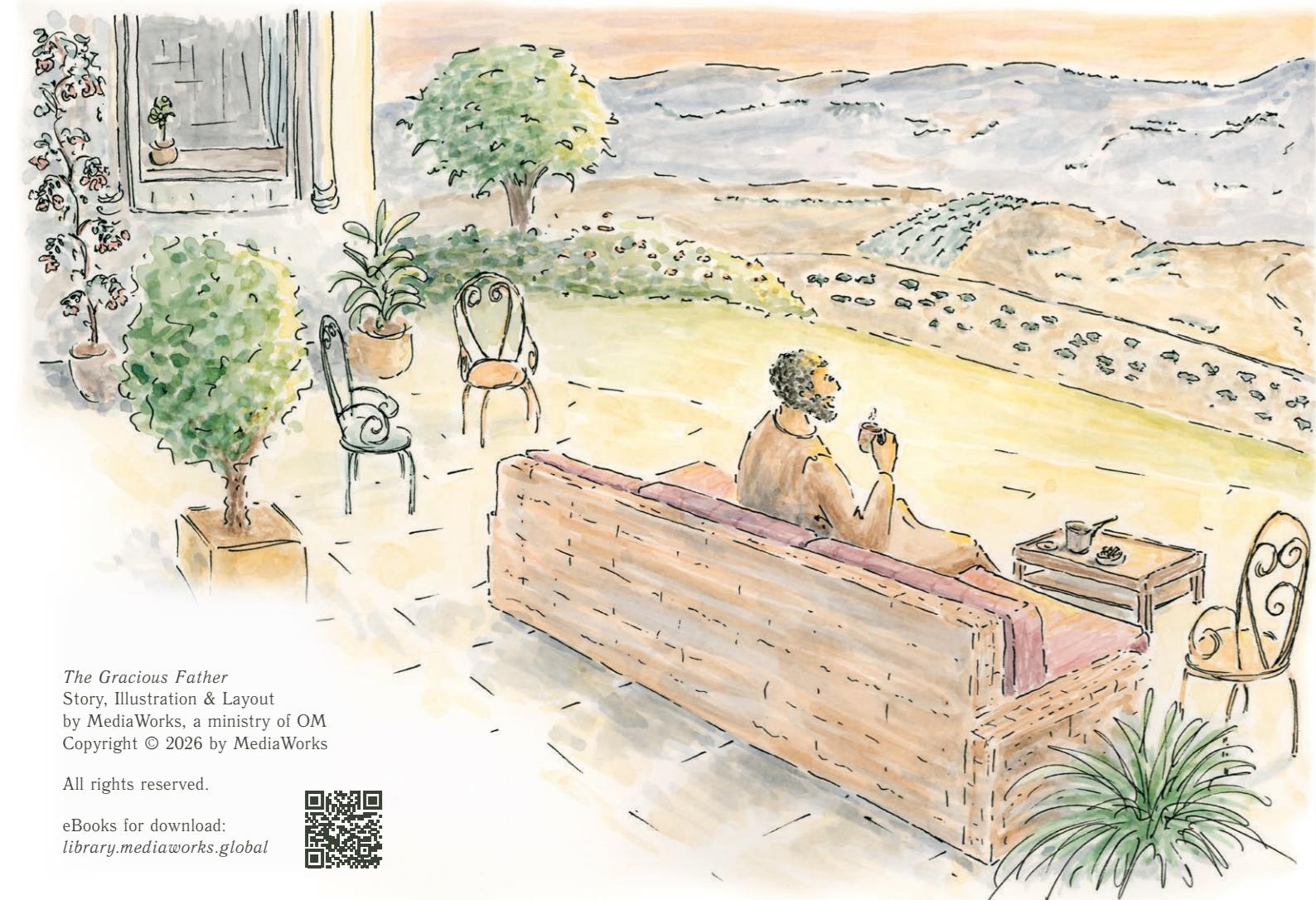


The Gracious Father



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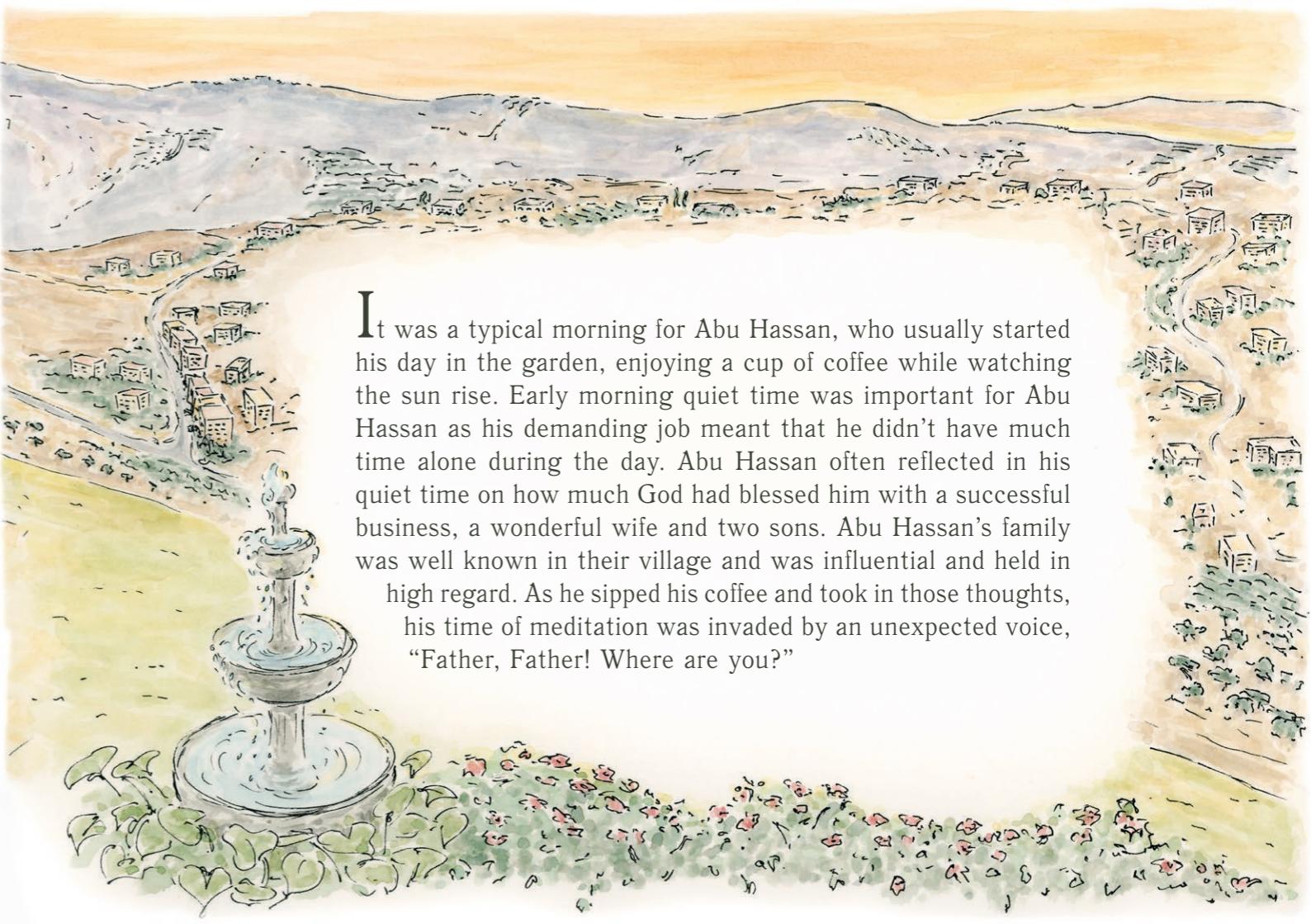




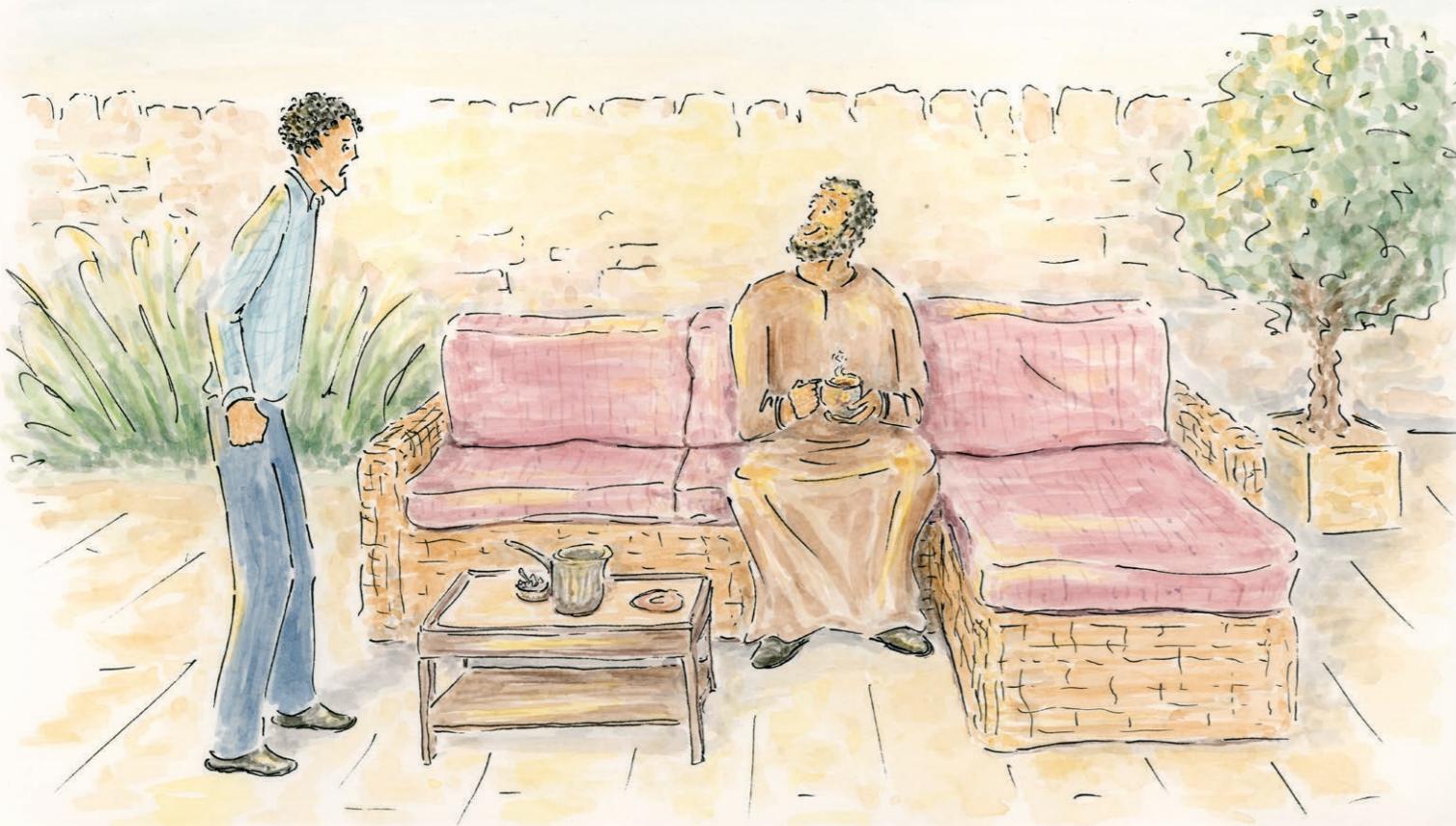
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It was a typical morning for Abu Hassan, who usually started his day in the garden, enjoying a cup of coffee while watching the sun rise. Early morning quiet time was important for Abu Hassan as his demanding job meant that he didn't have much time alone during the day. Abu Hassan often reflected in his quiet time on how much God had blessed him with a successful business, a wonderful wife and two sons. Abu Hassan's family was well known in their village and was influential and held in high regard. As he sipped his coffee and took in those thoughts, his time of meditation was invaded by an unexpected voice, "Father, Father! Where are you?"



Surprised that his younger son had intruded on his quiet time in the garden, Abu Hassan concluded that he must really need him and said gently, "I'm right here my son, good morning!"

"Father, I know we're not supposed to interrupt you during this time, but there is an important matter that I've been thinking about for quite some time, and I must address it with you now," said the younger son.

"Well in that case my son, I don't mind you interrupting me," said Abu Hassan with a smile.



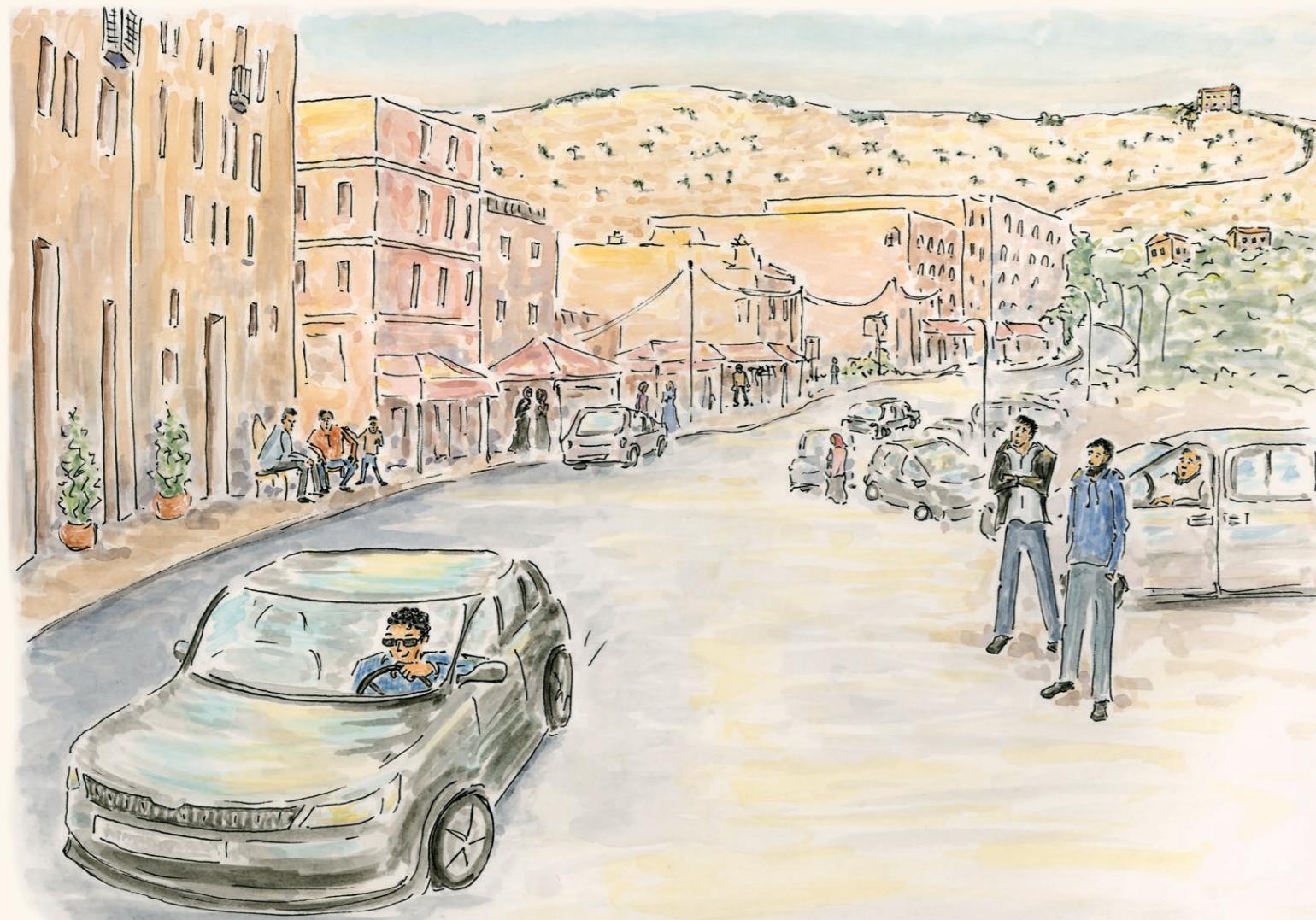


The son then quickly demanded, "Give me my share of the property that is part of my inheritance."

Shocked, hurt and unsure of what to say, Abu Hassan took a deep breath and fulfilled his son's wish.

Asking for his inheritance meant that the son didn't even wish his father to remain alive, and that knowledge hurt Abu Hassan a million times more than the amount of money he was about to lose.





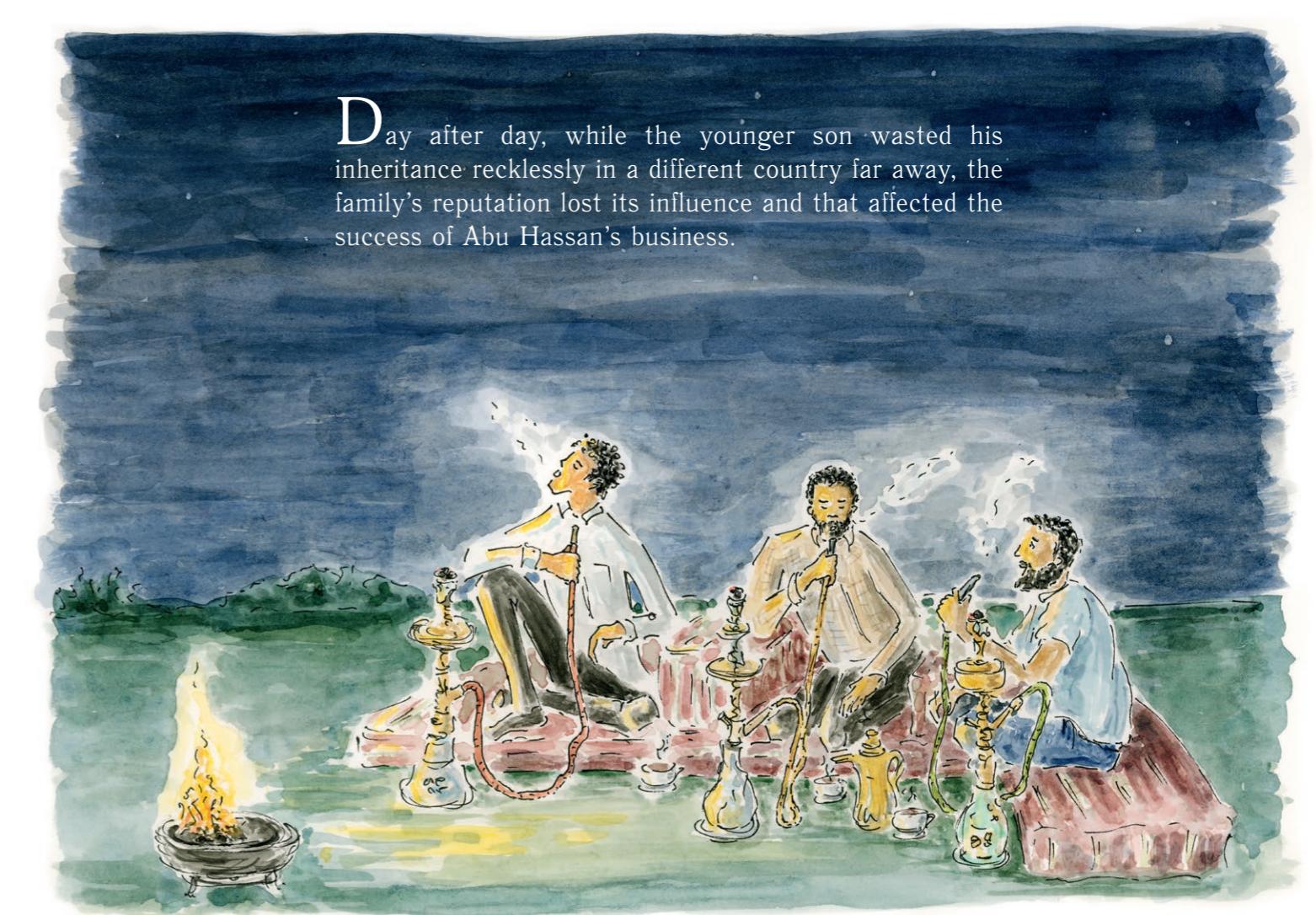
Sometime later, the son took all the money his father gave him as his inheritance and left home without telling his family where he was going.

Being from a small village, word spread quickly and soon the surrounding villagers were all puzzled and whispered among themselves,

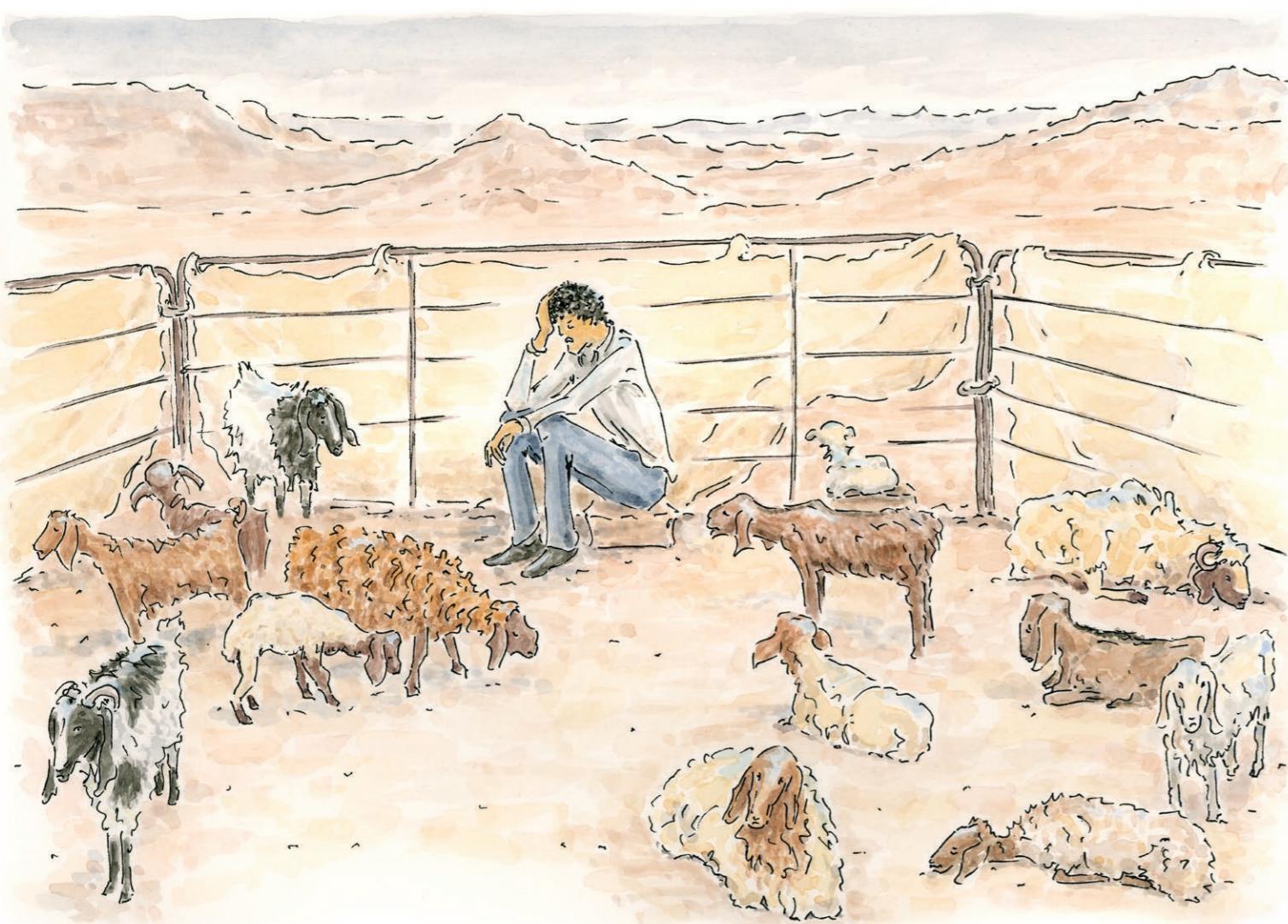
“Why did Abu Hassan sell his property and allow the son to leave with his portion of the inheritance?” “Why didn’t Abu Hassan severely punish him for such a dishonourable act?” “Abu Hassan’s younger son has brought so much shame on the family’s name and Abu Hassan does nothing?” “How much does Abu Hassan’s son hate him, to wish him dead?”

Abu Hassan mourned silently for the shame he was bearing, and even more so for the son he had lost.



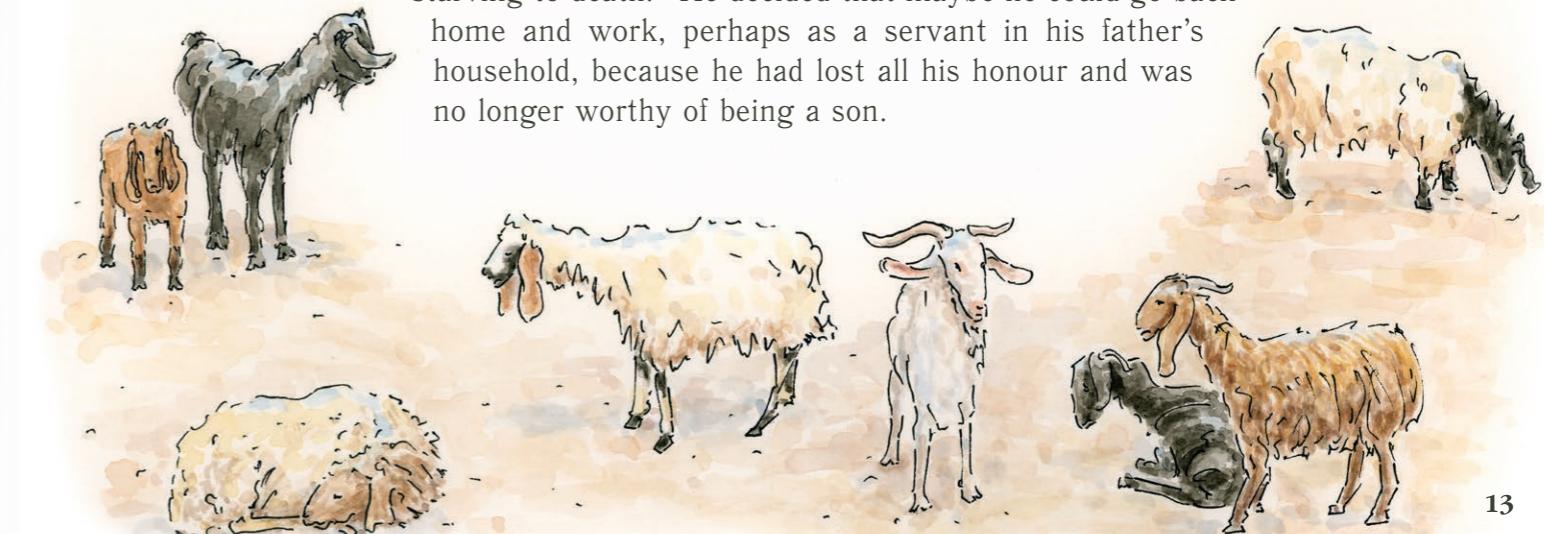


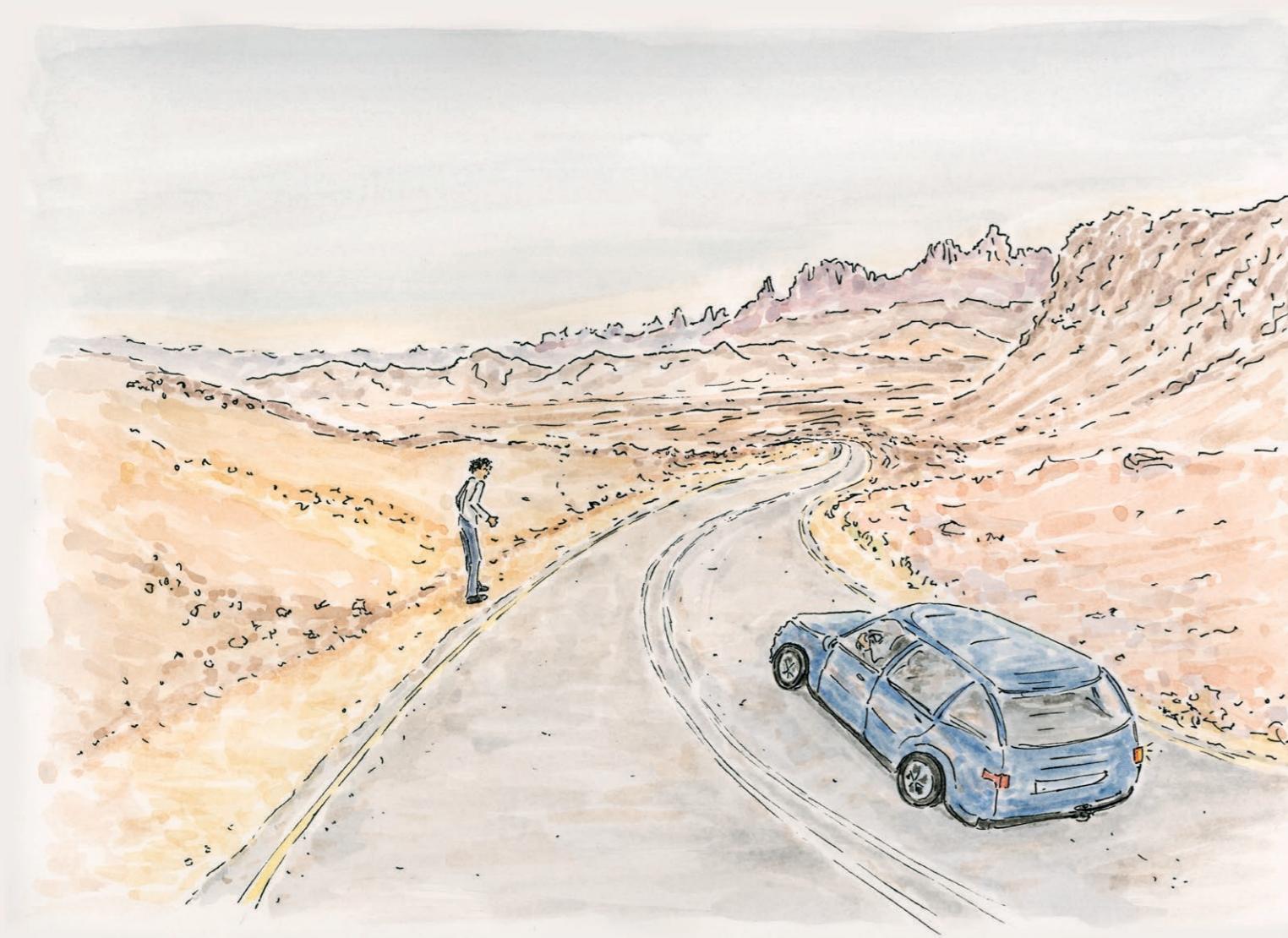
Day after day, while the younger son wasted his inheritance recklessly in a different country far away, the family's reputation lost its influence and that affected the success of Abu Hassan's business.



After some time, the younger son had spent all his inheritance money and the country he was living in had a severe famine and a failing economy. Thinking he could never go back home, he decided to look for a job and was hired to work in the fields and take care of animals. As he fed the animals, he longed for something to eat even if it meant eating the animals' food. He sat feeling sorrowful, thinking how much he had wasted his life and lost everything. Then he looked around and thought,

“My father’s servants have more food than this to eat, while I’m here starving to death.” He decided that maybe he could go back home and work, perhaps as a servant in his father’s household, because he had lost all his honour and was no longer worthy of being a son.





As he made the long journey home, his heart was heavy with anxious thoughts about whether his father would accept him back, even as a servant, and what his family and the local community would say.

As usual, Abu Hassan sat in his garden having his morning coffee and watching the sun rise. However, since his younger son had left, his quiet times felt heavy and restless; he longed for his son to return, despite the shame he had caused their family.

As he took another sip of his coffee and gazed far off into the village, he saw the image of his son walking toward their home.



Filled with compassion and without thinking much, he ran down the hill, through the busy streets, directly to his son, and embraced him with a kiss.

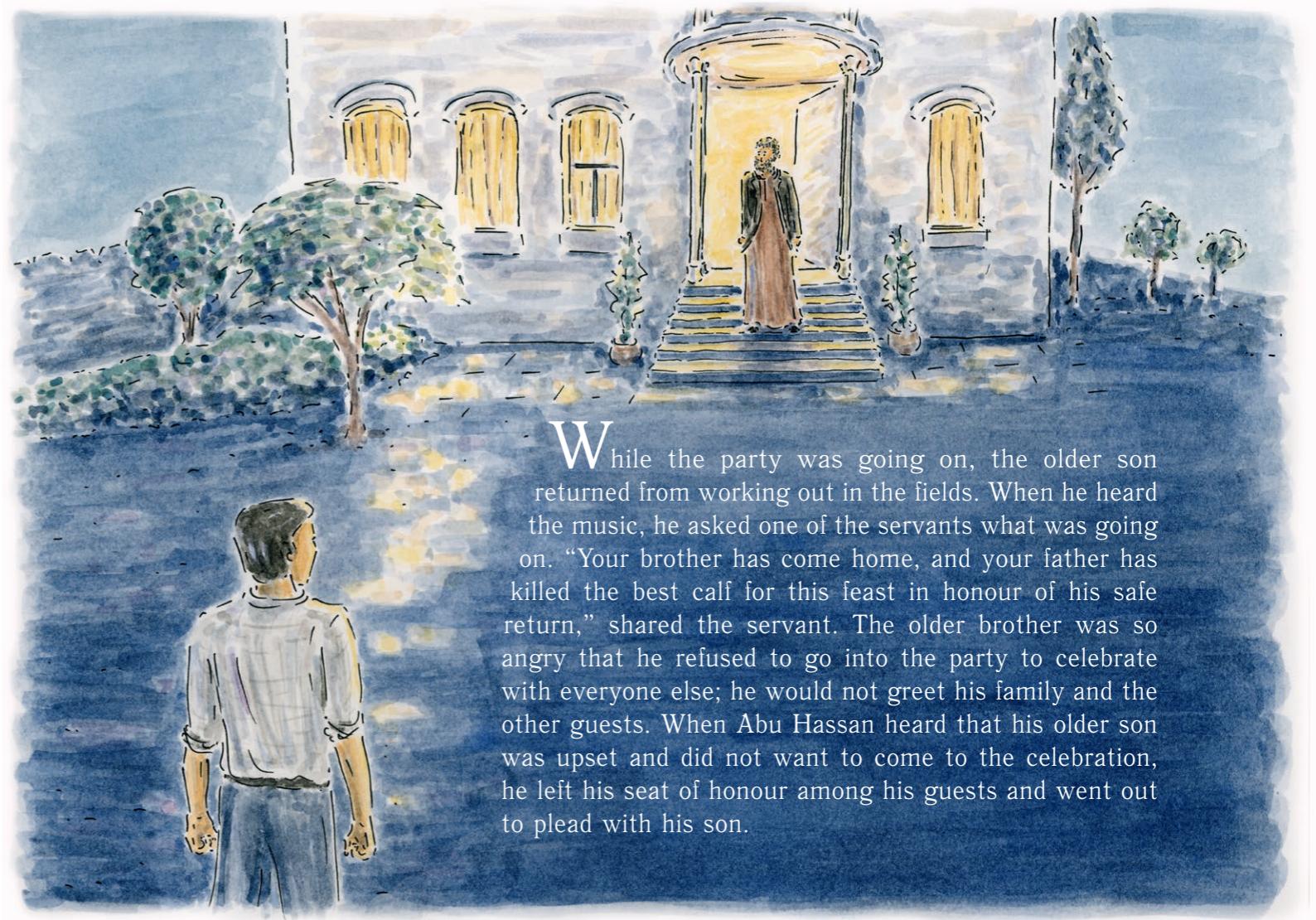
The younger son was astonished, first that the father would even run towards him, and then that he would embrace him with so much love, publicly.



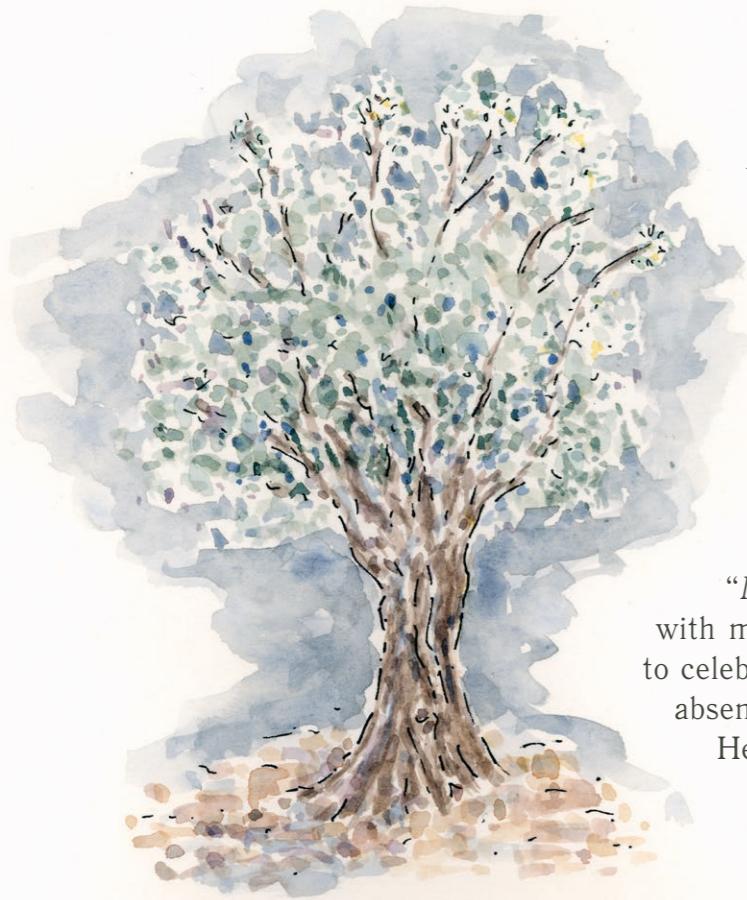
His eyes filled with tears, and he quickly said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

However, Abu Hassan was so overwhelmed with joy for the return of his son that he announced to his servants, "Quick, bring the best robe, a ring and sandals and put it all on him. Prepare the best calf because we are going to have a feast for my younger son."





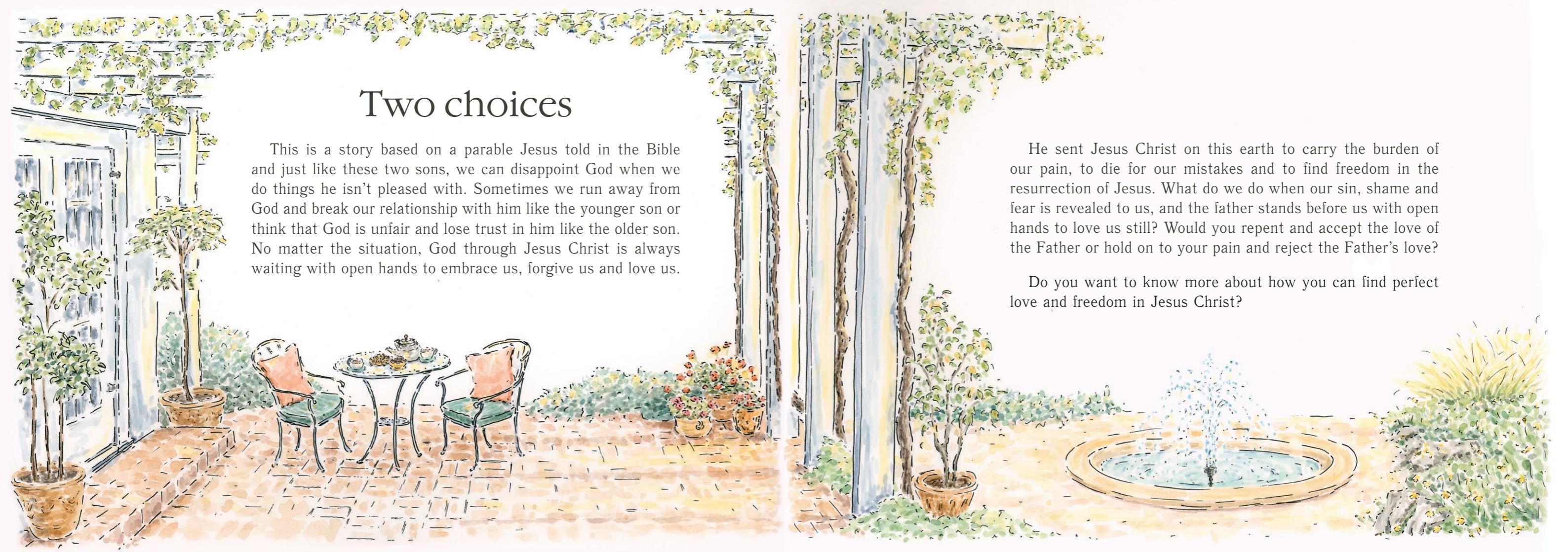
While the party was going on, the older son returned from working out in the fields. When he heard the music, he asked one of the servants what was going on. "Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the best calf for this feast in honour of his safe return," shared the servant. The older brother was so angry that he refused to go into the party to celebrate with everyone else; he would not greet his family and the other guests. When Abu Hassan heard that his older son was upset and did not want to come to the celebration, he left his seat of honour among his guests and went out to plead with his son.



The older son would not be persuaded by Abu Hassan, as he exclaimed, "Look! All these years I've worked so hard for you, like a slave and I have never disobeyed you. Yet you have never even given me a young goat to celebrate with my friends. How is it that this son of yours receives all this honour after squandering your property?"

Instead of being upset with his oldest son for his lack of understanding, Abu Hassan looked at him with compassion and said, "My son, you are my heir. You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate your brother's return after such a long absence. We thought he was dead, but he is alive. He was lost but now he is found."





Two choices

This is a story based on a parable Jesus told in the Bible and just like these two sons, we can disappoint God when we do things he isn't pleased with. Sometimes we run away from God and break our relationship with him like the younger son or think that God is unfair and lose trust in him like the older son. No matter the situation, God through Jesus Christ is always waiting with open hands to embrace us, forgive us and love us.

He sent Jesus Christ on this earth to carry the burden of our pain, to die for our mistakes and to find freedom in the resurrection of Jesus. What do we do when our sin, shame and fear is revealed to us, and the father stands before us with open hands to love us still? Would you repent and accept the love of the Father or hold on to your pain and reject the Father's love?

Do you want to know more about how you can find perfect love and freedom in Jesus Christ?





Abu Hassan never expected his quiet coffee time in the garden to turn into an explosion of painful emotions as he is confronted with a life-changing request.

The Gracious Father explores the relationship between Abu Hassan and his two sons. When both sons disappoint and shame him differently, Abu Hassan must respond despite the brokenness he feels for his children. He chooses to pursue them with a kind of love that reveals the heart of God.

