caught another plank and was washed ashore to a place near the city of Ratnapur. There reigned King Ratnaprabha whose wife was Ratnasundari and whose daughter was Ratnavati.



About the time the prince had reached the city, the princess suffered from a snake bite, and when all other remedies failed, it was the prince who cured her. This little episode ended in a marriage between the two.



The day there was a shipwreck and the prince was separated from Dhanavati, he undertook the vow to remain celibate until he was reunited with her, and hence the marriage with Ratnavati created a real problem for him. It was the first night after the marriage, and the bride was waiting in her decorated chamber on the seventh floor.



The prince came, but he lay on the floor. This raised all sorts of suspicions in Ratnavati's mind. She could not remain silent for long and asked the prince the reason for his quaint behavior. The prince, however, suppressed the fact and said,

"My dear! When I started on the last voyage, I took the vow not to indulge in sexual behavior until I saw my respected father."



"Sir! You are noble, you are worthy, to have such high regard for your parents, "

said the princess.

To the king, his father-in-law, however, he tendered a correct account and expressed a desire to go out in search of his first wife. The king heartily approved and lent him the service of a minister, Rudradatt, to assist him in his search.



So one day, prince Singhal, his wife Ratnavati, and the minister Rudradatt, all the three were again on board a ship. Now, as the minister saw Ratnavati, he felt a weakness for her, and soon he hatched a plan to throw the prince into the sea so that the lady would be his. He was only waiting for a chance.



The chance came one night when, as everybody else was fast asleep, the prince came on board and stood near the brim, and the minister, unperceived, pushed him into the sea. As soon as the plan was executed, he raised an alarm, but it was too late and no trace of the prince could be found.



When Ratnavati came to know of the tragedy, she was very sorry. Rudradatt came to console her and promised her all happiness if she was prepared to live with him. This was a new danger for the princess. But being alone in the ship, she was helpless.



Still she contrived a plan and said,

"But I must perform the last rites of my departed husband before I can start a new life with you. Don't you think, therefore, that I shouldn't consider your offer for the time being?"

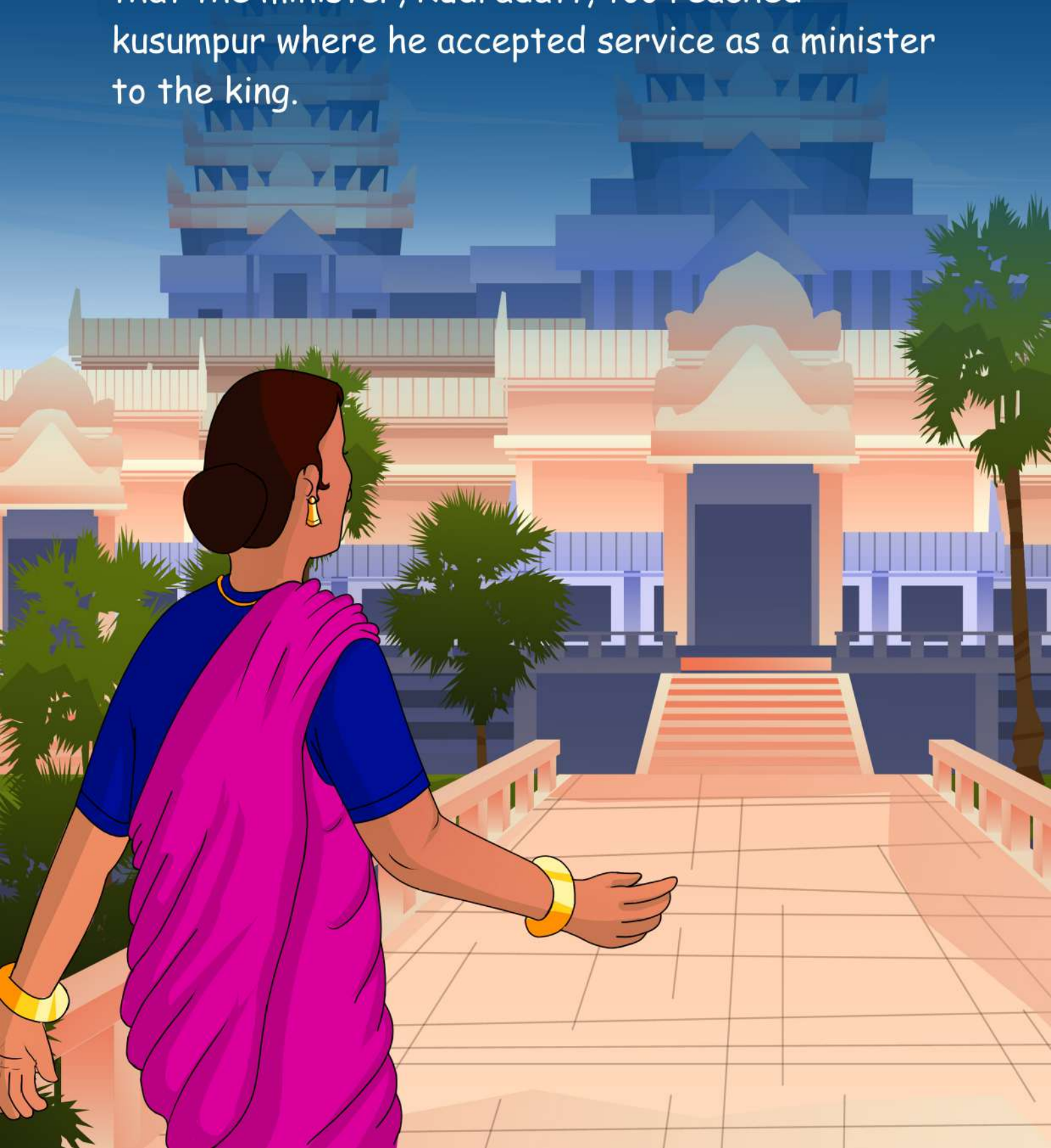
This raised high hopes in the mind of the minister, who started building castles in the air. It was a pleasant thought for him that he would be able to call a princess his own.



The ship was now not very far from the coast when it dashed against a hidden rock and broke into pieces. In their bid to save themselves from drowning, the passengers tried to catch the floating objects and swim ashore. Ratnavati also did the same.



With the support of a floating plank, she reached the coast near Kusumpur, and, therefrom, she reached the same temple where Dhanavati was already seated in penance. It was a coincidence that the minister, Rudradatt, too reached kusumpur where he accepted service as a minister to the king.



When prince Singhal was thrown into the sea, some unknown power had picked him up and placed him safely into a hermitage. The hermit was highly pleased to see a bright young man in his compound with distinct marks on his body that signified a bright future for him as a king.



He had a daughter named Rupavati for whom, he felt, the stranger-lad would make a nice groom. So he proposed, and the prince readily agreed. At the marriage ritual, the hermit bestowed on the prince a magic blanket, yielding one hundred coins per day, and a flying cot.



The prince now sat on the cot with his new bride and directed it to carry him where Dhanavati was. The cot descended in the central park of Kusumpur. Life is an arena of unions and separations. At a moment of the greatest expectation creeps in the greatest despair.



When the two had alighted in the park, the lady felt thirsty, and the prince went to the well to fetch water. As he threw the bucket inside, he heard a human voice saying,

"Please take me out."

The prince looked in and saw a snake.



At once, he hurled his wrapper in, the next moment the snake was crawling on the ground. The first thing it did was to pin a sting on its benefactor. This was a great setback for the prince, who said,

"Oh king of the snakes! That is a nice gesture of gratitude that you have made!"

"Please don't mind it, Sir. I shall help you in difficulty."

Saying so, he disappeared.



The prince, however, did not die of the venom, but he turned into a hunchback. As Rupavati saw a hunchback approach her with water, she refused to accept it, and did not recognize the man was her husband. She took him to be a crook who had come to deceive her. So she did not even look at him and started a search for her missing husband. But as she could find him nowhere, she too took the way to the Yaksha temple and started her penance.



Soon it became the talk of the town that three ladies were simultaneously propitiating the deity and would talk with none. The news reached the king's ears. He himself came to the temple to ascertain the reason of their penance, but the ladies did not open their lips.



An announcement was, therefore, issued at once to the effect that anyone who would make the ladies speak would win the princess royal. But no one came forward despite this attractive offer. At last, the proclamation reached the ears of the hunchback. He now prepared a voluminous book whose pages were filled up with white ink and wrapped it in fresh cloth.



Then he came to the court. He told the king that if he were given a chance, he would try to make the ladies speak. He said,

"Sir! I have this curious book that contains a detailed account of the earth, its past, present, and future. Each event is faithfully recorded in it. Now, if the relevant events are read out, I have no doubt that the ladies will speak."



So they all shifted to the temple where the ladies were on fast and silent. The hunchback started reading from his book.

"Prince Singhal of Singhal Island started with his wife Dhanavati on a voyage and was involved in a shipwreck."

He stopped. Hearing her own account, Dhanavati spoke out,

"Sir! You are very wise. Please read what happened next."

Everybody was surprised to hear the lady speak.



No less so was the king himself. The hunchback started again.

"The prince caught hold of a plank and swam ashore near Ratnapur, where he married Ratnavati and again went out to the sea. This time, a minister, Rudradatt by name, accompanied him. But he betrayed the prince to get his wife. He threw him into the sea one night."

He stopped and started winding up. Now Ratnavati spoke out,

"Sir! Please don't stop at that. What happened next?"



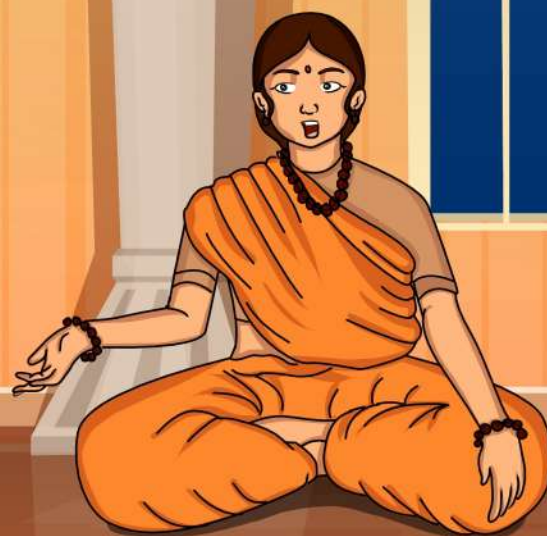
The king now joined with the lady to repeat the request, and the hunchback started again:

"The prince was lifted up by some unknown power even before he touched the water and was placed in a hermit's compound, where he was married with the hermit's daughter, Rupavati. The hermit gave him a magic blanket and a flying cot. The prince came with his bride to this very city, Kusumpur, where the cot landed in the park. As the lady became thirsty, the prince went to fetch some water from the well; but as luck would have it, he suffered from a snake bite."



He sighed a deep sigh and became silent. Now, Rupavati broke the silence and said,

"Sir ! It is painful to me that you have stopped at this point. I am interested to know what happened next."



The hunchback said nothing. He picked up his book and looked at the king who had promised, as per proclamation, to give the princess in marriage to one who would make the ladies speak. He had fulfilled it. This was an unequal match and was disliked by the members of the king's household. But the king did not budge and celebrated the marriage at once.



The inauspicious Karma of prince Singhal was now on its way to move out, and his life was to take a major turn. The Deva, the very one who had saved him at the sea, appeared and cured the prince of his physical defect, and the prince was his original self again.



Thus it became an occasion of great joy, a happy union of so many, for the three ladies, and for the king in particular who had such a nice young man as the husband of his daughter. The four co-wives embraced each other very cordially as sisters.



As the Deva revealed now, he was the prince's elder brother in the previous birth. He attained a divine life for offering food to a Muni. His younger brother then, now prince Singhal, had also offered cane juice to the Muni, but he was not very steadfast in faith, and so he suffered so much in his life separation from his wives, shipwreck, physical defect, etc. He also revealed that it was he who had saved him at the sea when his life was at stake. On hearing these, the prince regained his memory and saw his previous birth.



Rudradatt, the minister, was now dismissed by the king as a bad man because of his plot to drown the prince.



The prince, now a happy man, thought of returning home with his wives. They all took leave of the king and mounted on the flying cot, which brought the party to the prince's insular home, where he was crowned king by his father, who had grown old. King Singhal lived a worthy life and did many things for the well-being of his people.

