



# *QUEST FOR THE EBONY ELEPHANT*

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## **Chapter 1**

During the time of the great emperor Kali Lata, the tales of a great black elephant with black tusks and long black hair that reached to the ground, were told far and wide. The people began to call it the Ebony Elephant. It was the rarest of all the creatures on Earth.

The folktales said the Ebony Elephant lived in the high grasslands where the thick forest meets the majestic mountains. It was bigger than any elephant that had ever lived. Year after year, the stories of the elephant became more legendary. Parents told their children the stories of the great elephant and the remarkable things it had done.

In one story, it was said the great Ebony Elephant had created the river that flowed through the country by taking snow from the mountains into its trunk, and then releasing it in such a torrent that it created not just the river, but also the valley where it flowed.

Another tale told of how it had created many lakes, since the elephant's feet were so large, and yet another legend said that because of the elephant's great hunger, he had cleared the great forests creating the grasslands and making the fertile farmland.

The oldest legend said that when the Ebony Elephant was younger it had lost his family in a storm. In its search, it had come from the far north looking for his family.

Many people claimed to have seen it and they made drawings of the elephant, but no one had proof that it really existed. The tales of the Ebony Elephant had become so

famous they were the topic of conversation throughout the land. The tales of the elephant were so fantastic that people wanted proof that the Ebony Elephant was real.

The emperor, who was just as eager to find out if the stories were true, offered a reward of several million Zinkas to the person who brought him one of the ebony tusks.

Many men embarked upon a quest searching for the Ebony Elephant. When these men returned to their homes, they told stories of how they had seen the Ebony Elephant, but were not able to capture it. They said it was too big, too strong, and too fast for them to capture.

They told of the traps the elephant had destroyed, of the chains it had broken, and of how their arrows had just bounced off its tough skin. People thought capturing the Ebony Elephant was impossible, and the emperor's reward would never be paid.

That was until Rai Puli decided to find the Ebony Elephant. Since he was a boy, he had read the stories and listened to the tales. His older brother thought he was crazy for wanting to go on such a dangerous adventure, but when he realized that Rai Puli was not going to change his mind, he decided to help. He taught Rai Puli how to do exercises that would help him be stronger and faster.

Rai Puli interviewed the men who had searched for the elephant in the past, studied the maps, and prepared himself for the long adventure to the grasslands near the grand mountains. He knew it might take him many years to complete his quest.

He prepared very hard for his mission. He trained every day running and jumping to improve his strength, and he ate healthy food to give him more energy. Then the day came when he was ready to go. He knew that this was what he was supposed to do.

Rai Puli packed the things he would need for the trip, said goodbye to his family and began the long trek to the grasslands. He was confident that he would be able to finish his task. He knew it was his destiny.

As he walked out of his village, many people wished him well.

“Good luck Rai Puli!” some yelled as he passed. However, in the past, they had wished many others good luck yet they had returned empty handed, or had not returned at

all.

Even so, he felt important as he walked away from his home and from all he had known to follow his dream.

After a long day of walking, and as the sun set over the horizon, Rai Puli found a place along the road to build a small fire for his supper. He took out a small portion of meat from his bag and put it onto a stick. His mother had added spices to his food, so as it cooked the smell of the meat cooking filled the air. He was looking forward to tasting what she had made. He loved his mother's cooking.

After eating, he opened his blanket and spread it onto the ground. He sat on it for a long time looking at the stars above. He drew pictures in his mind and as he connected the stars, he saw a cow, a bird, a man, and a goat. Then he saw the flash of a star as it flew across the sky. As was the custom in his village, he made a wish.

"I wish that I will find the great Ebony Elephant and make my family proud," he made his wish.

This would be the first of many nights where he would look at the sky as he slept.

The next morning, he woke up early. He ate a small amount of the dried fruit in his bag, picked up his blanket, and continued his trip.

The morning sun glistened off the dew from the night's coolness. The blue sky foretold a sunny warm day was ahead.

While he walked, he found some orange berries to eat. He took a small amount of bread from his pouch and placed the berries onto it, making a small fruit sandwich. He knew he would have to be careful with his food. It might be a while before he would be able to purchase more.

He looked at the mountains in the distance dreaming of the Ebony Elephant. The road seemed to go on forever. He had never been this far from his home before.

The road ahead of him disappeared past the next hill, so he made it a game to predict what he might see once he arrived at the top of each crest. Every time he got to the top of the next hill, it always looked just like the last one, but it was fun to fantasize

about what he might see; maybe a village, or a large rock, or maybe even the elephant!

Day after day, he kept going and going, heading to the mountains where he was sure he would find the Ebony Elephant and claim the reward from the emperor.

After several days of walking, he came upon a village about the same size as his. It was early in the evening when he arrived. The people noticed him approaching and some of the little children ran out to greet him.

When he tried to talk to them, they did not understand what he said because their language was different. As he entered the village, he asked the people if anyone understood him. The villagers just stared back at him. They didn't respond; however, they were very friendly.

When he got to the center of the town, a woman walked up to him, speaking in his own language.

"What is your name?" she asked.

Surprised that she was speaking his language, Rai Puli paused before he answered.

"I'm Rai Puli. Who are you?" he asked.

The lady responded, "My name is Fran Tah. I live here, but I was born in your district. My husband was from this village, so I came to live with him after we were married."

Rai Puli made a request.

"I've walked for many days, and I need to buy some food. Is there someone here that I may buy food from?"

"Come to my hut. I'll give you what you need," Fran Tah answered.

Rai Puli followed her to her hut. It was beyond the village and sat alone among a group of trees that provided some shade from the sun.

"Why is your hut so far from the village?" Rai Puli asked, looking back at the village behind him.

"My husband died and I'm no longer welcome there. I'm different from them. Even though I have been living here for two years, they have never really accepted me,"

she answered.

“How are you different?” Rai Puli asked, very curiously.

“It’s a difficult question to answer right now. Perhaps I’ll tell you about it later,” she answered.

“Why don’t you just go home?” Rai Puli questioned her.

“It’s too far for me to return to our district alone. Plus, if I returned to my village, I wouldn’t be accepted. I didn’t marry the man my family had chosen for me, and that made them very angry with me,” she answered.

Fran Tah opened her door and welcomed Rai Puli into her hut.

Everything was neat and clean. In the center was a small fire and on the right, was a table big enough for two. At the far end was a small window that let in a ray of light.

He put his pouch on the table and sat down on the ground.

Sitting across the table from him, Fran Tah began to explain her situation.

“My husband’s family has been very generous to me. They have given me more than I can eat alone, so I’ll share what I have with you. But only on one condition,” she said to him.

“What’s the condition?” Rai Puli asked.

“That you take me with you when you leave,” she replied.

“But I’m not going back to my village. I’m on a quest to find the Ebony Elephant, and it may take me many years to find it,” Rai Puli was very surprised at her request.

“I don’t care about going back to my home. I just want to leave this place,” she almost begged Rai Puli. “I can help you find the Ebony Elephant. After we find it, you can return to your village, and I can go to mine.

“When you find the Ebony Elephant, you’ll have enough money so you can go anywhere you want. If I help you, you’ll share some of the money with me, and then it won’t matter what my family thinks,” Fran Tah came up with a plan.

“Who says I want to share the reward? I’m on a quest by myself. I don’t want anyone to go with me. This is something I’m going to do alone,” Rai Puli said sternly

informing her of his plan.

Fran Tah got a mysterious smile on her face, then asked, “You said you need food, isn’t that correct?”

Surprised at her question, he replied, “Of course. That’s why I’m offering to pay you for it.”

“I’ll let you know now, no one in this town is going to sell you food. since you came to my hut, they will have nothing to do with you. The closest village is more than five days from here. How are you going to survive that long without food?” Fran Tah put the question to him, with a grin on her face. “Get my point?”

Rai Puli had a puzzled look on his face. He knew she was telling the truth, but he had no intention of bringing her along. He thought and thought about a way to avoid taking her with him. Then an idea came to him.

“Okay, you can come along. Just pack enough food for both of us to get to the next town. We can leave in the morning.” Rai Puli said, knowing in his mind he had another plan.

He watched as Fran Tah prepared the food. The way she cooked the food was the same way his mother did. He knew the food would taste good.

At dinner time, it was nice to eat a fresh meal of meat and vegetables. It was like eating food from home.

The sun went down as the fire in the hut burned low, so only an orange glow filled the room.

“We’ll stay here tonight, and then in the morning, we’ll leave. There’s a place for you to sleep in the corner,” Fran Tah said as she pointed to where Rai Puli would sleep.

Rai Puli went to the side of the hut where she had pointed, unrolled his blanket, spreading it out onto the floor, placing his pouch along the wall and fell asleep.

In the morning, Rai Puli woke up early. The sky was still dark. Only the dim light of the moon lit the room. He quietly rolled up his blanket and picked up his pouch.

Sitting on the table was the food Fran Tah had prepared for the trip, so Rai Puli

took the food and put all of it into his bag. He left some coins on the table to pay for the food he had taken. Then he slowly opened the door and quietly left.

The moon was still bright, so it was easy to see his way down the road. The day went by quickly, and as midday approached, the sun became very hot. Rai Puli decided to stop and rest. He found a small tree that provided some shade. He sat in the cool of the tree, opened his pouch, and took out some of the food Fran Tah had made for him. It tasted just like his mother's food. It made him smile while he remembered his family.

The food made him sleepy. He hung his blanket over the tree to block the sun, lay under the tree, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. I wasn't long before he began to dream.

In his dream:

*Rai Puli approaches a village where the people greet him, even before he arrives at the edge of the town.*

*It appears that they have been expecting him.*

*A small child takes Rai Puli to a black hut in the middle of the other houses.*

*When he enters, sitting at a small table, facing the doorway is an old man.*

*The old man says, "Hello Rai Puli. Welcome to my home."*

*"How do you know my name?" Rai Puli asks.*

*"That's not important right now. Sit down. What I have to tell you is going to help you on your journey. Listen carefully because I don't have much time," he tells Rai Puli.*

*The old man points to the empty chair inviting him to rest.*

*Looking at the strange old man, Rai Puli sits down facing him.*

*He continues, "I know about the wish you made on the falling star, and I know you are seeking the Ebony Elephant. I can help you, but you must not forget what I tell you. I will share with you the greatest tale you have ever heard.*

*"When I was a young man, I went on a similar quest to find the Ebony Elephant. I had no idea what I was doing. I just knew that it would be a grand adventure. I spent many years searching the grasslands looking for the smallest sign. I never found anything, not even a footprint.*

*“I was just about to give up when something happened.*

*“I was walking along, not paying much attention, when suddenly I came face to face with the elephant! I looked at him and he looked at me for the longest time. Then he ran away. I tried to follow him, but he was too big and too fast.*

*“I stayed in the same spot waiting to see if he would come back. Two days later, he returned. When he saw me, he stopped and looked at me again. I just stared back at him. I don’t know how long we did this, but then he just turned and walked away. I didn’t chase him that time.*

*“Three days later he came back again. I think he was looking for me. When he saw me, he walked up to me and put his trunk on my head. I suddenly got a very wet shower. He let out a loud scream. I think he was laughing at me. I just laughed as well.*

*“For about a week, he stayed with me. We played games and went into the pond to swim. He was gentle and fun. I even got on his back and rode on him.*

*“Then one day he was gone. He never returned.*

*“I came home empty handed, but I had a wonderful story tell.*

*“Over the years I have had dreams of meeting him again, but now I am too old.*

*“Then, recently, in a dream, I saw you coming. I knew you were looking for him. I know you would find him.*

*“While I was with the Ebony Elephant, I drew a map. I want you to have it, but you have to promise me something,” he said looking deep into his eyes.*

*“I don’t want you to hurt him. If you do as I say, you will have riches beyond your wildest dreams. If you hurt him, you will surely die a painful death.*

*“Do you promise me?” he asked.*

Suddenly Rai Puli heard a voice very close to him that startled him. When he woke up, he saw Fran Tah standing over him with a very angry face.

Rai Puli jumped back in fright, thinking she might hit him.

“What did you do that for? Why did you wake me up?” he yelled at her. “I was

having an important dream. Now I'll never know what the end of the story is!"

"What do you mean?" Fran Tah asked.

"Never mind, it is not important," Rai Puli answered, not wanting to reveal the details of his dream to her.

Looking down at him, she asked in an angry voice, "Why did you leave so early? Why didn't you wake me up? Why did you leave me behind? You said you were going to take me with you."

Rai Puli stood up, and began to walk in circles out of frustration.

"As I told you, I want to go on this journey alone. I don't need anyone to go with me," he said to her.

Then under his breath he repeated, "I can't remember the dream. I need to remember the dream! Why can't I remember the dream?"

Then he looked over at her and asked, "Why did you have to wake me up?"

"Excuse me, I had no idea that you were in such an interesting dream," Fran Tah answered not really knowing what he was talking about. "All I know is that I needed to get out of that village, so now I'll go with you until I find a place to live where I'm welcome. I'll stay out of your way. I'll fix your meals, help you find food, and I won't say a word, I promise."

Rai Puli gave her a look, showing her that he didn't believe her. However, realizing that he was not going to get rid of her very easily, he said in a stern voice to make sure she understood him, "OK, you can follow me, but be quiet. I need to think. You can stay in the next village. That is as far as we'll go together."

Rai Puli put his things into his pouch getting ready to leave.

"Do you want to eat something?" Fran Tah asked.

"No, I want to get going."

With that, he turned to walk up the road, with Fran Tah following behind.

It took five days to get to the next village. Most of the time, as they walked, Rai Puli could hear Fran Tah speaking to herself. Rai Puli was not listening. Rai Puli walked

in front and Fran Tah followed behind.

Each time Rai Puli fell asleep, he had the same dream. The old man told his story, but each night he woke up just before the dream was finished. After he awakened, he wrote down a little more of what the old man had told him. He knew there was more to the story. It was so frustrating for him not knowing.

As they walked into the next village, the people stayed in their huts and stared at the two travelers from their windows and doorways. No one came to greet them.

In the center of the town was a well where a woman was getting water. She did not see Rai Puli until he was right behind her.

When she felt that someone was there, she turned around quickly, screamed, dropped her bucket on the ground, spilling the water out of it, and ran away.

Rai Puli looked back at Fran Tah and shrugged his shoulders.

“Why are the people so frightened of us?” he asked, as they filled their water skins with fresh water and drank until they were satisfied. Then they sat under a tree to get out of the hot sun.

They drank the water and ate dried fruit from their bags. The people just watched from their homes not even moving.

He looked around and asked once again, mostly to himself, “Why are they afraid of us?”

Fran Tah responded, “If this is the way to the Ebony Elephant, maybe many hunters have come here in the past. I have heard stories about how cruel some of those adventurers were.”

Then seeing the eyes of the villagers staring at them from their windows, she posed a question of her own, “Do you think this town was a victim in the past?”

“Maybe you’re right. I feel sorry for them,” Rai Puli answered.

They stood up and began to leave the village, and as they did, Rai Puli placed a few coins on the edge of the well to pay for the water they had taken.

A small child ran out of one the huts toward the well and took the money. Then he

ran back from where he had come.

Rai Puli smiled and waved at the people who were in their huts staring at the strangers from behind the windows. Fran Tah did the same.

As they were leaving the collection of huts, people began to leave their homes slowly and cautiously. The people brought food and candy with them. Even though Rai Puli and Fran Tah were not able to speak the language, they felt accepted. Eventually, the children were jumping up and down and had surrounded Rai Puli. He played with them and they laughed.

They began to feel very welcome.

They ate until they could eat no more. The villagers entertained them with dancing and music, and when it was over, they stayed the night. Fran Tah went to stay with one of the families, while Rai Puli found a comfortable place under a large tree.

It had been a long day so he fell asleep very quickly.

## Chapter 2

In the morning, as Rai Puli was preparing to leave, one of the young village girls handed a paper to him. When he opened it, he was surprised to see that it was a map. It showed them a faster way to the grasslands. It would take a lot less time to get there.

Rai Puli thanked the young girl who smiled back at him. She looked shyly away from him, as her cheeks blushed red. Then she ran to her home.

He collected his things and began to walk out of the village. When he looked behind him, he noticed that Fran Tah had followed him.

“Why are you following me?” Rai Puli asked.

He had expected her to stay, at least that is what they had agreed upon.

She let Rai Puli know that she was not going to stay in the village.

“I’m not going to stay there. I don’t understand their language and don’t know their culture. It would be the same as when I was living in the other village,” she informed him. “I’m coming with you!”

This did not make Rai Puli very happy. She was slowing him down and he didn’t want to have to worry about her, but since he knew she was stubborn he realized he had no choice.

The road led out of the village toward the valley, but they did not take it. They followed the map, which led them to the right and toward the grand mountains in the distance.

It was not going to be as easy as walking on a road. Following the map meant they had to climb hills, and find their way through thick forests. Rai Puli wondered why the map made the journey so difficult, but they continued.

Fran Tah kept up with Rai Puli, which surprised him. She was a lot stronger than he had thought. They did not talk much because when they did, they always argued. In

fact, they really didn't like each other very much. Fran Tah was annoying. When she did talk to him, she always asked questions that Rai Puli couldn't, or didn't, want to answer. They didn't have much to say to each other, however, that did not stop her from talking to herself, complaining all the time.

Fran Tah would just start talking about things that Rai Puli didn't understand. She would go on and on talking about things that made no sense to him. He tried to ignore her, but it was not easy. Fran Tah got upset that Rai Puli was not listening to her and she would complain about it. That made it even worse for him.

Slowly Rai Puli began to realize why the people of the town, where he had met her, didn't like he. She was very annoying and always had an opinion about something. It was irritating.

The days went by slowly. The path to the grasslands was difficult, but they kept moving.

When they could, they hunted for fresh meat and for berries. They saw many new and strange animals along the way. The weather remained sunny and hot, which made traveling by day challenging, so they spent the middle of the day relaxing or sleeping. Most of the time they walked at night, when it was cooler.

After several days, they came upon a very steep hill. They looked for a way around it, but the only way to go was over it. The climb was not easy. The ground was loose and it was hard to go up. There was almost no vegetation to grab onto to help, so it was slow and tiring, but eventually they reached the top. What they saw made them excited. The long hard climb was worth it. In front of them, they saw the most beautiful scenery either one of them had ever seen: large trees, a wide river, open spaces with yellow and red flowers, towering mountains capped in white and the sky was so blue that it seemed to reach to the ground.

Rai Puli and Fran Tah looked at each other in amazement.

"Is this the place where the Ebony Elephant lives?" Fran Tah asked.

He didn't answer. He just stared across the large valley, enjoying the sight.

Going down the hill was a lot easier than going up. The sweet smell of fresh flowers filled the air. They had arrived at the place marked on the map the villagers had given them.

Now Fran Tah wondered what to do next.

“I see a path. Let’s follow it to see where it goes,” Fran Tah suggested.

“No, I think we should stop and get some rest. It’s going to be a long way to find the Ebony Elephant. We need to keep our strength,” Rai Puli responded.

Fran Tah was excited. She did not want to stop.

“I don’t need to rest. We need to keep going. If you want to rest, fine, but I’m going to go to the trail below. I want to know which way might be the best for us to go,” Fran Tah said as she continued down the side of the hill, not waiting for Rai Puli.

“OK, I was just thinking of you. I thought you might need to rest,” he answered, as he followed her down the hill to the valley below.

They continued to argue about which direction might be the best. It was always like that.

Once they reached the bottom of the hill and got to the path, Fran Tah spoke up, “I think we should follow the road toward the mountains to see where it goes.”

Ignoring what she said, Rai Puli posed a question to Fran Tah, “May I ask you a question?”

“Sure, what do you want to know?” she responded.

“When you told me you wanted to go on this journey you said you would not say a word. You said you would stay out of my way, fix my meals, and help find food. What happened to that promise?” Rai Puli asked.

“I’ve done all that,” she responded somewhat offended.

“Yeah, all except the keeping quiet part,” Rai Puli shot back. “Can we just go our separate ways? You go to the right and I’ll go to the left. That way you can do what you want to do and I’ll do what I want, sound good?” Rai Puli presented an idea.

Fran Tah put her head down with a sad face trying to make Rai Puli feel bad.

“If that is what you want, then I guess it’s okay with me,” she said, looking up at him almost in tears. “I can find my own way, but I don’t have any supplies. May I have some food to take with me?”

Rai Puli knew what she was up to, so to get her to stop, he took half the food and gave it to her.

“I hope you find what you are looking for,” Rai Puli stated firmly. “I’m leaving now. I hope all goes well for you.”

As he turned, leaving her standing in the middle of the trail, he heard her begin to cry. He turned around to see her on her knees sobbing.

Not knowing what to do, he stopped and watched her cry.

“Now what is your problem? Why are you crying? Isn’t this what you’ve wanted all along? To go and find a new home?” Rai Puli asked.

“That’s true. It’s just that I don’t have any idea of where to go, and I don’t want to be alone,” Fran Tah paused.

“If I keep quiet, will you take me with you?” she pleaded.

Knowing it was probably a mistake, but feeling sorry for Fran Tah, he said, “If you promise to keep quiet, you can come with me.”

She got up and ran as fast as she could to catch up with him.

When she got to him, Rai Puli looked up and down the path. He decided that maybe she had chosen the best direction after all, so he turned around and went toward the mountains.

Fran Tah smiled.

She kept her promise and was silent most of the rest of the day, even though she didn’t like it much.

The path was much easier to travel on since it was smooth. Most likely animals used the trail as they moved from one part of the valley to another. It had been used more than the path that brought them to this valley, so the trees and bushes weren’t in their faces all the time. Rai Puli didn’t have to cut the bushes with his knife. Mostly it weaved

its way through the tall grass of the grasslands. They could walk much faster than before.

From time to time, they spotted unusual animals, but as soon as the animals saw them, they would go off the path and hide. The sounds of the wildlife echoed around the valley. It was peaceful.

As the days went by, things returned to the way they had been before. Fran Tah began to talk too much again.

While walking, they hunted for food, as well as searched for any signs of the elephant.

One day, a herd of large antelopes came running down the path. They were running from something, and they were not going to stop.

Rai Puli pushed Fran Tah into the tall grass so she would not be trampled by them.

“What did you do that for? It hurt!” Fran Tah screamed at Rai Puli while lying on the ground looking up at him.

“Did you want to die?” he asked. “Those antelope weren’t going to stop.”

Sometimes the path was narrow and sometimes it was wide. Sometimes it was hilly and sometimes it was flat. Sometimes it was in a forest and sometimes it was in an open field. The path just went on and on toward the mountains.

It seemed like it had been an eternity, when they came across a small village of about six small huts. As soon as Rai Puli saw it, he felt like this place was very familiar, and then he recognized it. It was the village in his dream. He got very excited.

He had not told Fran Tah everything about his dream, so she didn’t know why he was so happy.

Eager to find the meaning of his dream, he ran as fast as he could, with Fran Tah trying to keep up, but she fell farther and farther behind.

“Wait for me!” she screamed, but Rai Puli did not stop.

Before he got to the village, the people ran out to meet him. They all had smiles on their faces. It was as if they knew he was coming, and that he was a long-lost friend they were going to welcome into their homes.

When he entered the village, one of the young children took Rai Puli's hand and took him to a small black hut, in the middle of the other huts.

When he entered, he saw the old man from his dream sitting at the table.

"Hello Rai Puli. Welcome to my home," the old man said in Rai Puli's language, as he pointed for Rai Puli to sit down.

"How do you know my name?" Rai Puli asked.

"That is not important right now. Sit down. What I have to tell you is going to help you on your journey. Listen carefully because I don't have much time," he told Rai Puli. "I know about the wish you made on the falling star, and I know you are seeking the Ebony Elephant. I can help you, but you must not forget what I tell you.

"I will share with you the greatest tale you will ever hear."

The old man told him the story of how he met the Ebony Elephant and how they had become friends. It was the same as in his dream.

"While I was with the Ebony Elephant, I drew a map of where I was. I want you to have it, but you have to promise me something," the old man said looking deep into his eyes.

"OK, I promise. What am I to do?" Rai Puli asked.

"I will help you find him, but I don't want you to hurt him. If you do as I say, you will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams. If you hurt him, you will surely die a painful death. Do you promise me?" he asked.

"Yes, I promise you." Rai Puli stated.

(This was the part of the dream where he always woke up.)

The old man informed him. "The Ebony Elephant is in great danger. If you don't save him, he is going to die. If you follow my instructions, you will find him. Then you must take him away so he will be safe.

"He is gentle and has always avoided human beings. He needs you. You are the only one who can save him."

Then he got up from the table, walked over to his bed to get his bag, and then

reached into it. He pulled out a rolled paper.

Returning to the table, he handed the paper to Rai Puli.

He opened the scroll and looked at it.

“That is the map I drew many years ago. I’m certain that if you go to this place you will meet the Ebony Elephant. When he is with you, he will be safe. If you treat him with respect, he will be your friend. If you treat him badly, he will run away. If that happens, he will surely die, and then you will have failed to help him.

“Before you leave, the people of the village will feed you and give you whatever you need to finish your journey. It will take you many months to get there, so make sure you have everything you need. There are no towns between here and there. You will not meet any people other than those who want to harm the Ebony Elephant. Therefore, you must be very cautious. They will try to fool you.”

He walked over to his bed again and took the cover off his bed and brought it to Rai Puli.

“Here is a blanket I have used for many years. The elephant will smell my scent and it will help to calm him down. Take it with you.

“Go now and may you have a safe journey. I will not be here when you get back. My time on this Earth is over,” the old man finished telling Rai Puli the message.

Rai Puli put the map into his pouch, rolled up the blanket, put it inside of his own, and then he said goodbye.

He left and joined Fran Tah who was waiting outside the hut. The people were very excited. They were trying to talk with Fran Tah, but she didn’t understand the language. She just sat on a log and smiled at them.

The people brought food, clothing, blankets, and weapons to them. The villagers gave them a hut to sleep in for the night, but Rai Puli chose to sleep outside. He had gotten used to sleeping under the stars.

When he woke up the next morning, the people of the town were crying. It took a while before Rai Puli came to understand why they were upset. He found out the old man

had died during the night. Rai Puli went to see him. He was lying on a wooden bed, his hands over his chest, small pieces of wood were over his eyes, and he had a yellow feather in his hands. Rai Puli stood with his head down as he gave his last respects to the old man. He had lived just long enough to give Rai Puli the instructions on how to save the Ebony Elephant.

Later in the morning, he began the next part of the trek. He said good-bye and left just after he had eaten breakfast.

As he was leaving the village, Fran Tah stepped out of the hut. She saw that Rai Puli was leaving.

“Where are we going?” was the first question out of Fran Tah’s mouth.

“What do you mean we? This is the last town until the place where the Ebony Elephant is living. You need to stay here. I must go on the journey alone,” Rai Puli said as he checked his supplies to make sure he had everything he needed for this quest.

“I’m not going to stay here. This place is too small and I don’t know the language. I’m coming with you whether you like it or not,” she replied.

Rai Puli left and Fran Tah followed.

Not long afterward, she asked again, “Where are we going?”

At first, he tried to ignore her. He walked as fast as he could, trying to put distance between them thinking that if she couldn’t keep up, she would return to the village, but she wasn’t going to let that happen.

Then one day she just stopped walking. Rai Puli didn’t notice and he continued on. Suddenly, he noticed how quiet it had gotten. He turned around and she wasn’t there. He thought about just leaving her, but then he became concerned. What if she had gotten hurt.

He looked around and did not see her.

“Fran Tah, where are you?” he yelled.

No response.

Rai Puli retraced his steps to see if he could find her. After walking quite some

ways, he pushed the branches of a tree out of the way, and saw Fran Tah standing, not moving.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m not going any further until you tell me where we are going. We have been walking for weeks and we haven’t seen a single person. I think we are lost, and I don’t like it. Tell me where we are going or I am going to stay right here,” she demanded.

Not really listening to what she was saying, he said, “I thought you were being threatened by a poisonous snake or something serious. I thought you were in danger.”

Rai Puli was relieved, but annoyed at her stubbornness.

“No, I’m just not moving until you tell me,” she replied.

“Suit yourself. I can just leave you here, if that is what you want. I’m getting tired of your games,” Rai Puli said as he turned to leave.

“Wait! You’re not just going to let me stay here alone, are you?” Fran Tah asked panicked.

“If that is what you want, who am I to stop you? You’ve done this before. I’m getting tired of it. I’m not going to fall for your tricks anymore,” Rai Puli shot back.

“Can you at least give me a hint?” she asked.

“You’ll know when we get there. You’ll just have to trust me,” he told her.

Rai Puli did not want to do anything to break his promise to the old man. He didn’t want to die a painful death. He believed the story the old man had told him. It was now his responsibility to save the Ebony Elephant, not to try to kill it for his own gain. If he told her where they were going, she could put them into danger. If someone asked her where they were going she might tell them, so he thought it was best not to let her know.

She gave up, not wanting to be left behind, and followed him. She kept asking the same question, so he finally responded.

Rai Puli turned around and faced her.

“You wouldn’t believe it if I told you,” Rai Puli answered.

“Try me, you might be surprised,” she gave her response.

“I’m going to find the Ebony Elephant and I’m going to save its life, OK?” Rai Puli said over his shoulder back at Fran Tah who was still following behind him.

“Save the Ebony Elephant? I thought you wanted to get one of its tusks to take it to the emperor for the reward,” she said, very puzzled and confused.

“You’ll see,” was all Rai Puli would say.

Rai Puli had memorized the map. He hadn’t shown it to anyone, including Fran Tah. It was hidden deep in his bag. Later he decided it was too dangerous to keep the map, so when Fran Tah wasn’t looking, he placed it under a rock.

For several weeks they walked, following the instructions on the map. Rai Puli knew where he was going. Fran Tah followed him, getting more confused every day. No matter how many times she asked where they were going, Rai Puli did not answer. All she knew was that they were looking for the Ebony Elephant.

One morning, just as they were waking up, Rai Puli noticed a group of men had surrounded them. He jumped up in surprise.

“Who are you and what do you want?” Rai Puli asked.

In a very strong accent, a man with a large tattoo on his right arm, yelled at him, “Sit down young man. We have much to discuss with you. We’ll be the ones asking the questions, not you!”

The men were big, and didn’t look very friendly. Each one of them had a large knife strapped across their shoulders. They all had tattoos on various parts of their bodies.

One of the men was baldheaded with the tattoo of a snake winding around his neck and with its head on the man’s forehead. Another had an orange tiger on his chest, while still another had letters in a different language running down his arm. All of them looked like they were ready for a fight, which Rai Puli was not willing to give them. He sat down and did as he was told.

“Why are you here? What are you looking for?” the first man asked Rai Puli, looking him straight into the eye.

“What do you mean?” Rai Puli responded.

“I’m not going to ask you again. What are you doing here?!” he demanded.

Rai Puli looked at the strangers and said, “We are looking for the Ebony Elephant. We want the reward the emperor is giving. Have you seen him?” Rai Puli asked.

The men laughed.

“Don’t be stupid. If we had seen the Ebony Elephant, we wouldn’t be here asking you questions. We would be with the emperor collecting the reward ourselves,” the first man said in a serious tone. “Tell us, why are you here? Do you have some special information? Has someone told you where to look?”

“No. All of my life I have listened to the stories from people who returned to my village from searching for the Ebony Elephant and they told me about this place. Do you think this is a good place to find it?” Rai Puli asked another question, which made the men laugh again.

“You’re such a funny fellow. Give me your bag. I want to see what you have in there,” the first man said, as he grabbed the bag from Rai Puli’s hands.

He searched but found nothing. Then he threw it onto the ground. He looked over at Fran Tah and asked to see her bag. She handed it to him and after scrounging around inside, he threw it onto the ground as well.

Rai Puli was glad that he had left the paper under a rock after memorizing the map. If they had found it, they would have found the Ebony Elephant and it would have been his fault. Only fate would tell him if he would die because of a mistake like that. It was better to be safe than sorry.

They were speaking in a language that Rai Puli did not know. He was curious as to how the man with the tattoo on his arm knew his language, but he did not ask.

Before they left, the big man with the snake on his head, slapped Rai Puli hard enough to send him flying to the ground. He lay there looking up at the man, holding his jaw trying to be brave.

“Don’t let us find you again. If we do, we will kill you,” the man spoke loudly in Rai Puli’s face to let him know that he was serious.

The men searched the rest of the camp, and when they found nothing, they left.

After they were gone, Fran Tah was panicked. She ran to Rai Puli and hugged him.

“I was so scared. I’m glad we didn’t have what they wanted. I was afraid they were going to kill us,” Fran Tah spoke while crying from fear.

“I have a plan that might slow them down a bit. I don’t want them to come after us again before we have a chance to put some distance between us,” Rai Puli said as he pushed Fran Tah away.

She almost fell backward onto the ground.

“What did you do that for?” she asked.

“Huh, what do you mean?” he responded.

“Why did you push me so hard?” she inquired.

“Sorry, I was just thinking about how to get away from those guys. I’m afraid the next time we see them it won’t end up so well,” he answered.

He was a bit distracted while he collected the things the men had thrown on the ground.

She looked at his face to make sure he was not hurt badly. When she did, he pulled back.

“I’m fine. You don’t need to mother me,” Rai Puli muttered.

Fran Tah helped to pick up the scattered items, wondering what Rai Puli was thinking and what would come next.

When everything was back in their bags, Rai Puli told her about his plan.

“I’m going to walk into the forest for about half a day, and then I am going to walk backward to return. They will be two sets of footprints going away from the camp. In the meantime, you need to hide from them. You must be very quiet in case they return.

“I’ll be back before it’s dark. Then tomorrow we’ll do the next part of the plan together,” Rai Puli informed her.

“You’re going to leave me here alone?” she panicked.

“It’ll be okay. You’ll be fine so long as you are quiet,” Rai Puli tried to settle her

down.

Then he picked up his things and headed toward the valley below.

Fran Tah was afraid. Every noise she heard made her heart jump. She didn't like being alone. She stayed very quiet sitting behind a large log on the ground. Every occasionally, she looked over the log to see if Rai Puli had returned.

## Chapter 3

It was almost dark when he returned. Just as he had told her what was going to do, he was walking backward, which made the trip back to where Fran Tah was waiting more difficult, but that was his plan.

When he arrived, he softly called out to Fran Tah.

“Fran Tah, are you there?” he whispered.

She stood up from behind the log. She was never so happy to see anyone.

Rai Puli walked backward toward the log and then told Fran Tah to get onto his back.

“I’m going to carry you for a while to fool the men who were here so they cannot find us,” he explained to why he was going to carry her.

She did as he asked and then he walked backward in the opposite direction. When he was able, he would walk on rocks or logs lying on the ground so the trail would be more difficult to follow. When they got to a creek, he turned around and went into the water walking up stream, trying not to disturb the mud too much.

They stopped occasionally so Rai Puli could rest because it was not easy carrying Fran Tah for so long.

It was completely dark when he stopped and set Fran Tah onto the ground. She stepped onto a big rock on the edge of the creek. Rai Puli sat down completely exhausted.

“We’ll stay here until it gets light in the morning. We shouldn’t make a fire because it will attract too much attention. If you look in my bag I think there is a little dried beef left in there you can eat while I try to catch a fish,” Rai Puli instructed her.

Rai Puli couldn’t see well enough in the dark to catch any fish, so he just went hungry.

When he sat down on the large rock next to Fran Tah, she asked him again, “Where are we going? Why won’t you tell me what we are doing?”

“If I tell you, those men will try to get you to tell them. If you know anything about where we are going, they will know it. You don’t need to know for now because it is for the best. You’ll know soon enough,” he answered honestly.

Fran Tah didn’t like the answer, but she understood why he was keeping silent.

In the morning, as the sun began to rise, Rai Puli had Fran Tah ride on his back again.

He explained, “If they only see one set of tracks they won’t know it is us. It will give us more time to get far away from them. They’ll think that it is only one person walking making this trail.”

Rai Puli realized that in the darkness, the evening before, he had gone the wrong direction. They had gone in a circle. Once he realized the mistake, decided to walk normally. They didn’t need to go backward like before. He began to move more quickly, even though he had Fran Tah on his back.

“How long am I going to have to stay here on your back?” she kept asking.

Rai Puli just ignored her, which made her even more irritated at him.

After a half day of traveling, Rai Puli stopped and set Fran Tah down. At first, it was hard for her to walk. Her legs felt funny. For almost two days she had been on his back.

She looked around and found some blackberries for them to eat. When she looked through the brush, and on the other side she saw a majestic mountain.

“Rai Puli, come here. Look at this. Isn’t it beautiful?” she commented.

He walked over to where she was standing and moved the branches to see the view. It was beautiful.

The look on Rai Puli’s face told Fran Tah something was making him happy.

“Is that where we are going?” she asked, while admiring the view.

“Yes, that’s the direction we need to go. I’m not sure how much farther,” he said, adding, “We still need to be very careful. Those men we ran into back there are not the only hunters out here. We are bound to meet more of them. We are going to have to be

very careful to hide our tracks and travel quietly. From now on, we are only going to walk at night. The grasslands are a difficult place to hide, so if we can find streams or existing paths to take us where we are going, it will be best. Going through the tall grass will give our location away very quickly. Those other hunters are looking for any clues they can get. If they think we know anything they'll do their very best to get us to tell them what we know."

"Do you know where the Ebony Elephant lives?" Fran Tah asked, realizing for the first time that he knew exactly where he was going.

"Let's just say I know of a place that might help us find it. I'll tell you more later, when you need to know," Rai Puli said, staring out across the grasslands thinking in his mind which way would be the best to get to the forest on the other side without being seen.

They sat down under a berry bush to get out of the sun and to rest until it was dark. Rai Puli fell asleep.

When he woke up, he didn't see Fran Tah. He looked around, but she was gone.

He began to panic.

He spoke in a loud whisper, "Fran Tah, where are you?"

There was no answer. He was getting worried. What if the men had found her and had taken her away? He remembered that he had told her he knew where they were going. She knew too much. If they had her, they would know to follow him. Then the Ebony Elephant would be in great danger, and then he would die a terrible death.

He whispered again, "Fran Tah, are you there?"

Still no answer.

It was almost dark, so Rai Puli had to decide. Should he look for Fran Tah, or should he go alone to save the Ebony Elephant.

He looked at the ground to see if there were extra footprints close to where he was sleeping, wondering if someone may have taken her, but he didn't see anything other than his prints and Fran Tah's. Her trail led away from where they had slept in the opposite

direction from where they had come.

“Had she wandered away on her own?” he thought to himself.

He made the decision to look for her, even if it meant that he delayed his trip. He followed her trail. She had not been very careful. Her tracks were easy to find. For some reason, she had gone the opposite way, not toward the grasslands but toward the river.

Suddenly the trail ended. He looked around to see if there was any sign of her, but it was as if she had just vanished. Then he heard a noise above him. He looked up and hanging from a vine in the tree was Fran Tah. She had been caught in a trap.

Rai Puli looked for a way to get her down from the tree. She was hanging upside down with the vine around her ankles. She was sobbing, but she wasn't making loud noises that would give them away.

Fran Tah saw Rai Puli and said with pain in her eyes, “Can you please get me down from here?”

“Let me see if I can find a way to release you from the trap,” Rai Puli said as he looked around the tree that was holding her up. Finally, he found the rope the trapper used to lower his prey and then lowered her slowly to the ground.

When she was on the ground, Rai Puli cut the ropes around her legs to let her loose.

Rai Puli was very angry.

“Why did you wander off like that?” he asked sternly.

Rubbing her sore ankles and trying not to cry, Fran Tah answered, “I couldn't sleep. I was looking for food. Then I had an idea to make a trail like yours, you know, a one-way trail, but then I stepped into the trap. I've been hanging there for a long time. If you hadn't come, I'm sure I would be dead by morning.

“While I was walking here, I did get a lot of berries and other fruit. The food is in my bag over there,” she pointed to where her pouch, which had fallen on the ground. “We've got food for a few days.”

Fran Tah tried to stand up, but her legs hurt so badly she fell back to the ground.

Rai Puli lifted her onto his back and then walked backward to the berry bush. By the time he got there, it was too late to leave, so they would have to spend another day waiting.

It gave Fran Tah a chance to put some leaves on her ankles to make them feel better.

Rai Puli stayed alert. They had been in this place too long and the trails they had made when he went looking for her were now a clue as to where they were hiding. It was making Rai Puli very nervous. He had a tough time waiting for darkness.

He was still angry with Fran Tah for walking away, so there was no conversation. She kept asking questions, and he kept ignoring her.

Unknown to Fran Tah, it was going to take many more days before they reached the place the old man had marked on his map.

The rainy season was beginning. It rained almost every day. It made the walk more difficult and slowed them down, but the rain had one good result. The rain drops made it more difficult for anyone to follow them. It helped to cover their tracks.

Slowly they moved forward. Because of the rain, they could travel during the day, while at night, they tried to stay as dry as possible. Being wet all the time made Fran Tah even harder to get along with. She was always complaining about how she wished she had never come on the journey. Rai Puli always tried to ignore her, but it was not easy.

Sometimes the sun would come out and then they could dry their clothes and blankets.

They were no longer on the path. The map's directions took them a different way. Every so often, they found a place where someone had spent the night. He found the ashes of an old fire or a tree that had been cut down to provide shelter. It made him nervous that people were so close to where they were going.

There were other clues he found that proved he was going the right direction.

The jungle was getting thicker and it was harder to walk. They came upon a very tall cliff. They looked up to the top. It would take a long time to climb it.

"How are we going to climb this cliff? I don't think I can do it," Fran Tah looked

up at the wall in front of her.

“We don’t need to. I know a way through the wall. Once on the other side we will find what we are looking for,” Rai Puli stated with growing excitement in his voice.

He slowly moved to his right looking carefully at the stones.

“What are you looking for?” Fran Tah asked.

“There will be a small carving of an elephant on one of these stones. It will be our clue,” he informed her.

They looked at each stone on the face of the wall. After a long time, Fran Tah got excited, “I think I found it!”

Rai Puli rushed over to where she was searching and moved a vine out of the way. There on the rock was the symbol he had been looking for. He took the rock out of the wall and set it onto the ground. Then he reached inside of the small hole and began to pull more rocks out of the wall. Fran Tah just watched as he dug deeper.

The hole became big enough that Rai Puli soon disappeared inside. Fran Tah followed him.

It wasn’t very long before they were on the other side. Rai Puli crawled back through the opening and spread the rocks he had taken out of the wall across the ground so it would be difficult for anyone following them to find where they had gone. Then he put branches in front of it to hide it as he backed into the hole.

When he came out on the other side, Rai Puli began to get excited.

For two weeks, they moved slowly through the forest, while Rai Puli carefully inspected all the trees.

“What are you looking for?” Fran Tah asked, also looking up at the trees.

“I’ll let you know when I find it,” Rai Puli responded, distracted by his search.

They came to a large field in the forest. He stopped and looked closely at the trees surrounding it, and then he found the thing he remembered that was on the map.

He yelled out, “We’ve found the spot! This is what I’ve been looking for!”

For Fran Tah, she looked at where he was pointing, but it just looked like the rest

of the forest. Nothing was different.

“How do you know?” she said, looking around. “This place is no different than what we have been seeing for the past two weeks.”

Rai Puli pointed to a large tree. On one of the branches, she saw the same symbol that was on the rock. It looked like a very old carving of an elephant.

“That’s what I’ve been looking for,” Rai Puli said very excitedly.

“What do we do now?” Fan Tah asked, while looking around where they had stopped. “Are we going to make a camp here?”

“We need to go a little farther. There is a small pond about a kilometer from here. The old man told me he had built a small hut covered by bushes. When we find it, we can stay there until the Ebony Elephant comes to drink from the pond.

For several hours, they searched for the shelter. It was not easy to find. That meant that if others had looked for it, they would have probably given up.

“I think I found it!” yelled Fran Tah. “Come here and look.”

Rai Puli peered into a thorn bush and saw the hiding place. Had they not known to look for it, they never would have found it. The place was perfect for hiding them from anyone who might be looking for them.

“We need to find another way to the shelter. If we use the same path every time we come back here, soon it will be obvious to other people where it is,” Rai Puli directed where they should walk.

He found a long branch that had fallen on the ground and placed it between two trees. He dragged it on the dirt to cover their footprints in the soft dirt. Then he tied some branches together so they could climb the trees and not touch the ground. That way they would not leave any trace that they had gone that way.

“If we use this to get to the hiding place, it will be harder for anyone to find us. They won’t see anything on the ground to let them know where we went.” Rai Puli showed Fran Tah how to move hand over hand on the branches to the other side, so their feet would not touch the ground.

For many days, they stayed in the shelter looking for the Ebony Elephant.

One day, a group of men walked right past them and never knew they were there. The hiding place was doing its job. Nonetheless, it made Rai Puli nervous that other hunters were so close. He was hoping the elephant was smart and knew how to avoid the people who were trying to kill him.

During the evening, Rai Puli would leave the shelter and look for signs of the elephant. He found nothing, not even a footprint. He began to wonder if the old man was wrong and that the elephant would never come to this place again. It had been so many years since he had been in this place.

The area had many berries and other food for them to eat, so they were not going to be hungry; that was the good part. The bad part was the boredom that was setting in. There was nothing to do and Rai Puli had to listen to Fran Tah as she talked about nothing. Even though it was in a whisper, it was still annoying. He looked forward to his daily time away from her as he tried to find the Ebony Elephant.

The rainy season was ending, so the ground was getting firmer and the grass was turning brown. It was a little cooler, especially at night, and the crickets would sing their songs until the morning sun came up.

Only the season was changing, and nothing else, until there was the noise of something moving through the bushes. It woke Rai Puli from a deep sleep. Something was coming, and he needed to see what it was.

He moved as far as he could out of the shelter, but still in the cover of the thorn bush in front. He could hear something, but he still couldn't see it.

Fran Tah woke up and saw Rai Puli. She followed behind him and looked out at what might be making the noise as well. Then it came again. Rai Puli put his fingers to his lips to tell Fran Tah to stay quiet.

Just then, something came out of the bushes in front of them. It was a wild pig. It was looking for food.

Boars are dangerous. They are not afraid of humans and will attack if they are

hungry. Rai Puli slid back into the hut and got his bow and arrow. When he returned, he saw the pig standing in front of them eating some grass. He pulled back on the string of his bow and sent the arrow into the pig. At first, the pig jumped into the air squealing in pain. Then it fell on its back, lifeless. Now they would have fresh meat for the first time in months.

They left the protection of their home to cut the meat off the bones. It was a messy job, but they knew what they were doing. After getting the meat, they needed, Rai Puli dug a deep hole and threw the carcass of the boar into it. Then he covered the hole with dirt, burying the remains.

Since they had blood on their hands, they went to the edge of the pond to wash up.

It was then that Rai Puli looked up and looking back at him was the gigantic form of an elephant, not just any elephant, but the Ebony Elephant! They just stared at each other.

Noticing that Rai Puli had stopped washing his hands and had stopped talking, Fran Tah also looked up and saw the elephant on the other side of the pond. She was so startled she began to speak, but Rai Puli quickly put his hand over her mouth so she would not scare the elephant away.

Rai Puli whispered to her, “Go get the blanket the old man gave me and bring it here. Go quietly, and hurry.”

Fran Tah moved slowly away from the pond and did what Rai Puli had asked her to do.

Rai Puli did not move. He was surprised at how much smaller the elephant was compared to the many stories he had heard. It was big, it just wasn't enormous.

He just stared at the elephant and it stared back at him, neither of them moved an inch.

It wasn't too long before Fran Tah returned. The elephant and Rai Puli were still looking at each other. Fran Tah gave him the blanket. He stood up and showed it to the elephant. It did not move. It watched as Rai Puli walked slowly around the pond toward

it, step by step.

When Rai Puli was in front of the Ebony Elephant, he placed the blanket on the ground and stepped back. Curious, the elephant stretched out its large trunk and smelled the blanket. When it did, it raised its trunk into the air and then started to dance. It looked so funny that Rai Puli began to laugh.

To his surprise, the elephant walked up to Rai Puli, put its trunk around his waist, and lifted him off the ground. It was like a giant hug.

After it put Rai Puli back on the ground, it took a drink of water. Then it turned, faced Rai Puli, and showered him with water, just like the old man had said had happened to him. Rai Puli laughed.

Fran Tah joined him. At first, the elephant moved back in fear, but when Rai Puli took her hand, the elephant calmed down. It then sprayed water on her as well.

Just as quickly as the elephant had arrived, it left.

Even the elephant was not as big as the legends had said, but it was still impressive. He knew it was what he had been looking for.

Rai Puli knew he had to be patient. The elephant would return, but it would be just a matter of time.

## Chapter 4

In the morning, Rai Puli searched to find out what direction the elephant might have gone, but to his surprise, the elephant hadn't left any footprints. There was no sign that the elephant had ever been there. He was like a ghost. This was a mystery, but it may have explained why the elephant had never been caught.

Three days later, in the evening, the elephant returned, but this time it was limping. There was something wrong with it. It stopped when it reached the pond and then let out a loud screech.

Rai Puli raced over to see what was wrong, and when he saw the elephant, he discovered an arrow had found its way into his front right foot. It had gone deep into the soft skin just below the thick flesh that covered the rest of his body.

As Rai Puli looked at it, the elephant lifted its foot, trying not to put any weight on it. He was in tremendous pain.

"It's going to be okay, big guy. We're going to fix you up. Hold on. We need to get the thing out of your foot," Rai Puli spoke softly to the Ebony Elephant as he stroked his trunk gently.

He called over to Fran Tah, "I need your help over here. The elephant has been hurt. Bring your bag and your medicine."

First, she cleaned the wound and then he used his knife to remove the tip of the arrow. The Ebony Elephant didn't like what he was doing, and as the arrow came out, the elephant cried out in pain.

Once the arrow was removed, Fran Tah gently put some medicine she had taken out of her bag and put it over where the arrow had been. The medicine helped to make the injury less painful.

Then, to their surprise, the elephant wrapped its trunk around them in gratitude.

For the moment, they enjoyed the elephant's response, but then Rai Puli realized that it would not be long before the hunters would track the elephant to the pond because it had left a trail of blood everywhere it had walked. He knew it was necessary for them to leave, and they didn't have much time.

Rai Puli prepared their things for the journey. He wasn't sure where they would go, but he knew they had to leave. Taking the Ebony Elephant back the way they had journeyed was not only dangerous but also impossible. They would have to find another way around the steep cliff. They needed to leave the grasslands and go away from all the hunters. Once word that the elephant was injured traveled around the region, surely others would come looking for it. He needed a plan.

An idea came to him. He dug up the wild pig and placed it by the pond, spreading some of its blood around to throw off the trail to the injured elephant.

It was late in the day, so Rai Puli decided to leave early the next morning. This would give them a chance to rest and for the elephant to recover from his injured foot, but they would have to stay alert just in case hunters came.

He led the Ebony Elephant behind the thorny bush where they had been staying. It would spend the night there and rest. The elephant lowered itself to its knees and then onto the ground, so it was more difficult to see.

During the night, Rai Puli had another dream. This time the dream was very clear.

In his dream:

*In front of him, he sees the black hut he went into before. He walks into the hut and the old man is lying on the table. He looks the same as when Rai Puli left the hut before, he is dead.*

*Suddenly the old man begins to speak. It frightens him, but he stays to listen.*

*"I see you have found the Ebony Elephant. I am proud of you. Now you must take him away from there. You must keep him safe.*

*"On the trunk of the tree with the carving of the elephant is a map. I placed it there many years ago. It will show you the way back to this village. It is the safest way to go.*

*“I will not be here when you return, so be very careful.*

*“The people who live here will help you. They can be trusted, but those who are following behind you are not. They will try to fool you and then they will take the elephant for their own.*

*“When you arrive, the people of my village will tell you what to do next. A young girl will give you the instructions. Follow them closely or you will certainly fail, and then you will die a miserable death!*

*“I wish you well my young friend. May you and the elephant live long lives.*

The dream was over, and Rai Puli woke up. He scrambled for the entrance to the shelter and quickly pushed aside the thorn bush as he went to find the tree with the map.

He knew right where to look. On the upper branches of the tree was the same carving of the elephant that had helped him find the tunnel through the cliff.

Tall grass surrounded the tree, which Rai Puli had to push out of the way. Then he saw it, a map carved into the bark of the tree. It was very old, but the details were still clear. The old man had made a plan to take the Ebony Elephant away, but he was never able to do it.

Fran Tah emerged from the shelter just as Rai Puli returned. She was still half-asleep and wondered where he had gone.

“What were you looking for?” she asked as she stretched her arms into the air.

“I had a dream about a map that will get us home. I found the map and memorized the directions. Then I scratched the map off the tree for fear that if someone else finds it, they will come after us,” he informed her.

“Now we must go!” Rai Puli ordered Fran Tah. “Pack as much as you can so we can be on our way.”

She didn't like to be told what to do, but she understood this time. She quickly packed their supplies and prepared for the journey. She had no idea where they were going, but she trusted Rai Puli. He already had gotten them this far safely.

Rai Puli tore down the shelter and did his best to make the place where they had

been staying look as much like the rest of the jungle as possible, to hide that fact that they had been there.

When they were ready to go, Fran Tah asked Rai Puli, “Where are we going? Are you sure you that you remember the map?”

“Of course. I got us here, didn’t I?” Rai Puli answered. “If everything goes well we’ll get home, but it will take a long time. We’re going to have to go another way. The elephant is too big to take the path we used to get here. If we are lucky, we should be able to save the Ebony Elephant, but we must hurry,” Rai Puli shared with her. “I’m sure there are hunters out there who have found his trail and will be here soon.”

This surprised Fran Tah because he had just told her more than he had told her the whole time they were walking to find the elephant in the first place.

As Rai Puli and Fran Tah left, the elephant followed close behind. Somehow it knew that this was the best thing for it to do. They didn’t need a rope to lead him, he just followed them.

The direction they traveled was along the foot of the mountains. It would take them far from the places they had traveled before. The trees were thick and the branches above gave protection from the sun. It was cooler than when they were in the grasslands, but the ground was more difficult because it was so hard.

The sound of animals in the forest rang out and echoed through the thick branches. This was a good sign. It meant they were alone.

Most of the day, Fran Tah rode on top of the elephant, which made traveling much faster, and they could go farther each day.

A few weeks after beginning the journey, they came upon a very high steep rock that jutted in front of them. The elephant suddenly stopped. At first Rai Puli didn’t notice, but when he heard a strange noise above him he realized why. On top of the large rock was a big white cat. Its teeth were as big as a man’s arm and it was crouched ready to pounce. Rai Puli was about to be its dinner.

Fran Tah screamed and the elephant screeched, but the big cat didn’t care. Rai Puli

froze. He didn't know what to do. He stared up at the beast and waited for it to jump. He thought about the knife in his belt, so he slowly pulled it out and pointed it at the cat. Then he bent his knees lowering himself to the ground. Now he would be a smaller target.

For several minutes, the cat and Rai Puli stared at each other, neither one of them moved. Then suddenly the cat jumped, and just before it reached Rai Puli, it gave out a loud scream. The elephant had skewered the cat with its tusk. It looked like a giant kabob.

Now the cat was going to be Rai Puli's dinner instead of the other way around.

The days passed slowly as they traveled toward their final destination.

One day, the sound of screaming came from the forest in front of them. Rai Puli told Fran Tah to stay with the elephant while he investigated the sound.

"What is that?" Fran Tah asked.

"I think it's a man, and I think he might be hurt," Rai Puli answered. "Take the elephant and hide. This might be a trick and I don't want to put him in danger."

Rai Puli was cautious as he moved forward toward the screams. He moved from bush to bush as quiet as a tiger approaching its prey.

He got close enough to the sound to see a man in a trap. His leg was caught in a wooden snare used by hunters to catch large animals. Probably it was put there to catch the elephant. The man was in so much pain he was unable to open the trap himself.

Rai Puli looked around for anyone who might be watching. He approached the man slowly and with great caution, not wanting to be caught in a trap himself.

When the man saw him, he shouted, "Help me! Get me out of this thing!"

To Rai Puli's surprise, he spoke his language.

Rai Puli put his hand to his lips telling the man to be quiet. Once the man stopped yelling, Rai Puli inspected the trap to see if there was a way to open it. He pulled as hard as he could on each side of the claws that were holding the man captive, which opened the trap just enough for the man to get his foot out. His ankle was red and bleeding, but it

wasn't broken.

The man looked up at Rai Puli.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Rai Puli. I heard you screaming, so I came to help," he answered.

"What are you doing here, and how did you get caught in this trap?"

"I was looking for something to eat when I stepped into this trap. I have been caught here for two days. I thought I was going to die here. Thank you for saving me," the man told his story while rubbing his ankle.

"What is your name?" Rai Puli inquired.

"I'm called Dra Gu," he answered. "How is it that you speak my language?"

Rai Puli answered, "We must be from the same district. My village is on the river close to the great oak tree."

"I don't know your village. Mine is in the valley on the highway to the emperor's palace. My village is a popular place for people to stay over in the night while traveling to the palace. We have heard many stories about what is happening here in the grasslands, so I decided to find out for myself. It has been a miserable trip and now this. I'm ready to go home. Finding the Ebony Elephant is not worth losing my life," he told Rai Puli about himself.

Rai Puli carried him to where Fran Tah was waiting.

As they approached Fran Tah, Dra Gu noticed the large black elephant.

"Is that the Ebony Elephant?" the man asked in surprise when he saw it standing next to Fran Tah.

"Never mind that, let's get your leg fixed up," Rai Puli responded.

Then he turned toward Fran Tah, and said, "Fran Tah, this Dra Gu. He is from our district and speaks our language. He's hurt badly, so please take care of him while I hide the elephant. Tomorrow is going to be a long day."

Then he went to make sure the elephant was hidden well enough for the night.

Meanwhile, Fran Tah took out some of the salve she had in her pouch and gently

applied it to his ankle, helping to reduce the swelling.

“Did he say your name is Fran Tah?” he asked.

“Yes, that’s my name,” she responded.

“I know who you are,” Dra Gu said very surprised. “I heard that you left your family to marry a man in another village. Your parents weren’t happy about that. So, how did you get here?” he asked.

“It is a long story, and I don’t have enough time to tell you right now,” she said softly so Rai Puli would not hear her.”

“Please keep quiet that you know me. Rai Puli only knows a small part of my story and I want to keep it that way, okay?” she begged him.

“He doesn’t know your story?” he asked.

“He only knows a little. If he hears the rest, he won’t understand,” Fran Tah explained.

“So, what is your name again?” she asked.

“I’m Dra Gu, son of Gaw Bier. We are from the village on the road to the emperor’s palace. I think you may know my family,” he replied.

“Do you have a relative named Ma Lar?” Fran Tah asked.

“Yes, she is my cousin on my mother’s side,” Dra Gu answered.

“We went to school together, but I don’t think she ever mentioned anything about you,” Fran Tah told him.

Dra Gu told her about his family, “We don’t see each other very much. My mother and her mother got into a fight many years ago. Our families only get together for special events with our grandparents, even then we don’t talk to her family.”

Dra Gu promised, “I’ll keep your secret, but I hope you tell him some day. He should know.”

He watched as Fran Tah put the salve on his ankle and then put a cloth on it to make it feel better.

“Thank you for helping me. I really thought I was going to die out there. I was in

that trap for two days,” he spoke up.

Looking around, he asked, “Do you have anything to eat?”

Fran Tah took some berries out of her pouch and gave them to him. He ate them so fast he didn’t even have a chance to chew. She gave him some more and he did the same. Then she gave him some water to drink. He was so thirsty he drank almost all the water in the water skin.

She shared some of the dried meat and roots she had in her pouch until he had had enough.

When he was finished eating, he thanked her, and then rolled over and fell asleep.

Rai Puli returned from making sure the elephant was safe and sat down next to Fran Tah. He had a worried look on his face.

Rai Puli whispered over to Fran Tah, “What should we do with the stranger? He could be a danger to us and the elephant.”

“Let’s wait until he wakes up. We can ask him questions then. He might be willing to help us since we helped him,” Fran Tah recommended.

Rai Puli was not so sure about what she had said.

It was evening, so Rai Puli and Fran Tah also went to sleep.

When Rai Puli woke up in the morning, the man was gone, and so was the elephant. He jumped up and yelled at Fran Tah to wake up.

“Fran Tah! The man has taken the elephant!” Rai Puli yelled out.

When she looked around she saw Dra Gu was gone, and so was the Ebony Elephant.

“Where did they go?!” she screamed.

Rai Puli walked around the place where they had slept. He noticed footprints going back the way they had come. He knew the man’s leg was injured so he wouldn’t be able to walk very fast.

“What should we do?” Fran Tah asked.

“We’ll follow them, and when we find them, I will kill him!” Rai Puli said

expressing his anger. “To think we trusted him. I’ll never do that again!”

Rai Puli and Fran Tah packed their things and followed the trail. It was not hard to follow. Dra Gu didn’t know how to hide his trail the way Rai Puli did.

“I’m so mad. I could just kick myself over this. How did I let him take the elephant like that? Now I’m going to die for sure,” Rai Puli yelled up into the trees.

“What do you mean you’re going to die?” Fran Tah asked, very curious at what he had just said.

“It’s like this. If I don’t save the Ebony Elephant my fate is sealed. I will die a horrible death. That is what the old man told me,” Rai Puli shared something with Fran Tah he had never told her before.

“I guess we need to find the elephant then, don’t we?” Fran Tah concluded logically, trying to encourage Rai Puli.

The elephant and Dra Gu were going a completely different direction. It was leading down through the forest, toward the place where Dra Gu had been trapped.

“Be careful. There might be more traps in there,” Rai Puli warned. “This is the stupidest thing he could do. Leading the elephant into the woods where there are so many dangers.”

The deeper they got into the woods the easier it was to follow Dra Gu and the elephant. Big trees were knocked over on the right and on the left. The elephant was making a trail on its own. Soon Dra Gu’s prints disappeared, but the path the elephant was taking was easy to see.

“If anyone is following us, he has made it a lot easier for them to find him,” Fran Tah observed showing concern, while following close behind Rai Puli.

It was about two hours later when Rai Puli stopped and told Fran Tah to be quiet.

“Shh, I think I hear something,” Rai Puli whispered to Fran Tah.

Not too far in front of them, he heard the sound again. It was the sound of trees breaking.

“It must be the Ebony Elephant!” Fran Tah said louder than Rai Puli wanted her to.

“Shh, we don’t want him to hear us. We need to sneak up on them quietly,” he whispered back at her again.

They followed behind as the elephant moved forward. Rai Puli wanted to know where Dra Gu was headed and what his plan might be.

It didn’t take long for them to catch up. Dra Gu was on the elephant’s back and they were going slowly. They had changed directions and were now going toward the river. Smooth stones covered the riverbank, and as the elephant walked on them, they made a crashing noise. It was not easy for him to walk on the rocks.

Rai Puli and Fran Tah hid behind the bushes that lined the edge of the river. Dra Gu and the elephant kept moving forward down the river.

Finally, Rai Puli got so upset he could wait no more. He jumped out of the brush and stood in front of the Ebony Elephant.

“What are you doing with my elephant?!” Rai Puli yelled up at Dra Gu.

The elephant came to a sudden stop, which almost made Dra Gu fall off. He was surprised to see Rai Puli.

There was no answer. Dra Gu just sat atop the elephant silently.

“Get down from there. You have a lot of explaining to do!” Rai Puli showed his anger.

Rai Puli directed the elephant to go down to his knees and then onto its stomach. Dra Gu slowly dismounted the elephant, and when he got to the ground he knew he was caught, since his leg hurt too much to try to run away.

Rai Puli got right up into his face and started to yell at him.

“Do you realize that you have put the elephant into grave danger?” Rai Puli asked. “The trail you left will be easy for anyone to follow. It won’t be long before they discover the elephant’s tracks and find us. How could you be so stupid?”

## Chapter 5

Dra Gu did not answer. He just stood silently until Rai Puli took out his knife and threatened him.

“I should kill you right now!” Rai Puli screamed.

“If you do that you’ll never get to where you need to go,” Dra Gu said calmly, surprising Rai Puli.

“Why do you say that?” he asked.

“Because I know the best way to get home,” was the answer.

“I don’t believe you. I know exactly what we must do to keep the elephant safe. There is nothing you can do to help. I suggest you go back the way we came, and find your own way home,” Rai Puli said, as he pointed toward the forest where they had just come.

“I’m not going anywhere. If I leave, you will fail, and the hunters who are following you will find you and kill you and the elephant. You need me,” Dra Gu said confidently.

Rai Puli paused for a minute to try to understand what was being said to him.

“So, where were you and the elephant going?” he asked.

“I’m not really sure. I was curious about the Ebony Elephant, and when I went to check on him this morning, he turned and walked away. I followed him for a while, but it wasn’t too long before my ankle hurt too much. Then to my surprise, he picked me up with his trunk and lifted me onto his back. After that, I was just along for the ride. The elephant knew where he was going the whole time. For some reason, he wanted me to go with him.

“We went a lot slower than I thought he would go. I think he wanted you to catch up. I think the elephant is smarter than us. After all he has survived out here for a long time and has never been captured,” Dra Gu finished.

“Okay, tell me. Why should we take you with us?” Rai Puli asked.

“Cuz the elephant likes me,” Dra Gu said with a smile. “And because he won’t go anywhere without me.”

“How do you know that?” Rai Puli was puzzled.

“I just know,” was all Dra Gu would answer. “If you don’t believe me, try and leave me here. He won’t budge. Go ahead, try it.”

Rai Puli did not believe him.

He called over to Fran Tah, “We need to leave now. We have to get back to the forest and stay on the path we were on before. Bring the elephant with you.”

Fran Tah pulled and pulled on the elephant’s trunk, but he did not move.

“He won’t come with me!” Fran Tah yelled as she continued to pull on the elephant’s long nose.

“Just follow me, he’ll come,” Rai Puli told Fran Tah.

She dropped the elephant’s trunk and ran over to Rai Puli. Still the animal didn’t move. He was like a statue.

“See, I told you,” Dra Gu laughed.

“So, what are we supposed to do now?” Rai Puli shot back.

“We need to follow. He will show us where to go,” Dra Gu said.

The three travelers walked over to the elephant. As soon as they were beside it, it began to walk, only in the opposite direction Rai Puli wanted.

“I thought you said you knew how to get home?” Rai Puli was curious.

“Actually, it’s the elephant who knows where he’s going. He just won’t go without me,” he responded with a chuckle.

The elephant headed for the stream and walked into it. Then he dropped his trunk into the river sucking up water. He was very thirsty.

At the same time, Rai Puli and Fran Tah filled the water skins with cool fresh water, while Dra Gu managed to catch a large fish with a long pointed stick.

The elephant sprayed water on its back and on its face. When he shook the water

out of his long hair, water spray went everywhere, including getting all of them soaked. It made them laugh. They understood why the elephant had gone to the river. It needed to drink and to wash itself.

The elephant walked out into the middle of the river and rolled over in the water, spraying water in every direction.

While he was doing this, the others decided to bathe themselves. Unseen by them, some men came out of the bushes along the river.

Fran Tah stopped what she was doing when she saw them.

“Look over there!” Fran Tah yelled out.

By the time they saw the hunters, it was too late. They were the same four men who had confronted Rai Puli and Fran Tah earlier.

There was nowhere to escape.

“How did you follow us?” Rai Puli asked shocked that they had been tracked after all the tricks he had tried.

The men just laughed at him.

Once again, the man with the tattoo on his chest spoke with a thick accent, “We’ve been looking for that elephant for a long time. Do you think we don’t notice when there are changes in the forest? You were not that hard to find. We have been watching you for a long time, but now it is time for us to take the elephant from you and collect the reward from the emperor!”

The other men grabbed Fran Tah and Dra Gu tying them up. Then they led them over to the side of the river and made them sit on a large rock.

“We want you to watch as we kill the elephant and cut his tusks off. After we are finished, you can do whatever you want with what remains. Thank you for helping us. You have done an excellent job,” the big man laughed.

All Rai Puli could do was watch. They had led the elephant into a trap. He wished the men would kill him right then. He knew the death that awaited him would be far worse than anything those men could do to him.

The elephant stood still as the four men surrounded it. They had long spears ready to throw at him. The men laughed in anticipation of collecting the million Zinkas the emperor promised to those who brought him an ebony tusk.

The man with the tiger tattoo threw his spear first. At first it stuck in his skin, but did not go deep. Then it fell out and fell to the ground. This made the animal angry and then he charged at the hunter. The man was frightened and began to run away. When the elephant caught up with the man, he picked him up with his tusks and threw him into the air. The man fell with a thud onto the rocks along the river. He did not move.

The other three tried to distract the elephant, but when they did the elephant faced them with his head lowered, threatening them.

They all threw their spears at the same time, but they just bounced off and fell harmlessly to the ground. The elephant turned and charged at them. They ran in different directions, but the elephant swung his great tusks and knocked them all to the ground. Helplessly they looked up from the stones, thinking it was the end for them.

Curiously, the elephant backed up, but still kept his eye on them. The four tattooed men got up and ran into the forest, happy to be alive.

Fran Tah yelled out, "We're safe!"

"That must be how the Ebony Elephant has survived all these years. He scares the hunters away when they are unable to kill him," Rai Puli thought aloud.

"Hey, get us out of these ropes," Dra Gu demanded. "Turn around so I can untie you."

Rai Puli did as he asked and after struggling with the ropes, he finally got them off. Rai Puli then helped Fran Tah with her ties. Then he just looked at Dra Gu.

"Aren't you going to help me?" Dra Gu was surprised that Rai Puli had not helped him as well.

"Why should I? You tried to steal the Ebony Elephant, and for all we know, you helped those hunters find us," Rai Puli responded.

"Honestly, I had nothing to do with those men, and as I said before, I didn't try to

steal the elephant. He came here by himself. You can't just leave me here," Dra Gu begged Rai Puli.

"I think it would be cruel to leave him here. He doesn't have any food. He'll just die," Fran Tah said to Rai Puli, who wasn't very happy that she was interfering.

"So, what is so special about this guy? Why should we save him?" Rai Puli asked.

"Come on. He's almost like family. He's from our district, and think about it, he could be a big help to us," Fran Tah suggested.

"How's that?" Rai Puli responded with a question.

"Remember, the elephant won't leave without me," Dra Gu added.

"Now that we know that we've been followed, he can watch for strangers and warn us if he sees anything. He can be a lookout for us," Fran Tah recommended.

"Yeah, I can do that!" Dra Gu jumped into the conversation.

"Who was asking you?" Rai Puli said to him, irritated at the discussion.

"I was just saying that she has a good idea. I can be a tremendous help. I won't even ask for a share of the money," Dra Gu answered.

"There will be no money! We are going to protect the Elephant, not kill it," Rai Puli said sternly.

Rai Puli gave in and untied Dra Gu.

He rubbed his wrists where the ropes had been tied.

"Thanks," is all he said.

Fran Tah asked, "Now what? Where do we go from here?"

"We are far from the path we were taking, but I'm sure we can find it again," Rai Puli answered.

Then thinking for a second he added, "The elephant is smart. He is going to help us. If we let him lead us, it will be much harder for anyone to follow us. We thought we were smart enough to hide our tracks, but obviously we were wrong."

The elephant was standing nearby patiently waiting.

Rai Puli and Dra Gu picked up the supplies the hunters had left behind including

the spears. They now had extra food and equipment to make the trip a little more comfortable.

Fran Tah went to make sure all their other supplies were packed and ready for the trip.

Rai Puli stood in front of the elephant and looked it straight into its face. He looked at the wound the spear had made to make sure it was not too deep. The elephant did not seem to be too uncomfortable. He had Fran Tah put some of her salve on the injury.

“Alright big guy. Show us where we need to go to keep you safe,” Rai Puli said directly at it.

The elephant raised its trunk, let out a loud roar, and then began to walk down the river bed following the flow of the water. The others followed behind.

After a few hours, the elephant suddenly turned around and stopped. As it looked back up the river toward the grand mountains, it raised its trunk and once again gave out a loud roar that sounded like it was sad.

“I think he may be saying goodbye. According to the legends, he came here looking for his family. Maybe he realizes he’s not going to find them now,” Fran Tah surmised.

After standing for several minutes gazing at the mountains, the elephant turned again and walked slowly, appearing to be crying.

When darkness came, the group set up a camp in the trees on the side of the river. The elephant walked into the water to take another bath. He sprayed water in the air and he bellowed as he frolicked in the water. Rai Puli jumped in and joined him. They played together while Dra Gu and Fran Tah sat watching.

Dra Gu was the first to talk.

“Why did you help me back there? What did I do to deserve that?” he asked.

“I would’ve felt very guilty if we had left you there. It’s not in my nature to hurt anyone or anything. I meant it when I said you could help us get to where we are going, wherever that may be,” Fran Tah offered.

“You mean you have no idea where we are going?” Dra Gu responded in surprise.

“Nope. I haven’t known much of anything since I left on the quest with Rai Puli over a year ago. I’m not sure what I am going to do. Whatever I end up doing, it has been better than staying in my husband’s village. They really hated me there,” Fran Tah continued the conversation.

“Was it any better in your home village? From what I heard, life there wasn’t all that great either,” Dra Gu commented.

“I don’t know what you were told about my village, but most of it is untrue. That is one of the reasons I was happy to leave, there were too many stories and rumors. It became unbearable. I don’t really want to go back there, but on the other hand I don’t want to repeat what happened to me after I left. Rai Puli has been kind to me, although very distant. I don’t think he likes me, but that’s okay. If he knew everything about me, he would like me even less,” Fran Tah shared.

“He’s a good guy. He’s just focused on getting the elephant to the emperor, that’s all,” Dra Gu tried to make her feel better.

“He’s not taking the elephant to the emperor. He’s trying to save its life,” Fran Tah informed him.

“Save his life? Why is he doing that?” Dra Gu asked, shocked at what she had just told him.

“He had a dream and then he met this old man who told him he needed to save the elephant or he would die a terrible death. Every time we get in a place where he thinks the elephant is going to be taken from him, or be killed, he panics. When you disappeared with the elephant, he almost killed himself. He’s that scared,” Fran Tah explained.

“So, where are we going?” Dra Gu asked.

“I have no idea. All I know is that he had another dream and found a map,” Fran Tah answered.

“Where’s the map?” Dra Gu asked showing more curiosity than he wanted.

“In his head. He memorized it and then hid it, just like the one that took us to the

elephant in the first place,” Fran Tah gave him an answer he wasn’t expecting.

“So, we have to follow him?” Dra Gu asked.

“Kind of like that. So far, he hasn’t been too worried. I think he and the elephant know what they are doing. I’d bet my life on it,” Fran Tah said confidently.

“I’m not sure I have as much trust as you, but if it means staying alive, then I’m ready,” Dra Gu stated.

Rai Puli returned soaking wet. He shook himself, which sprayed water onto Fran Tah and Dra Gu.

Fran Tah shrieked, “Stop that! If I wanted to get wet, I would have joined you in the river!”

“Yeah, what’s up with that?” Dra Gu added.

Rai Puli just laughed as he went to dry off and change his clothes.

In the morning, and after eating breakfast, the elephant began its trek down the river bank once again. Fran Tah rode on the back of the elephant, so the pace was a little faster.

They came to a place where the water began to move more quickly. The gorge that the river had formed was narrowing and the sides of the river were rising beside them. If they needed to get out of the riverbed, it would be very difficult. The sides were steep and covered with moss, which made them impossible to climb.

Then they came to the edge of a waterfall.

The view from atop the waterfall was amazing. The valley below stretched as far as the eye could see. The sun was high in the sky illuminating the trees. The winding river flowed and disappeared over the horizon.

Just then, Fran Tah let out a scream.

She yelled, “There is nowhere to go but down!”

Suddenly the elephant began to fall over the edge. There was a scream from Fran Tah and then they disappeared

Rai Puli and Dra Gu stopped and watched.

“What did he just do?” Rai Puli yelled out.

They walked to the edge of the waterfall and watched in amazement as the elephant slid down to the bottom on a water slide on the rocks.

Rai Puli looked over at Dra Gu and then jumped over the edge, with Dra Gu following close behind. It when they reached the bottom, they splashed into a pool of water at the foot of the waterfall.

“That was amazing!” Dra Gu said when he emerged from the water.

They looked back to where they had just come, looking for a way back up to do it again, but none was found.

Fran Tah climbed down from the elephant just before it shook itself dry. Water spray went everywhere. Everyone laughed.

The river flowed very gently away from the waterfall. The rocks on the side of the river were not easy to walk on. Rai Puli guessed that the elephant knew that their trail would be next to impossible to follow on the rocks.

When the sun began to drop behind the trees, the elephant suddenly made a right turn into the woods. There was a wide path that led into the forest. The elephant knew about this path. As it got darker, mostly because of the thick trees, they decided to stop, but the elephant kept moving. He wouldn't stop.

Rai Puli ran up to it and tied a rope onto its tail so the others could follow in the darkness.

All night the elephant moved forward at a steady pace.

When daylight came, they came upon a meadow of tall grass and beautiful flowers. The elephant stopped and began to eat the grass. It was a chance for the companions to eat and rest.

“That was some walk. I thought that he would never stop!” Fran Tah said as she sat on a blanket spread over the grass.

Rai Puli and Dra Gu did the same.

After getting some sleep, Rai Puli stood up and looked around. Suddenly he had a

smile on his face.

“This is it!” Rai Puli yelled out.

“What are you talking about?” Dra Gu asked, still sleepy and not completely awake.

Rai Puli answered him, “This place was on the map. The elephant does know where he is going. He’s a lot smarter than I thought. We’re on the right track. I know where we are.”

Fran Tah was now waking up as well.

“Did he say he knows where we are?” she asked, not sure if she had heard him correctly.

“That’s what the man said,” Dra Gu answered.

Rai Puli was so excited he started to do a dance. Then he ran over to the elephant. He got onto its back and stood up looking toward where the sun had risen. He took something out of his pouch and looked at it. Then he returned it to his bag. He stayed on the elephant’s back for a long time.

When he finally returned to where Fran Tah and Dra Gu were sitting he was so excited he had to tell them.

“We are only about a day’s journey from our first destination. We will get more information once we get there,” Rai Puli yelled over to them.

“You mean that is not the end of the journey?” Fran Tah asked.

“It will be for you and him, but for me it’s just the next step,” he answered.

“What do you mean it’s the end for us but not you?” Fran Tah answered.

“Once you are at the village you can stay there or find your way home. As for me, I’m not sure what is planned. Time will tell,” he replied.

The elephant began to leave the meadow.

Rai Puli was excited as he got on top of the elephant so he could get a good view of where they were traveling. Fran Tah and Dra Gu carried the supplies and ran behind as best as they could.

“Do you think you could slow down a little?” Dra Gu yelled up at him. “We need to put these supplies on the elephant so we don’t have to carry them so far!”

Realizing that he was being inconsiderate of his traveling partners, he stopped the elephant and got down.

“Sorry, I got a little excited there,” Rai Puli said apologetically.

The path was not as difficult to travel on. The day went by quickly and then in the distance Rai Puli finally saw the village.

## Chapter 6

As the village came into view, Fran Tah recognized it. It was the village they had stayed at when Rai Puli talked to the old man. They had come from a completely different direction from when they had left.

“You don’t intend to leave me there, do you?! I already told you before I wasn’t going to stay there. I don’t know the language nor the culture,” Fran Tah spoke up.

“You have Dra Gu who can go with you to your home town now. You don’t need me. I have things to do other than taking care of you. You’ll be fine,” Rai Puli responded more eager to get to the town than to deal with Fran Tah.

“I told you I don’t want to go to my home town, don’t you listen?!” Fran Tah yelled at him.

“Not really,” Rai Puli answered sarcastically.

Dra Gu just laughed at them as they argued.

“This is not funny! You have no idea what I have been through since I met Rai Puli. He’s stubborn and unreasonable,” Fran Tah fought back.

Rai Puli’s eyebrows went up in surprise.

“ME? Stubborn and unreasonable? Do you have any idea how hard it has been to live with you? Talk, talk, talk, that is all you do. It’s going to be wonderful having some peace and quiet,” Rai Puli defended himself.

“All I’m telling you is that I’m not going to stay in that village,” she told him.

“I don’t care. After this you are free to go wherever you want, just leave me out,” Rai Puli responded.

After that, there was no conversation until they walked into the middle of the small huts.

When they did, the people saw them and recognized them. It had been many months since their last visit, but the villagers had not forgotten them.

Rai Puli looked over at the black hut where the old man had lived. A family had moved into it. When Rai Puli went to the door, a young girl ran out and gave him a hug around his waist. Then she looked up at him with a smile and handed him a rolled paper. She said something Rai Puli did not understand, and ran back into the hut.

Rai Puli opened the paper. At first, he could not read what was written, but the longer he looked at it, the letters began to change into his language.

The letter said:

*This letter and attached map will take you to your home village. You have been chosen to be the protector of the Ebony Elephant. Do not fail!*

*You have friends with you. You will need their help to accomplish your task. They have skills you will need.*

*When you arrive at your home town, the people there will help you. Trust them. You need them.*

*I know you will keep the Ebony Elephant safe. I have much confidence in you.*

*Go safely my friend and find the reward you will have once your task is complete.*

Rai Puli turned the paper over and found the map. He sat down under a tree and memorized the way they should go.

The map was complicated. He could tell the person who made the map wanted to make sure it would be very difficult for anyone to follow them.

After he finished, he put the paper deep into his pouch, but then thought it might be better to hide it in case they came across people who wanted to harm them. He once again placed it under a rock and then joined Fran Tah and Dra Gu around the fire in the middle of the small town. They were already eating their food when Rai Puli returned.

“So, what did you find out?” Fran Tah asked.

“I have news for you. The old man’s instructions say that I need both of you to finish the journey. It looks like I am going to be stuck with you a while longer.”

Fran Tah jumped up.

“Are you serious?! I was just getting used to the idea of leaving you alone on your quest,” Fran Tah teased Rai Puli. “I guess we’re going to be a part of the plan after all.”

Dra Gu didn’t seem all the excited. Having to deal with Rai Puli wasn’t easy. He had been thinking about going home and being with his family, and now he was being told he was needed for the next part of the trek.

He thought to himself, if the Ebony Elephant really needed him, why not go? He really had nothing better to do, and the journey might be more exciting than walking home with Fran Tah.

Then he spoke up, and asked, “So, where do we go from here?”

“I have a map to follow. It will take us on a safe journey back to my village. I was told that when we get there my people will help us. The letter said we cannot complete the task without your help. So, we are on our way back,” Rai Puli informed them.

“Where’s the map?” Fran Tah asked.

“In my mind,” he replied.

“Great, so now we have to follow you again, not knowing where we are going, right?” Fran Tah said frustrated.

“It would be just like that,” Rai Puli replied.

“That is not fair. Why are we being left in the dark about where we are going? You need us now, and we should be equal partners in this. You can either share the directions on the map, or we can go our own way. It is up to you,” Dra Gu complained.

Fran Tah told him to be quiet.

They finished their dinner and then Rai Puli made sure the elephant was okay while Fran Tah and Dra Gu talked before going to sleep.

She let him know that she had a plan.

“Rai Puli doesn’t know it but I found the map. I saw him put it under a rock. While you were eating, I found the one he got today. He is not very good at hiding things,” Fran Tah told Dra Gu as she pulled it out of her pouch and showed it to him. “We can just

pretend we don't know what he is telling us. I think he would be angry if he found out we had the map.”

Dra Gu agreed and then they laid near the fire and fell asleep.

The sky was gray and cloudy in the morning. It felt as if it was going to rain, but that did not change the plan to leave.

The villagers gave them food and water, as well as new shoes and blankets. They were very generous.

There were smiles and hugs as the elephant and the three travelers left. Fran Tah even had second thoughts about leaving these people. They had been very kind.

She thought to herself, not really seriously, “Maybe this would be a good place to settle. Perhaps I will return if things don't work well elsewhere.”

Nothing much changed as they walked away from the grand mountain and toward the river where they lived. Fran Tah continued to talk and Rai Puli continued to ignore her.

Dra Gu just thought it was all very funny.

The landscape continuously changed. One day the land was flat and the next it was hilly. Then it would go through a thick forest followed by open fields.

Rai Puli led the way while Fran Tah rode the elephant. It was easier for Rai Puli to ignore her when she was up high.

Sometimes Rai Puli would ride the elephant and let Dra Gu listen to her constant complaints.

When they were gone about two weeks, they came across a deep ravine and below a stream of water. Along the edge were steep cliffs.

“How are we going to get across that?” Dra Gu said to Rai Puli as he looked over to the other side. It wasn't a big distance, but farther than they could jump.

Fran Tah got down from the elephant to try to help. Just as she reached the ground, the elephant turned around and began walking back the way they had come. Rai Puli tried to stop it, but it was going fast enough that he could not catch up.

Rai Puli stopped after trying to stop the elephant. He was out of breath.

Dra Gu caught up to him and asked, “What are we going to do now?”

Not knowing what to say, and breathing hard, Rai Puli could only shake his head.

They walked back to where Fran Tah was standing.

“So, now what do we do?” she asked.

“This is the way. I guess we will just wait for the elephant to come back,” Rai Puli answered.

“What makes you so sure he will come back?” Dra Gu questioned.

“I have a feeling he’ll be back. He knows the way. He hasn’t been following. He knows where we are going. I’m sure he’ll return. It’s just a matter of time. We should get comfortable. Who knows when he will be back,” Rai Puli reasoned.

They set up camp in the protection of some bushes along the edge of the ravine.

“If we had some wood we could make a bridge to the other side, but all that is here are thin sticks. It would take forever to weave enough of these together to make it strong enough for the elephant to cross,” Fran Tah suggested.

Rai Puli was surprised at the idea.

“Actually, you have a pretty good idea. While we wait we should do exactly what you said. Dra Gu and I will collect the sticks and you can do the weaving. When we have enough sticks, we can help you. If nothing else, it will keep us busy until the elephant gets back. When we finish it, we can go to the other side and try to find some trees that might be strong enough to hold it,” Rai Puli complimented Fran Tah for the first time.

They did exactly what Rai Puli suggested. Day after day, they worked on the bridge that would help them cross to the other side.

The weaving Fran Tah did was tight and strong. The bridge was three meters wide and very thick. When it was finished, they had to figure out a way to make it stretch all the way across the ravine.

“We can make ropes to lower ourselves to the bottom and then we will cross to the other side. After we climb to the top, Dra Gu and I will then pull the weaving with the

ropes and drag it over to the other side to make the bridge,” Rai Puli share his idea.

“That’s fine, but how do we make it strong enough for the elephant?” Fran Tah asked.

“I guess we will have to figure that out after we get the bridge in place,” Rai Puli answered.

Dra Gu spoke up.

“It’s getting late. Why don’t we get some rest and do this tomorrow when we have a full day?” he suggested.

The others agreed to wait until the next day.

## Chapter 7

Rai Puli looked up at the clear sky. He knew the adventure was going to be over soon. He wasn't sure what would happen after returning home, but he knew his destiny lay with the elephant. Soon he drifted off to sleep.

The next day they worked hard to build the bridge. It was much harder than they thought it would be. They were exhausted at the end of the day and fell asleep shortly after eating the evening meal.

In the morning, when they woke up, the skies had turned dark and the wind was blowing very hard. The bridge they had built was bouncing up and down in the wind. Rai Puli was afraid it would blow away.

He and Dra Gu found long sticks they pushed into the ground to keep it from flying away. It was fortunate they had woken up in time because the wind got stronger. There was no place to hide, and then the rain began. The wind was so strong the rain went sideways. What little vegetation that was there, began to break away. The bridge was bouncing in the wind, but the stakes they used to hold it down were working. The storm lasted all day. All they could do was cover themselves as best as they could to protect themselves from the violent storm. It was the worst storm they had ever been in.

When the storm stopped, they discovered that most of their supplies had blown away. They searched for them, but only found a bottle of water and a blanket. Everything else was gone. It was going to be difficult to hunt for food without the arrows and spears.

“What are we going to do? We can't stay here any longer. We don't have any food. We have to go across to see what we can find,” Fran Tah complained.

They looked over the edge and down into the ravine where they discovered there was another problem. The rain had filled the stream with a lot more water, so now it was much deeper and faster than before.

It was too dangerous to cross until the water returned to its normal level.

“Maybe we should go and look for the elephant. He has been gone for long time. If he doesn’t come back, all our work will be for nothing,” Fran Tah said.

“First of all, we should get food and supplies. Then we can go after the elephant. I agree, he has been gone for too long and we do need to search for him,” Rai Puli surprised Fran Tah by agreeing with him.

The three went in search of berries, roots, fruit, or anything else that might keep them from starving. They went in three different directions and agreed to meet back at the spot before dark.

Fran Tah returned after the other two with a bag full of food.

“Where did you find that?” they asked.

“There is a small brook that feeds into this stream. Along its shores, I found these berries. I also found some roots. We should be okay for a while. There is more where this came from. I also was able to catch a few fish. It will be nice to have some meat for dinner tonight,” Fran Tah shared with them.

It took three days for the stream to go down low enough to try to finish spanning the ravine with the woven bridge. During that time, they made new ropes for climbing down into the crevice. It was difficult to find enough materials for it.

The two men pulled the poles out of the ground that were holding the bridge in place and then dragged it to the edge.

Before they went down, it was agreed that they would build the bridge, cross over to the other side, find food, and then return to see if the elephant was there.

Rai Puli and Dra Gu lowered themselves down the side of the cliff into the ravine. The water in the stream was still moving fast, but it was not as deep as it was before. Climbing up the other side was not easy. The soil was muddy and it was hard to get a footing.

Rai Puli would push Dra Gu up to a place where he could then reach down and pull him up. It took a long time, but they finally reached the top.

The ropes were tied to the end of the bridge. They began to pull it across. The plan was working. Fran Tah pushed as the two men pulled.

When the bridge was about half way across, Fran Tah yelled over to the other side of the ravine, “The elephant is coming back. He has something in his tusks. I’m not sure what it is.”

They stopped pulling on the rope and saw the elephant approaching. In its tusks, it had three large trees the elephant had pushed over. They looked long enough to reach over to where Rai Puli and Dra Gu were.

To the surprise of everyone, the elephant dropped the logs onto the ground. Then he brought one of them to the edge of the ravine, stood it up on end, and pushed it over so it spanned the creek.

He did the same thing with the other two. In a little over an hour, he had built a bridge. Once the logs were in place they drug the bridge they had built and pulled it over the top of the new bridge of logs. It looked perfect. When it was in place, they put stakes into the woven bridge to keep it from moving.

Fran Tah crossed to the other side first and then the elephant. As he walked on the logs they made a loud creaking noise, but it held him. When he was on the other side, the weight of the elephant had settled the bridge into the soil and made it smooth from end to end.

They looked back and admired their work. They were happy to have the elephant back. Rai Puli had been right, the elephant was very smart.

(For a long time after, this bridge was used to cross this stream, and then later, a road was built connecting all the villages across the region.)

Along the way to the village they gathered food, made weapons for hunting, and prepared for when they arrived home. It was not going to take long. Rai Puli recognized where they were by the landmarks in the distance.

What was waiting for them when they arrived was a mystery, but Rai Puli knew he had to follow the old man’s instructions to save the elephant.

The path was easier now. The land was flat, which made Rai Puli nervous. The big elephant would be visible for many miles. If they were seen, it would not be long before hunters came. They had keep a watchful eye in all directions to be ready for whatever may come their way.

When Rai Puli knew he was close to his home he got excited and began to move faster. He did not stop to sleep. Dar Gu and Fran Tah complained, but Rai Puli did not listen to them.

It was early in the morning when they got to Rai Puli's town and to their surprise, they entered the village without any problems.

A voice yelled out from one of the houses, "Rai Puli is here, and he has the Ebony Elephant with him!"

This woke up the entire village. People ran out of their huts to see if what they had heard was true. Sure enough, in front of them was Rai Puli on top of the Ebony Elephant. The people were shocked. They did not know what to say, until one of the villagers began to clap and yell, "Rai Puli is our hero! Rai Puli is our hero! Rai Puli is our hero!"

The others joined in and yelled in excitement.

The elephant dropped to its knees and then Rai Puli jumped down. Fran Tah and Dra Gu joined him. They had big smiles on their faces at the welcome they were receiving. It was as if a hero had returned from war.

Everyone wanted to touch the legendary animal. The Ebony Elephant did not mind. He knew he was in a safe place.

Rai Puli took Fran Tah and Dra Gu to his home. His family greeted him and his little sister took his hand. She was much bigger than when he left. They were excited to see him. It had been a long time since he left on his adventure.

When they entered the house, Rai Puli's mother was preparing them food. She invited them in and pointed to the table to sit down and enjoy a home cooked meal, something Rai Puli had dreamed about many times.

There wasn't much conversation while the three ate, but as soon as the meal was

over, the questions began to fly.

Rai Puli's mother stopped the questions to ask one of her own, "Who are these people with you?"

"Mother, this is Fran Tah and this is Dra Gu. I met them on my journey. They are from our region and speak our language," Rai Puli answered.

"Did you say Fran Tah?" her mother asked, very surprised.

"Yes, do you know who she is?" Rai Puli responded, a bit taken aback by her reaction.

"I think we need to talk alone," his mother said to him, while motioning for him to follow her into the bedroom.

Fran Tah had a surprised look on her face as they left.

Once in the room she closed the door and continued, "Do you know anything about Fran Tah?"

"Only what she told me. She said that she was to marry a man chosen by her parents, but she didn't want to marry a stranger. She met a man who was traveling through her town and she married him. She went to his town and lived there until he died. Then she was all alone. The people didn't like her much and when I came there, she insisted to go with me. Why, do you know who she is?" Rai Puli questioned his mother.

"Yes," his mother answered. "Did Fran Tah tell you anything else about herself?" she asked.

"Only what I already told you," he replied.

"How did you meet her?" his mother asked.

Rai Puli began to tell the story, "The first village I came to, was about five days walk from here. When I arrived the people were friendly, but they didn't speak our language. I wanted to buy some food for my journey. Unexpectedly, I heard a voice in our tongue offer to help. It was Fran Tah. She invited me to her hut and said she would give me food if I took her with me. She didn't like living there.

"She told me her story of leaving her village to marry a man that her parents had

not wanted her to, and that he was now dead.

“I told her I would take her with me, but I left very early in the morning when she was sleeping. I never expected her to follow me.

“I was taking a nap and having a deep dream when she woke me up. I was very surprised and angry.”

His mother stopped him, “She followed you?”

“Yes, she found me, and after that she never left.

“To tell you the truth, she is very annoying. She talks *all* the time about things I have no interest in. No wonder no one likes her. I have put up with her for over a year now and it hasn’t gotten any easier. I felt sorry for her, and I couldn’t just leave her in the forest,” Rai Puli concluded.

Rai Puli’s mother sat down next to him and began to explain, “I think you need to sit down while I tell you her story.”

“I have known Fran Tah’s family since I was a little girl. Her mother and I were in school together. I used to live in her village before I married your father,” she began.

Rai Puli interrupted, “You never told me about this. Why didn’t you ever tell me?”

“That is not important right now. We’ll talk about that later.

“When I came here, I had a difficult time meeting new people. I was a little shy. It was the same in my hometown. I never had many friends.

“Your grandparents were very kind to me. They helped me to make a home for you and your siblings. I am very grateful to them.

“However, I have never forgotten the people I grew up with and my family. They were always so supportive of me.

“It is because of this that our families decided that you and Fran Tah were to get married.”

Rai Puli jumped up in shock.

“What!” Rai Puli exclaimed. “You have to be kidding. You never told me. I didn’t even know you had promised anyone to me, much less Fran Tah. You have made a **BIG**

mistake. I could never live with that woman! I'm so glad she left before you made me marry her. It is the best thing that could have happened to me. Now that I know what she is like, it will never happen. Trust me on that."

Rai Puli ran out of his mother's room through the living room and ran into Fran Tah, almost knocking her over.

"What did you do that for?" she asked. "Didn't you see me?"

"Just get out of my way. I need to get some air," he yelled as he ran past her.

Then he out the front door to be alone to try to figure what he was going to do next. There was no way that he would ever consider marrying her. The last year had been bad enough.

After he had calmed down, her returned to his mother's house.

As he walked in, he noticed Fran Tah and Dra Gu sitting at the table talking.

"So, do you two think you want to go back to your village?" he asked, having planned to get rid of Fran Tah.

"That is what we have been talking about, but I'm afraid my parents are going to make me marry the man they promised me to," Fran Tah spoke up.

Rai Puli didn't know what to think. Fran Tah was supposed to be his wife? After spending almost a year with her he was certain this was not going to happen.

"Don't worry about that. It is not going to happen," Rai Puli responded, matter-of-factly.

"How do you know that?" Fran Tah asked.

"My mother has told me all about you. You can be assured that the man you were promised to will not go along with the marriage because that man is me!"

Fran Tah was surprised.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked.

"I wish it were not true, but my mother and your mother were best friends and that is how we became promised to each other. I am not going to do it!" Rai Puli shared with Fran Tah.

He knew his first priority was to the ebony elephant. He had to come up with a plan to keep it safe and take it somewhere where it would not be harmed or hunted again.

Word that Rai Puli had returned and the elephant was with him spread quickly through the region very quickly. People began to come to the town to see it.

Rai Puli and the people of the town hid the elephant in a cave not far from where he lived. The cave was difficult for anyone to find unless they had been there before. This made the spot a perfect hiding place.

A few weeks went by and then big trouble arose. The emperor got news of the elephant's location and sent soldiers to find it and bring it back to the palace. To Rai Puli's surprise, his friends and neighbors agreed to protect the elephant and to do whatever was necessary to keep it from being killed or taken by the soldiers. They organized a meeting and many ideas were presented.

Not everyone was in support.

Some said the elephant should be killed and then the army would go home. Others said the elephant was fine where it was. While others thought it might be a better idea to sneak the elephant out of the village at night.

Finally, one of the younger men spoke up. "I have an elephant that is about the same size. I'm willing to give him to you in place of the ebony elephant. We can make him black and then tell the emperor that he is the ebony elephant he is looking for. He has never seen the ebony elephant, so by the time he realizes they have the wrong animal, the ebony elephant will be safe."

The room went silent. The plan was brilliant.

The next day the young man brought his elephant to the town. To his surprise, the townspeople had taken a collection to pay him for his gift.

A large pot of black ink was prepared and then the women began to use large rags to spread the ink on its body and most importantly, the tusks.

It took a few hours for the ink to dry, but when it did, it was even difficult for the people of the village to see the difference, except the ebony elephant had longer hair, but

the emperor did not know this.

Two days later, the soldiers arrived. They had their weapons ready, but when they saw the black elephant in the center of the plaza, they rushed to see it. No one was out of their homes. They watched from their doors as the soldiers led the black elephant away.

The next day, Rai Puli and the ebony elephant left the town and slowly walked the opposite direction from where they had come. The ebony elephant was going back to where he had been born. Rai Puli was following the map he had been given from his last dream. After two days of travel they came upon a forest. It was deep and dark. Rai Puli walked in front cutting away the branches to make way for the elephant. He was worried because the path they were making was easy to see and follow. When Rai Puli looked behind him he did not see the elephant, but he could hear the loud noise of trees falling. He went back on the trail to find the elephant covering up the path by knocking over trees.

“What a smart elephant!” Rai Puli thought to himself.

They were in the forest for three days and nights, slowly moving toward the final goal. A place where the elephant would be safe.

After leaving the forest, they came upon a beautiful valley full of flowers and green grass. Through the middle of it ran a river flowing slowly and gently away from them. Rai Puli stopped and admired the view. In the distance, he saw a wisp of smoke floating gently into the sky. Rai Puli wanted to go the other direction, but the elephant had other ideas. He headed straight to the spot. Rai Puli had to run behind.

As they came over a small hill, in front of them they saw a straw hut and in front of it a fire. Over the fire was some meat cooking. It smelled amazing. The elephant did not stop. He went straight to the hut making a loud trumpeting noise. Just as he got to the hut an old man walked out. He had a big smile on his face and raised his arms in the air.

He said something in a language Rai Puli did not understand. And then ran at the elephant, who picked him up with his trunk and embraced him as a long-lost friend.

Rai Puli stopped in his tracks. He did not know what to do or say, he just stared as

the two seemed to dance together.

After a period of time, the old man noticed Rai Puli. He waved at him to come to meet him.

“You have brought my friend back to me. I can’t thank you enough!” he screamed.

Rai Puli was shocked. The legend of the ebony elephant went back almost fifty years; how could this be?

“Come in, come in. I bet you are tired from such a long journey. I have food and drink for you. I owe you so much. I am sure you have an adventure to tell me about,” the old man said as he opened the door to his hut.

Rai Puli went in and sat on the floor. The old man brought him fresh food and drink. It tasted amazing.

“Ok, now that you are rested and fed, please tell me how you found my friend,” the old man inquired, eager to listen to Rai Puli’s story.

Rai Puli told him the entire story of how when he was a young boy he felt it was his destiny to search for and find the ebony elephant. Only at first it was for the reward offered by the emperor.

He told him about Fran Tah, the old man who gave him the map, about the men who tried to take the elephant, and how they had stayed at the pond for a long time waiting for the elephant to come. He went on about the soldiers and how they had fooled them with another elephant they had painted black.

The old man listened to every word.

Occasionally, he would ask a question, and Rai Puli always had an answer.

When the story was finished, Rai Puli asked a question of his own, “How is it that you knew the ebony elephant before the legends began and yet you are still alive?”

“This valley is a special place. As long as you stay here, you will never die. I think it is something in the water, I’m not sure. It is the reason the ebony elephant has lived so long. This is where he was born. His parents left him here to find out if there was another place like this. They left him with me, but years ago he left in the night. I think he went

looking for them,” the old man told the story.

Just then, there was a loud sound from deep in the valley. The ebony elephant looked up in surprise. The sound came again, and after it stopped, he ran down the hill towards the river.

“Where’s he going?” Rai Puli asked.

“His parents are there. They returned after he left. They were sad that he was gone. Since then they have had three more children.

“You mean there are now six ebony elephants in the valley?” Rai Puli spoke up, very surprised.

“That’s correct!” the old man said.

Rai Puli and the old man walked down the hill to the edge of the river. In the middle of the water, the six elephants were spraying water on each other. The ebony elephant saw Rai Puli raised his trunk and let out the loudest sound Rai Puli had ever heard. Then he sprayed water over the two men standing on the shore. Since they were already wet, the two men jumped into the water to join the celebration.

Rai Puli stayed with the old man for a month, but then he decided it was time to go home. He had finished his mission and it was time to go.

The ebony elephant seemed to cry when he realized that Rai Puli was leaving, but Rai Puli told him to go be with his family.

“I’ll come back to see you some day. I may not look like I do now, but I will never forget you,” Rai Puli said, as he hugged the trunk of his friend.

It took over two months for Rai Puli to get home. When he got there, the story of how the emperor had finally gotten the ebony elephant was told throughout the land, only the people of Rai Puli’s town knew the truth.

Fran Tah and Dra Gu went back to their village where later they were married.

Rai Puli became the leader of his people, but never saw his friend again. The secret of where the ebony elephant lived was never told by Rai Puli. Only he knew where he was and he didn’t want any harm to come to him.

**The End**