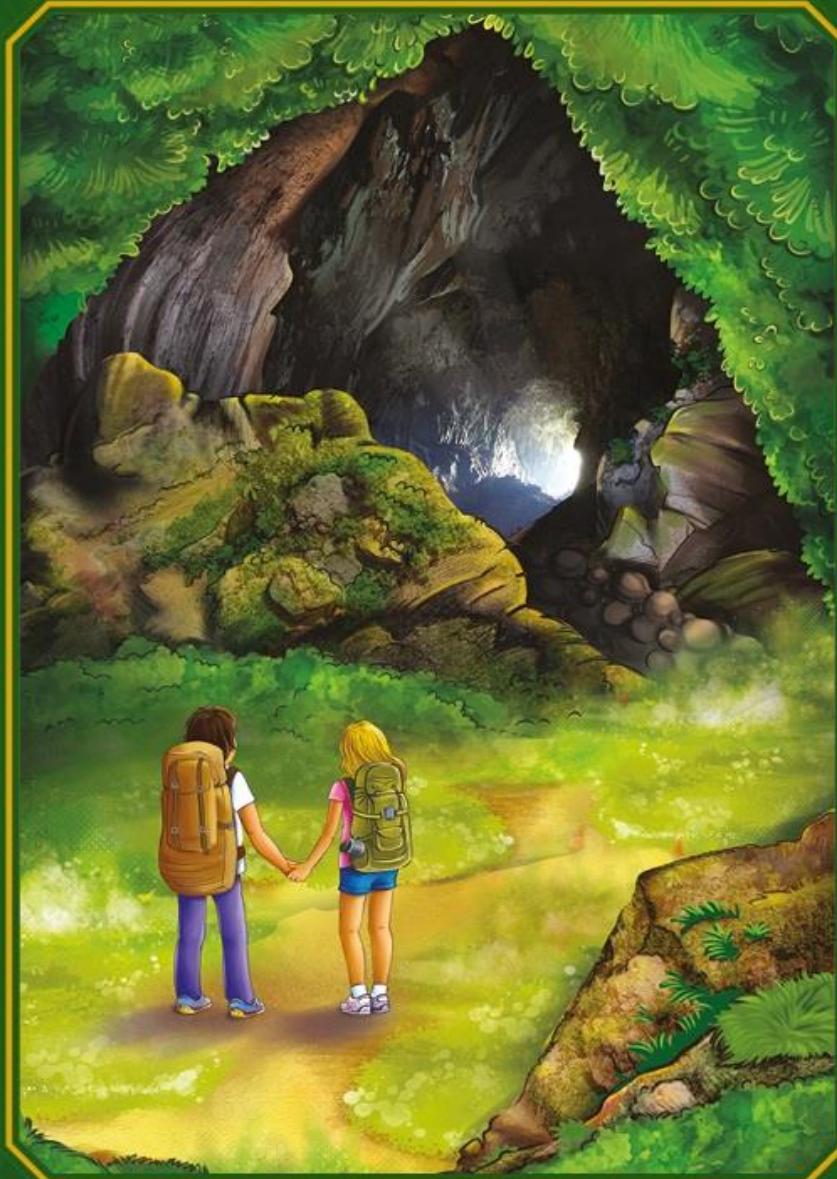


Igor Bondar

# THE GATE



*A fictional story*

*A young couple travelling in the mountains finds themselves in a very unusual place. From that moment on in their lives, the most incredible adventures begin.*

## *Mike and Brenda*

‘Ah, there’s one thing that cheers me up! There are just five days left until the plane,’ said Mike, dropping his heavy backpack off his back to the ground.

‘Don’t grumble, dear,’ Brenda smiled in reply, ‘isn’t it romantic here?’

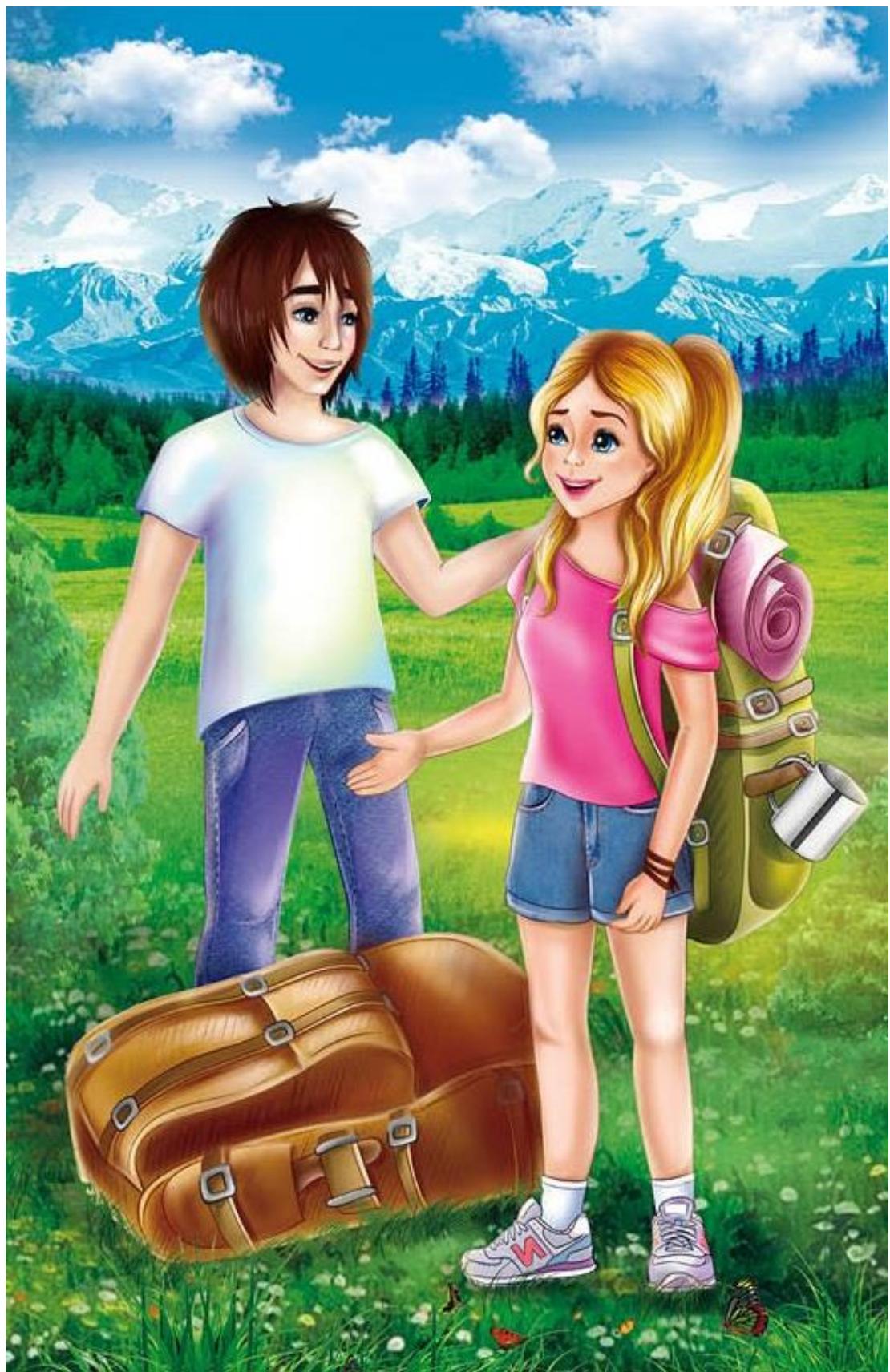
‘It is. It is romantic,’ the guy nodded and added cheerfully. ‘But we could find the same thing just an hour’s drive away from our home, my Princess... in the Mountains of Springbrook, for example, or in the O’Reilly’s. Moreover, there should be something much better than that in an hour’s flight.’

‘But we don’t have the same history there like it’s here in Greece!’, the girl resorted to her best argument again. ‘Here, every stone breathes with an ancient philosophy and with the first steps of Christianity...’

‘...saint hermits, marvels and something like that,’ Mike continued for her and picked a cobble from the ground. ‘I know, I know, Brandie! But to me, the stones seem to be the same as at home in Australia, and even a little heavier.’

Having said that, Mike threw the cobble far into the bushes.

‘Ah, you simply aren’t romantic, my dear Mikey,’ Brenda said with sympathy and stroked his shoulder.



‘I am that romantic, my Beauty!’, the guy smiled at last. ‘Although, I prefer to be romantic by the sea, with a surfboard lying on my right side and scuba gear for diving on my left.’

‘So, where am I in your romanticism here, then?’ Brenda asked suddenly frowning.

‘Of course, you’re in my heart, darling!’, the guy saved himself smartly and was immediately awarded a mellow kiss for that phrase.

‘I love the sea very much too, you know it, my dear! But, I’ve always wanted to visit Greece, the birthplace of my ancestors.’

‘I know, Brandie,’ Mike dropped a soft kiss on the girl’s nose. ‘It is because of this, I’m wandering with you across these savage mountains for the second week already.’

‘I appreciate it very much,’ Brenda smiled tenderly. ‘When we get back home, you can ask me for anything you want!’

The guy raised his brows in surprise, then lowered them a moment later and glanced at the girl lovingly.

‘You do everything for me, Bre. There’s nothing else to ask for. Simply, always be with me and that’ll be enough.’

The young couple leaned on each other sensually. At that moment, a sharp noise came from the side where Mike had thrown the cobble. The guy and the girl turned their heads there.

‘What’s that sound?’ Mike asked.

‘Perhaps that wasn’t just a stone,’ Brenda laughed in reply. ‘Don’t worry, there aren’t any formidable predators around here. Probably, there’s an eloquent he-rabbit telling his trusting she-rabbit something touching.’

‘Well, then it’s all the more worth it for me to go and have a look at that,’ Mike said smiling and having unclipped – just in case – an axe from his backpack he headed towards the bushes.

Meanwhile, the girl began to unpack their luggage.

‘Brenda, Brenda, come up here!’, she heard his voice a minute later.

Having left all the things, the girl headed to Mike.

## ***About Seven Hundred Years Ago***

*An old man Litos sat smiling near the cave which was not far from his house, drawing something with a stick on the ground. Birds were chirping around, the sun shone brightly, a light wind was moving the leaves on the trees. It seemed that the old man was not noticing all this as he was somewhere very far from that place in his thoughts. Apparently, this place was so nice that Litos’ eyes shone with love and happiness.*

*For more than thirty years the elder lived in this isolated corner of the world, away from anyone. Once, he came here for silence and peace to look within himself, to seek the purpose in*

*this life and to find a true God.*

*These years have not passed in vain for him. It was often a hard for him, but he was very set to go that way and has never stepped aside from it. And now, he has achieved all he came for a long time ago.*

*The elder sat in silence, smiling at his thoughts. Suddenly, there was a noise and despite a bright midday sun, it became much brighter. Litos raised his head and smiled warmly. A heavenly Angel was coming down to him. It was not the first time and the old man stood up to meet him.*

*‘Good day to you, Litos!’, said a blinding white Angel.*

*‘Good day, bright Angel!’, the old man responded with respect. ‘Your heavenly visit is an honour for me.’*

*‘It is always pleasing to come to see you,’ the Angel replied, ‘but this time, it was the Father who sent me to you. For your long years of striving to find Him, He decided to give you a present. Now, you may decide when you leave this world and pass to ours. The Father has made a small passage for you at the end of your cave through which you may come to us in Paradise.’*

*Litos took a deep bow.*

*‘Thank you, God, and thank you, bright Angel!’, he pronounced with warmth.*

*After that, the old man thought over it for a minute.*

*'This is a great honour for me,' he finally said. 'I think the Lord gave me much more than I deserve at the moment. I reckon, I should work further on the purity of my soul on earth before I deserve to be with you.'*

*The Angel approached the gray-haired old man and stroked his head.*

*'You decide, our dear! We all are looking forward to your coming! Now or later,' he said and began aspiring slowly off the ground.*

*The old man Litos watched him leave, then he sighed warmly and headed towards his abode.*

\* \* \*

In about fifteen steps, the bushes ended and in front of Brenda, there opened a nice meadow next to an almost vertical rock mountain. Mike was standing in its centre looking around in surprise.

'Look, Bre, someone lived here, apparently. It was likely a very long time ago,' the guy moved a half-rotten log with his foot.

Several similar logs lying around him.

'I told you!,' the girl cheered up and started inspecting everything around.

Eventually, she reached the rock mountain and suddenly stood

still there.

‘Come here, Mikey,’ she quietly called the guy.

When he came up, the girl showed him a big cross which was carved beautifully on a flat stone.

‘It looks like an ascetic Christian lived here.’

‘Very likely he did,’ the guy agreed and touched the stone with his hand.

After that, Mike took out his camera and took a few shots. Then, the young people stood there for a while more and went further along the rock. In five minutes, they came to the entrance of a large cave.

\* \* \*

The Angel in the Heavens had been watching the young pair with a smile. However, when they reached the cave, he worried slightly and raised his head.

‘Should I close the passage made for Litos, Father?’ he asked.

After a minute of silence, the Angel heard an answer.

‘You should not. Brenda has been wanting to find something unusual. Let them find it to the maximum.’

The Angel smiled cheerfully.

‘Good, Father!’

\* \* \*

While the young people were examining the entrance of the cave, the sun almost set behind the mountain. Having postponed the examination until the morning, the guy and the girl returned to their backpacks and having had a snack, they started to prepare for a night stop.

Mike set a small tent, while Brenda was making tea. When the first star shone in the sky, they were already seated, hugging each other by the fire, drinking a savoury beverage and chatting joyfully.

‘I confess, my Princess, this place has impressed me very much indeed. I’d never think that we would ever manage to find something like that,’ Mike said and adjusted the firewood.

‘I was sure about it,’ his travel companion replied optimistically.

‘You’re my best!’, the guy smiled.

The girl leaned on his shoulder with warmth.

‘And you, Mikey, haven’t you felt anything unusual on that meadow?’ Brenda asked him suddenly after some time.

‘Hum.., I wanted to ask you about that too but I was afraid of looking like an idiot,’ the guy replied amused. ‘What did you feel, Bre?’

The girl thought for a moment, trying to choose words.

‘Light, probably, joy,’ she started speaking. ‘I feel something similar when I meet you after a long parting or when I think of our future baby.’

‘A baby?’ Mike started to cough astounded and even rose to his feet for a moment. ‘But..., we’re just getting married, Bre?’

‘It’s not important, dear,’ a smiling Brenda sat him back down. ‘It’s simply we girls feel it’s important to dream of something very pleasing.’

‘Oh, I got it then...,’ Mike spoke out being somewhat slightly hesitated, and not understanding the gist really. ‘And me, I felt some childish joyfulness and carelessness on that meadow.’

‘That’s it,’ the girl started nodding her head, agreeing. ‘Perhaps, it may be put like that. What do you think of that generally?’

‘I don’t even know,’ the guy shrugged. ‘Possibly, that ascetic was a very bright and cheerful man.’

‘That’s probably how it was. It was the first thing I thought of,’ Brenda agreed and looked at her Mike with warmth.

However, he was yawning sleepily.

‘Alright, dear, let’s have some sleep now. We’ll think about it well in the morning,’ Mike continued somewhat sluggishly. ‘Today nothing clever will come to my sleepy head.’

The young people hid inside their tent and zipped it. Soon they fell asleep.

\* \* \*

On that night, the girl dreamt an unusual dream: she came to a beautiful bridge, which led somewhere upwards. Next to it, there stood a banner that read ‘the bridge of the elder Litos’. The girl looked around but saw no one.

Then, she stepped on the bridge cautiously and went on. The bridge took her steeply upwards and soon Brenda saw colourful clouds were passing next to her. The girl bent over the rails and looked down. Far, far below there was a blue sea, but she was not afraid despite the great height.

Having walked further on the bridge for some time, Brenda suddenly saw a silver-haired old man with a bright face and cheerful eyes.

‘Hello, Brenda!’, he said with a soft voice.

‘Hello!’, she replied courteously. ‘What is your name and how do you know me?’

‘My name is Litos.’

‘Oh! That’s your bridge, then!’, Brenda replied, slightly embarrassed. ‘I’m really sorry if I shouldn’t have used it. I wanted to ask someone for permission but there was no one around.’

‘That’s nothing, don’t worry,’ the old man replied with a smile. ‘You may use my bridge. It will lead you to a very unusual place. Remember everything you will see there, Brenda. If you want, help us after you return. For now, have a good trip!’

Having said that, the silver-haired old man with kind eyes disappeared.

Brenda woke up with surprise. The sunlight was already sparkling on the tent’s fabric.

‘Litos,’ the girl mumbled, remembering her dream.

‘What, darling?’ a sleepy Mike muttered next to her.

‘Litos,’ the girl repeated. ‘It is the name of an old man who once lived here. I saw him in my dream.’

\* \* \*

Brenda told Mike in detail about her dream during their breakfast.

‘Yes, it’s interesting,’ the guy reacted. ‘But I prefer to deal with those dreams only after a can of cold beer. And, the nearest beer can be found at the airport, in four days’ time, Brendie.’

The girl laughed cheerfully.

‘Alright, my beer analyst. Let’s pack our backpacks and go check the cave.’

A few moments later, the young people were approaching the familiar rocky mountain. Having switched their torches on, they entered the wide arch and looked around. The sound of their steps and voices immediately echoed from the cave's walls.

'Look, Brenda, someone loved to sit here apparently,' Mike said and pointed to a bench-looking construction made of stones and a fireplace in front of it.

'Certainly, as the elder lived here for many years,' the girl replied.

Then, they searched with their torches around the cave but found nothing else remarkable.

'There isn't much of his abiding traces left here,' said the guy.

'He didn't live here to paint the walls' Brenda shrugged with her shoulders. 'He was looking into his soul, purified it and searching for God.'

'Oh, Bre, I don't have much to say about this at all,' Mike complained making the girl laugh again.

'Yes, Mikey, this is apparently not for you.'

'Yep, I would prefer it to be something more understandable and much more beautiful,' Mike nodded and hugged his girl tenderly.

'No! Let's finish with this cave first,' Brenda broke away from his arms with a smile and headed deeper inside.

Mike followed her.

‘Look, Mikey, there is a passage here,’ the girl said and switched off her torch. ‘Oh, there’s some light coming out from it! Perhaps, that’s a through-passage to the other side of the mountain.’

Mike walked up to her.

‘It looks like so,’ he nodded, looking there for a while, ‘and the size of the passage is big enough to pass through it. So, shall we go there?’

The girl nodded her head and the young couple went further.

## ***On the other side***

As Mike and Brenda were approaching another end of the cave, the light penetrating it became brighter. Finally, the young people passed through one more arch of the cave coming out to an open air on the other side of the mountain. They stood still having made a few steps, and looked around in amazement. Literally everything seemed surprising to them: the grass they stood on, the plants around them and even the sky, which looked unusual. After some time, Mike found his tongue.

‘Bre, where have we come to? An experimental botanical garden, maybe?’

His girl could only blink silently. She stared at a yellow-bright grass which, with its everything-ideal, reminded her of a carpet with a long nap. Then, she stared at unusual trees of fancy shapes and tones, after that – at incredibly beautiful flowers. Finally, the girl gazed at the sky, which for some reason was sparkling by itself without the sun in it.

Brenda suddenly felt some kind of happiness. She stood smiling childishly, without knowing what to reply to her boyfriend's last question.

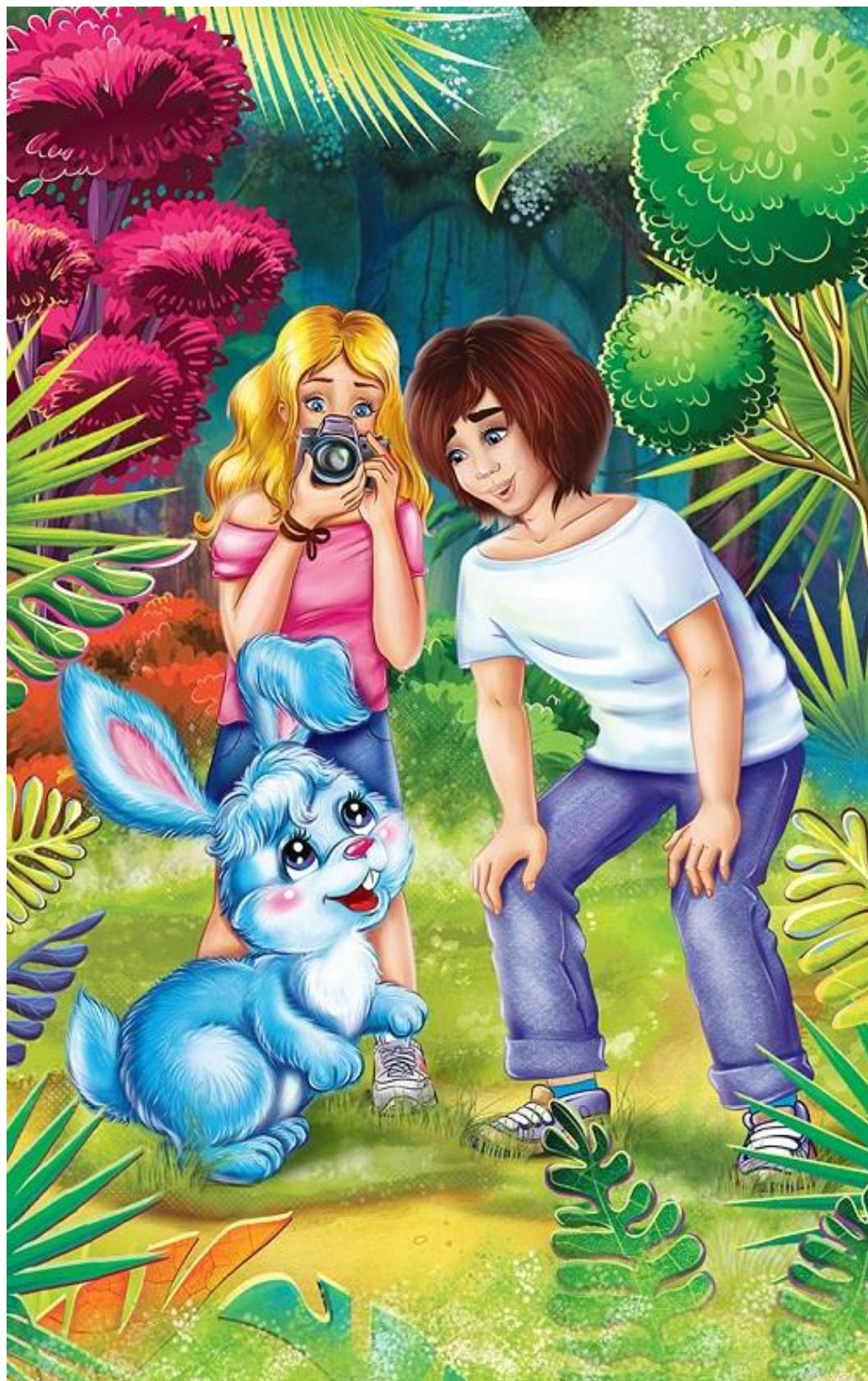
‘Oh, Mikey, it’s so beautiful here! I feel like I’m going to fly with happiness! I’ve never imagined that such beauty to exist somewhere,’ she finally found a reply after which she inhaled the air through the nose. ‘What a smell!’

The guy, who was experiencing the same feelings, nodded his head in agreement. So, they stood for several more minutes – smiling and holding each other’s hands.

‘I’ve seen something similar in a movie,’ Mike finally said. ‘Perhaps, it was filmed here?’

Brenda shrugged her shoulders; suddenly she started tugging the boyfriend’s hand.

‘Mikey, Mikey, look! What a big rabbit over there!’ she whispered with excitement and, taken out the camera, she began clicking on its button.



\* \* \*

The Angel, who was watching them, looked up with interest.

‘Father! What shall we do with their photos? Should I make it so, that nothing will come out?’

‘Well, no. Let them take the pictures,’ he heard a slightly cheered voice. ‘Only the one, who is capable of believing it, will believe it.’

\* \* \*

The guy looked in the direction that the girl was looking and was instantly stunned. About five metres away from them, there sat a light blue rabbit of incredible size, looking at them curiously. It was about their belt’s height.

‘Wow! As huge as an elephant,’ Mike was hardly able to mumble out.

‘No, the elephant is much bigger than me,’ the rabbit replied thoughtfully and scratched his one ear with another.

The young people were shocked.

‘Bre, pinch me. Is this rabbit speaking to us?’ The guy whispered and shrieked in a moment. ‘Ouch! What’re you doing?’

‘I’m pinching you, as you’ve asked,’ the girl replied calmly,

without taking her eyes off the rabbit.

‘It hurts...!’

‘Are you playing a game of pinching each other?’ the rabbit asked them, surprised. ‘I’ve never heard of such game before. Somewhat silly. I won’t play it for certain.’

Having said that, it waved with its ears and leapt into a colourful forest. Mike and Brenda watched him leave with their eyes popped out.

‘Now, I get it!’ Mike laughed, twitching slightly. ‘We’ve inhaled some gas in the cave: we’re hallucinating.’

‘Right you are! How could I’ve been so dumb,’ Brenda slapped her forehead and then asked the guy then, ‘what shall we do before these rabbits start telling us jokes?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps, we’d better go back to fresh the air?’

‘Let’s go,’ the girl replied.

The young couple headed back to the cave and soon found themselves on the other side of the mountain. Everything around them became simple and usual again.

‘Oh!’ Mike said happily, ‘it looks like we’re out of the gas cloud.’

‘Too quickly, it seems,’ Brenda replied with a pinch of doubt. ‘And my head’s not aching at all, quite the opposite.’

They stood there for five more minutes, looking at a familiar landscape.

‘That old man in my dream told me that his bridge will lead us to a very unusual place, Mikey,’ the girl suddenly remembered.

‘Do you believe these fairy tales?’

‘Well, no. I’ve just seen a huge speaking rabbit, though,’ she said.

‘A light blue rabbit,’ the guy added.

‘You see, it seems we’ve seen the same thing,’ the girl said, amused. ‘There can’t be two identical hallucinations, as far as I know.’

‘That’s strange... Bre, what was the colour of the grass there?’ asked Mike, understanding her train of thoughts.

‘The grass was light yellow, dear, the sky was sparkling and the rabbit told us that the elephant was bigger than him.’

‘O, golly!’ the guy could only say.

After that, they stood there for a few more minutes.

‘You know, I felt incredibly good there,’ the girl said. ‘This feeling doesn’t seem to be a hallucination. It reminds me a lot of what you and I felt in that old man’s meadow yesterday.’

Mike was immersed in his thoughts and unexpectedly slapped his forehead.

‘Bre! Didn’t you take pictures there?’

‘Right!’ the girl remembered shining up; in a moment, the young people leaned over the tiny screen of the camera.

A thoughtful light blue rabbit was looking at them from there.

‘This means, it’s true...,’ Mike spoke out. ‘My goodness! So, what shall we do know? Go there again?’

Brenda nodded her head and they headed to the cave again. When the young couple emerged from it for the second time, nothing changed in the unusual landscape around them. Treading cautiously on the yellow grass, they headed deeper into this unusual park.

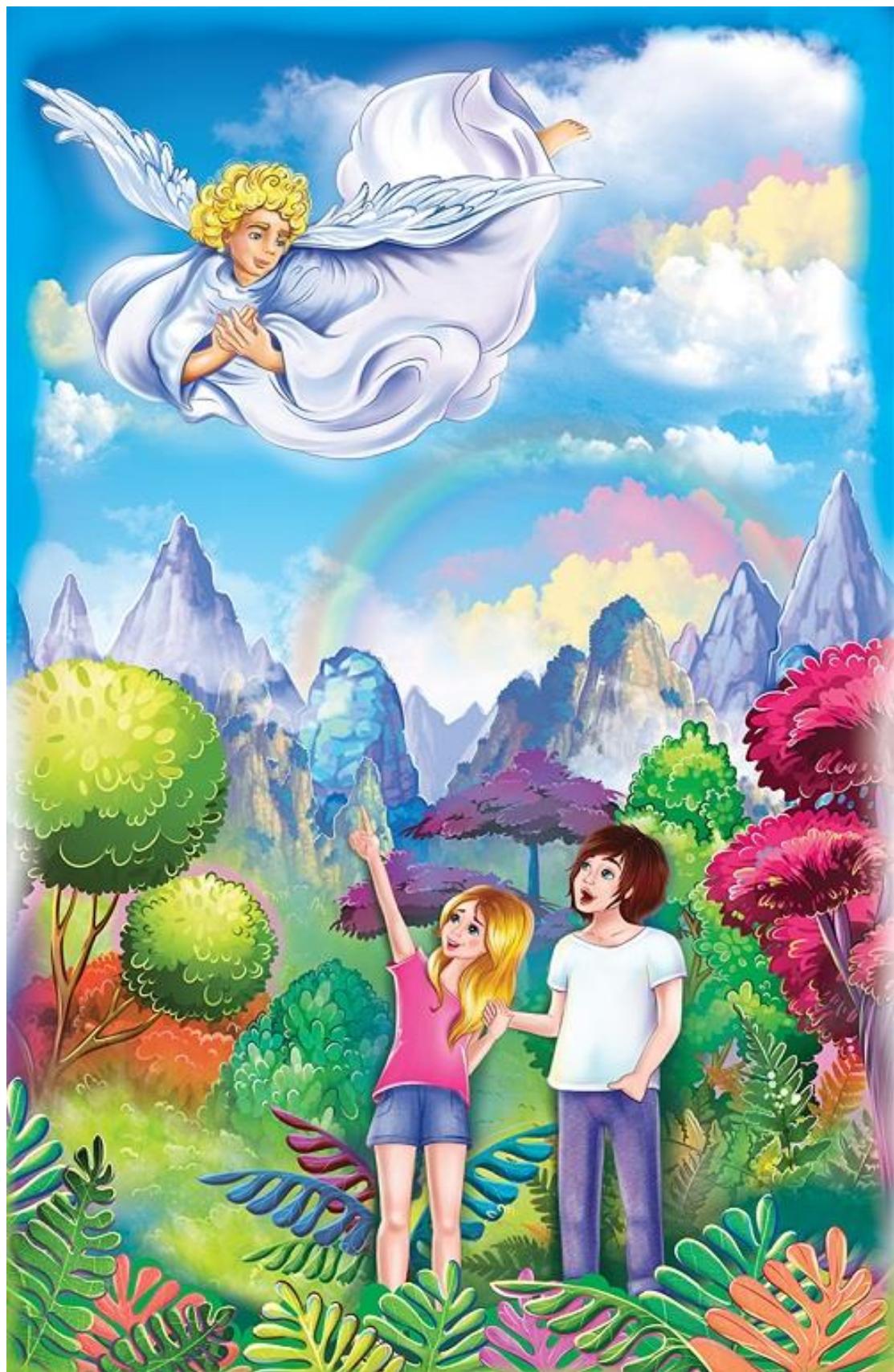
‘Wait, Bre,’ Mike said and took a compass from his pocket. ‘I’ll just take a notice of our direction so that we can find our way back.’

The guy started to rotate the device. However, after a few seconds he knocked it on his palm.

‘What’s the matter? Is it broken?’ he muttered in surprise. ‘The arrow turns as it wants.’

‘Look, Mikey,’ Brenda interrupted him alarmed and pointed into the sky with her finger.

Mike raised his head and froze motionless: there was a flying bright white man with wings. His arms were crossed on his chest,



as divers do, when swimming underwater. As he noticed them, the man waved joyfully and kept on flying.

‘An Angel...’ Brenda could hardly say.

‘I want some beer...,’ Mike complained and sat down on the grass.

\* \* \*

For a long time, the young people were still sitting on the yellow grass near unusual, enormous flowers and looking around in confusion.

‘Bre, the Angels, they live in Paradise, don’t they? Mike spoke slowly and hesitantly.

The girl nodded in reply.

‘What does this mean? Are we dead? We were probably poisoned by gas in that cave, I think...’

Brenda shrugged her shoulders, frustrated. But then, she suddenly shuddered and leaning into Mike, she quickly gave him a sensual kiss. After that, the girl stood up resolutely.

‘Hum...,’ she smiled for the first time. ‘I don’t know if we are alive or not, however, it’s very pleasing to kiss yet.’

‘Same for me,’ the guy was noticeably cheered up. ‘What do you know about Paradise, Bre? Tell me, as I’m completely unaware.’

‘Well, I know little about it too,’ the girl thought for a while. ‘Mainly, I heard some things from my grandparents in my childhood when I stayed with them. Strangely, those stories seemed absolutely true to me then.’

‘What did they tell you?’

‘Well, if kind people live their lives righteously on Earth, they go to Paradise after death and live there for eternity. Everything’s splendid, beautiful and well in Paradise, and everyone’s happy.’

Mike looked around thoughtfully.

‘It looks so, for now. What else?’

‘Also, God is the chief of Paradise. There’re Angels too, the saints and those who were simply good and kind people.’

‘We’ve already seen the Angel,’ Mike nodded agreeing, ‘but for the rest, not yet. Did you not hear anything about the talking rabbits from your grandparents?’

Brenda shook her head negatively.

‘Okay, at least it has become slightly clear to me,’ the guy smiled. ‘Oh, where have we gone, Bre! However, first we should verify if we’re still alive or not. How can we do that?’

The young people were silent, thinking. Suddenly Brenda raised her head.

‘Mikey, when I pinched you, you did feel pain!’ she said cheerfully. ‘A body can feel pain only if it’s alive. This means

that we are alive. Let's check it once more, if you want.'

Mike winced, then carefully pinched himself.

'Never mind, Bre, I've already checked. It's really painful. This means we're most likely alive.' After that, he looked at the girl once again. 'So, what shall we do now?'

'I don't even know, this is the first time happened in my life,' Brenda shrugged. 'Basically, we can leave this place at any time. We've done it once before.'

'Do you want to leave this place?' the guy asked her.

'No!' the girl shook her head, smiling. 'It's cool here! Very beautiful and somehow joyful. Besides, only fools run away from Paradise.'

'I love it much here too,' Mike laughed at her joke.

'One more thing I recalled: the old man in my dream told me to look around well and remember it; and to help afterwards if we wanted,' Brenda added.

'Whom should we help?'

'I don't know,' the girl shrugged her shoulders. 'He didn't tell me about that.'

'Well, anyway, he knew that we'd come here,' Mike proposed, 'as he told us to look around here thoroughly.'

'It looks like so,' his girlfriend agreed.

‘It means that we should look around here thoroughly. What do you think?’

‘Now that we know we’re safe and sound, I really like this idea,’ Brenda smiled and rose to her feet. ‘And, I’m full of strength and energy!’

‘I’m okay too,’ the guy replied and rose to his feet. ‘So, let’s go now. Where will we go first?’

‘How do I know where we need to go in Paradise?’ Brenda shrugged her shoulders. ‘Let’s go straight forward. The main thing is that we can find our way back to the cave or else, my parents will go mad if we are lost.’

‘Even in such a case, they’ll meet you here someday,’ the guy joked philosophically. ‘We surely won’t get lost: our mountain has a very noticeable shape. Also, we’ll tie red stripes on bushes. Then, we’ll easily find our way back.’

‘That’s clever,’ the girl nodded joyfully. She’d taken a skein of red band and tied the first stripe on a branch so it could be easily noticed. After that, she took Mike by his hand.

‘So, shall we go, my dear?’

‘Let’s go,’ the guy agreed and the young couple headed down the slope.

# *Ug*

After some distance, they stopped to tie the next strip. Brenda bent slightly over a bush but instantly pulled back. There was a happy face of their rabbit acquaintance looking at her from the bushes' leaves.

‘What are you playing now?’ he asked cheerfully. ‘You know, I like this game much more now!’

Mike choked.

‘Who are you?’ he asked the long-eared one.

‘Uggentusiys, but, you can simply call me Ug,’ the rabbit replied modestly. ‘I know you: you are Brenda and you are Mike. I just overheard you talk, but understood nothing, frankly. Why do you tie these strips here? For beauty sake?’

‘No,’ Mike replied. ‘We just want to find our way back to the cave. With this we won’t be lost for sure.’

The rabbit scratched his one ear with the other. Brenda could hardly stand from laughter. When she recovered, she took a video of this rather unusual talk with her boyfriend and a big, light blue coloured rabbit.

‘Hum. It’s so unusual. Why wouldn’t you find yourselves near the cave just after your journey?’

‘How would we?’ Mike stared at him in amazement.

‘Well, as always, of course,’ Ug spread his ears to the sides. ‘First, you think of a place you want to get to, then you want to get there and then you immediately find yourself there. Why do anything else?’

Mike and Brenda glanced at each other and smiled silly.

‘Should we try it, Mikey? What do we loose?’ the girl finally supposed. ‘We’re in Paradise. Who knows how things work here...’

‘Let’s try,’ the guy replied with uncertainty. ‘To our cave, but don’t tell anyone that we followed the rabbit’s advice.’

The young couple stood in silence, then took each other’s hands and a seconds later found themselves near the entrance to a familiar arch in the mountain.

‘It can’t be!’ Mike could only say. ‘This is..., how’s it... teleportation! I’ve seen it in a movie.’

‘I’m going mad!’ Brenda added.

‘So, what now? Shall we try going back?’ the guy asked her, cheering up in his face.

In a moment, they found themselves next to the light blue rabbit again.

‘How are you? Did you manage it?’ Ug asked them.

The guys nodded happily in response. After that, the rabbit glanced behind them.

‘What’s that hanging on your back?’

‘These’re backpacks,’ Mike replied to him with a slight surprise. Then he remembered that he was talking to a rabbit from Paradise, so he explained, smiling ‘Well, these are the bags inside which we carry all our necessary things.’

‘Are they? And, what’s there? Is this something to play with?’

‘Well, not quite, Ug. Do you always want to play?’ Brenda laughed and looked at Mike, smiling. ‘We play in a slightly different way. In our backpacks we carry food, a tent to sleep in and many other useful things.’

‘The food, to sleep in...,’ the rabbit slowly repeated the words that were obviously unknown to him, ‘What’s that?’

‘What do you mean?’ the guy and the girl asked together, surprised.

Mike crouched down closer to Ug.

‘Do you like carrots, friend?’

The rabbit gave him an embarrassed look.

‘Well, I don’t know, perhaps you call it something else,’ the guy scratched his head. ‘Well, what kind of tasty food you like to put into your mouth and chew?’

Ug looked at him terrified.

‘Put in my mouth? I don’t put anything into my mouth, I speak

with it,’ the rabbit replied and made two steps back to be safe.

Mike and Brenda glanced at each other astonished.

‘And for the tent,’ the girl decided to change the topic, ‘we sleep in it when the night comes and it becomes dark.’

‘The night, dark? What is this?’ the amazed rabbit asked again. ‘I have never seen it become dark. What does *to sleep* mean?’

The guy and the girl looked at each other and sat down on the grass astounded.

‘They probably have no food or night here?’ Mike started to figure it out.

‘I don’t know,’ the girl shrugged her shoulders. ‘I’ll ask him.’

She turned to the rabbit.

‘Ug, do you ever sleep?’ she asked.

‘How is that?’ the rabbit bent his ears forward with interest.

‘Well, you lay down under a bush and close your eyes...’

‘Oh, right!’ Ug cheered up. ‘Well, yes, certainly. We don’t call it *sleep*, but a *hide-and-seek*. Then, I open my eyes and go to seek for my friends.’

‘Mmm...,’ Mike mumbled. ‘This means, they don’t sleep here.’

The rabbit scratched his ears.

‘Well, alright, guys, I’ve got to go and meet somebody now. I’m going,’ he said. ‘See you later.’

Ug leapt joyfully towards a colourful forest. Mike and Brenda looked at him thoughtfully.

\* \* \*

When the rabbit disappeared from their sight, the young people silently stared into the sky.

‘It looks like it’s the same here as in our world,’ Mike said. ‘Although the sun can’t be seen, it’s still bright here. What’re you thinking about, Bre?’

‘These clouds are quite similar to earth ones,’ the girl nodded, took out her camera and started taking pictures of the sky. ‘Only there are no grey ones – they are all white and fluffy. However, there I see a pink and a green one.’

After that, Brenda put her camera away and took off her backpack.

‘Okay, Mikey, let’s get something to eat. We’ve completely forgotten about the food. Then, on a full stomach, we’ll come up with something clever.’

‘Perhaps, we should eat later?’ the guy stumbled doubtfully. ‘For some reason, I’m not hungry at all.’

‘Not hungry? What do you mean?’ Brenda stopped untying

her backpack in astonishment. ‘You’ve never said that, Mikey! You’ve never missed a meal before!’

‘Well right, I haven’t,’ the guy nodded and thought. ‘But for some reason, I am not hungry at all, at the moment. What about you, Bre? Are you hungry?’

‘No,’ the girl replied, listening to herself. ‘I don’t want to eat either, but I am full of energy and strength.’

‘That’s right! Me too,’ the guy nodded cheerfully.

‘So we became like the local rabbits,’ the girl smiled and moved closer to her guy, leaning her head on his shoulder. ‘What shall we do, dear?’

‘I don’t know,’ Mike said, stroking the girl’s head and smiling. ‘Like rabbits, you say? Hum, it sounds romantic!’

‘Well, yes. The rabbits, by the way, always play,’ the girl continued cheerfully. ‘Someone hasn’t kissed me today yet...’

‘Haven’t I?’ the guy wondered and bent closer to Brenda.

\* \* \*

Some time later, the young couple looked at the landscape around them again.

‘So,’ the girl started summing up, ‘we don’t feel hungry, but we don’t know about sleep yet.’

‘Mmm,’ Mike nodded. It’ll be rather funny, if we find that we

don't want to sleep too.'

'Then, why should we carry these heavy backpacks?' Brenda asked. 'Let's leave out the food, dishes and the tent near the cave. This will make walking much easier.'

'No, let's wait a day, Bre,' Mike shook his head in doubt. 'It's too early to leave the food behind.'

The girl burst out laughing.

'That's my Mikey!'

After that, the young people stood up from the grass. The guy wanted to clean the back of the girl's shorts, but suddenly whistled in surprise.

'Wow! Not a blade of grass or dust at all. Like you've been sitting in an armchair.'

The girl turned around herself, trying to look at her back.

'Yes, dear. It looks like the discoveries await us everywhere around here.'

Then, she put her backpack over her shoulders.

'Well, Mikey? Shall we go further to see Paradise?'

'Let's go, my Princess,' the guy replied happily and put his backpack on as well. Then, he sighed: 'it's a pity, no one in the world will believe us.'

'Why? We have photos and videos! How about we bring Ug

along as proof?' Brenda replied, laughing.

'Don't tell him this ahead of time or he'll be shocked.' Mike laughed out heartily and the young couple set off on their trip.

'Besides, if he comes with us, then he'll know what a carrot is,' a cheerful guy's voice was heard from a distance a minute later.

\* \* \*

'So, where shall we go, Bre?' Mike asked his girlfriend after nearly half an hour passed. 'Of course, it's beautiful here, but we could walk forever. We'd better go somewhere. Although, I don't know any places in Paradise.'

'Me too,' the girl slowed her pace thinking over and suddenly slapped herself on the forehead. 'Mikey! My grandparents should be somewhere here! They really wanted to get to Paradise.'

'Well done!' Mike replied cheerily. 'Let's hope they're here. So, they'll tell us everything about Paradise. But how can we find them here?'

The young people stopped and thought for a while.

'Bre!' the guy looked amazed at his girlfriend. 'Do you remember their appearance well?'

'Well, yes,' Brenda shrugged uncertainly. 'Do you want to

describe their appearance to our rabbit, so that he can help us find them here?’

‘No, Bre,’ Mike giggled. ‘I just thought if you imagined them and wanted to get to them...’

‘It would come out like with the cave?’ the girl intercepted his thought. ‘You know, Mikey, let’s try it. What do we have to lose?’

‘Nothing,’ the guy nodded, agreeing. ‘Let’s take each other’s hands now, then. The main thing is, we must not get separated in this place.’

‘Right,’ Brenda nodded.

‘So, if we do get separated,’ Mike started speaking again, ‘let’s immediately return to the cave.’

‘Of course!’ Brenda agreed and tenderly stroked Mike. ‘We can’t afford to get separated. Where else can I find such a remarkable father for my three children!’

‘Three?’ he asked with great surprise.

‘Uh, later,’ the girl waved her hand. ‘Now, let’s find my grandparents.’

‘Good,’ the guy agreed, astonished. ‘Hold on tight.’

‘I better hug you, just in case,’ the girl replied with a smile and the young people clung to each other.

After that, Brenda closed her eyes and remembered the image

of her grandmother Nika and her grandfather Kirik. Then, she wanted to get to them. Mike also closed his eyes, just in case.

\* \* \*

When the young people opened them again, they were standing on a beautiful seashore. A soft birds' tweeting, an amazing scent and the endless blue ocean flooded their hearts with happiness.

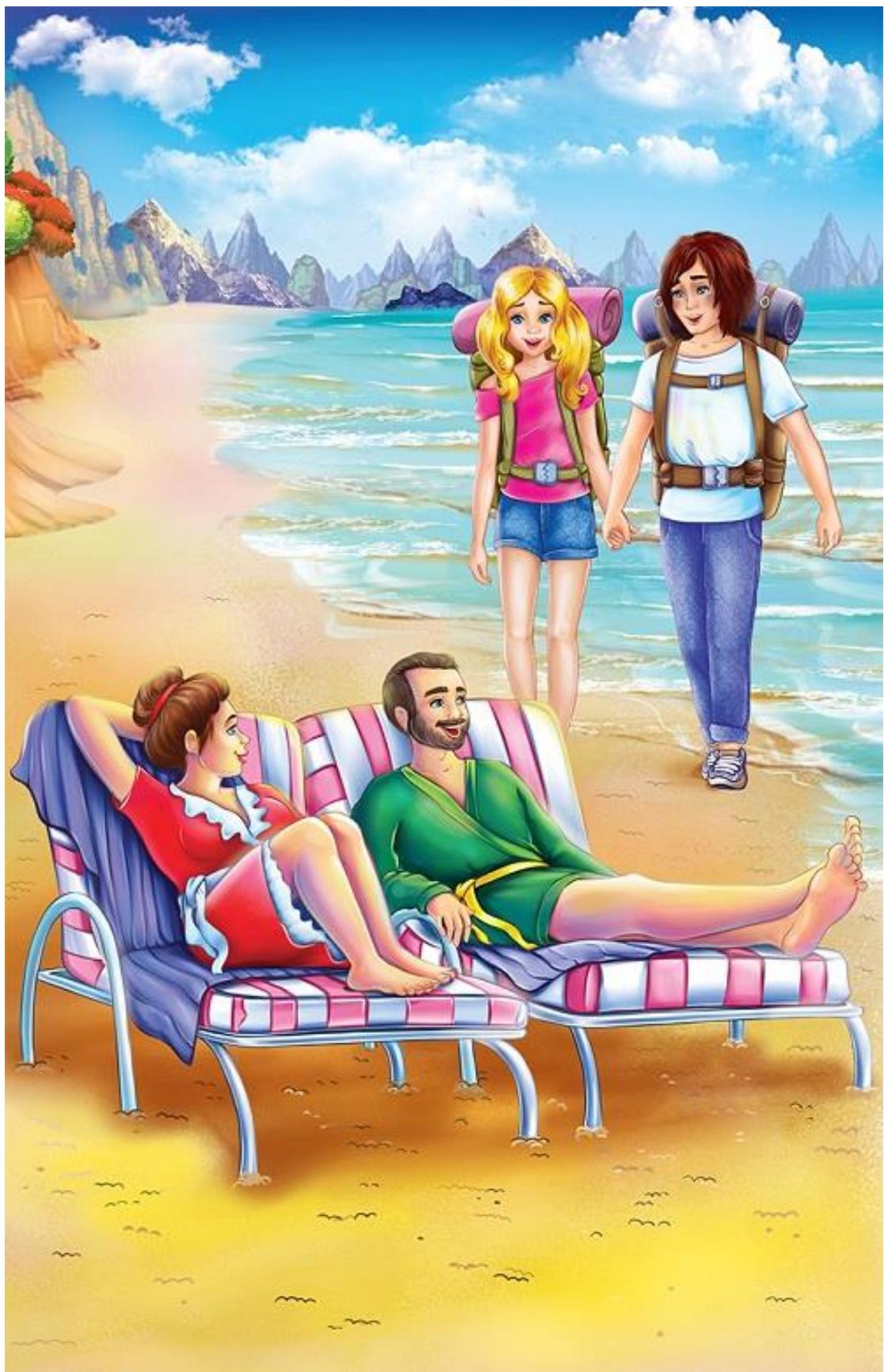
‘Wow!’ Mike mumbled first and reached his hand for the camera. ‘That’s the ocean! Though it looks slightly different.’

‘How beautiful!’ the girl said and, letting go of Mike, she stretched her hands to her sides. ‘This means there’re oceans in Paradise, too!’

‘What an interesting girl, Kir!’ the young couple suddenly heard a woman’s voice coming from behind them. ‘She looks a bit like our granddaughter.’

‘Hum, there is something in her, my dear,’ a man’s voice replied. ‘Hardly that’s her. It’s too early for her.’

Brenda and Mike turned around at once and stared at a strange young couple that was sitting in sun loungers right in front of them. Right behind the sun loungers, there was a nice garden with a beautiful house at the end. The young people turned their heads looking around for a while and saw a few more of such houses further on the shore.



‘Terrific!’ Mike stood, amazed. ‘It looks like they are build houses right by the ocean. Strange. What about storms?’

‘Storms?’ the people in the sun loungers glanced at each other.

In the meanwhile, Brenda stood still staring at them.

‘Excuse me!’ she suddenly spoke with an unusually agitated voice. ‘Do you know where Kirik and Nika Kortis live here?’

The couple in the sun lounges raised to their feet.

‘How do you know them?’ the man asked her, surprised.

‘I’m Brenda, their granddaughter,’ the girl hardly started to speak when she felt something and rushed to them happily. ‘Granny! Grandpa! Is that you?’

‘Brandie!’ they replied together and rushed to her.

Meanwhile, a touched Mike was shooting a video of this most unusual meeting in the girl’s life.

## ***Kirik and Nika***

After some time, the guy and the girl sat inside the beautiful house of Brenda's grandparents and told their long story during which Nika and Kirik were emotionally splashing their hands.

'I've never heard anything like this before,' the grandmother said first after the story was over.

'Yes, it is very unusual that Father allowed them to come in here,' a young-looking grandfather agreed. 'Unbelievable!'

'Father?' Mike asked him embarrassed.

'Father – is God. The Creator of the Earth and this Paradise!' Nika explained to him.

'Hum... You think that God knew we found that way in the cave?' the guy scratched his head.

Kirik and Nika laughed cheerfully.

'Father knows everything!' the grandfather explained to the guy. 'Nothing happens without His knowledge: neither here, nor on earth.'

'Does it?' Mike scratched his head again.

'Grandma, grandpa!' Brenda addressed Nika and Kirik. 'Will you tell us something about Paradise. We're so excited!'

'Well, my dear, you've already seen some of its outer looks,'

the grandmother smiled. ‘It looks a bit like Earth but much more beautiful and sophisticated. In addition, it is always absolutely safe in Paradise. Also, we have more ways to move around and many other things.’

‘You said that we’ve seen some of the outer looks,’ Mike said with interest. ‘Is there something else, internal in Paradise?’

Kirik and Nika glanced at each other and laughed heartily.

‘In fact, the essence of Paradise hides inside,’ the grandfather started explaining smiling. ‘Because love cannot be seen by the eyes. You, children, can you describe or draw what you feel for each other?’

The guy and the girl glanced at each other and thought for some time. Then, they simply took each other’s hands.

‘It’s a kind of joyfulness,’ Brenda tried to express her feelings in words. ‘It probably feels like the sun, flowers or the stars in the sky. This feels warm.’

‘You described it well, my dear!’ the grandfather nodded in appreciation. ‘The same inner joy is everywhere here.’

‘Is that thanks to grandma?’ Mike asked.

‘Thanks to her too,’ the grandfather laughed out loudly. ‘And because of our fine neighbours, the dwellers who live here...’

‘But mainly because of our Father!’ the grandmother added warmly. ‘If only you could feel how loving, kind and cheerful He

is! Father always fills Paradise with light and happiness. All of us, who live here love Him very much and feel the warmth of the light that comes from Him.'

'By the way, He is present on earth too,' the grandfather said and sighed, 'but the people don't strive to feel the touch of the most beautiful thing they have in their lives.'

Mike and Brenda listened to him attentively and tried to understand everything he said well.

'I've been feeling happiness here without any obvious reason too,' the girl finally said. 'It's like my birthday or something similar.'

'That's a good comparison, Bre,' Mike nodded. 'I too have a feeling of birthday happiness here, with a big pile of presents.'

They all burst out laughing heartily.

'Well, finally, you're feeling something yourselves. But you have not known the Creator of these presents and you don't yet have love and gratefulness to Him. That's why you don't feel everything by far.'

'Could you explain this?' Mike asked confused.

'It is not so difficult. Well, for instance, our granddaughter. Is there a difference for you, Mike, between first seeing Brenda from far away and now? When she loves you and has done a lot for you?'

The guy was trying hard to think over what he has heard, meanwhile the girl was smiling happily.

‘Well, yes. Come to think of it, there’s a great difference!’ Mike said. ‘Are you saying, we see everything in Paradise as if from a distance?’

The grandmother and the grandfather clapped their hands simultaneously.

‘That’s my clever!’ Brenda hugged her guy by his shoulders smiling.

Then, the grandfather stood up.

‘Well, my dear guests,’ he said cheerfully. ‘I don’t know how long you’ll be here, but let us show you something interesting in Paradise.’

‘That would be great!’ Mike said excitedly.

‘What would you like to see first?’

The guy and the girl thought for a while.

‘Well, you know,’ Mike said after some time, ‘I’ve heard that besides Paradise, hell exists. Is that true?’

‘Certainly,’ the grandfather nodded.

‘Can we have a look at it too?’

The grandmother and the grandfather looked at each other.

‘The dwellers of Paradise cannot get there,’ Nika replied in a

moment. ‘Hell lies behind a bottomless abyss. However, there is one place just on the edge of it from where you can see something on the other side. Are you sure you want to look at this?’

Brenda and Mike looked at each other and nodded.

‘Well, then, hold our hands,’ the hosts of the house said and came closer to them.

After that, they all closed their eyes...

\* \* \*

The next moment, when Mike opened his eyes, there was a splendid meadow with beautiful grass and big lonely trees.

‘Is that hell?’ he asked the grandmother and the grandfather, who stood nearby.

‘Not quite, Mikey, hell is behind you,’ Kirik replied.

Brenda and Mike turned around and instantly froze, as they found themselves standing on the edge of a great abyss, from which flames of fire would appear from time to time.

Right beyond the abyss, there was a different land. It was neither green, nor colourful. Everything, including the sky, was grey and dark. From the spot where they were standing, they could see well some living creatures moving there. Mike reached his hand into his backpack and took out binoculars. After looking through it for a minute, he silently passed them over to Brenda.

In a few minutes, the girl put her hands down as well.

‘Who are these creatures?’ she asked with a low voice.

‘There are different kinds of them there,’ the grandfather replied. ‘Those with tails are the devils and the rest are the people who didn’t strive much for love and kindness in their earthly lives.’

‘I really wouldn’t like to get there one day,’ Mike pronounced slowly.

## ***Beyond the abyss***

Devil Zinger passed the guards quickly and ran up the stairs in a headlong rush. Having come to the second floor, he flung into the Chairman’s office. Satan raised his disapproving look from the table on which he was gathering a puzzle of his own image.

‘What is happened, shaggy? I hope it isn’t a false alarm?’

‘Your Apocalypticity!’ the visitor addressed him with fright. ‘We have news! We’ve just noticed two people on the other side of the abyss. They’re probably still there.’

‘People in Paradise?!’ Satan said with surprise and stood up from his table. ‘This is really something new. Are you sure about that?’

‘Well, yes. I saw them myself. They were standing there with their backpacks and looked like tourists.’

‘Hum...’

Satan headed to the balcony. The devil instantly jumped forward and opened the door for him. As he came out to a wide terrace, the Chairman of hell took a big telescope with which he watched the land he was dishonourably expelled from.

‘Where are they?’ he asked the devil.

Zinger looked through the eyepiece and started moving the telescope around. Soon, he passed it to the Chairman.

‘There they are, four of them. Two are locals and the other two are definitely people.’

Satan leaned to the telescope. In a minute, he took it off the stand and began to watch attentively the girl and the guy; both were on the other side at that moment taking pictures of something.



‘Hum, these are people indeed,’ he finally said. How could they be there? What do they want? I’ve never heard of people visiting Paradise.’

After that, the boss suddenly turned to the devil.

‘Take clear photos of these people immediately.’

‘Already done, boss!’ the devil clicked his hoofs happily.

Satan grinned contentedly and patted the devil on his horns approvingly.

‘You are able to work properly, Zinger,’ he said. ‘Perhaps, I should consider your promotion at some point.’

The devil's tail began to spin like an airplane propeller. Satan turned toward the abyss and immersed deeply into his thoughts.

\* \* \*

Having taken a few photos with maximum zoom, Mike put away his camera. After that, he and Brenda looked at her grandparents.

‘Grandma, grandpa! Could we see something unusual and more beautiful in contrast to this? Well, the things you like,’ the girl asked them.

Nika and Kirik glanced at each other joyfully.

‘Hum... So, grandpa, shall we show the children a couple of our favourite places? Maybe we have similar tastes?’

‘Let’s go, Nika,’ Kirik replied with a smile, ‘I think, we have a chance there.’

They took each other’s hands once again.

When Mike opened his eyes, he screamed, horrified to death. They were standing on a seabed while a big shark was looking at his face with curiosity. A second later, the shark swam aback and disappeared in the blue of the sea, being obviously frightened by Mike’s scream.

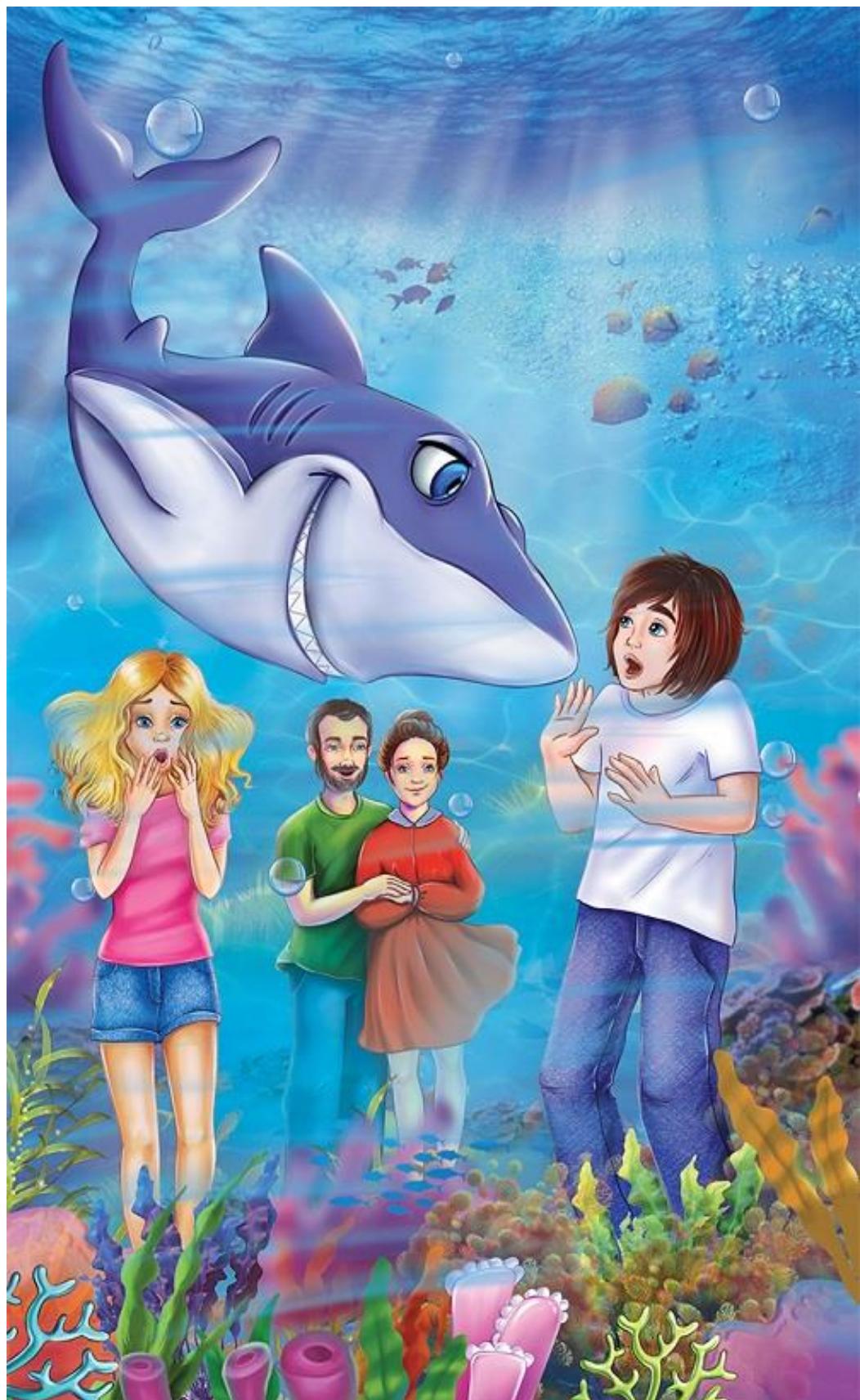
‘Well, now, Tobik was frightened,’ Nika turned reproachfully to her grandpa, then whispered, ‘I told you we should have warned them ahead.’

‘Well, they’re Australian divers, so...,’ the grandpa tried to justify himself. ‘I thought they would’ve been accustomed to that.’

‘We, we have frightened T-Tobik?’ Brenda found her tongue. ‘With such a huge t-teeth of his?’

‘Well, yes, my dear,’ her grandmother smiled. ‘His teeth won’t harm anyone in Paradise. Absolutely no one thinks of food here.’

‘Tobik is an old friend of ours!’ the grandfather added, laughing. ‘Nika and I love to ride him at times. He’s fun. Though after this incident, possibly less so...’



Mike and Brenda were listening to them, smiling silly, until the guy screamed for the second time.

‘How can we be underwater without scuba gears, Bre?’

The girl looked around amazed.

‘You are in Paradise, children!’ Kirik told them. ‘Things here look earthly, but are absolutely different in their essence.’

‘Our bodies might look like yours, but they are different. They don’t become older or ill; they don’t need food,’ Nika continued. ‘The local atmosphere, I’d say, is radically different.’

‘And, what about us? Can we stay here with our bodies too?’ Mike asked, amazed.

‘Of course, this is a very perfect world,’ the grandmother replied. ‘As for sleeping and eating, you won’t feel the need for it, probably.’

‘Human bodies are capable of many more things even on Earth when they are filled with the energy from Father,’ Kirik smiled. ‘Some prominent saints could refrain from food for a long time, rise above the ground and many other things. Here in Paradise, in His home, it always exists.’

‘Mikey! Our electronics will drown here!’ Brenda exclaimed, ‘cameras, telephones...’

Mike quickly pulled the camera out of his bag and sighed with relief.

‘It’s working! Looks wet, but working!’

‘Nothing can break or be damaged here,’ the grandmother explained with a smile, ‘neither on land, nor underwater.’

They stood on the seabed for some time. Mike took pictures of several known, as well as unfamiliar sea animals, many of which were swimming around them. Sometime later, Brenda turned to her grandparents again.

‘What’s the second place you wanted to show us?’

Her relatives glanced at each other slyly.

‘You’ll see. Take our hands.’

When Mike and Brenda opened their eyes again, they both screamed this time: they were falling down from an incredible height, flying through colourful clouds. Trees and grass could be seen far below, several kilometres away.

Nika and Kirik were happily flying next to them with their arms wide apart. When the young couple recovered from the first and second shock, they did as their grandparents did and flew down together.

‘How are we going to land? We don’t have any parachutes with us,’ Mike managed to ask his first question in a while.

‘No one can be harmed anywhere in Paradise!’ the grandparents repeated their favourite reply. ‘So, fly calmly, children.’

However, Mike and Brenda were not able to entirely relax themselves until the moment their feet softly touched the grass.

\* \* \*

Zinger the devil took the photographs which he threw aside a few minutes before and started studying them again thoroughly. The Chairman's words, which he had heard this morning, were sounding in his head constantly.

'Zinger, I don't know how the hell these people came to Paradise and whether they go back to Earth or not. But, if they do this, they'll have photographs and videos from Paradise in their hands which will severely harm us. We've been struggling for hundreds of years on Earth to make the people forget about God and Paradise. These photos can ruin many of our plans. By all means, we cannot afford this to happen. Find them on Earth, Zinger! This is a good opportunity for you to grow into a position of my senior assistant – if you succeed, of course. In case you fail, guess your perspectives by yourself.'

Having remembered the last words of the Chairman, the devil unwillingly jerked. He knew what happens in hell to those who fail and he did not even want to imagine that any further in his thoughts.

'So, my good ones,' Zinger began to whisper looking closely at the faces in the photographs, 'what place on earth do you come from?'

He studied in detail their clothes, footwear and backpacks on the photographs once more, then he wrote down brands of firms he could distinguish on their things. After that, Zinger made a drawing, copying all the symbols he could see.

At the appointed time, two new devils entered his office who were designated by Satan to assist. Both of them were very experienced and quite clever.

‘Your task is,’ Zinger said to them, after they sat down at a table, ‘to search the whole earth and find where all these things could be bought at one place. You can make use of absolutely all our channels and all the agents that we have on earth. The boss allows it. Is your task clear?’

The devils, whose names were Gluss and Stick, looked attentively at the sheets with the brand makers of the things from the photograph and nodded.

‘Go!’ their new commander ordered. ‘Report to me immediately on any success.’

The devils nodded again and left Zinger’s office. He picked up the photographs again.

‘Well, well, my goodies!’ he said with an overly honeyed voice, looking at the young couple in the photograph. ‘I really hope to get to know you better on earth very soon.’

\* \* \*

One day, while Mike and Brenda were strolling along the paradise ocean, Nika and Kirik decided to talk to God.

‘Hello, Father!’ Kirik said first, looking into the sky. ‘It is so unusual that we host living guests from earth.’

‘Hello, my dear!’ a smiling, kind face of the Father began to appear in the sky. ‘That’s right. It has been a long time since I showed Paradise to the people.’

‘Can we be of some help to you, Father?’ Nika started talking. ‘Shall we talk to them about something in particular or show them something specific?’

‘No, you don’t need to do anything special here,’ God’s smile widened. ‘Answer the questions they ask and show them things they ask for.’

‘Father, may we ask? Can they help you after they return to earth?’ Kirik looked at God with amusement.

‘Oh, my dear, how would I know?’ the Father sighed. ‘If their hearts open up, then they can be of some help; they may help a lot, probably. However, if they forget everything after they return, what can I do? You know that freedom of choice is granted to all of my children.’

‘We know that, Father!’ Nika smiled warmly. ‘But we really wish that they help you on Earth!’

‘Surround them with love, my dears,’ God replied and his face started fading away from the sky. ‘Love conquers all.’

Nika and Kirik waved the Father good-bye, after that they returned to their home.

\* \* \*

Zinger was looking the first report he received from his assistants. Their thorough analysis revealed that all those things could be bought together only in two places: Australia and New Zealand.

The devil smiled.

‘Not a bad start,’ he murmured in a low voice. ‘Both countries have less population than an average Chinese town.’

After that, he thought a little more and called the main underground computer genius, the devil Sophylus. He came to Zinger quite quickly and sat down at the table.

‘Boss told me to be at your full disposal for some important matter,’ he began speaking with a grin. ‘May I have a more details about it?’

‘Yes, fellow,’ Zinger replied. ‘We should somehow find two people on earth: a guy and a girl, about twenty years old. We only have their photo.’

The devil skimmed through a pile of photographs lying on the table in front of him.

Supposedly, they are living in either Australia or New

Zealand,’ Zinger added.

Sophylus was silently thinking for some time.

‘Hum, not an easy task,’ he finally spoke. ‘The first thing that comes to my mind is to place an advertisement on the lost items website of those countries. For instance, it says: *found an expensive camera with pictures of their owners. Owners or their acquaintances, please, respond.* Another version is possible about the wallet with their pictures and money inside. Well, something like that in general.’

‘That’s an interesting idea!’ Zinger grinned joyfully. ‘You can place these advertisements right now.’

‘Good, will be done,’ the computer genius replied and stood up. ‘If I come up with more ideas, I’ll tell you.’

They said goodbye to each other and Zinger was left alone. He sat at his table and smiled smugly. He was soon to report to Satan, and the boss will apparently be pleased with how the search for these people was progressing.

\* \* \*

Brenda and Mike were walking slowly along the water edge of the ocean. They firmly held each other’s hands and happily looked around. Each dweller of Paradise they met on the land or in the water was beautiful, friendly and greeting the young couple warmly.

‘I feel so good here, Mikey! I feel happy,’ Brenda said, smiling. ‘Everything’s so similar to the best places on Earth, but it’s much more kind and bright.’

‘Yes, local dwellers are very friendly,’ Mike agreed. ‘It’s probably a great place to live. Everything’s beautiful and there’re many opportunities. Besides, no one ages or dies here.’

‘Paradise was created by God for his most kind children. He loves them very much and brings them joy in everything,’ Brenda said.

‘Kind He is,’ the guy sighed. ‘Why do we think so little about Him on Earth?’

‘Well, we do think about Him at times,’ the girl smiled. ‘For example, I managed to get you out to Greece.’

‘Oh, thank you, my Princess!’ Mike hugged and kissed Brenda tenderly. ‘I’m so happy to touch such an important and interesting thing in my life.’

‘Thank you for coming with me to a far off place,’ Brenda replied warmly.

As they were talking, the young people came to the house of their grandparents who came out to meet them with a smile.

‘So, did you have a good walk?’ Kirik asked them.

‘That was great, grandpa,’ Brenda replied. ‘It’s so beautiful everywhere here and my heart constantly sings.’

‘This is the Father who fills Paradise with such happiness.’

‘He is good,’ Mike said, ‘He loves and cares so much for everyone. If only we could see Him.’

‘So, what’s the matter?’ Kirik raised his eyebrows and smiled.

‘What d’you mean?’ Mike asked, amazed.

‘This is Paradise, His home. And, we are His children who communicate with Him all the time.’

‘With God?’ Mike stood still in amazement.

‘Yes, with the Father,’ Nika joined their talk. ‘We’ve just spoken to Him.’

‘Terrific!’ Mike replied, and together with Brenda, looked at their grandparents in surprise.

They smiled in response.

‘What’s God like, Granny?’ the girl asked Nika with interest. ‘Handsome?’

‘Well, what do you think, my dear, if all of the most beautiful and kind creatures in the world try to be at least a little like Him?’ she replied with a smile. ‘Although outwardly He can be whoever He wants. It often depends on who and how we imagine Him to be.’

‘If only I had a chance to talk with Him too!’ Mike said dreamily.

‘So, what’s the matter?’ Kirik smiled. ‘Go ahead, talk!’

The guy and the girl stared at the grandfather in astonishment.

‘How?’

‘God always hears you, Mike. And He will speak to you if you address Him.’

‘God will speak to me?’ Mike continued amused and doubting.

‘Well, yes. He communicates even with all the people on Earth. This place is His home, and besides everyone may see Him here,’ Nika added.

‘How could I start talking with Him?’

‘That’s simple - look at the sky and say hello,’ Kirik smiled.

Mike shrugged his shoulders, smiling silly, and looked up.

‘Hello, God!’ he pronounced not very loudly.

Brenda also nodded to the sky with a friendly expression, just in case.

At the same moment, some motion began in the sky. Out of nowhere, a sparkling enormous cloud appeared above the young couple. One look at it was enough to understand that the cloud was alive. Gradually, a smile and kind eyes appeared in it.

‘Hello, my dear Mike and Brenda! Welcome to my Paradise!’ the young people heard a soft voice.

## *The Cloud*

The guy and the girl looked attentively at what was happening in front of them. They could not think of anything to say from excitement.

‘Are... are you God?’ Mike said first.

‘Yes, son, I am an ordinary God!’ the sparkling Cloud replied cheerfully.

‘Does it mean you look like a cloud?’ Brenda dared to ask Him a question as well. ‘The people sometimes depict you in a different way ...’

‘Not necessarily as a cloud, my dear!’ everyone there heard a cheerful voice. ‘Generally, I can be everything at all. Is this more familiar to you?’

After that, the Cloud suddenly turned into a huge light blue rabbit, which resembled their Ug much, but with its size reaching the sky. His huge ears were moving in the same manner.

Nika and Kirik smiled warmly looking at the Father.

‘It was a little better with the cloud, I think,’ Mike finally smiled. ‘I’d probably find it hard to talk to a rabbit seriously.’

The enormous rabbit laughed heartily and turned into the cloud again.

‘Well, as you want!’ the Father replied warmly. ‘What would you like to talk about, Mike?’

Mike and Brenda looked intently at the big sparkling marvel.

‘Is it true that you created all the people on earth?’ the guy picked the most clever question to ask.

‘Yes!’ God replied. ‘Have I done it fine? What do you think?’

Mike looked at his girlfriend and nodded his head, trying to be serious.

‘I like it too!’ the Cloud agreed with a friendly voice. ‘So, how do you like it here in Paradise?’

‘Great!’ the young people replied together.

‘Everything’s so beautiful and unusual!’ Brenda added.

‘I was very pleased to know that beyond the earthly world, there’s Paradise and eternal life,’ Mike said. ‘I’ve lived on Earth for almost twenty years but nobody ever told me about it.’

‘That’s not quite true, son!’ God answered.

A moment later, something resembling a cinema screen appeared in the sky near the Cloud. However, all the images there were three dimensional, like in real life.

Everyone started watching an unusual film. In the first scene, some grandfather told a small boy about God. However, the boy would not sit still and was impatiently looking at the door. Mike

looked into the characters and was surprised to realize that the grandfather was his Uncle Tony and the boy was him. Then, the guy choked.

The scene changed after that. In another episode, the same boy was sitting between his parents, reluctantly watching a movie about Jesus Christ and yawning widely.

In the next scene, a nurse tried talking about God with the boy at a hospital where he spent several days. But, the boy listened to her without any interest and often turned away.

As the scenes changed, Mike lowered his head more and more.

‘So, you are not quite right, Mike,’ the Cloud repeated once again when *the movie* was over. ‘Do you still think that nobody has told you about me?’

The guy’s face blushed red and he could not raise his eyes in shame.

‘No, God, I don’t think so anymore,’ he said quietly and looked guiltily at the Cloud. ‘I am sorry. I’m ashamed.’

‘Good, Mike,’ the Cloud replied in a serious tone. ‘You understood everything, you apologized, so let’s forget about it.’

‘Dear God,’ Brenda started to talk, ‘it seems to me, that people in the world are really speak less and less about you now, and somewhere they have almost forgotten you. Why is what? You and Paradise are the main reality indeed. Maybe, you should tell people about yourself more?’

‘Yes, Brenda, people always forget about me, it’s fact,’ the Cloud replied. ‘Why is that? Well, we should ask the people themselves about it. But if anyone attempts to search for me in any way, I will immediately help. Like with both of you, for example, you are in Paradise now and talking to me.’

The guy and the girl smiled, as well as their grandparents.

‘And, as for telling people more about myself, Brenda...,’ the Cloud continued, ‘do you think that the coming of twenty-five prophets, my son Jesus, appearance of thousands of saints on Earth is not enough for the people to remember me?’

‘Thousands of saints?’ Brenda asked, amazed.

‘Yes. If you search this question on the Internet, you will immediately see the answer. I have left all the information about Paradise and myself in first places. If people want to come to Paradise and receive eternal life, they themselves must show interest in this....’

‘People have so much proof!?’ Mike said in surprise, standing next to Brenda.

‘Of course. I think there is more than enough of it. I doubt that some new evidence will make much difference,’ the Cloud replied with a sad smile. ‘The only thing left for the people is to show interest in this. And I would like them to take some steps themselves, but not only me and me. What kind of family shall we have in this case? After all, they need Paradise...’

‘Dear God!’ Brenda addressed the Cloud as politely as she could. ‘May we tell our friends and other people about you and Paradise after we return home? We’ll show them some pictures, too.’

‘Of course, you may, if you want to,’ the Father smiled.

‘May I take a photo of you?’ the guy found the courage to ask.

The Cloud shook from laughter.

‘Take it, Mikey! I will be very surprised if anyone on earth believes that this cloud is God.’

Everyone burst heartily into laughter but Mike still took a couple of pictures.

‘You would be better off taking photographs of Angels: they are very photogenic,’ the Father advised joyfully. ‘Well, that is enough for now, my dears. Stay here for some more time and then return to your home. Your friends and relatives are already waiting for you. Have a good trip!’

After that, the Cloud slowly began dispersing.

‘Thank you so much for everything!’ Brenda said, ‘we’ve been thinking about going back ourselves too. It’s a pity we have missed our plane. But that’s alright, there’re frequent flights there.’

‘I will think of that,’ they heard the last words coming from somewhere far away.

The Cloud faded away but Mike and Brenda stood and waved to Him warmly for quite a long time after that.

\* \* \*

Katherine was about to finish her homework on one of her university subjects when her telephone rang. The girl glanced at the screen and pressed the green button with a smile.

‘Hi, Steve!’ she said cheerfully. ‘The ocean must have dried up for you to call me instead of going surfing.’

‘Hi, Kate!’ the girl heard a laughing voice. ‘I’ve already tried to do it but the ocean’s become as flat as a table. Though, there are more waves on my table now - there is a sausage and a bottle of Coca-Cola.’

Katherine laughed cheerfully.

‘Okay, have a good surf on it with a knife and a fork. How’re things?’

‘Ah, as usual. Everything’s great,’ Steve replied. ‘I’m calling on business, actually. I’ve come across some photos of Mike and Brenda on the Internet recently. It looks like they’ve lost their camera. But, a good man found it and wants to return it to them. Can you tell me when they’re coming back from their trip?’

The girl looked at the calendar that hung on her wall.

‘Well, they should be coming back soon, most likely. I think

they have a return flight from Europe tomorrow.'

'Got it,' the guy said. 'Well then, I'll give their phone number and address to that man. So, perhaps he'll send the camera to them and then Mike will refund him the delivery cost.'

'I think you're right, Steve! Give him all their contacts,' the girl agreed. 'Just in case they'll decide to deal with it themselves over the phone.'

'Agreed, Kate,' Steve replied. 'When you've freed yourself from your studies, come join us here on the beach.'

'Thanks, Steve! I will for sure,' Katherine smiled. 'Mike and Brenda would probably arrive by then.'

'Yeah, we'll hear all about their travels around Europe then.'

'Okay, Steve, I've got to dive into my dull textbooks again,' the girl sighed. 'Ride some waves for me!'

'Will do!' she heard a resonant voice. 'Bye!'

Katherine pressed a red button and turned off her telephone. After she looked into the window for some time, she pulled a thick textbook towards her.

\* \* \*

Zinger was looking with admiration at the devil Sophylus who was sitting by his table again. He had just read a response for the advertisement about a lost camera. It had all the details: telephone

number and address of the young couple in Australia.

‘Well, you are really good! You’ve done well indeed.’ Zinger said.

‘Quite so. That’s why the boss values me!’ Sophylus grinned and proudly raised his horns up.

After that, he stood up.

‘Good bye then! If you have any additional questions, you’re devilishly welcome.’

Zinger nodded to his departure and deeply immersed into his joyful thoughts. It looked as if he was not very far away from his promotion.

\* \* \*

‘Could you tell me, Granny, what’s bigger: Paradise or Earth?’ Brenda asked.

They were all sitting together on a shore of a picturesque mountain lake. This was another favourite place of Nika and Kirik where they have now brought their guests.

‘Of course, Paradise is much bigger, my dear! Your grandpa and I know some of those who have been here for two thousand years and they still discover new places here. The Earth is like a small school for teaching human souls. It is much smaller and it is not as eternal as Paradise is.’

‘The Earth is not eternal?’ Mike asked in surprise.

The grandmother and the grandfather looked at each other and sighed.

‘Yes. This was not big news in our time,’ Kirik said sadly. ‘Now, only a few seem to know the words of the Son of God about the Earth’s future.’

‘Right, Kir,’ the grandmother agreed. ‘Seems so. Although, not many years have passed since then...’

‘Where can I read these words about the people’s and Earth’s future?’ Mike asked with interest. ‘Is this a kind of special information?’

‘Not really, my dear,’ Brenda replied to him for her grandparents. ‘This *special information* is in fact called the Bible. It lays in the all hotels’ bedside tables in Australia and many other places.’

‘Good for you, Brenda!’ the grandparents smiled.

‘Wow!’ the guy exclaimed in surprise. ‘And, if it can be found anywhere, then why don’t people read it?’

‘This is the question of all questions, Mike,’ Nika smiled sadly. ‘In our times, people used to read it more. It still laying in the bedside tables since then, I suppose.’

‘Well, friends,’ the guy said thoughtfully. ‘Our civilization starts to look less and less civilized, it seems. Though, I’ve thought differently not so long ago.’

\* \* \*

The witches had already been working on Zinger for a few hours, giving him a new look familiar for people. Some spots were covered by make-up, others by witchcraft and finally they have made a typical Australian white-haired guy out of a coal-black, hairy devil.

That morning, the Boss sent him on a mission to Earth which was not his first time.

‘You’ve done everything well up till now,’ Satan said to him in the morning. ‘There is one little thing left – possess their cameras or memory cards with those photos and videos on them. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to steal them in that world, but we can deceive them at any time and endlessly. This work is a trifle for such a pro as yourself, but to be safe, you might want to have some assistants with you?’

‘Don’t bother, boss,’ the devil showed his teeth. ‘Deceiving these youngsters is a children’s task.’

‘Good,’ Satan laughed. ‘Then, you will receive a new position when you complete this mission. I’ll keep my promises.’

Zinger smiled, thinking, and adjusted his white hair instead of horns.

‘How are things going, my sly fellows? How long will you work on me?’

‘Almost done, Zee,’ a senior witch grinned. ‘But remember well,

that the enchantment will be undone the moment anybody kisses you. We don't have magic power against love and kindness.'

'Well, there's no one more beautiful than you are anyway!' the devil threw a compliment. 'I know, I will keep that in mind. It's not the first time I'm sent to Earth.'

The witches giggled contentedly.

'Well, who knows, who knows, Zee,' another witch said a moment later. 'In fact, there are already a lot of heavily tattooed women there. Some dress up and put their make-up on so that they look quite like us. So, some earthly women aren't too far from the looks that you're used to.'

'Done,' the senior witch announced at last and allowed Zinger to look in a mirror. 'How do you like it?'

'That's horrible!' the devil honestly confessed to himself. 'Well, I guess I guess, we can't do anything about it. The people are now used to such looks. Alright, slylies, don't get bored without me.'

The witches giggled again and Zinger went to the warehouse take the essentials: car, money, documents and a few other things.

\* \* \*

Mike and Brenda were saying goodbye to her grandparents. It was time for them to return to Earth.

'Take care of yourself, children!' the grandmother wished them.

“Always remember that no knowledge about Paradise leads to it, but only love and kindness in your life!”

‘Keep in your heart everything you’ve known here,’ the grandfather added. ‘And, help the Father, if you can. As you can see, He does not have many helpers on Earth...’

Mike and Brenda nodded their heads.

‘We’ll try to do our best,’ the girl said. ‘Thank you for showing and telling us so much!’

‘One more thing: thank you particularly for your granddaughter!’ Mike said warmly. ‘If you hadn’t brought her up this way, we’d have never got to you here for sure.’

‘Well, now go, our dears,’ Kirik replied. ‘We shall wait for you here after the end of your earthly life. We believe in you.’

The guy and the girl smiled gratefully. Then, before leaving, they hugged Nika and Kirik.

After that, the young people took each other’s hands. They both shut their eyes and imagined the entrance to the cave.

\* \* \*

In an instant, Brenda and Mike were standing next to it. They looked around. It seemed as if nothing changed during this time and even the red stripe was still there on the branch.

‘We better untie it,’ the girl smiled and reached out her hand.

‘I knew you’d come back here!’ they heard a familiar voice coming from the bushes.

‘Ug!’ the young people exclaimed cheerfully. ‘How’re you, friend?’

‘What can happen to me?’ Ug happily came out to the meadow. ‘Where are you going now?’

The girl and the guy glanced at each other and laughed.

‘Back to Earth, Ug!’ Mike replied. ‘To the place where everyone sleeps, eats and where the tasty carrot grow. Do you want to join us?’

Ug scratched his one ear with the other.

‘Probably not,’ he replied after some time. ‘I’ve got a lot of friends here, but I know nobody there besides you. You better come back here again.’

‘All right, Ug,’ Brenda replied and scratched the rabbit behind his ear.

He rolled his eyes upwards as rabbits like to do. After that, the young people took each other’s hands again.

‘So, shall we go, dear?’ the girl asked.

‘Let’s go, Bre. It seems I miss our friends too,’ Mike replied with a smile.

‘Me too,’ Brenda added.

They nodded goodbye to Ug and headed into the cave. Ug waved

them goodbye with his ears.

\* \* \*

Very soon, Mike and Brenda were approaching the exit at the other end of the cave.

‘We must go to the airport immediately,’ Mike made a plan on their way there. ‘We’ll possibly manage to change a ticket for another flight without serious money loss?’

‘We’ll see when we get there, dear,’ the girl replied with uncertainty, ‘but I doubt it. If only we’d called them beforehand...’

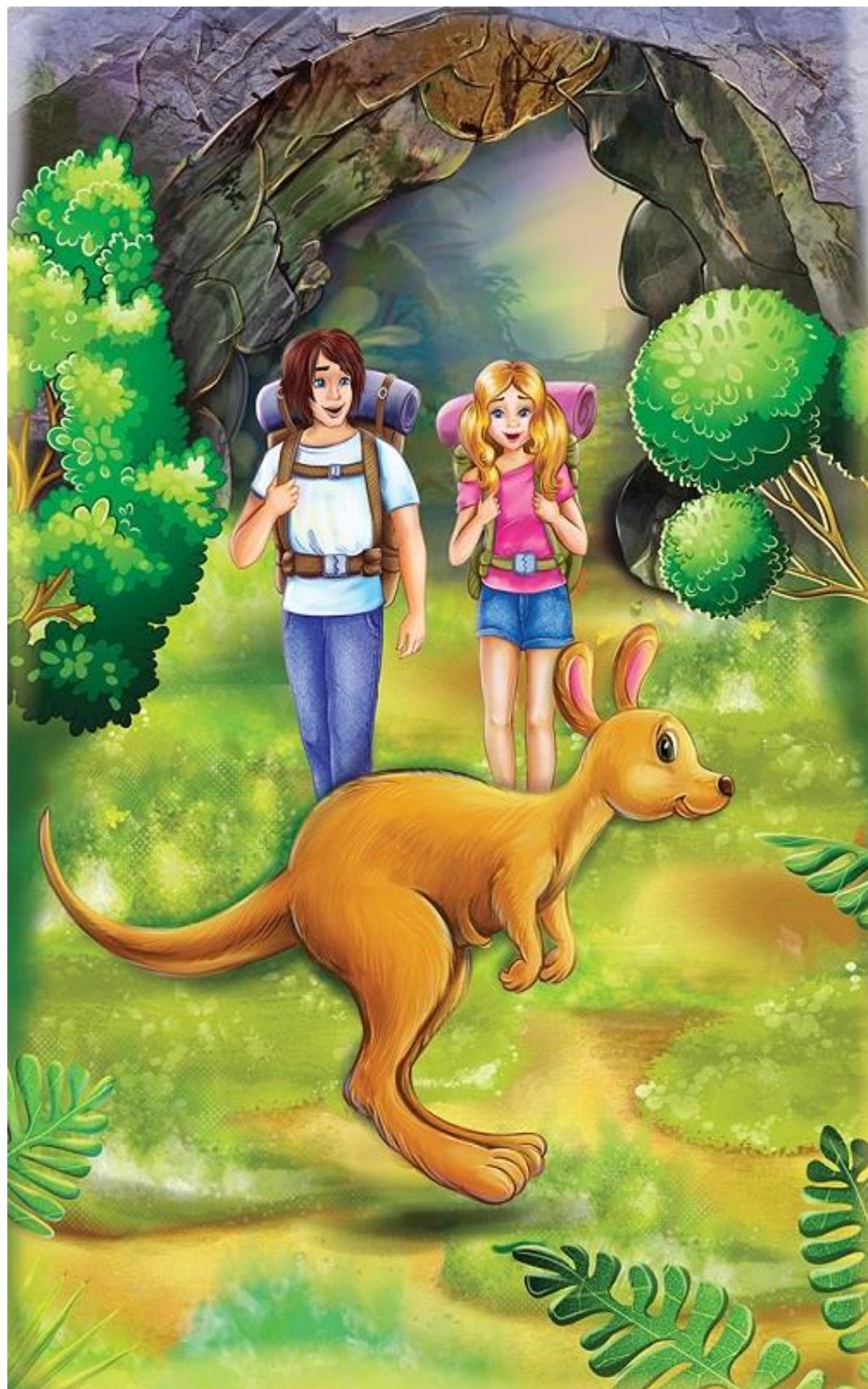
They emerged from the cave talking and walked further treading on the grass. Suddenly they stopped.

‘Mike, don’t you think this place is a little different? Or am I wrong?’ the girl asked, astonished.

‘It looks like it, Bre,’ Mike said, looking around. ‘The trees are different here, and the whole landscape too. There was a meadow at the exit, and here – a slope of a mountain. Wait a minute, Bre, who’s galloping over there?’

Brenda and Mike looked, as if seeing a dream, a big kangaroo was leaping past them slowly. The animal stopped near them, looked at them intently, and leapt on further.

‘It looks like we’re already in Australia, my Princess...,’ Mike said, astounded.



‘Remember, the Father told us that He’d think of something?’ Brenda recalled. ‘That’s what He’s thought up...’

The young people looked gratefully into the sky and waved with their hands.

After that, they happily went down the slope.

‘Bre, do we have any snacks?’ the girl heard the guy’s voice.

‘Oh, right. Now, we’re definitely home!’ Brenda laughed and began taking off her backpack.

## ***At Home***

Brenda and Mike got home only after midnight. The last part of their trip was so exhausting that they fell asleep almost immediately, having even not taken out the contents of their backpacks.

The girl woke up from a faint sound of clashing dishes coming from the kitchen. Brenda smiled, as it was obvious that a poor and naïve Mike was trying to find some food there.

‘Good morning, Mikey!’ she shouted. ‘What’re you looking for there? We ate everything before we left. If you come over here, I’ll tell you about my dream. It’s very curious.’

‘Oh, hi, Bre!’ a smiling guy’s head appeared in the doorway. ‘As for the products, I figured it out myself. Let’s wait with your dream for a while, darling. I’d better go buy something yummy for us. It’s not even breakfast now, it’s likely to be lunchtime already.’

Brenda looked at the clock. It showed a quarter to twelve.

‘Wow!’ she wondered. ‘We’ve been asleep for almost eleven hours.’

‘The sleep here is definitely longer than in Paradise,’ Mike laughed and the door instantly slammed behind him.

After being left alone, Brenda thought for a while, then she went to her computer desk.

\* \* \*

Half an hour later, Mike came back with a big bag full of packages with a tasty smell.

‘Have you been to an Italian cafe?’ Brenda asked, inhaling the smell.

‘Yep,’ the guy nodded. ‘Tony asked me to say ‘Hi’ to you and put something yummy inside as a gift.’

Brenda smiled. Then, Mike put an advertisement sheet on a table.

‘Look here, Bre,’ he said. ‘This was in our PO box. A new firm moved into the office just in front of our house. They specialize in promotion of all kinds of photo and video materials all around the world. Think, that’s exactly what we need now.’

‘Oh, Mikey, they’ll charge a high price there, most likely,’ the girl said with a doubt. ‘As far as I remember, we wanted to upload all the photos and videos on Youtube, Instagram and Facebook with Steve’s help. He isn’t bad at this, besides it’s free.’

‘These are professionals, Bre!’ Mike argued while biting a slice of pizza. ‘Besides, I called them about their prices while standing in the queue at Tony’s. They said they had some promo there as they’ve just opened, and that we’d be very happy with their offer.’

‘If that so,’ the girl replied, ‘let’s look there after lunch. After all, it’s very close.’

\* \* \*

Forty minutes later, the young couple walked through the doorway to a small office located almost in front of their house. There was only one office worker: a white-haired man about thirty years-old, he was seating in a beautifully decorated room. When the girl and the guy entered, the man stood up to meet them, with a smile.

‘G’day!’ Mike said in a friendly manner. ‘I called you about

an hour ago regarding an order.'

'Oh, you should be Mike, then?' the white-haired man cheerfully extended his hand. My name is John. Take a seat, please. So, how can I help you? How may I address your lady companion?'

'Brenda,' the girl introduced herself with a smile.

'Very nice to meet you, Brenda,' the white-haired man smiled again. 'So, I'm listening to you.'

'See, John, we've got about a hundred photos and about twenty short videos,' Mike began to speak. 'This is a kind of report about a trip to um..., a very unusual country. We'd like to make small comments on this material and distribute it as widely as possible all around the world.'

John nodded with understanding.

'This is exactly the thing we specialize in, guys.'

'Perfect!' Brenda smiled. 'How much will this cost?'

The white-haired man smiled.

'You're incredibly lucky, friends. We currently have a promotional offer with free service to the first ten clients of our company. You're our third, so it's absolutely free.'

The young couple smiled, amazed.

'Yes, that's great luck indeed!' Mike said, pleased. 'What can

we say? We agree, John.'

'Then, please give me your data storage devices with all your materials.'

Brenda put a small bag on the table with two cameras inside.

'Here, there are the memory cards inside the cameras. We haven't edited them yet,' the girl said. 'We would like to post all the videos and photos made between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> day of this month. We'll sort these photos out if you want.'

'Oh, no! Don't worry, it's not a problem at all,' John smiled. 'I'll do everything myself. You can pick up your cameras in a couple of hours. All will be ready along with their posting plan. You can add the description a little later.'

'That's so great we've come by, John!' Mike said, standing up. 'Thanks a lot! We'll be back in two hours.'

'Maybe we should pay something?' Brenda said hesitantly. 'That's a big job to do.'

'Your smile, Brenda, will be enough,' John replied with sincerity.

At that moment the devil Zinger - it was him, of course - made a mistake which he regretted a lot afterwards.

'Guys, I like you so much that I'll personally promote your materials everywhere for the whole month, free of charge,' he said.

Having heard this, Brenda smiled slyly.

‘Well then, John, a simple smile won’t be enough,’ she said and by making a step towards John, kissed him on the cheek. ‘Thank you very much for your help!’

No one expected what happened next. From a handsome white-haired man John instantly turned into something terrible and hairy, with two horns. His entirely hairy face was covered with shades and make-up powder.

Mike and Brenda stood still in astonishment. Meanwhile Zinger instantly reacted. He quickly understood the situation, grabbed the bag with the cameras inside and disappeared behind a service room door.

‘W-what... What was that, Bre?’ Mike asked, gradually recovering.

‘Looks like it was a d-devil, Mikey,’ the girl answered.

‘He’s stolen our cameras!’ The guy came to his senses at last and rushed to the door where the devil fled.

It was locked from the other side. The guy dashed out of the front door and ran around the building. Soon, the closed door’s lock clicked and a desperate Mike’s face emerged.

‘Got away, no traces. What shall we do, Bre? Perhaps, we should call the police? He’s got all our material on Paradise.’

‘Ask policemen to search for a devil? I would not like to make

an acquaintance with the local psychiatrist today,’ Brenda smiled. ‘Not worth it, Mikey. We’ll make do without a couple of cameras for three hundred dollars.’

‘What’re you talking about, Bre?’ I was not talking about the cameras at all,’ the guy looked at the girl embarrassed. ‘He’s stolen all the videos and photos of Paradise!’

‘The devil thinks he’s stolen them,’ the girl smiled and took a memory card out of her pocket. ‘We’ve got copies here and on our computer too.’

Mike looked at Brenda, amused and happy.

‘When did you make copies, my Princess?’

‘While you were out for food,’ the girl replied cheerfully. ‘In general, you should listen to my dreams before you run off somewhere. Then, you won’t ask silly questions.’

‘You’re a treasure, Bre!’ Mike lifted the girl up into the air in excitement. ‘So, what did you see in your dream?’

‘The elder Litos warned me that someone wanted to hinder our plans and that I ought to keep the photos safe,’ Brenda replied.

\* \* \*

A couple of days later, Zinger the devil was relaxing in a high armchair inside his spacious new office of a senior assistant. About ten devils in the same rank as he used to be were sitting at

the table in front of him.

His new position of Satan's senior assistant entitled him many rights and privileges. Zinger was now looking with a sneer at how attentively the devils caught his every word, and he could not enjoy himself enough from the new changes in his life.

\* \* \*

Steve pressed the last key then closed the laptop.

‘Well, that’s it!’ he said. ‘All your materials have been launched around the world. There’s only one question left for you, friends. Where did you find such an expert who made very good quality graphics for your photos and videos? Judging by their looks, these fake works are very similar to the real ones.’

‘We know one pro. And he doesn’t charge much for his work,’ Brenda replied to him smiling.

‘Really?’ Steve asked with interest. ‘Well, who is he and where does he live?’

‘Everyone calls him *Father*,’ laughing Mike responded in his turn. ‘He lives in Paradise City.’

‘I’ve never heard of such a place,’ Steve replied.

‘You definitely will,’ Brenda smiled. ‘Well, friends, what shall we do now?’

‘Can’t you guess? Of course, we’re going surfing! Today’s

waves are just what we need. What do you say?’

‘With pleasure!’ the young people replied simultaneously and went out to the street.

\* \* \*

Zinger’s meeting was going well underway when the door flung open. Satan stood in the doorway. One look at the boss was enough to understand that he was furious.

Everyone stood up from the table and retreated.

‘So, you said that you’ve tricked those youngsters?’ the boss roared without taking his eyes off Zinger.

‘Aye, boss,’ the devil muttered, while struggling to control his trembling knees.

‘Then how did this get on the Internet, can you tell me?’ Satan threw a pile of printouts photos from various social networks.

One look at them was enough to realize that all of them were made in Paradise.

‘It seems it was you who’s been fooled, Zinger,’ the eyes of the boss flashed with fury.

Every part of the devil started shaking.

‘Well, that’s nothing, my dear, I’ve chosen a place for you that will be absolutely adequate to your professional level,’ Satan

grinned. ‘I even had to create a new position for that. I think that the five hundred years that you will spend there should be enough to finally understand well where you failed in your mission...’

\* \* \*

Nika and Kirik were speaking to the Father.

‘Hello, Father!’ Kirik said, looking into the sky. ‘Are there any news from our earth guests?’

‘Yes, my dears, there is,’ God smiled. ‘The news is very good. All of the photographs and videos that Brenda and Mike made in the Paradise have appeared with free access on the Internet.

‘That’s great!’ Nika said happily. ‘Father, do you think this will help somebody?’

‘It may,’ God replied. ‘Of course, many will think these photographs and videos are fake or will take them for a joke. However, over time, something may change for the better. Then, a lot will depend on Brenda and Mike.’

‘I have no doubt they will succeed,’ Kirik said with certainty, ‘these guys are pretty good.’

‘It seems to me, too,’ God agreed warmly. ‘Soon, we will see what happens next, my dears.’

After that, Nika and Krik said goodbye to the Father and He slowly disappeared into the sparkling sky.

\* \* \*

Two witches were walking on a dusty road of hell, talking to each other in embarrassment.

‘I understand nothing. Why does the boss want us to clean and polish our hoofs? And to do this once a year,’ one of them wondered.

‘You don’t say,’ another took up. ‘We’ve lived for hundreds of years with these hoofs and no one cared for them. What does Satan need this for?’

‘Oh, dear, what can we do? An order means it needs to be done. No arguing with the boss,’ the first witch continued with a sigh. ‘Alright, it looks like we’ve arrived. Look, a new shed with a sign *Hoofs cleaning* appeared, see it?’

The witches went inside and saw several more witches who were sitting on chairs and waiting. They took a queue and took free seats. After some time, the door of a service room flung open and a witch with shining hoofs came out.

Then, a dusty head of a devil appeared, holding a polishing tool in his hands. His look was not very happy.

‘Next!’ he shouted and went back to his workplace.

The next witch went inside, sat in an armchair and stretched out her first hoof to the service master. The devil sighed, took a polishing tool and began cleaning off many-centuries-old dust,



collected from the roads of hell. In order not to be bored, the witch took a booklet from a table to read.

*Hoofs cleaning service. Devil Zinger, a service master. Open 24/7 until year 2500.*

## ***Epilogue***

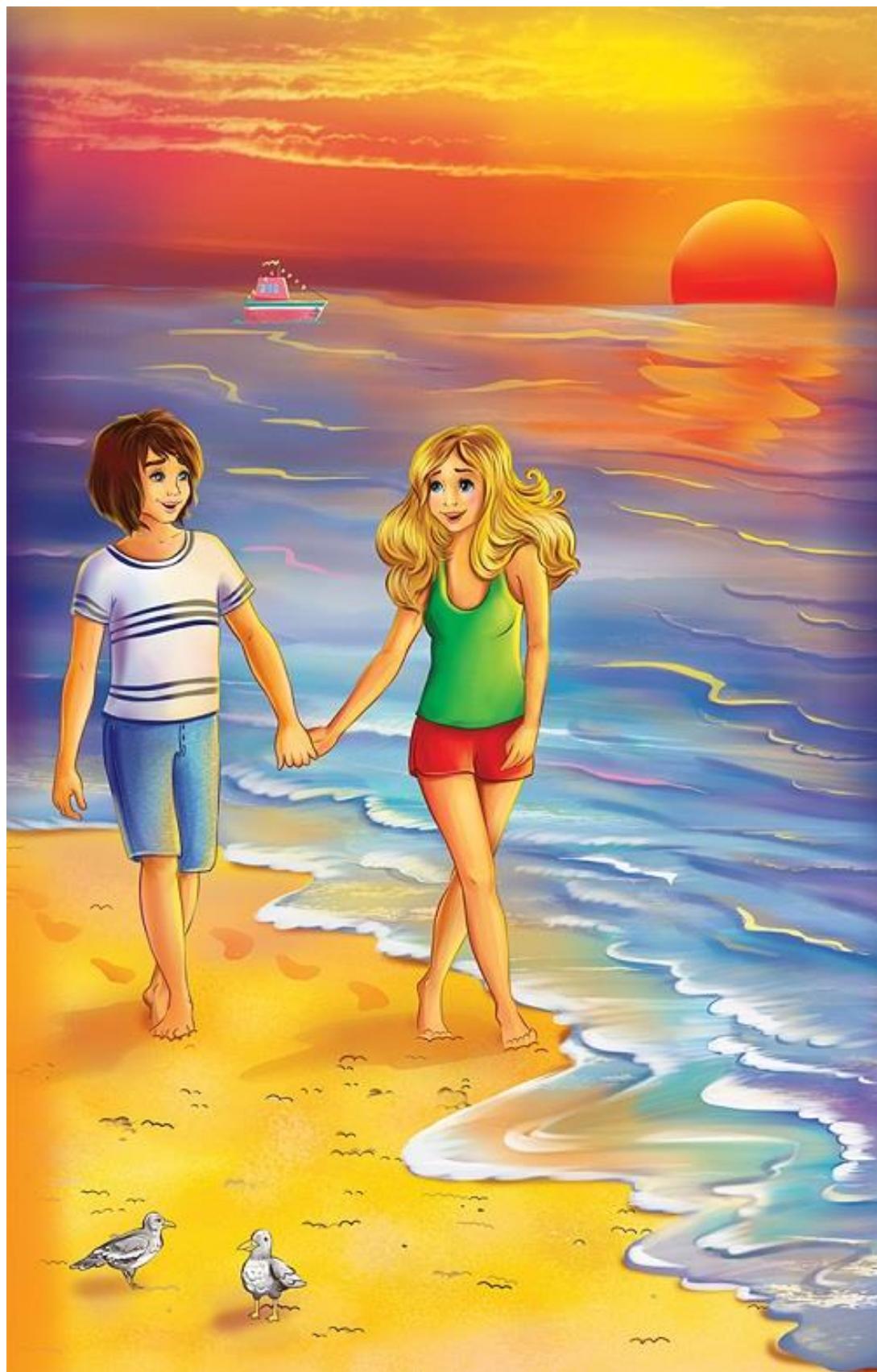
Brenda and Mike walked slowly along the water edge of the ocean. On that evening, the water was unexpectedly calm and the sun, while dropping below the horizon, cast the last of its bright rays.

‘Sometimes it’s so beautiful here on Earth, too!’ Mike said.

‘Right. The Father did His best,’ the girl said with warmth. ‘There’re many good people here too. It’s a pity that today not many know about the Father, Paradise and eternity.’

‘Yes, this is an upsetting fact of our times,’ Brenda sighed and stopped. ‘But, no worries. Perhaps, our photos and videos will somehow help with this.’

‘Maybe,’ the guy replied. ‘I would really like that too. It’s became very joyful and pleasing to live on Earth with this knowledge.’



‘We’ll see soon,’ Brenda smiled. ‘Our contact information is everywhere. If people are interested, we will know about it immediately.’

‘That’s right, we really need to help the Father, and them too,’ the guy said.

After that, he tenderly hugged his girlfriend and together they went on.

\* \* \*

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## CONTENTS:

<i>Mike and Brenda</i> .....	2
<i>About Seven Hundred Years Ago</i> .....	5
<i>On the other side</i> .....	14
<i>Ug</i> .....	26
<i>Kirik and Nika</i> .....	38
<i>Beyond the abyss</i> .....	43
<i>The Cloud</i> .....	59
<i>At Home</i> .....	74
<i>Epilogue</i> .....	86

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