

The Tale of Melon City

by IDRIES SHAH

Illustrated by Prashant Miranda

How can a mere melon be crowned a king? All too easily, it seems, in a city where basic common sense is in short supply. Its people are willing to accept authority in any shape or form, and their silly former king has ordered his own execution – all because he bumped his head on an arch and couldn't find someone else to blame! For centuries, this hilarious Central Asian teaching-story about a society where rationality turns in on itself has been a firm favourite with children. But is it really so far-fetched?

The Tale of Melon City is one of many stories collected by the late Afghan author and thinker, Idries Shah.

'These teaching-stories can be experienced on many levels. A child may simply enjoy hearing them, an adult may analyse them in a more sophisticated way. Both may eventually benefit from the lessons within.' **ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, NPR**

'Shah has collected hundreds of Sufi tales... In this tradition, the line between stories for children and those for adults is not as clear as it seems to be in Western cultures... the lessons are important for all generations.' **SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL**

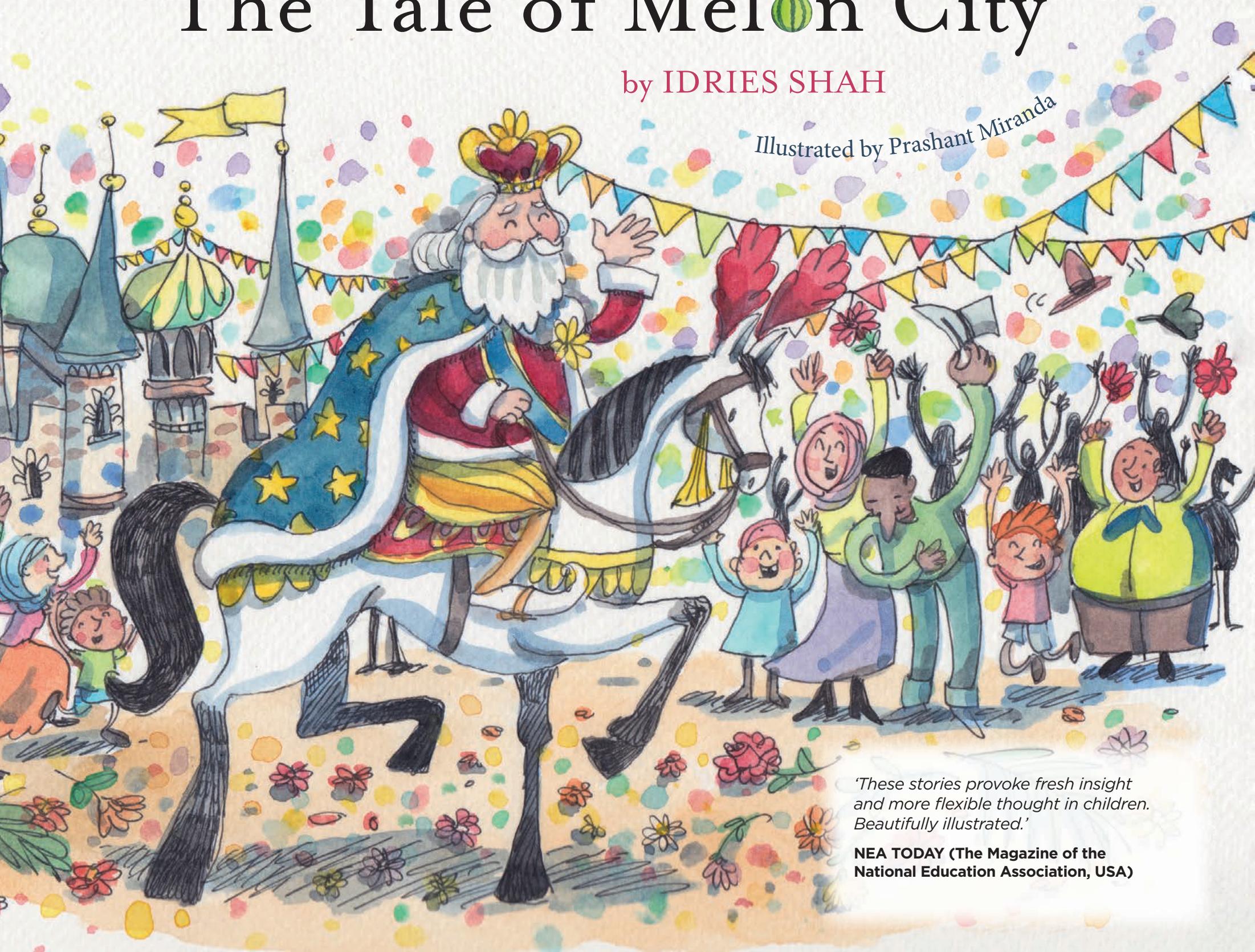


 The Idries Shah
Foundation

PRACTICAL WISDOM & PSYCHOLOGY

ISBN 978-1-78479-476-7

9 781784 794767



'These stories provoke fresh insight and more flexible thought in children. Beautifully illustrated.'

NEA TODAY (The Magazine of the National Education Association, USA)

The Tale of Melon City

Text Copyright © The Estate of Idries Shah

Illustrations Copyright © Prashant Miranda
Layout and Design: Rachana Shah

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or photographic, by recording, or any information storage or retrieval system or method now known or to be invented or adapted, without prior permission obtained in writing from the publisher, ISF Publishing, except by a reviewer quoting brief passages in a review written for inclusion in a journal, magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

Please send requests for permission to reprint, reproduce etc. to:

info@idriesshahfoundation.org

ISBN: 978-1-78479-476-7

Published by The Idries Shah Foundation
8 Belmont Lansdown Road
Bath, Somerset
BA1 5DZ
United Kingdom

Published in association with The Estate of Idries Shah

First published 2024

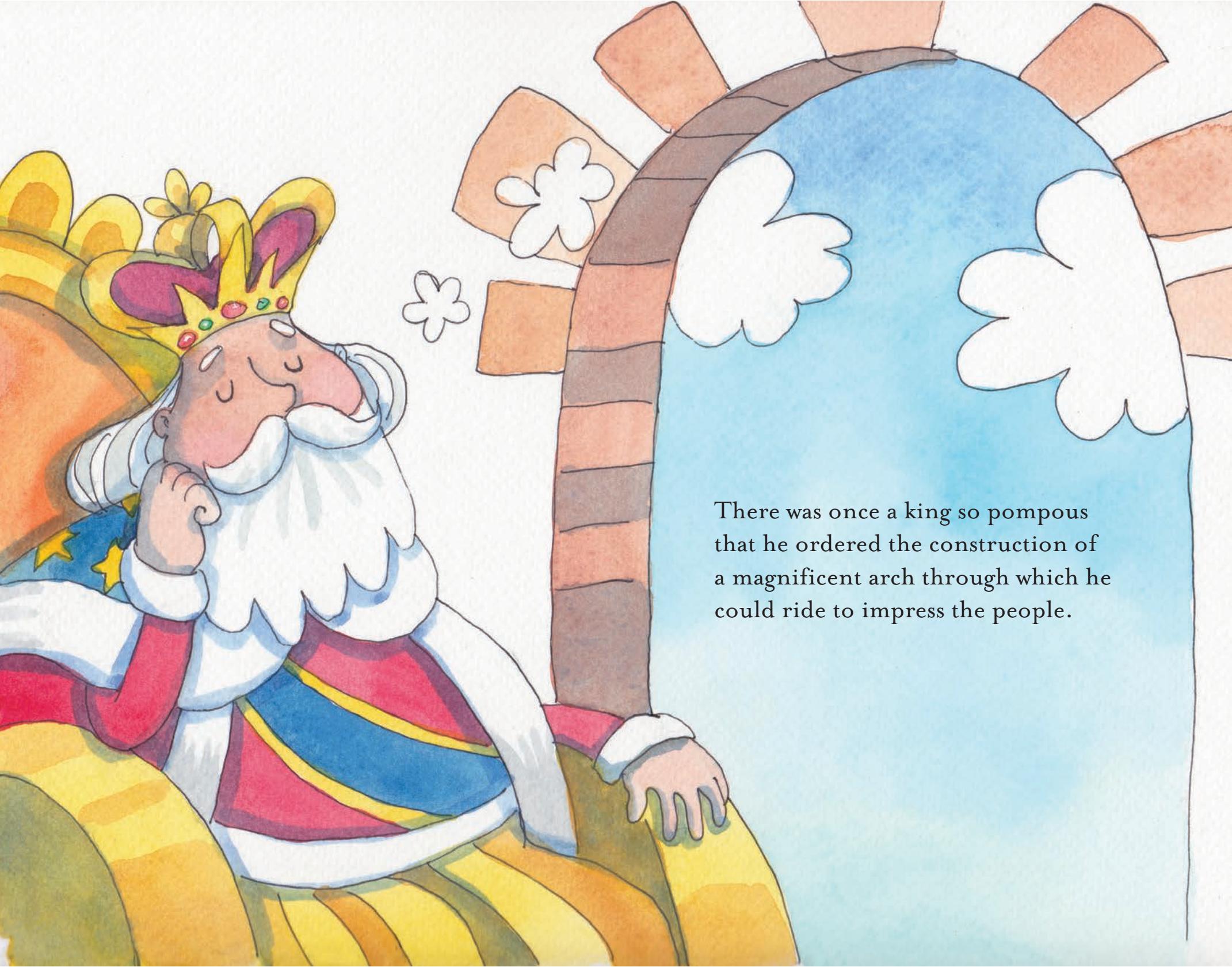
The Idries Shah Foundation is a UK-registered cultural charity.
For more go to www.idriesshahfoundation.org



The Tale of Melon City

BY IDRIES SHAH





There was once a king so pompous
that he ordered the construction of
a magnificent arch through which he
could ride to impress the people.

In his dreams, he could actually hear their deafening applause.





No expense was spared, and, very soon, the most splendid arch imaginable stood at the gates of the town.

But when the great moment came, and the king passed under the edifice, the royal personage did not quite clear the gap.

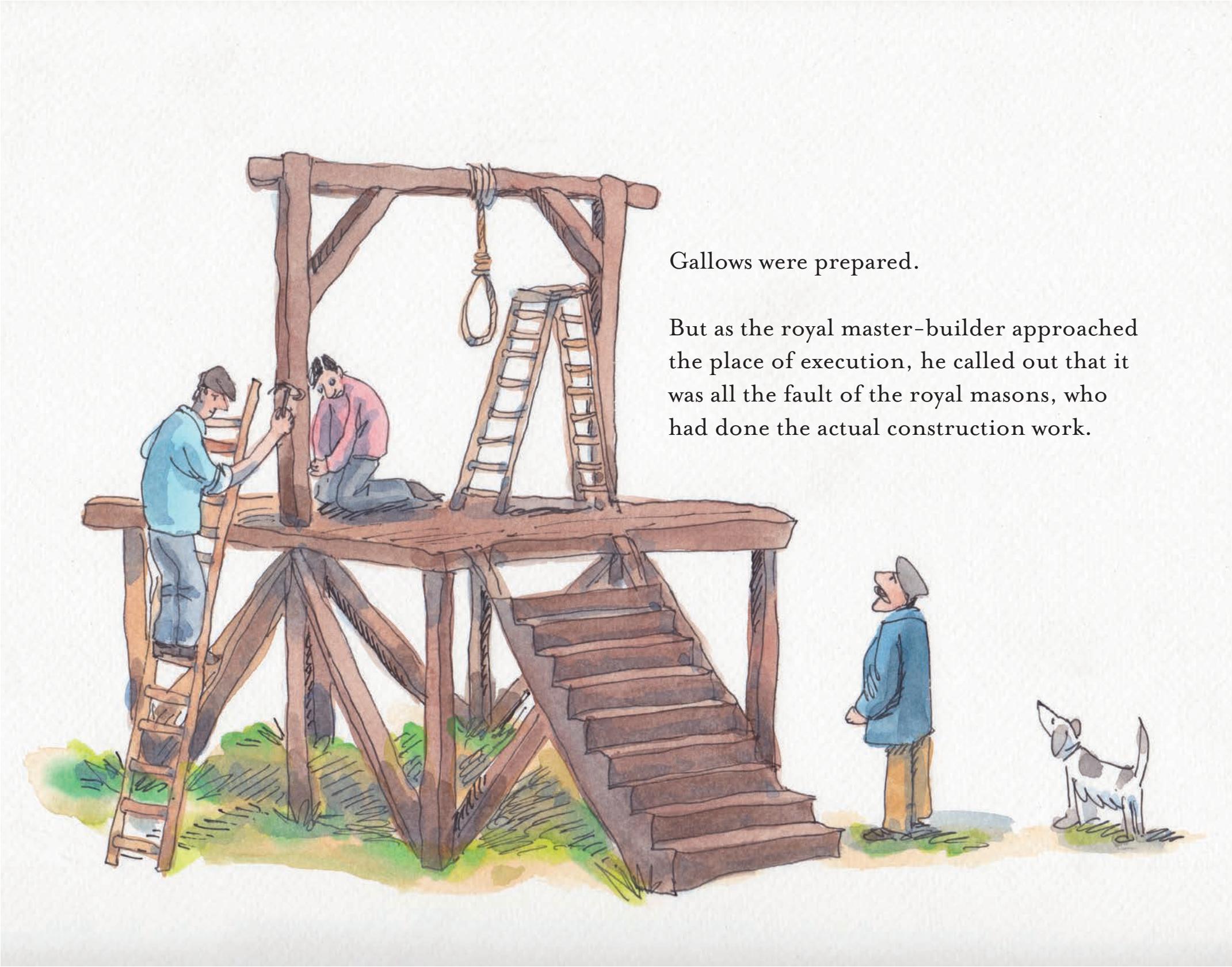
It appeared that the arch had been built too low.

The royal temper was immediately lost.

Furious, the king ordered that the royal master-builder be hanged.







Gallows were prepared.

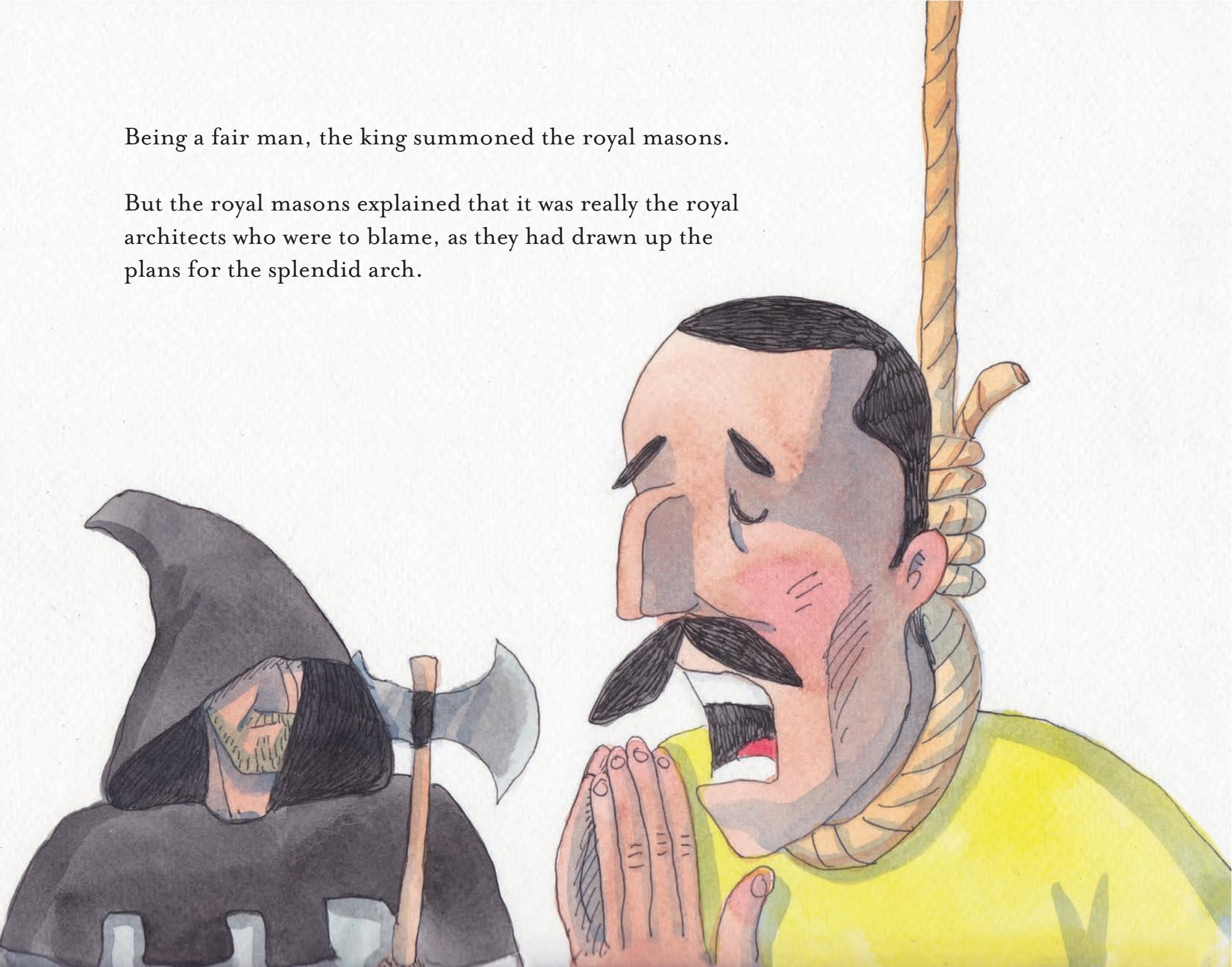
But as the royal master-builder approached the place of execution, he called out that it was all the fault of the royal masons, who had done the actual construction work.





Being a fair man, the king summoned the royal masons.

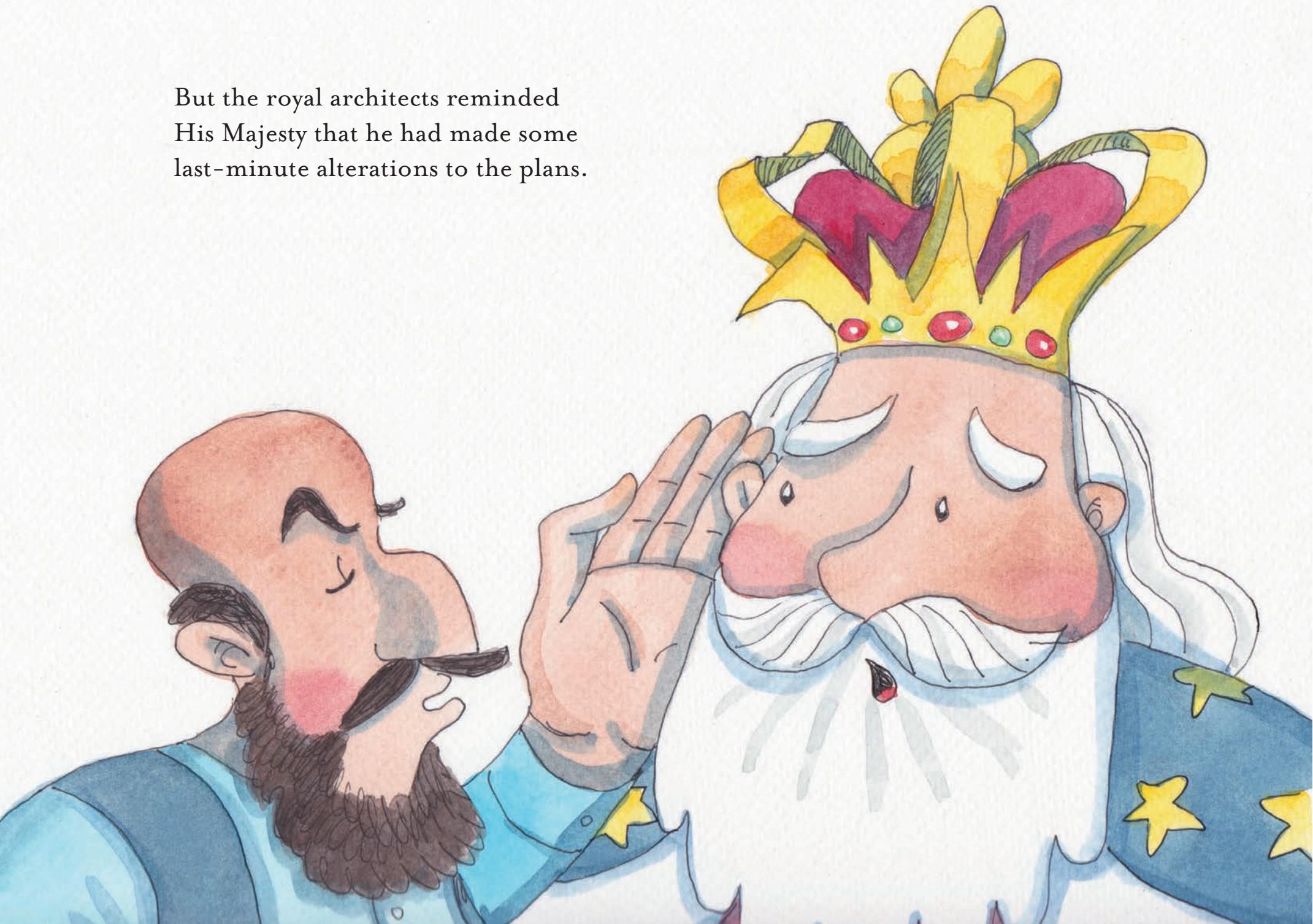
But the royal masons explained that it was really the royal architects who were to blame, as they had drawn up the plans for the splendid arch.



So the king summoned the royal architects.

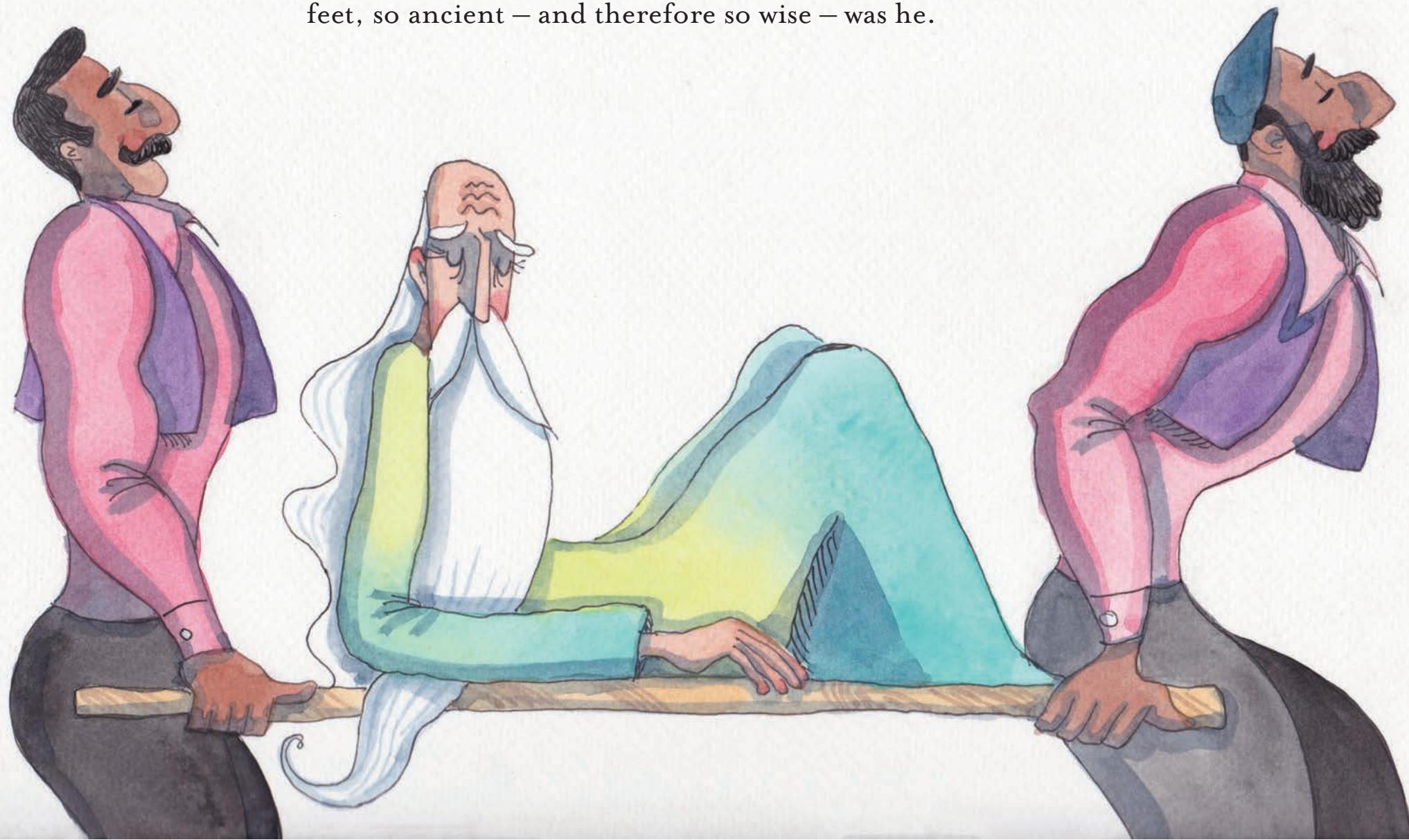


But the royal architects reminded His Majesty that he had made some last-minute alterations to the plans.



'Summon the wisest man in the land,' said the king, 'for this is a very difficult problem, and we need some highly intelligent counsel.'

The wisest man was carried in, unable to walk on his own feet, so ancient – and therefore so wise – was he.



'The Law of the Land,' quavered the wisest man, 'states that the actual culprit must be punished, and that is, in this case, quite evidently, none other than the arch itself.'

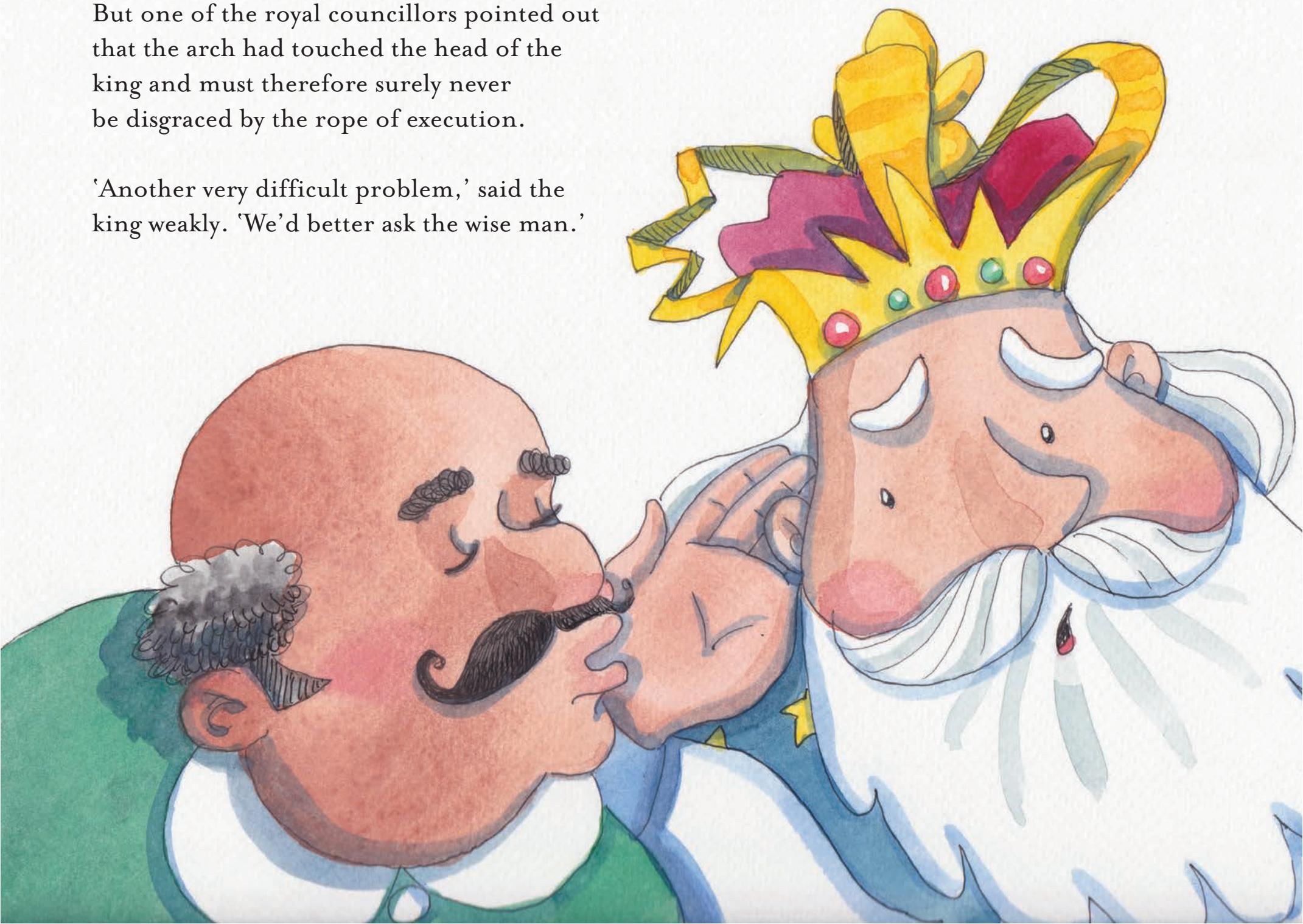
Delighted by this decision, the king ordered that the offending arch be carried to the scaffold.





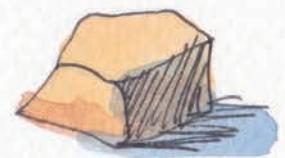
But one of the royal councillors pointed out that the arch had touched the head of the king and must therefore surely never be disgraced by the rope of execution.

'Another very difficult problem,' said the king weakly. 'We'd better ask the wise man.'





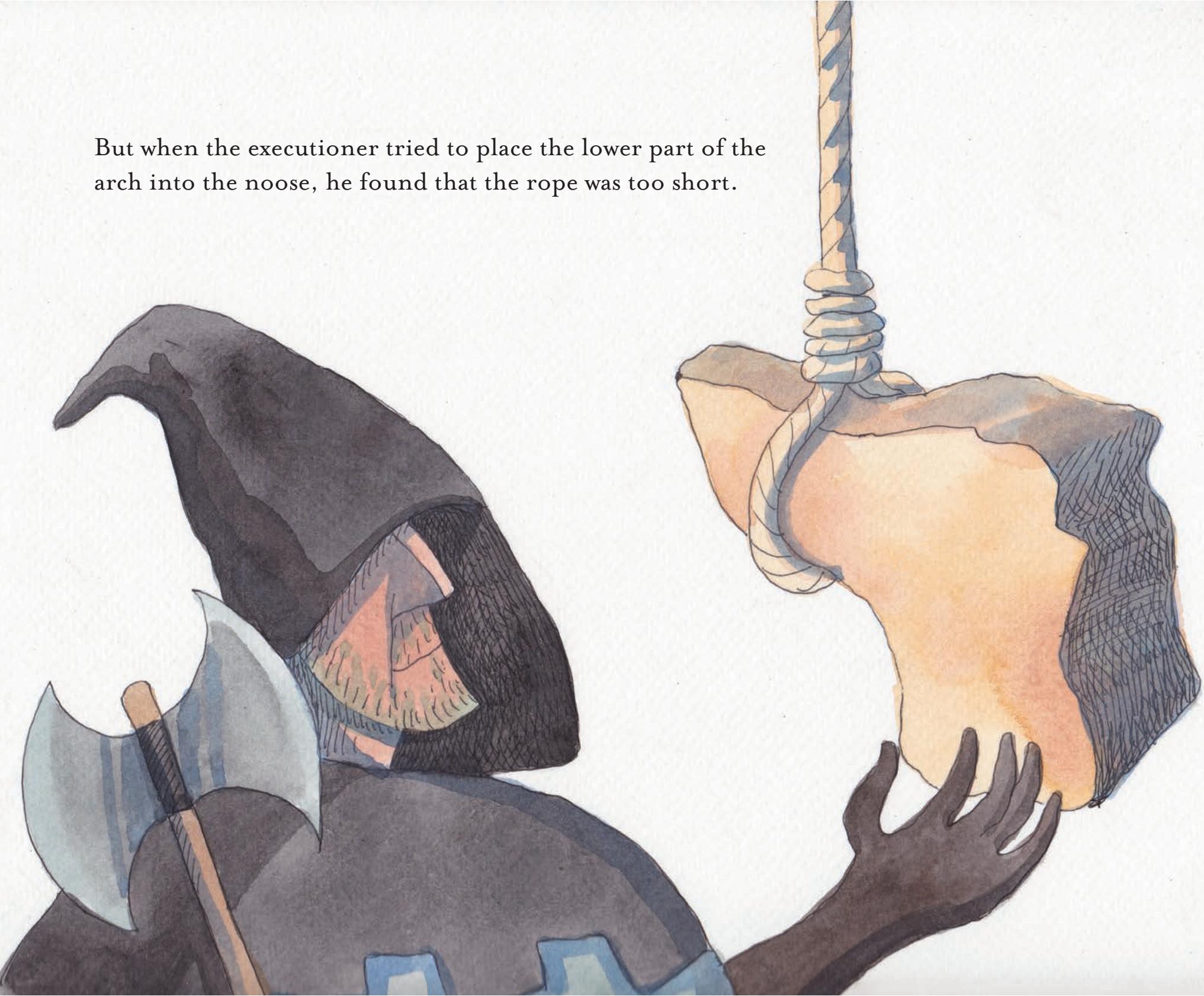
Alas, exhausted by his previous exertions, the wise man had breathed his last and was unable to offer his insight into this latest conundrum.



Hastily stepping in to advise, the judges of the land decreed that the lower part of the arch, which had not touched the royal head, could be hanged for the crime of the arch as a whole.



But when the executioner tried to place the lower part of the arch into the noose, he found that the rope was too short.

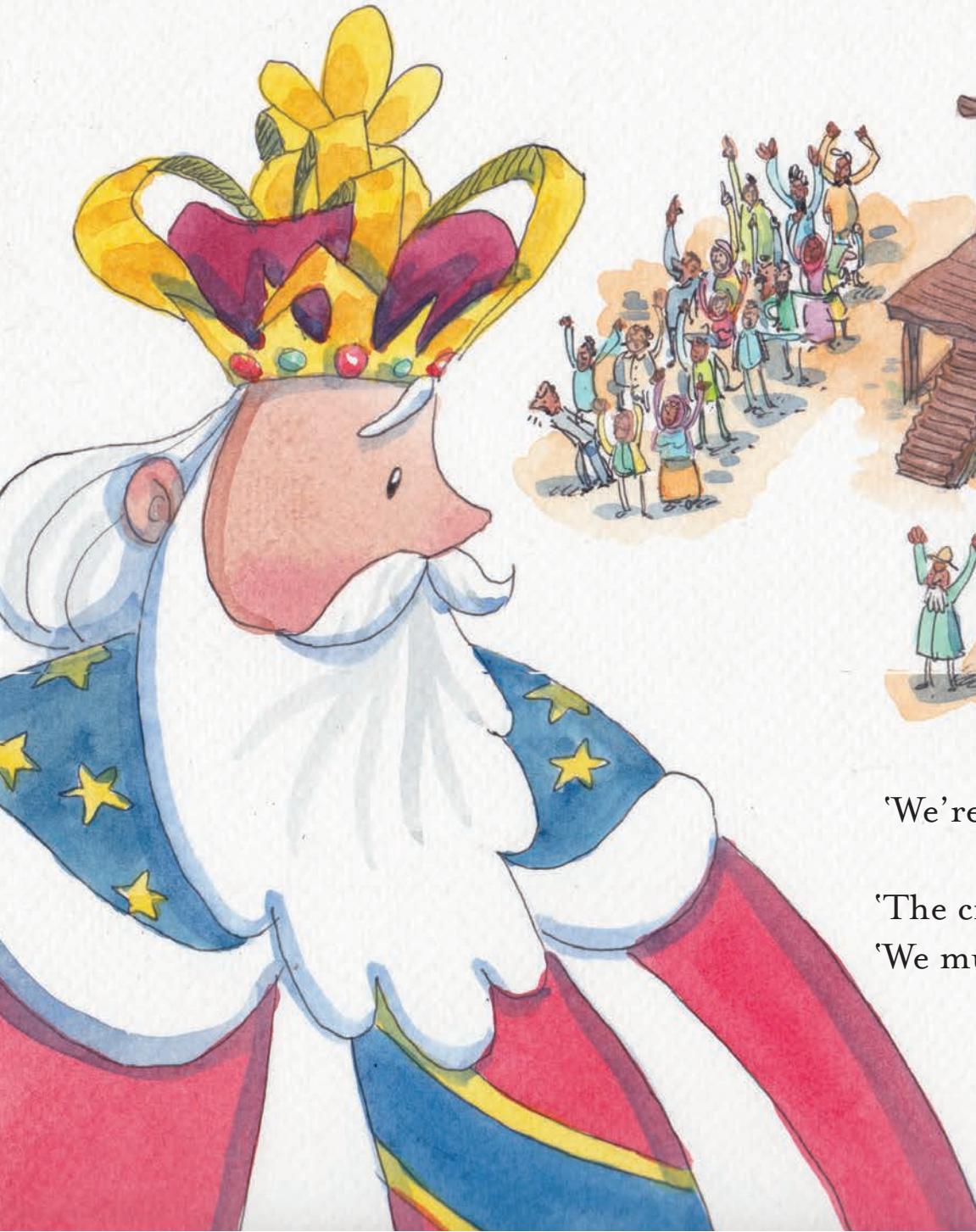


The king summoned the royal rope-makers.

But the royal rope-makers explained that it was really
the scaffold that was too high.

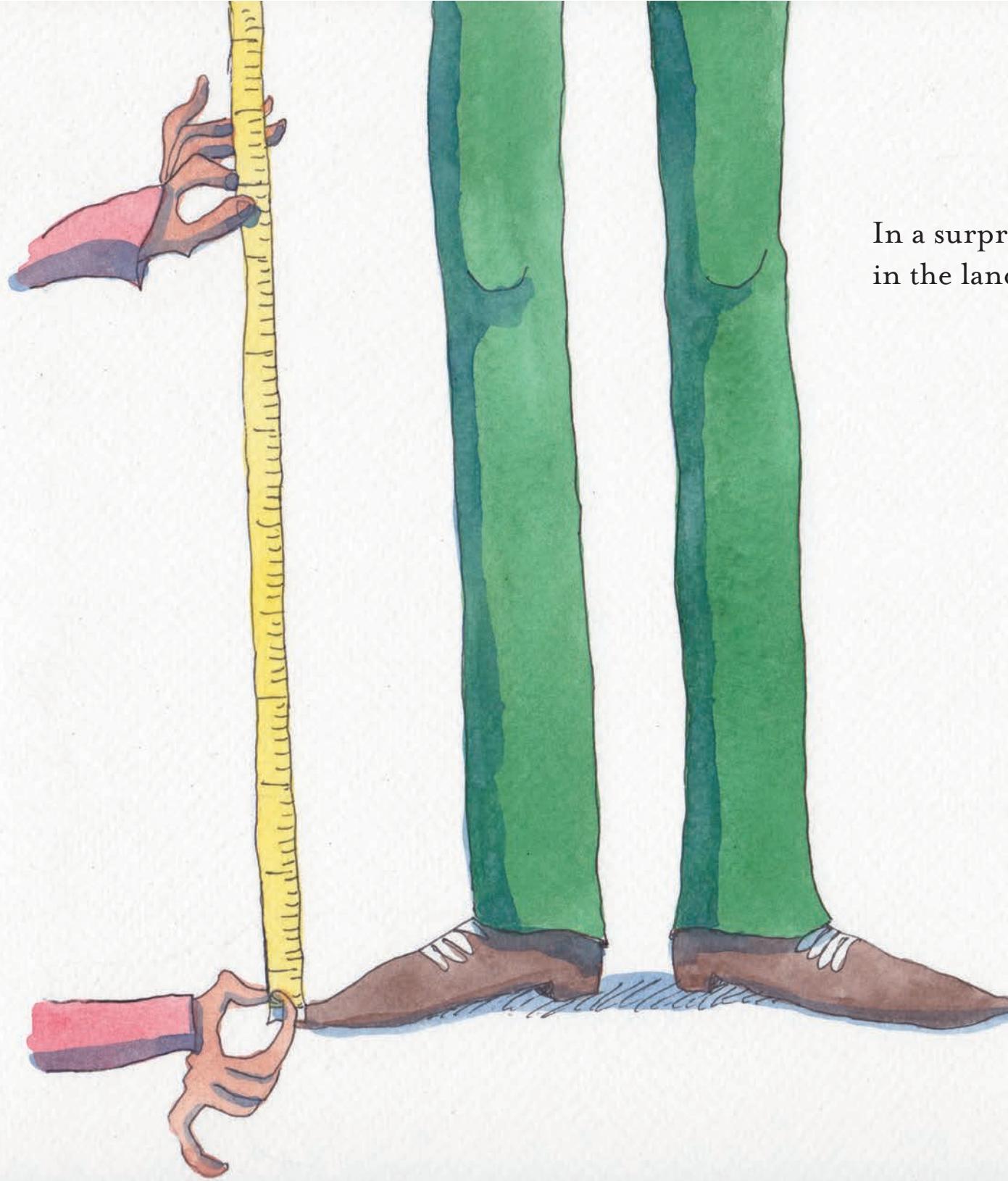
They suggested that the royal carpenters were at fault.





'We're NOT starting all that again,' said the king.

'The crowd is getting impatient,' said the royal advisers.
'We must quickly find someone suitable to hang.'



In a surprisingly short time, all the people
in the land were carefully measured.







But only one person was found to be exactly the right size
to fit the gallows.

It was the king himself.

And such was the people's enthusiasm that the king had
little choice but to give them what they wanted.

'Thank goodness we found someone,' said the prime minister after they had hanged the king. 'If we hadn't quickly acted to satisfy the mob, they would have undoubtedly turned against the crown.'



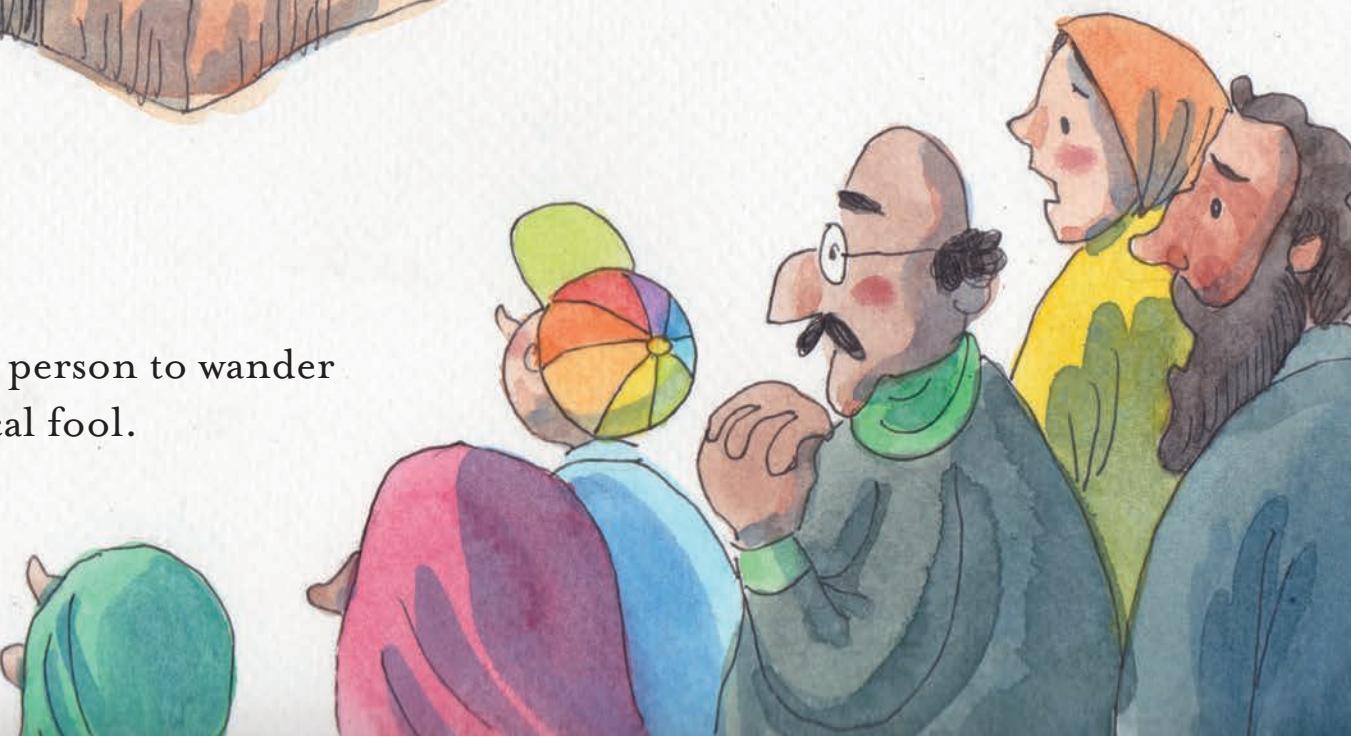
'In these troubled times,' he continued, 'we'd better act quickly to restore a monarch to the throne.'

And so he ordered that in line with tradition, the next person to pass through the city gates should name the new king.





It just so happened that the next person to wander through the city gates was the local fool.





Unlike the sensible citizens with whom we have become familiar in this story, the fool was not known for his brilliant reasoning.

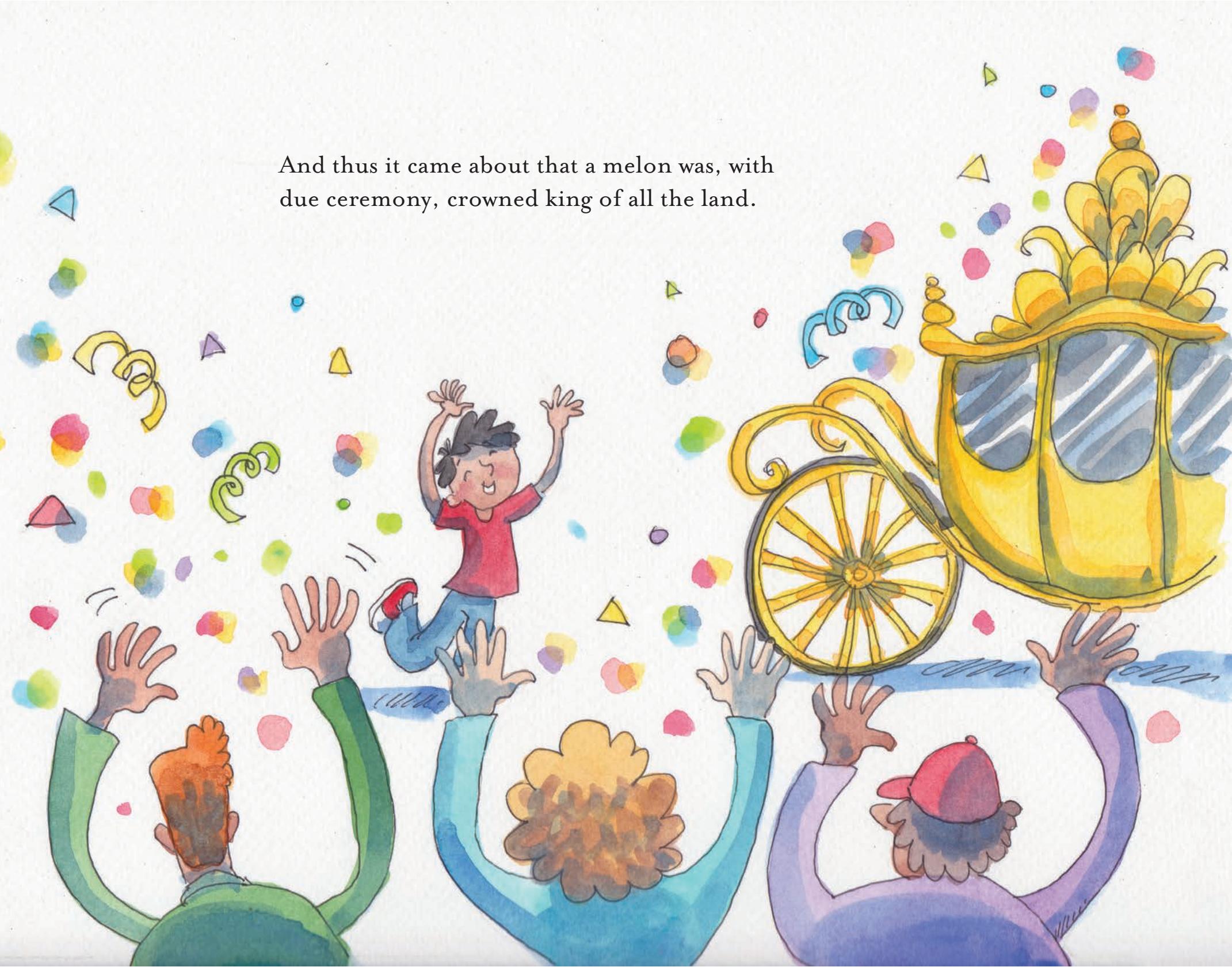
When asked to name the next ruler, he immediately said, 'A melon.'



He didn't say 'a melon' because he thought a melon would make a particularly good king.

He said it because he was very fond of melons, and being so fond of melons, he tended to say 'a melon' in answer to any question that he was asked.

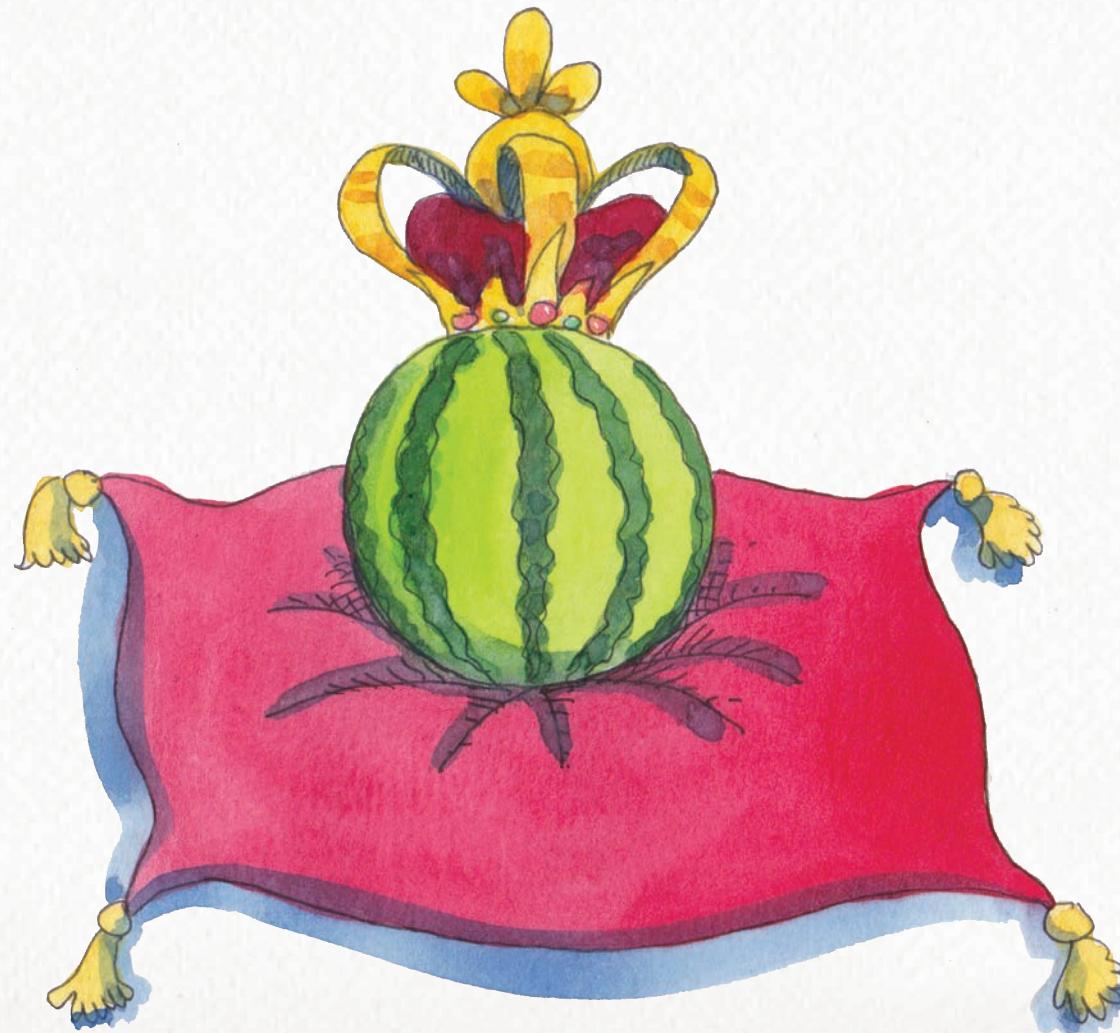
And thus it came about that a melon was, with due ceremony, crowned king of all the land.



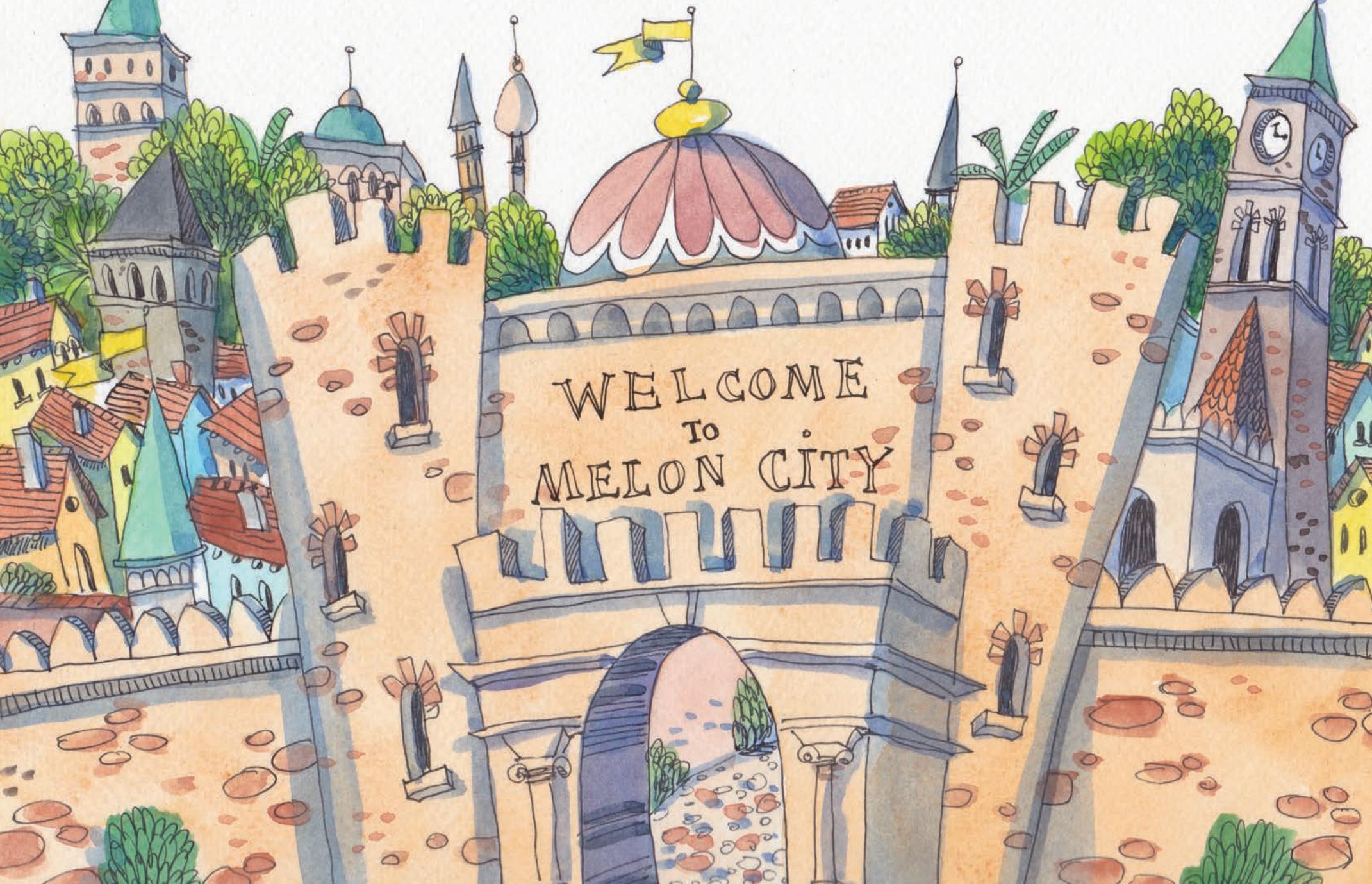
Now that was years and years ago.

These days, when anyone asks why the king is a melon, the people say:

'His Majesty evidently desires to be a melon...



...and it is not for us to question the king.
His Majesty will certainly make his wishes known, should
His Majesty ever wish to be anything other than a melon.'





CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY IDRIES SHAH

After a Swim
Speak First and Lose
The Ants and the Pen
The Boy With No Voice and the Men Who Couldn't Hear
The Fisherman's Neighbour
The Horrible Dib Dib
The Man, the Tree and the Wolf
The Onion
The Rich Man and the Monkey
The Story of Mushkil Gusha
The Tale of Melon City
The Tale of the Sands

For other children's books by Idries Shah please visit hoopoebooks.com

