

The Evening Star and the Morning Star

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Long ago there lived a king who had a son who was naughty and mischievous. One day the son was playing at the gates of the palace shooting stones from his catapult, when an old woman carrying a heavy pitcher of water passed by. The boy shot a stone right through her pitcher and all the water poured out, and the old woman turned to the boy and said:

“May you wander all over the earth, and find no peace until you get to the immortal kingdom and even there may you know no peace, no rest.”

The boy returned to the palace, but he soon became restless and sad and wanted to go out into the wide world to find the immortal kingdom. Nobody could stop him from going. He took a change of clothes, sword and a staff and he set off.

He walked along one road, then along another, past one village and then another until he came to the edge of a great wood and met a hermit and he asked him the way. The hermit advised him:

“Go through this dense, dark forest. There you will meet many wild beasts, and be sure to greet each one. You will then come to a dragon lying with his head on the threshold of a palace, greet him too and he will let you pass. There you will be told where to go further.”

The king’s son did as he had been told. While in the forest he greeted every bird, beast and insect and at last he came to the palace.

A dragon lay before the palace with his head on the threshold. The king’s son bowed low and said:

“Good day, dragon bold with your scales of gold!”

The dragon was very pleased and moved his head aside and said:

“If you hadn’t greeted me, I would have killed you on the spot.”

The prince stepped over the threshold and answered:

“If you had attacked me I would have made you into mincemeat.”

The king’s son entered the palace and saw an old man, as old as the world.



“What wind has brought you here, my brave lad?”

“I am looking for the immortal kingdom.”

“It is very far away, my fine fellow, very far indeed. Nobody has ever been there and nobody knows the way. But since you greeted all my creatures, I will give you this ball of golden thread. Follow it wherever it rolls and it will show you the way.” The prince bade him farewell, threw the ball on the ground, and it began to roll along over hills, through valleys and across deserts. As it rolled, it left behind a thin gold thread like a spider’s web.

So the prince walked for a long time until at last he came to an oak tree and stopped to rest in the shade of its great branches. By chance he sat on an acorn and feeling the weight the acorn asked:

“Who are you, my fine fellow and where are you going?”

“I am a king’s son and I am going to the immortal kingdom where I shall live forever.”

“Well, don’t sit on me, for I have only just sprouted. Let me grow, and if you like you can stay here with me until I grow up into a thick strong tree. When I tumble down at last and the swallows bathe in my dust, only then your end will come.”

The king’s son gently covered the acorn with soil to help it grow, bade it farewell and went on his way. He walked again for a long time until he came to a vine overloaded with grapes. The young fellow stopped for a rest and ate some of the grapes. After he had eaten, the vine asked him:

“Where are you going, my fine young fellow?”

“I am going to the immortal kingdom where I shall live forever.”

Then the vine said:

“Bury one of the grape seeds in the ground so that it will grow and bare fruits. If you like you can stay here, and you’ll live until the vine grows so big that the roots will have no place under the earth and the leaves will have no place under the sun. As long as you are here you can drink wine and eat grapes.”

The young lad buried a grape seed in the ground and said:

“Thank you, vine. Grow and multiply, but I will go further.”

The king’s son went on and soon he found a wounded eagle, and stretched his bow to shoot, but the eagle said:

“Don’t shoot. Cure and nurse me and I’ll be of great help to you. When you get into any trouble just think of me and I’ll fly to you.”

The king’s son nursed the eagle, dressed its wounds and went on his way.

Shortly after he came to the sea. Walking along the shore he saw something shiny and white before him. As the waves rolled back he saw the king of the fishes left lying on the hot sand, basking in the sun. He was twelve paces long and as tall as a man with silver fins and golden scales. Nobody had seen such a wonder before.

The prince said:

“Oh, what a tasty feast I shall make of this fish.”

But the fish answered:

“If you eat me you won’t get one little bit further. It would be better to take me to the deeper water and set me free.

Whenever you need me, think of me, and I’ll be at your service.”

The lad heaved the fish into deeper waters and then he went on his way, further and further.

Then at last he saw a fox being chased by some hounds. He was all bitten and out of breath. The prince stretched his bow to shoot the fox but the fox said:

“My fine fellow, don’t kill me. Save me from the hounds, heal my wounds and maybe someday I shall help you.”

The king’s son drove off the hounds and took the fox and protected him until he was well again.

When they parted the fox said:

“If you are ever in trouble, think of me and I’ll be beside you.”

The king’s son set out again, the golden ball of thread was growing smaller and smaller. He walked and walked until he came to an elm tree with two trunks. Between them stretched a cobweb. A mosquito was struggling there. When the mosquito saw the king’s son it cried:

“My fine young fellow, save me. I know you are going to the immortal kingdom and if you help me you won’t be sorry.”

The prince, hearing these words, stopped and took the mosquito from the spider’s web and let it go.

“Thank you, traveller, for your kindness. When you are in need just think of me and I will fly to you. You haven’t got much further to go. When you reach the palace go straight to the king and ask him for his youngest daughter’s hand in marriage, because you cannot rule over the kingdom without her.”

The king’s son went further and as he went the ball of thread became as small as an apple, then as small as a nut, and when it became as small as a pea, the king’s son saw the most beautiful palace with gilded towers. It was without a doubt the most beautiful palace in the world.

The prince went straight up to the palace and knocked at the gate and asked to see the king. When the king stood before him he said:

“Your Highness, I have come to ask you to let me marry your younger daughter. Do you agree to my proposal?”

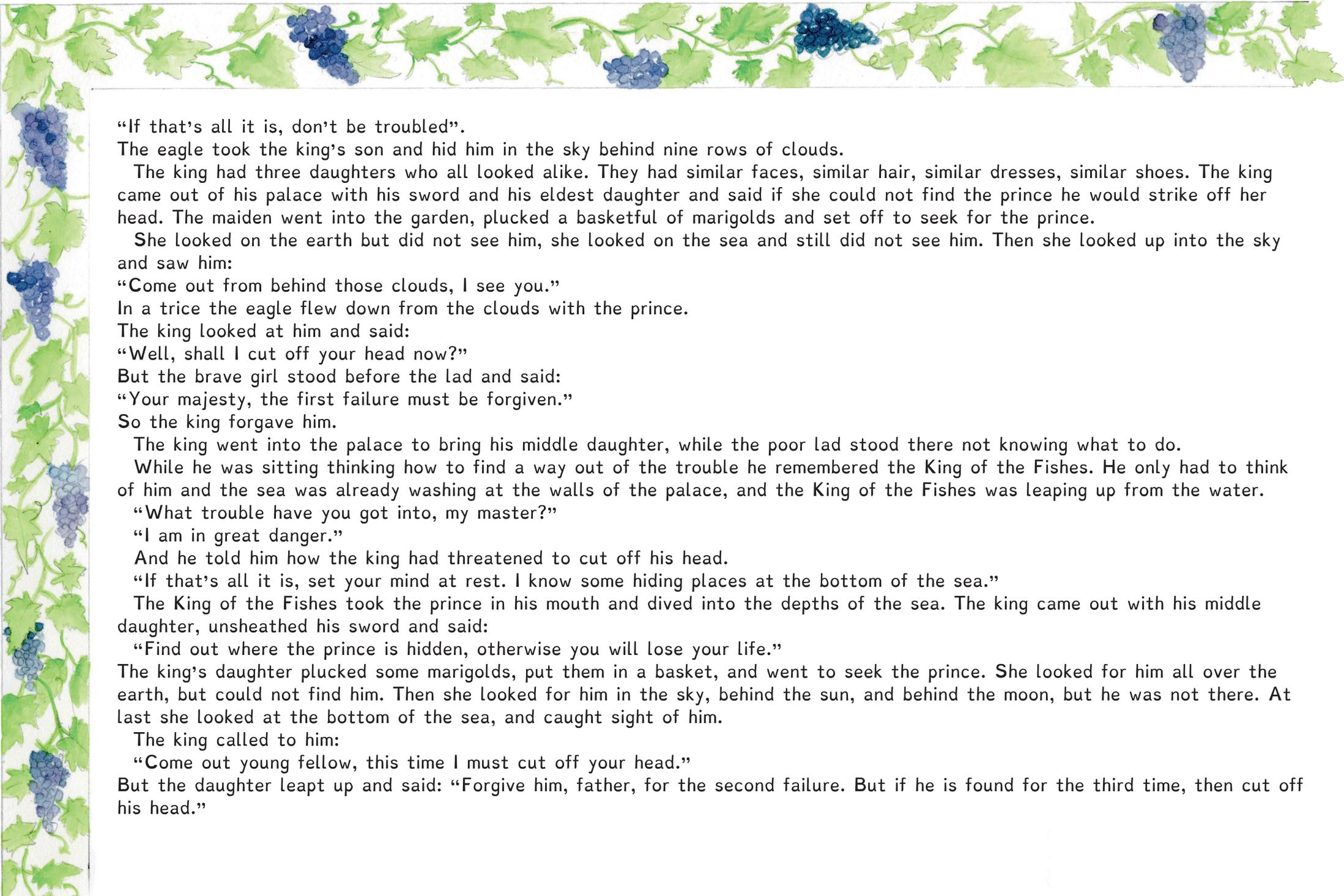
“Why not? I’ll give you my daughter as your bride, if you can hide so nobody can find you.”

The poor fellow became sad because he didn’t know how to hide so he could not be found. He sat down to think when he remembered the eagle. In a twinkling of an eye the eagle was at his side.

“What has grieved you so, my master?”

And the fellow told the eagle his troubles.





“If that’s all it is, don’t be troubled”.

The eagle took the king’s son and hid him in the sky behind nine rows of clouds.

The king had three daughters who all looked alike. They had similar faces, similar hair, similar dresses, similar shoes. The king came out of his palace with his sword and his eldest daughter and said if she could not find the prince he would strike off her head. The maiden went into the garden, plucked a basketful of marigolds and set off to seek for the prince.

She looked on the earth but did not see him, she looked on the sea and still did not see him. Then she looked up into the sky and saw him:

“Come out from behind those clouds, I see you.”

In a trice the eagle flew down from the clouds with the prince.

The king looked at him and said:

“Well, shall I cut off your head now?”

But the brave girl stood before the lad and said:

“Your majesty, the first failure must be forgiven.”

So the king forgave him.

The king went into the palace to bring his middle daughter, while the poor lad stood there not knowing what to do.

While he was sitting thinking how to find a way out of the trouble he remembered the King of the Fishes. He only had to think of him and the sea was already washing at the walls of the palace, and the King of the Fishes was leaping up from the water.

“What trouble have you got into, my master?”

“I am in great danger.”

And he told him how the king had threatened to cut off his head.

“If that’s all it is, set your mind at rest. I know some hiding places at the bottom of the sea.”

The King of the Fishes took the prince in his mouth and dived into the depths of the sea. The king came out with his middle daughter, unsheathed his sword and said:

“Find out where the prince is hidden, otherwise you will lose your life.”

The king’s daughter plucked some marigolds, put them in a basket, and went to seek the prince. She looked for him all over the earth, but could not find him. Then she looked for him in the sky, behind the sun, and behind the moon, but he was not there. At last she looked at the bottom of the sea, and caught sight of him.

The king called to him:

“Come out young fellow, this time I must cut off your head.”

But the daughter leapt up and said: “Forgive him, father, for the second failure. But if he is found for the third time, then cut off his head.”

“Very well”, said the king. “I forgive you for my daughter’s sake. But if you are found for the third time, then you will tread no more on the green grass.”

Now the prince was really frightened and his heart went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat in his breast and he thought who could help him now, and hide him so well so as not to be found by the king’s youngest daughter. While he was moaning to himself, he remembered the fox, and just as the thought appeared in his mind the fox stood by his side.

“Why are you moaning, my master?”

“Well, listen what has happened...”

“Be calm! Don’t moan and give way to sorrow for such a thing. There is no reason to become gloomy. If things have come to that, follow me. I know what to do!”

The fox went ahead and the prince followed him, until they came to the flower garden. There the fox turned round, struck the prince with his tail, and he turned into a beautiful marigold.

The king’s youngest daughter went into the flower garden, and plucked just that very marigold, because she liked it best and put it in her basket. Then the king came out of his palace with his sword unsheathed and called to his daughter and commanded her to find the prince or he would cut off her head.

The princess looked on the earth, but he wasn’t there. She looked on the sea, but he wasn’t there either. Then she looked into the sky but she didn’t see him there. She looked once more into the depths of the earth, the sea and the sky, among the stars and even further still, but he was nowhere to be seen. Then the king said:

“Look better, you are hiding him!”

The princess answered:

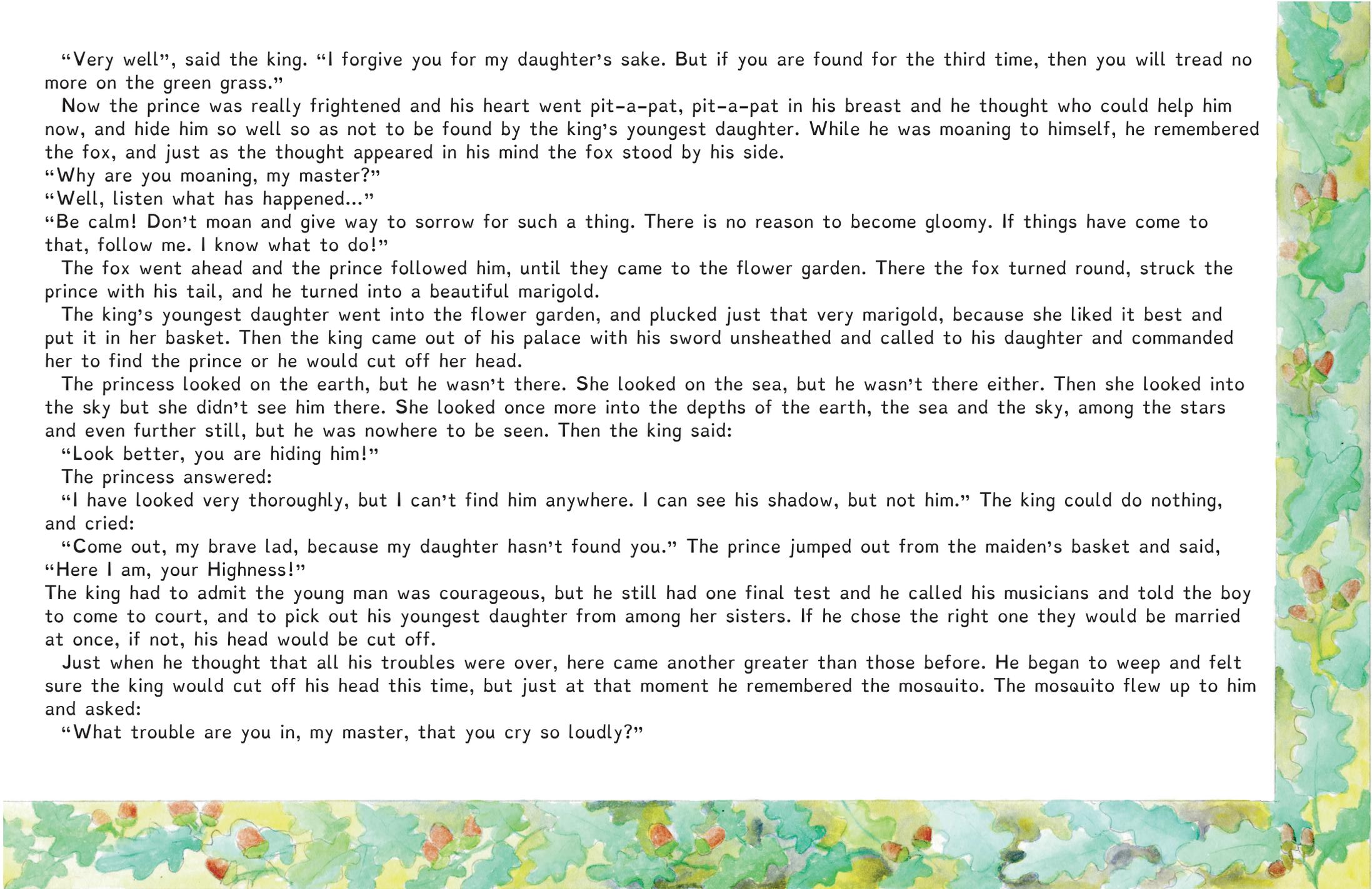
“I have looked very thoroughly, but I can’t find him anywhere. I can see his shadow, but not him.” The king could do nothing, and cried:

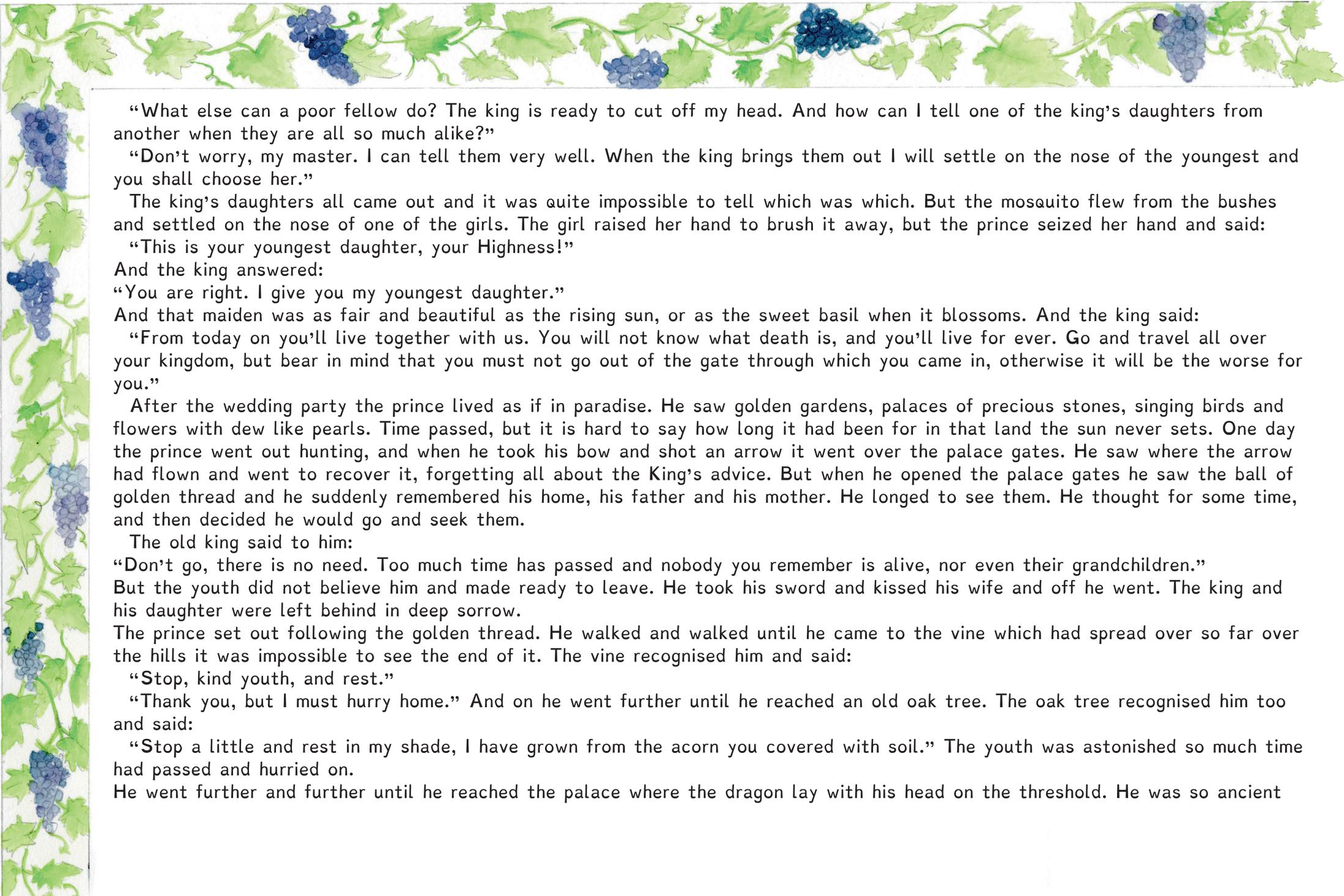
“Come out, my brave lad, because my daughter hasn’t found you.” The prince jumped out from the maiden’s basket and said, “Here I am, your Highness!”

The king had to admit the young man was courageous, but he still had one final test and he called his musicians and told the boy to come to court, and to pick out his youngest daughter from among her sisters. If he chose the right one they would be married at once, if not, his head would be cut off.

Just when he thought that all his troubles were over, here came another greater than those before. He began to weep and felt sure the king would cut off his head this time, but just at that moment he remembered the mosquito. The mosquito flew up to him and asked:

“What trouble are you in, my master, that you cry so loudly?”





“What else can a poor fellow do? The king is ready to cut off my head. And how can I tell one of the king’s daughters from another when they are all so much alike?”

“Don’t worry, my master. I can tell them very well. When the king brings them out I will settle on the nose of the youngest and you shall choose her.”

The king’s daughters all came out and it was quite impossible to tell which was which. But the mosquito flew from the bushes and settled on the nose of one of the girls. The girl raised her hand to brush it away, but the prince seized her hand and said:

“This is your youngest daughter, your Highness!”

And the king answered:

“You are right. I give you my youngest daughter.”

And that maiden was as fair and beautiful as the rising sun, or as the sweet basil when it blossoms. And the king said:

“From today on you’ll live together with us. You will not know what death is, and you’ll live for ever. Go and travel all over your kingdom, but bear in mind that you must not go out of the gate through which you came in, otherwise it will be the worse for you.”

After the wedding party the prince lived as if in paradise. He saw golden gardens, palaces of precious stones, singing birds and flowers with dew like pearls. Time passed, but it is hard to say how long it had been for in that land the sun never sets. One day the prince went out hunting, and when he took his bow and shot an arrow it went over the palace gates. He saw where the arrow had flown and went to recover it, forgetting all about the King’s advice. But when he opened the palace gates he saw the ball of golden thread and he suddenly remembered his home, his father and his mother. He longed to see them. He thought for some time, and then decided he would go and seek them.

The old king said to him:

“Don’t go, there is no need. Too much time has passed and nobody you remember is alive, nor even their grandchildren.”

But the youth did not believe him and made ready to leave. He took his sword and kissed his wife and off he went. The king and his daughter were left behind in deep sorrow.

The prince set out following the golden thread. He walked and walked until he came to the vine which had spread over so far over the hills it was impossible to see the end of it. The vine recognised him and said:

“Stop, kind youth, and rest.”

“Thank you, but I must hurry home.” And on he went further until he reached an old oak tree. The oak tree recognised him too and said:

“Stop a little and rest in my shade, I have grown from the acorn you covered with soil.” The youth was astonished so much time had passed and hurried on.

He went further and further until he reached the palace where the dragon lay with his head on the threshold. He was so ancient

he had nearly dried up.

The youth greeting the dragon cordially and the dragon was pleased and let him pass. Inside he met the old man, whose beard had grown so long he could use half of it to cover him at night and the other half to sleep on. He greeted the youth warmly and pointed him the right way.

He walked through the dark forest fearing for wolves and eventually reached his home. He looked all around and saw nothing. He could only guess where the palace of his parents had been from a pile of ruins. The king's son was deeply grieved and turned to go. When he passed where the gates of the palace used to be he saw a pile of clay and kicked it in passing, and out came Death from under it, all dressed in black.

"Oh young fellow, so you have come at last. I have been waiting for you such a long time!"

The brave lad turned on his heel and ran as fast as he could and Death went after him. When he reached the old king's palace he could run no further. He greeted the dragon who moved aside his head and let him pass. He fell before the old king and gasped:

"Help me, dear old man, tell me what to do because Death is on my track." The old man gave him a wide woolly girdle, and said:

"Here, give this to Death and tell him to wear it until only threads remain, and only after that shall he come for you."

When Death arrived at the palace gates he could not pass the dragon so he cried out:

"Old man, let the king's son come out, otherwise I shall tear out your beard hair by hair."

Then the king's son came out with the girdle and said:

"Take the girdle, Death, go back and wear it until only threads remain, then come for me." Death took the girdle and wore it. The king's son went on further until he came again to the oak tree. The oak tree called out:

"Come brave lad, and take a rest"

"I can't, because Death is on my track"

"Don't worry about that. Put your hand into the hollow of my trunk and pull out an iron walking stick, and tell him to use it until it wears down to the handle and only then can he come for you."

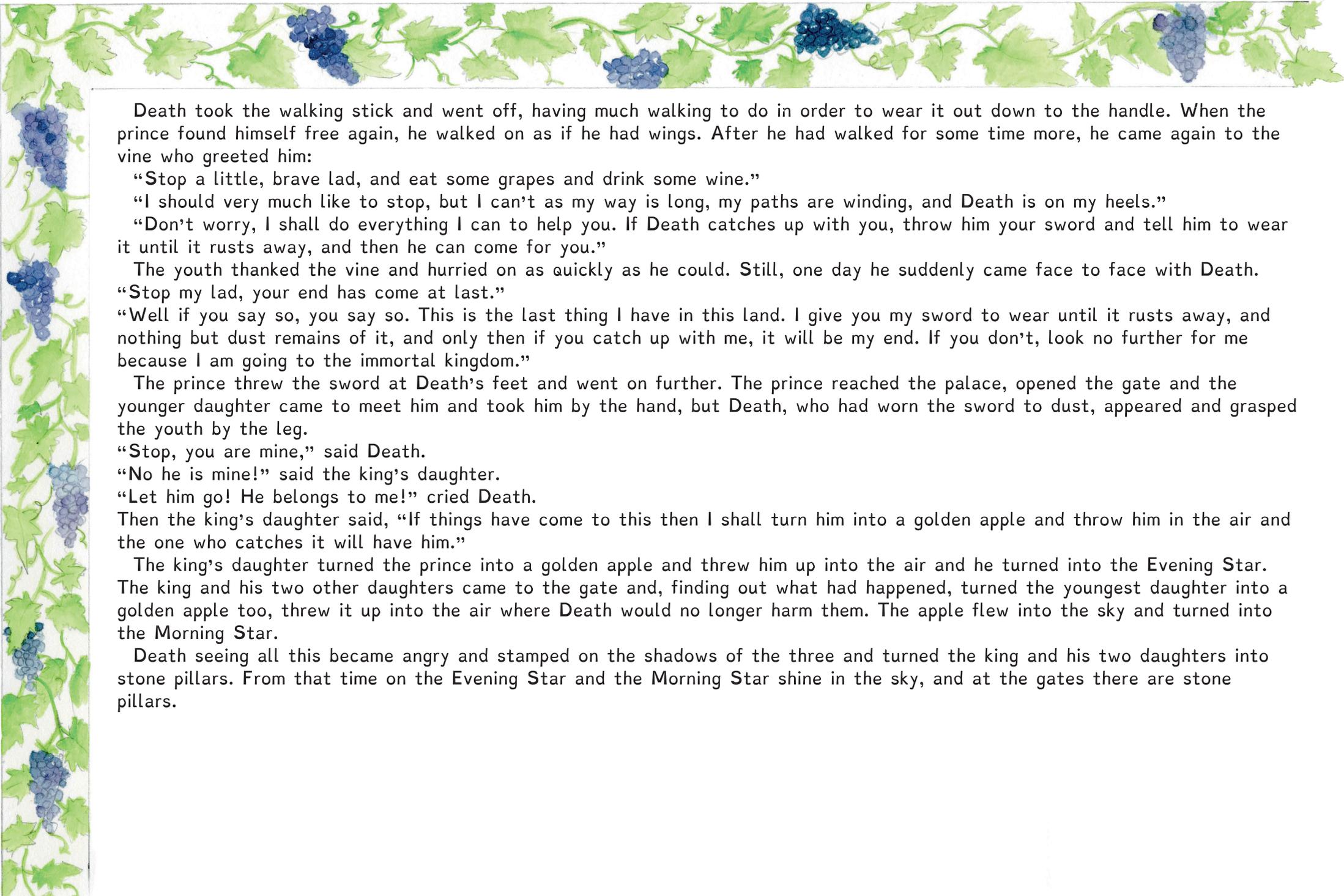
Then the brave lad took the walking stick and said farewell to the oak tree and off he went. He walked and walked across fields without roads and rivers without fords.

One day Death suddenly turned up before him.

"Stop, my brave lad, your time has come!"

"Well, when my time comes it will come, but first take this iron walking stick and when you wear it down to the handle, then you may come for me."





Death took the walking stick and went off, having much walking to do in order to wear it out down to the handle. When the prince found himself free again, he walked on as if he had wings. After he had walked for some time more, he came again to the vine who greeted him:

“Stop a little, brave lad, and eat some grapes and drink some wine.”

“I should very much like to stop, but I can’t as my way is long, my paths are winding, and Death is on my heels.”

“Don’t worry, I shall do everything I can to help you. If Death catches up with you, throw him your sword and tell him to wear it until it rusts away, and then he can come for you.”

The youth thanked the vine and hurried on as quickly as he could. Still, one day he suddenly came face to face with Death.

“Stop my lad, your end has come at last.”

“Well if you say so, you say so. This is the last thing I have in this land. I give you my sword to wear until it rusts away, and nothing but dust remains of it, and only then if you catch up with me, it will be my end. If you don’t, look no further for me because I am going to the immortal kingdom.”

The prince threw the sword at Death’s feet and went on further. The prince reached the palace, opened the gate and the younger daughter came to meet him and took him by the hand, but Death, who had worn the sword to dust, appeared and grasped the youth by the leg.

“Stop, you are mine,” said Death.

“No he is mine!” said the king’s daughter.

“Let him go! He belongs to me!” cried Death.

Then the king’s daughter said, “If things have come to this then I shall turn him into a golden apple and throw him in the air and the one who catches it will have him.”

The king’s daughter turned the prince into a golden apple and threw him up into the air and he turned into the Evening Star. The king and his two other daughters came to the gate and, finding out what had happened, turned the youngest daughter into a golden apple too, threw it up into the air where Death would no longer harm them. The apple flew into the sky and turned into the Morning Star.

Death seeing all this became angry and stamped on the shadows of the three and turned the king and his two daughters into stone pillars. From that time on the Evening Star and the Morning Star shine in the sky, and at the gates there are stone pillars.