

The Old One and the Chosen

A Nepali Folktale Retold

by Anurag Khatiwara



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Stories Matter



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This book is lovingly dedicated to my son,
whose presence inspired me to bring
this folklore to life.

I would also like to thank my wife
for her continuous support and for handling
the endless tantrums of our son
so that I could write this book in peace.

Last but not least, I want to thank my
parents for introducing me and my sister
to such wonderful folklore that continues
to amaze me to this day.





In a quiet village tucked between hills and fields, lived a curious boy named Ravi.

Ravi wasn't like the other children — while they played with marbles and chased goats, he wandered the forest's edge, listening.

“One day,” he whispered to himself, “I'll find where the forest keeps its secrets.”





In the mornings, Ravi helped herd the goats.

In the afternoons, he watched clouds drift over the terraced hills-

He liked quiet things—
the clink of millet in a wooden bowl,
the creak of a prayer wheel,
the soft buzz of bees.

But even on the calmest days,
his eyes wandered to the trees.





One morning, Ravi followed a butterfly
up the hillside.

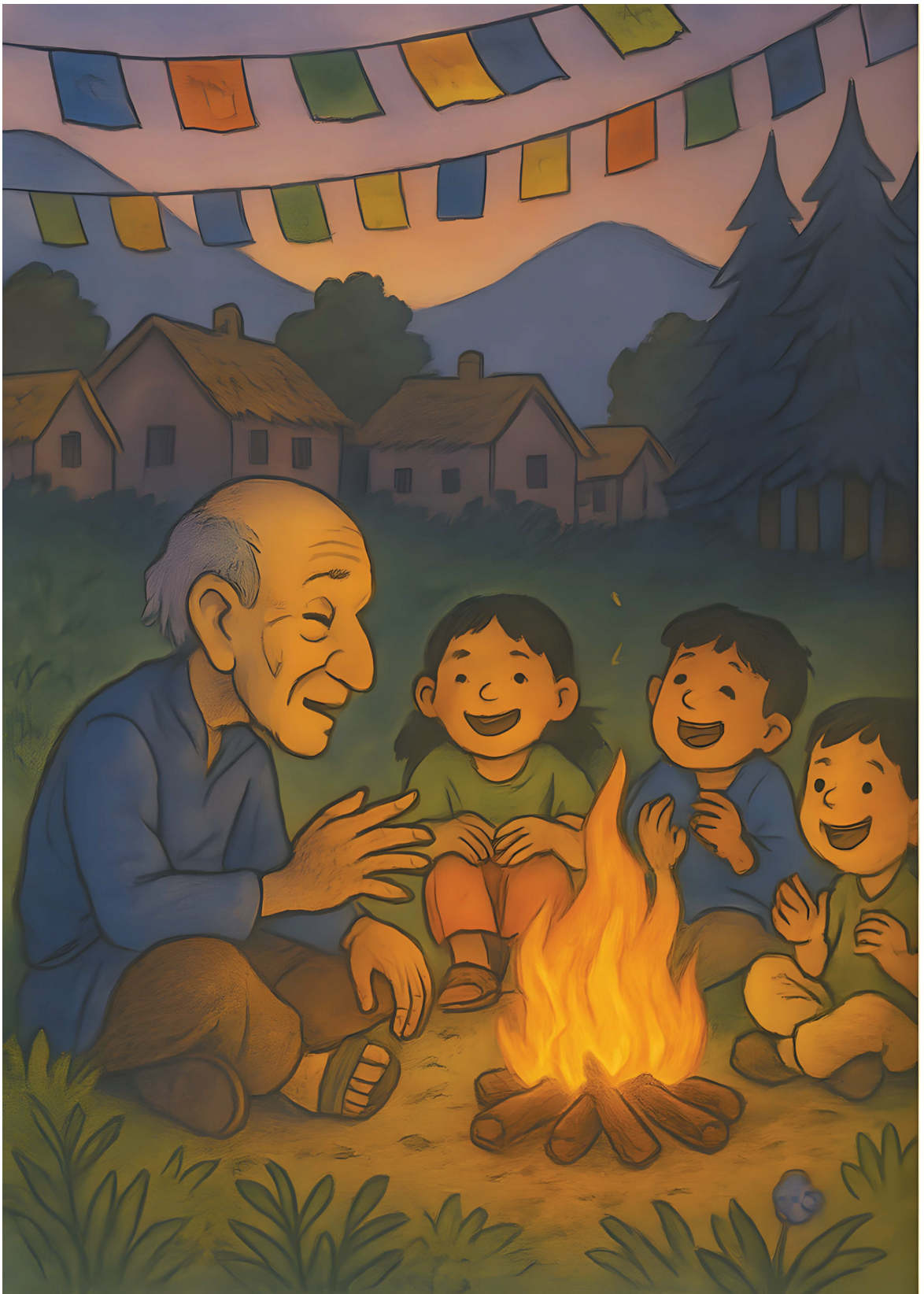
It fluttered past the last stone wall,
through the tall grass,
and stopped just before the forest.

Ravi stood still.

The trees were taller than he'd ever imagined.
And the forest...

the forest was quiet in a way that made
him feel watched.





“The forest is no place for children,” said
the oldest man in the village,

He sat by the fire, his hands like tree
roots, his voice low and cracked.

“Some boys go too far and never return.
The trees take them.”

The other children giggled.

But Ravi didn't.





One afternoon, Ravi ventured a bit farther into the forest than ever before.

He heard a whistling sound.

Something moved behind the tree in front of him, and his heart raced with fear.

He turned and ran,
the shadows of the dense forest
closing in around him.





That evening, Ravi barely touched his dinner.

He sat near the hearth, staring at the fire.

‘You’ve been too close to the trees again,’
his mother said.

Ravi didn’t answer.

He didn’t know how.





That night, Ravi dreamt of
a shadowy figure, dressed like
a shaman,
singing a strange song and dancing
while playing a drum.

The beat echoed through the trees,
calling to him.





The next day, Ravi wandered back
to the forest's edge.

Just beyond the grass, lying in the dirt,
was something he hadn't seen before—

a small charm made of feathers,
tied with red thread and
strung with a single claw.

It didn't look lost.
It looked left.





Ravi turned the charm over in his hand,
fingers tracing the red thread and claw.

Then he heard it—
a soft drumbeat,
low and distant, coming from the forest.

It grew louder,
one beat at a time.

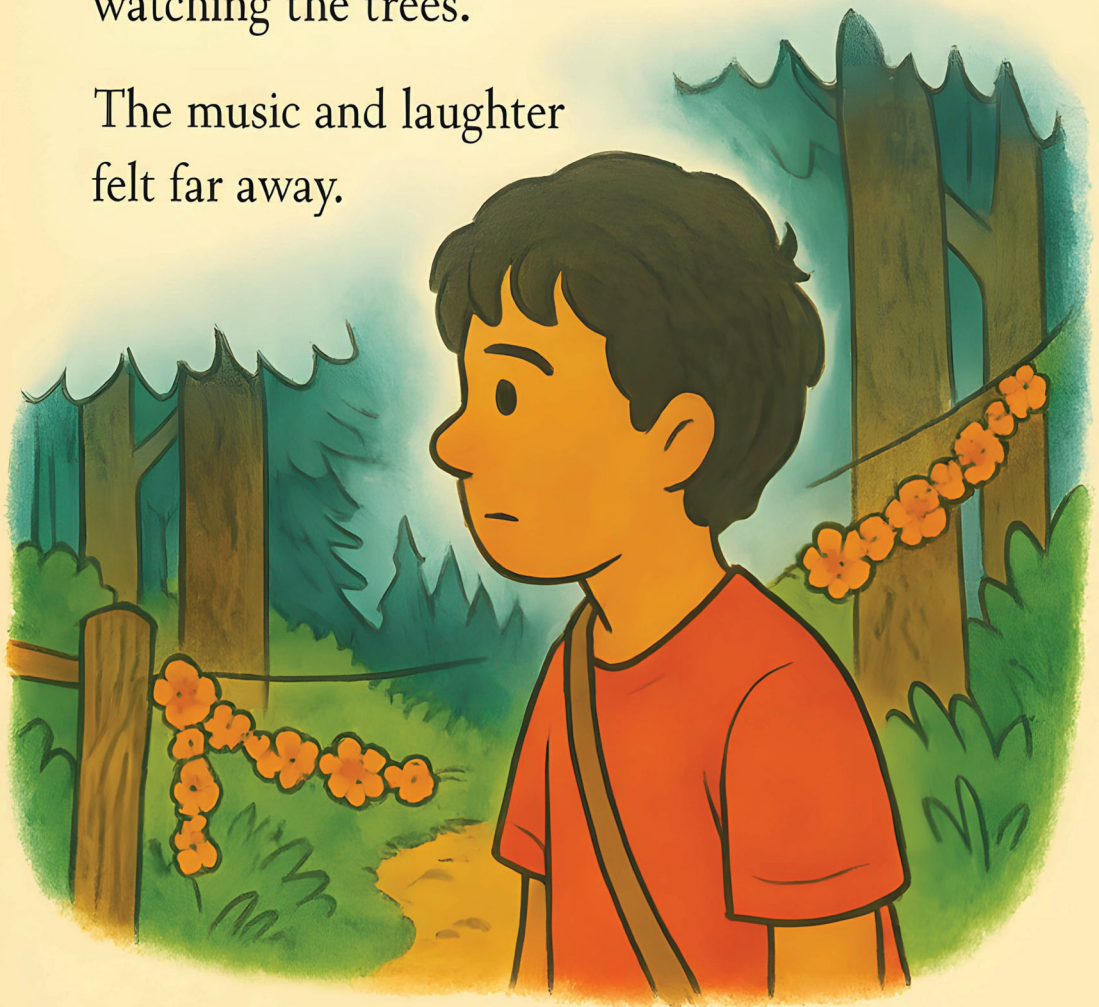




The village was busy with festival preparations.
Women strung marigolds, boys chased chickens,
and the old men tied prayer flags.

But Ravi didn't join them.
He stood near the edge of the path,
watching the trees.

The music and laughter
felt far away.





That night, the festival filled the village
with song. Drums and flutes echoed
through the hills,

No one noticed Ravi slip away.

Past the firelight, past the garlands,
down the path no one else was
watching.

Toward the trees.

Toward the beat he'd been hearing
all along.





At the edge of the forest, Ravi paused.

The trees whispered.

The beat pulsed low and steady.

Then—he stepped into the shadows.

The path behind him vanished.

And Ravi was gone.





Ravi woke up cold, lying on stone.
The cave around him was damp and dark.
Shadows clung to the walls like moss.
Somewhere in the distance,
water dripped...
and something moved.





From the dark,
a figure stepped forward.

He was tall and wiry,
with tangled hair and
bark-colored skin.

A drum hung from his shoulder.

“You’re not hurt,” he said.

His voice was low and scratchy—
like wind scraping stone.





Ravi waited until the forest man turned away.

Then he ran.

Through one tunnel, then another.

But each path circled back.

The cave was changing.

Or he was.





When Ravi finally stopped,
the forest man was already waiting.

“You can’t run,” he said.

Not because you’re trapped —
but because you were chosen.”

Ravi didn’t understand.
Not yet.





Banjhakri brought Ravi to the mouth of
a deep ravine. Trees stood tall on either
side, silent as stone.

“Close your eyes,” he said.

“Don’t listen with your ears.

Listen with your skin.

The trees speak that way.





That night, Banjhakri lit a fire of moss
and bone.

“The smoke curled in shapes Ravi didn’t
understand.

“There are rules here,” the forest man said.

“Never speak near the shadows.

And never, ever whistle in the forest.”

“Why not?”

Banjhakri didn’t answer.





“There’s one more thing,” Banjakhri said.

He dropped a bundle of herbs into the fire. The smoke turned sharp — bitter and strange.

“My wife hunts the forest at night,” Ravi stared into the flames.

“What does she hunt?”

“Boys,” Banjakhri said. Boys like you.”





The next morning, Banjhakri led Ravi
through a narrow gorge.

They crossed streams, climbed stone steps,
and ducked under roots.

The new cave was colder.
Quieter.

Even the wind didn't reach this deep.





Banjhakri crouched beside a sleeping fox.

He didn't speak—he breathed.

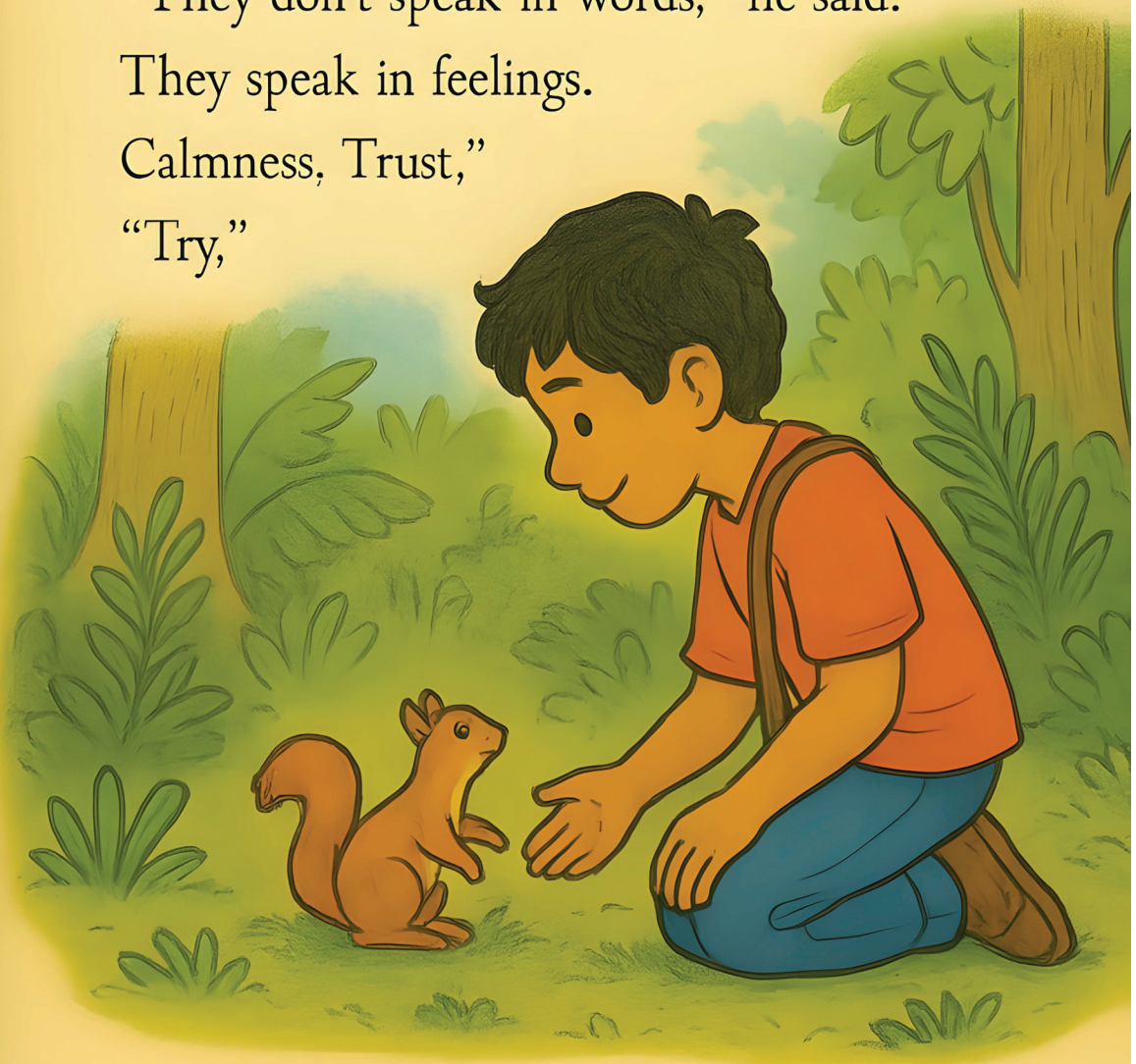
The fox opened one eye,
then rested its head on his knee.

“They don't speak in words,” he said.

They speak in feelings.

Calmness, Trust,”

“Try,”





That evening, Ravi stepped outside
the cave to fetch water.

On the stone near the entrance,
claw marks cut through the moss.

They were fresh.

He turned around—

and saw a dark shape, high in
the branches of a nearby tree.

Watching him.





Ravi said nothing about the shadow in the tree.

The next morning, training continued.

Banjhakri gave him a hollowed gourd filled with ash and moss.

“Light this,” he said.

Ravi held it in his hands.

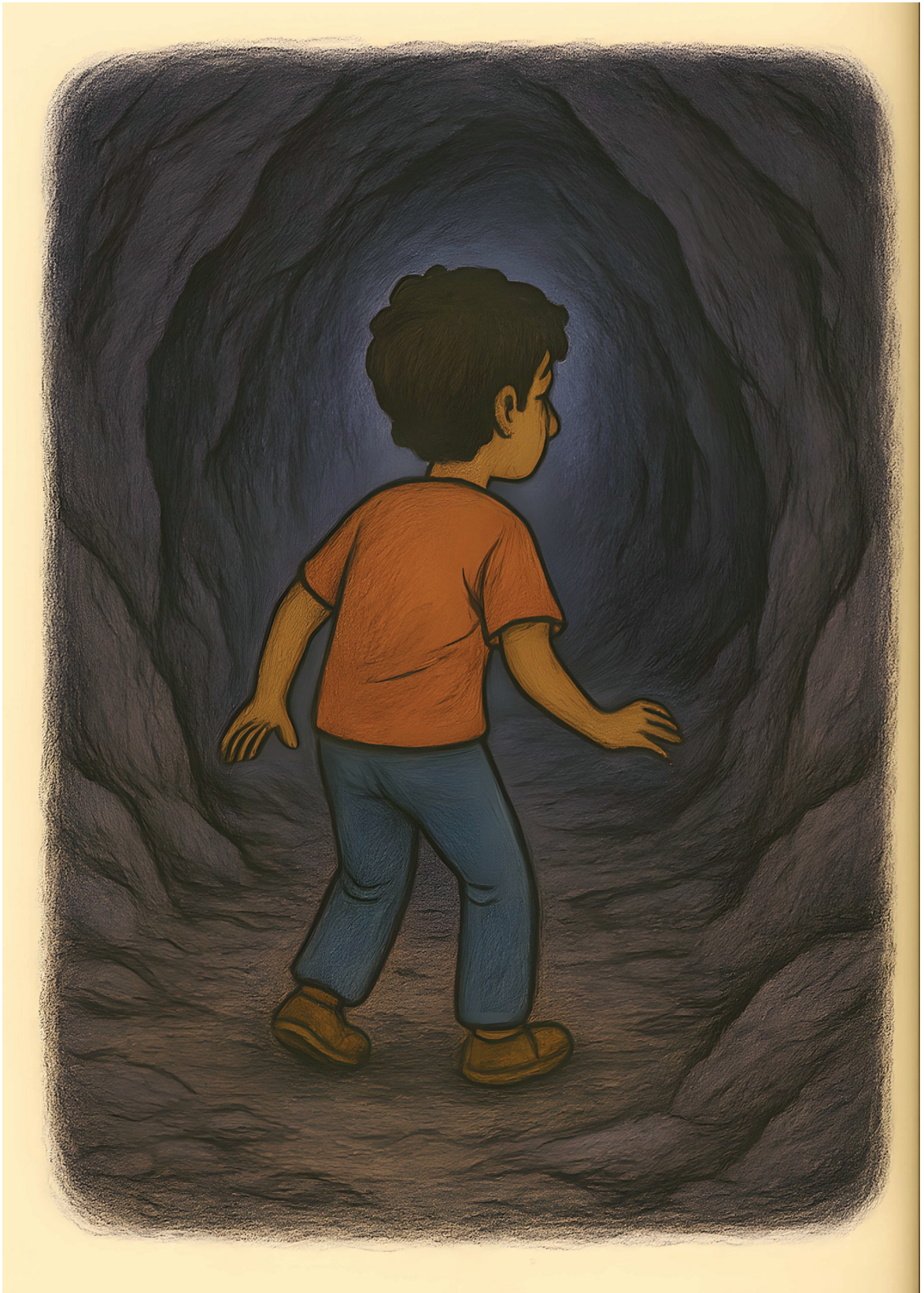
He didn’t strike it.

He didn’t blow.

And yet—

a warm glow
flickered
to life.





“She can take any form,” Banjhakri said.

“She can sound like anyone.

Your mother. Your friends. Even me.”

“If you see her, or hear her—
do not follow.”

Ravi stepped into the hollow cave,
and the opening vanished behind him.

Then he heard it—

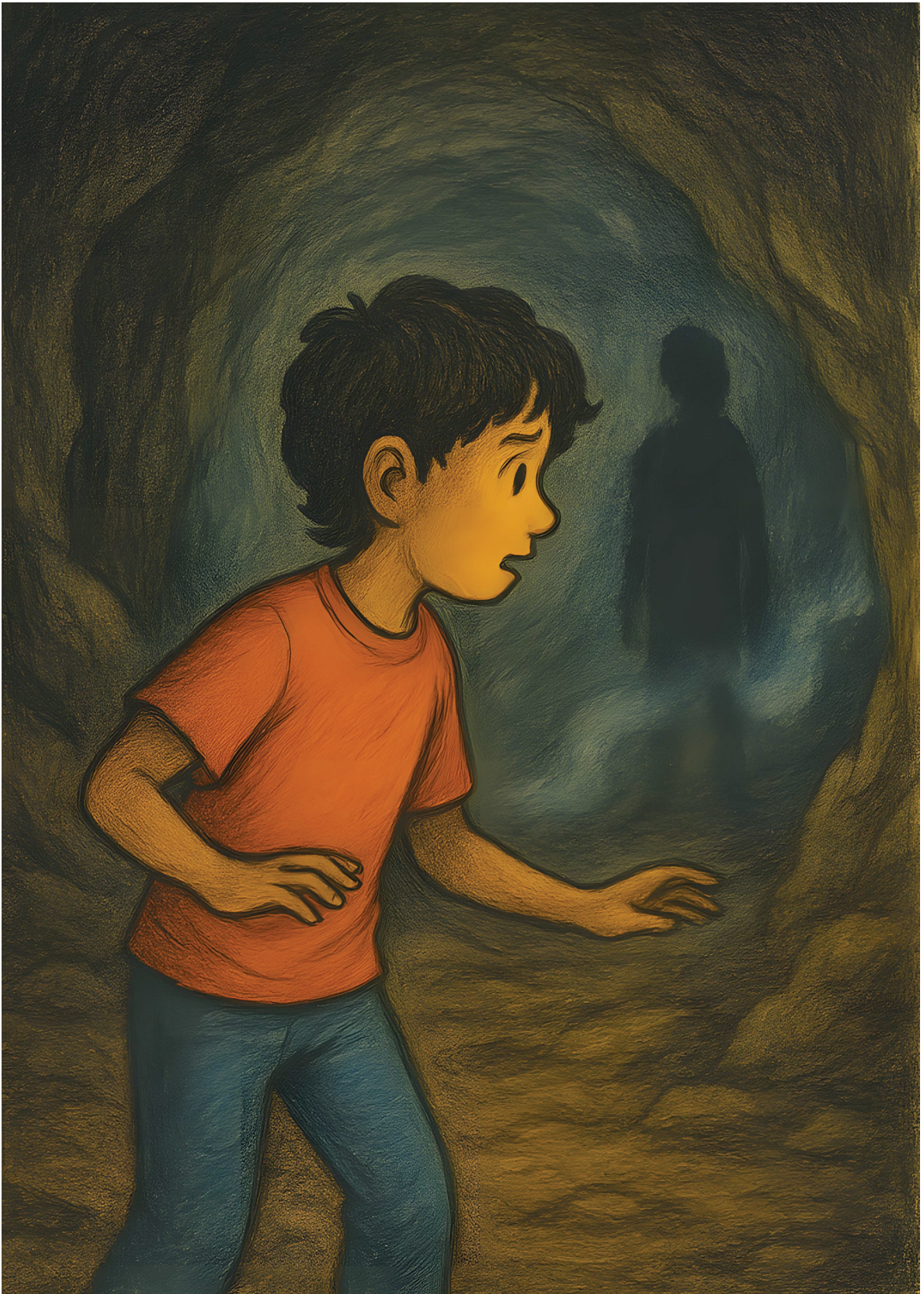
“Ravi?”

His mother’s voice.

“Where are you?”

“Come home.”





Another voice rose from the dark.

Calm. Familiar.

“It’s over now,” it said.

“You did well. Come back.”

It sounded exactly like Banjhakri.

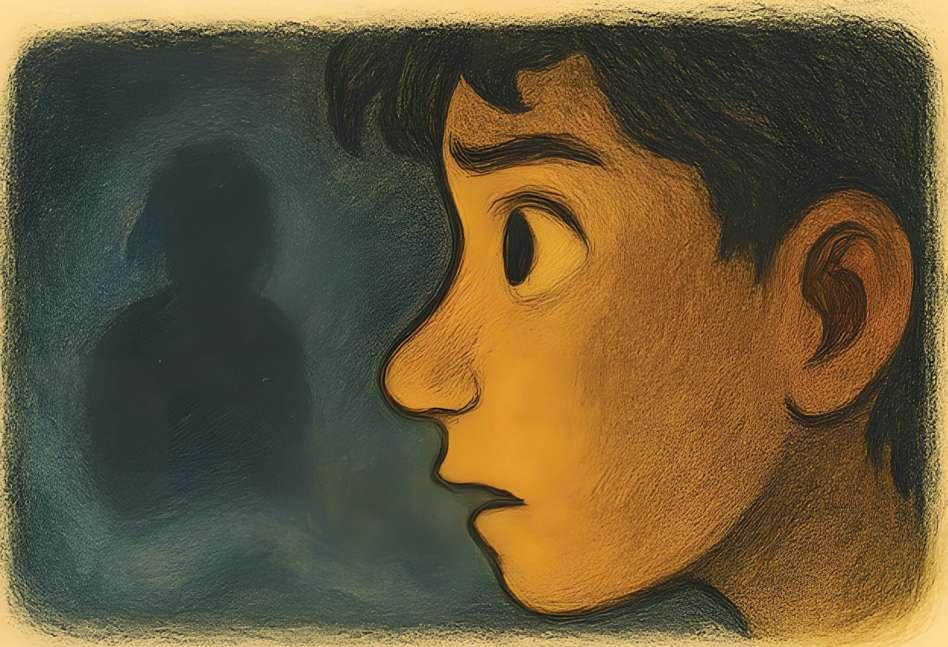
Ravi stepped toward the sound.

He almost spoke—

but stopped.

Banjhakri never called out from the dark.

He waited.





The fog curled tighter around Ravi—
until a sharp drumbeat rang through the cave.
The mist split open. Banjahkri stepped through.
He didn't speak.
He only looked at Ravi.
Then they left the cave.
The next one was colder.
The air smelled like iron and rot.





“Do you know why I chose you?”
Banjhakri asked.

Ravi shook his head.

Banjhakri looked down at his own hands —
rough, scarred, burned.

“You had no scars,” he said.
Not one scratch.
No falls, No bruises.”

“The forest watches for boys like that.”





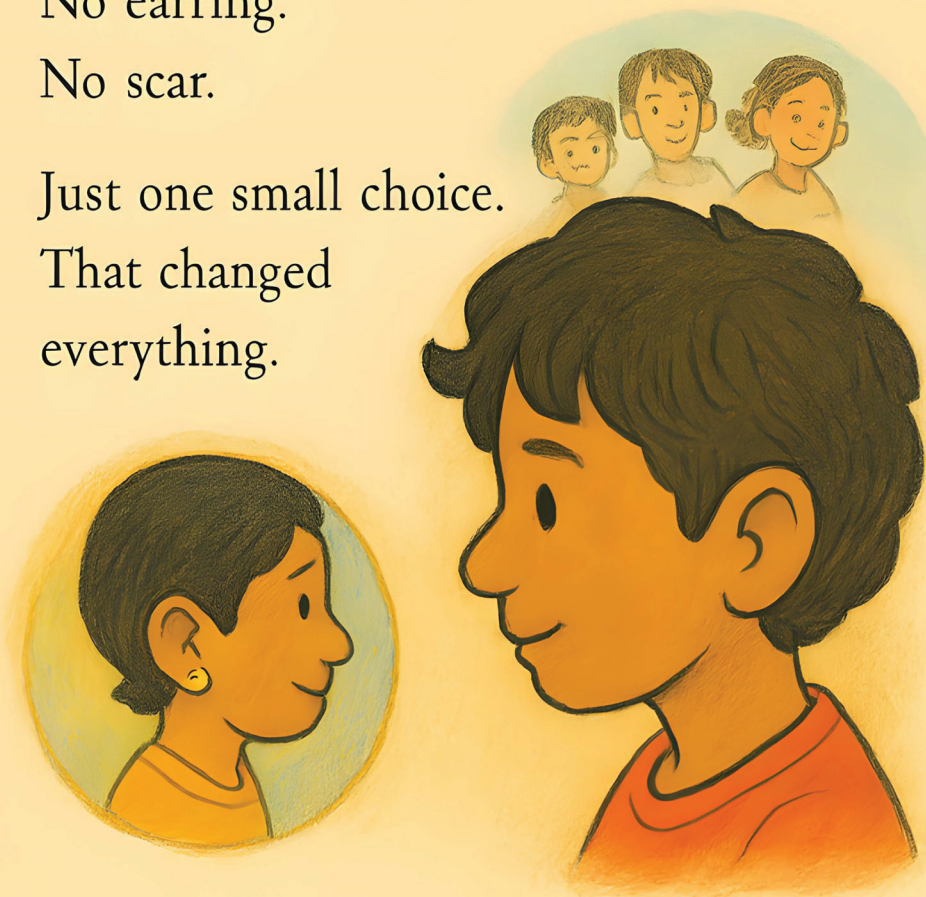
Ravi thought back to the village.
Every little boy had pierced ears.
It was just how things were.

But not him.
He had cried, hidden, argued—
until his mother finally gave in.

No earring.

No scar.

Just one small choice.
That changed
everything.





Banjhakri began teaching Ravi the darker arts of the forest.

They started with silence.

Ravi moved through the trees without a sound. Not a twig cracked.

Not a leaf stirred.

Then came shadow.

His own shadow bent the wrong way—
curling where he pointed,
stretching where he stepped.

“Good,” Banjhakri said.

“Now make the shadow hide you.”





Midnight, and the cave stumbled and shook.

Water gushed up from cracks in the stone.

Ravi and Banjhakri climbed to a ledge.

The flood was rising fast —

up their ankles,

then their knees,

until finally it reached their chests.

“We have to go,” Banjhakri said.

Ravi had never seen him look worried.

Not until now.





That night, they sat by the fire,
drying their clothes.

“Not all boys return home,” Banjhakri said.

“Some stay in the forest ...and keep the evil
in check.”

He unwrapped a strip of bark from
his shoulder.

A long scar ran down his back.

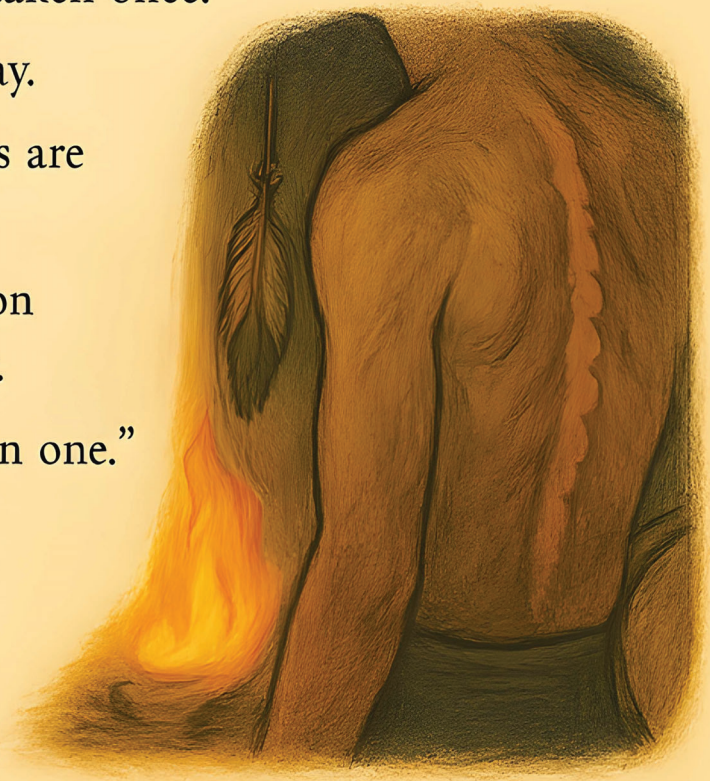
“I, too, was taken once.

I chose to stay.

Now my days are
numbered.

I must pass on
what I know.

To the chosen one.”





That night, Ravi dreamt of a cave
filled with smoke.

A shape moved in the mist—
hair like rope, arms too long,
a smile that didn't belong.

“Come closer,” it whispered.

He turned to run—





Ravi woke with a start,
heart pounding.

“I want to go home,”
he whispered.

Banjhakri didn't answer.

He added moss to the fire.

“You're not ready,” he said at last.

“But she is.”

His eyes were tired.

“The time is fast approaching.





They practiced in silence.

Banjhakri taught him
how to draw the circle —
ash, salt, feather, spark.

How to summon what listens,
and how to send it back.

How to guard the body
while the spirit leaves.

And how to
come back whole.





The next day, Banjjhakri was playing his drum.

He stopped mid-beat.

“She’s near,” he said.

“I feel her.”

He turned to Ravi.

“Be ready.”





“Stay inside the circle,” Banjhakri said.

He handed Ravi a pouch of salt,
ash, and bone dust.

“Walk the edge of the cave.

Draw the line.

She cannot cross it—
if you don’t break it.”

Ravi nodded.

And began.



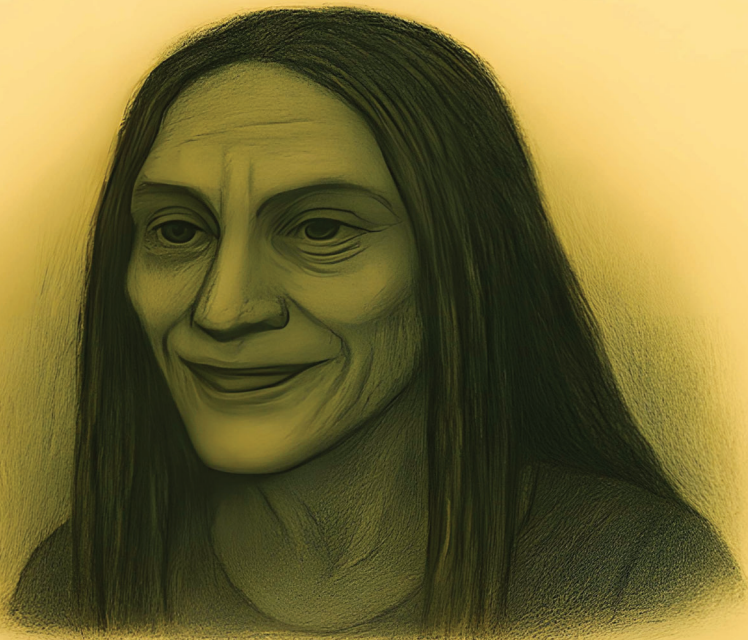


Lyamlyámyé arrives,
Ravi gasps at the sight of her.

“Greetings, husband,” she
says with an evil smile

“Did you bring this one for
me?”

“Greetings, wife, we have been
waiting for you,” Banjhakri said.





With a sudden snarl, Lyamlyámyé
lunged at Ravi.

Her hands clawed the air —
just inches from his face.

Banjahkri raised his drum and struck
it hard.

The sound cracked like lightning.

Lyamlyámyé stumbled back, hissing.





Lyamlyámyé circled the fire,
snarling.

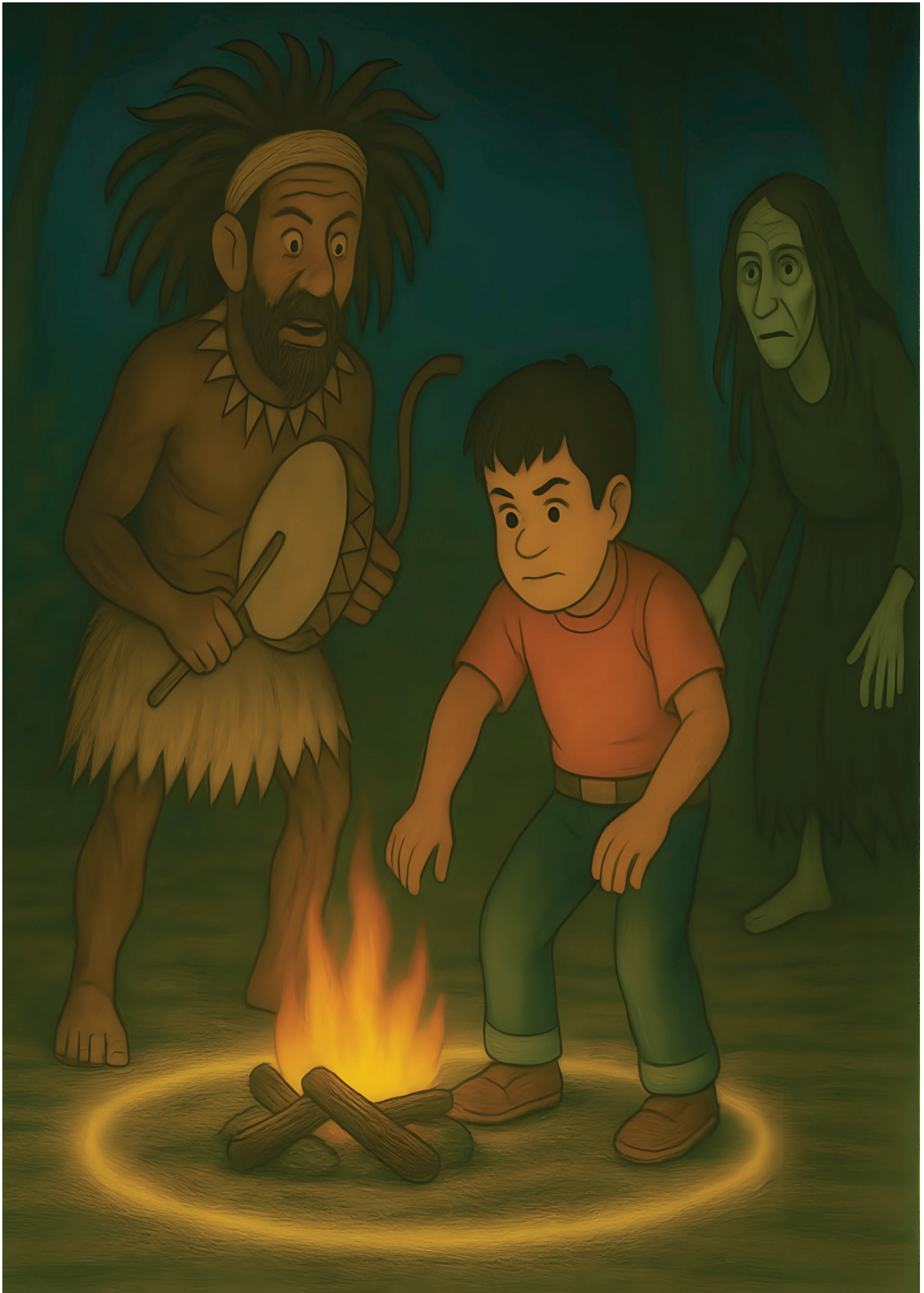
Banjhakri kept drumming—
slow, steady beats that echoed
through the trees.

Ravi stood inside the circle.

His heart pounded.

He didn't move.





“Now,” Banjhakri said.

Use what I have taught you.

Ravi took a deep breath.

He reached into the pouch
at his side.

The circle of salt began
to glow.





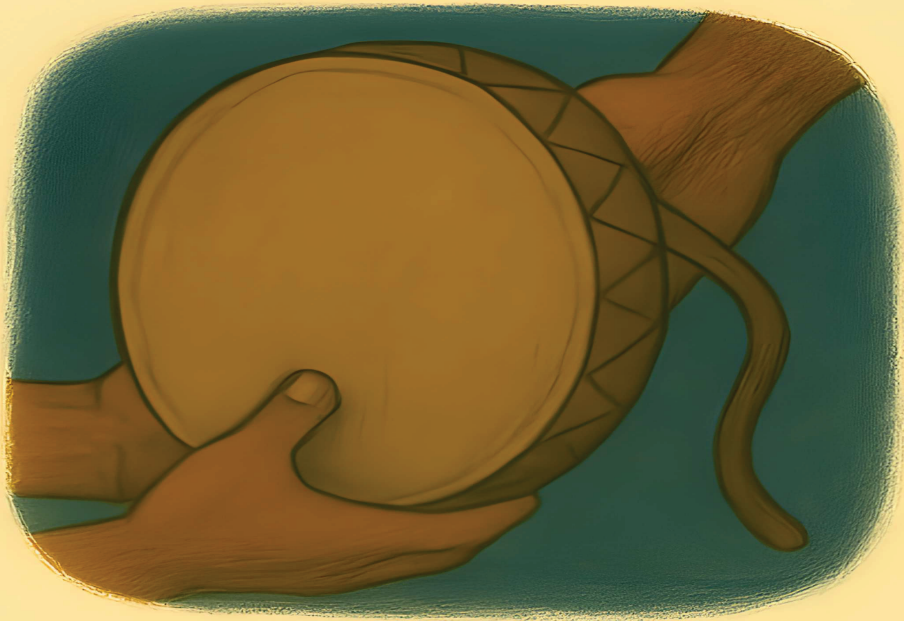
Ravi whispered the words.

Light burst from the circle.

Lyamhhámyé hissed
and stepped back.

Banjahkri handed him
the drum.

“It’s yours now,” he said.



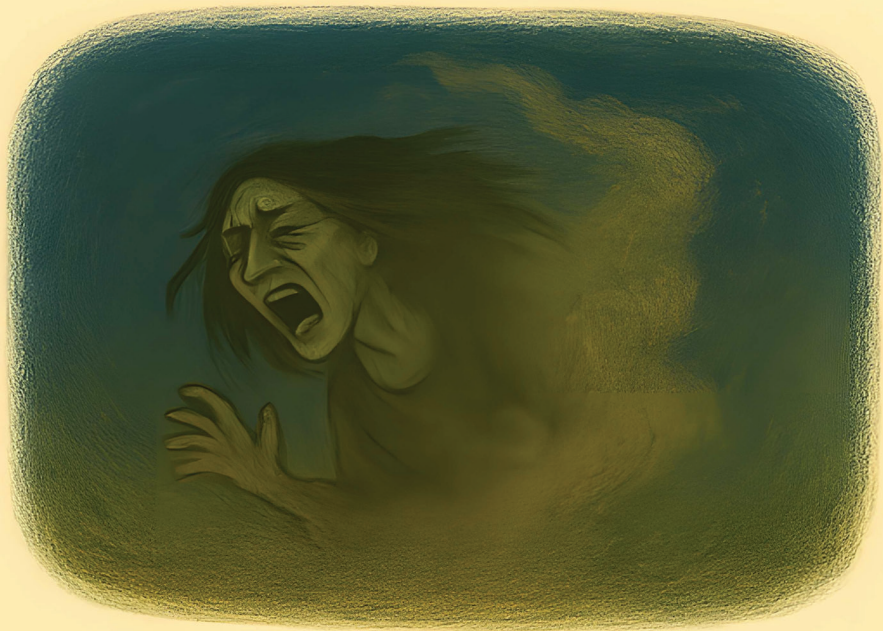


Ravi struck the drum—
once, then again.

He began to dance,
just as Banjhakri had taught him.

Lyamlyámyé shrieked.

Her body twisted—
then vanished in a puff of smoke.





“She’s not gone completely,”
Banjhakri said.

“But now she knows
you can defeat her.

She won’t come near the
village again.”

Ravi nodded.

He still held the drum.



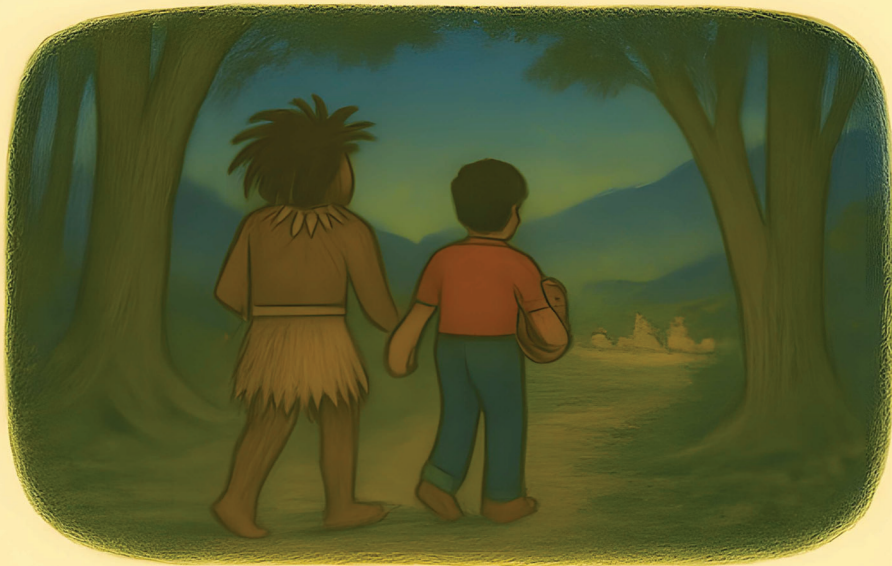


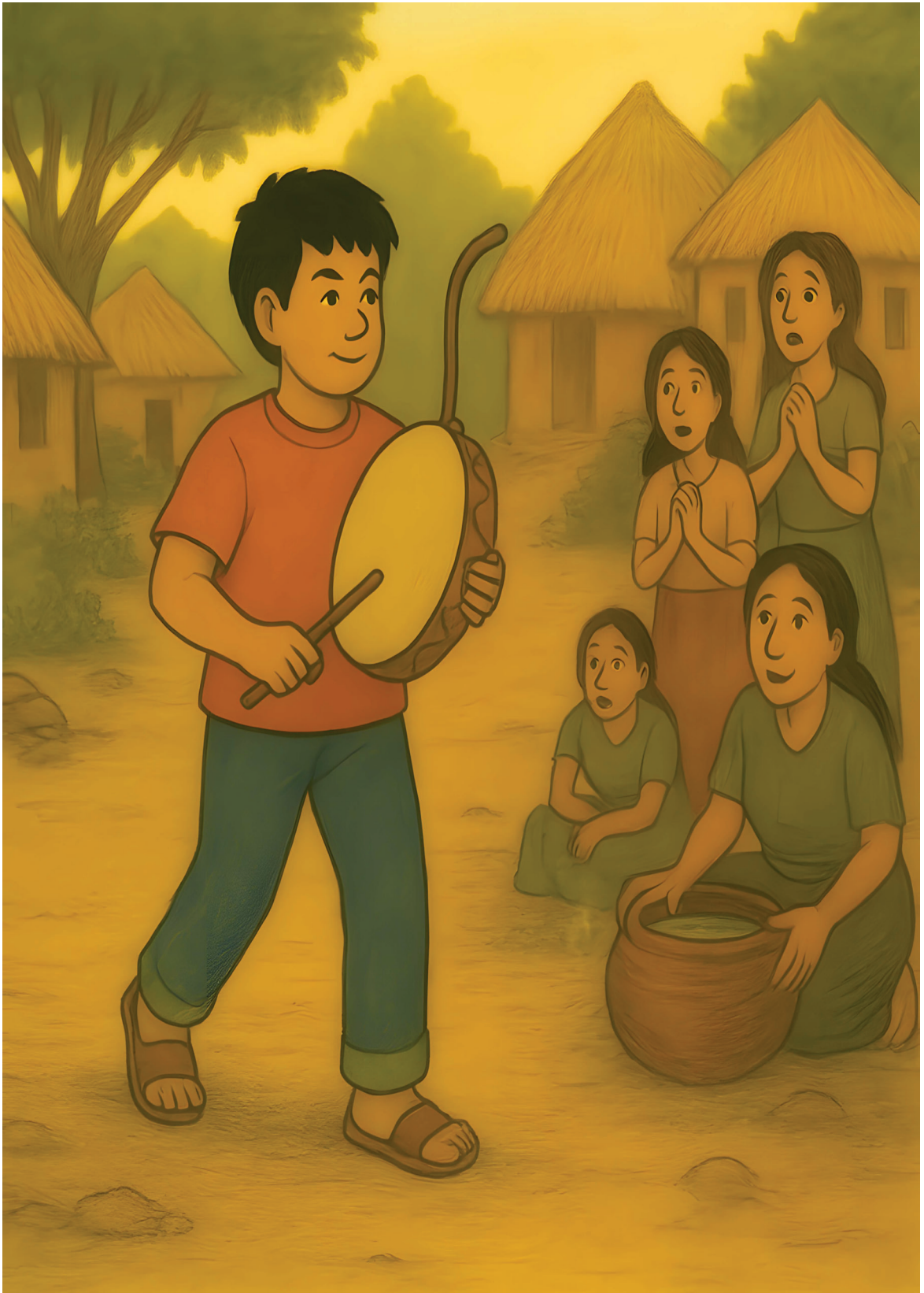
“Keep the drum,”

Banjhakri said.

They walked together through
the trees.

At the edge of the forest,
the village waited—
small and quiet in the morning
light.





Ravi stepped into the village.
The drum was still in his hand.
One by one, the villagers
looked up.
And somehow—
they understood.





He saw his mother standing outside
their house.

He ran to her.

She dropped everything and
pulled him close.

He didn't say a word.

He just held on.





One night, Ravi sat by the window.

The moon was full.

The village was quiet.

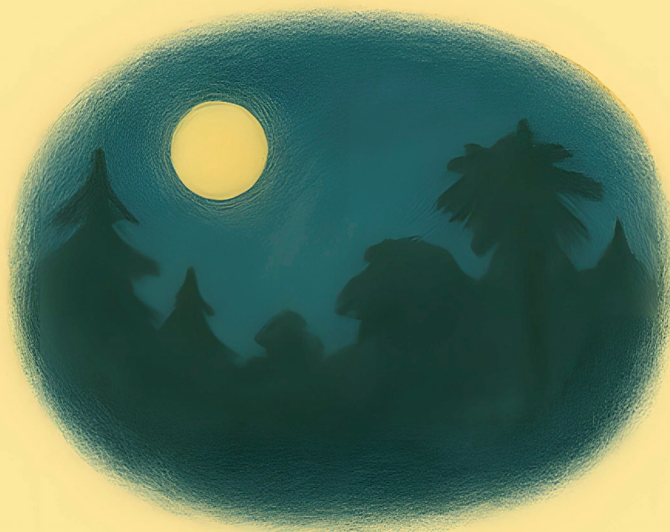
Then—

something moved beyond the trees.

Not scary.

Just... familiar.

Like someone making sure he was safe.





Banjihakri sat on a stone,
just beyond the edge of the forest.
Ravi stood before him.

“Have you made your choice?”
Banjihakri asked.

“You can stay here and lead
a normal life—
or you can be one like me.”





“I haven’t decided yet,” Ravi said.

Banjhakri nodded.

“That’s alright,” he said.

“You’re still young.





Banjhakri smiled.

“When the time comes,”
he said,

“fate will make the choice
for you.”

Then he was gone.

