





Many years ago I knew a little bird whose name was Tico. He would sit on my shoulder and tell me all about the flowers, the ferns, and the tall trees. Once Tico told me this story about himself.

I don't know how it happened, but when I was young I had no wings. I sang like the other birds and I hopped like them, but I couldn't fly.

Luckily my friends loved me. They flew from tree to tree, and in the evening they brought me berries and tender fruits gathered from the highest branches.

Often I asked myself, "Why can't I fly like the other birds? Why can't I, too, soar through the big blue sky over villages and treetops?"

And I dreamed that I had golden wings, strong enough to carry me over the snow-capped mountains far away.





One summer night I was awakened by a noise nearby. A strange bird, pale as a pearl, was standing behind me.

"I am the wishingbird," he said. "Make a wish and it will come true."

I remembered my dreams and with all my might I wished I had a pair of golden wings. Suddenly there was a flash of light and on my back there were wings, golden wings, shimmering in the moonlight. The wishingbird had vanished.

Cautiously I flapped my wings. And then I flew. I flew higher than the tallest tree. The flower patches below looked like stamps scattered over the countryside, and the river like a silver necklace lying in the meadows. I was happy and I flew well into the day.

But when my friends saw me swoop down from the sky, they frowned on me and said, "You think you are better than we are, don't you, with those golden wings. You wanted to be *different*." And off they flew without saying another word.



Why had they gone? Why were they angry? Was it *bad* to be different? I could fly as high as the eagle. Mine were the most beautiful wings in the world. But my friends had left me and I was very lonely.

One day I saw a man sitting in front of a hut. He was a basket maker and there were baskets all around him.

There were tears in his eyes. I flew onto a branch from where I could speak to him.

"Why are you sad?" I asked.

"Oh, little bird, my child is sick and I am poor. I cannot buy the medicines that would make him well."

"How can I help him?" I thought. And suddenly I knew. "I will give him one of my feathers."

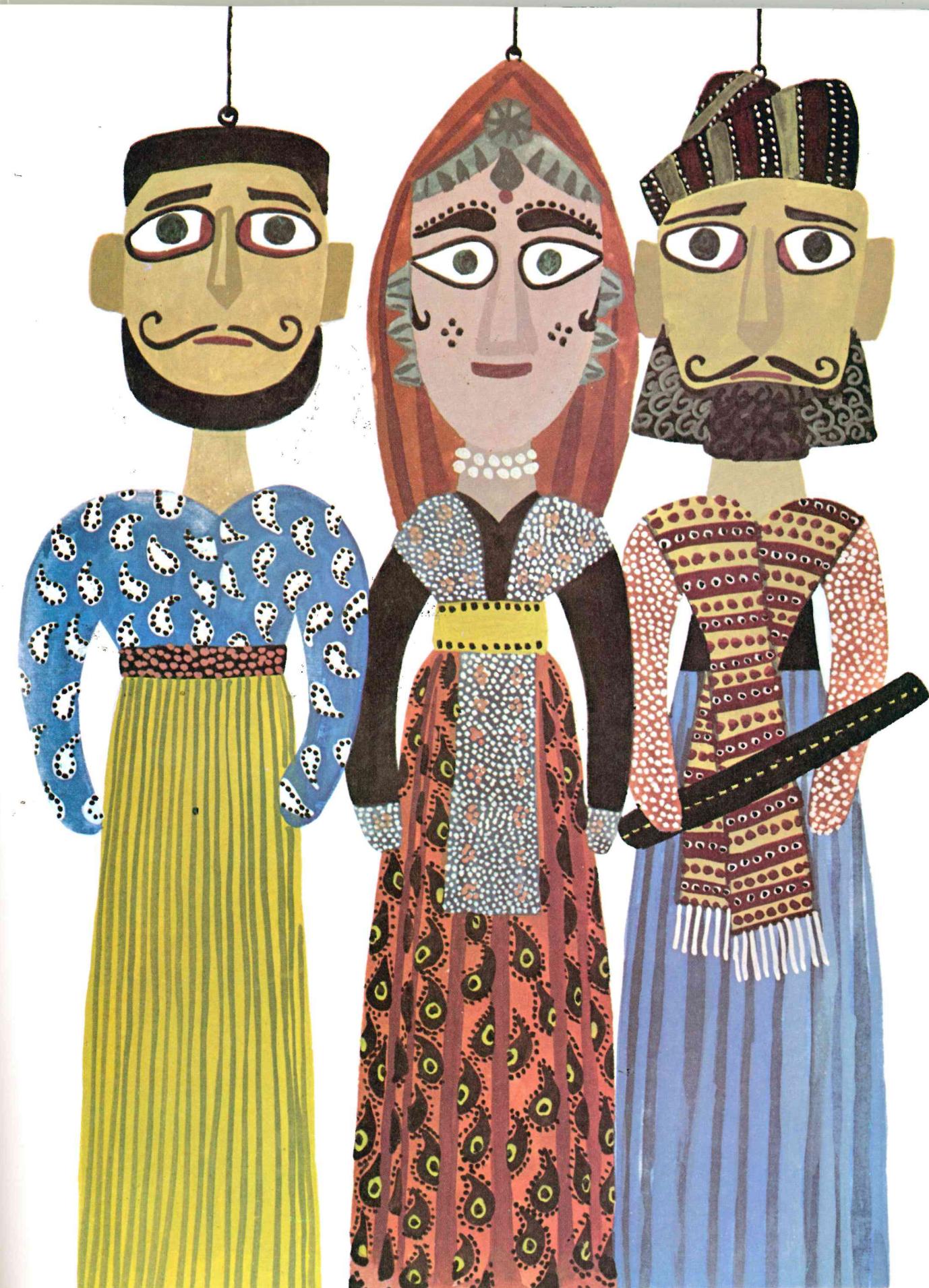
"How can I thank you!" said the poor man happily. "You have saved my child. But look! Your wing!"



Where the golden feather had been, there was a real black feather,
as soft as silk.

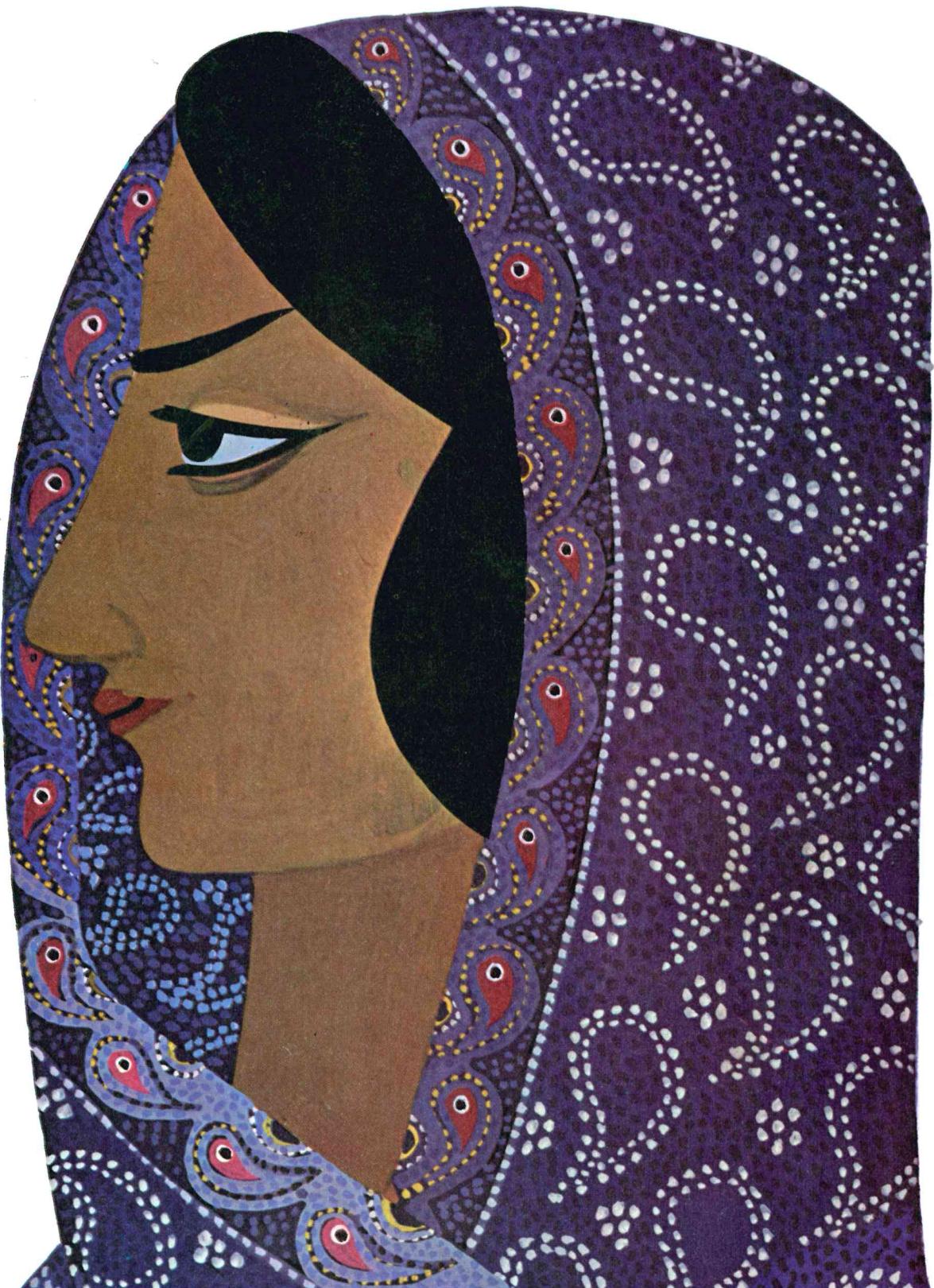
From that day, little by little, I gave my golden feathers away and
black feathers appeared in their place.

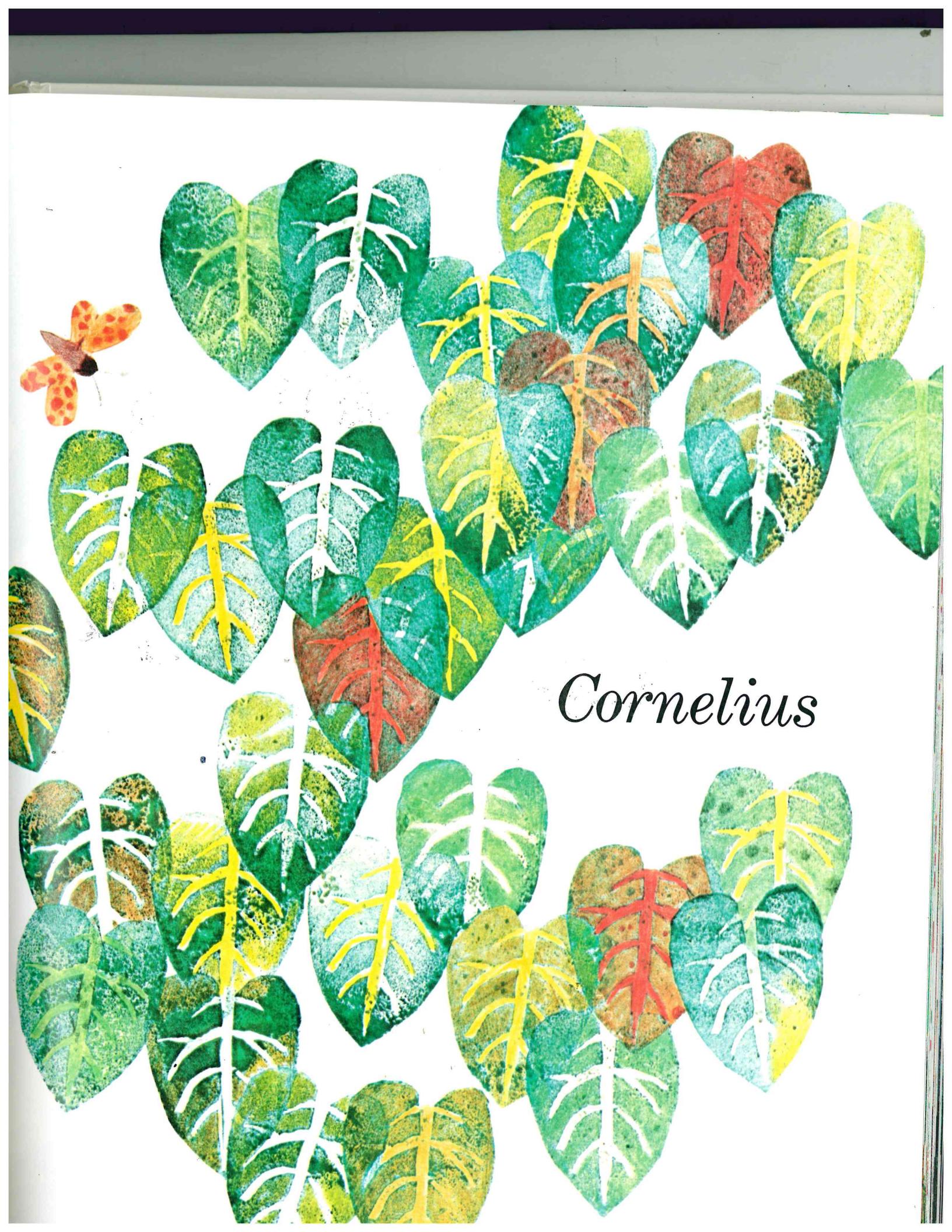
I bought many presents: three new puppets for a poor puppeteer,
a spinning wheel to spin the yarn for an old woman's shawl, a compass
for a fisherman who got lost at sea . . .



And when I had given my last golden feathers to a beautiful bride,
my wings were as black as India ink.

I flew to the big tree where my friends gathered for the night.
Would they welcome me?



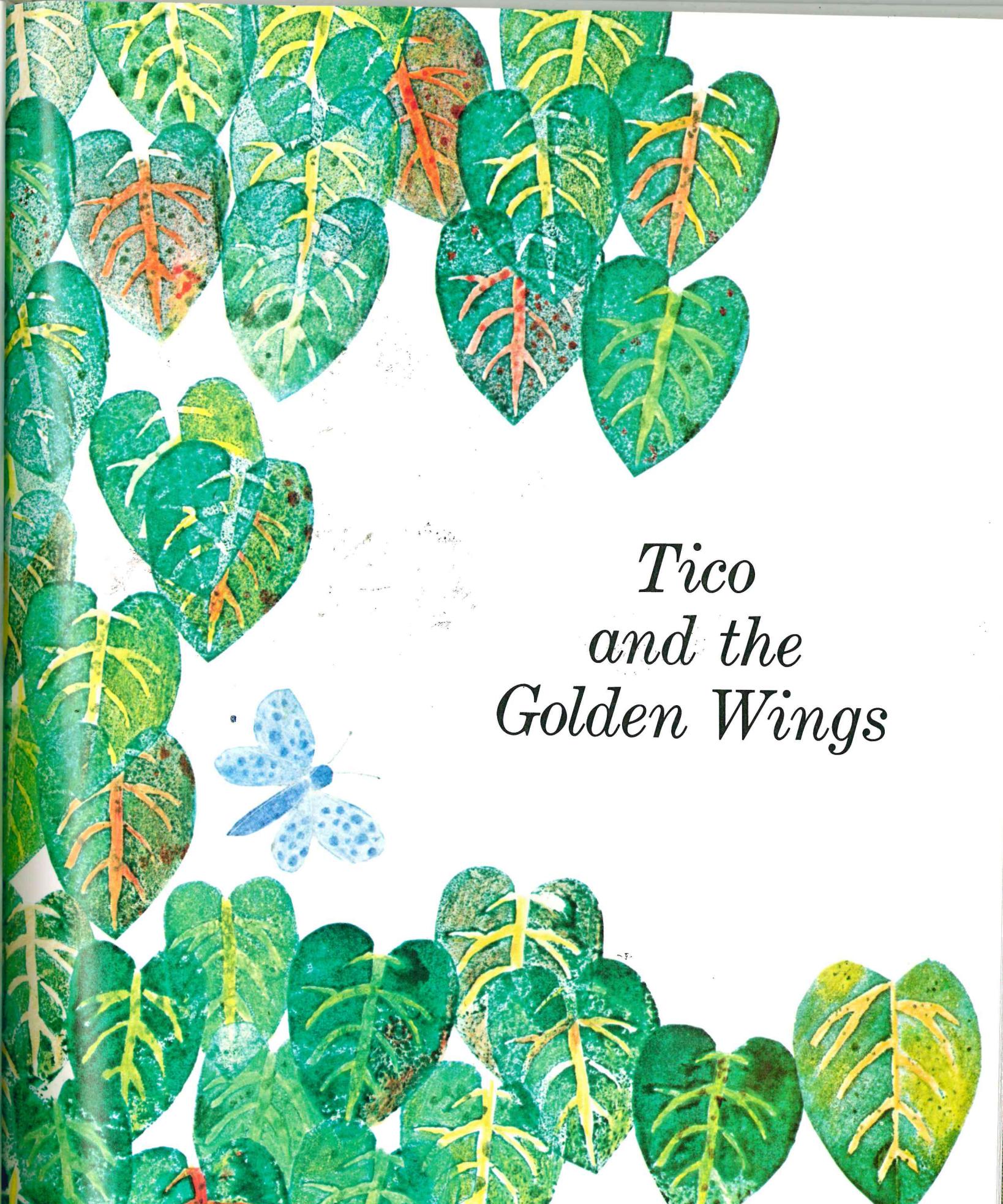
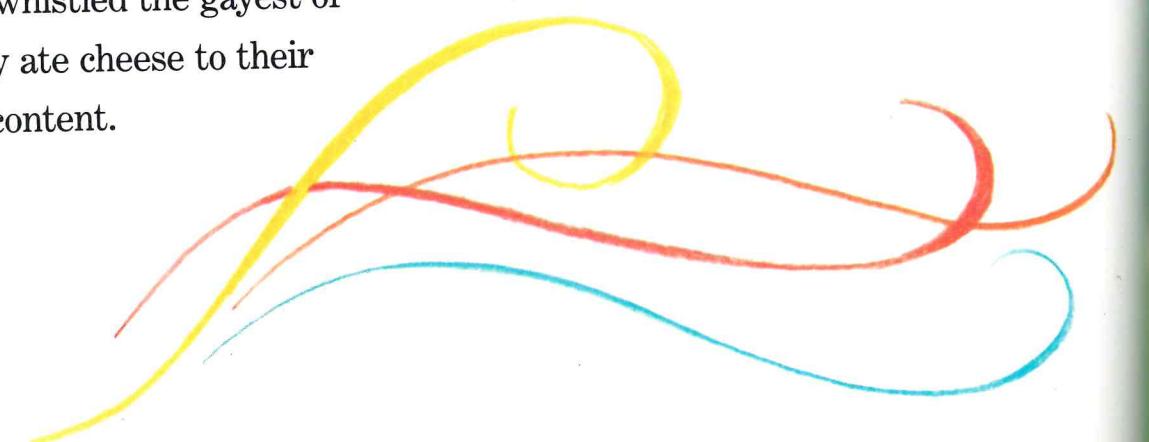


Cornelius

Then a long, soft, beautiful whistle came from Geraldine's lips. One of the melodies of the cheese flute echoed in the air. The little mice held their breath in amazement. Other mice came to hear the miracle. When the tune came to an end, Gregory, the oldest of the group, whispered, "If this is music, Geraldine, you are right. We cannot eat that cheese."

"No," said Geraldine joyfully. "Now we CAN eat the cheese. Because . . . now the music is in me."

With that they all followed Geraldine to the barn. And while Geraldine whistled the gayest of tunes, they ate cheese to their tummies' content.



Tico and the Golden Wings