

"Welcome to Cairo, Martin," Tarek said.

"This is Egypt's capital city."

The streets were crowded with people, cars, carts, bicycles, and donkeys. Everyone seemed to be in a rush.

"You've arrived during Ramadan, our most important festival," Tarek said. "We fast all day and then hurry home to eat a large meal at nightfall."

"Are all the lanterns part of the celebration?" Martin asked.

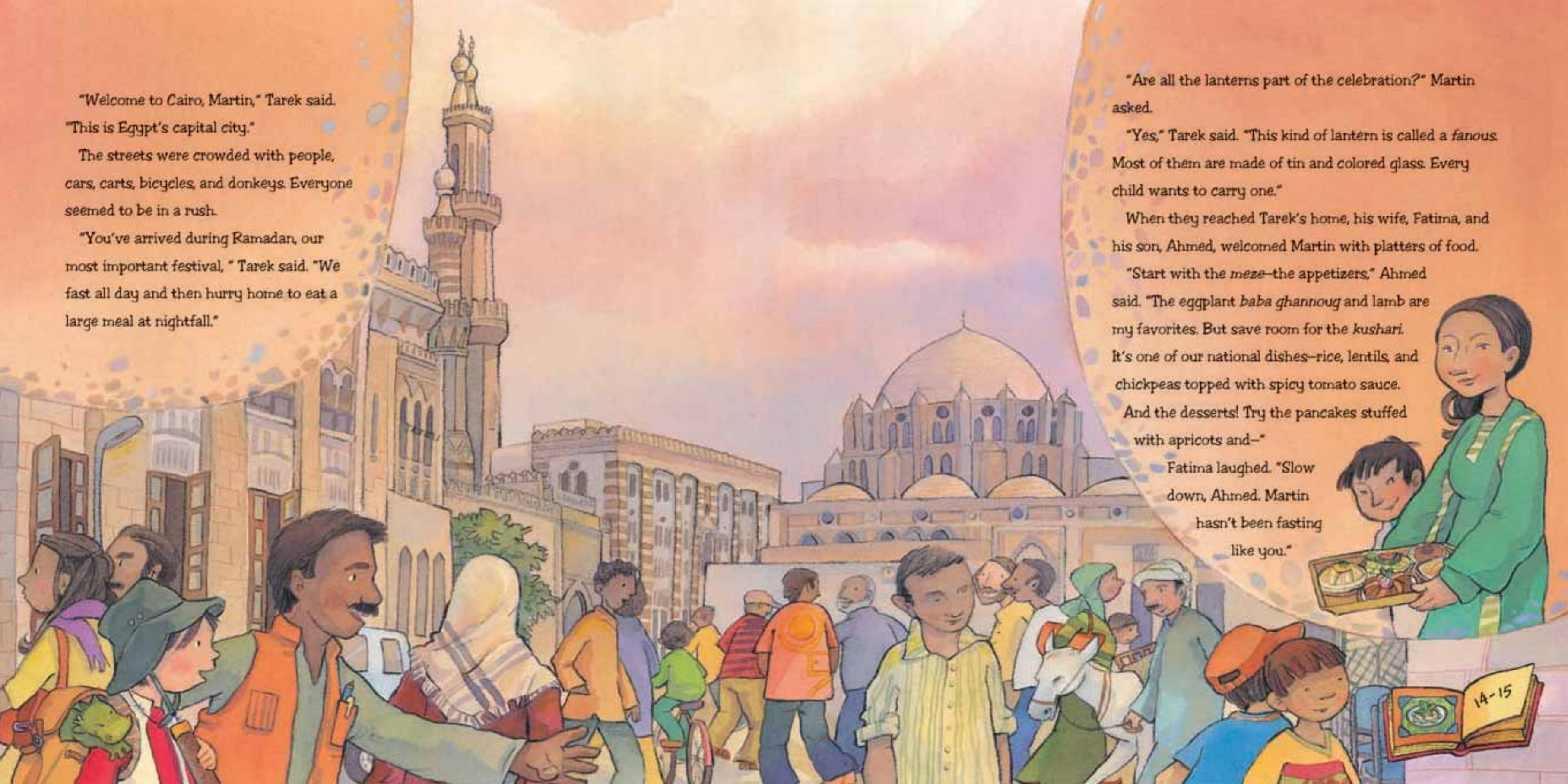
"Yes," Tarek said. "This kind of lantern is called a *fanous*. Most of them are made of tin and colored glass. Every child wants to carry one."

When they reached Tarek's home, his wife, Fatima, and his son, Ahmed, welcomed Martin with platters of food.

"Start with the *meze*—the appetizers," Ahmed said. "The eggplant *baba ghannoug* and lamb are my favorites. But save room for the *kushari*. It's one of our national dishes—rice, lentils, and chickpeas topped with spicy tomato sauce.

And the desserts! Try the pancakes stuffed with apricots and—"

Fatima laughed. "Slow down, Ahmed. Martin hasn't been fasting like you."



The next day, Tarek took Ahmed and Martin to the Egyptian Museum. He left the boys to explore while he took the papyrus scroll to the museum's laboratory.

"There are more than one hundred thousand items from ancient Egypt here," Ahmed said. "Mummies, coffins—called sarcophagi—and even toys and games. But I'm going to show you the very best thing first."

"Wow! Double wow!" Martin said when they got to the display.

"This is the famous gold mask of Tutankhamun," Ahmed said. "He was only nine when he became pharaoh, and he died when he was eighteen. The mask covered the head and shoulders of his mummy in his tomb."



A cold shiver went up Martin's spine. "I just saw the mask move!" he said.

"Let's get out of here," Ahmed said. Then he saw something behind the mask, something green. "It's your dragon, Martin! See-me made the mask move!"

Martin sighed. "I should have named him See-me-get-in-trouble."



The next stop was a group of ancient temples at Karnac, just outside the city of Luxor. Martin couldn't believe his eyes when he stepped into the great hall of the temple dedicated to Amun-re, the sun god.

"This place must have been built for giants," he said, gazing up at columns that were almost seventy feet tall. "We could play a super game of hide-and-seek here."

"This temple was the largest in Egypt," Ahmed said, "and this room is the largest columned hall ever built anywhere in the world. It's perfect for hide-and-seek."

"How does anyone know what the hieroglyphs mean?" Martin wondered.

"We know thanks to a two-thousand-year-old slab of Egyptian stone called the Rosetta Stone," Tarek said. "A law had been carved into the stone in three different alphabets—hieroglyphs, Greek, and another version of Egyptian. By comparing the alphabets, experts figured out the meaning of the hieroglyphs."

