

A People No Longer Neglected

A Kenyan Missionary Adventure





“Not again!” thought Peter in exasperation. He bent down to pull the tiny thorns of the ‘wait a-bit’ bush away from his trousers. Each time he moved another branch grabbed another part of his clothing. “I can’t wait to get through this scrub desert and find some green hills with water.” Peter Cameron Scott was leading a small band of missionaries, fresh off the boat from America, to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the tribes in the interior of Africa. It was 1895, and in his mind’s eye he saw a string of mission stations stretching from Kenya across to Lake Chad in the center of Africa. But his first task was to survive crossing this desolate stretch of Kenya between the green coastal strip and the hills of Ukambani. It was full of thorny bushes and not much else. “Who could ever survive in this place?” he thought as he and his companions slashed their way through the bush.

The O people survive very well in this place. It is too bad the early missionaries passed through the land without stopping to tell the O about Jesus. A few decades after the time Peter passed through, the O had embraced Islam. Nearly 100 years after Peter, missionaries, both from America and from Kenya, came to settle among this neglected people to teach them about Jesus.



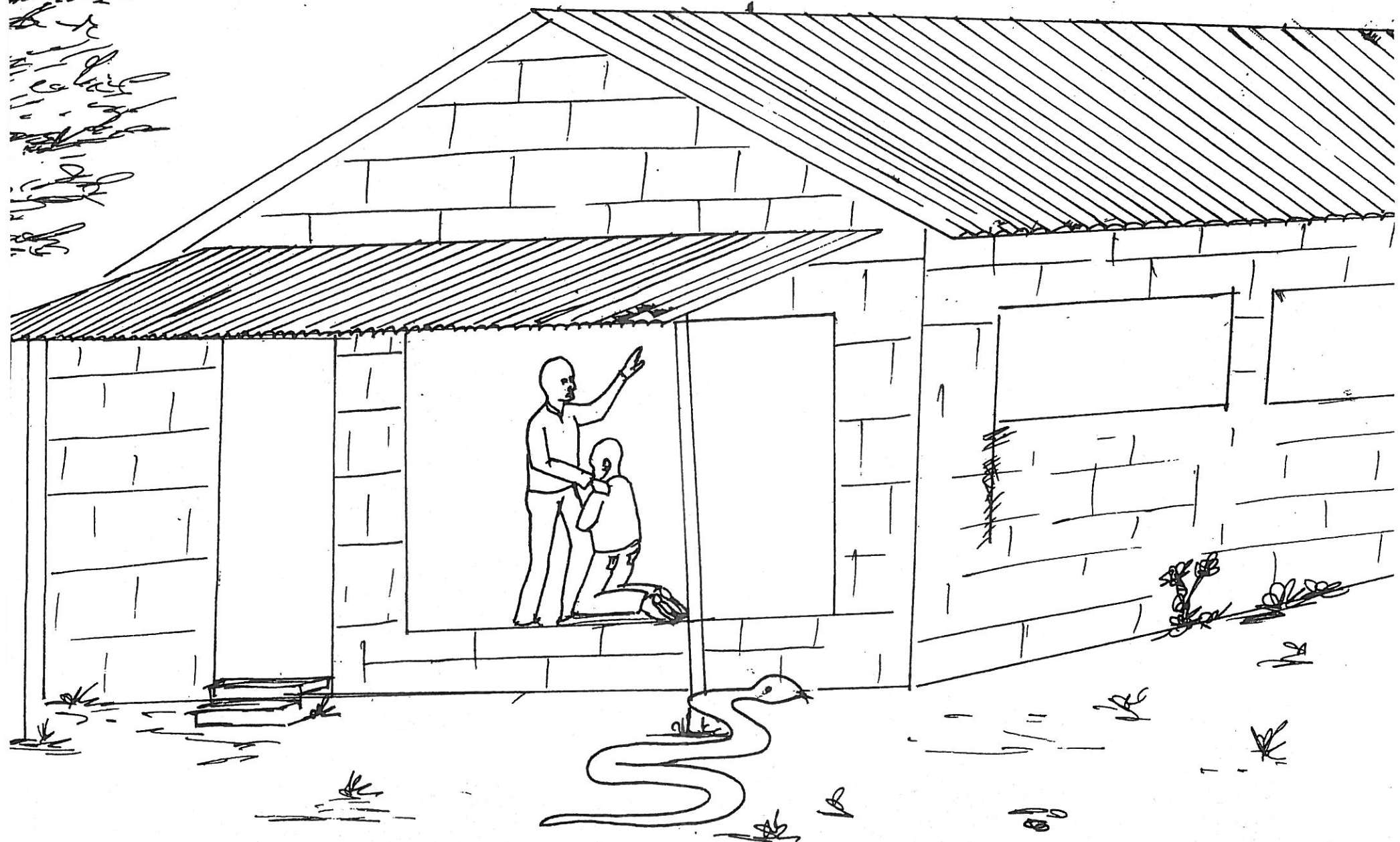
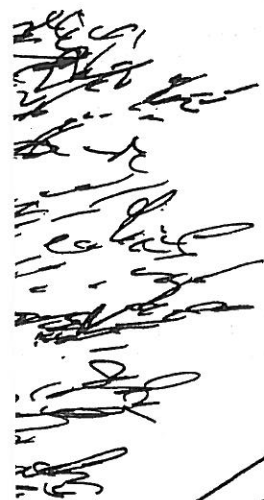
Yusuf sat alone in his hut thinking. He had been doing a lot of thinking lately. Here he was, a young man fully-grown, ready to marry and start a family. It was what his parents and fellow O tribesmen expected of him, and what he dearly wanted himself. If Yusuf had been a typical O man, his family would have long ago arranged a suitable marriage for him. But Yusuf is a Christian, one of only a few among the O. He loved the Lord Jesus and found great peace and joy in worship. But how would he ever find a wife who shared that joy with him? He knew there were no eligible O Christian women for him to marry.

As he sat thinking, his mind wandered back to the time he first heard about Jesus. There had been missionaries in his village for many years, first from America, but more recently from Kenya. Satu and Hakula came from the Borana tribe that live on Marsabit mountain, far north of Oland, but their language and culture is quite close to that of the O.

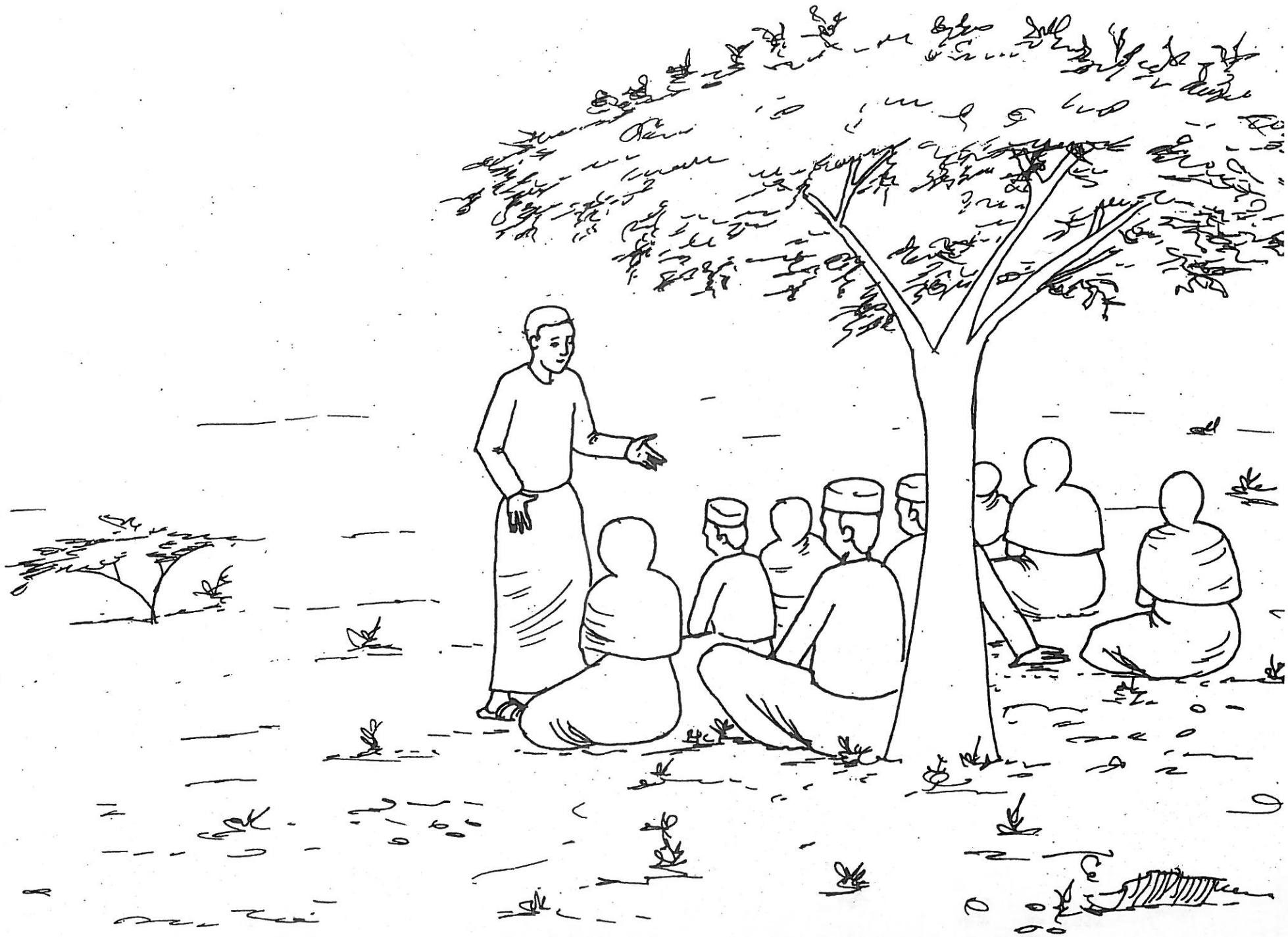


Yusuf was impressed with the dedication of the missionaries. Satu and Hakula were bringing up their three children without the help of their families. They had plenty of hardships, and even adventures, like the time the family got stuck in the bush for two nights traveling in Oland and had to survive by eating wild fruits.

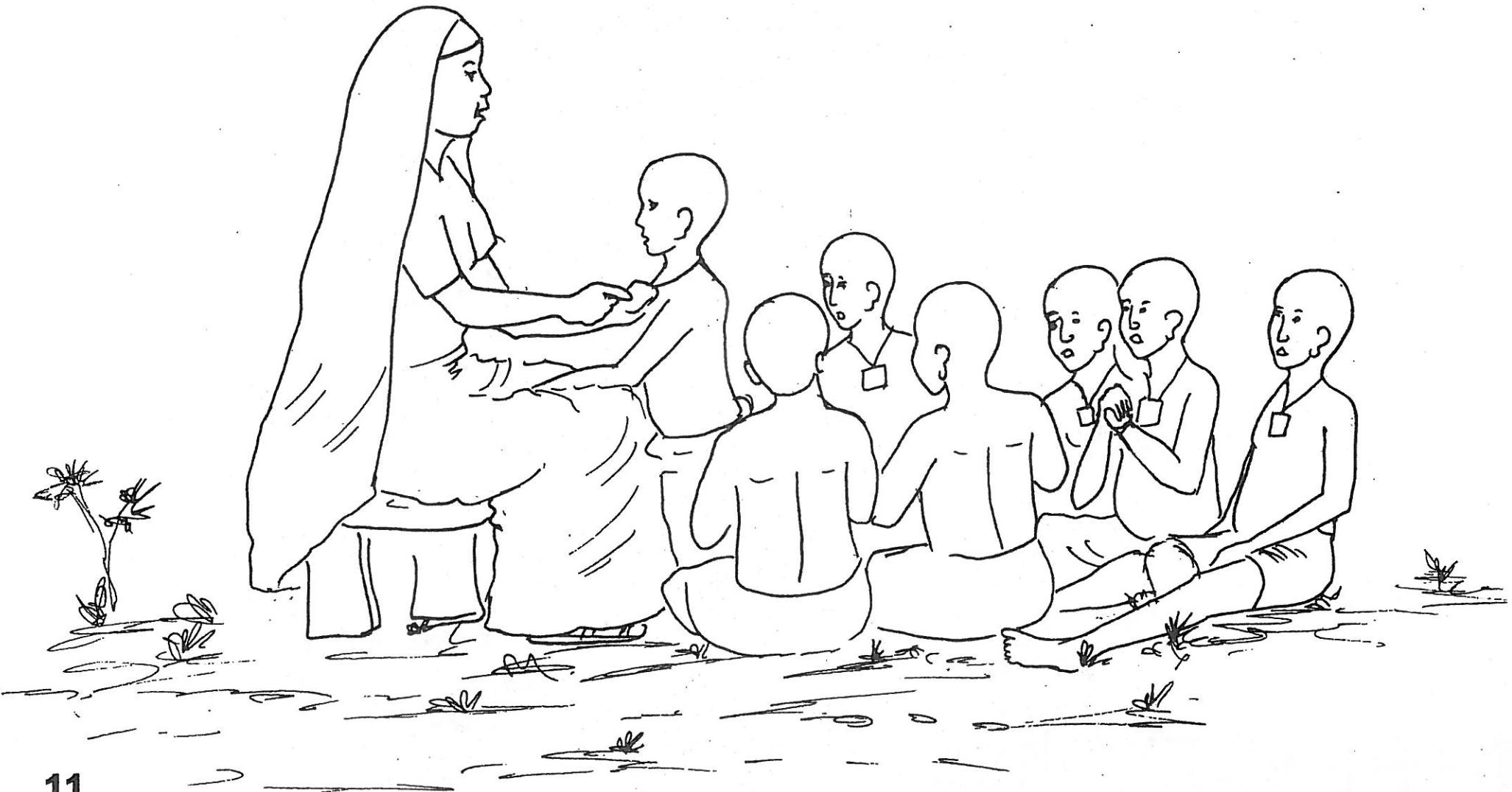
The missionaries had done amazing things for some people in the village. There had been two old men in the village who were both very sick. The Muslim leaders had prayed for them but had given up, especially on the one who could no longer walk because of a bad leg. But Satu prayed for them in the name of Jesus and refused to give up. When he placed the old men in his vehicle to take them to a prayer meeting in a distant town, the people asked, "Why are you bothering to carry the dead in your car?" How shocked they all were when the man with the bad leg showed up in the village healthy and walking. They ran from him in flight, thinking his ghost had risen from the dead!



The missionaries even showed they had power over demons. When Satu came back to the village after a leave, he felt uncomfortable about a new young convert named Juma. "Something is wrong in Juma's life," Satu thought to himself. "I must pray for him during our regular prayer meeting." The night of the prayer meeting, which he didn't attend, Juma couldn't sleep. He dreamed of snakes and felt they were demons attacking him. He decided he had to get up and go to Satu to confess the bad things he had been doing. As Juma confessed his sins and Satu prayed over him, Juma could feel the evil spirits leaving. He went home rejoicing, determined to stand firm for Christ. As Satu watched Juma walk off in the dark, he became aware of a presence on the ground near him. It was a large snake! Grabbing a stick, Satu beat the snake dead. From that night Juma was not bothered by any more dreams of snakes.

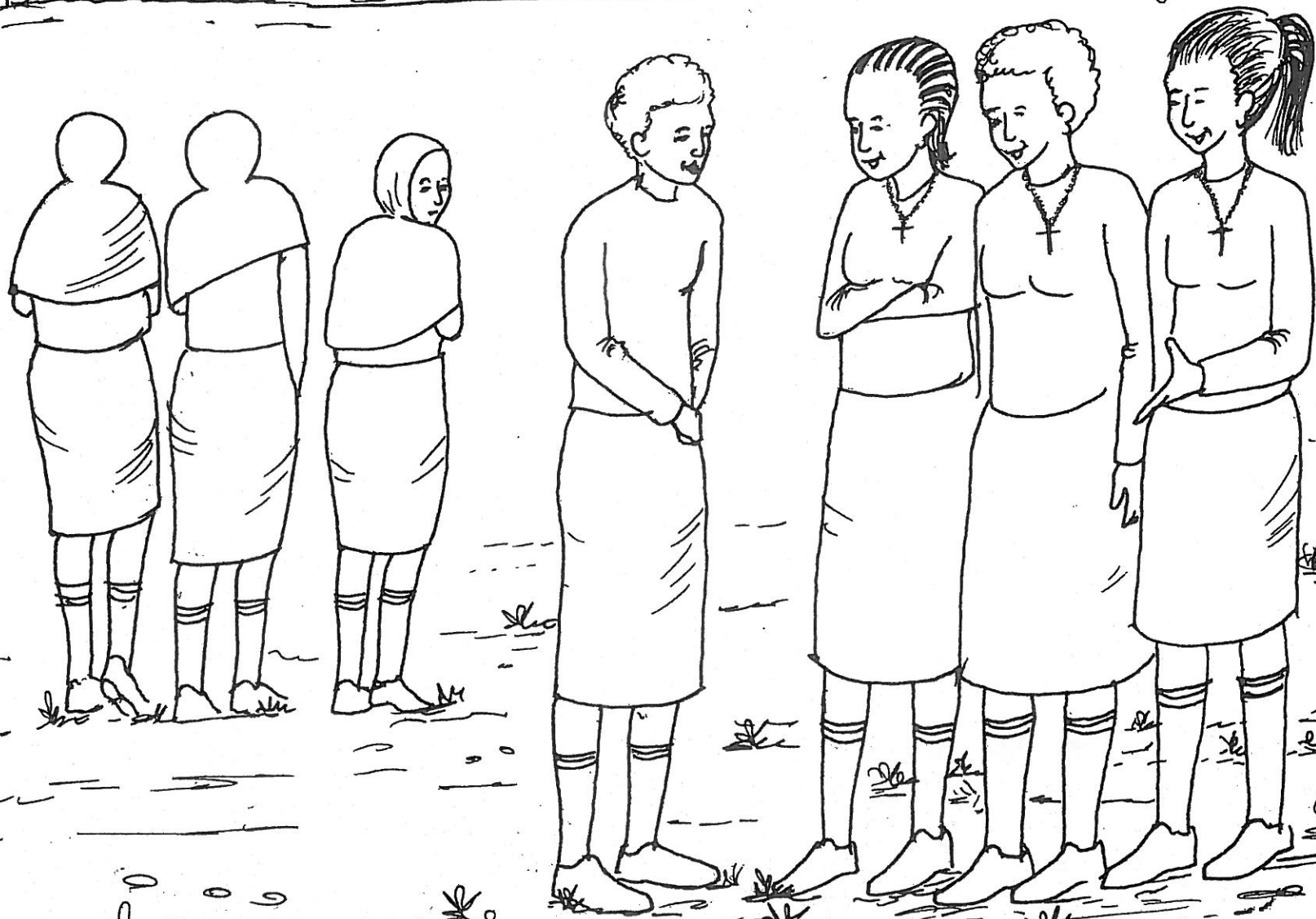
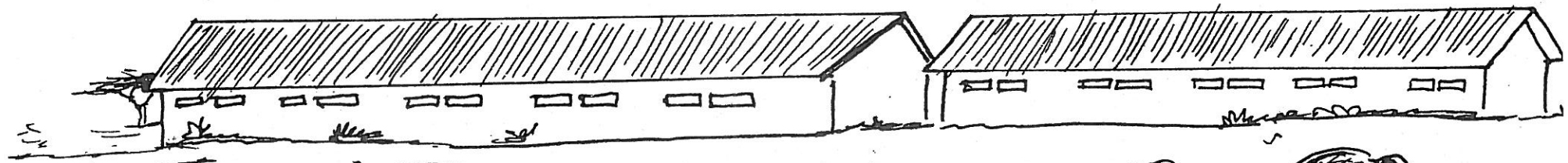


Yusuf knew there was something special about these missionaries. As a young boy he began listening to the stories they told. At first the stories were confusing. They were about Jesus and some of the other prophets Yusuf had heard about from the Imam at the mosque. Yet the stories the missionaries told were different. The prophets were waiting for someone very special to appear in God's time, as prophets did. Yusuf thought to himself, "Surely that would be Mohammed, blessed be his name, God's final messenger." But in these stories, the One they were waiting for was Jesus, and this Jesus seemed much more special than just another prophet. What was said sounded like blasphemy in Yusuf's ears; that this Jesus was actually God's son. "How could God possibly have a son?" Yusuf wondered. But as it was explained to the children, the whole story began to make sense to Yusuf. More than that, he felt sure in his heart that what the missionaries were saying was true.

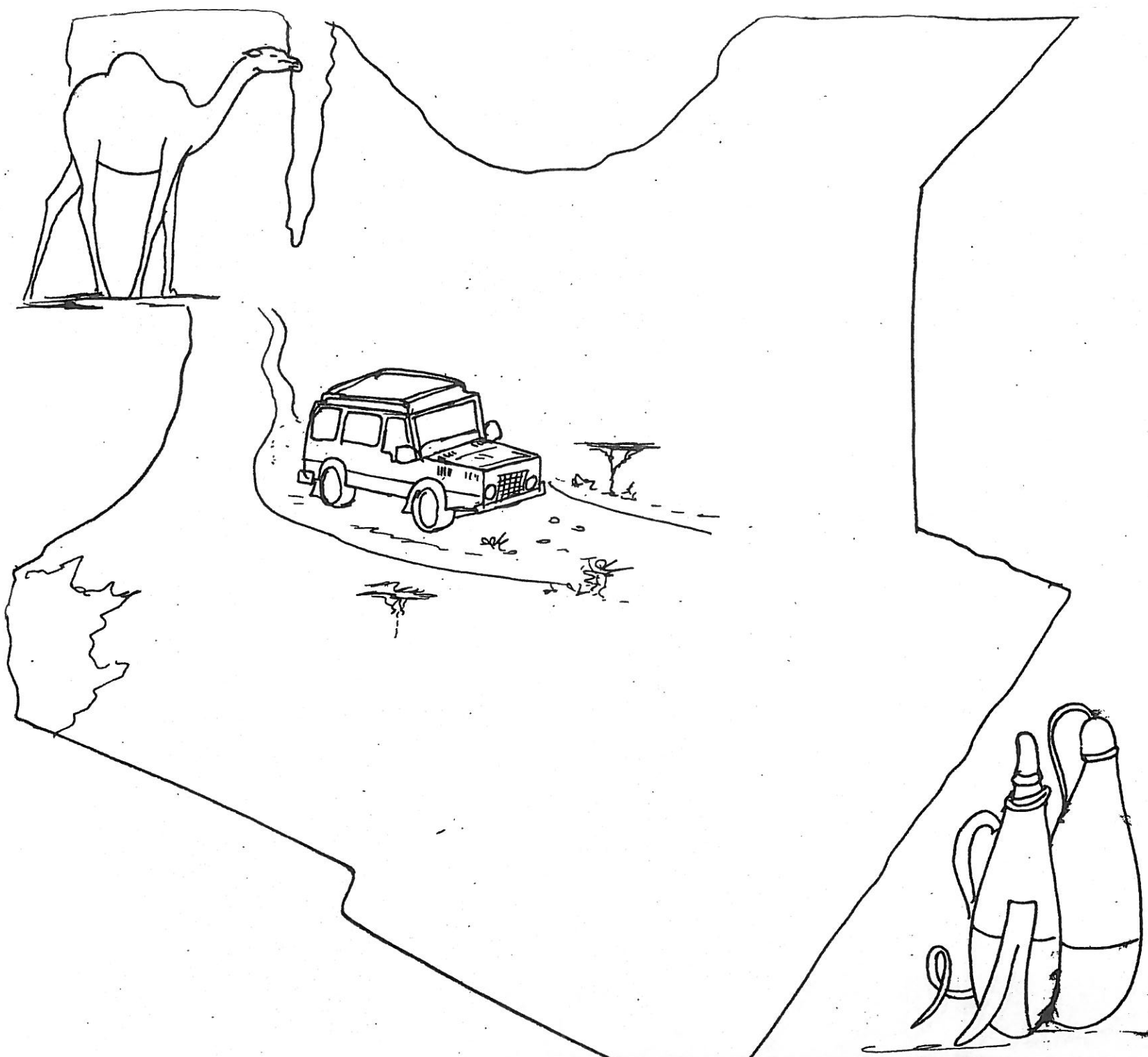


Other children in the village listened with wonder to Hakula telling stories. They enjoyed hearing stories and playing together in the shade of the acacia trees. But they also lived in fear that evil spirits could bring trouble on them at any time. One day Hakula noticed that all the children crowding around her had new little pouch amulets around their necks. "It's because of the hyena", they told her with eyes wide in fear. "Someone had a dream. In the dream a huge hyena came and said he was going to attack the village. We're scared", they said. "Our mothers made us these amulets to keep us safe."

Hakula fingered one of the small squares. "But this will not keep you safe," she said. "And why would a hyena that was going to attack the village come and warn someone? Wouldn't he want to sneak up and catch us unawares?" Very patiently Hakula explained how wearing charms and amulets will not protect them from evil, only God, who created them and loves them could do that. After several days of hearing such comforting words, the children decided to take off their amulets. "Burn these for us", they told Hakula, "We no longer believe they can help us."

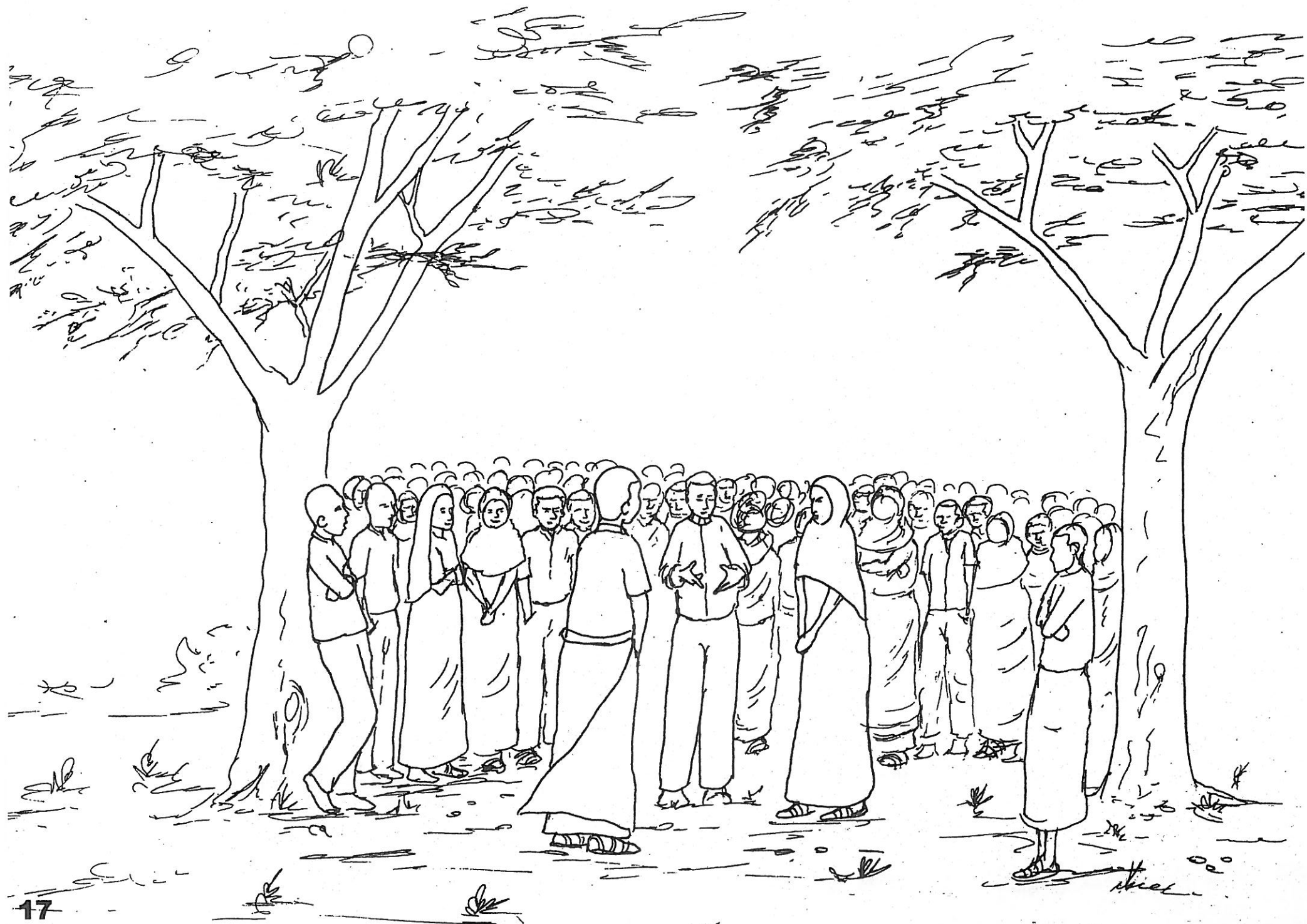


Hakula was so pleased with the children's decision. She thought back to her own childhood, when she herself had lived in fear of evil spirits. She was brought up in a traditional B family, neither Muslim nor Christian. She had Christian classmates at school, but she had abused them and hurled insults at them when they tried to tell her about Jesus. But they kept at her, until the day she decided to educate herself about the differences between Islam and Christianity. She went to some Muslim classmates and asked them to explain what they believed. But the girls treated her roughly and abused her, much as she had abused the Christian girls. They told her she had to take a Muslim name before they would tell her anything. Discouraged, Hakula went to the Christian girls to ask them about their religion. To her surprise, they welcomed her and very kindly answered her questions. She asked them to forgive her for her former rudeness, which they quickly did.



Around the same time, Satu was attending a different primary school. His family was also traditional, but he was in a Catholic school. There he excelled at Bible knowledge because he enjoyed reading the stories. His friends nicknamed him “The Moving Bible” because he knew so many verses. But one day he met a missionary from America named Bill. Bill was also impressed with Satu’s knowledge about Jesus, but he challenged him to really ‘know’ Him, not just ‘know about’ Him. Satu began attending the local Africa Inland Church where his relationship with Jesus grew. By the time he was a teenager, he and some other young people from his church helped a missionary plant another congregation. Ten years later, Satu became one of the first B men to attend Bible college. While he was in Bible college he met missionaries who invited him to help them reach the O people. His missionary calling had begun.

Meanwhile, Hakula was back in Marsabit waiting for Satu to finish college. They had become engaged after Satu’s first year but could not marry until he graduated. She spent a tense three years waiting for him, being pressured by her extended family and community to marry someone else, but she refused. She breathed a sigh of relief when she and Satu married right after graduation. Then she left the cool greenness of Marsabit to follow Satu to the mission field of Oland.



Several years later, Satu and Hakula were remembering their own anxiety about the possibility of being yoked in marriage with a non-Christian as they spoke with Yusuf. Satu determined to help Yusuf find a dedicated Christian woman to stand firm beside him when his family pressured him to return to the mosque. But there just were no O Christian women Yusuf could marry. “Why not a B girl?” Satu asked Hakula. On a trip to Nairobi, Satu attended a church with many B people. “Is there a faithful girl who loves the Lord and would like to marry a faithful man?” Satu asked the church secretary. He was introduced to Joyce, a young woman from a B village who had become a Christian during a missions trip by the Nairobi church. She had left the village and come to Nairobi to escape the anger of her family. Satu brought Yusuf to meet Joyce and they agreed to marry. Then Satu quickly made his way to the village to talk to her family, feeling like Abraham’s servant who went to find a wife for Isaac. Joyce’s brothers agreed to the marriage and Satu helped Yusuf pay the bride price. But there was no money left over for a church wedding. Invited to speak at a large AIC church in Nairobi, Satu shared the challenges Yusuf and Joyce faced to stand firm in their faith. At the end of the service, the church decided they would throw the young couple the nicest wedding either of them could ever have imagined!

But that wasn’t all. Bringing Joyce to Yusuf’s little village among the thorn bushes of Oland, he wanted to show the whole community that God had been faithful. So once again, Yusuf and Joyce stood before the altar to declare their love for each other and for God. This time they dressed themselves in traditional clothing, but there was nothing ‘traditional’ about the wedding. It was the first Christian wedding seen in Oland, and 500 O came and heard the Word of God preached.