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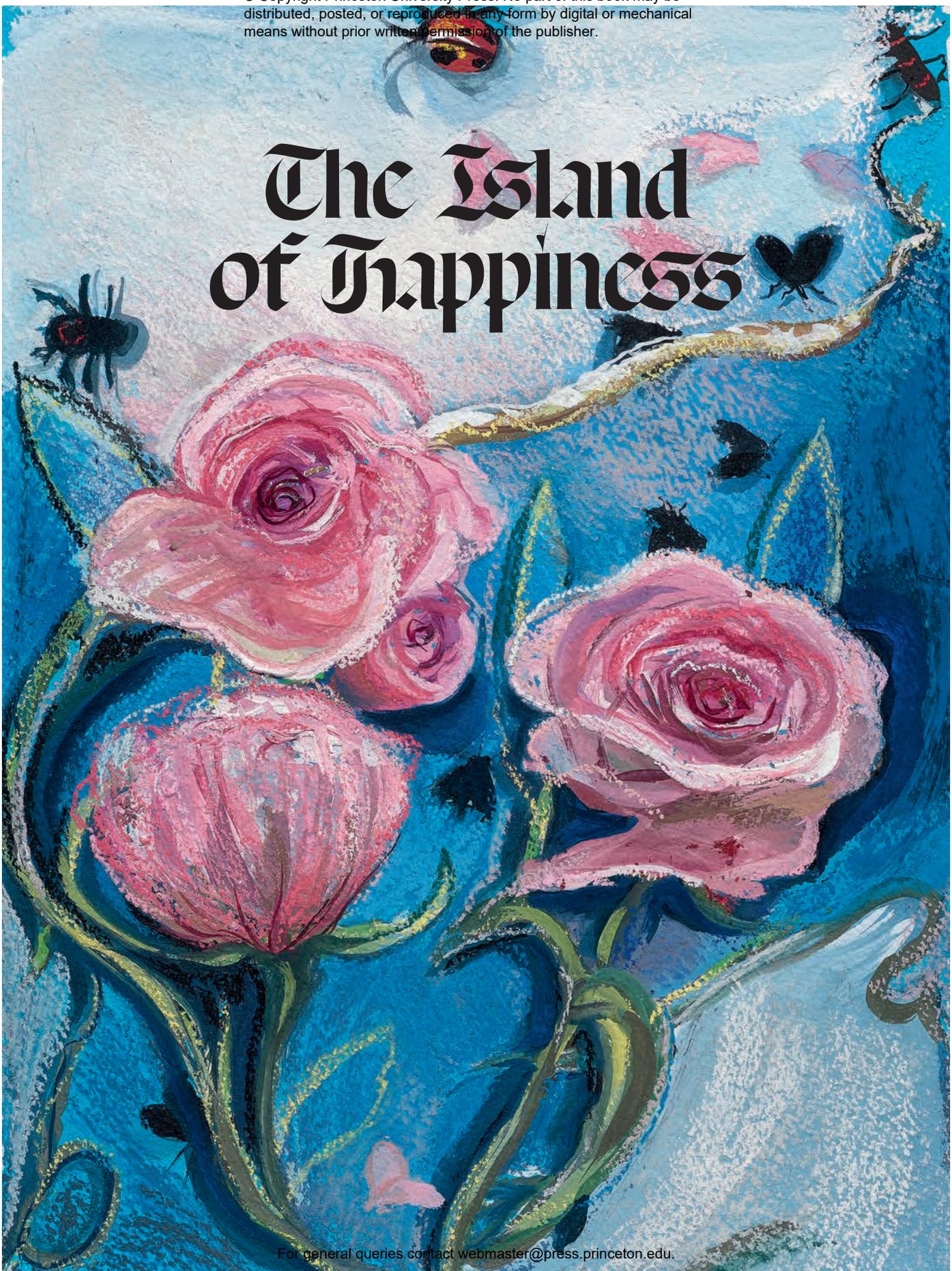
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The Island of Happiness



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RUSSIA is a frigid country where one rarely sees the beautiful days of a mild climate. Its mountains are usually covered with snow, and the trees are so loaded with icicles that when the sun casts its rays on them, they appear to be garnished with crystals. There are forests of enormous grandeur where white bears wreak terrible havoc, and the people are continually warring with them. Although they manage to kill the bears, it is not without difficulty and danger. Thus, in Russia, hunting bears is considered both the most noble and most ordinary occupation.

Once upon a time, a young prince named Adolph governed the Russians. Born under a lucky star, he was so handsome, polite, and intelligent that it would have been difficult to convince anyone that a person so accomplished lived in a country so coarse and savage. He had not yet turned twenty when he undertook a great war against the Muscovites and showed dauntless courage and remarkable leadership. When he allowed his army to rest, he himself did not rest. Instead, he went on that dangerous quest for bears.

One day, when he was carried away once again by his noble passion for hunting, he led a large retinue into a vast forest. He roved all over until he finally got lost. Just as he realized that he was alone, that it was late, and that he no longer knew where he was, a storm took him by surprise. He guided his horse down a wide track and vainly blew his hunting horn in order to alert some of his hunters. All at



once, the scant daylight that was left was transformed into the most obscure night, punctuated only by lightning. The thunder made a terrible noise as the rainstorm increased. The prince at first took shelter under some trees, but he was soon compelled to leave that spot. The rain continued to fall in torrents, and the paths were flooded. Deciding to get free of the forest and to seek some shelter from the tempest, he struggled with difficulty to reach open fields, where he found himself even more exposed to the inclement weather. He looked all around him and noticed a light in a spot that was very high up.

So, he headed in that direction, arduously climbing by foot and leading his horse to the top of an almost inaccessible mountain. His way was obstructed by a multitude of boulders and sheer cliffs. For several hours, he pressed on, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, until he found himself nearing a cave. Through

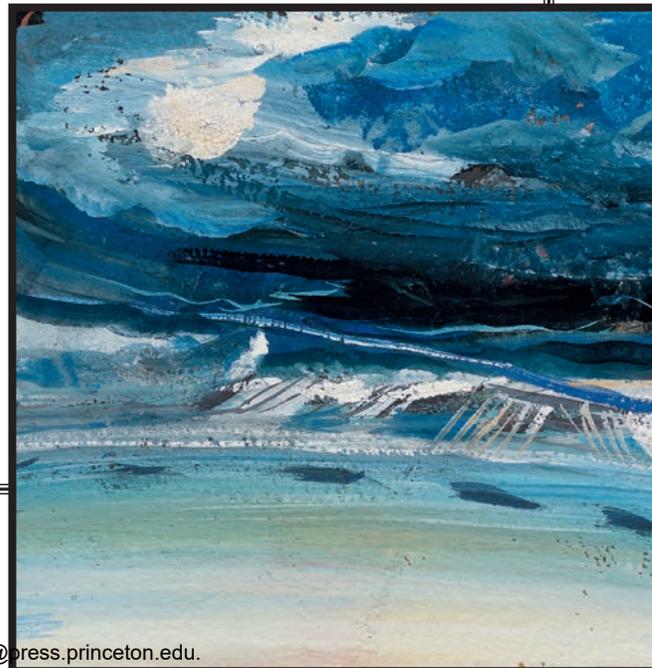
the opening, he saw the light that he had already observed. He hesitated before entering, for he thought it might be the hideout of some robbers who frequently ravaged the countryside and who could rob and kill him. However, since the souls of princes possess a nobility and pride that sets them apart from other men, he reproached himself for his fear. Into the cave he advanced, hand on sword, ready to defend himself in case someone was bold enough to attack him.

Because of the noise he made when he entered, an old woman, whose white hair and mass of wrinkles revealed how ancient she was, emerged from the rear of the cave. As she approached him, she was visibly astonished.

“You’re the first mortal I’ve ever seen here,” she said. “Do you know, sir, who dwells here?”

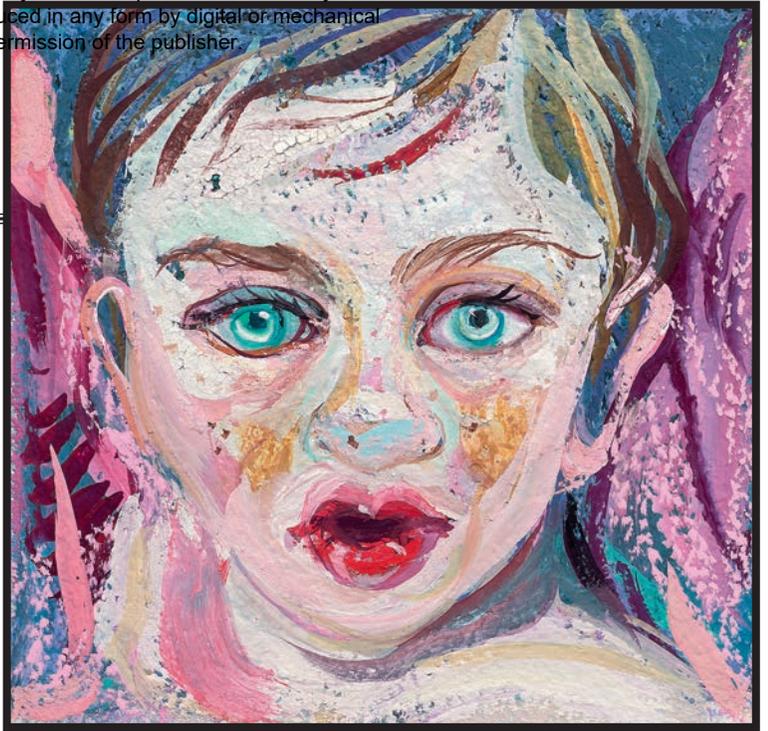
“No, my good woman,” Adolph responded. “I have no idea where I am.”

“This is the abode of Eole, god of the



winds," she stated. "This is where he retires with all his children. I'm their mother, and you've found me alone because they are all busy, each one doing good or evil in the world as is his wont. But you seem drenched from the rain that has just fallen. Let me make a fire so you can dry yourself. I'm afraid, though, that I cannot offer you much here. The meals that the winds have are very light, and men need to eat something much more solid."

The prince thanked her for the kind welcome and approached the fire, which leapt into flames almost immediately because the West Wind had just entered and blown on it. No sooner had he arrived than the Northeast Wind and many northerly gales returned to the cave. Eole was not tardy, and Boreas, the East, Southwest, and North Winds followed. They were all damp and had puffed cheeks and unkempt heads of hair. Their manners were not very civil or polite, and when they ventured to speak to the prince, they all but froze him with



their breath. One recounted that he had dispersed an entire navy. Another recalled that he had caused many ships to perish. A third had kindly saved certain vessels from pirates who had wanted to seize them. Many of the gales reported how they had uprooted trees, knocked down houses, and overturned walls. In short, each one boasted of his exploits. After listening to all of them, the old woman suddenly showed signs of great uneasiness.

"Did any of you encounter your brother Zephyr during your adventures?" she asked. "He's already late, and I confess I'm worried that he's not going to return."

While all echoed that they had not seen him, Adolph noticed a young boy at the entrance of the cave. He was just as handsome as Cupid. Indeed, he had wings made of white feathers mixed with the color of flesh that appeared to be fine and delicate and in perpetual motion. His blond hair fell carelessly in a thousand curls to his



shoulders. Roses and jasmine crowned his head, and he had a pleasant, jovial air about him.

“Where have you come from, you little rake?” the old woman cried huskily. “All your brothers are here. You’re the only one who takes his time and who doesn’t care at all about how much I might worry.”

“Mother, I had no intention of returning so late.” he said, “I know that you don’t like it. However, I was in the gardens of Princess Felicity. She was taking a walk there with her nymphs. One made a garland of flowers for her. Another nymph, who was lying on the grass, opened her mouth a little, and this gave me the freedom to approach her and give her a kiss. Several were dancing to songs. The beautiful princess was in an orange orchard, and my breath swept up to her mouth. I dallied around her and played gently with her veil. ‘Zephir,’ she said, ‘I like that! You make everything so pleasant! I’m going to keep walking as long as you tarry.’ ... I must confess that such sweet words uttered by such a charming person captivated me, and I was no longer my own master. I would not have been able to leave her at all if I had not known how this would displease you.”

Adolph listened with such great satisfaction that he felt sorry when Zephir fell

silent. “Permit me, charming Zephir, to ask you where the country is that the princess reigns?” he said.

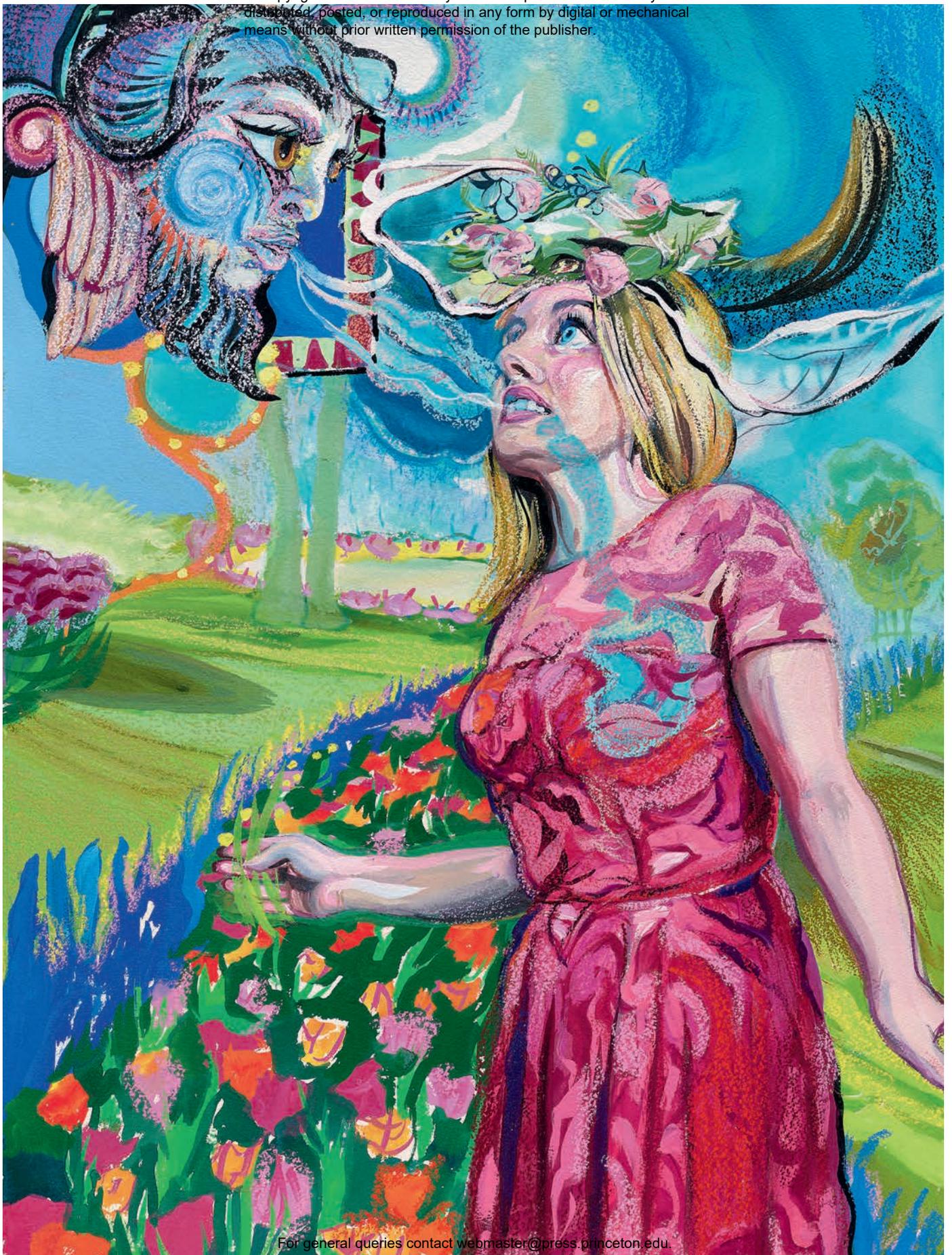
“It is the Island of Happiness,” responded Zephir. “Nobody, sir, can enter it. People have exhausted themselves in trying to find it, but their fate is such that they do not know how to find it. They have traveled all over in vain. Sometimes they even imagine that they have found it because they often arrive at other small ports possessing calm and tranquility. Many people remain there happily, but these floating islands are quite mediocre compared with the Island of Happiness. People soon lose sight of them, and only desire, which allows mortals to hope for just a shadow of repose, keeps them searching. Every day I see distinguished men perish nearby.”

The prince continued to ply him with questions, which Zephir answered with great precision and intelligence. It was extremely late, and the good mother ordered all her children to go to their corners of the cave. Zephir offered the prince a bed in a spotless place less cold than the other caverns of this grotto. A small spot of fine grass grew there, covered with flowers, and Adolph threw himself down on it. The rest of the night he spent with Zephir, talking about the Princess Felicity.

“How I’d love to see her!” he said. “Is it so absolutely impossible? Couldn’t I succeed with your help?”

Zephir told him that such a venture would be very dangerous, but that if he had the courage to abandon himself to





Zephyr's guidance, he imagined there might be a way; he would put him on his wings and carry him through the vast ethereal regions. "I have a cloak that I can give you," he continued, "and when you put it on with the green side showing, you'll be invisible. No one will be able to perceive you, and this is absolutely vital for your protection because, if the guards of the island, who are terrible monsters, see you, they'll capture you, no matter how brave you may be."

be it from me to complain. Let me thank you instead, for I must confess that I'm in love with a proud and pert rose, and I'd be in a good deal of trouble with her if I weren't there to see her as soon as it turns daylight. She is in one of Princess Felicity's flower beds."

So saying, he gave the prince the cloak that he had promised him. He wanted to carry him on his wings, but he did not find this way comfortable.

"Sir, I'm going to lift you," he said, "just as I lifted Psyche on Cupid's orders when I carried her to the beautiful palace that he had built for her."

So he took the prince in his arms, and after positioning himself at the edge of a cliff, he rocked for some time in a steady

Adolph had such an urgent desire to begin this great adventure that he accepted everything Zephyr proposed with all his heart, no matter what danger he faced. No sooner did the sun begin to shine in its chariot of mother-of-pearls than the impatient Adolph woke a still dozing Zephyr.

"I've given you hardly any time to rest," the prince said as he embraced him, "but it seems to me, my kind host, that it's already time to depart."

"Let's go, then," Zephyr responded. "Far

motion until he spread his wings, took off, and began soaring through the air.

Although the prince was courageous, he could not help being afraid when he found himself aloft in the arms of a young



adolescent. To reassure himself, he recalled that Zephyr was a god and that Cupid himself, who seemed the smallest and weakest of all the gods, was the strongest and most awesome. Thus, abandoning himself to his destiny, he collected his wits and gazed attentively at all the places they flew over. But how was it possible to count the places? There were so many cities, kingdoms, seas, rivers, fields, deserts, woods, unknown territories, and diverse peoples! All these sights transported him into such a state of wonderment that he was unable to speak. Zephyr told him about the names and customs of all those inhabitants of the earth. He flew gently, and they even took a rest on top of the formidable Caucasian Mountains, on Mount Athos, and on many

admiring these wonders for the first time.”

Adolph expressed his gratitude for Zephyr’s kindness and, at the same time, his concern that Princess Felicity would be unable to understand his language and he unable to speak hers.

“Don’t fret over that,” the god said. “The princess’s knowledge is universal, and I’m convinced that you’ll speak the same language soon enough.”

He flew until that desired island was in sight, and the prince was so struck by all its beauties that he readily believed that it was indeed enchanted. The air was thoroughly perfumed with dew from the excellent waters of Nafre and Cordoue. The rain carried the scent of oranges. The water gushed up to the clouds. Rare trees filled the forests, and the ground was covered with extraordinary flowers. Streams as clear as crystal flowed all over with a sweet murmur. The birds sang concerts that were superior to the music of the great masters. Exotic fruit grew there naturally, and throughout the island one could find tables covered with all the delicacies that one could desire.

others that they found along their way.

“Even though the beautiful rose whom I adore,” Zephyr said, “will sting me with her thorns, I can’t cross such vastness without giving you the pleasure of



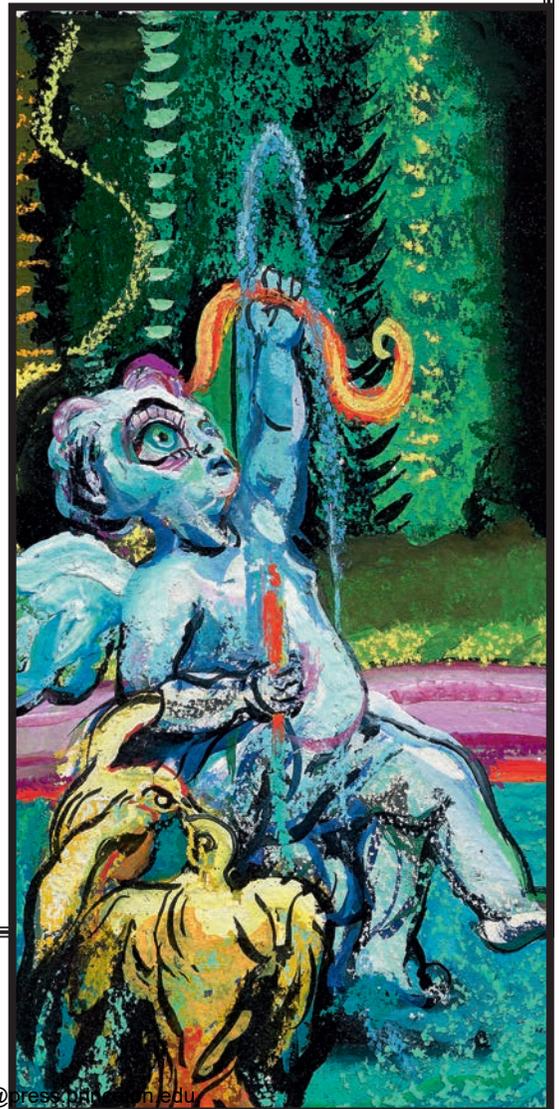
However, the palace surpassed even all the rest: the walls were made of diamonds, and the ceilings and floors were made of precious gems that formed compartments. Gold glittered everywhere. The hands of the most gallant fairies made the furniture. Everything seemed so natural that one could not help but admire the magnificence and assortment all the more. After Zephir set the prince down in a pleasant green lawn, he said, "Sir, I've kept my word, and now it's up to you to do the rest."

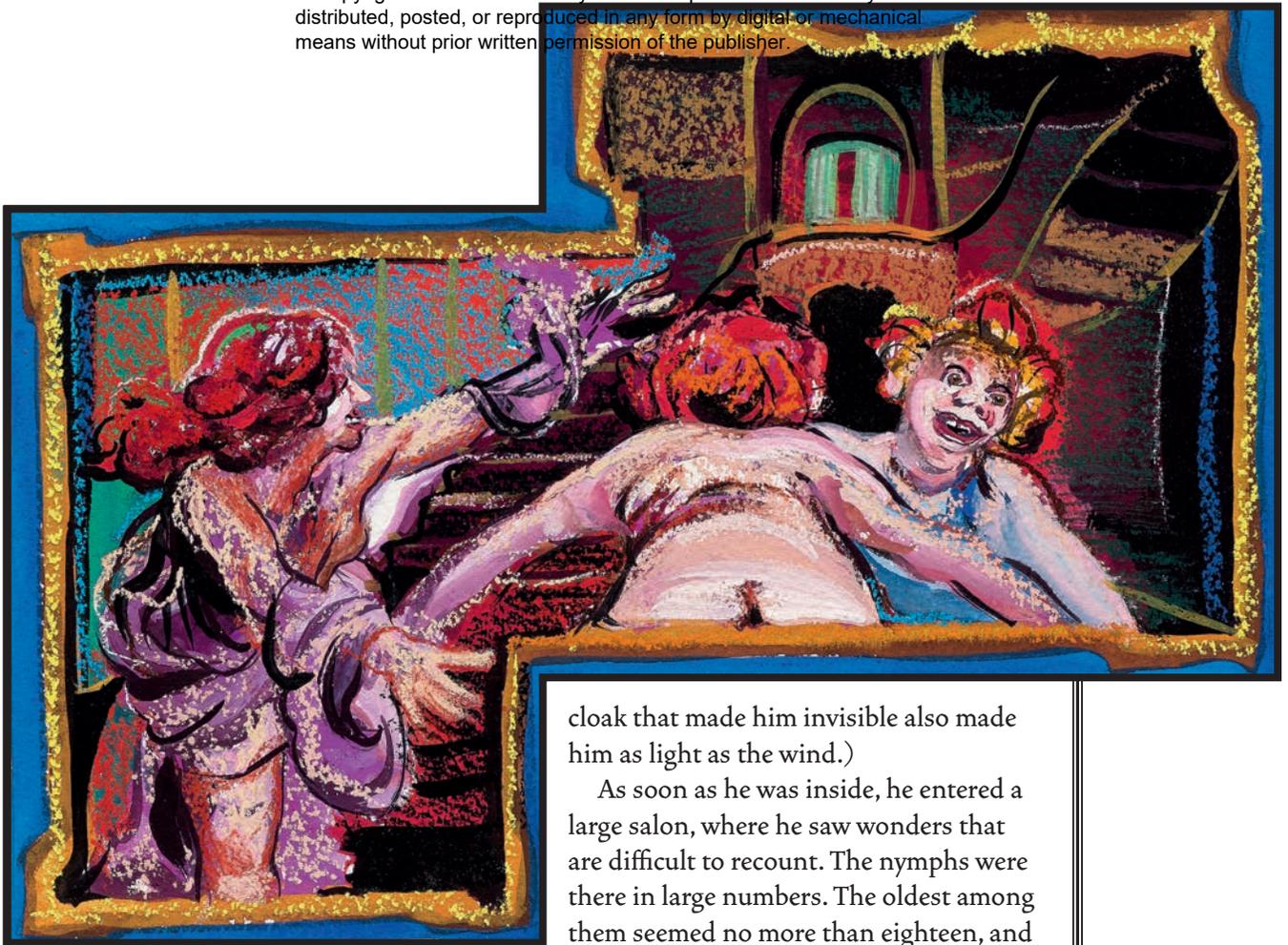
They embraced each other, and Adolph gave him thanks befitting such a favor. Since the god was eager to see his mistress, he left him in those delightful gardens. Venturing down several alleys, Adolph saw grottos made expressly for pleasure. In one, he noticed a white marble statue of Cupid so well made that it must have been the work of some divine sculptor. Instead of flames, a jet of water spurted from its torch, and the god was supported by grotto-work and seemed to be reading verses engraved on lapis lazuli. These proclaimed: "Love is the greatest of all blessings. Love alone is able to fulfill our desires. All other sweet things of life become dull if they are not mixed with love's attractive charms."

Adolph entered a honeysuckle arbor, where the sun could not penetrate the charming shade. Here, he lay on a carpet of grass surrounding a fountain, and he yielded to the sweetness of slumber, for his heavy eyelids and exhausted limbs begged for a few hours of rest.

It was close to noon when he awoke.

He was disappointed to have lost so much time, and to make up for it, he rushed toward the palace. As soon as he got near enough to it, he began to admire its beautiful features at a more leisurely pace than when he had been farther away. It seemed to him that all the arts had competed with equal success to contribute to the magnificence and perfection of the building. He could view everything without being seen because he continued to wear the cloak on the green side. The prince searched for a





long time to find a way to enter the palace, but either the vestibule was closed or the doors of the palace were on the other side of the palace, for he saw no way to enter until he noticed a pretty young nymph opening a window made entirely of crystal. At the very same moment, a dwarfish gardener ran to the spot, and the nymph let down a large gold filigree basket that had many ribbons and bows attached. Then, she ordered the gardener to gather flowers for the princess, and the gardener promptly did as she was told. Consequently, Adolph threw himself on the flowers in the basket before the nymph had pulled it up to the window. (It should be noted that the green

cloak that made him invisible also made him as light as the wind.)

As soon as he was inside, he entered a large salon, where he saw wonders that are difficult to recount. The nymphs were there in large numbers. The oldest among them seemed no more than eighteen, and a great many seemed to be younger. Some were blondes; others, brunettes, and all had remarkable white, fresh complexions with beautiful features and regular teeth. In short, the nymphs could pass for the most perfect people imaginable. Adolph could have stayed in the salon all day admiring them if his curiosity had not been aroused by numerous voices marvelously harmonizing with some exceedingly well-played instruments. He advanced toward the chamber from which this pleasant harmony came, and as he entered, he heard the most touching words sung in a manner equally tender.

When first the prince had entered the salon, he had thought that nothing



could equal the charms he saw there. However, he was wrong, for the musicians surpassed their beauty by far. Due to some miracle, he understood everything they said even though he did not know the language they used in this palace. He was standing behind one of the prettiest nymphs when her veil slipped to the ground. Without realizing that he would undoubtedly frighten her, he picked up the veil and gave it to her. Since the nymph did not see a soul, she uttered a great cry, and perhaps for the first time, someone had become afraid in that beautiful place. All her companions gathered around her, asking her urgently what the matter was.

“You’re going to think that I’ve been seeing things,” she said, “but I assure you that my veil that just fell to the ground was returned to my hand by some invisible force.”

Everyone burst into laughter, and several nymphs pranced toward the princess’s chamber to amuse her with this story. Adolph followed. Thanks to the green cloak, he crossed invisibly through the rooms, galleries, and chambers until he finally reached the abode of the princess. She sat on a throne made of a single carbuncle more radiant than the sun, but the eyes of Princess Felicity far outshone the carbuncle. Her beauty was so perfect that she seemed a daughter of the heavens.

Moreover, she cast a youthful aura of majestic confidence that aroused love and respect. She was dressed more in a gallant than a magnificent fashion: her blond hair was decorated with flowers and a scarf, and her robe was made of gauze mixed with gold. Around her frolicked many small cupids playing a thousand different games. Some took her hands and kissed

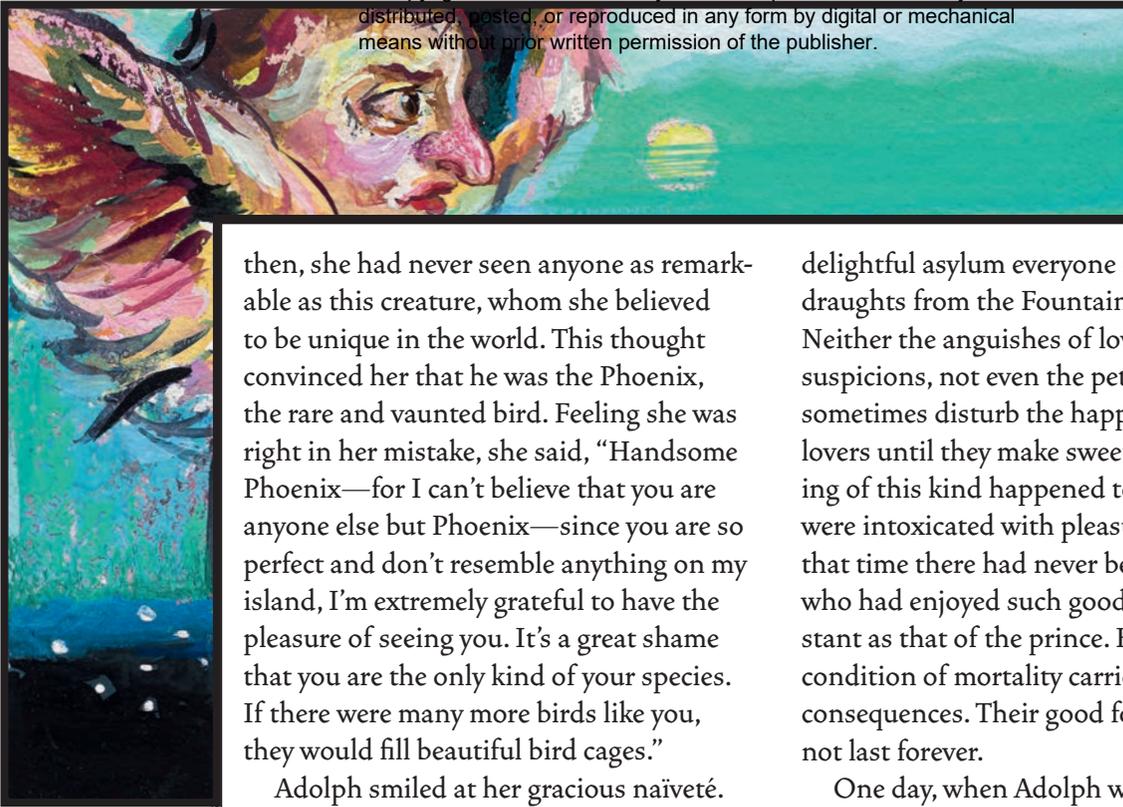
them; others climbed her throne with the help of their companions and placed a crown on her head. The pleasures were also playing about her. In brief, everywhere the prince turned his eyes, he was struck by the most charming things imaginable, and he stood there like a man entranced. He could hardly stand the princess’s explosive beauty, and he could not think of anything but this person whom he already adored. Indeed, he became so agitated and excited that his green cloak fell to the ground, and he became visible.

The princess had never seen a human being, and so she was extremely surprised. In turn, when Adolph saw that he had exposed himself, he threw himself respectfully at her feet.

“Great princess,” he said, “I’ve crossed the universe to admire your divine beauty. I want to offer you my heart and devotion. I hope you will not refuse me.”

The princess, who was normally vivacious, remained silent and confused. Until





then, she had never seen anyone as remarkable as this creature, whom she believed to be unique in the world. This thought convinced her that he was the Phoenix, the rare and vaunted bird. Feeling she was right in her mistake, she said, “Handsome Phoenix—for I can’t believe that you are anyone else but Phoenix—since you are so perfect and don’t resemble anything on my island, I’m extremely grateful to have the pleasure of seeing you. It’s a great shame that you are the only kind of your species. If there were many more birds like you, they would fill beautiful bird cages.”

Adolph smiled at her gracious naïveté. He did not want the object of his already great passion to remain mistaken for long because it might lead to misconceptions. Therefore, he took care to tell her everything about himself, and never has a pupil learned her lessons so quickly. In fact, she was ready to give them after just learning them.

Her natural intuition went further than what the prince could tell her. She loved him more than she loved herself, and he loved her more than he loved himself. The two lovers felt everything that love has to offer in sweetness, everything that the mind has to offer in vivacity, and everything that the heart has to offer in delights. Nothing disturbed their repose; everything contributed to their pleasures. They were never sick. They were never troubled by the slightest inconvenience.

Their youthfulness was not changed by the passing of the years, for in this

delightful asylum everyone drank long draughts from the Fountain of Youth. Neither the anguishes of love, nor jealous suspicions, not even the petty quarrels that sometimes disturb the happy tranquility of lovers until they make sweet amends, nothing of this kind happened to them. They were intoxicated with pleasure, and up to that time there had never been a mortal who had enjoyed such good luck as constant as that of the prince. However, the condition of mortality carries with it sad consequences. Their good fortune could not last forever.

One day, when Adolph was with the princess, it occurred to him to ask her how long he had been enjoying the pleasure of being with her. “The moments pass so quickly where you are,” he continued, “that I haven’t paid any attention to time since my arrival.”

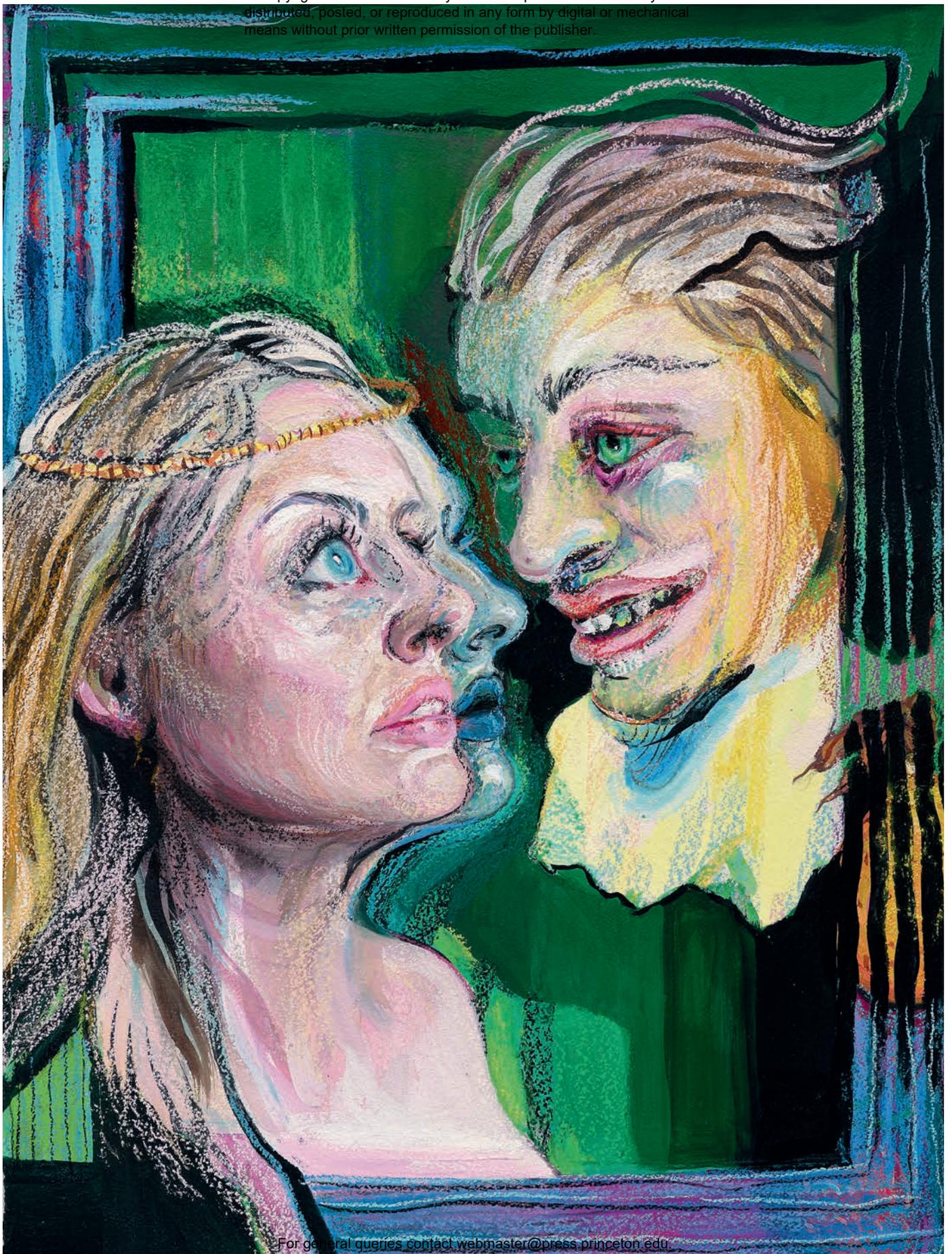
“I’ll tell you,” she said, “after you reveal to me how long you think you’ve been here.”

He pondered this and said, “If I consult my heart and the gratification I’ve experienced, I’d believe that I’ve only spent a week here. But, my dear princess, according to certain things that I can recall to mind, it’s been approximately three months.”

“Adolph,” she said more seriously, “it’s been three hundred years.”

Ah, if she had only known what those words would cost her, she would have never uttered them.

“Three hundred years!” cried the prince. “What’s going on in the world? Who’s



governing it right now? What are the people doing there? When I return, who will recognize me, and whom will I be able to recognize? My dominions have undoubtedly fallen into somebody else's hands rather than those close to me. I cannot dare hope that there's anything left for me. I'm going to be a prince stripped of his robe. People will regard me like a ghost. I'll no longer know the manners and customs that I'll need to live."

Becoming impatient, the princess interrupted him. "What do you regret, Adolph? Isn't this price worth all the love and kindness I've shown you? I received you in my palace where you are the master. I've preserved your life for three centuries. You haven't aged at all and apparently, until now, you haven't been bored. You wouldn't have had any of this if it weren't for me."

"I'm not ungrateful, beautiful princess," he replied, somewhat confused. "I know all that I owe you. But ultimately, if I were dead at this moment, I would have perhaps performed such great deeds that my name would be eternally engraved in stone. As it is, I see with shame that there has been nothing virtuous about my actions, and my name is not famous. The brave Reginald may have ended in the arms of his Armida, but it was honor that tore him away from her."

"You barbarian!" the princess screamed

as a flood of tears streamed from her eyes. "It will be honor that tears you away from me. You want to leave me, and you minimize the pain that it will cause me."

Upon saying this, she collapsed in a dead faint. The prince was greatly moved. He dearly loved her, but he reproached himself for having spent so much time with a mistress without having done anything that would place his name among the ranks of heroes. He tried in vain to restrain himself and conceal his misgivings. However, he fell into an apathy that soon rendered him unrecognizable.

Now the prince, who had mistaken centuries for months, mistook months for centuries. The princess saw this and suffered greatly because of it. Not wanting him to remain out of a sense of obligation, she declared, "You are master of your destiny and can depart whenever you wish. All the same, I fear something terrible will happen to you."

Her last words caused him less pain than her first, which were not very pleasing themselves. Although he grew tender and melancholy when he thought about separating, his sense of his destiny was stronger, and at last he said farewell to the woman whom he had adored, and whom he still loved with a great deal of tenderness. He assured her that as soon as he had achieved a measure of glory and made himself more worthy of her magnanimity, he would return and acknowledge her as his sole sovereign and the only treasure of his life. However, the princess was too





intelligent to be misled, and she had sad forebodings that told her she was going to lose the person she would cherish forever.

Despite the fact that she was terribly upset, she did not express her pain. She gave the indifferent Adolph magnificent weapons and the most magnificent horse in the world. “Bichar (that was the name of the horse) will conduct you,” she said, “and he will take you wherever you must go to do battle and triumph. But don’t place your foot on the ground no matter what happens in your country, for the fairy spirit that the gods have given me enable me to prophesy that, if you neglect my advice, Bichar will not be able to extricate you from your trouble.”

Promising her that he would obey her wishes, the prince kissed her beautiful hands a thousand times, and he was so eager to leave that delightful place that he even forgot to take his green cloak with him.

Once they reached the border of the island, the vigorous horse threw himself into the water with his master on top of him. After swimming across it, he galloped over hill and dale. He passed through fields and forests with such great speed that it seemed he had wings. However, one evening, in a narrow, rutted path, filled with rocks and pebbles and bordered by thorn bushes, they encountered a wagon blocking the path. Loaded with different kinds of old wings, it had turned over on an old man who had been driving the wagon. His head was gray, his voice trembled, and the

prince felt pity for the old man's distress because he was bearing the weight of the wagon. Bichar wanted to jump over the wagon blocking the way and was about ready to soar over it, when the good man cried, "Sir, have some compassion for my predicament. If you don't deign to help me, I'll soon be dead."

Adolph could not resist helping the old man. He put his feet on the ground, approached the man, and gave him his hand. But alas! He was tremendously surprised to see the man get up quickly and seize him before he could get ready to defend himself.

"Finally, the Prince of Russia," the old man said in a terrible, menacing voice, "I've found you. I'm called Father Time, and I've been looking for you for three centuries. I've used all the wings this wagon is carrying to go around the universe in order to find you. But no matter where you may have hidden yourself, nothing that lives can escape me."

Thereupon, he clapped his hand on Adolph's mouth with such force that he prevented the prince from drawing breath until he was smothered. At this sad moment, Zephir, who had witnessed everything, passed by and was greatly disturbed by the misfortune of his dear friend. When the old barbarian left Adolph, Zephir approached and tried to bring him back to life with his sweet breath. However, his efforts were in vain. He took him in his arms just as he had done the first time, and weeping bitter tears, he brought him back to the gardens of Princess Felicity. He set

him down in a grotto on a rock that was flat across the top. Then he covered him and surrounded him with flowers. After taking off his weapons, he formed a trophy with them and engraved an epitaph on a column of jasper that he placed near the unfortunate prince.

The sorrowful princess had been going every day to this grotto since the departure of her lover, adding a flood of tears to the flow of the stream. But then, what unexpected joy to find him again at the very moment when she believed him to be so far away! She imagined that he had just arrived and that, exhausted from the trip, he had fallen asleep. She contemplated whether she should wake him, and finally giving way to her tender feelings, she opened her loving arms to embrace him. As she approached, however, she began to realize her extreme misfortune, and she uttered such bitter cries that they could have moved the most insensitive heart.

She ordered the doors of her palace to be closed forever, and ever since that fatal day, nobody has seen her. Her suffering is the reason why she rarely shows herself, and one never finds this princess without her being preceded by some anguish accompanied by sorrow or followed by disturbances. This is the company that is usually with her most of the time. Human beings can certainly bear witness to this, and ever since that deplorable adventure, everyone keeps saying that there is no avoiding Father Time. Nor is there perfect happiness.

