



زال و سمرغ

Zal
and the
Phoenix



A thousand years ago, there lived a powerful warrior King of Persia.
His magnificent palace was covered in gold and precious stones.



One starry night, in the light of a silvery moon, a gigantic phoenix was seen circling over the palace. A mother said to her children:

“This must be a sign.
Something is about to happen.”

And it was. A little prince was born. A beautiful albino boy, his hair as white as snow with eyes like sparkling diamonds. He was named Zal.

Outside the palace everybody celebrated the news.

Inside the palace the mood was bad. The King was shouting angrily at his Queen, Zal's Mother:

“This can't be my son. He does not look like a Persian boy, he is much too white.”

Zal was locked away inside the palace by the King, who was so ashamed of his son. He wanted to hide him away from the world.

Eventually, on Zal's 5th Birthday, the King could take it no more and he commanded loudly: “I order Zal to be hidden away in the foothills of the Alborz Mountain.”

The King wanted to pretend his son did not exist. The Queen wept tears of sorrow.





Zal was carried secretly to the mountain and abandoned there on a wild and stormy night.

In the morning, flying high in the sky with her razor sharp eyes, the Phoenix spotted the five-year-old Zal stranded helplessly alone on the mountain.

She thought to herself: “What a tasty meal he’ll make for my hungry chicks!”



Zal saw the Phoenix diving towards him, but it was too late to hide. With her powerful talons, the Phoenix grabbed Zal roughly by the hair and flew him to her nest at the top of the mountain.

Her chicks did not think Zal looked tasty at all, in fact they grew rather fond of him and treated him like a brother.

Each month a group of traders passed by the mountain, carrying elaborate silks, carpets, and food to the city. Musicians and street performers travelled with them and entertained the passers by.

They were led by a funny man in a hat. He was a short fellow with a great big belly and a toothless mischievous smile... and what's more, his trousers kept falling down!

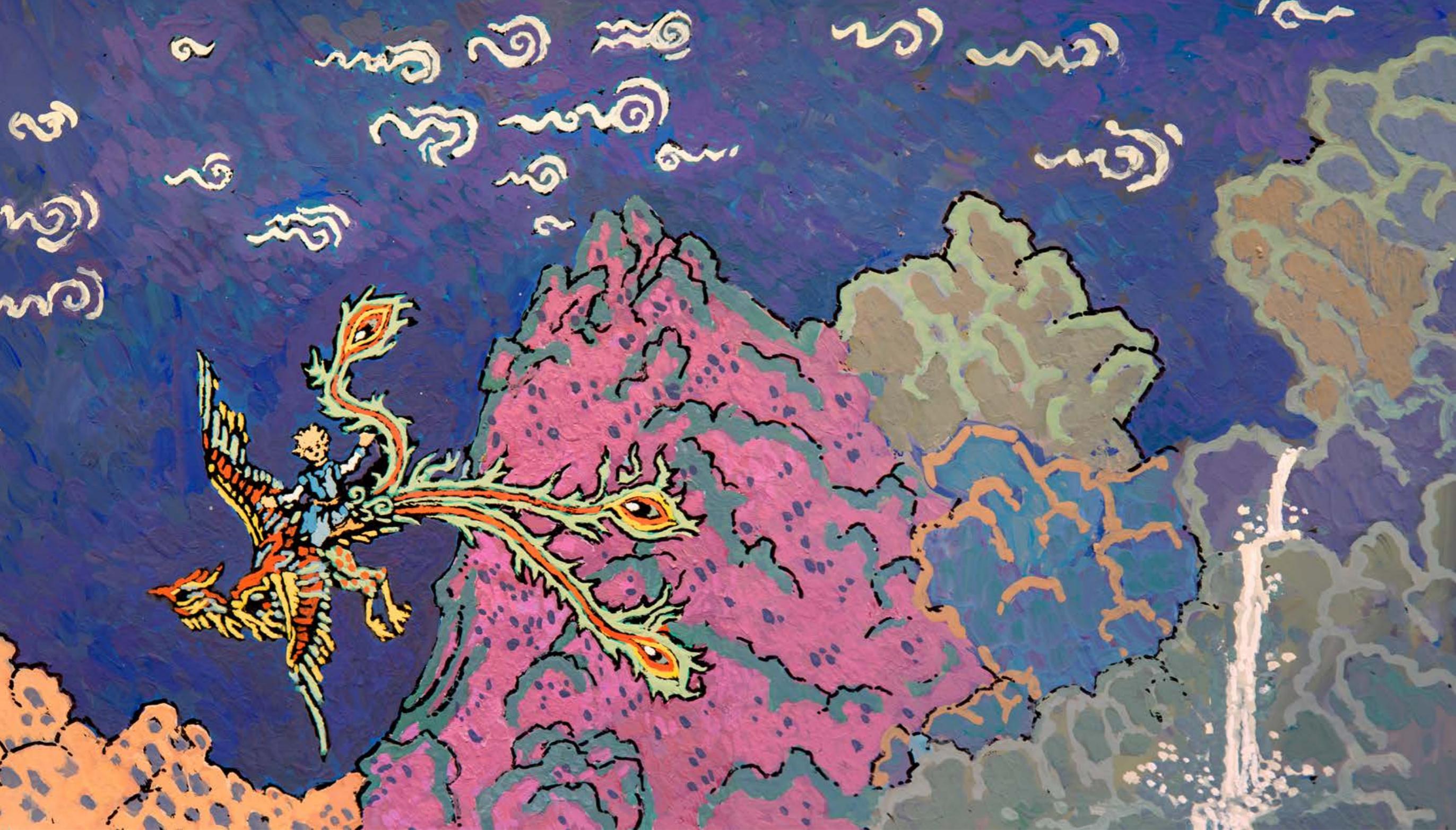
Zal would cartwheel down the mountain to say hello, the little chicks tumbling alongside him and the Phoenix gliding overhead.





One of the street performers was a fantastic magician. He would play magic tricks on Zal and the chicks, which they found amazing and crazy.

They also loved the songs sung by the street musicians, which told incredible stories about magical beasts like the Phoenix.



Every night, the Phoenix would say to Zal: “Do you fancy flying under the moon and the stars?”

And Zal would hold on tightly to her back, racing across the sky shouting:

“I’m a shooting star!”



One morning, a few years later, the King woke up suddenly from a horrible dream, calling out: “I have made such a terrible mistake! I love my son and miss him so much!” And so he set out to the Alborz Mountain, to find his son.

After searching for many days he found Zal, now a strong handsome young man.

The King argued ferociously with the Phoenix to take Zal back to the Palace. But the Phoenix fought back; she did not want to give Zal up.

Zal cried out: “I want to be with my Father, but I don’t want to leave the Phoenix. What should I do?”



The King swung his sword at the Phoenix, she knocked him over with one of her huge wings. He picked himself up and tried to thrust his sword into her, but the Phoenix was far too quick and powerful for the King.

The street performers and the funny man in the hat tried to distract the King as he attempted to drag Zal away with the Phoenix circling angrily overhead. They all hurtled chaotically towards the palace.



The Phoenix could hear in the distance the sound of the cheering crowds, and she began to have second thoughts.

She swooped down in front of the King, knocked his sword out of his hand and blocked his path.



If Zal was to be reunited, she wanted the King to grant her a wish: that Zal could fly on her back for his triumphant return to the palace.

The King looked at Zal. Zal smiled back at the King and nodded approvingly. So the King agreed.

For the last time Zal climbed onto the Phoenix's back and she proudly flew him to the palace gates.

The King made an announcement to the city people:

“Never, never again must any little boy or little girl ever be rejected or hidden from the world.”



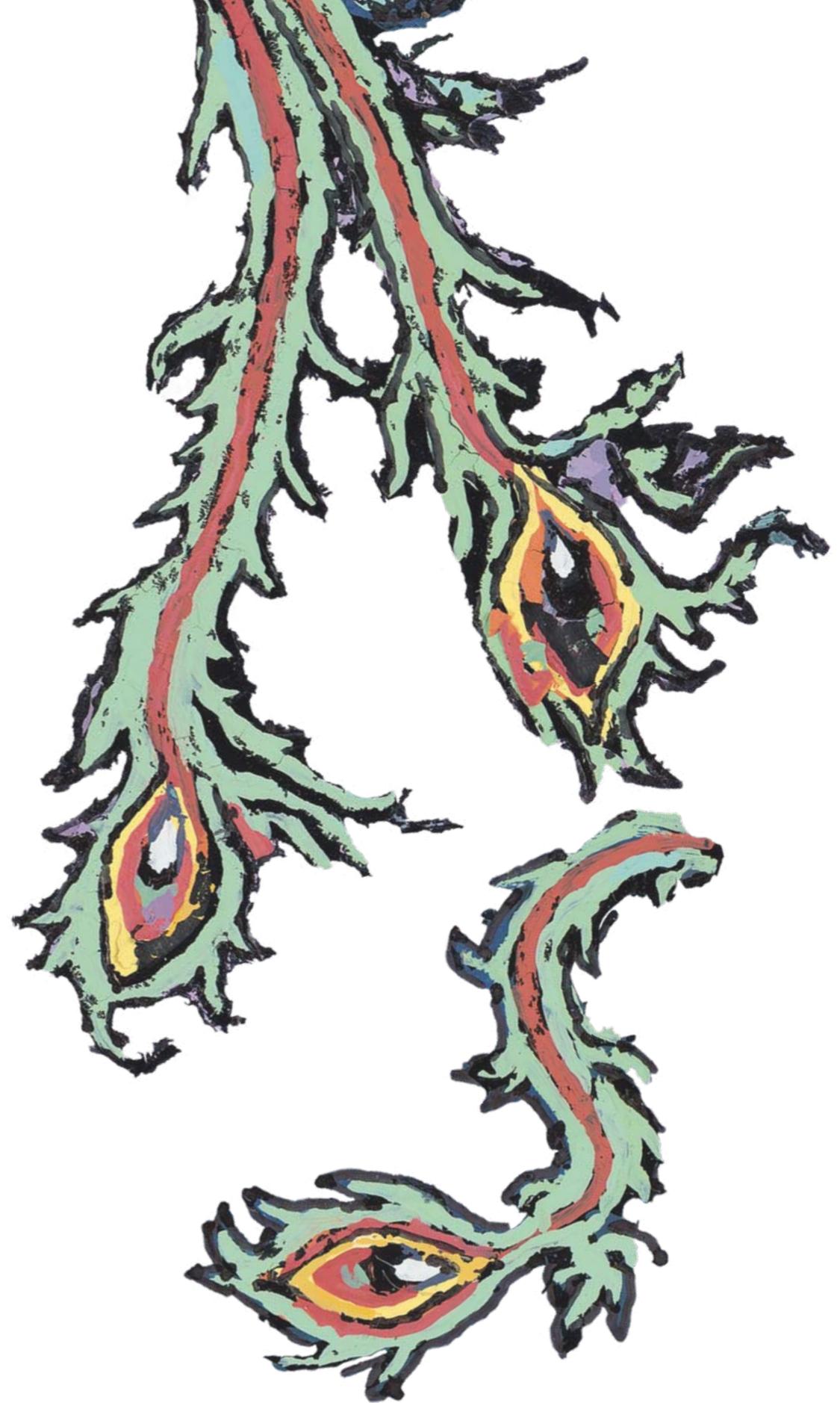
The city people chanted: “Long live the King, Long live Prince Zal.” The sun shone brighter than ever before, the Phoenix flew overhead, swishing her wings with pride and joy.

Zal looked up at the Phoenix with tears in his eyes and said: “I wish I did not have to leave you. I will miss you so much.”

The Phoenix shed three of her feathers down to the ground and said:

“Zal, if you are ever in danger, just burn a feather as a signal and I will fly to your rescue.”

Zal replied: “I’ll treasure these feathers and when I am crowned King, I’ll build a magnificent statue of you in the palace gardens.”



Everyone waved goodbye to the Phoenix, who flew off far away into the sunset.

All was now peaceful in the kingdom. Years later, the prince would be crowned King Zal.

He would often visit the statue of the Phoenix in the palace gardens with his children, telling them about those nights flying with the Phoenix, under the moon and the stars. Now it all just seemed like a distant dream.

Zal wondered what had become of the Phoenix; was she still out there somewhere soaring across the skies? Perhaps one day he would burn one of her treasured feathers.

But would she come back?





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