

Grey Island Red Boat

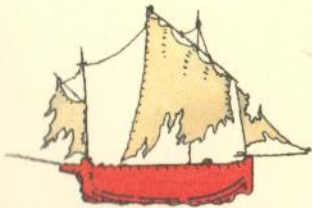


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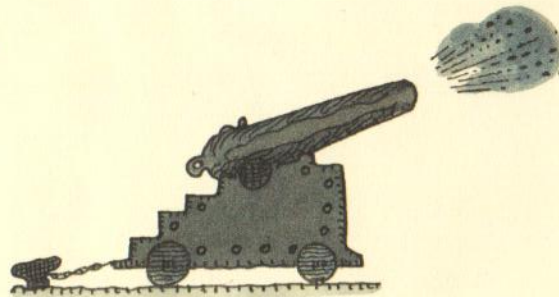


The Island of Ashes

A long time ago there was a grey island set in a grey sea. On the island there lived a princess. Her name was Opal and her home was a cold grey castle in the middle of a cold grey moat.

The castle towers were defended by six big grey cannons and a troop of grey soldiers. There were grey gardens, grey trees and grey flowers.

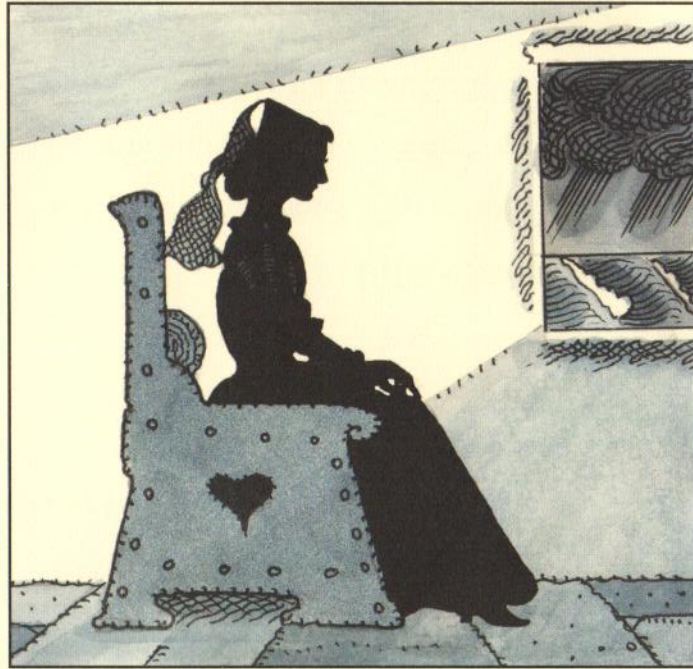
The name of the island was the Island of Ashes.



Princess Opal sat on her grey granite throne in a grey granite room at the top of one of the towers. She looked out to the far-off horizon and wished somehow for her life to be different.

Something was missing.





The cold grey sea washed up against the granite rocks at the shore just as it did every day.

Life was always the same for Princess Opal.

It was always November.

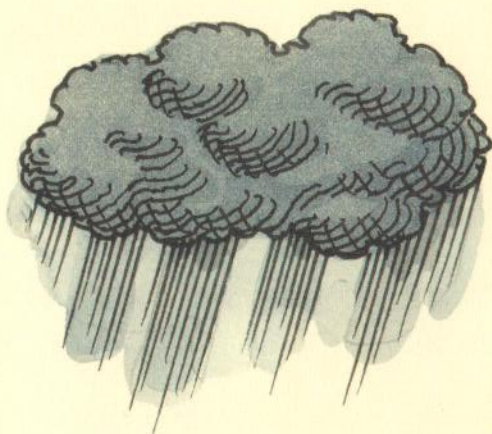
It was always grey, cold and wet.

Every day, her father, the King,
went up into the sky in his grey hot air
balloon and shouted at the rain to stop.

Every day, the island's fishermen
landed their silver-grey fish in the
harbour near the castle. Princess Opal
would sneak down to the harbour in a
long grey cloak just to have something
lively to watch.



Then, one very wet grey afternoon,
life turned out not to be always the
same for Princess Opal.

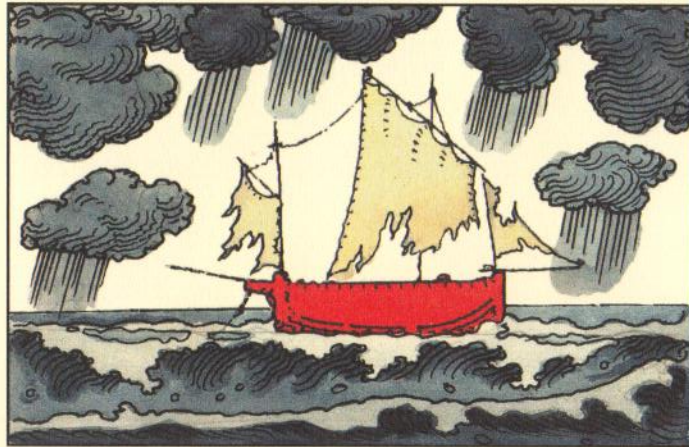


A Strange Little Boat

That afternoon, a fisherman towed in a
little boat that he had found adrift on
the open sea. The little boat was not the
usual kind of fishing boat. Its sails were
ragged and torn. It was so small that
there was only just room for one sailor.

Something else about the little boat puzzled the princess. Its hull was painted. It wasn't grey. It was a colour.

The hull of the little boat was painted red.



This was something Princess Opal had never seen before.

The sight of the little red boat gave her eyes a kind of ticklish feeling. The ticklish feeling pleased the princess and made her smile. She liked it, but she couldn't say why. She ran on down to the harbour just in time to see the fisherman lift a young man out of the boat and lay him down by the shore.

The young man was about her own age. He was bundled up in a grey blanket that the fisherman had given him for warmth. The fisherman turned to look at Princess Opal.

"Excuse me, Princess Opal," he said with a bow, "but does your father know you are down here among us and the fish?"



"Ssh," the princess said. "No, he doesn't. He's up there in his grey balloon, trying to stop the rain. Who is this?"

"I found him drifting in his boat far out at sea," the fisherman said. "No idea where he's from. He's not from here to be sure."

"His little boat looks so strange," Princess Opal said.

"That was why I first noticed it, Princess Opal. It is a very different sort of boat. I will say it fair tickled my eyes just to look at it."

"And mine," she said. "But the tickling was very nice. It made me feel warm inside and made me smile."

The young man stirred, sat up, and opened his eyes.



"He is awake," the princess said, "and he needs our care. Please help me to take him up to the castle."

"Are you sure?" the fisherman said.

"Yes, I am!" Princess Opal cried.

"Come on."

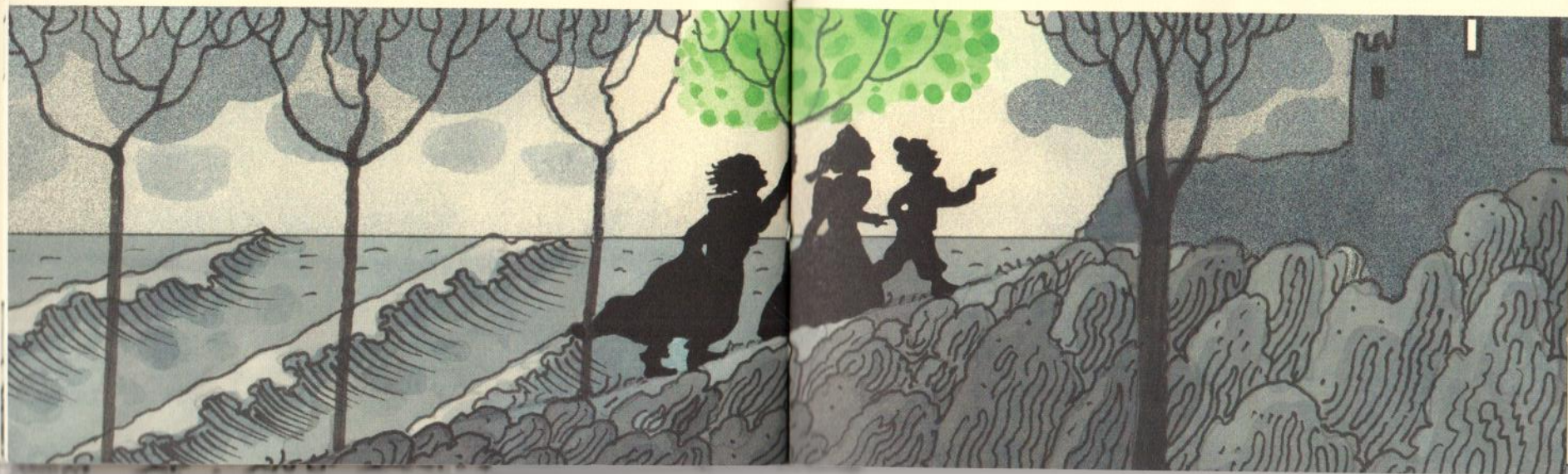
And so Princess Opal and the fisherman helped the young man to his feet.

At first the young man seemed a bit unsteady. He stumbled on the steep path that led up to the grey castle gates. He held onto the branch of a grey tree to steady himself.

The princess reached out her hand to help him. He shook his head and spoke to her for the first time.

"No," he said. "Please, you mustn't touch me." He found his feet again and they walked on up to the gates.

As the fisherman walked back down to the harbour, he noticed that the dull grey leaves on the tree the young man had touched had all turned a bright green colour. First the little red boat and now the green leaves. The fisherman couldn't believe his eyes.



He ran to fetch some of the other fishermen to come and see the bright green tree for themselves.



Tickles and Smiles

The princess opened the castle gates.
The garden was empty and rain dripped
endlessly from the roof.

"Come on inside," the princess said,
"before you catch cold."