

SOPHIA MADOUVALOU

The

# Prince

Who Turned Into a

# Castle

*illustrations: Vasso Psaraki*



ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ  
ΠΑΤΑΚΗ



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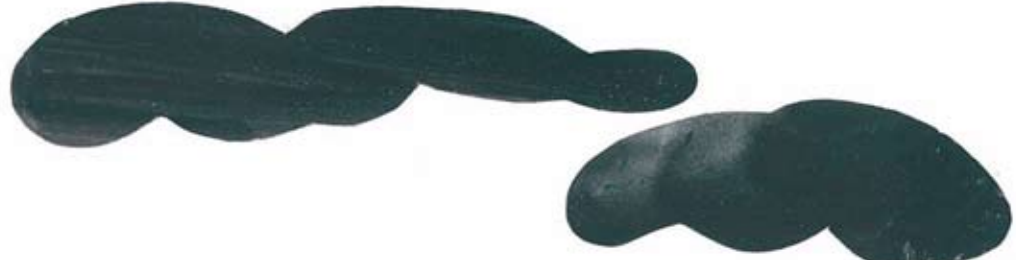
**W**hen I was a small girl, even younger than you little ones, my grandpa used to tell me tales about water nymphs and witches, haunted castles, dragons and goblins. Sometimes they would really frighten me, and then he would squeeze my hand and tell me, 'Don't be afraid, Sophouli,' -that's what he always called me- 'there's nothing to be frightened of. All these things happened a long, long time ago and far away.' That's how my grandpa's fairy tales would always start: "A long, long time ago and far away". And that's how I'll begin my own tale.

**S**o: A long, long time ago and far away, down in the deep south of Greece, in the dry hills of the Mani, and in a tall stone tower, a princess was born. She was a beautiful baby, so beautiful that every day people came in their hundreds, not only from the nearby villages but from places far afield, to gaze at her in admiration.




This went on for thirty-nine whole days, and on the fortieth there came three water nymphs, her godmothers, to tell the princess what the future held for her. They christened her Phoebe, for she had the colours of the sun in her fair hair, its radiance in her face and its warm glow in her heart.


One of the water nymphs gave her everlasting beauty, the second gave her a wise heart so she would know how to love and the third began to make a wish that she would live in happiness with a husband who was handsome, good and strong.



**B**ut before the third of her godmothers had time to complete her wish, a shadow blotted out the sun, the cockerels began a crazy “cock a doodle do”, the donkeys started to bray “eeeeaaw” and the rooks to crow “kraa, kraa”.



The water nymphs and all the villagers looked on in terror as a horrible old goblin woman, jealous because her own daughter was so ugly, swept into the house like a whirlwind and snatched the lovely princess up.



**S**he was too fast for the water nymphs to take the baby from her, too fast for her mother to pull her back, too fast for anyone to do anything but cry out, ‘Why did you come here, why? Be gone this very instant!’ The goblin looked at the baby and said, ‘I came to lay a curse on you, my little one, a curse!’ And she did just what she threatened: ‘May whatever prince should fall in love with you be turned to stone,’ she cursed the child, ‘and be transformed from a handsome nobleman into a castle.’ And with these words she disappeared among the olive trees. This sudden stroke of ill fortune left everybody rooted to the spot and speechless.

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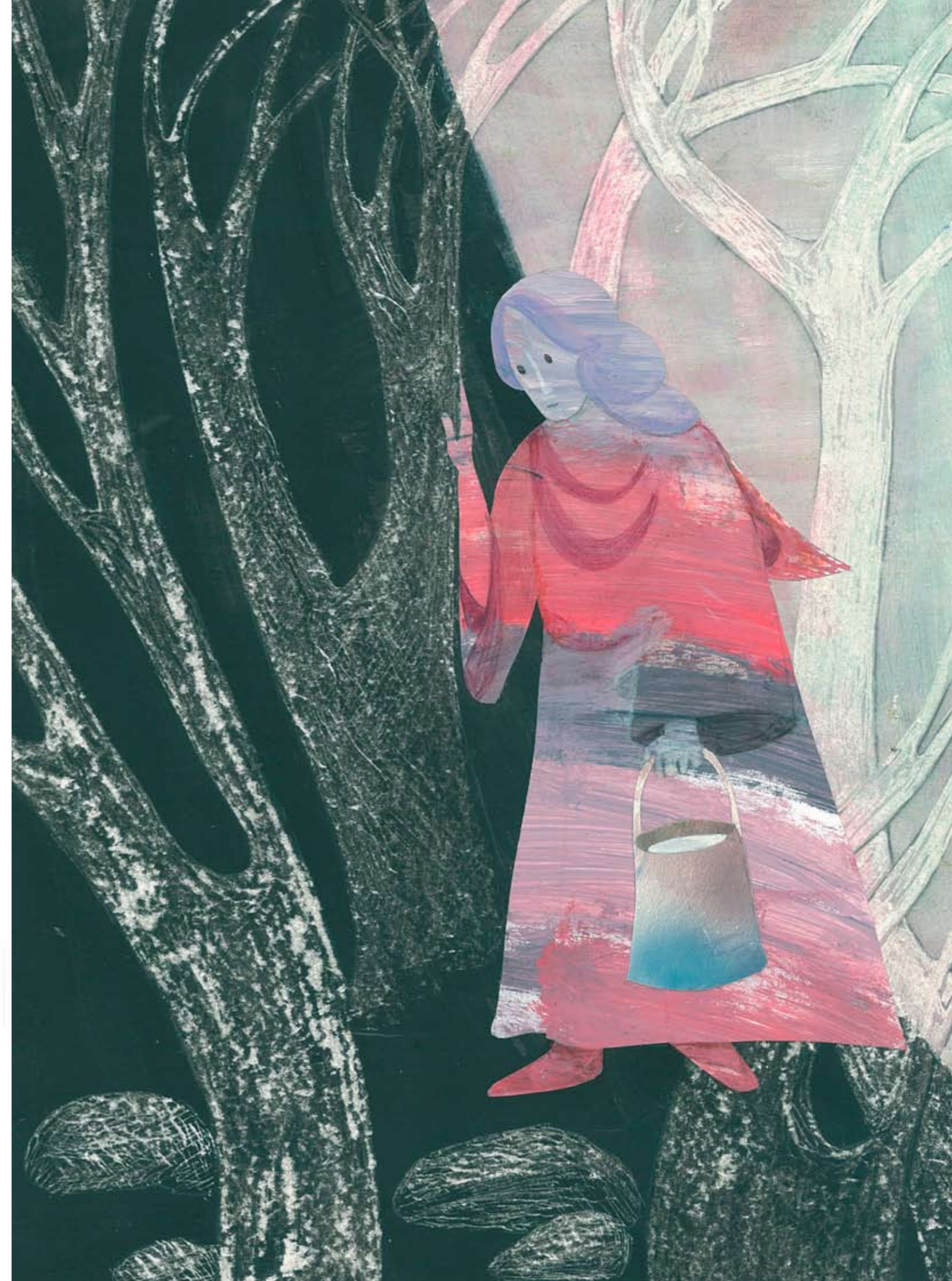
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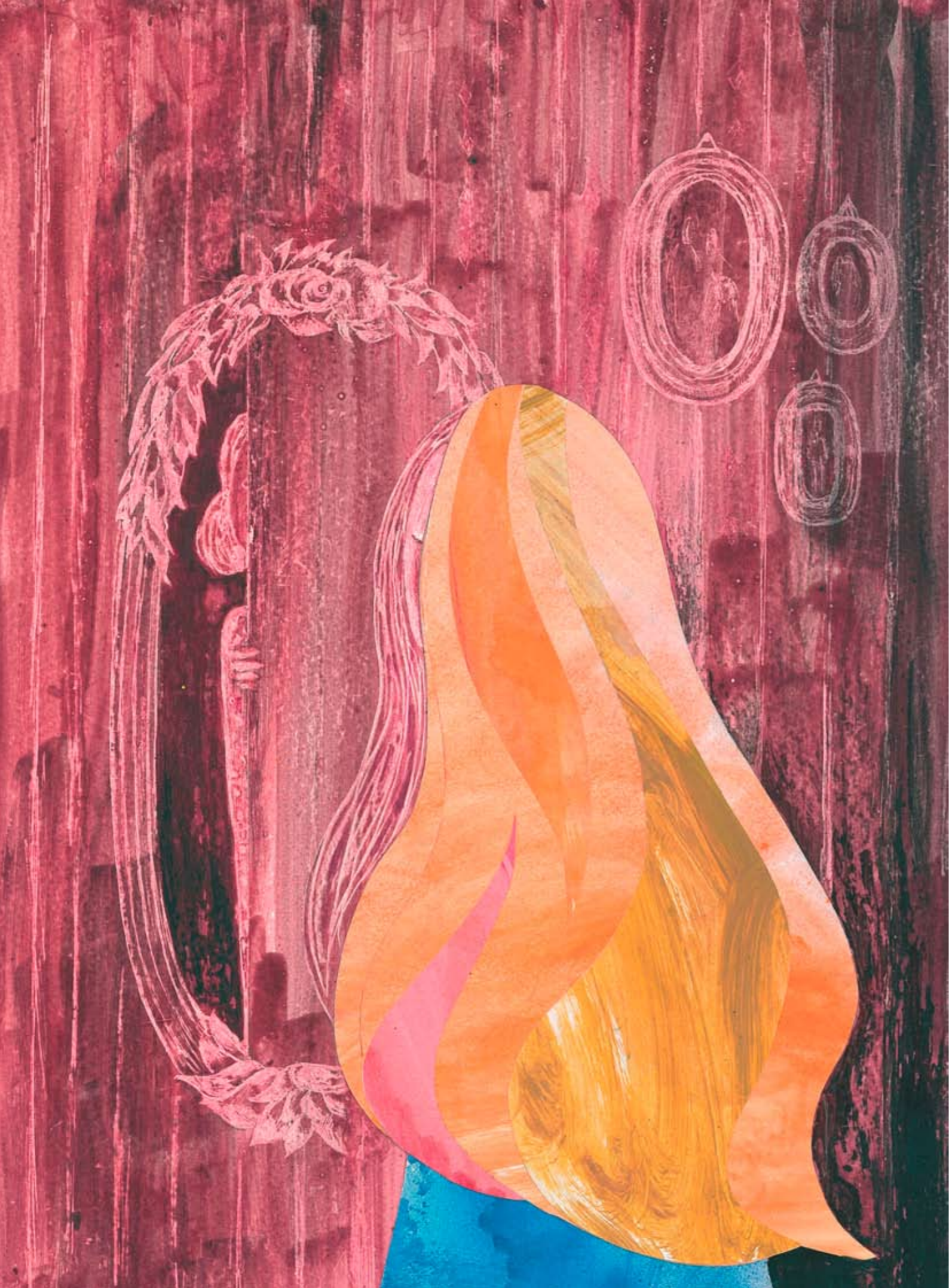
**F**or thirty-nine whole days and nights Phoebe's mother wept. For thirty-nine whole days and nights she searched for the goblin woman to make her take her hard words back. And on the fortieth day she found her in the grove with the forty olive trees. She brought her a bucket of warm milk mixed with honey to bathe her daughter and make the ugly creature prettier. And falling on her knees she begged the goblin woman to take back her words.

'The curse will be lifted only if the castle falls with pain and is built up again with love,' revealed the goblin, her hard heart briefly softened.

'Only then will the prince who loves your daughter be returned from stone into a living being.'

**P**hoebe's mother ran straight to her husband with the news; what else could she do? 'Phoebe's still very young,' he told her. 'When she grows up, God willing, that's when we'll tell her. Till then we've plenty of time.' This set her mother's mind at rest for a while. But before long anxiety began to gnaw at her once more.





**M**eanwhile the years were going by and as they passed Phoebe was growing up. And the more she grew, the lovelier and kinder she became. Her parents played with her all day and sang her to sleep with gentle lullabies. They fed her sugared strawberries to make her sweet and bathed her in milk and honey to keep her always beautiful. Many mornings, many afternoons and many evenings passed, so many that Phoebe had now reached the age of twenty.

**O**ne morning, Phoebe's mother overheard her complaining to her mirror, 'I am ugly. No young man even looks at me. Nobody loves me.' Once more, she ran straight off to her husband with the news. 'We must tell Phoebe why all the handsome young men stay away,' her father decided. 'Yes, it's time.' her mother agreed. 'We must tell her about the goblin woman's curse.'





**S**o they took Phoebe aside and told her the whole story. As soon as the princess heard that anyone who fell in love with her would be turned to stone, just like a castle, she burst into tears. 'So that's why no handsome young man will look me in the eyes,' she sobbed. Thirty-nine days she wept, till on the fortieth she had no tears left to cry.

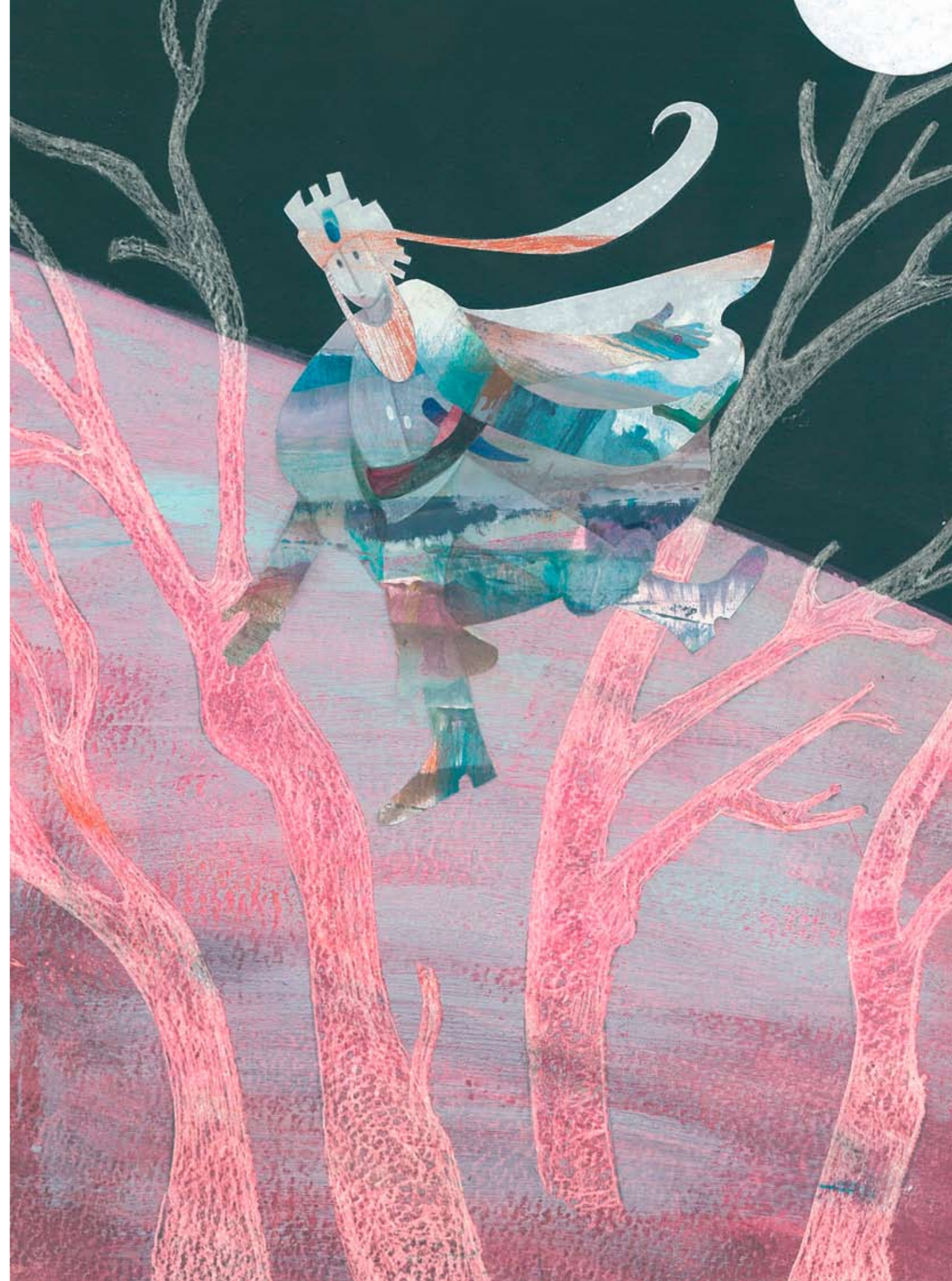
**F**rom that day on, Phoebe made up her mind that she would never leave the house by daylight. So she slept all day and went out only after night had fallen. Sometimes she had the moon for company and at other times she counted and recounted all the stars. And at other times still, when the clouds came down low and angry, ready to break into a thunderstorm, she would caress them in the hope that she might calm their fury.

**N**ow in those far-off times a prince from distant parts was searching for a wife. Not any beautiful young woman would do for him, however; and having searched his own land without finding any bride he came to my grandpa's part of the world, the region called the Mani, to find a woman he could marry.

He had heard from a travelling merchant that in those parts there lived a very lovely girl with kindness in her heart and a hidden sadness in her eyes.

'She wears a dress with all the flowers on the earth and all the stars in the heavens on it,' the merchant told him, 'and her hair is like the gold of the setting sun.'

Thirty-nine days and nights the young prince walked but he did not find a woman he would like to marry.



**O**n the fortieth night he reached a grove of olive trees, and tired by his long day's journey he lay down to rest at the foot of one of them. And there Phoebe, who had come out as she did each evening for her nightly walk, found him fast asleep.

The prince was a very handsome young man, and the moment Phoebe saw him in the moonlight she fell in love. With a fluttering heart, she stayed there until morning to gaze upon him. Suddenly, as she was looking, the young prince stirred.

Terrified, Phoebe ran away immediately. 'He mustn't set eyes on me,' she told herself anxiously, 'for if he falls in love he will turn to stone and become a castle.' And her heart broke at the thought.

The prince opened his eyes just in time to see the edge of the girl's dress disappearing.

'That dress has got all the flowers on the earth and all the stars in the heavens on it!' he exclaimed, remembering the merchant's words. 'It's her!' And sitting up he cried again, 'It's her!' But by the time he had scrambled to his feet the princess was nowhere to be seen.





**T**he young prince searched and asked in all the villages around. There wasn't a single house he did not call at, but nobody had seen the maiden with the lovely dress.

At last there was only one house left to ask at - the tower where Phoebe lived.

'Come in, come in, young man,' they welcomed him, and sitting him in a silver armchair, they offered him wine and honey. 'And what brings you to our house, noble stranger?' they enquired, as if asking out of mere politeness.

'I am searching for a lovely maiden, to make her my wife,' the young prince said.

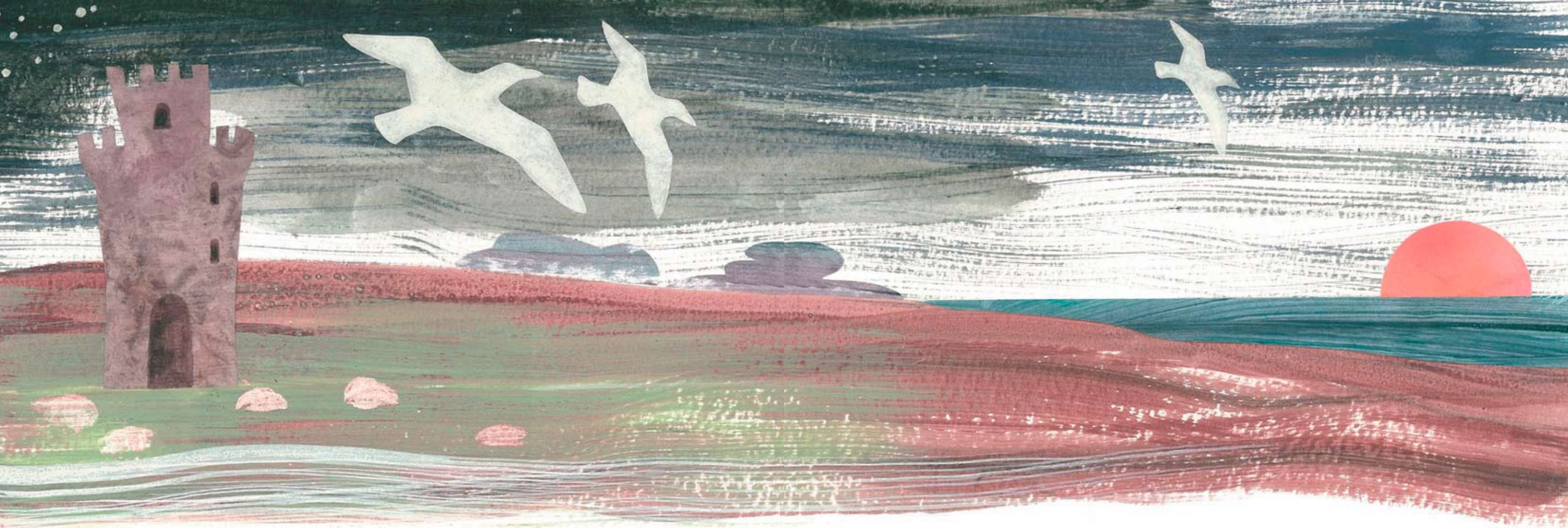
'My boy, we wish we had a girl that we could give you but, alas, we have no daughter,' replied Phoebe's mother and father in one breath. The young man left in disappointment.



**W**andering this way and that, he reached a grove of olive trees. He was just sitting down to rest beneath one of them when he heard a bird say, 'She sits all day, so I've been told, In a chair of silver, bronze and gold. You will not see her till night falls And the world outside her tower calls.' The young prince thought of the silver armchair where the couple had invited him to sit and his heart leapt in his breast. He waited until dusk was drawing in and went back to their tower. From the place where he was hidden, he saw its door open once night fell, then Phoebe coming through, head bent, and out into the darkness.

**T**he moment she drew near he stepped into her path. The young princess was horrified. 'Do not fall in love with me, I beg you,' she cried out, 'or you will be turned into a castle!' But the words were still in her mouth when the young prince turned to stone and was transformed into a tall strong castle. Only his sword remained unchanged.





**'G**et me out, get me out, get me out of here!' the castle yelled. Its voice could be heard all over the Mani, but no one could do anything. Only Phoebe's mother knew how to break the spell. She had not forgotten a single word the goblin woman had told her: only if the castle fell with pain and was then rebuilt with love would the curse be lifted. Phoebe left her parents' tower with these words engraved upon her heart and went to live in the castle.

**'M**y dearest castle, I shall never leave you,' she promised. But she heard no reply, for in his grief the transformed prince had lost the power of speech. He had now grown very tall, with four floors and a cellar filled with big clay jars for oil and the like. Up and down the stone steps all day long, up and down and in and out the rooms went Phoebe, looking after the castle and talking and singing to it. She would open its windows for the two of them to watch the rising sun together, to see it set and, always together, gaze out over the silver groves of olive trees which stretched down to the sea.



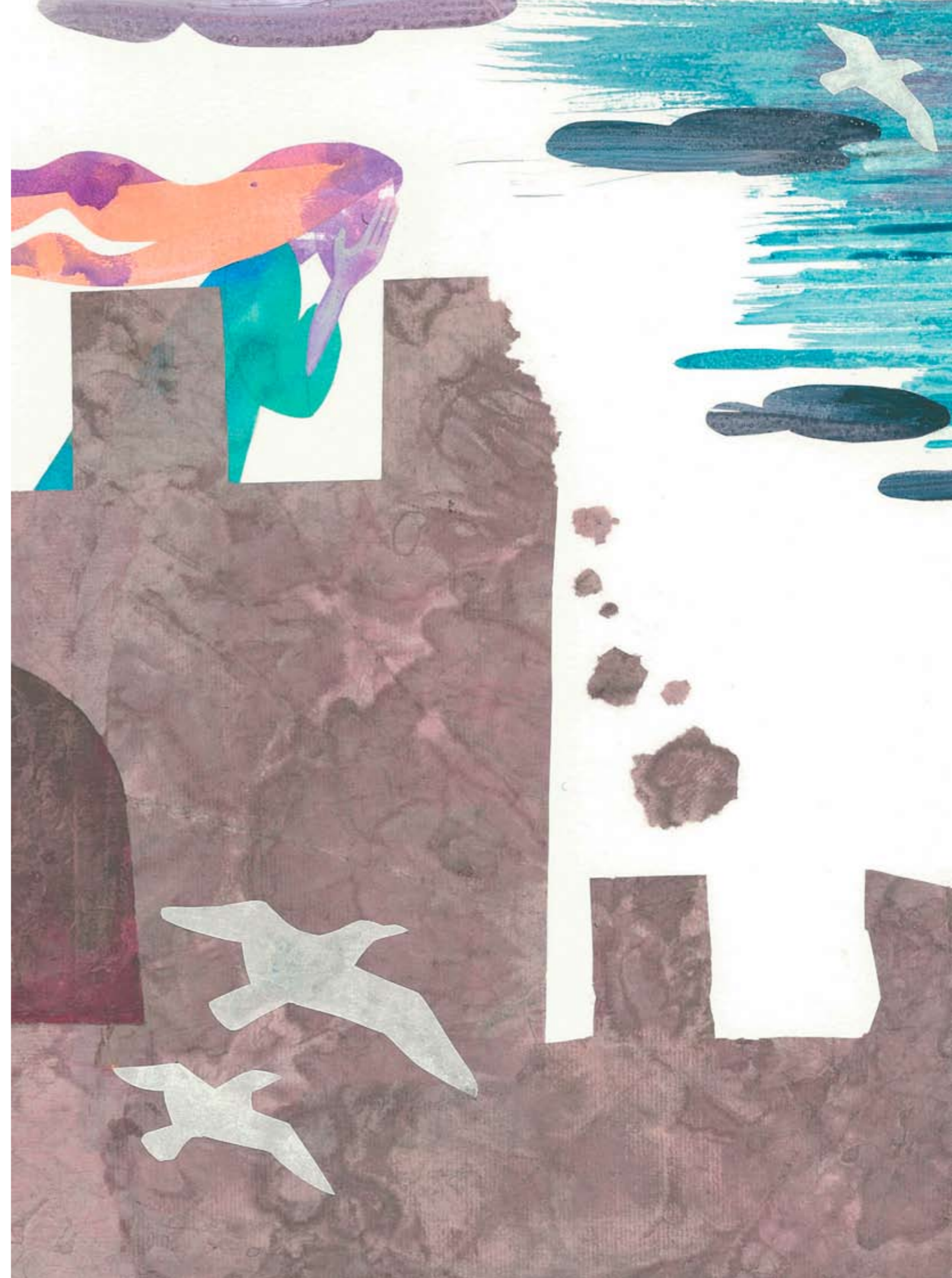
**T**ogether they smelled the bread that Phoebe baked; together they watched the rain and listened to the wind. By day the princess could lose herself in household tasks and forget about her sadness. But in the evenings, seated in the silver chair her mother had given her, she would stare dully into the fire all alone. Then her eyes would flood with tears and only words of grief would come into her mouth.

**O**ne day she decided she would lift the curse and bring her cruel fate to an end.

'I shall pull you down,' she told the castle, 'pull you down and then build you up again with love, with my own hands.'

Up the steps she rushed to the topmost turret and began to pull the castle down. But she had hardly managed to prise loose two stones when the castle found its voice again.

'Don't you see that I'm not feeling any pain?' it asked, once again reminding her of the goblin woman's curse: that only if the castle fell with pain and was built again with love would the evil spell be broken.

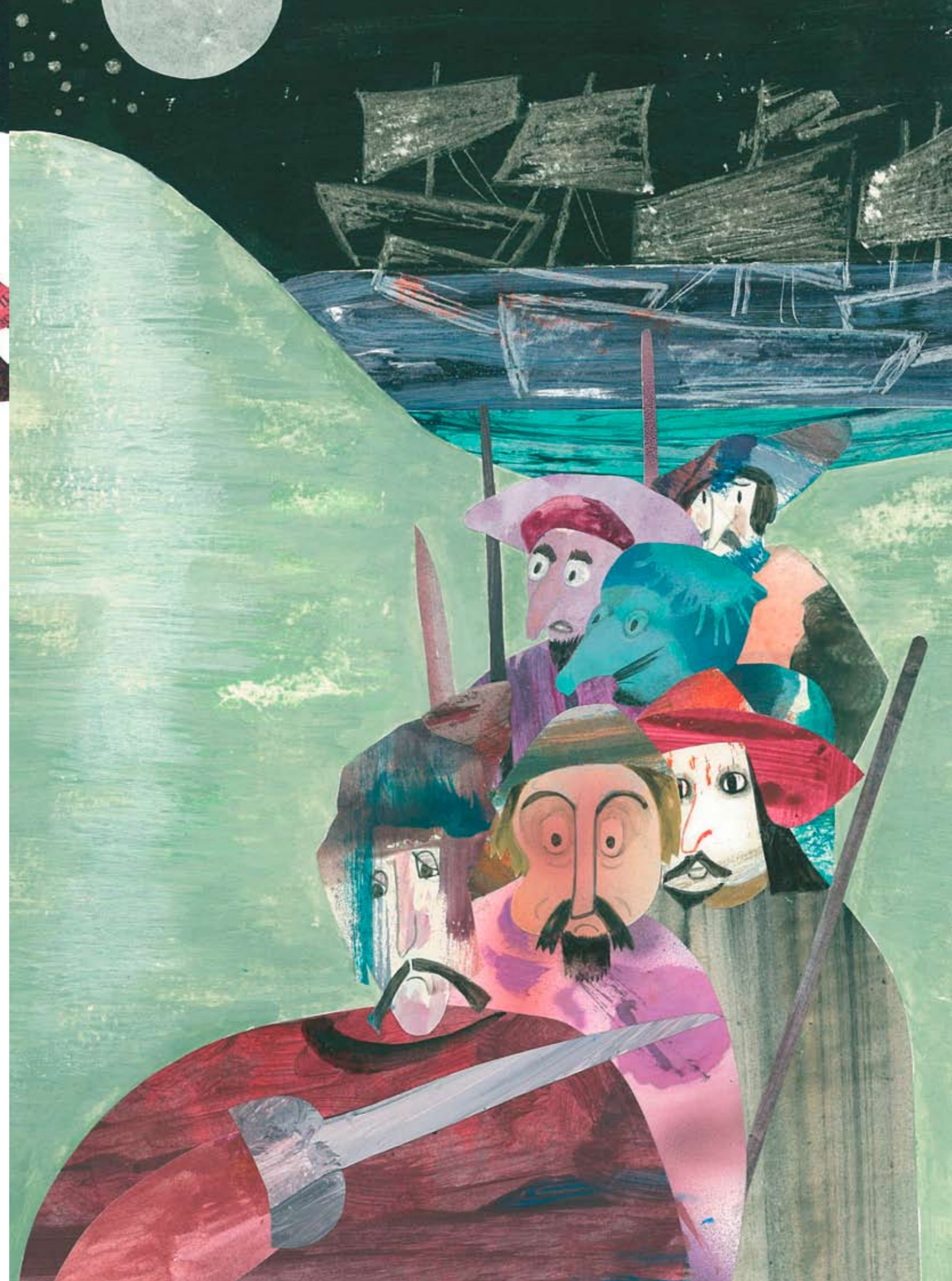


**M**any mornings,  
many evenings  
and many nights went by.  
The days grew longer,  
the nights grew shorter,  
then the days grew shorter  
and the nights grew longer,  
until one day, far out to sea,  
ships armed with guns appeared.


The princess was afraid and rightly so,  
for that very evening the castle door flew open with a crash  
and pirates brandishing swords and spears rushed in and carried Phoebe off.  
'Help! Help!' she cried.

**U**nable to come to the aid of his beloved,  
the young prince turned to stone wept bitter tears.  
Every day he wept, until his tears became a river.  
How could he stand there doing nothing?  
If only he could go in search of her!

BOHBEIAA





The illustration depicts a whimsical landscape. A winding, reddish-brown path leads from the left towards the center. To the right, a tall, thin tree with sparse green leaves stands. At its base, a small figure in a dark blue hooded cloak sits on a rock. In the background, a large, stylized number '40' is rendered in shades of green and blue. To the right of the tree, a figure in a colorful, multi-colored tunic and blue pants is running away from the viewer. The ground is a mix of brown, green, and purple tones, suggesting rocks and grass. The sky is white with some dark, horizontal brushstrokes at the top right.

**T**hirty-nine days had gone by since the loss of the beautiful princess; for thirty-nine days the castle's cries of grief had echoed from mountain peak to mountain peak and then returned, making the whole land tremble with the clamour of the prince's mourning. But on the fortieth day, as the sun was going down, the sad cries ended. 'I can stay here no longer,' said the castle. 'I shall go in search of her.'

**N**ext morning there was nothing left where the castle had once stood. Nobody knew where it had gone. My grandpa used to say that in fairy tales young men in despair would go to the ends of the earth in search of a maiden that they loved. And this what the prince turned into a castle had somehow done.

**T**hey said he had been seen one day in Vathia, asking again and again if anyone knew of the girl he loved. Next day they saw him at Boularia and the following day at Kitta. A day after that he was down in Areopolis, and he was even seen at Arahova, in the deepest, most remote part of the Mani.

**H**as anyone chanced to meet up with my Phoebe?' he enquired, over and over again. 'It's the first time I've heard a castle speak with a human voice,' said the first man that he asked; and he ran off fearing that the castle must be haunted.

**N**o cock has crowed, no donkey's brayed,' an old woman told him. 'That means your princess must be living still,' another told him. The prince turned into a castle breathed a sigh of relief.

**H**ere and there he went, asking over and over again if anyone had seen the princess. One person told him she had been taken on board a ship that would carry her off on a long voyage. A second had seen her on a horse, together with another rider. 'They must be up in the mountains by now,' he told him.

**O**ne night the castle arrived in Areopolis again. It asked an old woman if maybe she'd seen Phoebe. 'Don't waste time looking for her any more,' she said. 'The girl fell from her horse and is no longer living.' When the castle heard this, it felt such pain that it collapsed into a heap of stones. They say its cry of grief was so loud that it was heard for miles around and all the countryside could feel its pain.



**B**ut let us see what really happened to the princess. One of the pirates had swept her up before him on his horse and galloped off towards the ships. But on the way the horse had slipped and fallen. The girl was thrown from its back and pretended to be dead. The other pirates coming up behind them saw what they thought was her lifeless body and left her for the crows to eat. For thirty-nine days Phoebe had wandered up hill and down dale, trying to find her way back to her castle. On the fortieth she reached the place she had been born and what did she see? Nothing.

The castle had disappeared!

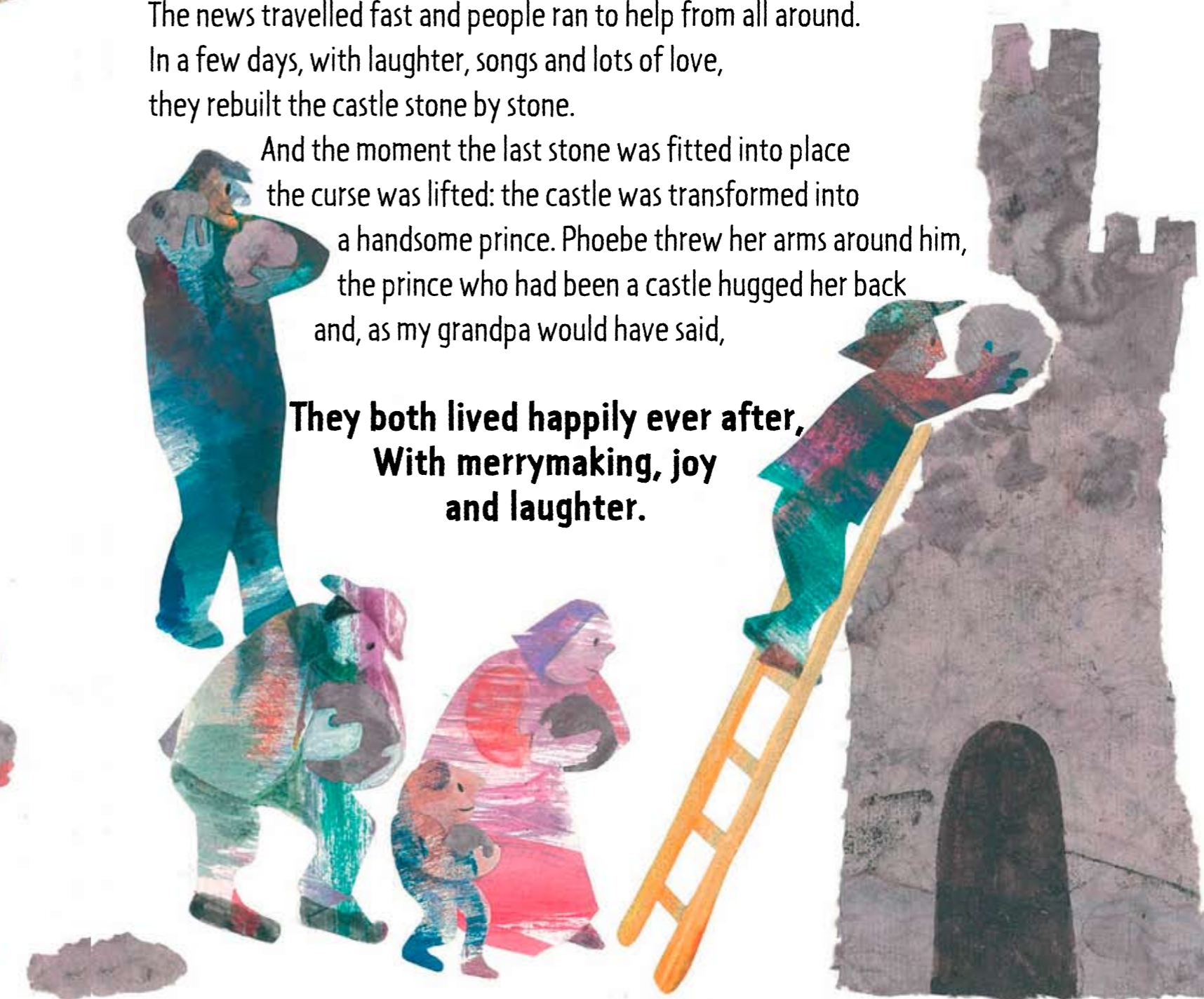
And so once more the princess wandered up hill and down dale in search of the prince who had been turned into a castle.



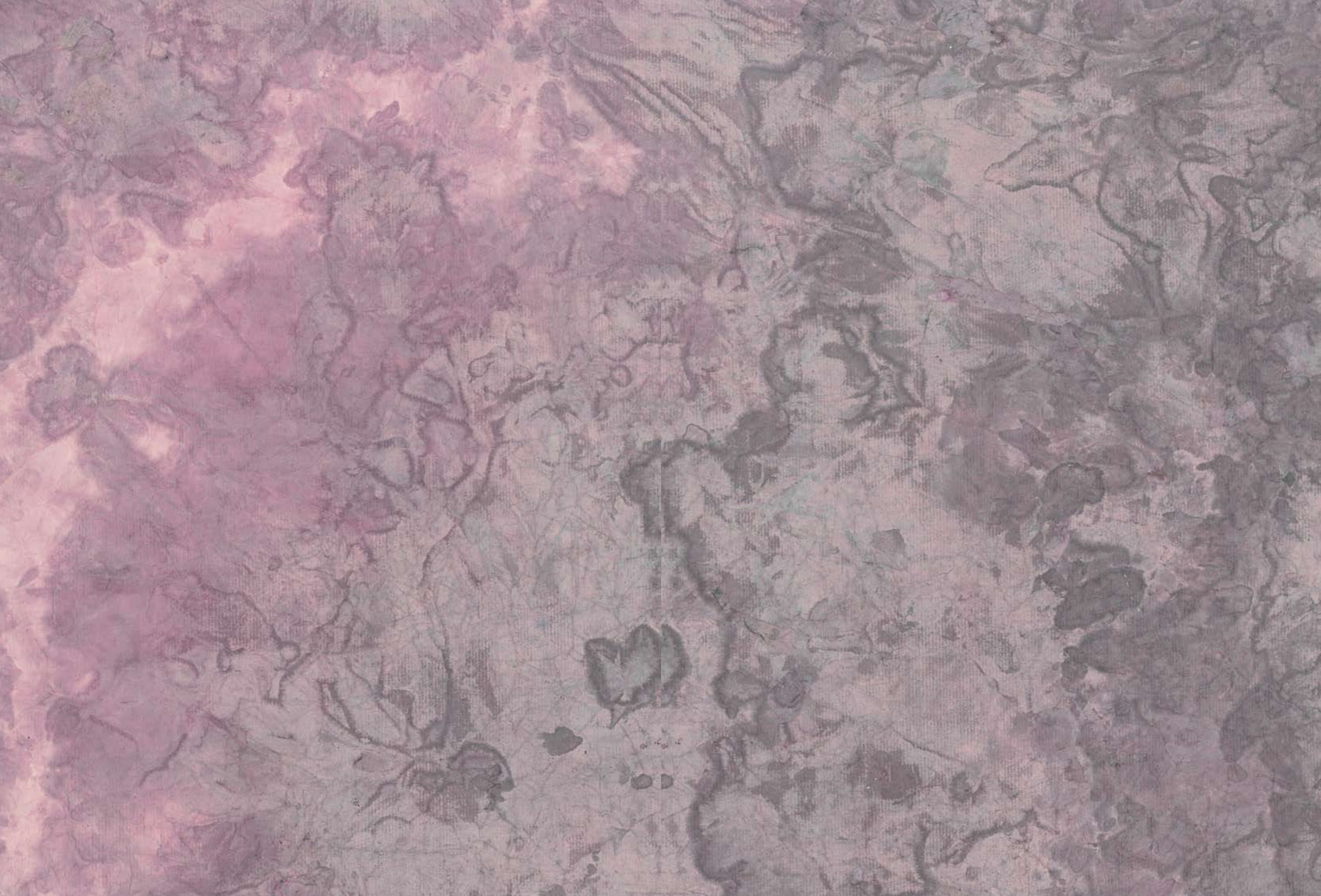
**N**ow my grandpa used to say that fairy tales must always have a happy ending. And this one said that after many wanderings the princess found her prince tumbled into a pile of stones from pain, somewhere in the inner Mani, and that she was beside herself with joy. One by one she caressed the fallen stones, then wasted not another moment. She called on all the children and young people of the region to help her build the castle up again -for only if the castle that had tumbled down from grief were rebuilt with loving hands could the evil spell be broken. The news travelled fast and people ran to help from all around. In a few days, with laughter, songs and lots of love, they rebuilt the castle stone by stone.

And the moment the last stone was fitted into place the curse was lifted: the castle was transformed into a handsome prince. Phoebe threw her arms around him, the prince who had been a castle hugged her back and, as my grandpa would have said,

**They both lived happily ever after,  
With merrymaking, joy  
and laughter.**







Which magic secret follows Phoebe from the day she was born?  
Why the prince who fell in love with her turned into a castle?  
How he will return from stone into a prince again?  
In fairy tales like in real life, the power of love  
overthrows even the magic power of the evil.



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