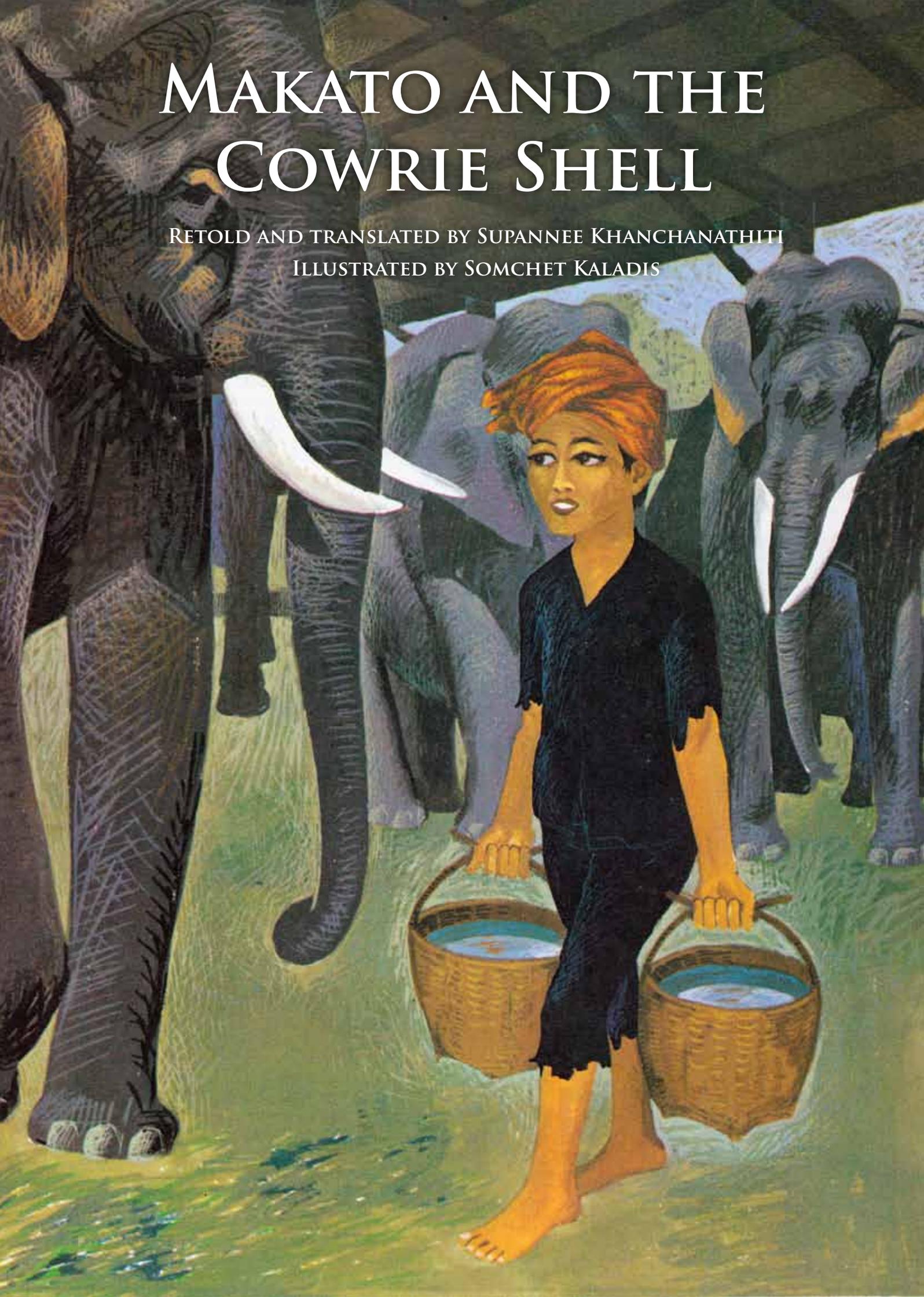


# MAKATO AND THE COWRIE SHELL

RETOLD AND TRANSLATED BY SUPANNEE KHANCHANATHITI

ILLUSTRATED BY SOMCHET KALADIS



THAILAND

**MAKATO AND THE**  
**COWRIE SHELL**

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Once upon a time there was a boy whose name was Makato. He was an orphan, for his father and mother had died when he was very young. He had no brothers, sisters, cousins, or friends to take care of him, so he had to make a living for himself. He did every kind of work—carrying heavy things, clearing away the forest, or feeding pigs. He never idled over his work, and although he was paid only a small wage, he was satisfied. He knew that if he did not work he would starve. Wherever he went his employers praised him for being sensible, hard-working, good-tempered, and cheerful.

One fine evening after he had finished chopping up a big pile of wood, he sat down for a rest and thought of all he would like to do in the future. He wanted to try his luck in far-off strange lands for he longed for exciting adventures.

“What are you thinking about so deeply, my boy?” asked his employer.

“I would like to go on a journey for adventure,” said Makato pointing to the northeast. “I’ve heard that the land over there is fertile and the people are kind. I wish I could see that land for myself.” His eyes sparkled with excitement.

“The land you wish to go to is called Sukhothai,” said his employer. “They say Pra Ruang of Sukhothai is a very kindhearted king. You might be lucky if you could go there.”

Some time later, Makato decided to try his fortune. He left his village and set out into the wide world. He walked along cheerfully, enjoying new sights and talking to the people he met on the way. After a month’s journey, he reached a village on the frontier of the kingdom of Sukhothai.

“Please can I have some water to drink?” Makato asked an old woman with a big water pot on her head. “I’m so thirsty.”

“Where did you come from? Why are you here alone? You look as if you’d

come a long way,” said the old woman, pouring cold water from her pot into a small cup and handing it to Makato.

“Thank you so much,” said the boy.

“Who are your father and mother? Haven’t you any family?” the old woman asked again.

“I have neither father nor mother. I come from the city of Mon over there,” replied Makato.

“Good heavens! Have you really come from Mon? How is it that you are traveling alone, such a young boy as you are?”

“I wanted to see Pra Ruang of Sukhothai,” replied Makato. “They say he is a very kindhearted king.”

“You are a determined boy!” said the woman. “Come along with me. Who knows, you might see Pra Ruang someday.”

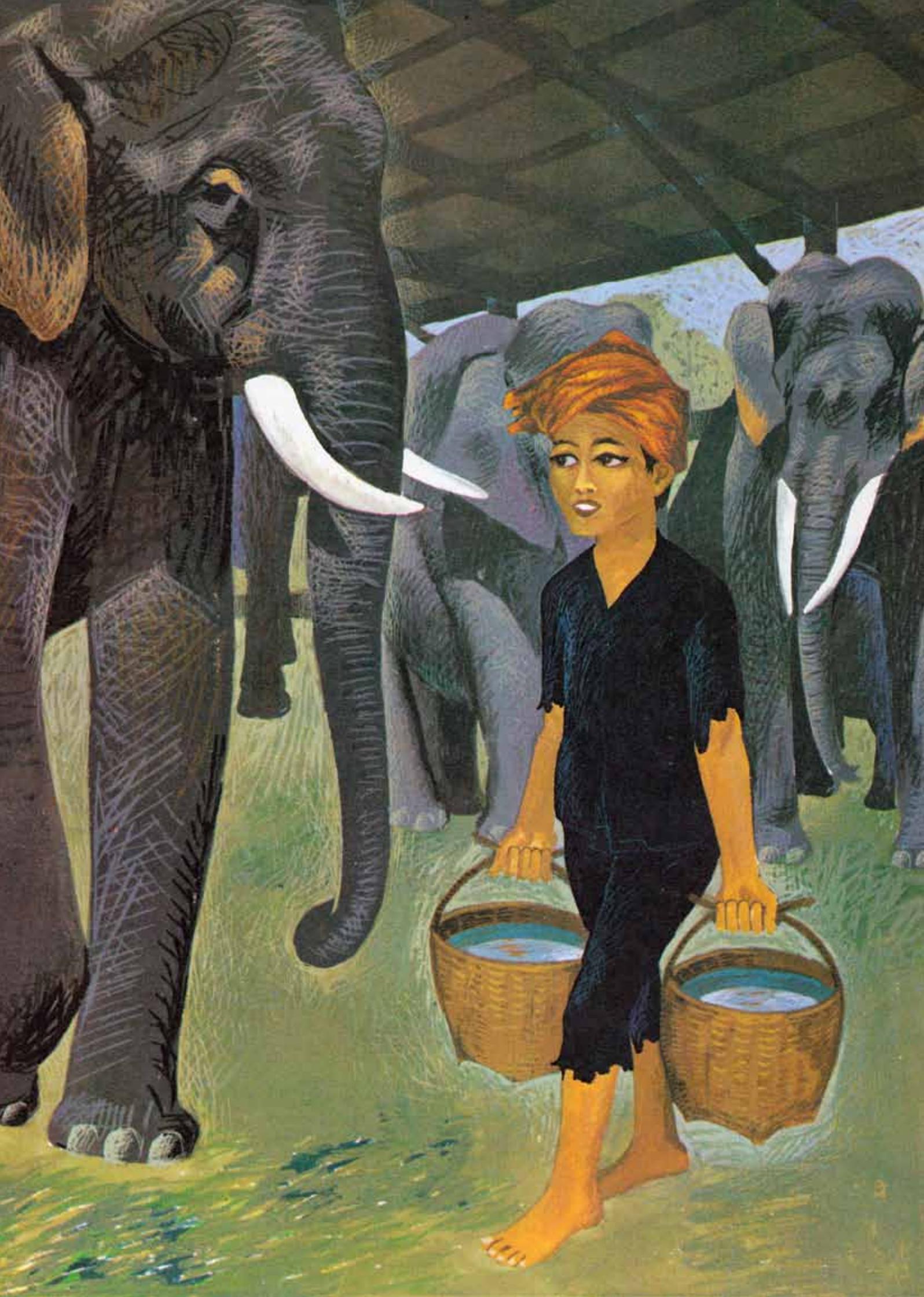
Makato was glad to go with her. If he could work for this kind woman, he would have a place to sleep, some food to eat and, perhaps, someday he might be lucky enough to see the king.

The old woman’s husband was one of Pra Ruang’s mahouts, which meant that he helped look after the hundreds of elephants that the king owned. Makato helped the mahout find food for the elephants and clean out the elephant sheds. He worked hard and well and the mahout and his wife were fond of him.

One day the sky was so clear and the weather so fine that it seemed to Makato that it must be a lucky day. As he worked in the elephant sheds, a tall young man in a splendid costume, followed by attendants, came in. It was Pra Ruang himself. Makato bowed low at once with his hands clasped together before him.

His heart beat fast.

“Where did that boy come from?” The king asked the old mahout, who was attending him.



“He came all the way from the city of Mon,” said the old mahout, bowing. “He heard so much about Your Majesty that he longed to see you.”

“How old is he?”

“Twelve years old, Your Majesty.”

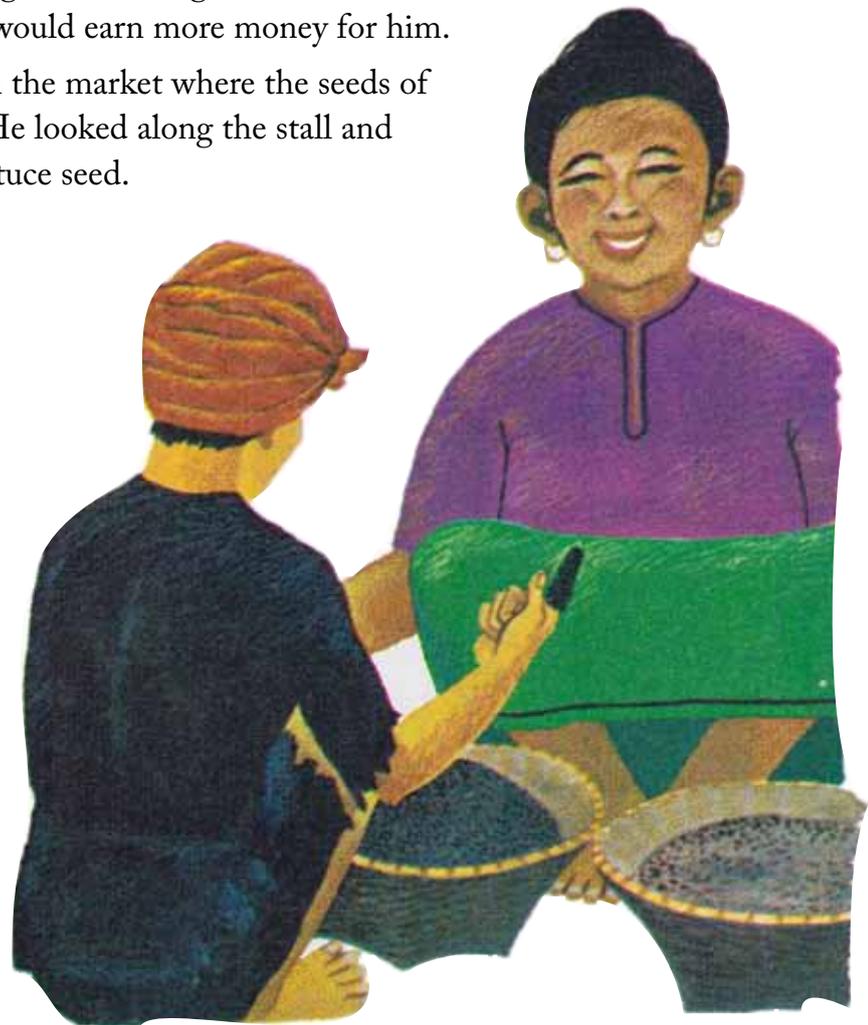
“A good-looking and hard-working boy,” said the king. “Take good care of him.”

As the king walked away, Makato saw a little cowrie shell lying on the ground. He ran to pick it up and held it out to the king, but the king said with a smile: “You may keep it.”

“How wonderful!” Makato thought. “The king has given me a cowrie shell.”

At that time the people of Sukhothai used cowrie shells as money. Although one cowrie shell had little value, Makato wanted to make as much use of it as possible, for it was the king’s gift. For a long time he could not think of a way to use it so that it would earn more money for him.

One day he passed by a stall in the market where the seeds of many different plants were sold. He looked along the stall and caught sight of a basket full of lettuce seed.



Lettuce! He could grow small plants like that. He asked the jolly-looking woman at the stall: “Can I buy some lettuce seed?”

“Oh yes, my boy. How much do you want?” said the woman.

“I have one cowrie shell,” said Makato.

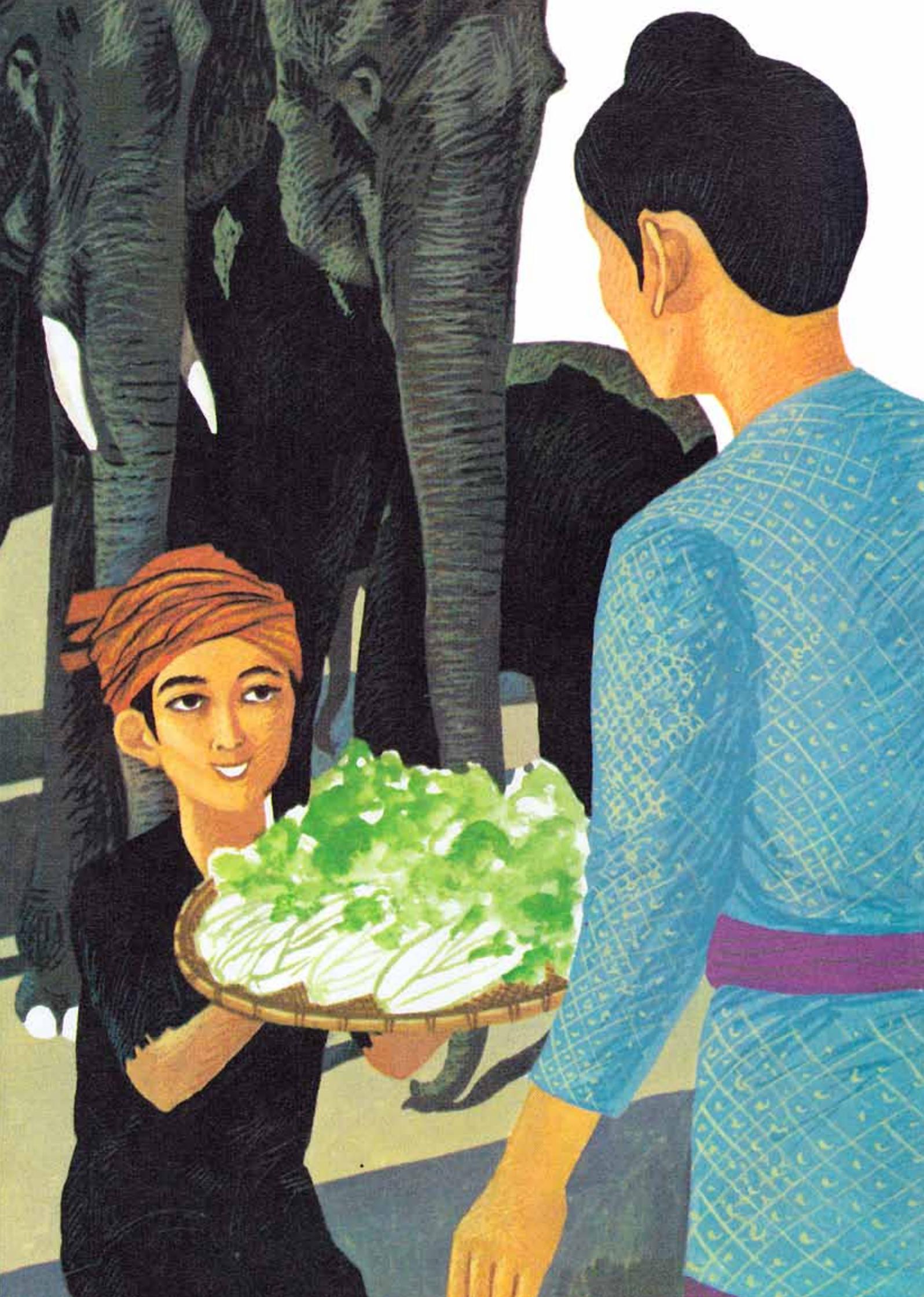
“One cowrie shell!” said the woman laughing. “That won’t buy anything. I can’t even measure that much.”

“Look!” said Makato eagerly. “I’ll dip my finger into a pile of seeds; then I’ll take the seeds that stick to it—that must be about right for one cowrie shell.”

“Well, why not?” said the woman amused at his suggestion. “All right, boy. Help yourself.”

Makato paid the woman his one cowrie shell. Then he put his finger into his mouth and dipped it into a pile of seeds. When he pulled his wet finger out, it was covered with seeds. He carefully scraped them off his finger into the palm of his hand and went away happily, clutching the seeds.

Now that he had seeds, Makato broke the soil and sowed them at once. He watered the seed bed every day and soon the young plants appeared. Day by day he cleared more ground and planted more lettuce seedlings until the kitchen



garden was covered with them. He was very proud of himself because he had done so well.

“I wish I could give the king some of my fine lettuce,” he thought.

One day the king passed by the elephant sheds again. Makato waited his opportunity, then knelt down and proudly presented his biggest bunches of lettuce to the king.

“Where did you get these?” the king asked, surprised.

“I grew them from the cowrie shell you gave me, Your Majesty,” answered Makato with a beaming smile.

“How could you do that?” asked the puzzled king.

Makato told the king the whole story. The king was impressed with his intelligence and industry. So much so that later on he gave Makato a job in the palace.

As the years passed Makato grew tall and handsome. He mastered every grace and served the king well. He was so loyal that the king trusted him absolutely. He was promoted to higher and higher positions until he was given the title of Khun Wang, which meant that he was the most important person in the king’s court. He was also happily married to a beautiful young daughter of the king. After that the king made him the ruler of Mon.

So it was that Makato, who had once been a poor orphan, became the king of that prosperous kingdom.

**RETOLD AND TRANSLATED  
BY SUPANEE KHANCHANATHITI  
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