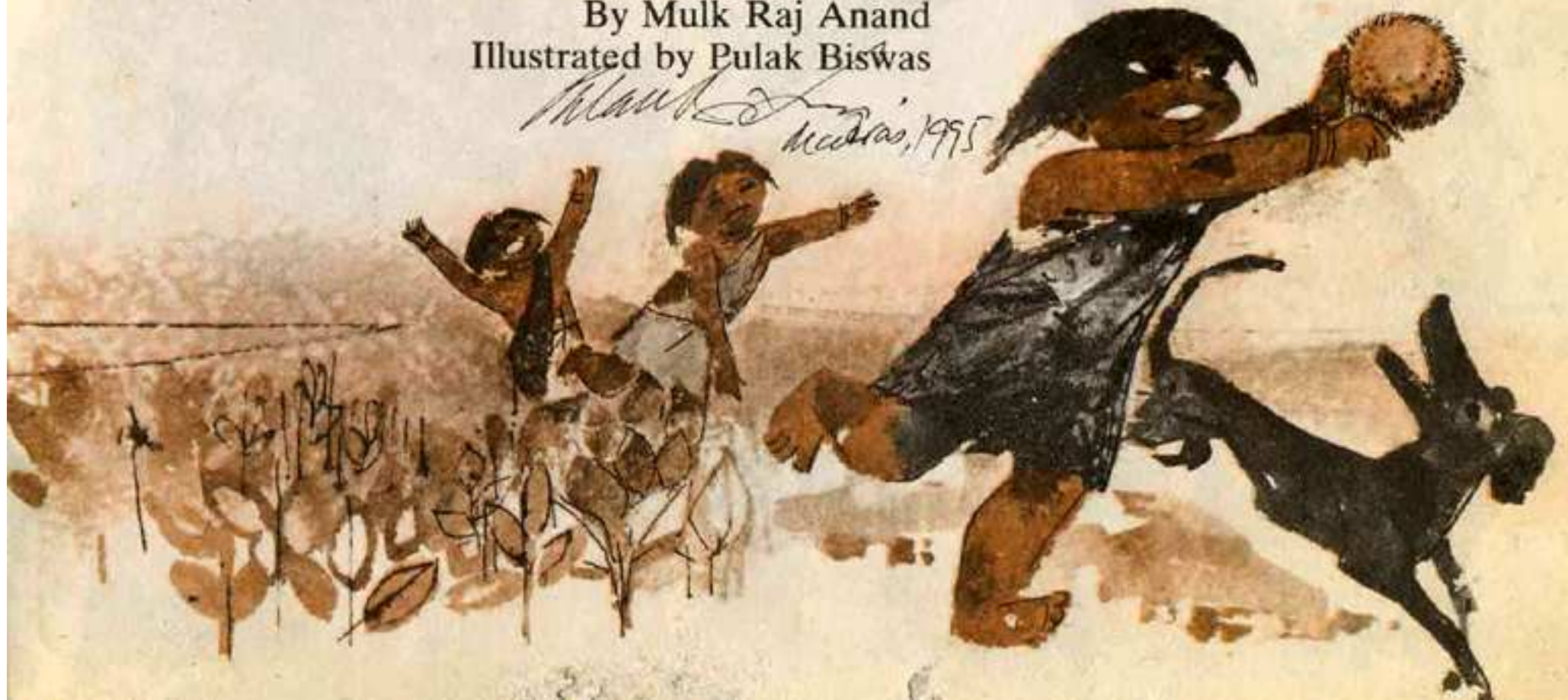


A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
**MAYA
OF
MOHENJO-DARO**

By Mulk Raj Anand
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Mulk Raj Anand
Pulak Biswas, 1995





It was five thousand years ago.

In Mohenjo-daro the morning opened like a sleepy lotus flower at the touch of the sun. And the cocks crowed shrill praise to the Giver of light. Men, women and children stirred on their charpoys.

Little Maya woke up earlier than her parents. She looked just like a little flower-bud. At first she stared at the huge wooden beams in the ceiling, gazing at the flowers and birds carved on them. Then she talked and sang to herself. Her voice rose and went through to the room where her parents slept. A little later she felt alone. So she climbed out of her little cot and ran to her father's bed, dragging her toy cart behind her with a string. She climbed onto her father's tummy and tried to walk on him like a dancer on a tightrope.

"Ba," she called to her father, "Ba."

Ba did not reply. He only growled. So she playfully pulled his beard. At this Ba groaned. And

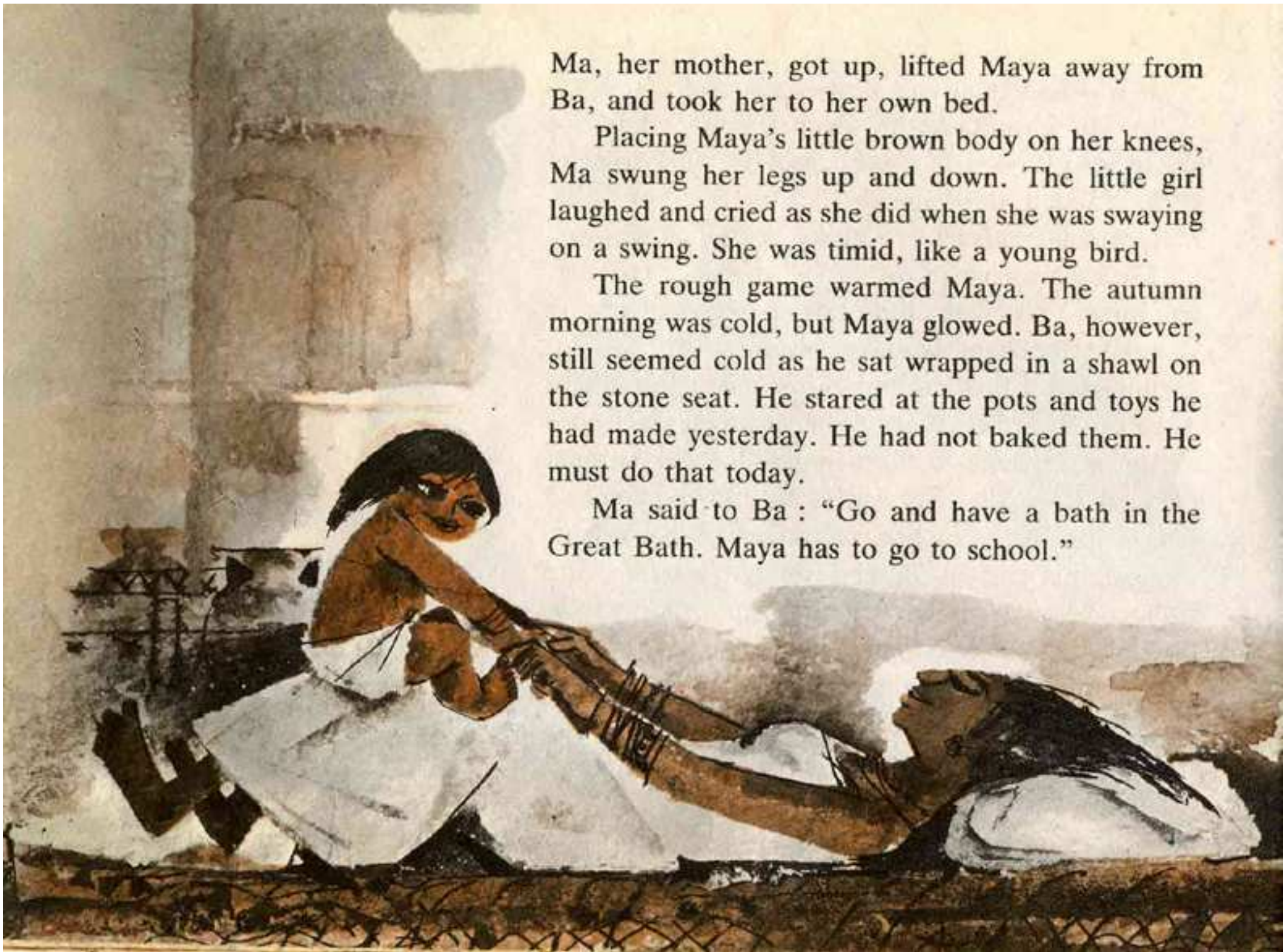


Ma, her mother, got up, lifted Maya away from Ba, and took her to her own bed.

Placing Maya's little brown body on her knees, Ma swung her legs up and down. The little girl laughed and cried as she did when she was swaying on a swing. She was timid, like a young bird.

The rough game warmed Maya. The autumn morning was cold, but Maya glowed. Ba, however, still seemed cold as he sat wrapped in a shawl on the stone seat. He stared at the pots and toys he had made yesterday. He had not baked them. He must do that today.

Ma said to Ba : "Go and have a bath in the Great Bath. Maya has to go to school."



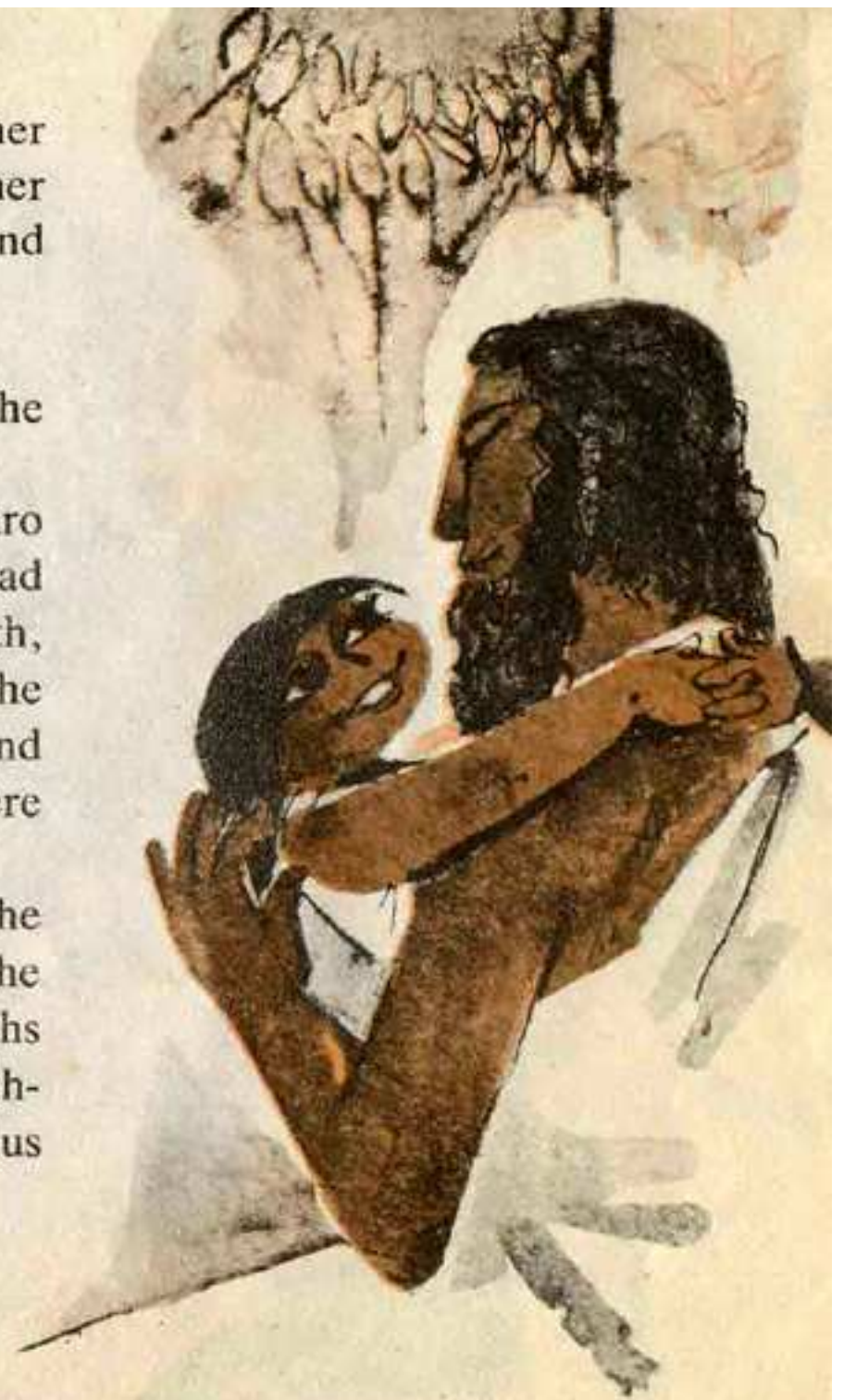
Maya was playing with her clay cart and her animal toys made of clay. But when her mother spoke of the bath she ran and put her arms round Ba's neck.

"Come, Ba, let us go," she said.

Ma dressed Maya in a skirt and tunic and she was ready to go.

The Great Bath of the city of Mohenjo-daro was a tank surrounded by a very thick wall. It had four gates; one on the north side, one on the south, one on the east, and one on the west. Round the tank were verandahs, rooms, and galleries, and several large halls. In one room was a well. There were stairs, leading to more rooms above.

The poor people came here. The potters, the copper-smiths, the weavers, the painters, and the school-teachers were poor, and did not have baths of their own. Only the rich merchants had big bathrooms in their houses. The Great Bath was thus the meeting place of the people.





It was exciting for Maya to see the crowd. Men and women were dipping themselves in the fresh water, some singing little snatches of prayer to keep warm. Others were repeating the name of the Mother goddess to make sure she did not get angry with them. Maya wanted to go into the water at once. She tried to jump out of Ba's arms and nearly fell into the water. He held her tightly, however, and told her to be patient.

Ba quietly gave his shawl and his shoes in the safe keeping of the keeper of the bath. He gave him Maya's clothes too. Then he got into the water, going down the steps to the platform at the bottom. He put Maya across his outstretched palms, and tried to teach her to swim. The little girl splashed the water as she moved her arms and legs. She shrieked with joy and fear as Ba nearly let go his hand to see if she could swim on her own.

Ma had cooked *khichri* of rice and lentils in the special earthen pot which Ba had made for her a





year ago. In the large kitchen were more vessels Ba had made. Some were for storing rice or wheat. Oil was kept in a wide pot with a narrow mouth.

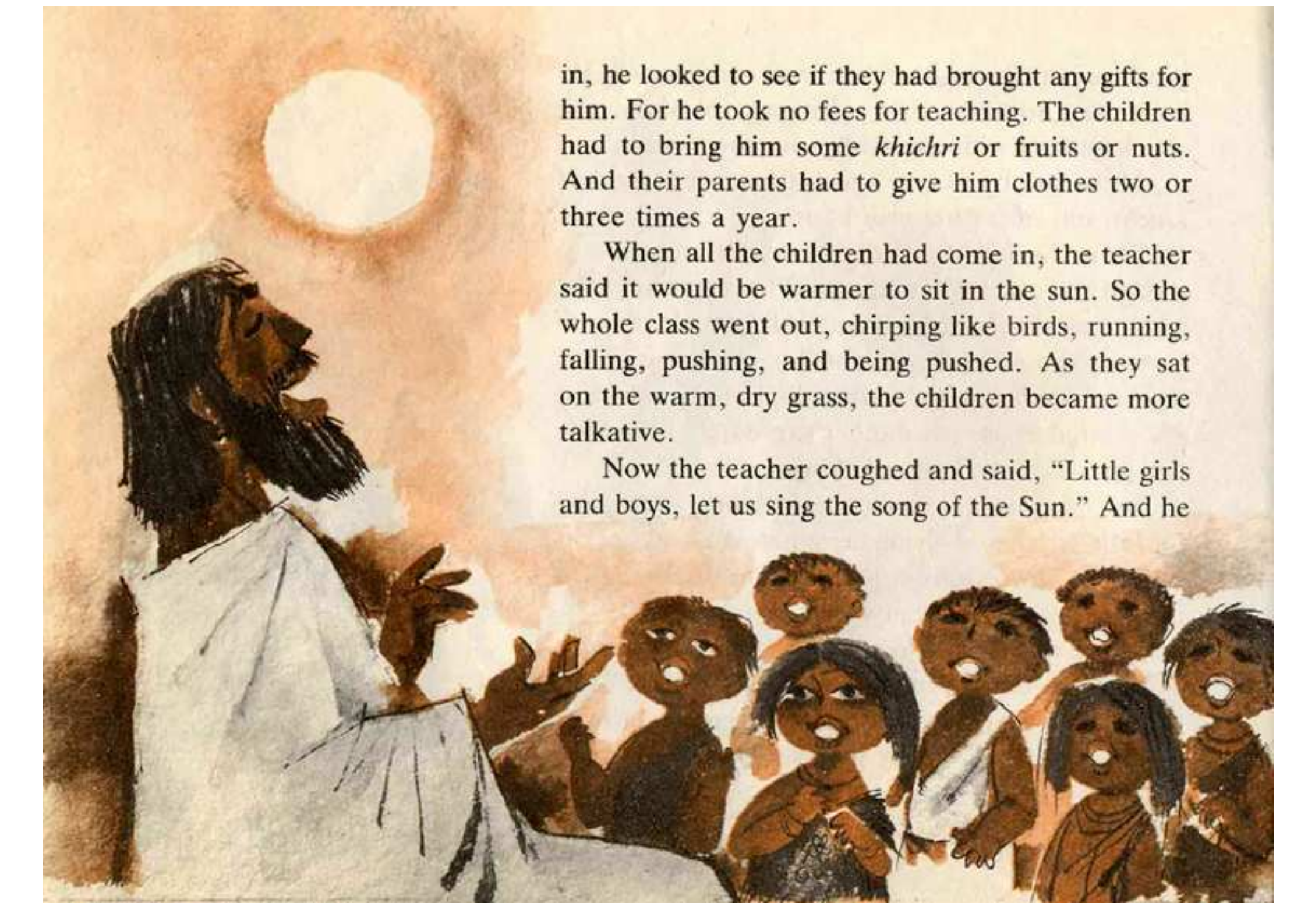
Maya sat by Ba in the kitchen and ate her *khichri* out of a little clay basin.

Then she let Ma wash her hands and mouth, though she cried when Ma tried to smear her eyes with black *surma*, using a small slide made of lead. Instead, she wanted very much to put some of her mother's *sindur* on the parting line of her hair; and she wanted to use her mother's tree-bark to redden her lips. She liked all red things.

But Ma did not think these things were good for little girls. And giving her a pat, she sent her off to school. Two little girls, Toto and Coco, called for her, and Maya went with them.

There was no bell to call the children to school. Nor did the teacher mind if the children were late. He sat on a platform at the end of the schoolroom writing on a slate. Every time some children came





in, he looked to see if they had brought any gifts for him. For he took no fees for teaching. The children had to bring him some *khichri* or fruits or nuts. And their parents had to give him clothes two or three times a year.

When all the children had come in, the teacher said it would be warmer to sit in the sun. So the whole class went out, chirping like birds, running, falling, pushing, and being pushed. As they sat on the warm, dry grass, the children became more talkative.

Now the teacher coughed and said, "Little girls and boys, let us sing the song of the Sun." And he

began to chant. The children chanted after him, all together, until the chorus rose to the sky like a shrill thanksgiving to heaven for the gift of light.

After that the teacher asked the children to recite the numerals up to sixteen.

Then they were allowed to make dolls and animals of mud. Maya made them better than any other child, for she had seen her father make them.

The teacher then sent the children to play hide and seek in the grove by the old banyan tree. By noon he let them go home.

The air at midday was still. A few kites wheeled round and round and round in the sky. When Maya came home from school, Ba was sitting in the sun by his wheel. She loved to watch the wheel as it turned round and round, and she loved to watch the pots forming between Ba's skilful fingers.

She longed to sit by the wheel and do what Ba did.

But Ma called her to come and drink up her hot





milk. She poured it into the tall pointed pot Ba had made specially for Maya's milk. But Maya did not like the cream on top of the milk and she wanted to run away. But Ma made her drink it, telling her a story the while.

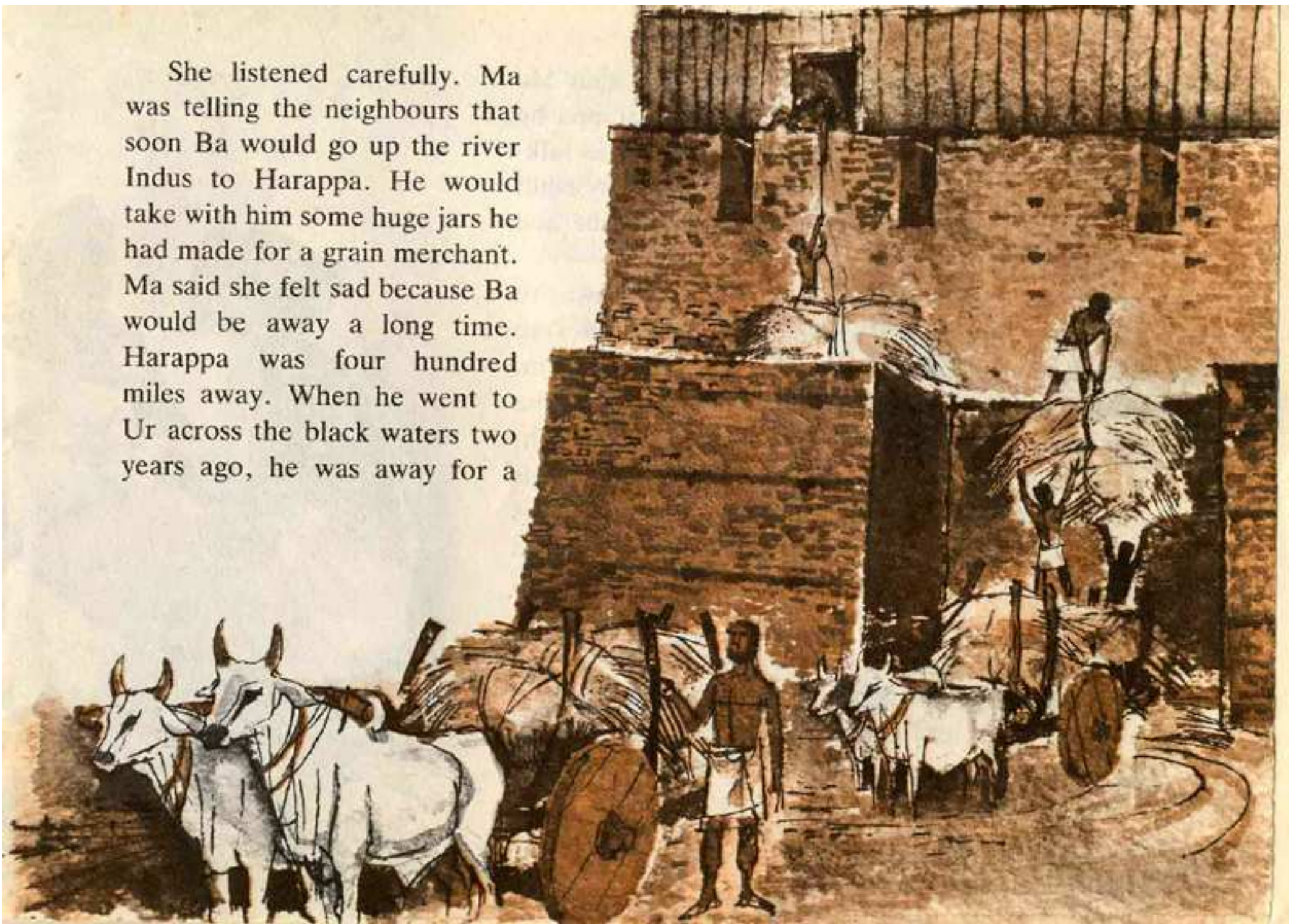
"If you are a good girl," said Ba, "I shall make a cup for you, a cup with a handle. You will enjoy your milk if you drink it from a cup."

"Make a cup for me now," said Maya.

But then Ma took Maya and put her to bed because it was time for her afternoon rest.

Maya was restless and could not sleep. She could hear her mother talking to the other women. They sat in the courtyard with their needlework. They talked and talked as they embroidered their cloth. To Maya their voices sounded like sweet music. The sound attracted her and she lay there listening. Then she became curious to know what they were talking about.

She listened carefully. Ma was telling the neighbours that soon Ba would go up the river Indus to Harappa. He would take with him some huge jars he had made for a grain merchant. Ma said she felt sad because Ba would be away a long time. Harappa was four hundred miles away. When he went to Ur across the black waters two years ago, he was away for a



whole year. But one of the women said that Ma should not be sad. Ba was lucky. In Harappa he would see the Great Granary. Everyone was talking about it. It was a huge building with forty-eight large rooms in which grain was stored—rice and wheat and barley.

Maya was excited. She was ready to fly away to Harappa and Ur. In her mind these two cities were like stars dancing in the sky. She longed to see them. How she would love to see the Great Granary! She felt impatient and began to roll in her bed. Oh, if only Ba would take her with him, away from this city to other cities. She would like to go to places where there were toys of gold and silver, and pomegranates and melons and oranges and grapes to eat!

Maya got up and went to her mother in the courtyard. Ma was still talking but Maya began to ask her again and again for a needle and thread. She wanted to embroider cloth just as Ma did.





Ma gave her a piece of cloth and a needle and thread, and Maya tried to sew.

Outside the courtyard the boys were playing at marbles. Maya could hear their voices. Among them she could hear the shrill voice of Ra, the brother of Toto and Coco who had taken her to school that morning. These three were the children of the weaver who lived next door.

Maya wanted to see Ra, so she ran out. She was small and he was tall. But she liked him because he had such lovely coloured marbles. She wanted to play marbles with him and to touch him.

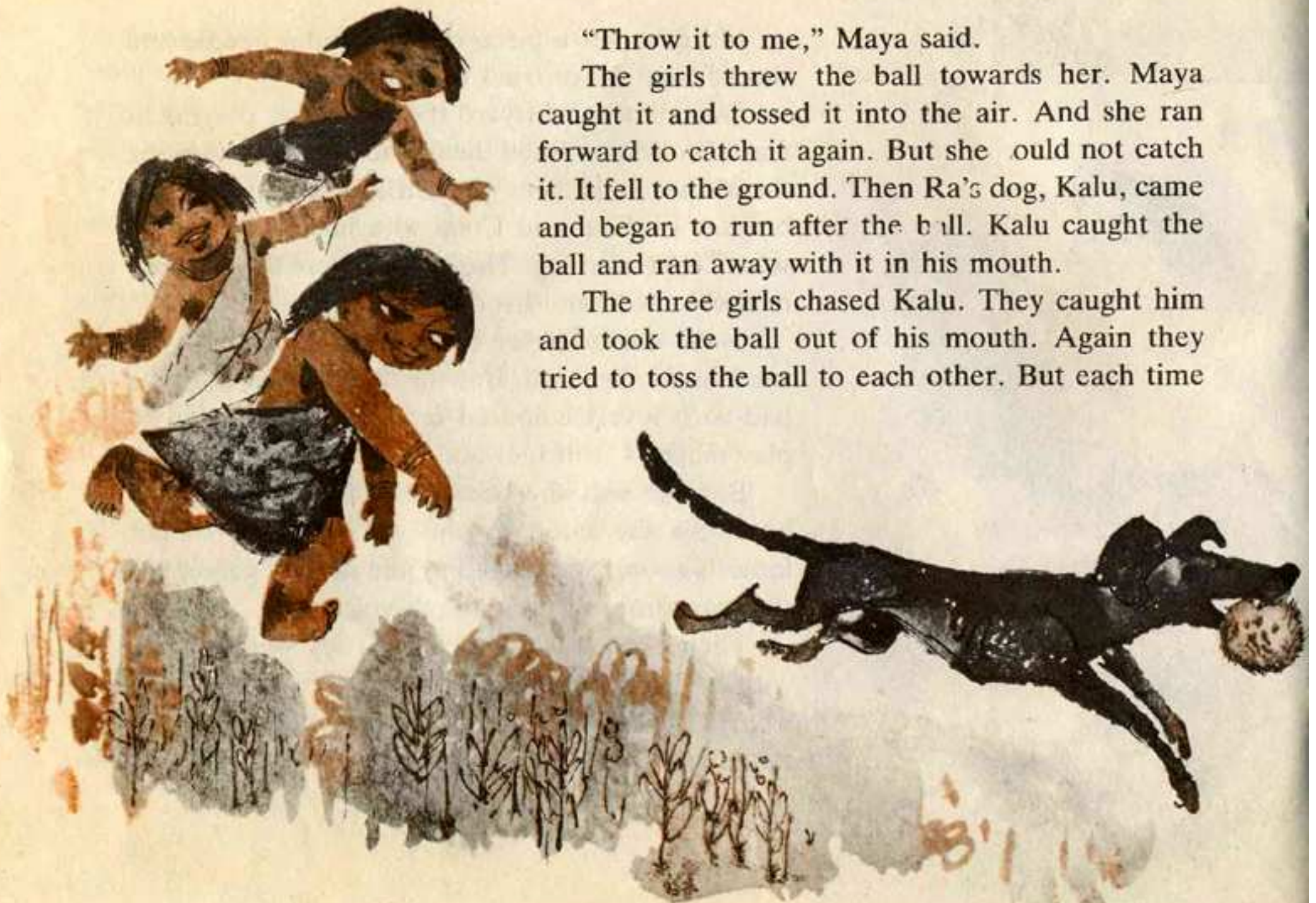
But she was shy because there were so many boys. So she stood by the wooden door of her father's room. She longed to join in their game, but she was afraid of their rough voices.

Then Toto and Coco came. They were playing with a fluffy, woollen ball of many colours. Oh, what a lovely ball! It had all the colours of the rainbow.

“Throw it to me,” Maya said.

The girls threw the ball towards her. Maya caught it and tossed it into the air. And she ran forward to catch it again. But she could not catch it. It fell to the ground. Then Ra's dog, Kalu, came and began to run after the ball. Kalu caught the ball and ran away with it in his mouth.

The three girls chased Kalu. They caught him and took the ball out of his mouth. Again they tried to toss the ball to each other. But each time



they threw it the dog caught it and ran away with it. So they had to run after him. They ran and ran and soon felt very hot. They were sweating. At last they sat down, tired but happy.

Maya's mother called them and gave them fresh oranges to eat. Maya threw her orange in the air and tried to catch it. Her mother scolded her.

"I like to see oranges dance," the child said.

"Oranges do not dance," Ma said.

"I think they do," Maya said.

But all the same she sat down and peeled the orange and ate it with salt and pepper, as her mother did.

It was evening. Ba had finished baking the pots and toys which he had made yesterday. Now he was ready to take them to the market to sell them. Maya said she must go too.

"You can carry this, Maya," Ba said.

And he put a baked pitcher on her head.

Then he picked up a basket of pots and toys





and put it on his own head. Together they set out for the market in the centre of the city of Mohenjodaro. They saw some cowherds bringing the cows back home for the night.

Ba and Maya soon left the cows behind. They walked on through the city. Down the wide roads they went, until they came to a narrow lane. Ba turned into the narrow lane.

“Why are we going down here?” Maya asked.

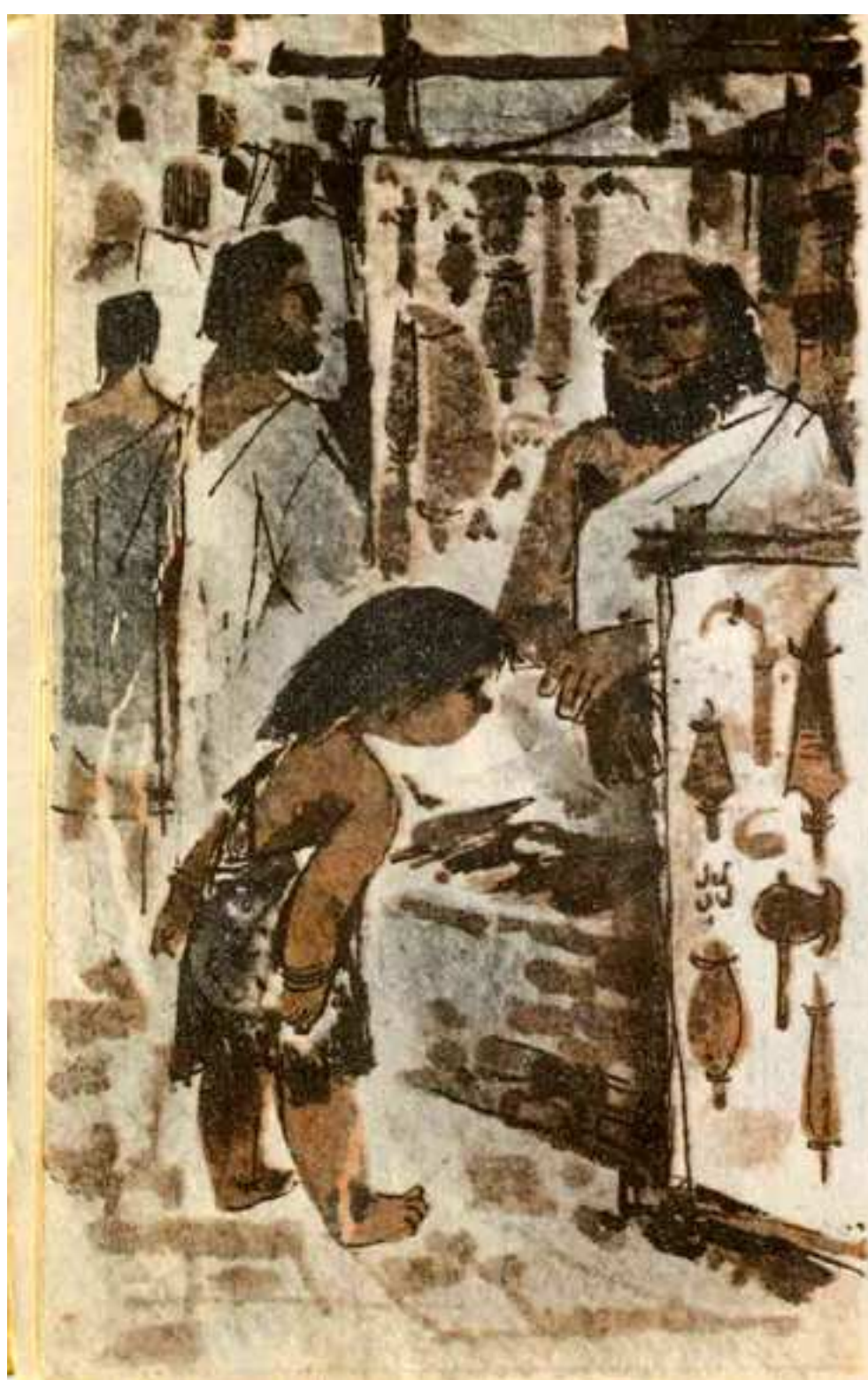
“It is quicker this way,” said Ba. “If we go down this lane, and then take the third lane on the right, we shall come out into North Street, and that will take us straight to the market hall.”

On and on they walked, passing many shops and houses. At last they reached the market-place.

Here, there was a lot of noise. It sounded as if many sheep and goats were being killed. But it was only the merchants talking and shouting, trying to sell their wares.

Ba too began to shout.





“Come, masters!” he cried. “Come, generous masters! Buy this toy. Hear the beautiful sound it makes. Come, buy toys for your children!”

Maya looked eagerly around her. The talking and the laughter and the haggling filled her with excitement. The noise seemed to flow through her, bringing colour into her cheeks.

Maya stood near her father’s basket of toys. All the children gazed at the little clay carts, the clay animals, and the dolls. They came along holding their father’s hands. But as soon as they saw the toys they made their fathers stop. The children praised the toys and Maya felt very pleased that she had helped her father to make some of them.

The stall-keepers shouted more and more loudly. Maya left her father for a

moment and went to see other stalls.

On one stall there were all sorts of knives. There were big knives and small knives, razors and sickles and fish-hooks, chisels and choppers and saws. And there were all kinds of axes, some made of copper or bronze.

Another stall had many things made of stone.

Next, there was the stall that sold ribbons, brooches, and hairpins.

“When I grow up,” Maya said to herself, “I shall buy all these things.”

“Come this way! See them nod their heads!” cried a loud voice.

Maya turned. Then she burst out laughing. There were toy dogs, cows, goats and sheep, monkeys, elephants, tigers, bears, and deer, and they were all nodding their heads.





Then there were all kinds of birds, peacocks, owls, eagles, and geese, and they were all nodding their heads.

“They are lovely,” cried Maya.

She looked at all the animals and wished she could have one. She would ask Ba to buy one for her. She tried to make up her mind whether to ask for an elephant or a peacock. But just then she happened to look at the next stall. On it there were woollen things and linen dolls. And next to the linen dolls there were coloured, fluffy balls.

A ball! That was what she wanted. She would not ask Ba for an elephant. She would ask him for a ball, a ball so full of colours, so soft and fluffy, better than Toto’s and Coco’s fluffy ball.

She went back to her father and said, “Ba, I want a fluffy ball.”

And just at that moment, when Maya felt that she must have a fluffy ball, her father said, “Come, my daughter. Now we must go home.”

“I want that ball,” she said again.

“Tomorrow, my child,” Ba said. “Tomorrow I shall buy one for you. Tomorrow is the festival of the Mother goddess and I shall sell all my toys and pots.”

“I want the ball now,” Maya said firmly.

“Come, we must go home,” said Ba gruffly.

Maya began to cry. Ba felt sorry. It hurt him to see Maya cry.

He went to the stall where woollen things were sold. For one fluffy ball he gave one of his



own clay toys, a little cart drawn by two bullocks. He took the ball and gave it to Maya.

Maya's fluffy ball was bigger than the one she had played with in the afternoon with her friends, Toto and Coco. How happy she was to have one like theirs but bigger and with more colours. She was filled with happiness. As her father carried her home, happiness seemed to hum inside her like a song.

She saw the great orange sun going down behind the dense trees. There was another ball! Her father walked on and by the time they reached home her eyes were half closed with sleep.

Now nothing could keep her awake, she was so sleepy. All around her lights were lit in earthen lamps, and on all sides the evening prayers and songs rose to the darkening sky. But Maya lay in her cot and the ball lay beside her. She was dreaming of this wonderful thing, so big, so soft, so round, so full of colours, her fluffy ball.







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