

*Elephant Hill
and
The Path of Light*

Part Three

*by
J. C. Dickens*

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Back on Madagascar, the three adventurers had approached the road that Chitterbox had previously seen.

“Shall we see where it leads?” inquired Chitterbox.

“Might as well,” agreed Dickens.

Dickens and Amber, with Chitterbox flying on ahead, walked down the road. Before very long, a battered truck overtook them. They moved out of the way, but the truck stopped.

“Hello,” said a grinning man wearing a turban, “can we give you a lift?”



“Why, thank you, very much,” replied Amber, and he and Dickens scrambled aboard. Chitterbox landed on Amber’s head, and whispered “I’ll fly on ahead and see where the road leads.”

The truck sped on and soon they came to a town. The truck turned down a side street and up into a yard surrounded by a high wall. It backed up against an empty cage.

The turbaned man hurried round to the back of the truck and fiercely whacked Amber and prodded Dickens with a large stick and saying, “Okay, you two, into the cage before I give you another dose of this stick.”

Amber and Dickens backed away from the stick and squeezed into the cage. The man

slammed the door shut and drove the truck out of the yard.

Amber was dumb struck.

“Hey,” he called, “We’d like to leave now, but the door is locked”

The man gave an evil chuckle, but didn’t answer.

Amber rattled the door, but it seemed very strong.

“We are prisoners!” Dickens exclaimed, “I *knew* we should have been more careful.”

“What are we going to do?” asked Amber anxiously.

Chitterbox whirred in for a landing.

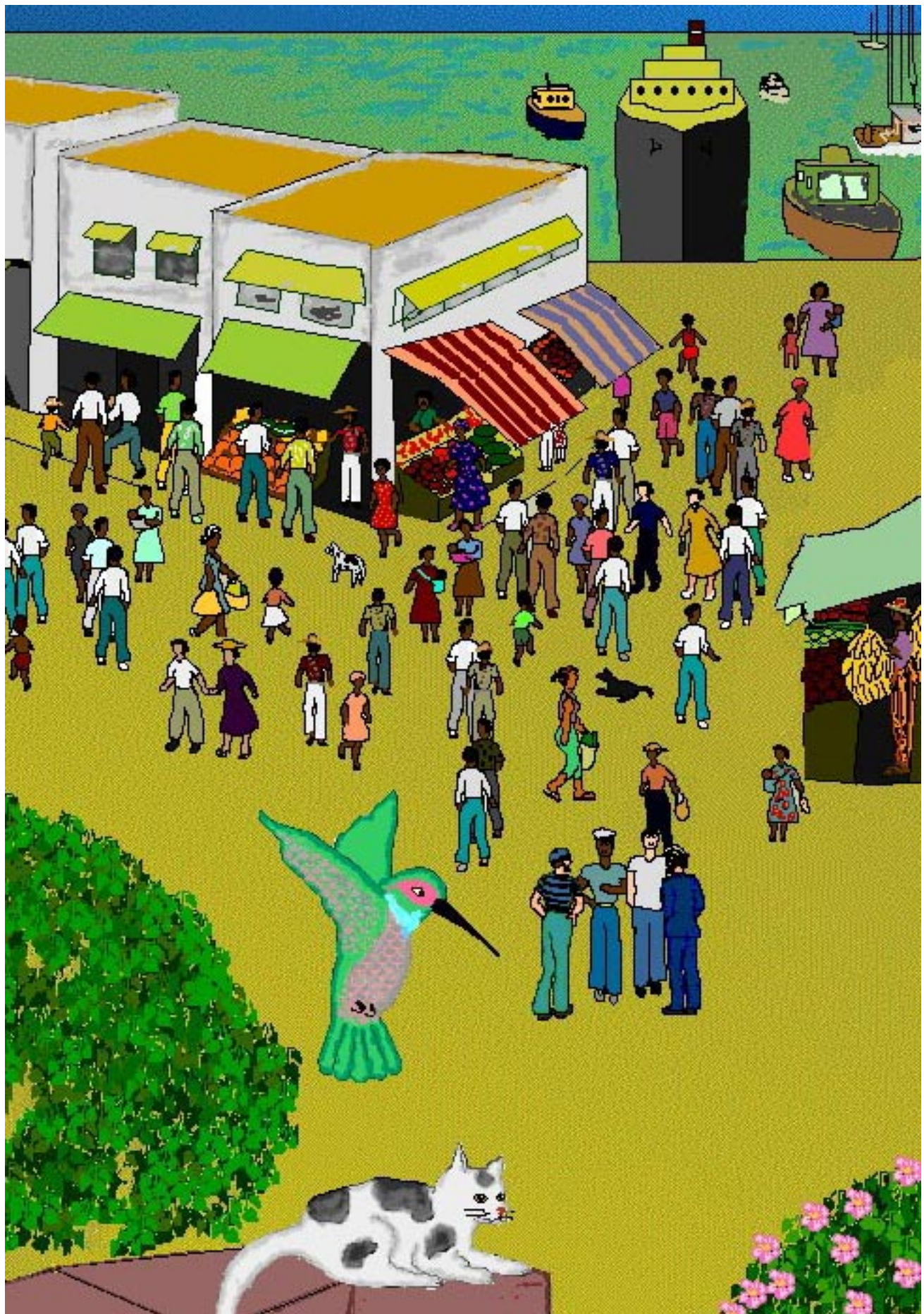
“I’m not a prisoner,” reminded Chitterbox, “I’ll fly away and get help.”

“If I can,” he added, whirring up and away.

Dickens and Amber peered glumly through the bars of their cage in the yard, seeing other cages filled with unhappy monkeys, alligators, parrots and even lions.

“Pssst,” whispered a strange looking bird in a nearby cage, “you’ve seen the last of the wild now.”





“What do you mean?” said an alarmed Dickens.

“I mean,” said the bird sadly, “that we have fallen into the hands of a band of poachers, who will sell us off in the market.”

Dickens said to a trembling Amber, “I don’t like the sound of this at all.” And they sat silent and sad.

Later the turbaned man and his companion swaggered around the compound. Pointing to Amber, he said, “This one is quite rare and should bring a good price.”

“We may even get something for this bag of fluff,” said his companion, as he passed a glowering Dickens.

“Looks like we’re in a tight spot,” whispered Dickens.

“Oh, Dickens,” wailed Amber, “I don’t want to fetch a good price.”

When the men had gone, Dickens reached out his paw gently to Amber and said softly, “Cheer up, Chitterbox may still save the day.”

All the next day, Chitterbox flew tirelessly back and forth over the streets and rooftops of the town. He knew that his friends had landed in a desperate situation. But what was a tiny fellow like him to do? He thought and thought, racking his brain for a solution. After a time, it seemed hopeless, but he flew on.

Finally at the end of the day, he saw Captain Briggs of the Bombay Star talking to a group of sailors. At last, he saw a chance. Chitterbox flew down on to the Captain’s



shoulder and told him what had happened to Amber and Dickens.

“What?” thundered the captain, “my shipmates behind bars? This is sad news indeed. Gather round, shipmates, we must find a way to free them.”

And so it was that the Captain, Chitterbox and the sailors came up with a daring escape plan.

Later that night when everyone in the town was sleeping, Chitterbox, the Captain and a group of burly sailors cautiously approached the darkened compound. Chitterbox peeped through a window and saw the poachers asleep. He then flew over the compound wall.

“Oh Chitterbox,” said Amber and Dickens.

“Be very quiet,” said Chitterbox, “help is coming—get ready to run.”

And with that, he flew over to the cage of lions.

“Noble creatures of the forest,” said Chitterbox, “we need your help—soon you will all be free. The poachers are asleep behind the door over there. Would you stand by it, and let out one of your loudest roars?”

“Certainly,” said the lions, “anything to oblige.”

The sailors, in the meantime, clambered over the wall, found the keys which were left hanging on a hook by the door and freed all the animals. They hesitated about freeing the lions, but Captain Briggs hurried forward and released them.

The three lions padded up to the door, took a very deep breath and gave a mighty earth-shaking roar. The poachers, waking up to this terrifying sound, fled in their night-clothes, pursued by three very large and determined lions.

Meanwhile, Captain Briggs and the sailors, Dickens, Amber, with Chitterbox flying





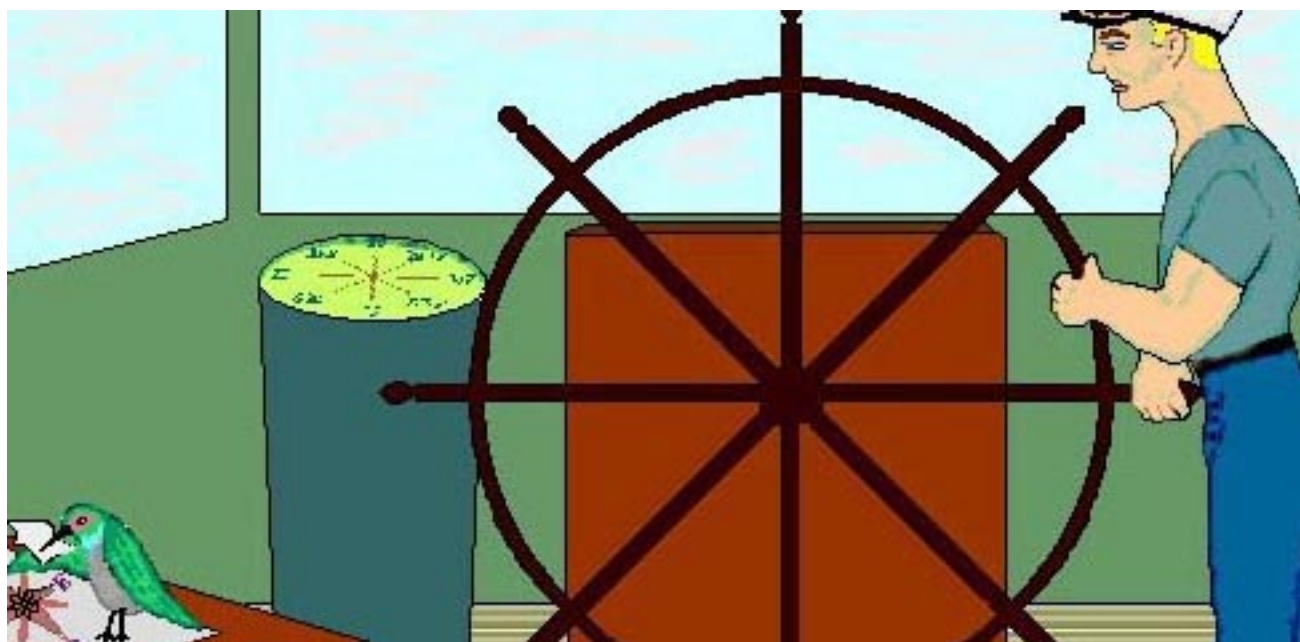
ahead, quickly made their way down to the harbor.

Earlier that day, Captain Briggs had met his old friend, Captain Meechum who had agreed to take all the survivors of the *Bombay Star* to London, England. Captain Briggs had told him about Amber, Dickens and Chitterbox.

“I was looking for you,” Captain Briggs said to Amber, Dickens and Chitterbox, “but when I went to the beach, you weren’t there. Well, never mind, we’re all here now

and it’s time to be on board. Captain Meechum is anxious to put out to sea. And let’s hope we have no more adventures,” and winking at Amber he added, “at least, not until we reach London.”

Now it happened that Captain Meechum was having trouble finding a crew. He was well pleased because Chitterbox assisted the navigator, Amber helped stoke the boiler’s furnace, and Dickens took on the temporary position of ship’s cat, which meant he made the tea at tea breaks.





“And for that,” said Captain Meechum, “I’ll see that you are well remunerated when we dock in London.”

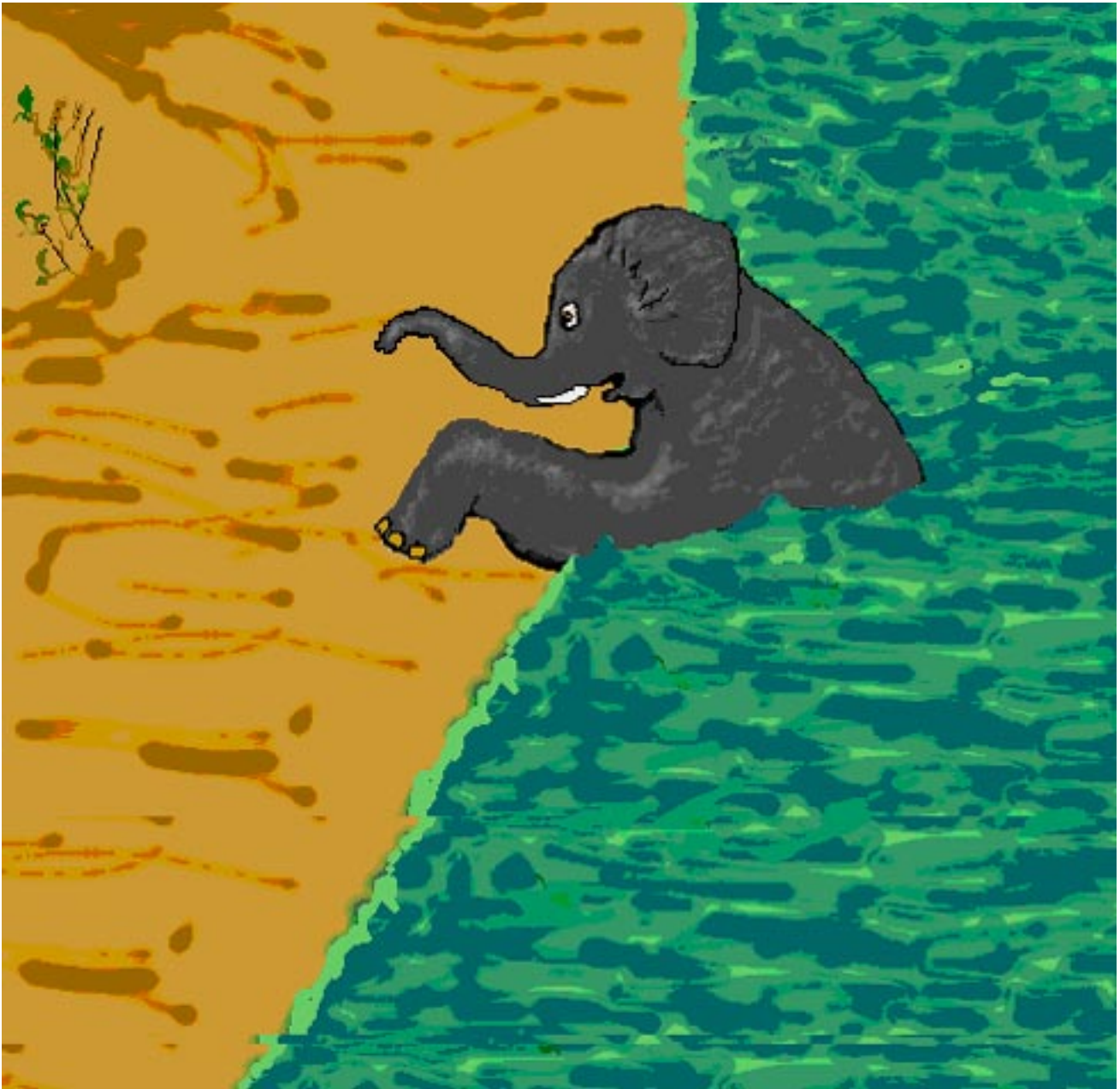
When everyone was safely on board, Captain Meechum standing on the bridge, tooted the ships whistle and gave the order, “Cast off, and full steam ahead.”

And the SS Ponacella, trailing a long smoky plume, headed out to sea.

A week later, the SS Ponacella steamed up the Red Sea a few miles south of Port Suez. Chitterbox was up on the bridge talking to the Captain, Dickens was in his cabin writing up his diary, and Amber stood by the deck rail gazing across at some very strange animals, who, in turn, were studying him from the bank. As he leaned forward to get a closer look there was a loud “Crack” and the deck rail gave way. Amber fell overboard and disappeared into the swirling waters.

Amber didn’t think he could swim, but he managed to flail and thrash along. He finally reached shore and staggered up the bank. In dismay, he saw the SS Ponacella





disappearing from view. All around him were sand dunes, but far away, he saw some palm trees.

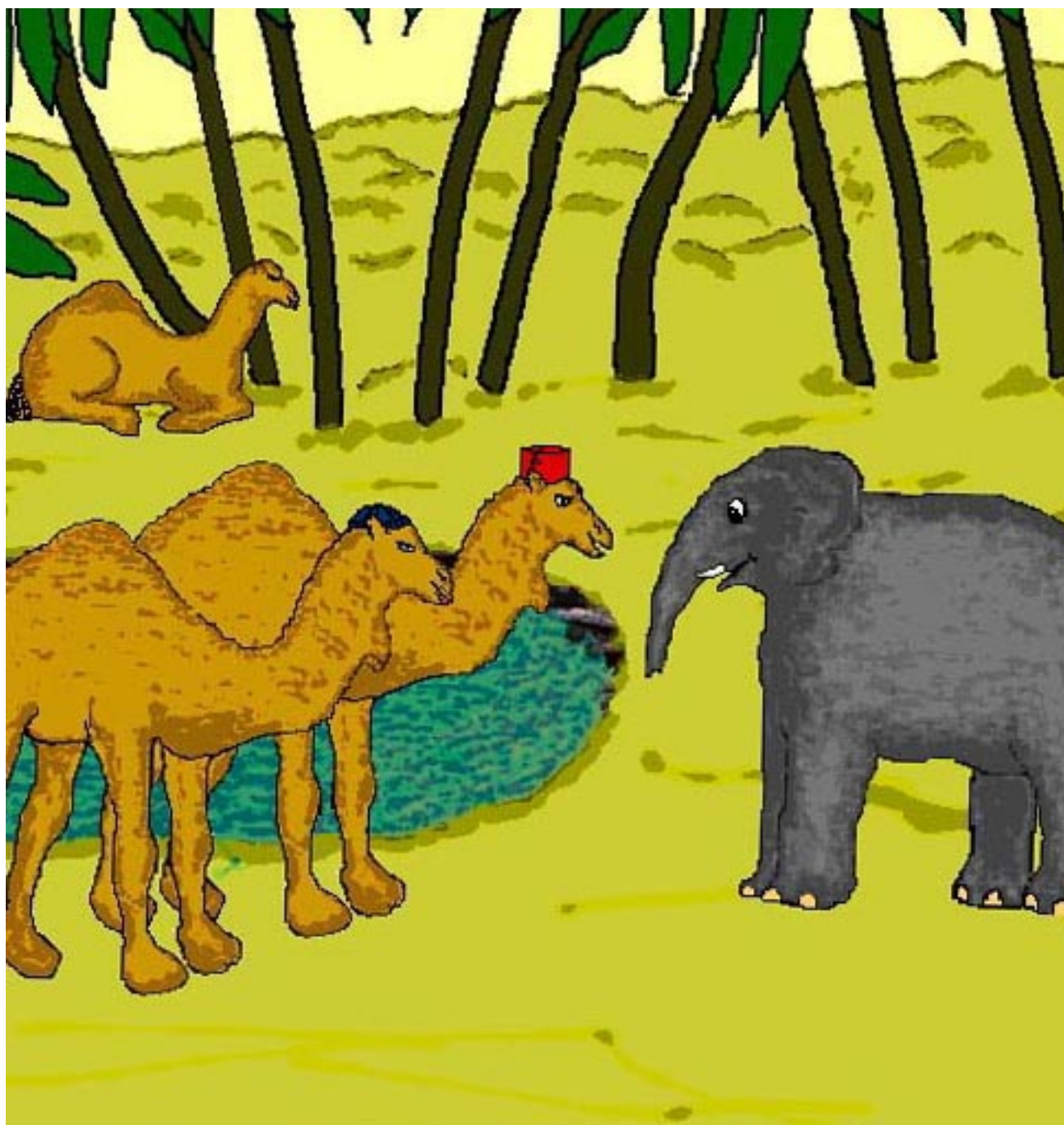
He didn't know what to do. The ship by now was only a small dot on the horizon. Apparently, no one had witnessed his falling overboard, otherwise the ship would have stopped and they would have rescued him. Marooned again, he sighed, hoping there were no poachers skulking in the sand dunes. He turned toward the palm trees and reluctantly set out for them.

It was a long walk but worth it. To his surprise, he entered a pleasant cool oasis.

“Good morning, little brother,” said a friendly camel. “A fine morning for a swim,” he added with a smile.

Amber explained, “I fell from the ship.”

“My name is Abdullah,” the friendly camel said. “Come, you will join us for dinner and then we shall see about getting you back to your ship.”



Abdullah introduced him to Chaim, a camel who was an old friend of his, and in the shade of the palms, the camels laid out a wonderful meal for their unexpected guest. It was desert hospitality at its finest, the delicious meal and the good company of the camels revived Amber's spirits.

Abdullah judged that the ship would dock in Port Suez. He advised Amber to get a little sleep as they would start very early in the morning to meet it. Amber was happy to sleep after his tiring swim. He woke to find Abdullah shaking him gently, and reminding him it was time to leave, if he wanted to catch the ship when it docked.

Abdullah kept up a swift pace and soon they reached Port Suez and made their way to the harbor. As soon as they reached the dock, Dickens and Chitterbox were there to meet them and had news.



“The Captain couldn’t wait for us, but he let us ashore to look for you. We discovered the broken rail and knew you had fallen overboard. The Captain said that if you could swim just a little, he knew you could not be very far away,” explained Dickens. “We waited as long as we could, but the ship had to start through the Suez Canal. There’s no way to get back aboard. The Captain prayed you were safe, and God willing, he would look for us in Alexandria where they have a few days lay over.”

Amber looked at Abdullah and Chaim with consternation. “Is it all right to be your guests a little longer?”

“You are welcome,” said Abdullah, “no guest is ever refused in the desert. And, In’shallah, we will discuss your journey, you will need a caravan to get to Alexandria, it’s a long way. But caravans are our business, it’s been a long while since I was in Alexandria, I will guide you myself.”

But Amber and Dickens were deep in thought as they trudged behind the camels. Amber tumbling into the water and the ship sailing off was only one of many disasters that had befallen them. They were thinking longingly of the quiet life on Elephant Hill.

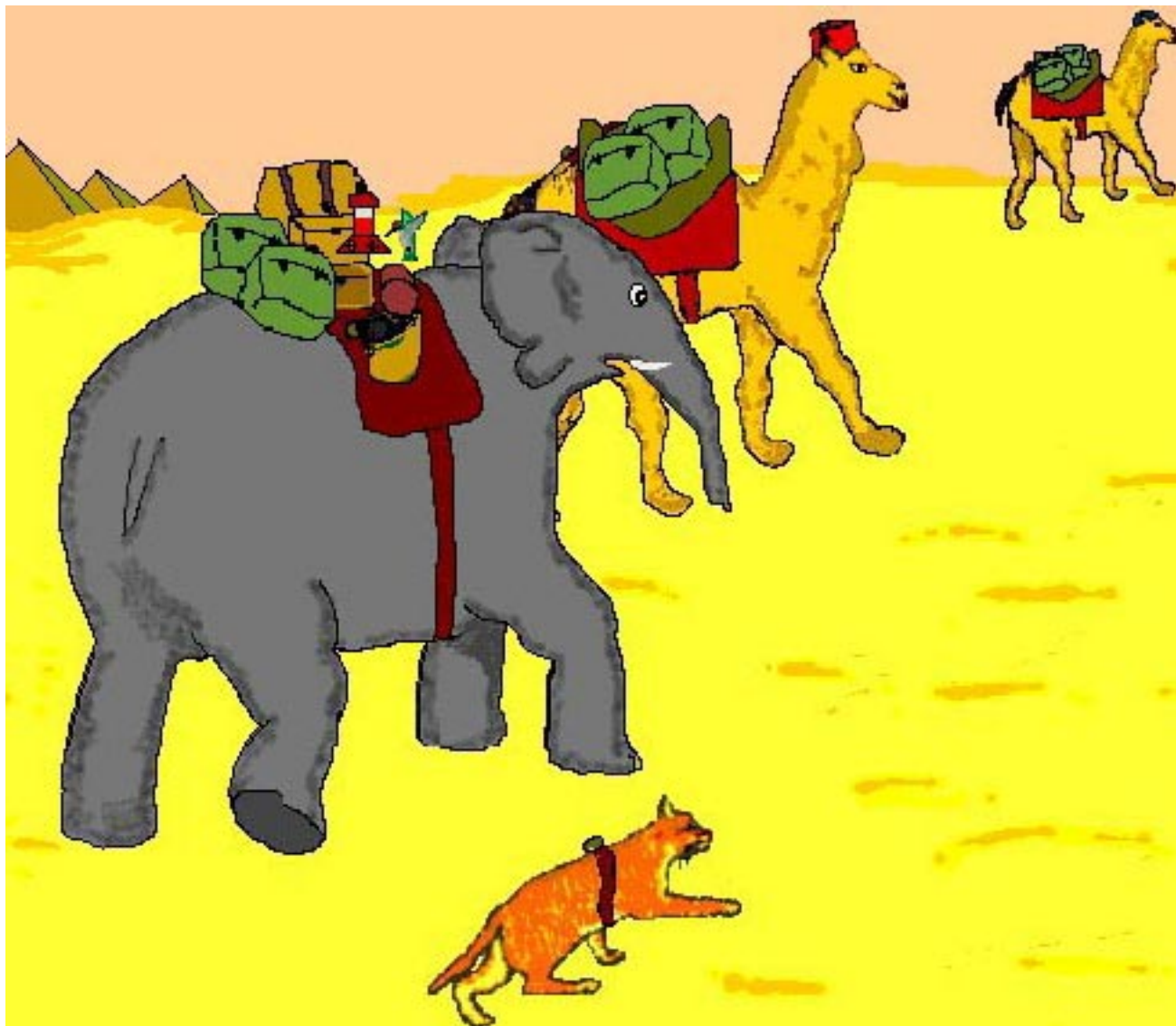
They shared the same unspoken thought—enough is enough, it's time to go back to Elephant Hill as quickly as possible.

When they reached the oasis, Abdullah prepared a meal that surpassed the one he had prepared earlier for Amber. After they had eaten, they sat quietly exchanging small talk.

Abdullah said, “Mine is an ancient people. Our life is hard here, people have forgotten us, yet we have witnessed many wonderful things. Our ancestors journeyed with the Persian Prophet through the snowy waste of the Winter’s Gate, and traveled with Father Abraham from the City of Ur when the fruit lay heavy on the branch. We carried the gifts of frankincense, myrrh and gold for the Magi and stood with them in wonder at the manger door in Bethlehem.”

Chaim, the camel, nodded in assent and said, “Father Abraham began our religion. Abdullah follows the way of the Prophet Muhammad, and I am a Jew, but we both respect Father Abraham and we both have faith in the One God. Ancestors of mine were there when Moses crossed the Red Sea, and when Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land. Yes, it was a land flowing with milk and honey.”

“You mentioned a shipwreck, I have no experience of them myself, but our ancestors watched Noah build the Ark and joined him on board when the waters of the Flood



came. They rode out the storm and when dry land was sighted, they rejoiced with Noah and his family,” said Abdullah.

As Chaim and Abdullah lapsed into silence, they saw in front of them the vision of a leaping flame. It was a glowing tree of light, its branches spreading over the world, journeying far beyond the avenues of the sun. Seeds of light like shooting stars showered down from the tree into the troubled darkness of the world.

“Man now lives in darkness and turmoil, yet the path still calls that will eventually lead us to the light,” chorused Chaim and Abdullah.

Amber, Dickens and even Chitterbox, who was still barely awake, were captivated.

“Oh well,” whispered Dickens to Amber, “the comforts of the quiet life are all very well, but our trip to London is important.”

“If we fail now, we might miss the path that will eventually lead us to the light,” Amber whispered back, “And Uncle Arthur would be so disappointed if we turned back.”

Abdullah made preparations for the caravan and morning had them on the road to Alexandria. That night they sheltered by the ruins of an old caravanserai. Stars shimmered overhead in the blue vastness.

In the silence, Abdullah spoke: “As I have said, we are an ancient people. My ancestors rode through Arabia with the Prophet, others traveled the Great Silk Road. We have traveled many paths, and many adventures have we shared. Your caravan to Alexandria has awakened us, isn’t that true, Chaim? When we get to Alexandria, perhaps someone will need a new caravan, leading us onwards.”

“Caravans are our business,” said Chaim, “what a pity that few travel that way anymore. The Great Silk Road should have circled the wide earth, instead it lays neglected and abandoned. But it still lives on in the memories of a few.”

“Who knows, perhaps one day the Great Silk Road will circle the earth,” said Abdullah, “and guides and caravanseries will once again be busy.”

“Listen.” whispered Chaim. “Do you hear it? It’s the foot fall and voices of travelers who passed this way in distant times—the path is coming alive again.”

Amber looked up, and whispered, “Look!”

A radiant caravan of light was gliding by, illuminating the whole night sky.

Amber asked, “Where are they all going?”

“Many travelers and many destinations,” murmured Abdullah. “Very beautiful. The path is alive. I have seen it before, and who knows? Dilmun, a Lost Eden, we all travel in a mystery.”

The strange procession continued well into the night. It was an awesome sight, yet so very peaceful that it lulled them all into sleep. Morning found no trace of the vision, only the encircling sand dunes and endless blue sky.

At breakfast, Abdullah announced that Alexandria was only one day’s march away.

Amber, Chitterbox and Dickens had come to regard Abdullah and Chaim as long lost friends. The prospect of parting with them so soon greatly saddened them.

Chaim said softly, “Come, little brothers, we must go if we are to see you safely aboard your ship in Alexandria.”

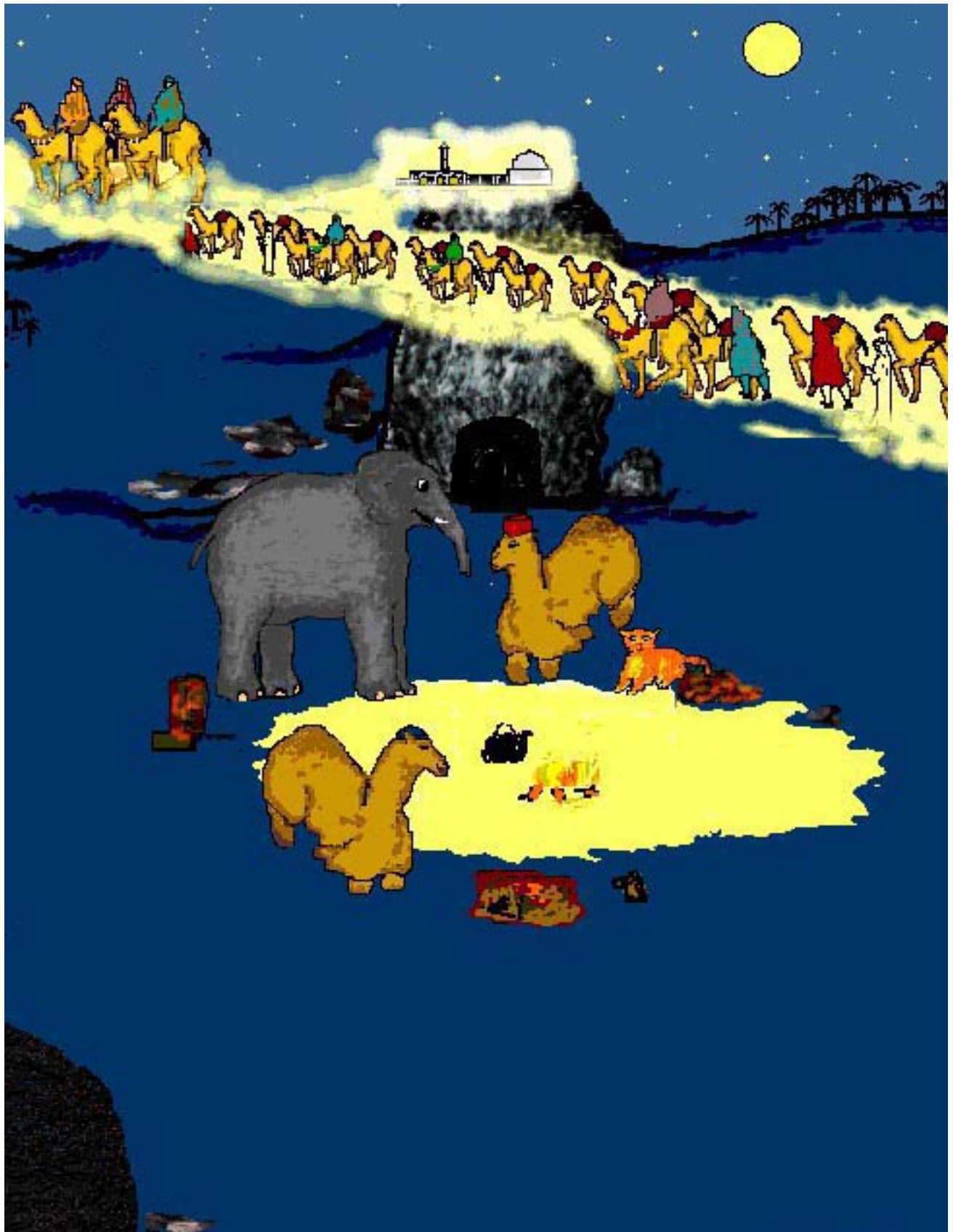
Abdullah smiled and said, “Remember always, that for those who journey on the path, there are no goodbyes, only tomorrows, we will all meet again.”

“In fact,” said Chaim, “after a time, we may join you at Elephant Hill. We are thinking that way.”

“Oh,” said Amber, “that would be ever so nice.”

Dickens echoed him, “You would be very welcome.”

“We have some other business to do first,” said Chaim, “but some of it includes India.”



And in a few minutes, they had gathered all their their belongings and were walking happily across the sands towards Alexandria.

*Welcome to Part Three of
Elephant Hill and The Path of Light.*

*There is only one more part in this
series. But the story of The Path of Light
has many, in fact, the story never ends.
But see what happens in Part Four of
Elephant Hill and The Path of Light.*

*It is one of the endings of
Elephant Hill and The Path of Light.*



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