

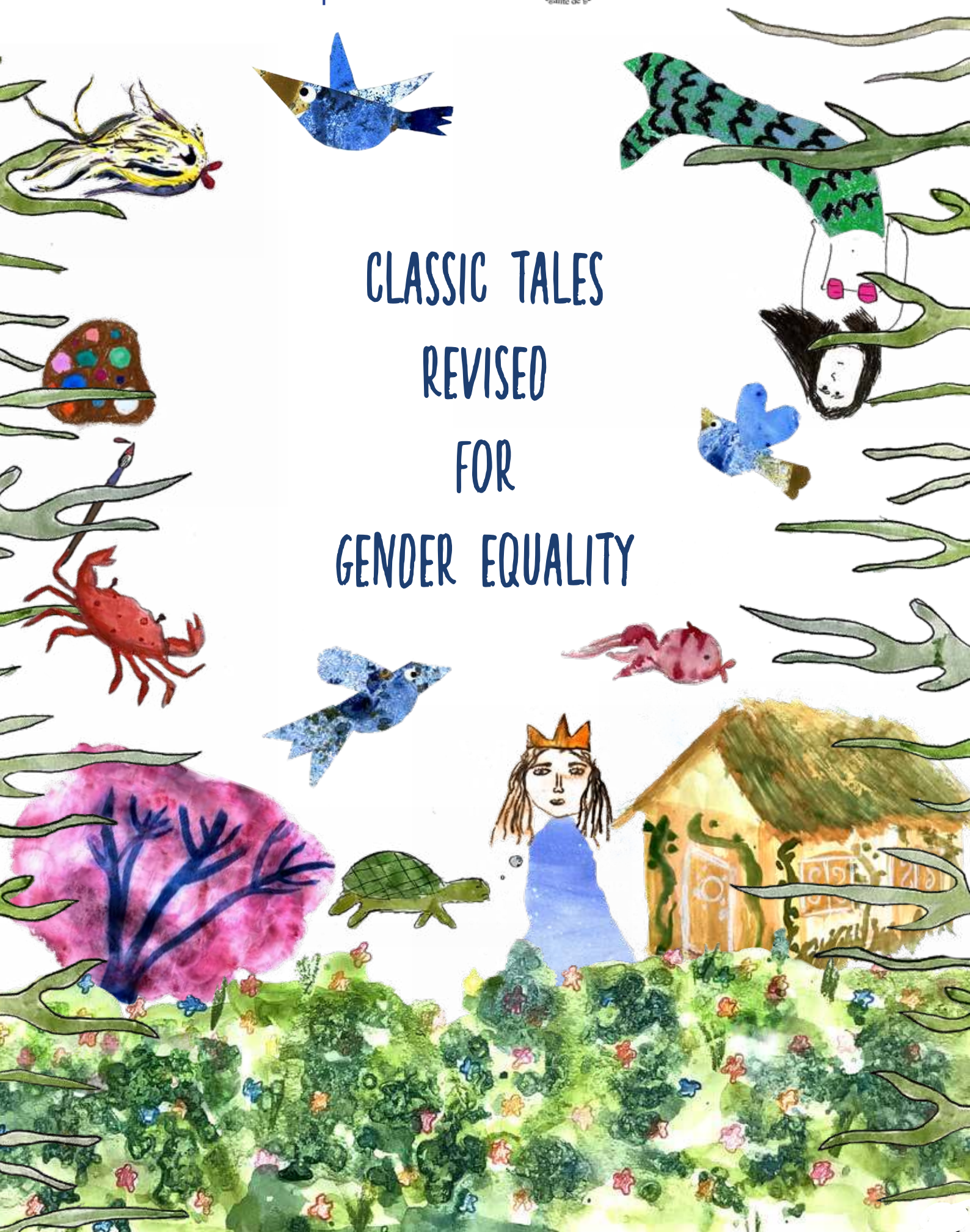


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Des stéréotypes à l'égalité de genre

CLASSIC TALES REVISED FOR GENDER EQUALITY



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CLASSIC TALES REVISED FOR GENDER EQUALITY



PREFACE

This book of revised tales aims to promote gender equality in order to achieve more social justice in the Europe of tomorrow. It is part of the ERASMUS+ project *Des stéréotypes à l'égalité de genre* associating four European schools (in Finland, France, Greece and Romania) two associations (in Spain and France) and a communication agency in Italy.

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Even today, children have deep-rooted prejudices about what girls and boys should be and act accordingly. As a result, men get more advanced positions of responsibility, while women have to settle for precarious and poorly paid jobs. This vicious cycle repeats itself from generation to generation.

This observation forces us to reflect on gender stereotypes in order to better combat them. In fact, there can be no true equality between girls and boys without deconstructing the foundations of gender relations, that is, the historical division of social roles between men and women. These roles are based on philosophical, religious, political, biological or social *justifications* that vary throughout history and between countries.

Far from being innocent, fiction is part of this system of legitimation and reproduction of inequalities.

By giving girls, and then women, their rightful place, this storybook aims to offer boys new imaginations to change minds. The development of our societies can no longer be achieved by ignoring half of the population that constitutes them. Equality in law must become equality in fact because, as Victor Hugo said: 'Humanity has a synonym: Equality'. Using a comprehensive and a collaborative approach, we selected several well-known traditional tales in Europe, traced the underlying messages that undermine gender equality, and then created alternative versions. The result is a series of stories in which the characters, regardless of their gender identity, freely show their personality and sensitivity.

Through these stories, we aim to mitigate the effects of gender bias and clichés, showing that a more just and harmonious society is possible. Released from stereotypes, children will be able to fully develop their individuality and empathy.

Follow us and find project progress, student productions, tools and many other resources on our project website and our Facebook page.

The whole ERASMUS+ team and students wish you an excellent read.

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WOOD-BROWN



Once upon a time, in the middle of a heat wave, when the feathers of the birds fell from the very hot sky, a king was ironing in front of a chocolate-brown window. And as he ironed casually while watching the dry wood outside, the king burned himself and three red blisters were formed. These red blotches were so striking that when he looked at them, the king thought: 'Oh! I wish I could have a child as brown as dry wood, with red lips like my blisters and with chocolate-brown hair as the wood of this window!'

Soon after, he had a little girl, brown as dry wood, with red lips like his blisters and chocolate-brown hair like the window, and Wood-Brown was her name because of that. After her birth, the king suddenly disappeared. No one knew why or where he was.

At the end of the year, the queen took a new man who was very ugly and ambitious. He owned a lot of factories that polluted a lot. He was so rich that he could not bear to be outdone by anyone. He had a magic mirror with which he spoke:

'Mirror, mirror, on the wall, tell me, in the kingdom, who is the richest man?'

And the mirror answered him back: 'You are the richest in the country, Sir.'

So, the king was happy because he knew the mirror was telling the truth. Wood-Brown, however, grew up and was passionate about ecology. She protected animals and swamps and she ensured that no toxic substances were released into the water. She wanted to save the planet. She was so appreciated that people gave her gifts.



Thus, she always became richer; and when she was sixteen, she was richer than her father. And when the king, one day, questioned his mirror:

‘Mirror, nice mirror, tell me in the kingdom who is the richest of all?’

The mirror answered back: ‘King, here you are the richest, but Wood-Brown is a thousand times richer than you.’

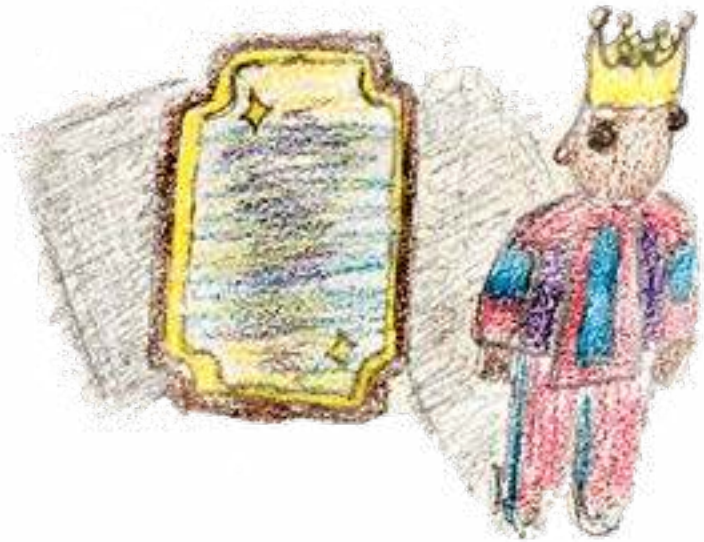
The king turned yellow and green with envy. He could no longer bear to see Wood-Brown without his heart turning upside down in his chest, he hated her so much.

He called a huntress and said to her: ‘Take the teenager to the desert: I do not want to see her anymore. Kill her and bring me all her money in testimony.’

The huntress obeyed, went to look for Wood-Brown, got her money and took her into the desert. When it came time to act, she realized that she had a choice.



Her father was a hunter too and throughout her life she had tried to gain his recognition by becoming the boy he had always dreamed of having, that is, a strong, strong person who did not cry, as women do, he said, these fragile and weak beings. But now that she was facing Wood-Brown, she listened to her heart:



she could not hurt her, it was impossible, it was against her deepest conviction. She refused to believe that violence was the solution. Too bad if she did not get her father's approval or the king's reward. 'Wood-Brown, your stepfather asked me to kill you, but don't worry, I'm not going to harm you. I cannot go with you; we do not have enough water for both of us. I know there is a shelter a few miles away from here, you must follow this direction and you will find it. We'll share the water, and I will give you back your money' she told Wood-Brown before leaving in the opposite direction.

Wood-Brown wandered alone in the desert. As she walked on, the sky changed, the dunes transformed into orange, yellowish and brown dancing surfaces under the shadow of the sunset. Behind her, the sand reflected the rays in a pale beige that stung her eyes. Here everything was immortalized. Then fatigue took hold of her. And the icing of the cake was: she ran out of water. As night fell, it started to get very cold. But thanks to her determination, she found the energy to continue and eventually found the shelter the huntress had told her about. She stepped inside; it was good. She was exhausted, hungry, and thirsty.

Everything in the house was clean and tidy, with a nice library and beautiful paintings. Funny tools were also displayed everywhere. A table was set and there were seven plates and seven glasses filled with water and some bread. She quickly ate and drank everything. She was too tired to stand on her feet. She saw that there were two bedrooms, one with three beds and the other one with four beds. Dead of fatigue, she decided to lie down on the first bed.

But it was not at all comfortable. She tried another, then another, but neither fit, the mattresses were just too hard! They were all equally inconvenient. After undoing all six beds, turning, and turning in each one, she tried the last one. Phew! This one was perfect! She fell asleep immediately.

Shortly thereafter, three young women and four young men who were the owners of the house, arrived. As it turned out, the shelter was at the edge of the desert and they were students who were studying in a nearby city.

As soon as they entered their home and turned on the light, they immediately realized that someone had come in and had drunk from their water, had eaten their food, had made a mess with their beds. At first, they were very angry, but after looking at Wood-Brown, quite sun-burnt despite her mixed skin, they had a lot of compassion for her and decided not to wake her up.

In the morning, Wood-Brown woke up and met the seven students. Surprised and embarrassed, she tried to give an explanation, but no sound came out of her mouth.



Understanding well her embarrassment the students began to introduce themselves: 'Hello, I am Gary! My nickname is *Grumpy* because I complain about everything! However, do not feel like you would have to call me that!!'

'I'm Ayana! Some people call me *Doc* because I know a lot of things and because I am the wisest of us all! But...I don't necessarily want this nickname...'

'Me, I am Camille! Or *Happy* because I am always full of joy. And me too, I do prefer my proper first name.'

'I am Colin. But because I am allergic to everything due to all these pollutants and toxic products that I must swallow, people sometimes call me *Atchum* because I sneeze all the time. You don't have to call me that, it will prevent me from remembering my unhappy state of health!'

'And I am Renata. I am very reserved by nature, that's why people call me *Shy*.'

'I am Adiou. I am the youngest one. I love all kinds of games and I like simple things. But, please, do not call me *Simplet*, I don't like that much.'

'Hello. I am Alberto. You are in my bed, it is very comfortable, isn't it? I have built it myself. The mattress is filled with sand and camel hair: it is a memory foam. And yes, I do sleep a lot and sometimes fall asleep quite suddenly. That is why people call me *Sleepy*. Please, do not use this name. I can't help being narcoleptic.'

'And you then, who are you and how did you find your way to us?' said all the seven with one voice.

'Well, my name is Wood-Brown and I do not have a nickname. I love my first name and it was given to me by my father.'

Wood-Brown was reassured by their benevolence: they could have chased her away and pointed out her boldness, but instead they welcomed her into their home, as if she were welcome. She apologized for her behavior the night before. Then she told them about her unfortunate adventures and confided her concerns to them. Shocked and feeling sorry for her, they soothed her and told her that they would do anything to protect her from her evil stepfather. They gave her aloe vera to cure her sunburn. Alberto made her a mattress as comfortable as his so that she could rest.

'We have to leave now, dear friend! We go to school in the city, where we study at the School of Fine Arts.'



See you soon! Make yourself at home!’

Wood-Brown realized then why there were brushes, paints, clay, wood and many other painting and sculpture materials in their home. The books on the shelves were mostly documentaries and technical works on art. With her money, to thank the students for their welcome, she decided to complete this collection and buy many very expensive instruments and devices. The students were delighted and thanked her warmly for this donation.

The first days Wood-Brown rested, but then she was bored to death. So, to pass the time, she started reading and learning to draw. With the material available, she painted, made clay pots, and made small wooden structures. Then she had an idea: why not use the waste in the trash bin to make new objects? She made all kinds of things out of cardboard, plastic, and even vegetable peelings.

When her friends saw her work, they were in awe and amazed by the beauty and originality of these creations. They decided to present them at an exhibition on the theme of ecology organized by their school.

Many people were invited to the opening and everyone was impressed by Wood-Brown’s works. A rich art lover, recognizing the ecological and artistic genius of the young woman, bought several of her works of art. Within a few months, she became one of the most popular and richest artists of the kingdom.

The king had not seen the huntress again. He was very upset because she was supposed to bring him Wood-Brown's money.

'She has run away with my money' he thought to himself, 'I don't care, at least Wood-Brown is dead, she couldn't have survived in the desert anyway.'

Then he approached his magic mirror and asked: 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the richest in the kingdom?'

And the mirror replied: 'You, my king, are the richest in this country, but far away in the desert, Wood-Brown is hiding with seven students and she has become a lot richer than you.'

Mad with rage, the king made inquiries. He heard the news of Wood-Brown's fame. He began to devise a new plan.

He found the hiding place and hid himself behind the one and only vegetation he valued, the tamarisk, a large, rough barked tree with small scaly leaves, which proudly reminded him of his own warrior posture. He waited patiently for the night to come, then entered quietly into the house and, quite unnoticed, stole all Wood-Brown's works and left.

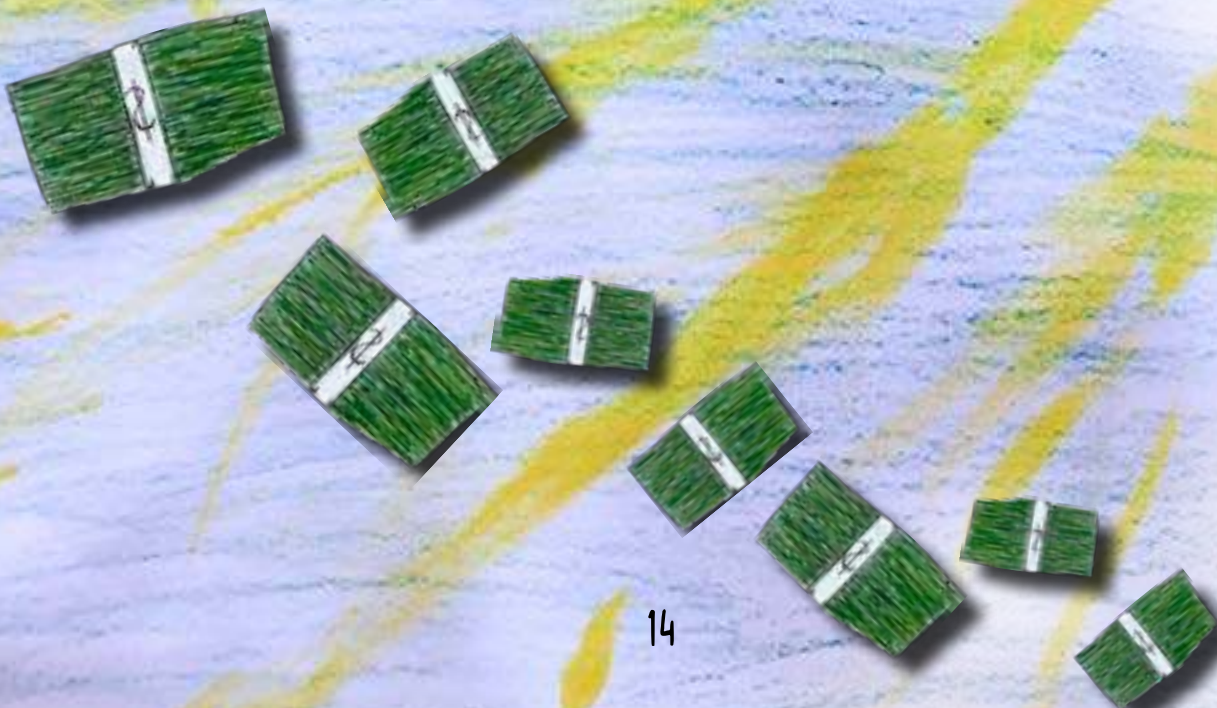
In the morning Ayana, Camille, Renata, Colin, Alberto, Gary and Adiou were very sad to see the artworks were gone. Clever as she was, Camille proposed to bring new materials from school recycling bins. Grumbling repeatedly, Gary offered to help anyway. Adiou jumped for joy because he thought the idea was so excellent. Colin used a glove and a mask to avoid sneezing in the rubbish. Of course, all this had made Alberto tired, and he went to bed again, and as for Renata, she said nothing.

All six of them came back loaded with new materials every day. Alberto encouraged and helped Wood-Brown, which gave her the courage to get back to work quickly.

Her reputation grew. Many people sent her letters thanking her for her genuine, insightful, and thought-provoking ideas. Everyone recognized her ability to raise awareness of the ecological emergency. Her creations made it possible to become aware of the harmful effects of overconsumption. Reuse instead of throwing away, buy less but better products, this is what her productions conveyed as a message.

Meanwhile in the kingdom, the king asked his mirror again and again, and it replied that Wood-Brown had become ten thousand times richer than him.

The king could not stand around doing nothing. This time he disguised himself as a rich collector of works of art and knocked on Wood-Brown's door. She gladly opened and welcomed him. The king pretended to be interested and bought all her works. But what Wood-Brown did not know was that he had given her fake money. As he left, he greeted her courteously with a deceptively warm smile, then hurriedly tossed everything in a dumpster. Then he quickly went to the local police station and told the policemen that Wood-Brown was storing a huge amount of fake money. They went to her house quickly, found the money and asked Wood-Brown to follow them. She had just enough time to go to the bathroom before she left and wrote a message on the wall. Moments later, she was in jail. In the evening, when the seven young women and men arrived home, they panicked because they could not find Wood-Brown. Fortunately, before going to bed, Alberto found her message on the bathroom wall. It said: 'I am being taken to prison; the king has tricked me with counterfeit bills.'



They left quickly to meet the judge of the kingdom. He was a very wise man, he listened to them attentively and ended up believing them, knowing the king's reputation. He freed Wood-Brown while issuing a condition: she should no longer open the door to a stranger. In the meantime, the king had returned to his palace, jubilant at his abominable action. He questioned his mirror again, but once again the answer was very unpleasant to him. The king cried furiously: 'Wood-Brown must die!'

In the evening, he dressed as a merchant and bought a coconut. Then he went to the factory next to his castle and dipped half of the fruit into poison he had concocted, a mixture of spurge sap and other poisonous substances. As he left, he forgot to take the antidote that would save him if he ever accidentally touched the soaked side of the nut. He took one of his camels, crossed the desert and presented himself the next morning in front of the students' door. He shouted again and again outside the door, but nobody opened. Then he went in front of a window and saw Wood-Brown.

'Come on, nice girl', he said in a pleading voice trying to make her think he was a poor victim, 'buy something so that I can feed my family.'

Wood-Brown felt very sorry for him, but she did not open her door. From the window, she gave him some money and told him she did not need anything.

'Here you are, Madam, I will give you a coconut to thank you for your generosity' he said, holding out the uncoated half of the fruit.

She looked at him suspiciously but decided to take the coconut and just put it aside. She watched him leave and then noticed something strange: he was wearing thick rubber gloves. At that moment, she felt her body burn and her head spinning. Her legs trembled and she passed out.

The toxic substances from the coconut had passed through the skin of her hands... The king turned and saw her collapse behind the window. He burst into a sadistic laugh: he was sure now that Wood-Brown was dead. And he had finally got rid of her.

At nightfall, the seven students returned to their cottage, where they found Wood-Brown lying on the floor. Ayana rushed over to take her pulse, 'She's still breathing!' she breathed a deep sigh of relief. It was then that she saw the coconut lying on the table, next to the inert body of the young woman.

'It must be one of her evil stepfather's dirty tricks! This fruit must be poisoned, do not touch it! Help me put Wood-Brown on the couch until we find a solution.'

She then rushed to the bookshelf and took a large medical book. She frantically browsed the pages of the book looking for an antidote to the poison which ran through her friend's veins but ended up realizing that without knowing what toxic substance this was, it was impossible to find the cure; in the worst case it might end up killing her if it was not the right one. The only way to be sure not to make her condition worse would have been to have her blood analyzed but the nearest hospital was a seven hour walk away and it was already pitch dark...

All the seven students agreed to take turns overnight to watch Wood-Brown and to take the first bus in the morning to take her to the hospital. The first part of the night passed without incident but, while on duty, Gary heard a funny noise coming from the tamarisk bushes.



He grabbed a frying pan to defend himself in case it was the evil king who had come to finish his dirty work, and quietly approached the trees. He found himself face to face with a little monkey. He barely had time to breathe when the monkey opened his mouth and greeted him in impeccable English:

'Good evening my dear, forgive me for this somewhat late and daring entry, but time is running out for...'

'But how dare you?! Are you a king's henchman? I warn you; you better get out before I knock you out with this pan! As long as I am alive, you will not touch a hair on Wood-Brown's head!!'

'No no, you are wrong my dear, it is quite the opposite, I am coming to help her... Let me explain, I am...'

'Keep your mouth shut, you dirty little villain! Don't teach an old monkey what to do, your sales speech will have no effect on me!'

Camille had been awakened by all this noise. After checking that Wood-Brown was okay, she hurried outside, where she heard the muffled sound of a heated discussion... When she opened the door and found out that Gary was talking with a monkey, she could not suppress a small exclamation of surprise: 'But, what...?!' Her sentence died on her lips.

'Stay away, he's an envoy from the king! But do not panic, I'm in control of the situation!' Gary exclaimed in a firm and somewhat theatrical tone, given the difference in strength between him and the frightened little macaque.

'No, I promise you. I am here to help you save Wood-Brown! We're on the same side, please believe me!' exclaimed the little creature with teary eyes.

'Ah, he's playing his role well, the guy, I almost believe it! Shut up and run off, before I make you feel my pan!' Gary hissed, still emphatically.

'Gary, please calm down, he may be telling the truth, at least give him a chance to explain himself...' said Camille in a soothing tone. She then gently placed her hand on Gary's arm trying to get him to let go of the pan, but Gary resisted.

'Out of the question, we do not know what magic tricks this rascal may have in his bag! Let us not take unnecessary risks!'

Camille managed to convince him to wake up all the others to give advice and decide what to do with this mysterious visitor. With four votes against three, they finally decided to give him a chance to explain the reasons for his presence.



‘Who are you and what are you doing here at such an hour?’ Ayana asked solemnly.

‘I am sorry for this unexpected arrival. I assure you that I have the best of intentions. So, my name is Doreen, and I am the daughter of a hunter who works in the service of the king. A few months ago, the king wanted to test my loyalty by ordering me to take Wood-Brown to the desert and kill her... But I could not bring myself to do so, and it was I who told her the direction to your house, where I knew she would be welcome and safe. I then lived hiding for several weeks, but the king eventually found me when he learnt that Wood-Brown was alive. To punish me for disobeying, he turned me into a monkey... He made me do acrobatics to distract his court and kept me locked the rest of the time... But yesterday, from the tower where he kept me prisoner, I saw the king leave the castle in the middle of the night, disguised as a traveling merchant, and smear a coconut with a strange liquid. I thought he was up to something evil and I got worried about Wood-Brown. Fortunately, in his haste, when he brought me something to eat, he forgot to lock the door to my cell, and so I was able to escape and follow him from afar. I came as fast as I could to save Wood-Brown.’

‘Very well,’ said Colin skeptically, ‘but what are you going to do, in practice? You’re a hunter, not a doctor as far as I know!’ he said before emitting one of those thunderous sneezes of his.

‘Before starting to shadow the king, I crept into his factory to see what poison he had used and took the antidote with me’, she said, proudly pulling a small vial from her wallet. ‘And that is not all, I also managed to steal this from him...’

She then showed them a silver half-moon-shaped locket that looked exactly like the one Wood-Brown always wore around her neck.

‘And yes, I also know that the king has a magic mirror which he keeps precious. I secretly went to see it last night. As a monkey, I managed to get through the window and no one got worried about it, such luck! It showed me where the locket was hidden. It told me that Wood-Brown had the other half and that if we could bring the two together, we could finally defeat the Evil King forever!’

Ayana grabbed the vial, uncorked it, and sniffed its contents, frowning as she did whenever she concentrated on a difficult task. Eventually, she delivered her verdict: ‘This is an extract of moody cactus.’

It tastes foul but it is harmless to your health. Even if it does not get our friend out of a coma, it can't hurt her.'

All eight of them went to Wood-Brown's bedside. Ayana gently poured the thick liquid into her mouth and waited, holding her breath. After a few moments, Wood-Brown began to cough and then opened her weary eyes. Everyone gave a big sigh of relief. A look of disgust then spread over Wood-Brown's face: 'Ugh! Quick, some water! It tastes horrible!' After Wood-Brown had emptied her glass of water and recovered completely, Doreen told her the whole story. When she had finished her story, she handed her the locket.

'Gosh!' Exclaimed Wood-Brown. 'It is really the same as the one I am wearing! It was my father who gave it to me when I was born...'

'The magic mirror in the castle says that if we put the two halves together, we will have the power to stop your stepfather from acting maliciously...'

'We won't lose anything by trying...', said Wood-Brown, a little hesitantly.

She then pulled the two lockets closer to each other and they had barely made contact when a powerful jet of blue light burst from their union, flooding into the entire room. The beam of the light then moved towards Doreen and enveloped her in a vibrating vortex. When the whirlwind had passed, a young woman with hair almost as dark as Wood-Brown's was at the place where the monkey had been standing a moment earlier. Wood-Brown's last doubts were dispelled:

'It was you who spared me and showed me how to avoid dying of thirst in the desert!' She exclaimed. The two women hugged each other for a long time.

'This tyrant's reign has gone on long enough, it's time to end it,' said Wood-Brown. 'Doreen, do you think you can help us get into the castle without being noticed?'

'Yes, I know where the guards are, but we need a plan' she told her. With a well-prepared plan and the water supplies secured, they all set off for the castle.

When the castle gates were finally in sight, Camille and Gary separated from the rest of the group to distract the guards and thus allow the others to enter the castle grounds: Camille because she found it insanely funny, and Gary because he still felt like he had to apologize for the rather hostile reception he had given Doreen. The guards fell for it, leaving them the way clear.

Wood-Brown's locket then began to sparkle again and to move on its own in the air, guiding them towards the door of the king's chamber. Doreen warned them: 'Watch out! The king's apartments are under surveillance! Careful!' They then hid discreetly in a recess. Renata, however moderate, took her courage in both hands and appeared in front of the guards. She began to sing at the top of her voice, and to run at full speed in the opposite direction, the guards after her. The others took the opportunity to rush into the room. Attracted by the mirror like a magnet the locket was pulling so hard on the chain that Wood-Brown had no choice but to follow it. The very instant the locket contacted the mirror, the mirror gave off the same intense blue light, but the jet was so powerful it blinded them for a few moments.



When they could reopen their eyes, they saw a hand appear out of the mirror, soon followed by an arm, then another, followed by a bearded face with worn features... 'Daddy!!!', exclaimed Wood-Brown, incredulously. 'My dear child...' the man replied tenderly, opening his arms to her, moved to tears.

However, their embrace was cut short because they heard footsteps from the hallway. Wood-Brown's father put his index finger on his lips and motioned for the others to go and hide behind the door, then ran himself to hide behind the mirror. A moment later, the evil king burst into the room, making a confident step towards the mirror, where he took the time to admire his reflection with a satisfied air before asking the one and only question that mattered to him:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the richest in the whole kingdom?'

'You may be the richest in the kingdom, but your heart is poorer than the poorest of the peasants you starve to satisfy your greed', Wood-Brown's father replied from his hiding place.

'How dare you?!' shouted the tyrant, his voice choking with anger.

'I'll teach you what it costs to laugh at me, filthy mirror!' he raged, wagging his fist. To his huge surprise, when he punched at the mirror, his fist met no resistance but dug into the mirror up to his shoulder. Wood-Brown immediately understood the idea his father had, rushed towards her stepfather, and pushed him with all her strength. He tilted his head forward and, in a split second, the mirror engulfed him completely. Wood-Brown's father leapt out of his hiding place at full speed and quickly grabbed Wood-Brown's locket.

'Pull the other half, quick!' he cried. Wood-Brown did so, and the locket instantly split in two, closing the mirror for good. The tyrant's fate was definitively sealed. He would never be able to escape from the mirror and hurt anyone again.

After a moment of amazement, everyone shouted of joy and congratulated each other on their courage and determination. And by mutual agreement, they set out to announce the news of the good king's return throughout the castle. On their way, the king was able to explain to his daughter how his rival had tricked him years earlier: after stealing the twin lockets, he had lured him into the mirror room under a false pretext and imprisoned him in the mirror, making everyone believe that he had disappeared to take his place on the throne.

Everyone then headed for the dungeons, where Camille, Gary and Renata had been locked up in the meantime. After they had been released, everyone was amazed to discover that Wood-Brown's mother was in the neighboring cell. The tyrant had locked her there after trying to get rid of Wood-Brown for the first time. Wood-Brown and her parents hugged each other and cried for a long time; they were so happy to be together again. The news of the good king's return spread like wildfire throughout the kingdom, giving rise to jubilation not seen in many years.



On Wood-Brown's advice, the King and the Queen shut down all the horrible stepfather's factories and turned them into schools, where you could learn to create objects, tools, and techniques to preserve nature. You could study biodiversity, learn how to consume less but better and how to preserve the resources of the precious planet. They redistributed the tyrant's money by offering all inhabitants of the kingdom the same salary, regardless of status, leader, or worker, to stop the greed for power. And this concerned the royal family too, of course. Doreen stopped hunting and began to develop small farms which respected animals and nature.



As for Wood-Brown and her seven friends, they opened free art schools throughout the kingdom, to offer everyone the opportunity to develop their artistic potential and to enrich each other's lives by being in contact with others.

Ever since, the motto of the kingdom has been: 'The only valuable wealth is shared wealth.'



ACTIVE

ALEXANDRA



One day, in a small village in the north, a child was born. She was given the name Alexandra. Her parents loved her very deeply. They decided to have a party to celebrate the birth of their first and only child. The parents invited only a few friends and Alexandra's grandparents to join in the fun. They also invited a family from the neighbouring chalet to share this moment of happiness. Everyone laughed and enjoyed the party.

Alexandra received many gifts. Suddenly, as all the guests were singing a song to her, her uncle stormed into the house... although he had not been invited.

'I'm very surprised you didn't invite me to Alexandra's party!' stated the uncle.

'I have a present for her' he said unctuously 'far be it from me to do so, but I have a prediction to make, and that prediction will be my birth gift. Listen carefully: For her thirteenth birthday, Alexandra will have an accident.'

After saying this, he disappeared as he had come.

No one took it seriously and everyone soon started laughing at this man's delusional words... Well, almost everyone. Oceania, Alexandra's old and wise grandmother, though known for her composure, did not seem to share the carelessness of the other guests:

'I know my son very well and if I were you, I would keep a close eye on Alexandra...' she said in a quavering voice that had never been heard before.

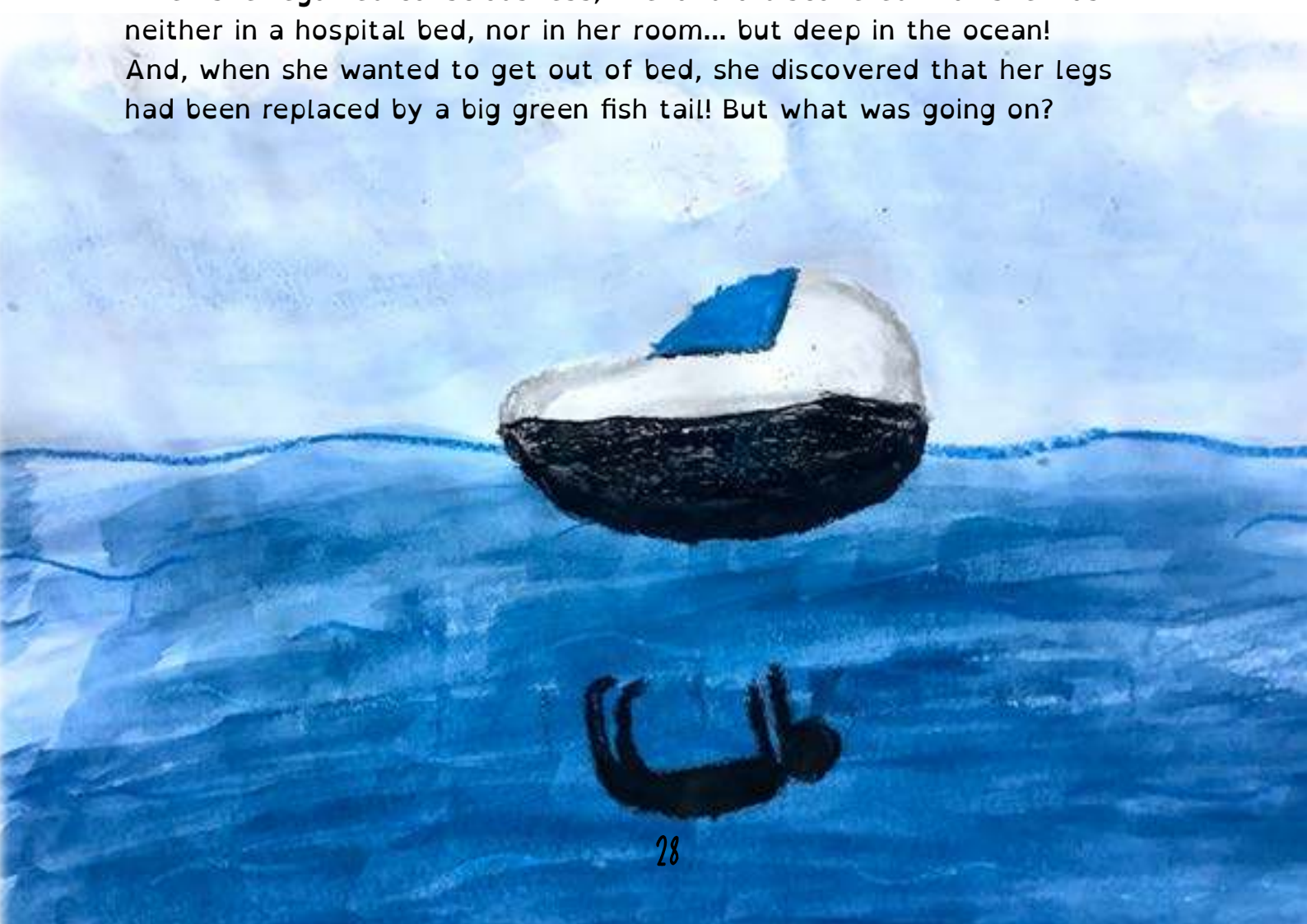


Alexandra spent her childhood playing and discovering the world happily, without knowing anything about her uncle's prediction.

Finally came the day she turned thirteen. She had become a very independent young girl. She was also an excellent swimmer. On the day of her thirteenth birthday, her grandmother never let her out of her sight. But as the day went by without the slightest incident, everyone concluded that the uncle's 'prediction' was nothing other than a bad joke of a cranky old man and that Oceania was definitely starting to lose her mind. The next day, the whole family happily left to enjoy the sun at the beach. Alexandra was swimming when she heard the sound of an approaching motorboat...

She looked around and saw a zodiac rushing towards her. She panicked and tried to go under the boat but... she had no more air! She resolved to go back to the surface to breathe, but then she violently hit her head against the hull and fainted. She sank to the bottom, without knowing that her grandmother had seen everything and had jumped into the water without the slightest hesitation.

When she regained consciousness, Alexandra discovered that she was neither in a hospital bed, nor in her room... but deep in the ocean! And, when she wanted to get out of bed, she discovered that her legs had been replaced by a big green fish tail! But what was going on?



How was such a thing possible? She wanted to call for help but only the sound of bubbles coming out of her mouth answered her.

Once the initial shock was over, Alexandra decided to explore the surroundings. She discovered that she was in a kind of underwater castle... a castle where time seemed to stand still. There were fishes ready to cook frozen in motion.



Some of them in the bedrooms had fallen asleep on their broomsticks. The crabs were at a standstill and the octopuses that were writing had run out of ink! Stingrays lined the floor, motionless. The turtles were no longer moving and the dolphins no longer swimming, the seahorses were petrified.

The castle was surrounded by fire corals, seaweed and sea urchins that formed an impassable barrier. Alexandra felt panic take hold of her: 'What am I going to do? Where am I? Why do I have a green mermaid tail? Why am I locked in this strange fortress?'

After several days without finding a way out or anyone to talk to, Alexandra fell into a deep depression and decided to let herself die in bed, not knowing what else to do. She felt alone, abandoned, lost.

Until one day, a tiny yellow and purple fish named Memory slipped through the dense vegetation and saw Alexandra asleep in her room. Thanks to her green tail, he immediately knew she was a descendant of the sovereign family of the Ocean World. So the rumours were true, he thought to himself: the royal line had not died out! Excited, he called out to her a little abruptly:

'Hey! You! What are you doing here all alone?'

'Who spoke?' Alexandra was worried, barely awake.

'I, the fish! Let me introduce myself, my name is Memory!'

'Oh, nice to meet you, Memory! Uh... I'm Alexandra.'

Alexandra thought to herself that she had really gone mad. 'Now a talking fish! And then what?'

'You are Oceane's granddaughter, aren't you?' continued Memory as if nothing had happened.

'But how can you even know my grandmother's name?! And how is it only possible that we speak the same language?! None of this makes sense, I must be dreaming, it's all happening in my head!' shouted Alexandra, gasping.

Memory hesitated for a moment, becoming aware of the confusion in which his interlocutor was.



He weighed his words before answering:

'Hem... well... Alexandra, it so happens that you are the descendant of a great family of mermaids, more precisely the family that reigned for a long time over the Ocean...'

Alexandra, frowned, cautiously.

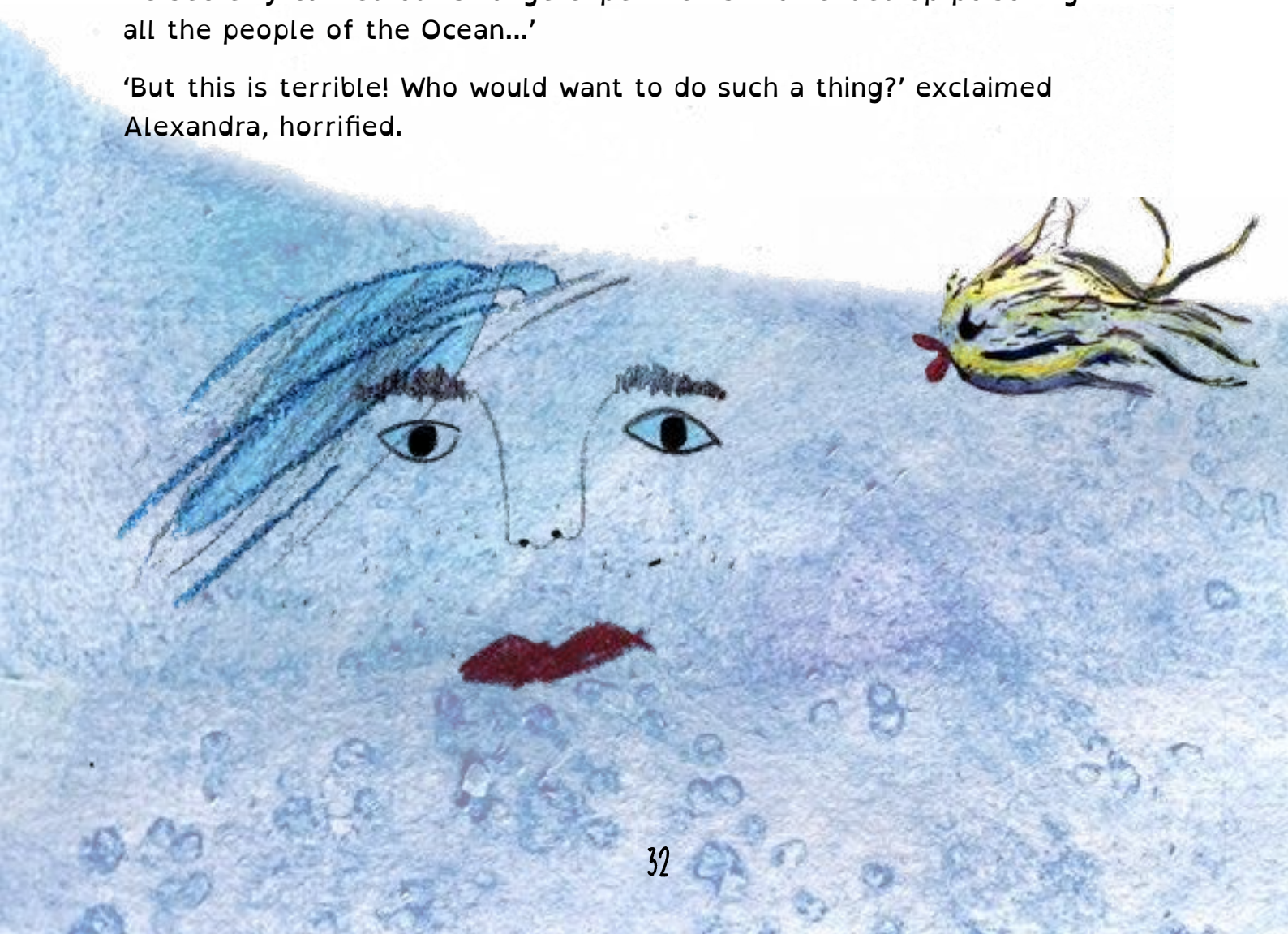
'How can you be so sure?'

'The green colour of your tail cannot be mistaken, it is the colour of the royal family, without a shadow of a doubt.'

Alexandra was speechless. 'Didn't you know that?'

She shook her head, still looking puzzled. 'Well... I'll tell you the whole story. A long time ago, Queen Ocean, your grandmother, became the regent of the Ocean Kingdom, following the death of her husband, King Nork. Originally, it was Walter, your uncle, who was destined to ascend the throne, but he was only seven years old when his father died. But as he grew up, Prince Walter did a lot of harm around him. He secretly carried out strange experiments that ended up poisoning all the people of the Ocean...'

'But this is terrible! Who would want to do such a thing?' exclaimed Alexandra, horrified.



'Well, you see, he wanted at all costs to get the magical powers that his mother and his big sister Coralie naturally have... Mad with envy, he tried to create them artificially with chemicals. But as his toxic creations were poured into the Ocean, all the people became sick.



A tremendous revolt then broke out in the kingdom, we had never seen such outrage, from a fish's memory and, you know, we have an excellent memory, contrary to what humans claim! Creatures of all underwater species joined forces, plankton and shrimp went on strike, whales organized spectacular blockades, hammerhead sharks broke everything in their path in the posh neighbourhoods, ah it was quite a mess! And then one day, the royal family had the bad surprise to discover as they woke up that the whole palace was surrounded by fishermen nets attached to each other and painted in bright yellow! Impossible to get in or out until a squad of over-trained sawfish cleared the way! We never knew who did it, but anyway, that's why this event is still remembered as *The revolt of the yellow nets*. After this tour de force, the regent Oceania ended up proposing the organization of a popular vote on the law which prohibited women from reigning. The people overwhelmingly voted against this absurd old law, so that Coralie could become the Queen of the Ocean. The people voted massively against this old absurd law, so that Coralie the Generous could become Queen of the Ocean.



But this decision infuriated Walter. He decided to poison the whole castle in revenge.

Fortunately, Oceania, your grandmother, had seen it all coming long before and had predicted this rage. She was able to alleviate the bad fate: instead of killing all the occupants of the castle, Walter's potion only put them to sleep, as if time had stood still. Oceania escaped with her daughter Coralie, your mother. Your uncle Walter believed for a long time that everyone had died, including his mother and sister... Even we, the people of Ocean, hesitated to believe the rumors that the regent Oceania and Princess Coralie had survived and that the memories of the latter had been erased by her mother... And I must confess that I don't know how he managed to find you on earth...'

Alexandra was stunned. Memory continued and explained what was happening today: 'I am very worried because Walter still carries on with his experiences that are poisoning the Ocean and only you can help us. You have to get out of bed and ascend the throne to become the Queen of the Ocean, our people need a fair and good mermaid leader! Please, Alexandra, get up and swim!'



Seeing Alexandra still unconvinced, Memory decided to play his last card: 'Alexandra, it must have been your grandmother Oceania who brought you to this palace, to keep you safe but also because she knows that only you can wake everyone up and save the kingdom of the Ocean. She has the gift of seeing the future.

You know, if you are here, it is because your destiny must be played out here.'

'But I have no idea what the role of a Mermaid Queen is, what am I supposed to do?' Alexandra asked timidly and feverishly.

'Don't worry, with your title of queen and your powers, which I'm sure will soon be revealed, you will find a way to stop your uncle with the people. I do believe in you.'

Reassured, Alexandra agreed to accede to the throne, happy to be able to stop the bad deeds of her uncle Walter.

Memory was so thrilled that he stormed out of the palace and started swimming all over the Ocean to warn the inhabitants. He decided to organize a big party in the palace for Alexandra's coronation. Memory wanted to invite the royal family and told Alexandra about his plan, and she thought it was a great idea. But Memory was suddenly anxious:

'How do you send out invitations on earth?'

'Oh, good question. I don't know....'



'Oh! Now I remember! Mermaids can talk to the sky creatures! All you have to do is ask them to carry the message to Oceania! But tell them to be careful that the news doesn't reach your uncle's ears!'

With the help of Memory, who ate the seaweed and kindly asked the sea urchins to move away, Alexandra left the palace and quickly reached the surface of the ocean. She entrusted the invitations for Oceania and her mother Coralie to a seagull who willingly accepted to bring them to their destination.



From the first light of dawn, guests began to mass in front of the palace doors, some with glossy scales, others with tentacles dressed up to the nines. Alexandra's astonishment grew as the crowd swelled. When she finally spotted her mother and grandmother, looking like they used to, except that they too now wore a majestic green tail instead of their legs, she pushed her way through the crowd and rushed into their arms. Their tears mingled with the salty water of their recovered home.

The party was magnificent. Alexandra ascended the throne and delivered her speech in the large ceremonial hall: 'Dear aquatic species, I have decided to save the kingdom of the Ocean with you. I rely on your valuable help. Are you on board?'

'Oh yeeees!' cried out together as a single voice the seahorses, the fishes, the dolphins, the turtles, the whales and many others.

At that very moment, the whole palace that had been asleep until then woke up.

But the cheers of the crowd did not even have the time to fade when Walter popped up out of nowhere and shouted angrily: 'Do not rejoice too soon! As long as I live, no queen will ascend the throne!'

But immediately, Walter was surrounded by threatening hammerhead sharks, and Queen Alexandra replied: 'No Walter, it's over. A new era has begun for the people of the Ocean and I swear on my life that I will stop you from pouring your poison and your hatred into the seas.'



With a grin on his face, Walter taunted 'That's what we'll see' and, in a fraction of a second, he raised his hand and poured the content of a red vial. All of a sudden, everyone around him froze.

They still could hear and talk but could not move anymore.

With the way now clear to Alexandra, the greedy uncle walked towards her with a determined step and a triumphant look. Alexandra felt helpless. As Walter was approaching her, Alexandra, in a moment of panic, let out an amazingly powerful scream. Stunned, Walter stepped back, covering his ears. It was enough for Alexandra to realize the force of her scream. That's how she discovered her power: the supersonic cry. In a heartbeat, Queen Oceania cast a magical enchantment to protect the rest of the crowd from hearing the supersonic cry.

Alexandra took a deep breath and screamed again, with all her strength, towards Walter, who writhed in pain. The force of the wave propelled by Alexandra's cry dissipated Walter's potion and the whole crowd regained its freedom of movement.



No sooner had they recovered their mobility than the hammerhead sharks rushed at Walter to immobilize him and tie his hands behind his back with the strongest seaweed in the entire kingdom.

Oceania looked at her granddaughter with pride and spoke with a solemn air: 'My queen and granddaughter, I am so happy that you finally have discovered your inner power, the strength you always had within you. Your uncle Walter got intoxicated with power-over, which can only lead to destruction. The only power that is worthwhile is the one that honors and preserves life. And this nurturing power, everyone can find it within themselves. May you never forget this?'

Alexandra fully understood the responsibility that lay before her and spoke loudly and clearly: 'Dear people of the Oceans, I vow to use my reign and powers wisely for the common good and the preservation of life under the sea. Together, we will find a way to undo the damage caused by my uncle's greed for power.'

A clamor of joy arose in the crowd: 'Long live the Queen! Long live the Queen!'

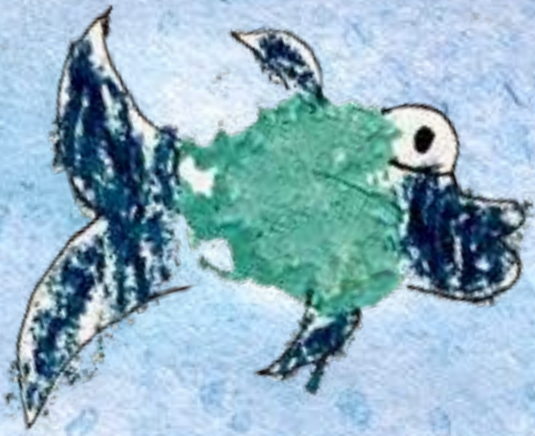
Everyone began to embrace, sing and dance to celebrate the beginning of this new era.

Over the following weeks, Queen Alexandra along with her grandmother Oceane and her mother Coralia and all the inhabitants of the kingdom began to clean the waters. The task was arduous, but no one complained because they knew they were working for the common good of present and future generations. Besides, Alexandra turned out to be an innate leader. She treated her subjects with respect, working side by side with them. She had even managed to identify an alga that made the underwater creatures immune to the toxins of Walter's poisons and allowed them to clean up this waste without putting their health at risk.

However, people eventually realized that the pollution had not stopped with Walter's imprisonment. He had obviously found a way to continue harming the environment from a distance, but he would not reveal to anyone where the new contamination was coming from.

One day, while Memory was looking for new sources of pollution, he discovered a shipwreck which was hidden by a lot of seaweed and dead corals.





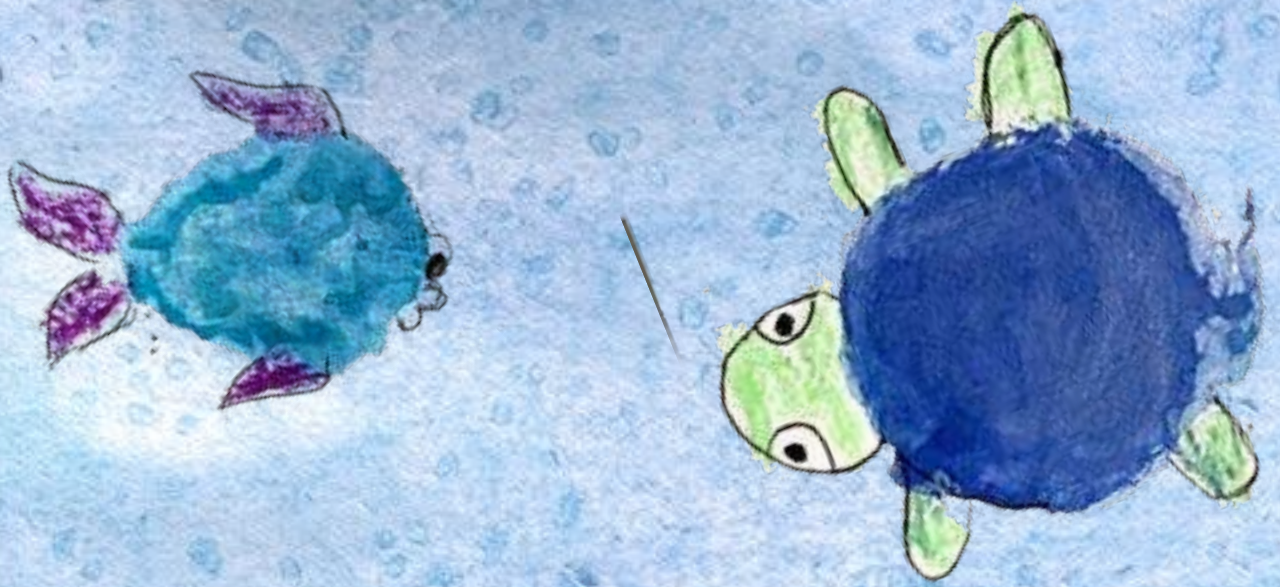
He entered the ship and found out that it was Walter's hideout, where he used to run his sinister experiments. The area was so polluted that Memory could hardly escape and find enough strength to swim to the castle to tell Queen Alexandra the news.

'Queen Alexandra, Queen Alexandra, I have found the source of all pollution, Walter's hideout!' shouted Memory just before he passed out.

It took Memory several days of intensive care before he was able to explain in more detail what he had found out.

In the meantime, Alexandra and her advisors had worked hard to develop a solution to neutralize the poison. They eventually discovered that mermaid hair had a magical ability to absorb toxic liquids. Alexandra, Oceania and Coralia all agreed to shave their long hair to make poison traps out of it. But this was not enough. Diplomats therefore went to ask for help from the mermaids of the neighboring kingdoms, who gladly agreed to donate their hair for a just cause.

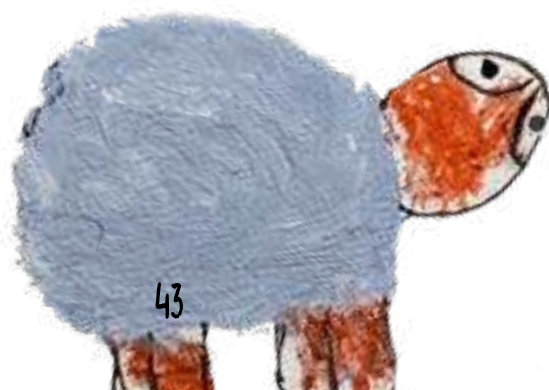
When the gigantic net of magical hair was finally ready, Memory was fully recovered. He was then able to lead the final cleaning expedition. Although she felt very sad to see all the damages Walter had caused, Alexandra felt relieved that they could finally get rid of the main source of pollution. Several hundred underwater creatures, duly dressed in their protective gear, worked together to wrap the wreckage with the net.



A few days later, all the poison had been absorbed and the waters had regained their transparency and delicate iodine flavor.

Once her mission was fulfilled, Alexandra realized that the people were in the best position to know what was good for them. After clearing the seas of pollution, it was time to remove the last vestiges of power-over as well. This is why Alexandra decided to propose a referendum for the abolition of the monarchy. The people voted overwhelmingly for the establishment of a participatory democracy. Their trust in Alexandra grew all the more and she was elected as the first president of the new government and remains to this day the most inspiring mermaid of all time.

Ever since, the motto of the Ocean World has been: 'The happiness of a people lies neither in its possessions nor in its submission but in sharing, civic commitment and peace of souls'.



NESTOR AND THE BEAST

A long long time ago there was a poor widow who lived with her three sons in a small house. Her name was Sarah. The two younger sons were very good looking and they were keen on horses. The oldest son, Nestor, loved to help his mum with the chores and to read books. Every day he started fires, cooked meals, tended the garden and fixed things when they broke. Nestor was not as handsome as his brothers, but he was very intelligent, wise and generous. He had brown hair and brown eyes and he wore glasses.

One day the mother brought some good news. She inherited a large amount of money from a remote cousin. All at once Sarah became very rich.

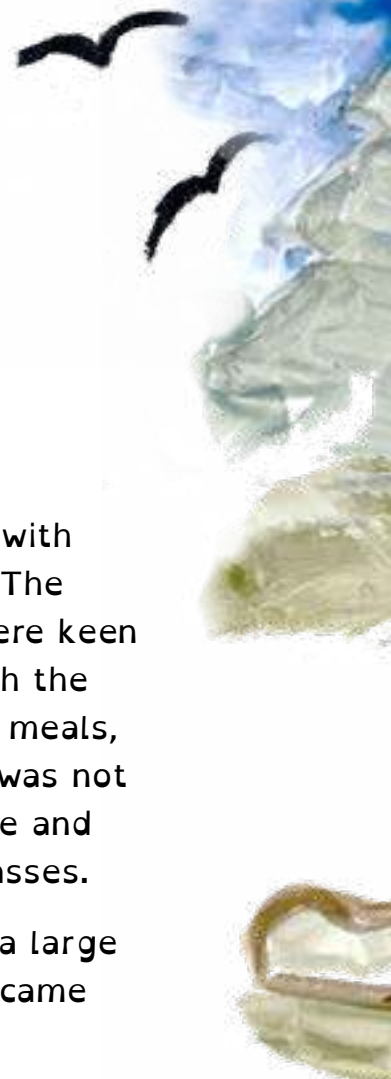
'My sons!' said the happy mother 'I am going to get my inheritance. Tell me what fine gifts I can bring back for you.'

'Bring us the best horses in the realm!' said the sons.'

'What about you, Nestor?'

'All I want, mother, is a book.'

A few days later, Sarah was on her way back home when she realized she had forgotten about Nestor's book. She paused to think about a solution and then realized she was surrounded by a beautiful meadow full of colourful flowers and butterflies, and birds singing heavenly. Charmed by the beauty of the meadow, she did not realise that it was getting dark and she was tired and hungry. It was then that she noticed a path leading to a large castle.







Maybe it was a place she could stay for the night, she thought to herself. When Sara got up close, she saw that it was a half ruined castle. She found it very odd, but the front door was open...

The horses were restless, as they could feel that something wrong was about to happen. They pulled so hard on the bridle that Sarah had no choice but to let go. They ran away, leaving Sarah all alone.

The widow stepped inside the ruined castle, where she was attracted by a small flickering light at the end of a long corridor. She entered the room where the light was coming from and in front of a candle on a table, she found a glass of milk and some bread. She waited for a while, but there was nobody inside and she was very hungry. The mother ate and then she went into another room and fell asleep on a chair.

The following day, Sarah still did not find anyone, but she saw a big dusty book, which looked like an ancient book of spells on the table.





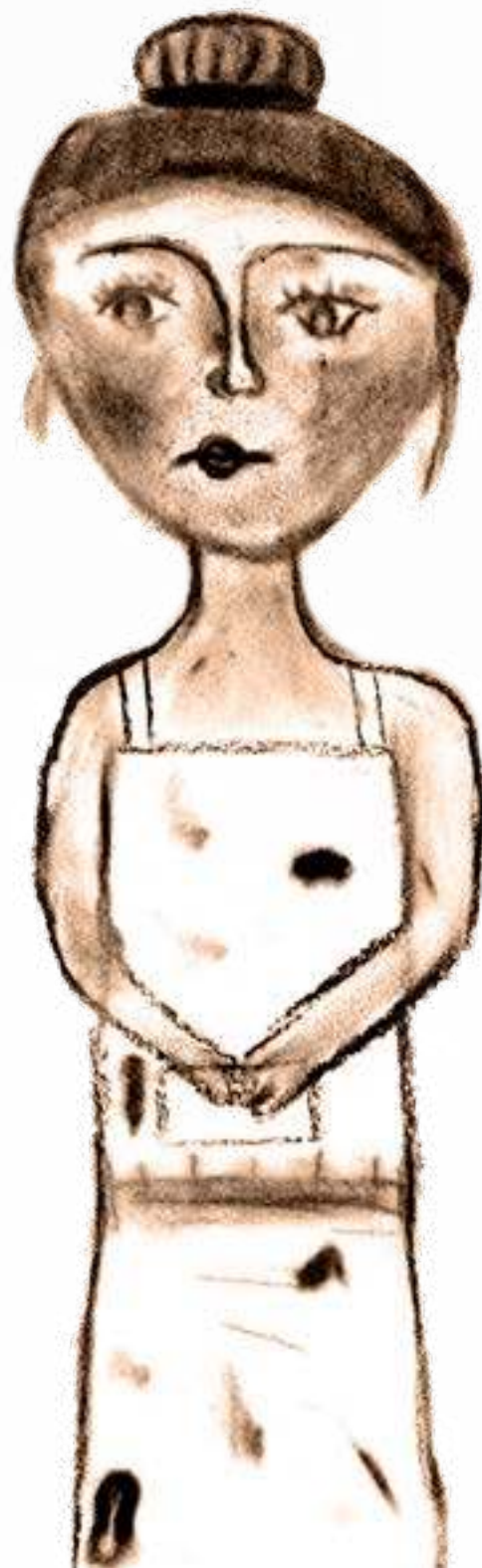


She remembered Nestor's wish. She took it, thinking that nobody needed such an old dusty book and headed for the exit.

Suddenly, a voice from beyond the grave sprang out of nowhere:

'I let you stay at my house, and instead of showing me gratitude, you steal my most precious thing in the world! How dare you? From now onward, you are my prisoner!'

The widow was frozen. Her panic was immediately followed by sorrow and guilt when she realized that she might never see her sons again.





In the meanwhile, Nestor realised that something bad happened to his dear mother and told his brothers that they should go after her, but they were too lazy and careless to do so. So, he left the house alone and started the journey of his lifetime.

He went looking for his mother all over the county. In a distant village, he found some villagers who had seen a few days ago a woman whose description matched Nestor's mother. They showed him fresh traces of a horse and Nestor began to follow them. After following them for a while, Nestor saw a river and decided to drink some water. Next to the river there was a large pile of red, orange and yellow leaves and Nestor decided to rest his feet for a moment.

As he tried to sit down, Nestor felt his body sink into what was actually a pit covered by the leaves, but it was too late. He fell into the darkness. Nestor landed softly on some sort of a net and tried to look around, but it was completely dark down there. Nestor's heart was pounding. He sensed someone entering the space.

The stranger lit a torch. Nestor couldn't distinguish any features, as the figure had covered its face and body with a long frayed fabric. He could only see the stranger's eyes.

'Hey you there, can you help me out of this net, please?' Nestor asked.

'And why would I do that?' the stranger laughed. 'If you want to get out of it, you have to solve my riddle.' Nestor was stunned.

'I'm on my way to save my mother, could you just let me out, please!' Nestor answered, desperately.

'Answer my riddle and I'll help you.'

The mysterious shadow had the voice of a young lady, but Nestor felt that there was something evil, maybe not even human, coming out of her.

'I suppose I don't have any other choice...' Nestor sighed, resigned.

'When I'm young I'm tall, when I'm old I'm short. Even though I shine with life, a breath can wipe me out. What am I?' the girl said.

'Hmm, could it be a flame?' Nestor muttered to himself after a few seconds.



'I know! It's a candle!' Nestor finally exclaimed, with a triumphant air.

'Oh no, that's correct...' the ghostly creature admitted reluctantly. As promised, she freed Nestor from the net.

'Follow me!' she said as she walked towards a dark staircase.

Nestor hesitated for a moment but then ran after her.

After walking for a while, they arrived in the gaols of the castle.

There, Nestor saw his mother sitting behind bars. Nestor turned back. The creature had removed her veil. Nestor held back a fearful scream in front of this vision of horror. She was staring at him with a grim smile fixed on her deformed face. He then realized that she was the beast, who had captured his mother.

'Let my mother out!' Nestor shouted.

'I have one condition' the Beast said with a mischievous expression on her face.

'Nestor, you answered my riddle correctly, so I'll release either one of you.

But the question is: which one of you goes home and which one stays with me,' the Beast said maliciously.

Nestor looked at his mother and said: 'Mother, your two other sons need you... And I'm young and strong, I can stay.' Before Sarah could even voice a protest, the Beast opened the cell where she was imprisoned, grabbed Nestor's hand and started to drag him down the dark corridor. Nestor watched his mother crying at the threshold of her cell until he could only see a dark corridor with large oak doors. When the Beast opened the door, Nestor gasped. He was facing a huge room, at least three times the size of his home, with a welcoming bed in the middle and even a small balcony outside. Nestor felt relieved to see his detention conditions would not be as bad as he thought. However, he couldn't help but feel disappointed that there was not a single book in the room.

'You live here now' the Beast said, slamming the doors shut. Nestor heard the Beast lock the door. Exhausted, he lay down on the bed and fell immediately asleep.

Next morning, Nestor got up and walked to the balcony. He heard the door open and the Beast stepped in.

'I want you to clean the castle from top to bottom, but I strictly forbid you to go into my bedroom!' the Beast commanded, throwing a broom, a bucket and a mop at his feet.

Nestor obeyed and went into the hallway. He began to polish the frames of the paintings on the wall and, a few hours later, he was in front of the Beast's room.



Nestor remembered what the Beast had said about her room, but his curiosity won and he decided to have a look inside.

The room was dark, cluttered, and it looked like it hadn't been cleaned for years.

'Maybe the Beast will treat me a little more favorably if I clean her room' Nestor wondered aloud. Nestor started wiping the windows. The dirt left easily and light flooded into the room. Something glittered in Nestor's eyes and caught his attention. On the table near the bed there was a large leather-covered book, the golden edges of which glistened in the sunlight once he had dusted it.

Nestor loved books so much that he couldn't resist the temptation. He glanced back to be sure the Beast wasn't there and opened the book carefully. He had imagined an adventure story or a book full of magic formulas, but he could not have figured out what the book actually contained. The book had recorded all the events of the castle, even the tiniest events and movements of the Beast.

The last sentence of the book was: 'The Beast enters her bedroom'. Nestor froze.

'I told you very clearly that this was a boundary you were forbidden to cross! Get out of my room, you snoop!' the Beast screamed, outraged. Nestor hurried out of the room.

'Maybe she is not that wicked after all...maybe there is even some kindness behind all this cruelty...' Nestor thought, a few hours later, realising that the so-called Beast had not done anything more to chase him away, even though he had shamelessly broken the only rule she had explicitly given him. So Nestor decided to do his best to make amends and left a letter of apology on her doorstep.

Although she did not answer him back, the Beast progressively gave Nestor more freedom over the following weeks. She became more trusting and began to show a brighter side of her personality. Not only was she capable of being nice, but she was also very intelligent and had the finest sense of humour. Gradually Nestor began to feel sympathy for her... and even some affection.

One day, while they were having dinner, Nestor finally dared to ask the Beast about the book he had seen in her bedroom weeks ago.

'I've been wondering...' Nestor began, 'I know I shouldn't have snooped in your stuff and I apologize for that again... But maybe things would be easier for both of us if I could understand you better... Would you explain to me what the book in your room is and why you are guarding it so carefully?' Nestor asked.

She sighed and looked at Nestor.



'I knew this moment would come' she admitted with some pain in her voice.

'Well...I used to be a joyful and brilliant princess and I lived in a huge palace with my family and countless servants. One day, one of my father's courtiers tried to seduce me. As I rejected him, he asked my father for my hand in marriage. I refused, because I didn't love him... Then, to punish me, this man, who was in fact a sorcerer, cast a spell on me... he turned me into the monstrous beast that I have been ever since.

He told me that since I had refused him my love, I deserved to suffer like him... so that I would understand what it felt like to be rejected. And he was right. Almost the whole court deserted the palace within a few days. Even my parents left, ashamed to have a daughter as ugly as me. My closest friends stayed by my side at first but... I was so convinced that they would also abandon me sooner or later that I preferred to become a beast to scare them away. It was less painful than being abandoned by them... This wicked man left me a book that would record all the events of the castle, including my good and bad deeds. He told me that I should find true love before the pages of the book ran out, or I would remain a beast forever.'

Nestor was listening carefully in silence, shattered. He was revolted by the cruelty of this sorcerer. He understood that the real beast was the sorcerer, who was all evil inside, not the young woman standing in front of him, no matter her physical appearance. He was overwhelmed by empathy for her. Who would not become mistrustful and even embittered after suffering such injustice?



The young woman spoke again:

'I don't have much time left, the book is about to come to an end... At this rate, in about three days, it will be over... I will forever remain this hideous creature, whom no one will be able to love...'

'Don't despair...there may be a solution...maybe we could add more pages to the book to give you more time?'

'Really? You would do that for me?'

'Of course, after all that happened to you, you deserve to be listened to and supported... I could try to get more pages in the book. I could go and search for them at my home.' Nestor suggested.

'Thank you, but you need to go quickly. If you don't come back in time, I'll be doomed forever' the Beast warned.

'I won't disappoint you!' Nestor shouted while he was already running towards the castle doors. Suddenly he stopped, he turned and looked at her.

'Hem.. What's your name? You do have a name, don't you?' he asked.

'Well, before... you know, before what this man did to me, everybody used to call me Victoria' she said hesitantly.

'I will be back as fast as I can, Victoria!'

After getting out, Nestor took one of Victoria's horses and started riding home at full speed. There he would definitely find books, he had a lot, to add pages to the magic book.

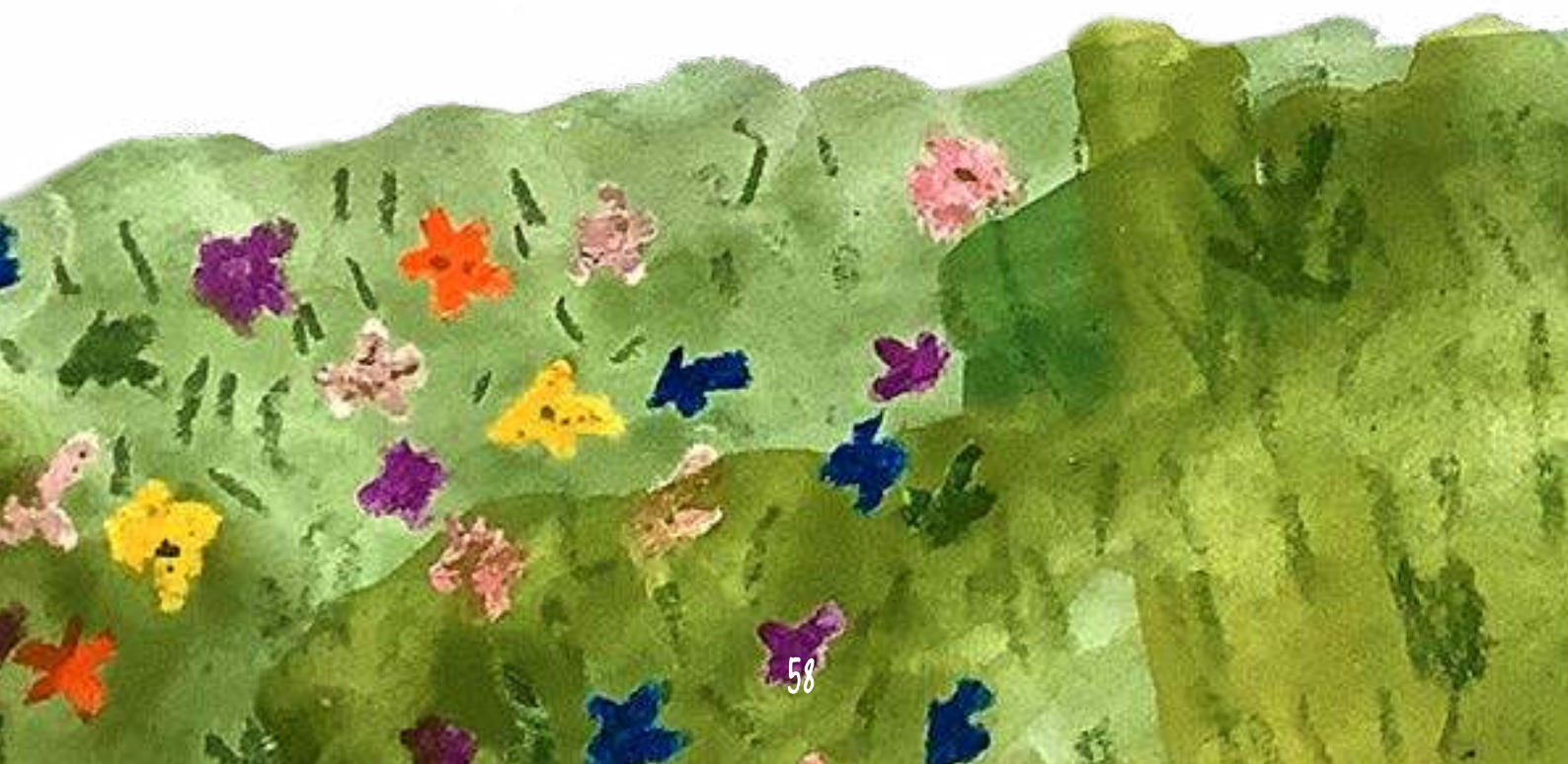
Before he left, Victoria had given him some magic glasses. Thanks to this device, he could see what was happening in the tower and know when to return. Nestor promised her that he would be back as soon as possible with a solution to help her out.

When he arrived at his house, he found his brothers busy preparing for their weddings. They were very happy about Nestor's return and admired his horse. His mother, who had been worried sick, burst into tears. Her beloved son was back, away from that disgusting monster and close to her. Besides, he was back just in time for his two brothers' weddings and could even help with the preparations.

In the morning, when Nestor woke up, he immediately put on the glasses that the Beast had given him and saw her in a very bad condition. Lying next to the magic book, she was barely breathing. Eventually, her time was much shorter than expected. Nestor had to act, and to act fast.

He quickly got ready and picked up as many books as he could fit in his bags. He took his favorite book with him, a very rare edition of Homer's *Odyssey* that he had tried hard to find and had spent much of his savings on. He ran to say goodbye to his mother: 'But she's a beast! Why on earth would you go back to this dreadful place?!' she told him, puzzled and panicked. 'No, mother, she is not a beast, she is a young woman who was treated unfairly. Because of a bad person, her life changed dramatically and she tried to face her new reality on her own. But she has a good heart and I have to help her', Nestor replied.

Although she did not fully understand, Sarah decided to trust her son and gave him her blessing.



Leaving the house, however, he had to face his brothers who were arguing over who would take his horse. For the first time in his life, Nestor, angry and anguished, separated his brothers and shouted at them: 'Someone is in danger. I don't have time to argue with you. I must leave now!' he said.

'But she is an ugly and brutal beast', they told him. 'Why do you even care?'

Nestor looked at them furiously and as they saw their brother like this for the first time, they ran, brought the horse and helped him with his bags to set off even though they still did not understand their brother's whim.

As soon as Nestor got on his horse, he set off at full gallop.









Throughout the trip he put on his magic glasses again and again to make sure Victoria was still alive.

There was not much time left...

When he arrived in front of the castle, he dismounted his horse and ran up the stairs two at a time, until he reached the tower where Victoria was lying on the floor. After checking her pulse, he rushed to the magic book with his bag full of books. He threw all the books on the floor and tried to match their pages with those of the magic book. None of them fitted. While he was at the height of his anguish, he grabbed the last book in the pile, his favorite. And miraculously, the pages matched. No sooner had he placed them in the book than they merged with it and their ink was poured out, leaving them completely blank. Without thinking twice, he began to tear all of its pages and stick them into the magic book. These also immediately turned blank as new.



However, he quickly noticed that the pages were being written again in the book. He stopped in agony and saw that the thoughts and feelings of the unfortunate woman were being written. He realized that she loved him for who he was, just as he loved her for who she truly was. And then the book stopped being written. Its last sentence was: *The magic spell has become undone.*

He looked back and saw the young woman who had become human again and ran to her. He hugged her and together they started making plans for their common future.

Within a short time, the castle came back to life. Everything was bright and joyful voices could be heard from everywhere. Their relatives came to celebrate the wedding and Victoria was able to reconcile with her parents and friends. People came from all over the county, whether to work there, to share their art or to participate in the henceforth famous salons organized by Victoria and Nestor.

The largest room of the castle became a huge library with many books, not only for Nestor but also for anyone from the area who wanted to read inside the library or borrow a book.

In the middle of this library, inside a glass case, there was a very old book that only the young couple knew about. It was opened on its last page.

And they lived happily ever after.





ROCKERELLA



Once upon a time there was a young blonde girl who lived with her royal family in a distant kingdom. Her dream was to travel the world and challenge the royal protocol that required her to stay in the kingdom, to wear dresses in society, to be elegant, refined, gentle and docile. Her father, King Henry Cat, who worshiped cats for their wisdom, of course disagreed with this.

The girl was very fond of rock and football. She wore jeans and modern outfits whenever she could.

In the palace also lived his uncle, his father's brother, who was nicknamed *Prolixus* because every time he spoke we were bored to death, his speeches were so long, superfluous and boring. His sons, John and Alex, also inhabited the kingdom. Both were very jealous of their cousin because she was better than them at everything! Since they didn't like her, they gave her the nickname *Rockerella* because, like we said, she liked rock. Her real name was Caroline, but one day she decided to pull the rug out from under her petty cousins and proudly claim the nickname *Rockerella*.

One day, King Henry Cat became very ill. He was so ill that the doctor said he only had one month to live. But there was perhaps a solution: if someone brave could find the rare flower that grows in a steep canyon, then the king could be saved. This flower, *The Rose of Life*, had a scent that could heal him.

No one except *Rockerella* offered to help. So, without hesitation, she took her dusty old moped and put on her helmet.



But his uncle Prolixus, learning that Rockerella had gone in search of the flower, immediately sent his sons, John and Alex, to bring her back. They managed to stop her before she was going through the last gate that guarded the palace.

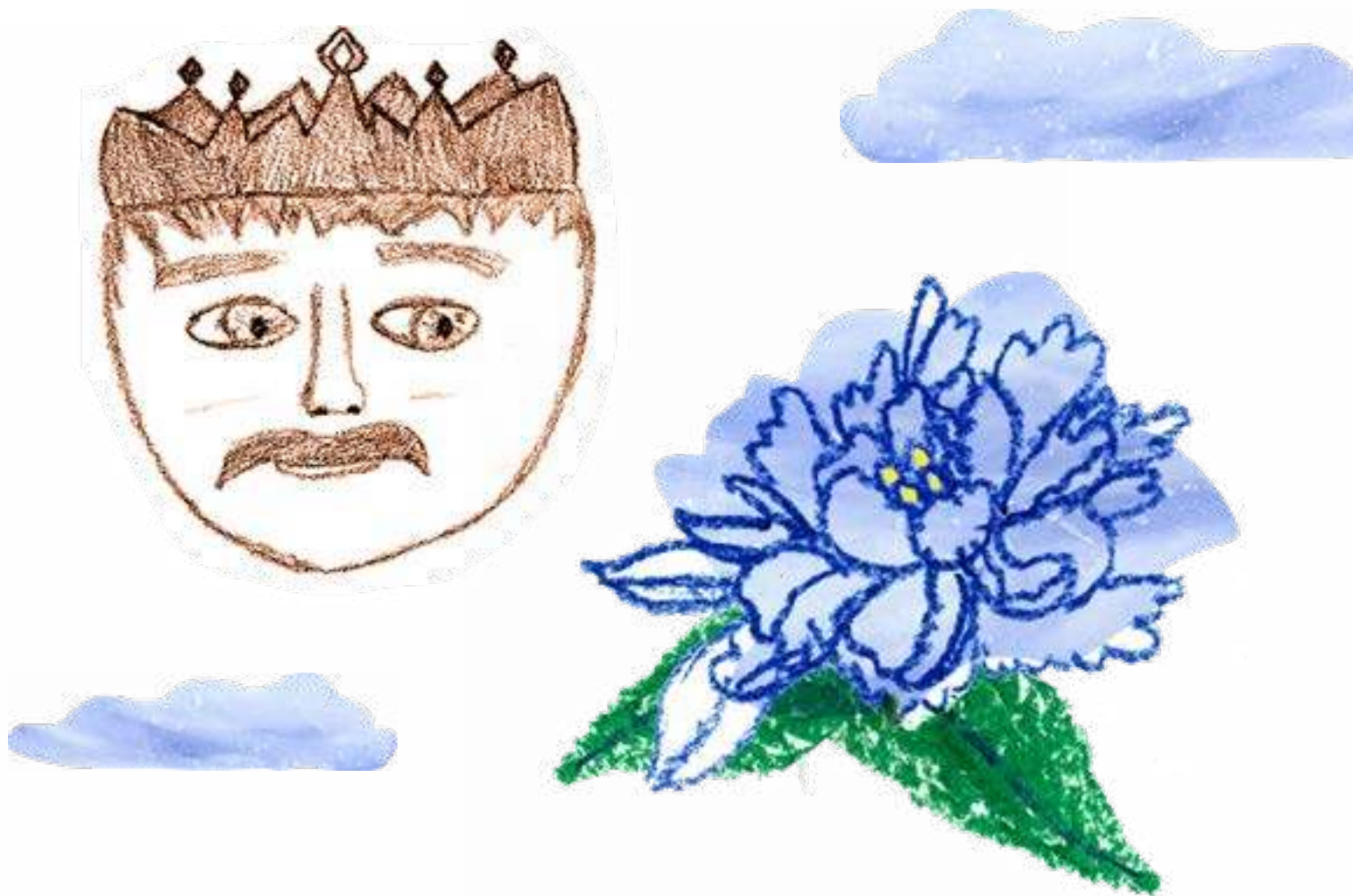
John and Alex took her in front of their father.

'Why did you stop me? Rockerella asked, furious. None of you have been brave enough to go in search of the Rose of Life... so why stopping me from doing it?'

'We couldn't let you go because your mother is very worried. If we had told her that you had gone on an adventure, imagine the extra anguish she would have gone through! Leave it in our hands!', replied Prolixus authoritatively.

Prolixus didn't want anyone to go and get that famous rose, because, actually, he wanted his brother, King Henry Cat, to die: greedy for power, he wanted to become king.





'I want to see my mother,' Rockerella pleaded.

'She stays with your father and doesn't want to be disturbed. That's why it's my responsibility to take care of this problem. And you know, that's the way life is, men are better at handling this kind of business, they are brave, strong, women are nothing but sensitive and whining housewives. We are ambitious and enduring. We know how to fight and...'

Rockerella had stopped listening to that long soporific speech she knew by heart. It didn't even make her angry anymore. But what she didn't know was that her uncle had isolated her parents, and no one could come in contact with them. Besides, no one but him knew where they were.

'Well, my dear niece, I hereby order you to stay in the castle tower room to rest better until we find a solution. Don't worry, all your stuff will be brought there.'

Days went by and Rockerella heard nothing from Prolixus. She asked the guards in charge of her surveillance to take her to his quarters, but they refused.



Rockerella finally realized that her uncle would not send anyone for the Rose of Life. She understood that he was waiting for his father to die in order to take his place on the throne. She wanted to do something but felt trapped and helpless: how could she save him if she couldn't escape from this tower?

One sunny day, as Rockerella was sitting on the balcony, she saw a small ladybird entwined in a spider's web, struggling to break free and panicking at the sight of the terrible tarantula approaching her.

Rockerella pulled the pretty ladybird from the spider web just in time. And suddenly, the ladybird turned into a fairy. She had a very bright and sweet look and wore a silky red dress with black spots and silver shoes adorned with gemstones. Rockerella was speechless.

'I am the ladybird fairy and I know the problem you have, dear Rockerella! To thank you for helping me so kindly, I give you tiny little magic wings. If you're in trouble, you can blow it three times and I'll come to help you. However, you cannot fly with it.

'Thank you, dear fairy, thank you for everything! In case of need, I will call on you!'

The fairy became a ladybird again and flew high in the sky.





The following night, Rockerella decided to escape from the tower where she had been locked in order to finally be able to carry out her quest: finding the Rose of Life.

Her plan was to search for the flower during the night, then return to her tower before the sun rose, so the guards wouldn't suspect anything.

She made a sort of lanyard out of the dresses she no longer wore anyway, took her helmet and descended with the rope thus crafted. She reached the ground, silently walked away from the palace, then breathed three times on the wings the fairy had given her.

'How can I help you, dear Rockerella?' asked the fairy that had just appeared.

Rockerella explained what her plan was and the fairy replied:

'Look, to help you travelling fast, look, I turn your old moped into a nice flying motorcycle. Now it has a powerful engine and a large pair of wings. And I add magic glasses to your helmet, so you can see long distances. Here, I'll give you gloves too. '

The fairy also transformed Rockerella's jacket into a black leather jacket and changed her shoes to a pair of red boots. She thus had nice biker gear that matched perfectly with the pants she was wearing that day.

'Oh, and beware, the fairy added, the wings of your motorbike are no longer magical from midnight to sunrise. So don't waste time. Hurry up!'

The motorcycle was waiting for her.



Rockerella straddled her and jumped when she saw wings protrude and rise into the sky. She headed north.

With her helmet and glasses on, she spotted posters on the edge of a city in a far country. She could read *ROSE OF LIFE - COME MANY*. It also mentioned the time and place of the event.

When she reached the place, Rockerella realized that it was a rock music concert, and that *The Rose of Life* was the name of the band. She knew she had a very important mission to accomplish, but still, she could not help but take: she had dreamed of seeing a rock concert like this for so many years! Because it was too hot in the crowd, Rockerella took off her jacket.

Delighted with the music, she stayed up all night singing and dancing. She befriended an eccentric young woman who happened to share her interests.

Realizing that midnight was approaching, Rockerella fled, put on his leather jacket and raced onto the flying motorcycle, making her way back to the tower chamber just in time. At first, she felt deeply relieved that she had managed to escape the vigilance of the guards, but a sense of guilt soon seized her. Sure, she had enjoyed herself a lot, but she had failed to find the real Rose of Life her father needed so much.



The following night, Rockerella called the fairy back and gave her details of what had happened. She was a little embarrassed. The fairy realized that Rockerella had been torn between her desire to save her father and her desire for some freedom, a freedom she had been deprived of during her whole life. She explained to her that her jacket was actually magical, able to protect her from all kinds of spellbinding, and that it was because she had taken it off that the music had enchanted her. Rockerella did not tell her about the young woman she had met at the concert.

At dawn, she put on her leather suit and red boots, escaped through the window using the same technique as the day before, got on her motorbike and drove off. Putting on her glasses, she headed south.

In another town, she saw another poster that read: *The Rose of Life - Football Championship*. The winners will receive the grand prize *The Rose of Life*.

Rockerella reached the stadium where the final of the football championship was taking place. She decided to stay to watch the game. How surprised she was to run into the girl she had befriended the previous night at the concert!

They watched the final together, Rockerella waiting to see if the prize the winning team would receive was indeed the Rose of Life. What a disappointment she felt when she realized the prize was nothing more than a rose-shaped gold trophy!

Rockerella, upset, headed for the exit. Her new friend realized that she was not feeling well and asked her:

‘Why are you sad, Rockerella? Didn't you like the football game?’

‘Oh yes! A lot! But I thought I would find the real Rose of Life here. You see, my father, King Henry Cat, is in great need of this plant...’

Rockerella told her the whole story. Moved by the trust she had placed in her, the young girl, whose name was Grace, began to tell her own story. She happened to be a princess too, but her father had disowned her for not following the royal protocol and having what he considered to be masculine and popular tastes and attitudes. As she was about to reveal to Rockerella that the Rose of Life was growing in the canyon inside her father's kingdom, Rockerella spotted John and Alex, her cousins. So that they wouldn't find out that she had escaped from the room where she was supposed to be a recluse, she ran as fast as she could to reach her motorbike, without even taking the time to say goodbye to Grace.

Back in the tower a few minutes before midnight, she began to cry. Not only had she failed to find the Rose of Life once again, but she also lost the opportunity to befriend Grace who had so much in common with her. She would probably never see her again. And as if that wasn't enough, she had also lost one of her red boots as she ran away from her cousins.

LA ROSE
DE LA VIE



CHAMPIONNAT
DE
FOOTBALL



But Grace had found Rockerella's shoe. And she was rather determined to help her in her quest, even if that meant facing up to her tyrannical father.

How to find Rockerella? Grace had a zebra-striped lion, named Mappie, which she had received as a gift when she was born. He had the ability to locate anyone wherever around the world. She didn't waste a second and called out to him, snapping her fingers three times.

'Hello Grace,' said Mappie 'it's good to see you again. Where should I take you this time?'

'Hi my little Mappie, can you help me join my friend Rockerella, daughter of King Henry Cat?'

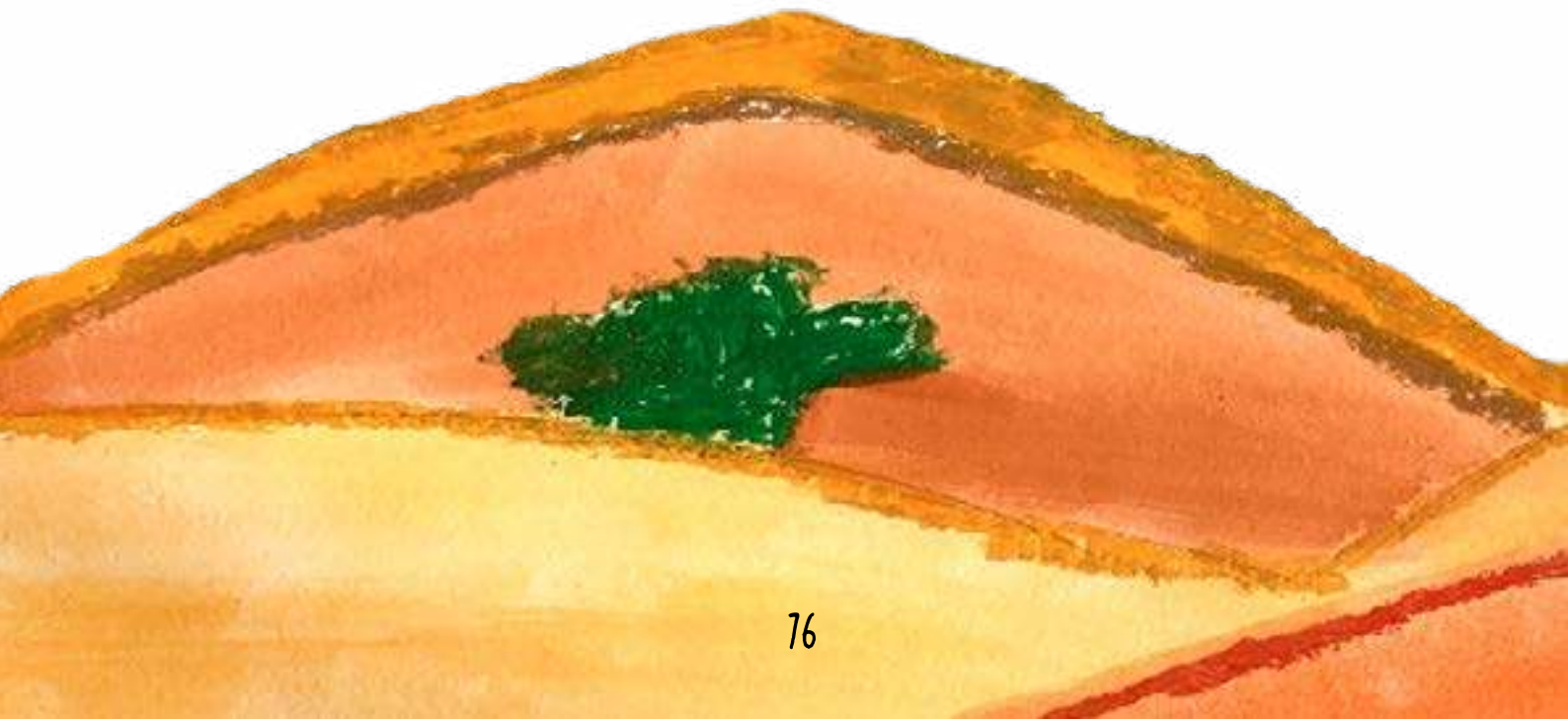
'Okay, get on my back, I'll take you there!'

Together, they crossed a forest, a river and a mountain. Finally, the next morning, they arrived at King Henry Cat's kingdom. Mappie dropped Grace off in front of the palace and left. Suddenly, a ladybird landed on Rockerella's red boot. Immediately she transformed into a fairy. She told Grace where to find Rockerella.

Stunned, Grace wondered who this strange creature was:

'But who are you and how do you know I'm looking for Rockerella?'

'I'm a fairy. Rockerella saved me and you have her boot. I suspect you're here for her. Here is a pair of wings that will allow you to fly to her balcony. Her room is in the castle tower.'



'Thank you very much dear fairy!'

And Grace flew off, then landed discreetly in front of the tower window.

'Oh! Grace! But what are you doing here? Rockerella exclaimed, incredulous, as he saw her new friend popped up at her window.'

'I came to bring you your boot back and explain to you where the Rose of Life is.'

'Oh, thank you very much, Grace! I'm so happy to have this shoe back, Rockerella said, confused, as he pulled on both of her boots. But, what you tell me surprises me: do you really know where this famous flower is?'

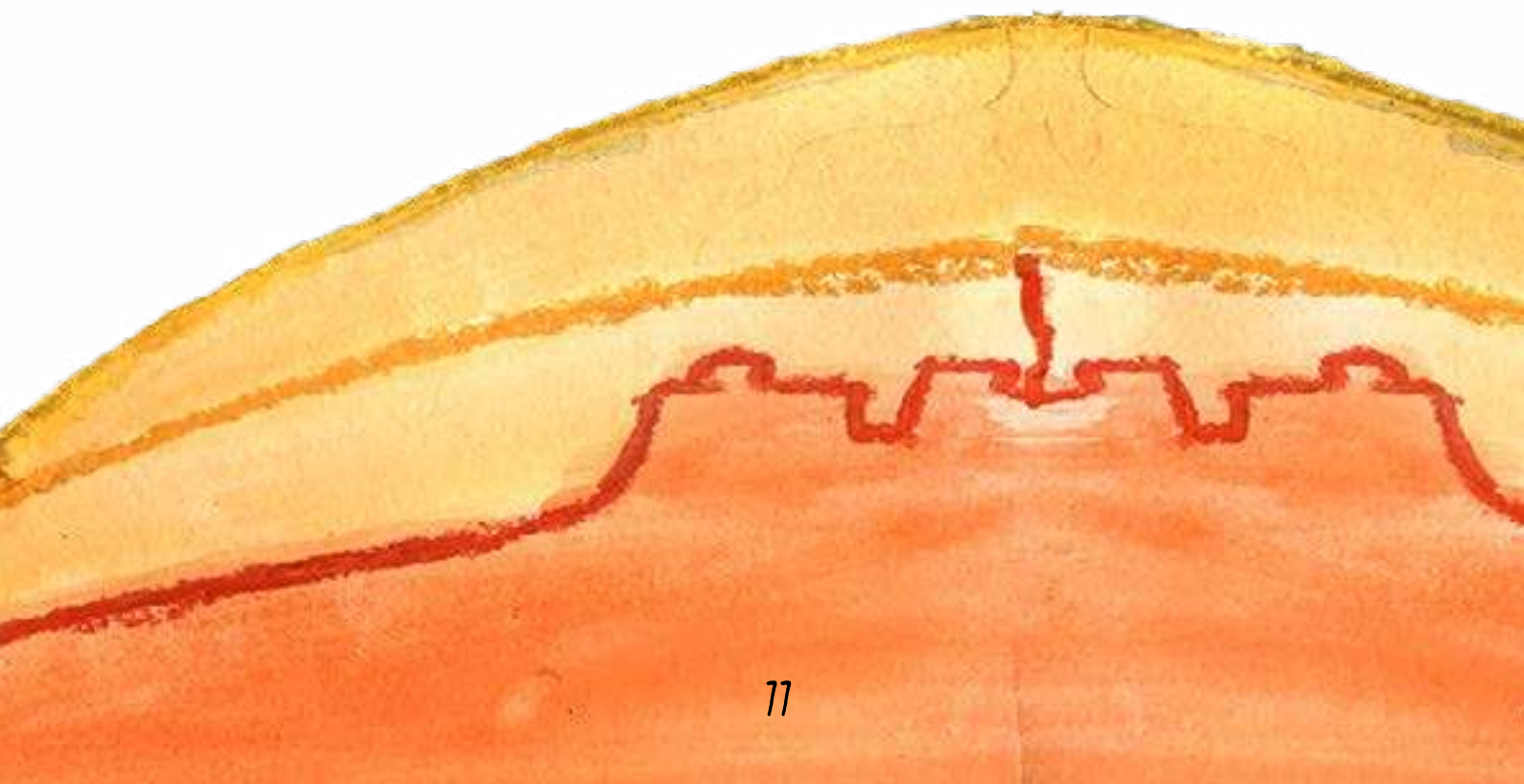
'Yes, it is in the kingdom of my father, Junain.'

'But a kingdom is huge! Do you have more details?'

'I just know it's growing somewhere in the canyon of this kingdom.'

Grace hugged her friend and they both flew to Rockerella's motorbike and set off. The journey to reach the kingdom of Junain was long, but, luckily the bike was going fast and had wings.

They faced a terrible storm, torrential rains, and the engine made loops. Rockerella almost lost control of the vehicle but she mastered the driving of her motorcycle perfectly.



Finally, thanks to her glasses, Rockerella saw a castle. They landed, took a small road, and left the motorbike on the side of a path behind a bush. Cautiously, discreetly, they approached the entrance to the kingdom and hid behind a huge oak tree. They saw two guards watching.

Rockerella had an idea. She took a Y shaped stick on which she hung her scrunchies. She found a large stone and explained her plan to Grace who understood it immediately. The latter also took a stick, placed her rubber bands on it, and a second slingshot was built. She also unearthed a large stone.

They got into position to shoot and shouted 'Hi!' to the guards, who, surprised, walked towards the tree, but did not see the two girls. When they were close enough, the girls fired and knocked them out. Quickly, they undressed them and put on their clothes to go unnoticed: they absolutely must not run into Junain, or be captured by other potential guards. Afterwards, they reached the canyon located just behind the castle. There, they saw a huge trap formed by a huge hole covered with a strange plant that Grace knew well, as a fine connoisseur of nature: it was white bursage, a grass also called Ambrosia Dumosa, which grows in the deserts. Through the net formed by this plant, one could distinguish small cactuses whose spines were only waiting for a fleshy posterior to spur!

As they did not know where exactly the Rose of Life was in this vast territory, they decided to use this trap to deceive Junain and make him believe that someone had been captured. They looked for a big rock and threw it into the pit. This set off a funny alarm. Quickly, they hid behind a huge prickly pear cactus.

Worried by the alarm, Junain left his castle and approached the trap. He looked into the hole but he only saw a rock. Nervous, he turned around, but saw no one. He wanted to check one last time and leaned in a little more. That's when the girls came out behind him and pushed him into the hole.

'Ouch, it stings!' Yelled Junain.

'Hello dad! It's Grace.'

'Oh, my daughter, is that you? I didn't recognize you. I missed you so much darling' he said, pulling the thorns off his butt.'

'If you only knew how sorry I am for rejecting you. I didn't realize what you needed and have since realized how wrong I was. How can I be forgiven?' He said in a tone that left no doubt about his sincerity. The old king was truly repentant.

'Well, dear father, here's a timely apology,' Grace replied, moved. 'We seek, Rockerella and I, the Rose of Life to save her father, King Henry Cat. He is very ill. I know it grows in your canyon. Can you help us locate it precisely?'

'Yes, I will guide you to the Rose. But what a pity! You will not be able to pick it.

Presumably, according to legend, only someone wearing the red boots of a so-called Ladybird fairy can gather this flower. Otherwise, the one who touches the rose bush or the petals of its flowers dies on the spot...'

'That's good timing! Rockerella exclaimed happily. I happen to wear these precise boots!'

With her wings, Grace picked up her father and pulled him out of the trap. Although his butt ached, he guided them to the rose bush. Rockerella picked the most beautiful flowers without any problem.

Grace thanked Junain for helping them. The girls hurried back to King Henry Cat's castle with Rockerella's motorcycle, to prevent the roses from starting to fade.

But how to locate where her father was isolated?



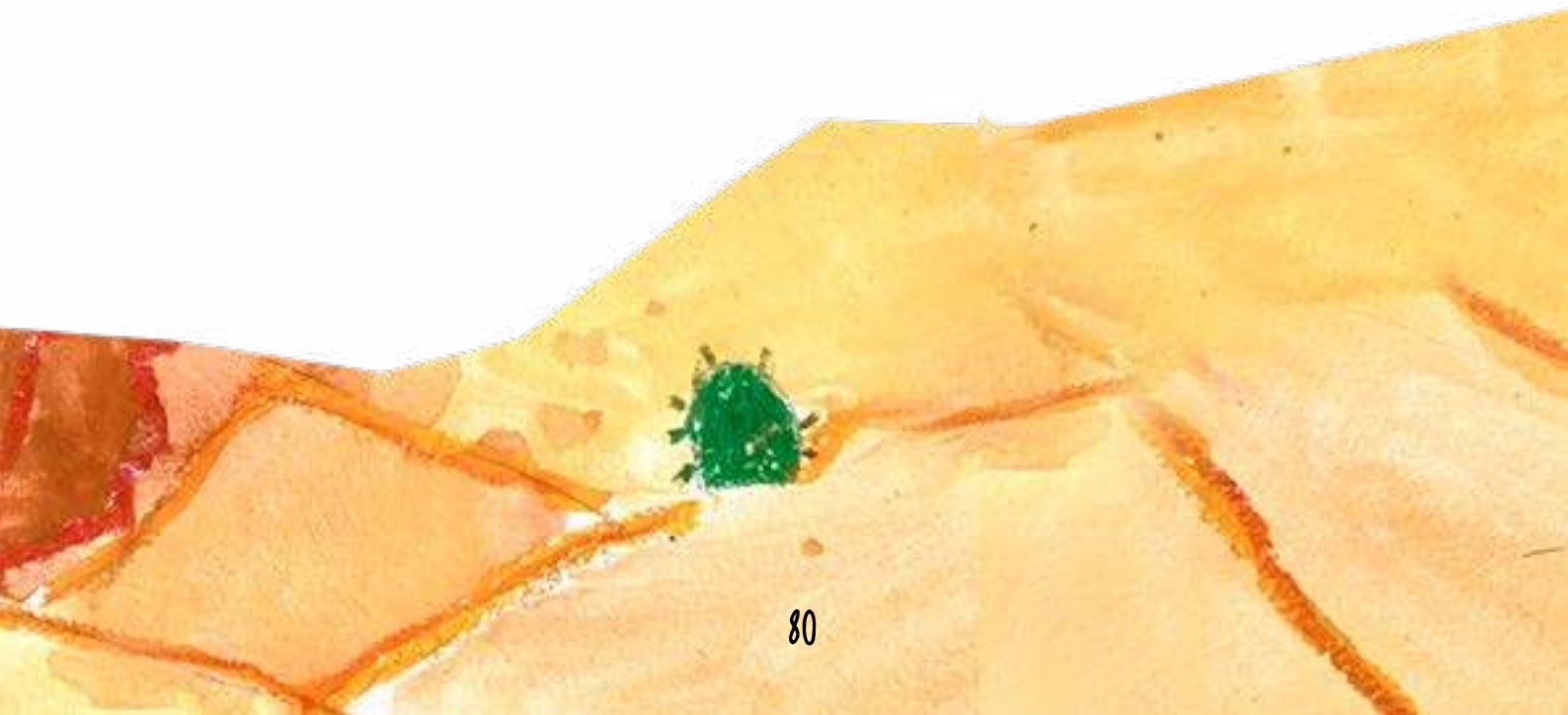
Grace called Mappie back and asked him to locate Rockerella's father. The lion explained that he was in the dungeons of the castle.

While Grace occupied the uncle with a far-fetched story pretending to be a gold digger, Rockerella was able to go down to the dungeons without being caught by her cousins, too busy having fun behind the castle. She found her father lying on the ground, about to die. He was hardly breathing. Her mother, crying, on her knees and bent over him, raised her head when she saw Rockerella. She jumped on her neck, relieved to find her daughter back.

Quickly, Rockerella crouched down and let her father smell the Rose of Life. Instantly, he came back to life. Rockerella told her parents that Prolixus had locked her in the castle tower and his goal was to ascend the throne. She also related the adventures that had allowed her to come and save them. But they didn't have time to talk, now they had to get to Grace and her uncle quickly.

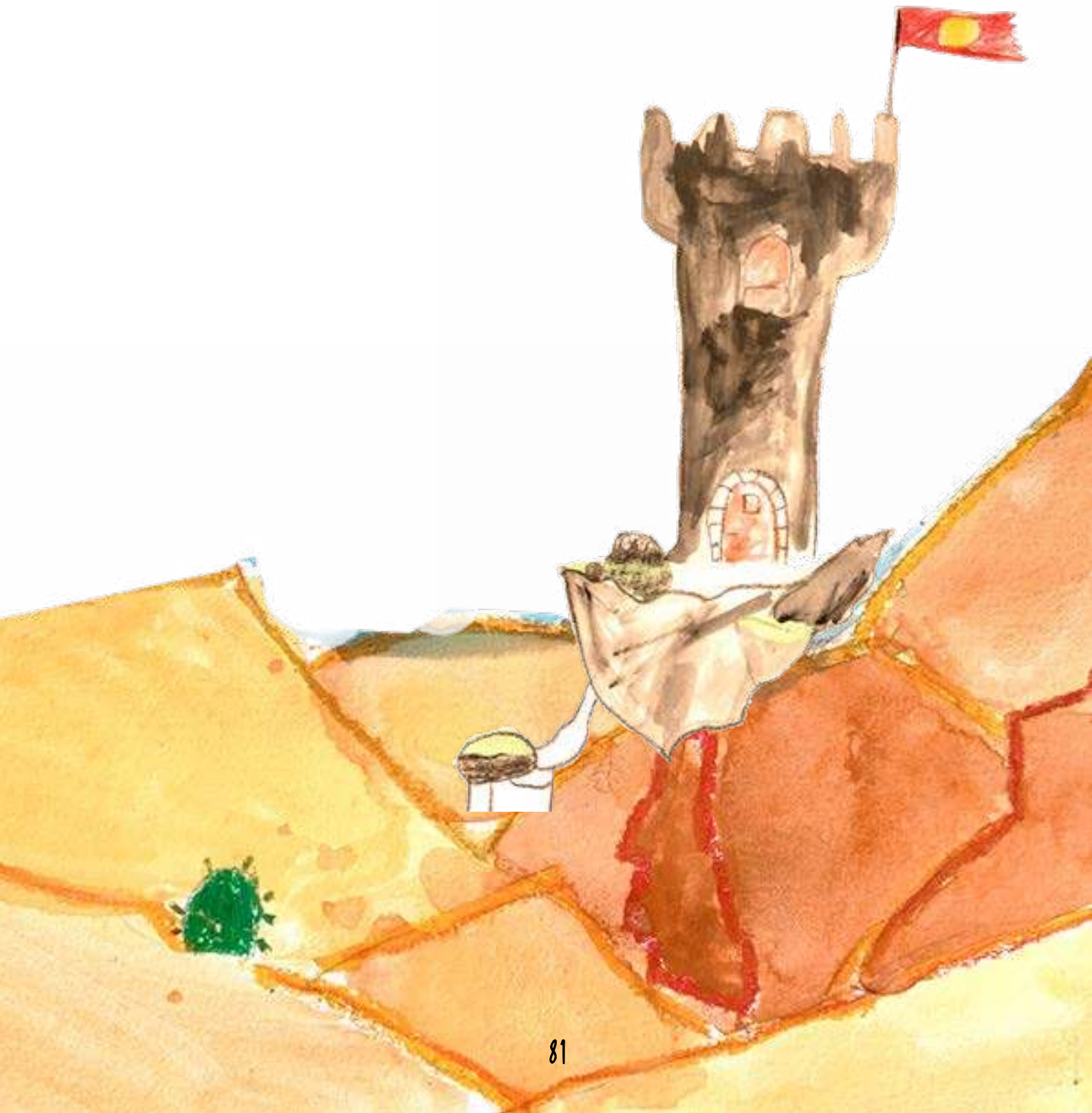
In the twilight, thinking he saw the ghost of his brother and not understanding how Rockerella and her mother could be together in front of him, Prolixus stepped back with a look of dread. Terrified, he ran out of the castle, called his sons, and they fled the kingdom together without a backward glance.

From that day on, they were never heard from again.



Proud of their daughter, of what she had achieved, Henry Cat and his wife decided to crown her. She was much better able to lead this kingdom than they were.

Of course, Grace and Rockerella kept in touch. Indeed, Grace had become the queen of the Kingdom of Junain, who had also been dazzled by her daughter's heroic deeds.



And the two of them introduced a new vision of the world, a new way of living, in which girls could travel, love rock music, play soccer, make their own life choices, dress the way they wanted to, and do so in complete freedom and without any judgement.



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Students from schools in Finland, France, Greece and Romania present the classic texts of Snow White, The Sleeping Beauty, The Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella.

This rewriting invites us to reflect on the status and place of girls and boys in our societies.

Wood-Brown, Active Alexandra, Nestor and the Beast, Rockerella do not hesitate to shake up prevailing ideas.

Are there gender roles? Do girls have to be gentle, kind and fragile and boys brutal, insensitive and strong?

What possibilities do we have of achieving equality and social justice?

This is the challenge of this wonderful book of tales, to read and reread with children.

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