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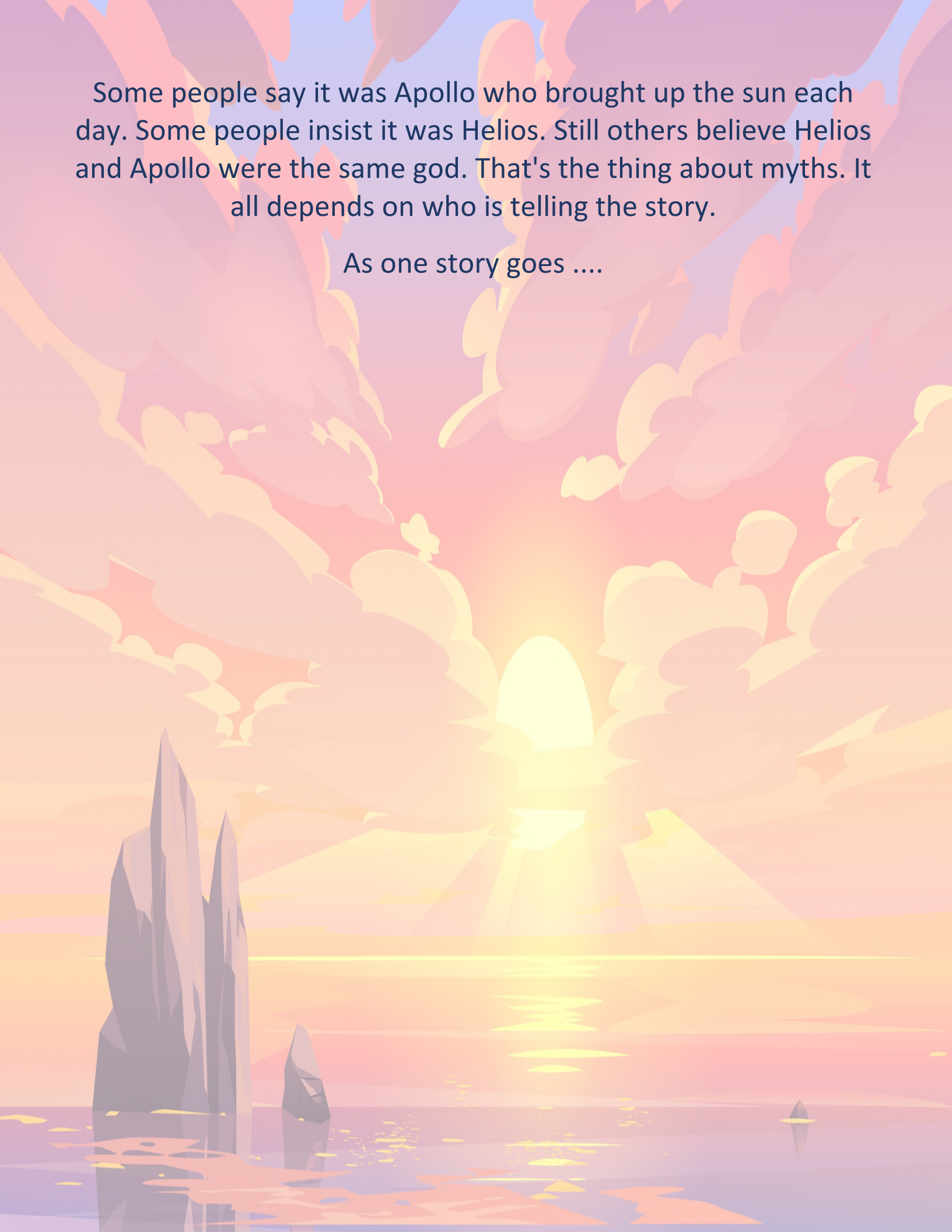
Mythology

Helios and Phaethon



Some people say it was Apollo who brought up the sun each day. Some people insist it was Helios. Still others believe Helios and Apollo were the same god. That's the thing about myths. It all depends on who is telling the story.

As one story goes



Phaethon was the son of Helios. Both father and son had curly golden hair and sparkling bright eyes. Both bragged about the other all the time.

Helios thought his son was the brightest and bravest kid in the world. He named his son Phaethon, because Phaethon meant "brilliant" in the ancient Greek language.



Phaethon was equally proud of his Dad. He thought his Dad had the most important job in the world. His Dad's job was to bring out the sun each day. If the sun did not come up, the crops would die and everyone would starve.



Each morning, the Hours, his Dad's servants, would harness four white horses to the most splendid golden chariot. It was so splendid that it even had a nickname.

The people called it The Sun Chariot.





Each morning, without fail, his Dad would leap aboard his golden Sun Chariot and begin his perilous journey across the sky. (It's not easy to haul a burning sun behind a chariot, even a special golden one, without getting burnt yourself.)

No matter how tired he was, or how jarred by the jerking of the chariot, his Dad always managed to reach every corner of the earth, to bring light and warmth to all the crops and all the people and everything on earth every single day.



In the evening, after his Dad had tucked the sun out of sight, to give the sun time to rekindle, he returned home, weary but content.



Each evening, he would gather his beloved son and his equally beloved wife and daughters, and together they would watch the moon appear in the sky.





The next morning, without fail, his Dad would leap again aboard his glowing chariot, and fly off to bring out the sun.



Phaethon bragged about his father to anyone who would listen, and even sometimes to those who were not listening at all. He bragged about the golden chariot. He bragged about the four wild horses. He bragged that one day his father would let him drive the chariot across the sky.

Phaethon bragged so much that after a while his friends no longer believed him. They knew his Dad brought up the sun. But they did not believe his Dad would turn over such an important job to a mere boy, not even for one day. The job was too important to risk.

First, his friends began to tease Phaethon. Then, after a while, his friends began to scatter away as Phaethon approached. They were tired of his incessant bragging.



Phaethon begged his father to let him drive. He knew he was ready. He knew he could handle the horses. He knew he could do the job without getting burnt. But mostly, he wanted to prove to his friends that his father trusted him enough to give him the reins. Finally, one evening, exhausted by his son's perpetual pleading, his father said yes.



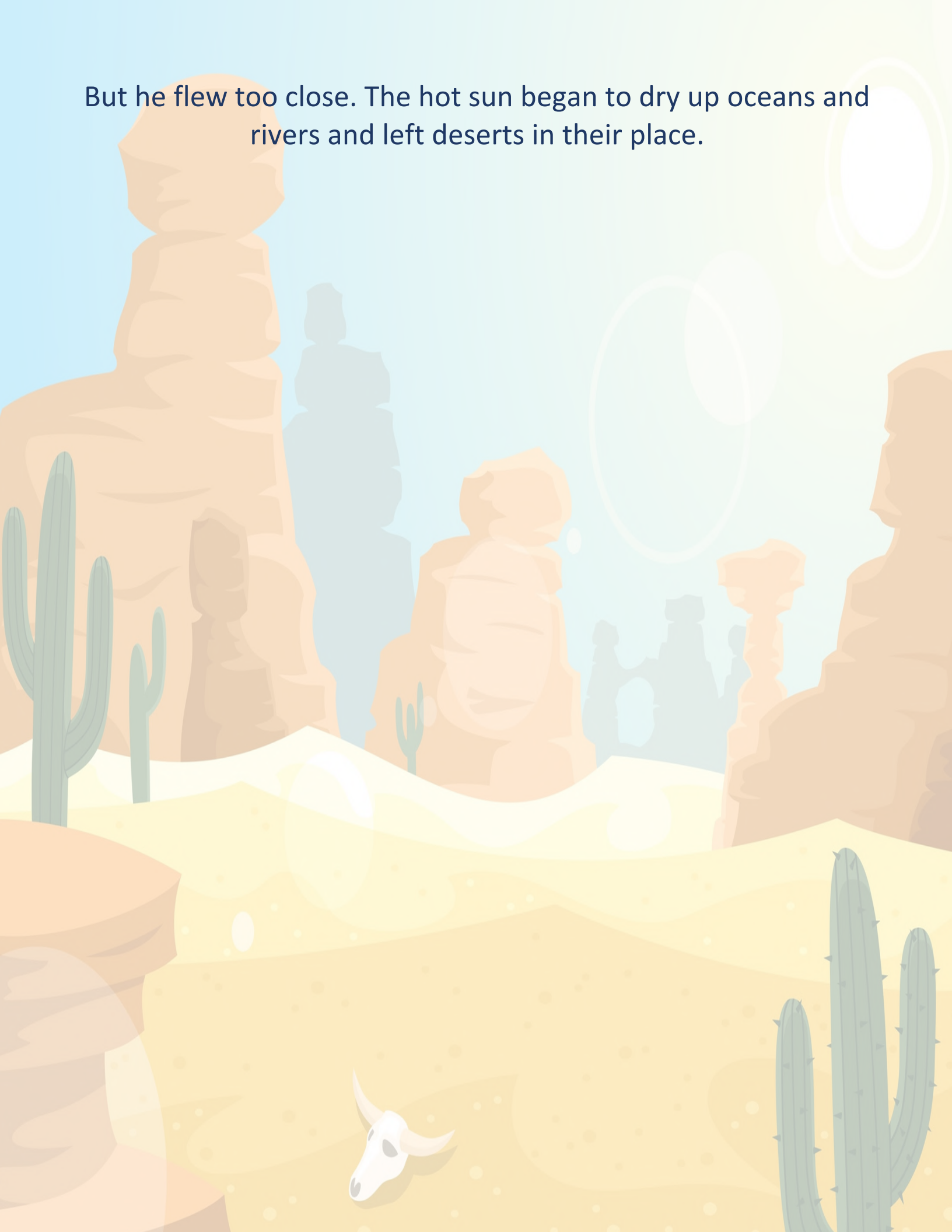
The next morning, Phaethon eagerly climbed aboard the golden chariot. He took the reins tightly in his hands. The horses knew at once that the driver was not the capable Helios. They jerked and reared but Phaethon hung tightly to the reins.





Phaethon caught the sun up behind him on his first swing by, and began to drag the sun across the sky. Bursting with pride, he dipped down towards the earth. He wanted his friends to see him.

But he flew too close. The hot sun began to dry up oceans and rivers and left deserts in their place.



When Phaethon realized his mistake, his eyes widened with panic. He yanked the reins to pull the horses higher in the sky. The horses reared in anger at being jerked so hard. The reins were ripped from Phaethon's hands. The runaway chariot tore across the sky, burning a trail behind it, a trail some call the Milky Way. The horses slowed finally to an amble, and turned towards home, eager for oats.



High on Mount Olympus, Zeus was sitting outside on his front porch. He had been enjoying his breakfast. But now, he was watching the sky. Something was definitely wrong. It looked like Helios' horses were headed for home, but it was too early for them to go home. Could Helios have fallen asleep?



Zeus hurled a lightning bolt at the chariot as it flew by to wake Helios up. It hit the side of the chariot with incredible force. The chariot tilted.



Something or someone dropped out of the chariot, and fell into the Po River.





Zeus called for his magical horse, Pegasus. They quickly caught up with the sweating horses, who had slowed nearly to stop. Pegasus took the lead. Zeus grabbed the reins. Together, Zeus, Pegasus, and the four white horses finished dragging the sun around the earth.

By the time they had tucked the sun in for the night, Zeus was in a raging temper. Pegasus had been nipped three times, which did not help matters any. Zeus roared towards Ethiopia, where Helios kept his palace.



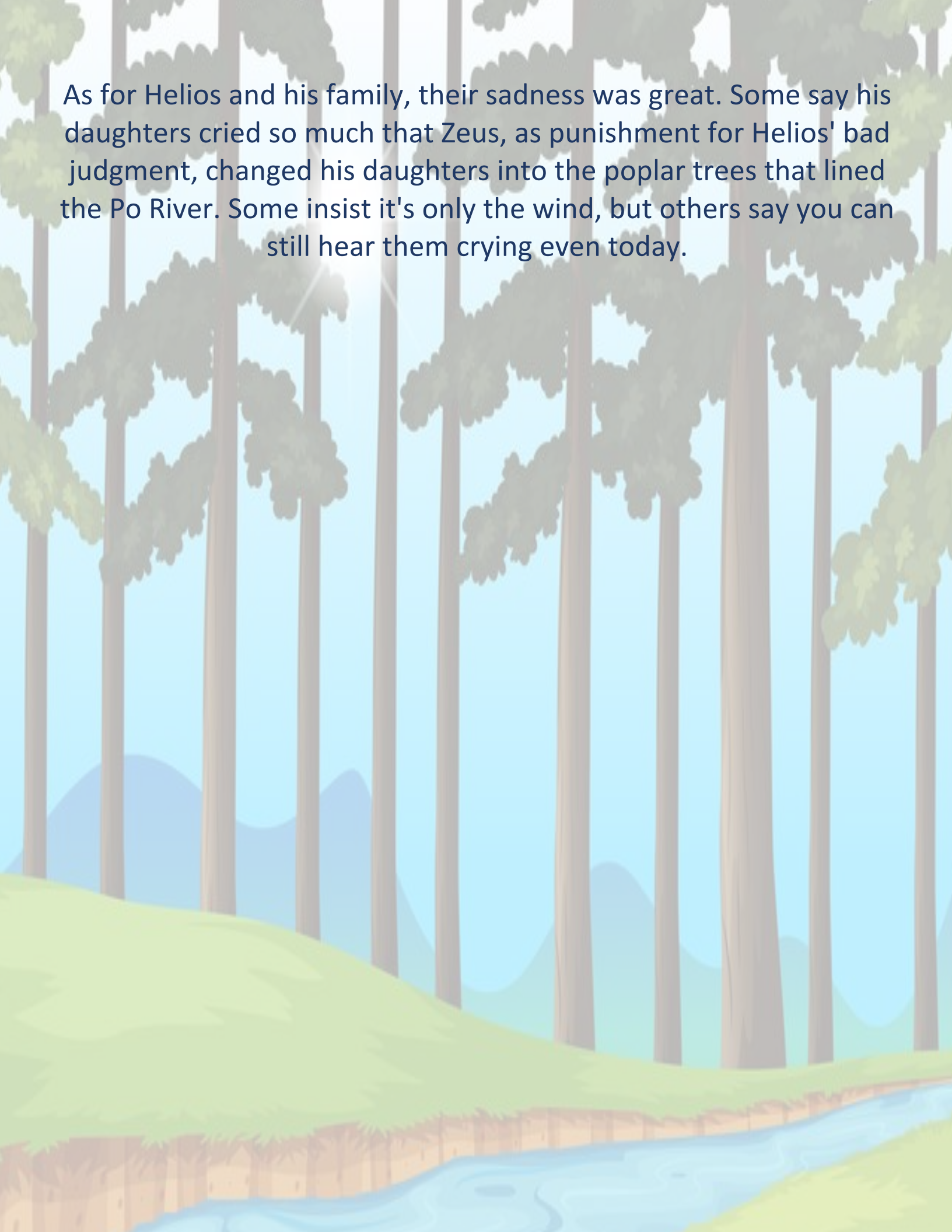
Once Zeus understood that the young boy, Phaethon, had been driving and had probably been what Zeus had noticed dropping out of the chariot into the Po River, Zeus sent Hermes to organize a search party.



It was no use. Phaethon had disappeared. No one knew if he was drowned. Perhaps he had made it to shore and was hiding, ashamed. No one ever heard from him again.



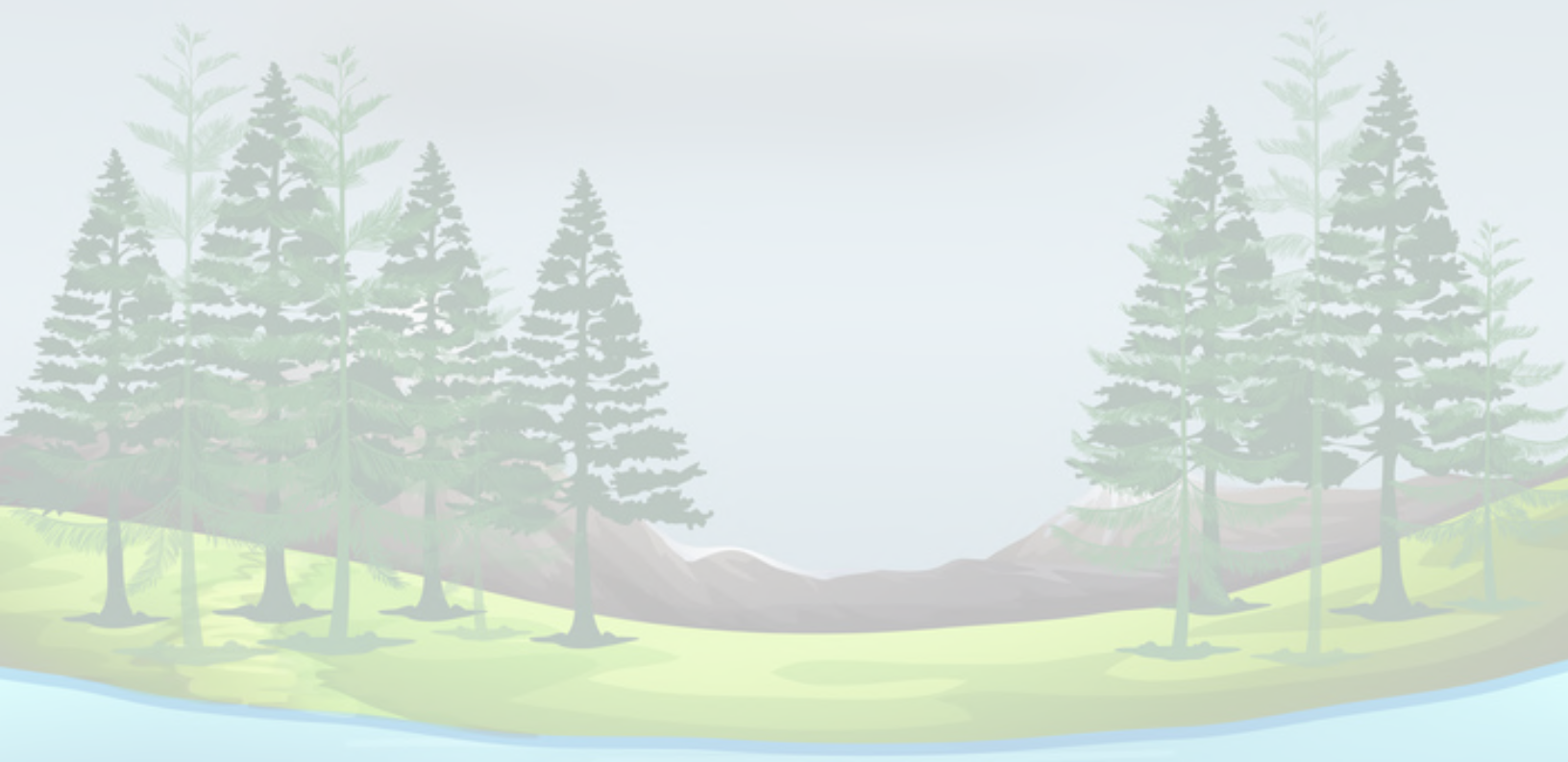
As for Helios and his family, their sadness was great. Some say his daughters cried so much that Zeus, as punishment for Helios' bad judgment, changed his daughters into the poplar trees that lined the Po River. Some insist it's only the wind, but others say you can still hear them crying even today.





Helios continued to bring out the sun, but his heart wasn't it.

He flew too high and let clouds cover the earth. The earth suffered gloomy day after gloomy day.



He flew too low, and burned rivers down to creeks.



Finally, Zeus had to intercede. He made Helios give up his job, the job that had made him so proud, and give the job of bringing out the sun each day to Apollo. Some say he gave his golden chariot to Apollo as well.



But others insist he gave his splendid chariot to Hades in exchange for a favor - that Hades would keep an eye out for his son.





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