



# Madiba's Favourites

## The Clever Snake Charmer



*From Morocco comes this entertaining story about a clever snake charmer who knows how to push his luck. Once again there are three riddles that have to be answered.*



Sultan Jadi – may blessings be upon him – was very bored in his palace. So, he called for his sitar player Mohammed.



For a few days he took pleasure in listening to the sitarist, and he even started laughing and cracking jokes again.



But it was not long before he tired of the sitarist and had the unlucky fellow's head chopped off.



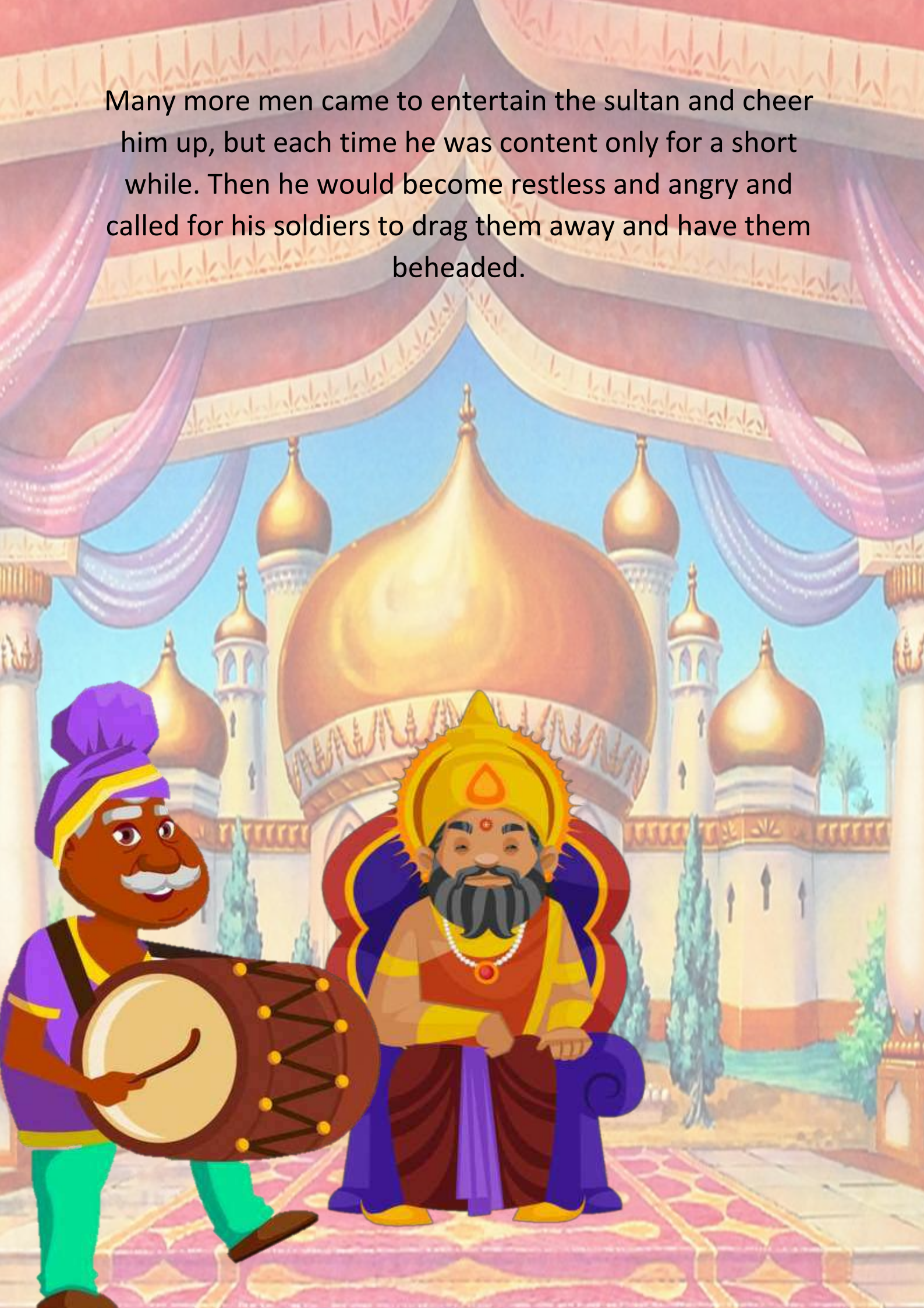
Then he called for Josphe, his harp-plater.



But it was not long before the music of the harp was just a scratching in his ears and he had the harpist's head chopped off too.



Many more men came to entertain the sultan and cheer him up, but each time he was content only for a short while. Then he would become restless and angry and called for his soldiers to drag them away and have them beheaded.





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The situation grew so bad that everyone in the city sat and trembled. Each one wondered if he would be the next to be called to the sultan's palace, only to die by the sword a few days later.



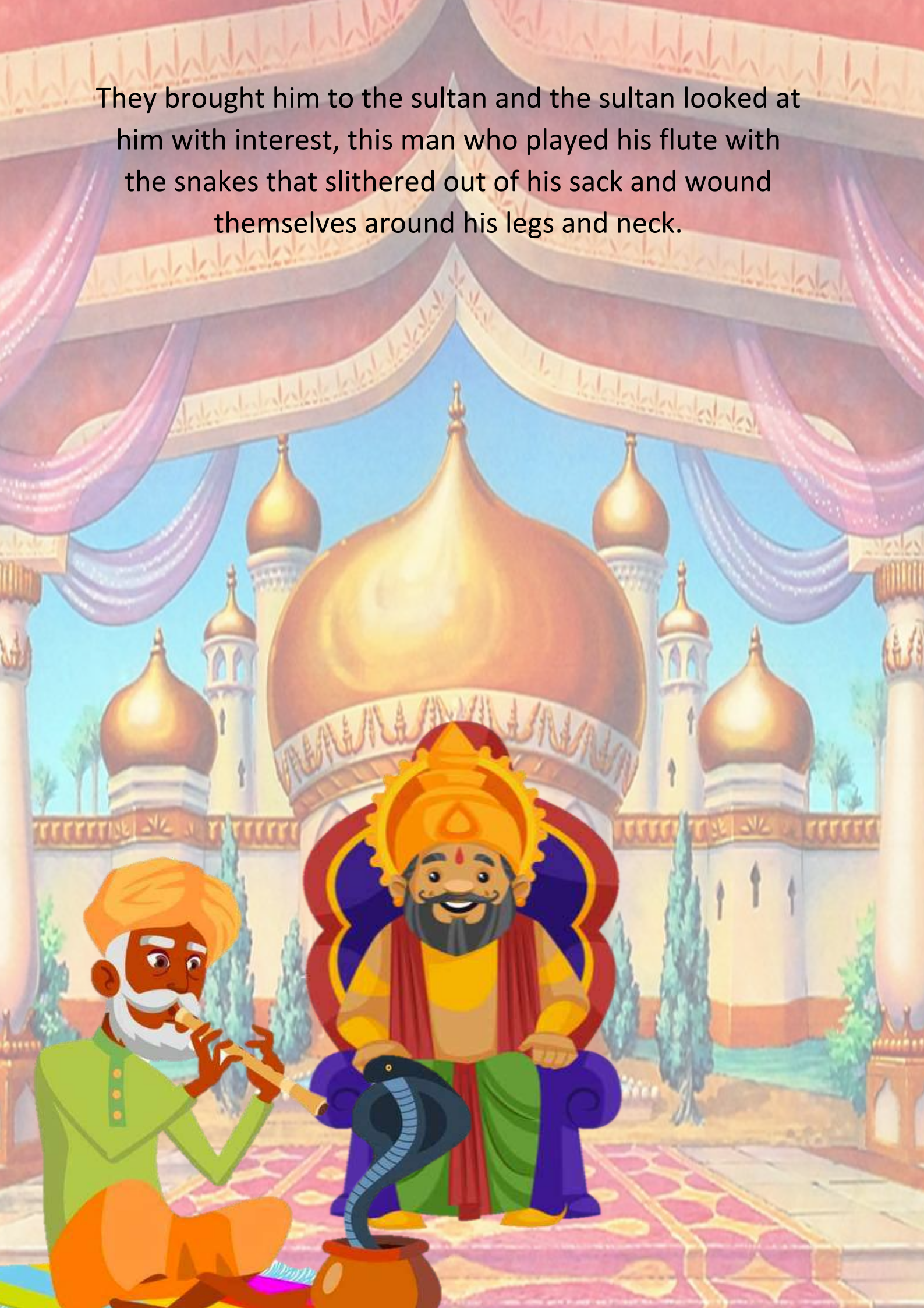
Soon everyone fled: the storytellers, the musicians, the dancers, the jugglers. Everyone left the city where the powerful sultan lived.



But one morning, Selham, the snake charmer, arrived at the palace and bravely announced that he would like a chance to entertain the sultan.



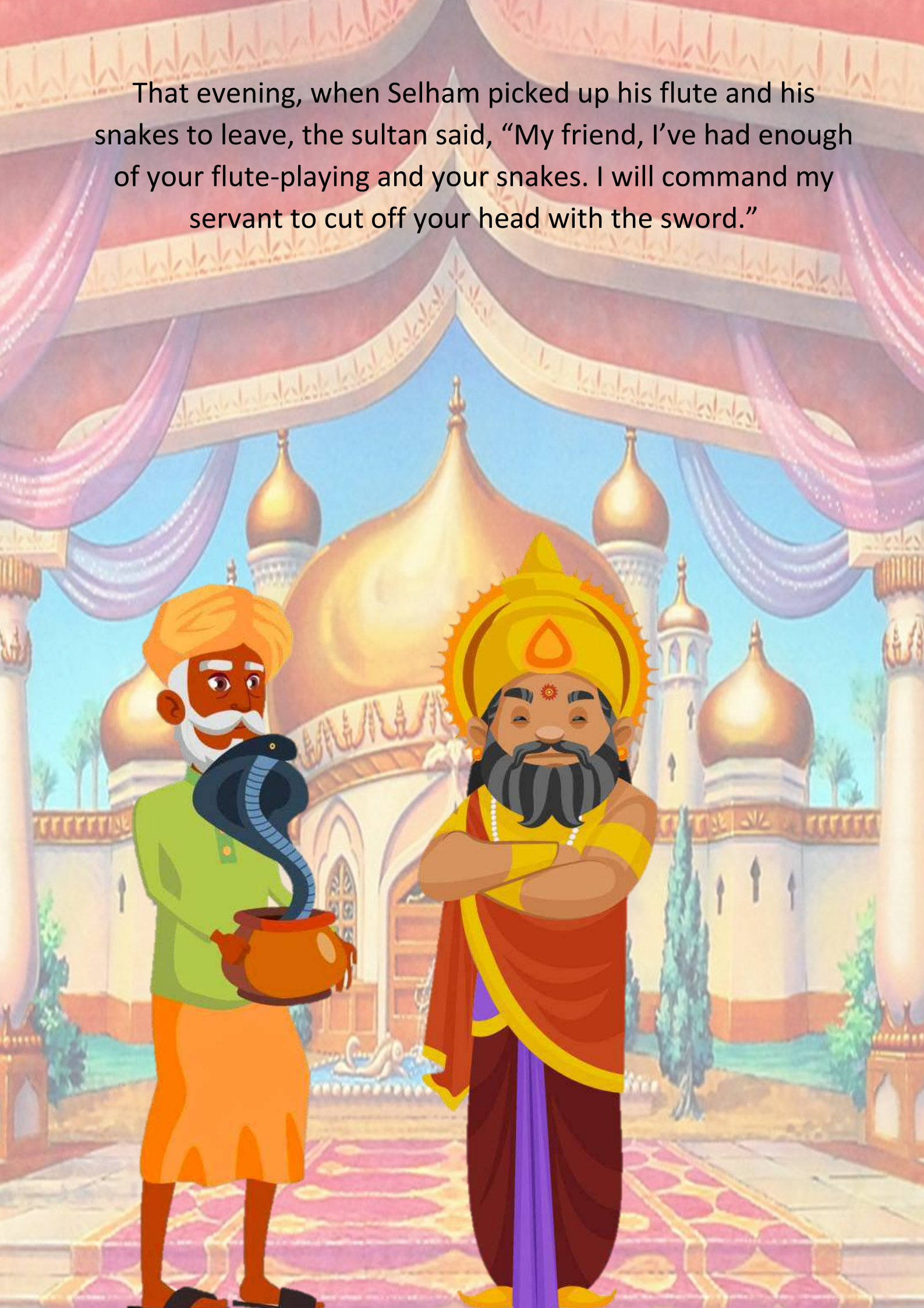
They brought him to the sultan and the sultan looked at him with interest, this man who played his flute with the snakes that slithered out of his sack and wound themselves around his legs and neck.



But it was not too long before the sultan was once more bored and irritable. He felt no further inclination to watch the flute-player with his snakes.



That evening, when Selham picked up his flute and his snakes to leave, the sultan said, “My friend, I’ve had enough of your flute-playing and your snakes. I will command my servant to cut off your head with the sword.”



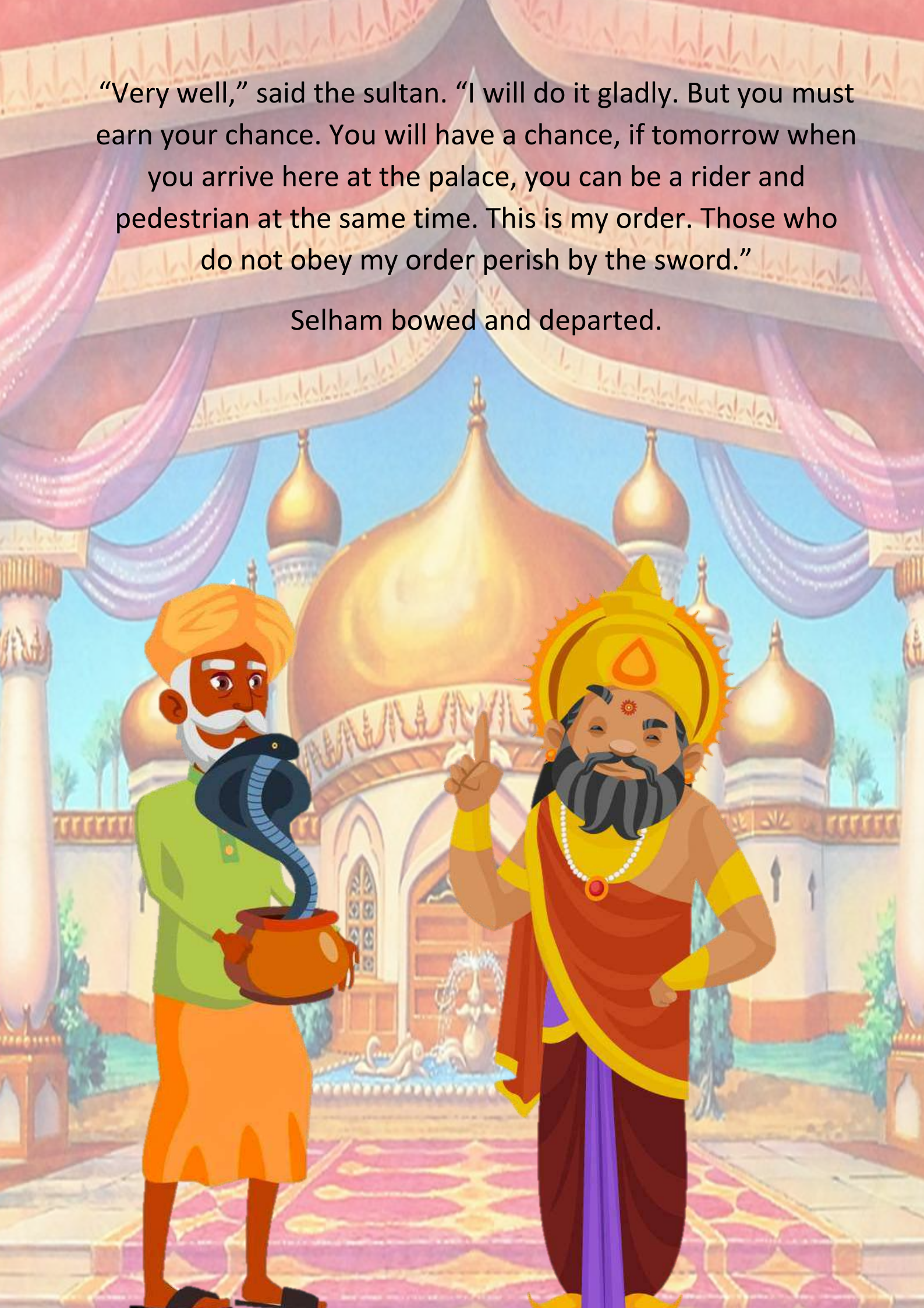
“My Lord,” said Selham, “as you say, so it must be. But give me one chance. If you give me a chance, it will be well worth your while.”





“Very well,” said the sultan. “I will do it gladly. But you must earn your chance. You will have a chance, if tomorrow when you arrive here at the palace, you can be a rider and pedestrian at the same time. This is my order. Those who do not obey my order perish by the sword.”

Selham bowed and departed.



Early the next morning, the sultan stood on the terrace before his palace to watch the snake charmer's arrival. When the palace gates opened, the sultan's eyes nearly popped out of his head and he couldn't utter a word.



There was Selham coming through the gates on the back of the smallest donkey the sultan had ever seen. The donkey was so small that Selham's feet touched the ground!

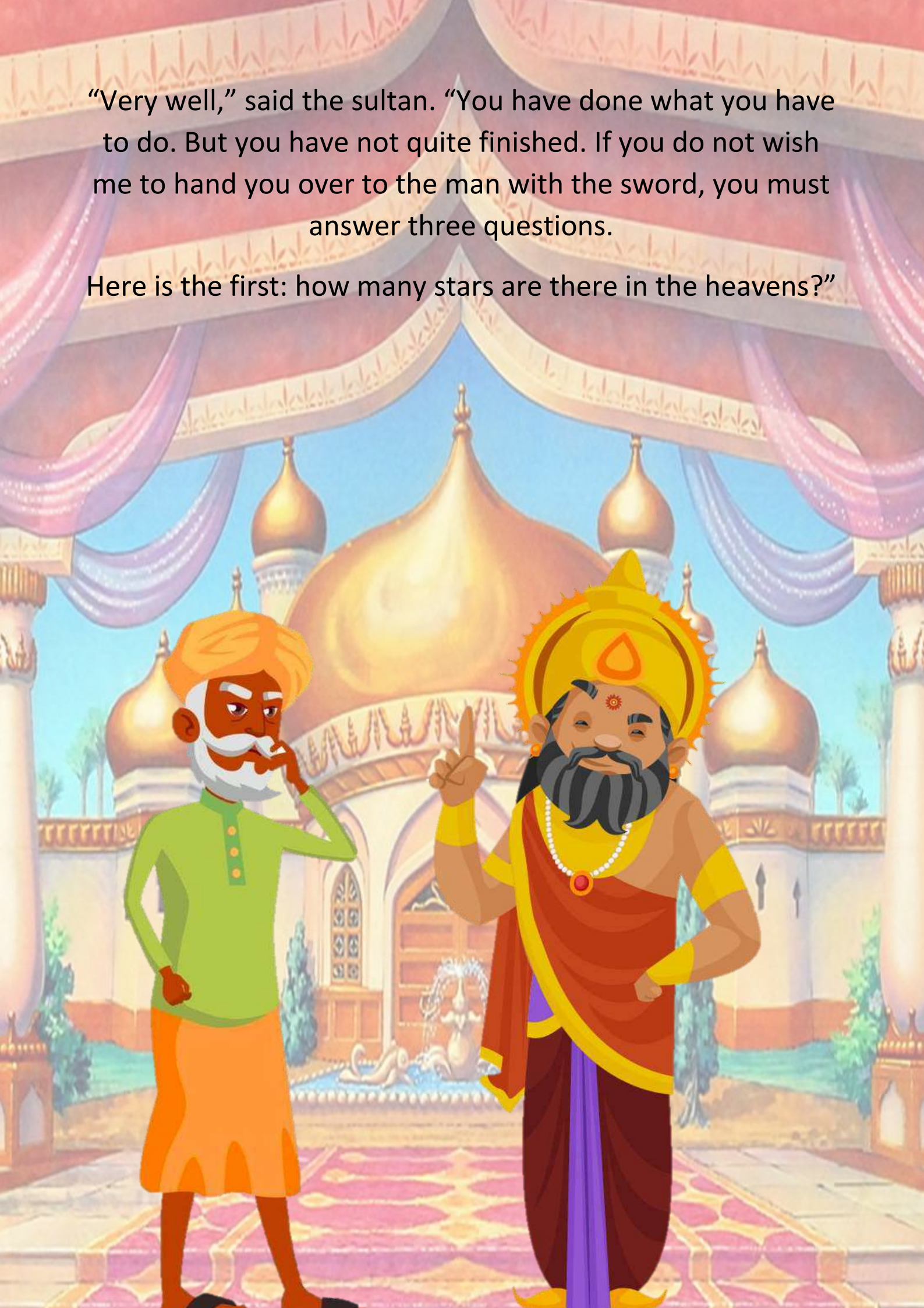


As he came towards the sultan he was riding the donkey, but at the same time he was walking.

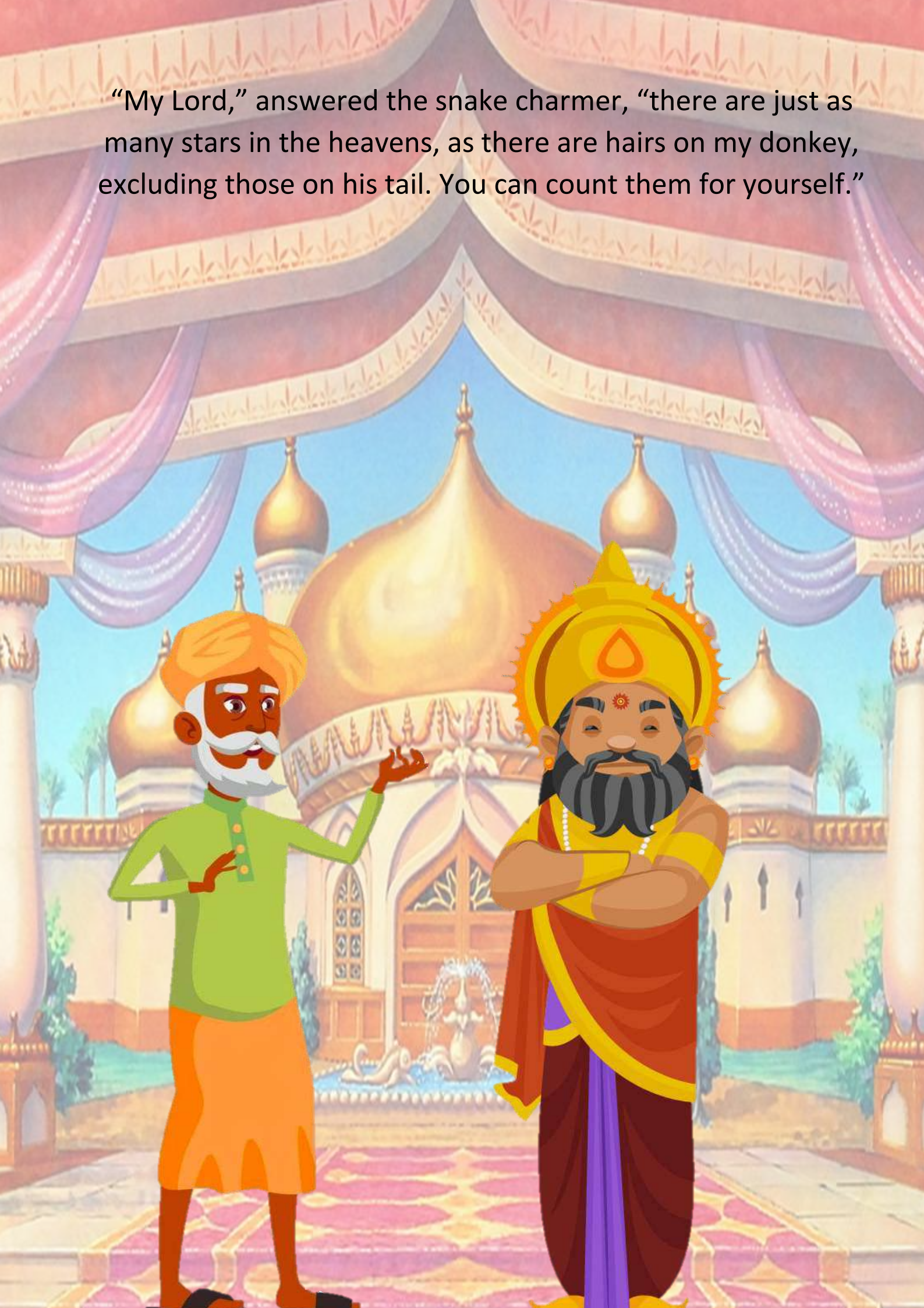


“Very well,” said the sultan. “You have done what you have to do. But you have not quite finished. If you do not wish me to hand you over to the man with the sword, you must answer three questions.

Here is the first: how many stars are there in the heavens?”



“My Lord,” answered the snake charmer, “there are just as many stars in the heavens, as there are hairs on my donkey, excluding those on his tail. You can count them for yourself.”



“Very well,” said the sultan. “Now tell me: On what part of the earth are we?”



“In the middle.”





The sultan laughed and asked, "How many hairs are there in my beard?"

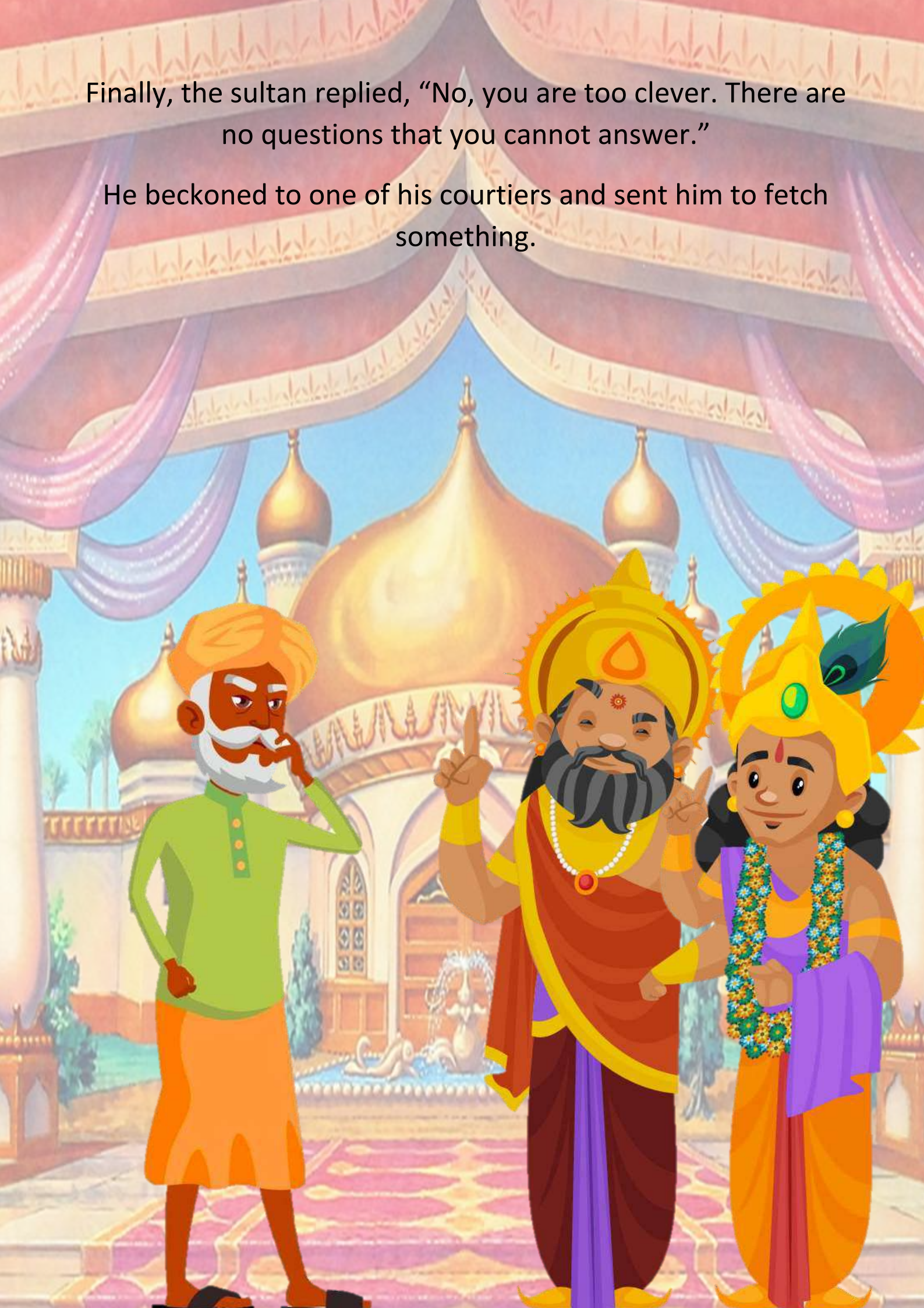


“Just as many as on the tail of my donkey. Cut off your beard and I will cut off my donkey’s tail. Then we can count together.”



Finally, the sultan replied, “No, you are too clever. There are no questions that you cannot answer.”

He beckoned to one of his courtiers and sent him to fetch something.



The man came back and pressed a sack of gold into Selham's hands. The snake charmer bowed deeply to the sultan and walked outside to his little donkey.



Once more the sultan went onto his terrace to watch the clever man riding – but at the same time walking – out of the gates of his palace.



Yes, Selham was leaving on the smallest donkey that the sultan had ever seen.





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