

# The TALE of STONELAND



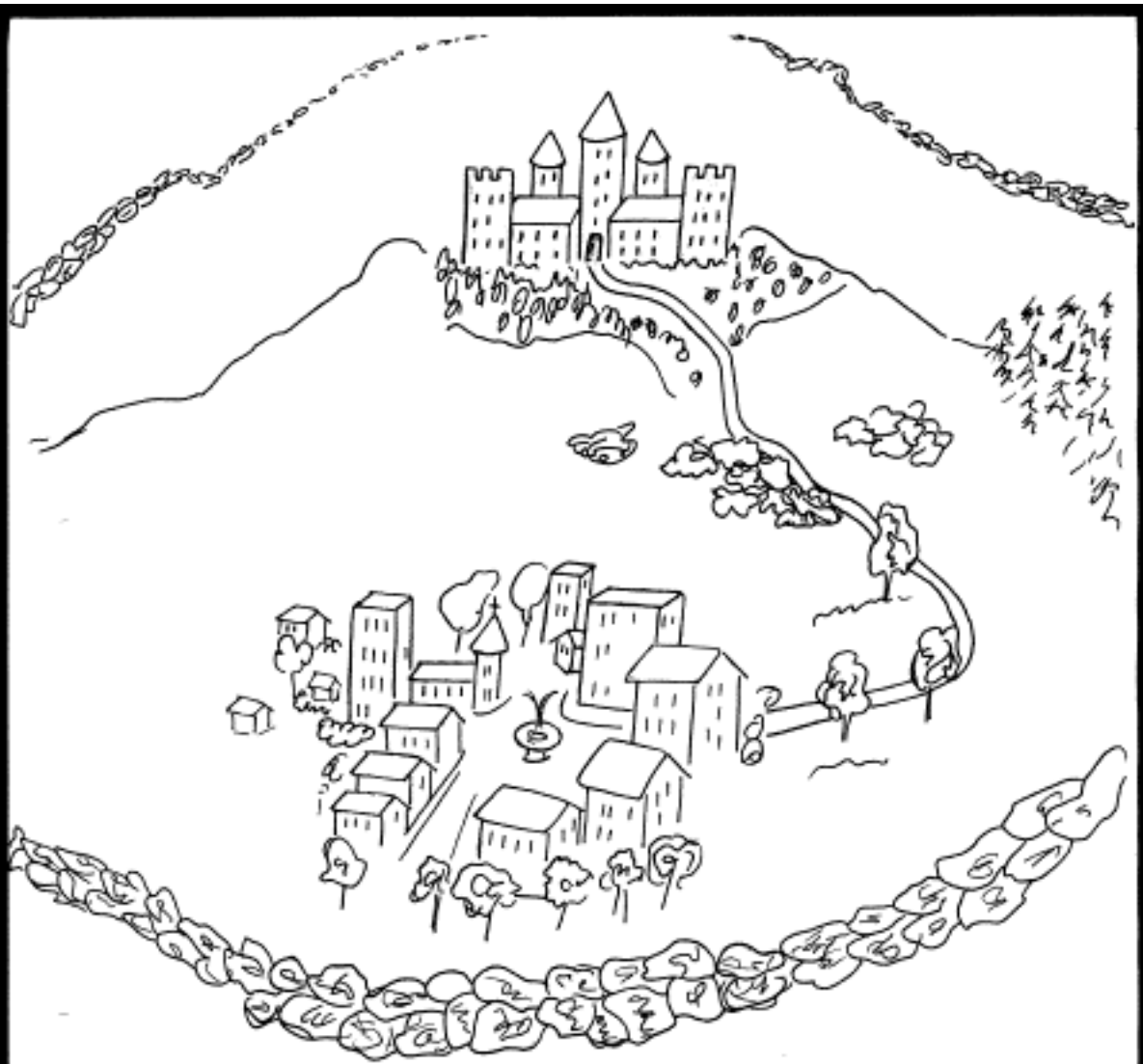
# The TALE of STONELAND



© text: Sandra Merimo 1995

© illustration: Maud Öst 1995

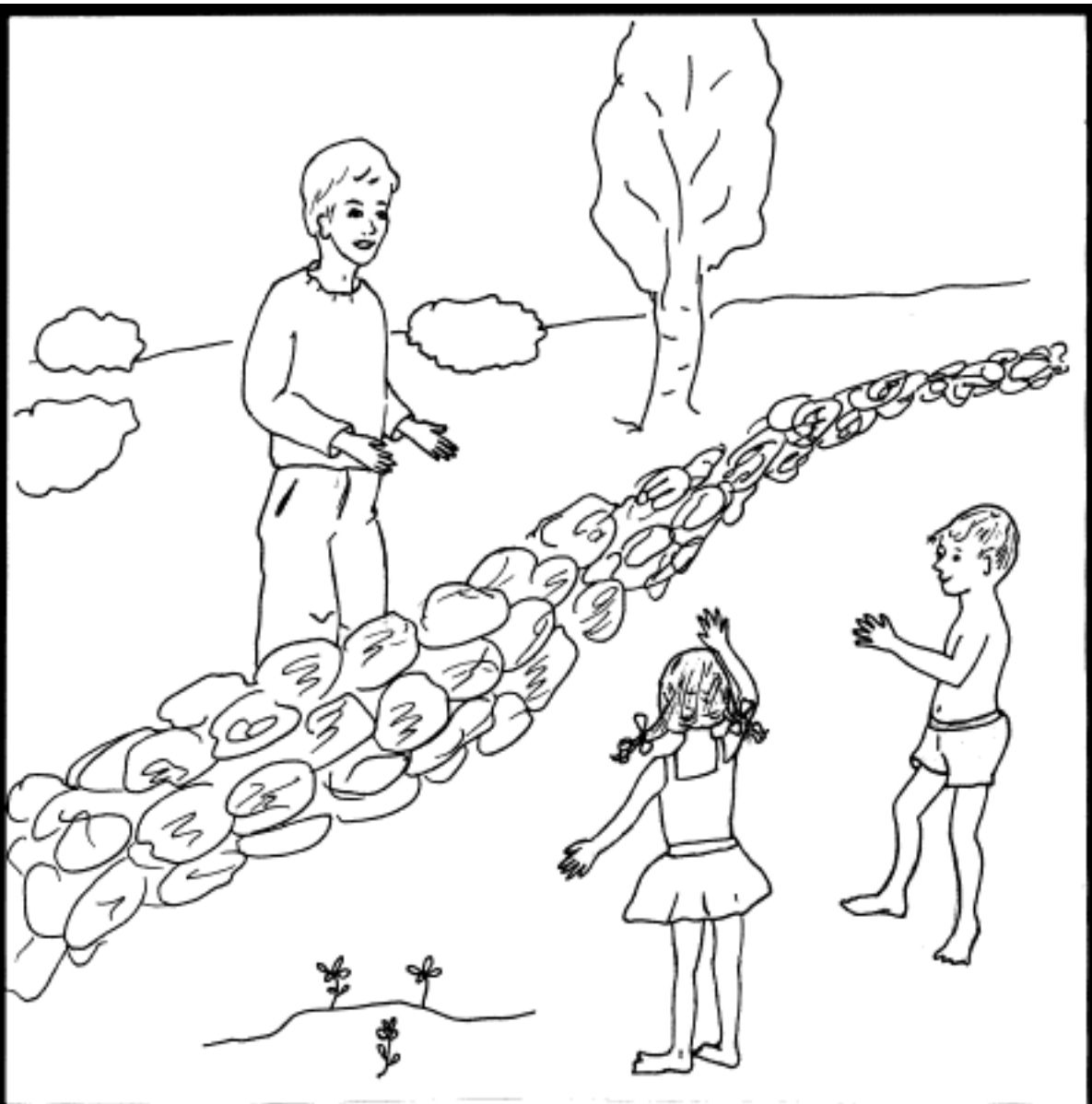
First edition. Printed in Sweden 1995.



This is Stoneland. It is a country which only exists in the fairy tales. Stoneland is ruled by a wicked magician. He lives at the black castle on top of the hill. Around the little country there is a stone wall which no one has ever passed over. Wait a minute, that is not true...



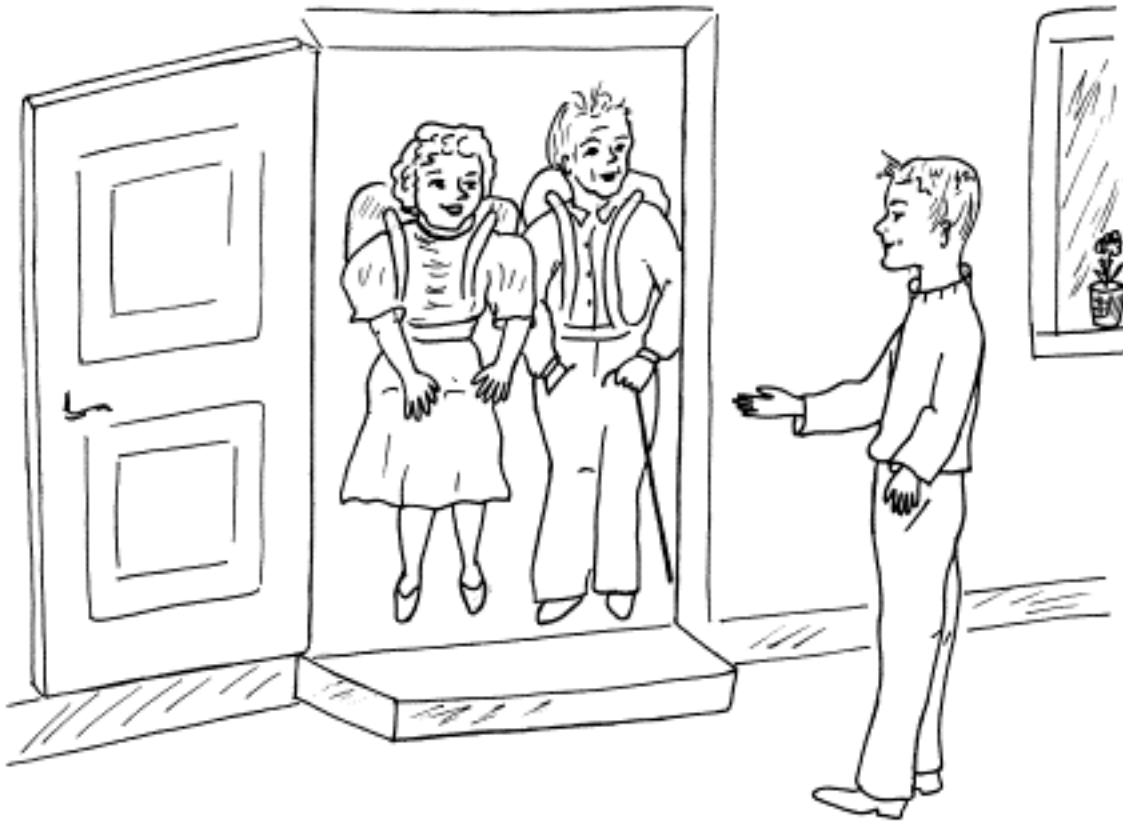
Many years ago a little boy disappeared from Stoneland. The boy was playing in a meadow with some other children. A big eagle flew above them. Suddenly it dived down and took hold of the boy. Then they flew high above the wall to the mystical Land Outside. When the parents found out what had happened they felt very sad. They never thought they would see their son again.



Then one morning a young man came walking from the other side of the stone wall. The children who played in the meadow saw him coming. They had never before seen an adult without a rucksack. All grown-ups and older children carried rucksacks in Stoneland. They had to do that, otherwise the magician Hypocratus would punish them. There were many stories about the dreadful things that would happen if you did not carry a rucksack.



The man said hello to the children and asked where the town was. They showed him the way. When the man came close to the town he saw people walking bent forward and looking down. They seemed very serious. Everybody carried rucksacks which were so heavy that they could not walk upright. It was easy to see that they would lack the energy to climb over the stone wall to the Land Outside. The man, whose name was Charlie, thought he recognized one of the houses. He walked up to the door and knocked.



The door opened and he could see an old couple in front of him;

- I recognize you, he said. You must be my parents.

The old couple could not believe their eyes. It took some time for them to realize that Charlie was their own son who had come back. Then they felt so happy that they immediately gave a party and invited all their neighbours.



At the party Charlie received a big present. Everyone stood around him in expectation when he opened it. It was a rucksack filled with stones. Charlie thanked everyone for the present and they helped him to put it on.

- It'll take some time before it grows on to your back, they said.

- Grows on to me? said Charlie. But I don't want it to do that. And it's so heavy. I can't stand upright.

Charlie put the rucksack down and everyone stared at him in panic:

- Now you must leave us, they said. Otherwise Hypocratus will punish us all.





Charlie was forced to leave the town. He walked back to the meadow where the children were playing rucksackball. They had little bags on their backs. The point of the game was to throw a soft little ball into someone else's bag. When you had done that you could get another ball. When all the balls had been thrown, the one with the fewest balls had won.

Charlie knew that when the children turned seven they would be forced to carry real rucksacks filled with stones. First one stone and the next year another stone,...etc. It was considered to be an honour to carry as many and as heavy stones as possible.



Charlie felt sorry for the children. He wished that they would be able to choose if they wanted to carry rucksacks or not. He decided to talk to Hypocratus about it.

He began walking up the hill. The children followed him in the distance. They wondered what he was going to do.

When Charlie arrived in front of the castle he was stopped by two guards whose faces reminded him of bulldogs. The children saw how Charlie was led into the castle and that the door closed.



The guards took him to a big hall where they let him sit down. It was cold and dark, almost like in a cave. Hypocratus walked in and looked curiously at Charlie:

- Very interesting, he said. I might be able to create something here.

- I'd like to speak to you about the law forcing people to carry rucksacks. Does it have to be like that? Wouldn't it be possible to...

Hypocratus interrupted:

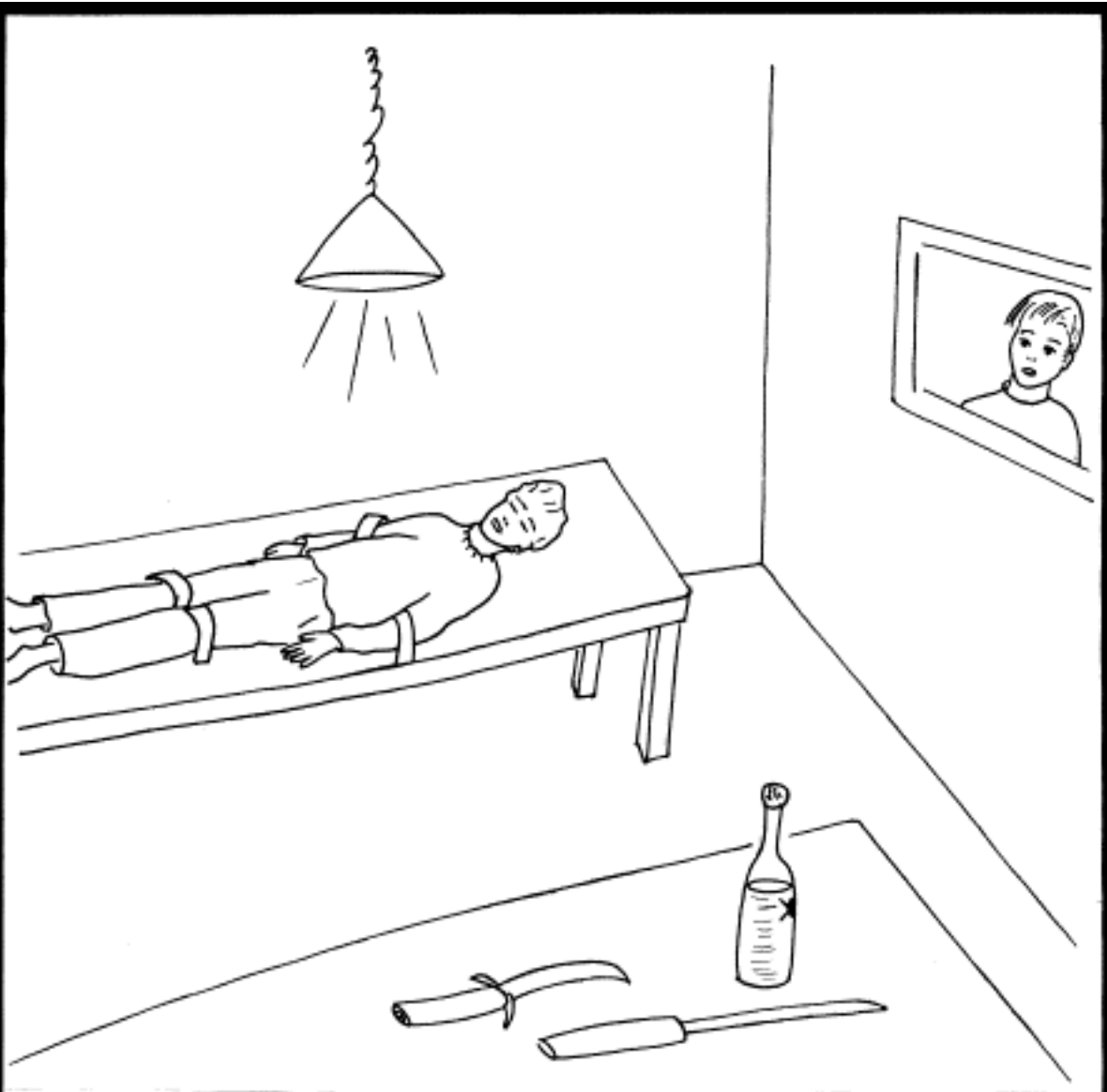
- Give him some bat juice and take him to the cellar, he said and left the hall.

The guards forced Charlie to drink something that tasted awful. He felt sleepy. He could not stop the guards from leading him to the cellar and tying him onto a bunk.



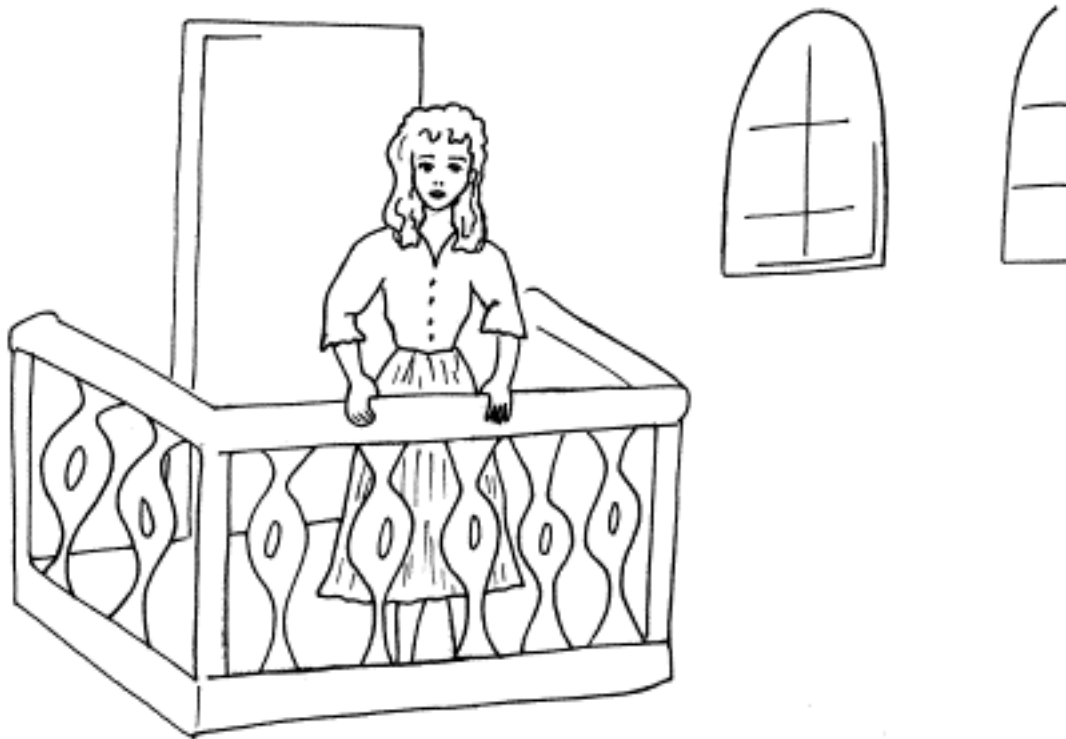
During this time the children had run into the town. They told what had happened. Charlie's parents and their neighbours felt very sorry. They decided to beg Hypocratus to set Charlie free.

The children set off and ran uphill towards the castle while their parents stumbled after them.



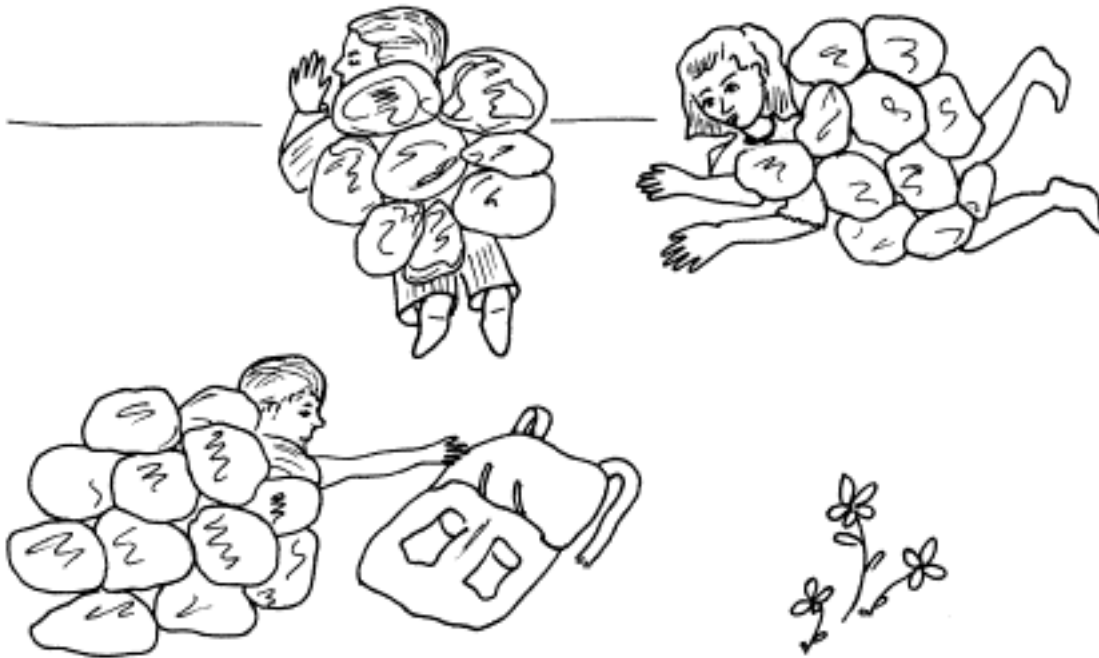
When the children arrived at the castle they ran to the backside and looked through all the cellar windows. Through one of them they could see Charlie. He lay tied. On a table nearby there were knives and a bottle marked with a death's head.

Suddenly they could hear a woman's voice:  
- What are you doing here?



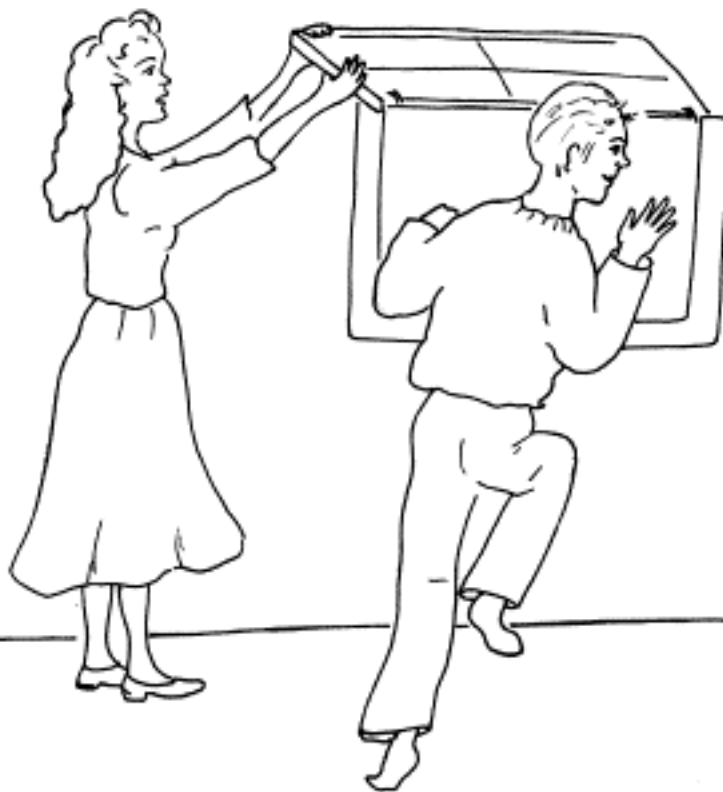
The children were frightened at first. They looked up. Above them on a balcony was a young woman dressed in white. She was very beautiful. The children had heard of Hypocratus' daughter Sun, but no one had seen her before.

The children told her that Charlie lay tied in the cellar and that they thought Hypocratus were going to hurt him. Sun promised them to do her best to save him.



Now the parents had almost arrived at the entrance door, but they could not walk the last few steps. It had been too tiring to walk up the hill with all the stones on their backs. They fell down, one by one. The rucksacks broke and the stones fell out on top of them.

The guards did not know what to do so they called for Hypocratus. He got angry. He was interrupted just as he was going to perform an operation on Charlie's head. Nevertheless he went up the stairs to find out what had happened.



On his way up he met Sun:

- If you're going down there, don't touch anything! I will begin operating very soon, he said as he kept on walking up.

Sun walked down and into the cellar. She saw Charlie lying on the bunk and she did not want her father to hurt him. She freed him from the strapping. Then she opened the window and helped him to climb out to the children who were waiting outside.



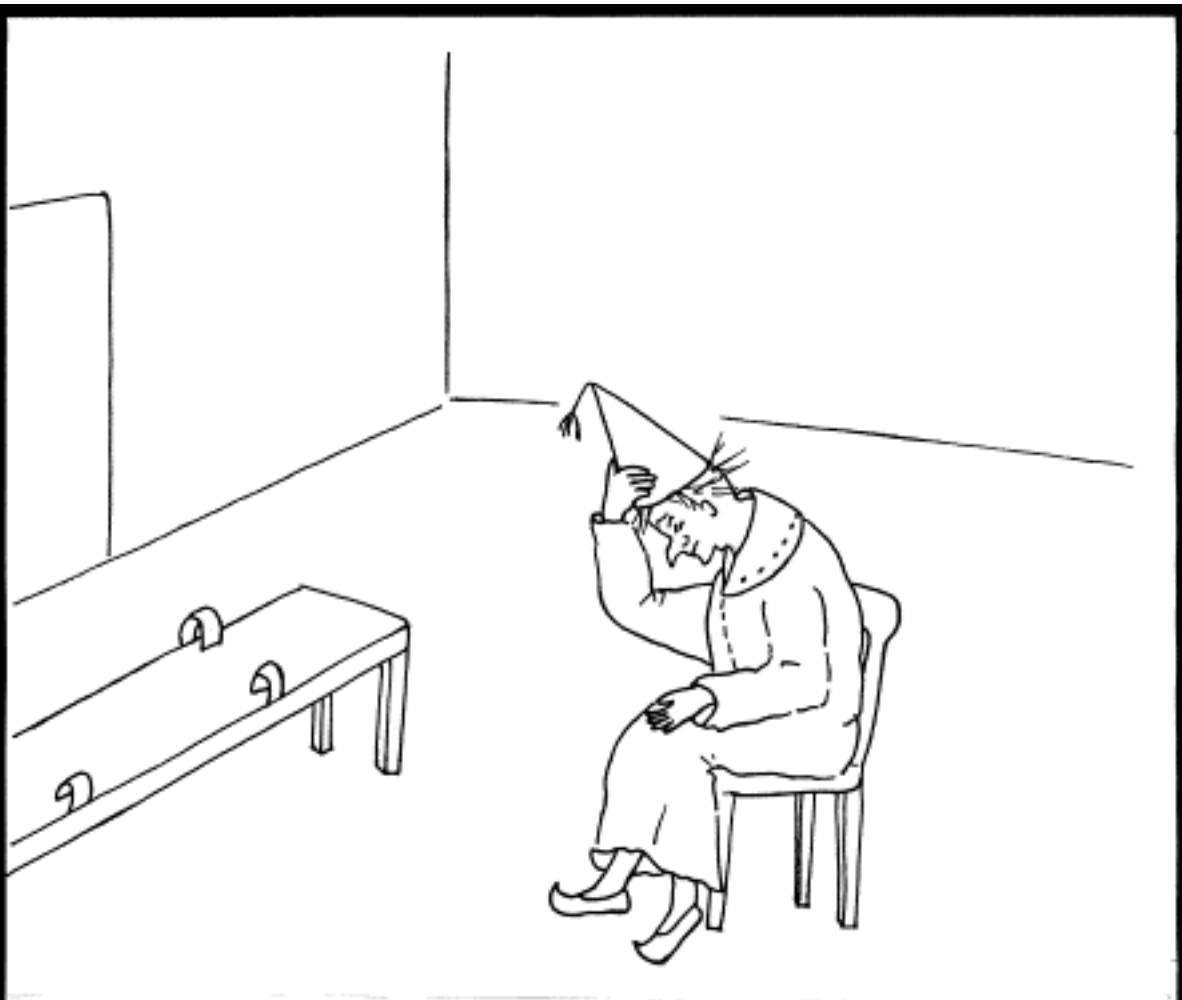


Hypocratus was irritated when he looked out through the entrance door. He said to the guards:

- Yes, I see! There are a lot of stone piles here. How did they get here, anyway? Well, see to that the graves are moved from here. We can't have a cemetery in front of the castle.

Then he walked back to the cellar to start operating. When he came down there he saw that Charlie was gone. He immediately began shouting at Sun:

- What have you done!! If I had operated on him he would have become an obedient bulldog guard!



Sun protested:

- But I don't want you to operate on anyone! And I don't understand why everybody has to carry heavy rucksacks! Mother told me before she died about the Land Outside. There it was one's own choice to carry a rucksack, so hardly anyone did. And the people were very happy. It could be like that here as well! I would like to tear the stone wall down. I don't want any borders separating us from other people.

Hypocratus stared at her and could not speak a word. He did not know what to answer. Sun left him and Hypocratus sat down alone, thinking for a very long time about what she had said.



Outside in the sunlight Charlie and the children were helping their parents to get up from under the stones. They were not used to moving without rucksacks on their backs, so they kept falling.

Sun saw them and she said to the children:

- I will make sure that Hypocratus won't be able to hurt you anymore. He's not really mean. It's just that he doesn't understand that he is hurting others. By the way, would you like to help me repaint the castle. I'd like to paint it in the colours of the rainbow.

Everybody thought it was a brilliant idea. They started immediately. The guards helped as well.



Far away in the distance they could hear a rumbling noise, almost like thunder. It was the stone wall falling apart.

Charlie looked at Sun and smiled. She smiled back. They knew they had a future together.