

Fahad the Brave



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Fahad the Brave



Story

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Emily Styles

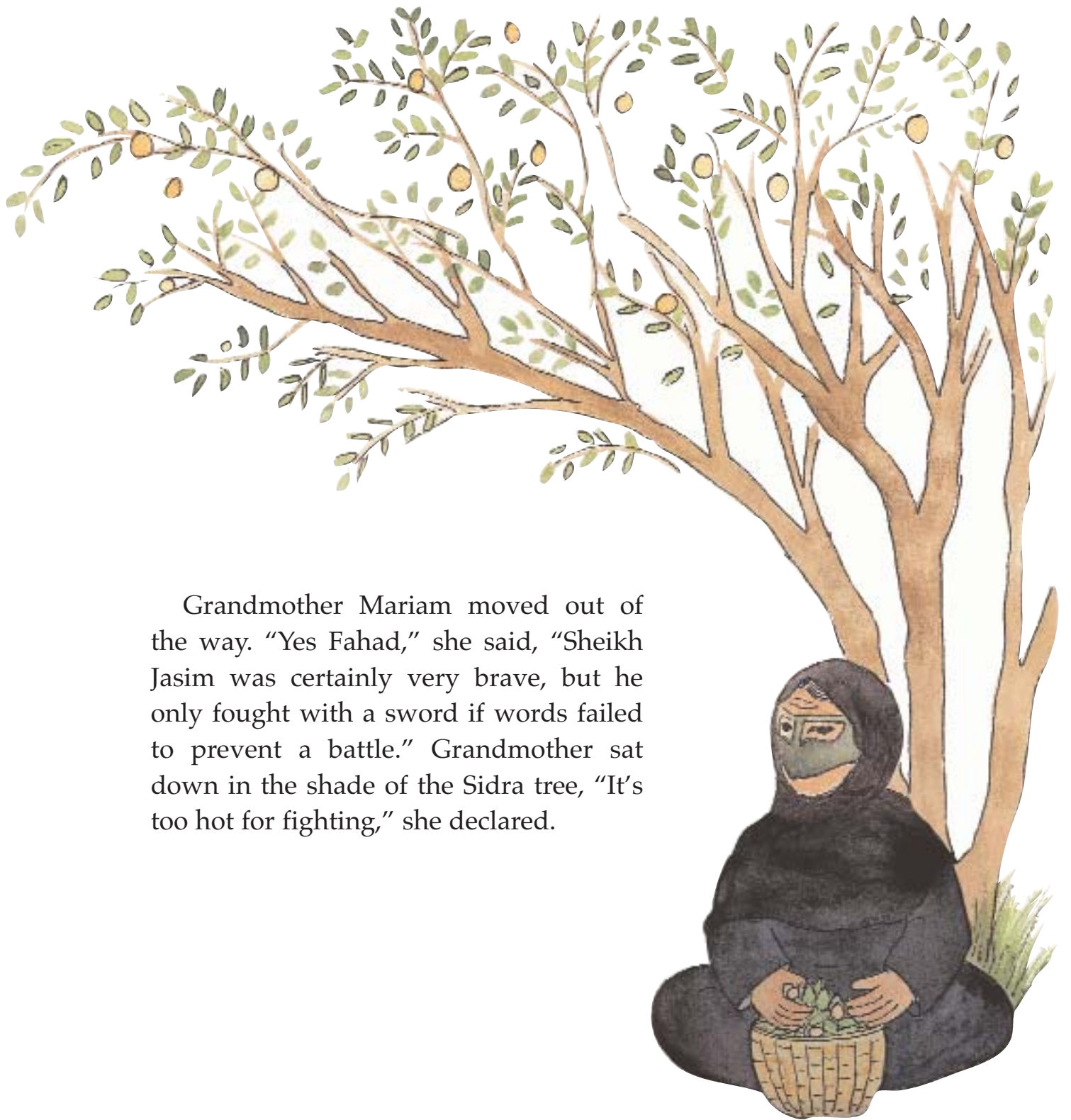
Fahad marched up and down. He was playing his favourite game. When he heard the enemy approaching he hid behind one of the tall clay pots in the courtyard.

Grandmother Mariam stepped outside. Fahad made a fierce face and let out a blood-curdling scream as he leapt

from behind the pot. "Good gracious!" Grandmother exclaimed, "You frightened the wits out of me! What on earth are you doing Fahad?"

"I am one of Sheikh Jasim's brave soldiers," said Fahad, "and I am surprising the enemy," and he swished his wooden sword through the air.



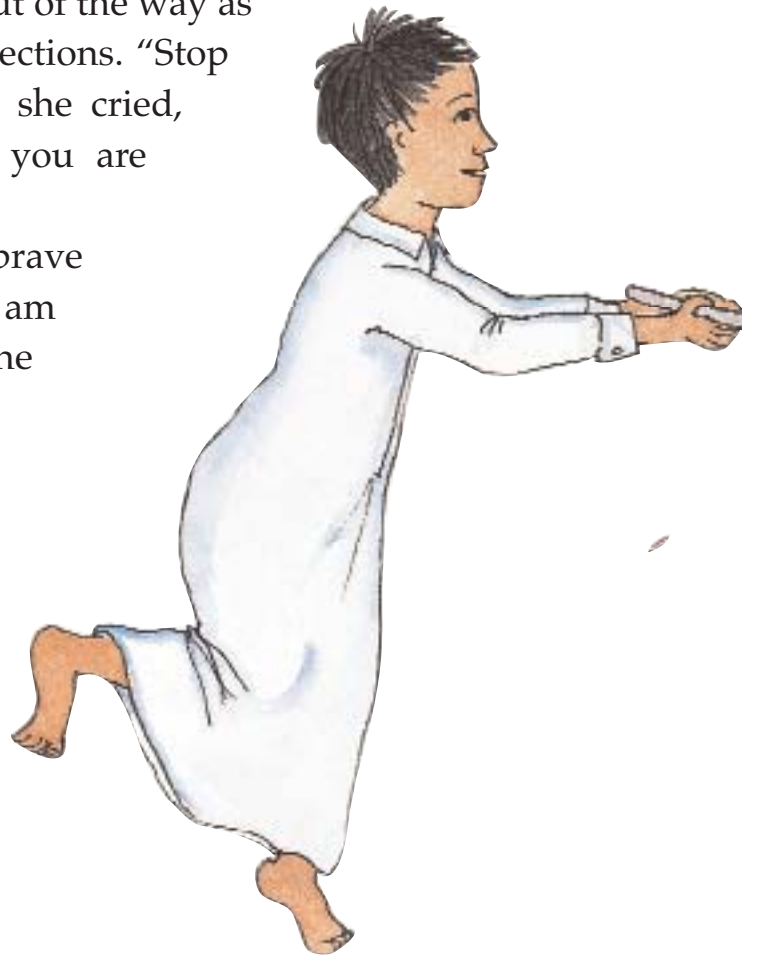


Grandmother Mariam moved out of the way. "Yes Fahad," she said, "Sheikh Jasim was certainly very brave, but he only fought with a sword if words failed to prevent a battle." Grandmother sat down in the shade of the Sidra tree, "It's too hot for fighting," she declared.

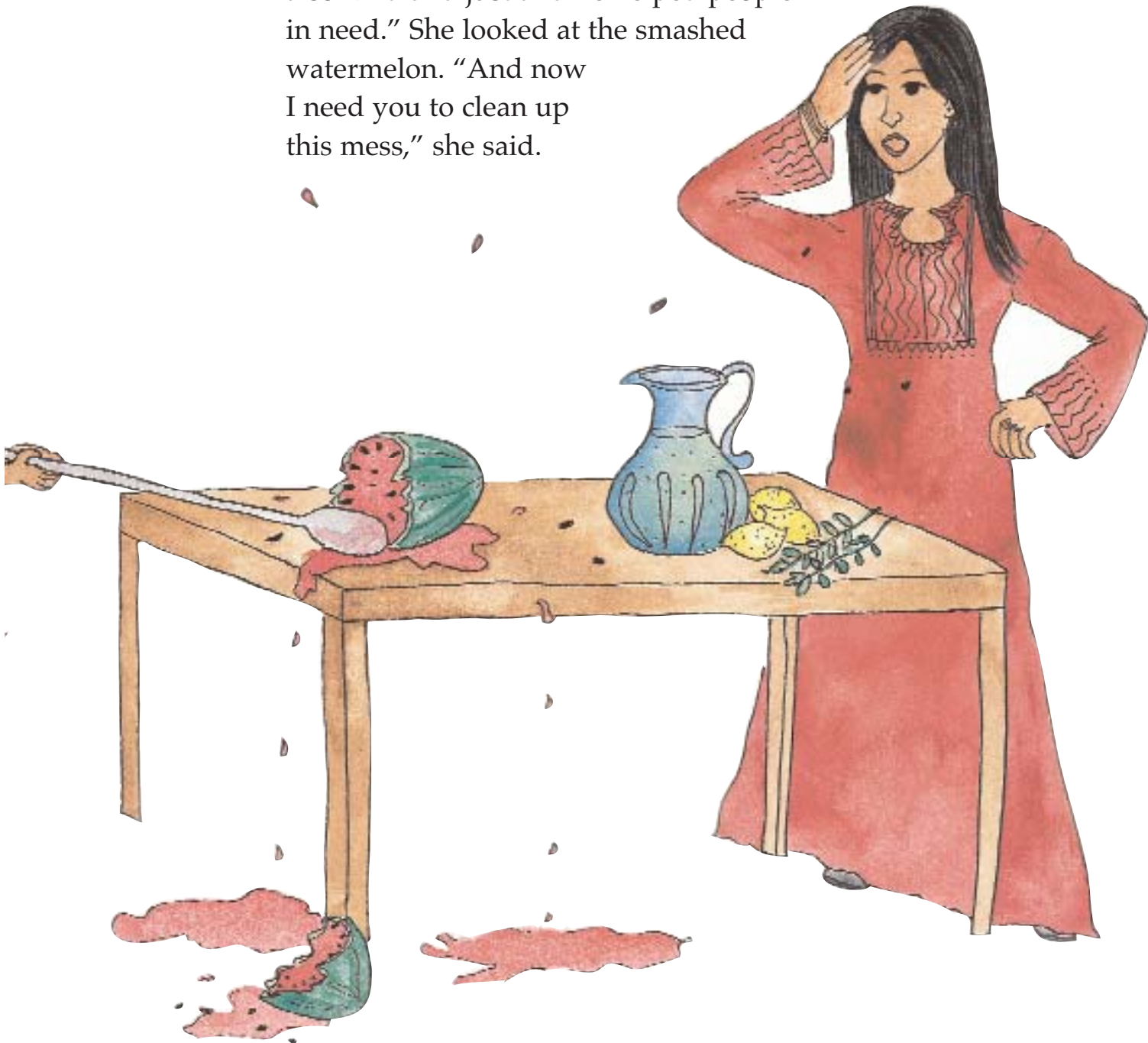
Fahad went inside. He found his mother in the kitchen. She was mixing a jug of lemonade and mint. "Would you like a cool drink, Fahad?" she asked. Fahad shook his head, he was still busy being a soldier.

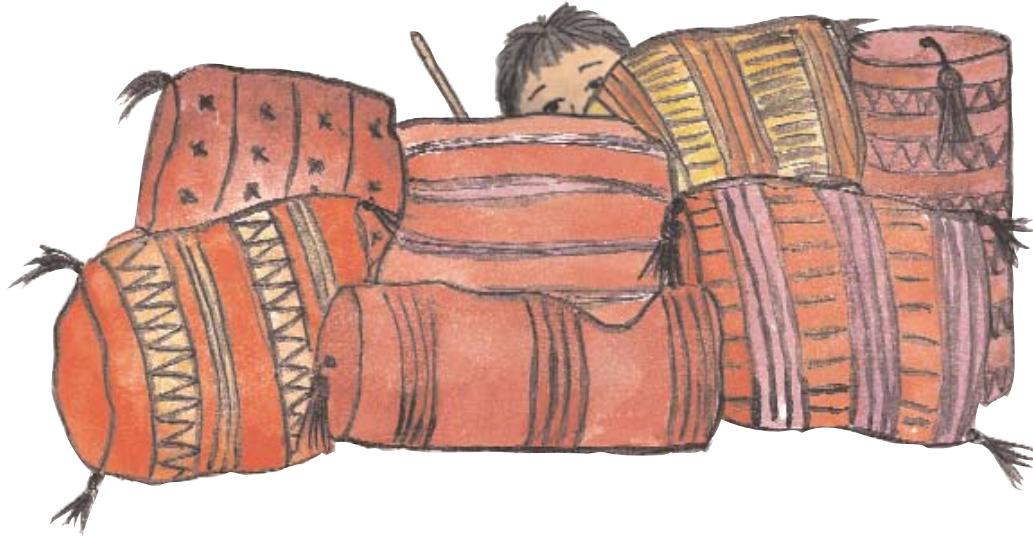
He picked up a big flat metal ladle and held it high above his head. With a terrible shriek, he attacked a watermelon which was lying on the kitchen table. His mother leapt out of the way as fruit and pips scattered in all directions. "Stop that, Fahad, stop that at once!" she cried, "What on earth do you think you are doing?"

"I am one of Sheikh Jasim's brave soldiers," said Fahad, "and I am defending my country against the enemy."



“It’s true that Sheikh Jasim was very brave,” said Fahad’s mother, “but he was also kind and just and he helped people in need.” She looked at the smashed watermelon. “And now I need you to clean up this mess,” she said.





Fahad found Grandfather sitting on a cushion in the majlis. His eyes were closed. Whilst he waited for Grandfather to wake up, Fahad built a fortress with some of the cushions. He picked up Grandfather's stick and hid inside the fortress. Peeping between the cushions, he watched and waited. When Grandfather opened his eyes Fahad gave a loud shout and leapt out of his fortress. Swoosh! Swish! He sliced the air with Grandfather's stick as he galloped around the majlis.

Grandfather rolled out of the way. "Bismillah! Bless me!" he cried, "What a fright you gave me! And do be careful with that, it's my favourite stick!" Fahad gave it back to him.

“I am one of Sheikh Jasim’s brave soldiers,” he told him, “and I am chasing the enemy.”

Grandfather looked thoughtful. “Sheikh Jasim was definitely very brave,” he said, “but he was wise and generous as well. He bought many books for his people with his own money, and he encouraged children to learn to read. Now we have excellent schools and universities so that boys like you can be educated,” Grandfather told him. He looked at Fahad. “And a jolly good thing too,” he added.

Fahad went into his room, and took out his favourite book of adventure stories. He sighed. “I wish I could be really brave,” he thought.





He looked at himself in the mirror. How could he make himself look brave, he wondered. He planted his feet wide apart and stood up tall and straight, but the reflection which stared back at him showed a small skinny boy. He puffed out his chest. He rolled up the sleeves of his thobe and flexed the muscles in his arms, but the little lumps that appeared were no bigger than pigeon's eggs.

Perhaps if he were to make a brave face that might help. He opened his eyes very wide and bared his teeth.

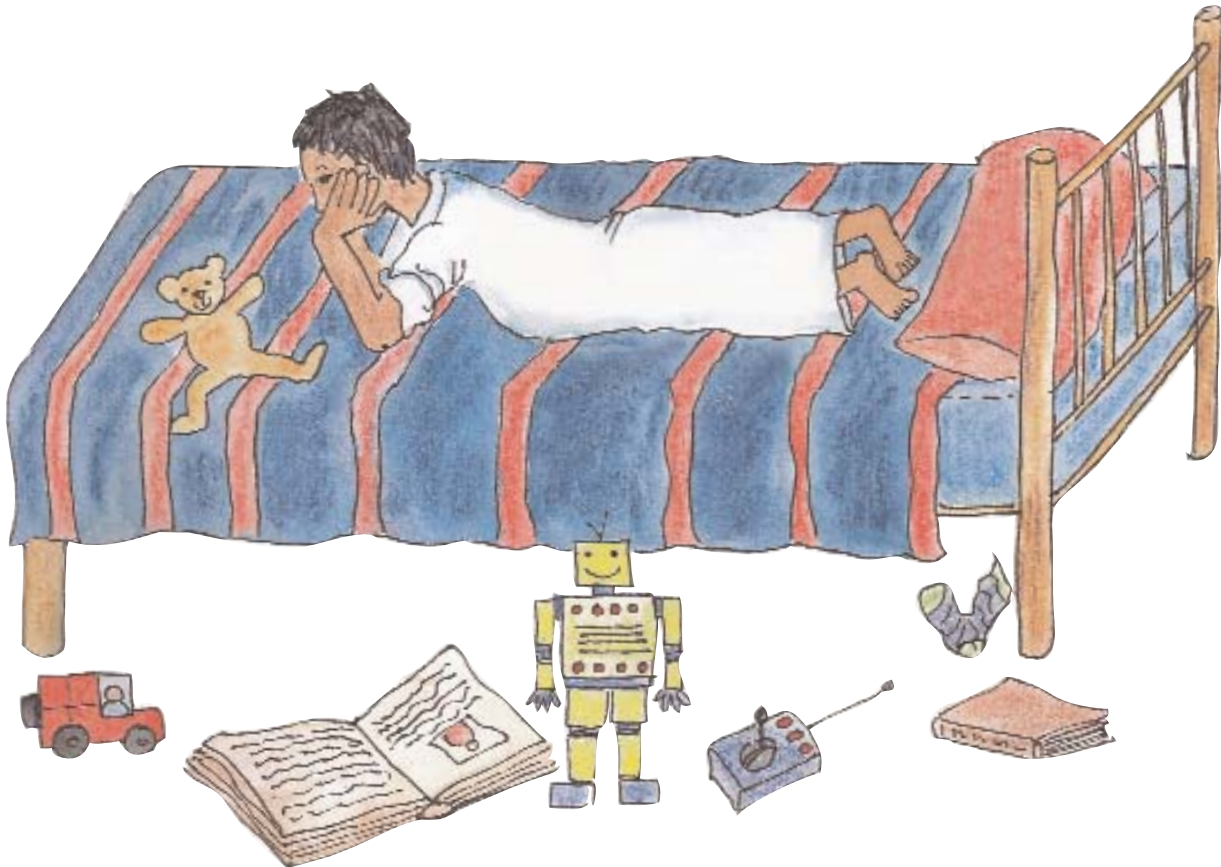
At that moment the door opened and his big sister came in. Roda took one look at Fahad and burst out laughing. "What are you doing?" she asked.

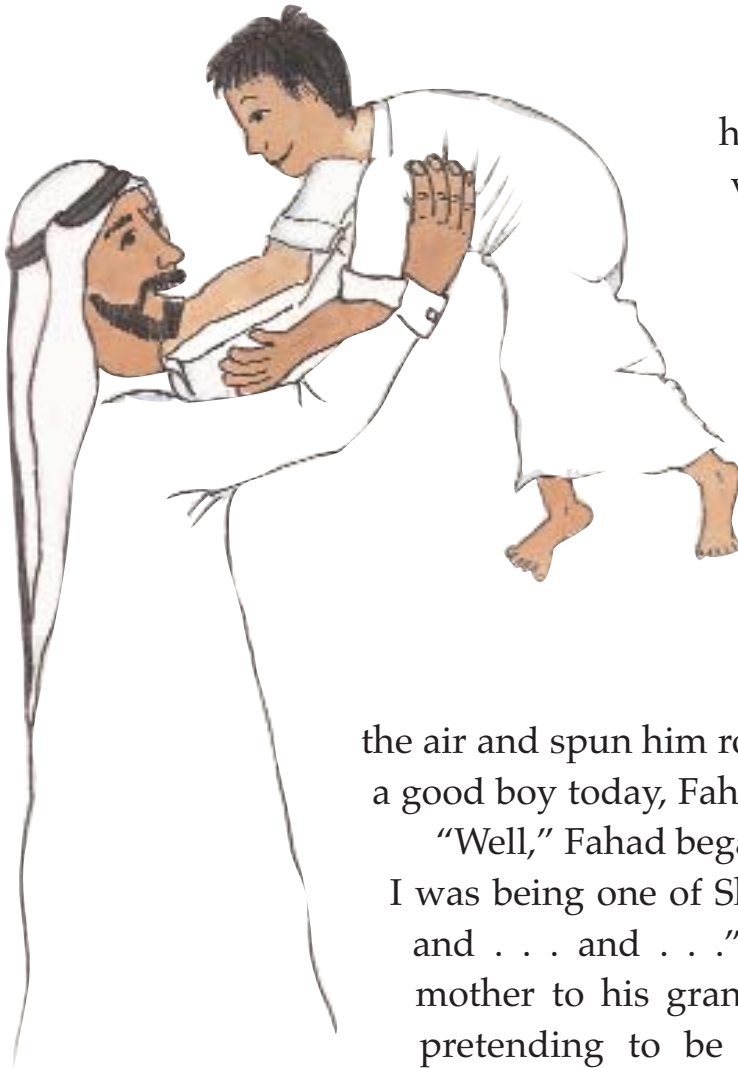
"I am one of Sheikh Jasim's soldiers," Fahad replied, "and I am being very brave."

"Well you don't look very brave," said Roda, and she laughed again. Fahad felt miserable. "Anyway," Roda

continued, “brave people aren’t scared of things, and you are frightened of lots of things.” She went out, and Fahad could still hear her laughing as she walked away.

Fahad felt like bursting into tears, but he didn’t let himself because brave people didn’t cry, did they? He had been brave that time he had fallen off his pony, he hadn’t cried even though he had hurt himself. He remembered picking himself up and climbing back into the saddle. So he was brave sometimes. But Roda was right, he was frightened of lots of things. Darkness, for instance, and stories of djinns, and swimming in water that was too deep to stand in . . . Yes, lots of things.





Just then Fahad heard his father's voice. He raced through the house. "Papa, you're home," he cried, flinging himself into his father's outstretched arms.

His father laughed and lifted him high in the air and spun him round. "Have you been a good boy today, Fahad?" he asked.

"Well," Fahad began, "well you see Papa I was being one of Sheikh Jasim's soldiers, and . . . and . . ." He looked from his mother to his grandparents, "and I was pretending to be brave and fight the enemy," he said, "but instead I scared everyone and I made a mess." He caught his mother's eye, "Rather a big mess," he added. Fahad looked at his father, "I didn't mean to Papa." He hung his head, "I'm sorry," he said, and he meant it.

“Well it’s brave to say you’re sorry,” said his father.

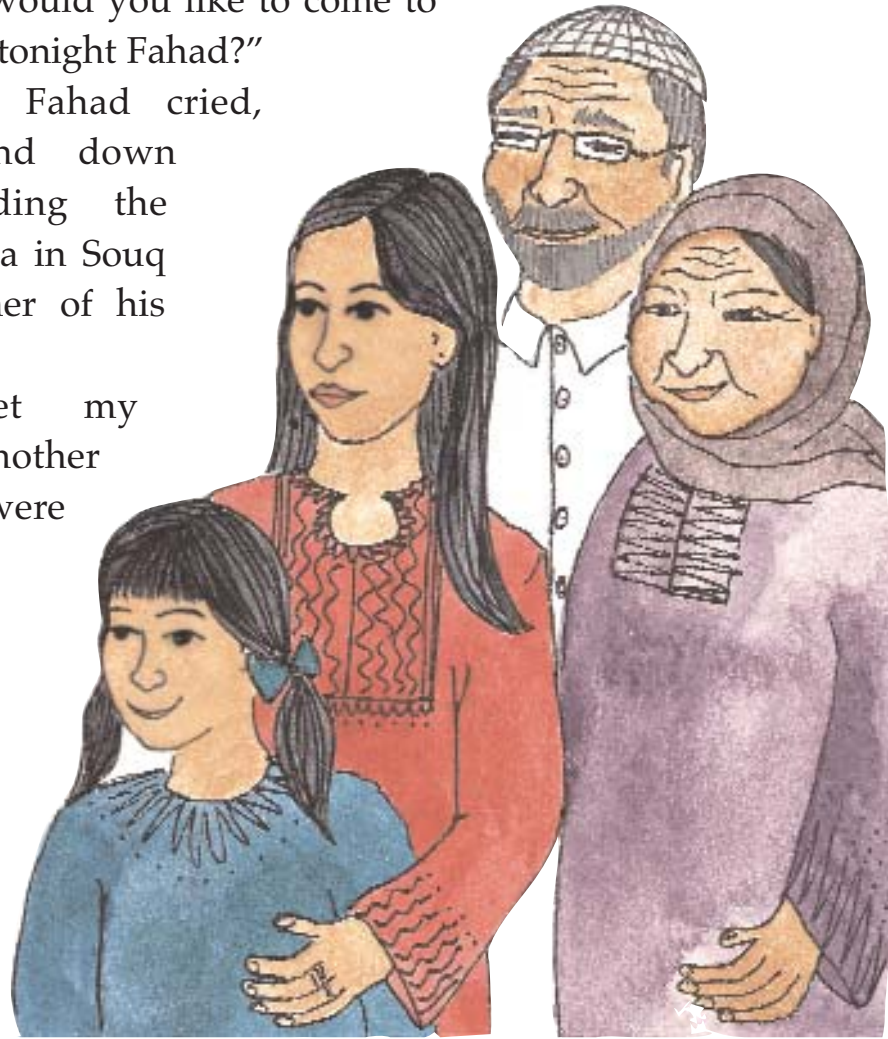
“Now then everyone, have you forgotten that we’re all going camping at Khor Al Udaid tomorrow?”

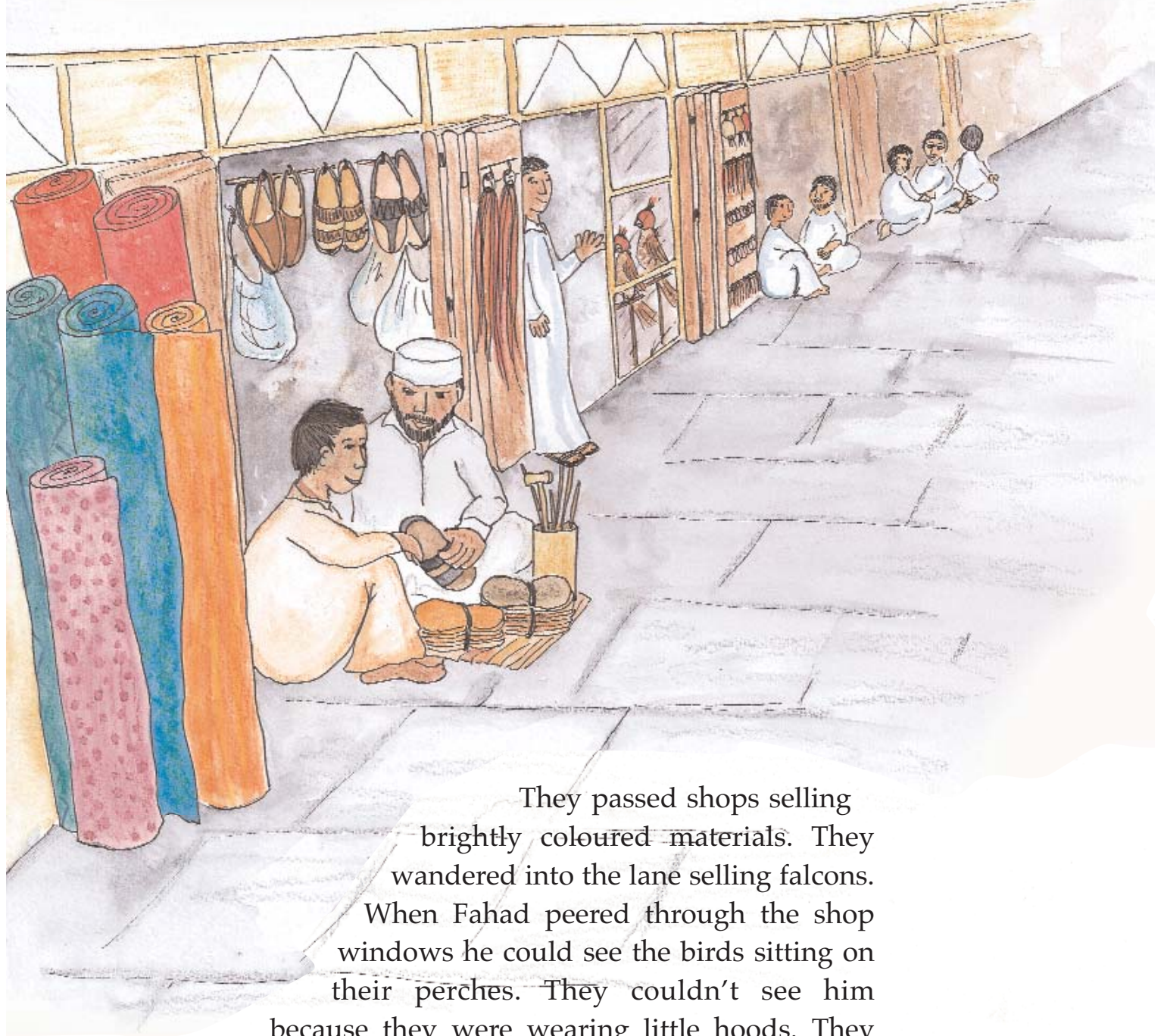
Fahad clapped his hands. “Hooray,” he cried. Camping was one of his favourite things in the whole wide world, and he loved the drive through the desert, over the dunes to the inland sea.

“I need to buy one or two things for the trip,” his father went on, “would you like to come to the souq with me tonight Fahad?”

“Yes please,” Fahad cried, jumping up and down excitedly. Spending the evening with Papa in Souq Waqif was another of his favourite things!

“Don’t forget my spices,” his mother called as they were leaving.





They passed shops selling brightly coloured materials. They wandered into the lane selling falcons. When Fahad peered through the shop windows he could see the birds sitting on their perches. They couldn't see him because they were wearing little hoods. They passed the cobblers mending shoes.

"You know why the souq is called Souq Waqif don't you, Fahad?" his father asked.

“It means ‘the standing market’,” Fahad replied straight away, “because in the old days the traders had to stand up all the time, didn’t they Papa?”

“That’s right, well done,” said Papa, “there weren’t any shops here back then because it was so narrow and sometimes the ground got flooded.”

They came to a shop selling kites. “Let’s buy one for your sister,” Papa suggested, “which one do you think she’d like?”

Fahad picked out one that looked like a butterfly. It was bright pink. “Roda’s favourite colour!” he said delightedly.



Fahad could smell the spices long before they reached the shop. “Salam alaikum, Siraj,” Papa greeted the shopkeeper.

“Alaikum Salam,” Siraj replied. Fahad watched him take a scoop of cardamom seeds from a big sack, weigh them in the scales and tip them into a small paper bag. They bought dried chillies too and ginger.

“How’s the family?” Papa asked. Siraj’s family lived in Mumbai in India.

“Everyone is fine, alhamdulillah,” Siraj replied. “My eldest son is training to be a policeman,” he said proudly. He turned to Fahad. “What do you want to be when you are grown up?” he asked.

Fahad shook his head. He would not say that he wanted to be brave like Sheikh Jasim. But to his surprise Papa said, “Fahad admires Sheikh Jasim, and he wants to grow up to be someone Sheikh Jasim would have been proud of, isn’t that right, Fahad?”





They left the spice shop and made their way to a café where they were greeted by Papa's friends. The men drank Arabic coffee from small cups without handles and Fahad had a glass of laban. The yogurt drink was refreshing and delicious.

Sometimes there was a storyteller, and tonight they listened to a poet. Fahad loved the rhythm of the words, it was like music washing over him, even if sometimes the meaning was a bit difficult to understand. His





favourite poem of course,
was by Sheikh Jasim!

On the way home
Papa said, "There
are many ways of
being brave you
know, Fahad, and

being brave doesn't mean
that you aren't frightened sometimes."

Fahad thought about this. "But Sheikh Jasim was
never ever frightened was he Papa?" he asked.

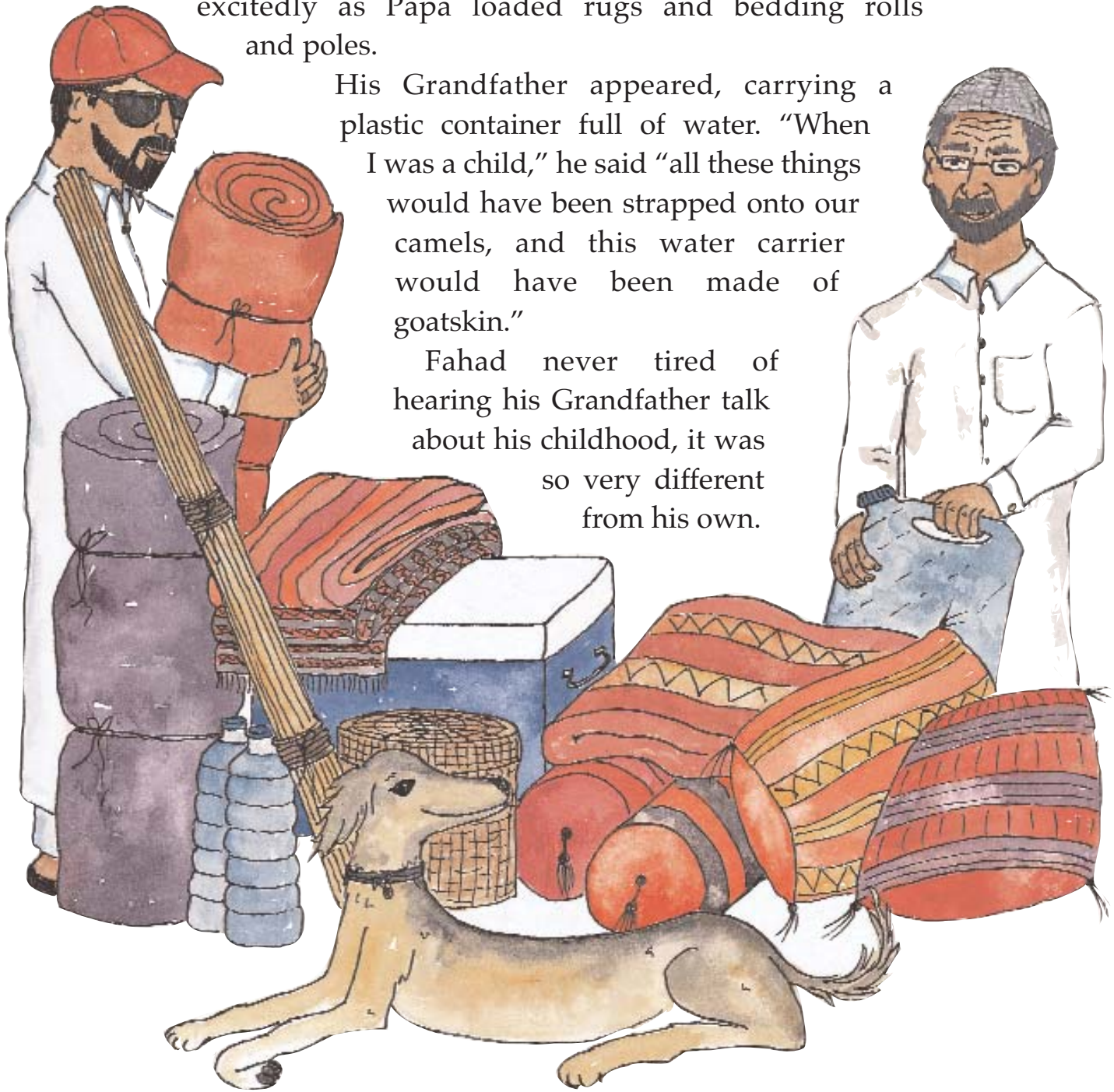
"I am sure that everyone is afraid once in a while," his
father replied, "but the important thing is not to allow
your fear stop you doing what you believe you must do.
That's what makes a person truly brave."

When Fahad got up the next morning he found his

father already packing the big 4WD. Fahad watched excitedly as Papa loaded rugs and bedding rolls and poles.

His Grandfather appeared, carrying a plastic container full of water. "When I was a child," he said "all these things would have been strapped onto our camels, and this water carrier would have been made of goatskin."

Fahad never tired of hearing his Grandfather talk about his childhood, it was so very different from his own.



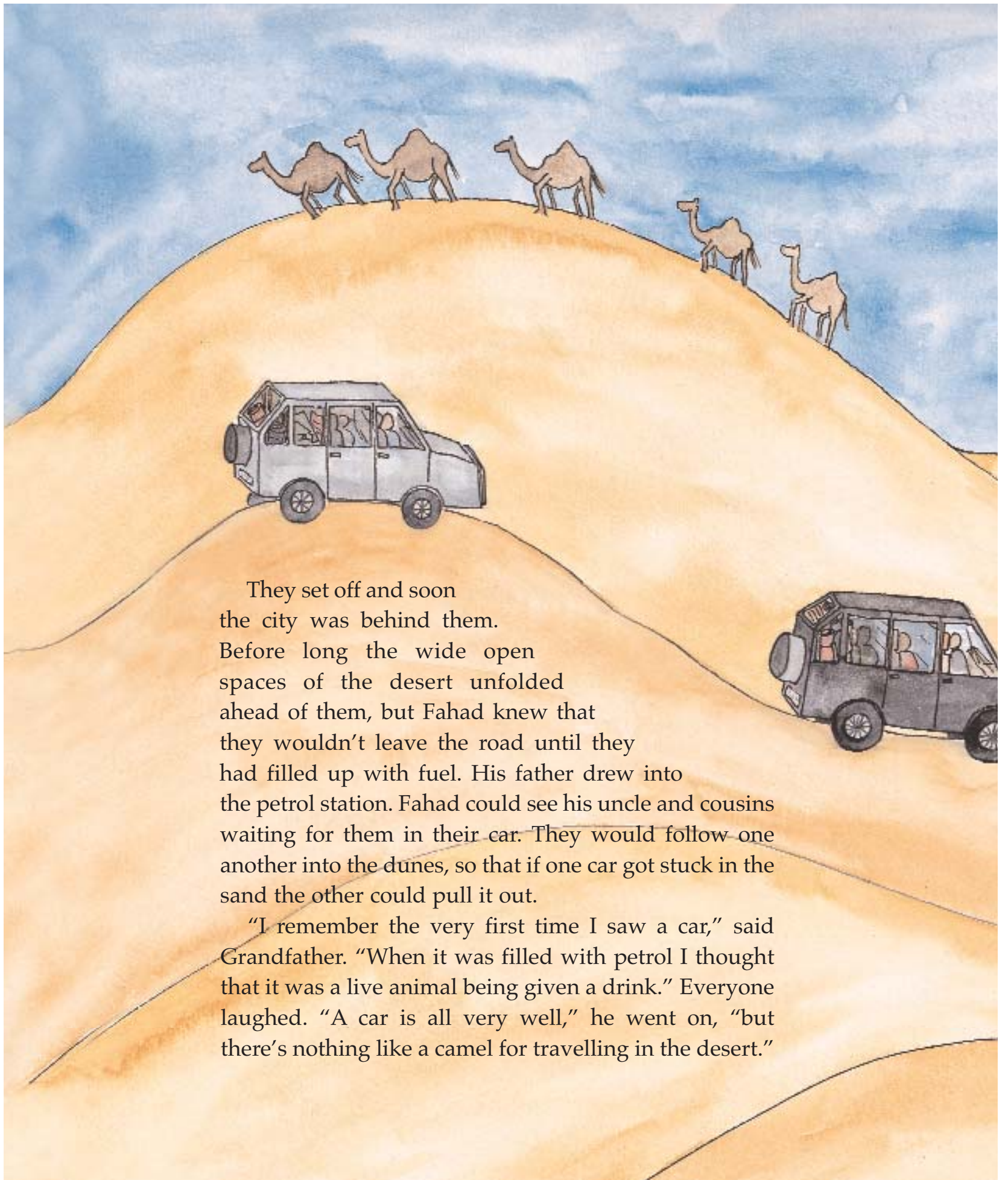
When he was a boy Grandfather had lived in a traditional tent in the desert for several months of the year. If the water supply ran dry the family moved, in search of fresh grazing for their goats and camels and horses.

Grandfather didn't have burgers and hotdogs and ice cream to eat when he was a boy. And he didn't have television either. Fahad couldn't imagine life without ice cream and television!

At last they were ready. The car was piled high with things. "My goodness," said Grandmother Mariam, "it looks as if we are going away for two weeks, not two days!"

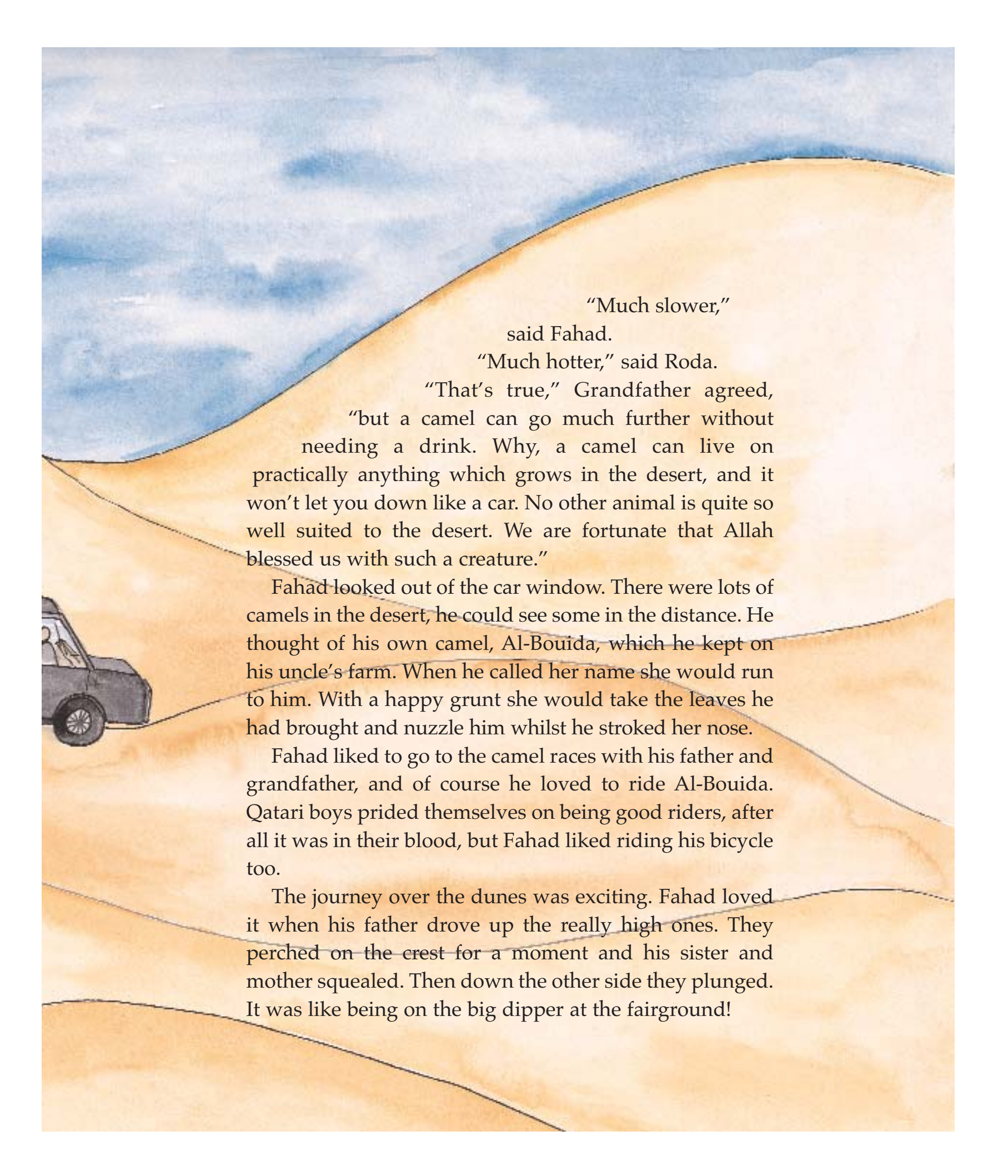
"Come on Sahab," Papa called to the family's Saluki hound. Sahab was waiting obediently for the invitation to jump into the car. Now he squeezed himself in between Fahad and Roda. He loved camping trips too!





They set off and soon the city was behind them. Before long the wide open spaces of the desert unfolded ahead of them, but Fahad knew that they wouldn't leave the road until they had filled up with fuel. His father drove into the petrol station. Fahad could see his uncle and cousins waiting for them in their car. They would follow one another into the dunes, so that if one car got stuck in the sand the other could pull it out.

"I remember the very first time I saw a car," said Grandfather. "When it was filled with petrol I thought that it was a live animal being given a drink." Everyone laughed. "A car is all very well," he went on, "but there's nothing like a camel for travelling in the desert."



“Much slower,”
said Fahad.

“Much hotter,” said Roda.

“That’s true,” Grandfather agreed,
“but a camel can go much further without
needing a drink. Why, a camel can live on
practically anything which grows in the desert, and it
won’t let you down like a car. No other animal is quite so
well suited to the desert. We are fortunate that Allah
blessed us with such a creature.”

Fahad looked out of the car window. There were lots of
camels in the desert, he could see some in the distance. He
thought of his own camel, Al-Bouida, which he kept on
his uncle’s farm. When he called her name she would run
to him. With a happy grunt she would take the leaves he
had brought and nuzzle him whilst he stroked her nose.

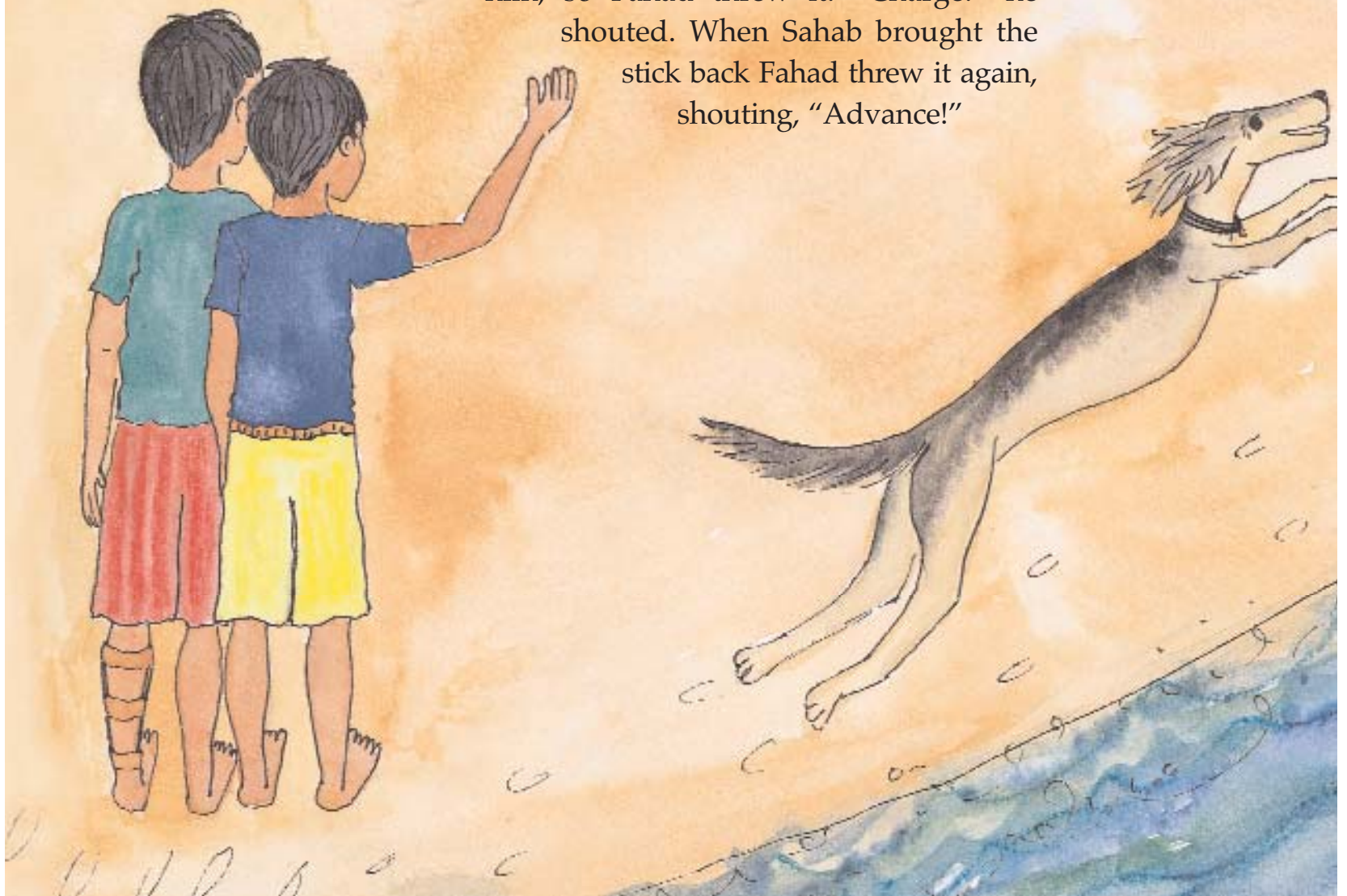
Fahad liked to go to the camel races with his father and
grandfather, and of course he loved to ride Al-Bouida.
Qatari boys prided themselves on being good riders, after
all it was in their blood, but Fahad liked riding his bicycle
too.

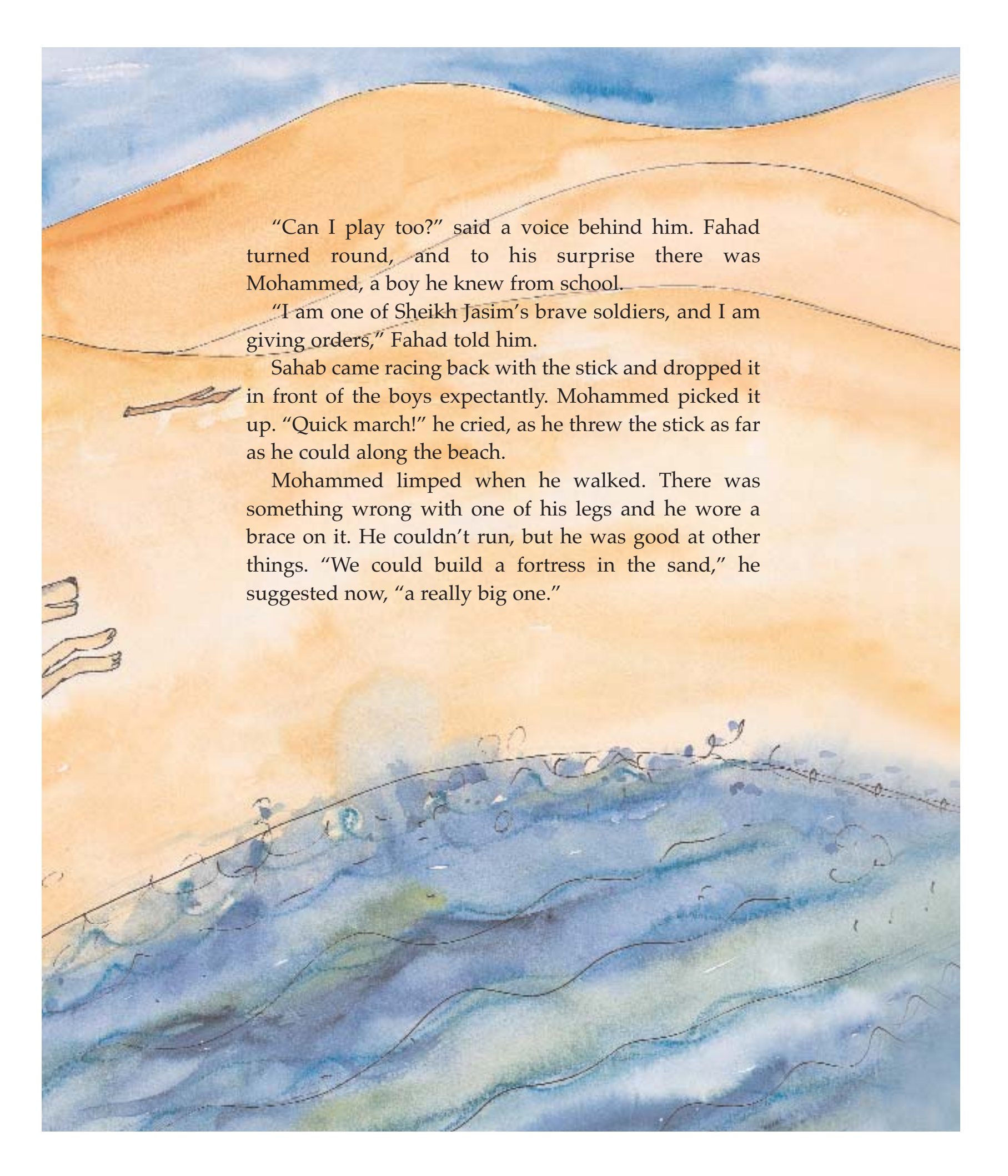
The journey over the dunes was exciting. Fahad loved
it when his father drove up the really high ones. They
perched on the crest for a moment and his sister and
mother squealed. Then down the other side they plunged.
It was like being on the big dipper at the fairground!

When they reached the beach some other families were there already. Fahad jumped out of the car and Sahab leapt after him. Together they ran down to the water's edge. Khor Al Udaid was a big lagoon almost completely surrounded by land. At one end there was a narrow inlet that connected it to the open sea.

Fahad picked up a stick. It was just the right sort of stick for a sword, but Sahab didn't want to play soldiers.

He was waiting for Fahad to throw the stick for him, so Fahad threw it. "Charge!" he shouted. When Sahab brought the stick back Fahad threw it again, shouting, "Advance!"





“Can I play too?” said a voice behind him. Fahad turned round, and to his surprise there was Mohammed, a boy he knew from school.

“I am one of Sheikh Jasim’s brave soldiers, and I am giving orders,” Fahad told him.

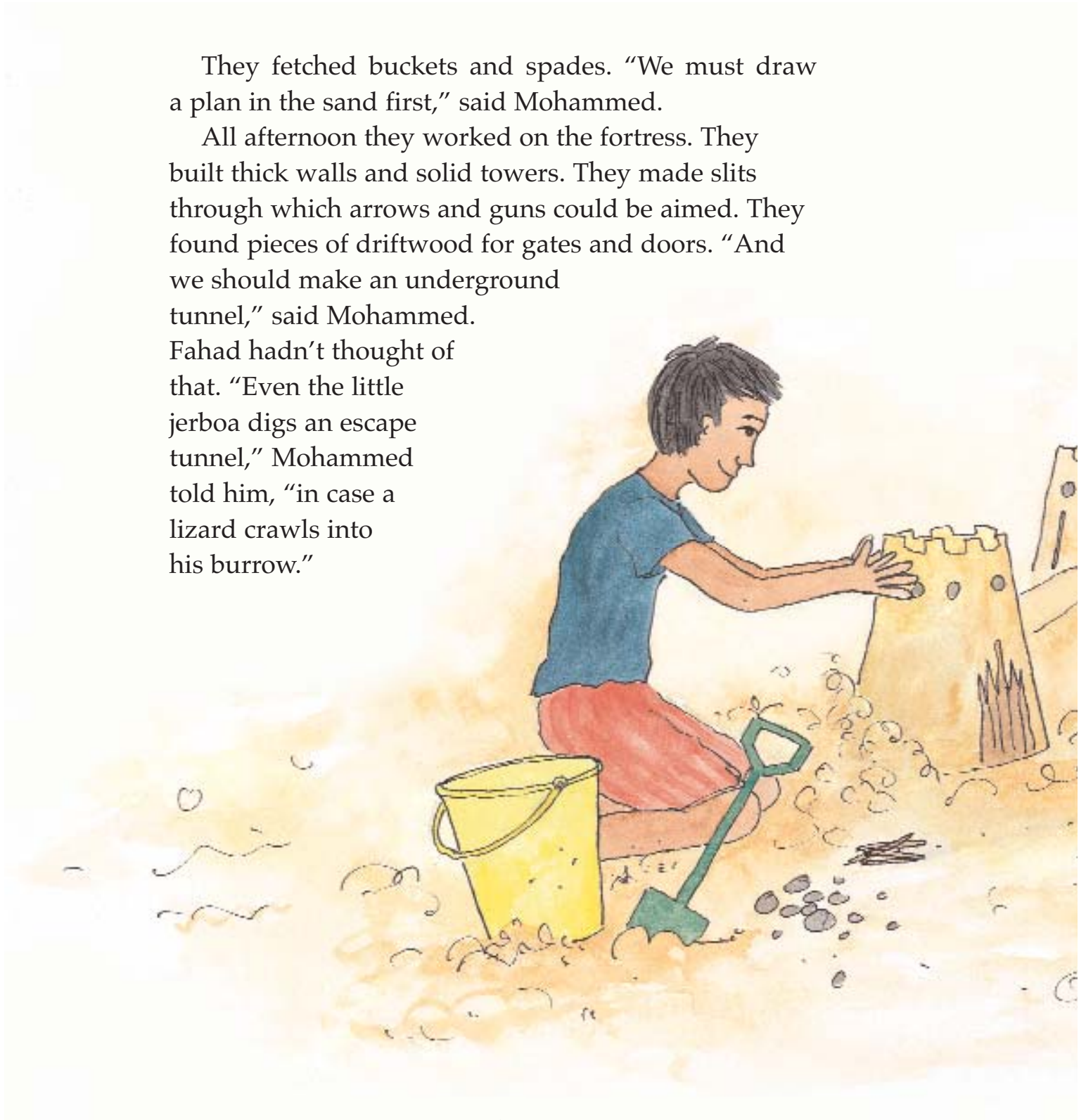
Sahab came racing back with the stick and dropped it in front of the boys expectantly. Mohammed picked it up. “Quick march!” he cried, as he threw the stick as far as he could along the beach.

Mohammed limped when he walked. There was something wrong with one of his legs and he wore a brace on it. He couldn’t run, but he was good at other things. “We could build a fortress in the sand,” he suggested now, “a really big one.”

They fetched buckets and spades. “We must draw a plan in the sand first,” said Mohammed.

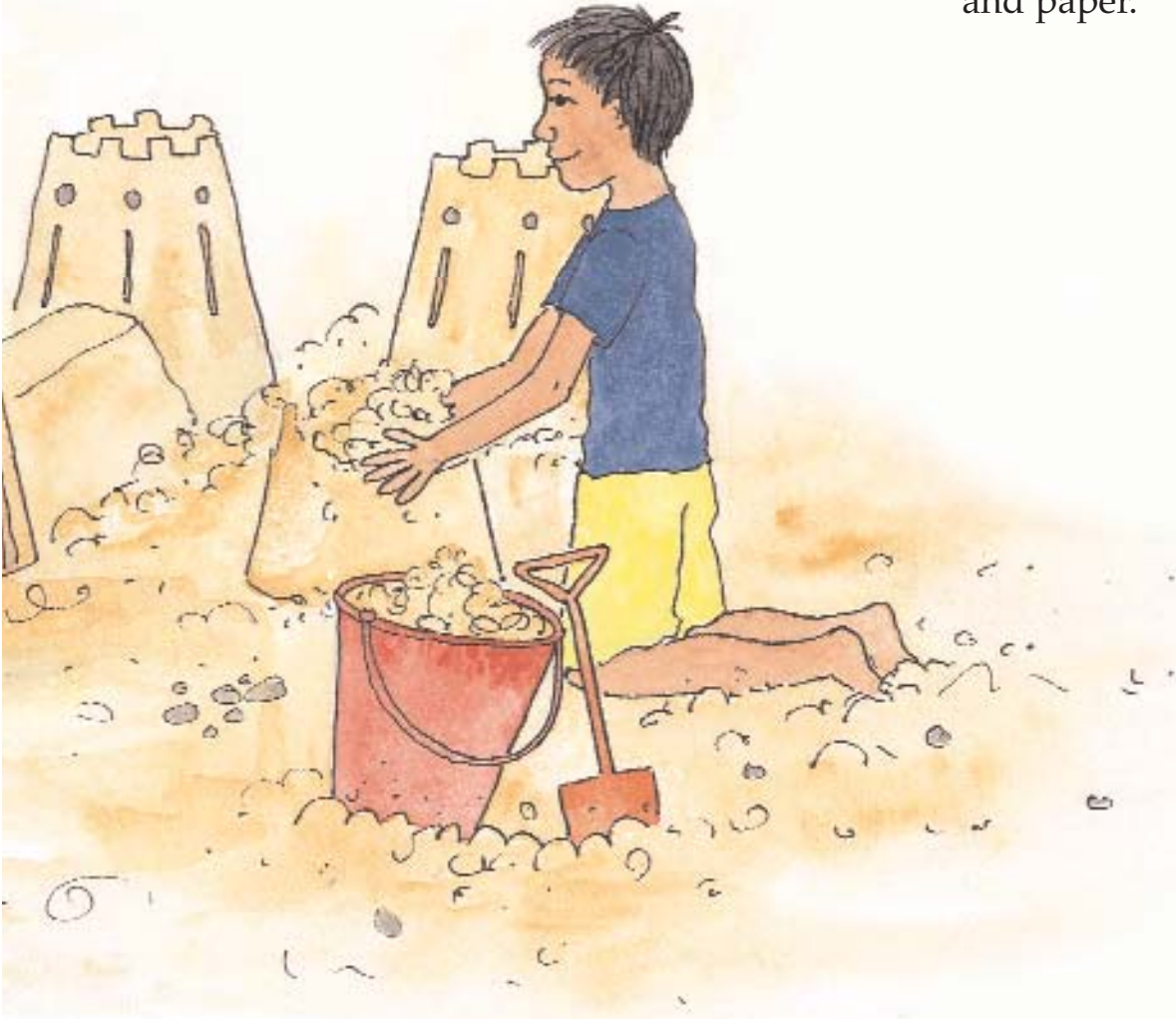
All afternoon they worked on the fortress. They built thick walls and solid towers. They made slits through which arrows and guns could be aimed. They found pieces of driftwood for gates and doors. “And we should make an underground tunnel,” said Mohammed.

Fahad hadn’t thought of that. “Even the little jerboa digs an escape tunnel,” Mohammed told him, “in case a lizard crawls into his burrow.”



At last the boys stood up. They walked all round the fortress. It was splendid! "We could have the national flag of Qatar flying from one of the towers," Mohammed suggested.

"Good idea," Fahad agreed, "wait here!" and he ran off. A few minutes later he came running back with crayons and paper.



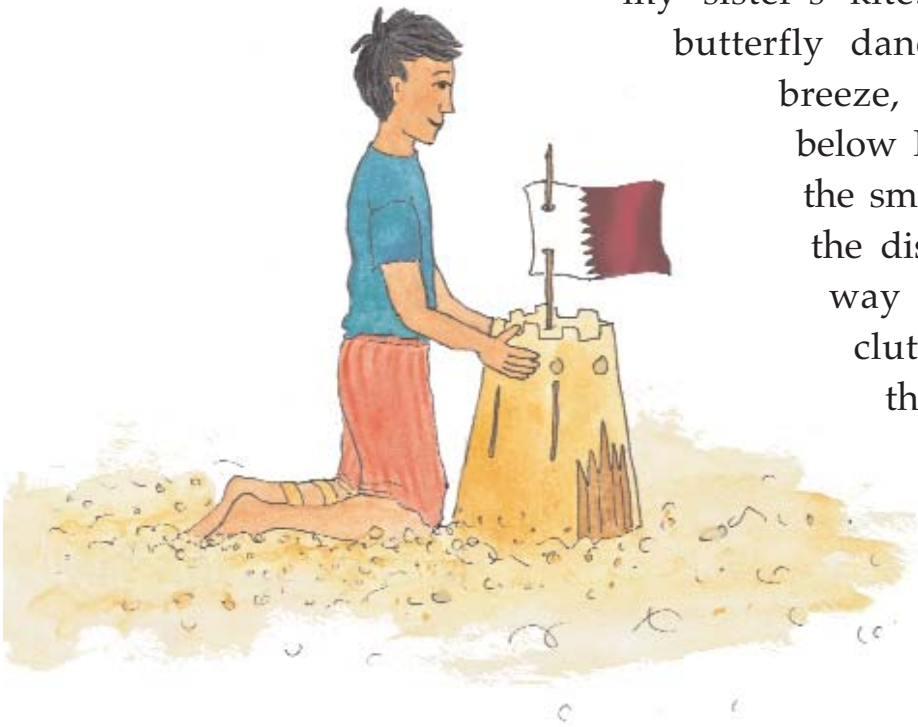
Mohammed made the flag. First he drew a nine-pointed zig-zag line to divide the flag into two parts. Then he coloured the large part maroon, making sure not to colour over the zig-zag line. The smaller part he left white.

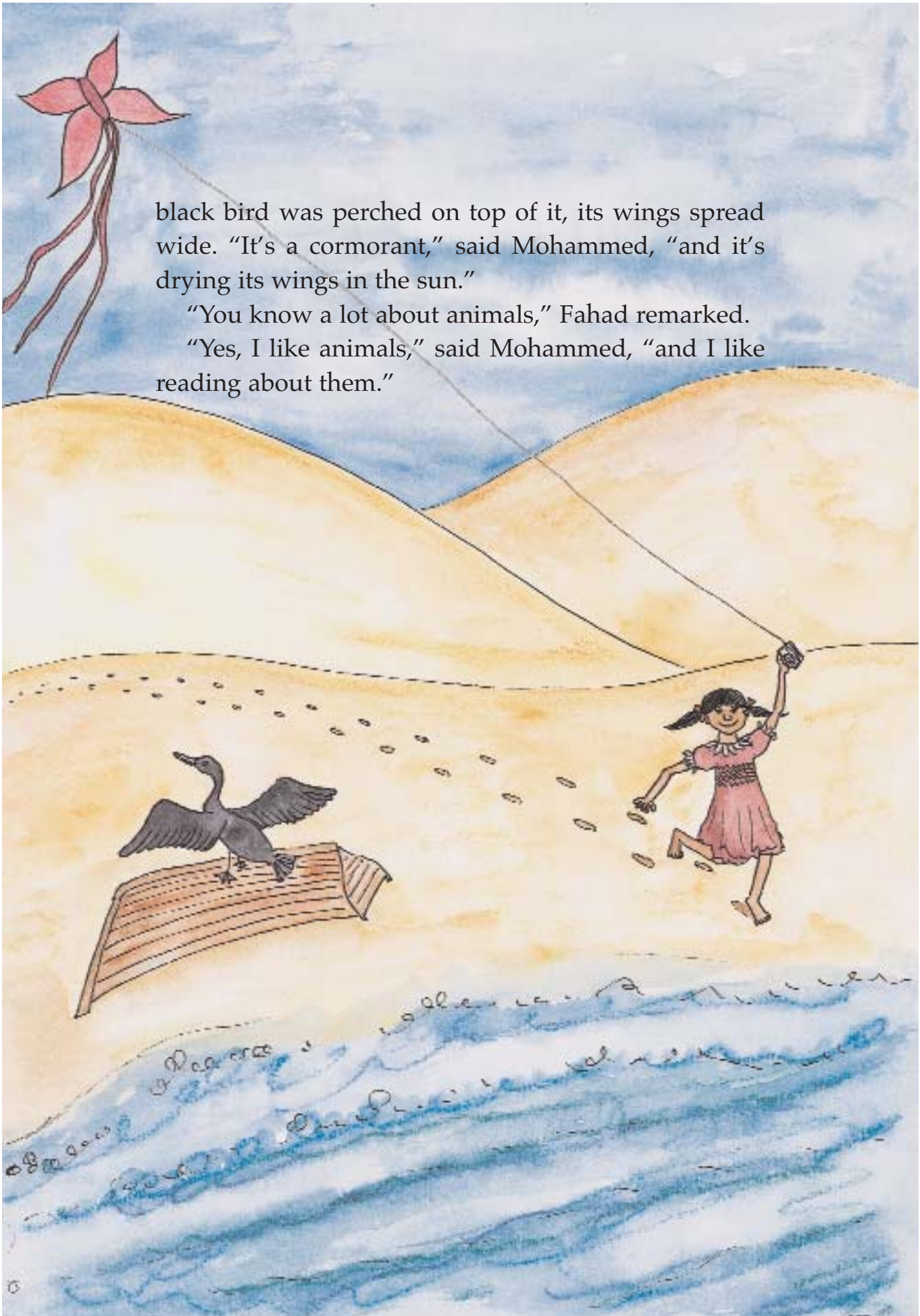
Fahad looked for a pointy stick on the beach. "Found one!" he cried. Mohammed poked the stick through the paper flag and stuck it carefully into the tallest tower. "Perfect!" declared Fahad.

The boys wandered along the beach together. Suddenly Mohammed pointed to a shiny, slippery, slithery creature, "A sand fish," he whispered as it vanished beneath the surface of the sand.

Glancing up at the sky, Fahad shouted, "Look! That's my sister's kite!" The bright pink butterfly danced merrily in the breeze, and on the sand below Fahad could just see the small figure of Roda in the distance, skipping this way and that as she clutched the string of the kite.

Further on they could see an old boat lying upside down in the sand. A





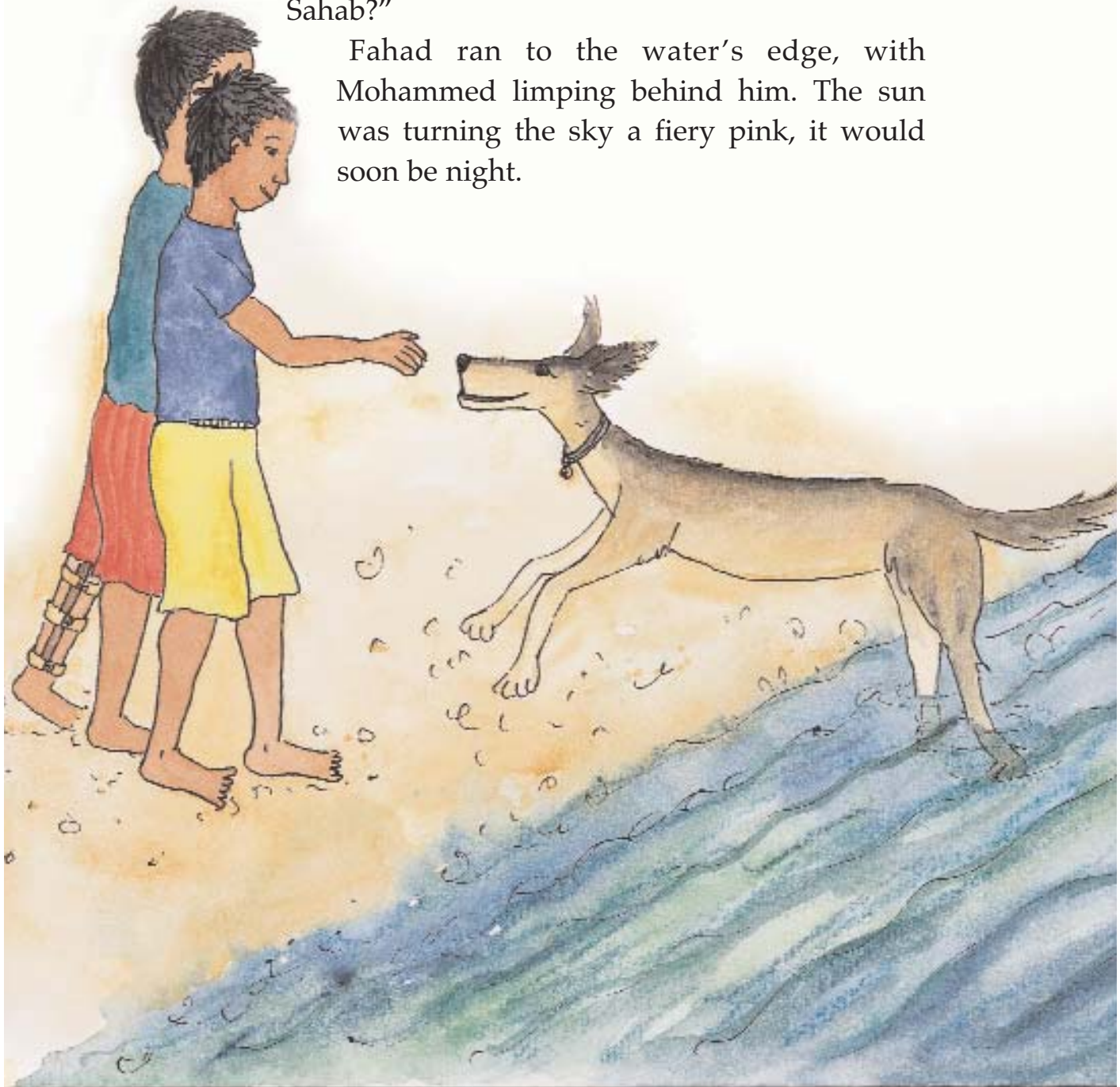
black bird was perched on top of it, its wings spread wide. "It's a cormorant," said Mohammed, "and it's drying its wings in the sun."

"You know a lot about animals," Fahad remarked.

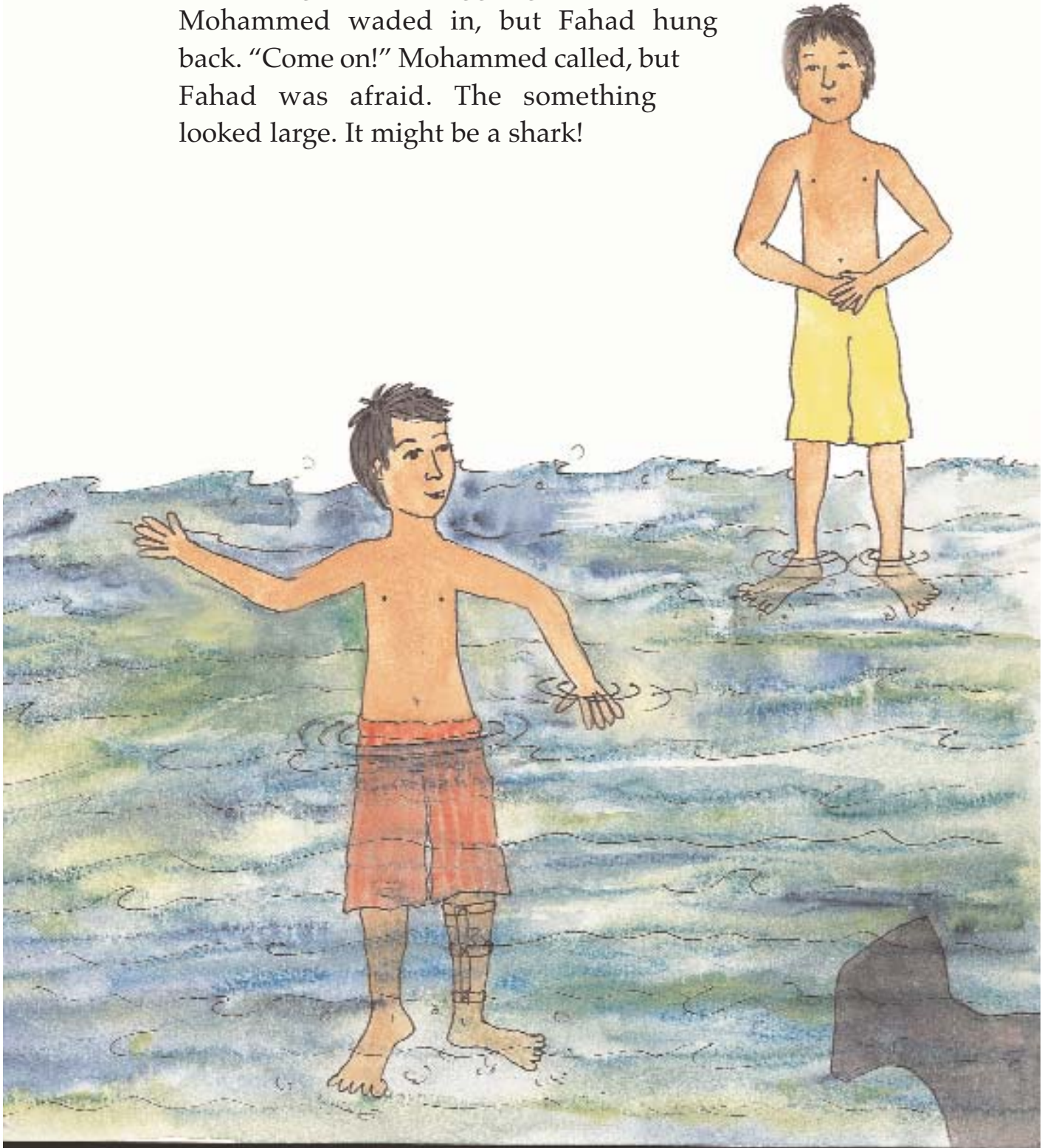
"Yes, I like animals," said Mohammed, "and I like reading about them."

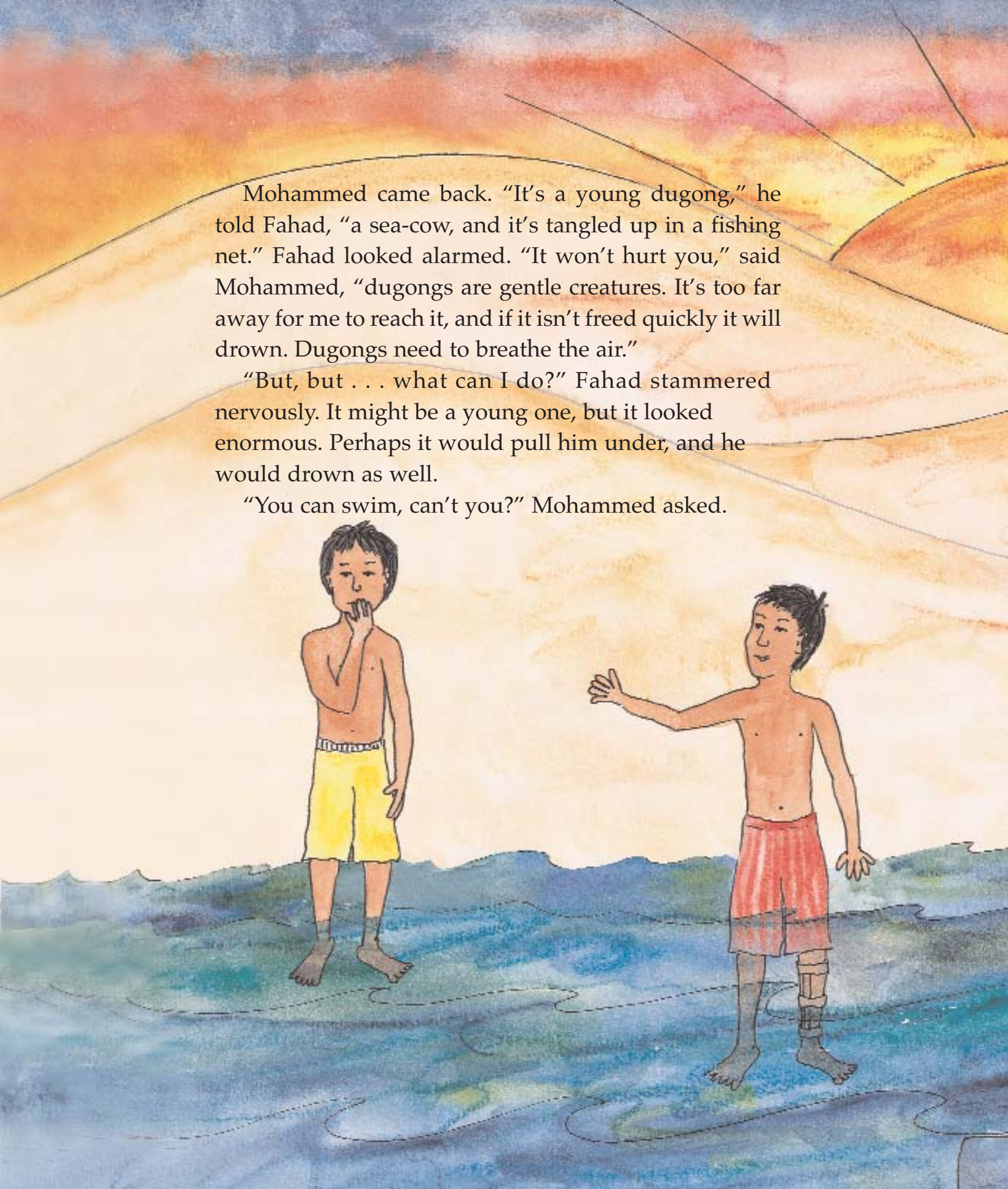
Sahab came racing along the beach towards them. He rushed into the water, barking excitedly. "What is it Sahab?" Fahad asked "What have you seen?" Sahab bounded backwards and forwards, into the sea, then back to the boys. "What are you trying to tell us Sahab?"

Fahad ran to the water's edge, with Mohammed limping behind him. The sun was turning the sky a fiery pink, it would soon be night.



“Look,” cried Mohammed, “over there.”
Something was struggling in the water.
Mohammed waded in, but Fahad hung
back. “Come on!” Mohammed called, but
Fahad was afraid. The something
looked large. It might be a shark!

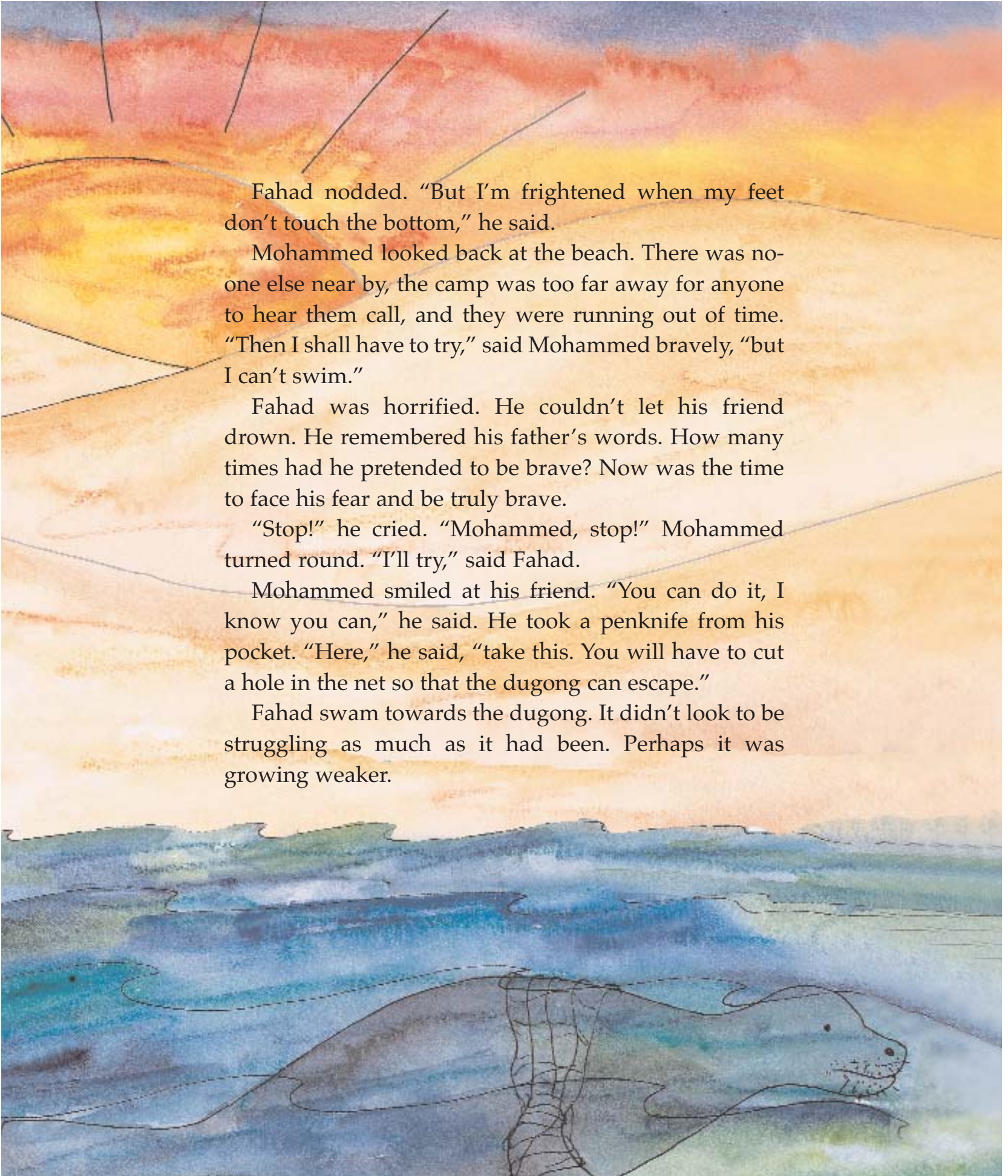




Mohammed came back. "It's a young dugong," he told Fahad, "a sea-cow, and it's tangled up in a fishing net." Fahad looked alarmed. "It won't hurt you," said Mohammed, "dugongs are gentle creatures. It's too far away for me to reach it, and if it isn't freed quickly it will drown. Dugongs need to breathe the air."

"But, but . . . what can I do?" Fahad stammered nervously. It might be a young one, but it looked enormous. Perhaps it would pull him under, and he would drown as well.

"You can swim, can't you?" Mohammed asked.

A watercolor illustration of a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is filled with warm, blended colors of orange, yellow, and red, with a few thin black lines representing the sun's rays. The water below is painted in various shades of blue and green, with a dark, rounded shape representing a dugong. A net is visible, partially enclosing the dugong. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Fahad nodded. "But I'm frightened when my feet don't touch the bottom," he said.

Mohammed looked back at the beach. There was no one else near by, the camp was too far away for anyone to hear them call, and they were running out of time. "Then I shall have to try," said Mohammed bravely, "but I can't swim."

Fahad was horrified. He couldn't let his friend drown. He remembered his father's words. How many times had he pretended to be brave? Now was the time to face his fear and be truly brave.

"Stop!" he cried. "Mohammed, stop!" Mohammed turned round. "I'll try," said Fahad.

Mohammed smiled at his friend. "You can do it, I know you can," he said. He took a penknife from his pocket. "Here," he said, "take this. You will have to cut a hole in the net so that the dugong can escape."

Fahad swam towards the dugong. It didn't look to be struggling as much as it had been. Perhaps it was growing weaker.

Fahad put one foot down to touch the bottom, but the bottom was no longer there. Instead he swallowed a mouthful of salty water. He coughed and spluttered, he could feel his heart pounding, but he kept on going.

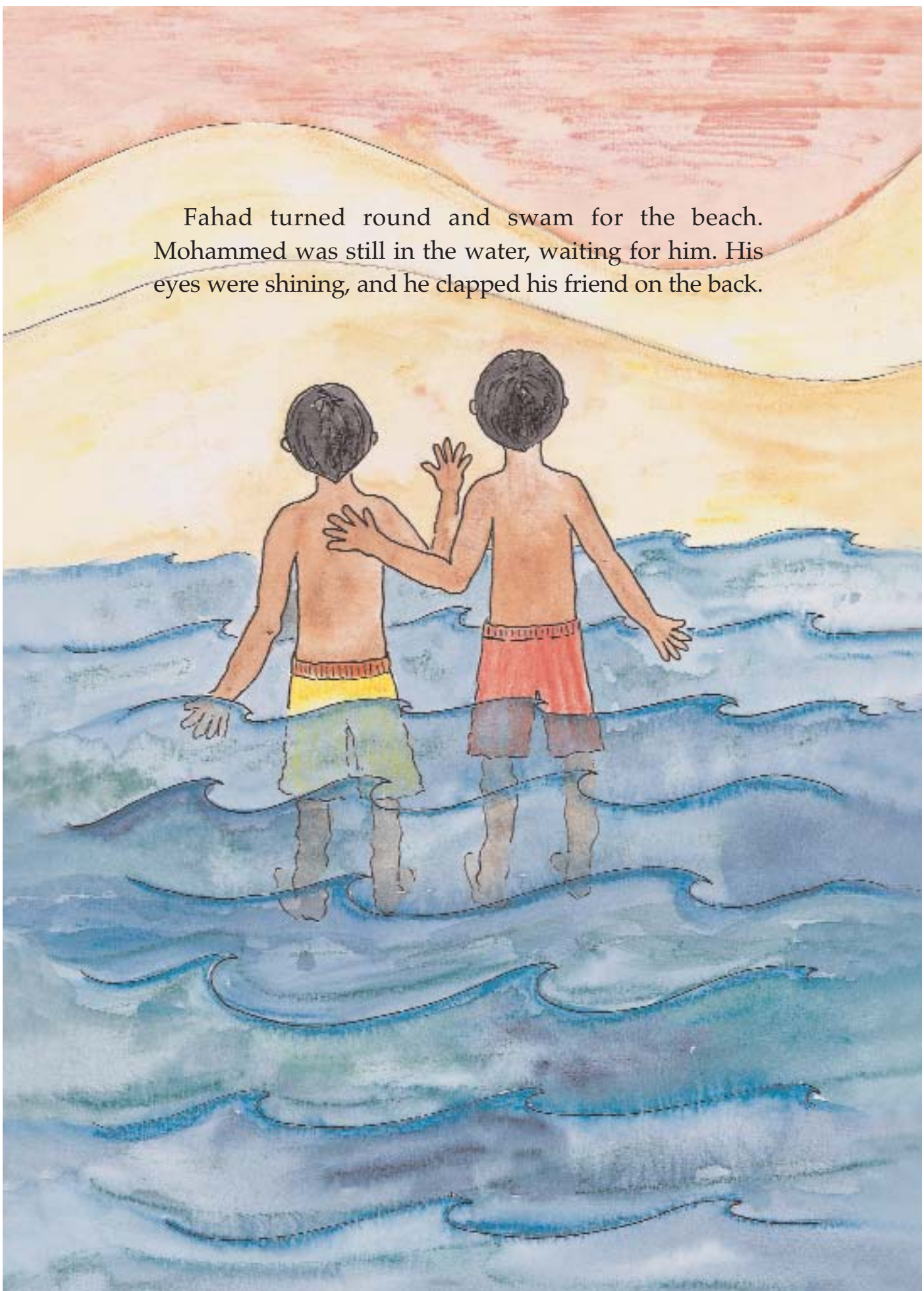
“Only a little bit further,” Mohammed called, “you’re almost there.” A few more strokes, just a few more, Fahad told himself. He had never swum as far as this before, but he was no longer feeling quite so afraid.

At last he reached the dugong. What a curious creature, he thought, as he peered at it through the water. It seemed to be peering back at him from its small beady eyes. It was no longer struggling though. Perhaps he was too late. Quickly he cut the net with the penknife. He could feel the creature’s bristly skin beneath his fingers. Please make it live, he prayed.

Soon he had made a big hole in the net. “Come on,” he urged, “come on.” As if it had heard him, the dugong made a sudden determined effort. It rose to the surface, it gulped in air, and then it slipped back into the water and was gone.

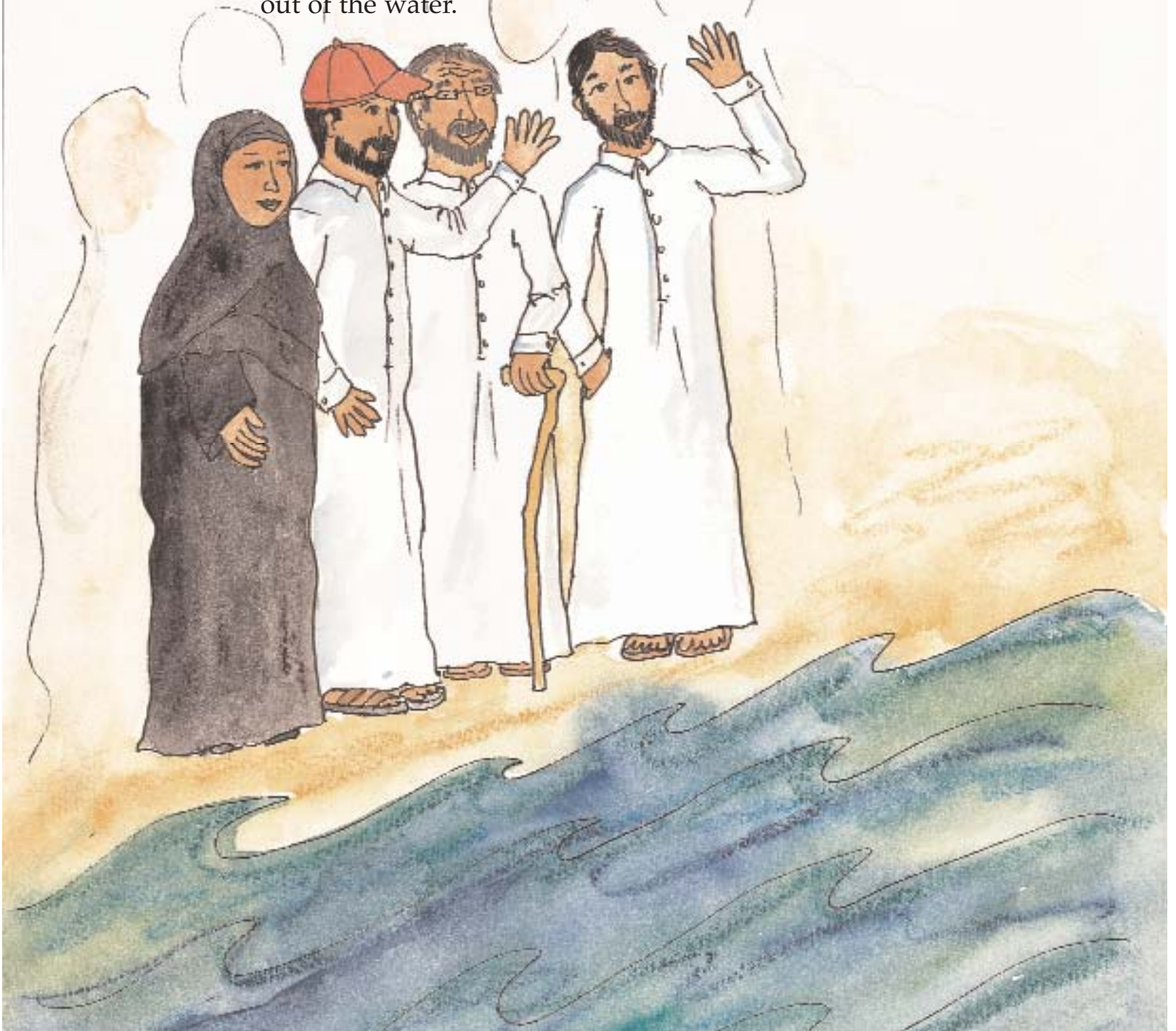


Fahad turned round and swam for the beach. Mohammed was still in the water, waiting for him. His eyes were shining, and he clapped his friend on the back.



FAHAD THE BRAVE

Papa, Mother and Grandfather were standing at the water's edge with Mohammed's father. Roda came running to join them. Other people had gathered on the beach as well. They gave a loud cheer as the boys came out of the water.



Grandfather said, "You have saved a rare and precious creature of our seas."

Roda grinned at Fahad. "Who would have thought it, my brother is a hero," she said, and hugged him.

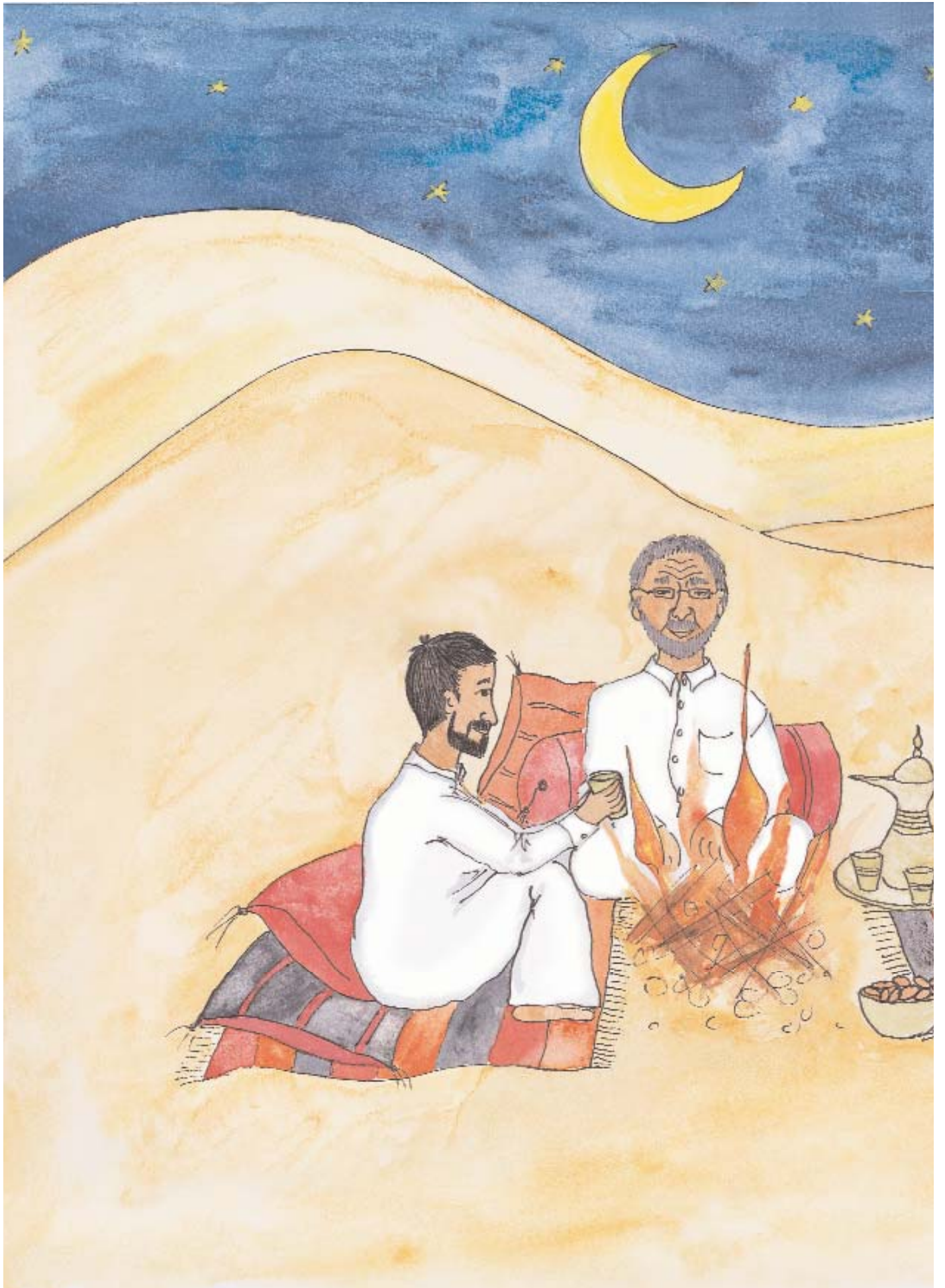
"Well done, Fahad," said Papa, "you overcame your fear, and that was a truly brave thing to do." He held his son close, "I'm very proud of you," he said.

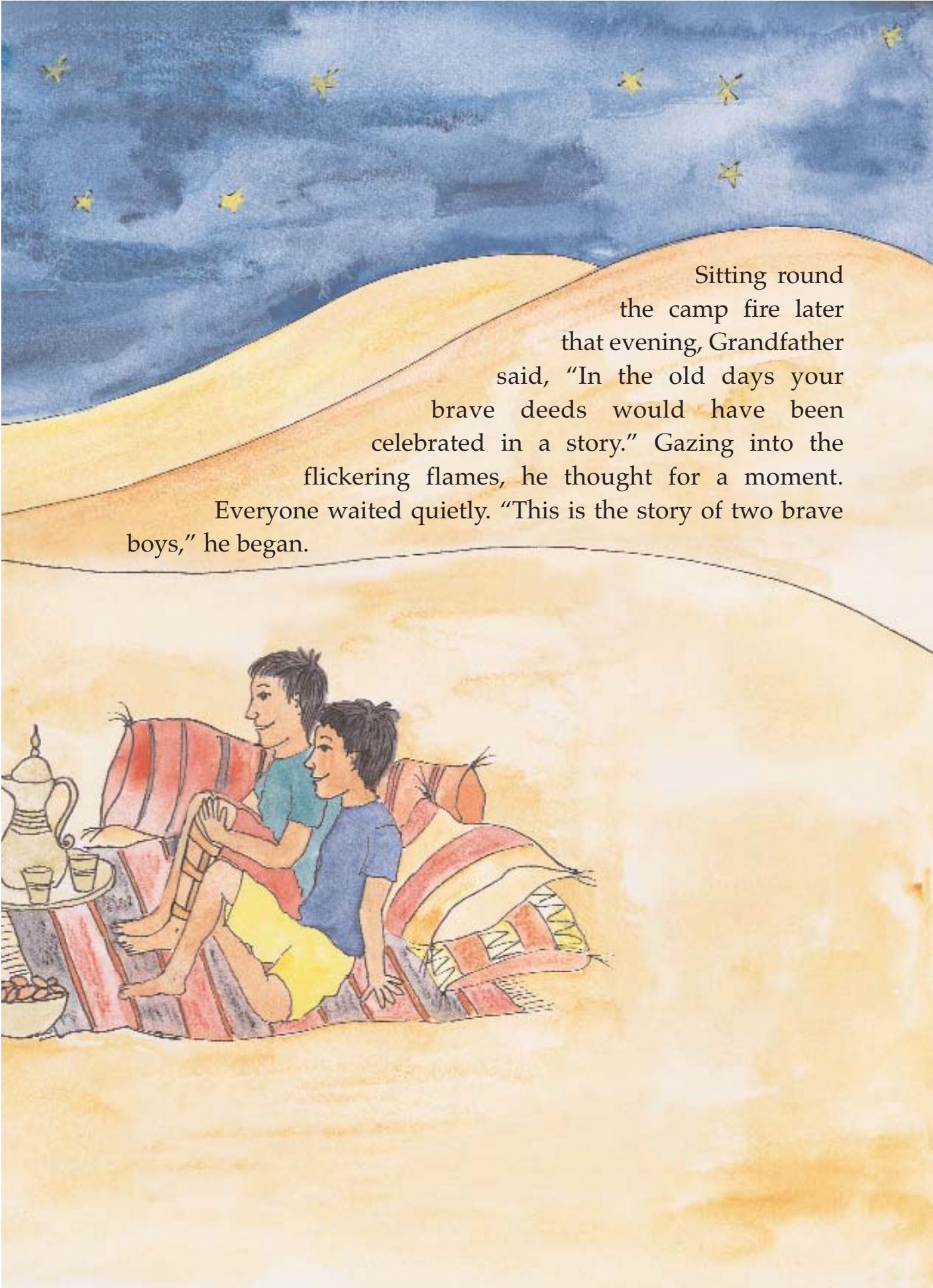
"But it was Mohammed who knew what to do Papa," said Fahad.

"And it was Sahab who showed us the dugong," said Mohammed.

"Well then," said Papa, "together you make a good team. Sheikh Jasim would have been very proud of all of you."

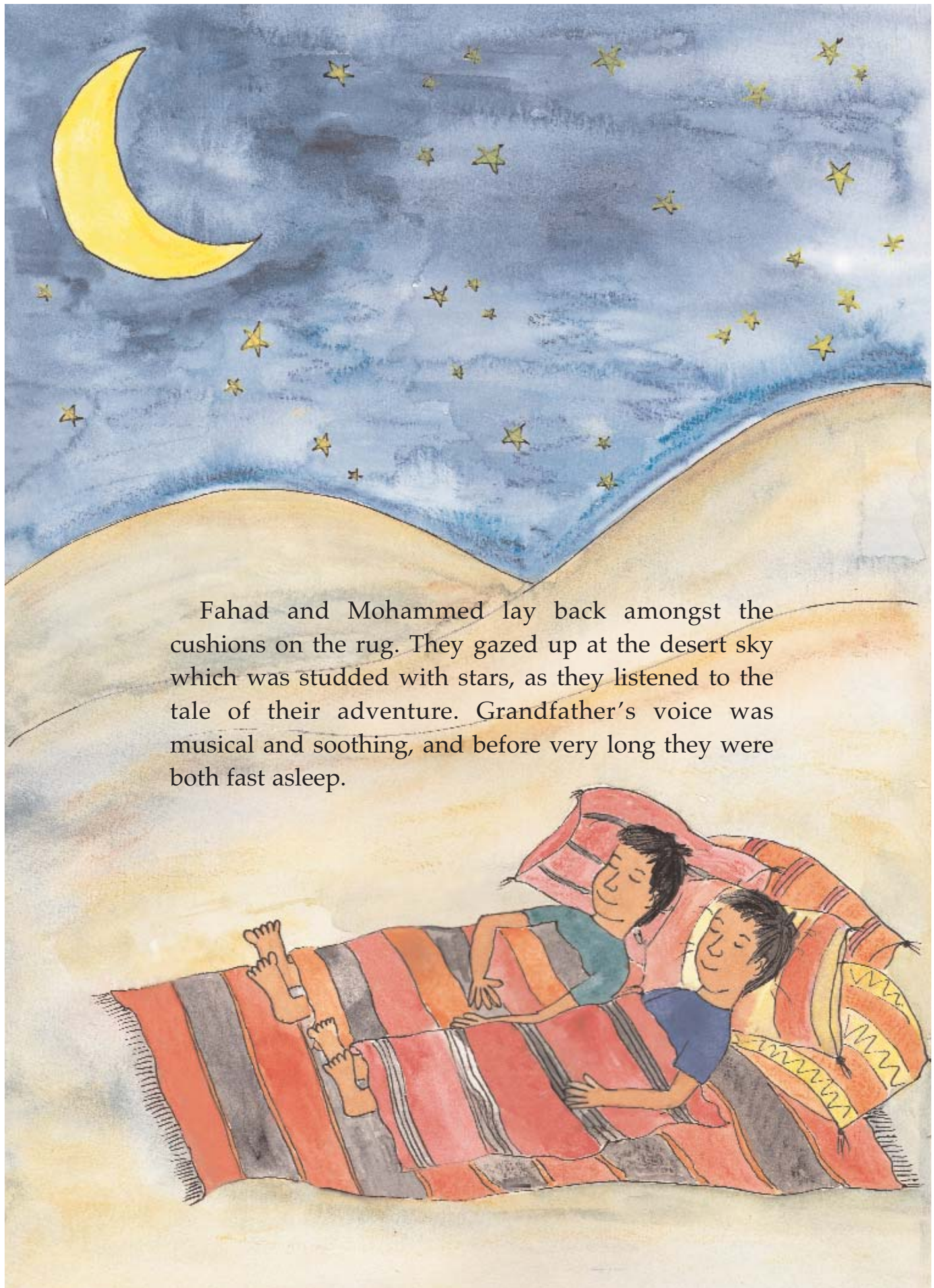






Sitting round
the camp fire later
that evening, Grandfather
said, "In the old days your
brave deeds would have been
celebrated in a story." Gazing into the
flickering flames, he thought for a moment.
Everyone waited quietly. "This is the story of two brave
boys," he began.





Fahad and Mohammed lay back amongst the cushions on the rug. They gazed up at the desert sky which was studded with stars, as they listened to the tale of their adventure. Grandfather's voice was musical and soothing, and before very long they were both fast asleep.