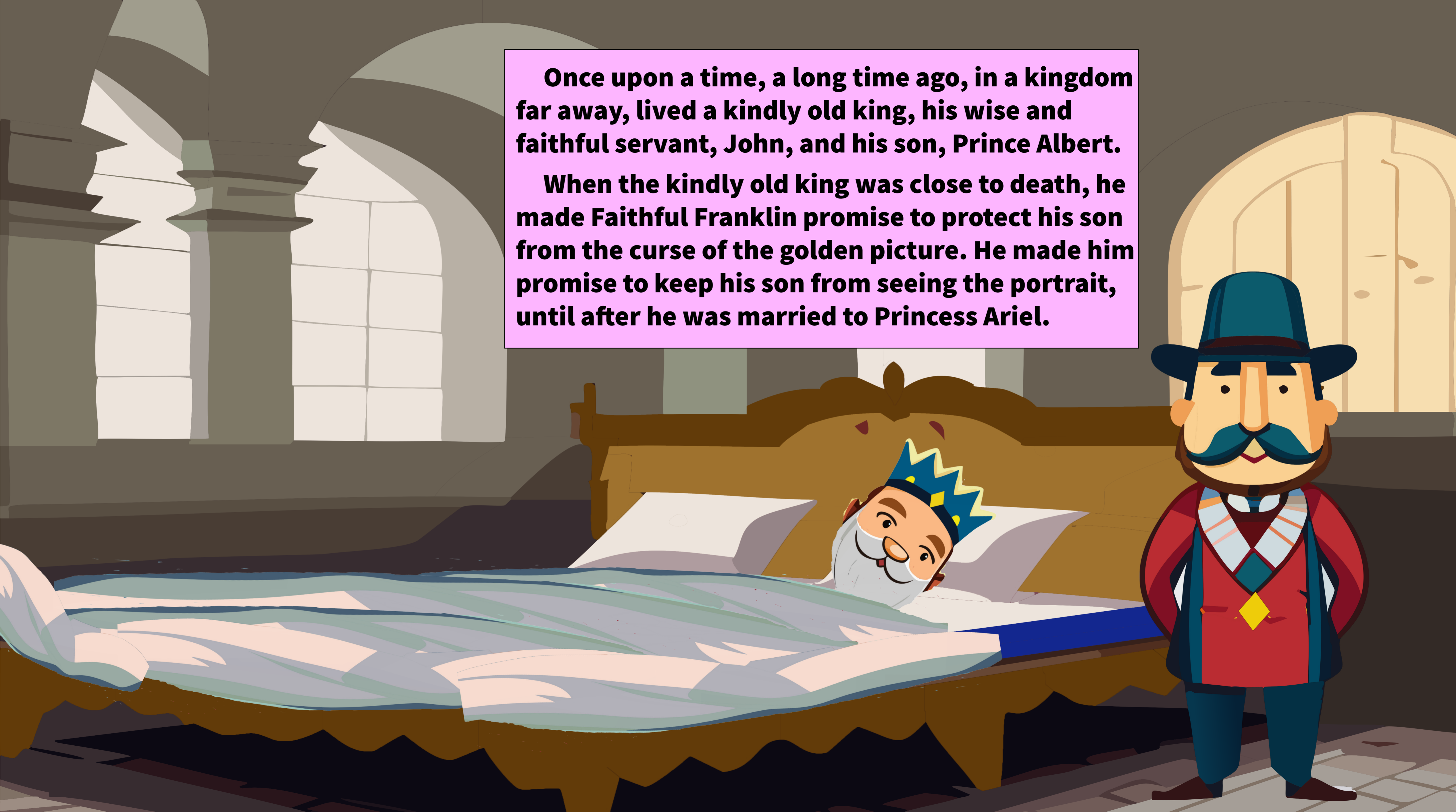


# The Curse of the Golden Portrait



**Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a kingdom far away, lived a kindly old king, his wise and faithful servant, John, and his son, Prince Albert.**

**When the kindly old king was close to death, he made Faithful Franklin promise to protect his son from the curse of the golden picture. He made him promise to keep his son from seeing the portrait, until after he was married to Princess Ariel.**







**After the funeral, Faithful John hurried up to the attic to hide the portrait. He had wanted to put it away somewhere, for years, but the king wouldn't allow it. He just made sure the attic always stayed locked. Faithful John was afraid of the golden portrait of Princess Ariel. It was said that if Prince Albert saw the portrait before he was married that he would fall madly in love with the girl, even before they met. Also, he would, instantly, be cursed by three curses, and each curse had potential to cost him his life or the life of someone he loved.**



**“What are you looking at?” Albert asked, walking up behind him.**

**“Nothing!” John slammed the doors and locked them behind his back.**

**“You know, I’d die to know what’s been so secretive about that room my whole life.”**

**“Yeah, and you might just do that if you don’t learn to mind your own business.” John mumbled, walking away.**





**Despite John's advise, Albert picked the lock to the attic and went inside. As soon as he saw the portrait of Princess Ariel, he fell madly in love. He was so smitten, he couldn't think of anything else but meeting her. He felt like running to John and demanding that he set up a meeting with her, whoever she was... but he knew he wasn't supposed to be up there. He looked over his shoulder. Even though he was king, now, he was still a little afraid of John's wrath. The guy could out-smart a fox... and easily out-smart him.**

Faithful John met up with Albert when he was going through the ballroom. “You’ve been up in the attic, haven’t you... an-n-d you saw the portrait, didn’t you?”

“What? What makes you think that?” Albert stammered, clearing his throat.

“You’re all starry-eyed.”

“That is without a doubt, the most beautiful girl that I have ever seen. Get her for me, please.”

“You know, that picture is cursed? You were supposed to meet Ariel first and fall in love with her goodness before her beauty.”

“That’d be impossible,” Albert sighed. “She’s just too beautiful.”

“You did hear me? That picture is cursed.”

“She’s worth any curse. You have to arrange it for us to meet. You have to!”





**Albert was so upset about not being with Ariel that he rode his horse violently through the woods and refused to eat.**

**Finally, after several days, John conceded. “I will take you to meet Princess Ariel,” he said, “but I have no idea if we will make it out of this curse alive,” he continued.**

**“I don’t want to just meet her. I want to marry her!”**

**“So, pretty to be a widow so young.” Franklin shook his head. “Well, we’ll fill the ship with treasures and see if we can’t entice her. You’d better get ready. We sail tonight.”**



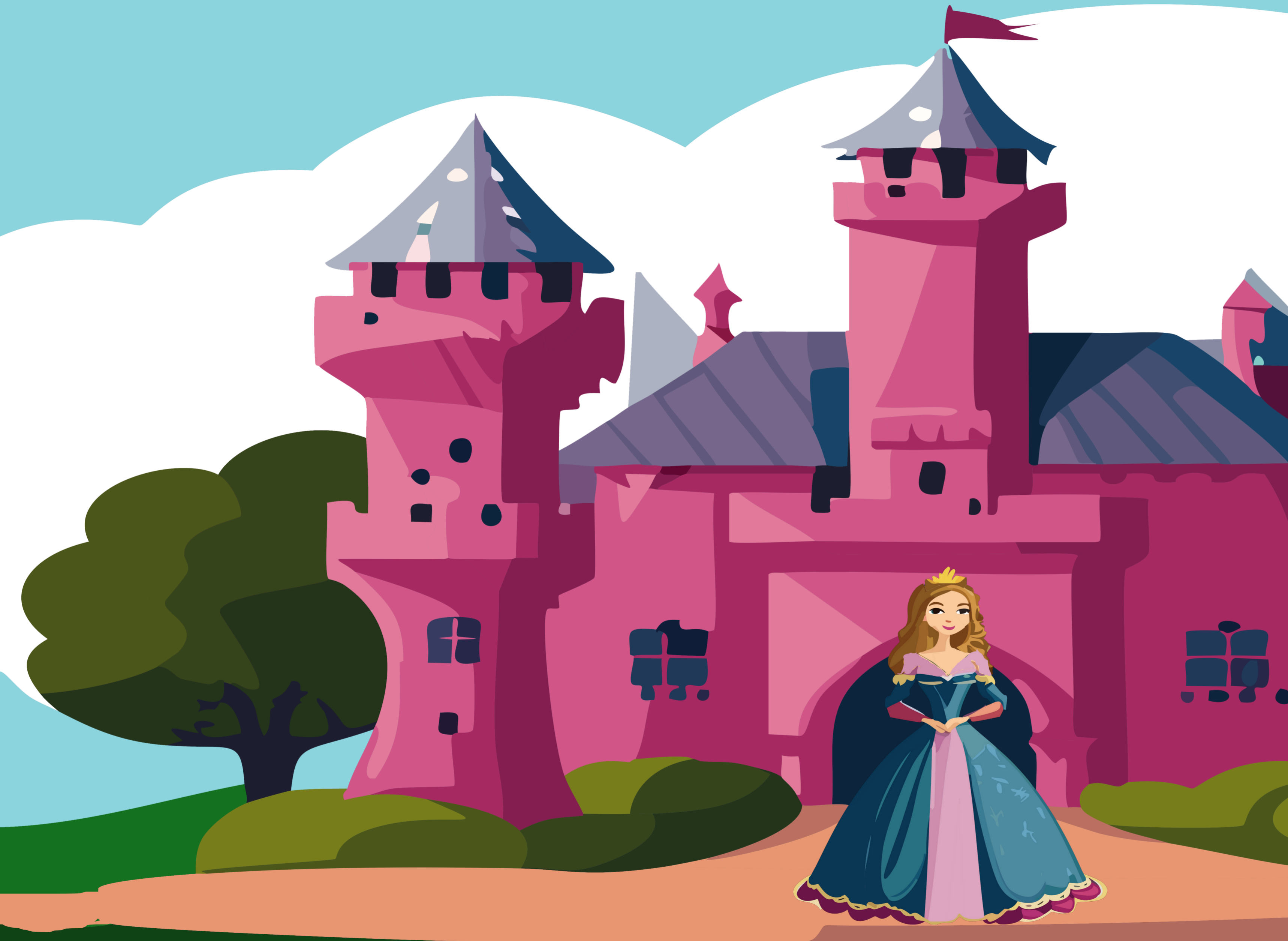


**They sailed for days through choppy seas to get to the kingdom of pearls, where Princess Ariel lived.**





**When they arrived at port, Prince Albert could see the princess, standing off in the distance in front of her castle. “She’s even more beautiful than her picture!” Albert exclaimed.**



**“Here’s the pearls.” Faithful John, handed him a large, red velvet box. “I guarantee those are the largest pearls she’s ever seen. Rent the best horse at the stable and go see her. Spend as long as you want. I’ll wait here by the treasures.”**

**“I’d rather she want to come with me than bring her to the ship to kidnap her,” Albert said, thoughtfully.**

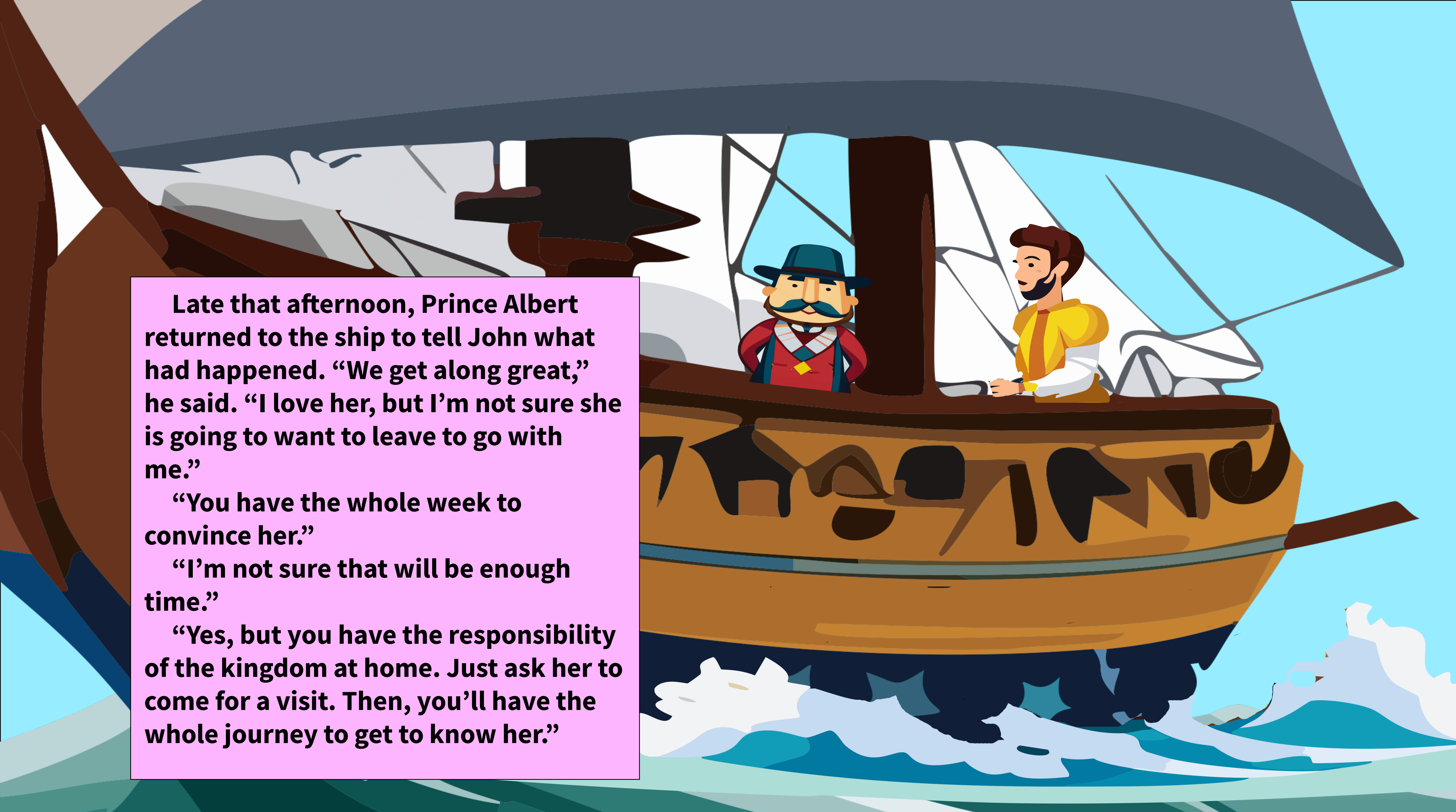
**“Glad to hear it,” Faithful John replied. “Now go!”**



**Princess Ariel gasped when she saw the size of the pearls. “These are gorgeous!” She exclaimed. “Who are they from?”**

**Prince Albert of Elderberry,” he said, dismounting. “And he thinks you are the most beautiful lady he has ever seen.” He stared deep into her eyes.**





Late that afternoon, Prince Albert returned to the ship to tell John what had happened. “We get along great,” he said. “I love her, but I’m not sure she is going to want to leave to go with me.”

“You have the whole week to convince her.”

“I’m not sure that will be enough time.”

“Yes, but you have the responsibility of the kingdom at home. Just ask her to come for a visit. Then, you’ll have the whole journey to get to know her.”



**“She said that she’s heard about me many times that we were matched from birth and that you told her we were coming. How come it is that I was never told of her?”**

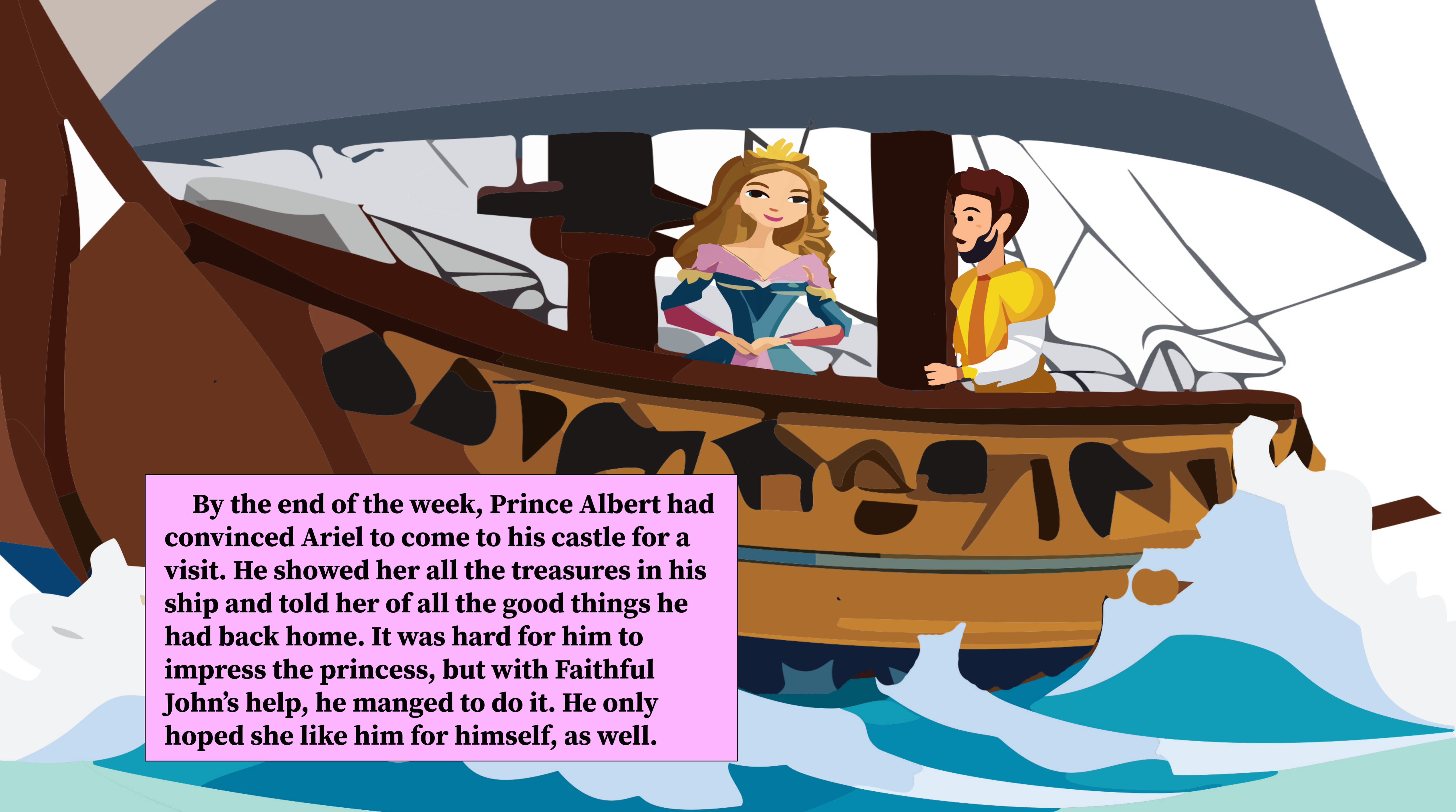
**“Your father was best of friends with her father, but he had a complicated relationship with her mother. Since your father was much older than her parents, it was decided that you would not meet until after your father passed away.”**

**“What about the picture?”**

**“Yes, since you chose not to listen to your father’s faithful advisor, you will have to survive the three curses of the portrait if you want to live happily ever after.”**







**By the end of the week, Prince Albert had convinced Ariel to come to his castle for a visit. He showed her all the treasures in his ship and told her of all the good things he had back home. It was hard for him to impress the princess, but with Faithful John's help, he managed to do it. He only hoped she like him for himself, as well.**





**One day on their journey home, when John was standing out on the deck, he was met by a talking seagull. “I am here to tell you about the curse,” the bird cawed.**

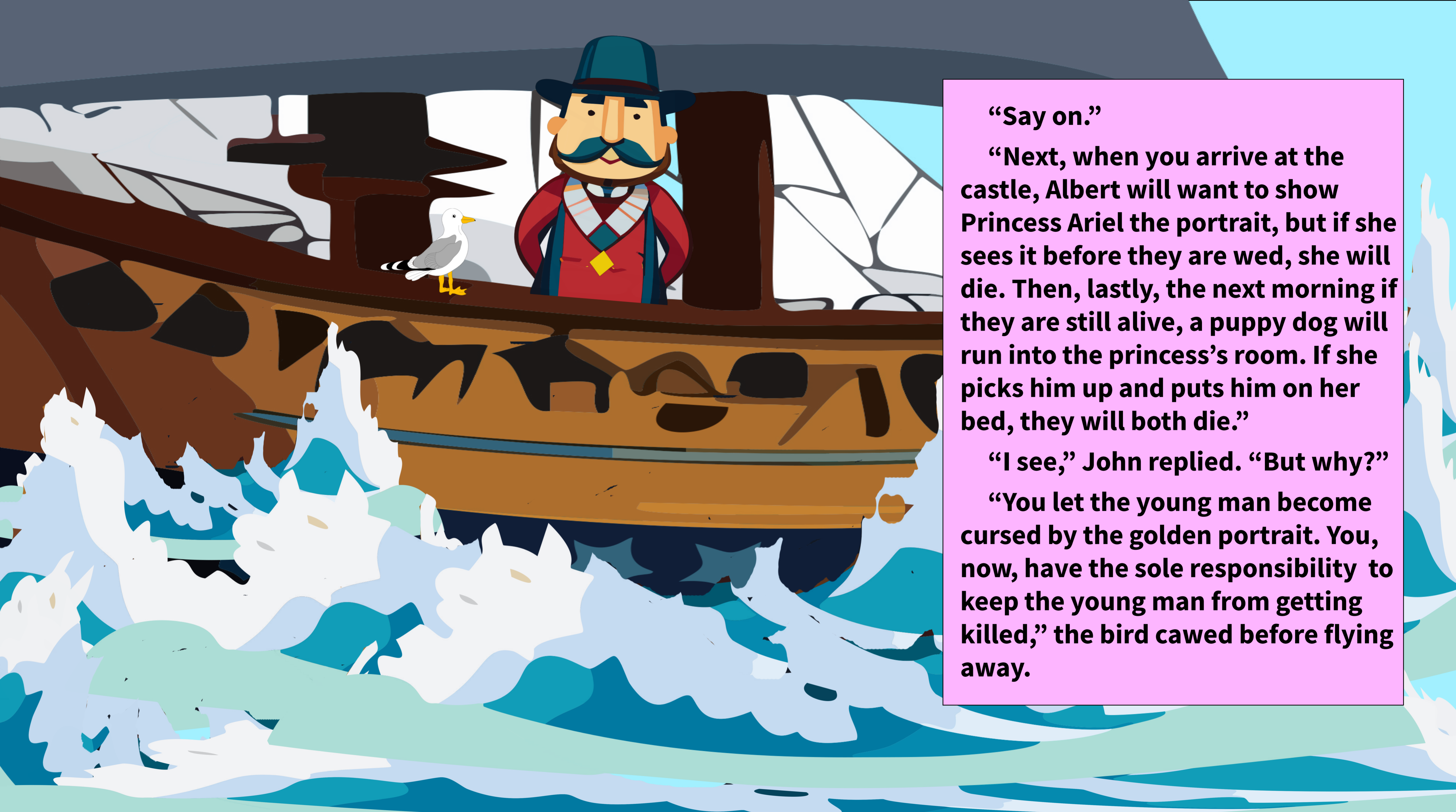
**“Say on.”**

**“I will tell you the three curses. Only you will know. If you tell anyone, ever, you will, immediately, be turned to stone.”**

**“Say on.”**

**“First, when you arrive to port, you will meet a wild stallion, who will run up to the ship. Albert will want to ride the horse through the meadow, but if he does, the curse will be complete, and he will die.”**





**“Say on.”**

**“Next, when you arrive at the castle, Albert will want to show Princess Ariel the portrait, but if she sees it before they are wed, she will die. Then, lastly, the next morning if they are still alive, a puppy dog will run into the princess’s room. If she picks him up and puts him on her bed, they will both die.”**

**“I see,” John replied. “But why?”**

**“You let the young man become cursed by the golden portrait. You, now, have the sole responsibility to keep the young man from getting killed,” the bird cawed before flying away.**





**As soon as they docked, early the next day, a beautiful white stallion, who had just thrown his rider, reared up next to their ship. “Watch this,” Albert said to Ariel before jumping from the ship onto the stallion.**

**“Wait!” Faithful John jumped from the ship after him and grabbed the horse’s reins.**







**“What are you doing?”**

**“I will not allow you to ride this steed!”**

**“Why not?”**

**“I am your father’s dearest and most trusted advisor!  
You must listen to me in this matter!”**

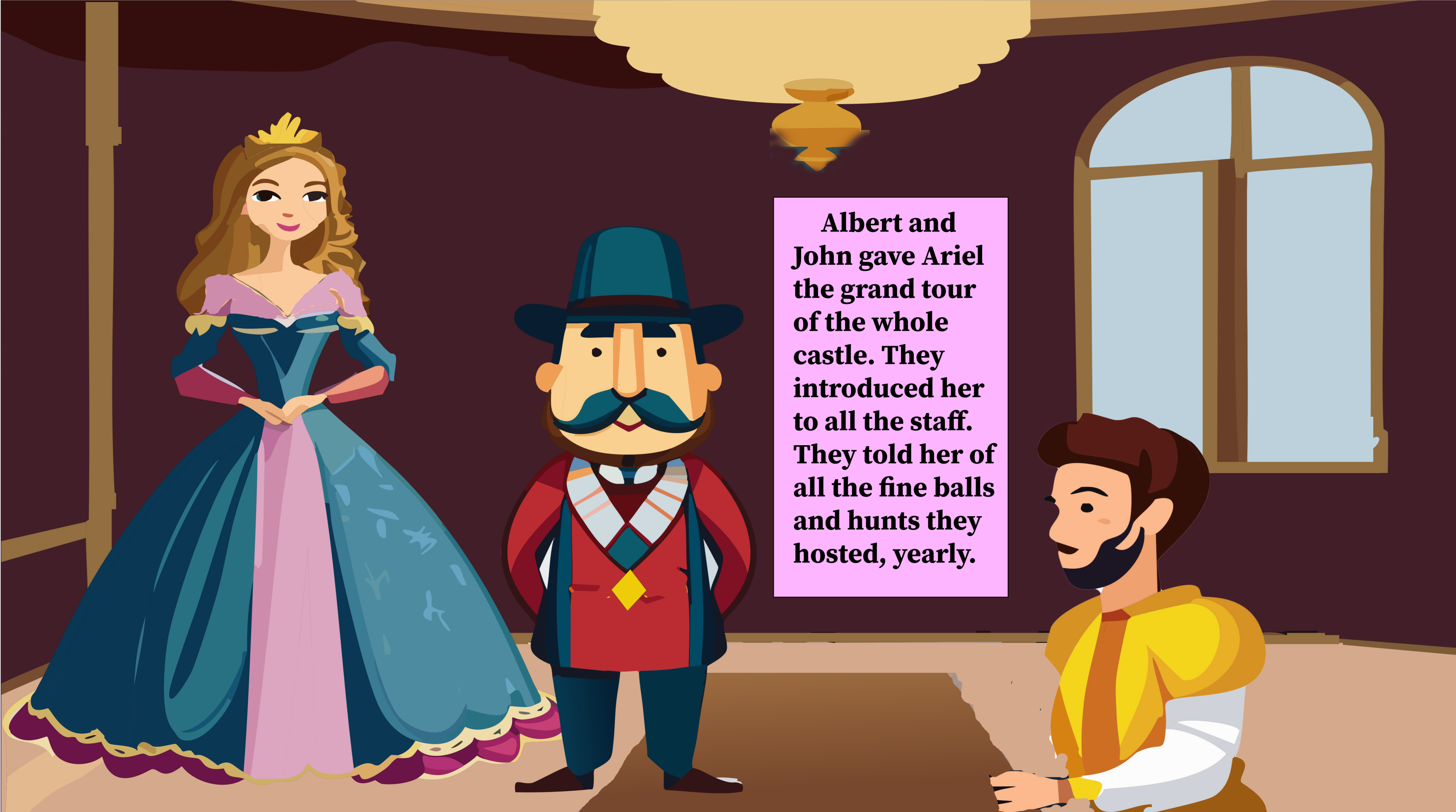
**“Fine.” Albert dismounted and gave the horse back to  
his owner.**





**When they got to the castle, Albert showed Ariel his own horse and worked to convince her that it had once been as wild as the white stallion, but he had tamed it.**





**Albert and John gave Ariel the grand tour of the whole castle. They introduced her to all the staff. They told her of all the fine balls and hunts they hosted, yearly.**





**When they got to the attic, John stood and blocked the doorway. “I would like to go in and show Ariel the portrait I’ve been telling her about.”**

**“I’m sorry I can not permit it.”**

**“Why not?”**

**“I am you father’s dearest and most faithful advisor. I implore you to listen to me in this matter.”**

**“That line can get old in a hurry.”**

**“Please, young ones, just move along.”**

**They left, but Ariel glanced back with such curiosity that he knew the matter was not settled.**

**The next morning, John woke up to barking noises down the hall. “Oh no! I hope I’m not too late,” he said to himself as he jumped out of bed and ran into the princess’s room.**







**John chased the puppy out before Ariel could pick him up, but he had greatly startled the princess by rushing into her room unannounced.**

**This time Albert became very angry with Faithful John. The more John refused to explain himself the angrier Albert became. He sentenced John to the rest of his life in prison. Then, he had him locked up until the knights were to transfer him to prison.**

**John became very sad while locked up. He honestly didn't know which he preferred... to live the rest of his life disgraced in captivity and die with a blemish forever on his good name... or to tell the truth and turn to stone.**



**Albert came to visit John from time to time. Though still angry at him, he told him when he and Ariel became engaged. He, also, told him, 'goodbye' the day before the knights were to transfer him.**



**John walked out of confinement proudly. Then, with as much poise and grace as ever, he marched, staunchly, down the road, with the knight's horses clopping behind him.**

**In the distance he saw Albert and Arial standing together in the grass, watching. Suddenly, a wave of emotion flooded over him. He glanced down at the medal he always wore around his neck... the metal of faithfulness given to him by Albert's father.**



**Suddenly, he knew he couldn't do it. He couldn't live with the shame of the lie that everyone believed. "It was for you!" he called out as he passed. "It was to break the third curse of the golden portrait. If she had pick up the puppy she would have died."**





**As soon as the words came from Faithful John's mouth, he turned to stone.**

**"Oh no!" Ariel gasped. "What can we do?"**

**"It must have been part of the curse," Albert concluded. "That's why he wouldn't tell me. I should have trusted him."**





**Albert told Ariel to wait there. Then, he ran up stairs and picked the lock to the attic. He didn't know what would happen to him, this time, for touching the portrait, but he had to. He had to get it out of their lives. He ran downstairs to the fireplace and tossed it on the fire. Fear, anger, and hope all crowded his emotions as he watched it burn.**





**Now that she understood, Ariel felt so bad about the little man that tears began to trickle from her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Faithful John. I misjudged you... badly.” She bent down and kissed the stone statue of the little man.**



**As soon as Ariel kissed the statue with forgiveness and the golden portrait was all burned up, Faithful John turned back from stone.**





**“I’m so glad you’re alright!”  
Albert exclaimed, after  
running across the courtyard  
to meet them. “I’m sorry for  
not trusting you. I burned up  
the portrait.”**

**“Should have been done  
many years ago, my boy.”**

**“I’m so glad you’re  
innocent. Besides, It solves a  
terrible problem I’ve been  
mulling around.”**

**“What’s that?”**

**“Will you be my best man?  
...After all, you are, you know.”**

**“Jolly good. I’d be pleased  
as punch.”**







**So, Prince Albert and Princess Ariel were married and lived happily ever after.**

