



Meenakshi Bharadwaj
Art by Christopher Corr

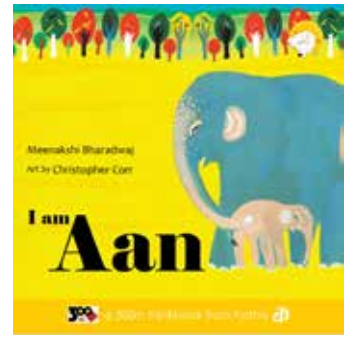
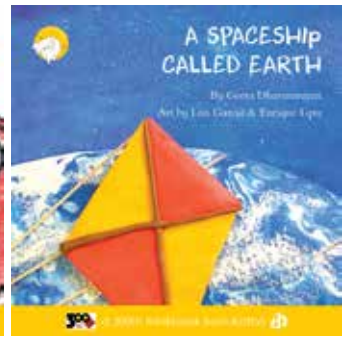
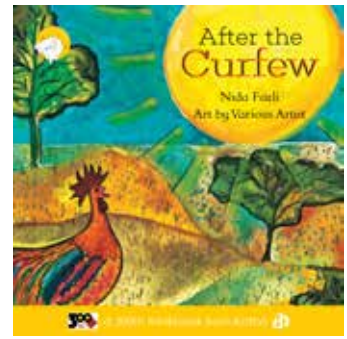
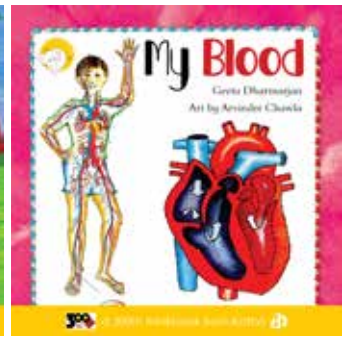
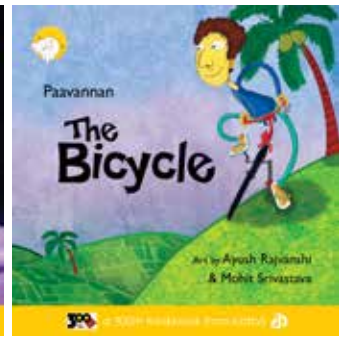
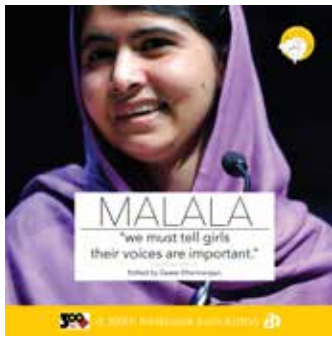
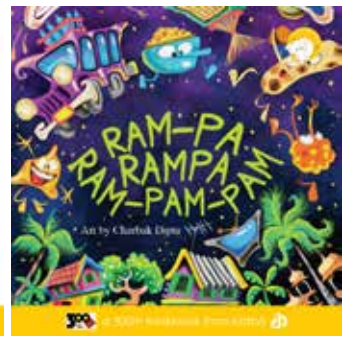
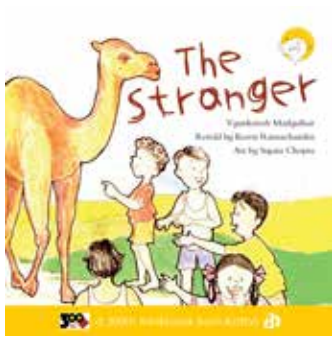
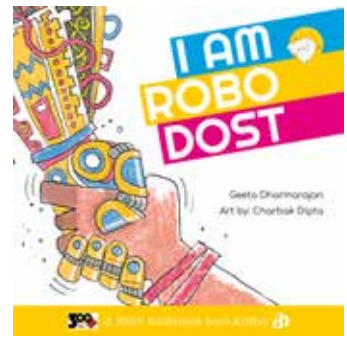
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IN THE YELLOW SERIES

It is October.



Deep inside the jungles of the Western Ghats an elephant, Aan, is born.

This is his story.

I must tell you about my family. Mine is a herd of about 20 cow elephants and their calves. Dadi Rani is an experienced cow.



She leads us through paths trod by elephants for hundreds of years and she protects us.



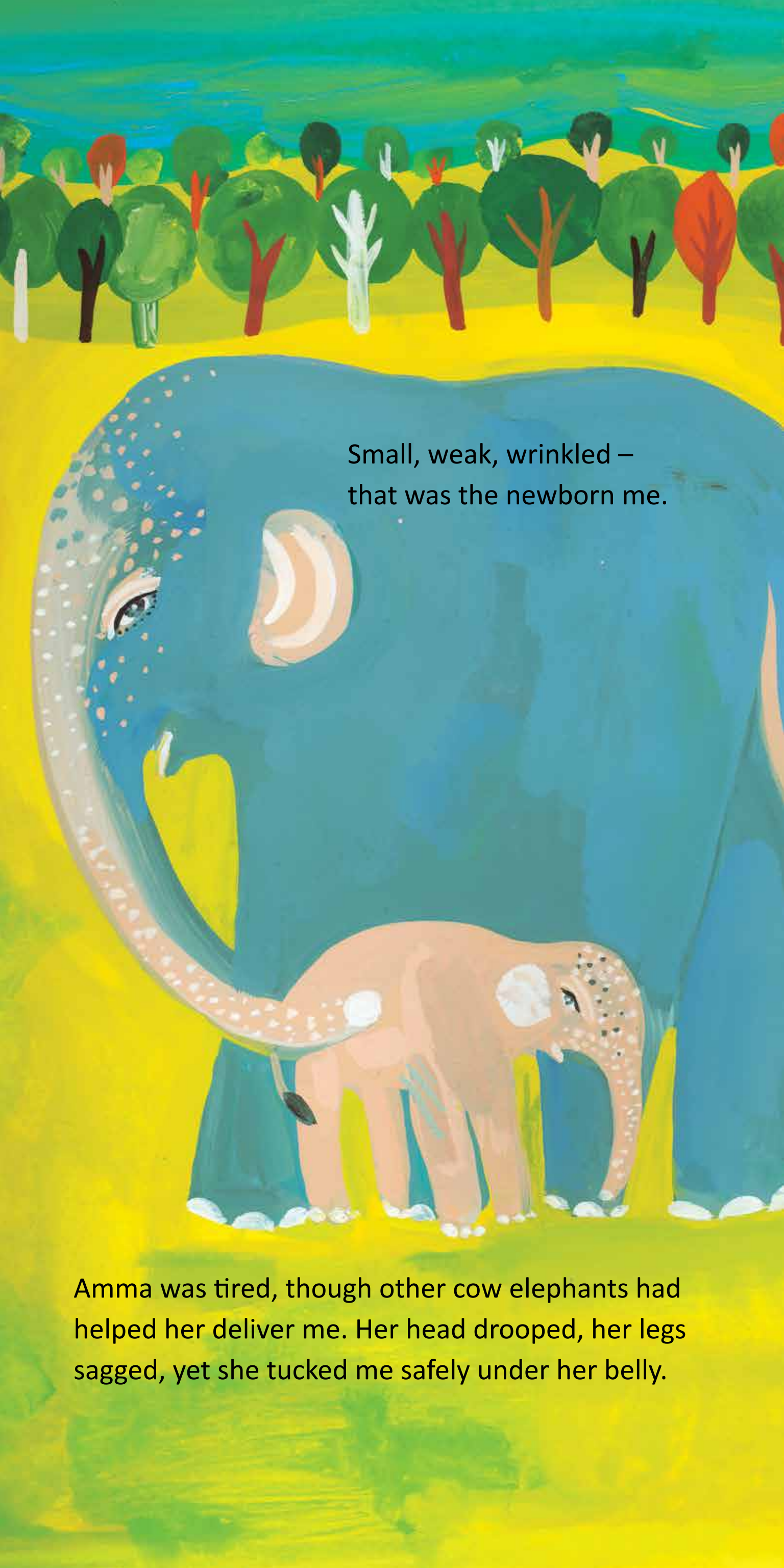
She is aunt, mother or grandmother to all of us in our herd. She's gentle with calves.



But if a tiger comes ...



Wow! She's a terror!

An illustration of a large blue elephant with a small pink calf. The blue elephant has a trunk with white spots and a large ear. The pink calf is smaller and has a white patch on its side. They are in a yellow field with a line of colorful trees in the background.

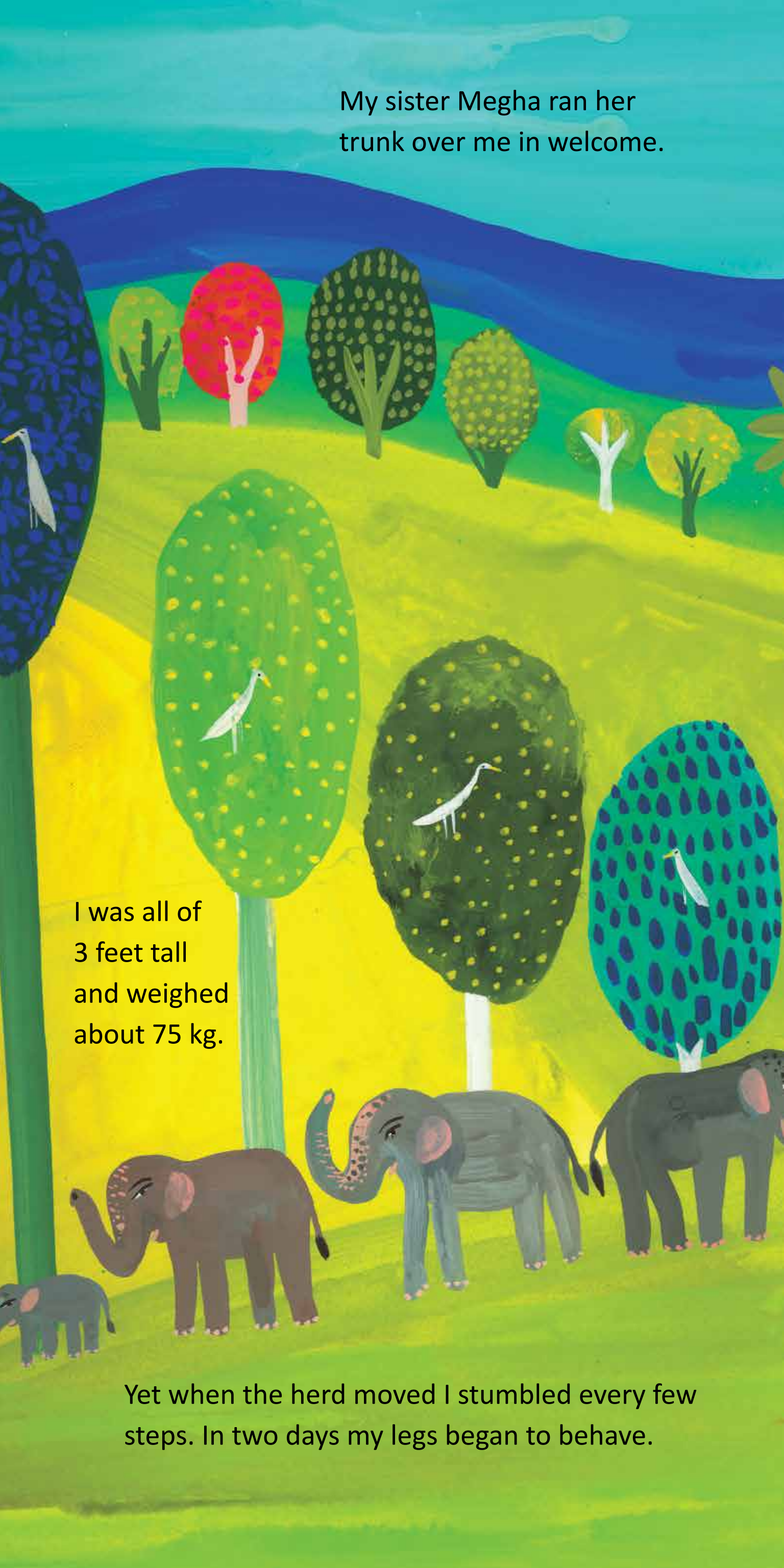
Small, weak, wrinkled –
that was the newborn me.

Amma was tired, though other cow elephants had helped her deliver me. Her head drooped, her legs sagged, yet she tucked me safely under her belly.

My sister Megha ran her trunk over me in welcome.

I was all of 3 feet tall and weighed about 75 kg.

Yet when the herd moved I stumbled every few steps. In two days my legs began to behave.



It took me three days to learn where Amma's breasts were! I sucked with my fleshy mouth.



I didn't know what to do with my trunk at first, but I was soon playing the fool with it while suckling and it also came in handy when I was lonely – I'd just sit and suck it!

Not that I was lonely often. I sucked milk from my aunts, my grandmother Dadi Rani, the leader of our group, even my elder sisters! So I always had enough.



Before I was one, I was already eating leaves, though I drank milk till I was four.

Of course, I was the pet of the whole herd, my elder brother and Megha especially.



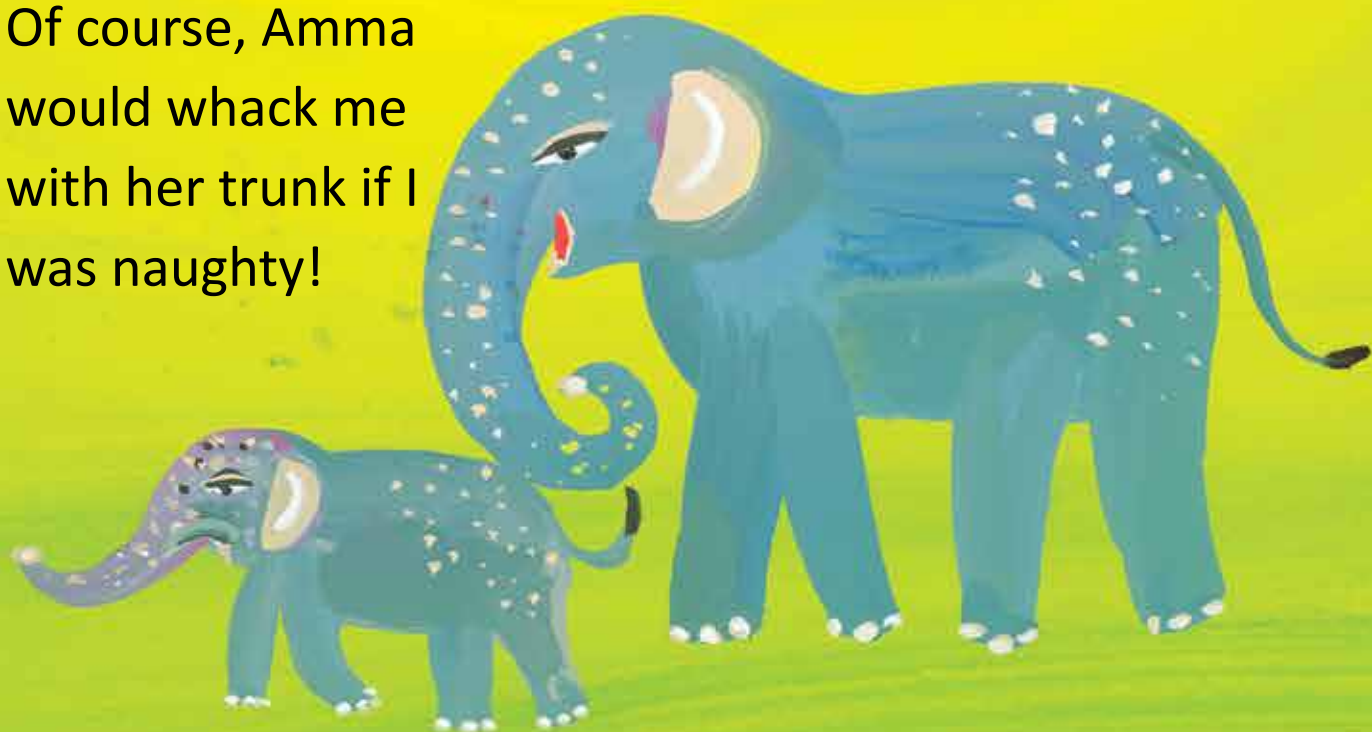
Watching them, I learnt how to feed, use my trunk (which often got tied up in knots!) and to roll on my back. I'd even steal food from Amma's mouth! And later, putting my trunk to my elders' mouths was a way of greeting them.

I stayed close to Amma – hanging on to her tail, leaning on her – till I was one. She'd mud-bathe me and never let me wander far.

Oh, she was the best mother anyone could have.



Of course, Amma would whack me with her trunk if I was naughty!



By the time I was five, I was more independent.



We'd meet other elephant families, our cousins, that browsed nearby.



We bulls would have pushing contests to find out who was strongest.

Megha said I was a playful calf – all calves aren't.

I loved to climb over sleeping elders
(they never minded!), to chase falling
leaves or egrets, or just to run!



I also enjoyed bullying Megha and my brother, mud and water baths and snoozing in the afternoons.

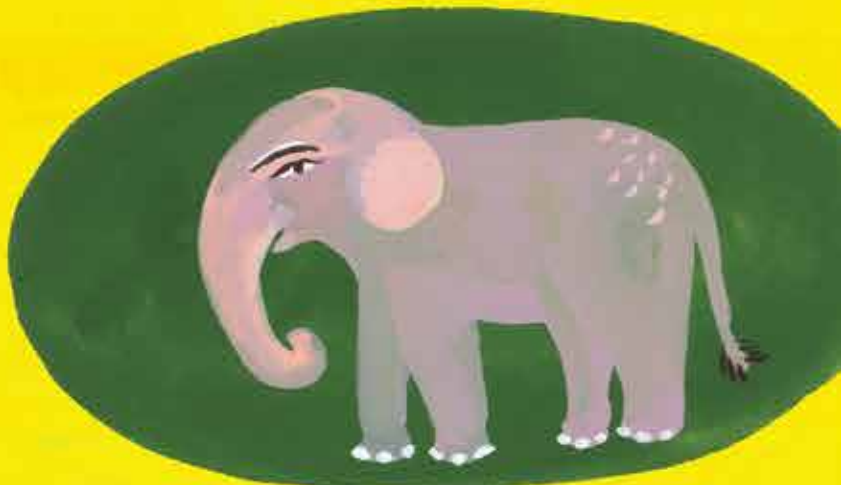


Once I almost got left behind when the herd started moving but Megha tickled me awake.



She loved acting the mother. Lucky me!
Megha used to be my best friend. But as we grew,
she no longer play-fought like the rest of us. But
she'd butt her way in if our play got too serious.

She was 10 now and
played mother to the
younger calves.





By the time I was 12, my cow herd began to fret and fume over my playfulness.



Finally Dadi Rani pushed me out of the herd. I wanted to return but she wouldn't allow it.

I lived near them for a while but slowly drifted nearer the older bulls. I understand that cows have to live in herds to learn about childcare and they need the herd to protect the calves.



I like being a loner now.

Once in a while I get together with other bulls or join a cow herd – not Dadi Rani's – to mate.

But I had lots of affection from them when I was a baby, and we elephants never forget!

Elephant Trivia



An elephant can weigh as much as your school bus, around 5000 kg. An elephant's tooth can weigh as much as 3 kg.



Elephants use their trunks to breathe and smell. They also use them as we use our hands or arms.

They cool off by fanning their ears.



Elephants sleep standing up.

Elephants love mud baths and are very good swimmers.



Bananas, rice and sugarcane are their favoured foods.

Elephants have an incredible memory.



Elephants cry, and laugh as well.

Elephants are very sensitive beings. If a baby elephant cries or complains, the entire family goes to caress it.



Elephant families are always ruled by the matriarch.

They also have greeting ceremonies for their friends when they meet them after a long time.



Elephants cannot jump.

Now isn't that amazing!

Meenakshi Bharadwaj loves writing for children. She thrills to the mysterious sounds of the night and dreams off to sleep with a still-sleepy dawn waiting outside her window, somewhere in the hills of the Nilgiris. She says she can only write between midnight and 4 am.

Christopher Corr is an international name in children's book illustrations. He was born in London and studied at The Royal College of Art. He works in a traditional way, paint on paper, usually gouaches on hand-made Italian or Indian paper. His round-the-world travels provide much inspiration for his work and he says that India is where he discovered colour.

KATHA

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