PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Level 3

Kottavi Raja and his Sleepy Kingdom

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YAWN!

Kottavi Raja was sleepy. His ministers were talking about a complex problem and he was bored.

He hadn’t slept well last night, or the night before. Or the thirty nights before that. He tried to concentrate on what they were saying. But the sentences were so garbled!

“Insofar as the lessee is concerned, the right ***glablaglablaaa*** to till and tax ***blblblublooo loooballaoooozzzzzzzzzzzz.***”

His head lolled forward.

Raja Nalan was a good king. But of late, he had a problem staying awake during the day. He yawned in court all the time. So people had started calling him Kottavi Raja, because ‘kottavi’ means ‘yawn’ in Tamil.

“Sujata,” he asked his queen one night, gently waking her up, “how come you are so alert and energetic throughout the day?”

“Because I sleep at night,” she snapped. “And so should you.”

Yes, sleep at night. But how? He was always sleepy during the day, sleepiest in the evening. But by night, he was alert, not at all sleepy!

The next morning, in court, Kottavi Raja asked, “Prime Minister, what do you do when you aren’t sleepy at night?”

“I ask Nidra Devi, the goddess of sleep, to bless me,” he said.

“How?”

“My mother used to say the goddess cannot resist a full stomach. So I ask my cook to serve a rich dinner, full of warm, sweet things. Two minutes after eating it, I’m fast asleep.”

Kottavi Raja saw the minister’s round stomach. And believed him.

The Finance Minister did not want to be left out. So he said, “I drink warm milk with honey at night. Simple, no fuss. No need to trouble the cook. And I always sleep a full nine hours.”

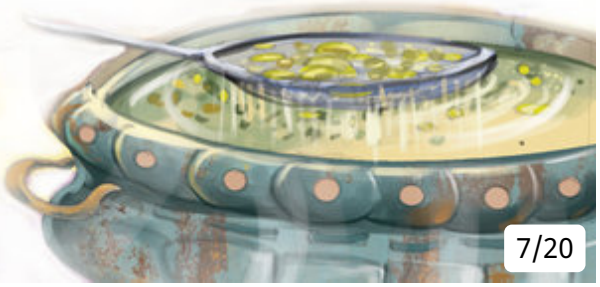
The court musician did not like all these stories of food. When his stomach was full, he couldn’t sing. But he wanted to help. So he said, “In our family, my lord, we always invite Nidra Devi with music. A beautiful Neelambari, sung with the veena... Ah, bliss!”

The poet said, “A gentle stroll in the palace gardens with a soft breeze blowing and the moonlight falling on parijatham flowers....ah! The beauty and poetry of the moment will wash away all your worries, Maharaja. Nidra Devi loves a peaceful mind.”

The court jester added, “If nothing else works, my lord, a good story will always get you to sleep.”

‘So many things to try,’ thought Kottavi Raja.
‘One of them has to work.’

That evening, the royal cooks were asked
to prepare a special meal.



Warm rice with ghee, hot sambar, fried potatoes, yam and khus khus payasam. And, to wash it all down, cool buttermilk. The king wanted to be sure that he would sleep at night, so he took two helpings of every dish.

It was nearly 11 pm when he finished. Yet – old habits are hard to break – he wasn’t sleepy.

He tossed and he turned and he became very unhappy with his Prime Minister. Nidra Devi was missing! He decided he simply hadn’t eaten enough.

“Cook!” he bellowed.

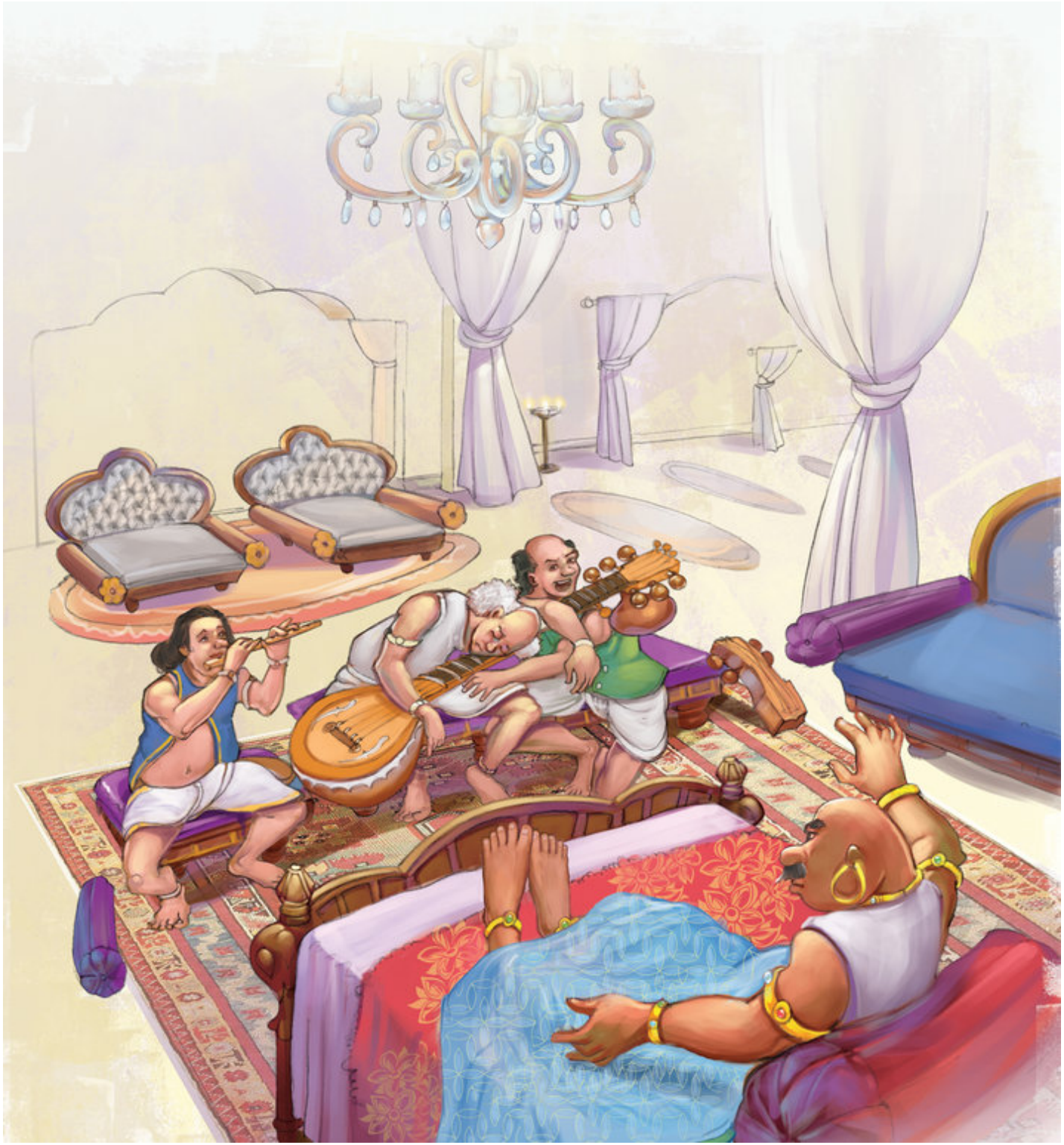
A sleepy cook hurriedly dressed and ran to the king.

“Get me a large glass of warm milk with honey! Hurry!”

Kottavi Raja gulped it down. Ouch! He was soooo full. He couldn’t get up, he couldn’t move and he definitely couldn’t lie down and fall asleep.

‘Perhaps I should try music,’ he thought.

He sent for the court musicians. They came, turbans askew, with hurriedly tied dhotis. It was past midnight.



“Play Neelambari for me!” he said.

It was wonderful to listen to the melody in the still night. Kottavi Raja relaxed. What bliss!

Twenty minutes later, his eyelids began to droop...
Then – ***TWANG! THUD!***
The veena player had fallen asleep on his instrument..

They began again. But one after the other, the sleepy musicians dropped notes and played the wrong tune. It was cacophony. Nidra Devi heard those tunes and bolted! And the king was wide awake and very annoyed.

He remembered his jester’s idea and summoned him.

“Tell me a story!” he said.

The jester started a long boring story, hoping that the king would fall asleep. Ah, but our Kottavi Raja was not pleased. He got impatient and kept saying, “Yes, yes, but how does the story end?”

Nidra Devi didn’t like the impatience. So she kept away. One hour later, a hoarse jester ended the story and went home bleary-eyed. And the king? He was still awake.

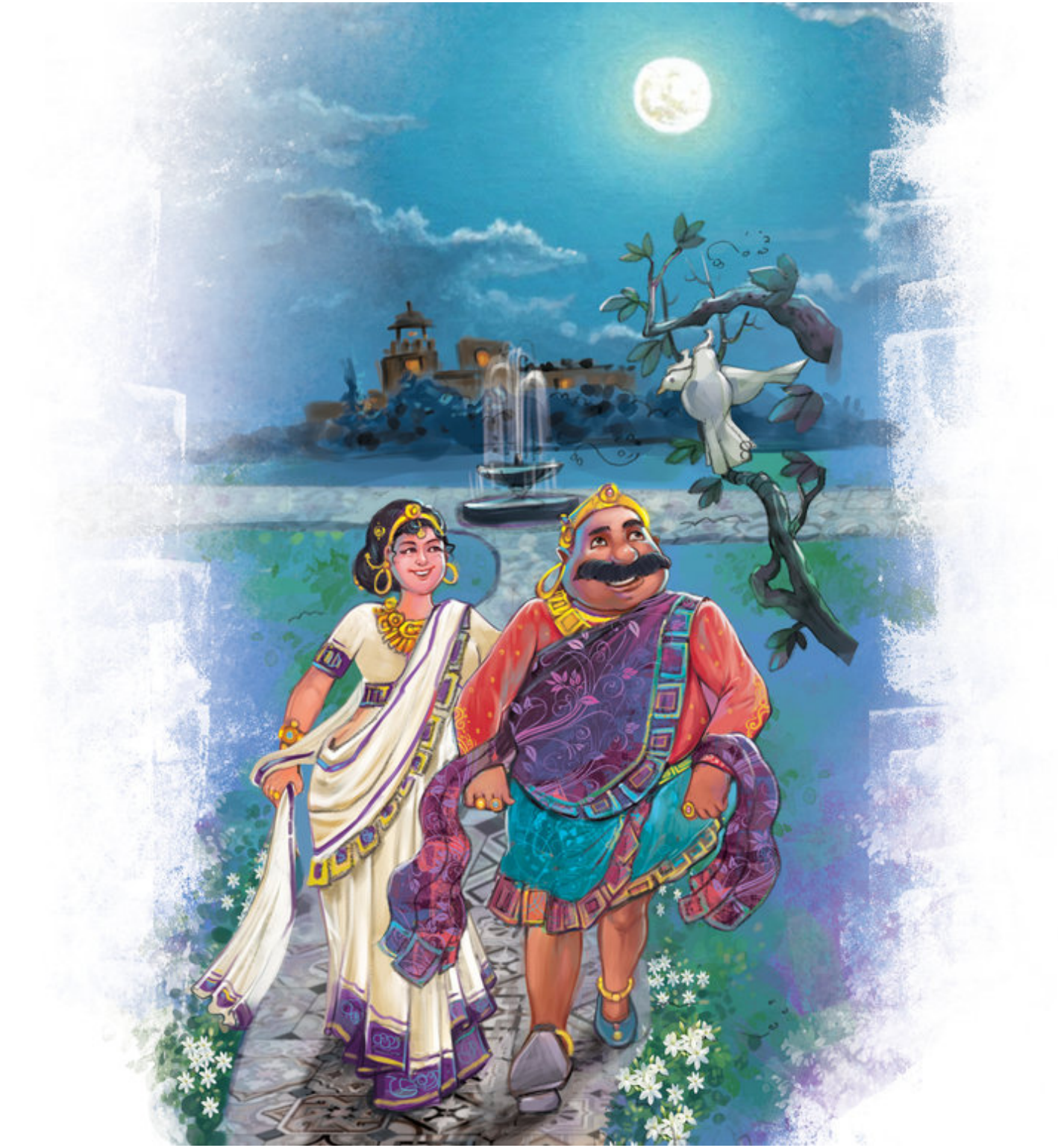
He woke the queen up and insisted on taking a stroll. She got ready grumpily.

“Just up to the jasmine garden, okay? After that I’ll come back and sleep!”

They walked in the moonshine, heard the drowsy tittering of birds and went around the large palace garden. The king found himself calming down and thought, ‘Aha! Now is the time to go back and sleep.’

As he settled down, there was a dreamy silence all around. Until he heard a curious rumbling. From his stomach.

The music, the story, the breeze, and the walk had made him hungry!



The queen took matters into her hands. She ordered a small glass of milk, and got a masseuse to press his legs. In a few minutes, Nidra Devi came and blessed the king. The palace finally shut down for the night.

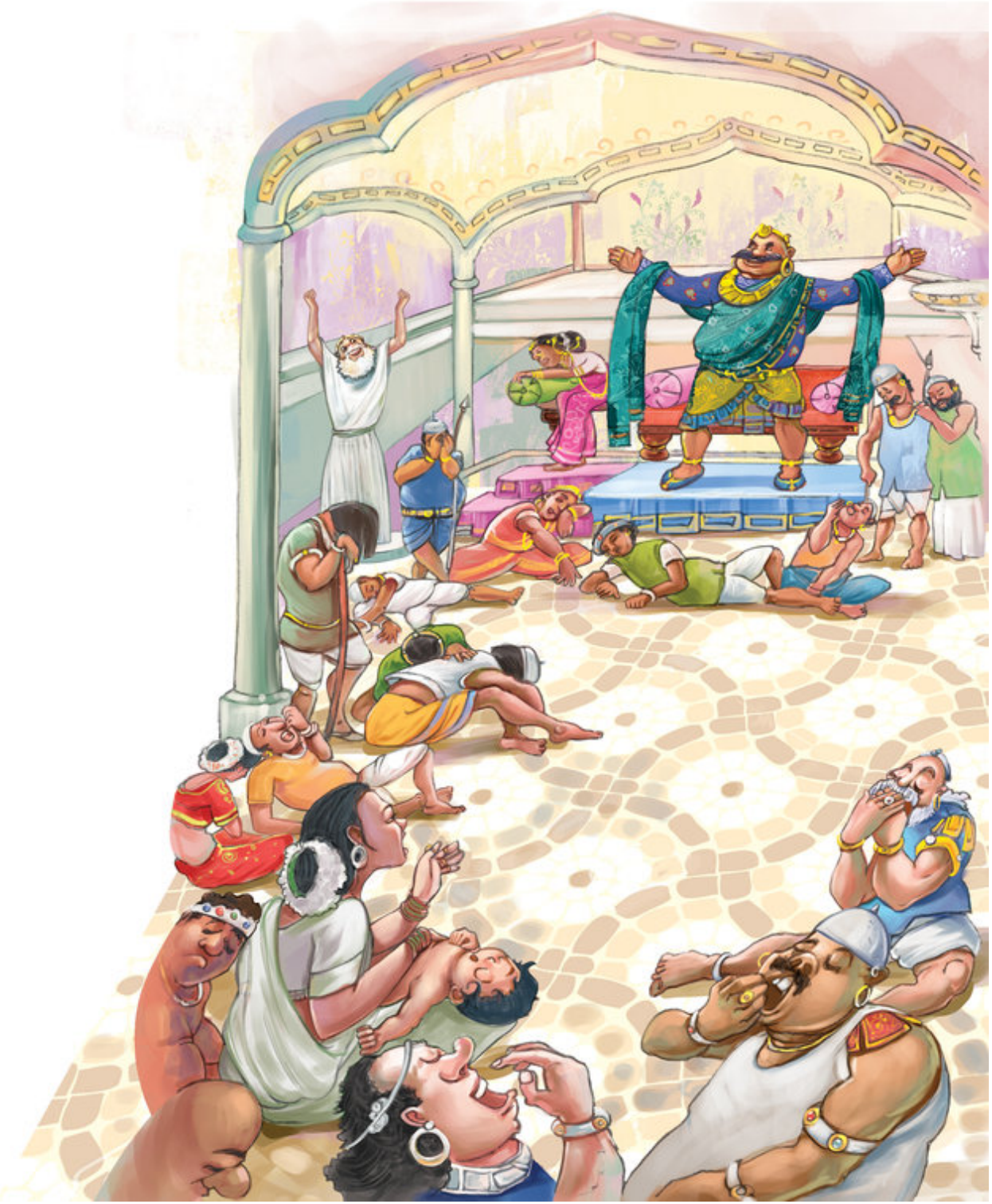
Every day, this routine continued. Over time, Kottavi Raja started to sleep earlier. In two weeks, he found that he fell asleep after his second glass of milk. A few weeks after that, he started sleeping just after his walk. A month later, the jester’s story put him to sleep.

And finally, he managed to sleep right after dinner. Most mornings, he woke up feeling fresh! He walked with a bounce in his step and smiled at everyone.

But what about the cooks, the musicians, the jester, the masseuse, the queen? They remained on standby through the night – they never knew when the king might wake and ask for them. And they were sleepy, tired and grumpy all day. So were the people who waited for them - the cook’s wife, the musician’s son, the jester’s brother, the masseuse’s father, the queen’s maid, the maid’s husband, the husband’s brother, the brother’s friend, the friend’s parents... the whole city.

The king grew worried about his sleepless people. He couldn’t recommend his elaborate remedy to everyone. So he asked his chief priest for a solution. The wise man knew that this was a tough problem. He said, “Get everyone to assemble in the town hall fifteen days from now. They should have a warm bath, finish dinner and arrive at sunset. I will summon Nidra Devi to bless everyone.”

So the entire city gathered. They were all relieved that their sleepless nights were going to end. The priest began to chant hymns in praise of the goddess.



A few minutes into his droning, a new mother, the sleepiest of them all, yawned. Looking at her, her infant yawned. The baby's father saw this and...yes, yawned.

A musician yawned halfway through a tune, and twenty people around him yawned. Then, their neighbours yawned and a mighty wave of yawns swept through the gathering.

Nidra Devi couldn’t resist the
power of so many yawns.
She came running to the city,
and touched everyone with
a cooling breeze.

And from that night onwards,
she continued to bless
everyone in Kottavi Raja’s land,
every night.

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Kottavi Raja and his Sleepy Kingdom
(English)

Kottavi Raja had trouble sleeping. Only at night. During the day, when his ministers discussed complex problems, he'd find himself nodding off. He asked everyone for remedies. Nothing seemed to work. Until... Travel to Kottavi Raja's land through this book and see what happened next.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.

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