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michael morpurgo

THE Boy Who Would Be King

illustrated by

Michael Foreman



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

Foreword

Just a short time ago I wrote a fairy tale inspired by the life of our late Queen Elizabeth the Second. I called it *There Once Is a Queen*. She had been queen almost all my life. As a young boy, I saw her coronation live on a small black-and-white television in my village hall, the whole village gathered round. I grew up knowing her as queen, all through my childhood, my teenage years, grown-up years, years as a family man, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather. And all my life she was there. Sadly, sadly, she died shortly after I wrote my fairy story.

And now we have a new king, shortly to be crowned, her son, King Charles the Third. He is just a little younger than me, but he was a boy when I was a boy. We grew up part of the same generation. I always felt a kinship. He, like me, went away to boarding school, and he, like me, developed an abiding love of nature and the countryside.

I thought I might write another fairy story, very much inspired by King Charles, and by his childhood in particular.

Michael Foreman – who is the wonderful illustrator of both these books – and I, should like to dedicate this book to His Majesty the King, and Her Majesty the Queen Consort, wishing them well and happy in the years ahead.









There once was a boy

who was different,

not like other children.

He knew it and other children knew it.

Everyone knew it,

that he was going to be king one day,

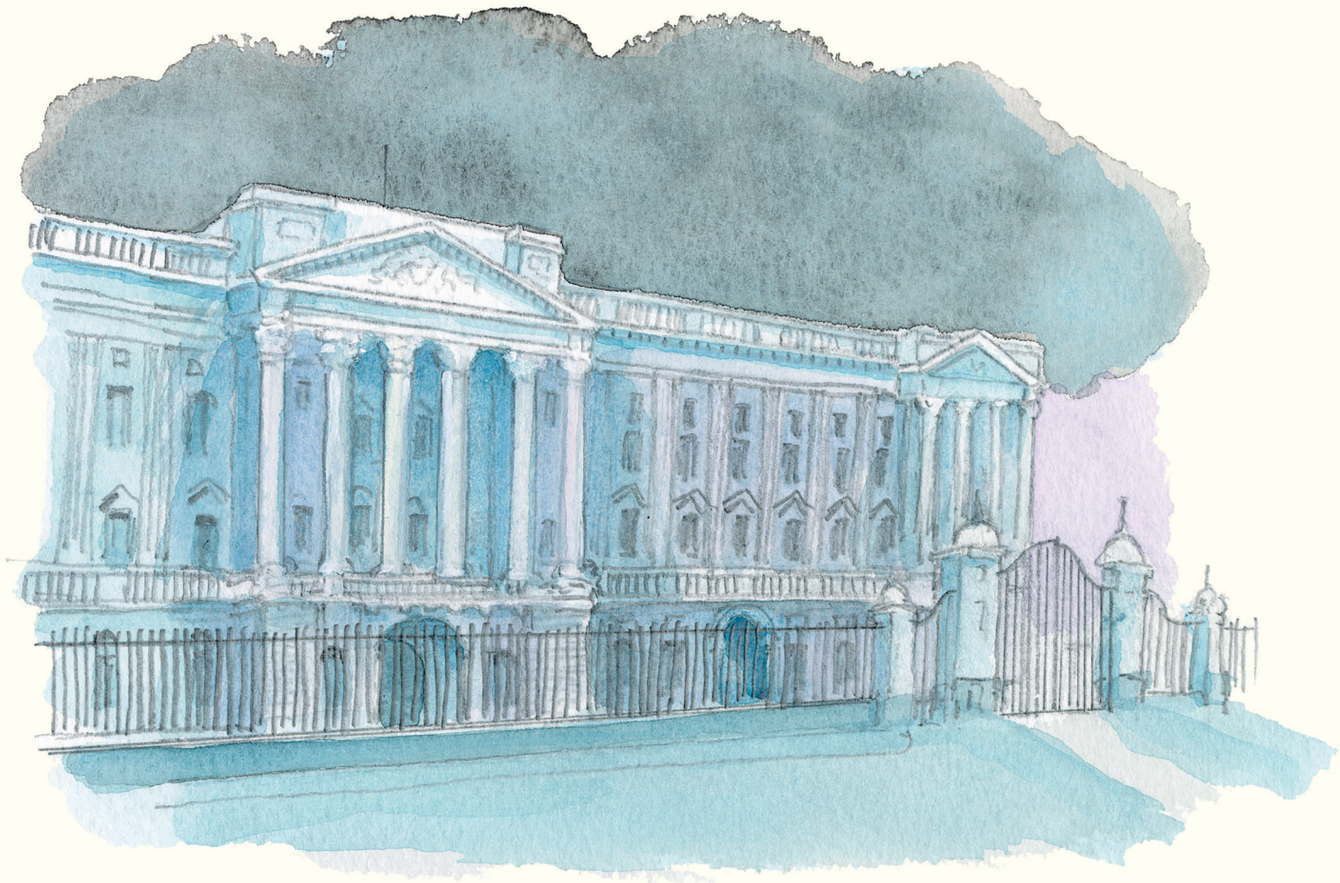
when he was older.

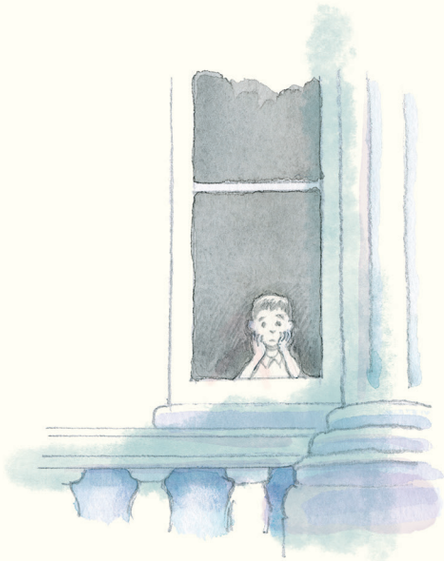






He lived with his family in a great palace, with high walls and fences all around. He was never allowed out, not on his own. Sometimes, looking out of his window, it felt to him like a prison.





His mummy and daddy were forever busy doing what queens and kings do, meeting the people, shaking hands, opening this school and that hospital, even launching ships. He didn't really know much about what they did. He just knew it kept them away from him, and he didn't like that. They always seemed to be going off somewhere, or coming back, but not staying.

There were always people in the palace to look after him. His nanny looked after him, and she was always kind to him, as kind as anyone could be, but, even so, he often felt very alone in the world, and sad.

But when they came home, when they stopped being King and Queen and became Mummy and Daddy again, they would sometimes take him for long walks in the countryside,
with the dogs or the horses,
and he loved that.



They loved what he loved, the wind in the trees, the glimpse of a deer or a fox, the river rushing by, a fish rising, the heron in the shallows, the darting kingfisher, the ducks taking off noisily, watching the sun setting over the hills, then a pale moon rising, stomping home in the evening through muddy fields in wellies,

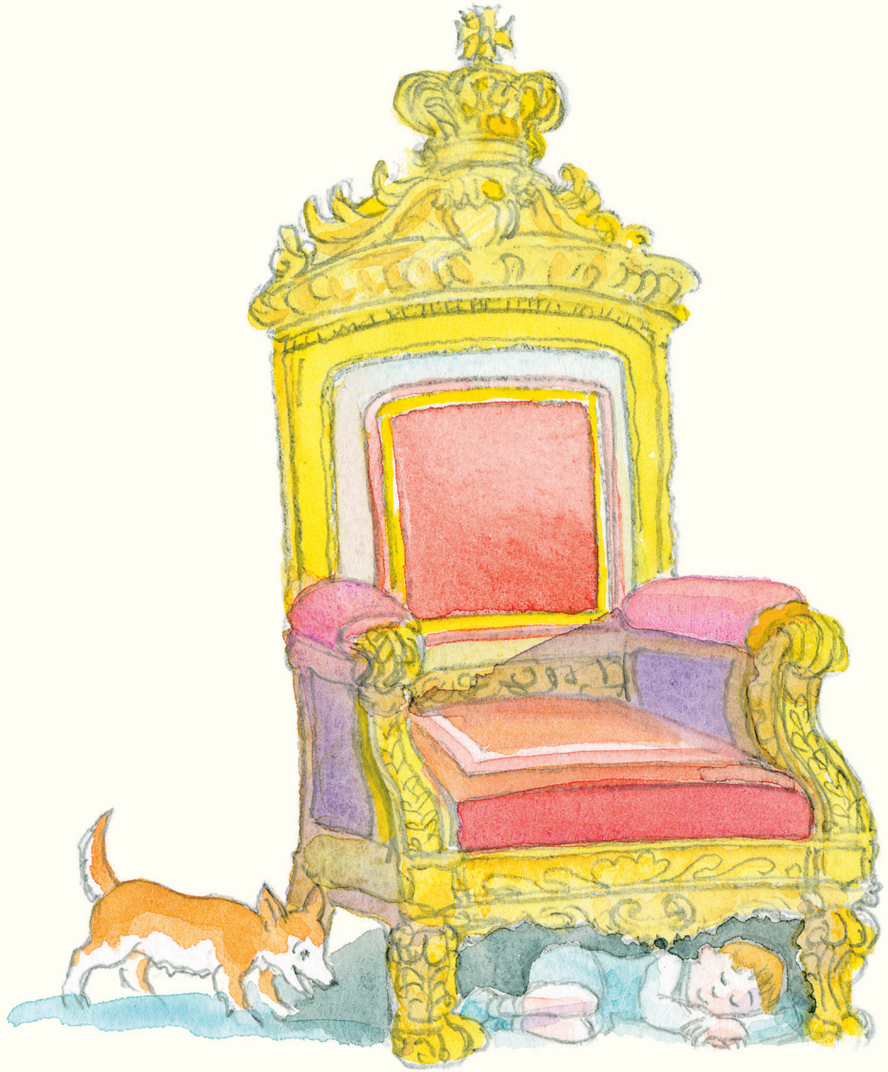
his pockets full of shining acorns and conkers.

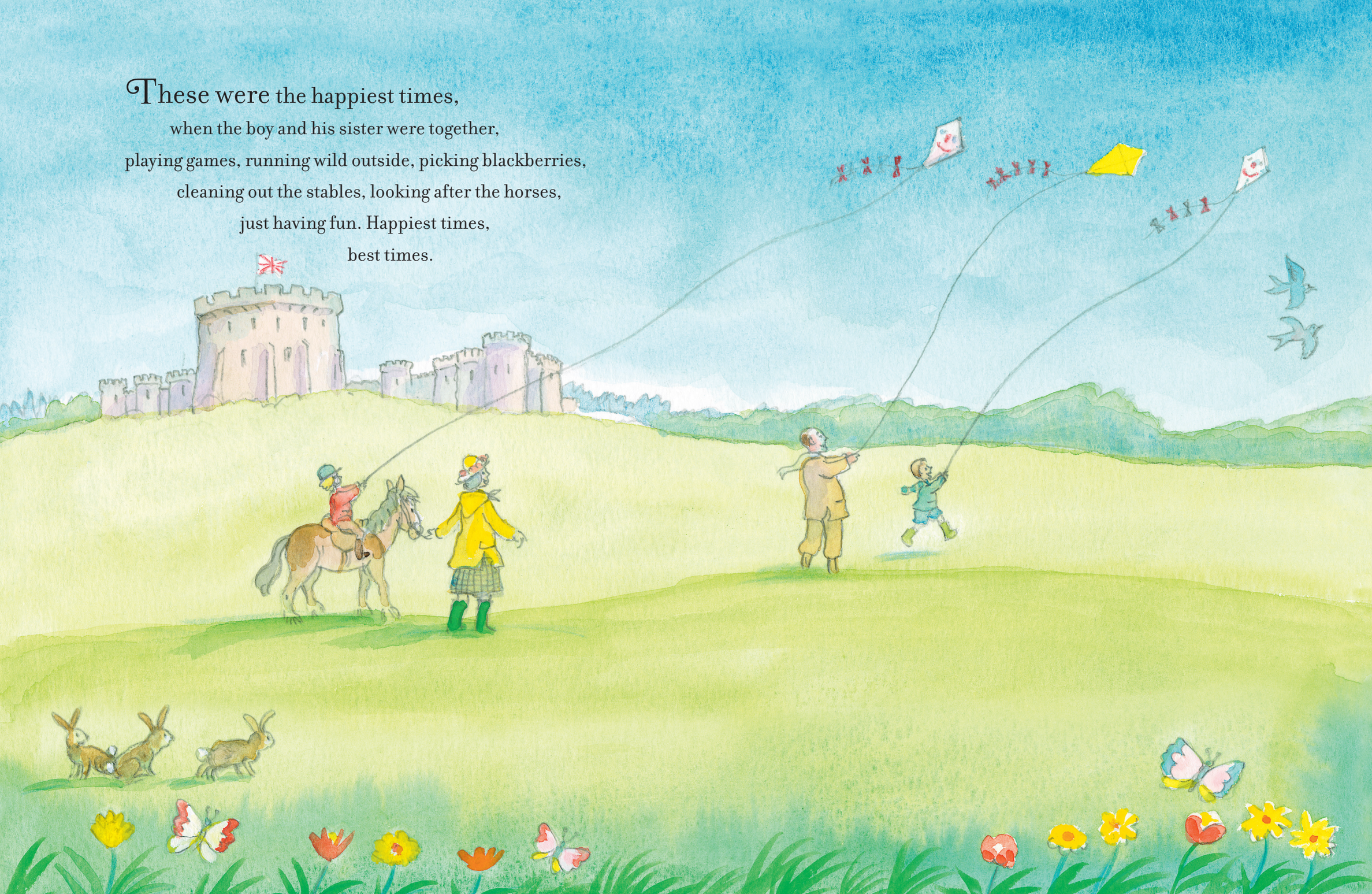
All these they loved together.



Soon he had a new sister, and at last someone to play with at home, someone he could explore with, play hide-and-seek with. So he wasn't lonely any more. Once he ran off down the corridor into the Throne Room and hid under one of the thrones. His sister soon gave up looking for him, but no one told him. The dogs found him in the end, hours later, curled up fast asleep under the throne.
His daddy said afterwards it was the best thing
you could do with a throne:
go to sleep under it.







These were the happiest times,
when the boy and his sister were together,
playing games, running wild outside, picking blackberries,
cleaning out the stables, looking after the horses,
just having fun. Happiest times,
best times.

But then came the worst times. He was on a walk with his daddy in the countryside. But he could see his daddy wasn't happy, wasn't telling him as usual about the trees or the badger setts, wasn't listening out for the cuckoo or the blackbird. He wasn't talking at all, and that was unusual, strange.

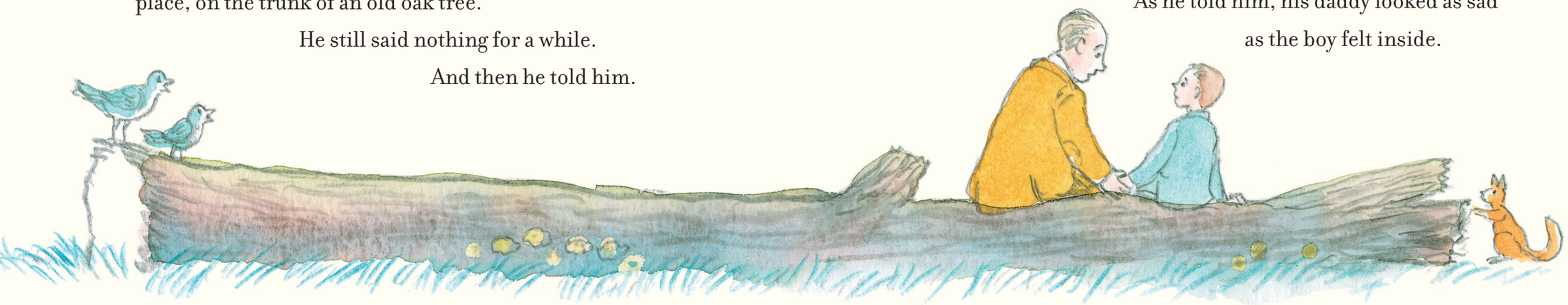
After a while, his daddy sat him down in their favourite place, on the trunk of an old oak tree.

He still said nothing for a while.

And then he told him.

"You won't like what I have to tell you," he said, "but Mummy and I, we think the time has come for you to leave home, and go away to boarding school, like most boys do, like I did. You're old enough now. You're a prince. You're going to be a king. There's a lot you're going to have to do that you may not like. Time to grow up. Don't worry. You'll love it there. You'll make lots of new friends, have lots of fun. There's a park to play in, trees to climb. You'll play sports."

As he told him, his daddy looked as sad as the boy felt inside.



His mummy looked just as sad when they got back to the palace, his sister too. It felt to the boy like the end of the world.