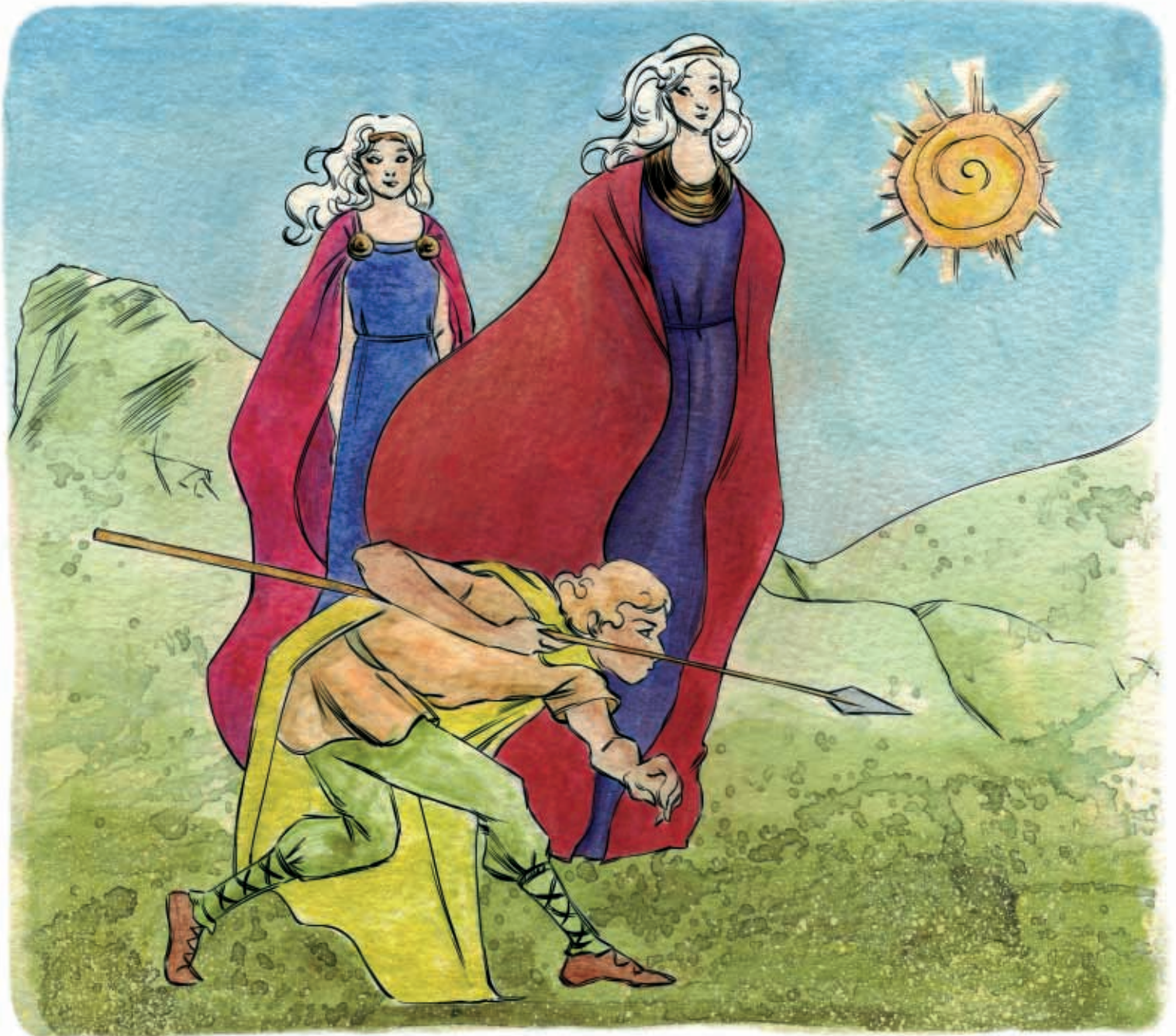


THE SALMON OF KNOWLEDGE



PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Fionn: *fjun*; Finnegas: *finnayguss*



Long ago, there lived a boy called Fionn, who wanted to know everything. His mother got tired of answering his questions, so she sent him to live with two wise women. They taught Fionn many things. Then, one day, they too got tired of answering his questions. They sent him to live with the wisest man in Ireland, who was called Finnegas. But even he did not know everything. And even he got tired of being asked questions by Fionn.

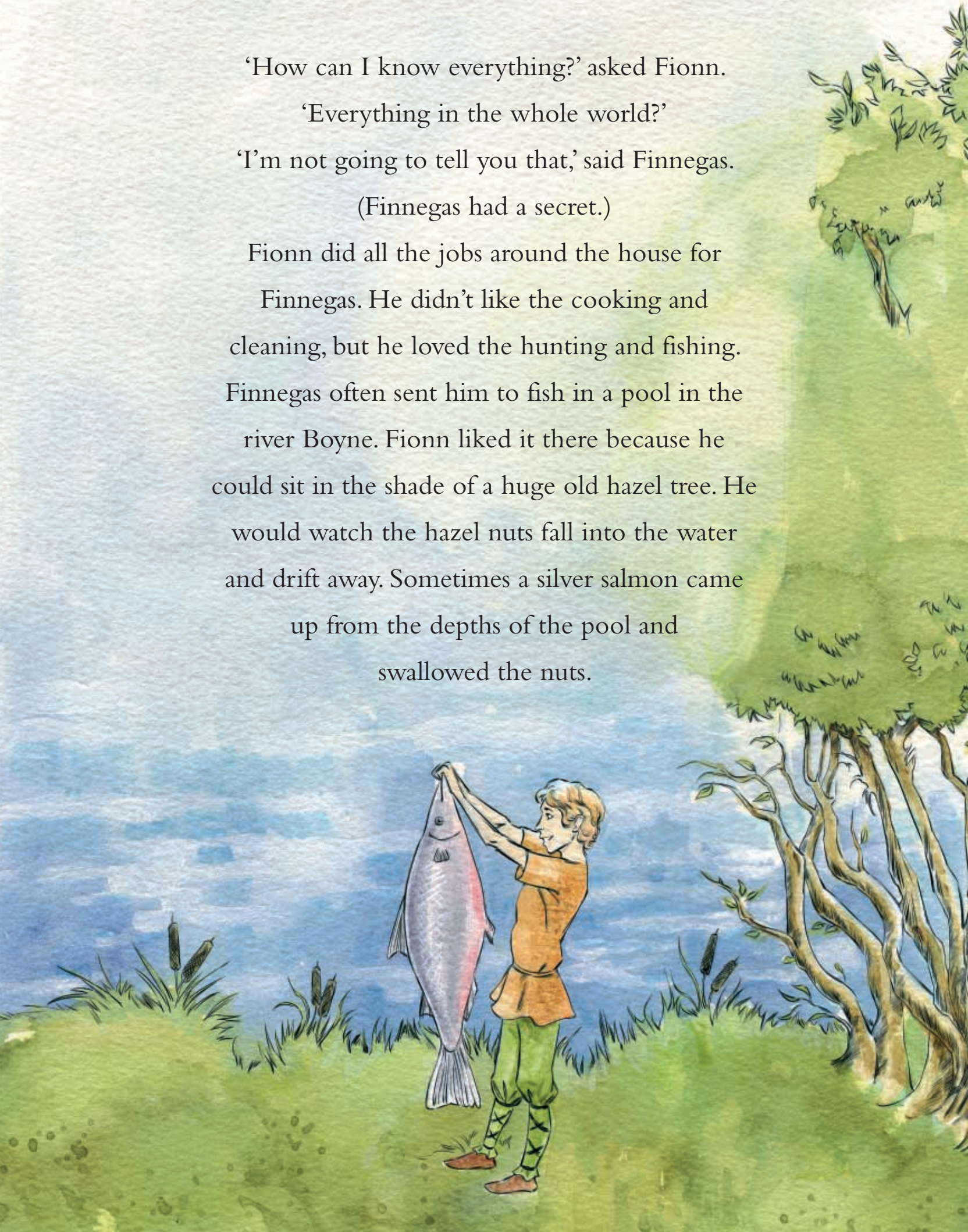
‘How can I know everything?’ asked Fionn.

‘Everything in the whole world?’

‘I’m not going to tell you that,’ said Finnegas.

(Finnegas had a secret.)

Fionn did all the jobs around the house for Finnegas. He didn’t like the cooking and cleaning, but he loved the hunting and fishing. Finnegas often sent him to fish in a pool in the river Boyne. Fionn liked it there because he could sit in the shade of a huge old hazel tree. He would watch the hazel nuts fall into the water and drift away. Sometimes a silver salmon came up from the depths of the pool and swallowed the nuts.

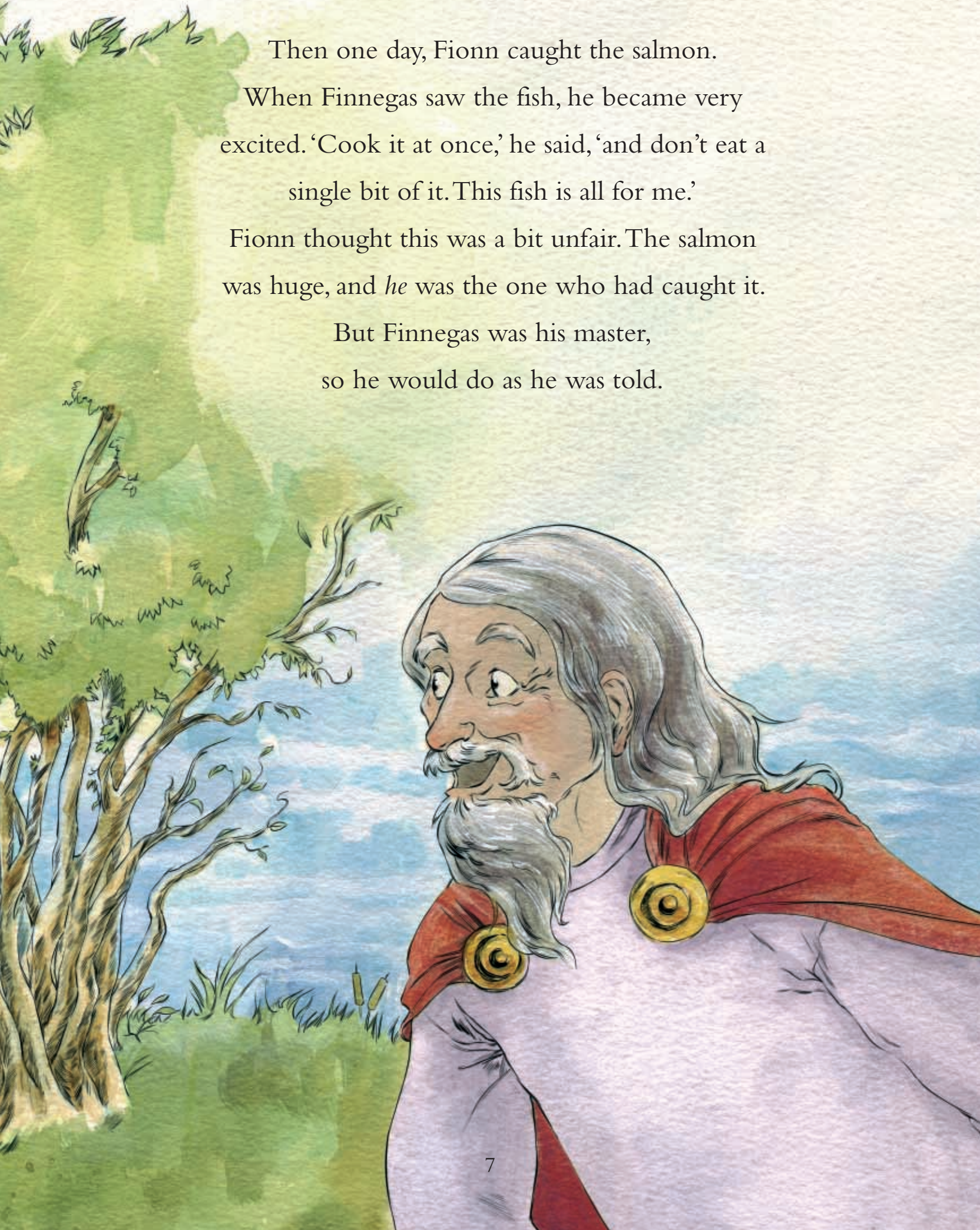


Then one day, Fionn caught the salmon.

When Finnegas saw the fish, he became very excited. 'Cook it at once,' he said, 'and don't eat a single bit of it. This fish is all for me.'

Fionn thought this was a bit unfair. The salmon was huge, and *he* was the one who had caught it.

But Finnegas was his master, so he would do as he was told.

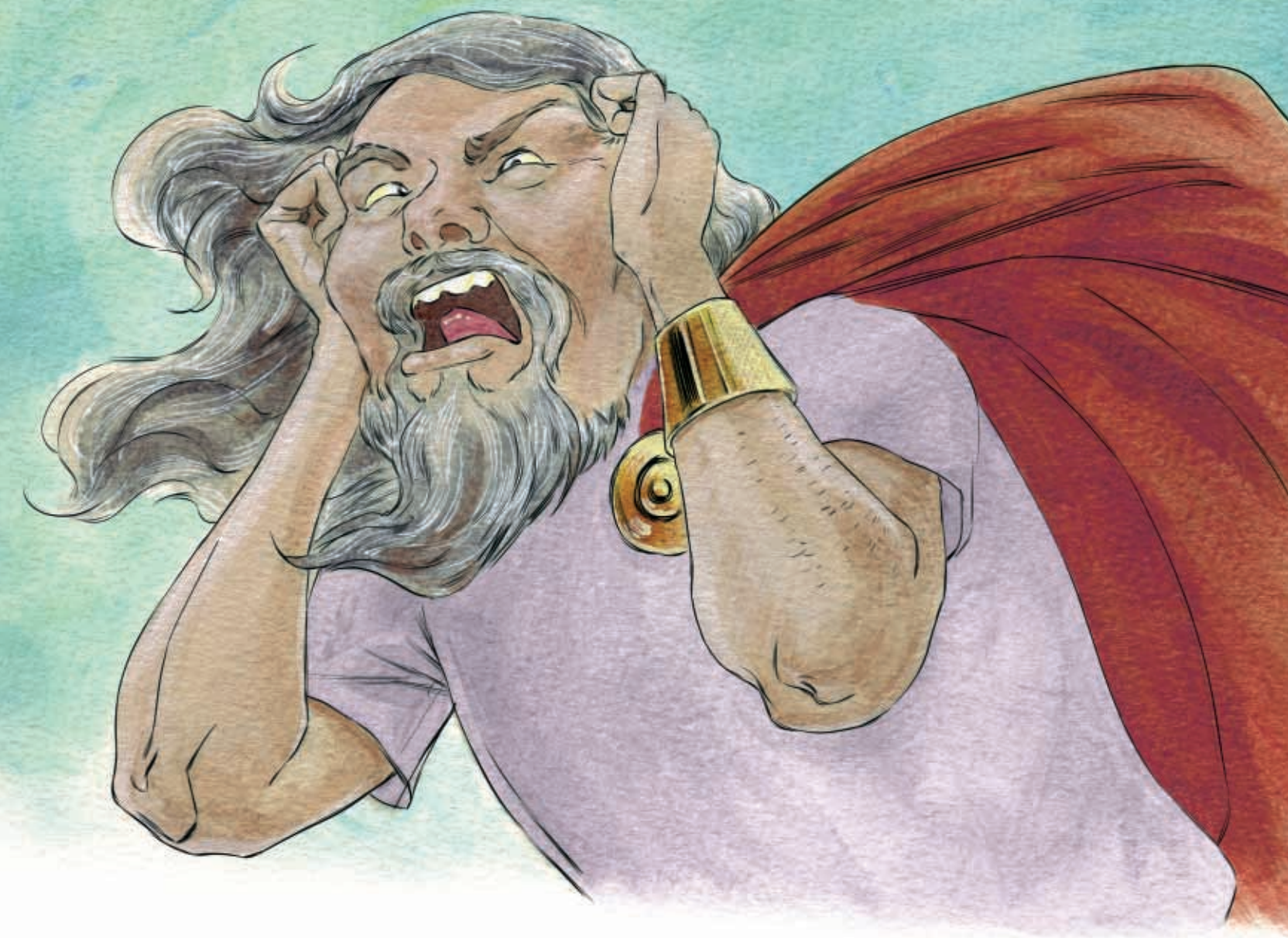




He lit a fire and cooked the salmon. Even though it smelt delicious, he did not taste any of it. But as he was taking it off the fire, he burnt his thumb on the salmon's hot, bubbling skin. He stuck his thumb in his mouth and sucked it to stop the pain. Then he took the fish to Finnegas. 'You didn't eat any of the salmon, did you?' Finnegas asked suspiciously, his voice squeaking with worry.

'I did not,' said Fionn.

'You didn't even taste its skin, did you?' said Finnegas. Fionn started to say, I did not, again. Then he remembered. 'I just put my finger in my mouth when I burnt it on the skin,' he said. 'But I didn't eat any.'



Finnegas was furious. ‘Now *you* have it! *You* have the Knowledge!’

he roared. ‘What?’ said Fionn. ‘What are you saying?’

‘That fish is the Salmon of Knowledge,’ said Finnegas.

‘It has eaten the nuts from the ancient hazel tree that holds all the knowledge in the world. And the first person to taste that salmon gains all the wisdom there is!’

Fionn was amazed. ‘You can have the rest of it,’ he said guiltily.

‘It’s no use now,’ said Finnegas. ‘It’s only a stupid, ordinary fish.

Now all its knowledge is inside you.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Fionn.

‘I don’t feel very different.’

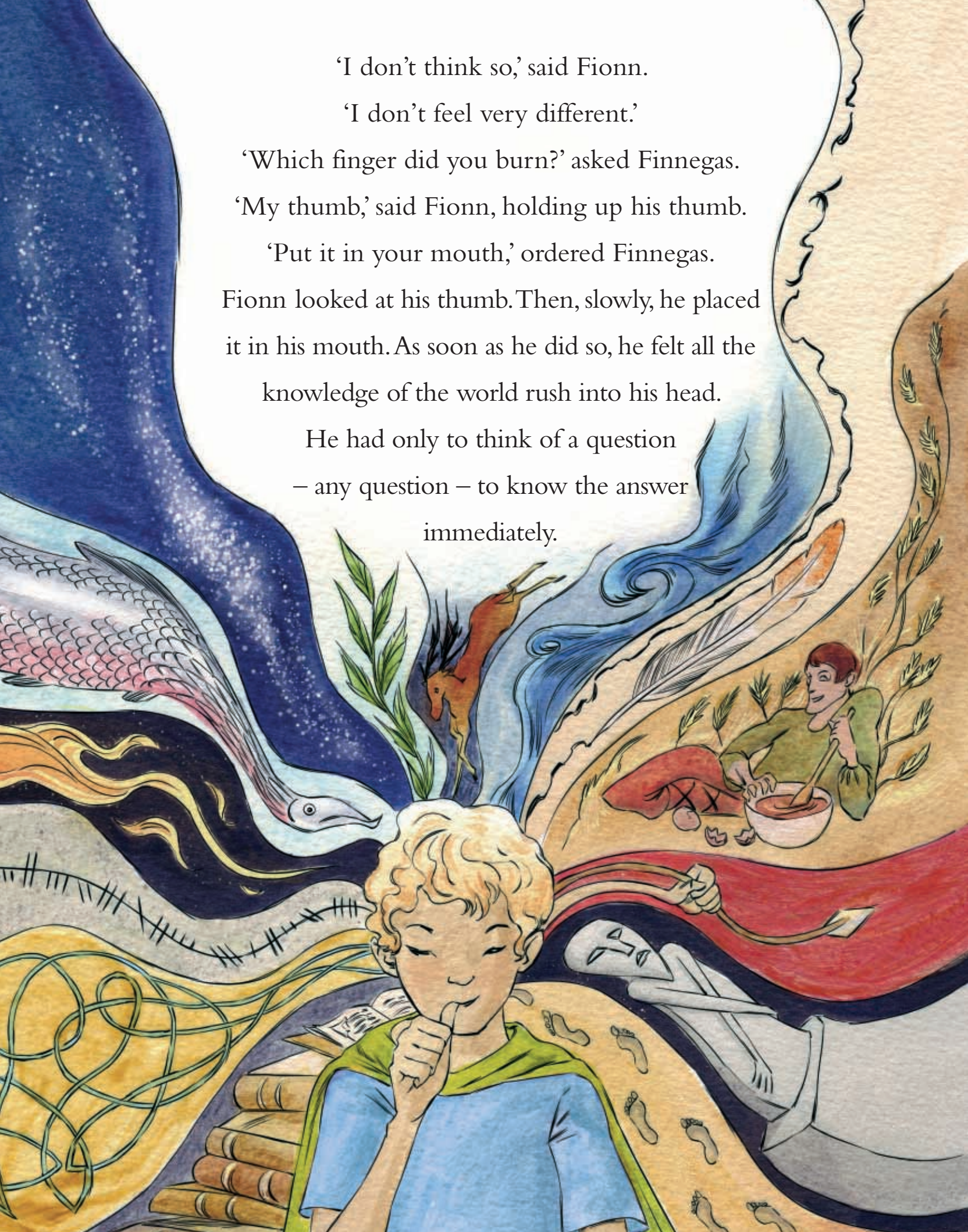
‘Which finger did you burn?’ asked Finnegas.

‘My thumb,’ said Fionn, holding up his thumb.

‘Put it in your mouth,’ ordered Finnegas.

Fionn looked at his thumb. Then, slowly, he placed it in his mouth. As soon as he did so, he felt all the knowledge of the world rush into his head.

He had only to think of a question
– any question – to know the answer
immediately.





Poor Finnegas! They ate the rest of the fish together anyway. But Finnegas could not eat very much. He knew now he would never have the wisdom he had waited for all his life. Instead, the knowledge had gone to a little boy.

When Fionn grew up, he became a great warrior and hunter, and a wise leader of the Fianna, the greatest band of warriors Ireland has ever known. And whenever he needed to know something – anything – all he had to do was put his thumb in his mouth and bite hard on it.

He never had to ask anyone any questions, ever again.