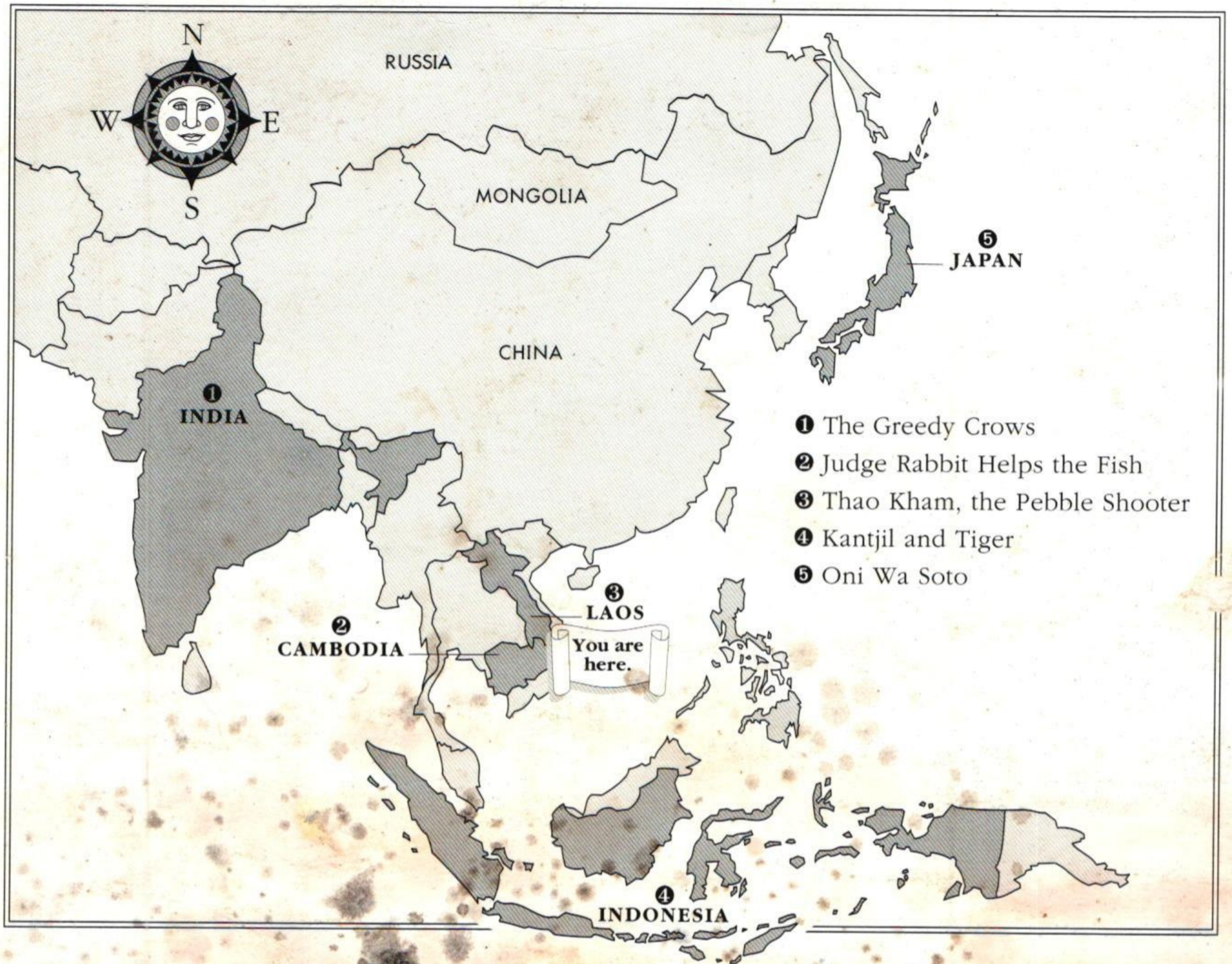




Thao Kham, the Pebble Shooter

**A tale from Laos retold by Cathy Spagnoli
Illustrations by Chi Chung**

Tall Tales and Tricksters from Asia



Tall Tales and Tricksters from Asia

Thao Kham, the Pebble Shooter

A tale from Laos retold by Cathy Spagnoli

©1995 Text by Cathy Spagnoli

Illustrations by Chi Chung

©1995 Wright Group Publishing, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without written authorization from The Wright Group permissions department.

The Wright Group
19201 120th Avenue NE
Bothell, WA 98011-9512

Printed in Canada

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 0-7802-1480-3

ISBN: 0-7802-1481-1 (6-pack)

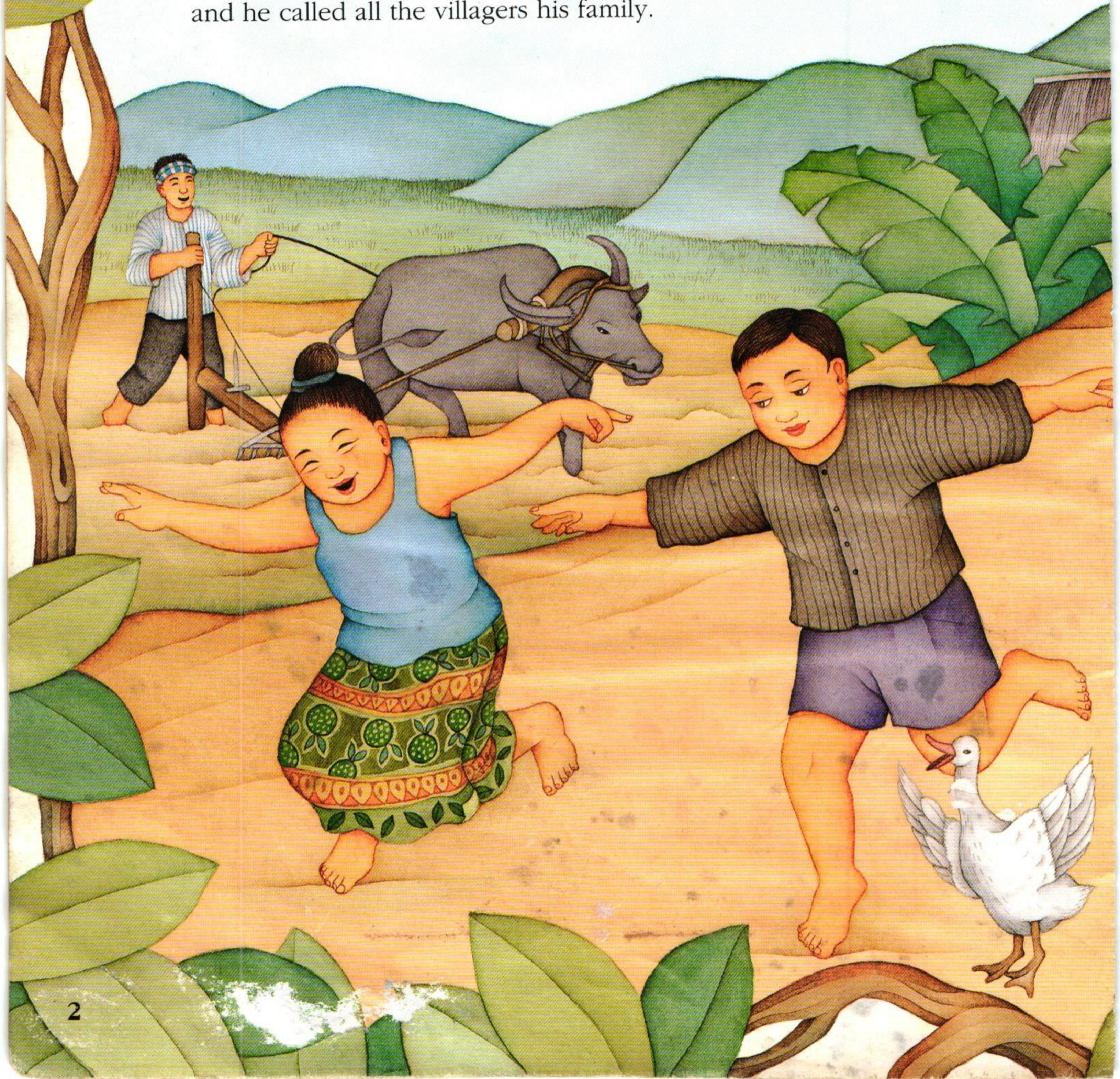
Thao Kham, the Pebble Shooter



**A tale from Laos retold by Cathy Spagnoli
Illustrations by Chi Chung**

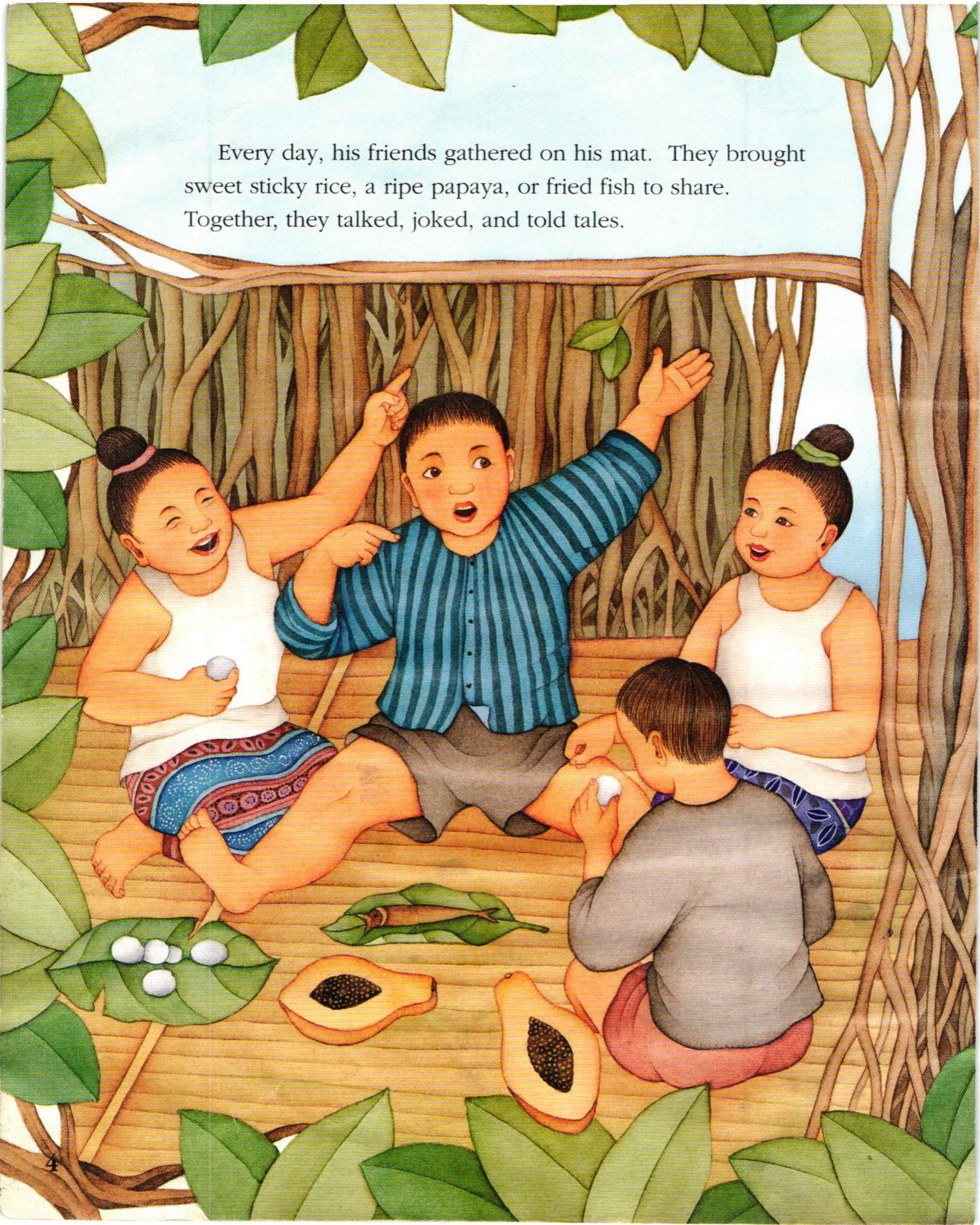
Long ago, in a peaceful Lao village surrounded by rice fields, young Thao Kham once lived. His parents had died years ago, so the boy stayed alone under a grand banyan tree. His legs had once been badly hurt, so he could never walk, would never run.

But Thao Kham was rarely sad or lonely. He loved to laugh, and he called all the villagers his family.



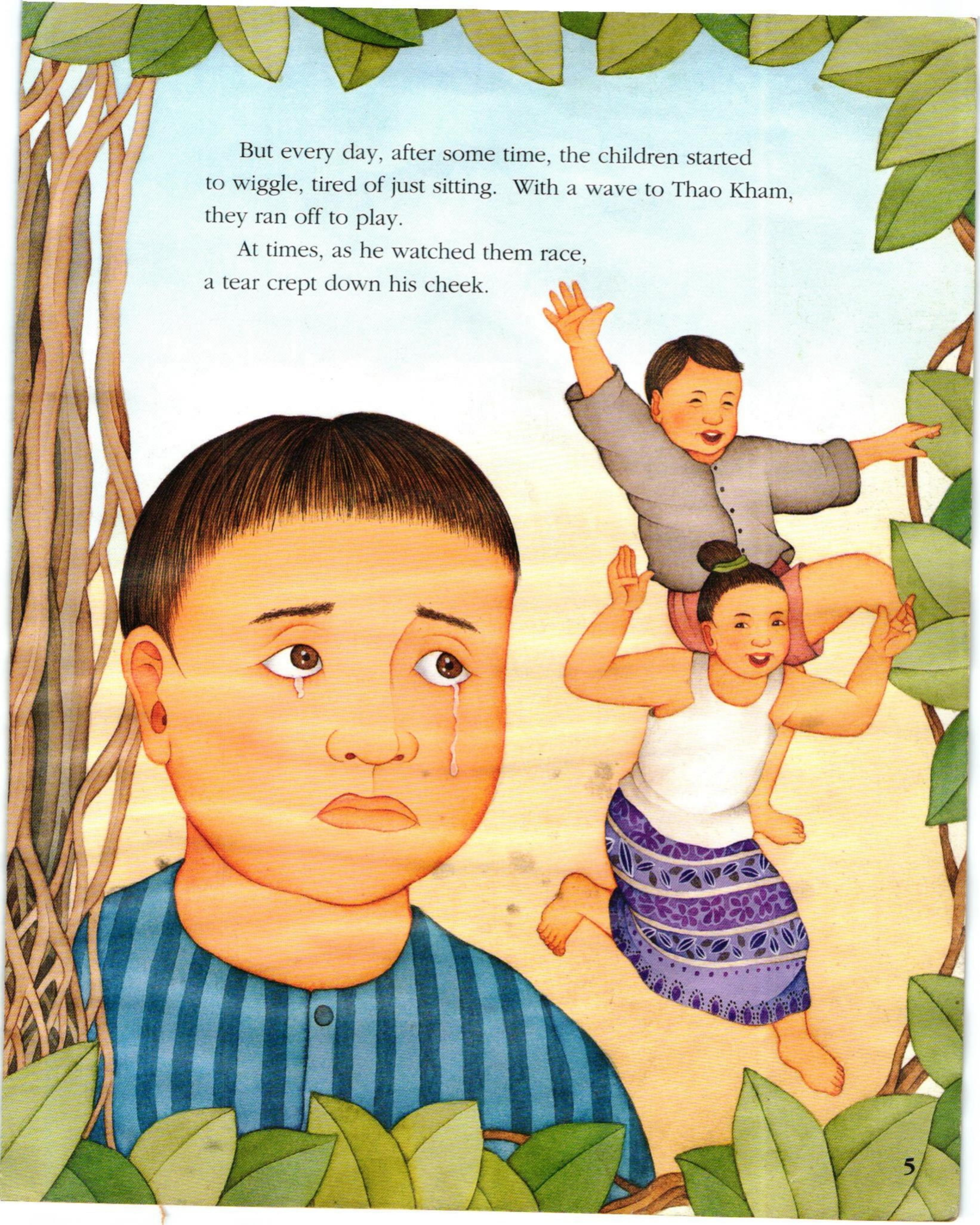


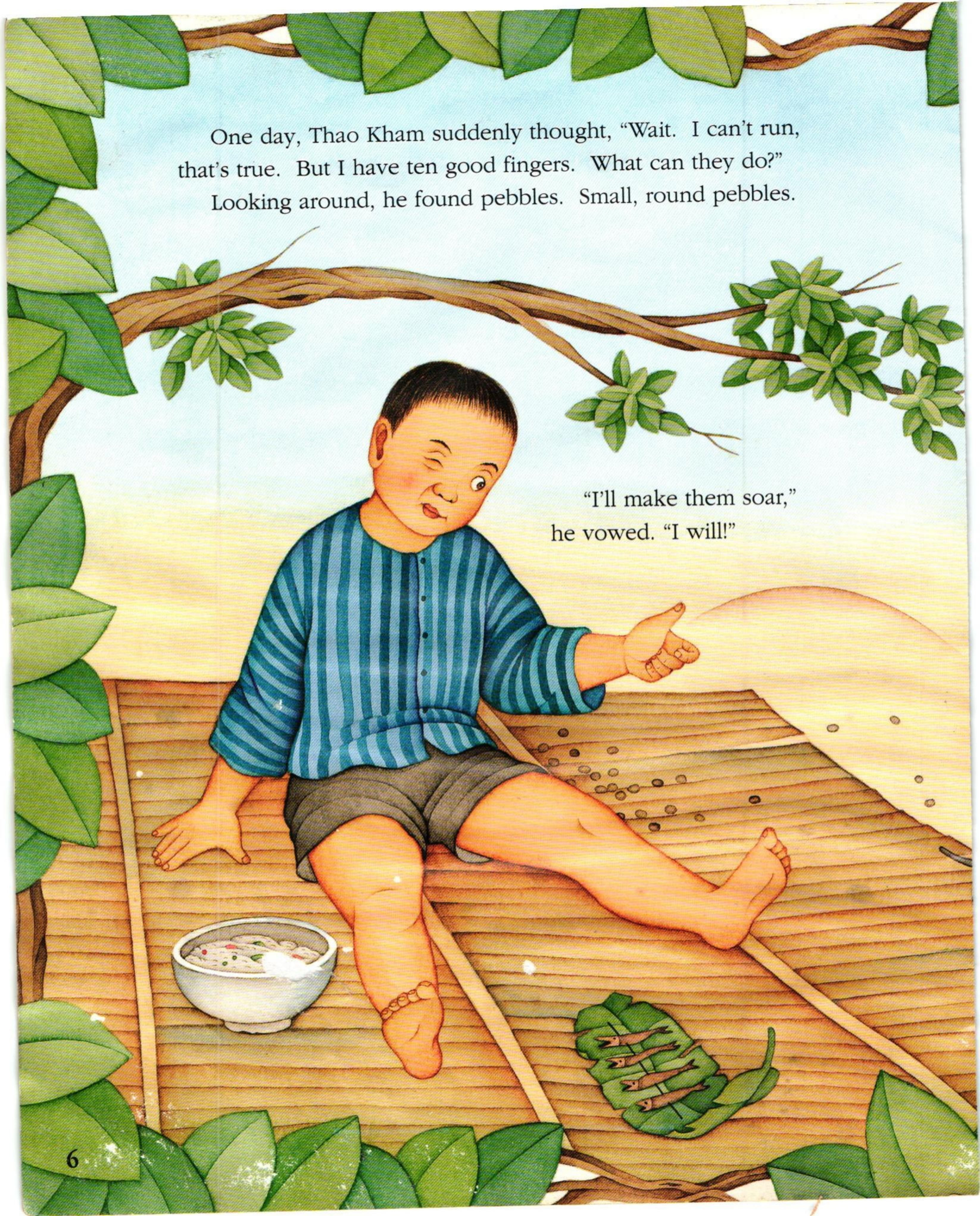
Every day, his friends gathered on his mat. They brought sweet sticky rice, a ripe papaya, or fried fish to share. Together, they talked, joked, and told tales.



But every day, after some time, the children started to wiggle, tired of just sitting. With a wave to Thao Kham, they ran off to play.

At times, as he watched them race, a tear crept down his cheek.



A young boy with a thoughtful expression sits on a wooden platform under a large tree. He is wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt and dark shorts. He is barefoot. To his left is a white bowl of noodles. In front of him on the platform is a green tray with several small fish. The background shows a light blue sky and the green leaves of the tree.

One day, Thao Kham suddenly thought, "Wait. I can't run, that's true. But I have ten good fingers. What can they do?" Looking around, he found pebbles. Small, round pebbles.

"I'll make them soar,"
he vowed. "I will!"

Eagerly, he picked up a pebble and flicked it...
but it just dribbled along, *baka baka baka*.

Yet he didn't mind. Another pebble soon followed:

baaa kaaa

baaa kaaa

baaa kaaa.

It flew a bit better. Thao Kham smiled and kept on practicing,
day...after day...after day.

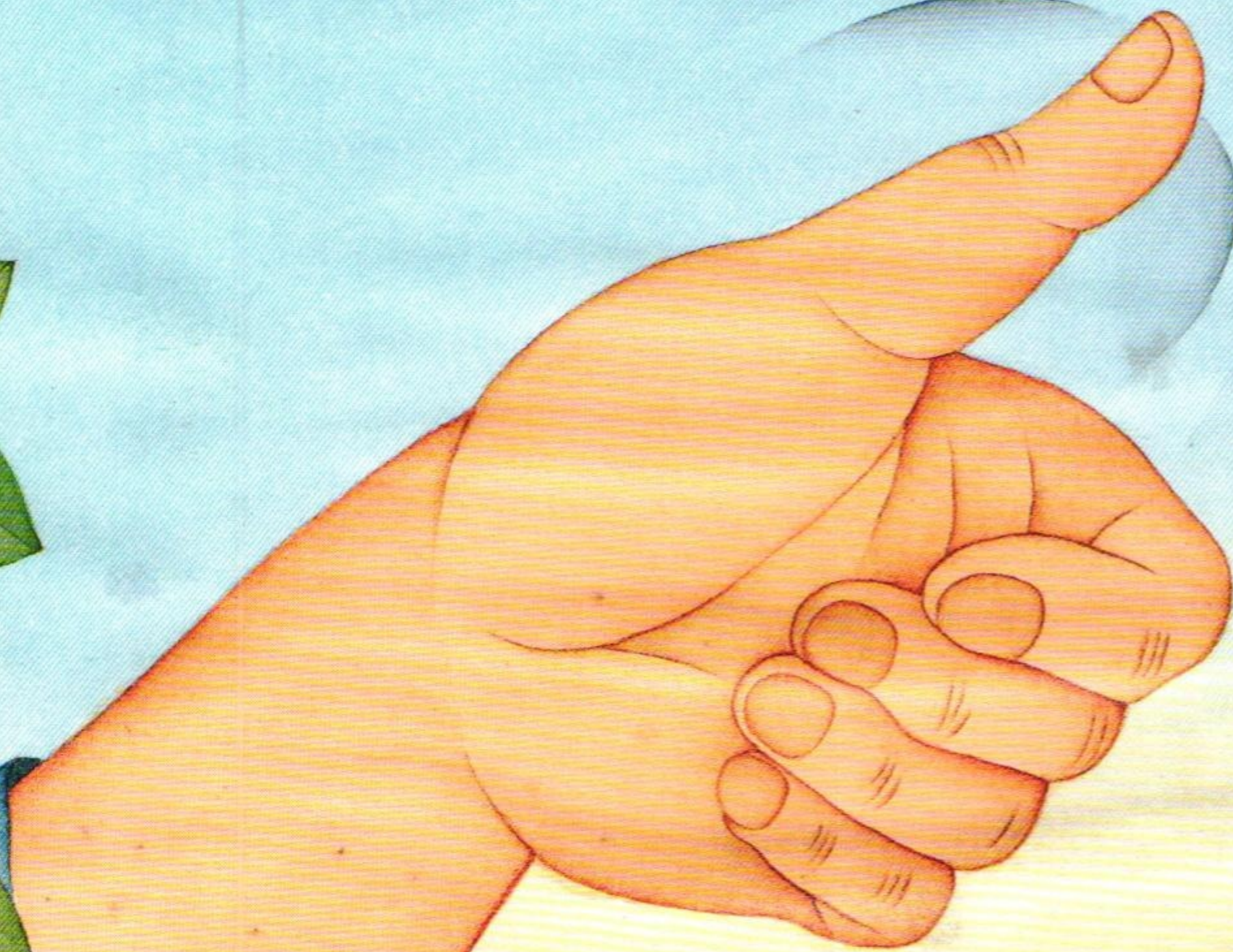


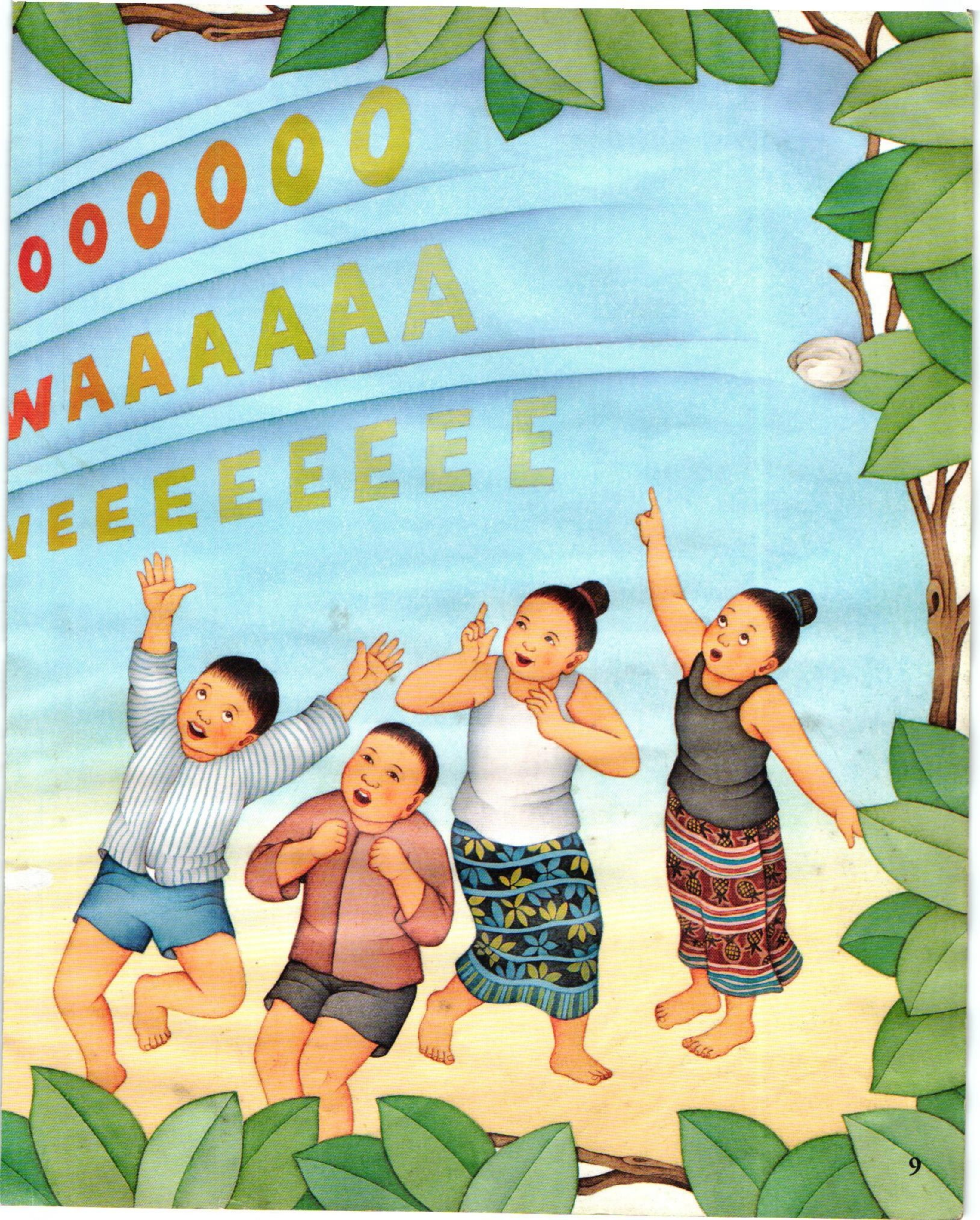
Finally, his fingers were strong and sure. His pebbles
raced great distances. All the children stopped running
to stare instead, as his pebbles whizzed through the air:

WOOOOOO!

WAAAAAA!

WEEEEEEEE!

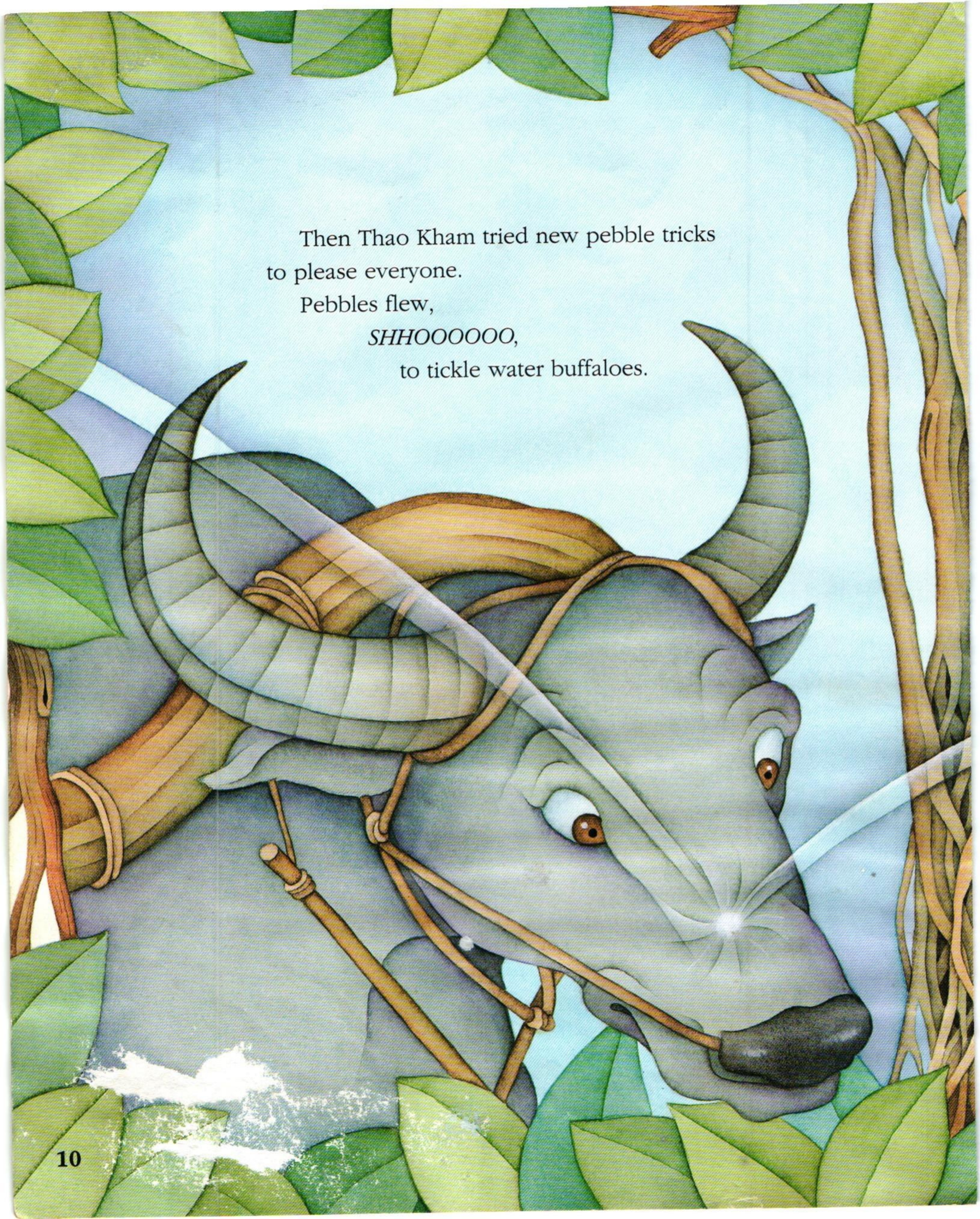




O O O O O

A A A A A A A

E E E E E E E E E

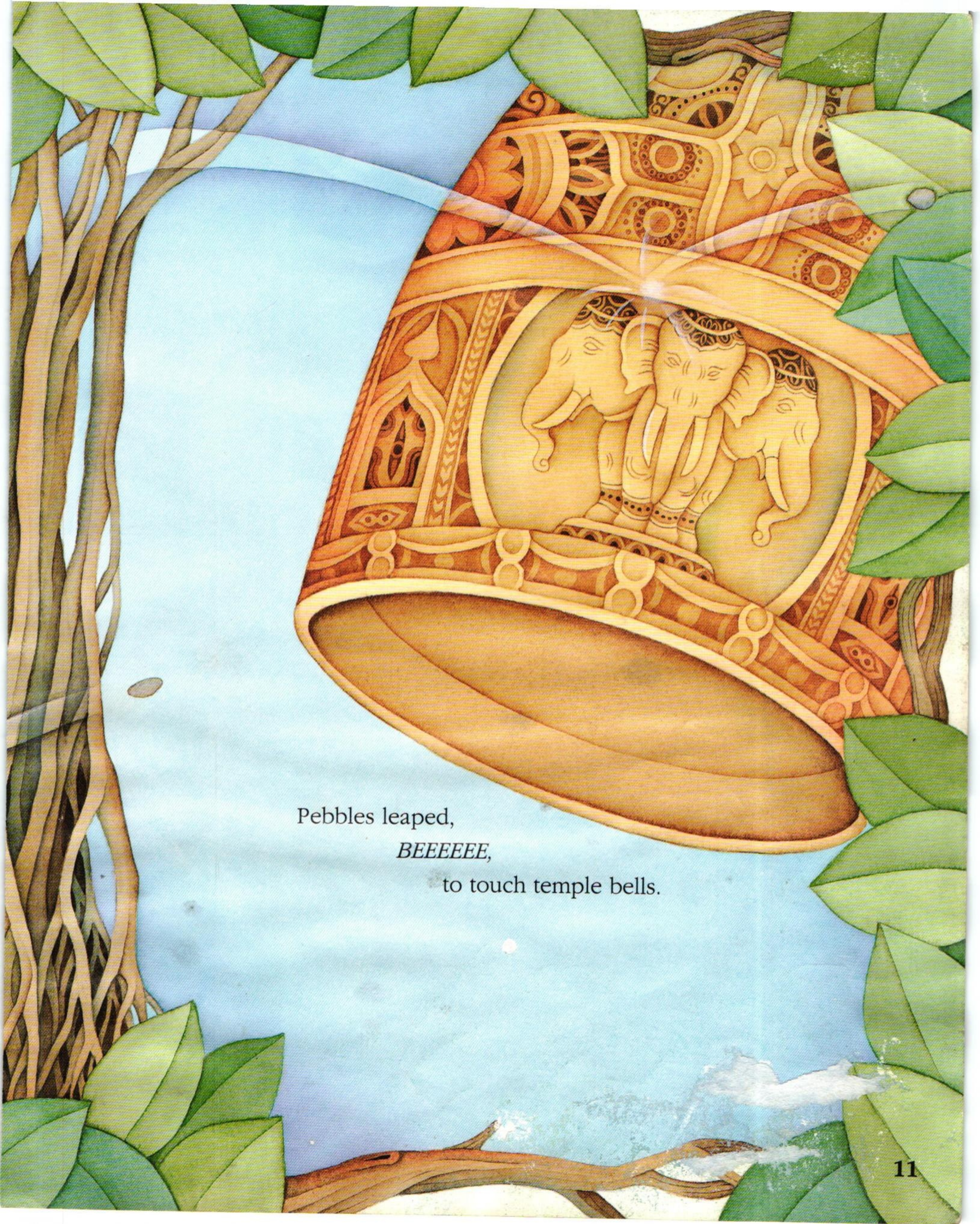
A detailed illustration of a grey water buffalo with large, curved horns, wearing a wooden collar and a harness. The buffalo is looking towards the right with a surprised expression. The background is a light blue sky with green leaves and tree trunks framing the scene.

Then Thao Kham tried new pebble tricks
to please everyone.

Pebbles flew,

SHHOOOOOO,

to tickle water buffaloes.



Pebbles leaped,
BEEEEEE,
to touch temple bells.

Then one hot morning, the leaves of an ancient tree gave shade to the children—and an idea to Thao Kham.

“Look up,” he cried, “and I’ll shoot pictures for you.”

Pebbles quickly bit through a large leaf,

PA, PA, PA, PA!

Each shot made a dot, a window for the sun.

All the small holes then formed lines of light.

Suddenly a green tiger ROARED to life.

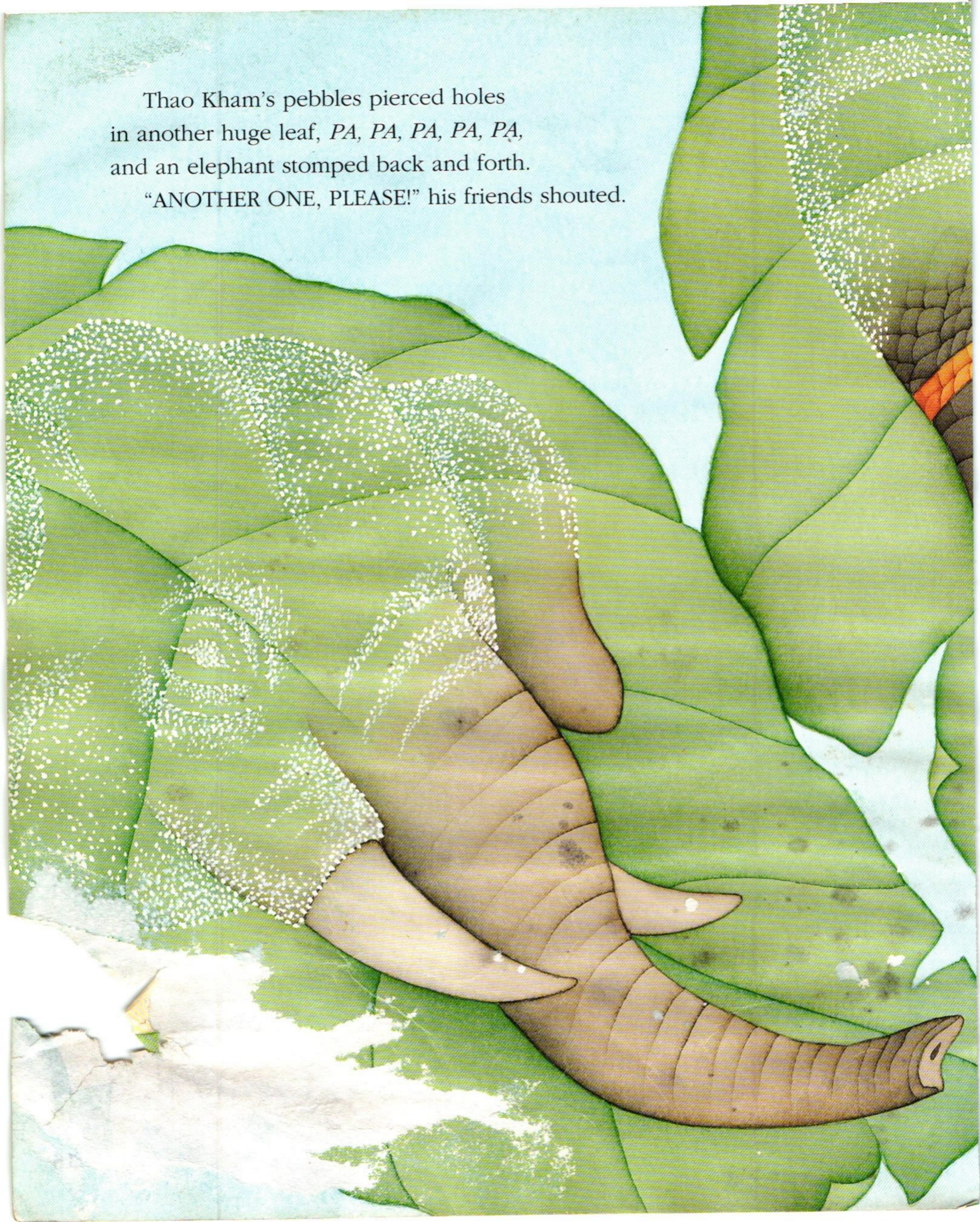
Like a shadow puppet, it moved in the wind,
wondrous to watch.



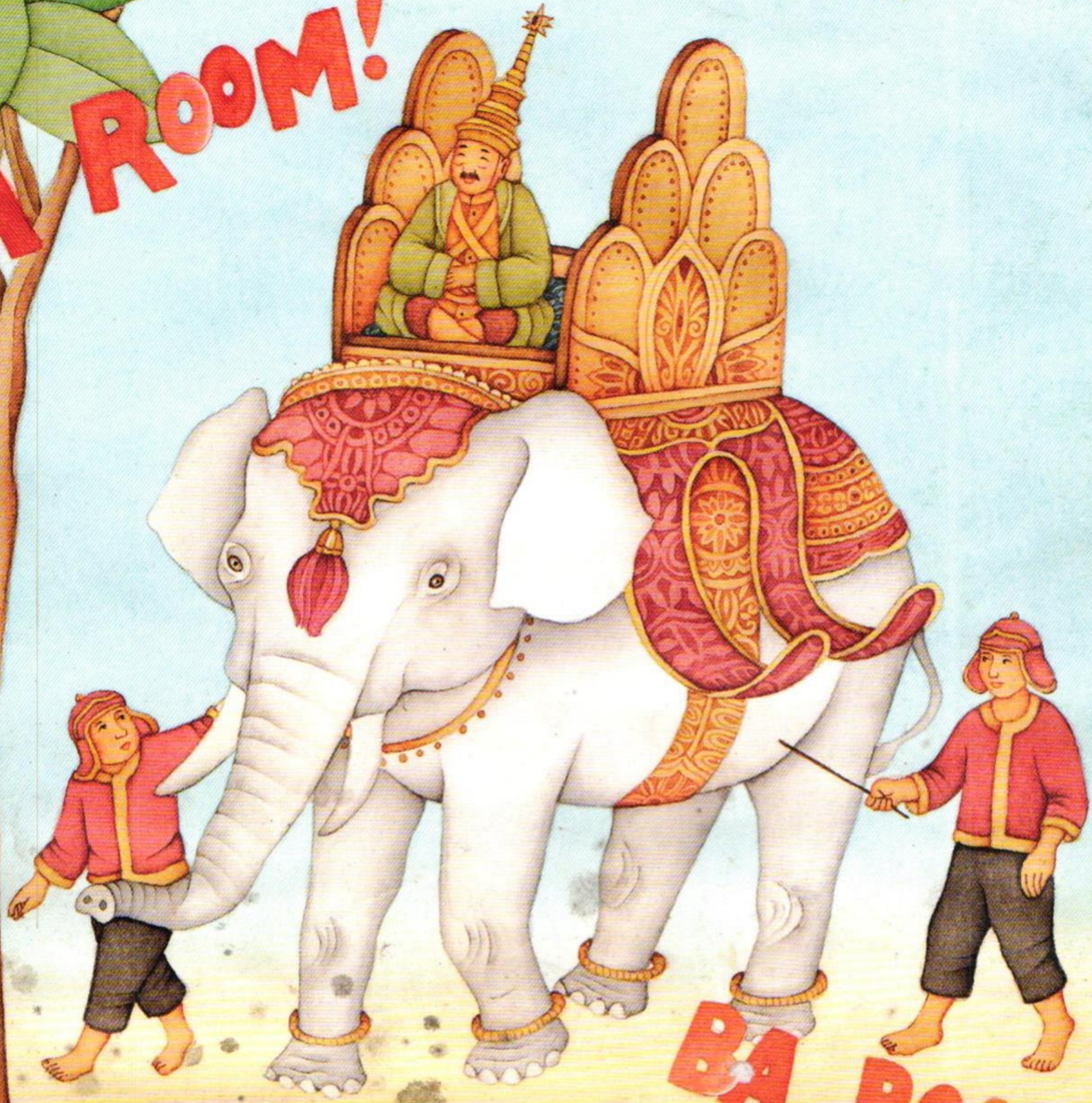


“DO IT AGAIN!” the children cried.

Thao Kham's pebbles pierced holes
in another huge leaf, *PA, PA, PA, PA, PA,*
and an elephant stomped back and forth.
"ANOTHER ONE, PLEASE!" his friends shouted.



BA ROOM!

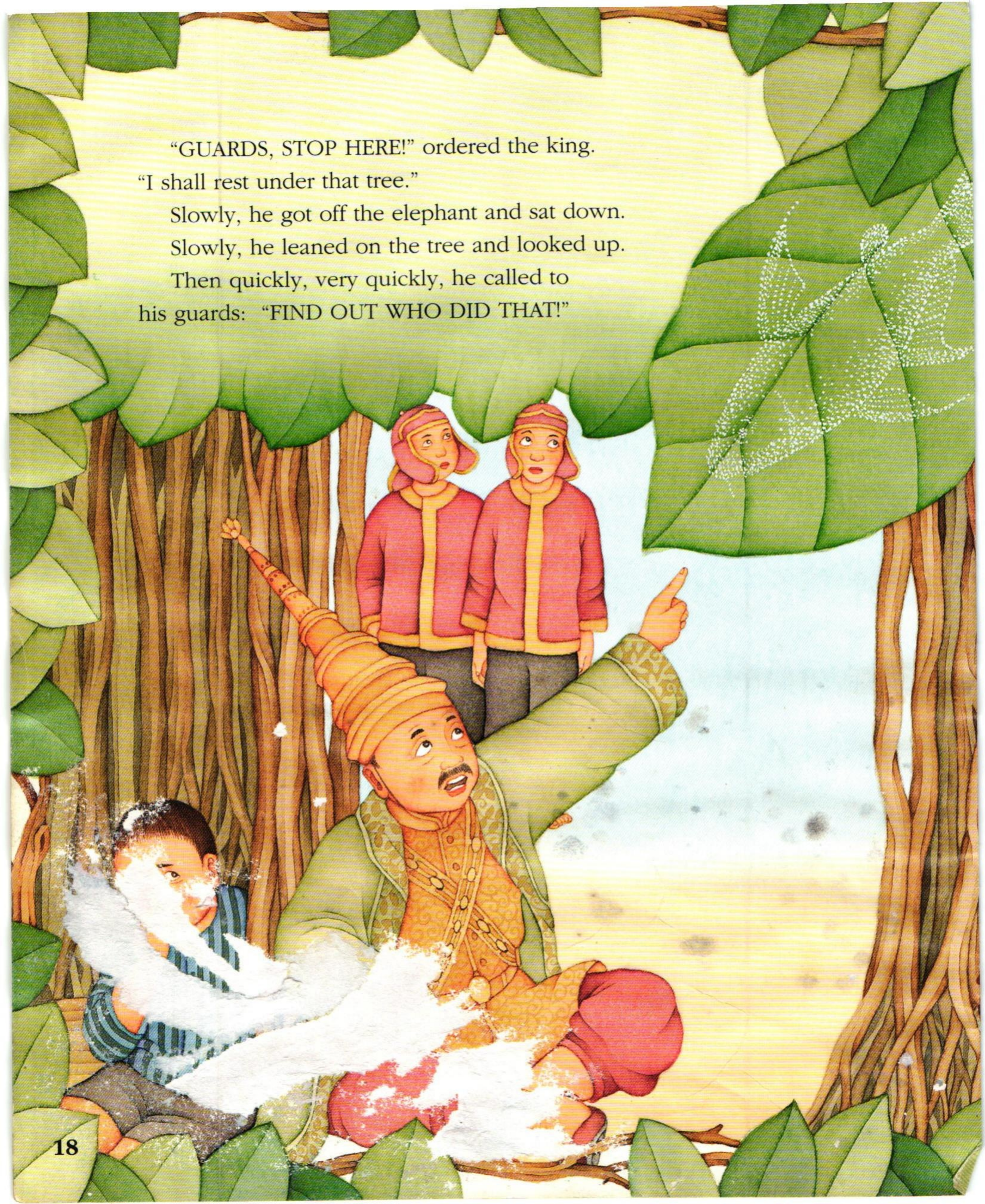


BA ROOM!

BA ROOM!

“GUARDS, STOP HERE!” ordered the king.
“I shall rest under that tree.”

Slowly, he got off the elephant and sat down.
Slowly, he leaned on the tree and looked up.
Then quickly, very quickly, he called to
his guards: “FIND OUT WHO DID THAT!”



Poor Thao Kham was pulled from his hiding place.

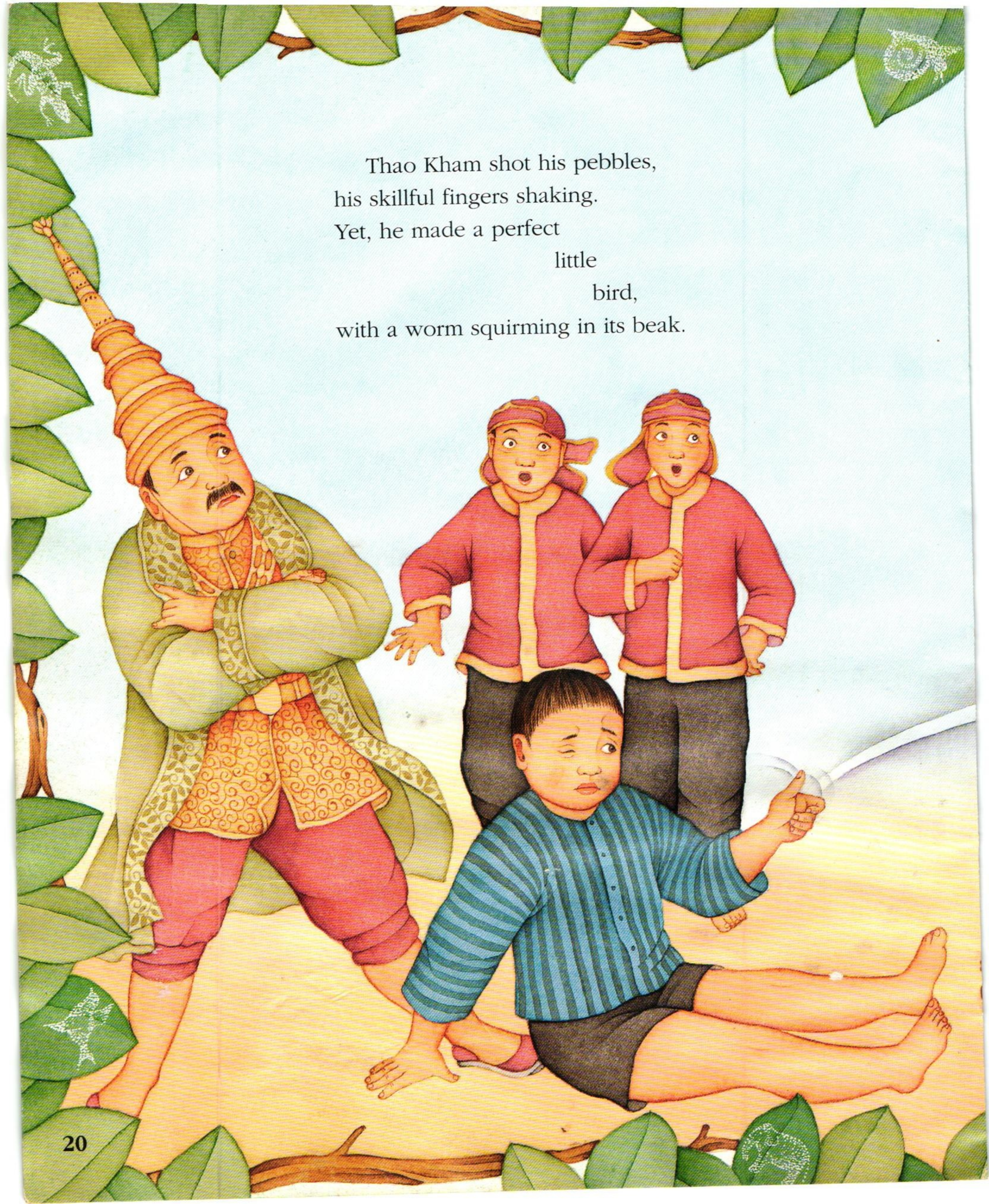
“Did you make those animals?” asked the king, pointing to the leaves.

“Y-y-yes, Your Highness,” whispered Thao. “Is it wrong? Is it against the royal law?”

“No, no! Show me how you made them,” ordered the king.



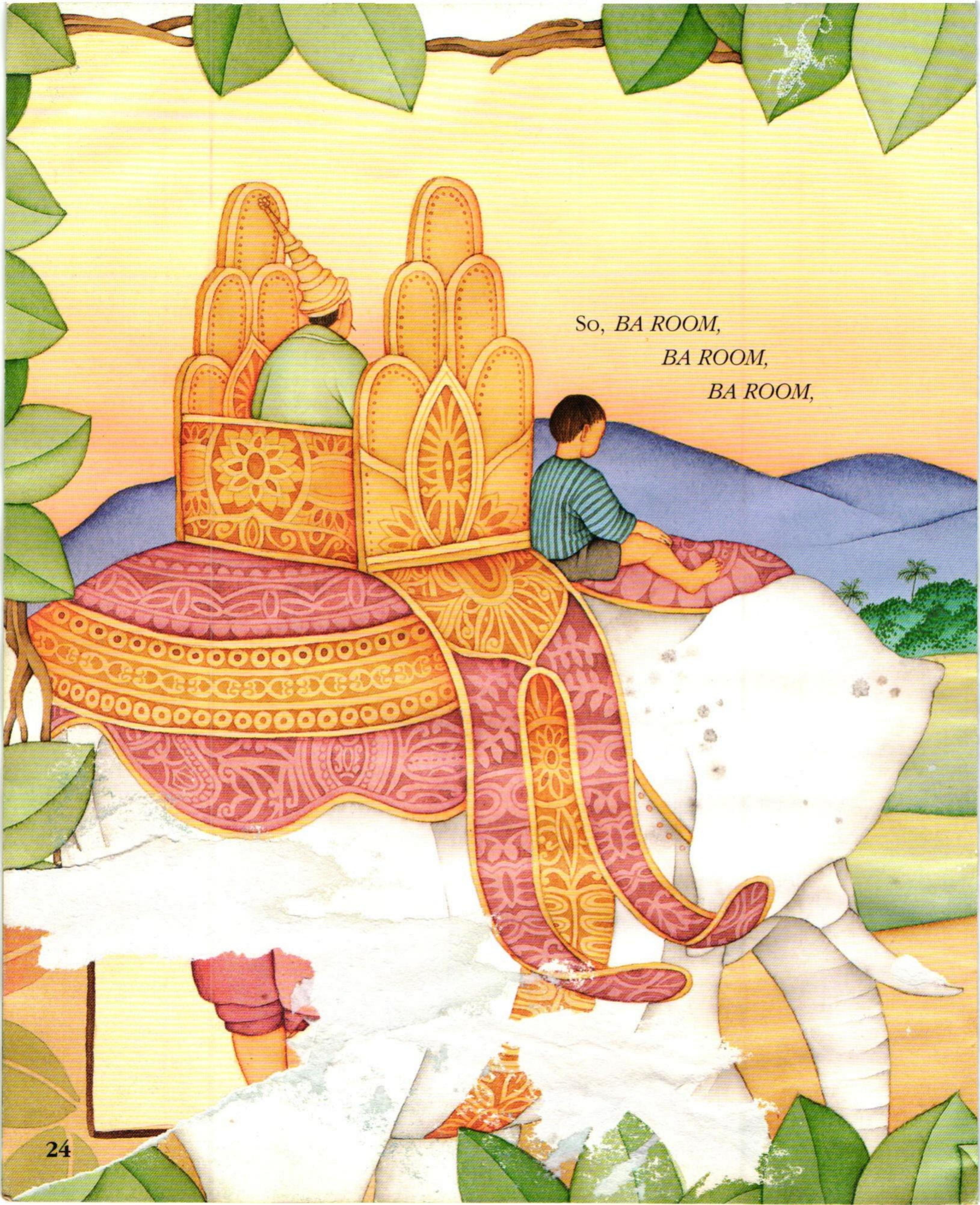
Thao Kham shot his pebbles,
his skillful fingers shaking.
Yet, he made a perfect
little
bird,
with a worm squirming in its beak.





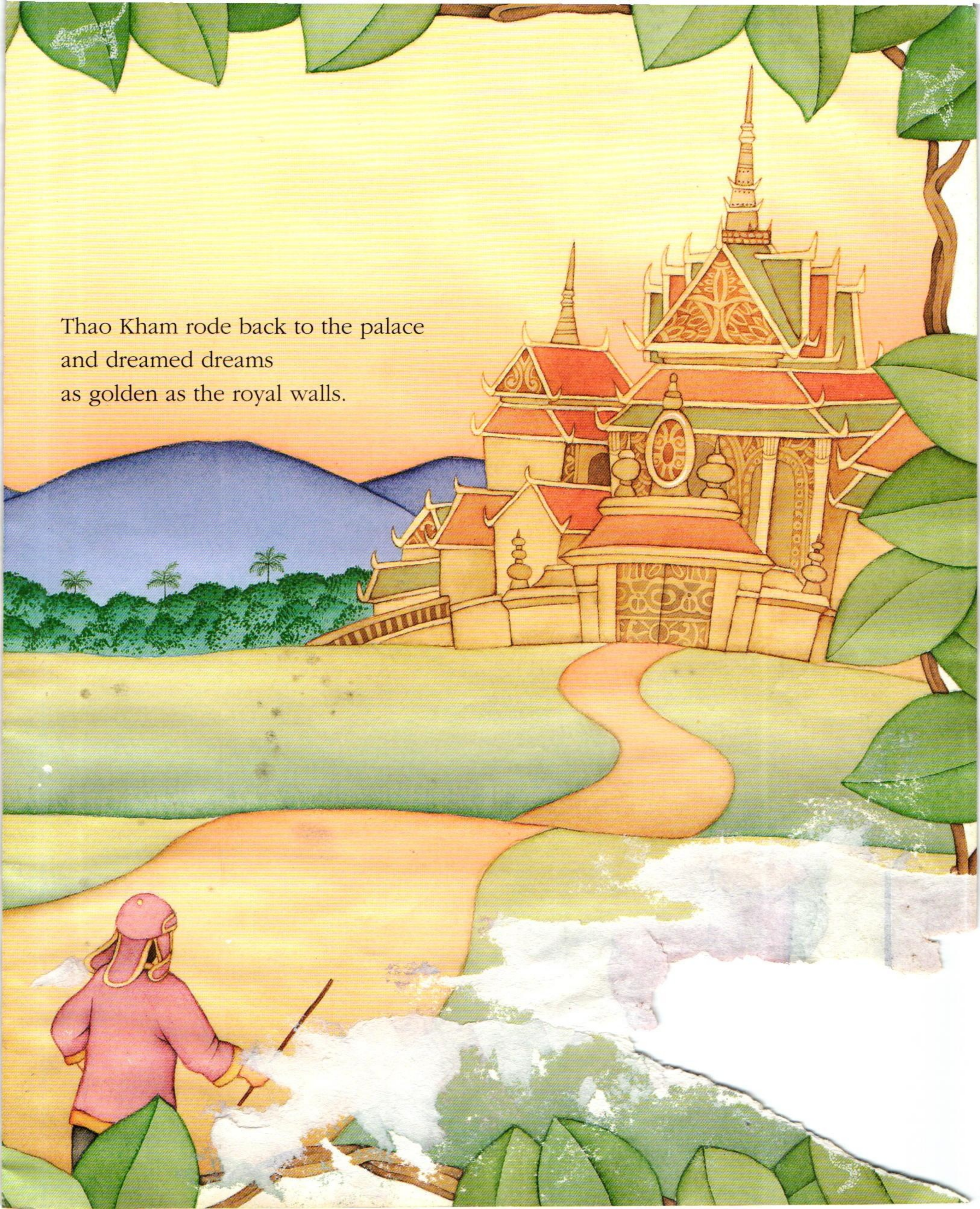
“Fine,” said the king, smiling.
“Come help me play a trick tomorrow.”





So, *BA ROOM,*
BA ROOM,
BA ROOM,

Thao Kham rode back to the palace
and dreamed dreams
as golden as the royal walls.



In the morning, he went to the throne room.
He sat behind a curtain in back of the throne.

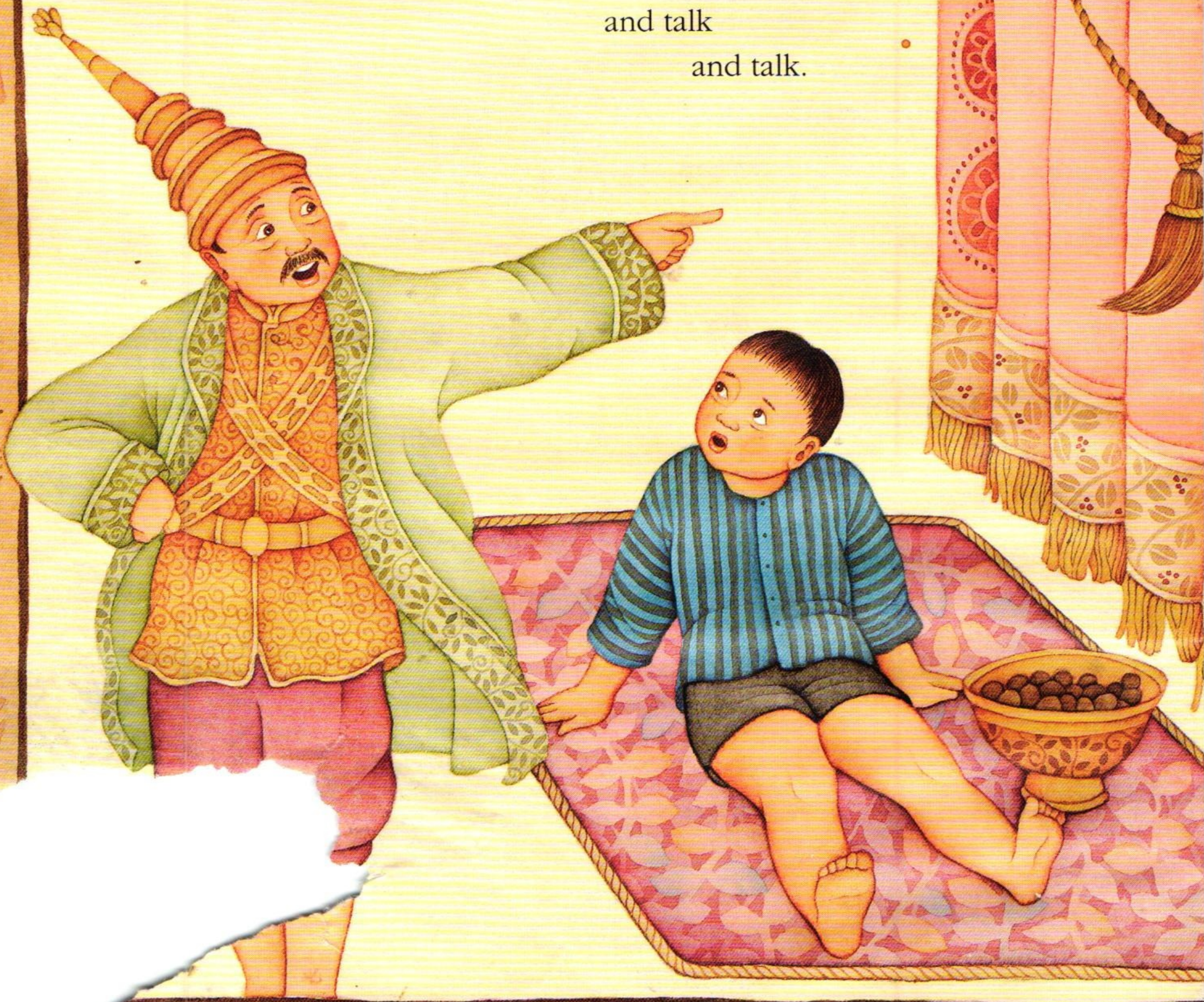
“Do you see that hole in the curtain?” asked the king.
“Do you see the bowl of mud balls next to you?”

Thao Kham nodded twice, and the king continued.

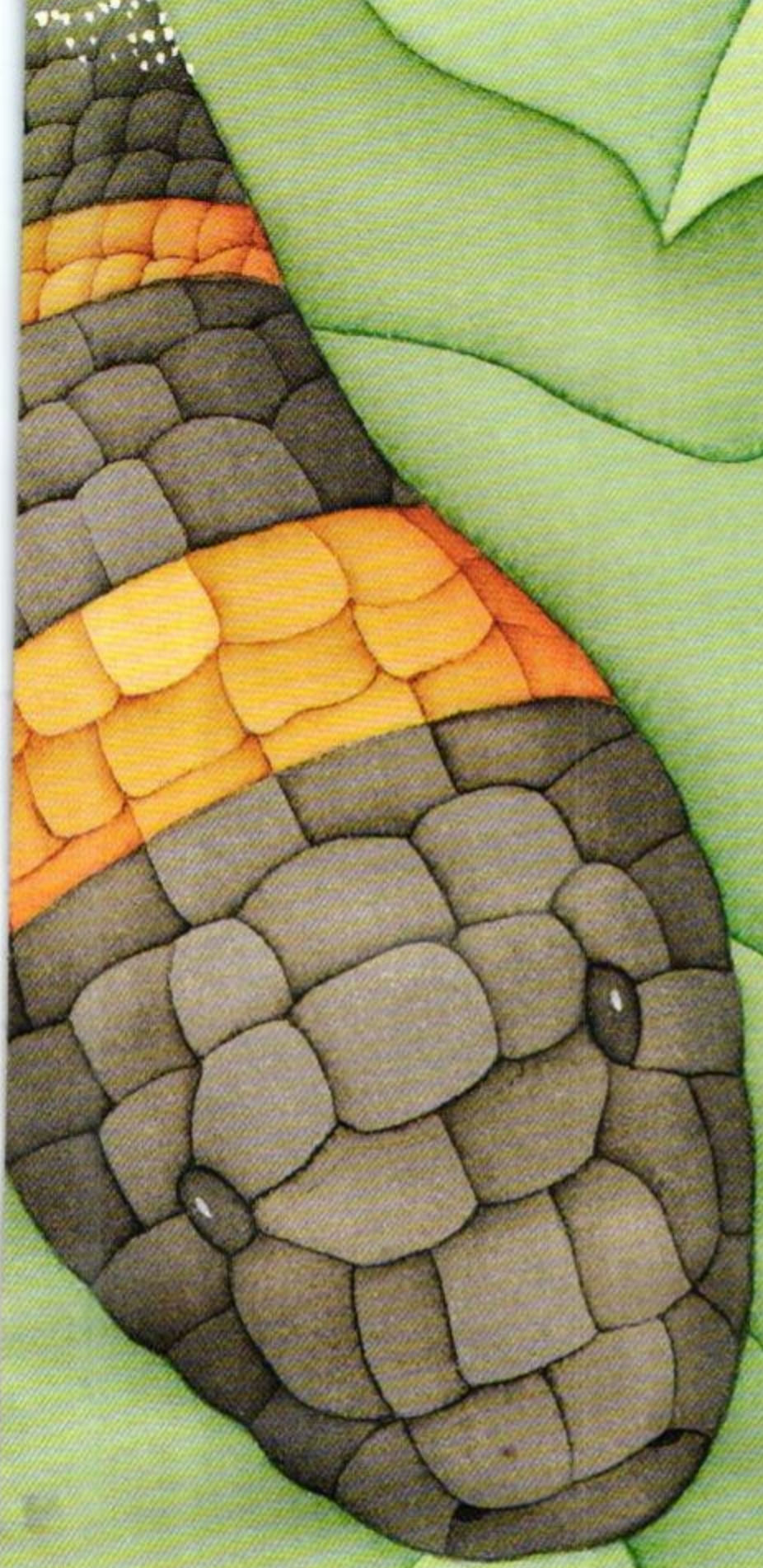
“Soon my advisors will come to meet. One man will
stand in front of that hole. He will talk

and talk

and talk.



Pebbles flew,
sun came through,
and a leafy, light s-s-snake
s-s-slithered above.



Delighted voices begged, "Mo
Thao Kham had lit... rest th...
but went to sleep well..."

From then on, birds sang to the sun, and children played near swaying beasts of green.

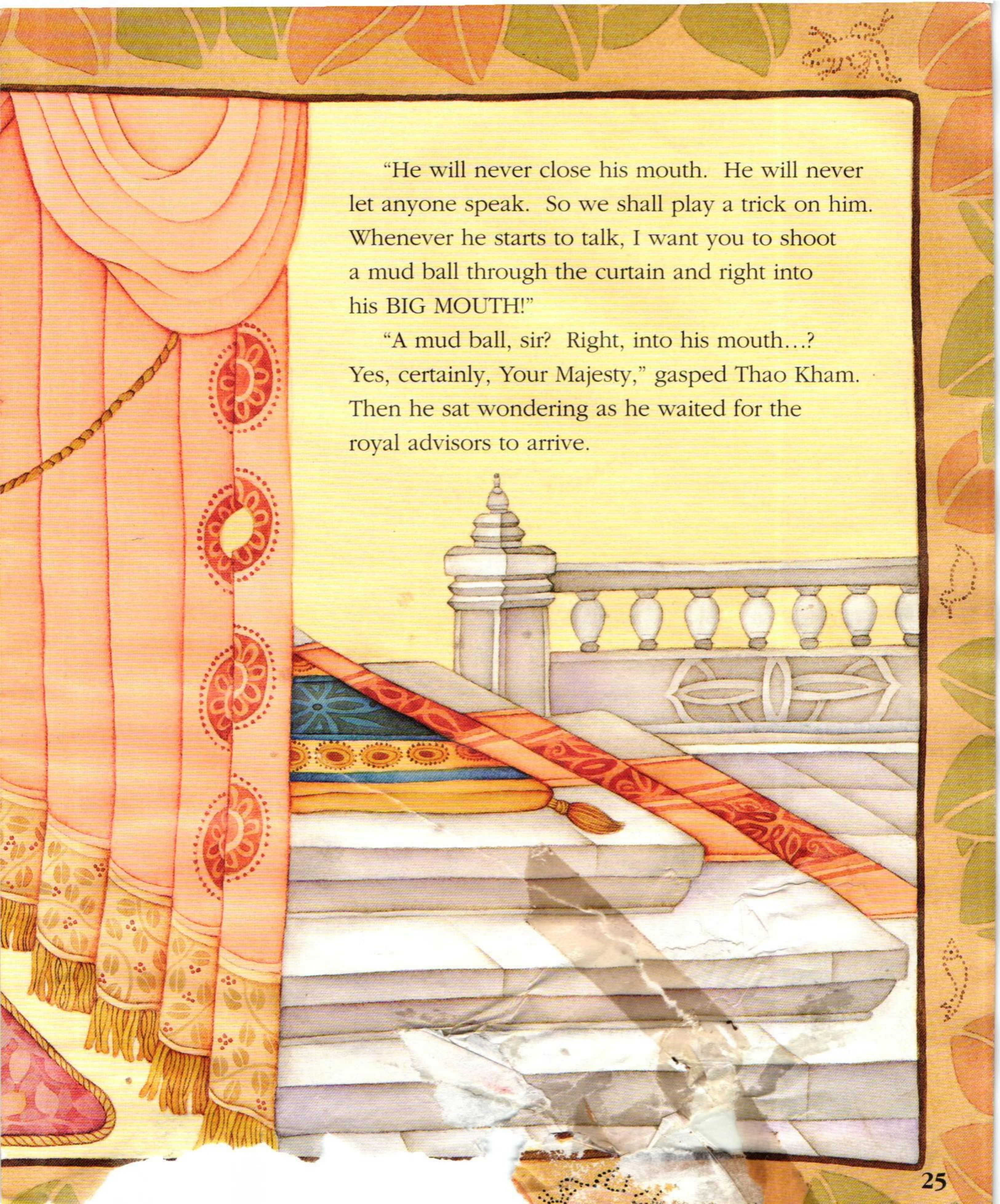
But one day, a new sound stopped the birds and scared the children:

BA ROOM! BA ROOM! BA ROOM!

It was the king riding his royal white elephant.

The frightened children rushed away while Thao Kham hid behind the tree, trembling.





“He will never close his mouth. He will never let anyone speak. So we shall play a trick on him. Whenever he starts to talk, I want you to shoot a mud ball through the curtain and right into his BIG MOUTH!”

“A mud ball, sir? Right, into his mouth...? Yes, certainly, Your Majesty,” gasped Thao Kham. Then he sat wondering as he waited for the royal advisors to arrive.

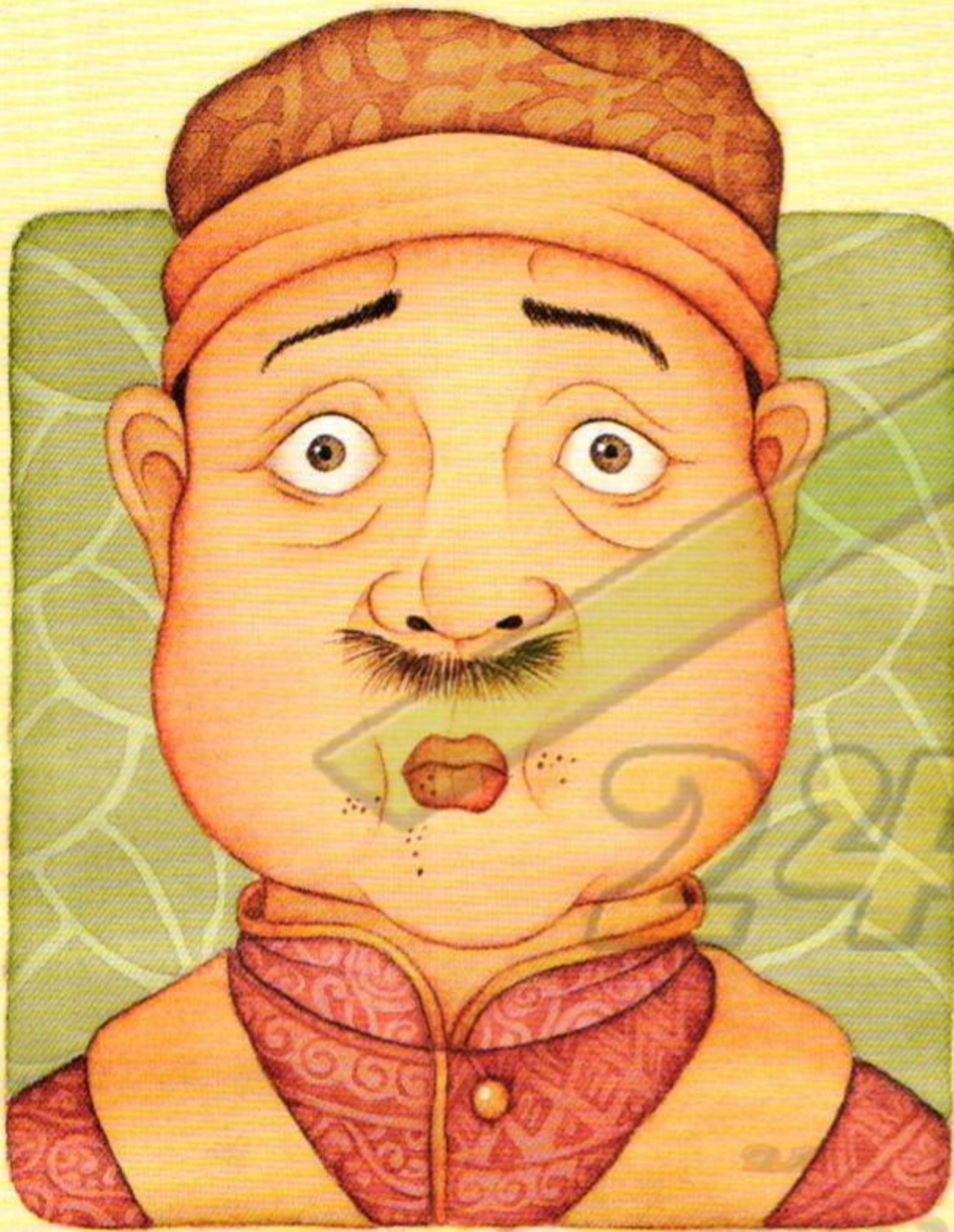
DAANN! DAANN! The gongs sounded, and the session began. Immediately, the man in front of the hole stood up and started to talk...and talk and talk and talk.

Thao Kham picked up a mud ball and shot it, *WEEEEEE!*

“And then, Your Majesty,” said the man, “I saw—”



“EH-H-H!” The advisor suddenly closed his mouth, while his eyes stared strangely. Something was in his mouth, but he couldn’t spit it out! NO ONE spat in front of the king!



So the man swallowed the mud ball, *ULLP!*



BUT he kept...on... talking
“I saw an elephant—” he began

And Thao Kham shot another mud ball, *WSSSHHHH!*

“—who was—*EHH-H-H-H!*”

The advisor swallowed that one, too, *ULLP!*

His hands held his throat as he cleared it,

HM-MM, HM-MMM!

BUT he kept...on...talking!

“—going to—,” he continued.





Thao Kham shot his VERY BIGGEST mud ball.
“—to the—*YEEEEEMMMM!*” Mud in his mouth
stopped the advisor’s words. He coughed and choked.
He could not go on.

Quietly, he sat down...and STAYED down.



Later, when the session was finished,
the king called to his advisor.

“Usually, you have the most to say,” he said.

“Today, you were most quiet. Why?”

“Your Majesty,” the man sputtered, “some bugs
flew into my mouth. I couldn’t talk.”

“Well, I enjoyed your silence,” said the king.

“Finally, I could hear everyone speak! Do remember
to be more quiet!”

“Yes, sir, yes, sir,” mumbled the man, bowing.
Then he ran to spit out the mud still left in his throat.





The
Wright
Group®

ISBN: 0-7802-1480-3

