

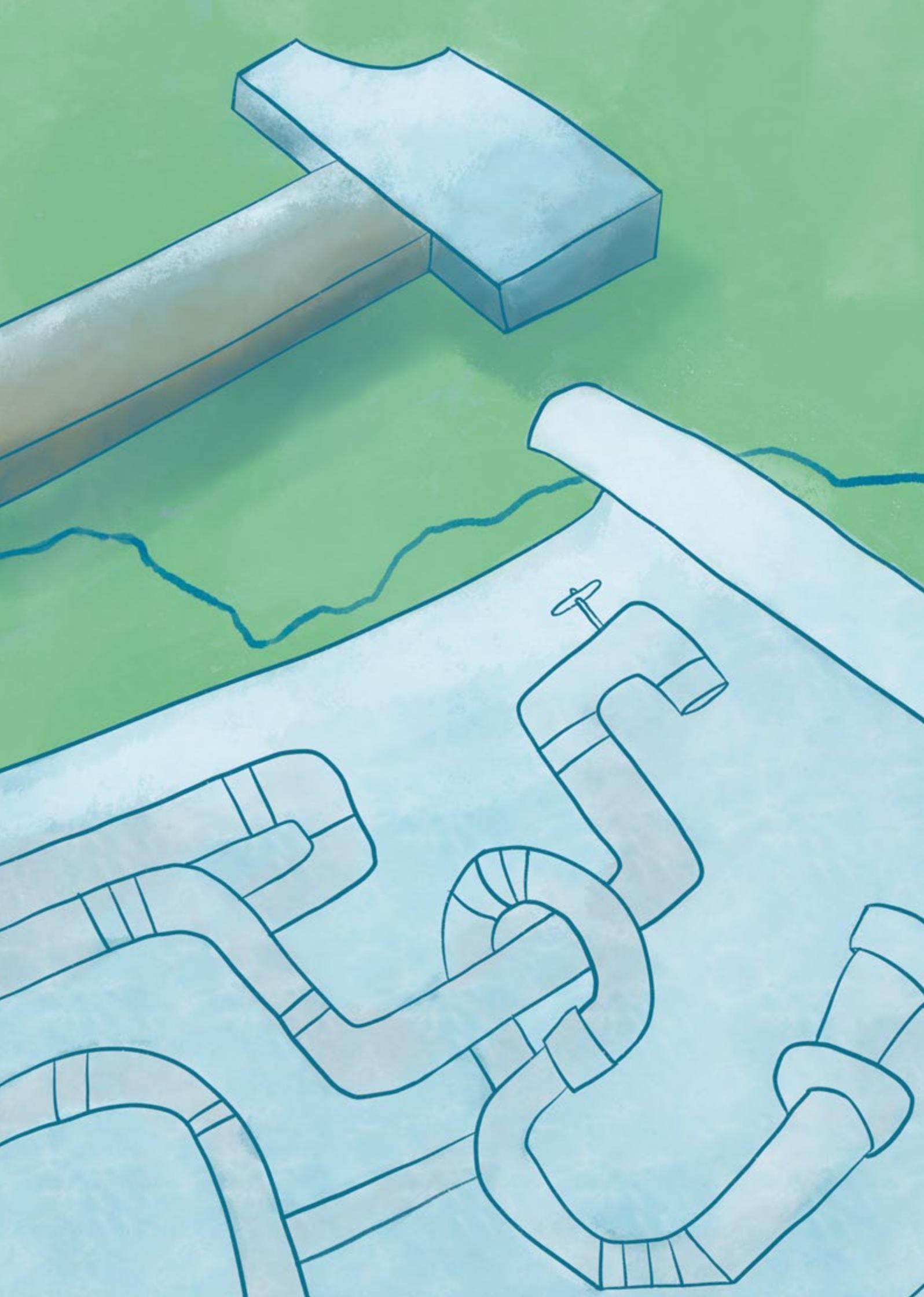
Maria Elena Bacilieri and Veronica Cestari

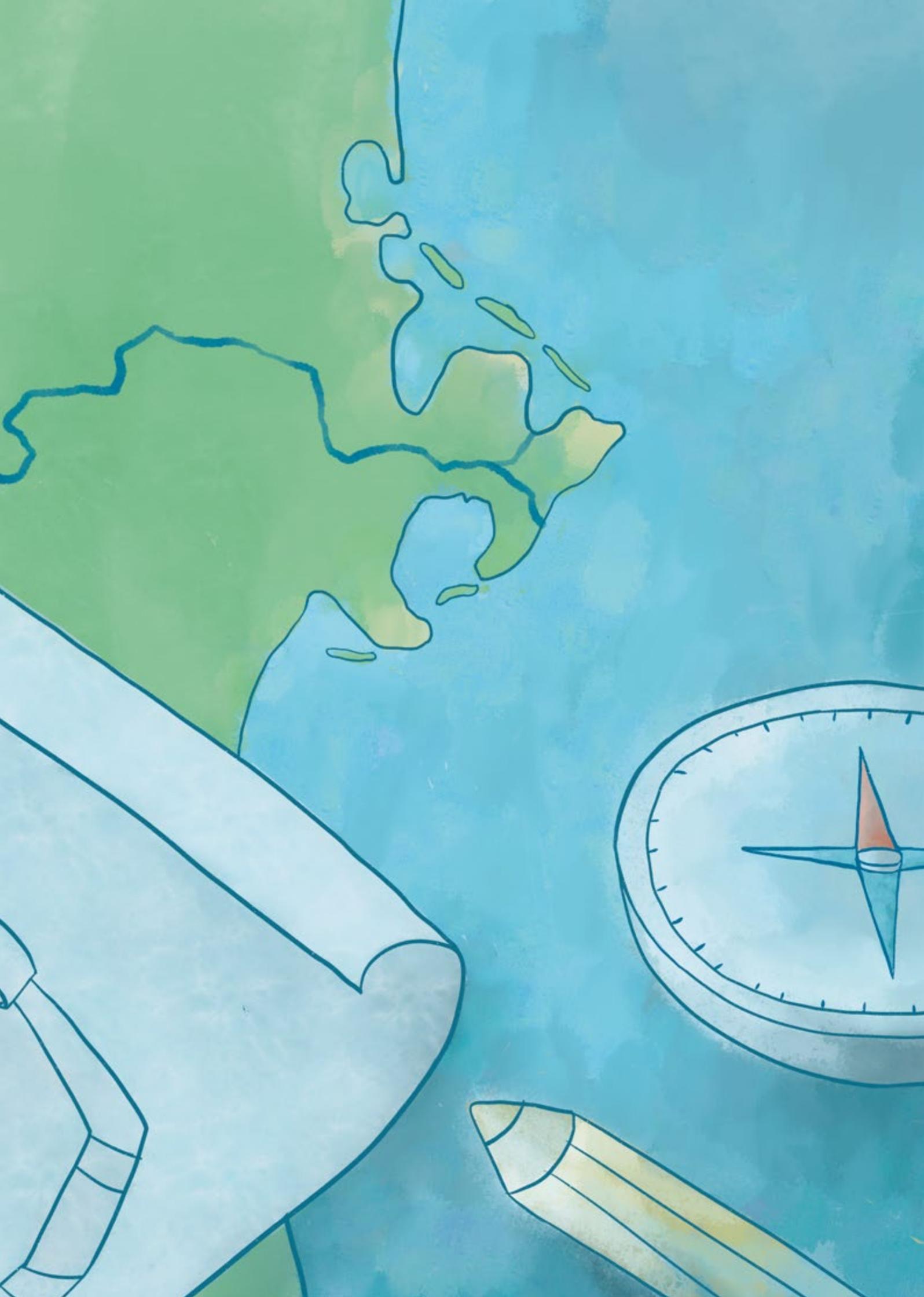
Translation by Tricia Fenech Fabri

THE ADVENTURES OF BONIFÈ

Consorzio di Bonifica Pianura di Ferrara







How aware are we of the natural risks affecting our territories? What measures can be implemented to prevent them or ensure adequate protection?

Our organization is engaged daily in water management: removing excess water where necessary and supplying it where it is needed for productive and environmental purposes. This work is carried out within a highly complex territory, lying largely below sea level and almost entirely below the level of the surrounding rivers.

Climate change is accelerating the need to reassess and strengthen the resilience of the entire system. However, given the scale of the challenges ahead, acting solely on infrastructure would not be sufficient. It is equally essential to enhance public awareness and empower communities to understand, prevent, and mitigate risks.

For this reason, we chose to begin with children and younger generations, through a story set in an imaginary yet familiar place. The aim is to explain, in a simple way, how hydraulic land management works and to highlight the importance of coordinated action in addressing natural challenges.

This publication is part of the communication strategy of the **STRENGTH Project, funded by the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme.**

The project is led by the University of Ferrara, with the Consorzio di Bonifica Pianura di Ferrara among its partners.

Its main objective is to develop a strategy to **strengthen capacity in addressing natural risks and climate change**, thereby reducing future losses and damage.

Note to the Reader

BoniFè is the little elephant and protagonist of this book. His name is a wordplay combining “Bonifica” (land reclamation) and “Ferrara,” a historic city in northern Italy where the Reclamation Consortium operates. The name therefore connects the character to both land reclamation activities and the territory it serves, symbolizing the shared commitment to protecting the land and managing water responsibly.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Tricia Fenech Fabri for her creativity, sensitivity, and professionalism. Her imagination and skill have been instrumental in bringing this story to life in another language, faithfully preserving its spirit and meaning. Thanks to her valuable contribution, BoniFè’s journey can now reach and inspire a wider audience.

The Adventures of BoniFè

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Translated by Tricia Fenech Fabri

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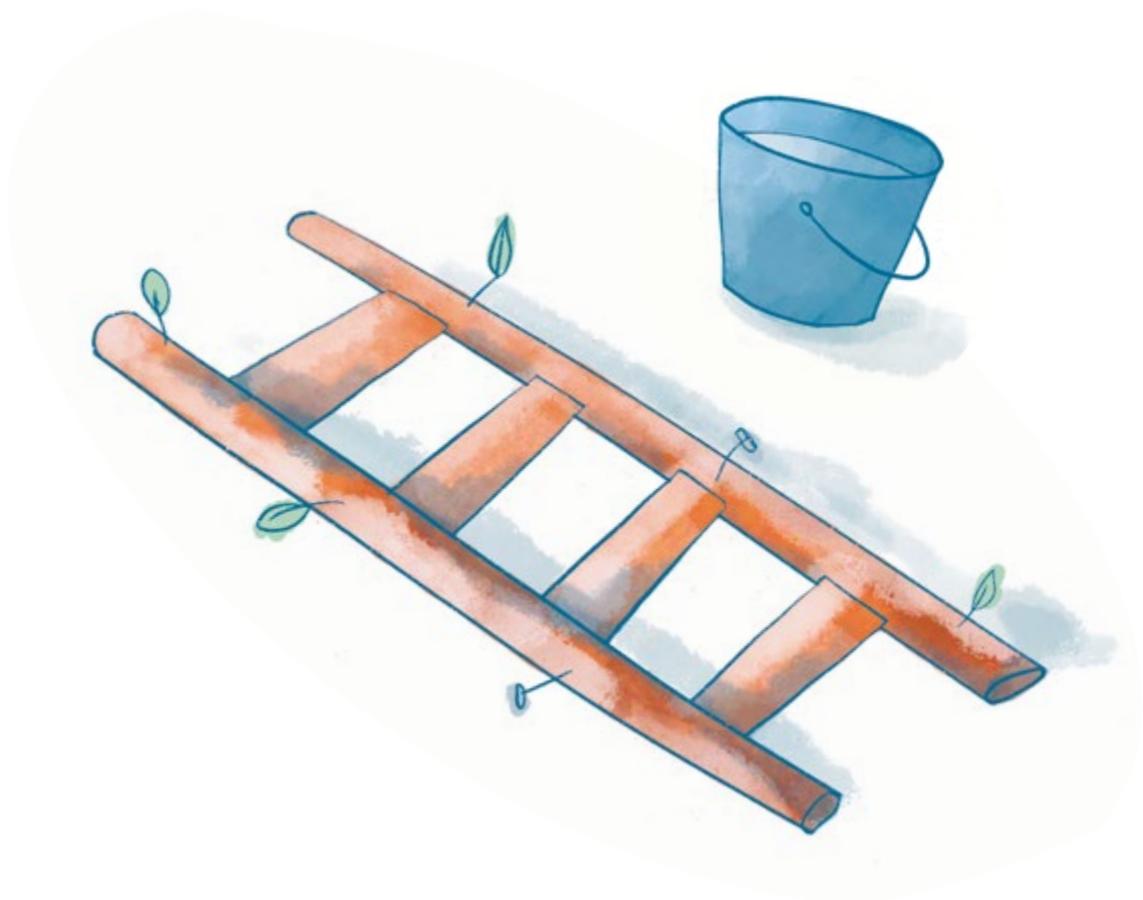
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Developed within the STRENGTH Project, funded by the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme.

Maria Elena Bacilieri and Veronica Cestari
Translation by Tricia Fenech Fabri

THE ADVENTURES OF BONIFÈ



Consorzio di Bonifica Pianura di Ferrara

On the riverbanks,
where the waters flow,
lived BoniFè,
a little elephant everyone ought to know.

Though small in size,
he was as strong as can be.
He was wise,
and lived wild and free.

On two sturdy feet
this blue elephant strides,
with two large ears
and a trunk that is
roomy and wide.

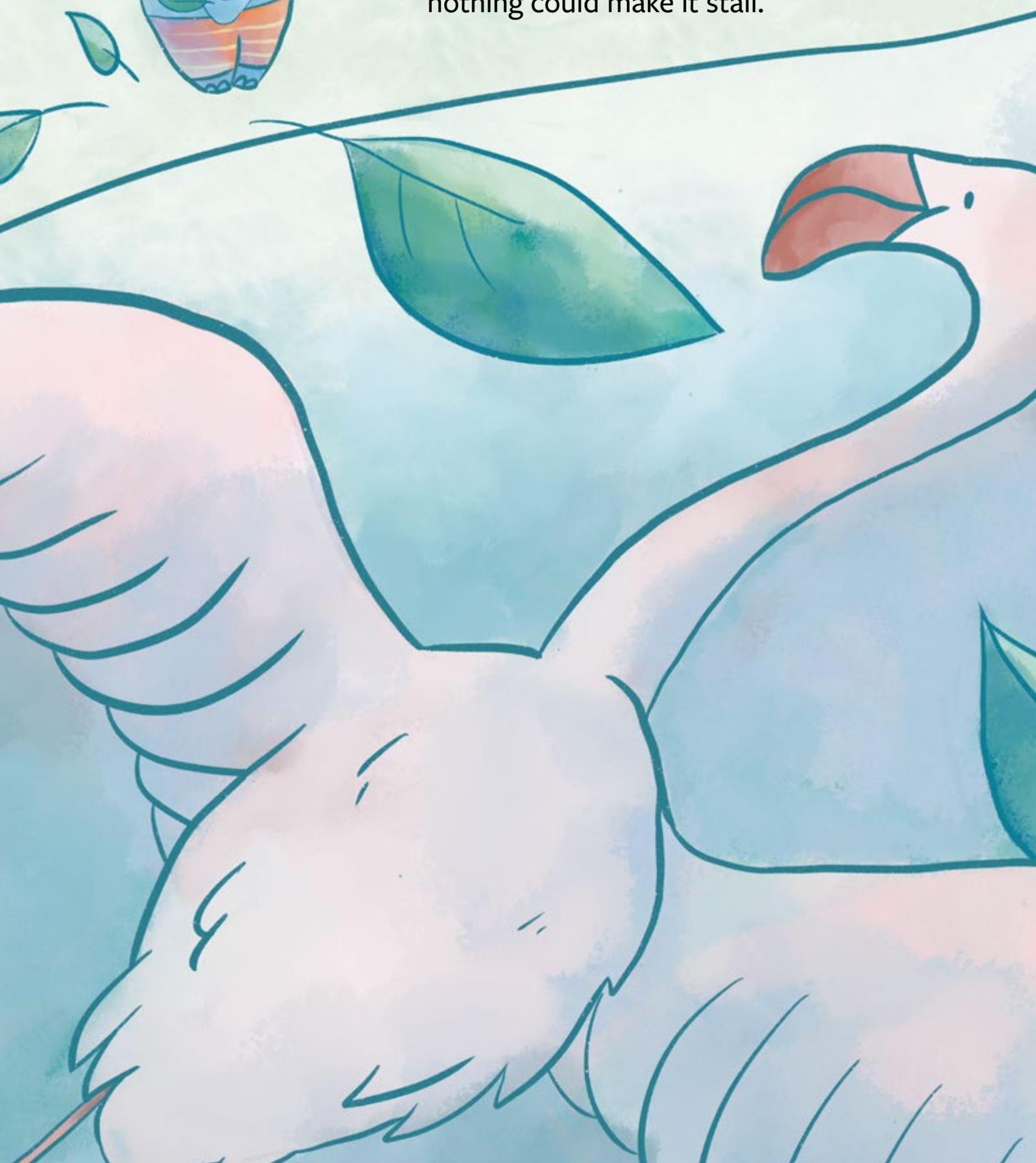






He worked hard all day long
and organised things that went wrong.

The river carried wonders great and small
when the waters were choppy,
nothing could make it stall.





A little further down was
the big open sea.
This always made BoniFè
work happily.

He was always looking
in search for a friend.
For alone he was working
from morning till end.

The lack of rain and the drought all around,
made dryness everywhere on the ground.
So, with his trunk he would draw up the water
from the river.

Like a fountain of happiness, sprayed water of silver.
Like ballerinas dancing and swaying,
these droplets of water, the land would be saving.

This little elephant never ever stopped,
through all the four seasons he never dropped.
Come Autumn and Winter, through Spring and
in Summer,
the sweet water he would give to the trees and
the flower.

The fruit and the vegetables would grow like no other.
The warmth of their colours like love of a mother.



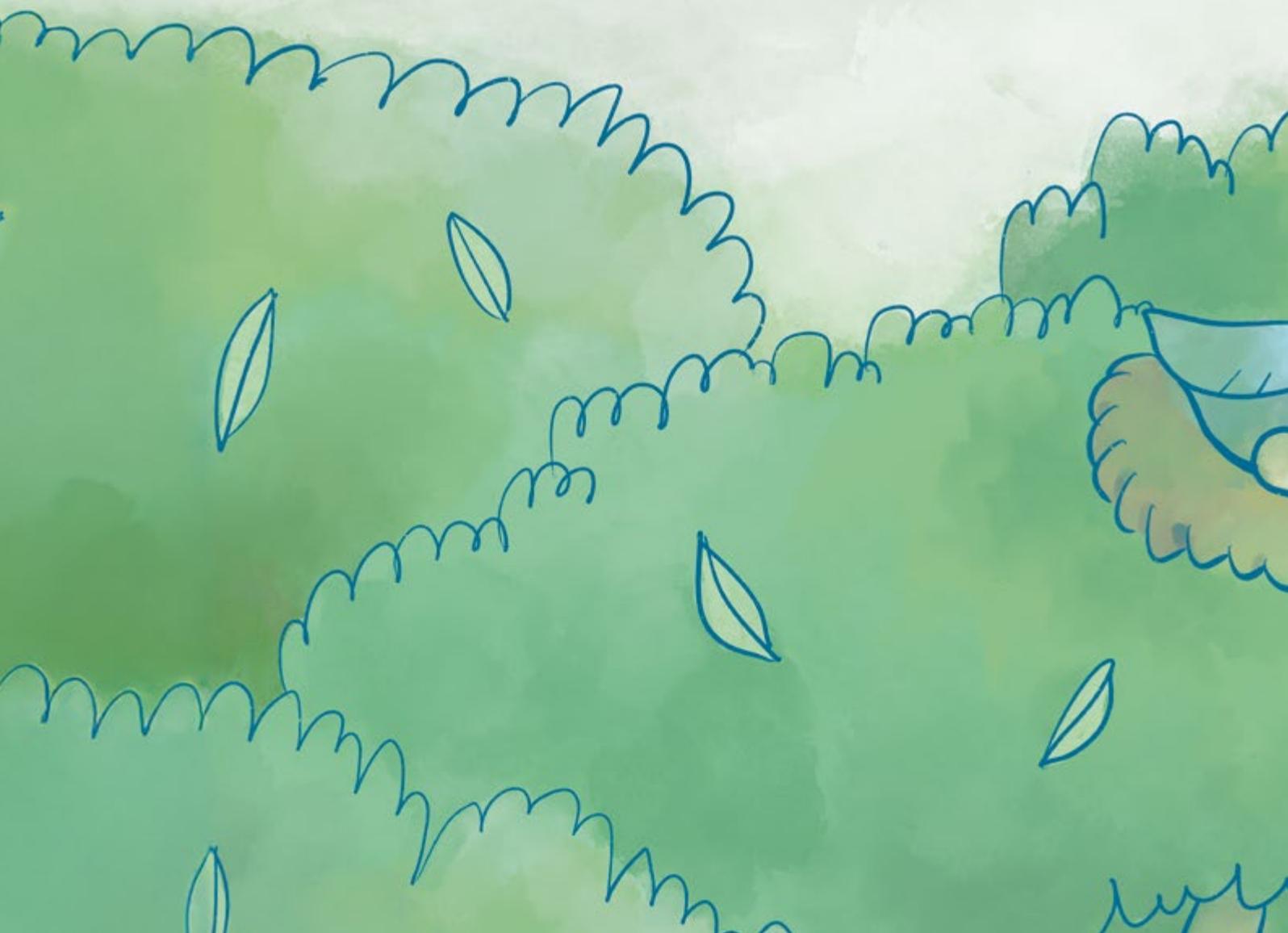


All around his abode lived a forest so vast,
so dense and so dark, you'd lose yourself fast.
But one boring morning,
he caught himself thinking;

*Are there just trees beyond what I see?
I've never roamed far, oh what a task it would be!*

The vines and the leaves crawl onto the banks,
but a thought came to him without any thanks.

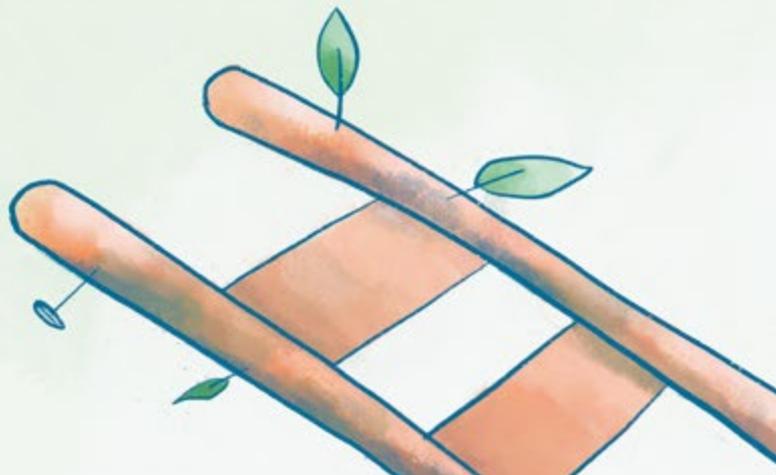
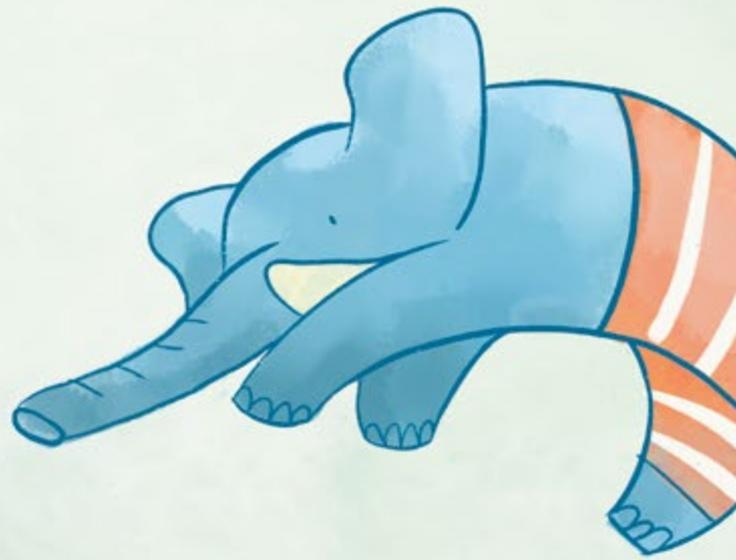
*I'll build myself a ladder so very, very high,
I'll be able to see beyond the trees in the sky.*





So he built himself a ladder
in a blink of an eye.
Headed straight to the top
with no fear and no sigh.
But when he was there
the wind picked up such force,
that the ladder did sway and push him off his course.

Down with a...





“BANG!”

like a sack of potatoes.

Poor little elephant, full of anger.
I'm not only bored now, I'm also dirty.
To make things worse I saw nothing up there.
At least the ladder is still intact,
even if I fell just like that.

That's it, I've decided.
It's coming with me.
He stood up with glee
and started to head for the trees.

Full of curiosity and determination of finding things out,
of finding a friend beyond his own doubt.
He started to bend the branches with care,
careful to not break one, it wouldn't be fair.

After lots and lots of walking around,
a faint distant echo came out of the ground;

“HAHAHAHAHA!”



BoniFè opened his ears even better
to hear once again the song of the matter.
It made him feel good.
It made him have hope.

**“HEHEHEHEHE!
HAHAHAHAHA!”**

He knew he was close.
He hurried along and bent the last branch and then...

“WOWIDANILIONY!”

There truly was something beyond my dear banks!

A joyful little village, that’s what he did see.
With houses and people living happily.

What a discovery! Oh what a joy!

BONILANDIA

Oh what a sight!
That name, it was just right.
For it seemed like an island of happiness and glee
where boredom transferred itself so mightily.





As soon as his face came into the light
with a big smile a little girl came in sight.

*“Hi, my name is Marina, and what is yours?
Where do you come from?
I’ve never seen you down here”.*

*“My name is BoniFè,
I come from far beyond the forest over there”.*

OH ME O MY!

*“No-one has ever come from the trees,
Come tell us, we’d love to know.
Lift up your ladder, let everyone see.
Make way, make way, look what’s following me”.*



She grabbed his paw, and with no delay,
they ran together towards her house, not to play...

*“Daddy, Daddy!
Let’s celebrate!
Look come and see,
he comes from the forest,
oh daddy, please let it be”.*

*“How I wish we could feast, dear daughter of mine,
but the river is wide and the last time it grew,
it left little, if anything at all”.*

*How unlucky these people, thought BoniFè,
So many mouths to feed and not enough food,
with hardly any good crops for bringing good mood.*



All of a sudden,
while they were chatting away,
the pale blue skies turned heavy and grey.

Just like that, the rain came down,
buckets and buckets, it fell to the ground.
The water rose higher, it rose with no sound.
So fast and so quick, panic was all around.

“Quickly, Marina!” her father cried out,
“To the high ground, run, don’t wait about!”.
A little small hill, just a gentle mound,
Yet there they felt safe, secure and sound.





The water now reached the streets and the houses.
But Bonifè stood there, steady and still.
He knew he could help, he knew that he will.
He wanted to show them there must be a way,
before the rain could sweep everything away.
For the waters could drown all there was in sight
and turn a bright day into sorrow and fright.

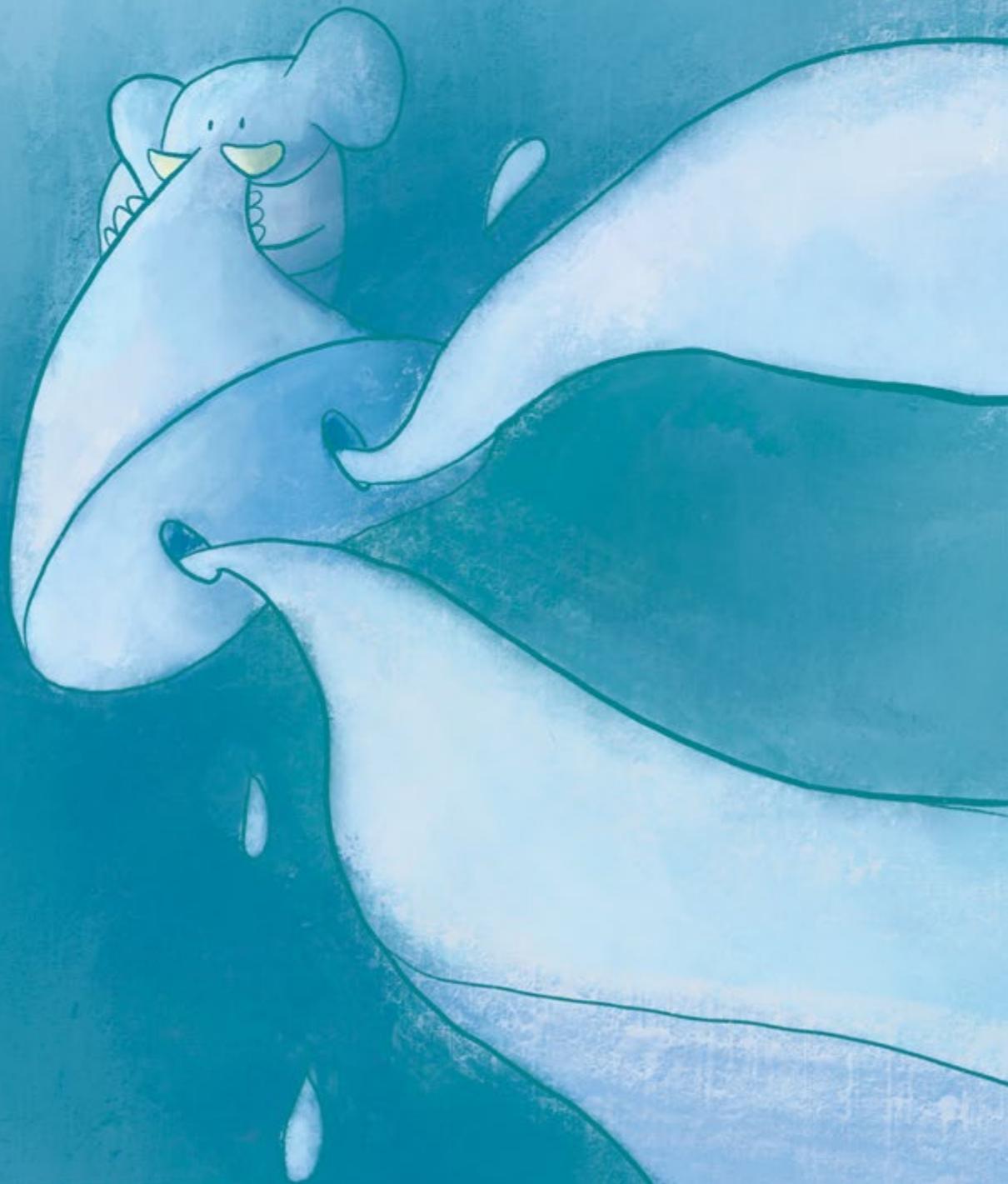
So, with his big trunk he drained in the rain,
again and again and again and again.

Then he asked himself:

Now, what shall I do with all of this water?



The answer was simple, as plain as could be.
The water needs to go down to the sea.
So, into the river further down he did push,
all of the rain he had swallowed up in a rush.





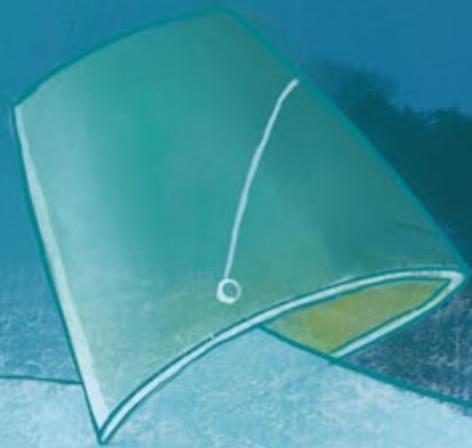


When the people saw this, they knew what to do:

*Let's gather,
Let's dig*

*Refill and again
let's work all together
let's never, ever,*

EVER STOP!



Everyone was tired, everyone had worked hard.
Finally the waters had stopped going up.



Little by little, the dark clouds drifted away,
and blue skies returned in a soft, shining display.
The waters grew calm, no longer a fright,
as sunshine wrapped all in a golden light.

A cheer rose as one, filling the air.
The villagers were grateful for BoniFè's care.

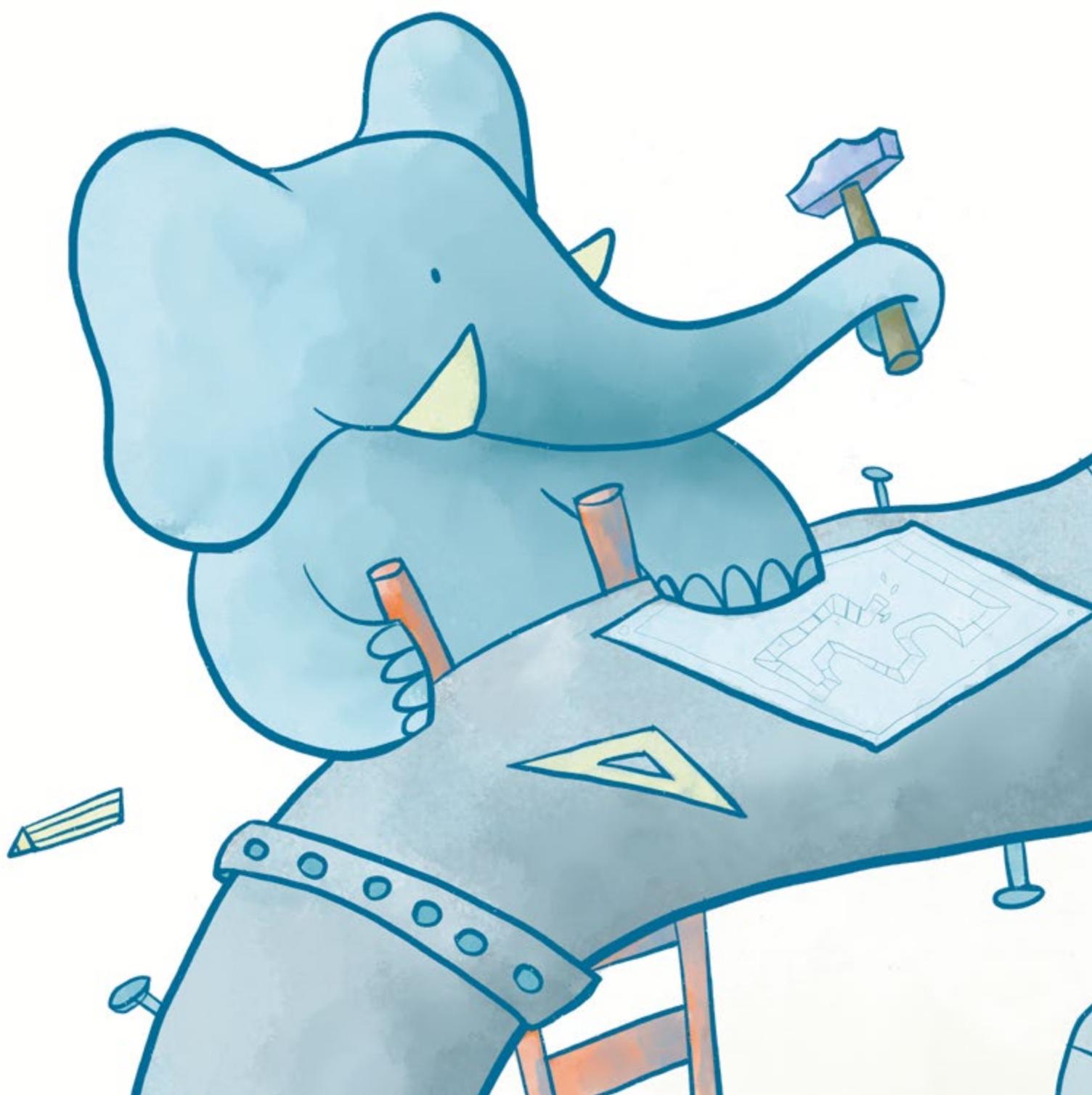
For with his efforts and helping his friends,
the day was saved and a lesson was learned.

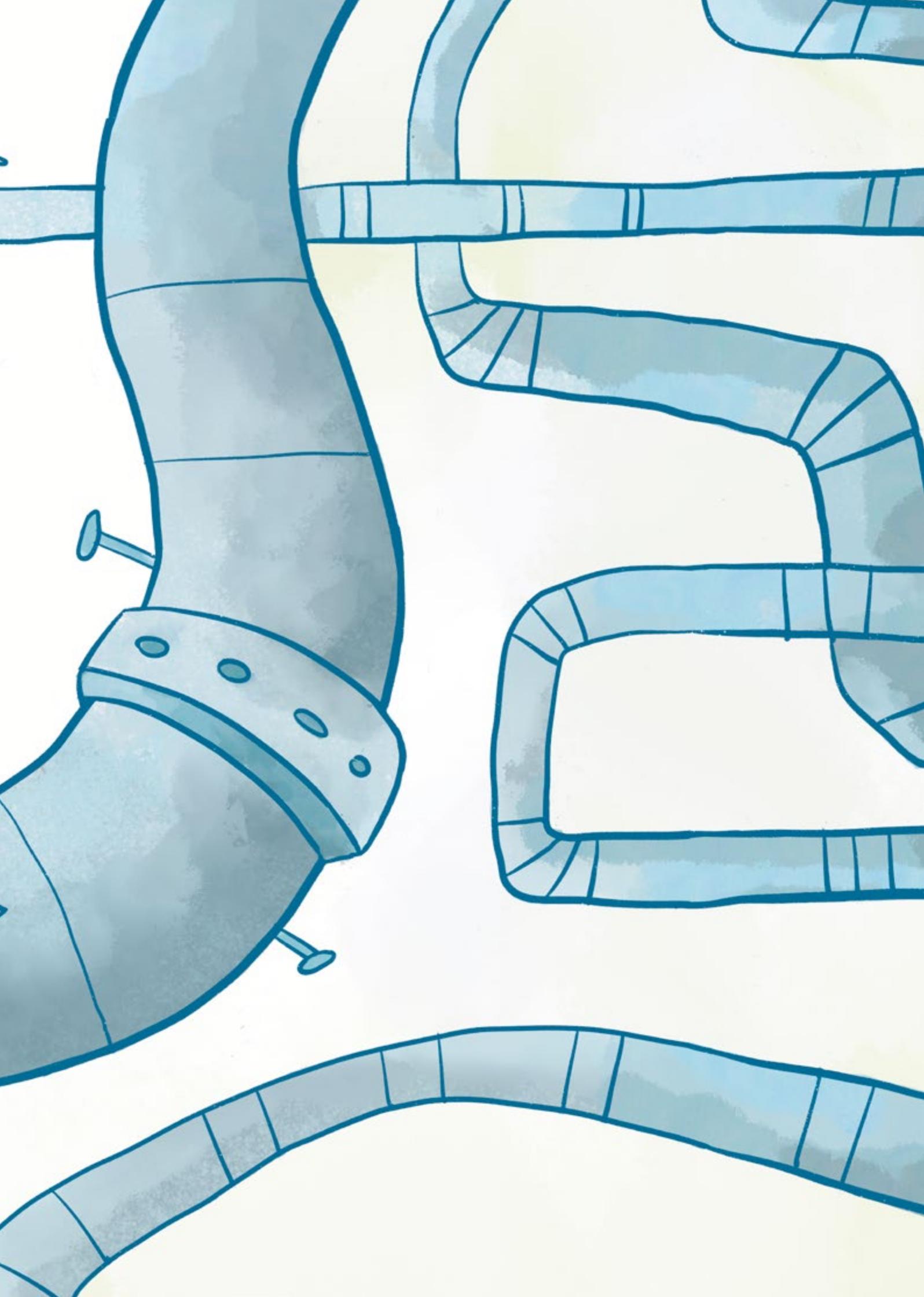




A big pump we must build,
Marina's dad called to the crowd,
to guide the floodwaters away from our crops.

*BoniFè, please be our scout.
Show us the way, lead us through,
as only you know what to do.*

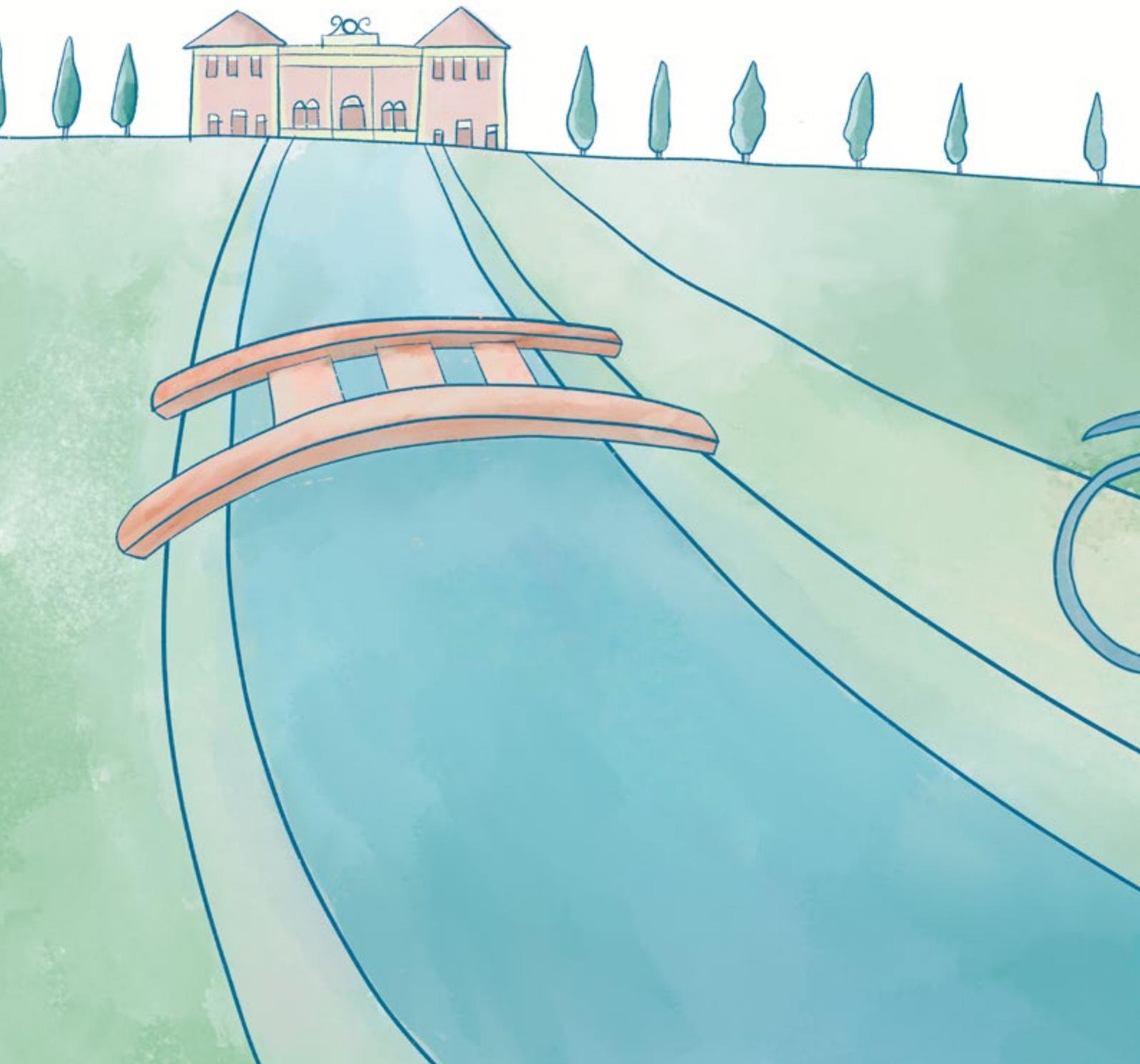




Yes, they built a large water pump and that's true,
to defend the land and the village too.

“IDROVORA”

they named such a wonder.



So the water no longer floods all the land and yonder.
Now the fields on the plains grew fertile and rich,
fresh fruit and beautiful vegetables for every dish.

Finally, the village could celebrate,
with the sweetest of strawberries one could ever dedicate.





*“The real voyage of discovery consists
not in seeking new landscapes,
but in having new eyes.”*

Marcel Proust

We would like to thank **Barbara Leonardi** (*Secretarial and dissemination office*) for her precious collaboration in drafting the text in her free time, for her professionalism and her patience but most of all for her inner child.

We extend our gratitude to **Martina Berneschi** (*Program and communications operations unit*) for following, step after step, the realisation of this project. Her belief in the project from start to finish was an encouragement all along.

Finally, I'd like to thank **Ginevra**, my daughter, the muse, inspiration and advocate of the adventures of BoniFè.

Maria Elena Bacilieri



*“On the riverbanks, where the waters flow,
Lived BoniFè, a little elephant everyone ought to know.”*

A curious and intelligent little elephant loves to help find solutions for the humans that live in an area near the river and sea. With his strong trunk he gathers water from the river and sprays it around the dry land so that fruit and vegetables can grow. What happens when too much rain falls? BoniFè has a brilliant idea, and understands how he can help: he vacuums up the water from the fields and village and places it into the river as the river will get to the sea.

BoniFè has been the Consortium’s mascot for various years now and helps in educational paths aimed for schools in the Ferrara Plains. Today, we get to know his story which is also our own.

Maria Elena Bacilieri is 33 years old, comes from Portomaggiore (Ferrara, Italy) and has been working for the Consortium for the Reclamation of the Ferrara Plains since 2024. When her 3 year old daughter asked her: *“Mamma, where do you work?”* she came up with this tale to tell her at bedtime. Like this she could explain in simple terms, the difficult concept of the water systems and their risks and safety functions for this area.

Veronica Cestari is 37 years old and she is originally from Copparo (Ferrara, Italy). She frequented the Accademia de Belle Arti in Urbino where she graduated in 2012 in Education and Art Communication. She has a Master in Curatorship and Art Critique from Accademia Treccani as well as a course in Management for Art Galleries from Node in Berlin. Today she works as a graphic designer and in digital marketing. She has never lost her love for illustration especially children’s illustration.

