

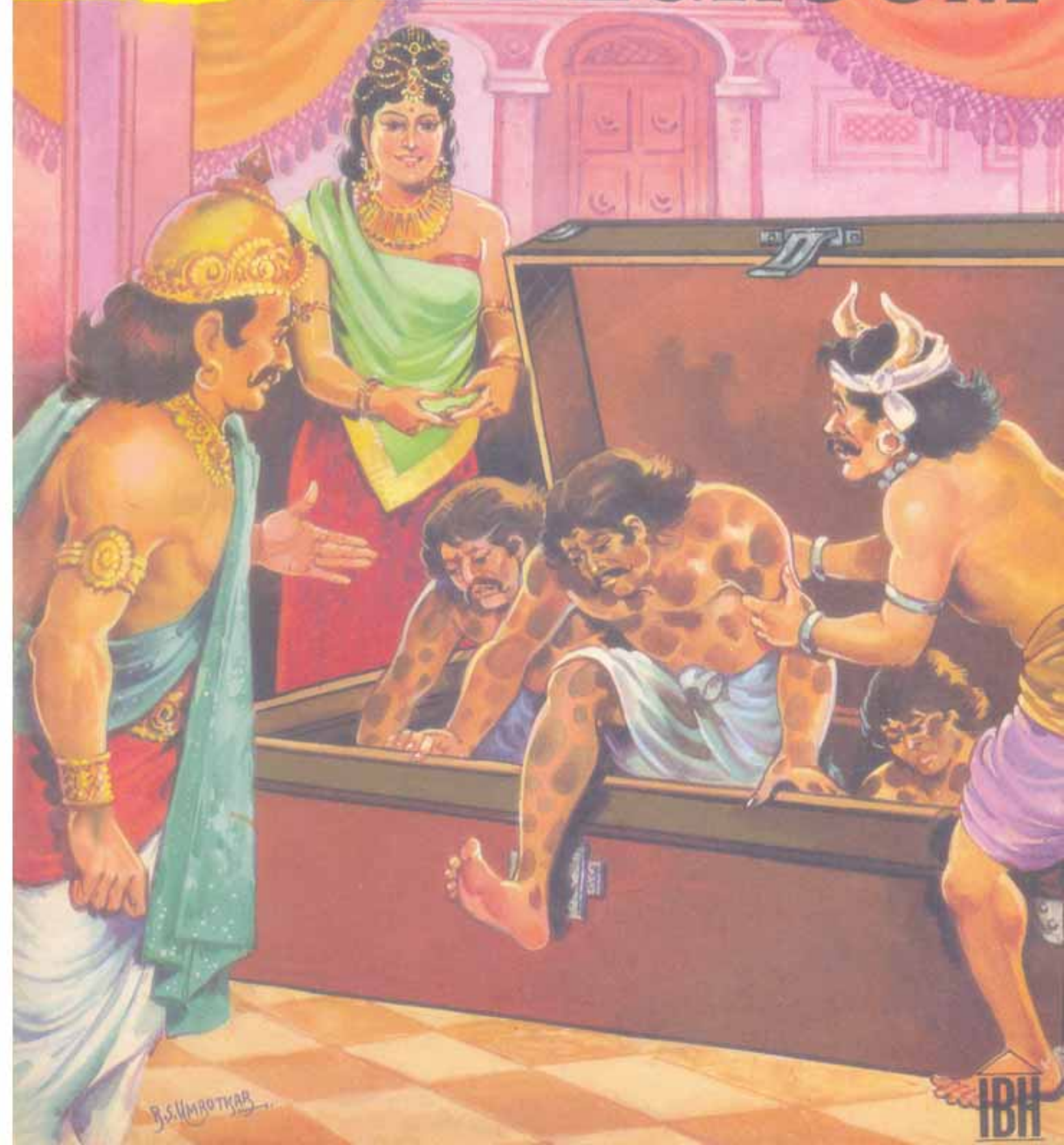
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TALES FROM THE KATHA-SARITSAGARA

THE CHOSEN BRIDEGROOM



R. S. HIRATKAR

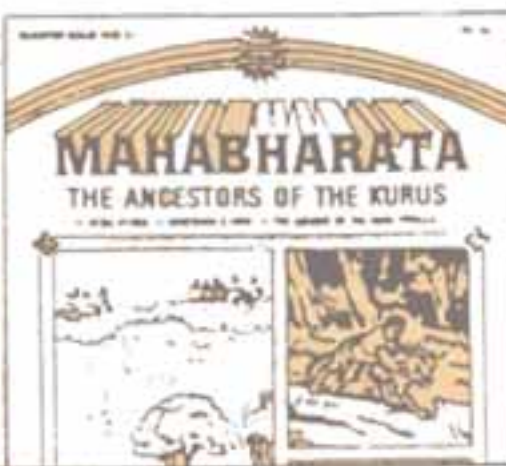
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Kathasaritasagara, the ocean of stories is among the earliest collection of stories extant in the world. It was compiled by a brahmin named Somadeva for the amusement of Suryavati, wife of King Ananta of Kashmir, at whose court Somadeva was a poet.

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THE CHOSEN BRIDEGROOM

THERE RULED IN THE CITY OF AYODHYA, KING VIRAKETU. PEOPLE FELT HAPPY AND SAFE IN HIS CARE.



THE LEADING MERCHANT OF THE CITY WAS RATNADATTA. ONE DAY—



CONGRATULATIONS, MASTER! YOUR WIFE NANDAYANTI HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO A LOVELY DAUGHTER.



WHAT A GEM! WE'LL CALL HER RATNAVATI.

RATNAVATI GREW UP TO BE A LOVELY, GRACEFUL YOUNG LADY.



SO MANY SUITORS HAVE COME FOR RATNAVATI'S HAND.

BUT SHE IS REFUSING TO GET MARRIED.

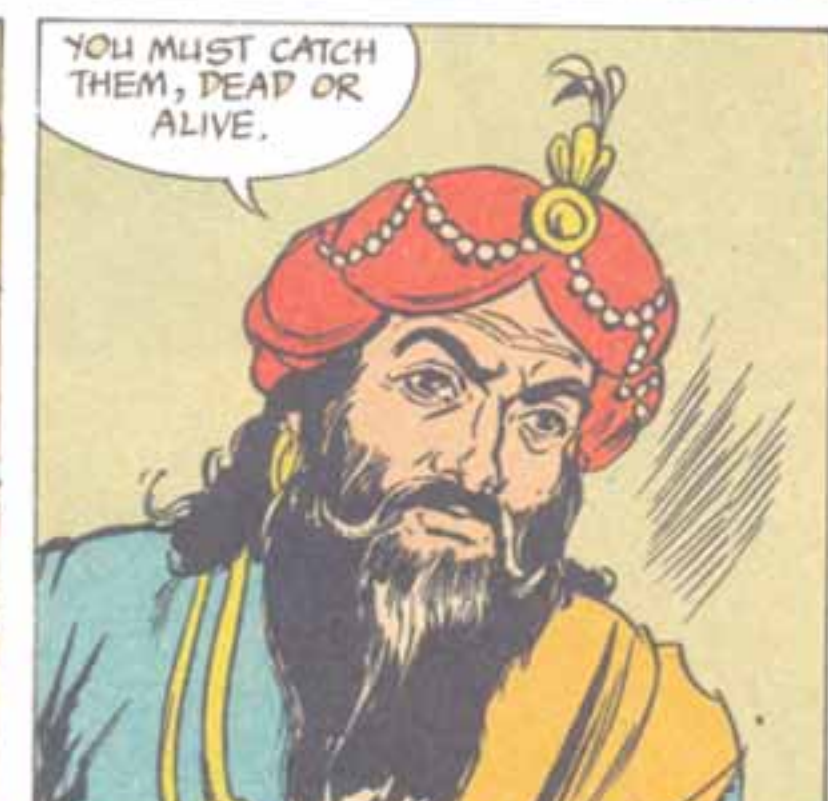
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AT NIGHT THE KING WAS BUSY IN HIS PRIVATE CHAMBER.

THERE! I'VE DARKENED MY FACE WITH PAINT. NOW I'LL TIE MY BEARD UP.



WITH THIS LONG HAIR FROM MY HORSE'S TAIL I'LL TIE UP MY NOSE. HMM, IT LOOKS DIFFERENT NOW.



REPLACING HIS SILKEN ROYAL ROBE WITH A ROUGH CLOAK HE STEPPED OUT IN THE DARK.



THE MAN SPRANG UP WITH A CRY WHEN THE KING TAPPED HIS SHOULDER.



WHO ARE YOU?

I AM A THIEF. AND YOU?

ME TOO. COME, LET'S WORK TOGETHER.

RIGHT-O!



BY THE WAY, ARE YOU A HIGH FLIER OR A SMALL FRY?

HUSH! HOLD YOUR TONGUE AND LET'S GET CRACKING.



FOR AN HOUR OR TWO, THE KING WALKED THROUGH THE DARK SILENT STREETS. AS HE PASSED THROUGH THE MERCHANTS' QUARTER.



THAT MAN IS WALKING SO STEALTHILY. HE MUST BE A THIEF.

SOON THE EXPERT THIEF LED THE KING TO THE RIGHT SPOTS IN THE BACK STREETS.

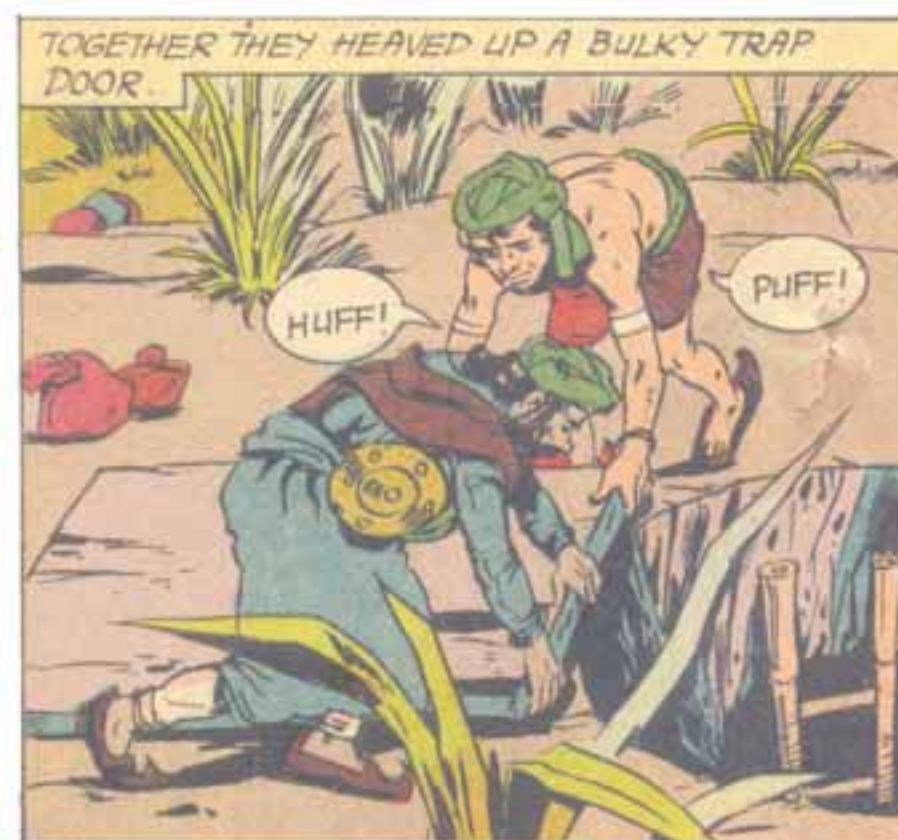
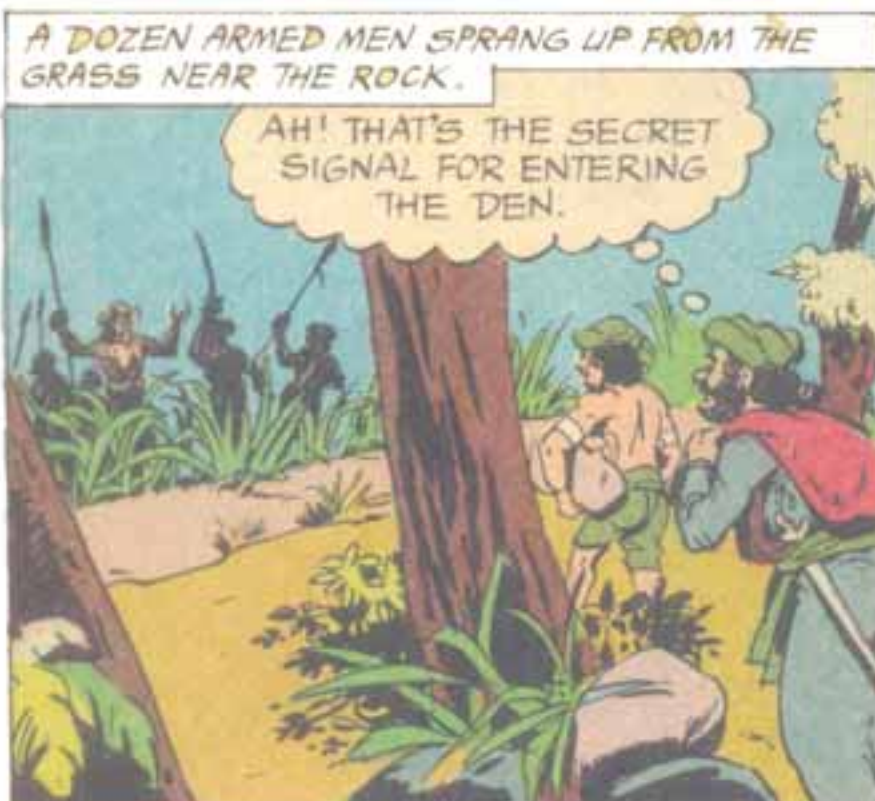
THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM AT WORK.



KING VIRAKETU AND HIS NEW-FOUND COMPANION WORKED HARD FOR HOURS.

THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT. LET'S GO TO THE FLASHKEN AND WET OUR WHISTLES.





SOON THE GANG ATE, DRANK AND ONE BY ONE DROPPED OFF TO SLEEP.



SUDDENLY A MAID SERVANT WHO RECOGNIZED THE KING CAME FORWARD.



O KING VIRAKETH! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? THEY WILL KILL YOU IF THEY RECOGNIZE YOU. RUN AWAY.

WHEN IT WAS PAST MIDNIGHT HE LED THEM TO THE THIEVES' DEN.



THIS IS THE WAY TO THEIR DEN. WE WILL CAPTURE THEM BEFORE THEY SET OUT FOR ROBBING.

MEANWHILE SOON AFTER KING VIRAKETH LEFT THE DEN—



HEY, WHERE IS THAT NEW FELLOW?

HE HAS DISAPPEARED.

THE OLD LADY LED HIM ACROSS THE SLEEPING BODIES TO A SECRET EXIT OF THE CAVE.



I'D BETTER MARK THIS EXIT CAREFULLY.

I HEARD THE MAID-SERVANT WHISPERING TO HIM. CATCH HER.



I SUSPECT HE WAS A SPY.

ON BEING THREATENED THE OLD LADY CONFESSED.



IT WAS K-KING VIRAKETH.

WE'D BETTER BE PREPARED.

AT DAWN HE WAS BACK IN THE PALACE. AS SOON AS HE APPEARED IN THE DURBAR—



O KING, YOU PROMISED TO PROTECT US. BUT THE ROBBERY LAST NIGHT WAS THE BIGGEST.

JUST GIVE ME ANOTHER DAY.

HE SUMMONED HIS GROUP OF EXPERT ARCHERS.



KEEP READY TONIGHT FOR A SECRET MISSION.

HE'LL SURELY COME TO CAPTURE US SOON.



LET'S RUN AWAY!

NOW IN DAYLIGHT WE'LL SURELY BE CAUGHT.

THE CHIEF THOUGHT FOR A WHILE.



NO, WE WILL NOT RUN AWAY. WE WILL CONFRONT HIM.

YES, CHIEF! WE'LL DO AS YOU SAY.

THEY SPENT THE DAY SHARPENING THEIR DAGGERS AND CHECKING THEIR WEAPONS. AT NIGHTFALL —



COME, FOLLOW ME.

THE REST OF THE GANG STEALTHILY FOLLOWED THE CHIEF AS HE POSITIONED HIMSELF IN THE WOODS.



THERE THEY COME!

THEY ARE SO SURE WE'LL BE IN THE CAVE THAT THEY ARE WALKING WITH THE WEAPONS DOWN.

THE BRAVE VIRAKETU CONFRONTED HIS OPPONENT. HE DREW HIS SWORD AND A DUEL ENSUED.



THEY BENT, SKIPPED, JUMPED OUTMANOEUVERING EACH OTHER TILL THEY WERE EXHAUSTED.



BOTH WERE WELL MATCHED IN SKILL AND COURAGE AND THE BATTLE SEEMED UNENDING. AT LAST THE KING CLEVERLY DISARMED HIS OPPONENT.



AHH!

RUN FOR YOUR LIVES. OUR CHIEF IS DEFEATED.



ONE, TWO THREE, ATTACK!



THE KING'S SOLDIERS WERE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE.



AHH!

THE KING CALLED FOR THE FEW REMAINING MEN FROM HIS ARMY.

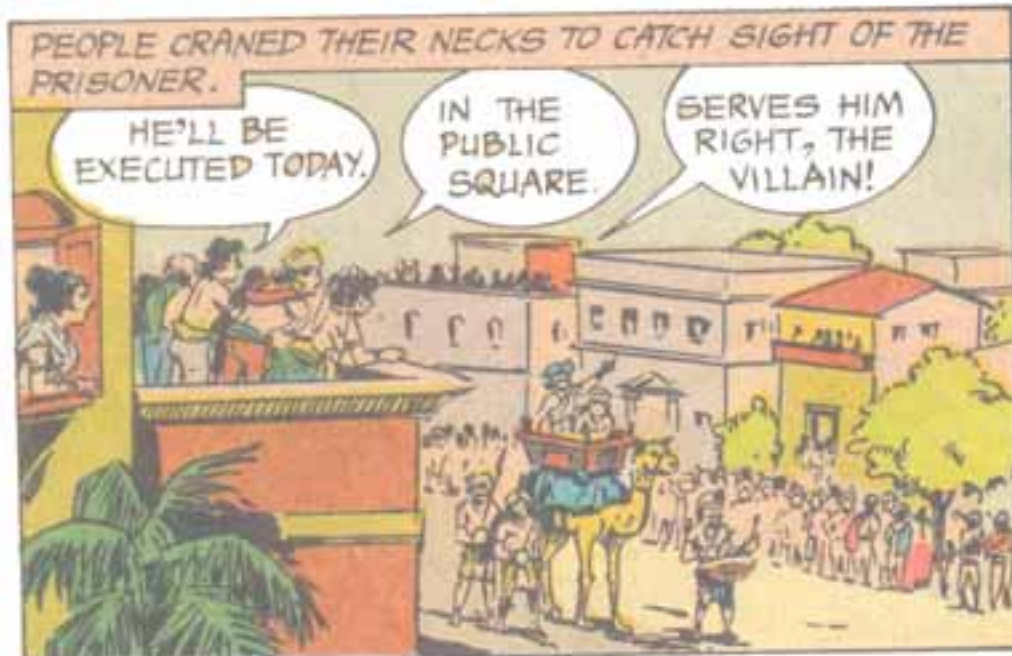
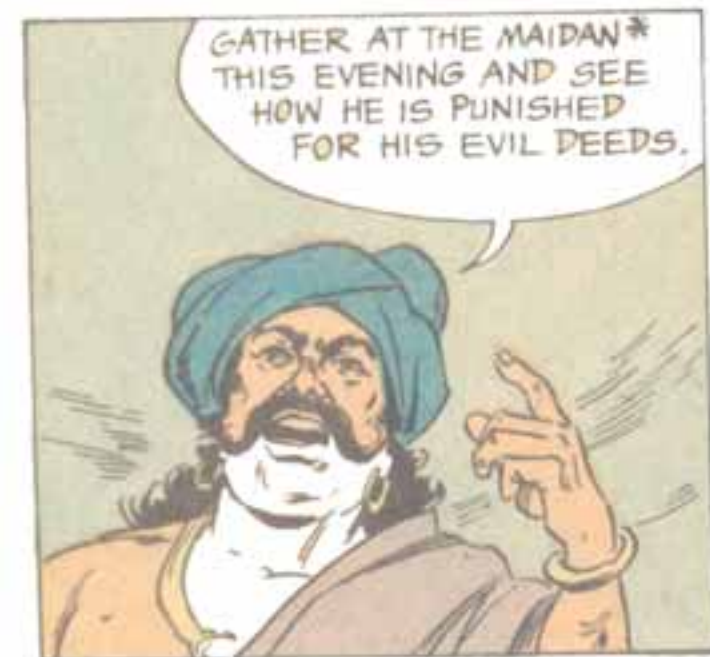


CAPTURE HIM!

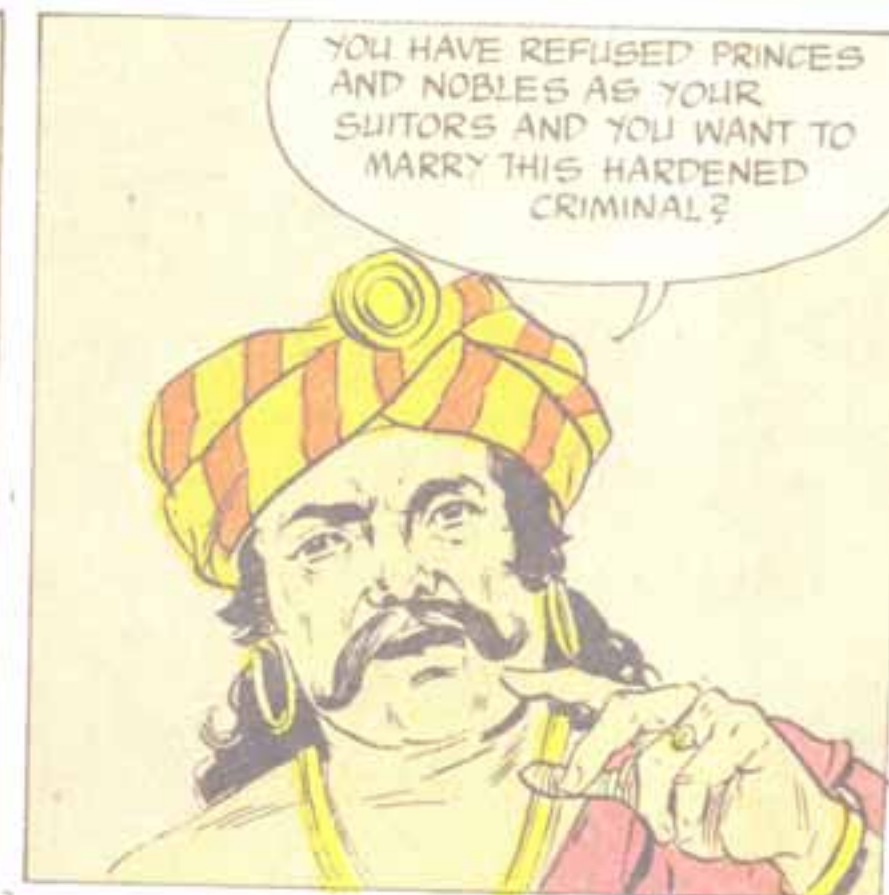
TYING HIS HANDS BEHIND HIM, THE CHIEF WAS BROUGHT TO THE PALACE.

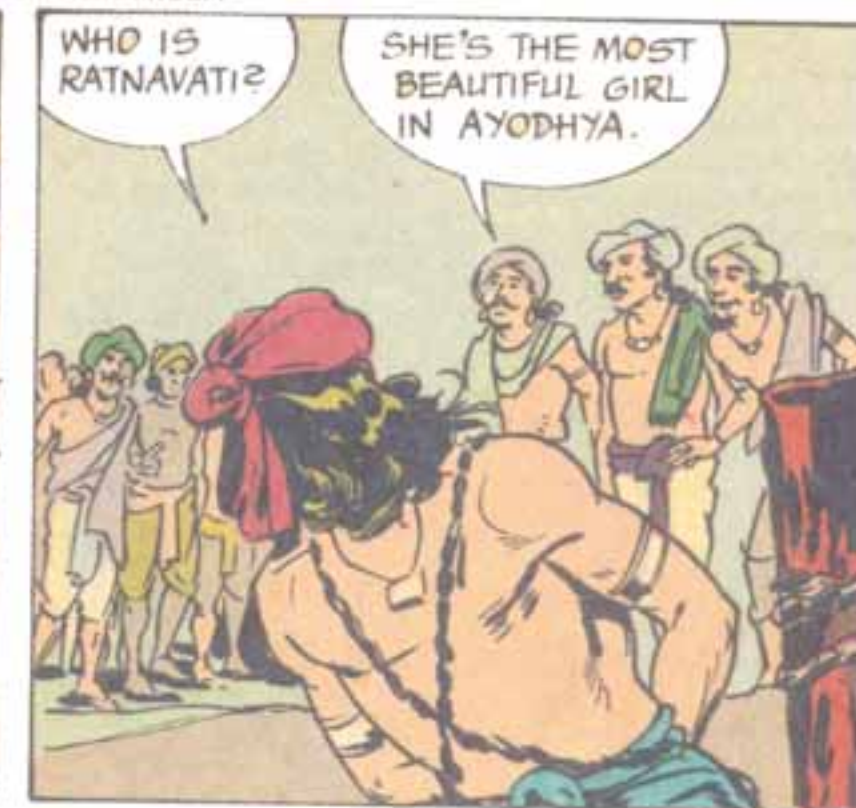
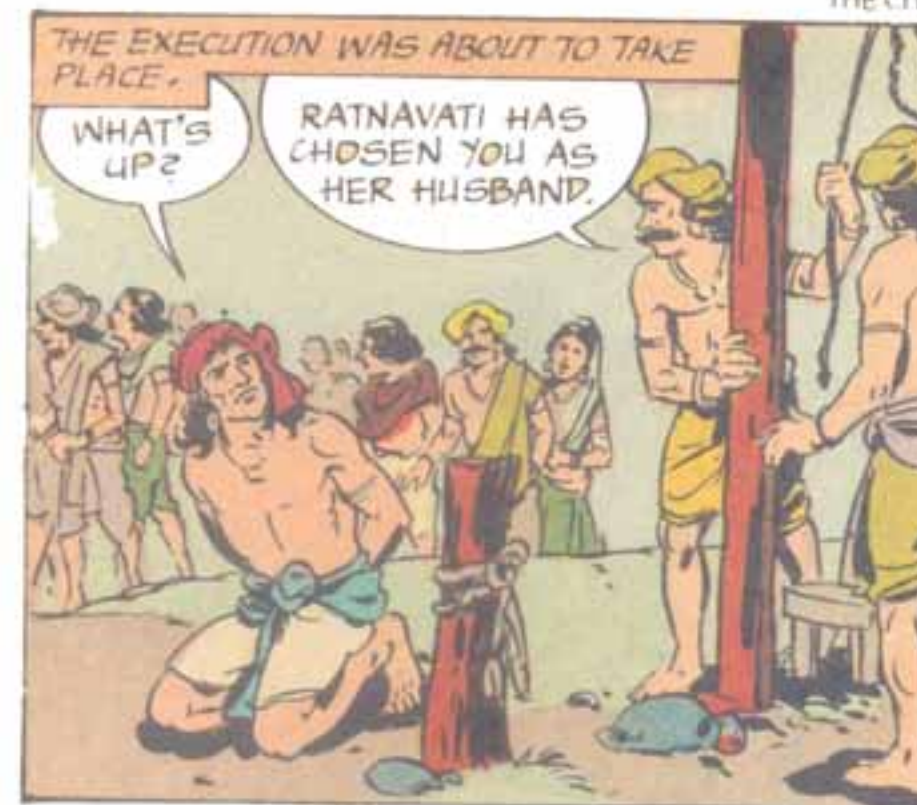
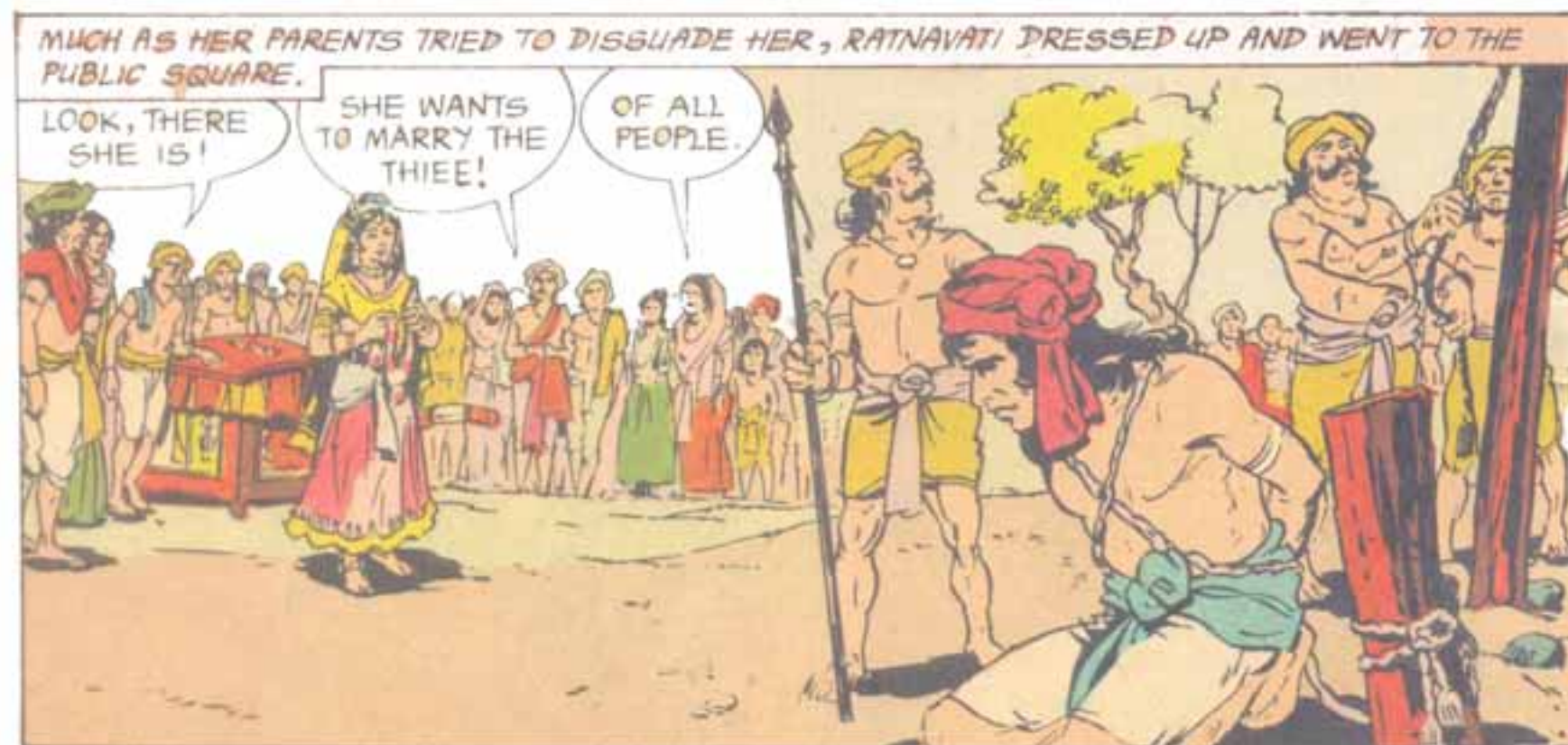
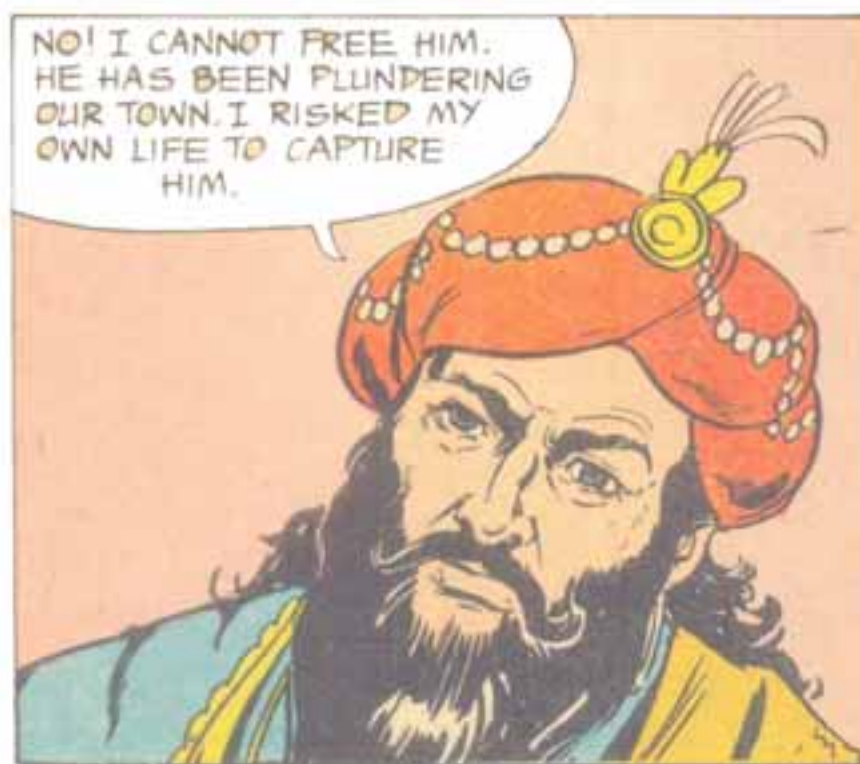
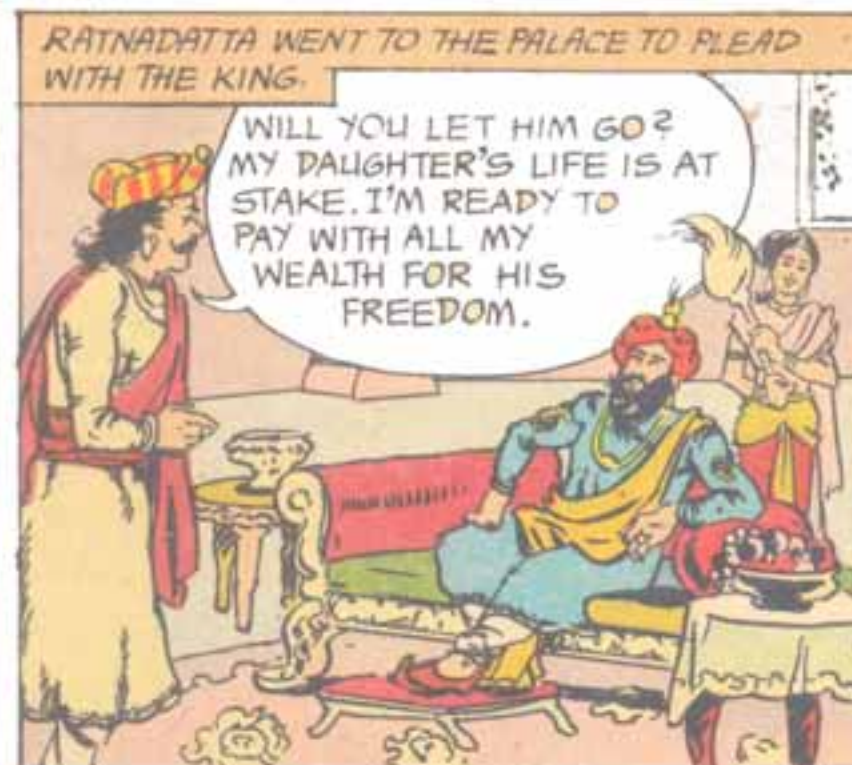
LET HIM BE BATHED AND DRESSED IN FINE CLOTHES AND LOCKED UP.

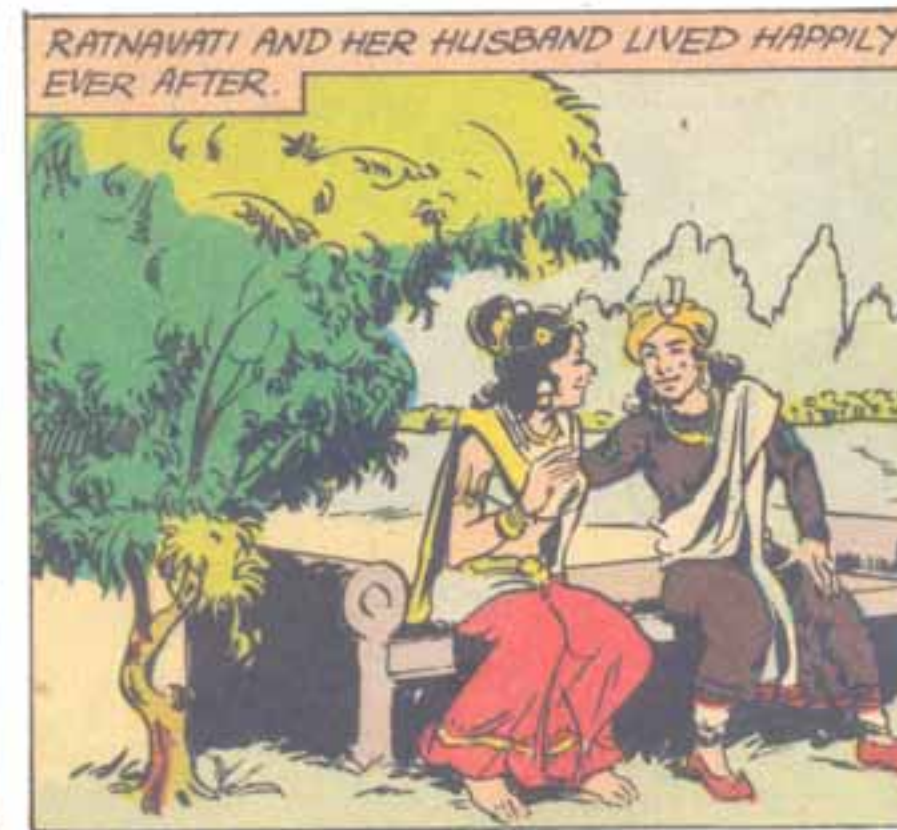
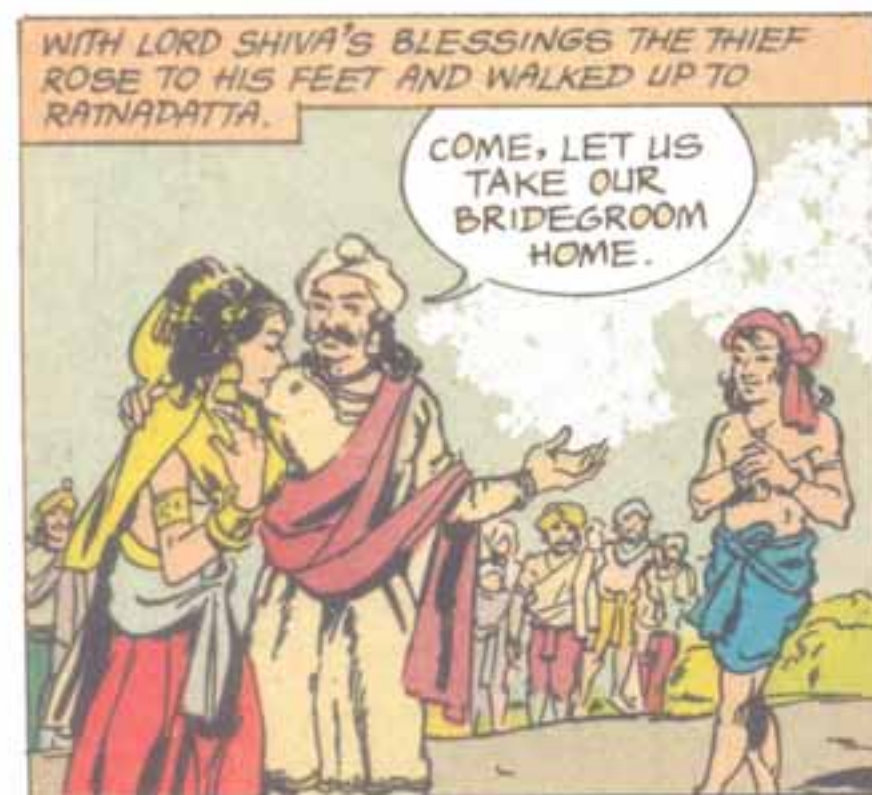




THOUGH THE THIEF WAS WOUNDED AND COVERED WITH DUST RATNAVATI WAS SMITTEN WITH LOVE FOR HIM.

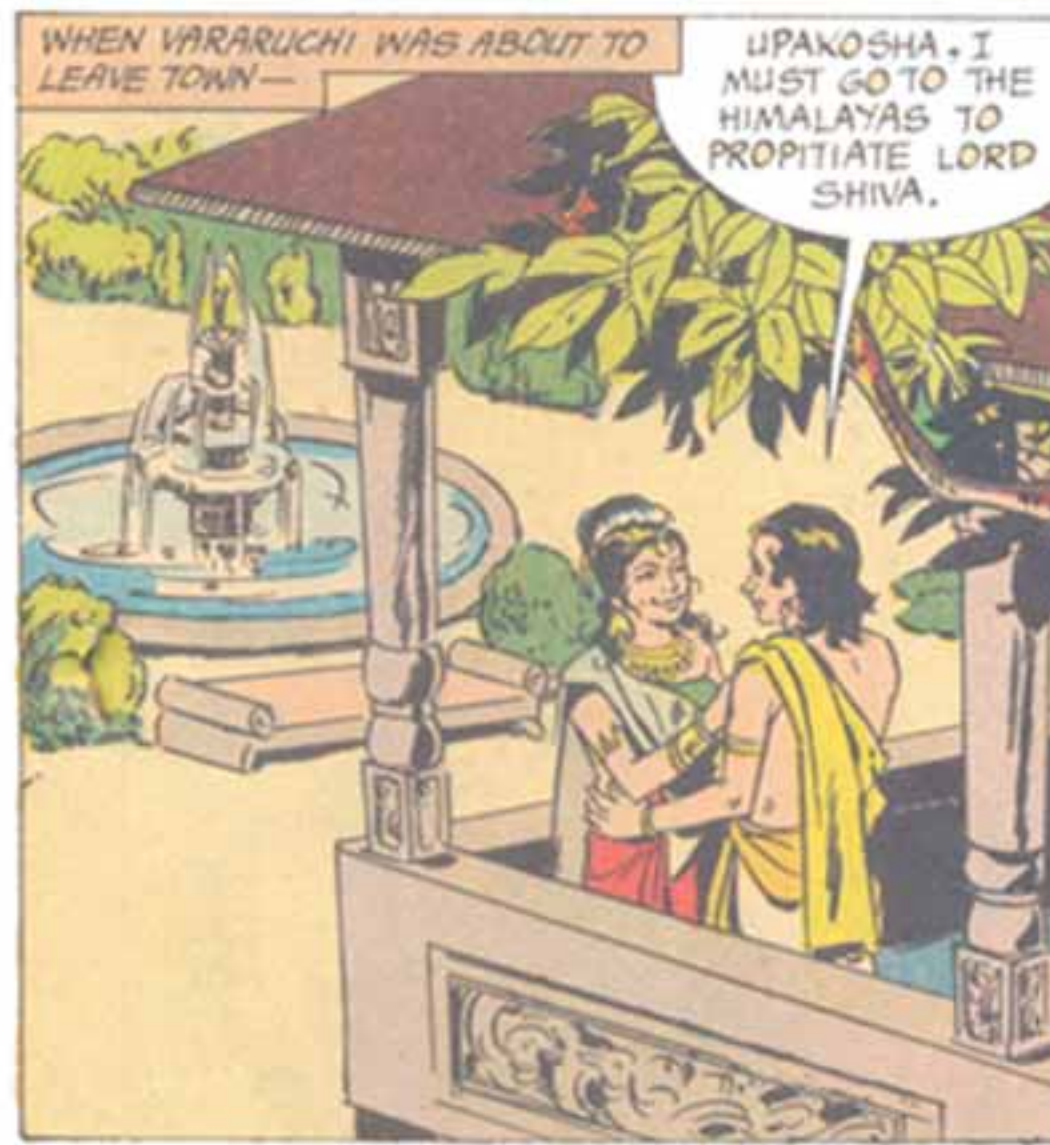
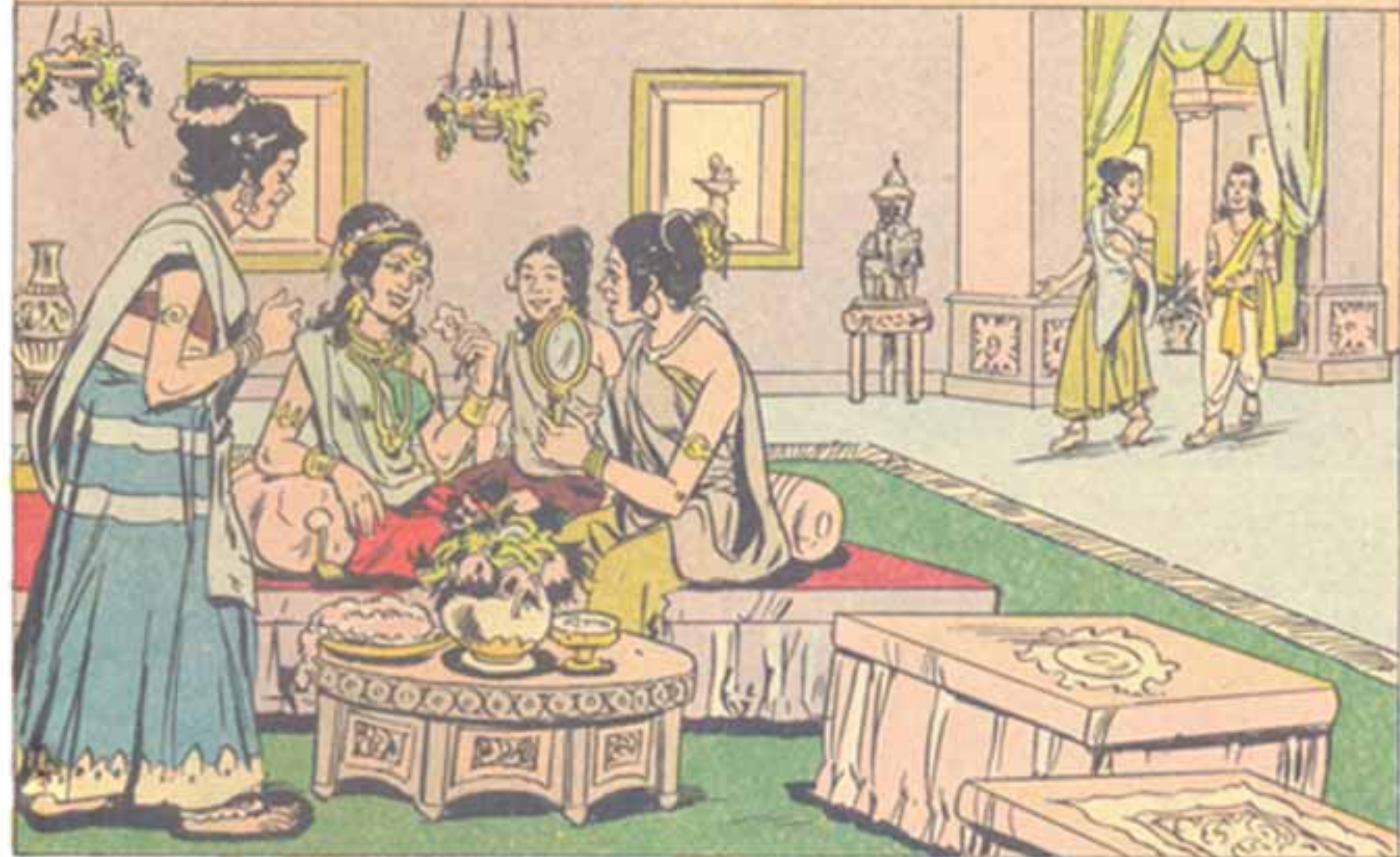






THE GODS AS WITNESSES

UPAKOSHA, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN IN PATALIPUTRA, WAS BETROTHED TO VARARUCHI.



AS THE DAYS PASSED, UPAKOSHA GREW THIN AND WAN. LISTLESSLY SHE WENT ABOUT HER DAILY CHORES.



ONE DAY AS SHE WAS RETURNING HOME AFTER HER EVENING BATH, THE MINISTER AT THE ROYAL COURT SAW HER.



OH, HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE LOOKS!



THANK GOD! I GOT RID OF HIM.

BUT SHE HAD HARDLY GONE A LITTLE FURTHER WHEN —



OH, THE KING'S TREASURER!

EMBOLDENED BY HER BEAUTY, HE ACCOSTED HER —



MARRY ME, O BEAUTIFUL ONE.

BUT I'M BETROTHED TO VARARUCHI...

WHEN HE PERSISTED, UPAKOSHA QUICKLY THOUGHT OF A PLAN.

DO NOT APPROACH ME THUS IN PUBLIC, SIR, LEST MISFORTUNE BEFALL BOTH OF US.



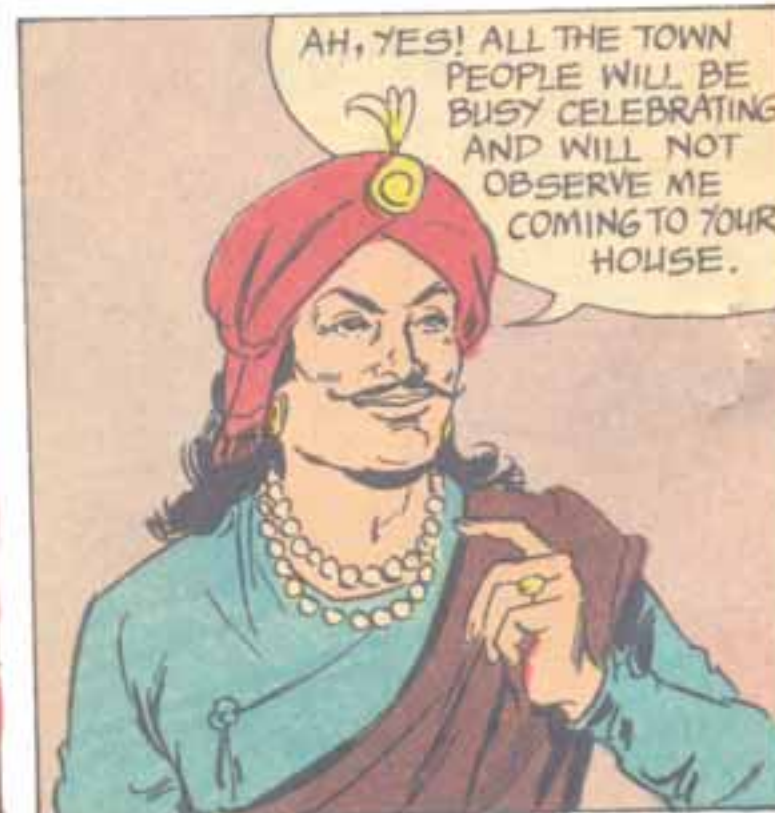
ALL THE JEWELS IN THE ROYAL TREASURY SEEM PALE BEFORE YOUR BEAUTY. OH FAIR ONE, BE MINE.



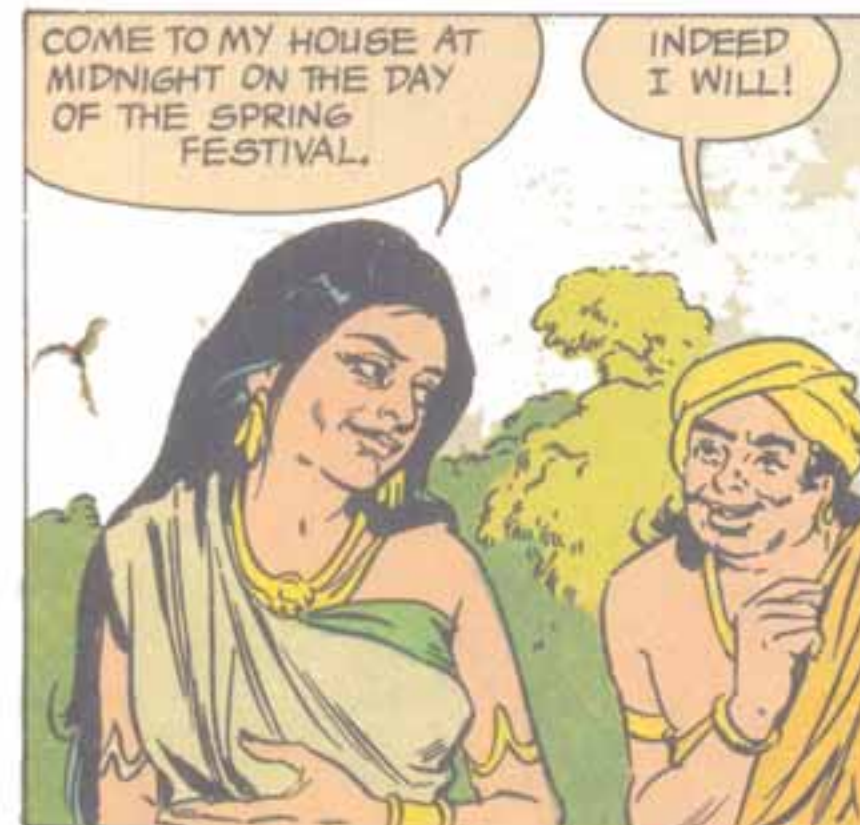
HOW CAN I ACCEPT YOUR PROPOSAL HERE? IT WOULD NOT BE PROPER.



COME TO MY HOUSE AT DUSK ON THE NIGHT OF VASANT PANCHAMI* NEXT WEEK.



AH, YES! ALL THE TOWN PEOPLE WILL BE BUSY CELEBRATING AND WILL NOT OBSERVE ME COMING TO YOUR HOUSE.



COME TO MY HOUSE AT MIDNIGHT ON THE DAY OF THE SPRING FESTIVAL.

INDEED I WILL!



AS SHE WAS ABOUT TO REACH HER HOUSE SHE MET THE HEAD MAGISTRATE, WHO ALSO DETAINED HER WITH HIS PROPOSAL.

COME TO MY HOUSE AT DAWN AFTER THE SPRING FESTIVAL.



ELATED AT BEING THUS WELCOMED, THE MINISTER AGREED. HE WAS LED INTO A DIMLY LIT INNER CHAMBER.



HERE'S A SPECIAL UNGUENT WE'VE MADE FOR YOU.

THEY TOOK A LONG TIME ANOINTING HIM WITH THE UNGUENT WHICH HE COULD SMELL BUT NOT SEE. JUST THEN—



KNOCK KNOCK

THEY BROUGHT THE TREASURER INSIDE THE DIMLY LIT ROOM.

OH SIR! YOU MUST BE WEARY FROM YOUR ROYAL DUTIES.

OUR MISTRESS HAS MADE THIS SPECIAL UNGUENT TO GIVE YOU A SOOTHING MASSAGE.



UNSUSPECTING, THE TREASURER SUCCUMBED TO THE MASSAGE.

GOOD! HE'S ALL COVERED WITH LAMPBLACK.

NO ONE WOULD RECOGNIZE HIM NOW.



IT IS THE ROYAL TREASURER!

OH! HE IS VARARUCHI'S FRIEND. HIDE! HIDE!



WHERE?

IN THIS TRUNK!



JUST THEN—

THE HEAD MAGISTRATE IS HERE.

OH! I'M DONE FOR!



DON'T WORRY! WE'LL HIDE YOU.

GET IN HERE, QUICK!



BUT MY CLOTHES?

LATER! HURRY UP AND GET IN. THERE'S NO TIME!



NOW THE NEXT ONE!

THE TREASURER.



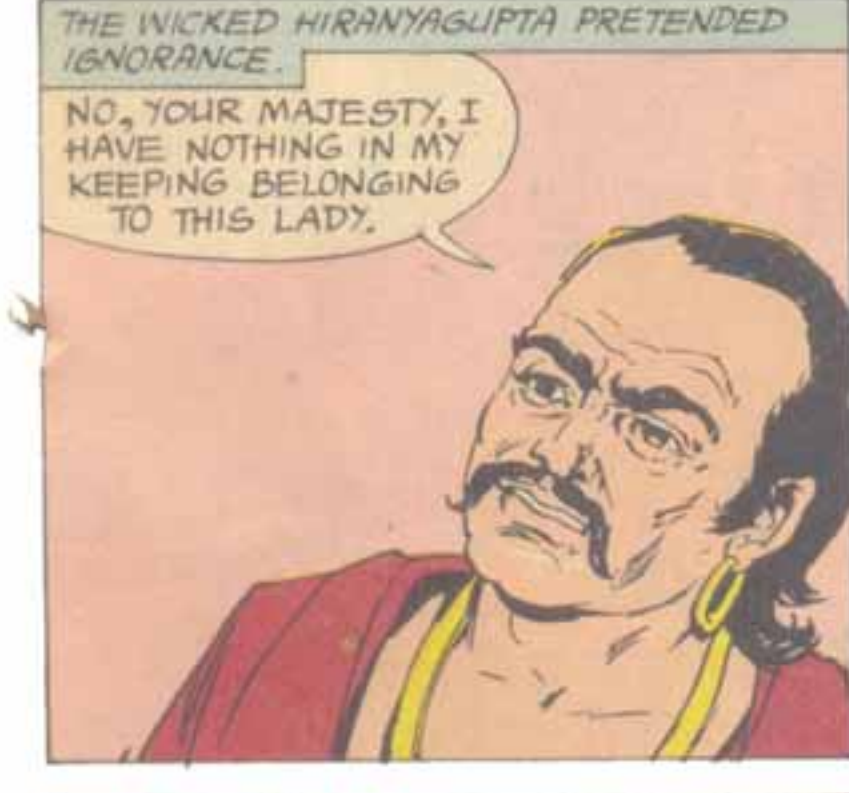
SOON IT WAS THE MAGISTRATE'S TURN TO ENJOY THE DELIGHTFUL MASSAGE.



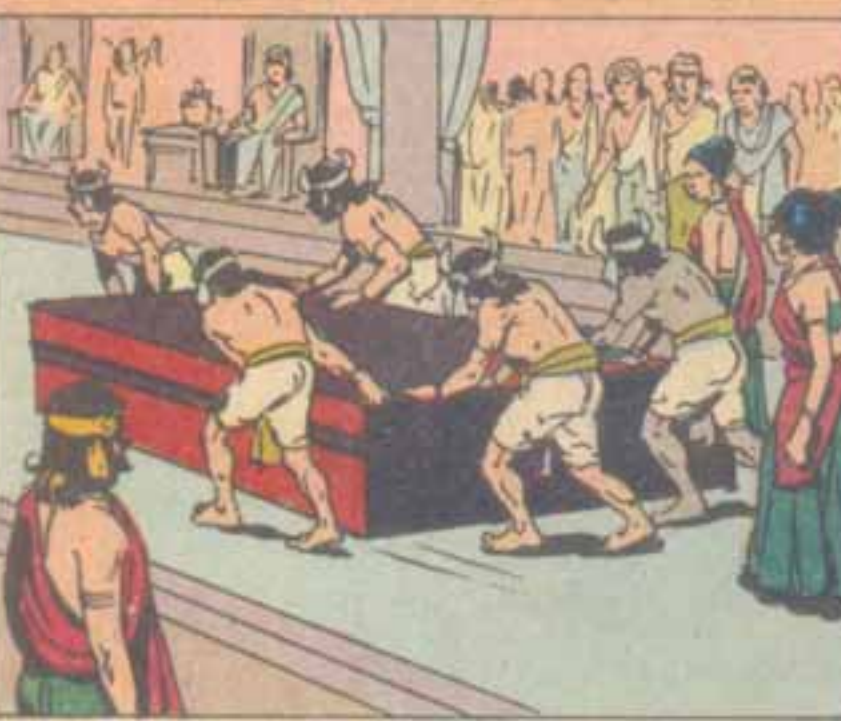
MEANWHILE—

SEND WORD TO HIRANYA-GUPTA, THE MERCHANT, THAT I'M READY TO REPLY TO HIM.





THE HEAVY TRUNK WAS BROUGHT TO THE COURT BY SEVERAL OF THE KING'S MEN.



DRAMATICALLY RAISING HER HANDS SKYWARDS UPAKOSHA SAID—



RELATE TRULY, O GODS, WHAT THE MERCHANT SAID.

QUICKLY HE BENT BEFORE THE KING—



FORGIVE ME, YOUR MAJESTY. I DID INDEED ACCEPT THE MONEY FROM VARARUCHI...

GO AT ONCE AND GET HER MONEY.

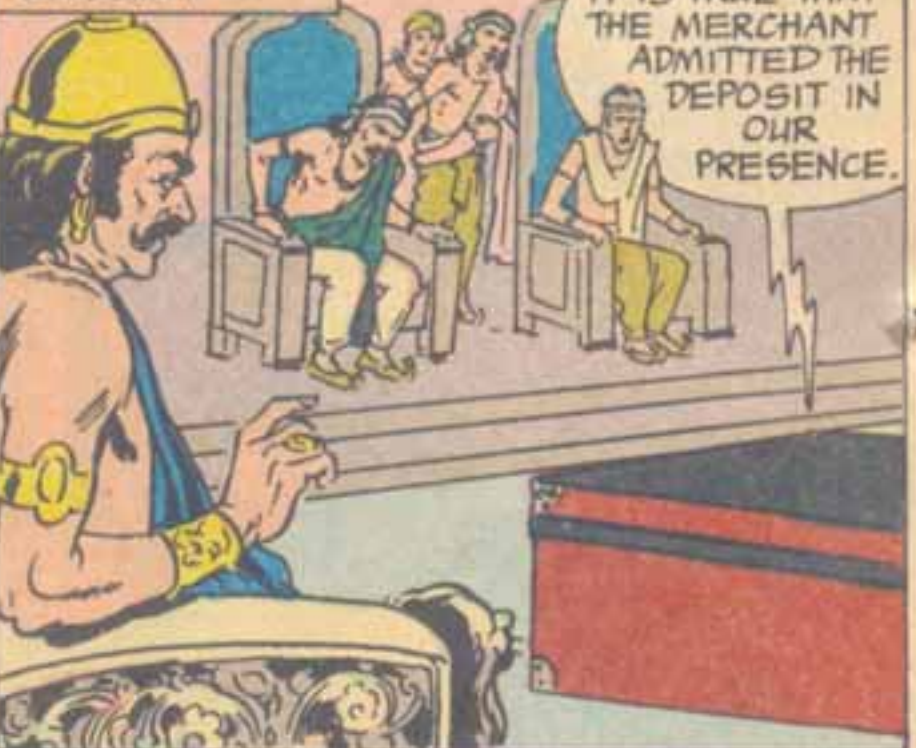


NO SOUND CAME FROM THE TRUNK.

SPEAK UP, O LORDS, WHO DWELL INSIDE THE TRUNK. ELSE I'LL BURN YOU OR OPEN THE BOX IN THE COURT.



SUDDENLY—



IT IS TRUE THAT THE MERCHANT ADMITTED THE DEPOSIT IN OUR PRESENCE.

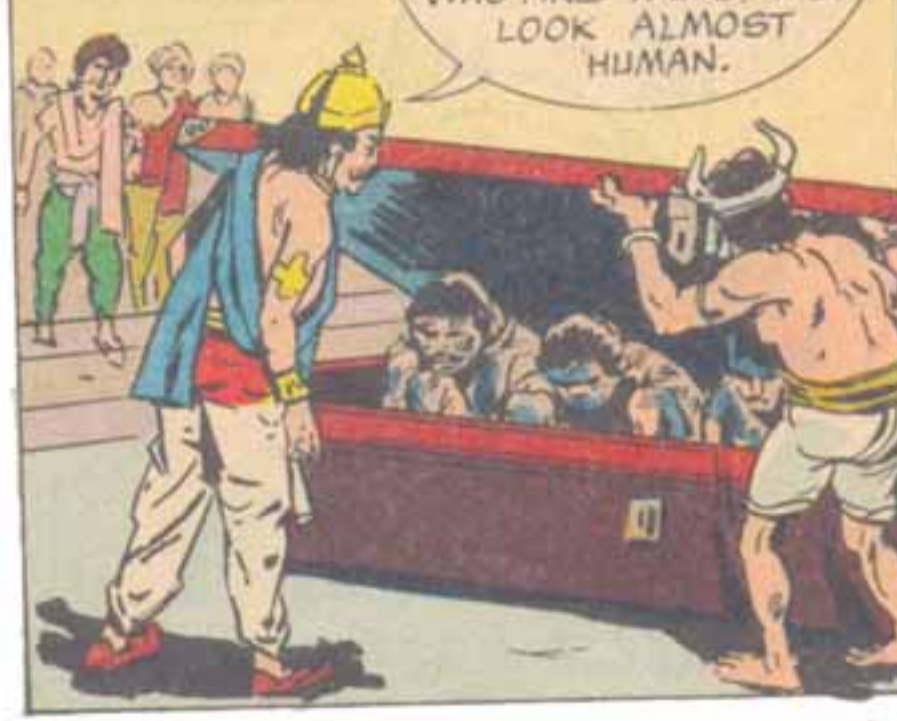
BUT KING NANDA'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED.



CAN I HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR HOUSEHOLD DEITIES?

HOW CAN I REFUSE A ROYAL REQUEST, YOUR HIGHNESS?

WH-WHAT ON EARTH? WHO ARE THESE? THEY LOOK ALMOST HUMAN.



YES! YES, WE CAN VOUCH FOR IT.

INDEED HE HAS ADMITTED TO VARARUCHI HAVING DEPOSITED HIS WEALTH WITH HIM.



HIRANYAGUPTA WAS BESIDE HIMSELF WITH FEAR—

OH DEAR! HER GODS ARE REALLY POWERFUL AND PROTECTIVE TOWARDS HER.



THEY LOOK FAMILIAR LET THEM BE BROUGHT OUT FROM THE TRUNK.



OH! IT'S MY TREASURER.

WHAT A SIGHT!

HA! HA!





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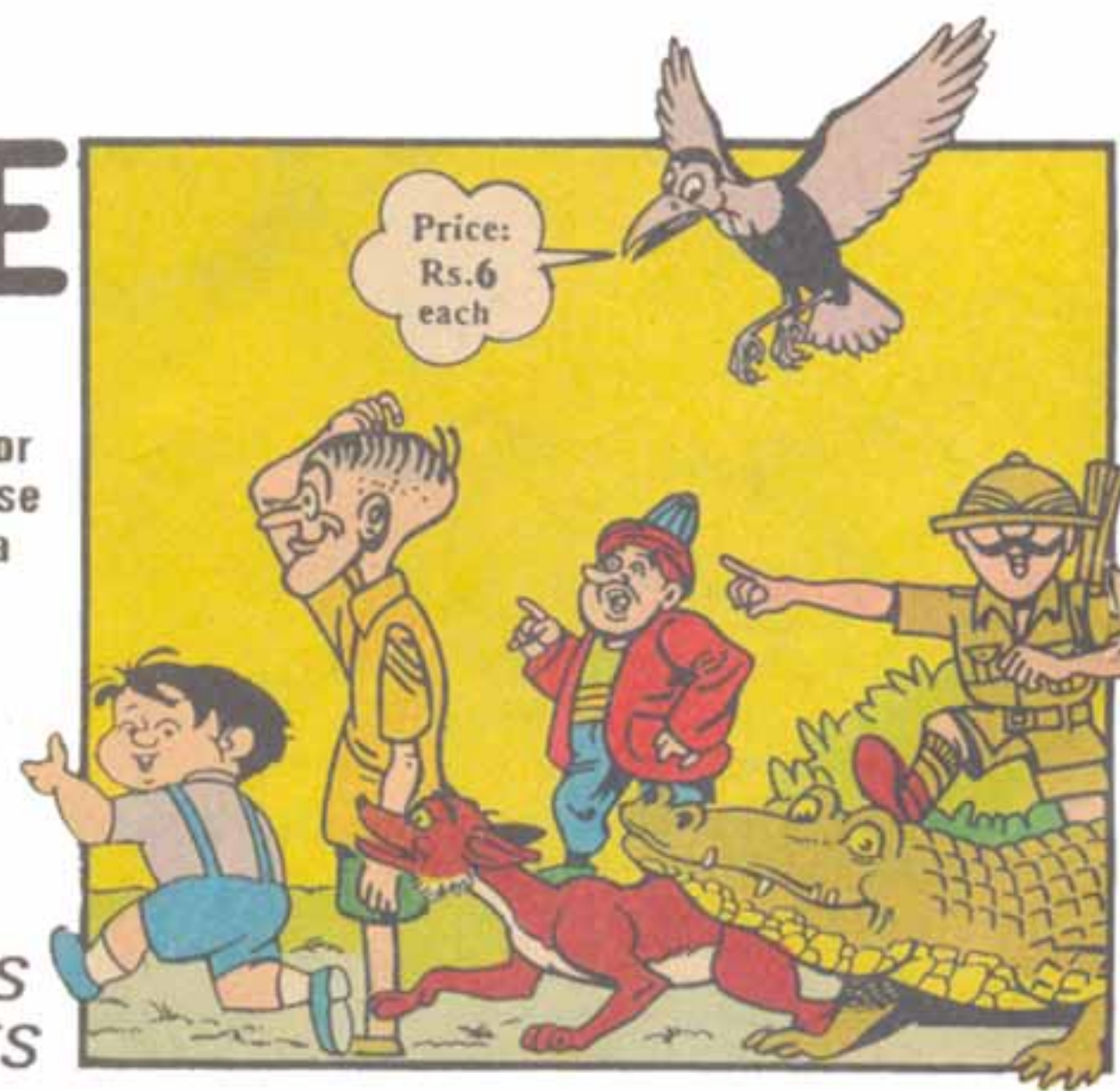
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