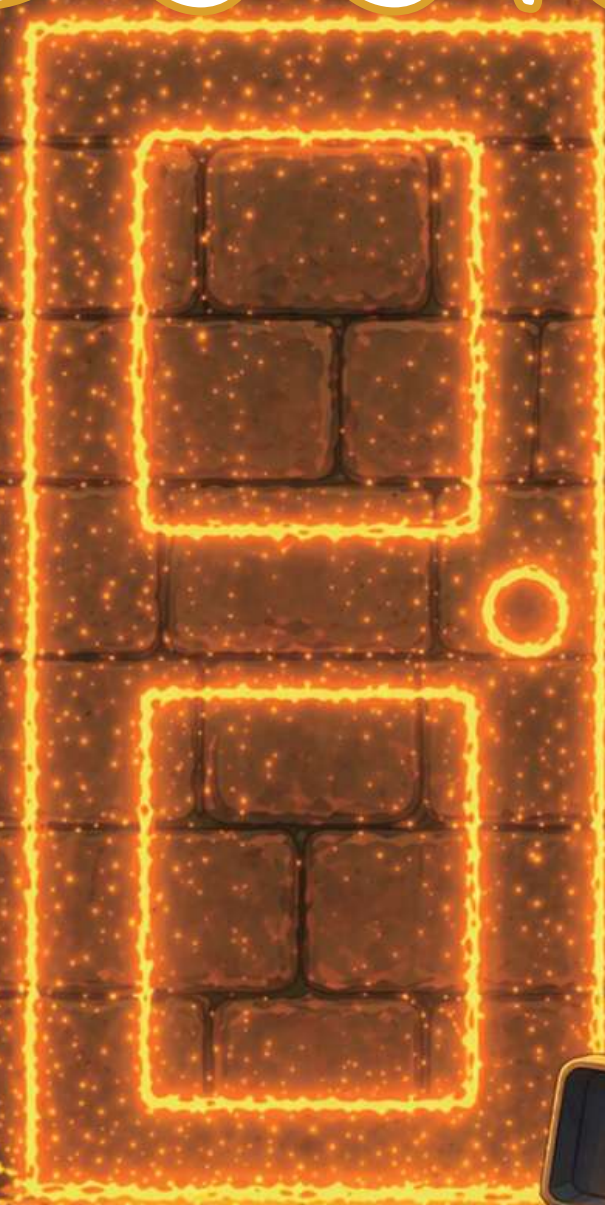


THE MAGIC DOOR



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One quiet afternoon, Alba and Martín, two curious siblings from Jaén, were rummaging through their grandfather's old things whilst their father had stepped out for a moment.

Amongst old photographs, medals and other mementos, they found a small metal box, covered in dust.

'Shall we open it?' asked Martín.

Alba nodded. Inside was an old key and a dark, well-worn pencil. On the lid, almost faded away, were the words:

Draw to unlock Castles.
Paint to traverse Battles.

The two looked at each other.

"What if. it's true?" whispered Alba. Martín was already smiling.

"Let's give it a go."



They ran up to their room.

Martin drew a door on the wall. Alba added the lock.
And then it happened.

The door and the lock began to glow.

'It can't be.' said Alba.

Alba picked up the key, inserted it and turned it slowly.
And the drawn door. opened.

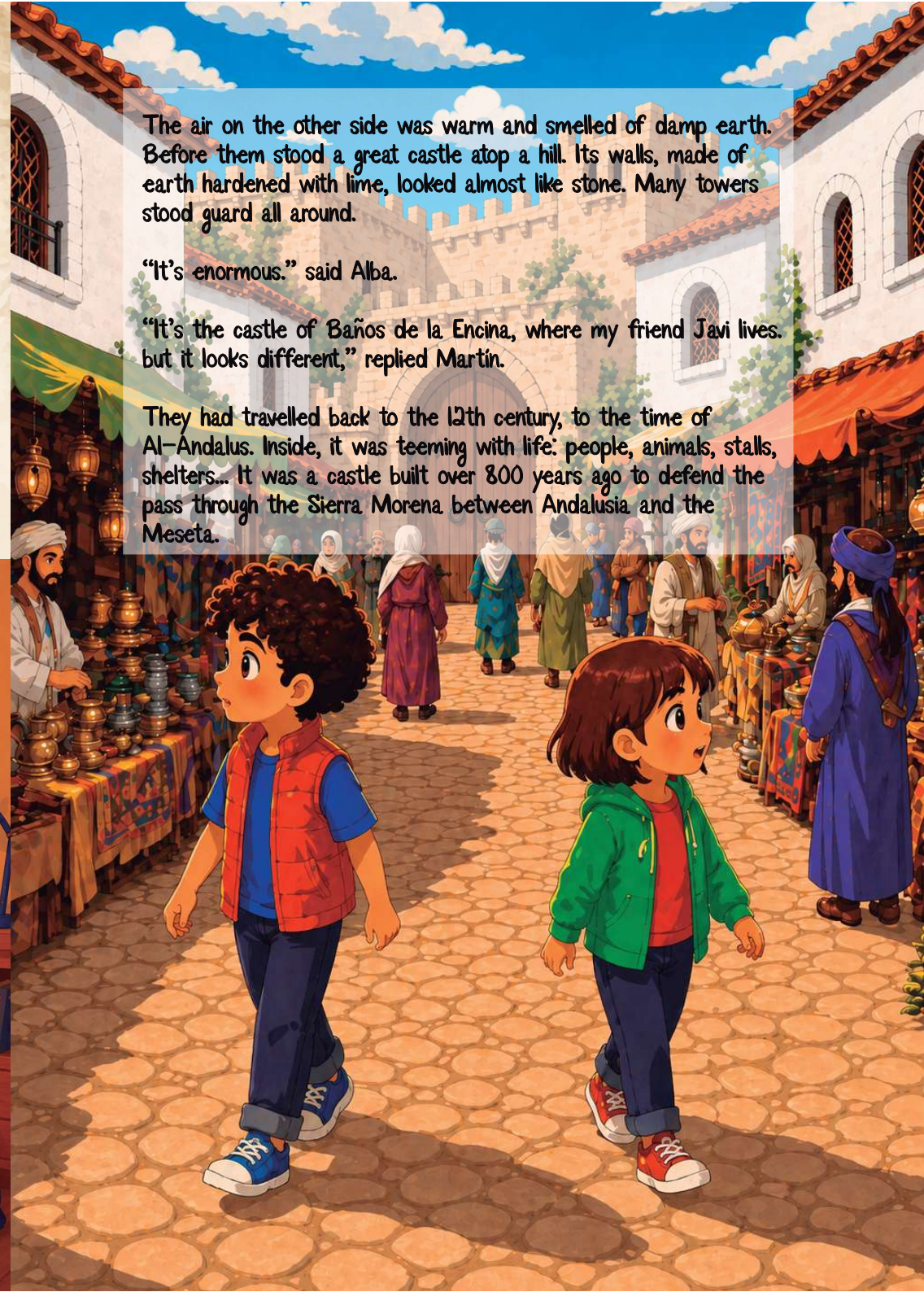


The air on the other side was warm and smelled of damp earth. Before them stood a great castle atop a hill. Its walls, made of earth hardened with lime, looked almost like stone. Many towers stood guard all around.

"It's enormous," said Alba.

"It's the castle of Baños de la Encina, where my friend Javi lives. but it looks different," replied Martin.

They had travelled back to the 12th century, to the time of Al-Andalus. Inside, it was teeming with life: people, animals, stalls, shelters... It was a castle built over 800 years ago to defend the pass through the Sierra Morena between Andalusia and the Meseta.



A wise man approached.

‘This place protects us. but it also teaches us.’

He showed them how some children were learning to look at the sky through astronomy.

‘The stars help you find your way,’ he explained. ‘If you know how to look, you’ll never be lost.’

Alba was fascinated.

But a shout from the ramparts broke the calm.

“You must leave,” said the wise man solemnly.

Without hesitation, they drew another door, inserted the key. and stepped through.



They found themselves in a field surrounded by mountains. The wind was whipping up dust. They could hear the sound of drums. In the distance, they could see hundreds of flags fluttering in the breeze. They had arrived in the year 1212.

'I think we're at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. This is where Muslims and Christians fought for control of these lands,' said Alba in a low voice.

Just then, a shepherd approached them.

'But young ones! What are you doing here?'

The shepherd led them along a narrow path, almost hidden amongst the rocks, as if few had ever seen it.

'Sometimes, knowing the terrain changes your fate,' he explained.



From the end of the road, two great armies could be seen preparing: hundreds of horsemen, archers, soldiers.

‘This battle will change our history,’ the shepherd told them.

The horses began to gallop and the ground began to shake.

“Alba, we have to go,” said Martin.

He crouched down, drew a door in the earth and, just before the clash began, they disappeared.



As they passed through the door, they found themselves in a spacious room that smelled of straw, leather and damp stone.

‘Where are we?’ asked Alba.

Martin looked around. On one side were saddles, buckets and sacks piled high. On the other, several horses were snorting and stamping their hooves on the ground.

‘It looks like a stable,’ he said.

Just then, a knight entered, wearing a white cloak and a dark cross on his chest.

‘Who are you? And how did you get here?’ he asked in a serious voice.

‘We were just exploring,’ said Martin.

The knight looked at them for a moment.

‘You are in Alcaudete Castle, a castle of the Order of Calatrava—a military order of monks and warriors dedicated to defending the Kingdom of Castile.’

Alba looked at him curiously.

‘Are you a Calatrava knight?’

‘That is correct,’ he replied. ‘There are very important fortresses in Jaén, and in many of them there are Calatrava knights guarding the border.’



Alba and Martin went out into the courtyard with him. From there they could see high walls, towers and soldiers hurrying to and fro.

‘Do you always have to be on the alert?’ asked Alba.

‘Always,’ said the knight. ‘That is our duty.’

Just then a soldier came running up.

“Sir, they’re calling you to the guardhouse. Afterwards, you must go to the Chapter House.”

The knight nodded immediately.

“I’ll be right there.”

Then he looked at Alba and Martin.

“You two stay here and don’t move.”

And he walked away at a brisk pace between the castle walls. Alba waited a moment.

“I think we should go too.”

Martin already had the pencil in his hand.

“Yes. Better.”

Martin drew a door on the stone wall. Alba turned the key and the two of them slipped through it in silence, before anyone could see them.





They arrived at a huge medieval fortress.

“Where are we?” asked Alba.

A young falconry apprentice explained:

“You’re at the Fortaleza de la Mota, in Alcalá la Real. They call it the ‘Key to Castile’ because of its strategic position on the border between Muslim Granada and Catholic Castile. Come, I’ll show you around.”

Together they walked along the walls and towers.

They passed through several gates, one after another, as if every step had been designed to stop the enemy.

‘Nothing here is left to chance,’ explained the young man. ‘Everything is built for defence.’

Martin stamped his foot on the ground.

‘And underneath?’ he asked.





The young man lowered his voice.

‘There are tunnels too. We’re keeping watch above. and below.’

Just then, a hawk landed on the young man’s arm.

‘Something’s approaching. You must go to a safer place.’

Alba smiled and said,

‘Don’t worry, we know how to get out of here.’

Martin drew a door and, a moment later, the two of them walked through the wall.



On the other side lay the fifteenth century. This time they were in the highest tower of a castle.

A cool breeze blew, and they could see mountains and forests...

'Isn't this where we were in the summer?' said Alba.

Martin looked around and recognised the place straight away.

'Of course! We're at Segura de la Sierra Castle.'

A knight wearing a red cross explained to them:

'Welcome! You are at the residence of the Grand Master of the Order of Santiago, which was once run by the family of the renowned poet and warrior Jorge Manrique. From here we control the roads and territories. But it wouldn't be possible without those: they are cisterns, where we store water. Without it, we couldn't hold out.'



Alba peered out curiously.

'Here, water is just as important as the walls,' said the knight.

'Dong! Dong!'

A bell began to ring rapidly.

Martin jumped.

The knight, looking worried, said to them:

'Quick! You must get to safety. Follow this corridor and you'll reach a shelter.'

Alba shook her head.

'Don't worry. We've got a better solution.'

She took out her pencil, drew a door, and Martin opened it straight away.

The two of them hurried through it.



This time, everything was different. They were in the Renaissance, in Sabiote.

‘Wow, how beautiful!’ exclaimed Martin.

Alba looked around, surprised.

“Are we in a castle or a palace?”

A noblewoman approached them and explained:

“Nowadays, castles reflect both power and beauty. Authority is no longer achieved by force of arms alone. The finest architects, such as Andrés de Vandelvira in this case, are held in as high esteem as the bravest soldiers.”



There were coats of arms, carved decorations, columns. and soft music playing in the background.

For a moment, everything seemed peaceful. Too peaceful.

Then a noise broke the calm. Voices. The clatter of hooves.

Alba frowned. Martín took a step back.

They both had a bad feeling about the situation.

Without waiting any longer, they drew another door and escaped.



They emerged beside some olive trees. The heat was intense. They could hear singing in French.

They had travelled back to 1808, in the midst of the War of Independence.

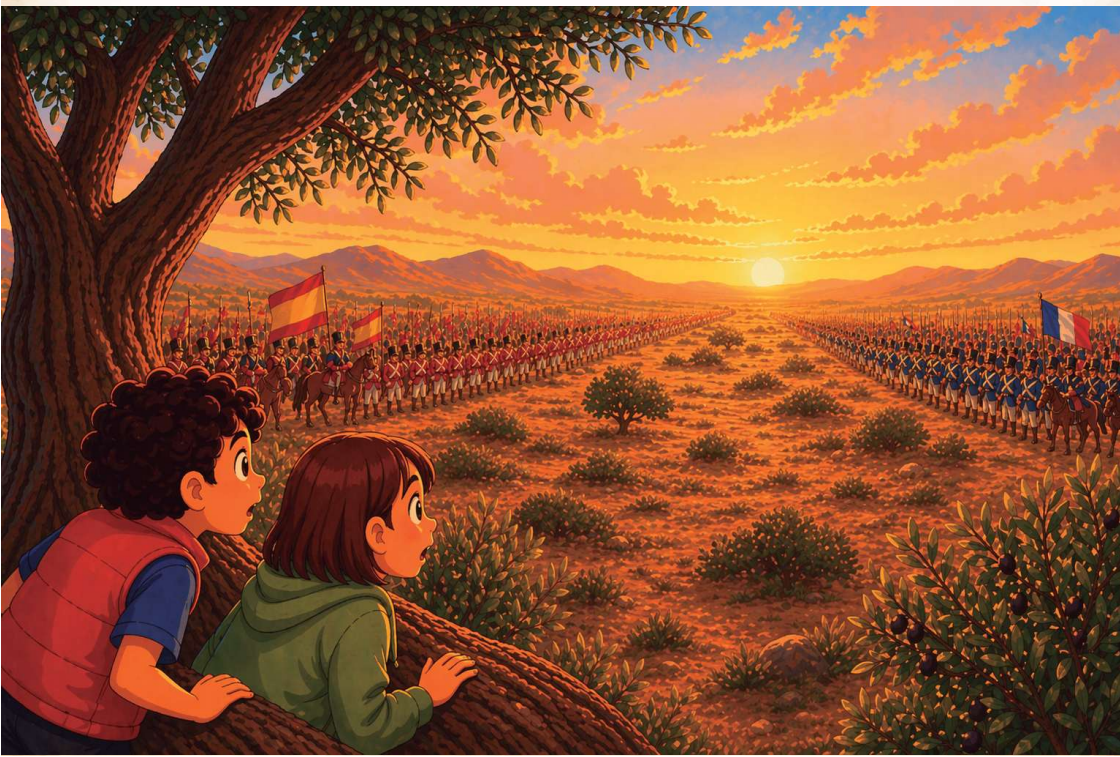
‘Look! You can see Spanish troops over there,’ said Martin, pointing in one direction.

‘And over there, a French army,’ replied Alba, pointing in the other direction.

Both of them’s eyes widened.

‘We’re at the Battle of Bailén!’ they exclaimed at the same time. ‘This is where Napoleon suffered his first major defeat at the hands of the Spanish!’

Cannon fire rang out, generals were giving orders, soldiers were shouting.



A general approached them.

‘Let’s go after them! And remember: putting up a fight could change the course of history.’

The ground was shaking and the dust was getting thicker and thicker.

Alba looked at Martin. Martin already had his pencil ready.

‘Let’s go!’ she said.

Martin drew the door on the trunk of an olive tree, Alba put the key in, and they jumped through to the other side.

Covered in dust, they appeared in their room.

Everything looked the same, calm. They went down to the living room to check. Everything was in order.

Just then, the front door opened and their father came in.

“I’m here!”

The two brothers ran to greet him, not even giving him time to come in.

They hugged him.

But straight away they began to see and hear something strange and, at the same time, familiar.





They peered out onto the street and saw knights in armour, women in period dresses and French soldiers walking amongst the crowd.

Martin was still holding the pencil in his hand and Alba was clutching the key.

They looked at each other.

And then they shouted in unison:

‘The doors! They’ve been left open!’

In that instant, they understood everything: history hadn’t been left behind; thanks to Castles and Battles of the Kingdom of Jaén, it had come back with them, and they could learn from it.



