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ALWAYS ELEPHANT

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Always Elephant
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A TRADITIONAL TALE

ALWAYS ELEPHANT

Chapter 1

Every year, all the animals held a competition to see who would be their new king. It was called the Challenge. Everyone took part in the Challenge, but it was *always* Elephant who won, year after year.

This year Mole did not want to leave his

soft, dark bed in the soft, dark earth to go to

the Challenge. He was tired and the bright light

outside hurt his eyes. But he knew he had to

go and help choose a king – even though

Elephant always won.



Mole brushed his shiny black coat and went up into the sunshine. The bright light blinded him, and he bumped straight into something on the path. *Ooofi!* It was warm and feathery and it looked as if it were hurt.

"A bird!" exclaimed Mole. "A poor, broken bird!" Mole ran to get her a drink of water.

"Oh, thank you! I flew too high and banged my head on the sky!" sobbed the bird.

Mole said, "I must go to the Challenge, but if I put you in my backpack and take you with me, you will be quite safe."





As he hurried on, Mole explained, "Every year there is a Challenge to decide who becomes king. Last year the Challenge was 'Who has the biggest ears?'"

"And Elephant won?" asked Bird.

"Of course," said Mole. "The year before it was 'Who weighs the most?'"

"And Elephant won?" asked Bird.

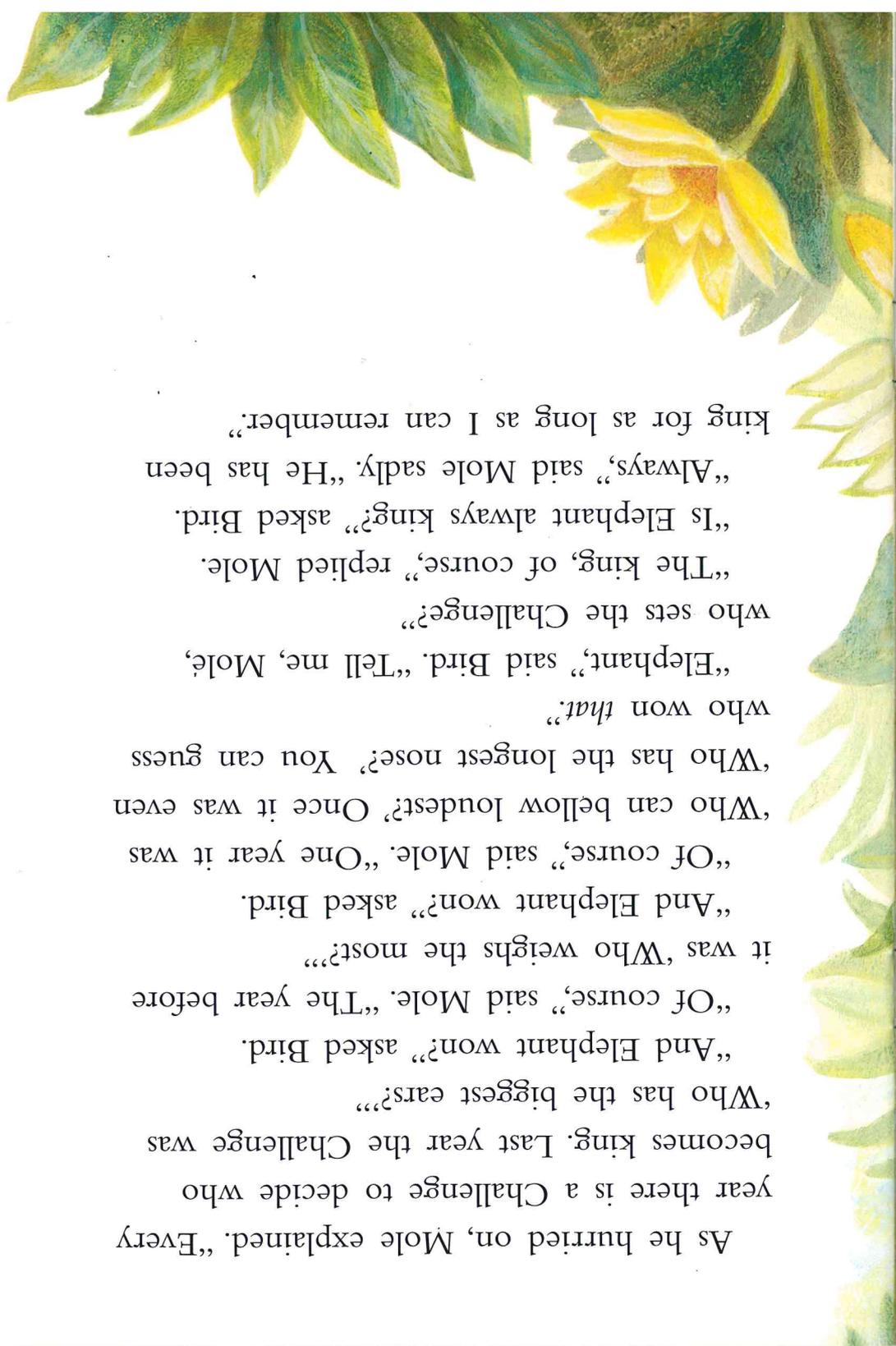
"Of course," said Mole. "One year it was 'Who can bellow loudest?' Once it was even 'Who has the longest nose?' You can guess who won *that*."

"Elephant," said Bird. "Tell me, Mole, who sets the Challenge?"

"The king, of course," replied Mole.

"Is Elephant always king?" asked Bird.

"Always," said Mole sadly. "He has been king for as long as I can remember."



The other animals were already gathered for the Challenge. Mole was a bit afraid of their hooves and paws and claws. His black velvet fur was soon dusty and dirty. Then the ground shook and four huge, grey feet crashed past beneath two sharp, white tusks. King Elephant did not even see small, dusty Mole.



King Elephant blew a blast on his long,
trumpety nose and flapped his big, grey ears.
Then he bellowed:

“For this year’s Challenge I shall throw this
mango in the air. Whoever catches it will

be king.”

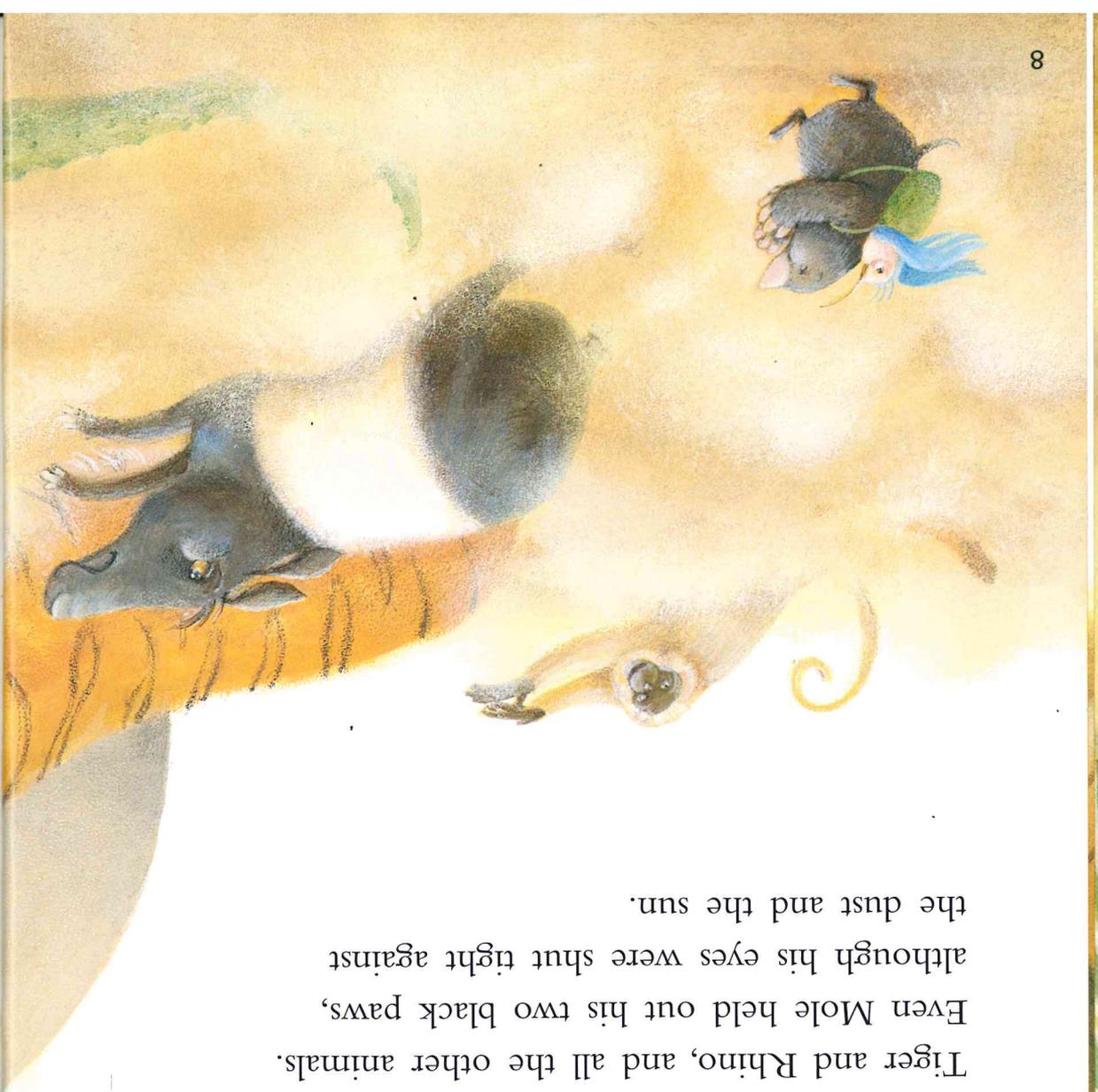
Mole sighed. He wanted to slip away home.

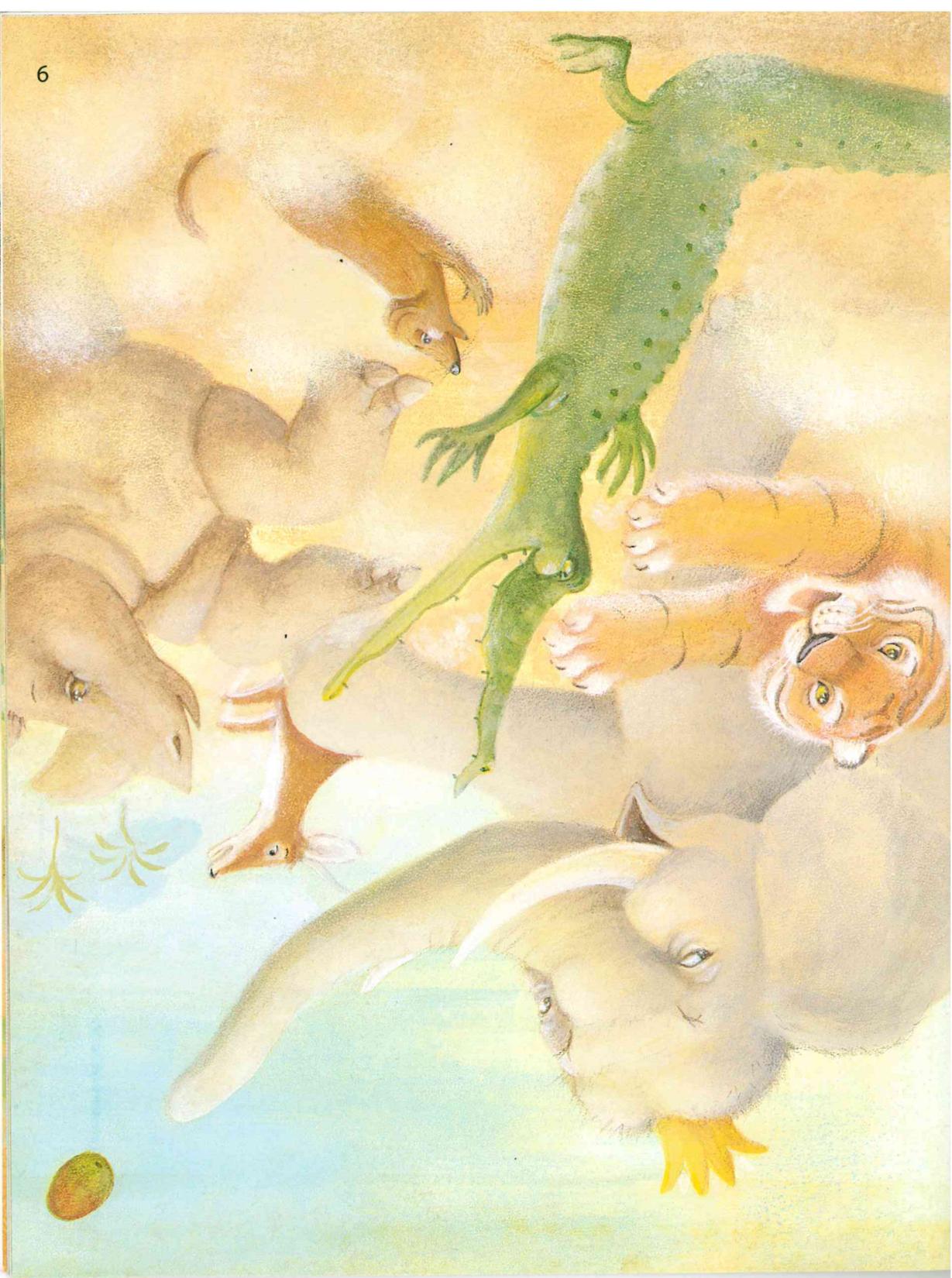
What chance did he have of catching the mango?
The other animals were stamping their feet

in excitement. Mole dared not move.



King Elephant whirled his trunk around once,
and the mango flew high into the air. The
animals all rushed forward . . .
Gazelle was hopeful. She reached her head
up high; she opened her mouth wide. So did
Tiger and Rhino, and all the other animals.
Even Mole held out his two black paws,
although his eyes were shut tight against
the dust and the sun.



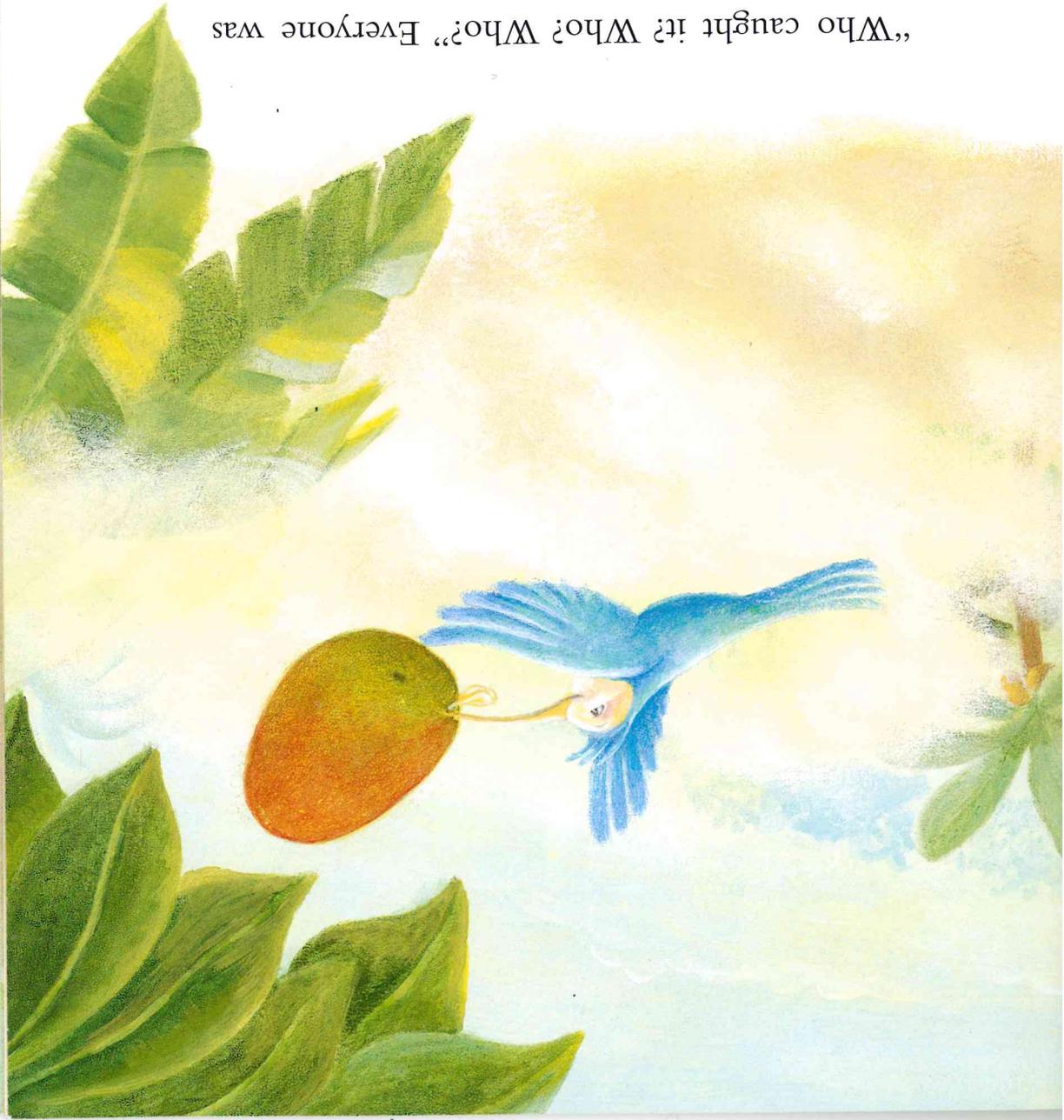


Then out of Mole's backpack flew Bird,
so fast that no one saw her in the clouds of dust.
She flew straight up, like a ball from a kick,
and caught up with the mango just as it reached
the top of the trees. Sticking her sharp beak
through its peel, she flew down again.



“Who caught it? Who? Who?” Everyone was asking. Elephant looked puzzled. He crossed his eyes to look at the tip of his trunk, but there was no mango there.

“Who caught the mango?” he bellowed.



“Oh!” whispered Mole. “I did! I mean . . . yes! I must have! I did!”

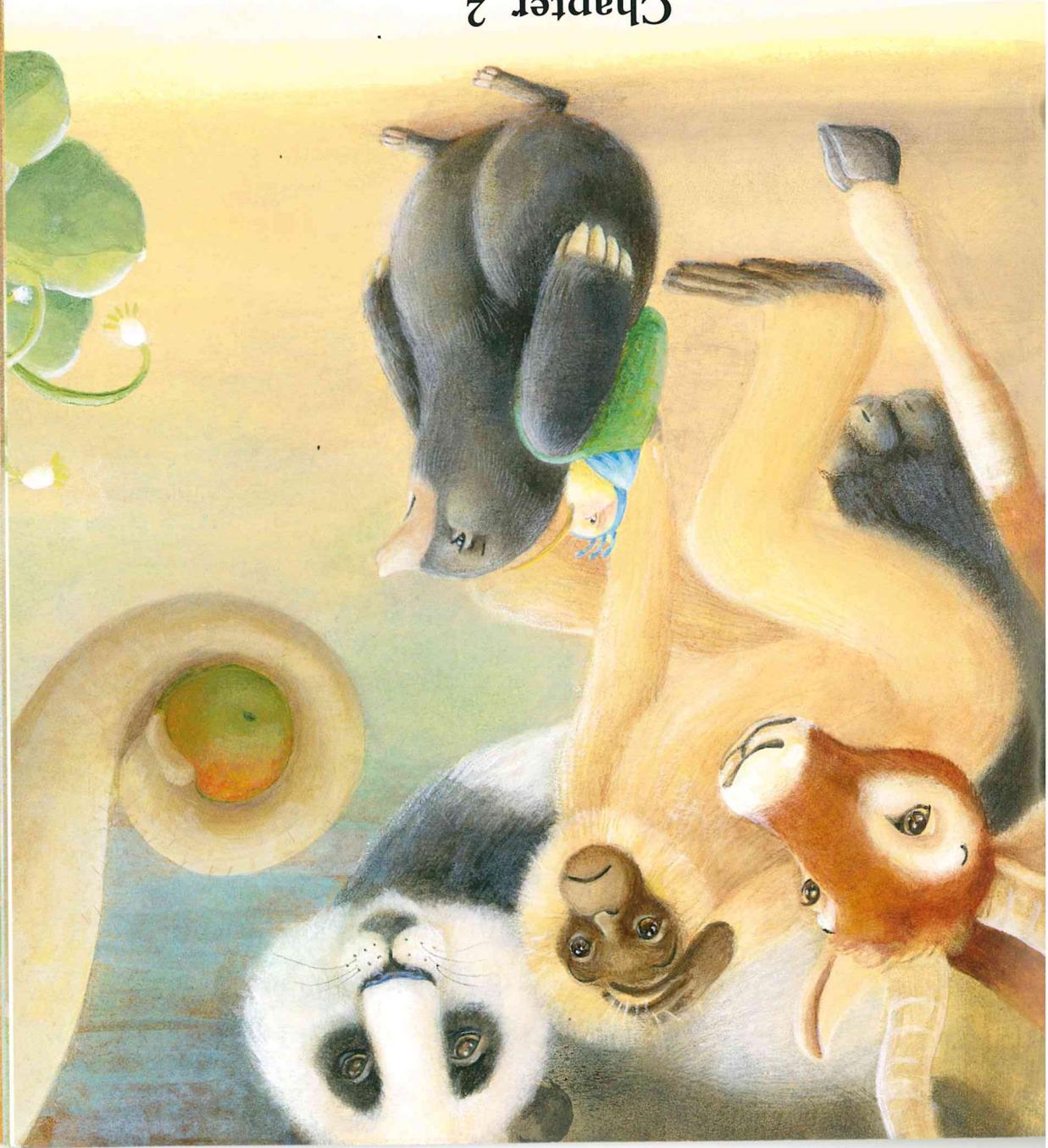
Sure enough, there in his paws lay the mango. “Hooray for Mole! Mole is king!” shouted all the animals.

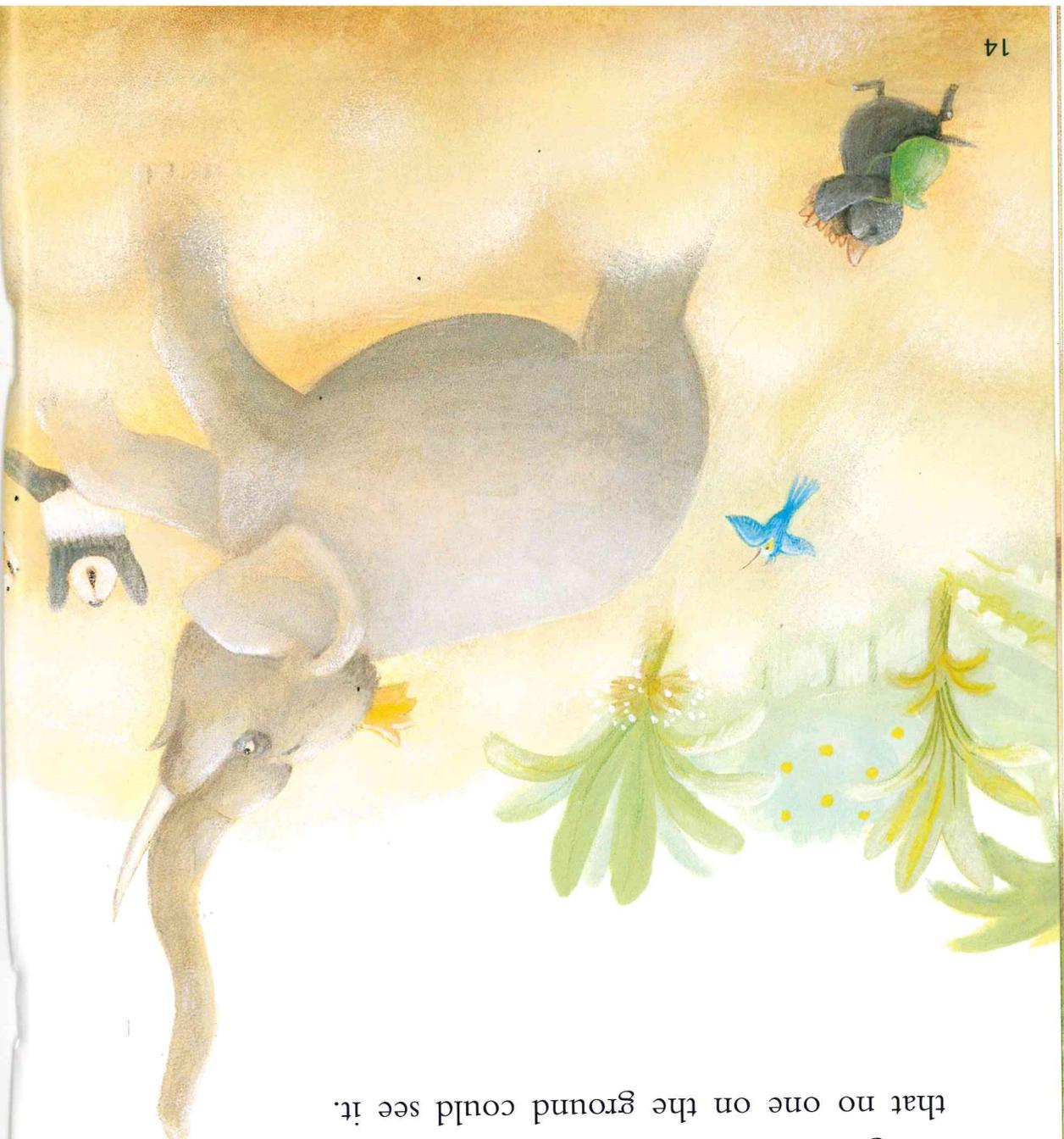
Elephant coughed. “That was just for practice. Now that you understand the rules, we can hold the real contest.”



Mole's little heart sank. For a moment,
he had thought . . . but no, of course,
The winner was always Elephant.

Chapter 2





Again, Elephant whirled his trunk around and
 around, much faster this time. Up went the
 mango, like a rocket on Bonfire Night – so high
 that no one on the ground could see it.



Hopeful animals rushed forward and banged into one another, paws out, mouths open, all wanting to be king. Even Mole put out his paws again, though his eyes were shut tight. Up out of Mole's backpack flew Bird, so fast that no one saw her amid the dust. She caught up with the mango as it reached the clouds. Sticking her sharp beak into its bruised flesh, she plunged back down.



“Who caught it? Who? Who?” There was chaos among the animals.

Elephant was looking grumpy. He squinted at the tip of his trunk, but there was no

mango there.

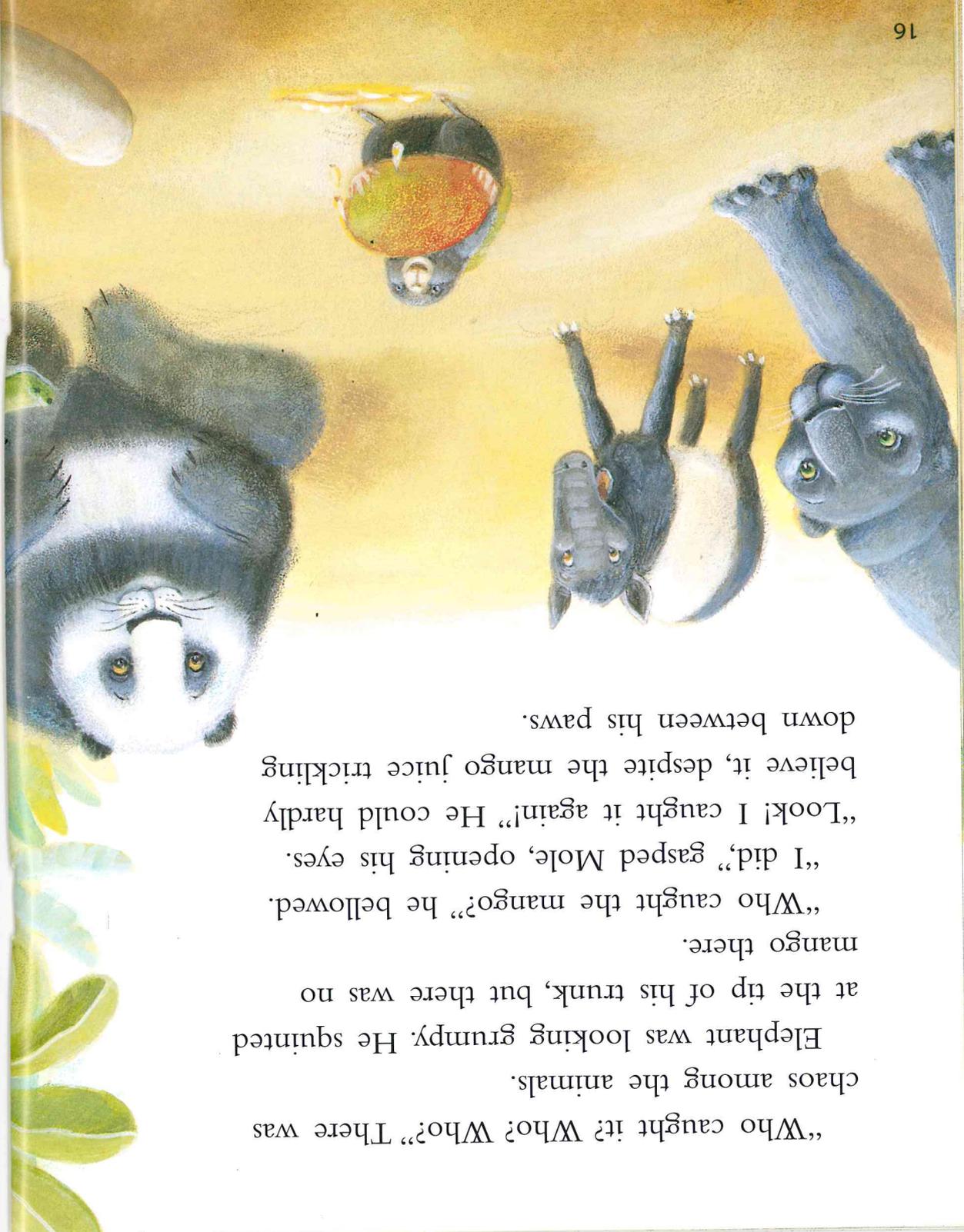
“Who caught the mango?” he bellowed.

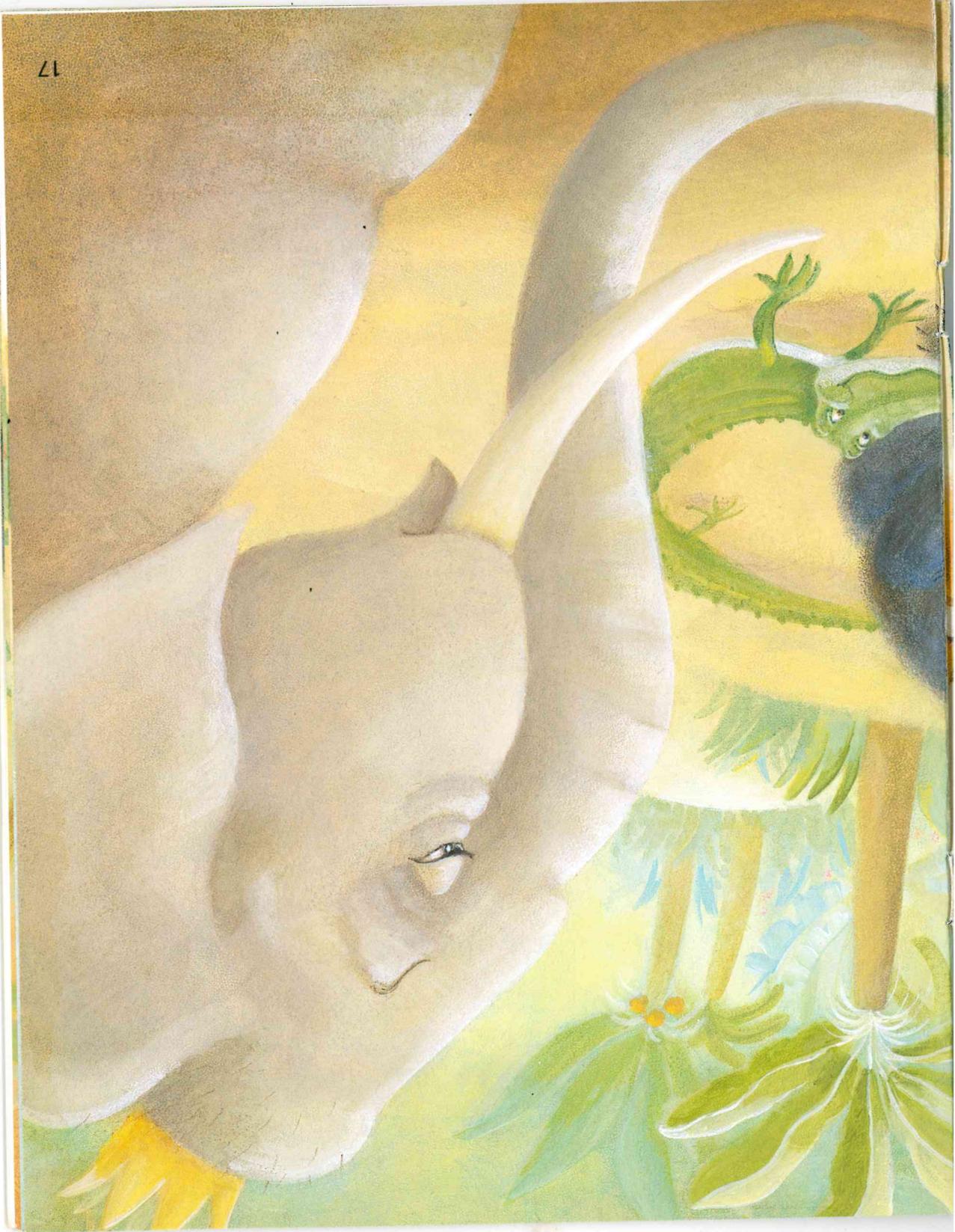
“I did,” gasped Mole, opening his eyes.

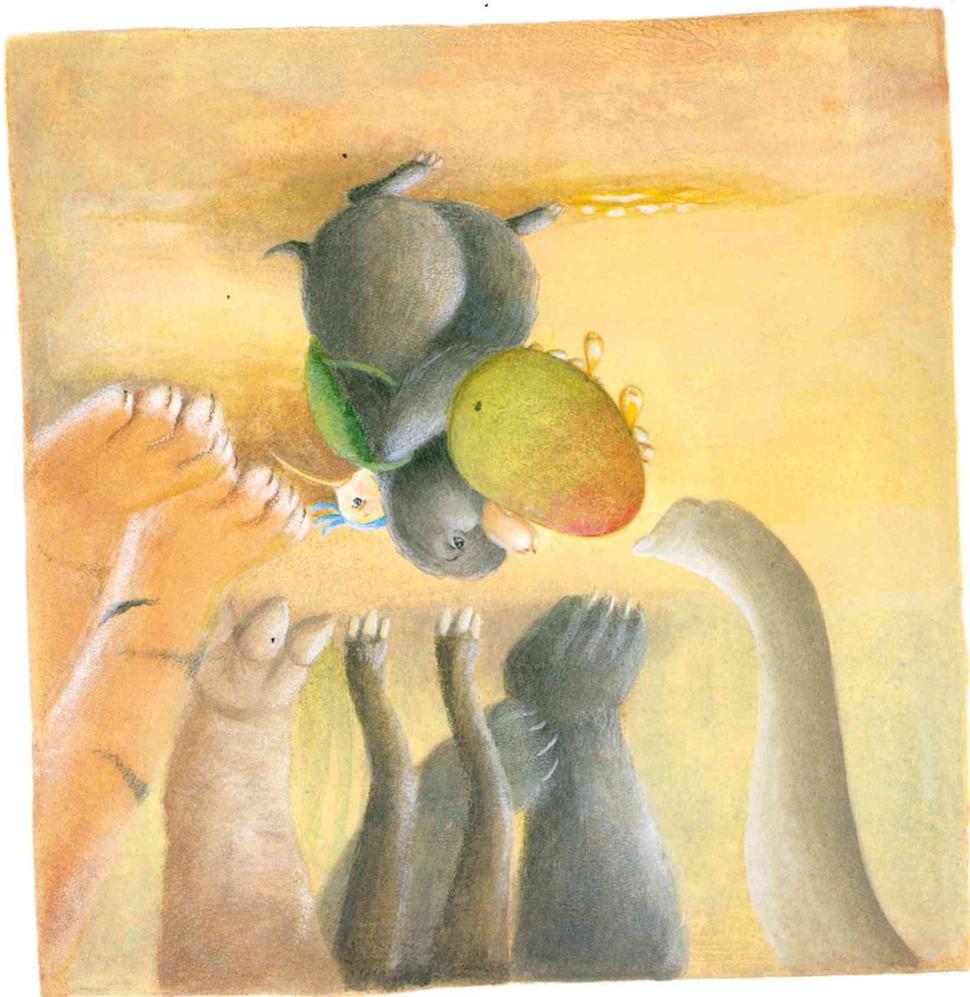
“Look! I caught it again!” He could hardly

believe it, despite the mango juice trickling

down between his paws.

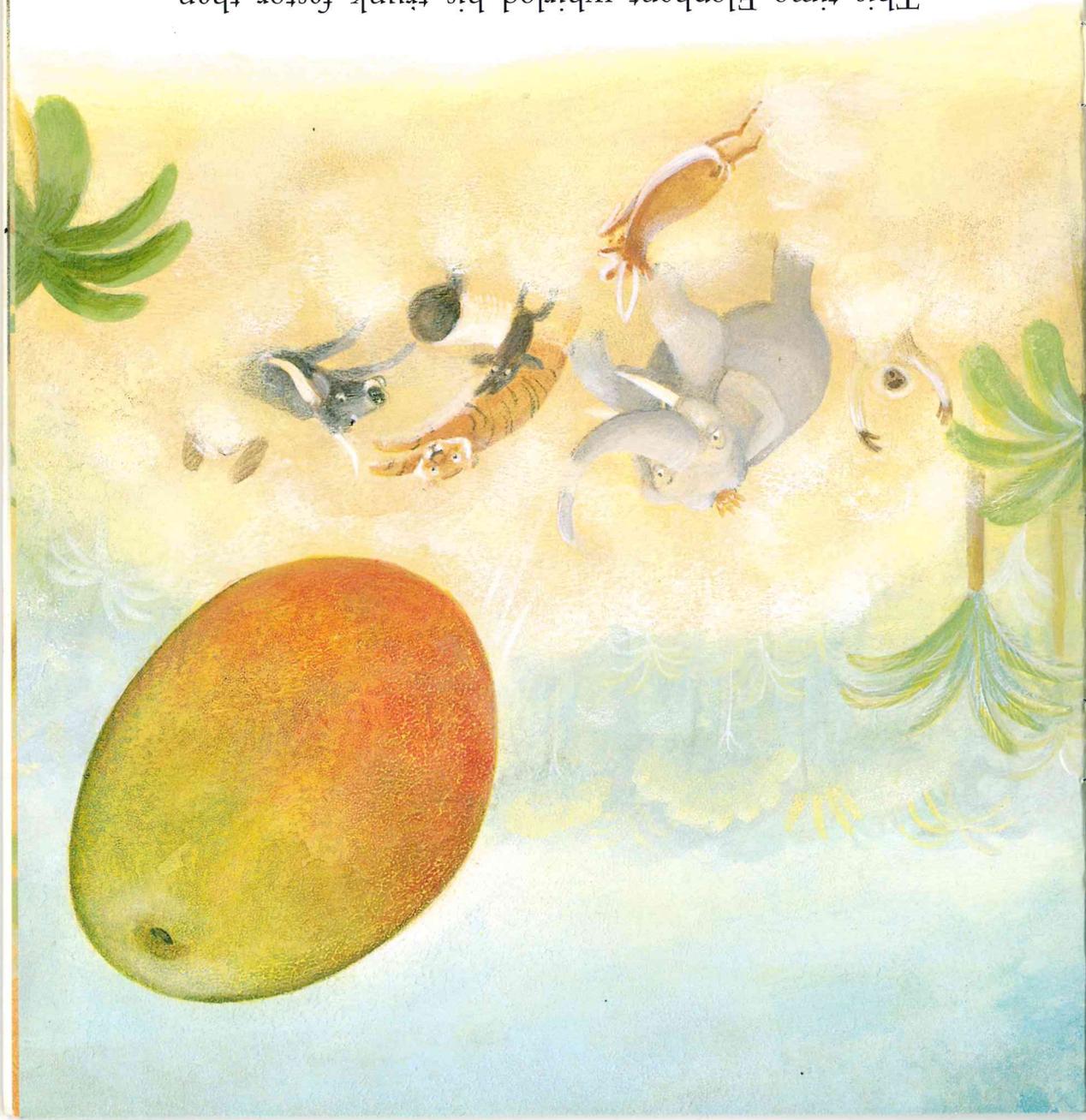




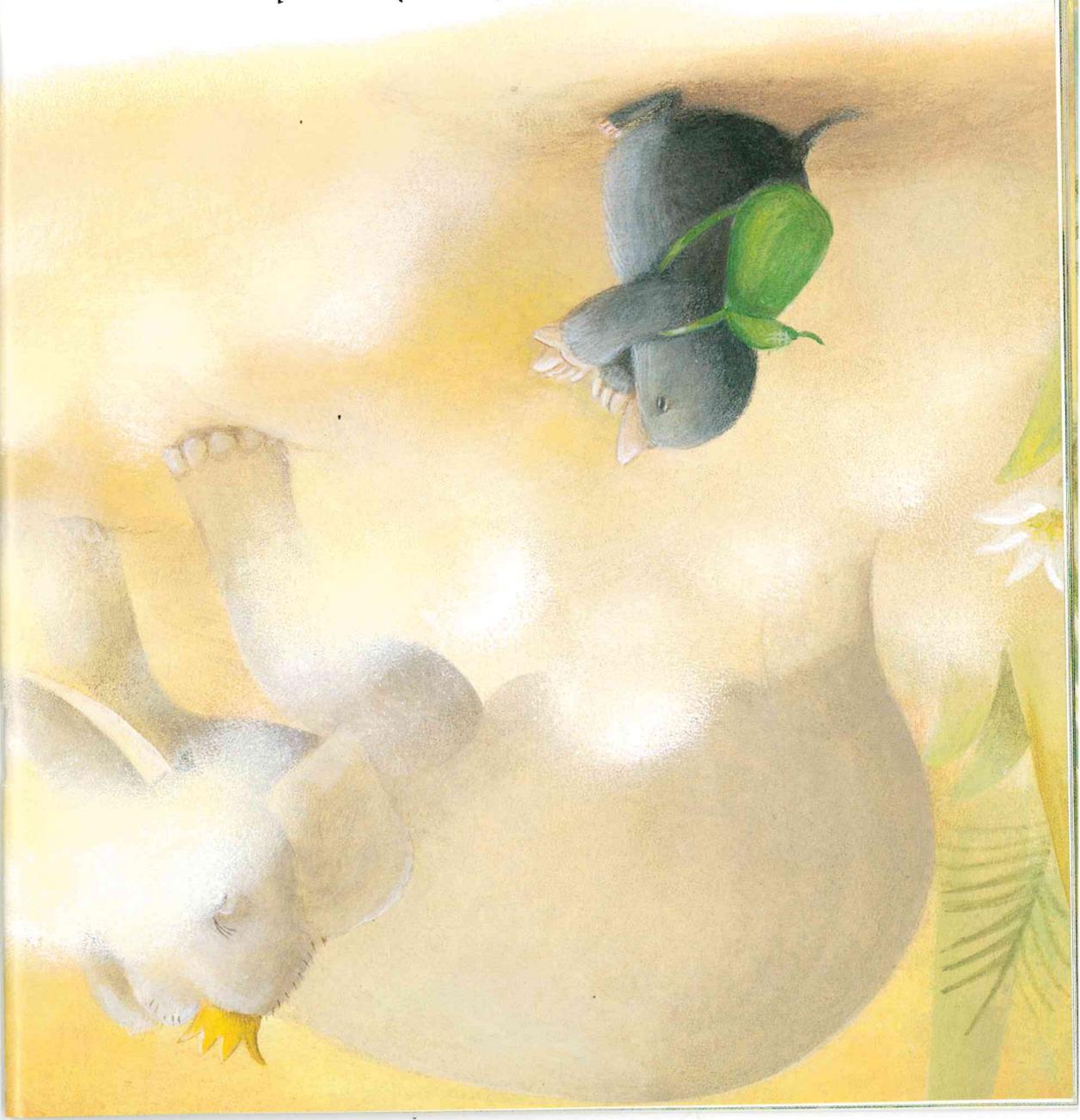


“Oh, well done, Mole!” cried all the animals
(except Elephant). “You are *such* a good catcher!”
“I wasn’t ready,” said Elephant. “We’ll try
it again.”
Mole’s disappointed little heart felt like
a bruised mango.

This time Elephant whirled his trunk faster than the propeller of a helicopter and let go. The mango flew so high that it almost splattered against the sky. Eager animals rushed forward.



Up went Bird, catching the mango at the very top of the sky. As she flew back down, she saw Mole. His snout was upturned, his eyes were shut tight, and his little face was so hopeful.



“Who caught the mango?” bellowed Elephant.
Mole blinked his little eyes and stared at the
mushy mango in his paws.
“I did!” he said.
“Best of ten,” said Elephant. “I forgot to say.”



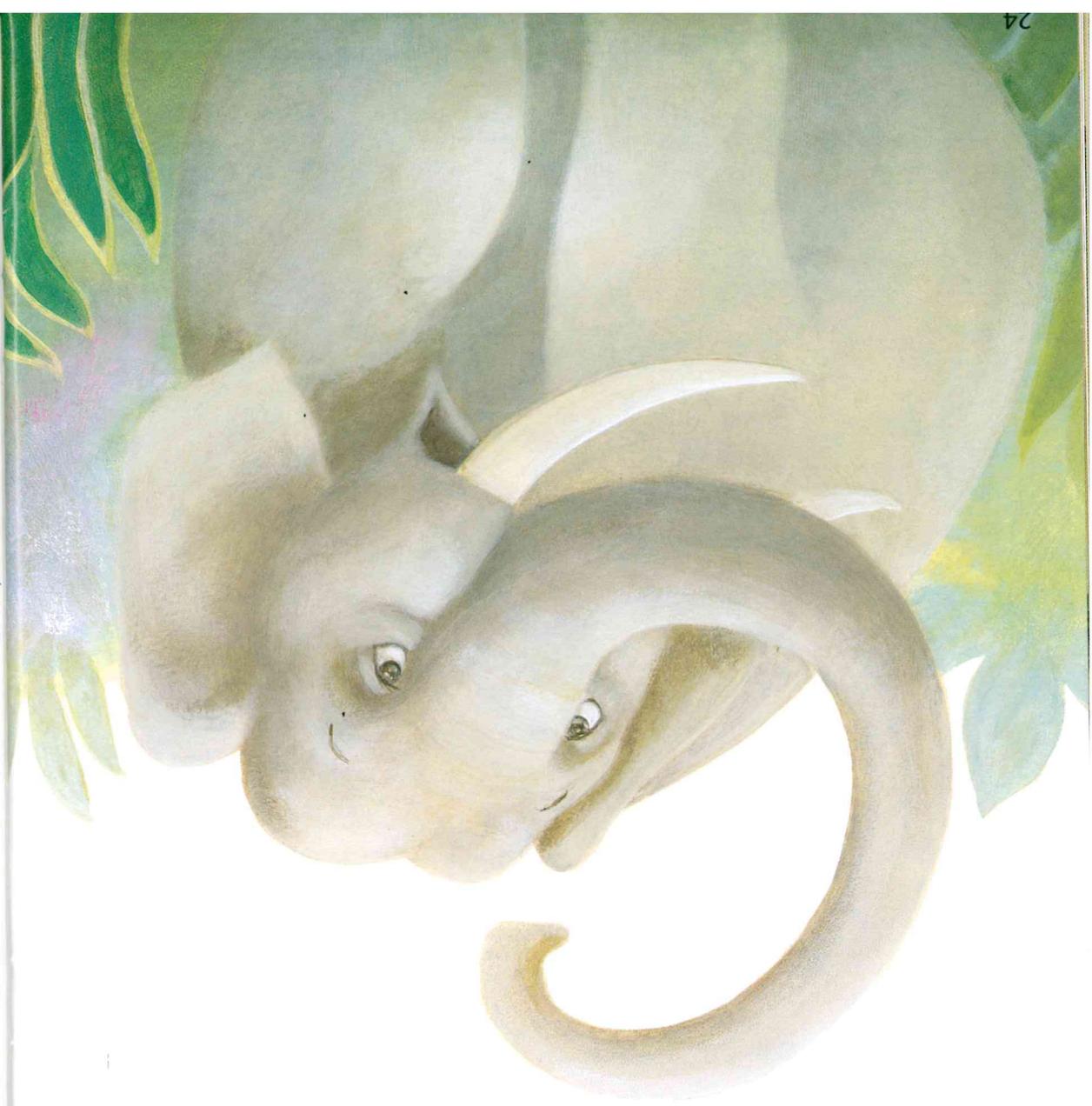
The other animals let out a noisy roar.
"Play fair! Mole is king! He caught the
mango three times!"
Then they crowned Mole and carried him
off to the king's feast.

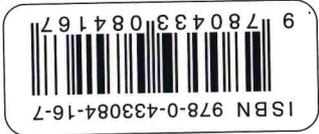


Bird poked her head out of Mole's backpack,
as if she had just woken up.
"What's happening?" she asked sleepily.
Shyly, Mole explained how he had caught
the mango three times, so that now he was
king for a year.
"And what a kind, helpful, gentle king you
will make," said Bird.
"Hear, hear!" cried all the animals.



Elephant, though, said nothing. He was looking
dizzy, peering up his trunk, still hoping to find
a mango there.





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INDEPENDENT READING LINK
The Rat Princess



Every year the animals hold a
competition to see who will be king.
Elephant always wins. This year,
Elephant is tricked by a clever little
bird. So, who will be crowned king?

Always Elephant

Objective
Explore how
particular
words are
used

