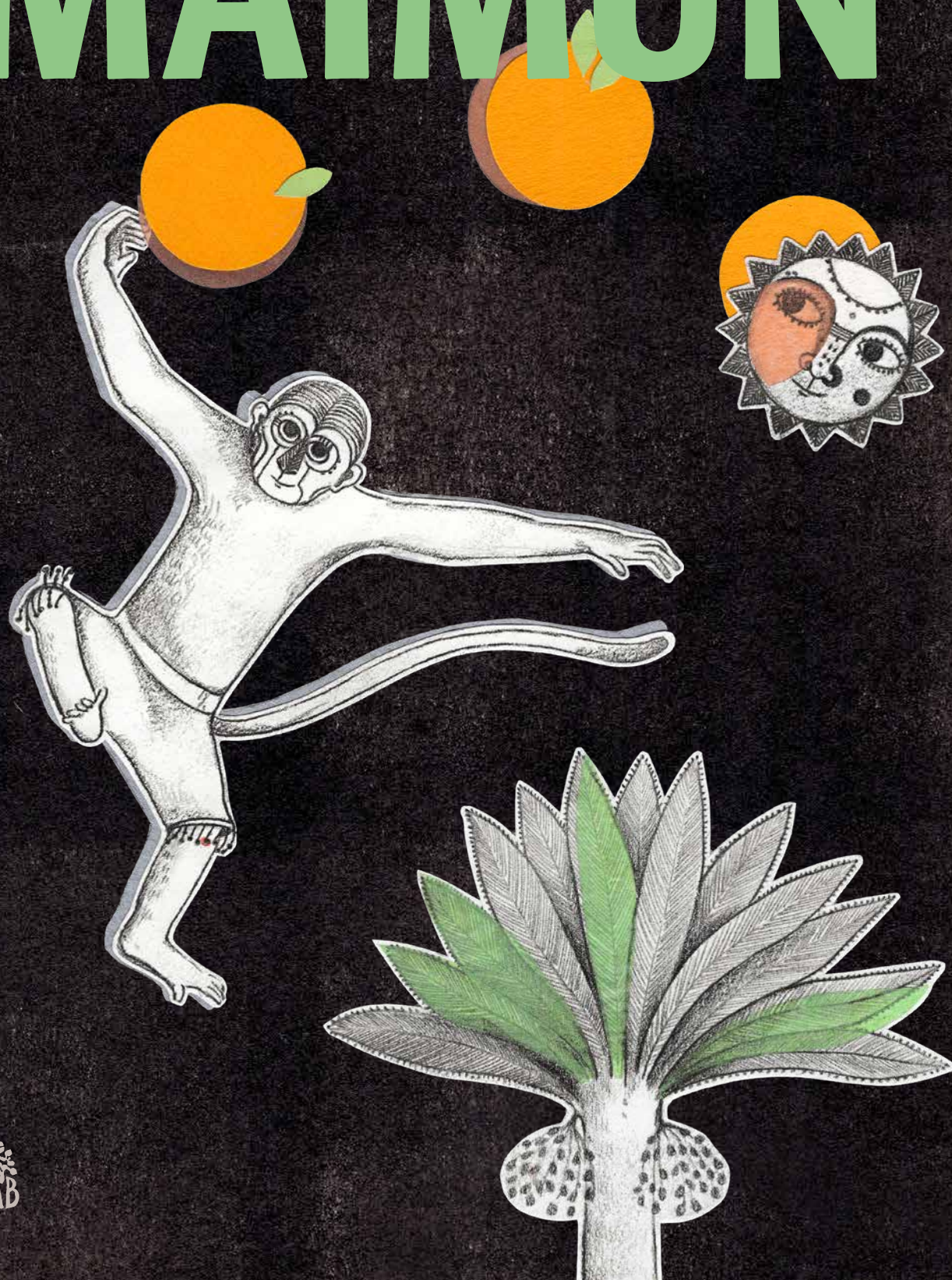
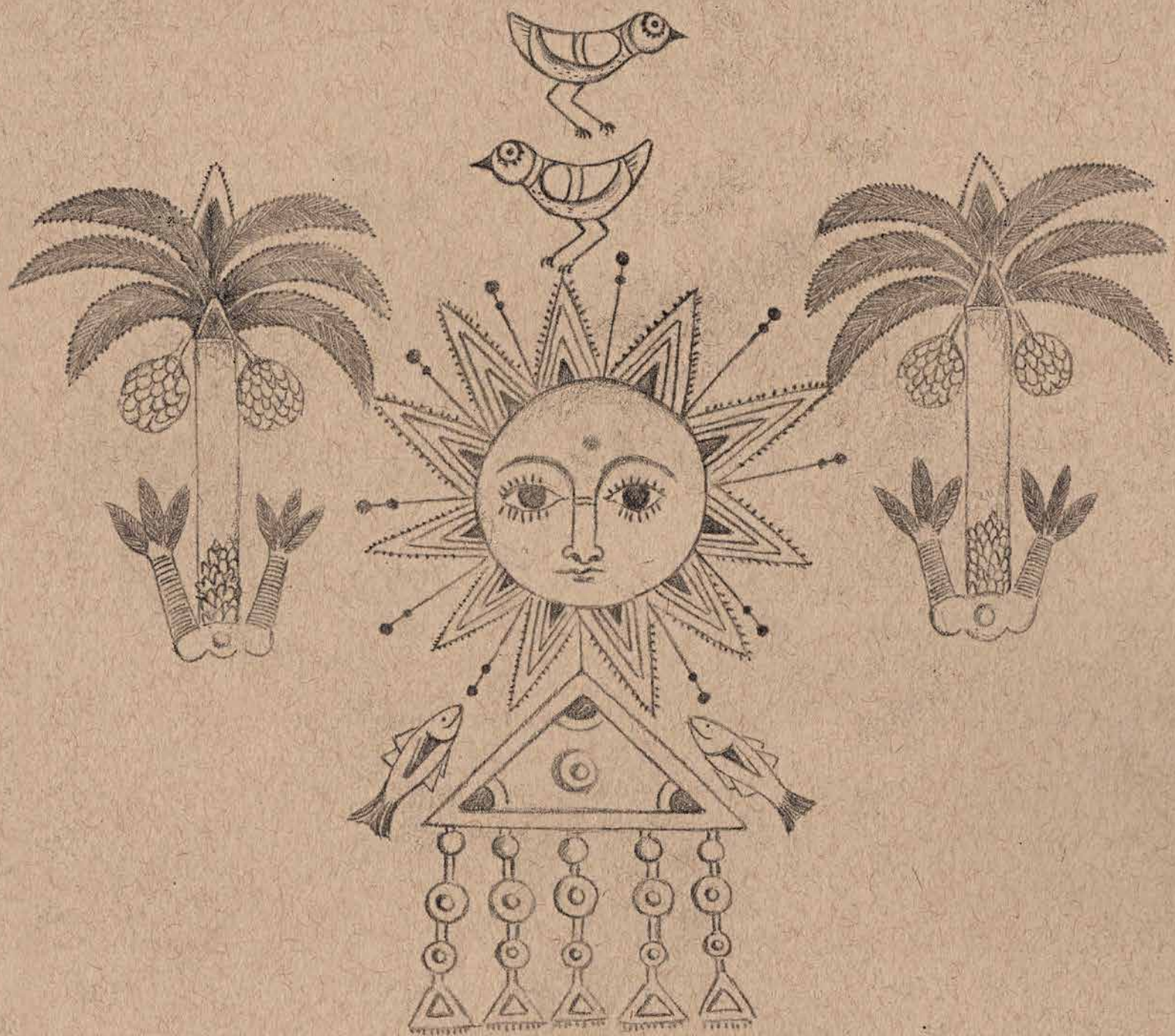


Sahar Abdallah

MAIMUN







For my homeland Egypt
and its daughters



Baobab is the name of the monkey bread tree in whose shade people tell each other stories. Baobab is also the name of the book programme in which picture books, children's stories and young adult novels from all over the world are being translated into German. It is published by Baobab Books, the specialist centre for the promotion of cultural diversity in children's and young adult literature.

You find information on our programme and our projects at:
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Maimun

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Sahar Abdallah

MAIMUN

A picture book from Egypt

English sample translation



BAOBAB BOOKS

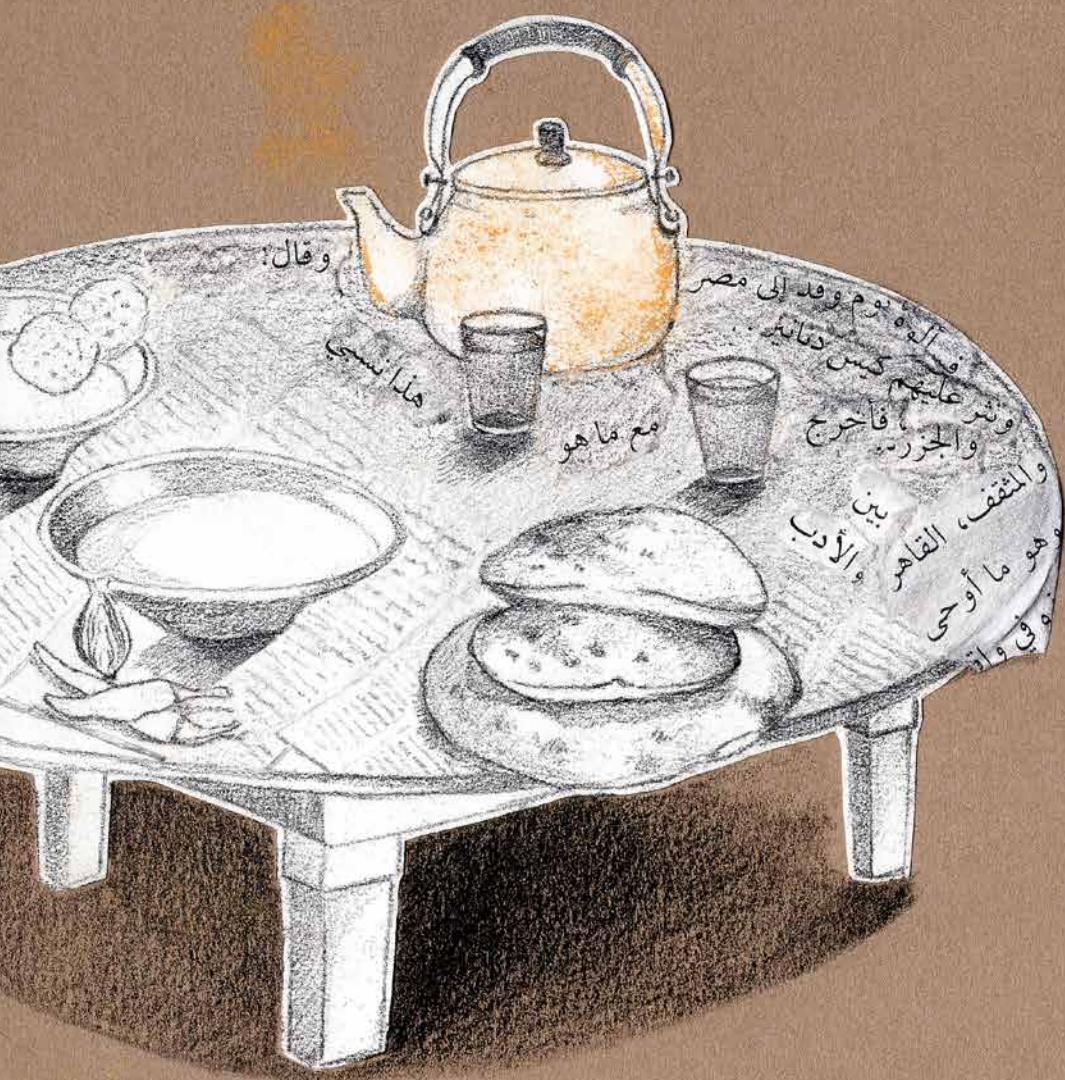


The buildings in this neighbourhood stand close together. They are made of bricks and look like cubes with windows and doors. The alleyways between the houses are narrow and always crowded with people.

A girl named Tuha lives in one of these houses. Her father earns his money as a travelling artist in the streets of Cairo.

The family also includes the monkey Maimun. Tuha has chosen this name, it means “happy monkey”. When Tuha looks him in the face, she has to smile. Maimun is sure to bring happiness to the family! Tuha and Maimun are inseparable. And the two of them often join the father when he plays his tambourine in town.





For breakfast, the low table gets covered with an old newspaper. There are broad beans, a few falafel balls, salad leaves and some bread.

Maimun sits next to Tuha, opens the bean pods and pops the seeds into his mouth. Tuha's father meanwhile prepares the tea. While the spoon knocks against the tea glass, Tuha looks at a photo in the newspaper. It shows a figure from the time of the pharaohs: A little monkey playing a harp.

Tuha looks at Maimun and says: "I think monkeys have been playing and dancing since ancient times!"



Then, the three of them set off. With Maimun at their side, Tuha and her father walk through the narrow alleys of their neighbourhood until they reach a street which leads to a road and then to an even larger road.

Finally, they come to a square where many other artists are already bustling about.

One of them is performing as a clown. The man with the Punch and Judy puppets is also there. The children gather around him and can't stop laughing as Punch, Judy, and the policeman argue with each other.

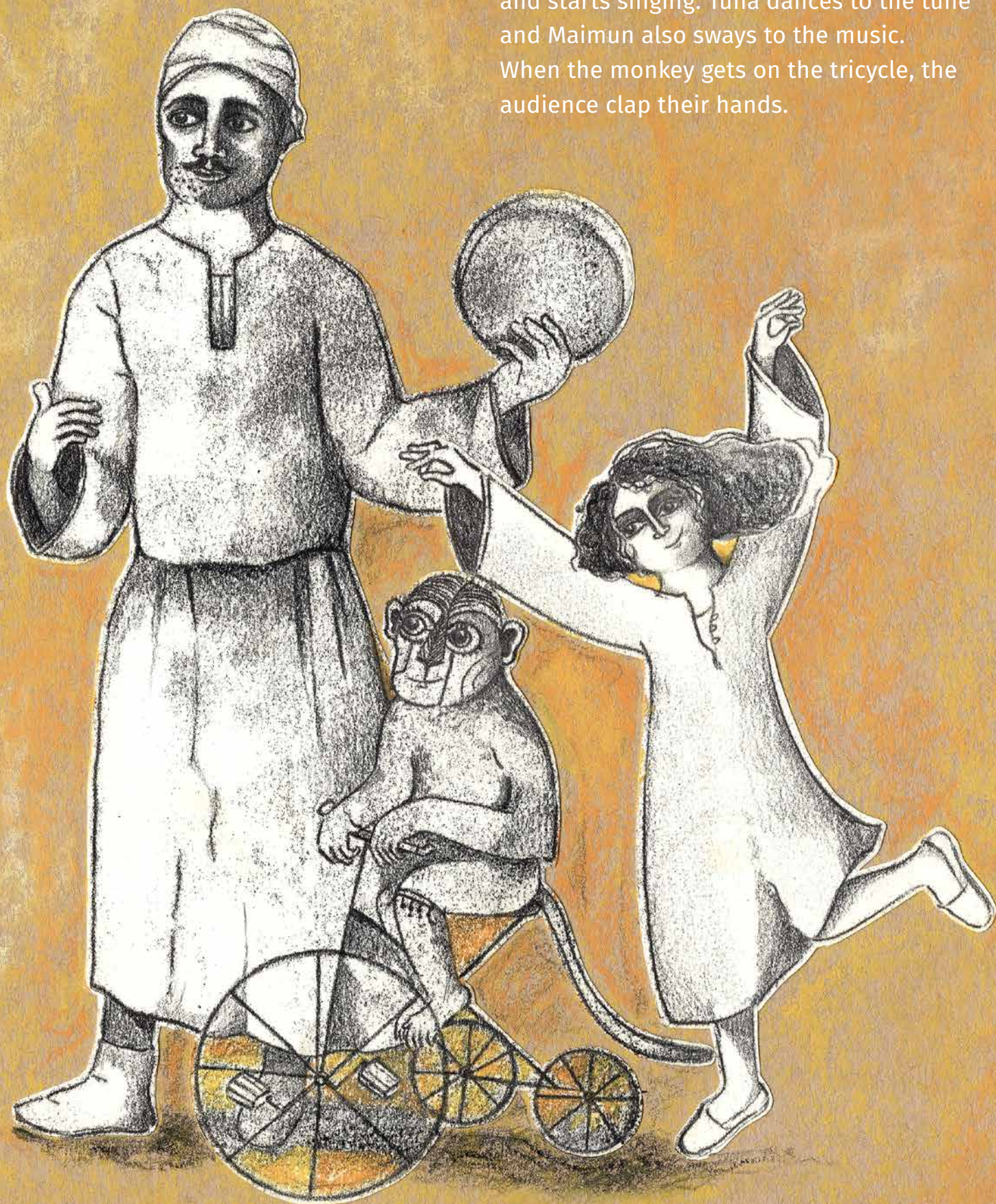
Some children fly up into the sky on swings and look down on the people from way above.







Now, the father strikes the tambourine and starts singing. Tuha dances to the tune and Maimun also sways to the music. When the monkey gets on the tricycle, the audience clap their hands.



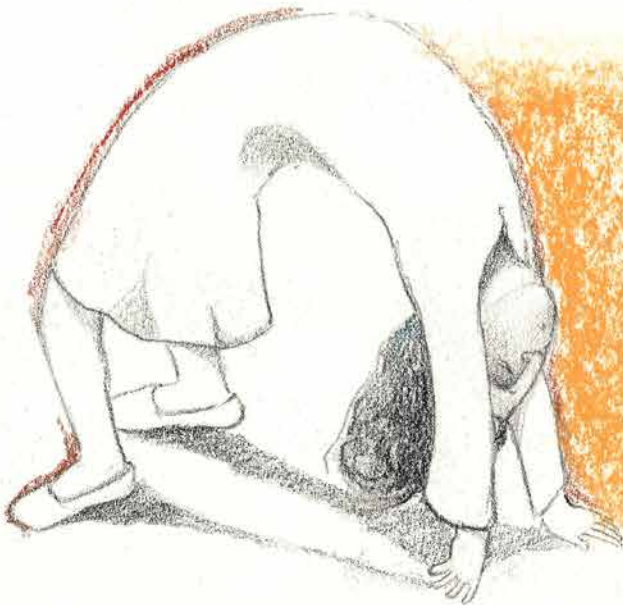


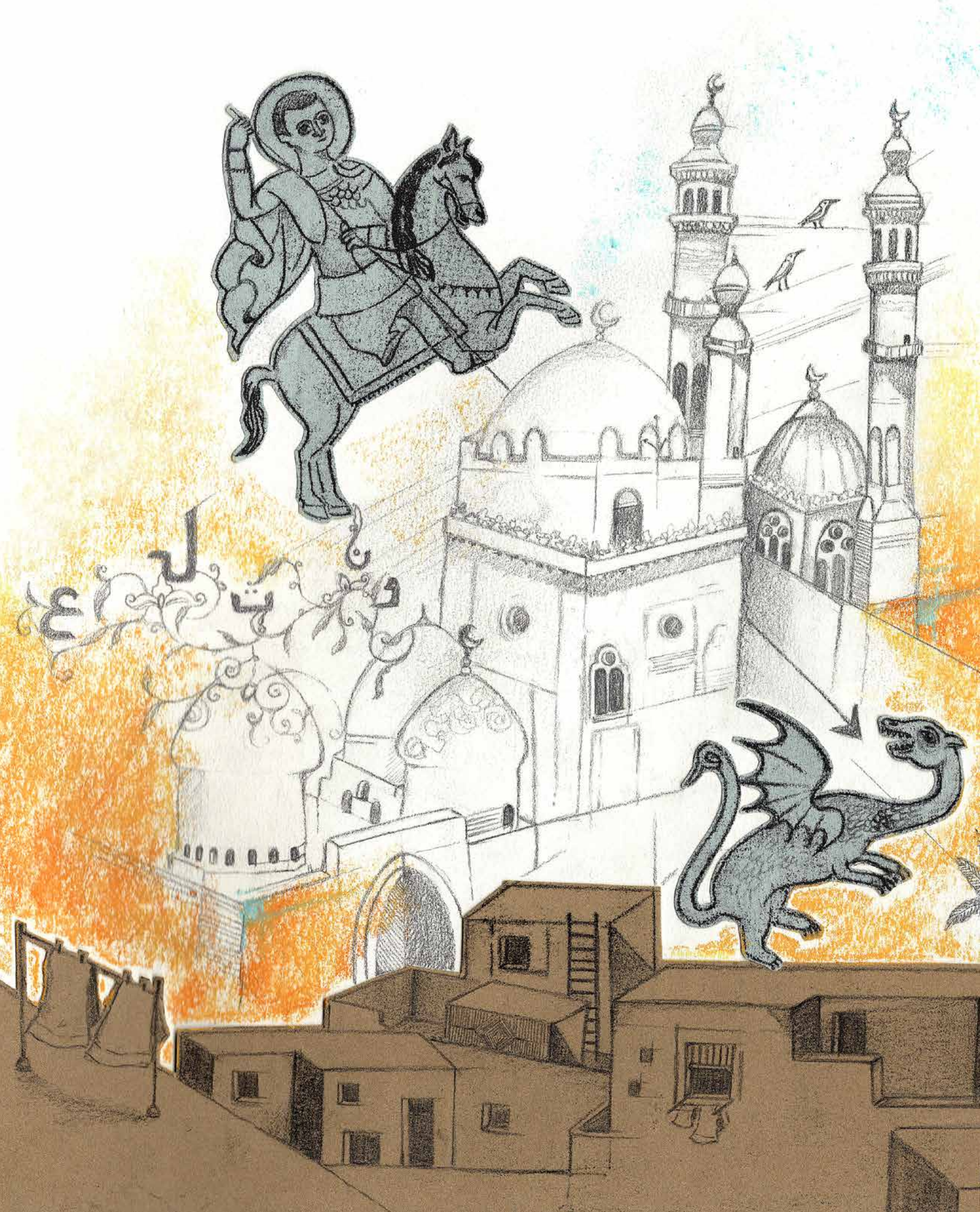
At some point, it's time for a break. A tray of food is passed around, someone brings a pot of fresh mint tea. Then the artists and showmen get back to work. But as skilful as their acts are, their earnings are like those of fishermen at sea, says Tuha's father: "Sometimes they return home laden with fish, sometimes the net remains empty."

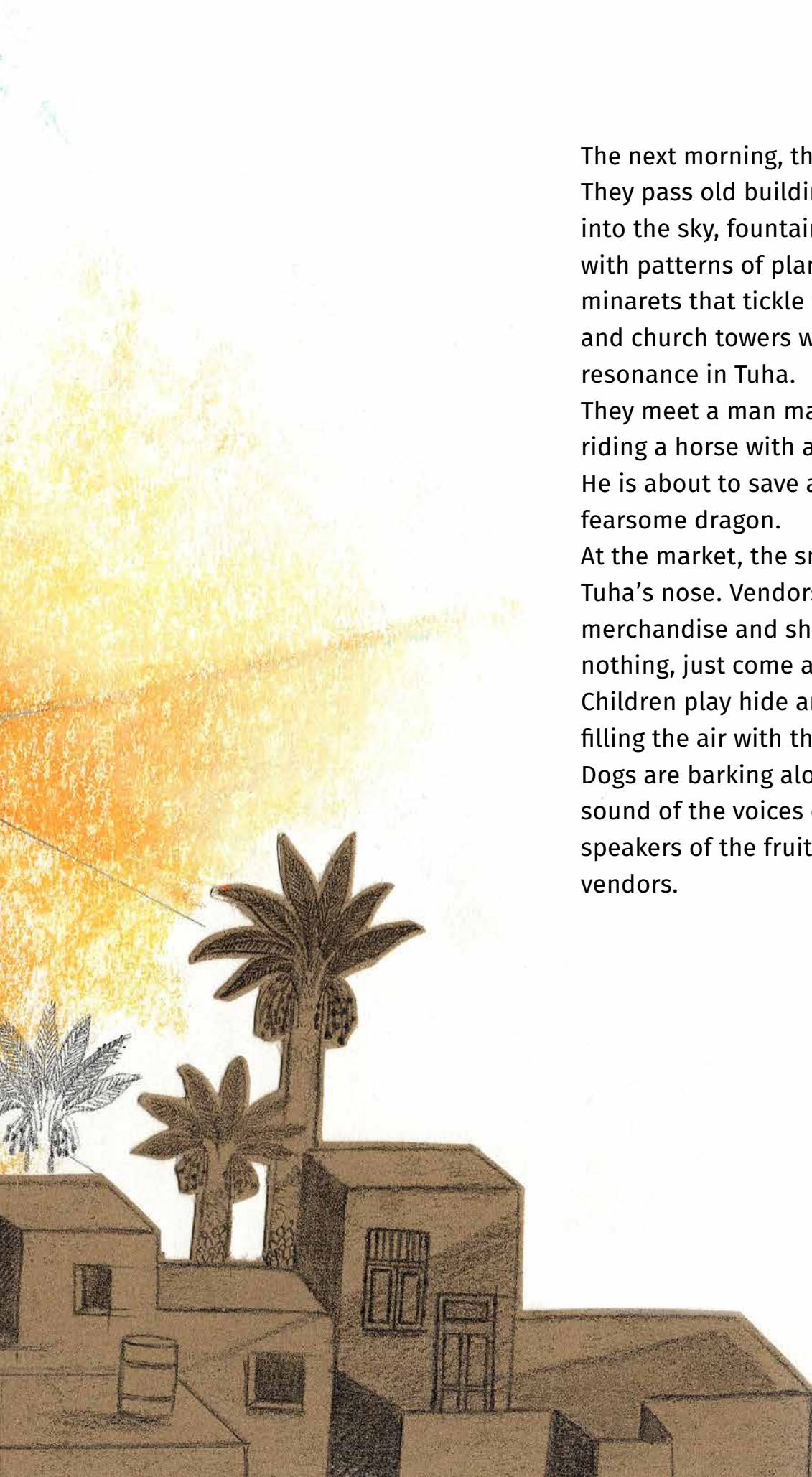




Tuha can't help but notice that her father is becoming more and more thoughtful. One day he leaves the house early. On his return he comes in with a donkey. The father tries to teach the donkey a few tricks, but the donkey just brays. Then Maimun hops onto the donkey's back and Tuha does somersaults around the two of them.







The next morning, the four of them set off. They pass old buildings that tower high into the sky, fountains richly decorated with patterns of plants and animals, minarets that tickle the clouds in the sky and church towers whose chimes resonance in Tuha.

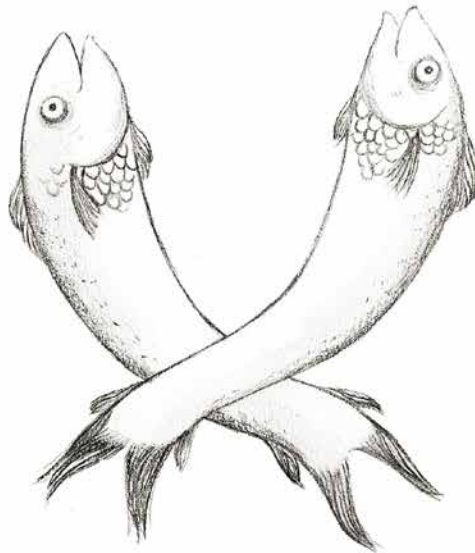
They meet a man made of stone, riding a horse with a spear in his hand. He is about to save a child from a fearsome dragon.

At the market, the smell of incense fills Tuha's nose. Vendors advertise their merchandise and shout: "It costs almost nothing, just come and see!"

Children play hide and seek in the alleys, filling the air with their soaring laughter. Dogs are barking along with the rattling sound of the voices out of the loud-speakers of the fruit and vegetable vendors.

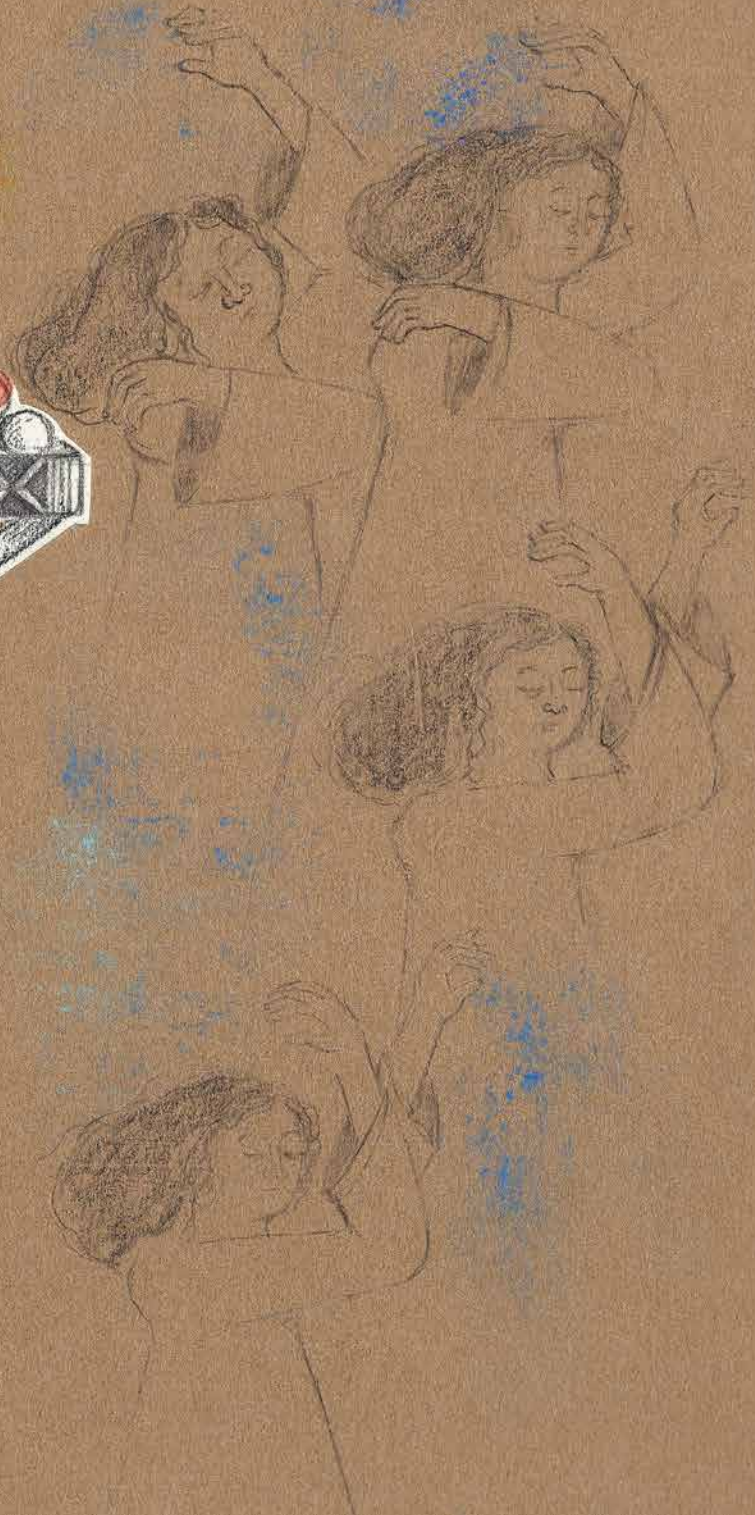
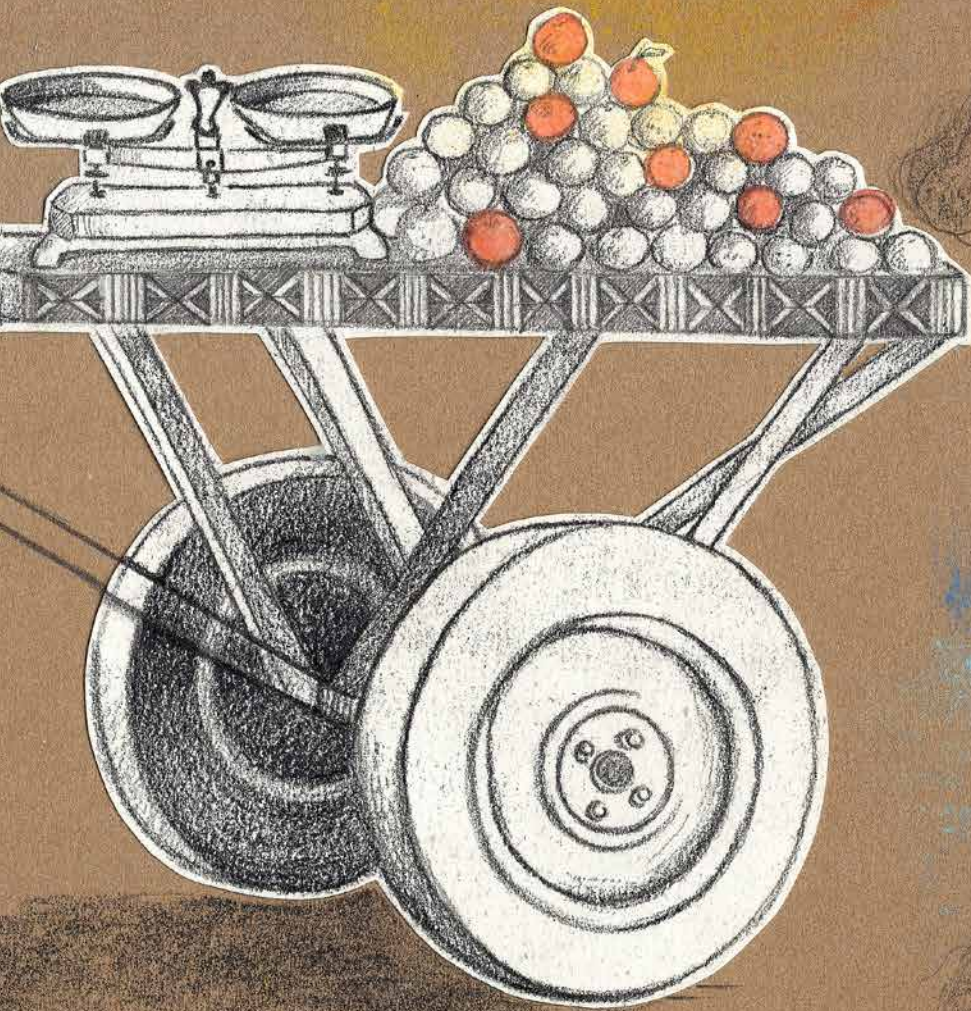


Tuha and her father are rehearsing a new act for the upcoming public holiday. On this day, music is played and people dance all over the city. But although there are many spectators around them, the coins in Tuha's father's pockets just don't multiply. When he counts them later at home, he mumbles to himself: "Some people just aren't lucky."





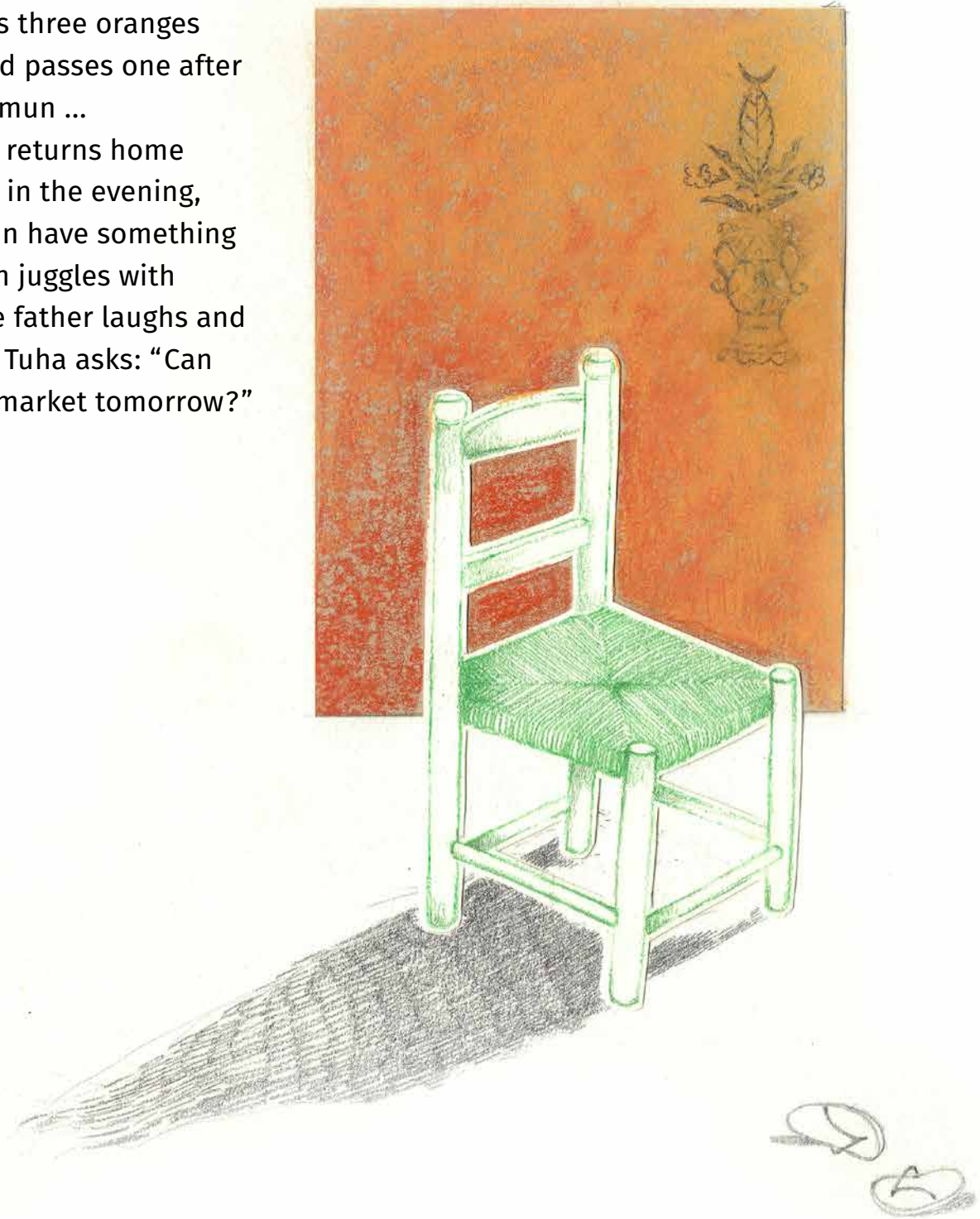
A short time later, the father leaves the house with the donkey early in the morning.
When he returns, the donkey pulls a cart behind him. There are some oranges on it and the father says:
"I'll sell these at the market."
Silent tears roll down Tuha's cheeks. How can her father give up his beautiful job as a musician?!





But that's not all. The father says that they might have to send the monkey away as there is not enough money to feed everyone. Tuha is desperate. She can't imagine life without Maimun. She thinks and thinks and thinks. Finally, she takes three oranges from the cart and passes one after the other to Maimun ...

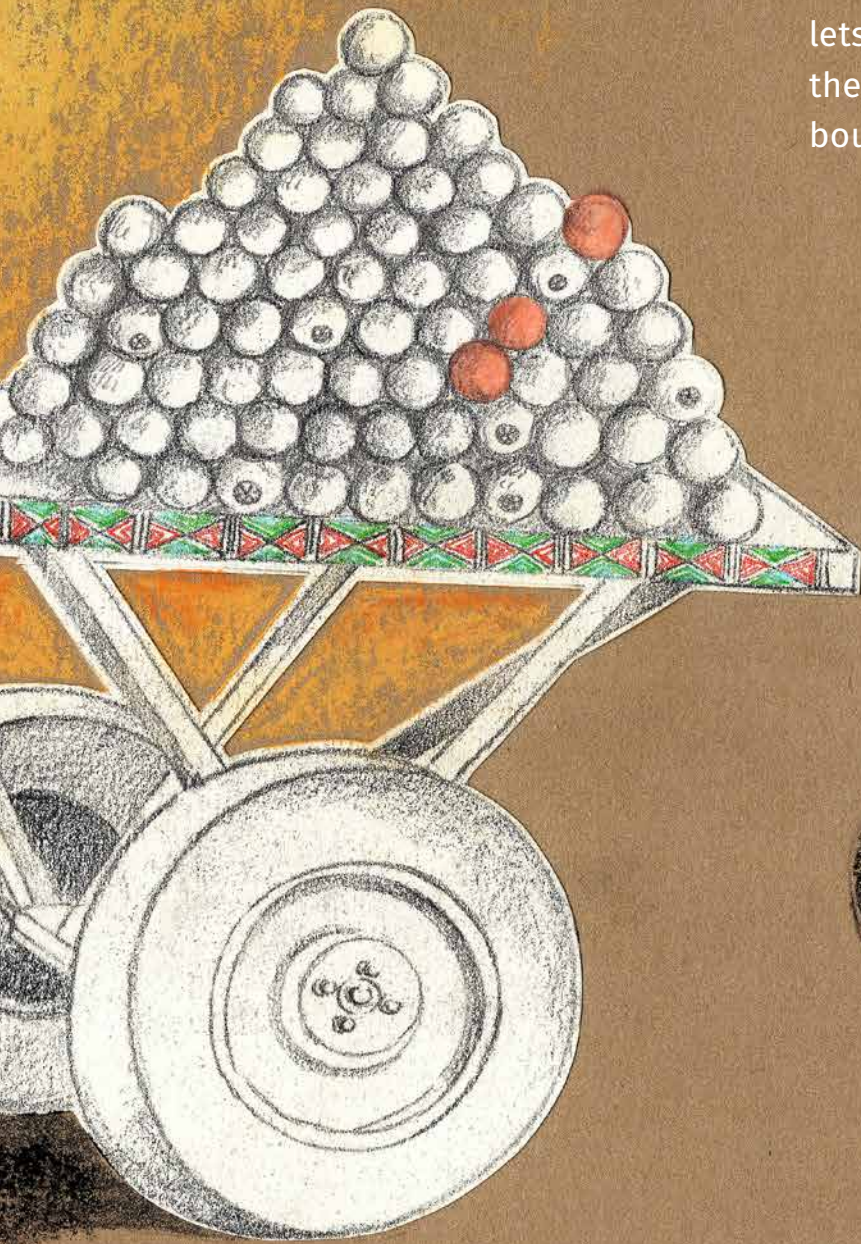
When her father returns home from the market in the evening, Tuha and Maimun have something to show: Maimun juggles with the oranges! The father laughs and claps his hands. Tuha asks: "Can we come to the market tomorrow?"





And so the four of them set off together again the next morning: Tuha, Maimun, the donkey and the father.

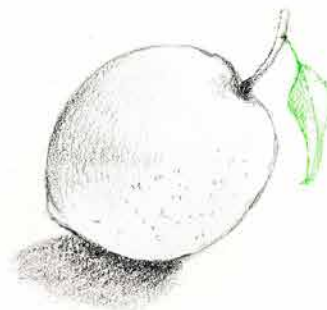
At the market, Maimun jumps onto the donkey's back, and when the donkey hee-haws, Tuha throws three oranges to the monkey. Maimun catches them and throws them one by one into the air, lets them roll over his arms ... throws them high up again ... and catches them bouncing.





It doesn't take long before they are surrounded by a crowd of people. The spectators are thrilled and clap their hands. And imagine, all the oranges from the cart are sold in no time! The father laughs and Tuha sings:

"Fresh oranges,
oranges juicy and sweet ...
Hurry, hurry and call Aziz!
Fresh oranges,
oranges juicy and sweet ...
with a taste fresh as a breeze!"







Then, Maimun jumps onto Tuha's shoulder, as he always does, and the quartet gets on the way home.

Tuha and Maimun are truly an inseparable couple ...





Afterword by the author

During a visit to Basel in 2023, I visited the Ancient Art Museum (Antikenmuseum Basel) and looked at the Egyptian collection with great interest. Among many other objects, I discovered a small sculpture of a harp-playing monkey. I was fascinated and got to thinking.

The monkey was a sacred animal in ancient Egypt and was very close to the people. It had a firm place in the everyday life of families, was present at the harvest and also played an important role in musical performances.

As I looked at the sculpture in the museum's glass case, I remembered old pictures and films that showed how people in Cairo once walked through the streets beating the drum while a monkey danced to it. After the performance, the drum was turned over to collect money from the audience.

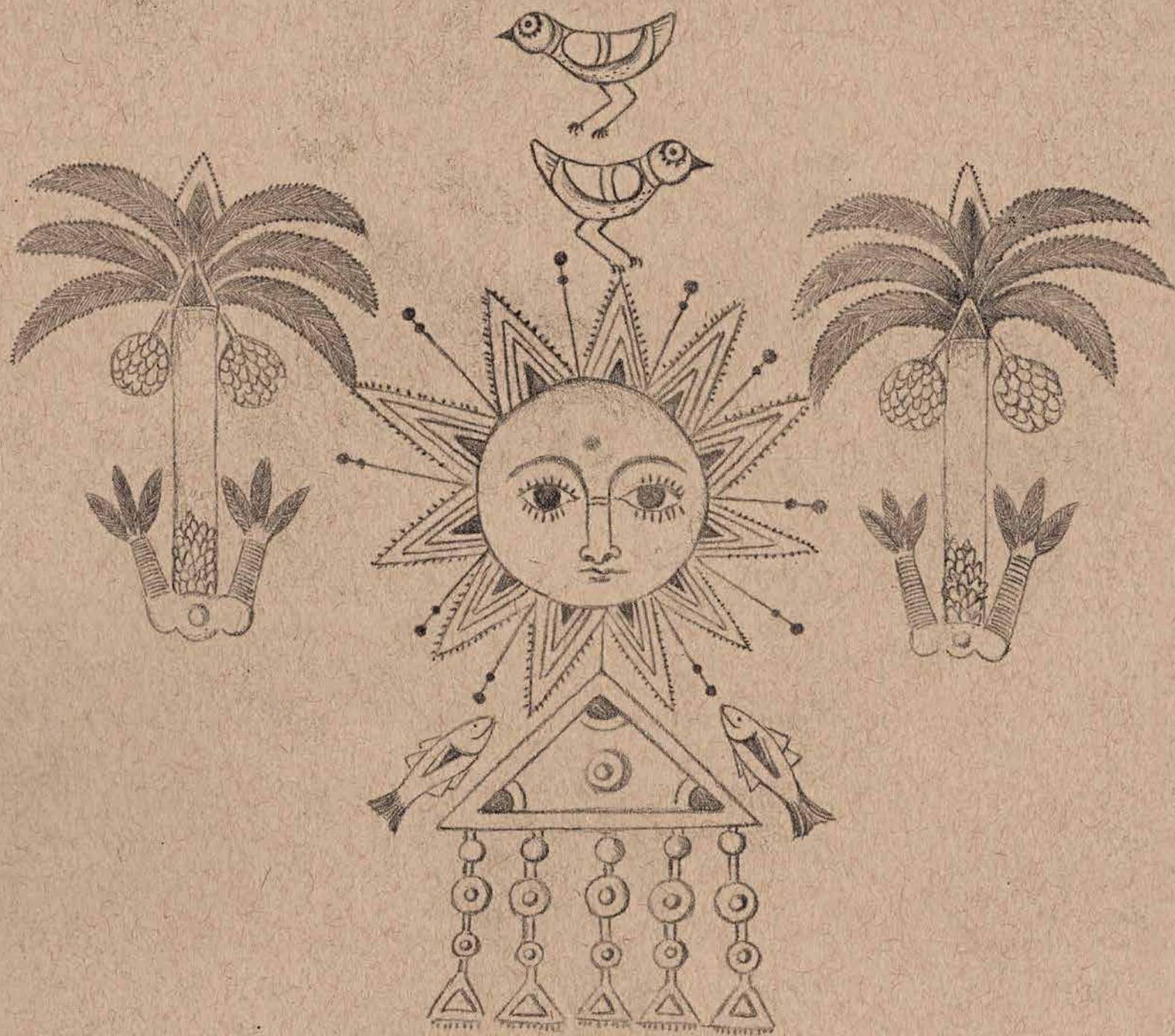
I suddenly realised that one hardly ever sees travelling artists in the streets of Cairo anymore, and I wondered where the people who once performed on the streets have gone to.

Many other things have changed in Egypt since my childhood. I wish that some things of the former Egypt will remain. That country, where many cultures live together peacefully and enrich each other.

The diverse Egyptian folk art and the art of ancient Egypt were sources of inspiration for me while working on this book. With the story of Tuha and Maimun, I would like to encourage children, like the heroine of this story, to go their own way and look for opportunities to bring joy to others.

Sahar Abdallah, July 2024







The girl Tuha lives in Cairo. Her family also includes a monkey, as is not unusual in Egypt. Tuha has given him the name Maimun, which means “happy monkey”.

Tuha and Maimun are inseparable. The two of them usually join in when Tuha’s father performs in town with his tambourine. People stop and applaud the trio. And yet, at the end of the day, the coins are scarce and barely enough to buy the daily bread.

Tuha’s perseverance and Maimun’s skill finally lead to a decisive turnaround. No one has ever seen a performance like this before ...

