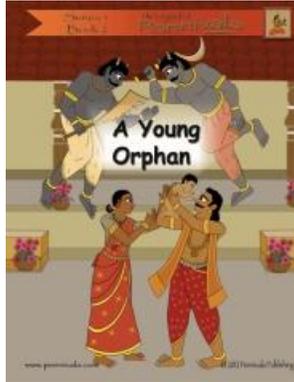


Episode 2 - A Young Orphan - (Sub Stories a, aa, and b)
Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)
VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you



2-a) A BABE IS FOUND!

The child is found when the landowner discovers that one of his cows is not feeding its calf. There seems to be little milk in its udder. Following the child and questioning the shepherd the landowner finally finds a beautiful baby under a large pile of rocks in his field. The cow with the empty udder had been secretly feeding it. This child shines “like the sun itself.” When the farmer takes it home his wife the wife takes a few minutes to adjust to the idea, asks some questions, and then becomes overjoyed at the prospect of keeping and raising the little infant as her own.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever done some careful research before you took action, had a good outcome and been very glad that you asked lots of questions up front? Do you know any animal stories that describe gestures of caring or kindness towards the helpless, say an example where a she-dog adopted a kitten and raised it lovingly with its own litter of pups? Have you ever read a “children’s book” that tells a story like this?

COMMENTARY: This story is covered above, by 1e. It should also be compared to 1d as this is essentially the same story as that one with the outcome reversed. This time the same farmer does careful research and is amply rewarded for it. One can separately discuss the small sub-story embedded here by focusing on how the farmer found his baby in a surprising and un-natural place (under a pile of rocks in a field). (A biblical parallel with the Moses in the Bullrushes story comes to mind here). Abandon babies frequently make the news today. Often the mother will leave her child in a somewhat hidden spot.... in a stairwell, in a side ally or whatever and then a passer by later discovers it. Children are also commonly found in piles of rubble after an earthquake. Sometimes the natural mother is still alive and sometimes not. The fact that a cow is feeding the child in this story is a nice touch, almost suggesting it was living in a kind of cow “nursery” awaiting adoption. Stories about children raised or breast fed by animals are quite common, both in folklore (as in the popular wolf-boy story) and in mythology (a human child fed by mare, a doe etc.) Indeed the Legend of Ponnivala has such a story (in the third generation) where the story’s heroic male twins are fed by a tigress and also by a she-elephant. See Episode 14d.

**2-b) AN ORPHAN CREATED
BY HIS PARENTS’ DEATHS**

After only five years of joy, the parents who adopted the little boy (above) both die. The Lord of Death shows them no mercy and they must take the ladder the heaven only hours after they learn of their fate. Their adoring son is left behind. The neighbouring Chola monarch who attends their

funeral tries to console him and rebuild his confidence. This ruler gives the clansmen the right to use the lands for a few years, but they have to agree to return these fine fields to the boy when he grows up. As soon as this gentle ruler leaves, however, the clansmen of the boy's parents begin their abuse. They attack the little hero verbally and beat him physically. Their motive is obvious. They want to intimidate him and make sure that the family's land will become theirs forever. These men quickly destroy the farmer king's palace and drag the frightened little boy off.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know anyone whose two parents died together suddenly? Did this unexpected misfortune leave a child of theirs alone to cope in the wide world by itself? Can you imagine something like this happening to you?

COMMENTARY: There are many stories like this from places like Haiti, where both parents died in the earthquake leaving a child (or children) alone in the world. This story reminds us that this is not just a "modern" tragedy. It is a sad story that has always been true for a few. The consequences of suddenly finding oneself to be an orphan are also (sadly) predictable. These children suffer a lot and are very vulnerable to exploitation.

The life of any orphan is tough, and this story can always be taken in that direction. Furthermore, almost any story of child abuse will reverberate with this tale of woe. Greedy relatives want their kinsmen's wealth. They also hold a grudge because their own fathers were "younger brothers" and the land given to them was not as good as that given to the eldest son, (the father of the hero) long back. A straight forward telling would emphasize the traditional pattern of land inheritance following in the descent male line. The farmer king's family never had a "genuine" biological son who could claim his rights. The relatives were just waiting for this moment. When the king asks why they didn't request that he endorse their rights earlier the men standing before him have no good answer. The king extracts a promise that they will return the land to this newly orphaned boy when he matures.

As soon as this monarch leaves there is no one to enforce the clanmen's hollow promise to look after the little boy well. Intimidating the child and destroying his family palace are their means to further weaken the possibility that he might try to claim back his inheritance later, as a grown up. This same story can be broadened, of course, and used to reflect a larger landscape of exploitation. Almost any modern story of a young and dispossessed child whose future is taken in hand by a stronger, manipulative and very savvy adult could serve here for comparative purposes.