

# The bride of the mountain

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**It is a weird story pulled from the heritage of the Aures, in eastern Algeria, depicting the tale of a sheikh metamorphosed into a young man, as he also requested the marriage from the most beautiful girl in the village, because he had saved the villagers from a impending danger...**

## The bride of the mountain

Once upon a time, in the Aures Mountains there lived a queen of beauty and fascination, named Ahmama. She was rivaling the sun in sunrise and the spring in its resplendence as she would strut around in her typically traditional *Shawiya* dresses. She lived in the inmost depths of the Aures like a mistress of greenery, moving between the *White Stream* and the *Abdi Stream*. Where are you, handsome princes, those capable of getting from her stares all the hallmarks of seduction and embrace?

The Nature was showing off that day, prancing for her charms and wooing the Aures with her magnificent secrets.

The Aures is a holy jewel the Creator endowed the Earth with for the merriment of Nature. The Aures is an enthralling painting and a pure mosaic of virgin majesty. All over the features of the foreheads of its inhabitants, we can make out the glorious past of a centuries-old civilization since the dawn of History, as its realms tell us many stories of heroism and bravery.

The Aures is unique in the world, for it looks like a gigantic mass from afar. When it rises over the earth royally, its horizon bewitches us with sunshine, moonlight, flash of lightening, or hail. Those coming into the Aures hesitate to break into this thrilling world because of its inexpugnability.



All the roads lead to the Aures. The first northern road starts from the heights of Constantine, littered with swamps. The southern road is the most beautiful of all the roads leading to the Aures, since it emblazoned with palm groves, oases of honey, and the fresh dates stretching over like an ornamented carpet the Aures has unrolled to the bride of the Zibans, Biskra!

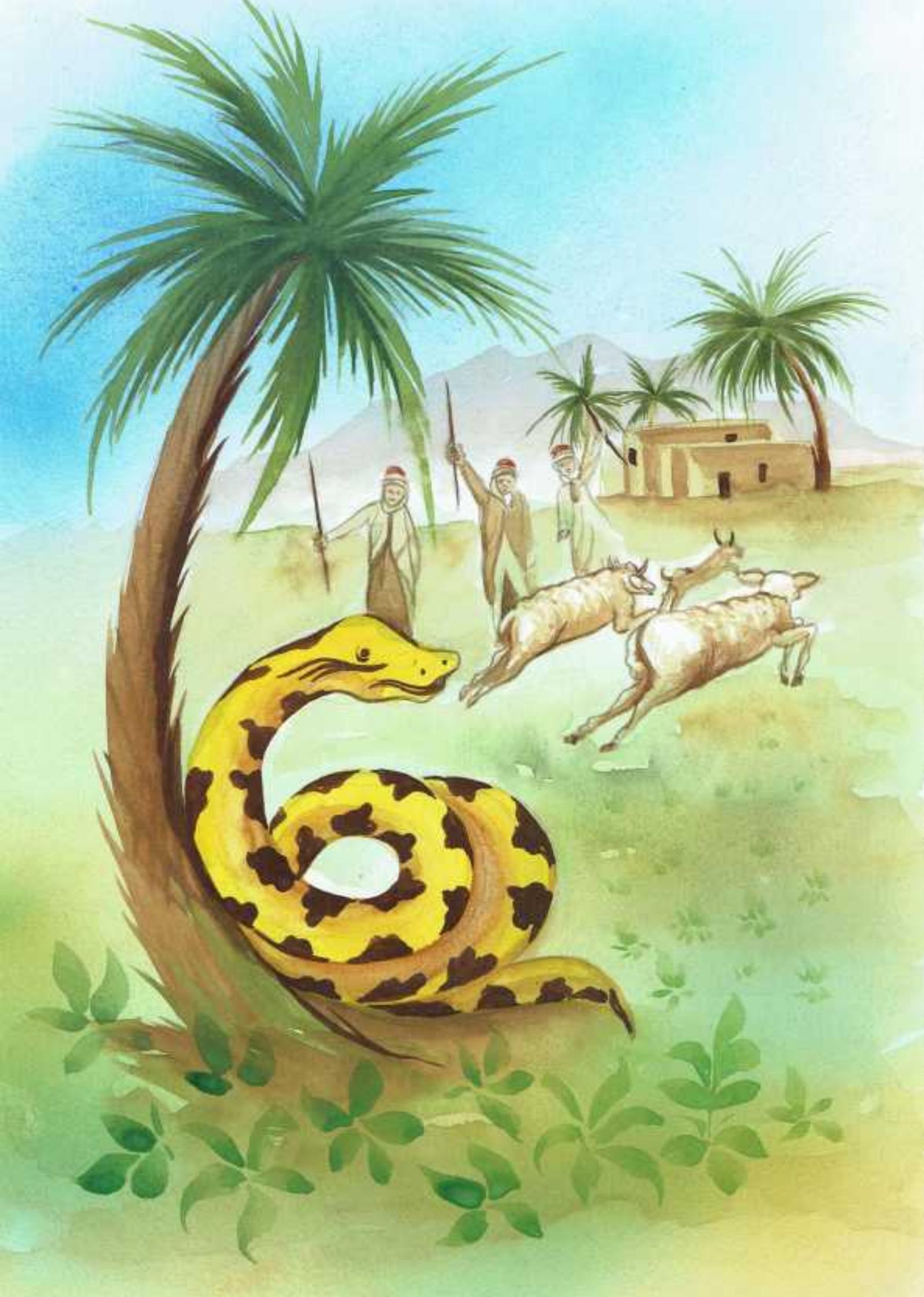
Anyone venturing deep inside the Aures Mountains, he will find himself in front of a breathtaking and diversified landscape. The Aures embodies the face of the History: a Sahara of boulders giving birth to a Sahara of pebbles.

The Aures is a riot of natural wonders: summits, hills, valleys, and many creeks cutting through splendid meadows. The palm groves stack up against the diverse trees of the forests, while the highlands espouse all the four seasons, dressing each with its correspondent suit. And the prettiest of all clothing is the whiteness of the snow when the rays of sun are reflected on it, putting the kisses of mornings on the bright-white of the cheeks of the Aures, glittering like a gold brick.

In the midst of this entire outlandish environment, the villages look like a cohort of fortresses and stone-built castles, guarded by its olden high walls, making the places isolated from the outside world atop the mountains as if plunged in a long hibernation...

There she was, the gorgeous Ahmama, walking between the roses like a butterfly enamored of the splendors of the wild fields. Ahmama found a weird egg.





She beheld it; and then she took it in haste, as though she had found a precious treasure. She stared in every direction, before running away like a mad to the middle of nowhere. She put the egg in a secure place between the stones...

What would happen if Ahmama broke the egg to see what it contained inside?

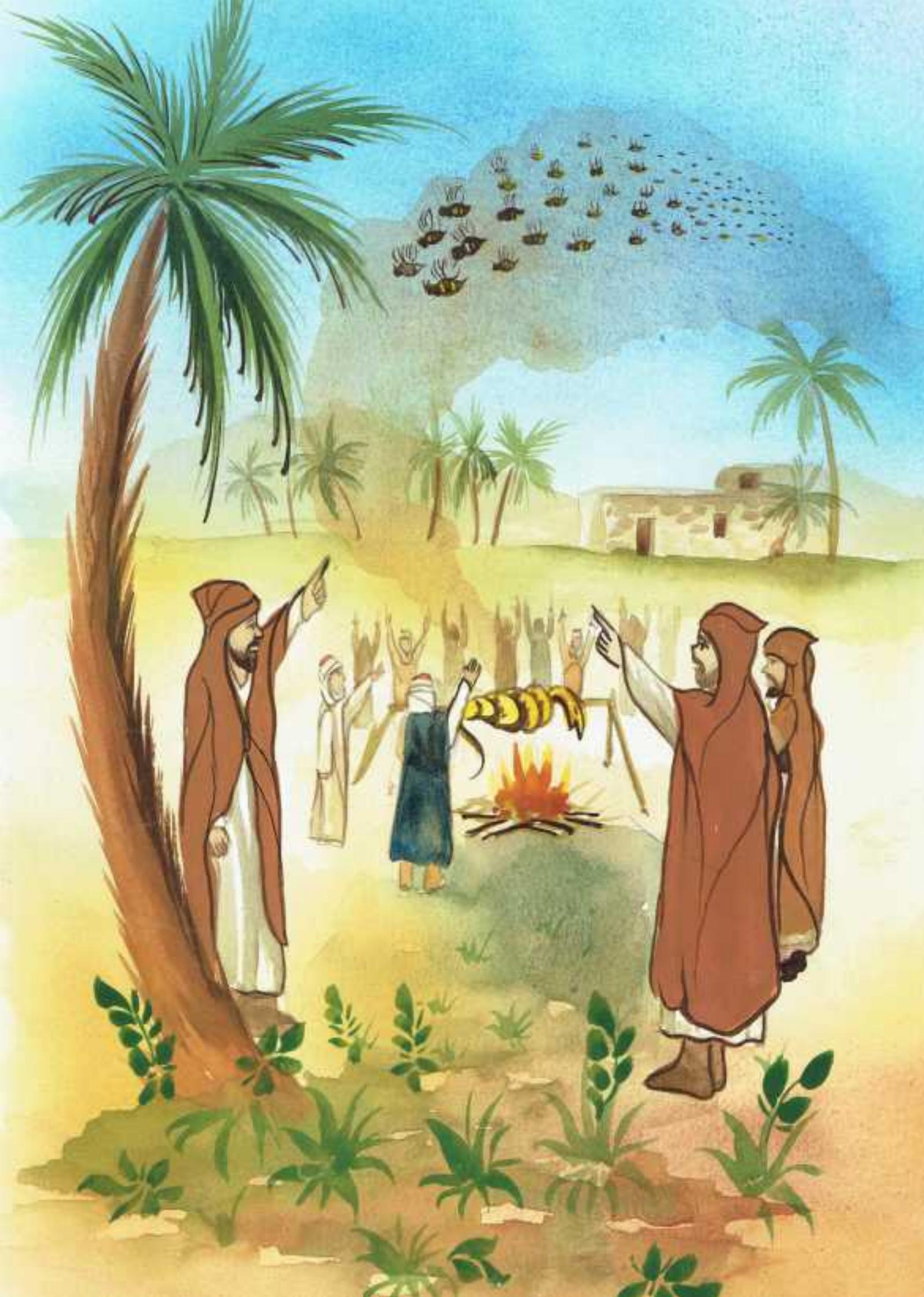
The days passed by, and Ahmama would pay a visit to the hidden place. A tiny creature hatched from the egg, resembling a snake.

How strange it was, as Ahmama was not aware of it. She went on promenading between the meadows, searching for enjoyment of life. What if Ahmama dared to kill the snake? Would the story end at this stage?

After countless days, the snake grew longer and faster, till it became huge enough to threaten the safety of the villagers and their livestock.

The dwellers looked confused as to the menacing creature, and the bent upon making a decisive choice. They decided to combat the snake...

After a bitter fighting, the villagers defeated the enormous snake and threw it lifeless on the ground. Then, they brought heaps of firewood to burn it down and erase its existence. As the snake took fire, the crowd got excited, singing by the way their incredible victory. The thick smoke ascended to the sky, bearing the smell of burning. All of a sudden, a swarm of bees *blackened* the sky of the Aures.



The villagers were astounded and ambiguity began to overwhelm them anew, when they caught sight of armies of bees sucking the secretions of the burning snake, as if the bees were gathering nectar and pollen.

It was a genuine catastrophe. The venom contaminated the honey. *“Would all the people die should they taste the venomous honey?”* That was the question the present crowd had asked during the burning of the snake and the unexpected invasion of bees. Afterwards, they all mused over a suitable solution to the current danger, to save themselves from the looming disaster.

They said:

- Someone must volunteer to taste the honey. It is a matter of life and death.

But who could dare to sacrifice himself?

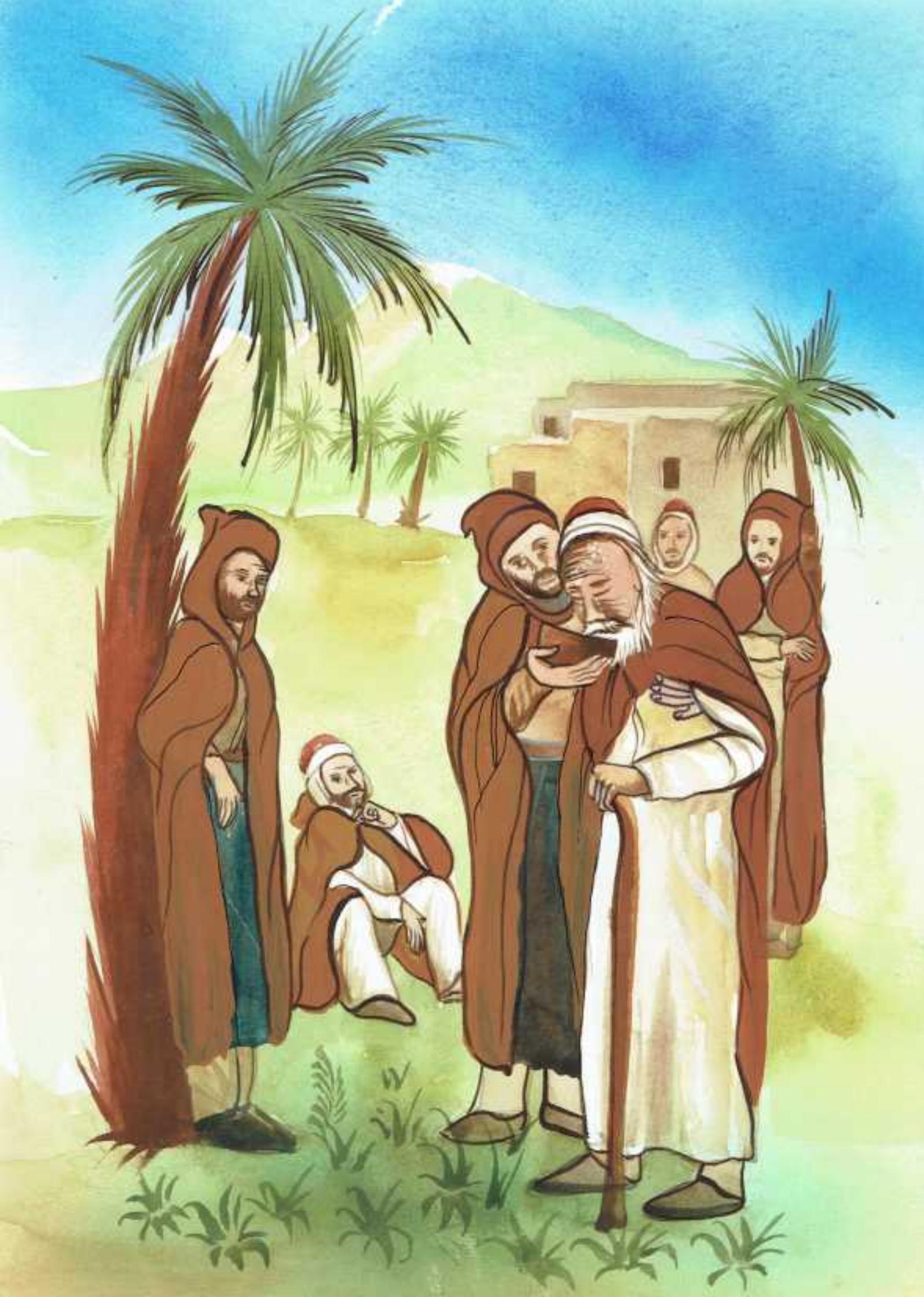
After a short silence, thought it seemed an eternity for them, one peasant spoke out:

- Let's make Sheikh Burak taste the honey to see the outcome!

He got a warm applause. The idea illuminated their spirits. They accounted for their choice:

- Yes, indeed! Sheikh Burak is very old, as he has one foot in the grave. If he dies poisoned, he will take leave of life's hardships and poverty. This way, we will have achieved our experience and known the truth!

When the season of honey harvest came, they looked for Sheikh Burak till they found him solitary, valetudinarian, shrunken, hunched-over, almost blind, with toothless mouth, and grey-haired.



The venomous honey was given to the poor old man. The throng stood expecting him to die straight away. Yet, the contrary had surprisingly happened! It was an unbelievable miracle!

The blind old man regained his sight anew after he had swallowed the honey!

The crowd did not believe their wide-open eyes. Even the old man was bemused by the healing effect of the beverage of the bees. Shortly after, he began to rejuvenate, as his hair turned black again, his back straightened, and his mouth got its teeth back. So, his body turned younger and more energetic!

The inhabitants looked dazed. Then the old man said joyfully:

- God Almighty sent me the honey of bees as His soldiers. This is the reward of anyone who entrusts himself to God. Yes, who has said this maxim is right: "*Fear God and you will witness quite wonders and many miracles!*"

He villagers regretted their ill-will. They asked him for forgiveness, but the old man blamed them, instead:

- You wanted to kill me, you bastards!

The humiliated men lowered their heads, as the revitalized Sheikh Burak talked on:

- I demand the legal *blood money!*

One of the villagers told him:

- Ask anything you want, *sheikh!*

Sheikh Burak replied with a chin:

- The *blood money* (*diyya*, in Arabic) to pay is: *Ahmama!* I would like to marry Ahmama, the most beautiful women in the Aures!

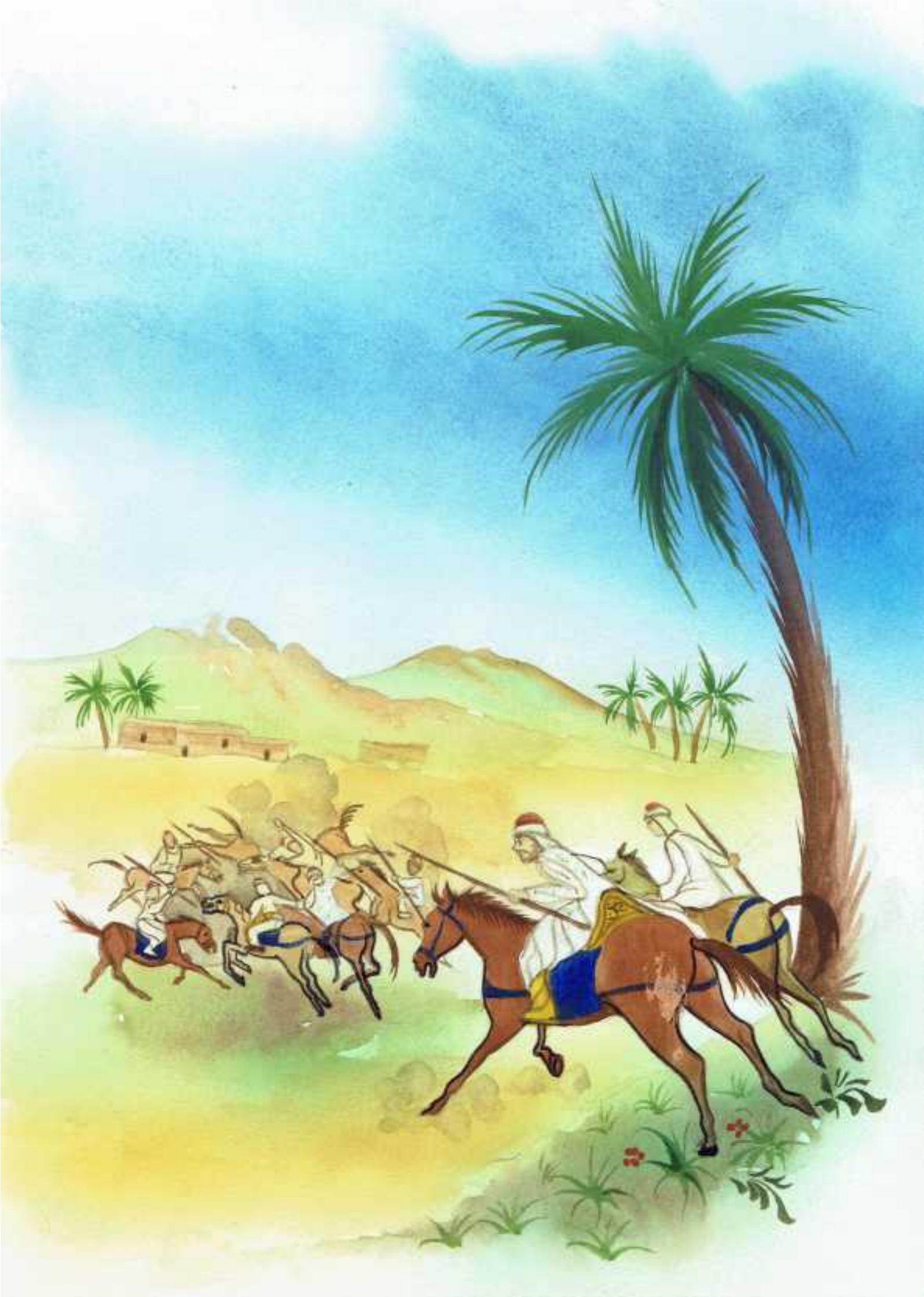
The father of Ahmama agreed on the old man's request. Then, Sheikh Burak married his '*blood money*', Ahmama. The newlyweds lived in happiness and satisfaction on the bank of a river, called *Abdi*. They gave birth to several children; hence their names *Ouled Abdi* (*The Sons of Abdi*)...

The years flew by, and the beauty of Ahmama began to wither away little by little, despite her unending efforts to delay ageing by miscellaneous traditional drugs. Yet, times had been pitiless toward her. *Could the apothecary fix what the edge of time has injured?*

Over the years Sheikh Burak became stronger, smarter and healthier, as though a man enjoying his twenties. Accordingly, he married a second young woman named Tuba, leaving thus his first wife Ahmama with her sons, the Abdi lineage. He lived with Tuba on the other side of the river, and had had with her many children, giving birth to the lineage of Tuwaba.

At last, Sheikh Burak had passed away. Consequently, the river that split up the two women and their respective children witnessed the dawn of covetousness and sedition because of the hitch of Sheikh Burak's inheritance. Followed a fierce struggle between the brothers and the half-brothers; that is, the lineage of the Abdis clashed with the lineage of the Tuwabas...Feuding brothers...



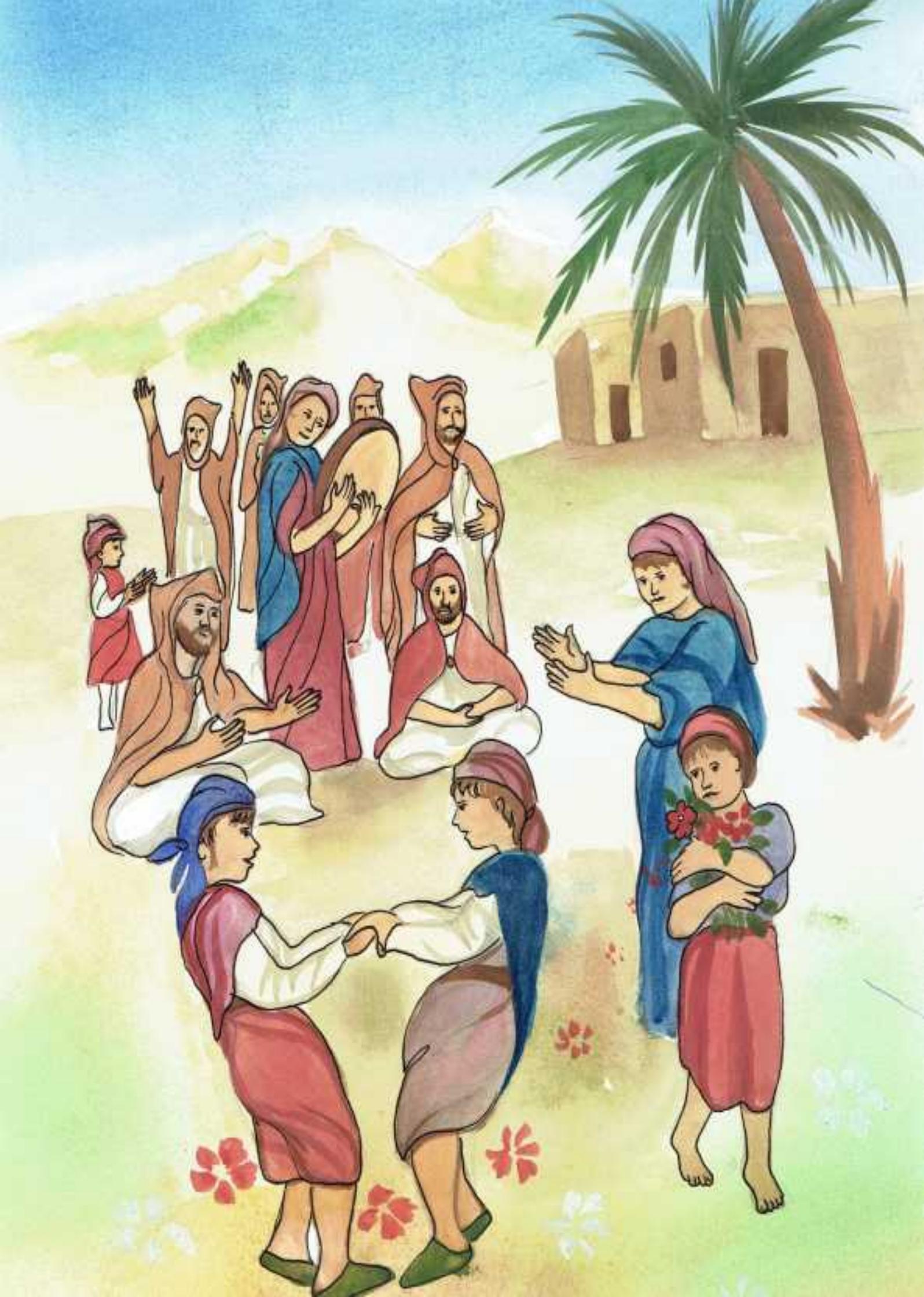


The hostility and odium had swollen on both sides of the aforementioned river, as the two rivaling widows breast-fed the feud to their babies. So, the tots grew up hatred-laden on the two banks of the sad river. Generation after generation, the grandchildren of the two divided tribes would only inherit grudges and interminable quarrels, endangering therefore the survival of the Aures. The tragedy occurred the day the heinous members of the two expanding tribes brimmed over with attacks and revenge, spilling each other's blood on to the impotent river...

In the villages and the hamlets, the peasants took fright and terror. Safety was then lost throughout the Aures region. Chaos set in bloodily as powder roared both in the vales and atop the hills...

Yet, *nothing is forever* in this life. "*Brotherhood should not be auctioned off.*" Only time did heal the bruises of humanity, gradually but efficiently. The trigger of the unexpected reconciliation between the two decades-old warring tribes was the arrival of an enemy from the sea! The tough days began seriously for the Aures dwellers! The conquerors invaded the whole country, plundered its wealth, and then displaced its inhabitants to hostile whereabouts!

Finally, the two tribes reunited their ranks and took part in an extremely ferocious Revolution, so that History still eulogizes about its glory. The Independence of the country recovered through incredible human sacrifices, the fresh water of the river of olden dispute purified the hatred-filled hearts and whitened them for good. As at all times known, the wisdom took over the discord.



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