

Yellow Bananas



Illustrated by Gerry Turley

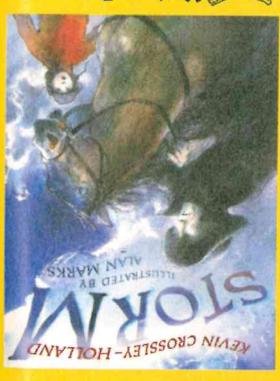
CONKER



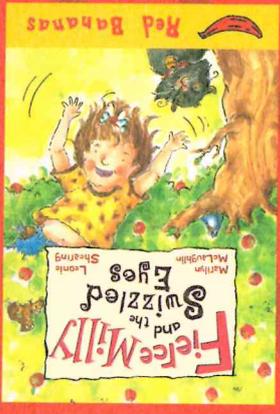
Michael Morpurgo

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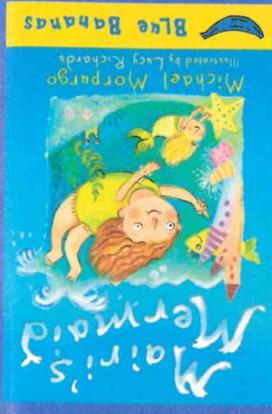
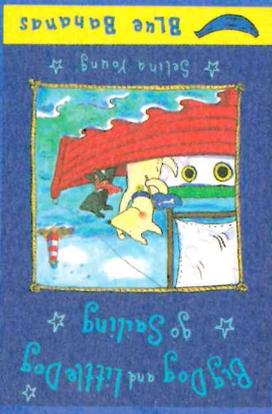
For newly fluent readers



For building confidence



For early readers





CONKER

CROSSHALL INFANT SCHOOL



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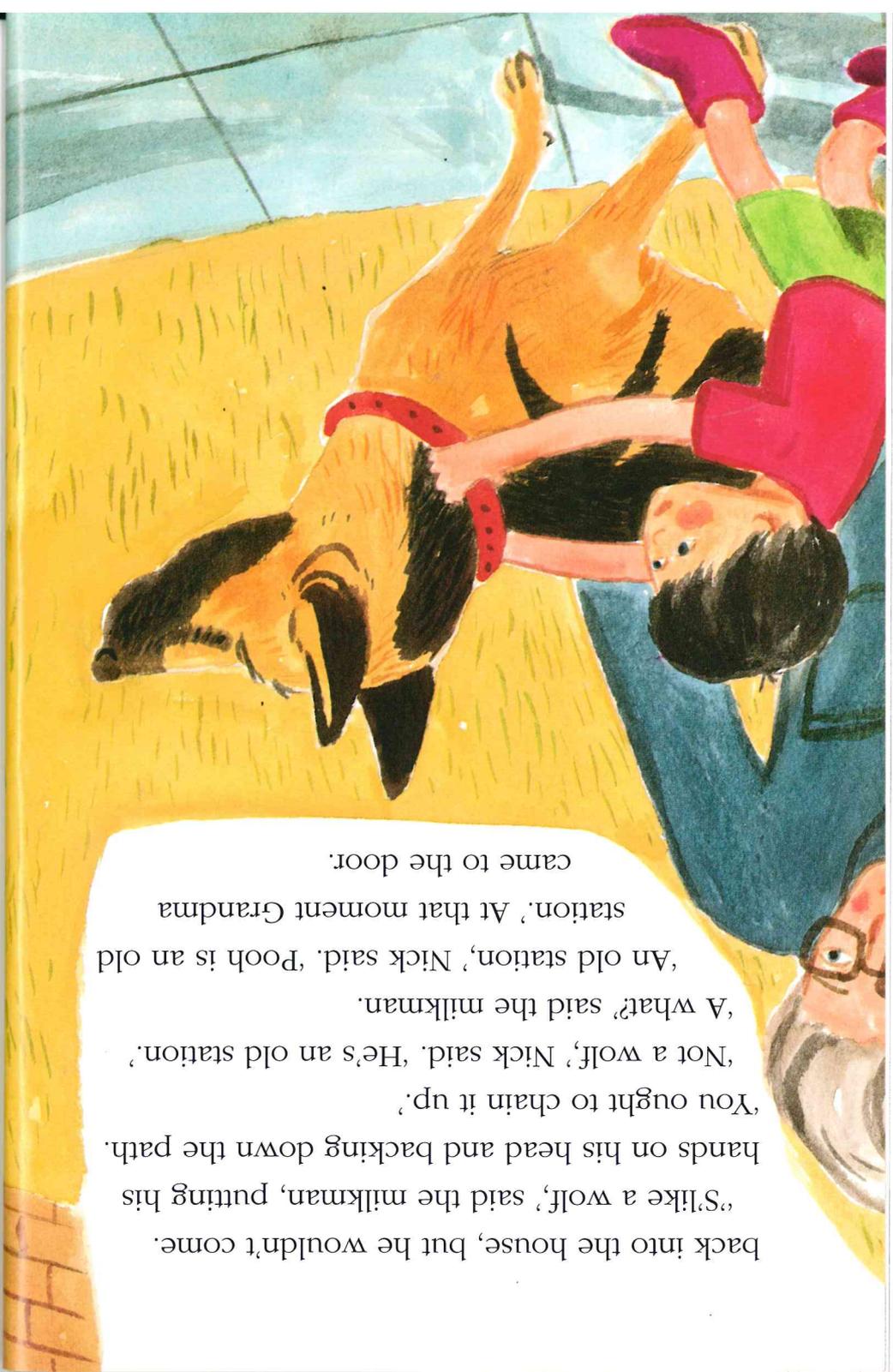
GROSSHALL INFANT SCHOOL

MOST DOGS HAVE one name, but Pooch had three – one after the other. Pooch was what Grandma called him in the first place. But when Nick was a toddler he couldn't say Pooch very well and so Pooch soon became Pooh. Then one day Pooh heard the rattle of the milk bottles outside and came bounding out of the house to say hello to the milkman – he liked the milkman. But today it was a different one. Pooh prowled around him sniffing at the bottom of his trousers. The new milkman went as white as his milk. Nick tried to drag Pooh

Chapter One



back into the house, but he wouldn't come.
"S'like a wolf," said the milkman, putting his
hands on his head and backing down the path.
'You ought to chain it up.'
'Not a wolf,' Nick said. 'He's an old station.'
'A what?' said the milkman.
'An old station,' Nick said. 'Pooh is an old
station.' At that moment Grandma
came to the door.



'Nick gets his words muddled sometimes,' she said. 'He's only little. I think he means an *Alsatian*, don't you, dear? Old Station! Old Station! You are a funny boy, Nick.' And she laughed so much that she nearly cried. So from that day Pooh was called Old Station. There were always just the three of them in the house. Nick had lived with Grandma for as long as he could remember. She looked after Nick, and Old Station looked after them both.



Everywhere they went Old Station went with them. 'Don't know what we'd do without him,'

Grandma would say.

All his life Old Station had been like a big

brother to Nick. Nick was nine years old now.

He had watched Old Station grow old as he

grew up. The old dog moved slowly these

days, and when he got up in the

morning to go outside you could see it

was a real effort. He would spend most of

the day asleep in his basket,

dreaming his dreams.

Nick watched him that morning as he

ate his cornflakes before he went off to

school. It was the last day before half-term.

Old Station was growling in his sleep as he

often did and his whiskers were twitching.

He's chasing cats in his dreams,

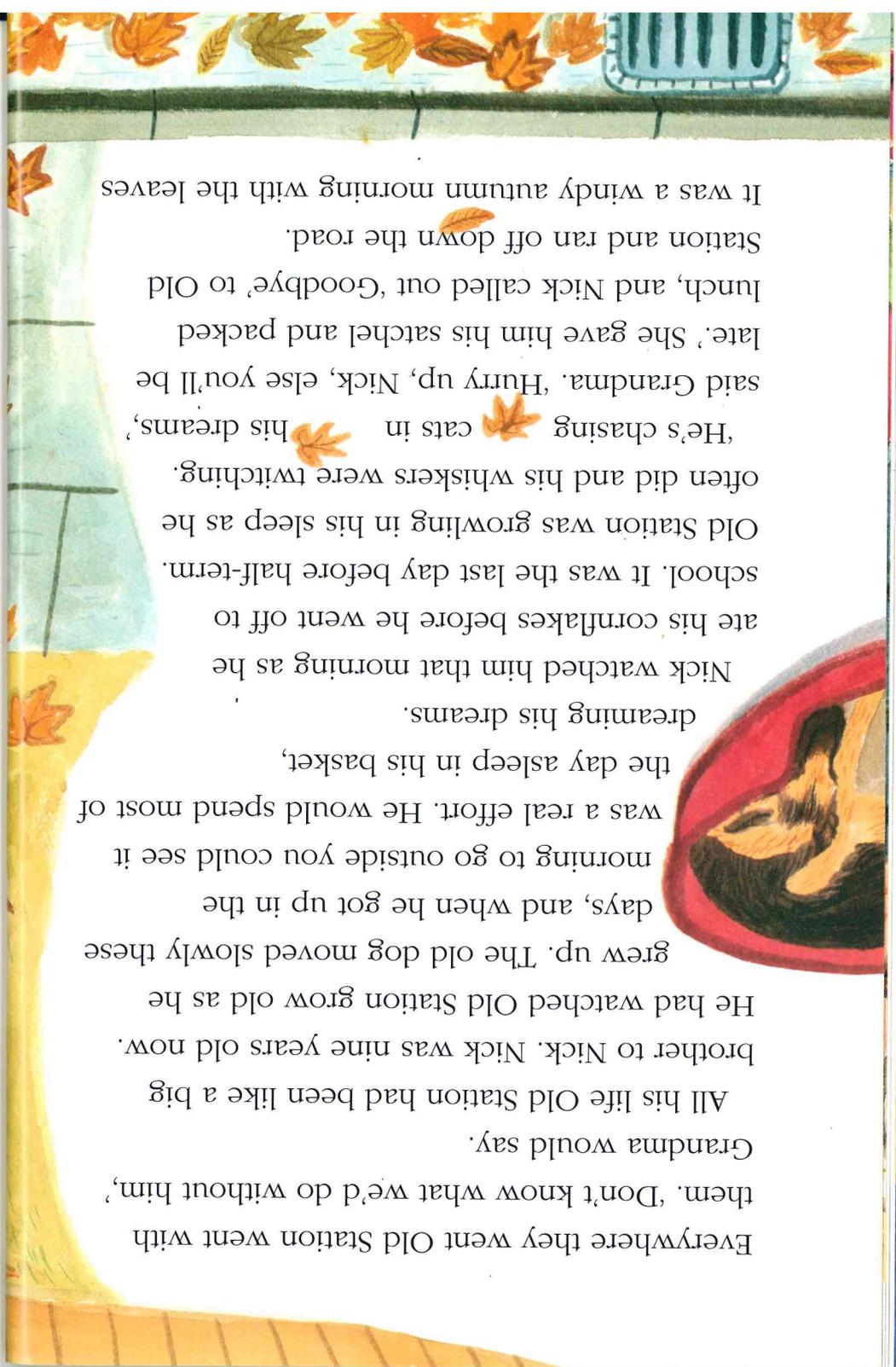
said Grandma. 'Hurry up, Nick, else you'll be

late.' She gave him his satchel and packed

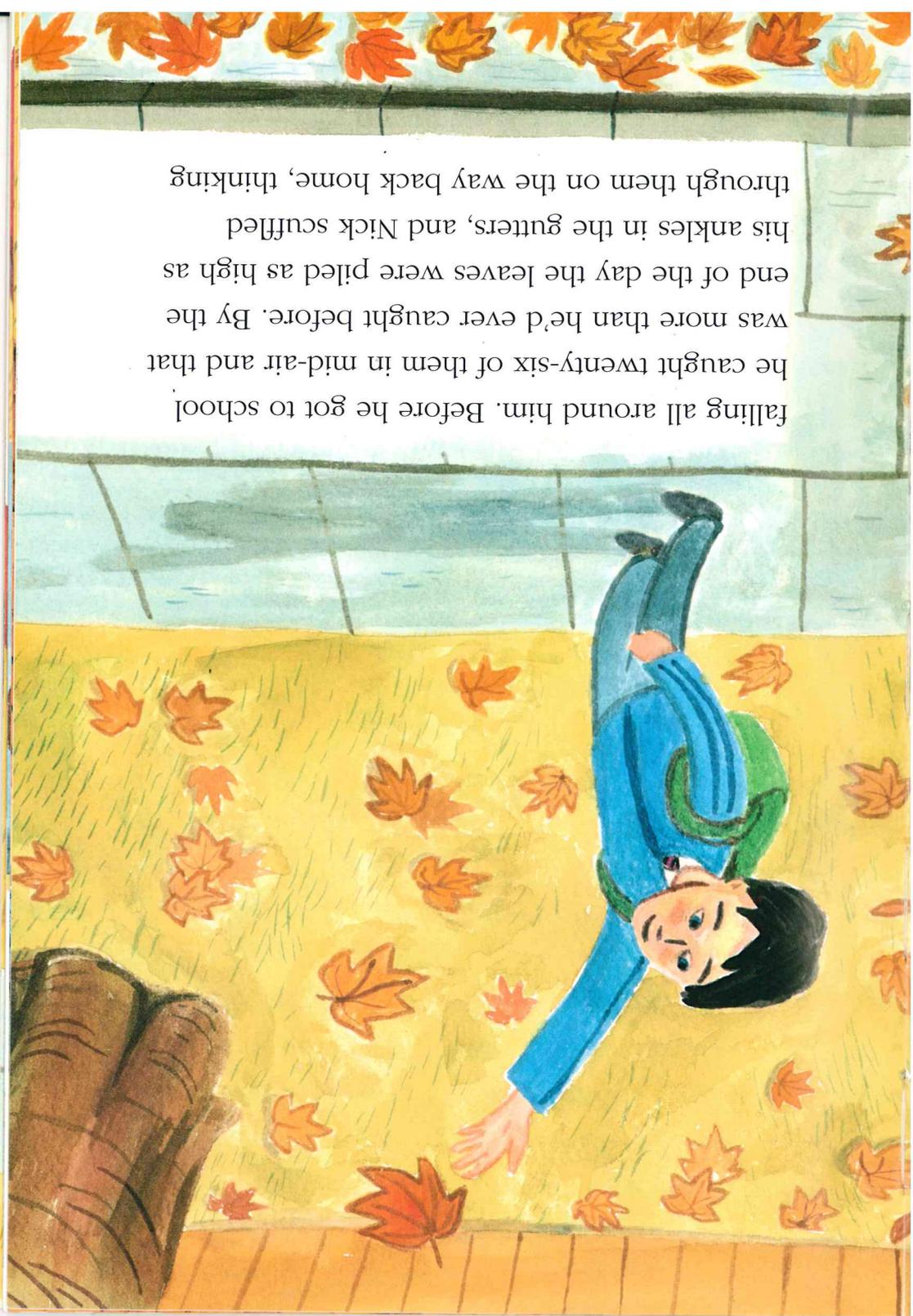
lunch, and Nick called out 'Goodbye' to Old

Station and ran off down the road.

It was a windy autumn morning with the leaves



falling all around him. Before he got to school he caught twenty-six of them in mid-air and that was more than he'd ever caught before. By the end of the day the leaves were piled as high as his ankles in the gutters, and Nick scuffled through them on the way back home, thinking



of all the bike rides he could go on now that half-term had begun.

Old Station wasn't there to meet him at the door as he sometimes was, and Grandma wasn't in the kitchen cooking tea as she usually was. Old Station wasn't in his basket either.

Nick found Grandma in the back garden, taking the washing off the line. 'Nice windy day. Wanted to leave the washing out as long as possible,' she said from behind the sheet. 'I'll get your tea in a minute, dear.'

'Where's Old Station?' Nick said. 'He's not in his basket.'

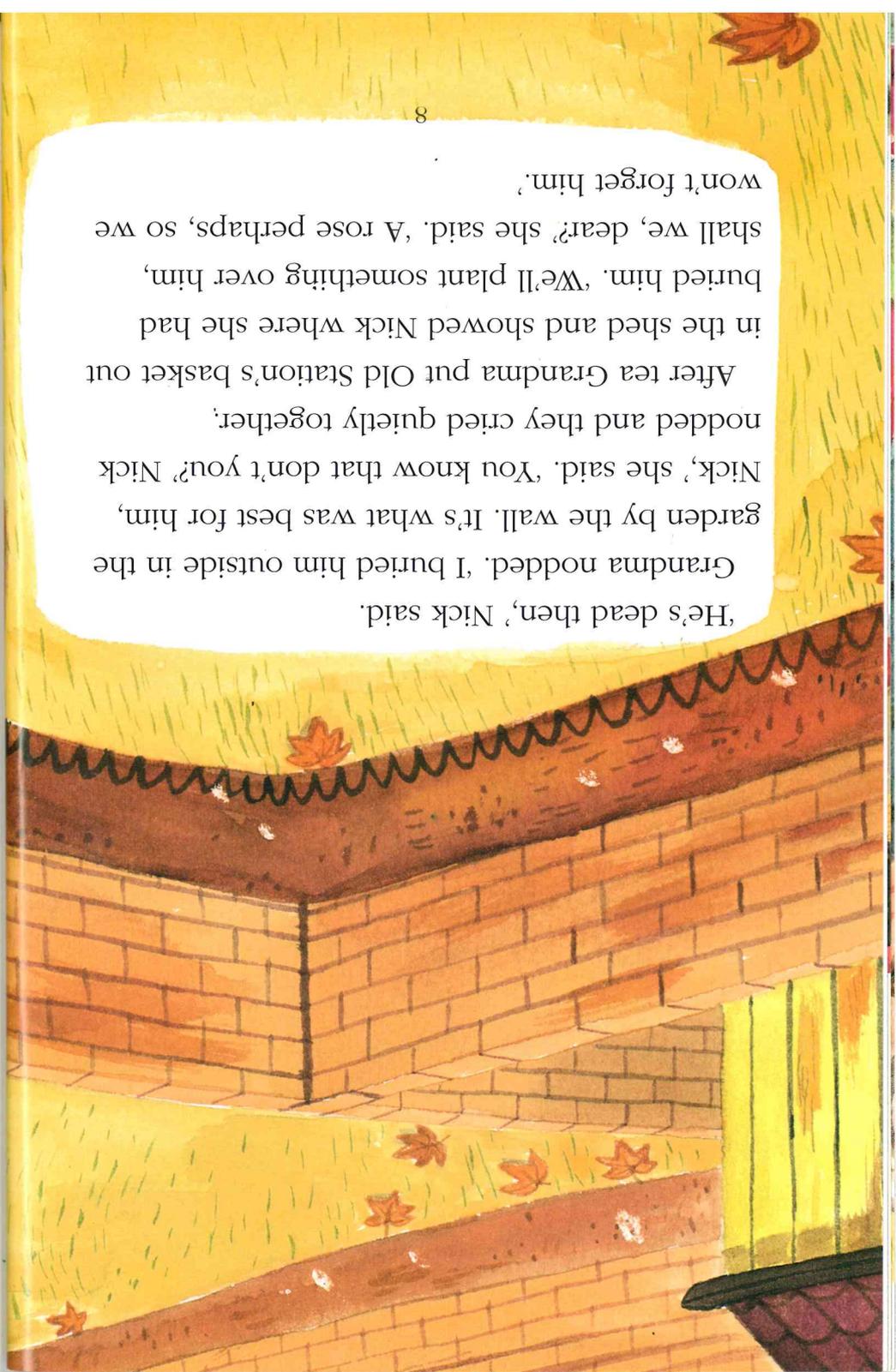
Grandma didn't reply, not at first anyway; and when she did Nick wished she never had done. 'He had to go,' Grandma said simply, and she walked past him without even looking at him. 'Go where?' Nick asked, 'What do you mean? Where's he gone to?'

Grandma put the washing down on the kitchen table and sat down heavily in the chair. Nick could see then that she'd been crying, and he knew that Old Station was dead.

'The Vet said he was suffering,' she said,
looking up at him. 'We couldn't have him
suffering, could we? It had to be done. That's all
there is to it. Just a pinprick it was, dear, and
then he went off to sleep. Nice and peaceful.'

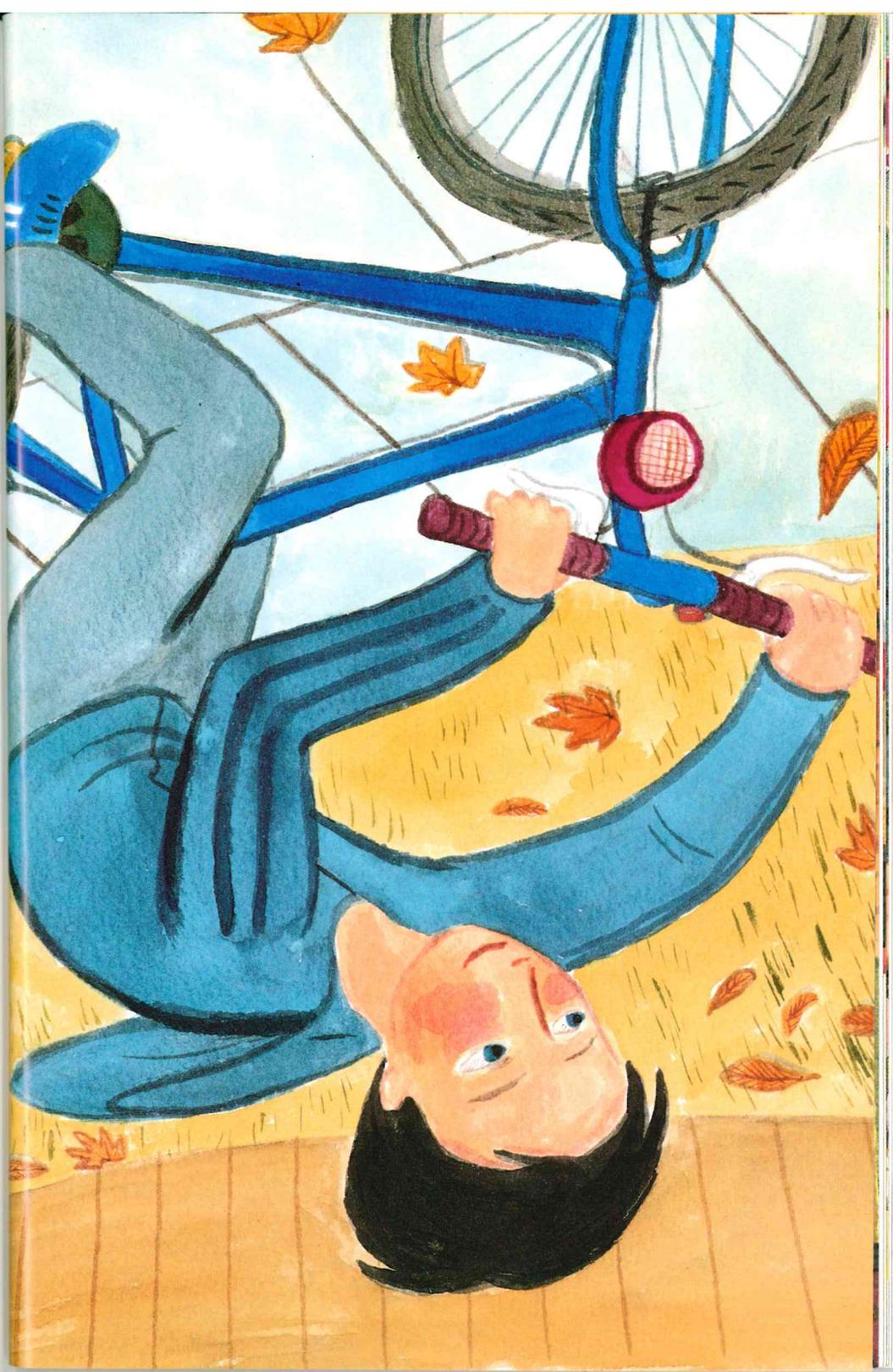


'He's dead then,' Nick said.
Grandma nodded. 'I buried him outside in the
garden by the wall. It's what was best for him,
Nick,' she said. 'You know that don't you?' Nick
nodded and they cried quietly together.
After tea Grandma put Old Station's basket out
in the shed and showed Nick where she had
buried him. 'We'll plant something over him,
shall we, dear?' she said. 'A rose perhaps, so we
won't forget him.'





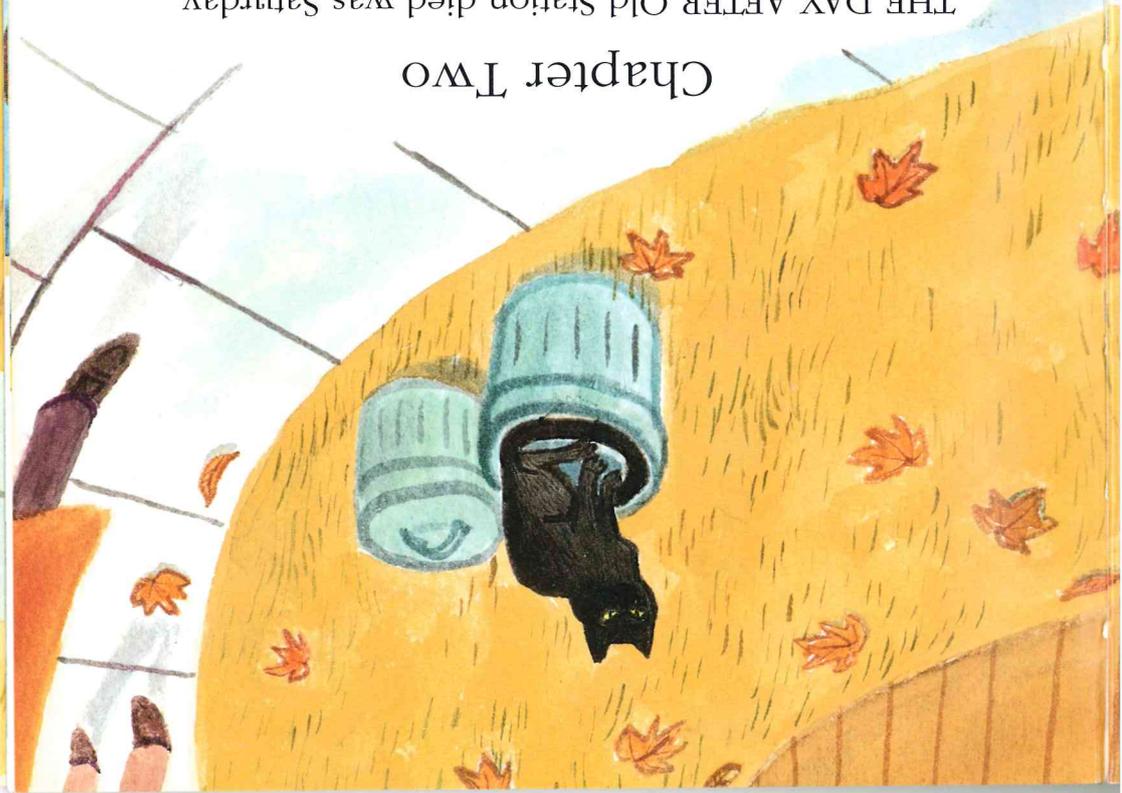
'We'll never forget him,' said Nick. 'Never.'



THE DAY AFTER Old Station died was Saturday. Saturdays and Sundays in the conker season meant conkers in Jubilee Park with his friends, but Nick didn't feel like seeing anyone, not that day. Every time he looked out of the kitchen window into the back garden he felt like crying. It was Grandma's idea that he should go for a long ride, and so he did. The next best thing in the world after Old Station was the bike Grandma had given him on his

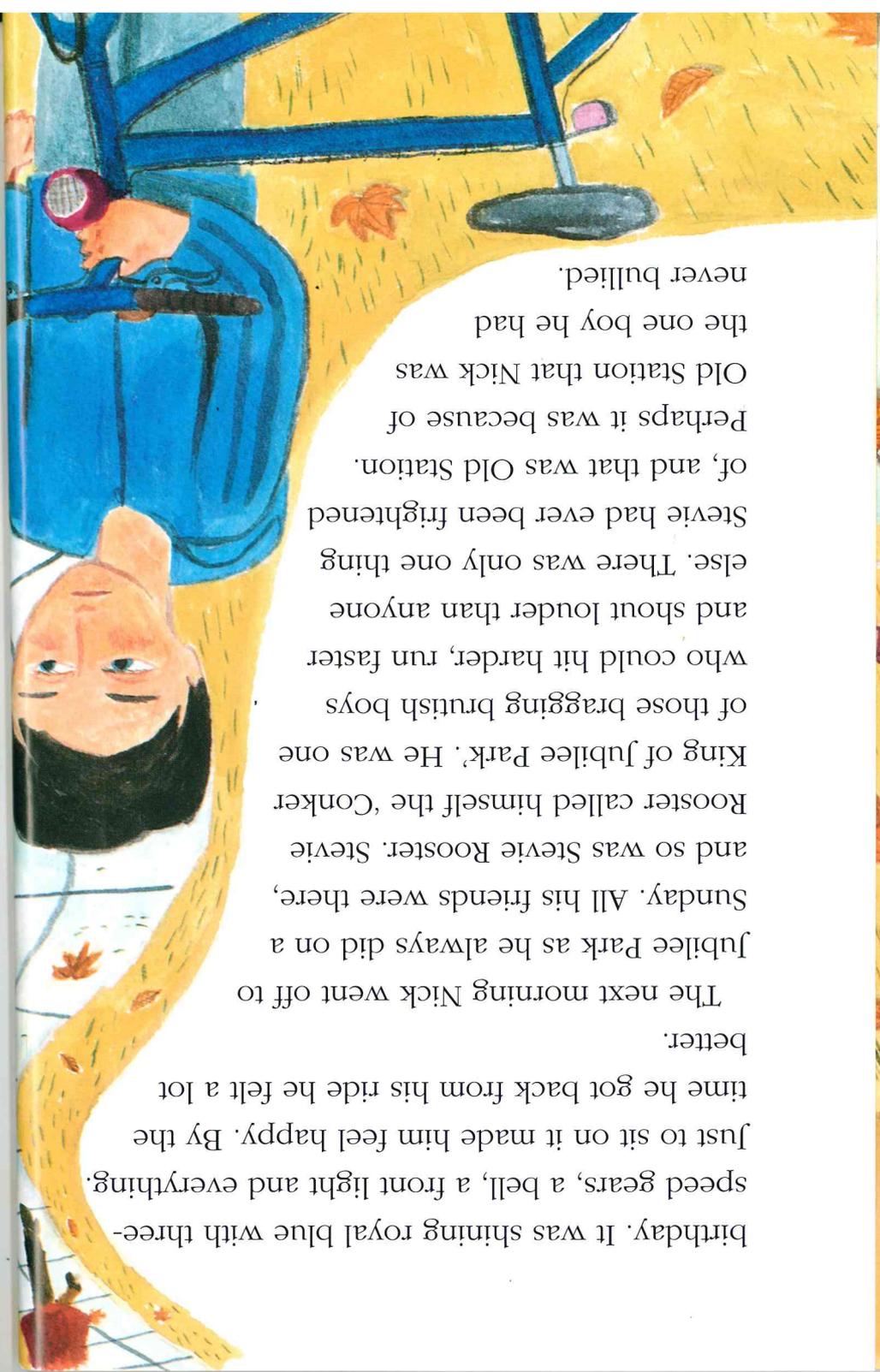


Chapter Two

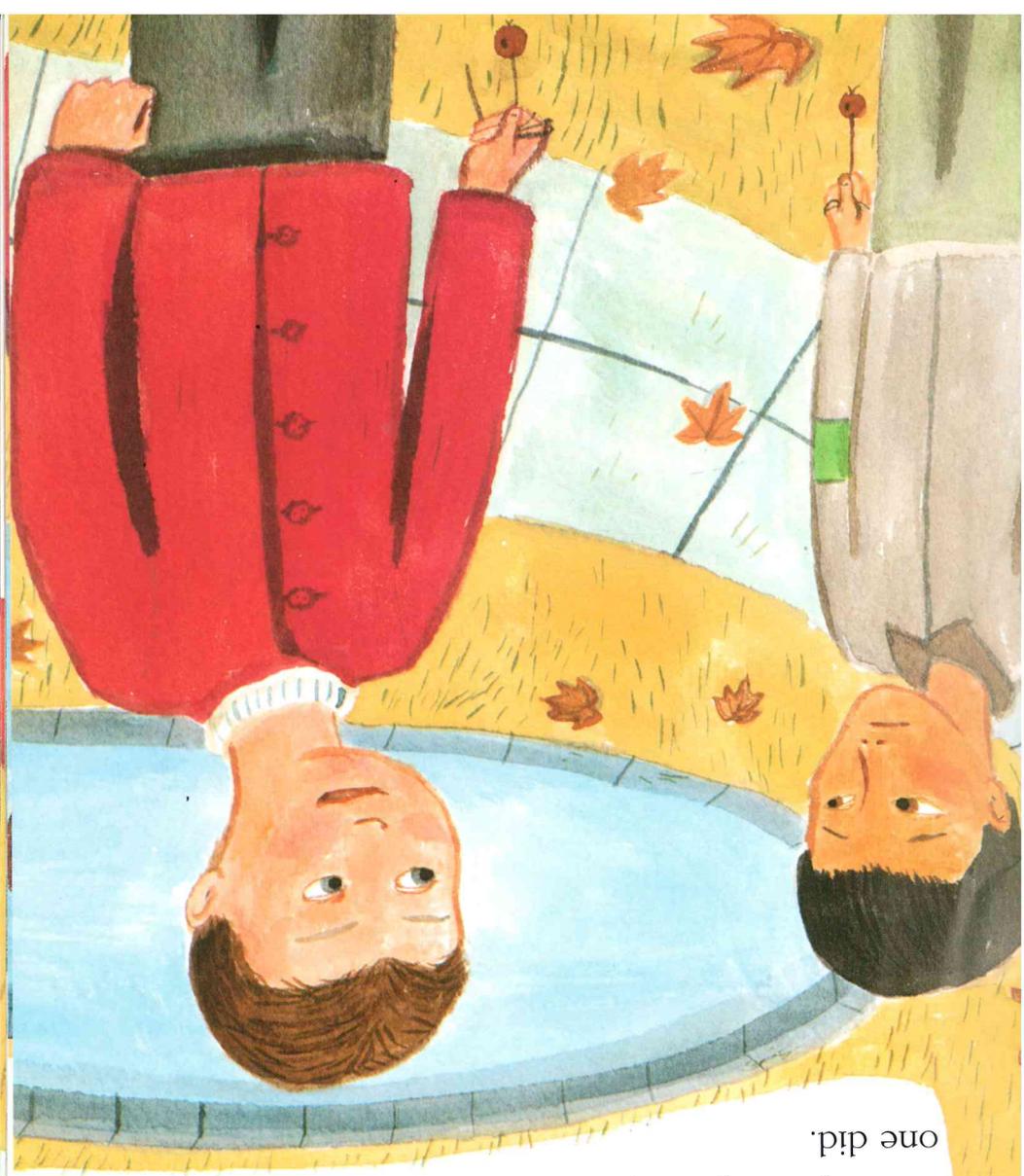


birthday. It was shining royal blue with three-speed gears, a bell, a front light and everything. Just to sit on it made him feel happy. By the time he got back from his ride he felt a lot better.

The next morning Nick went off to Jubilee Park as he always did on a Sunday. All his friends were there, and so was Stevie Rooster. Stevie Rooster called himself the 'Conker King of Jubilee Park'. He was one of those bragging bruvish boys who could hit harder, run faster and shout louder than anyone else. There was only one thing Stevie had ever been frightened of, and that was Old Station. Perhaps it was because of Old Station that Nick was the one boy he had never bullied.



Of course they all knew about Old Station, but no one said anything about him, except for Stevie Rooster. 'So that smelly old dog of yours kicked the bucket at last,' he said. Perhaps he was expecting everyone to laugh, but no one did.





Nick tried to stop himself from crying.
Stevie went on, "Bout time if you ask me."
In his fury Nick tore the conker out of Stevie
Rooster's hand and hurled it into the pond.
'That's my twenty-five,' Stevie bellowed, and
he lashed out at Nick with his fist, catching him
in the mouth.



Nick looked at the blood on the back of his hand and flew at Stevie's throat like an alley cat. In the end Nick was left with a split lip, a black eye and a torn shirt. He was lucky to get away with just that. If the Park Keeper had not come along when he did it might have been a lot worse.

Grandma shook her head as she bathed his face in the kitchen. 'What does it matter what Stevie Rooster says about Old Station?' she said. 'Look what he's done to you. Look at your face; I had to get him,' Nick said.

'But you didn't, did you? I mean he's bigger than you isn't he? He's twice your size and nasty with it. If you want to beat him, you've got to use your head. It's the only way.'

'What do you mean, Grandma?' Nick asked. 'What else could I do?'

'Conkers,' said Grandma. 'Didn't you tell me once that he likes to call himself the "Conker King of Jubilee Park"?' 'Yes.'

'Well then,' said Grandma. 'You've got to knock him off his throne, haven't you?'

'But how?'

'You've got to beat him at conkers,' she said. 'And I'm going to teach you how. There's nothing I don't know about conkers, Nick, nothing. You'll see.'

And so it was that Nick found himself that
we're after;

than my thumbnail. Small and hard is what
hard as nails they are. Mustn't be any bigger
conker off that tree that let me down. Always
bus only the other day. I never had a

It's still standing, I saw it from the
conker tree out by Cotter's Yard.

conker and that's from the old
one place to find a champion
conkers,' she said. 'And there's only

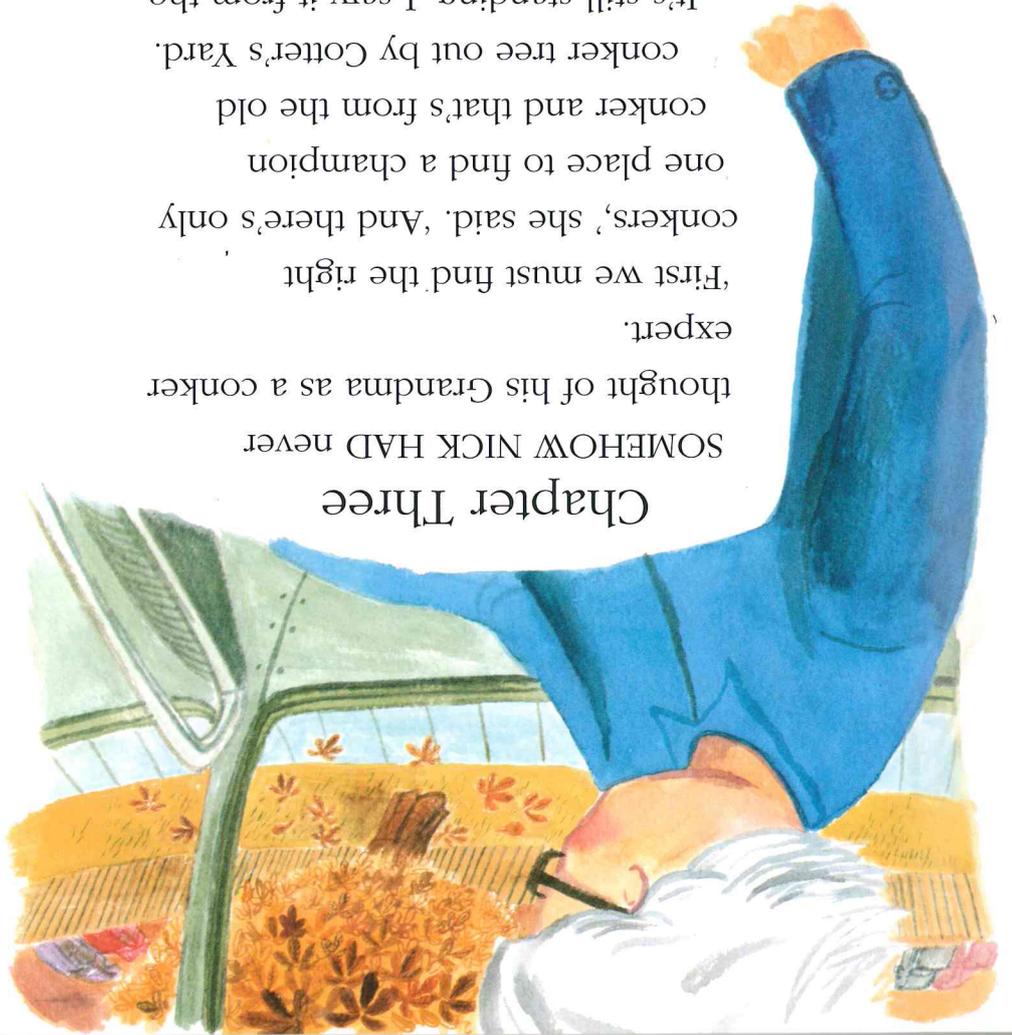
'First we must find the right

expert.

thought of his Grandma as a conker

SOMEHOW NICK HAD never

Chapter Three



afternoon cycling along the road out of town,
past the football ground and the

gasworks, with a packet of jelly babies
in his pocket. 'Now don't eat them all
at once, dear,' Grandma had told him.

'Go carefully and look for the tree on the left-
hand side of the road just as you come to

Cotter's Yard; you know, the scrapyard where
they crunch up old cars. You can't miss it.'

And Grandma's conker tree was just where she
said it was, a great towering conker tree

standing on its own by the scrapyard.

Nick must have spent half an hour searching
through the leaves under the tree, but he

couldn't find a single conker. He was about to
give up and go home when he spotted a cluster

of prickly green balls lying in the long
grass on the other side of the fence.

There was no sign of life in Cotter's
Yard. No one would be there on a

Sunday afternoon. No one would mind

if he went in just to pick up conkers. There
was nothing wrong with that, he thought.



He climbed quickly. At the top
he swung his legs over and
dropped down easily on
the other side. He found the
cluster of three small conkers
and broke them open. Each one
was shining brown and perfect, and just the
right size. He stuffed them into his pocket and
was just about to climb out again when he heard
from somewhere behind him in Cotter's Yard,
the distant howling of a dog. His first thought
was to scramble up over the fence and escape,
but then the howling stopped and the dog
began to whine and whimper and yelp. It was a
cry for help which Nick could not ignore.

Cotter's Yard was a maze of twisted
rusting wrecks. The muddy tracks
through it were littered with car tyres.

Great piles of cars towered all about
him now as he picked his way round the
potholes. And all the while the pitiful-howling
echoed louder around him. He was getting
closer.





