

The Fisherman's Neighbour

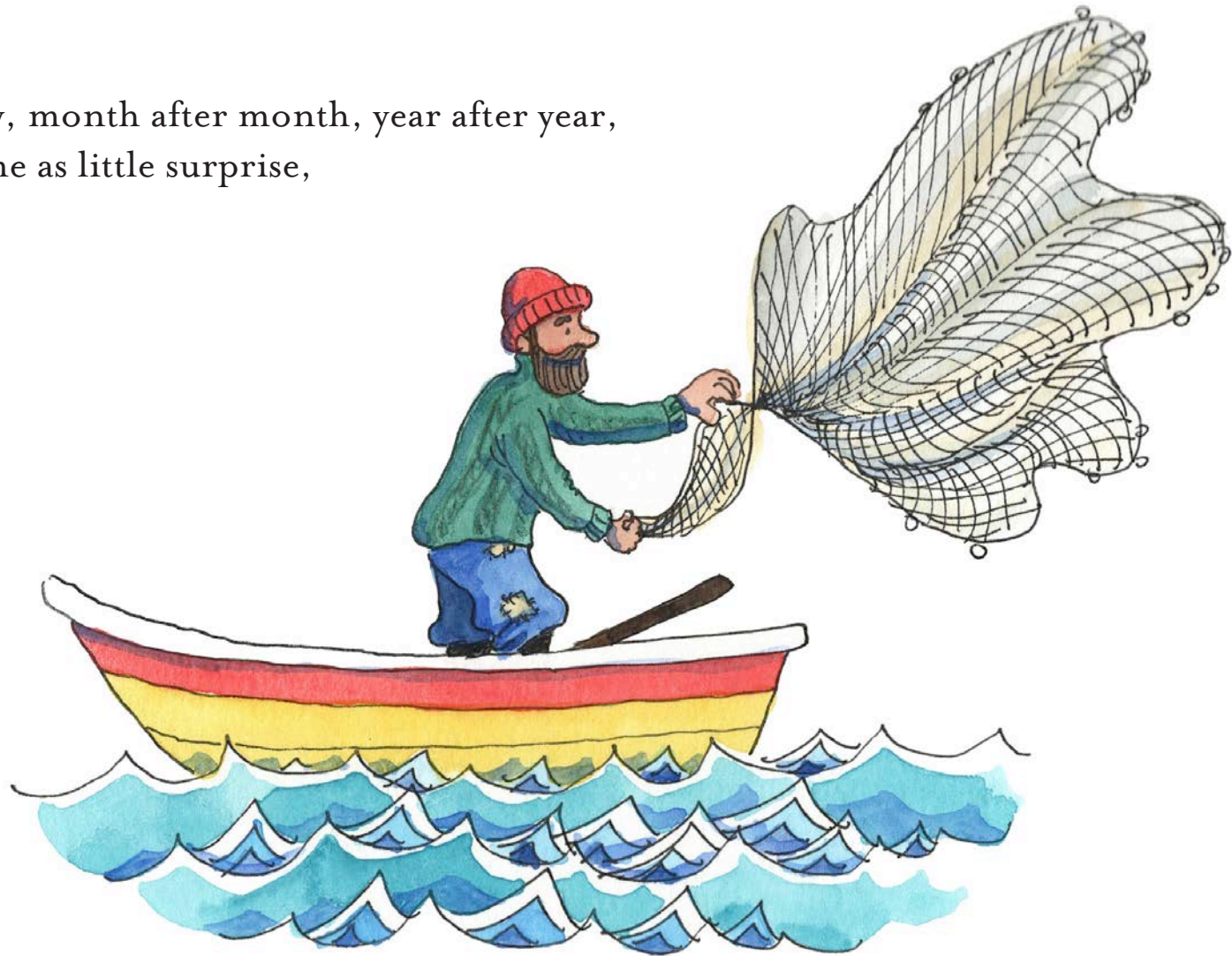
BY IDRIES SHAH



There was once a poor fisherman, who only just managed to feed his family and pay his bills.



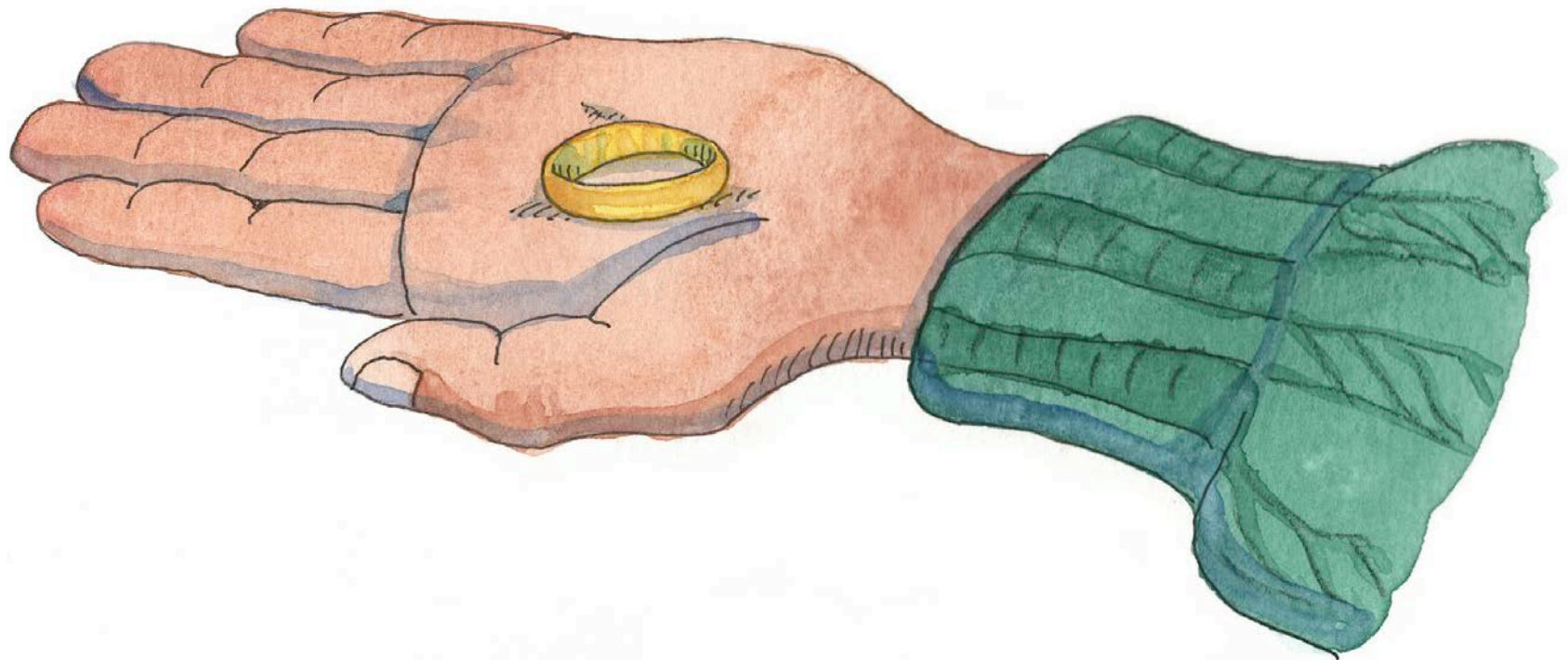
Day after day, month after month, year after year,
his catch came as little surprise,





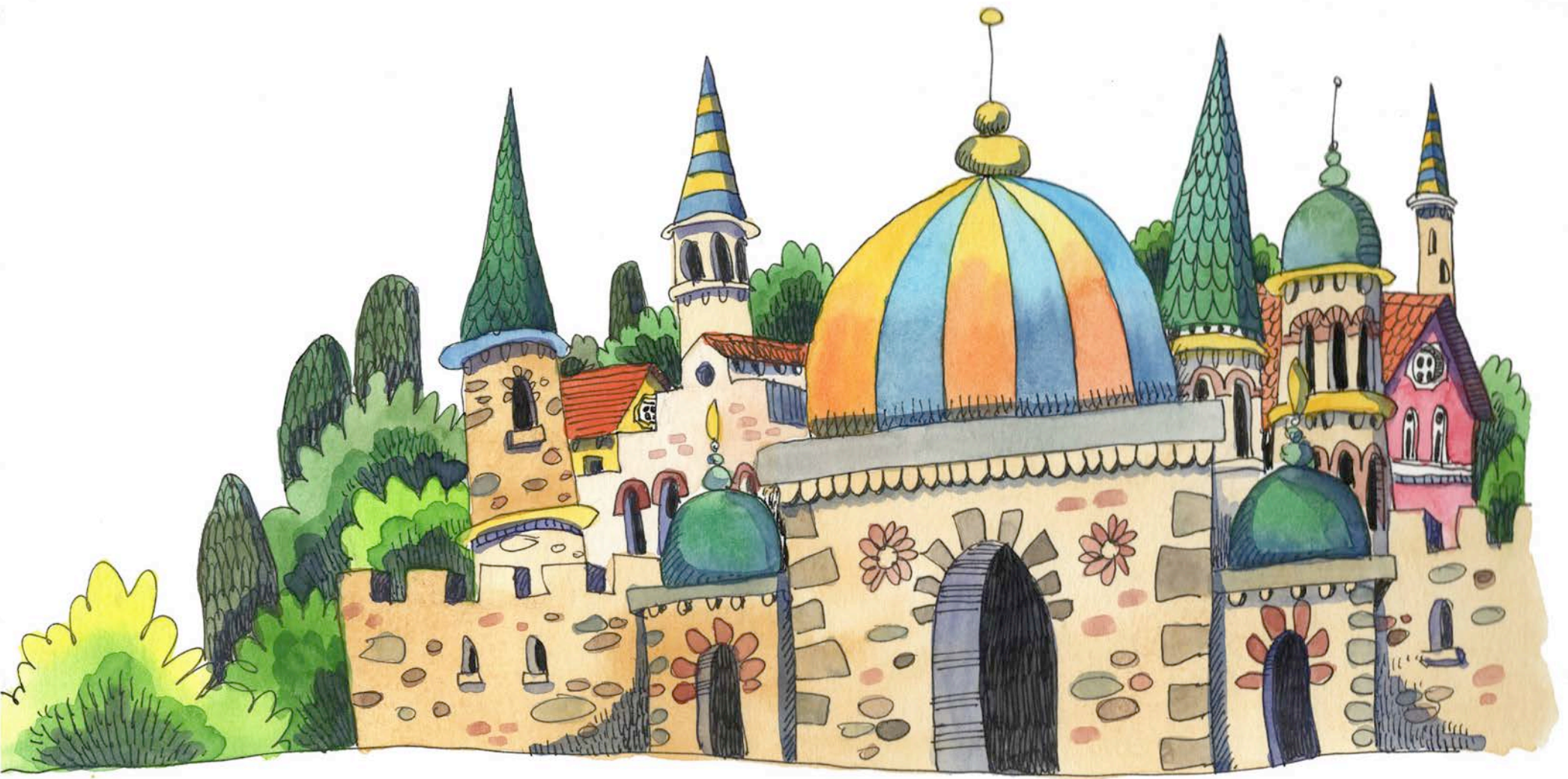
until one day, he cast his net and brought up a muddy brown fish with a substantial golden ring inside it.

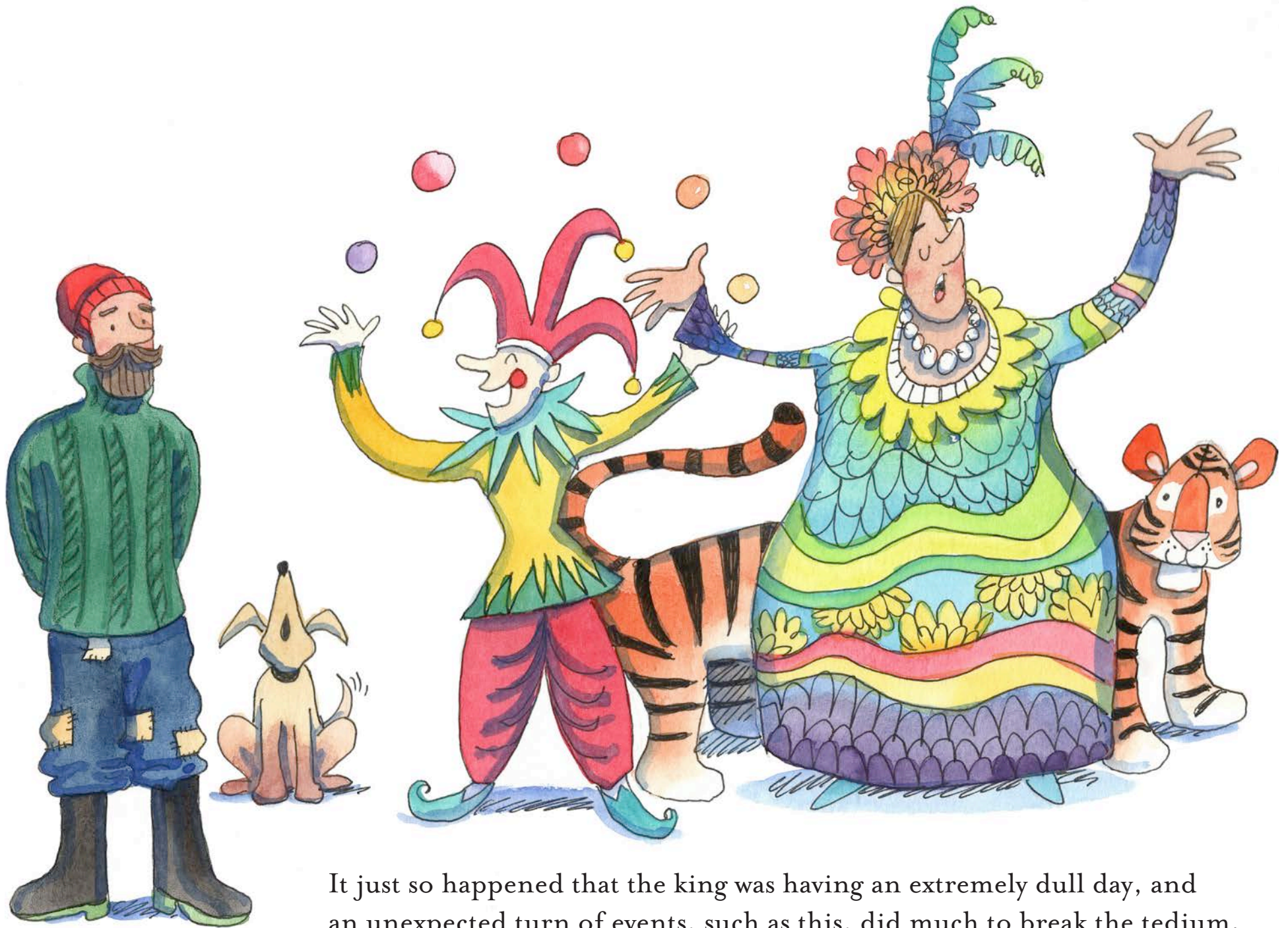
Being a man of very little imagination, the fisherman wasn't at all sure how to react to this unexpected turn of events,



so he did the only thing a man with very little imagination would do
and hurried off to give the ring to the king.







It just so happened that the king was having an extremely dull day, and an unexpected turn of events, such as this, did much to break the tedium.



In gratitude, he paid the fisherman much more than the ring was worth.

He ordered the royal treasurer to load the man with a great many bags of silver coins.





After staggering home with the considerable booty, the fisherman dispatched his son to their neighbour's house to borrow some scales with which to weigh the coins.



As is so often the case in stories of this kind, the neighbour happened to be both greedy and nosy.

But as we already know, the fisherman lacked sufficient imagination to take such character traits into consideration.



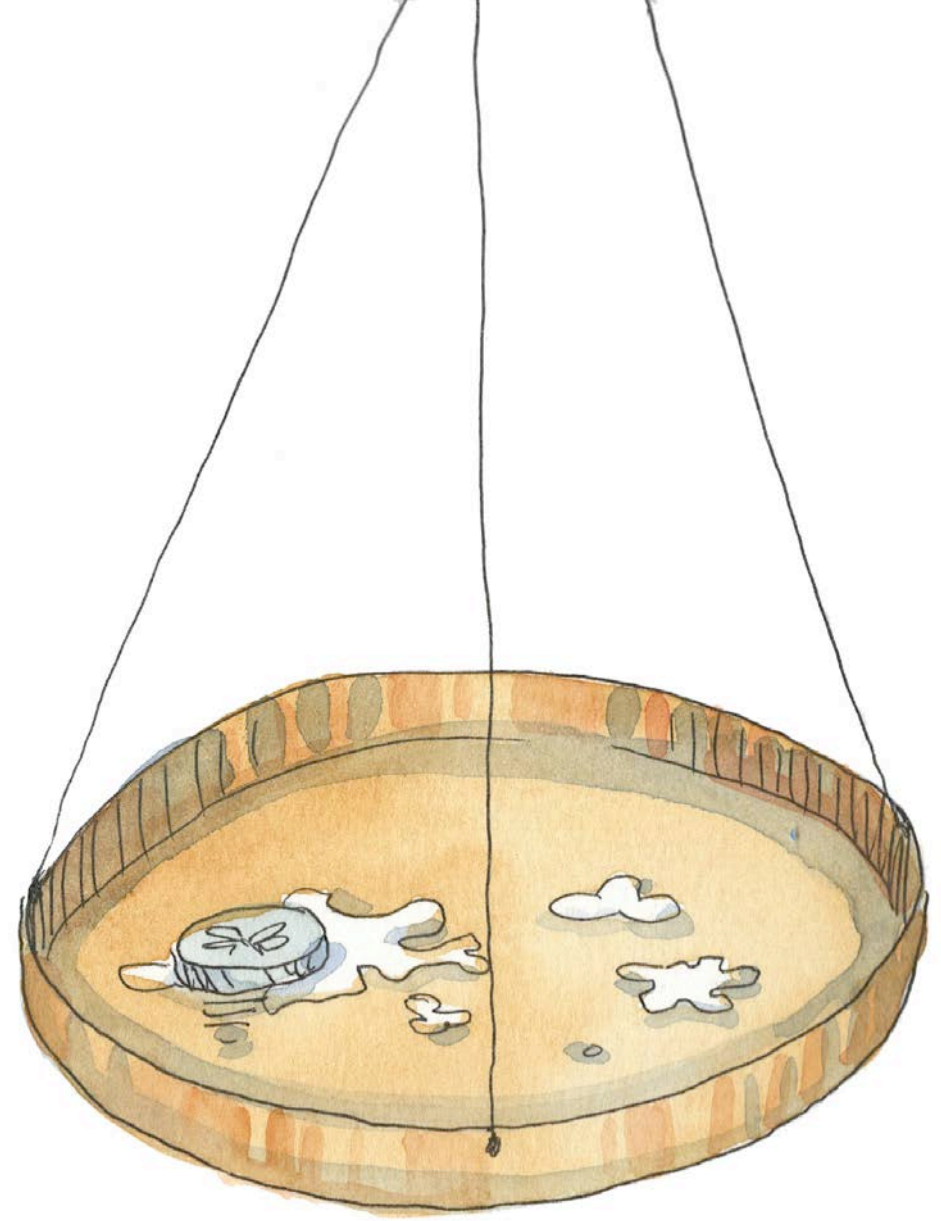


Thinking himself very crafty, the neighbour smeared fat on the inside of the scale pans in order to find out what the fisherman wanted to weigh.

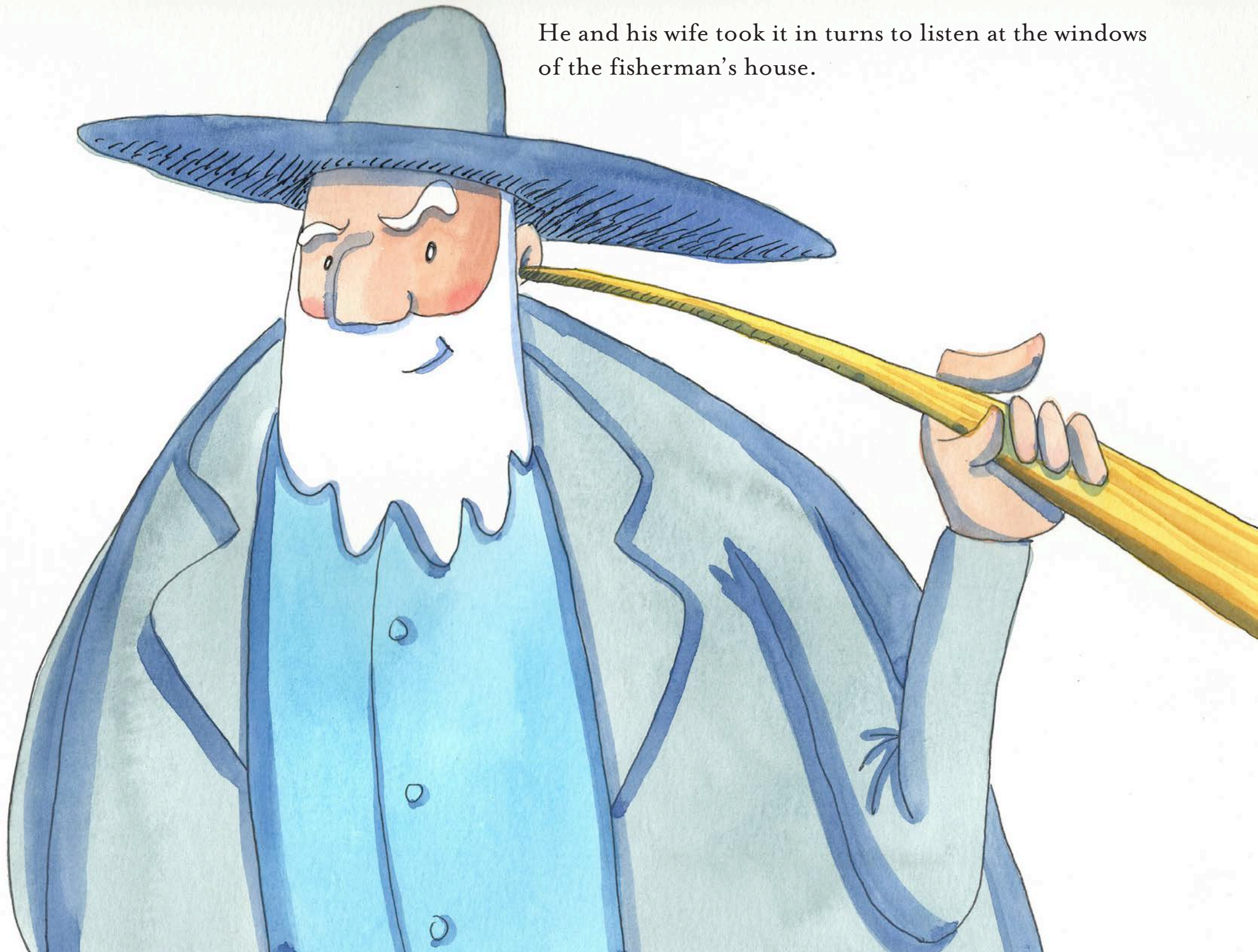
‘By what sticks to the fat,’ he smirked to himself, ‘I’ll know just what he has in the house.’

Sure enough, upon the return of the scales, there was a small silver coin embedded in the fat.

The neighbour vowed to ascertain how the fisherman had managed to get hold of such a fortune.



He and his wife took it in turns to listen at the windows
of the fisherman's house.









However, as well as being greedy and nosy, the neighbour was also slightly deaf.

Eavesdropping beneath the window, he heard the fisherman explaining to his wife about the muddy brown fish, the gold ring, the king, and the cash.

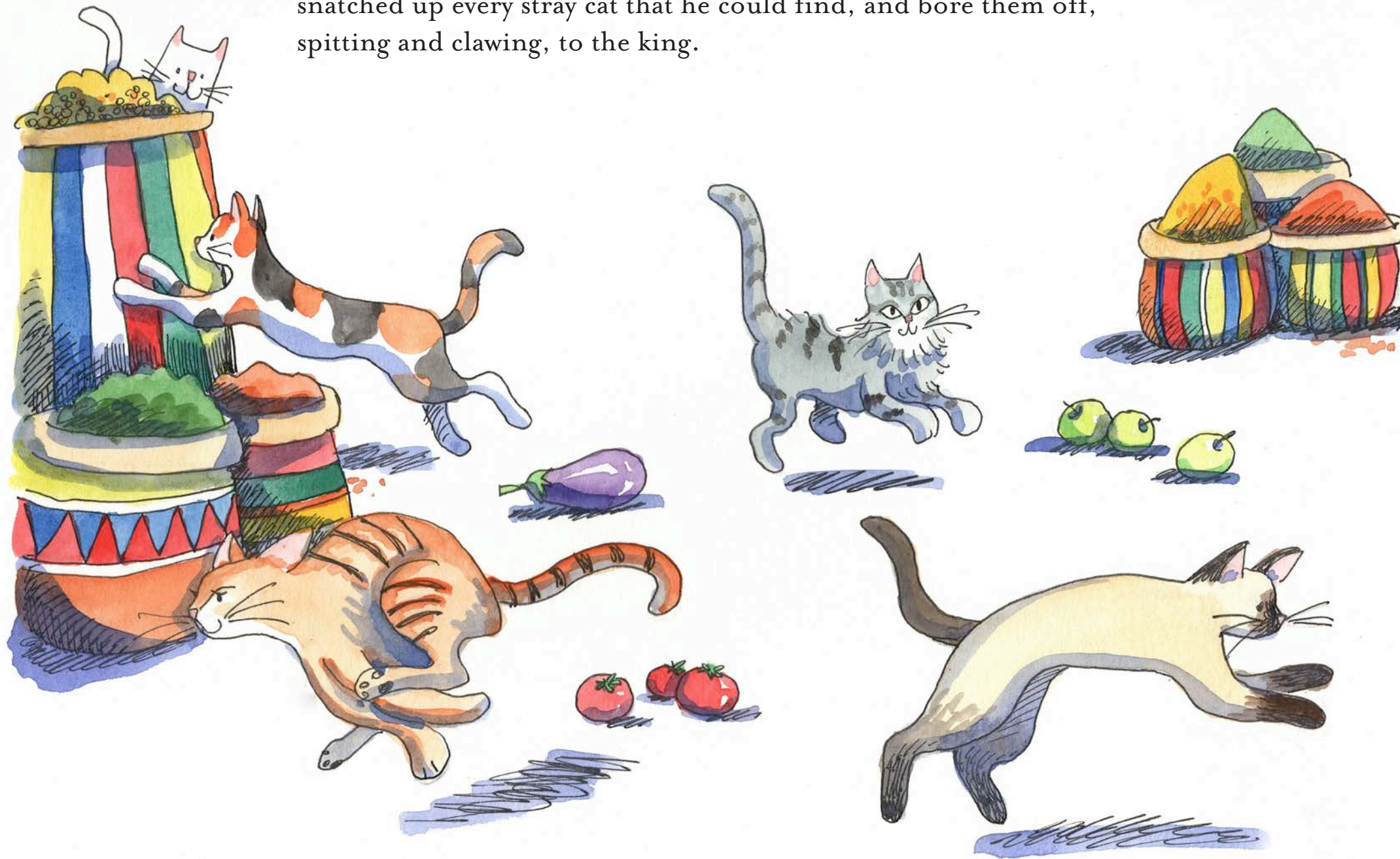


From his hiding place, the neighbour managed to correctly make out most of the tale but instead of hearing 'gold ring' he heard 'many cats'.

For in the language of their land, these two phrases sounded almost the same.



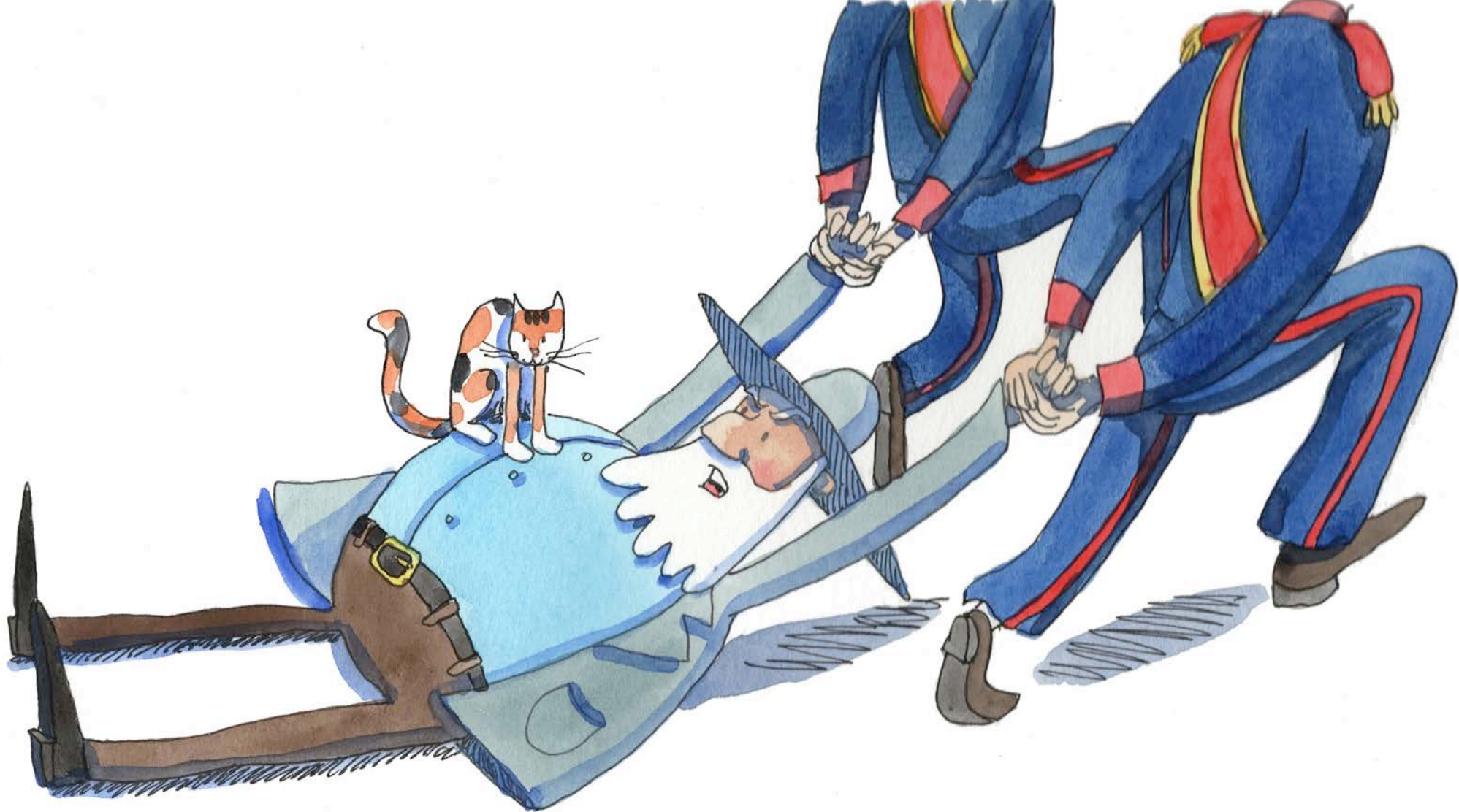
Without a moment's delay, the neighbour rushed to the market square, snatched up every stray cat that he could find, and bore them off, spitting and clawing, to the king.



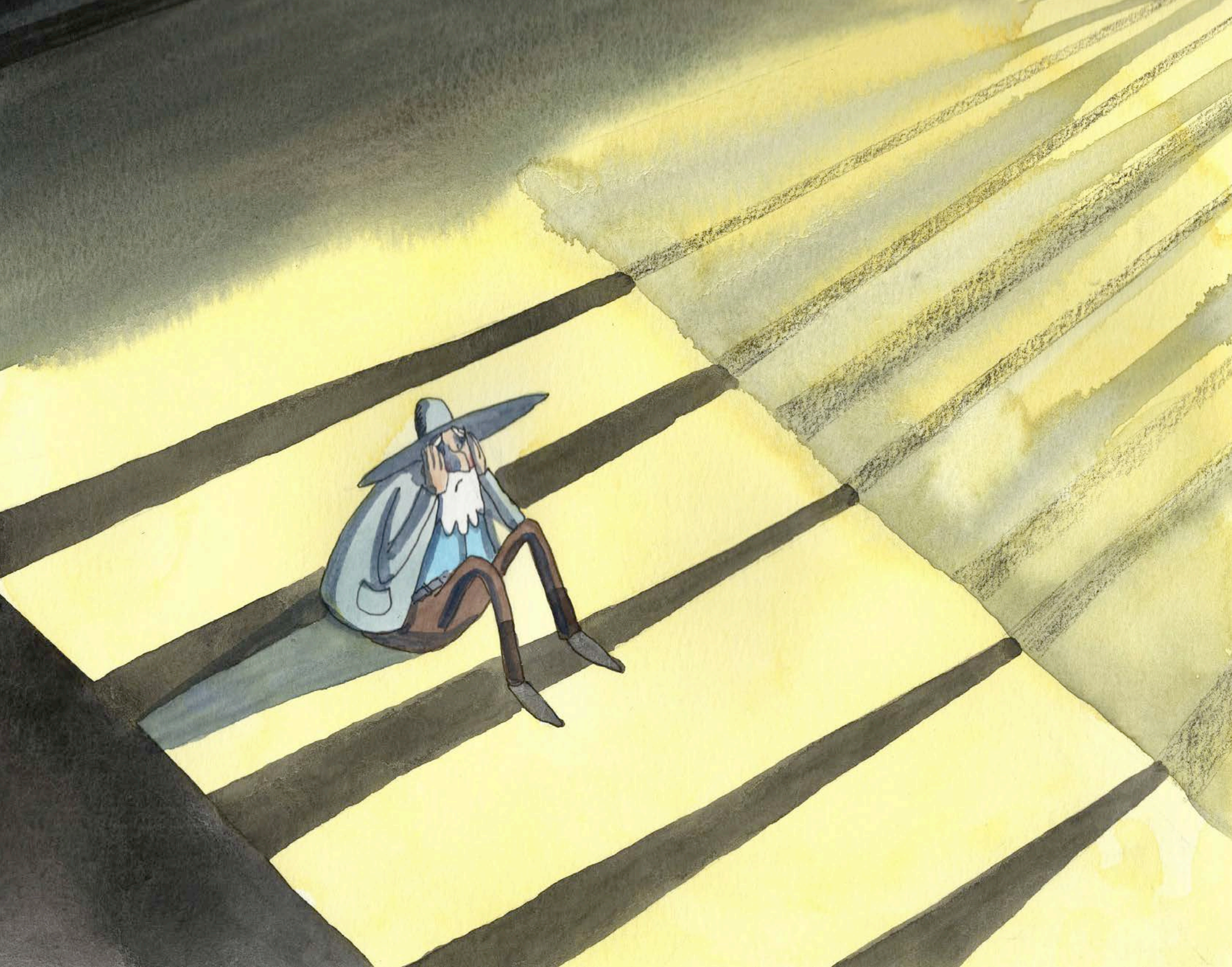



Making their escape in the throne room, the furious felines went wild,
biting and scratching countless courtiers and shredding the royal draperies.





You will not be surprised to hear that far from receiving his weight in silver coins, the fisherman's neighbour was thrown into the deepest and darkest of dungeons.



A watercolor illustration featuring a stack of yellowed, aged pages on the left side, with dark, textured lines representing the book's binding or spine. The right side of the image is dominated by a large, dark, textured area in shades of grey and black, suggesting a deep shadow or a dark, moody environment. The overall style is artistic and atmospheric.

Unfortunately for him, he had made the fundamental error of having rushed whole-heartedly into an enterprise, without possession of the full facts, and without having thought the project through.

And did he use his time in the cell to see the error of his ways?



I am sorry to tell you that he did not,



preferring instead to spend his lifetime of solitude cursing the fisherman ...

and blaming him for having deliberately tricked him
into so infuriating the king.



THE END

