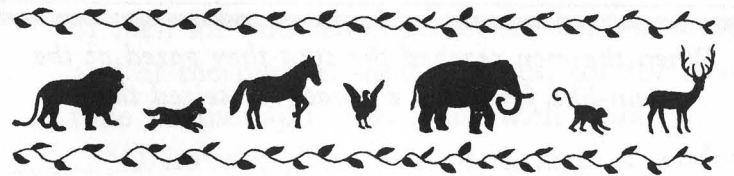
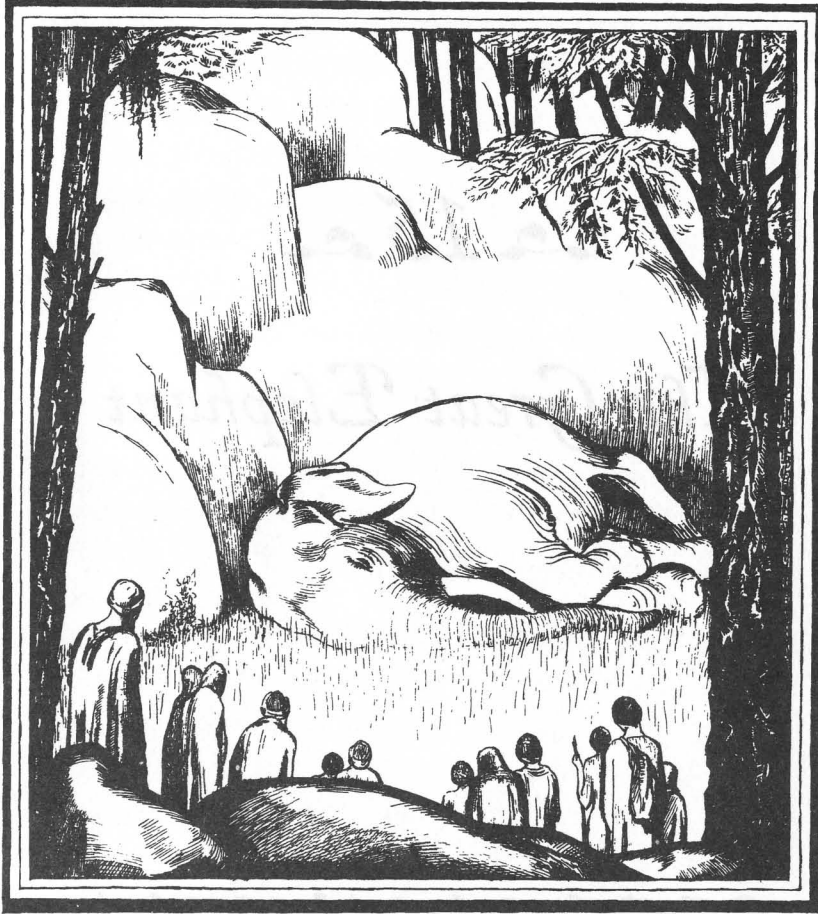


15

The Great Elephant





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ar, far in the sandy desert was a small oasis of palm trees and flowers. And in that oasis, as a lonely hermit, lived an elephant, a beautiful elephant. He

ate the fruit of the trees, and drank from a little stream of water that ran through the rocks. Happy he was, dancing through the banana trees, watching day and night come over the desert.

But one day, as he was dancing along, in the distance some strange voices came to his ears.

“Whose are those voices?” he said to himself. “Are they not voices of men, of unhappy men? Who are those men, and why do they cross the desert? Surely they are lost, or maybe they suffer some terrible pain.”

Such were the thoughts of the handsome elephant as he walked in the direction of the voices. He walked some distance over the burning sand when he came upon a great crowd of men all huddled together at death’s door, and at the piteous sight his eyes, for the first time in his happy life, filled with tears.

“O travelers,” he said to them in a tender voice, “wherefrom do you come, and where

are you going? Have you lost your way in the desert? Tell me, O men, that I may help you in some way."

So happy were the men to hear these friendly words that they fell on their knees before him.

"Beautiful one," they said, "we have been driven from our country by our King, and have roamed through the desert for many days. Not a drop of water have we found to drink, nor food to give us strength."

"Help us, O dear one," they cried; "help us."

"How many are you?" asked the elephant.

"We were one thousand," they replied, "but many have perished on the way."

The elephant gazed at them. One was crying for water, another asking for food.

"You are weak, O men," he said, "and the next city is too far for you to reach without food and drink. Therefore walk towards the hill which stands before you. At its foot you will find the body of a large elephant which will provide you with food, and nearby runs a stream of sweet water."

When he had thus spoken he ran over the

burning sand and disappeared as he had come.

"Where did the elephant go? And why did he run at such a pace?"

Straight to the hill he went, to the same hill he had pointed out to the men; but he took another way, that the men might not see him going. He climbed to the top of the hill and then from its highest point, in a mighty jump, his beautiful body crashed to the ground below.

When the men reached the spot they gazed at the giant-like form and a great fear seized them.

"Is this not our dear elephant?" exclaimed one among them.

"This face is the same face; the eyes, though closed, are the same eyes," said another.

And they all sat in the sand and wept bitterly.

After some time one among them spoke.

"Companions," he said, "we cannot eat this elephant who has give his life for us."

"Nay, friends," said another, "if we do not eat this elephant, his sacrifice will have been useless, and we shall die before reaching an-

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other city. Thus we shall not be helped, nor shall the wish of our elephant be fulfilled.”

The men spoke no more but bent their heads in the burning sand and ate the meat with tears in their eyes. And it made them strong, very strong, so that they were able to cross the desert and reach a town where their troubles came to an end. They never forgot the great elephant, and they lived happy ever after.