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of 16 Favorite Leo Lionni Stories •



Frederick's --- **FABLES**

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The leaves rustled and there stood the lizard. "The moon is round, the pebble found," said the lizard. "Who or what do you wish to be?"

"I want to be . . ." Alexander stopped. Then suddenly he said, "Lizard, lizard, could you change Willy into a mouse like me?"

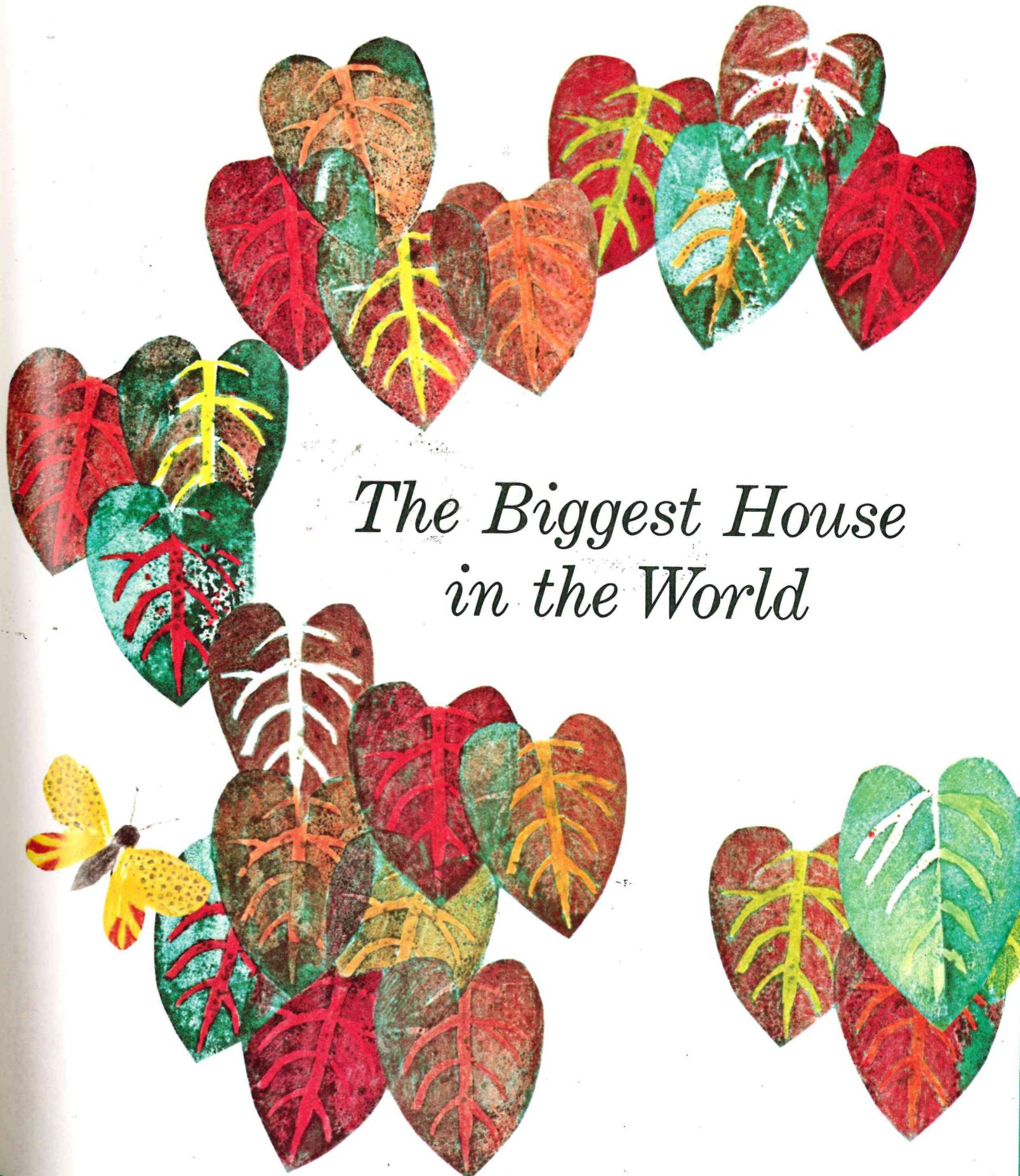
The lizard blinked. There was a blinding light. And then all was quiet. The purple pebble was gone.

Alexander ran back to the house as fast as he could. The box was there, but alas it was empty. "Too late," he thought, and with a heavy heart he went to his hole in the baseboard.

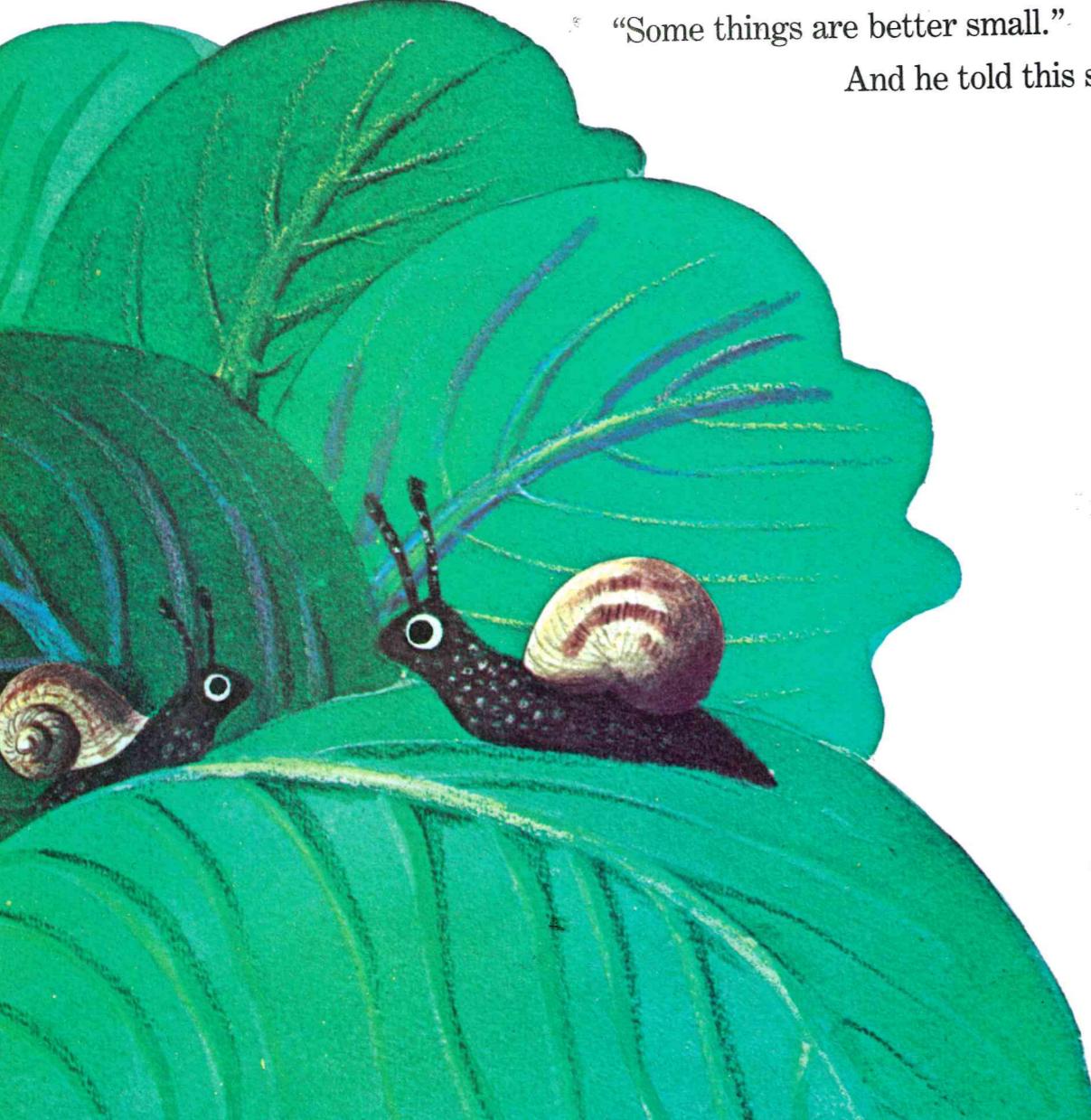
Something squeaked! Cautiously Alexander moved closer to the hole. There was a mouse inside. "Who are you?" said Alexander, a little frightened.

"My name is Willy," said the mouse.

"Willy!" cried Alexander. "The lizard . . . the lizard did it!" He hugged Willy and then they ran to the garden path. And there they danced until dawn.



The Biggest House in the World



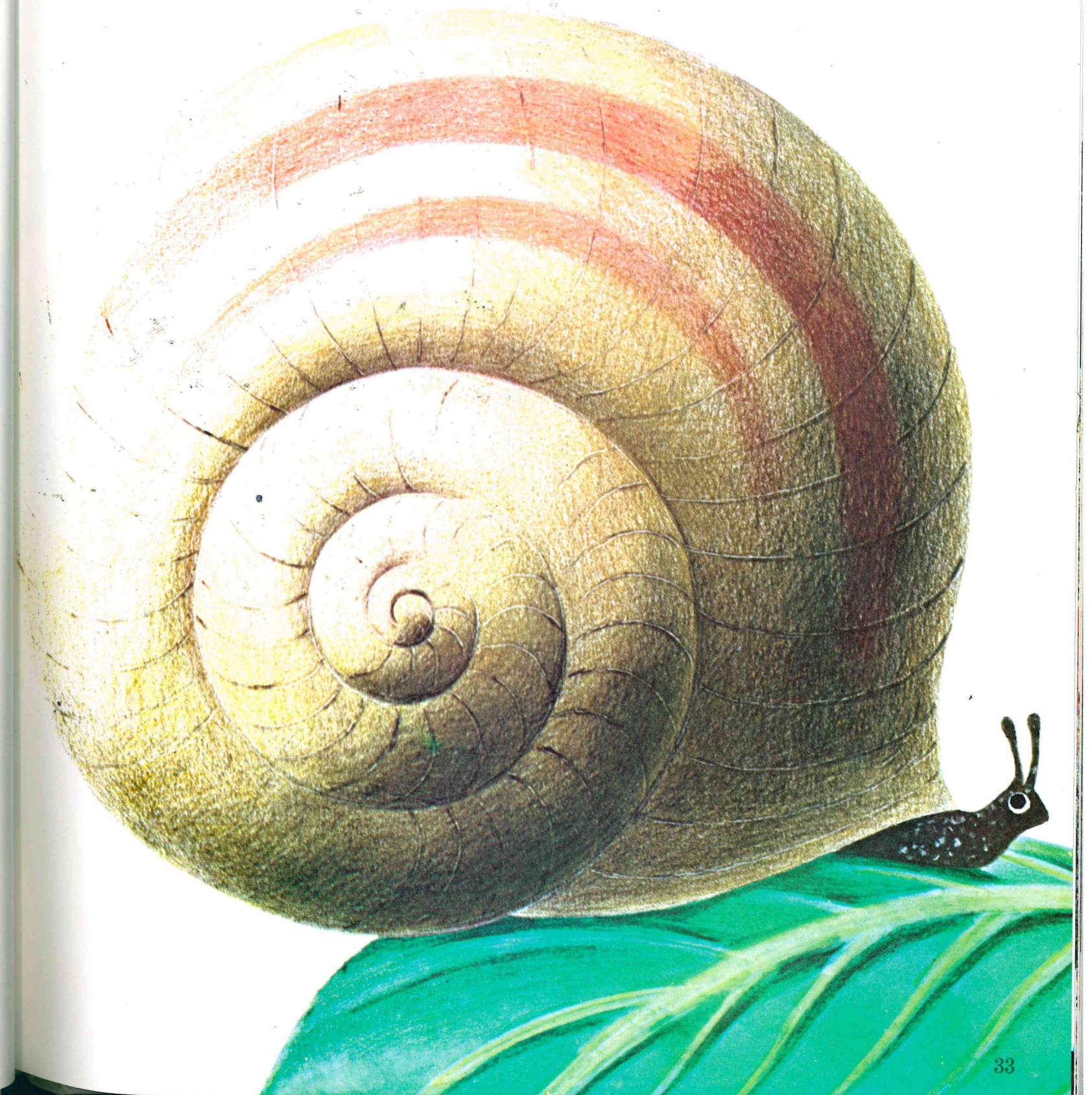
Some snails lived on a juicy cabbage. They moved gently around, carrying their houses from leaf to leaf, in search of a tender spot to nibble on.

One day a little snail said to his father, "When I grow up I want to have the biggest house in the world."

"That is silly," said his father, who happened to be the wisest snail on the cabbage.

"Some things are better small."

And he told this story.



Once upon a time, a little snail, just like you, said to his father,
"When I grow up I want to have the biggest house in the world."

"Some things are better small," said his father. "Keep your house
light and easy to carry."

But the little snail would not listen, and hidden in the shade of a
large cabbage leaf, he twisted and twitched, this way and that, until he
discovered how to make his house grow.

It grew and grew, and the snails on the cabbage said, "You surely
have the biggest house in the world."

The little snail kept on twisting and twitching until his house was as
big as a melon. Then, by moving his tail swiftly from left to right, he
learned to grow large pointed bulges. And by squeezing and pushing,
and by wishing very hard, he was able to add bright colors and
beautiful designs.

Now he knew that his was the biggest and the most beautiful house
in the whole world. He was proud and happy.

A swarm of butterflies flew overhead.

"Look!" one of them said. "A cathedral!"

"No," said another, "it's a circus!"

They never guessed that what they were looking at was the house of
a snail.

And a family of frogs, on their way to a distant pond, stopped in
awe. "Never," they later told some cousins, "never have you seen such
an amazing sight. An ordinary little snail with a house like a birthday
cake."

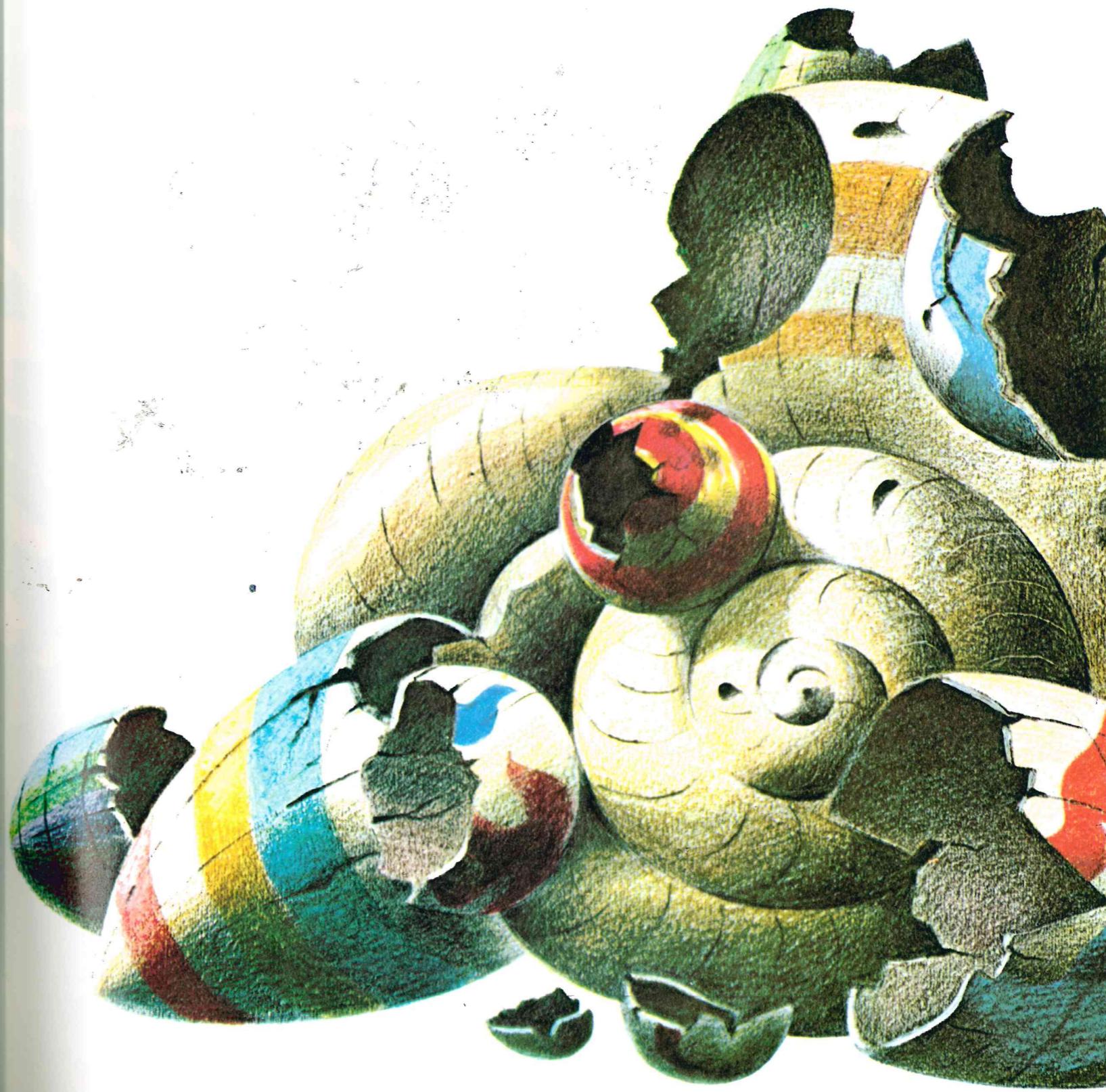


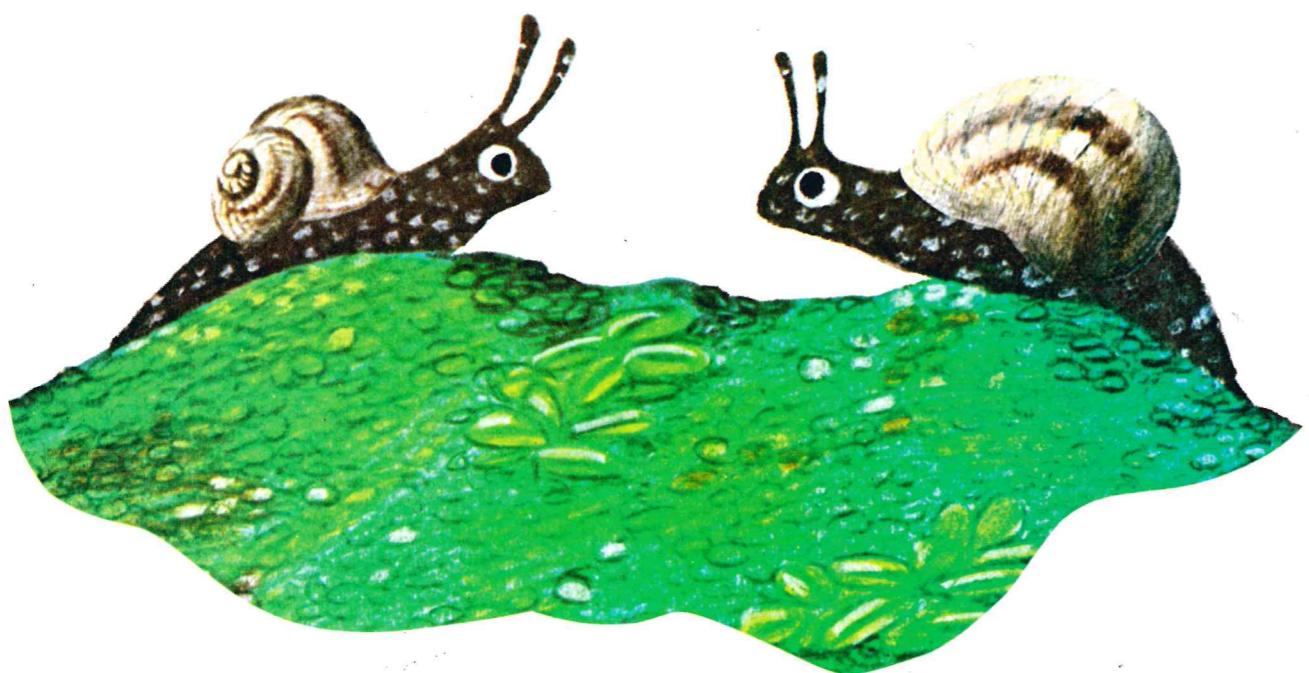
One day, after they had eaten all the leaves and only a few knobby stems were left, the snails moved to another cabbage. But the little snail, alas, couldn't move. His house was much too heavy.

He was left behind, and with nothing to eat he slowly faded away. Nothing remained but the house. And that too, little by little, crumbled, until nothing remained at all.

That was the end of the story. The little snail was almost in tears. But then he remembered his own house. "I shall keep it small," he thought, "and when I grow up I shall go wherever I please."

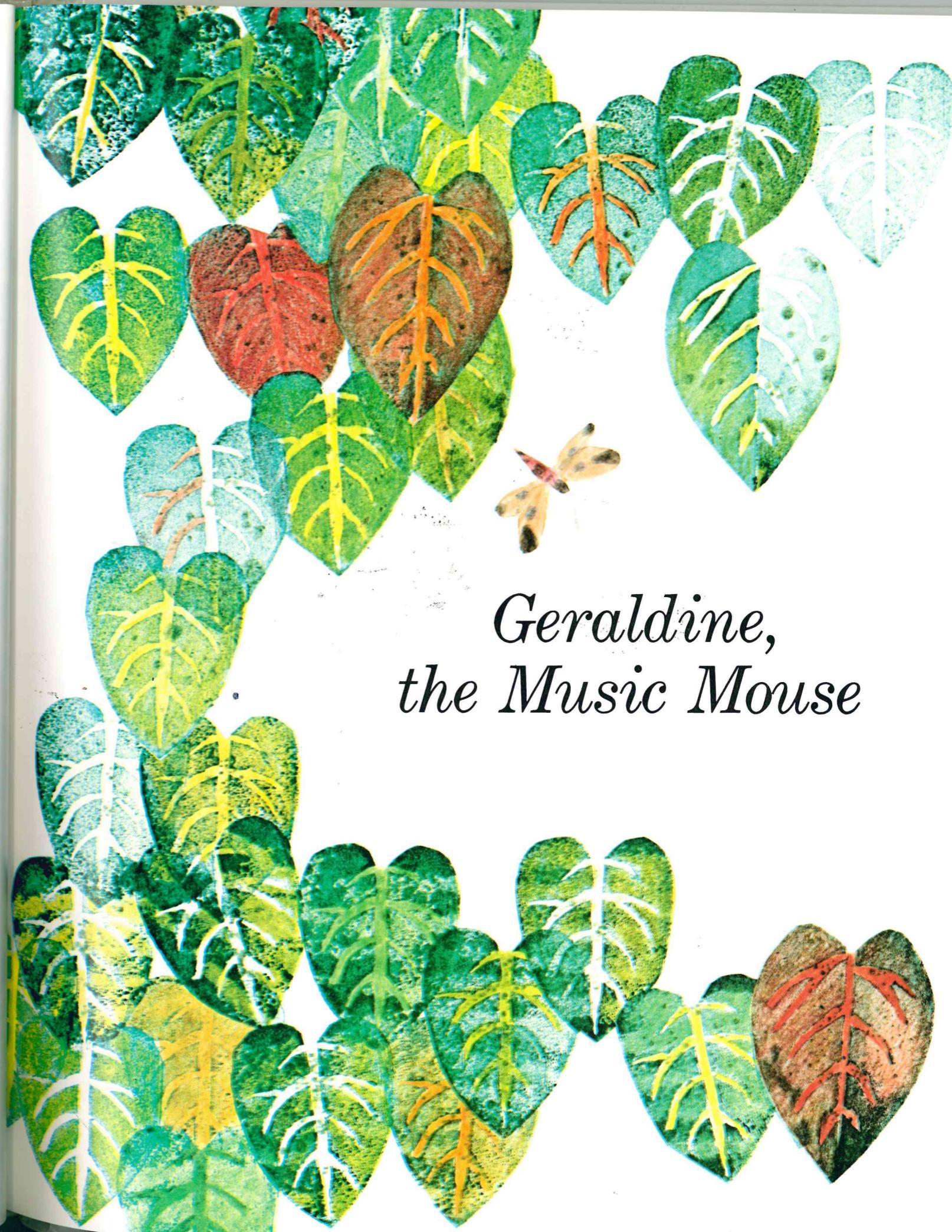
And so one day, light and joyous, he went on to see the world. Some leaves fluttered lightly in the breeze, and others hung heavily to the ground. Where the dark earth had split, crystals glittered in the early sun. There were polka-dotted mushrooms, and towery stems from which little flowers seemed to wave. There was a pine cone lying in the lacy shade of ferns, and pebbles in a nest of sand, smooth and round like the eggs of the turtledove. Lichen clung to the rocks and bark to the trees. The tender buds were sweet and cool with morning dew.





The little snail was very happy.

The seasons came and went, but the snail never forgot the story his father had told him. And when someone asked, "How come you have such a small house?" he would tell the story of *the biggest house in the world*.



Geraldine, the Music Mouse

And so the days went by. The frog had gone and the fish just lay there dreaming about birds in flight, grazing cows, and those strange animals, all dressed up, that his friend called people.

One day he finally decided that come what may, he too must see them. And so with a mighty whack of the tail he jumped clear out of the water and onto the bank. He landed in the dry, warm grass and there he lay gasping for air, unable to breathe or to move. "Help," he groaned feebly.





The minnow too had grown and had become a full-fledged fish. He often wondered where his four-footed friend had gone. But days and weeks went by and the frog did not return.

Then one day, with a happy splash that shook the weeds, the frog jumped into the pond.

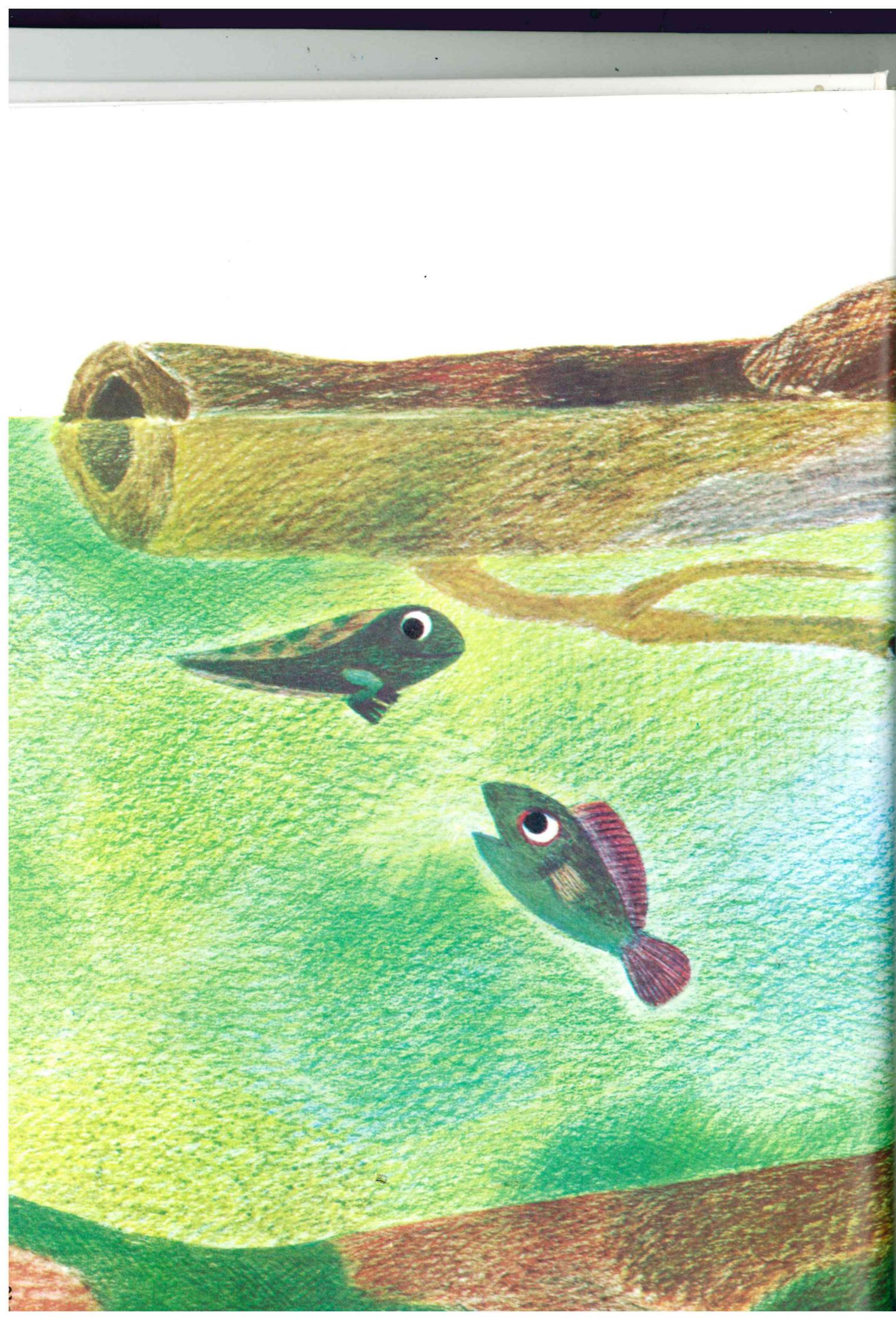
"Where have you been?" asked the fish excitedly.

"I have been about the world—hopping here and there," said the frog, "and I have seen extraordinary things."

"Like what?" asked the fish.

"Birds," said the frog mysteriously. "Birds!" And he told the fish about the birds, who had wings, and two legs, and many, many colors.





At the edge of the woods there was a pond, and there a minnow and a tadpole swam among the weeds. They were inseparable friends.

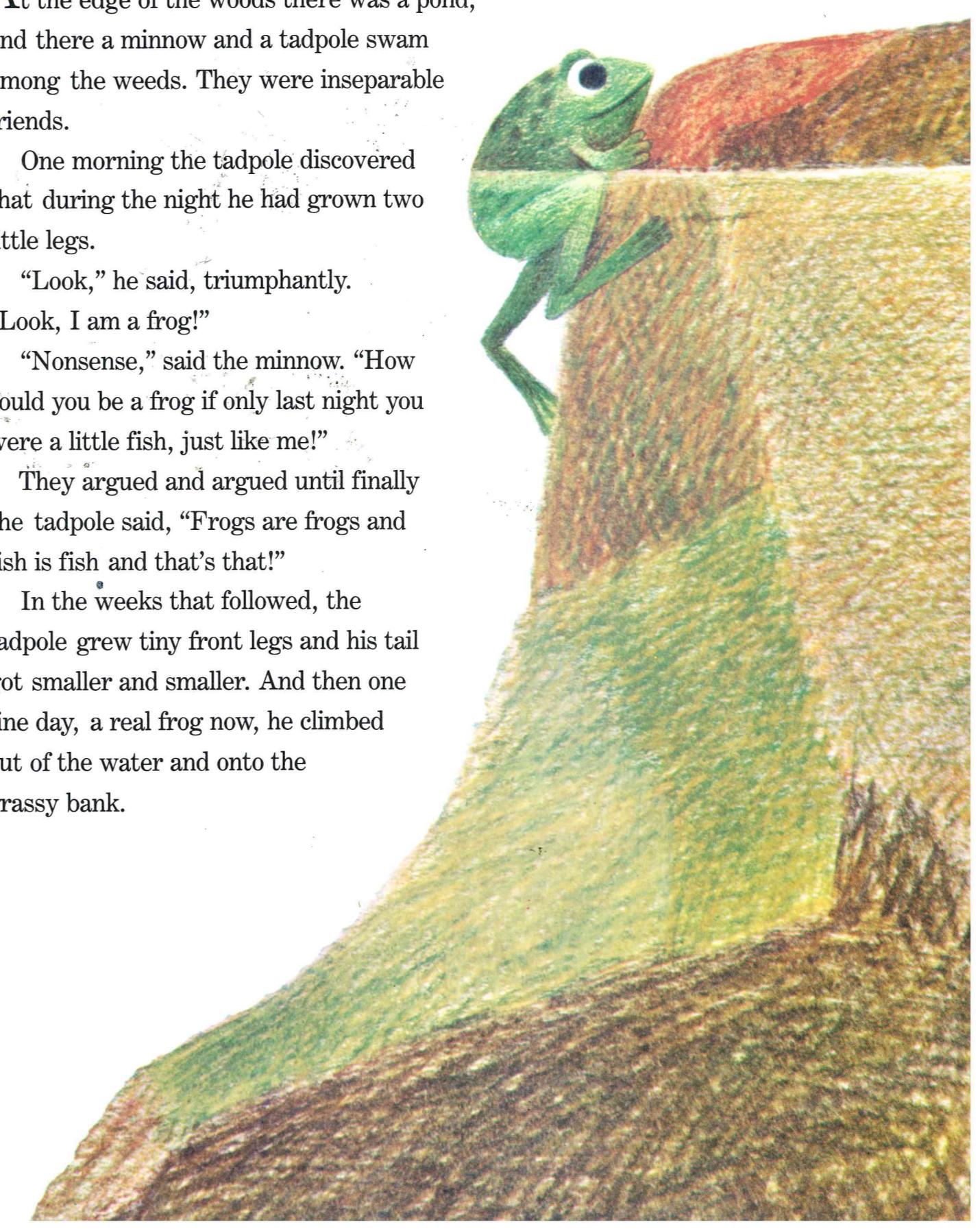
One morning the tadpole discovered that during the night he had grown two little legs.

"Look," he said, triumphantly.
"Look, I am a frog!"

"Nonsense," said the minnow. "How could you be a frog if only last night you were a little fish, just like me?"

They argued and argued until finally the tadpole said, "Frogs are frogs and fish is fish and that's that!"

In the weeks that followed, the tadpole grew tiny front legs and his tail got smaller and smaller. And then one fine day, a real frog now, he climbed out of the water and onto the grassy bank.

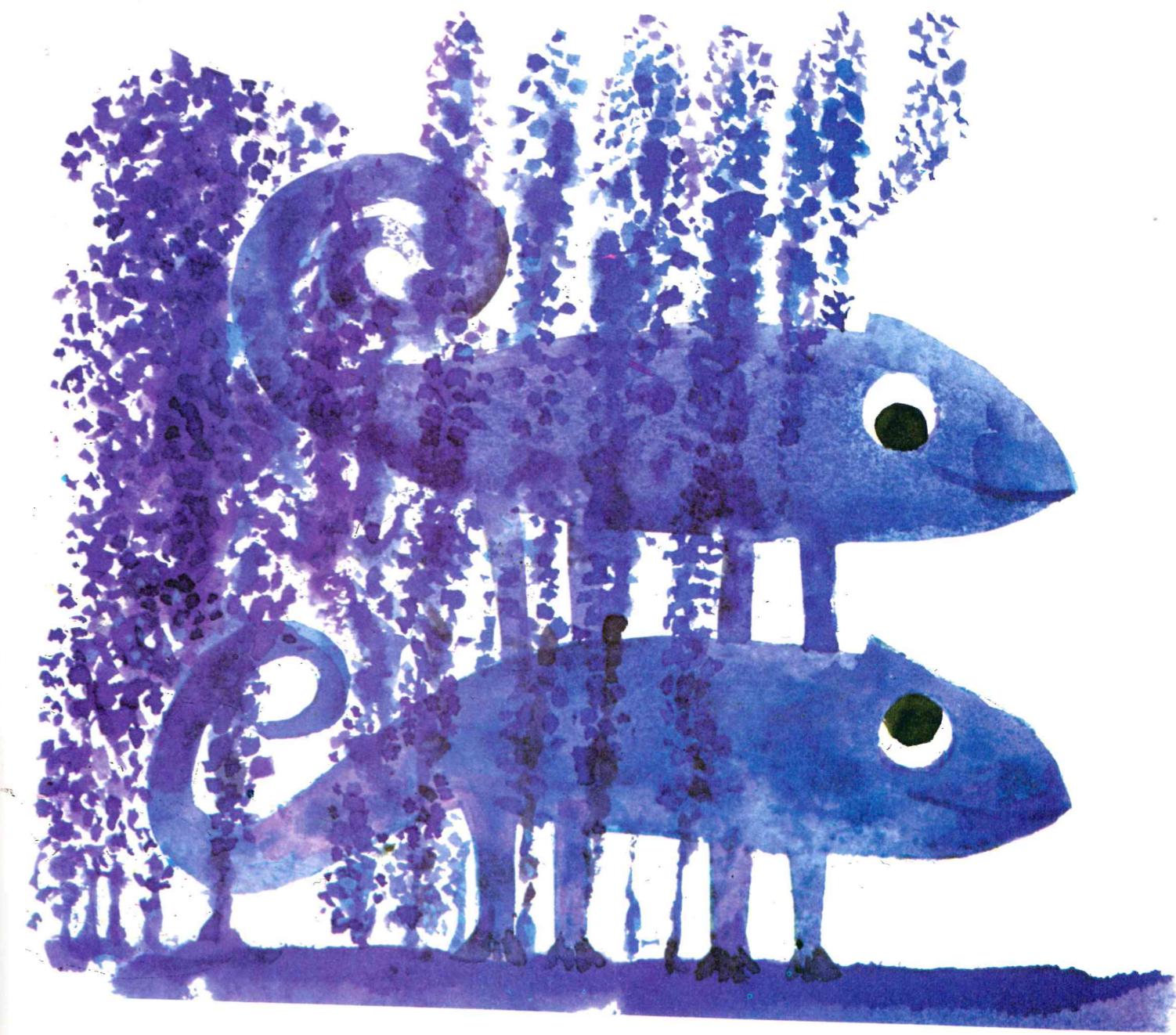
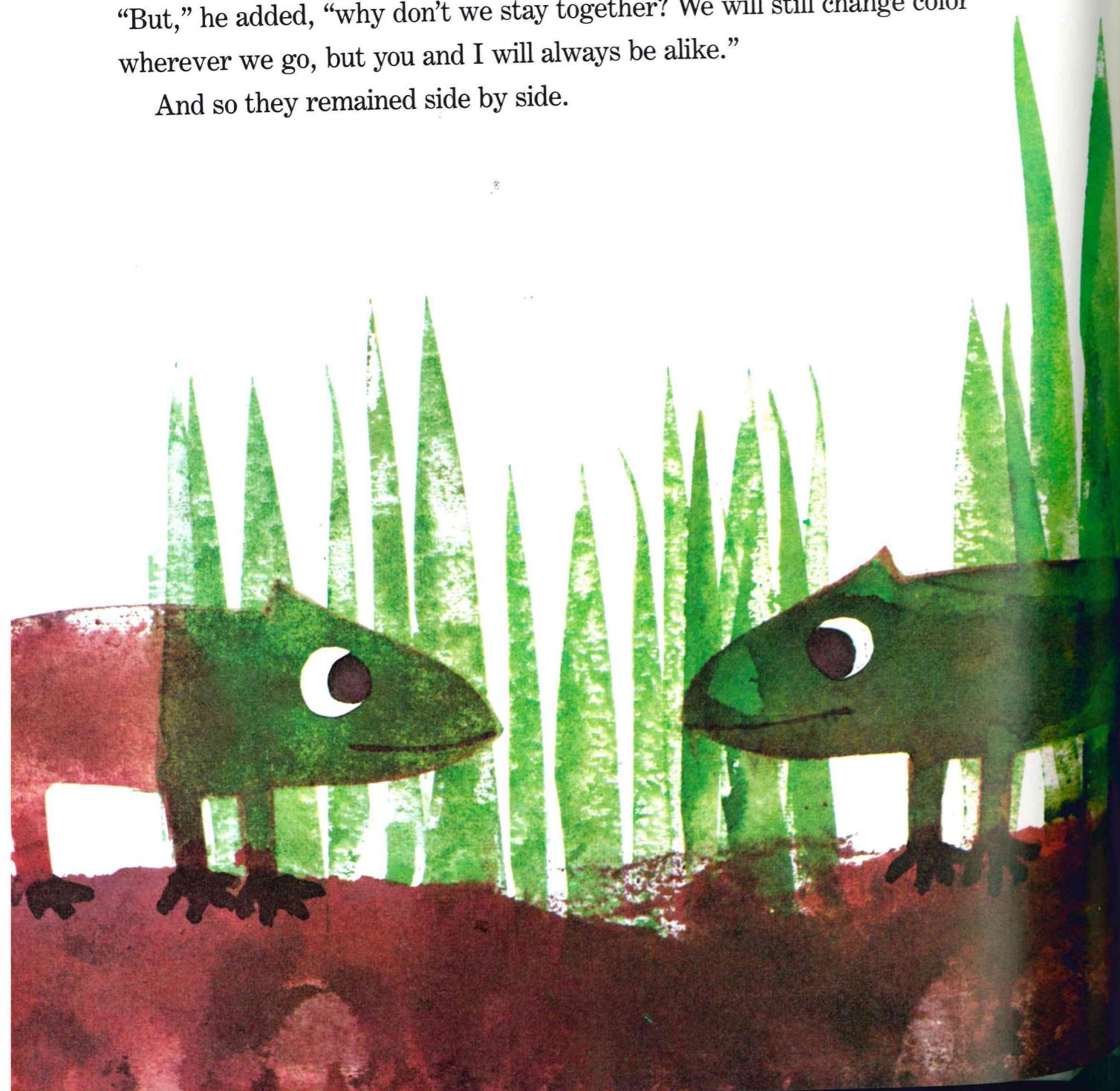


The chameleon was black in the long winter night. But when spring came, he walked out into the green grass. And there he met another chameleon.

He told his sad story. "Won't we ever have a color of our own?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," said the other chameleon, who was older and wiser. "But," he added, "why don't we stay together? We will still change color wherever we go, but you and I will always be alike."

And so they remained side by side.



They were green together,
and purple,
and yellow,