

ONDINA'S BATTLE

Alenka Ban



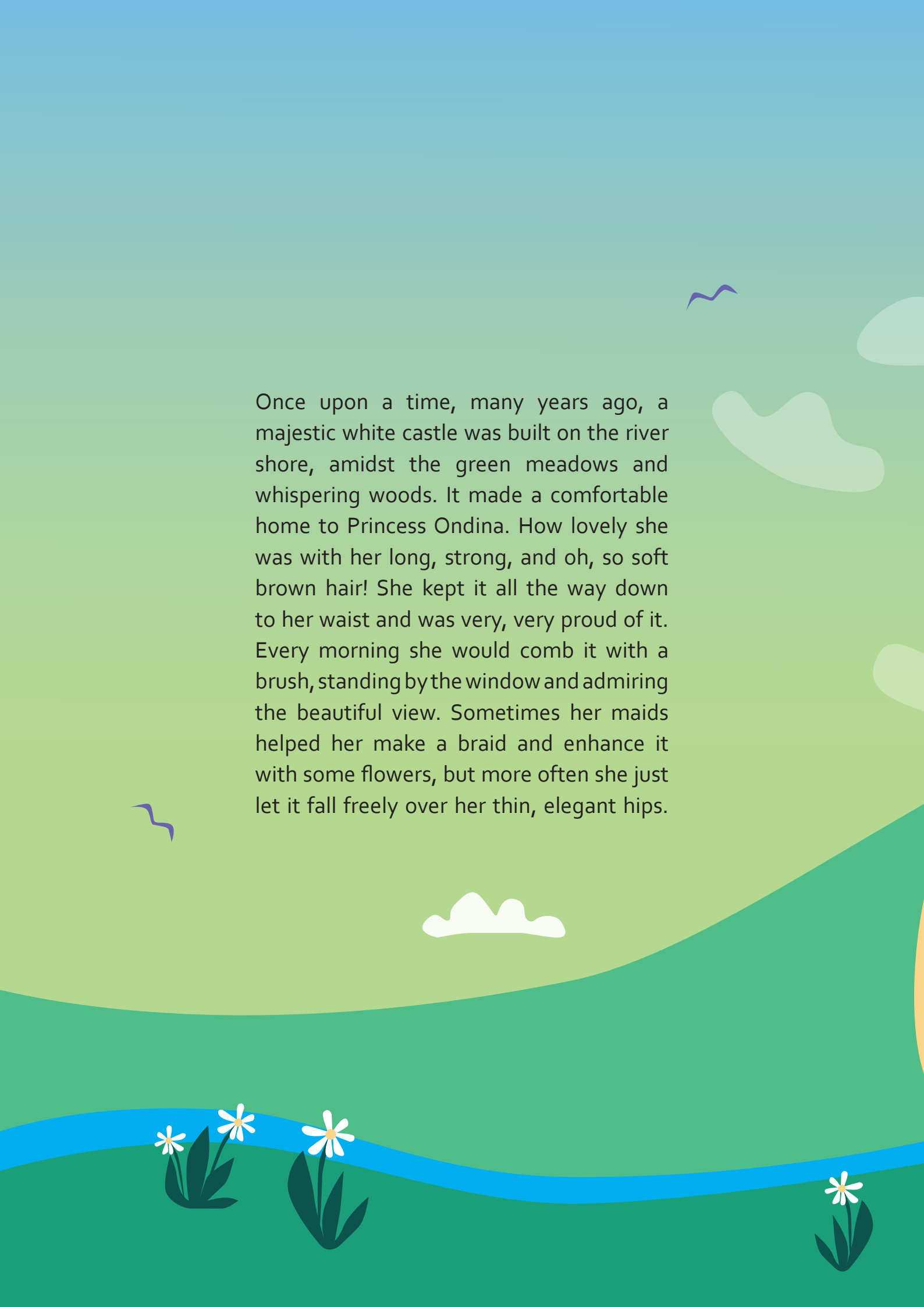
Dear brave reader!

Ondina's battle is your battle too. Your battle for health, and for life! It may take a lot of sacrifice, but your final win repays all of it!

If you happen to lose your hair, don't be afraid to look at your reflection in the mirror: it's still outstanding and beautiful you, worth to be loved and cared for! Some short years ago it was my battle as well. From all it gave to me I created the fairy tale you are holding in your hands right now! Through its lines I send you my support and a warm, encouraging hug.

Yours Alenka Ban



The background is a vibrant, stylized landscape. At the top, a light blue sky transitions into a green gradient. A blue river flows horizontally across the lower third of the page. Below the river, there are rolling green hills. In the center, a white, fluffy cloud is depicted. Two purple birds are shown in flight, one in the upper right and one in the lower left. At the bottom, several white daisies with dark green leaves are scattered along the riverbank. The overall style is clean and modern with a soft color palette.

Once upon a time, many years ago, a majestic white castle was built on the river shore, amidst the green meadows and whispering woods. It made a comfortable home to Princess Ondina. How lovely she was with her long, strong, and oh, so soft brown hair! She kept it all the way down to her waist and was very, very proud of it. Every morning she would comb it with a brush, standing by the window and admiring the beautiful view. Sometimes her maids helped her make a braid and enhance it with some flowers, but more often she just let it fall freely over her thin, elegant hips.



Almost every day after breakfast she loved to take a ride along the river; it was a sheer joy to watch her fine, slim body steady on the horseback and her hair waving behind in the harmony with the horse's blonde mane. But one bright, sunny day, when she was riding on her usual route, her horse suddenly shook and froze still! It stopped so quickly, that she nearly fell from the saddle. She looked forward and saw a tall and thin silhouette, wrapped in a black cloak with two evil black eyes glimpsing under a big, dark hat.

"Good day, beautiful!" His deep voice sent shivers down her spine. **"Where are you hurrying so fast?"**

"Shortly to the crystal pool and safely back home."

"I know for a spot with even more beautiful view and clearer water. Will you join me if I promise to show it to you?"

Princess Ondina frowned and flinched. **"Sir, I don't know you! And I should really go now."**

She tried to turn her horse around, but it looked like some kind of a spell kept him stuck in its place. All it was able to do is wave with the head and blow through the nostrils.

"I know who you are, my beauty. Let me introduce myself to you: my name is Rudolo and I am the river spirit. I watch you from the darkest water depths every single day and I get to love you more and more, stronger and stronger. Marry me, sweet Ondina, and I won't do you any harm!"

"I don't know you and I do not wish to marry you!"

"So be cursed, Princess Ondina! If I can't have you, I send you the weakness and pain, which shall eventually make you die!", he hissed through his teeth.



Ondina's face turned pale in fear, teardrops running down her cheeks, and she fell on her knees, begging for mercy. "Please, please, mighty Rudolo, let me live, I am still so young, I don't want to die yet!"

"Alright, girl. You got another chance. I shall let you live - but only in exchange for something you cherish and value a lot - your beautiful hair! You have one night to decide. Meet me here at the dawn and let me know." Then Rudolo lifted his cloak and vanished into the fog, only his loud, creepy laughter still echoed over the swamp.





Princess Ondina then rode home, still stiff of all fear, pale and tired, shaking and shivering all over her body. She couldn't eat a single bite, just locked into her room, lay down on her bed, and tossed and turned in it sleepless, all night long.

Very early next day she went to the stables and saddled her horse. She struggled to ride off before the dawn. Now she knew clearly, what she wanted more! She loved to hear the sound of the river and the birds singing in the trees. She loved to spend time with her family and on her horse, she loved to read and sing and dance.

She loved her life - and she was ready.



She stopped on the river shore, stepped off her horse, and shouted out loudly: **“Rudolo! Come out, you malicious river demon!”**

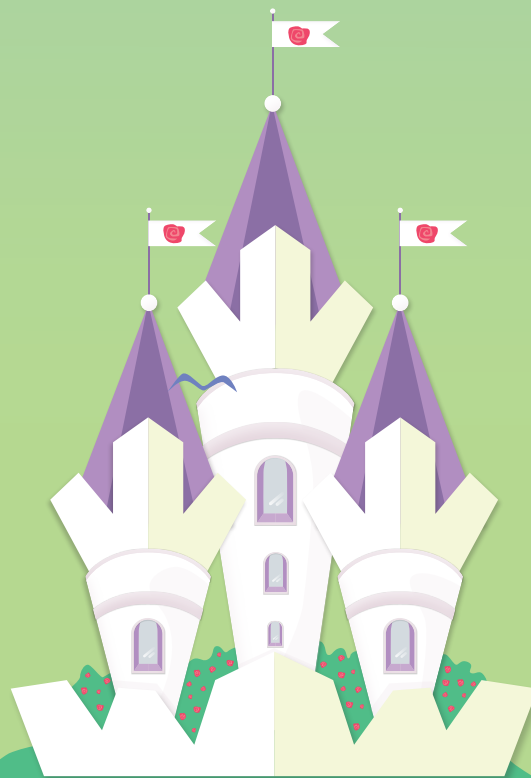
He appeared before her out of the deep fog and stared at her with his eyes, glimmering like two pieces of smoldering charcoal. Princess Ondina powerfully reached behind her back, let her hair fall loose from her long braid, looked straight into Rudolo’s eyes, and quietly, but firmly said: **“Here. Take them!”**



Rudolo waved with his cloak, lifted his arms, and spoke:

**“Princess Ondina, I gave you the time
but your soft and silky hair is now mine!
It might grow back again and thrive
if true love makes you heal and shine!”**

In a moment, strong wind rustled over the swamp,
lifted Ondina’s long hair up into the air, and swirled the
grass and leaves all around her.



When it all finally stopped
and calmed down, Ondina
stood next to her beautiful
horse, alone and all hairless.



She swallowed down the tears and lifted the hood on her coat up, to cover her baldness and warm herself up a little. She turned her horse towards her castle first, but at the crossroads she changed her mind and took the narrow road, leading to the monastery in the mountains.

She settled there from then on, hiding her bald head under the black veil and praying for Rudolo's last words to come true.



Weeks have passed, turning into months. Then, one windy and stormy afternoon a lone traveler lost his way and knocked at the door of the monastery to ask for a place, where he could stay overnight. Ondina was the first to hear it, as she was walking down the corridor from the chapel to her room. And she saw the young man, who stepped in through the door, so tall and well-built, with wavy fair hair and broad shoulders. At first, she lost her breath whilst looking at him, but the next moment she stepped aside and shyly turned her eyes down to the ground, without noticing how much her pale, yet beautiful face and big, sad eyes have touched his heart.

The young man decided to stay in the monastery for a couple of days, waiting for the weather to calm down, and Ondina was the one, who took care of his horse. One day, when she was in the stables, he surprised her and intentionally blocked the door, so she couldn't sneak away, like she tended to do every time their paths met. **"I've been watching you and thinking... haven't we by any chance met before? You look so familiar... and you can do with horses so well! I must have seen you somewhere before."** Ondina now dared to look into the young man's eyes. They were blue and cheerful, with sheer life power shining inside. **"Can't tell. Could be."** She thought for a while. **"I grew up at the Riverside Manor and I learned to handle the horses from my dad. He always took me with him to the county tournament."** **"My God, you are Princess Ondina!"**, he smiled. **"You might remember me too. I used to follow my dad to that same tournament. My name is Leo, and I am the oldest son of count Wheatstein from Greendale!"**

These words brought Princess Ondina's memories back. She remembered a cheeky boy, who liked to pull her braids for fun and then redeemed himself with a basket of fresh fruit. She laughed, but the very next moment she pulled her veil tighter on her forehead. This first encounter made their friendship grow back; they often talked about good old times, had a good laugh, and had a bite of sweet red apples from the orchard. He started to notice, that her eyes had begun to shine again, and that her cheeks got back their beautiful pink color. Through long conversation, he discovered her brave and beautiful soul, and he felt, that his bond with her is becoming stronger each day. Soon he was determined to set her free from the monastery, take her home with him and ask her to marry him.



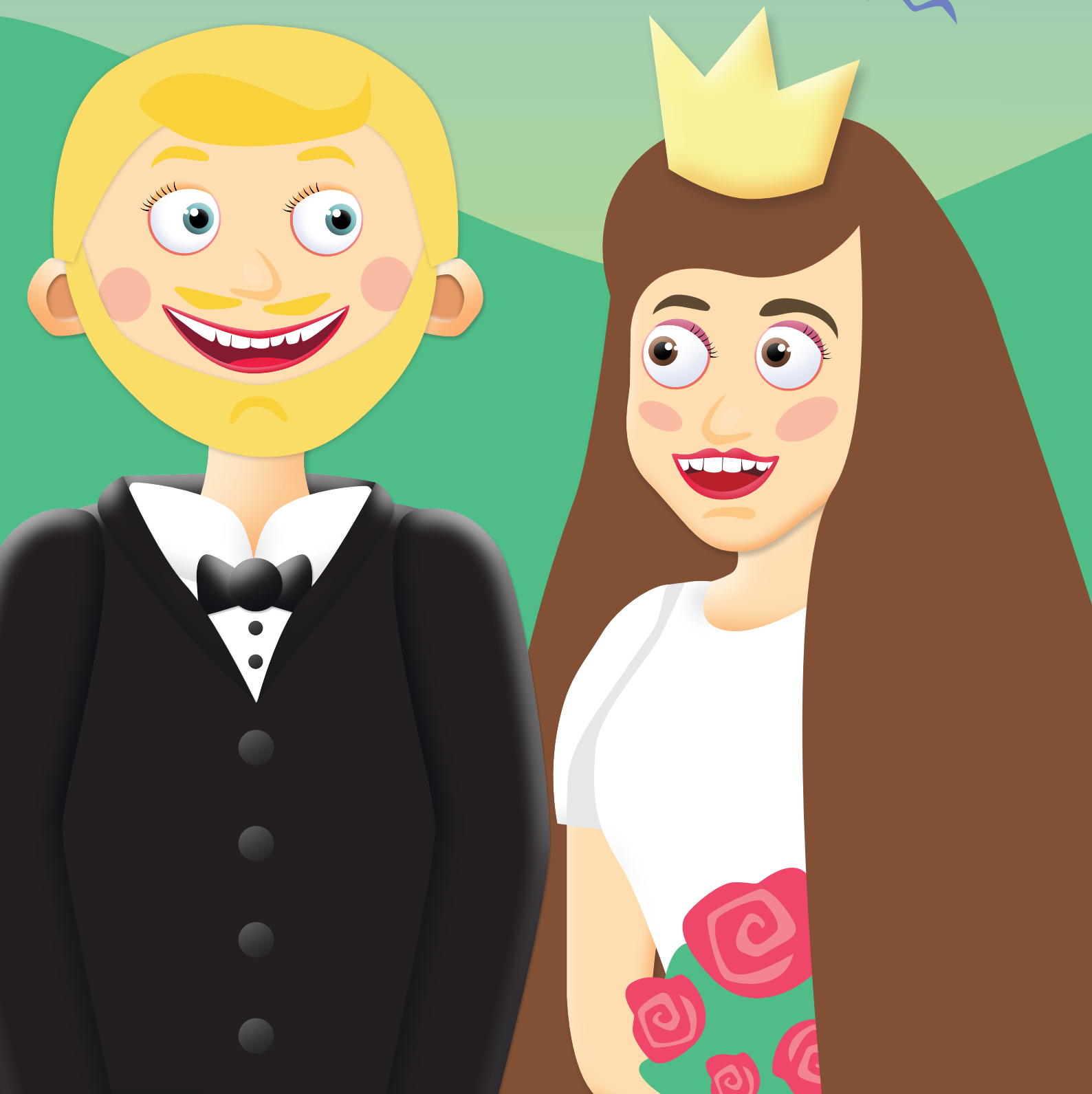
On the day of his departure, she saddled his horse, and when she turned around to leave the stable, he caught her hand and stopped her. He looked deep into her eyes and said: **“Ondina... Please, ride away with me and be my wife! I can’t imagine my life without you...”** Her grey eyes filled up with tears. **“Do you really mean it?”** she whispered, all stunned and trembling all over. **“I love you more than anything in the world. There’s nothing I would want more!”** **“So I’ll be true to you as well... I sincerely love you... but alas, I am cursed. I’m not what you remember me anymore!”** She took the black veil off her head and let it fall onto the ground. But Leo just smiled and said: **“You look amazing! Short hair suits you even better.”**

Princess Ondina then touched her head and what she felt under her fingers wasn’t smooth, naked skin, it was a curly fluff that softly tickled her fingertips! Her face shone and instantly her happy laughter echoed between the monastery walls when she fell into Leo’s arms and tangled her palms into his blonde locks. His heart trembled with joy as he held her so tight and silenced her laughter under his lips.



Soon the church bells announced the big day and the beautiful hair of Princess Ondina waved around her shoulders in the warm wind again, as she stood in her white dress next to Count Leo, her one and only true love.

Shining and caring for each other, their love thrived and they lived healthily and happily ever after.



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