



Level 4

# The Twelve Dancing Princesses



OXFORD





# The Twelve Dancing Princesses

*Retold by Sue Arengo*  
*Illustrated by Sally Haysom*



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Once there was a king who had twelve daughters. These twelve beautiful princesses all slept in one bedroom. And every night the king said, 'Go to sleep, girls! No more talking!' Then he carefully locked the bedroom door.

But every morning the princesses were tired. And their shoes were all dirty and full of holes.

'Look at your shoes! What did you do last night?'

'Nothing, Father,' the girls always answered.

'Nothing!'





The king could not understand it. So he wrote a notice: 'What do my daughters do every night? Tell me – and you can marry one of them and be king one day.'

A prince read the notice and came to the castle.

'Watch my daughters carefully,' said the king, 'and speak to me in the morning.'

But the oldest princess gave the prince a drink and he went to sleep. So he saw nothing and he heard nothing. And in the morning he had nothing to say to the king.

This happened on the second night and on the third night. So he went away with nothing.





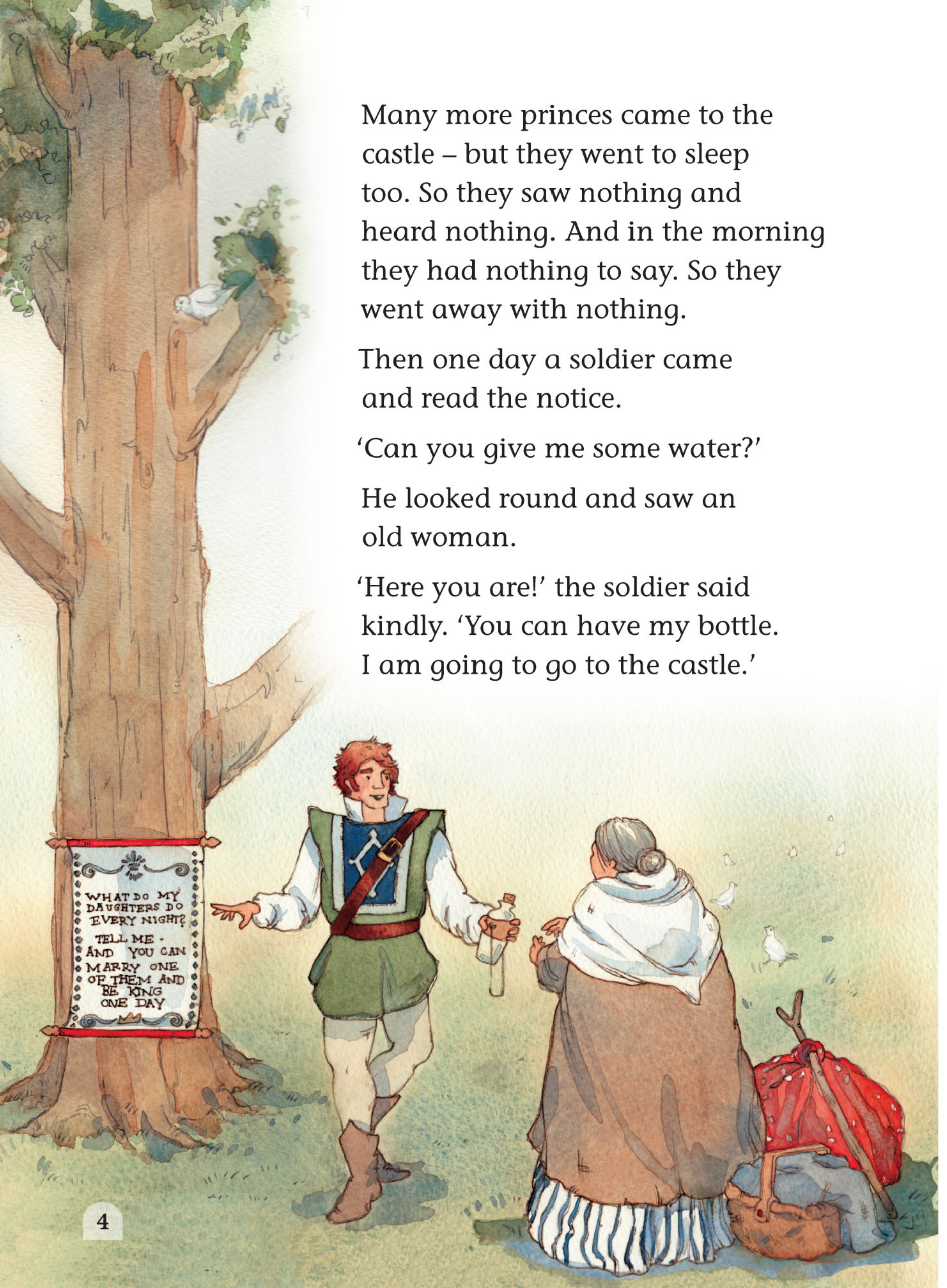
Many more princes came to the castle – but they went to sleep too. So they saw nothing and heard nothing. And in the morning they had nothing to say. So they went away with nothing.

Then one day a soldier came and read the notice.

‘Can you give me some water?’

He looked round and saw an old woman.

‘Here you are!’ the soldier said kindly. ‘You can have my bottle. I am going to go to the castle.’





‘Thank you,’ said the old woman. ‘Now ... listen carefully to what I say. Those princesses will give you a drink. But you must not drink it. Do you hear me? You must not go to sleep. You must stay awake all night. Then you can watch them.

‘And look! You can have this. It’s a magic cloak. The princesses will not see you when you wear this. You will be invisible! Then you can follow them.’

‘Thank you,’ said the soldier. ‘Thank you, good old woman!’

‘Thank you for the water, soldier!  
And good luck to you!’





At the castle that night, the oldest princess said,  
'Here, soldier! Have a nice drink! Good night!'

The soldier took the cup. But he did not drink.  
He gave the drink to the dog. The dog drank it  
and went to sleep. Then the soldier sat down  
and closed his eyes.

'Is he asleep?' whispered the youngest princess.

'Yes,' answered her sisters. 'Come on! Let's have  
some fun!'





The princesses laughed. They put on their best dresses and their dancing shoes.

‘Come on!’ said the oldest princess. ‘Let’s go!’

She moved her bed and opened a door in the floor. There were some stairs going down into the ground.

The soldier saw everything.

Quickly he put on his magic cloak. Then he followed them.

They went down the stairs. No one could see him because he was invisible.

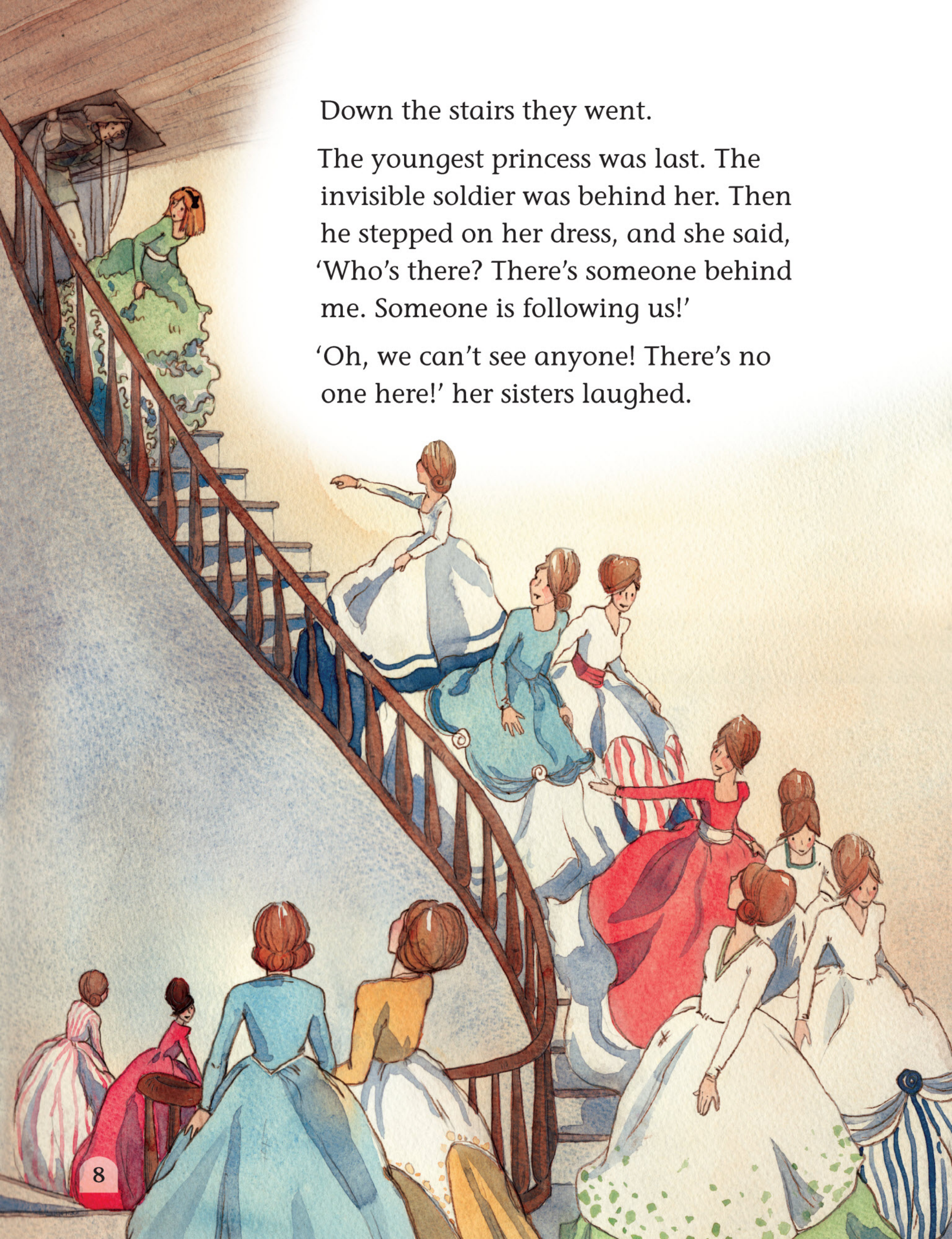




Down the stairs they went.

The youngest princess was last. The invisible soldier was behind her. Then he stepped on her dress, and she said, 'Who's there? There's someone behind me. Someone is following us!'

'Oh, we can't see anyone! There's no one here!' her sisters laughed.





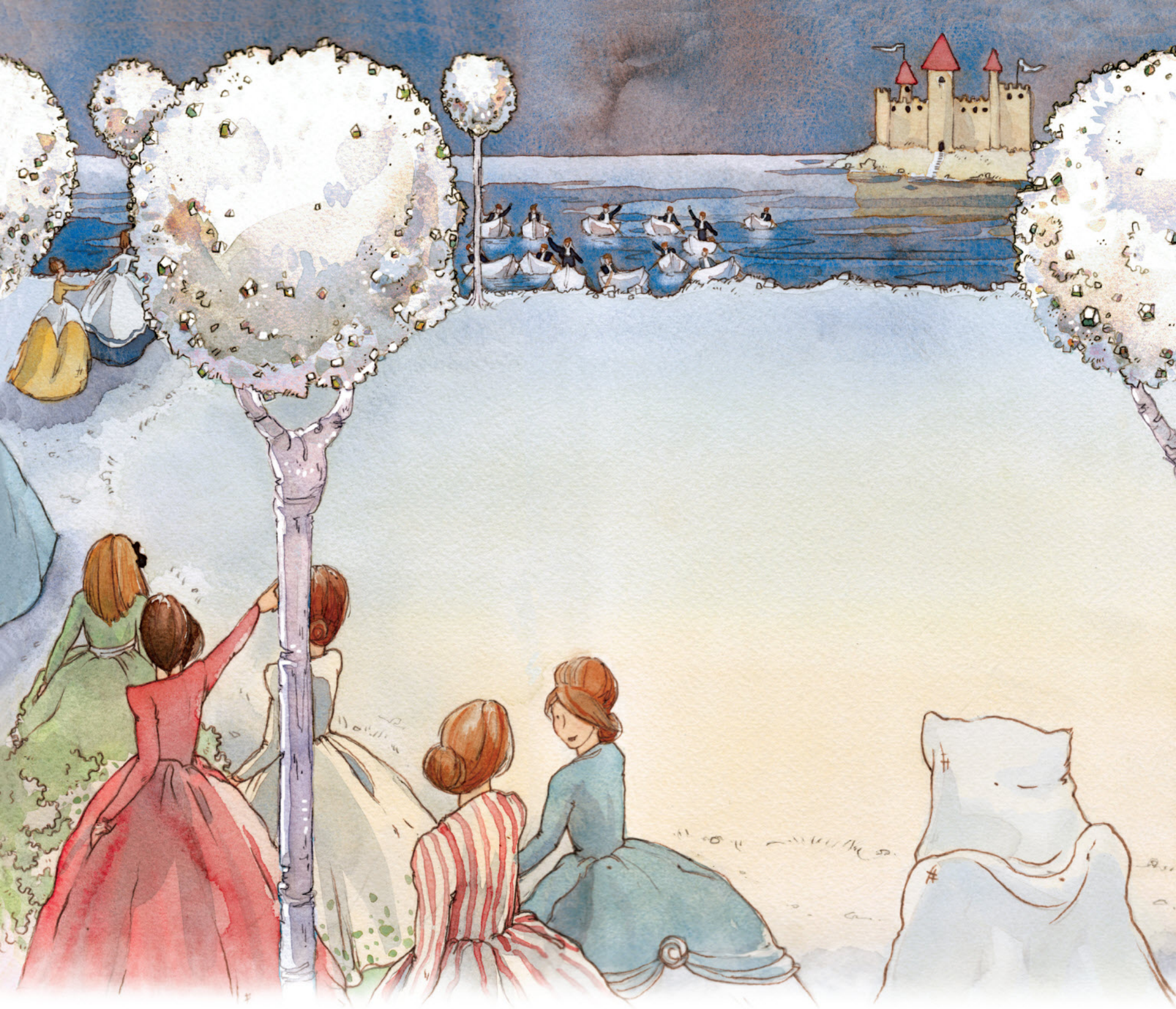


They came to a road of  
strange trees all made  
of silver. The twelve princesses  
walked quickly. They looked  
beautiful and they were  
having so much fun.

Now they came to a road of  
trees all made of gold. The  
princesses danced through the  
trees and the soldier watched  
them. It was wonderful.







Now they came to a road of trees all made of diamonds. The princesses laughed.

They were so happy because now they could see the lake. And across the lake there was a wonderful castle.

There were twelve white boats on the water. And in every boat a prince was waiting.



The soldier stepped into the boat with the youngest princess.

‘This boat feels different tonight,’ said her prince. ‘It feels heavy.’

‘Perhaps the weather is too warm for you,’ the youngest princess said.

At the castle, the twelve princesses danced with the twelve princes. And the soldier watched them. They had so much fun. He saw it all.

At last the sky began to grow light.

‘It will soon be day, sisters!’ cried the oldest princess. ‘It’s time to go home to bed!’





The twelve princesses ran out of the castle.  
The twelve princes ran with them and rowed  
them back across the lake. And the soldier  
went with them.

Then the twelve princesses ran back through  
the trees of diamond, the trees of gold, and  
the trees of silver. They ran all the way back  
up the stairs to their bedroom.

But the soldier ran faster. He ran up the stairs  
before them. He got to the room first and sat  
on the chair. He closed his eyes.

‘Look! He’s asleep,’ said the oldest princess.  
‘To bed, sisters ... to bed!’





Later that morning the king came.

‘Look at these shoes!’ he said. ‘They are all dirty and full of holes. It’s the same every day. And look at these girls! They are still asleep and it’s nearly midday!’



The king spoke with the soldier. ‘Did you see anything?’

‘Yes, I did,’ said the soldier. ‘But I need to see more. Let me watch again tonight. Then I will tell you.’

‘OK! Good man!’ said the king. ‘Good luck!’



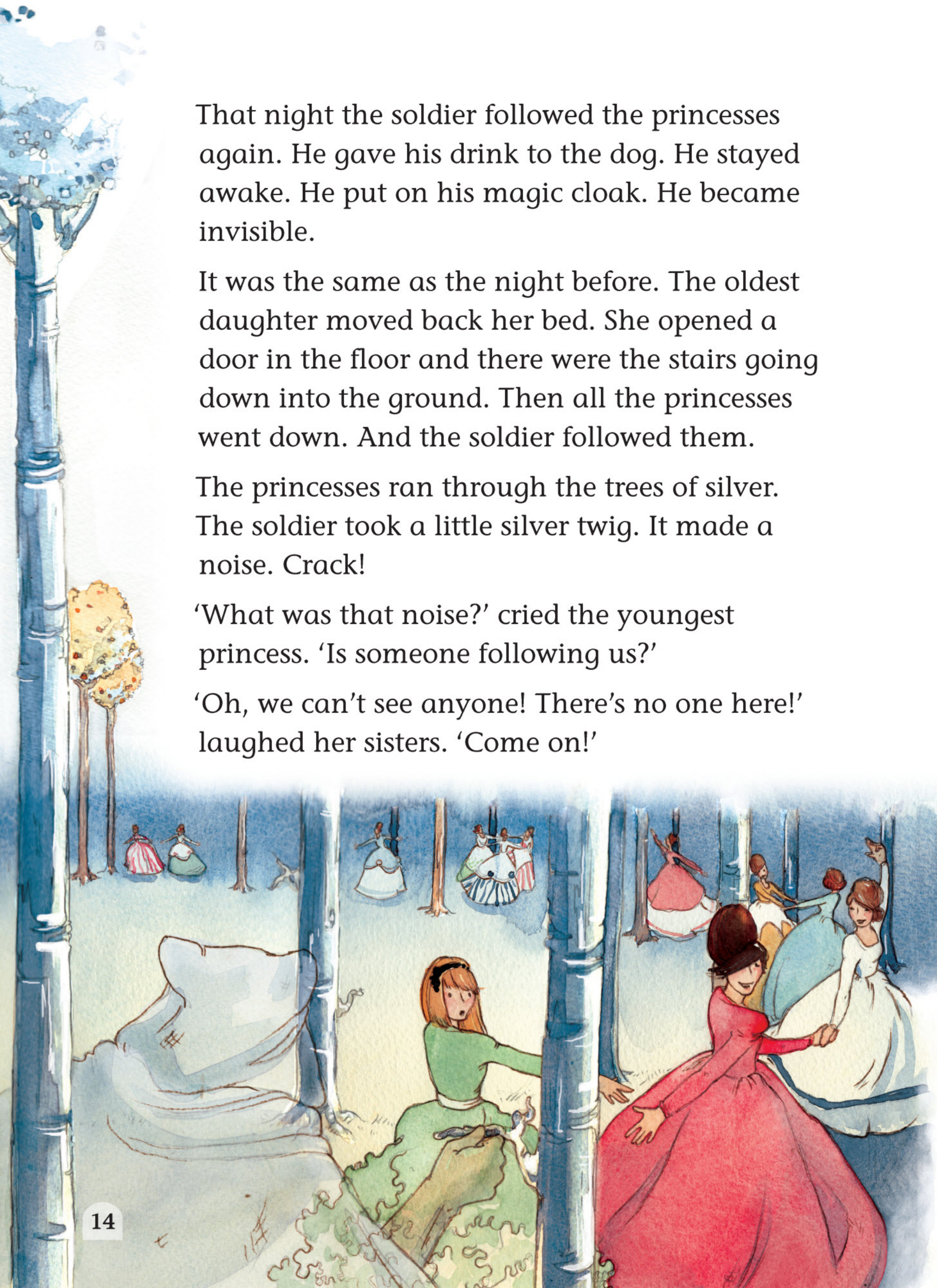
That night the soldier followed the princesses again. He gave his drink to the dog. He stayed awake. He put on his magic cloak. He became invisible.

It was the same as the night before. The oldest daughter moved back her bed. She opened a door in the floor and there were the stairs going down into the ground. Then all the princesses went down. And the soldier followed them.

The princesses ran through the trees of silver. The soldier took a little silver twig. It made a noise. Crack!

‘What was that noise?’ cried the youngest princess. ‘Is someone following us?’

‘Oh, we can’t see anyone! There’s no one here!’ laughed her sisters. ‘Come on!’





The soldier took a little gold twig. It made a noise. Crack!

Then the soldier took a little diamond twig. It made a noise. Crack!

‘What was that noise?’ cried the youngest princess. ‘Is someone following us?’

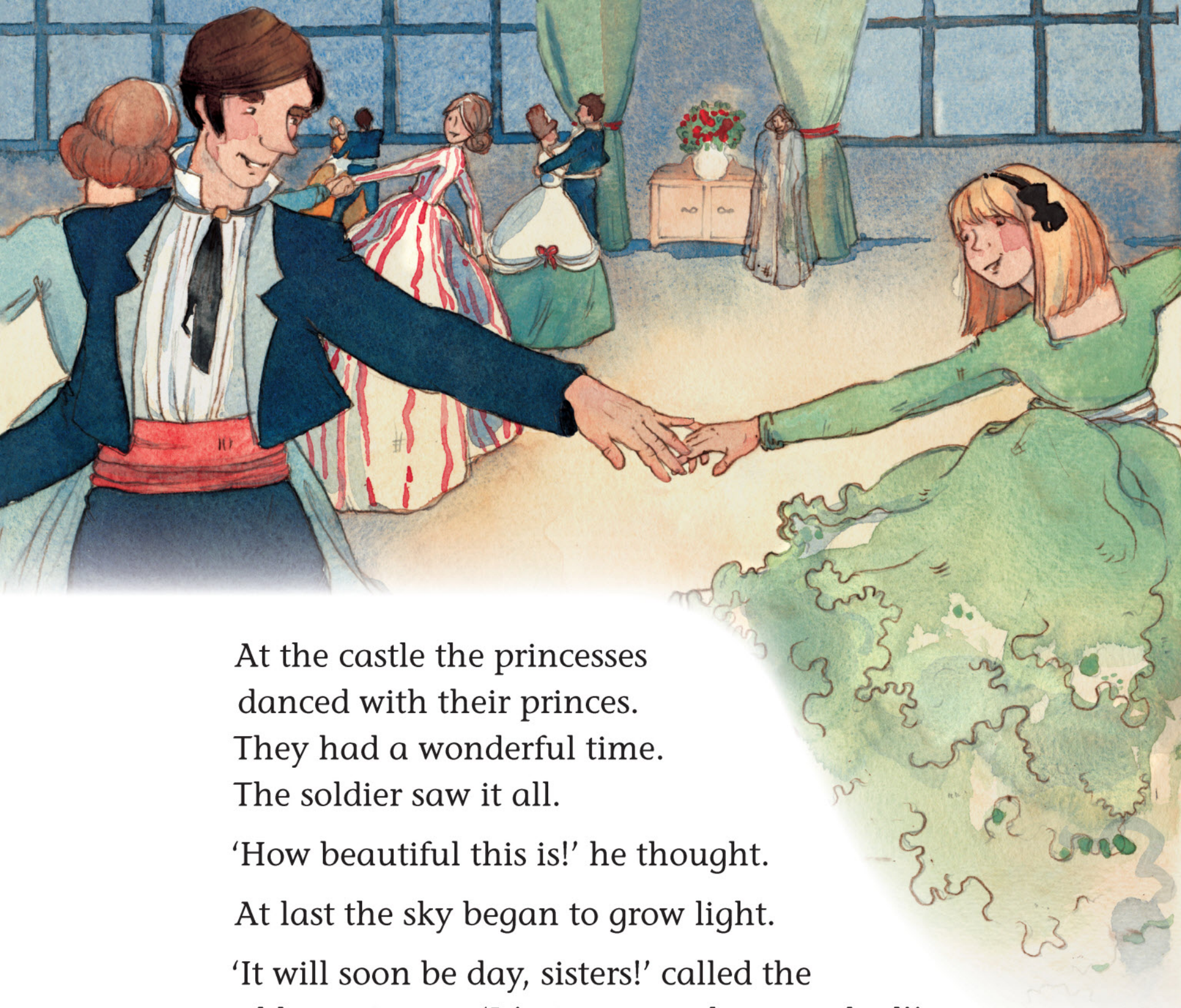
But her sisters didn’t hear her. They could see the lake and the wonderful castle.

At the lake, there were the twelve white boats and the twelve princes. One prince for every princess.

Again the soldier got into the boat with the youngest princess. And her prince said, ‘The boat feels heavy again tonight. How strange!’







At the castle the princesses  
danced with their princes.  
They had a wonderful time.  
The soldier saw it all.

‘How beautiful this is!’ he thought.

At last the sky began to grow light.

‘It will soon be day, sisters!’ called the  
oldest princess. ‘It’s time to go home to bed!’

The twelve princesses ran back to the lake.  
The princes ran with them and rowed them  
back across the water.

Then the twelve princesses ran back through  
the trees of diamond, the trees of gold, and  
the trees of silver. And the soldier ran with  
them. But he was faster.



The soldier ran up the stairs before them. He got to the room first. He sat on the chair. He closed his eyes.

‘Look! He’s asleep!’ whispered the oldest princess. ‘To bed, sisters ... to bed!’



Later that morning the king came.

‘Did you see anything?’ he asked the soldier.

‘Yes, I did,’ said the soldier. ‘But I need to see more. Give me one more night. Then I will tell you everything.’

‘OK!’ said the king. ‘One more night. But no more. One more night. Then you must tell me everything.’



That night the soldier followed the twelve princesses again. He stayed awake. He put on his magic cloak and became invisible.

Then he followed them down the stairs. He followed them through the trees of silver, the trees of gold, and the trees of diamond to the lake.

At the castle, he watched them dance all night. And this time he took something new to give to the king. He took one of the beautiful glass cups. He put it in his pocket.





In the morning the soldier told the king everything. He gave him the twigs.

‘Look! You can see it is true! I took these twigs to show you! And look at this! It’s a cup from the castle!’

‘Is this true?’ the king asked his daughters.

‘Yes, Father,’ they answered.

‘OK,’ said the king. ‘Well, soldier ... which one do you want to marry?’

‘I am not a young man,’ said the soldier. ‘I think your oldest daughter is the one for me.’

The oldest princess saw the soldier was very clever so she wanted to marry him, and be his wife.

And that is the story. The soldier married the oldest princess, and they had a wonderful time, and they were very happy. They had a lot of fun and they danced and laughed often.





# Exercises

- 1 Who is speaking? Write the name for 1–4.  
For number 5, what does the soldier say? Write one sentence.



1 'This boat feels different tonight.'

the prince

2 'Can you give me some water?'

3 'Who's there? There's someone behind me.'

4 'Look at your shoes! What did you do last night?'

5 \_\_\_\_\_

the soldier

## 2 Write the words.

invisible follow awake sleep cloak ~~princesses~~

'Now, listen carefully to what I say. Those princesses will give you a drink. But you must not drink it. Do you hear me? You must not go to \_\_\_\_\_. You must stay \_\_\_\_\_ all night. Then you can watch them. And look! You can have this. It's a magic \_\_\_\_\_. The princesses will not see you when you wear this. You will be \_\_\_\_\_! Then you can \_\_\_\_\_ them.'





### 3 Answer the questions. Write *Yes* or *No*.

- 1 Did the princesses sleep in their bedroom? No.
- 2 Was the castle wonderful? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Did the princesses have fun? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Could they see the soldier? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Did the soldier watch them? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Were there thirteen princes? \_\_\_\_\_



### 4 Write the story again, correcting the mistake in each sentence.

The king had eleven daughters. Every morning the princesses' shoes were very clean. The king could not understand it, so he read a notice. A soldier read the king's notice and saw a young woman. He gave her some water, and she gave him a magic cup. The oldest princess gave the soldier a drink, but he gave it to the cat. He followed the princesses to a castle across a river. He watched them dance with twelve soldiers. He told the king everything and then he married the youngest princess.

*The king had twelve daughters.*

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# Glossary

**asleep** sleeping

**awake** not sleeping

**bottle**



**follow** to go after someone / something

**glass** *a glass cup*



**castle**



**gold** *It is gold.*



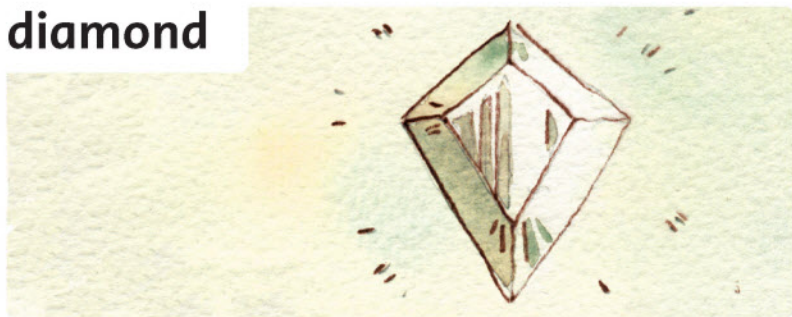
**cloak**



**have fun** to have a good time

**heavy** difficult to carry or move

**diamond**



**hole**



**invisible** when no one can see you

**floor**



**lake**





**locked** past tense of **lock**



**magic** when things that seem impossible happen

**marry** to become someone's husband or wife

**midday** twelve o'clock lunchtime

**notice** a paper for people to see; it tells them important things

**pocket**



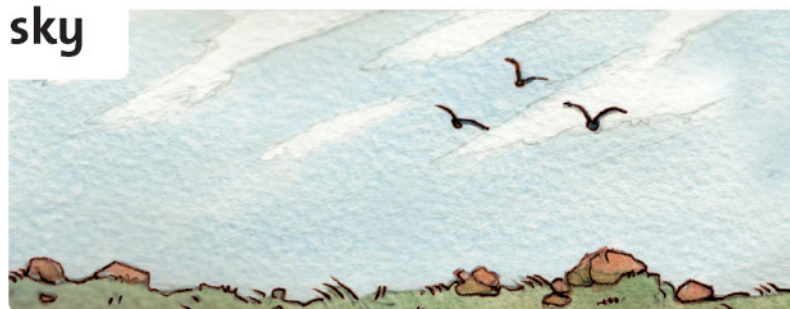
**rowed** past tense of **row**



**silver** *It is silver.*



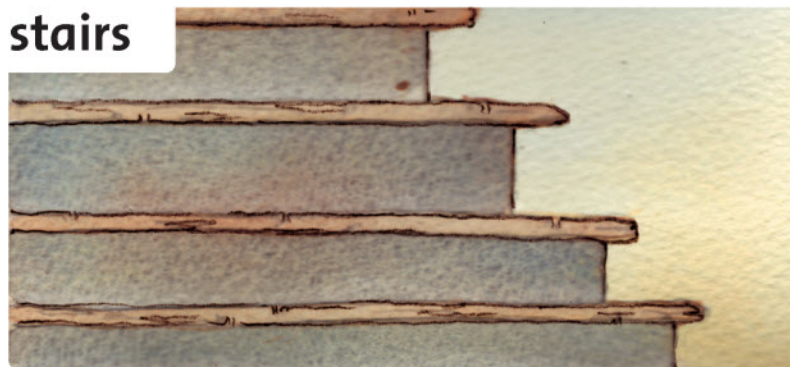
**sky**



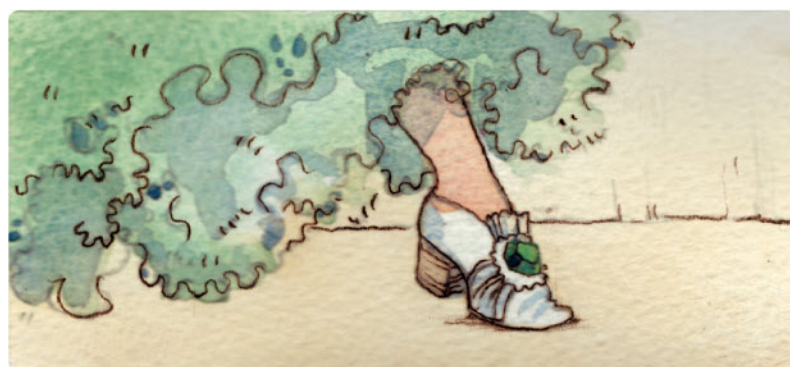
**soldier**



**stairs**



**stepped** past tense of **step**



**true** when something really happens

**twig** a little piece of wood from a tree

**whispered** past tense of **whisper**: to speak very quietly



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Level 4

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Enjoy the tale of the princesses who had holes in their shoes every morning. What did they do every night?


A retelling of the classic story for learners of English

Retold by Sue Arengo  
Illustrated by Sally Haysom


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**Word count for this story: 1,529**

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