

# The devil's bridge



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Generalitat de Catalunya  
**Departament  
d'Ensenyament**

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CIUTAT DE **TARRAGONA**



**Camp d'Aprenentatge de la ciutat de Tarragona**  
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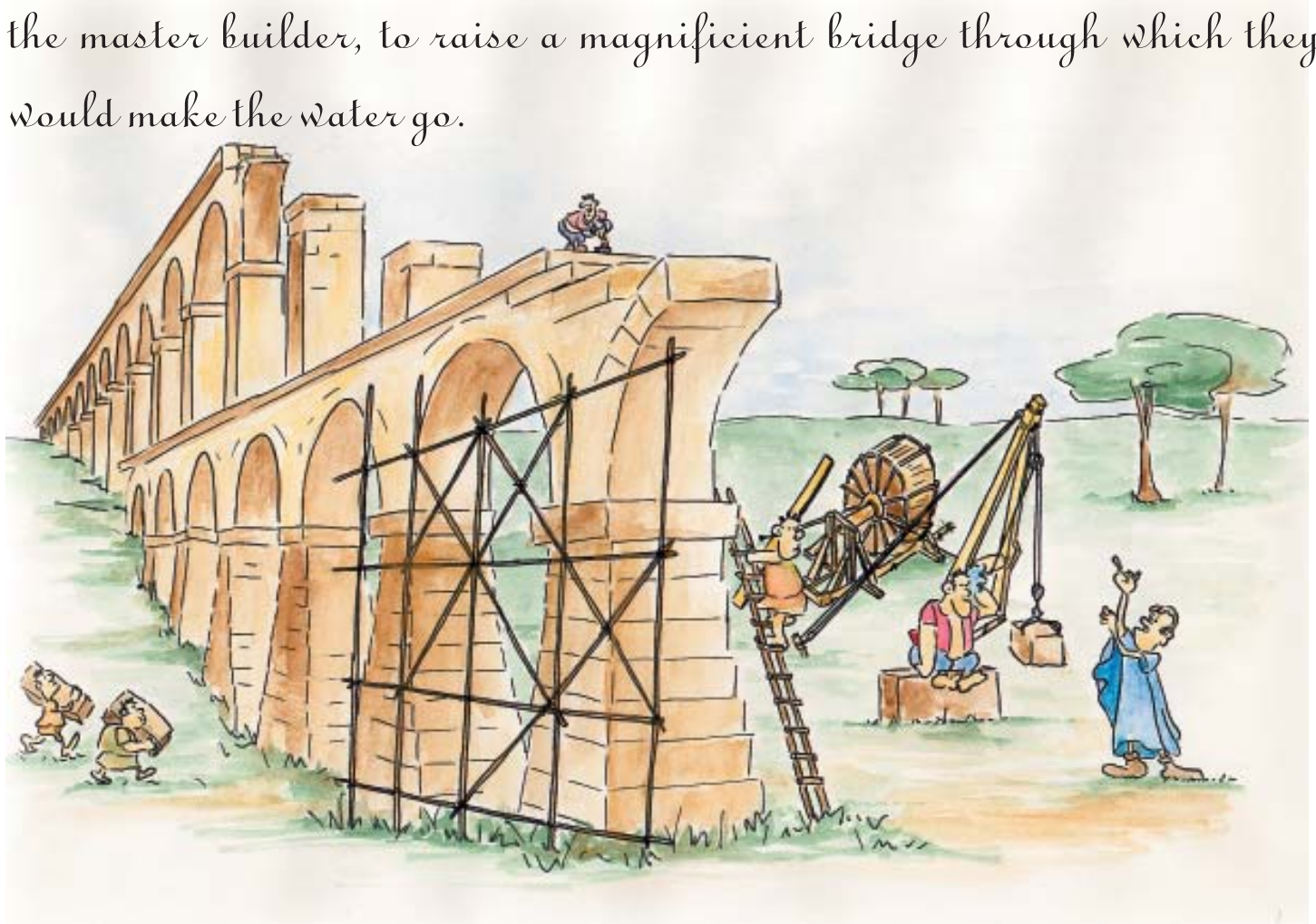
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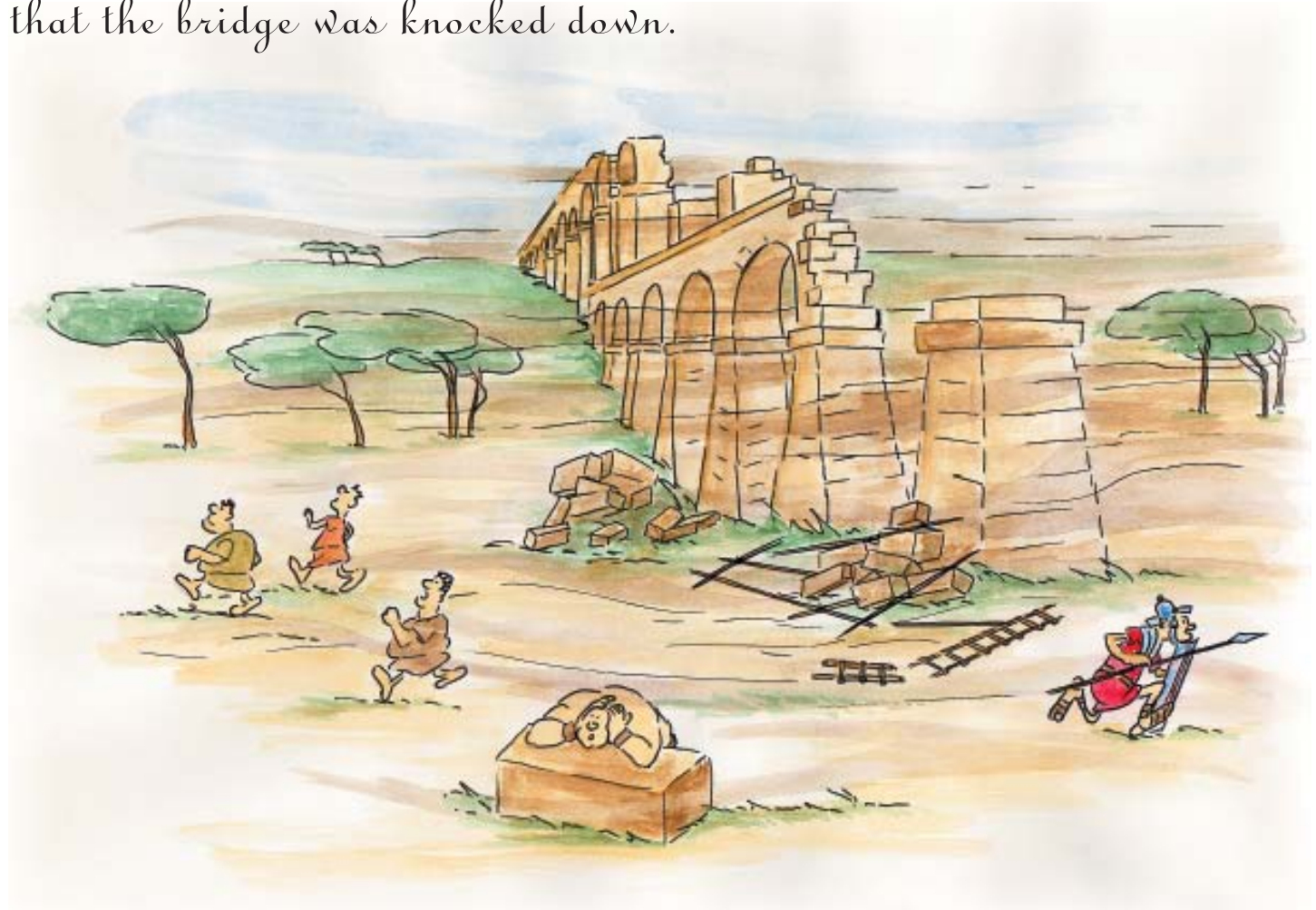
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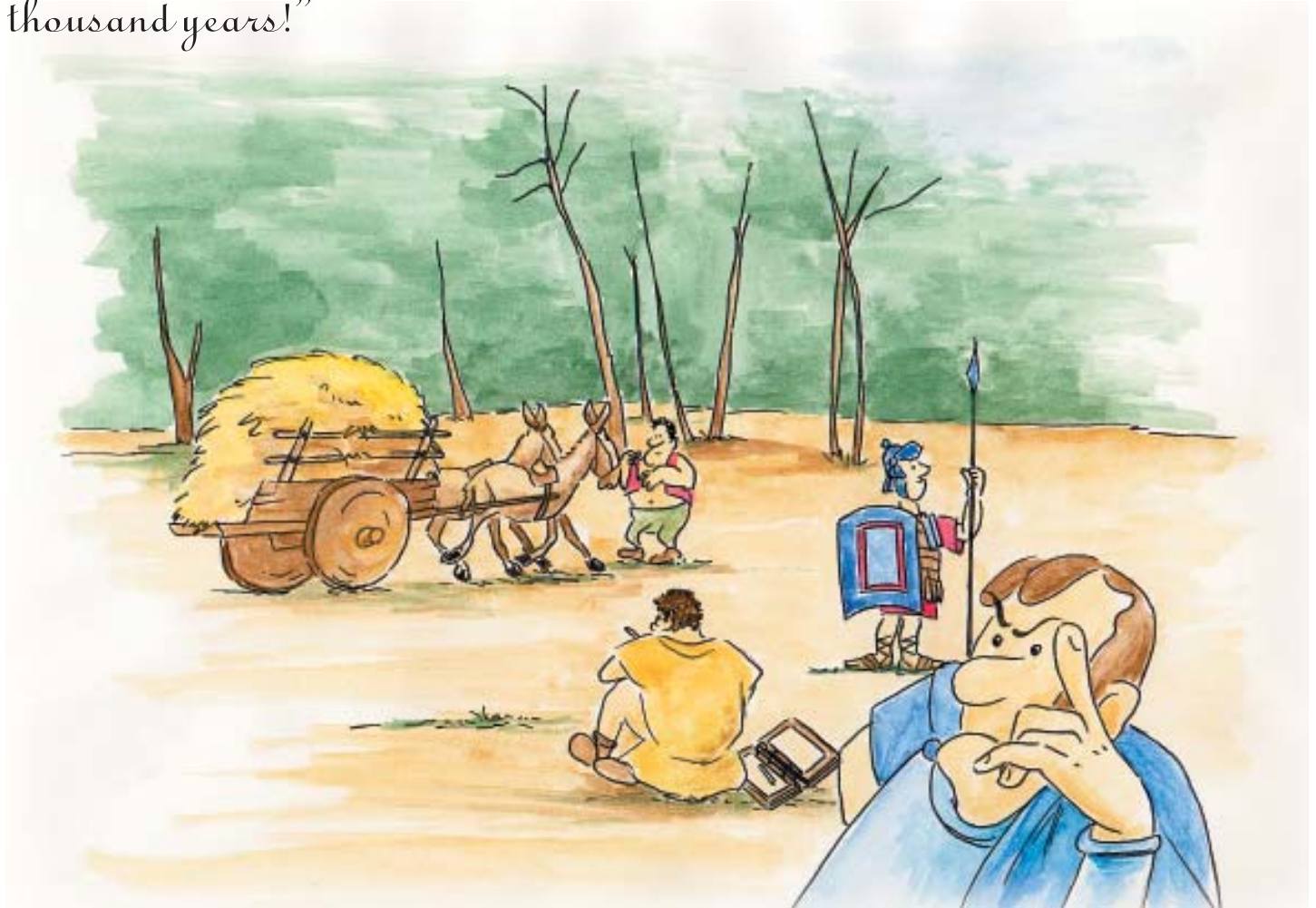
Many years ago, Tarragona was called Tàrraco and it was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. However, since it would not be supplied with enough water, the governor commanded Octavius, the master builder, to raise a magnificent bridge through which they would make the water go.



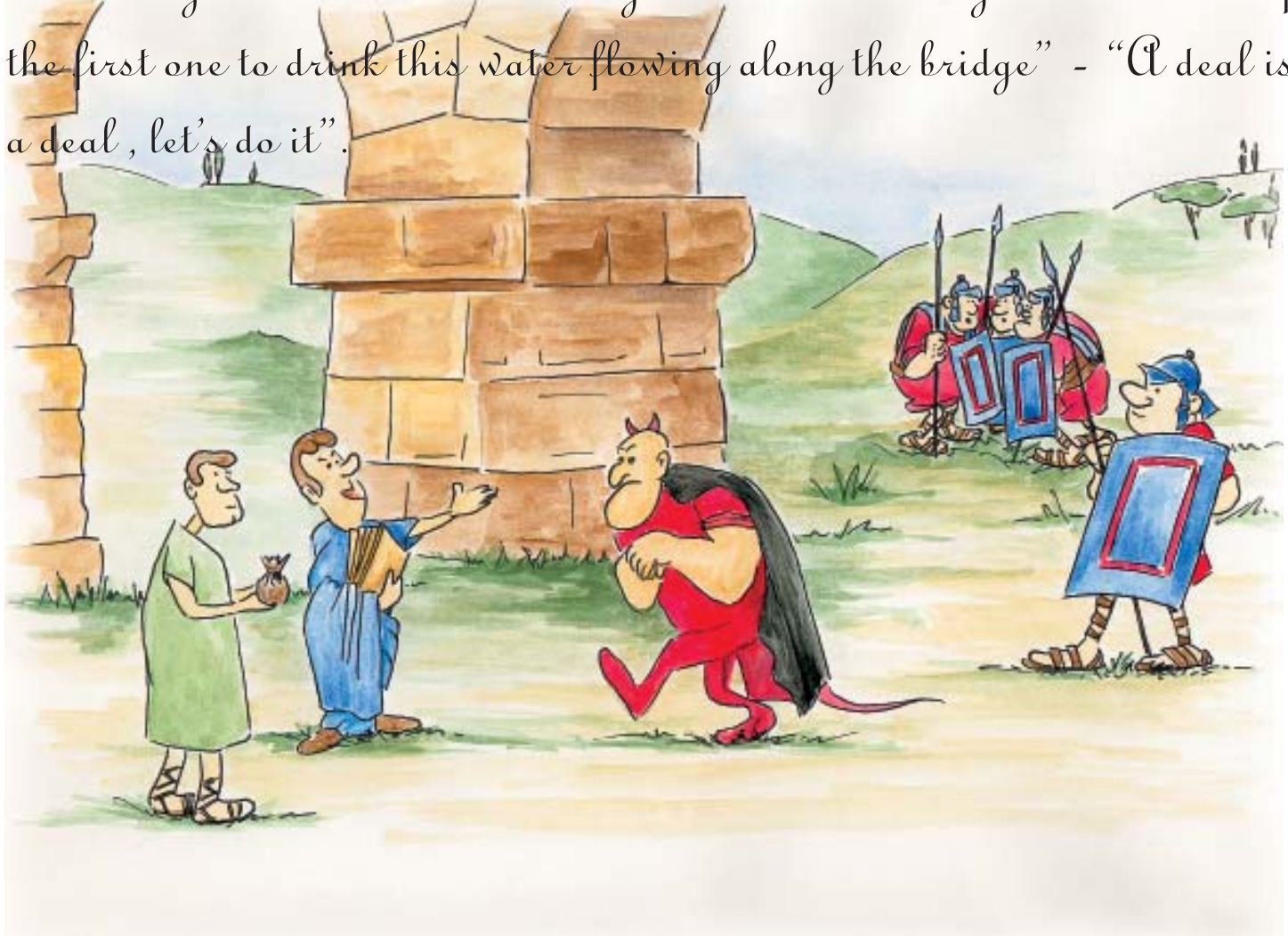
Octavius would give directions on how to place the stones so as to raise the magnificent bridge. However, one day at dusk, when both rows of arcades were almost finished, the wind blew so hard that the bridge was knocked down.



The master builder got very sad and worried, and he would not see how to construct another bridge that resisted the strong gusts of wind. So he said very angrily: “Only the Devil is able to build a bridge that lasts one thousand years!”



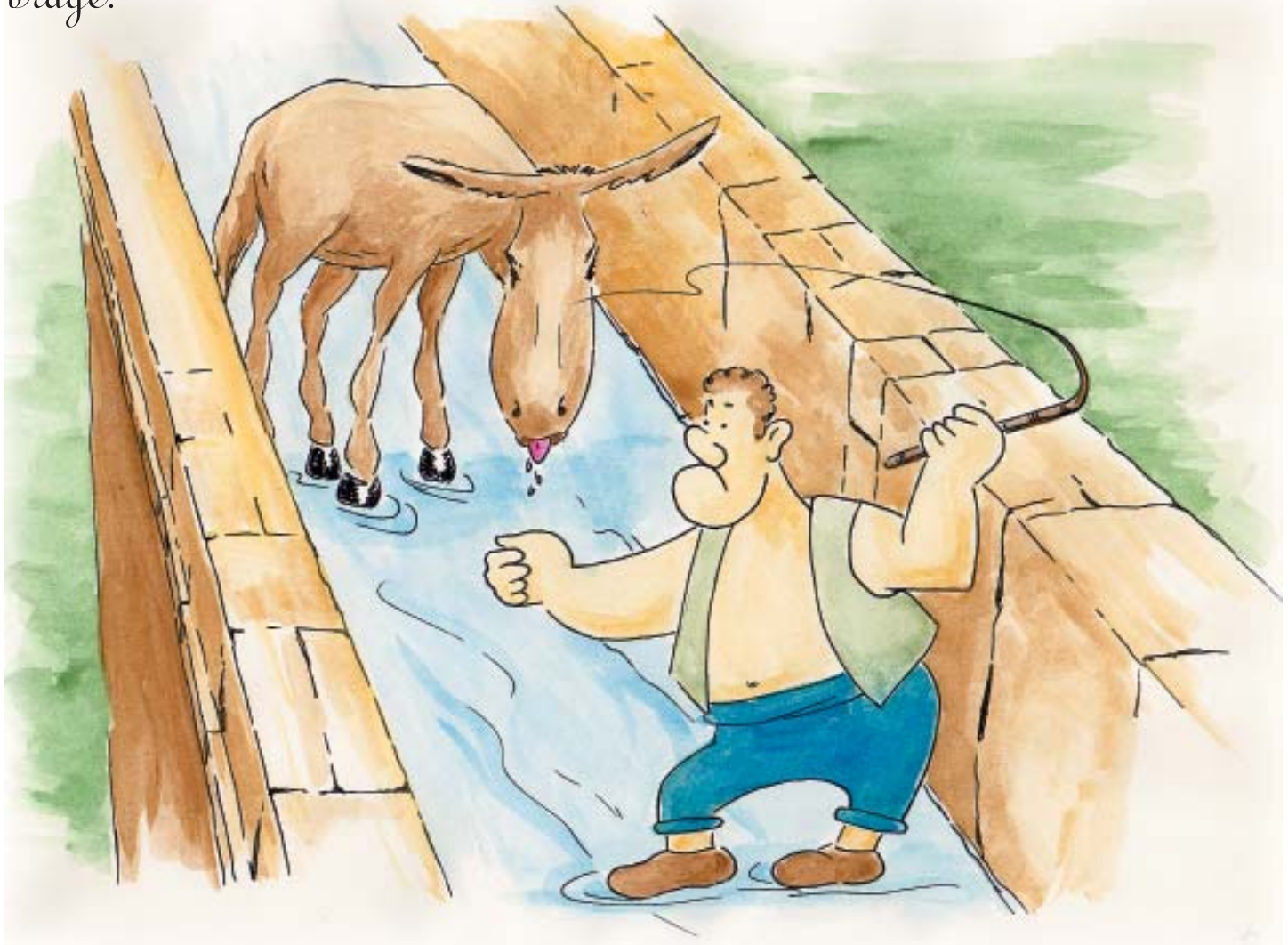
All of a sudden, the Red Devil showed up and said: "This very evening, I will construct a bridge that will last more than one thousand years" - "And what do you want in exchange" - "The soul of the first one to drink this water flowing along the bridge" - "A deal is a deal, let's do it".



The following day, when Octavius saw the bridge was finished, he remembered the promise he had made to the Red Devil and got very sad. However, one of the quarrymen said: “Master, why don’t you get the donkey to drink?”

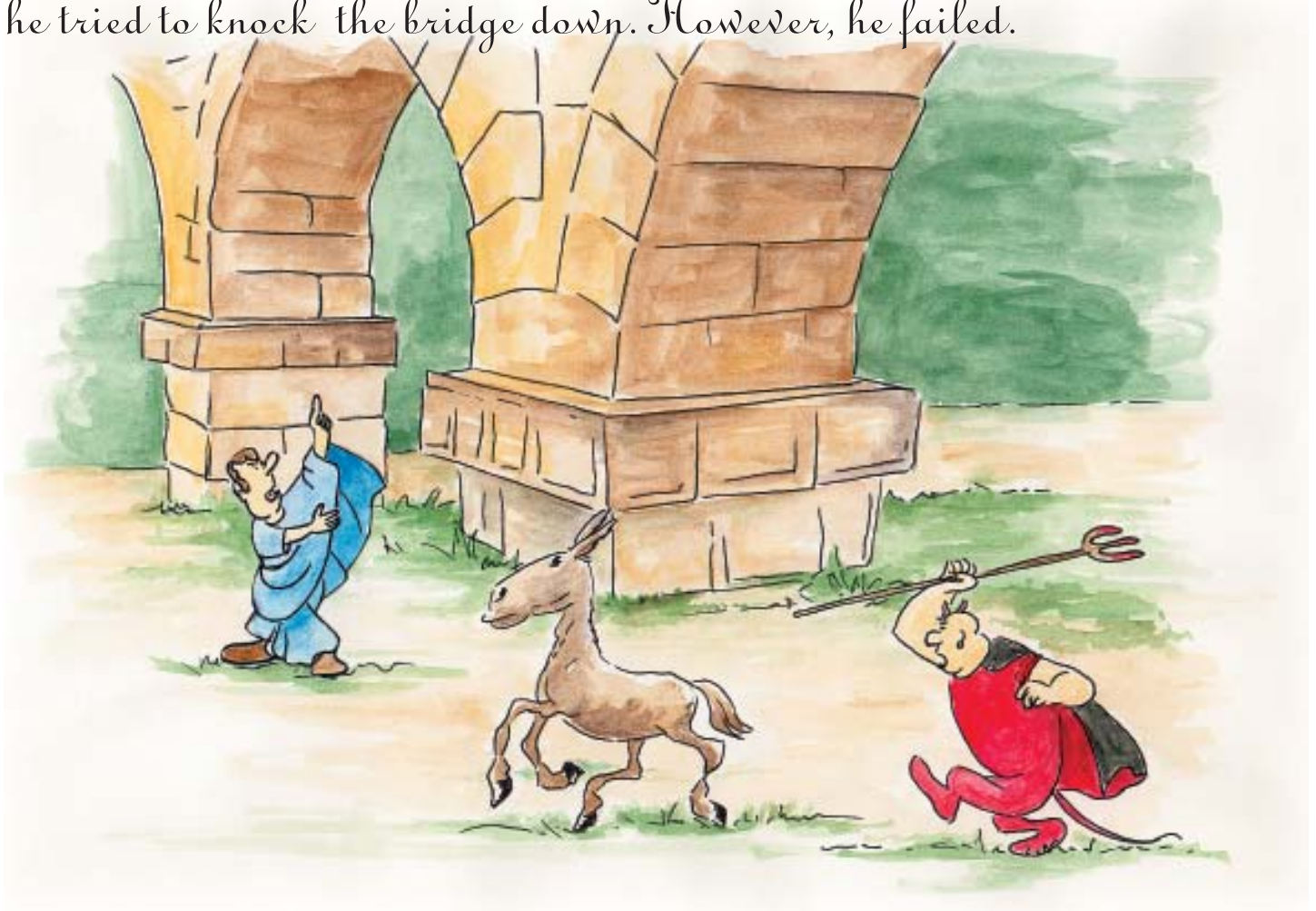


No sooner said that done, they took a donkey that was wandering around the surroundings and forced it to drink water that was going through the bridge.

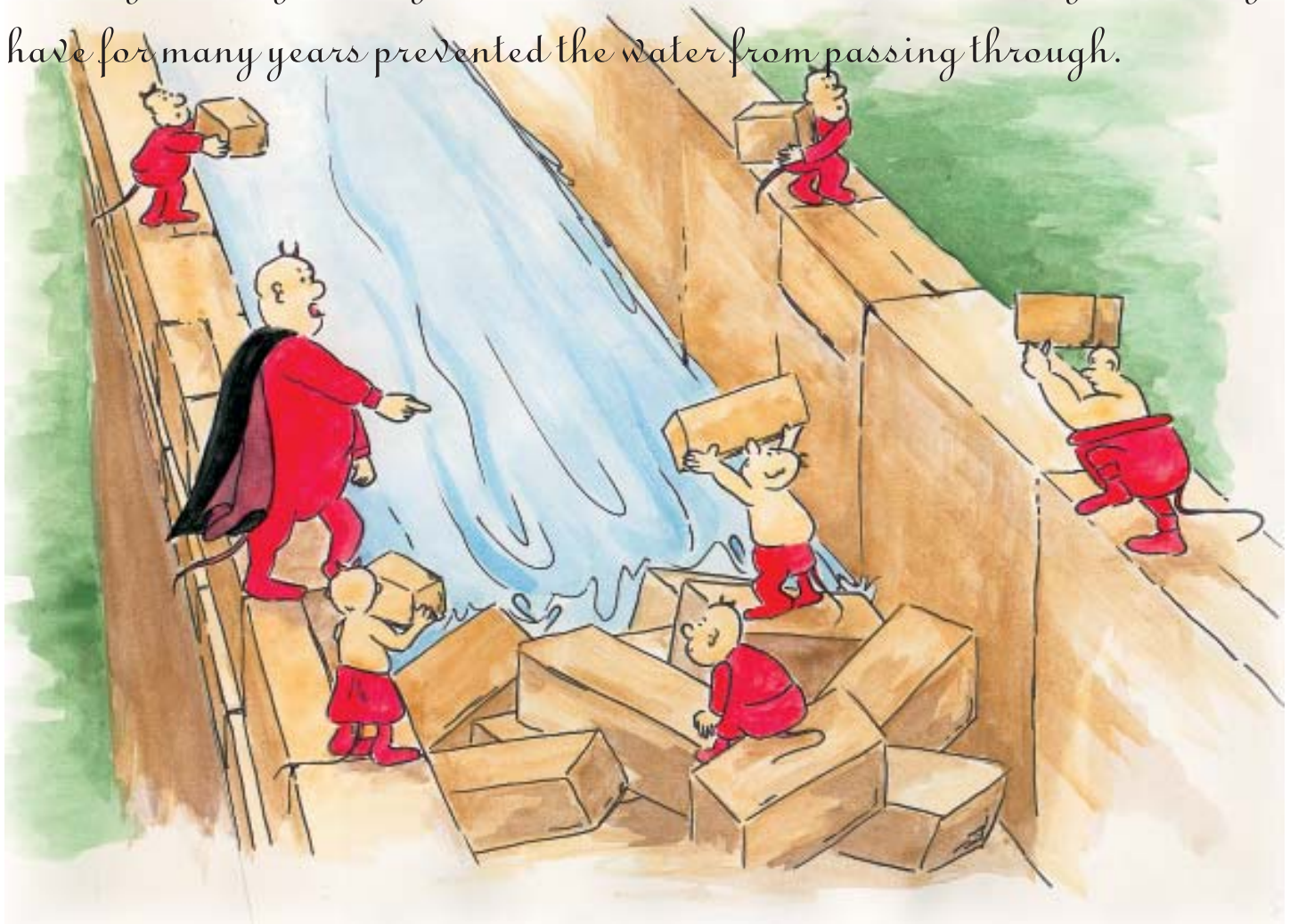




When the Red Devil showed up to recover the debt, Octavius, while pointing at the donkey, said to him: “A deal is a deal. This is the soul you can take”. Having been deceived, the Red Devil got so angry that he tried to knock the bridge down. However, he failed.



But the story does not end there. The Red Devil cursed the bridge saying that the water would never flow from the bridge to the city. Finally, the legend says that the devils, who are hidden by the bridge, have for many years prevented the water from passing through.







Despite being flanked by two rivers, Francolí and Gaià, the city of Tarragona has always suffered from water problems. Thus, one point of concern on the part of the Romans, given the importance of the city, was that of creating a water supply network to solve the issue.

The Roman aqueduct at the outskirts of Tarragona, also known as “Les Ferreres” because of its location, or as “Pont del Diable” (The Devil’s Bridge), took part of the city’s supply pipelines. It is placed on the left side of the Francolí river —from where it would take the water— 4 kilometres far from the urban nucleus of Tarragona. The Devil’s Bridge is the most important aqueduct in Catalonia and it was built in order to ensure the ground from unevenness on its way. It consists of pieces of local stone with a rectangular shape and bevelled edges. The stones were joined together using the dry stone technique and it is 200 meters long and 27 meters high. The aqueduct has two floors of super-imposed arcades, with 11 arches in the lower row and 25 in the upper one. The channel through which the water would flow, settled on top of the construction, preserves remains of opus signinum, despite the restorations it has undergone. The lack of sufficient data makes it difficult to provide a precise date of construction, though it is likely to match either the period of the city’s greatest splendour, under the rule of Emperor August (63 BC to 14 AD), or the first half of the 1st century.

This tale is based on the ancient legend. Actually, the legend would pass down from generation to generation until the Catalan historian Joan Salvat and Bové collected it in his book titled “*La Ciutat i el Camp de Tarragona*”, edited by the Deputation of Tarragona in the year 1969.

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