



Creative Park

Canon

Creative Park

# THE ENDLESS ADVENTURE



Story by Denitza Mineva-Deslandes



The 9 adventurers in this story  
are based on the favourite paper toys of children and parents  
across Greece, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia,  
Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

# THE ENDLESS ADVENTURE

**Author** — Denitza Mineva-Deslandes, Paris  
**Art direction, illustration and production** — NEXT-DC Agency, Sofia

## Creative Park

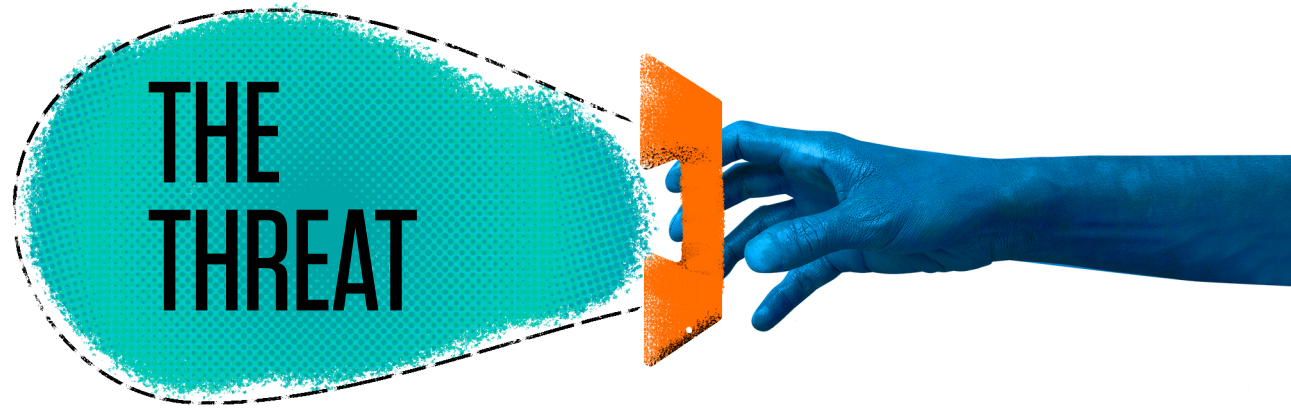
The toys were created from *(insert local Canon Creative Park website)*  
Creative Park is a free online platform where you can download,  
print and create toys, stylish handmade decorations, personalized greeting cards,  
handcraft templates and much more.

All rights reserved © 2020



**Bunny, Puppy, Cockatiel, Kitten, Elephant, Owlet, Tiger Cub, Prairie Dog** and **Chicken** were a jolly and united bunch. But also, a rather unusual one because they lived far apart - everyone was in a different country and they never actually met.  
Instead, they talked on the phone often, wrote to each other, sent each other photos and parcels. They exchanged culinary recipes, ideas and advice on insignificant or more serious matters, shared joys and woes...  
Yes, in spite of the distance that separated them, Bunny, Puppy, Cockatiel, Kitten, Elephant, Owlet, Tiger Cub, Prairie Dog and Chicken were **great friends** indeed.





Prairie Dog's birthday was in the beginning of June.

Bunny, who was a rather shy and prudent animal, decided to call him as early as the beginning of May and ask what present he would like.

'This way I will have enough time to prepare it so that it gets there **right** on time,' said Bunny to himself.

However, Prairie Dog did not answer Bunny's call.

'He is probably distracted in his garden again,' said Bunny to himself.

'Prairie Dog is a passionate gardener and, right now, in the spring, he is working in the yard all day long. I will call him tonight.'

But Prairie Dog did not answer the call in the evening either. Or on the following evening.

Bunny began to worry.

'I will call Chicken,' said Bunny to himself.

'Chicken is **smart** and one can always rely on him for good advice.'

Chicken was practicing his computing skills when the phone rang.

'Twenty plus five... twenty-five, plus three... twenty-eight, plus ten... thirty-eight... oh, what a pity, I will have to start again,' said Chicken to himself and picked up the phone.

'Chicken, I am really worried that **something** has happened to Prairie Dog,' shouted Bunny and began telling the story excitedly.

Chicken pondered the fact.

'There is no point in getting worried too much,' said he, 'but, after all, this is unusual. Prairie Dog loves staying at home and he wouldn't leave his garden without supervision...'

'What if,' Bunny was suddenly worried, 'he is angry with me for something and he doesn't answer **my calls only**? Chicken, try calling him yourself, let's see whether he will answer your calls.'

Chicken called Prairie Dog but then something really unusual happened; somebody answered but it wasn't their friend! A strange, deep voice hissed:



‘Prairie Dog has been kidnapped! If you want to save him, return the Cursed Diamond to the Sorcerer of Colours from the Grim Rocky Mountains!’ the voice burst into sinister, irritable laughter and then silence fell.

‘Wow, who is this Sorcerer of Colours?’ squealed Bunny. ‘He appears evil and dangerous!’

‘What could Prairie Dog have to do with some Cursed Diamond? And how can we find it at all?’ wondered Chicken.

The friends decided to consult the rest of the animals.



First, they called Cockatiel.

‘You are being really funny! Can’t you understand that Prairie Dog has played a joke on you?’ exclaimed Cockatiel. He was extremely joyful and carefree by nature. ‘He answered the phone with a distorted voice and is now having great fun while you whine!’ and he went back to his dancing lessons.

‘Shall we ask Kitten?’ suggested Chicken. ‘She is a **learned person** and she will surely know what we should do.’





Kitten was studying different things every day, all day long. She was very proud of her knowledge and loved to use complicated words and phrases. After listening to them, Kitten cleared her throat and said in a self-important manner:

‘The highlands called the Grim Rocky Mountains are indeed located not far away from Prairie Dog’s residence. As for the Sorcerer of Colours, undoubtedly this is a fictitious character from the folklore mythology! But, despite this, I will consult the relevant sources and will then inform you of the results. Bye.’

‘Did you understand anything?’ asked Bunny.

‘I think Kitten wants to check what the books say before she gives her opinion.’ said Chicken. ‘Let’s call Elephant in the meantime...’

Elephant was a nice, cute and dapper creature. He had picked up a lovely bouquet of wild flowers early in the morning, he had carried water to his elderly neighbour; he had taken a bath and was now tying a ribbon to his tail.

‘What a weird story,’ said Elephant anxiously. ‘I hope everything will be alright quickly! If I can help with anything, you can rely on me.’

Puppy was an expert in making and repairing all sorts of machines and devices. He was just completing a project – a large hot air balloon – and was very satisfied with the result.

The balloon was decorated with yellow and red stripes and contrasted beautifully against the sky. When he learned of Prairie Dog’s disappearance, he said without thinking:

‘His phone is probably broken! The phone lines must have intertwined and Chicken had misheard. Here is what you have to do in order to fix a phone when it is broken,’ and Puppy went on with complex technical details.

The next friend they called was Owlet.

‘I really, really don’t like this at all,’ exclaimed Owlet. Owlet had a wild imagination; he was pessimistic by nature and liked to exaggerate a little. Besides, he had just finished watching a particularly scary movie.

‘I have a premonition. This Cursed Diamond is a harbinger of great disasters. I am afraid something terrible has befallen our Prairie Dog and will now crash upon all of us!’

Tiger Cub was last on the list of calls.



‘We have to act!’ snapped Tiger Cub. He was huffing and puffing because he was just doing his daily exercise. It involved a ten-kilometre run, lifting weights, several squats and other impressive things. Tiger Cub was a great sportsman, adventurer and daredevil.

‘Here is what I propose,’ said Tiger Cub. ‘Let’s go on a **Great Adventure** to the Grim Rocky Mountains with the aim of saving Prairie Dog from whatever has happened to him!’

When they learned about Tiger Cub’s suggestion, everyone wanted to participate in the Great Adventure for saving Prairie Dog, even Bunny and Owlet!

A hectic organisation began. The friends were impatient to save Prairie Dog and everyone was preparing for it in their own way.

Kitten was writing an **Action Plan** and was hoping to apply in practice things she had learned from books.

Puppy offered that his brand new Hot Air Balloon be used for the trip and was now finishing the last details, happy that they will get to try it

out soon.

Chicken started calculating the best trajectories to the target. He was very excited because he had reached an agreement with Puppy to fly the balloon together with him.

Elephant stitched some soft cushions in order to make the trip as comfortable as possible for everyone. He was really happy to help.

Owlet started drafting an endless list of things that would be necessary for a **Great Trip**. In spite of having terrible premonitions, he was secretly glad that he would experience a real adventure.

Cockatiel was trying out new chords on his guitar and hoping that they would have great fun.

Bunny, in spite of having misgivings, was repeatedly telling himself that he would be safe among smart and brave animals.

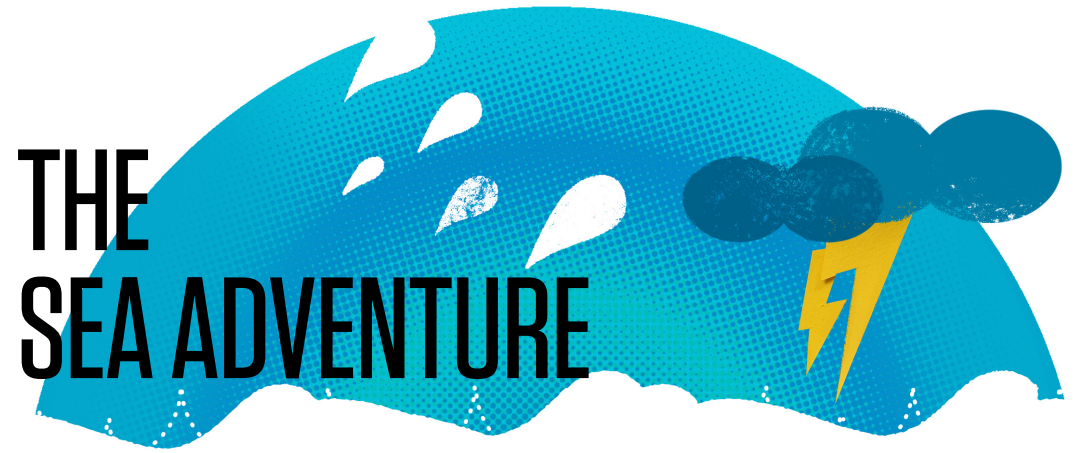
Tiger Cub was practicing his jumps and locks; he was simply terribly eager to overcome everyone who would stand in his way.

However, all of them were glad from the bottom of their hearts that they would embark on this adventure **together!**





# THE SEA ADVENTURE



The balloon was cruising smoothly in the tender, blue sky. The weather was warm and pleasant, a soft breeze was whiffing like a caress and the friends were in an excellent mood. They had just picked up the anxious Owlet from the tree where he lived. They barely managed to load the enormous piece of luggage that he had prepared ‘just in case’ but were now comfortably seated and all were present.

‘A flashlight, blankets, pills against the cold,’ Cockatiel laughingly listed the numerous items while he was looking in Owlet’s bag. ‘I brought along only my guitar so we can sing and dance!’ said Cockatiel and played a jolly tune.

Elephant was giving away the chocolate chip cookies that he had



prepared, while Puppy, Kitten and Chicken stared at the map and discussed how to get to the final destination of the expedition.

‘The road will now become a trifle dangerous,’ whispered Chicken. ‘We will have to fly over the sea where there are strong air currents and then over the Grim Rocky Mountains. They have great, steep ridges and strange legends have been told about these. Let’s hope Owlet and Bunny have not heard of them.’

‘My flying apparatus is solid,’ said Puppy proudly. ‘It will survive the air currents.’

‘Legends are no more than literary works relating fantasy events,’ said Kitten.

They reached the sea at dusk. White birds were soaring around the balloon, the water was of deep blue-greenish colour and bunnies made of froth were chasing each other along the waves. The sky was full of dusk-lit, rosy, tiny clouds with weird shapes.

‘Look how beautiful it is!’ exclaimed Elephant and started taking pictures while Kitten explained how the different types of clouds were

called and elaborated on the atmospheric conditions that formed them. ‘The clouds around us are cumulus clouds, while the ones in the distance look like stratus clouds...’

‘And what is that thing there,’ squealed Bunny, anxiously pointing with his paw to something resembling a dark grey rainbow advancing towards them and clearly different from the remaining lighter clouds. At the same moment, there was a thunder and an orange bolt of lightning pierced the sky.

‘Let’s remain calm,’ said Chicken. ‘The storm might not come this way.’

But the sky was growing darker, the sea also changed its colour. It was now green-blackish and roared excitedly. Heavy drops of rain started falling. The wind grew stronger and stronger and the balloon began to swing menacingly.

‘Help!’ shouted Bunny and clung to Elephant.

‘I did tell you...’ started Owlet but another even mightier gust of wind drowned his words. The whirlwind caught the balloon and carried it



with full force further into the sea.

The friends crouched at the bottom of the basket. Elephant whispered calming words, Cockatiel was trying to tell jokes which no one was listening to. Bunny was shaking like a leaf. Owlet had his eyes closed. Only Tiger Cub was standing upright and stared at the water element through the binoculars.

How long did this last? Everything around them was rumbling and whirling. Bolts of lightning were flashing through the darkened sky...

‘Land ahead!’ shouted Tiger Cub suddenly pointing with his paw ahead in the semi-darkness. Puppy rushed next to him immediately and, after he made sure that there was an island ahead of them, exclaimed: ‘Let’s land there!’

Everyone rushed to help amid the screams:

‘Pull that lever! – No, the other one, release the rope, let’s push together,’ the balloon began its descent downwards.

Alas, the wind was too strong and the flying apparatus passed by the island crashing thunderously in the coastal rocks. The balloon shattered with a roar while the basket where the friends were crouching swam





along swept and pushed around by the waves. Soon, the improvised boat began to leak.

‘I can fly over to the island,’ said Owlet, ‘although this wind is very dangerous and I have a bad...’

‘I can’t swim,’ squealed Bunny.

‘If you want, I will pick you up on my back,’ offered Elephant.

While they were thinking over how everyone should get to the island, something moved in the depths and a huge, slimy back twisted around the boat. Then they heard a strange gurgle and the head of the Sea Monster rose above the water. It looked like a gigantic albescent snake and stared at them viciously with its only protruding eye located above an enormous, predatory mouth.

‘Let’s row quickly so that we can get away from it!’ shouted Chicken and everyone started rowing with their paws, wings, a plank or whatever they could find. The boat was gaining pace fast but the monster dived even more quickly and resurfaced in front of them again opening menacingly its predatory maw. Tiger Cub skilfully threw a large plank and it barred the snout of the beast but only for a short while – the





gigantic mouth shut down with a roar and broke the obstacle. Cockatiel suddenly took off and tried to peck at the eye of the gigantic snake but this only enraged the snake even more because it splashed its tail and turned over the boat. Then it roared terribly and lunged at the tiny group of horrified animals chattering its numerous sharp teeth.

‘This is the end,’ shouted Bunny and closed his eyes.

Suddenly, there was the sound of an enchanting, fantastic melody. It surrounded them and rocked them like a tender lullaby, filled their hearts with joyous peace and began to lull them pleasantly. The monster, which had just opened its mouth in order to crunch them, opened it even more and yawned loudly. Then its only eye closed and it disappeared slowly into the sea. Just a light, steady rumble accompanied by gurgles suggested that it was snoring somewhere in the sea depths.



# THE BLUE ISLAND



Kitten opened her eyes. She looked around her cautiously and was stunned. She was lying on a lawn covered with bright blue grass and the landscape spreading out around her shone in the sun in all shades of blue – from the lightest and subdued, nearly white nuance to a deep night-blue with an almost black tinge.

The trees and bushes that surrounded her were turquoise in colour. Exotic flowers in bluish hues spread a pleasant aroma. A river of pale blue colour meandered among great blue stones. And there, on the largest stone, sat a beautiful Mermaid combing her long hair, decorated with an exquisite blue seashell.

‘What a marvellous dream I’m having,’ said Kitten to herself but suddenly remembered everything – the trip, the storm, the monster...



‘My sisters and I arrived right on time,’ spoke the Mermaid with a melodious voice and smiled enchantingly. ‘The old sea monster is a bit irritable and we often have to help lost travellers by putting it to sleep with our magic songs.’

‘Where am I?’ Bunny’s voice squealed from an unknown direction and Kitten looked around. Bunny was sitting on the other side of the river rubbing his eyes with his paws. Yes, it was Bunny. It was only that his fur had acquired a sky-blue colour! Kitten looked at her tail – it was blue in colour.

‘Don’t worry,’ laughed the Mermaid, ‘everything is in blue on our magic island but when you get further away from it you will become the same as before. You slept the longest but come with me, I will take you to your friends.’

The Mermaid slipped gracefully into the water and swam along the current. Kitten and Bunny followed on dry land. They crossed a small blue forest with blue birds, which greeted them with joyful shouts, and after hauling down a smooth slope where tiny blue crabs scattered under their feet, they reached the seashore. A jolly commotion was in







full swing there – a bunch of Mermaids were pulling out of the sea something resembling large pieces of cloth while Tiger Cub and Elephant were taking these in and dragging them to the pale blue sand. Not far away, Owlet and Puppy were stretching on some ropes other pieces of cloth. Cockatiel and Chicken, sitting under the shade of a blue tree, seemed to be sewing something. All of them had become blue except for Elephant who, for unknown reasons, had remained grey.

‘This is the first time I have seen anyone keep their colour on our island,’ said the Queen of the Mermaids thoughtfully.

‘Oh, there you are!’ cried out Cockatiel gleefully when he saw Kitten and Bunny. ‘Come and lend us a hand! We are making a new balloon out of the sails of sunken ships, which these wonderful Mermaids are pulling out from the bottom of the sea. It’s really fun!’

The friends remained on the island for a few carefree, happy days. They worked on the new balloon and, in between, had great fun with the Mermaids and their numerous friends. They swam on the back of multi-coloured fish, dove down to sunken ships, flew around on magic tiny blue clouds, went down to the river, fooled around in the fantastic

landscapes of the island...

Thus came the day when the balloon was ready. All were standing on the highest blue lawn on the island loading the luggage that had miraculously survived after the sea accident and taking their leave of the Mermaids.

‘You have done so much for us!’ said Elephant to the Mermaids. ‘How can we repay you?’

The Queen of the Mermaids smiled.

‘We were glad to help!’ said she. ‘However, you can really do something for us. We learned that you are headed towards the Grim Rocky Mountains. An old acquaintance of ours – the Sorcerer of Colours – lives there. If you meet him by accident, ask him to return the colours to our island. Sometime ago, he cheated us and stole them; we managed to save only the colour blue. This is why everything here is in this colour.’

‘So, the Sorcerer of Colours really exists!’ exclaimed Chicken. ‘Tell us more about him!’

And the Mermaids started telling a story:

Once upon a time, the Sorcerer was a good King, strong and just. He wore a white mantle and a crown made of rock crystal. He was a friend of ours and he came to the island often because, at the time, he was engaged to the Queen of the Mermaids. They loved each other and were happy together. But then the Evil Sorceress came and enchanted him turning his heart into a cold gem, a Cursed Diamond. Now, the King is her servant – he became greedy, evil and started stealing the colours of nature everywhere along his way. The stolen colours turn into bright, brilliant gems: red rubies, green emeralds, blue sapphires, violet amethysts, silver pearls, topazes, diamonds, moonstones...but nothing can satisfy the greediness of the Sorceress; she keeps wanting more and more.

Most of the time, the Sorcerer of Colours appears in the shape of a man covered with a mantle studded with hundreds of colours – gems. However, he is capable of transforming himself into a giant fierce dragon. We heard that, not long ago, during one of these transformations, the Cursed Diamond disappeared. Now, the Sorcerer is looking for it everywhere because there is an empty space where his heart used to be...



The friends listened to the story in amazement and promised to do everything within their power for the release of the colours of the Blue Island. At parting, the Queen of the Mermaids removed from her hair the exquisite blue seashell and handed it over to them saying:

‘Look after it well, it will be of help to you!’

‘How beautiful it is!’ exclaimed Elephant. ‘Let me look after it. I will wear it on my neck as a necklace.’

‘Bon voyage!’ shouted the Mermaids and then dove into the river and swam off to sea.

‘Three, two, one... Off we go!’ shouted Puppy and the balloon rose smoothly into the sky. Underneath them, the Blue Island was getting smaller and smaller until it gradually disappeared into the sea expanse.





# THE GRIM ROCKY MOUNTAINS



The hot air balloon was cruising over the earth for a second consecutive day. Its colour was no longer blue: as it got further away from the island, the sails of the ship retained their true colours and it was now clear that it was made up of numerous colourful pieces. The animals had also restored their colours except, of course, for Elephant who had not changed at all. They flew over hills and valleys, over towns and rivers. The hours passed by in a light-hearted and pleasant manner. They sang songs, Cockatiel played the guitar, they told each other stories, laughed... and when they liked the landscape they landed on the earth and went for walks.

But for some time now, the sky was beginning to get covered by veils of soft mist and now they were swimming as if in a river of

semi-transparent grey clouds. It started getting chilly.

‘We are entering the territory of the Grim Rocky Mountains,’ said Chicken.


‘I don’t like this place at all,’ said Owlet while staring at the sharp black ridges which were beginning to get outlined like ghosts in the fog. ‘Something so sinister is hovering around here that I am getting goose bumps.’

This time, the others did not attempt to calm him down because they felt strangely down-hearted themselves. Even Cockatiel looked crestfallen. The fog around them was becoming even denser and it looked as if it was stifling them in its embrace. Suddenly, the hot air balloon jumped, shook slightly and came to a complete halt in the air. Silence reigned.

‘Strange,’ whispered Puppy. ‘There isn’t even the slightest breeze. It is as if everything around has become still. Our last resort is to let out the air and land.’

And so they did. The hill that greeted them was black and grim. Black rocks and ridges spread around them; the plants and trees were black





and wilting as far as the eye could see. No noise was to be heard, not movement glimpsed. A tiny bird perched on a nearby bush remained still as stone and did not move at all. It was as if an evil force had robbed nature of all its freshness and vigour. Elephant shuddered.

‘What a sad place!’ said Elephant and tears came to its eyes.

‘Are we going to walk on foot across these sinister mountains?’ cried out Bunny in a terrified manner.


‘Sinister, yes, and, undoubtedly, **very dangerous**,’ added Owllet darkly.

‘Courage! We just have to go on,’ said Tiger Cub but even he looked concerned.

‘Besides,’ Chicken made an effort, ‘according to the map we are relatively close to Prairie Dog’s house.’

‘I know what we need – a bit of good mood!’ said Cockatiel decisively and started playing their favourite song. The friends started singing, hesitating at first but ever more cheerfully until they felt the joy, strength and hope return to them.

A steep path entering a small forest of black trees lay at the bottom of the hill. They decided to follow it.



Tiger Cub was walking at the very front and cleared the way through the ever denser bushes and trees. Chicken was jumping behind him, carrying a map and compass, followed by Kitten who did not stop giving useful advice. Whistling, Cockatiel flew from bush to bush, Bunny took tiny steps behind him while Elephant walked in the rear and pushed and lifted Bunny when they encountered obstacles. Owllet hovered over all of them, murmuring something unintelligible with a dark look on his countenance and, from time to time, went off to check whether the road was passable.

Eerie silence continued to reign around them. Suddenly, Bunny, who was just crossing a crack in the earth semi-covered by a large stone, pricked up his ears.

‘Can you hear that?’ asked Bunny.

All of them stopped and began to listen. A barely perceptible, steady, throbbing sound was coming from the crack.

‘Look,’ suddenly cried out Cockatiel. ‘There are tracks around here!’ All of them approached. Kitten took out a magnifying glass, searched the earth and said in a self-important manner:

‘These are the tracks of a very small mammal, probably a squirrel or...’



‘Prairie Dog!’ cried out all at once Elephant and Chicken. ‘Perhaps Prairie Dog was here!’

The throbbing sound started again. All of them looked in the tiny crack. ‘What could this be? How do we look inside?’ asked Cockatiel.

‘Leave it to me,’ said Elephant. ‘I will easily move this stone.’ And he skillfully pushed it away with his trunk. The opening of a cave began to show and now the throbbing became very clear. But the harder they stared, the less they could see because the inside of the cave was dark as night. Even Owlet’s flashlight could not shed light on the bottom.

‘I can jump inside,’ offered Tiger Cub.

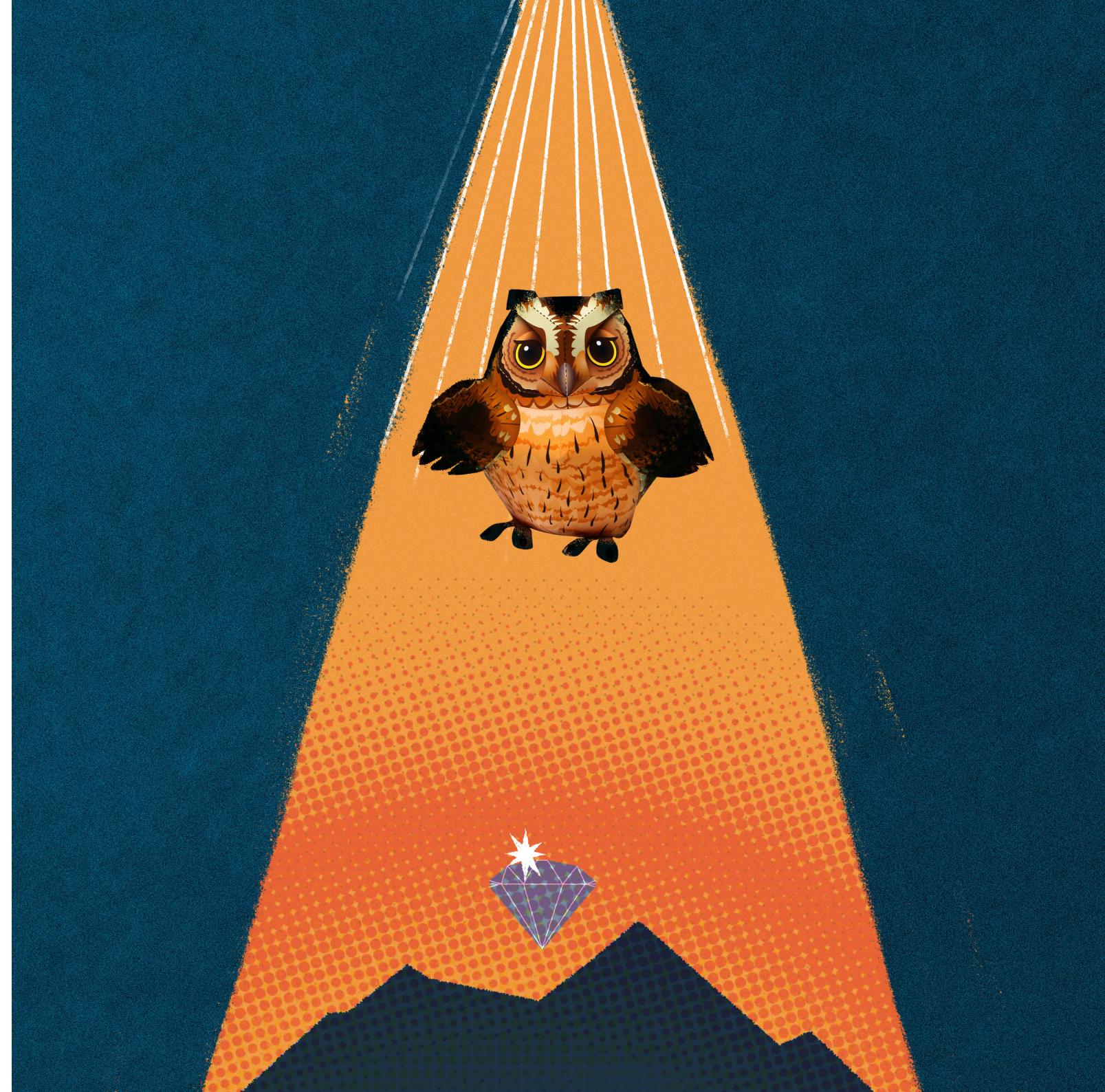
‘You are very brave,’ interrupted Elephant. ‘But jumping inside a deep cave without knowing what is at the bottom is too dangerous.’

‘I will go,’ said Owlet reluctantly, ‘because I am the only one who can fly and see in the dark... and someone has to make the sacrifice.’

And he dove into the opening.

Not very much later they heard the fluttering of wings and Owlet appeared again fully covered with cobwebs and dust.

‘The cave is large and rather deep,’ said he importantly. ‘Of course, it was very dangerous but I took a big risk and managed to reach the





bottom. There is a lake there with sharp protruding rocks and there is a large, transparent gem in a shallow there. It looks as if it is throbbing and it is making tiny circular waves in the water. I think the sound that we hear is coming from it. I tried to take it in my beak but the gem is too big so it slipped.'

They all looked at each other meaningfully and Chicken repeated:

'A large, sparkling, transparent gem that is throbbing... like a heart. But that is the Cursed Diamond!'

'I have a new suggestion!' said Tiger Cub who was going around in circles impatiently. 'Tie me up with something and drop me down there. I will pick it up.'

'This is an excellent idea,' said Kitten. 'But you, Tiger Cub, are too heavy. It is better to drop down a small animal.'

All looked at Bunny.

'Well...' he started but then remembered that Prairie Dog has been kidnapped and was now perhaps waiting for them hopefully, so he finished off in a shaky voice: 'Yes, that's a wonderful idea!'

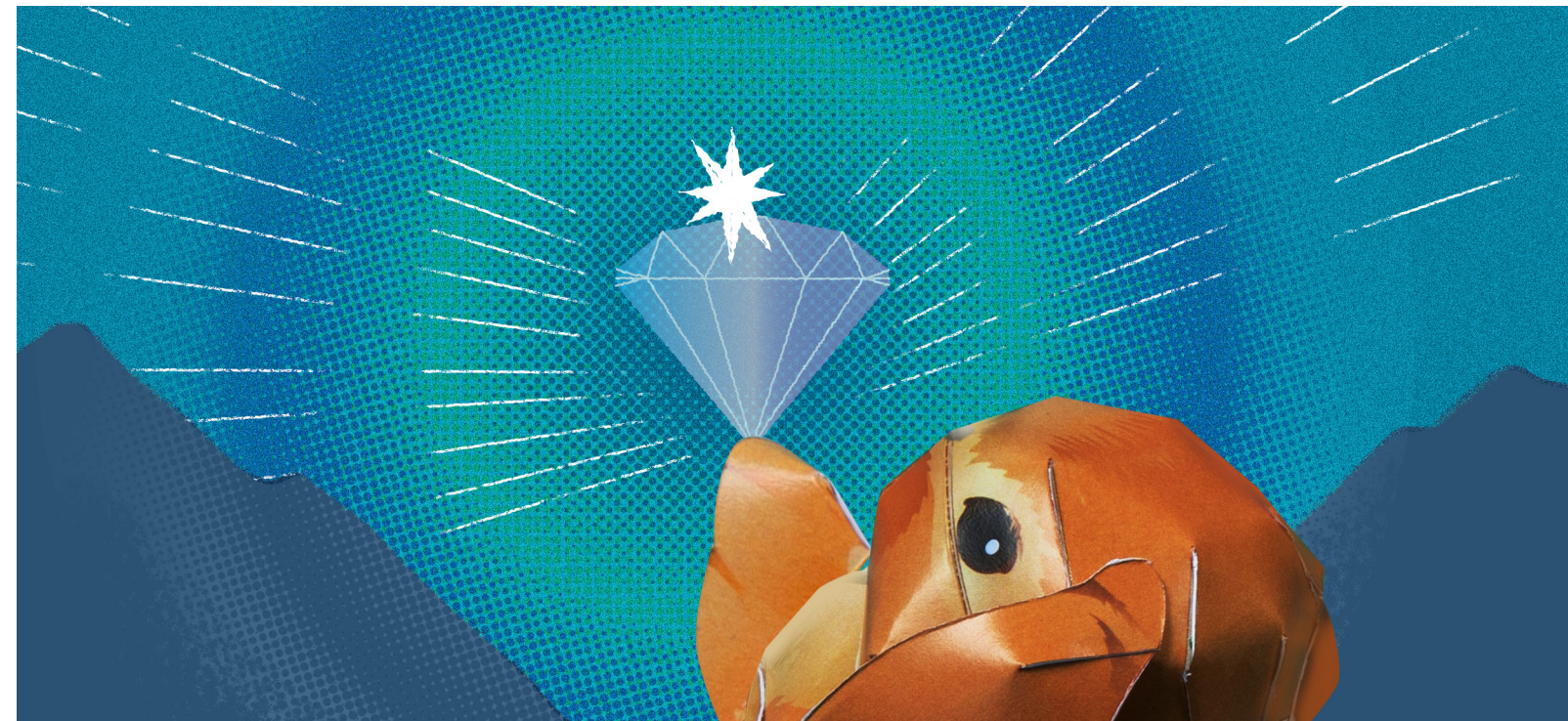
'It is well that I have foreseen all of this,' said Owlet and proudly started taking out a sturdy rope from his luggage.

And so, they tied one end of the rope to a tree and the other one to Bunny. After that, they lined up in a single file and started lowering him smoothly into the cave. After a few endless minutes, Bunny shouted out: 'I got it' and the friends quickly pulled him back out.

Poor Bunny was shaking all over and looked very miserable with his wet fur but was smiling happily nevertheless. All applauded him.

'Well done, Bunny, you were really brave and heroic!' cried out Tiger Cub in true admiration and Bunny's whole face lit up.

'Here,' said Bunny and stretched out his wet paw. A large, blindingly beautiful, polished diamond glowed in it.





‘So, this is the heart of the king that was turned into a cursed gem,’ murmured Cockatiel.

‘I was going to say that it is beautiful,’ exclaimed Elephant, ‘if I did not know how much evil there is in it!’

The friends decided that it is best for Tiger Cub, being the strongest, to watch over it and continued on their way. But only after a few minutes, they witnessed a sight that made them all suddenly stop. The path was covered with stones and trees that had fallen randomly, broken and squashed as if there had been a battle just now. And, at the centre of the cleared space, there was... Prairie Dog!

‘Hurray!’ cried out Cockatiel joyfully and flew towards him but Prairie Dog did not move.

He had become black and still, frozen in a slightly reclining position and with a determined expression as if he was preparing for a jump. The friends surrounded the strange figure.

‘He looks as if he has been petrified,’ noted darkly Owlet touching his paw. All fell sadly silent. After a little while, Kitten cleared her throat and said:

‘In view of the information gathered, we can conjure a logical hypothesis





that all of this is the work of the Sorcerer of Colours. He has destroyed nature in the mountain by stealing all its colours. He has taken away Prairie Dog's colour and has petrified him. But why did Prairie Dog come here and why did the Sorcerer attack him?'

'Yes, what does Prairie Dog have to do with the Cursed Diamond?' said Tiger Cub and turned the gem over in his paw. The friends gazed at its cursed light as if looking in it for an answer to their questions.

'You would like to know, wouldn't you?' hissed suddenly a deep, hoarse voice. All turned around in surprise and Bunny jumped so high that he hit a bough. The Sorcerer of Colours stood behind them and looked at them with an evil grimace. He was well-built and menacing and his mantle swirled around him like a multi-coloured fire set ablaze by the rays of the thousands of gems which covered it. A tall woman in an emerald green dress stood next to him. A diamond tiara sparkled in her thick reddish hair and her long pale hands were covered with rings made of gems of all kinds. Despite its regular features, her face emitted something revolting. Her eyes were cruel, her smile – evil and ice cold. The friends shivered from the cold which she emanated.

'This stupid prairie dog had hidden the Cursed Diamond,' said she in an

indifferent voice. 'He refused to tell me where it is. This is why he got what he deserved. But you turned out to be even more stupid with your naïve loyalty and the hope that you can save him. Now, my loyal Sorcerer will regain his strength and we will continue to rob the colours of animals, rivers and mountains, forests...' She raised her voice. 'The entire earth will belong to us!... Give me the diamond.'

'Never!' growled Tiger Cub and got up boldly. The rest of them surrounded him ready to fight to the end. The Sorceress laughed ominously and nodded to the Sorcerer of Colours. At that signal, he started quickly revolving around himself until he turned into a colourful whirlwind. Gradually, the whirlwind slowed its movement, started to calm down and a giant, blood-curdling Dragon emerged at its centre. Its torso was covered with sparkling gems instead of scales. The beast opened its mouth and started to inhale the air around it. The friends froze still and felt how their entire heat vanished. Their colours faded and disappeared in the open maw. Finally, they all became black and still as a forest sculpture. Everyone but Elephant! He was still grey and lively and looked boldly at the Dragon's eyes. The Dragon stared in







disbelief and spoke:

‘I had heard that there are creatures of great virtue and pure heart whose colours are difficult to take away... But wait, you still don’t know what I am capable of!’

And he opened his maw again and, this time, a violent fire element erupted from it; it scorched everything in its way and advanced towards Elephant. Suddenly, the blue seashell which hung around his throat moved and a sea wave gushed from it. The wave grew higher and higher until it rose above the tree tops. Then, it suddenly rushed forward, put out the fire with a hiss, bore down on the Dragon and the Sorceress and hurled them against the rocks with great force. The Sorceress shattered into a thousand crystal pieces which melted like ice in the air and the Dragon remained crumbled lifeless at the foot of the rocks.

Elephant approached him faintly.

And then something strange happened: the gems on the torso began to glow more and more brilliantly, their coloured rays glimmered and intertwined around Elephant. Their beauty simply hypnotised him!

‘How nice it would have been if these jewels were mine,’ thought

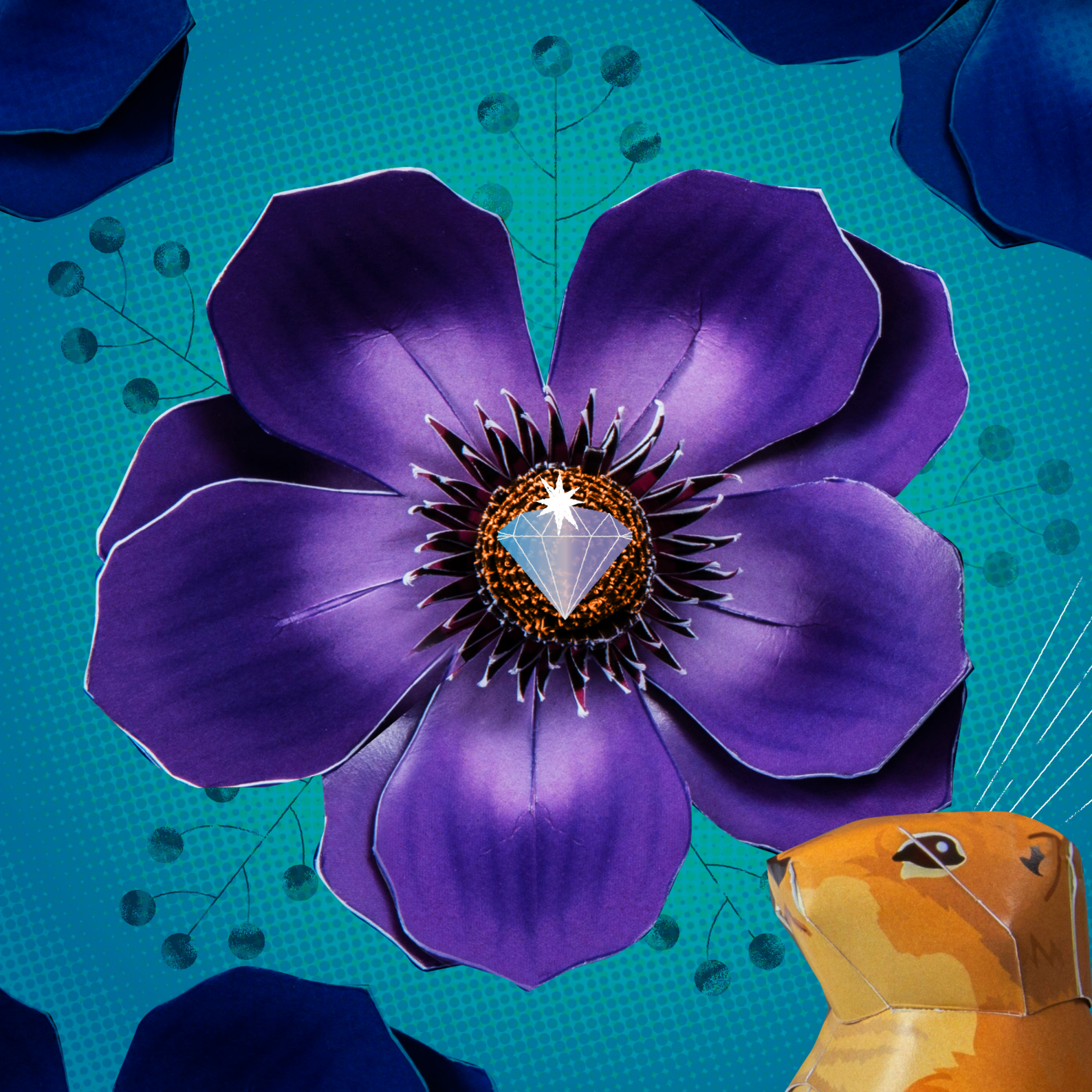
Elephant, ‘I would have decorated my forehead and trunk... I would have been beautiful and magical... and everybody would respect me and admire me.’

Elephant reached towards the glowing gems but suddenly remembered all of the blackened wilting nature, the frozen bird... and his heart sank. He turned his gaze towards his petrified friends and came to as if from a dream! Then he shook his head and said in a clear voice:

‘Magical, colourful jewels, you are beautiful! But living nature is more beautiful and her changing colours are more magical. And friendship and love are the greatest of all jewels in the world!’ The moment he uttered these words, the gems moved, flew up and turned into colourful tiny lights which danced joyfully in the air. Gradually, they intertwined into a beautiful rainbow which started to rise over the forest. Everything underneath it became colourful, moved around and came back to life. The leaves of the trees rumbled, a bird’s song was heard, colourful butterflies played in the air...

The friends also started to come to and looked around in surprise. But the greatest surprise was that of Prairie Dog:





‘What are you doing here?’ wondered Prairie Dog. ‘And what happened to the Sorcerer of Colours? Did I vanquish him?’

‘We all did. Together,’ replied Elephant with a smile. And he told them what had happened.

‘And you, Prairie Dog, what were you doing here?’ asked out of curiosity Cockatiel.

Prairie Dog told them the story:

‘You know how much I love my garden. And this spring it was exceptionally beautiful: full of red roses, white daisies, blue violets, golden primroses, purple chrysanthemums... One day, the Sorcerer of Colours showed up attracted by their multi-coloured beauty. I saw through the window how he turned into a dragon and kidnapped all colours! I rushed in his direction but by the time I got there he had disappeared leaving my garden black and wilting. Then suddenly I noticed a large brilliant gem at the bottom of a flower bed. At that moment, I did not know that this was the Cursed Diamond but I guessed that it belonged to the Sorcerer. I thought I would take it to him and, in return, he would give me my colours back. On the way, I hid the diamond in a cave; I pushed an overhanging stone in order to cover



the opening and marked the spot with paw tracks. I was just finishing when I saw the Sorcerer heading in my direction. He had discovered his loss and was wild with rage.'

'Give me back the diamond!' shouted he.

'Only if you return the colours of my garden!' replied I. When he realised that he will not be able to convince me, the Sorcerer threw himself at me... and attacked me! I was springing around and hiding myself between trees and bushes, which he was angrily knocking down.. and I don't remember anything after that.

'So, when Chicken called Prairie Dog on the phone,' guessed Kitten, 'the Sorcerer was in his house looking for the Diamond!'

The diamond having been mentioned several times, Tiger Cub checked his pocket and shouted in surprise:

'It is gone! The Cursed Diamond has disappeared!'

'Perhaps,' said Chicken thoughtfully. 'It, like the other magical gems, has turned again into what it was before the magic... into a heart, the real heart of the King!'

They all looked at the rock where the dragon had been until recently. In his place, there was a man pressing his chest with his hand. His posture

resembled that of the Sorcerer but his face had been transformed and was now beautiful and gentle. His mantle had become white and his crown made of rock crystals shone in the sun. But his eyes had darkened and one could see that he had been fatally wounded. The friends surrounded him cautiously.

'I am asking you for forgiveness,' uttered quietly the King. 'My real heart has returned to me and it told me what an evil and greedy beast I had become. Now, that my strength is fading and I am leaving this life, I realise the mistake I made by trusting the Evil Sorceress!'

His face twisted in pain.

The friends fell silent. Bunny and Elephant were snivelling.

Suddenly, the blue seashell fluttered again, flew up and landed in the hand of the King. He smiled and, in a final effort, held it to his ear. The enchanting song of the Queen of the Mermaids welled from it and, like a healing balm, soothed his pain. The King closed his eyes and fell into a magical sleep.





# THE FEAST



Bunny, put the strawberries on the cake closer to each other!’ ordered Kitten. ‘Owlet, prepare the candles so that they are close at hand!’

The three of them were bustling about in Prairie Dog’s kitchen while in the garden the feast was in full swing. Cockatiel, Puppy and Tiger Cub were dancing to the sound of cheerful music and colourful balloons were floating around them. The fragrance of wonderful flowers from the flower beds filled the air. Light garlands were shining in the green branches of the nearby trees and underneath them there was table piled up with goodies. Prairie Dog was sitting at the head of the table surrounded by Chicken and Elephant. They were remembering moments from the Great Trip again and again.

‘Thank you, friends!’ said Prairie Dog. ‘You saved my life and I have

never had such a wonderful feast for my birthday!’

The music stopped and Kitten’s pleasant voice sounded from the kitchen accompanied by Bunny’s high-pitched child-like voice and the rather sharp but enthusiastic croak of Owlet.

‘Happy Birthday to you...’

‘Happy Birthday to you, Prairie Dog...’ all joined the song and placed before Prairie Dog a large delicious cake heaped with lit candles.

Prairie Dog blew the candles; all applauded and it was time for the presents.

‘Oh, an entire basket full to the top!’ exclaimed Prairie Dog joyfully and started opening them. There were garden tools, a jar of special honey, seed of exotic flowers. Prairie Dog was overjoyed and he patiently unwrapped every single one. Finally, he got to the last package; it was quite big and heavy.

‘Who is this from?’ wondered Prairie Dog.

‘Actually, we don’t know,’ explained Chicken. ‘It came in the post today and we thought that it is a surprise for your birthday.’

A casket made of ebony and encrusted with silver patterns was in the package.



Prairie Dog looked in the casket and exclaimed:

‘It says here ‘for Bunny, Puppy, Cockatiel, Kitten, Elephant, Owlet, Tiger Cub, Prairie Dog and Chicken!’”

Then he opened the casket and everyone gasped. Nine gems shone like stars on a cushion made of night-blue velvet – every gem had a different colour but all were equally beautiful. After the initial surprise, Bunny said:

‘They are wonderful but I like the moon stone best.’

Prairie Dog took it in his paw and exclaimed:

‘Bunny, your name is written on it!’

Meanwhile, Tiger Cub was saying:

‘I like that one best, the bright red one.’

Prairie Dog took the ruby and imagine their surprise when they read Tiger Cub’s name inscribed on it. It turned out that everyone had been assigned exactly the stone that they liked best.

‘This is a present from someone who knows us well!’ noted Chicken.

‘Look, there is a letter as well!’ and he pointed to an envelope sticking out from underneath the cushion.

The envelope was made of golden paper and in the middle of it there

was a royal coat of arms. Prairie Dog opened it impatiently and started reading:

‘To our dear, brave and good friends with infinite gratitude. Don’t forget you are always welcome here! The King and Queen of **Multi-coloured Island.**’

The friends looked at each other. Then Prairie Dog took the envelope and all stared at the royal coat of arms.

On it, there was a crown made of rock crystal intertwined with an exquisite blue seashell.



**THE END**



