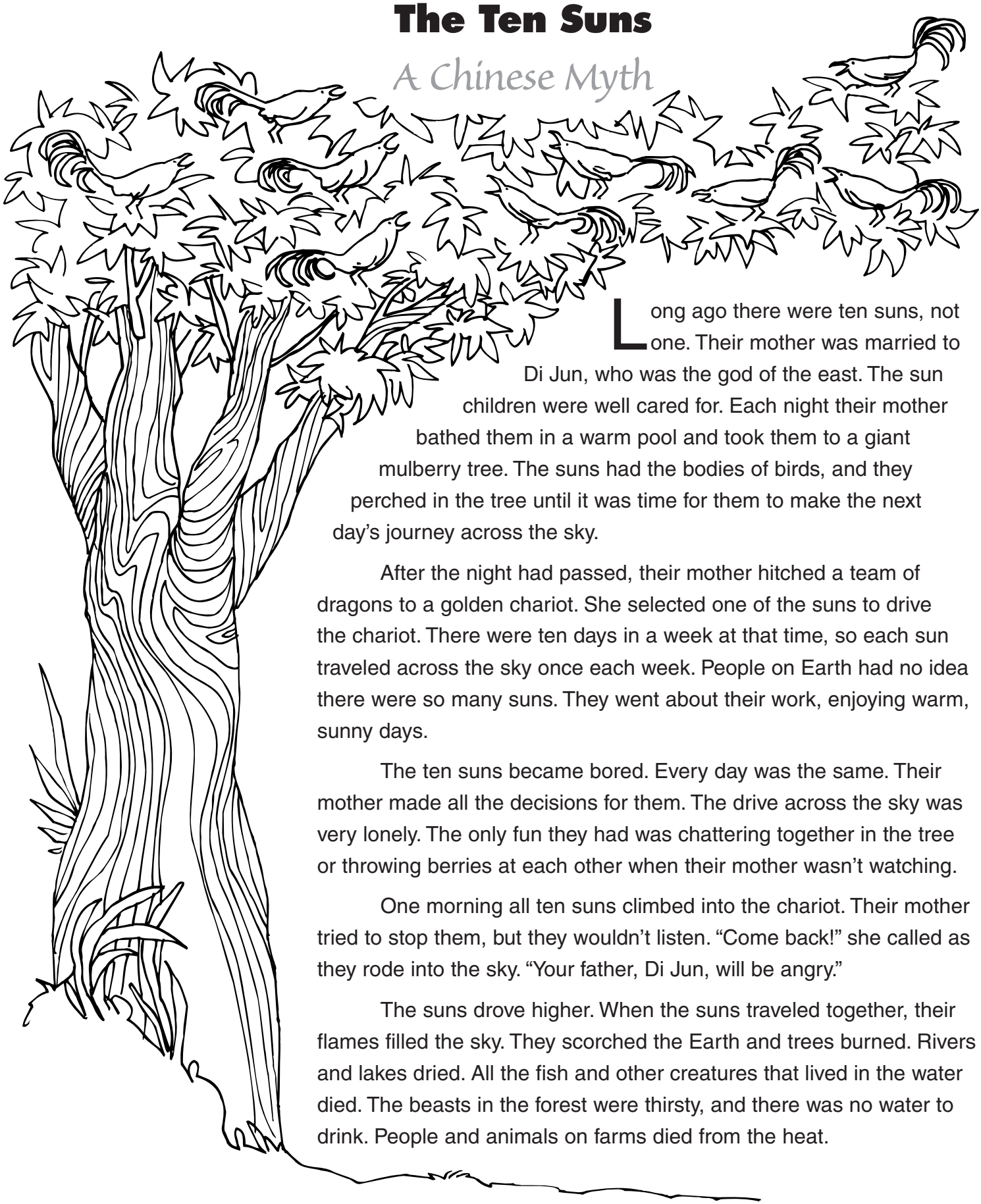
The Ten Suns

A Chinese Myth



Long ago there were ten suns, not one. Their mother was married to Di Jun, who was the god of the east. The sun children were well cared for. Each night their mother bathed them in a warm pool and took them to a giant mulberry tree. The suns had the bodies of birds, and they perched in the tree until it was time for them to make the next day's journey across the sky.

After the night had passed, their mother hitched a team of dragons to a golden chariot. She selected one of the suns to drive the chariot. There were ten days in a week at that time, so each sun traveled across the sky once each week. People on Earth had no idea there were so many suns. They went about their work, enjoying warm, sunny days.

The ten suns became bored. Every day was the same. Their mother made all the decisions for them. The drive across the sky was very lonely. The only fun they had was chattering together in the tree or throwing berries at each other when their mother wasn't watching.

One morning all ten suns climbed into the chariot. Their mother tried to stop them, but they wouldn't listen. "Come back!" she called as they rode into the sky. "Your father, Di Jun, will be angry."

The suns drove higher. When the suns traveled together, their flames filled the sky. They scorched the Earth and trees burned. Rivers and lakes dried. All the fish and other creatures that lived in the water died. The beasts in the forest were thirsty, and there was no water to drink. People and animals on farms died from the heat.

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Day after day, the ten suns rode together across the sky. They laughed and sang and teased the dragons that pulled their chariot. They didn't worry about the Earth.

Their mother went to Di Jun and said, "What can I do? The children won't listen to me. Each day, they all climb into the chariot together. They are burning the Earth. Perhaps they will listen to you."

The people prayed to Di Jun. "Deliver us from the heat your children send to Earth. The ground is cracked and burnt. There is no food left for us or for the animals. Speak to them, or soon you will have no people to rule."

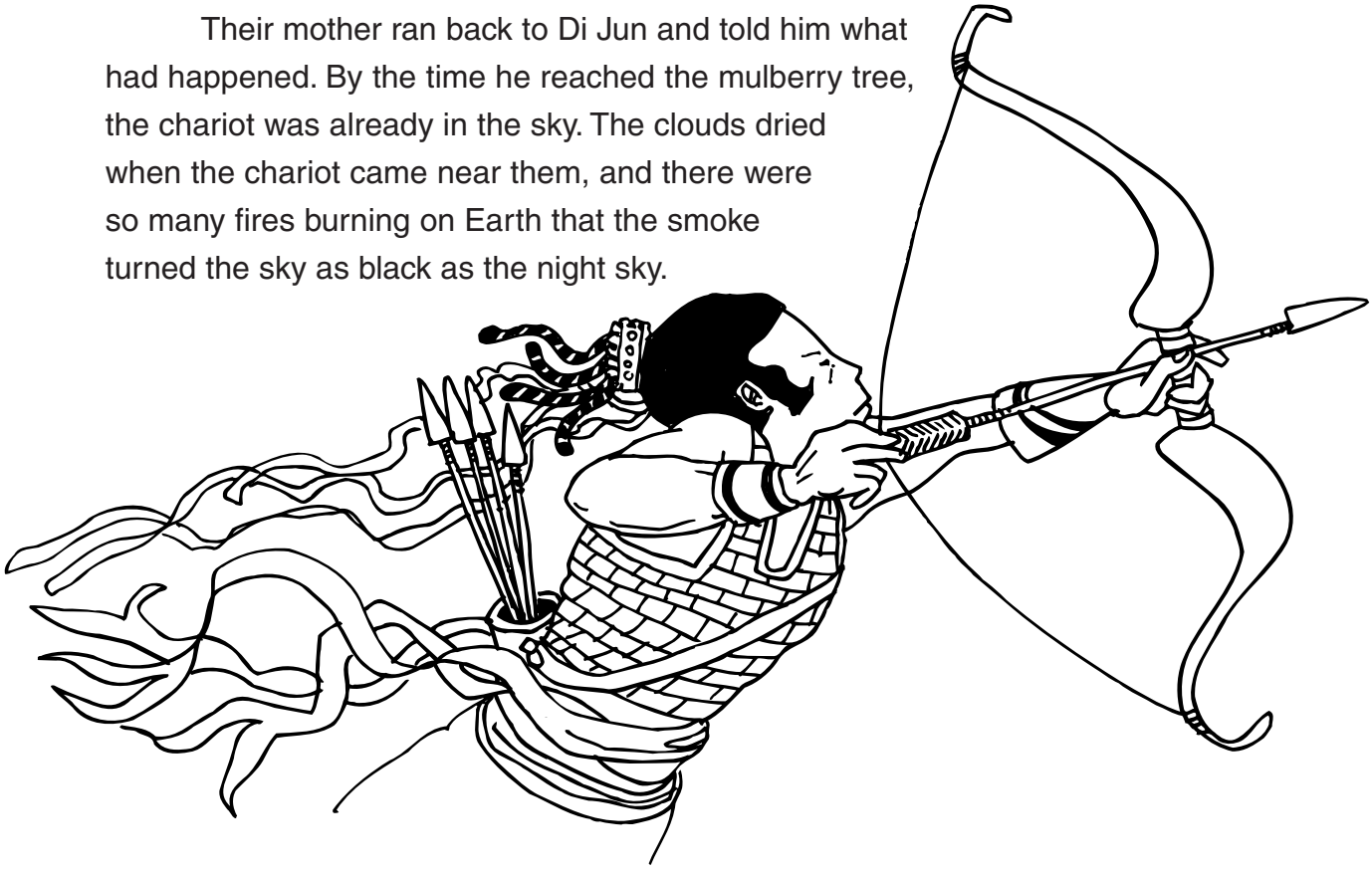
Di Jun went to the tree that night and told the suns that they couldn't cross the sky together. "You are destroying the Earth. There is no water left. Your mother and the people have asked me to stop you from riding together."

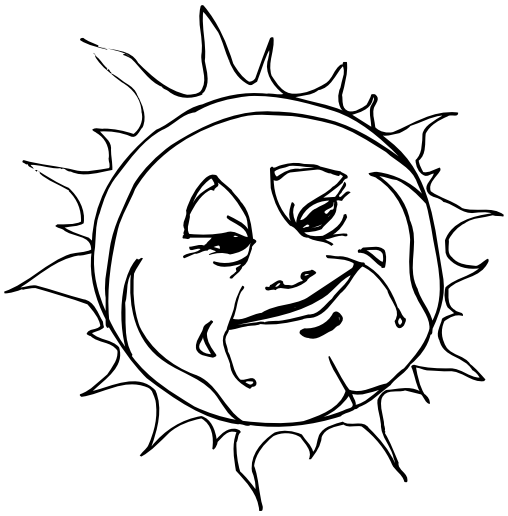
The suns, perched in the tree, chirped noisily.

Di Jun, thinking the suns had agreed to obey him, returned to his palace. He assured his wife and the people on Earth that the suns had given their word. "They have promised to ride across the sky one at a time."

At dawn the next day, all the suns climbed back into the chariot. Their mother tried to pull them out and put them back in the tree. Whenever she took one out, another climbed back in.

Their mother ran back to Di Jun and told him what had happened. By the time he reached the mulberry tree, the chariot was already in the sky. The clouds dried when the chariot came near them, and there were so many fires burning on Earth that the smoke turned the sky as black as the night sky.





The people went to the emperor and asked for his help. “There will be nothing left for you to rule if you don’t stop the ten suns,” they said.

The emperor called for his council. They discussed the problem until the suns were directly over the palace. The gold on the walls began to melt.

The emperor realized that there was no time for talk. He sent the council home and called for the royal archer.

The archer was a giant, and he could shoot an arrow so high that it never returned to Earth.

“You must shoot the ten suns before the Earth dies,” the emperor said.

The archer filled a quiver with ten arrows and selected an enormous golden bow. He climbed to the top of a mountain and readied his bow as the suns’ chariot came closer. He aimed the first nine arrows carefully, and each one hit its mark. The wounded suns fell from the chariot in the form of birds. Their golden feathers floated in the air.

When there was one sun left in the chariot, the archer fit the last arrow in the bow. He felt someone tugging at his arm.

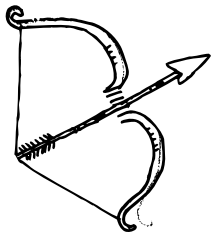
“Wait,” said a voice. “Don’t shoot the last sun from the sky.” The archer turned and saw the suns’ mother. “If there is no sun left in the sky, it will be worse than too many. Without sunlight, plants won’t grow. There will be nothing to eat. Save one of my children.”

The archer nodded and he handed the suns’ mother the last arrow.

From that time, there has been just one sun in the sky.

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Questions about *The Ten Suns*

1. Describe the sun children. Tell how they looked and what they did.

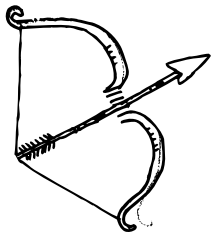
2. Tell what problem developed when the suns became bored.

3. What caused the emperor to act quickly?

4. Why did the archer save one sun?

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Character Analysis

Describe the mother in the myth. Would you consider the suns' mother a good mother? Justify your opinion.

Describe the father as portrayed by Di Jun. Would you consider Di Jun a good father? Justify your opinion.

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