

The Giant Turtle

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The Giant Turtle

Jataka Tales

The Jataka tales are stories that the Buddha told about the many times he was reborn on Earth, sometimes as a prince or a poor man, sometimes as an animal or a fish or a tree. These stories celebrate the wonderful joy, compassion, wisdom, and kindness that the Buddha showed in each of these lives to help others.

The Giant Turtle is one of the tales told by the Buddha to his disciples over 2,500 years ago.



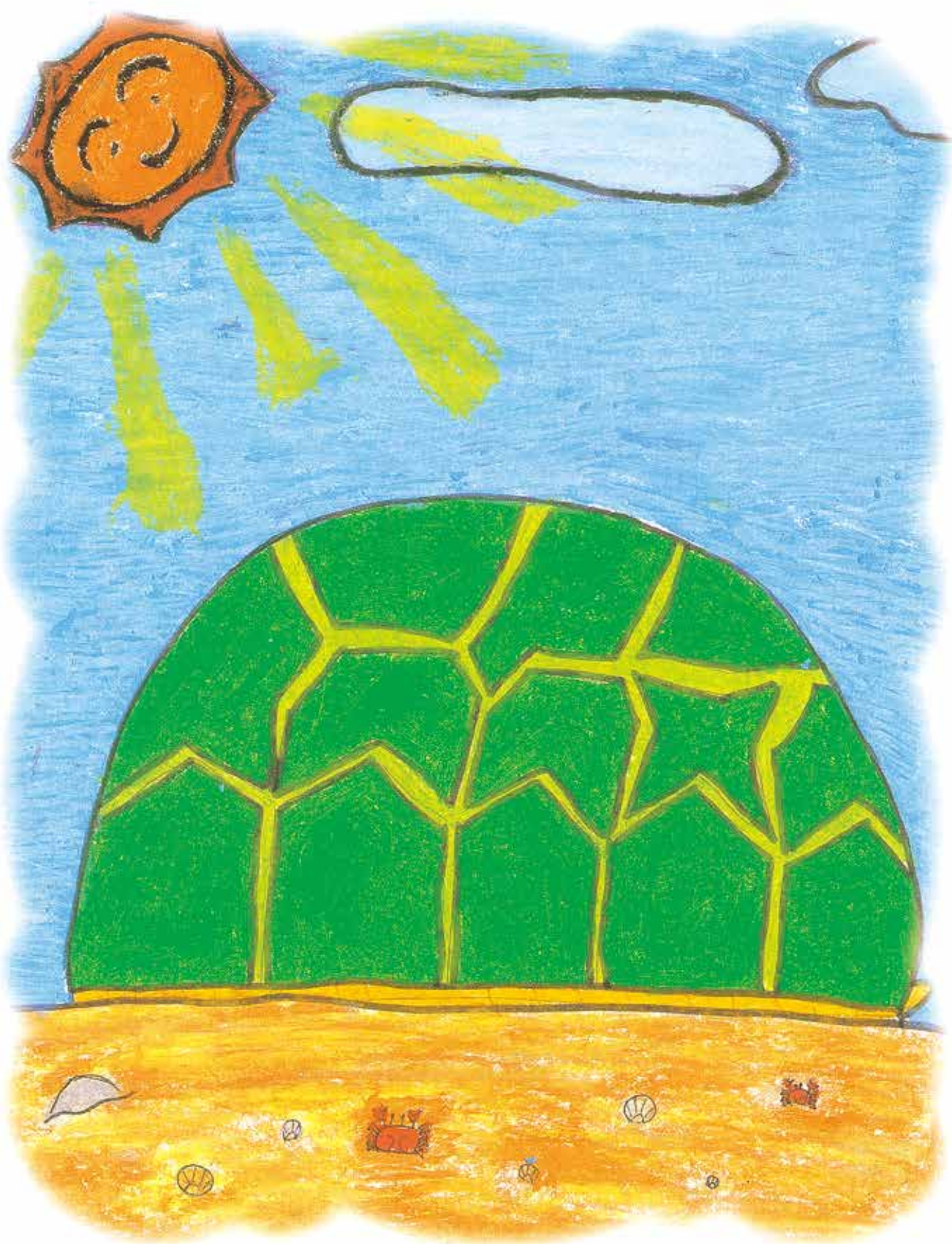
The Giant Turtle

Once a long, long time ago, the Buddha came to the earth as a giant turtle. He was a king turtle and ruled over all the animals in the deep blue sea. Every day he swam among the



painted fish, the pearly-white oysters, and the blue whales,
helping them with their problems and wishing them well.
Everyone was happy and peaceful in his kingdom of the sea.





One day, he crawled onto the sandy beach to take a nap.
Because he was so large, as large as a continent, he napped
for a very long time, for thousands of years.





In the nights, the rain came dropping tiny raindrops onto the turtle's back. Drip, drop! Drip, drop! The raindrops flowed down between the cracks on the turtle's great shell, forming sparkling rivers and lakes.

The turtle slept on.

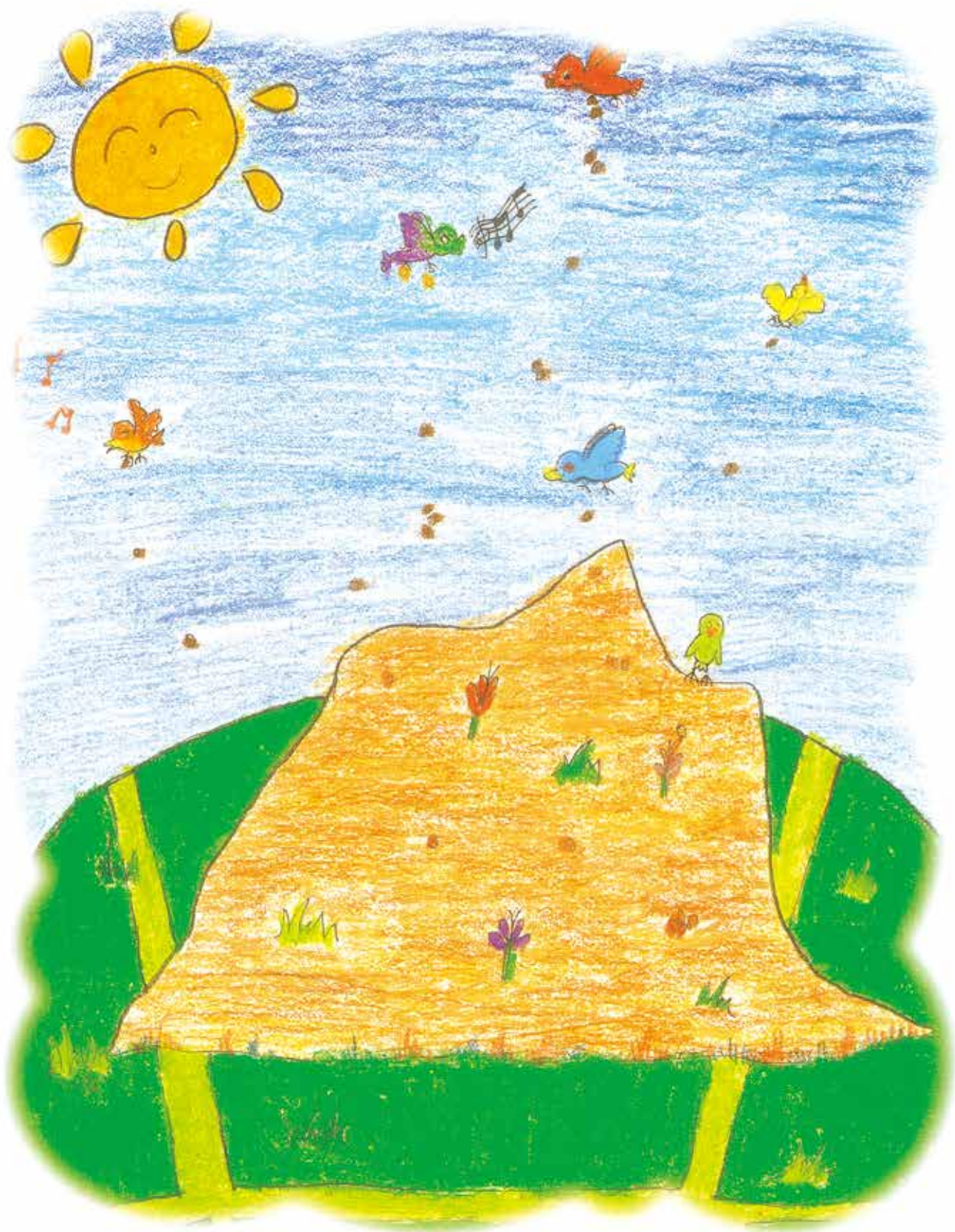




In the mornings, the winds came up, blowing tiny grains of sand onto the turtle's back. Whoo-sha! Whoo-sha! The grains of sand joined together forming mountains and valleys.

The turtle slept on.

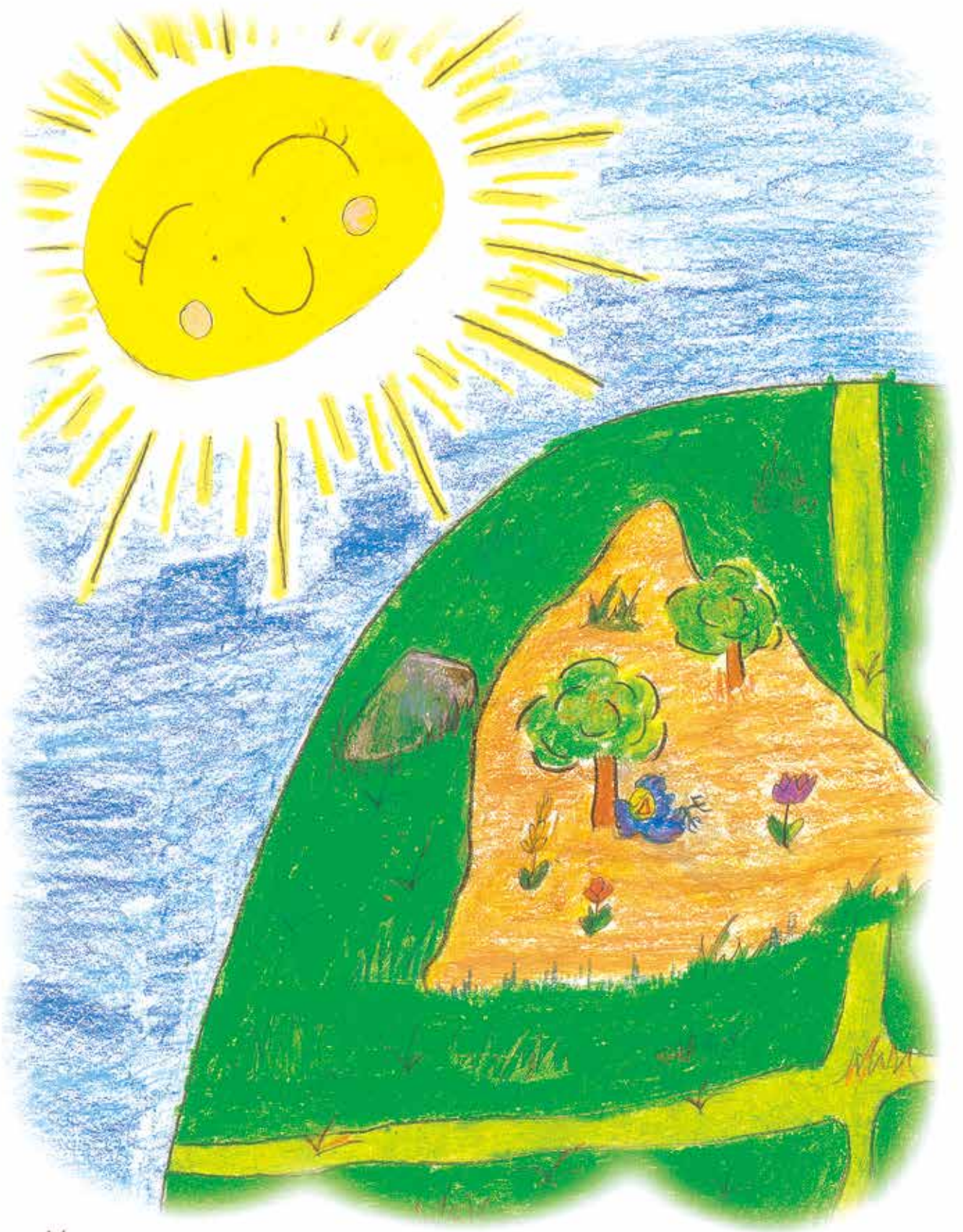




In the afternoons, the birds flew over, dropping tiny seeds onto the turtle's back. Pi-link! Pi-link! The seeds sprouted, and there on the turtle's back grew flowers and grass and trees.

The turtle slept on.





The sun warmed the turtle through the days.





The moon watched over him through the nights.

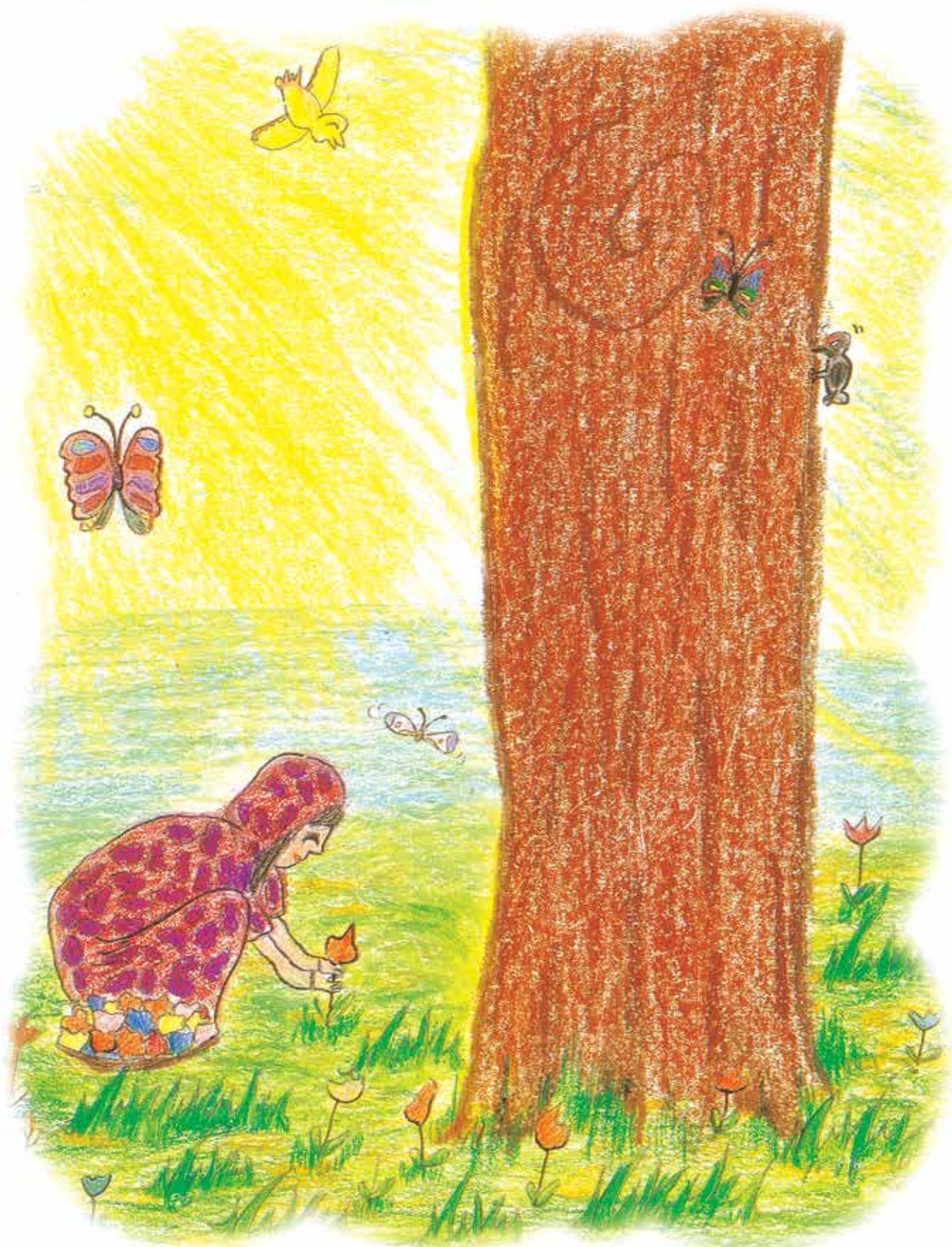


As time passed, the seasons embraced the giant turtle with Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, and animals that

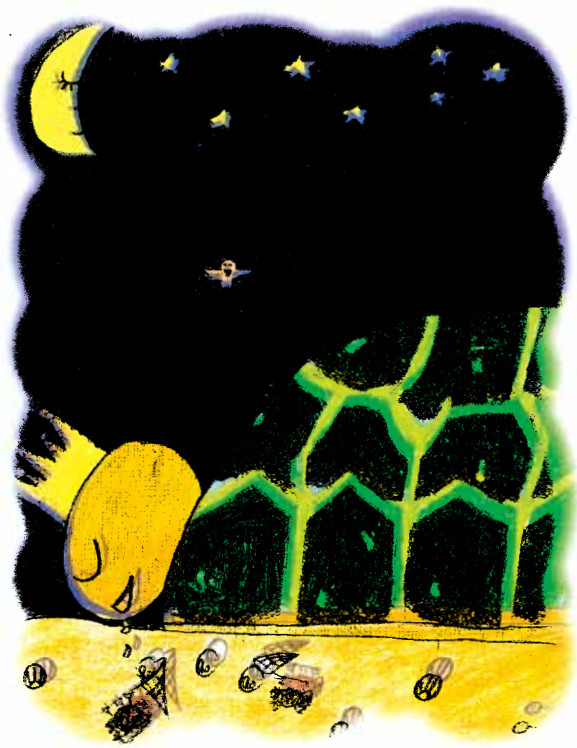


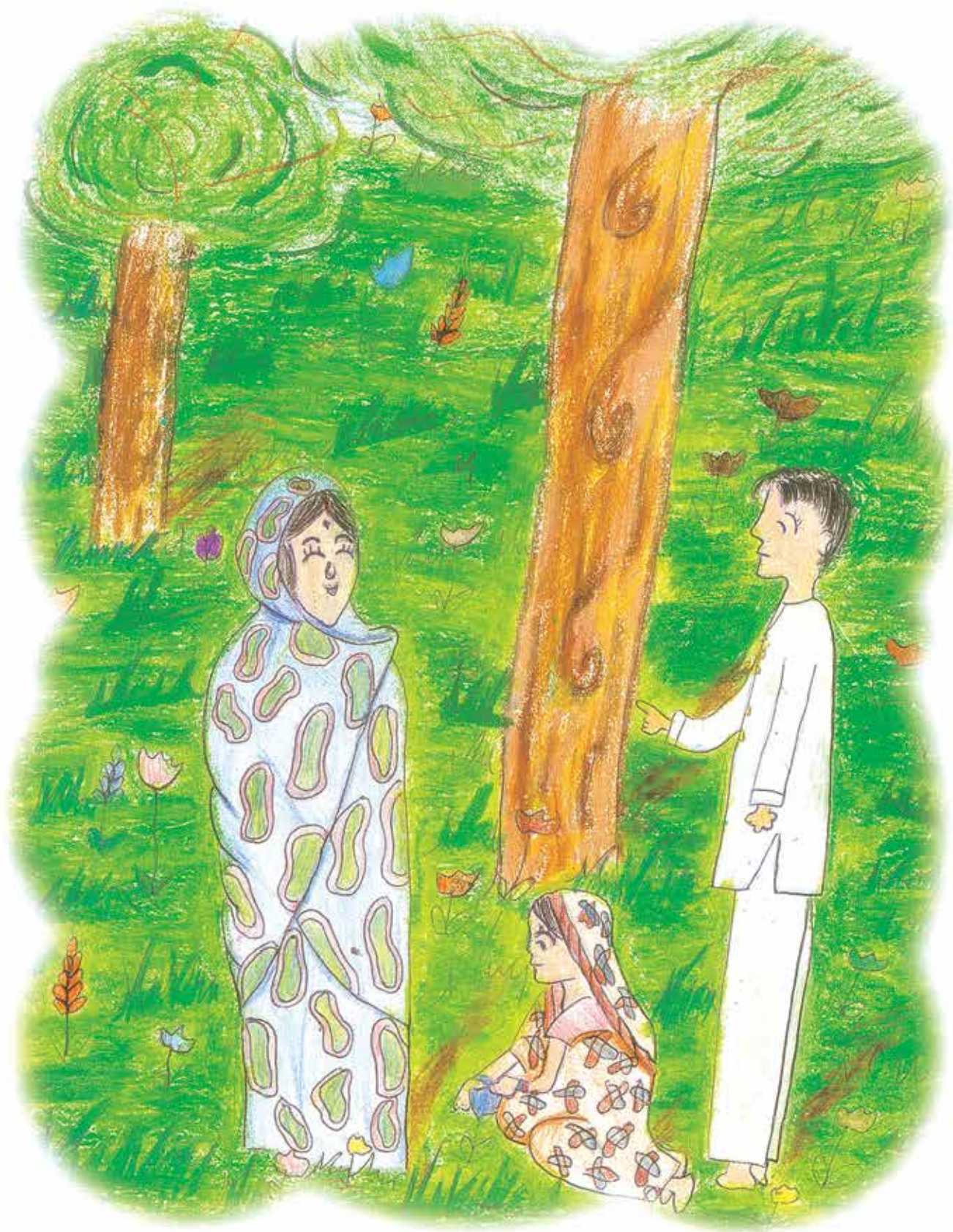
lived on the turtle's back experienced the seasons and multiplied.





One day, not knowing the difference between the earth and the giant turtle's back, a child drifted among the mountains and valleys to pick some wild flowers.

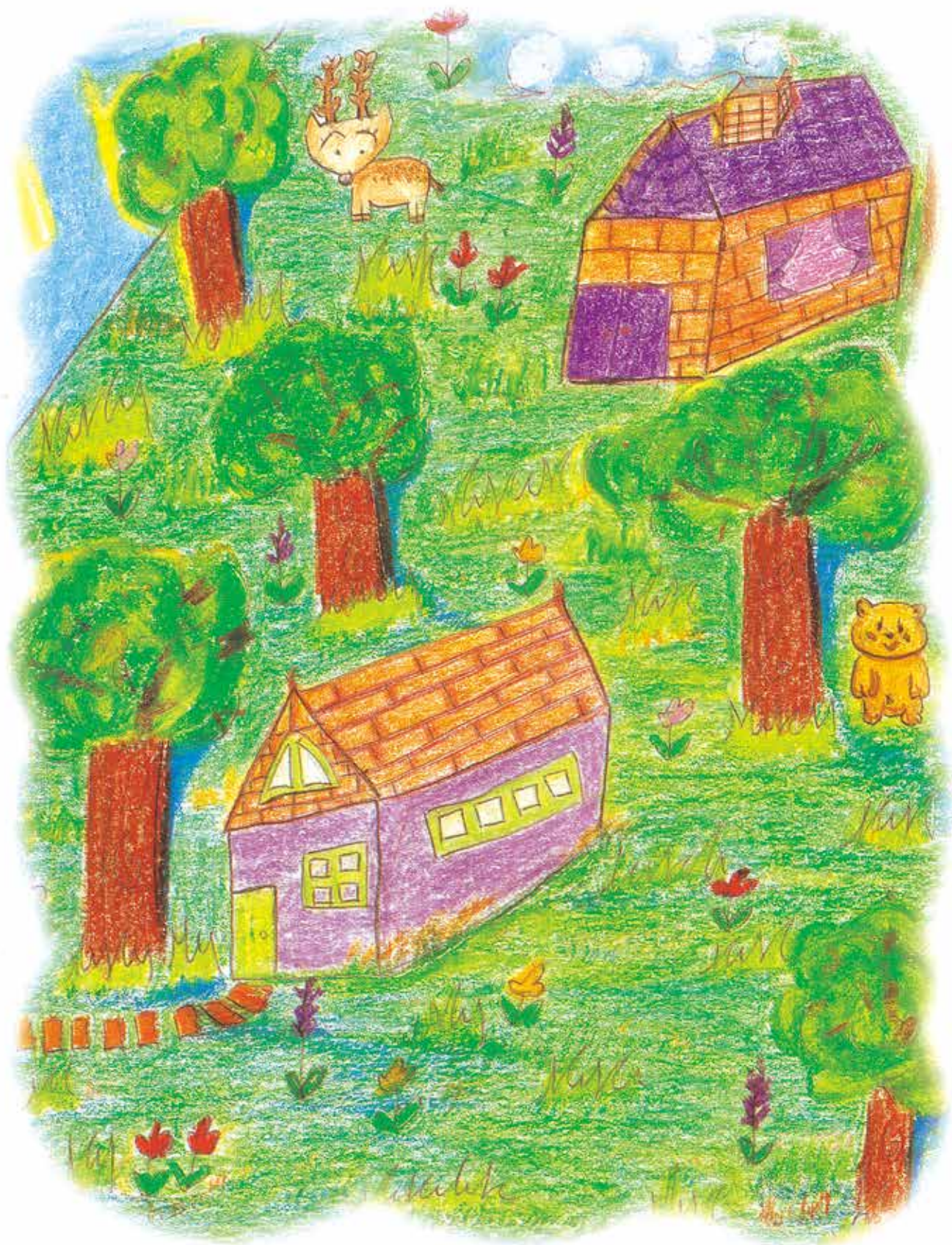




The next day she returned with her family. “This will be a good place to build a house. We can grow rice and get salt from the sea,” said her father.

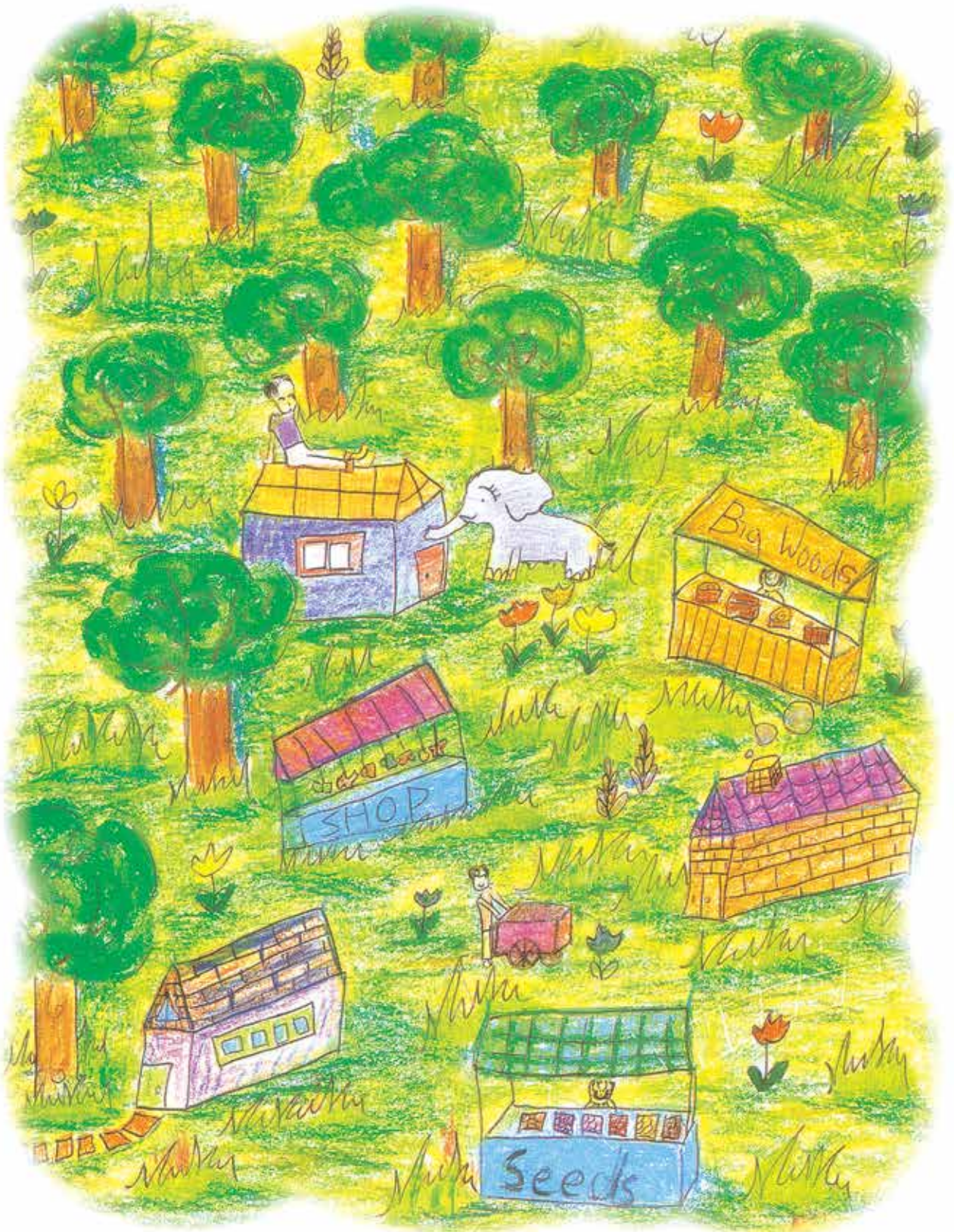
The turtle slept on.





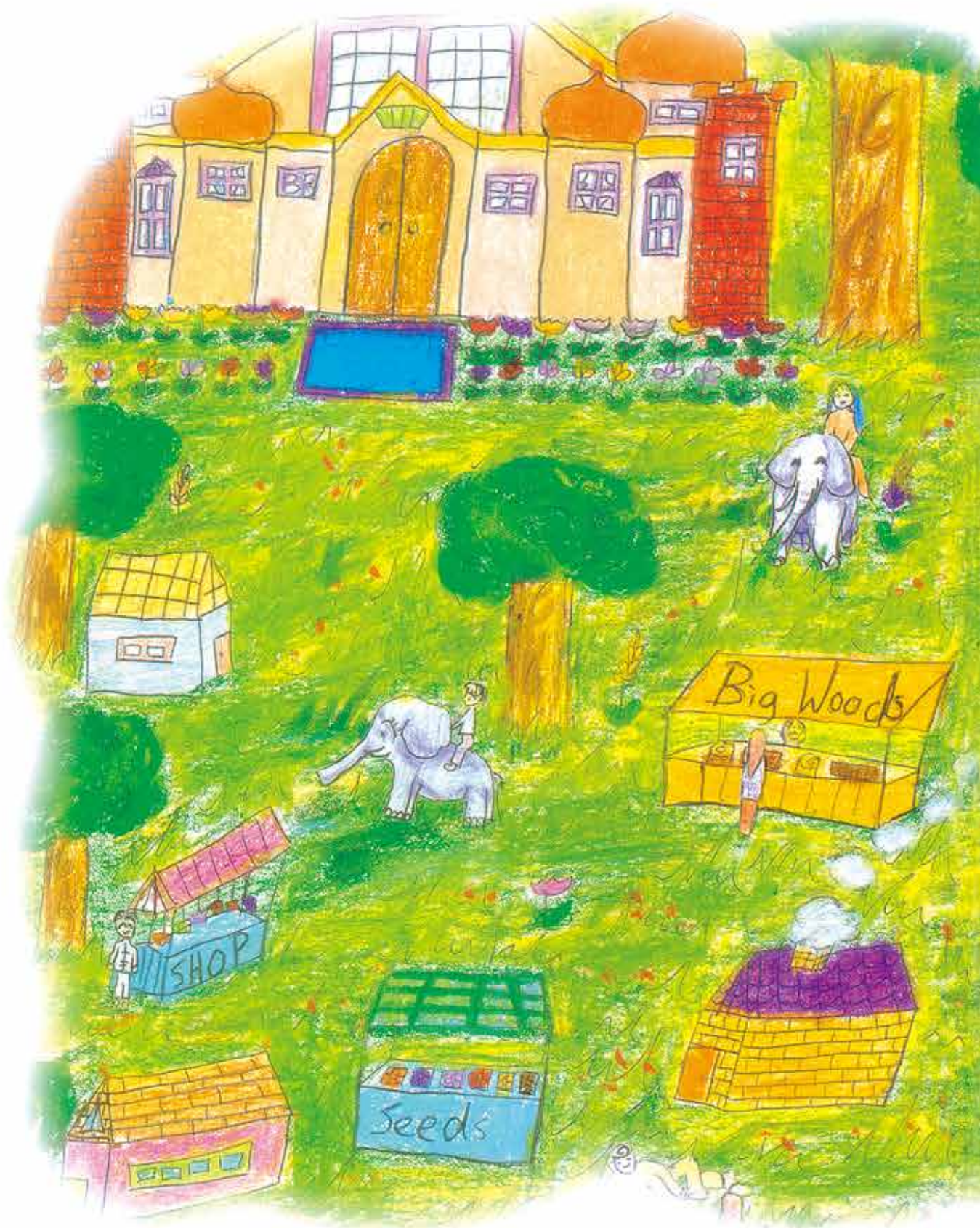
The next year another family moved to the little mountain,
and then another.





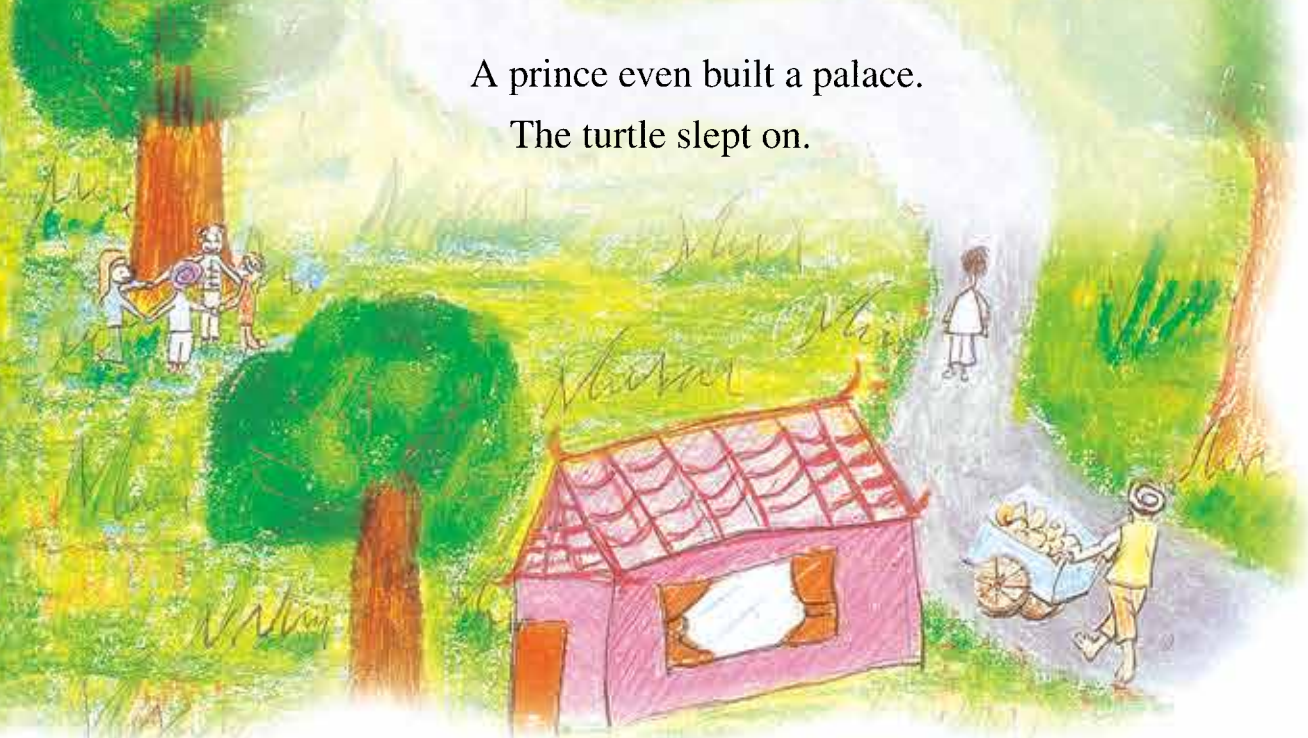
Roads were built and merchants came to set up shops.







A prince even built a palace.
The turtle slept on.





People pulled their carts and rode their carriages over the streets cutting deep ruts into the turtle's shell. Their cities became a heavy burden on his back, and the noises they made drummed in his ears. The fires that they built for their needs burned his skin.

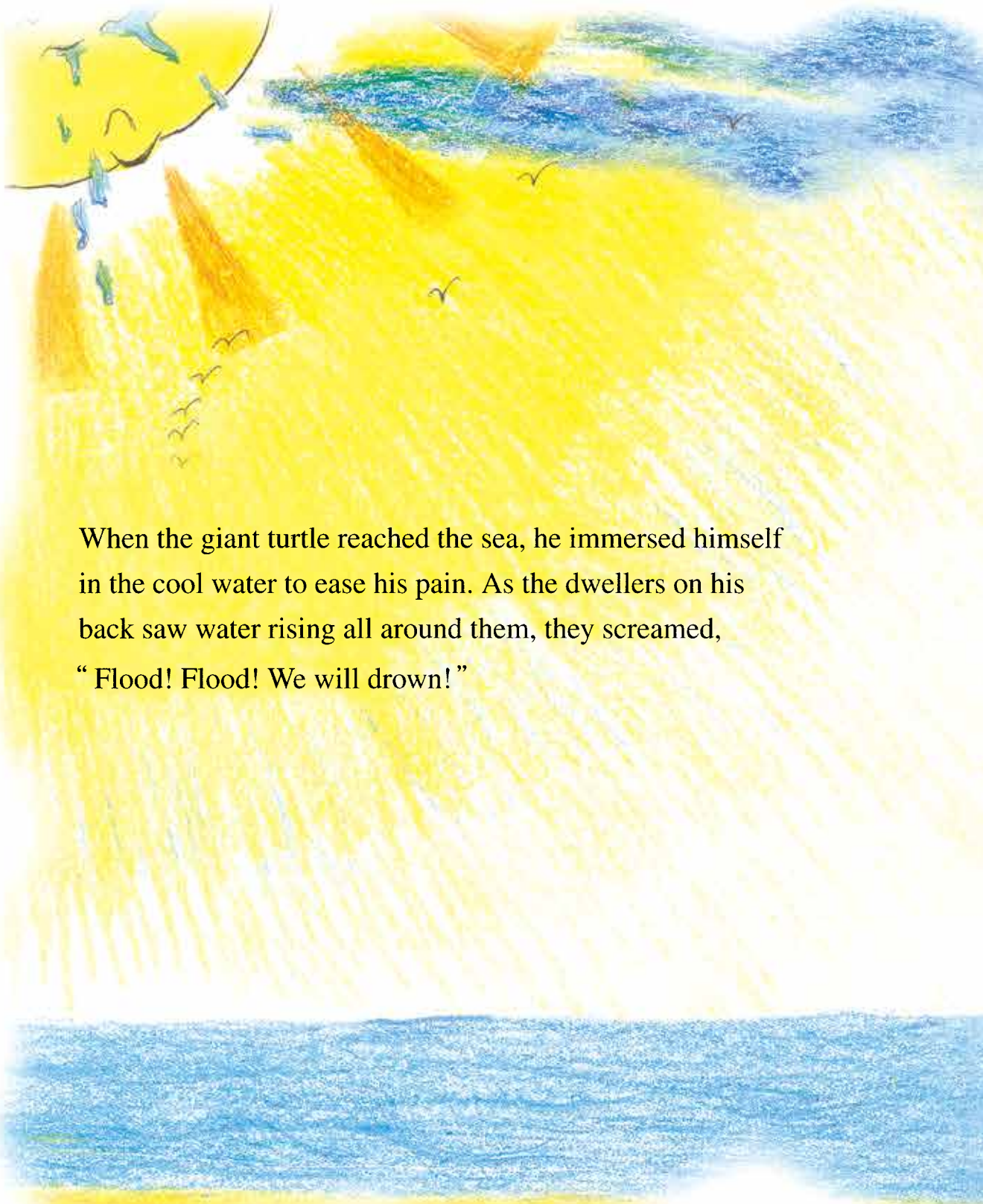


And so it went until one day the giant turtle was awakened by the pain from the fires. He wanted to cool himself, so he began



to crawl toward the sea. He did not hear the people cry,
“Earthquake! Earthquake!” or see them run hither and yon.

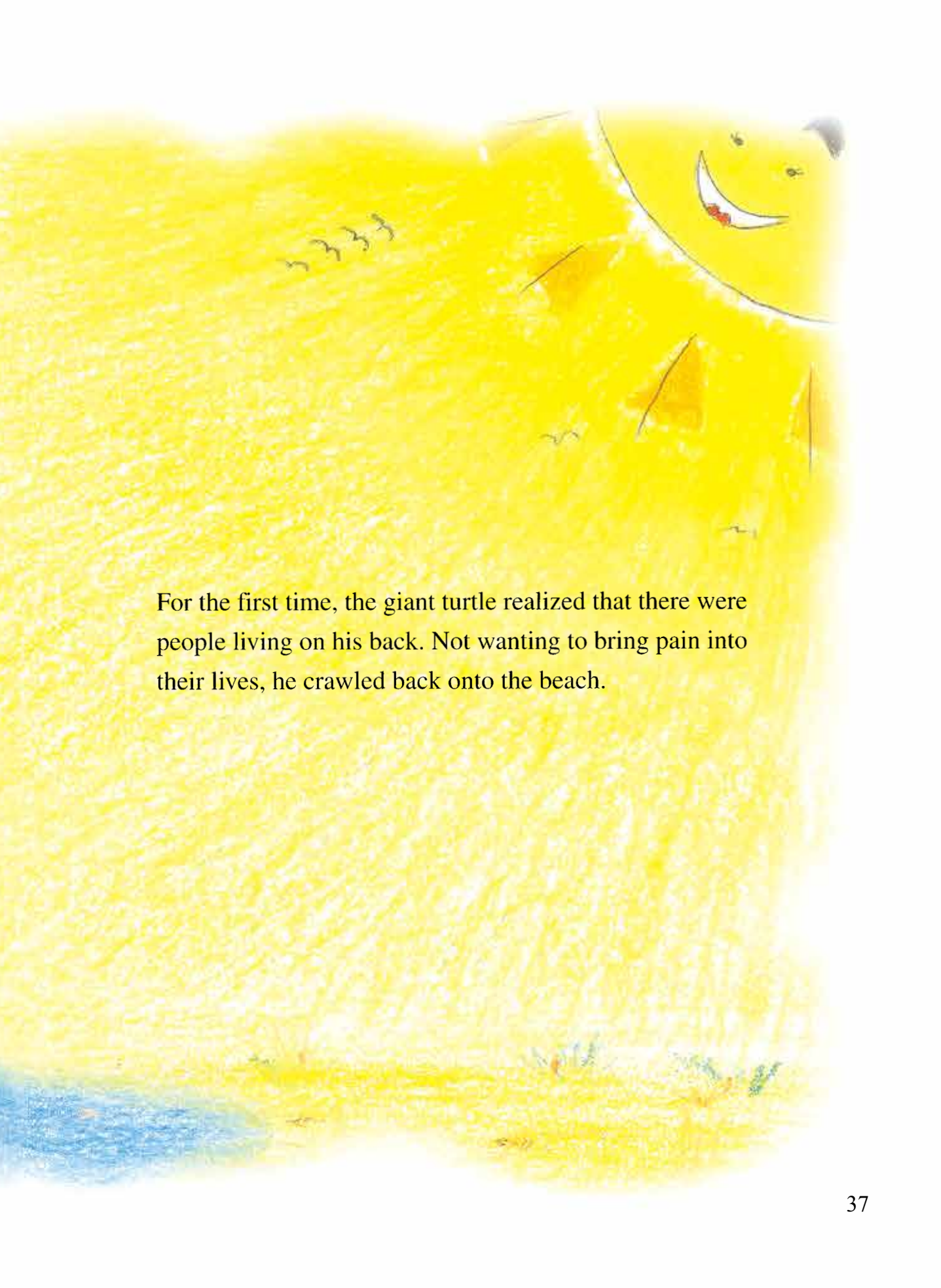




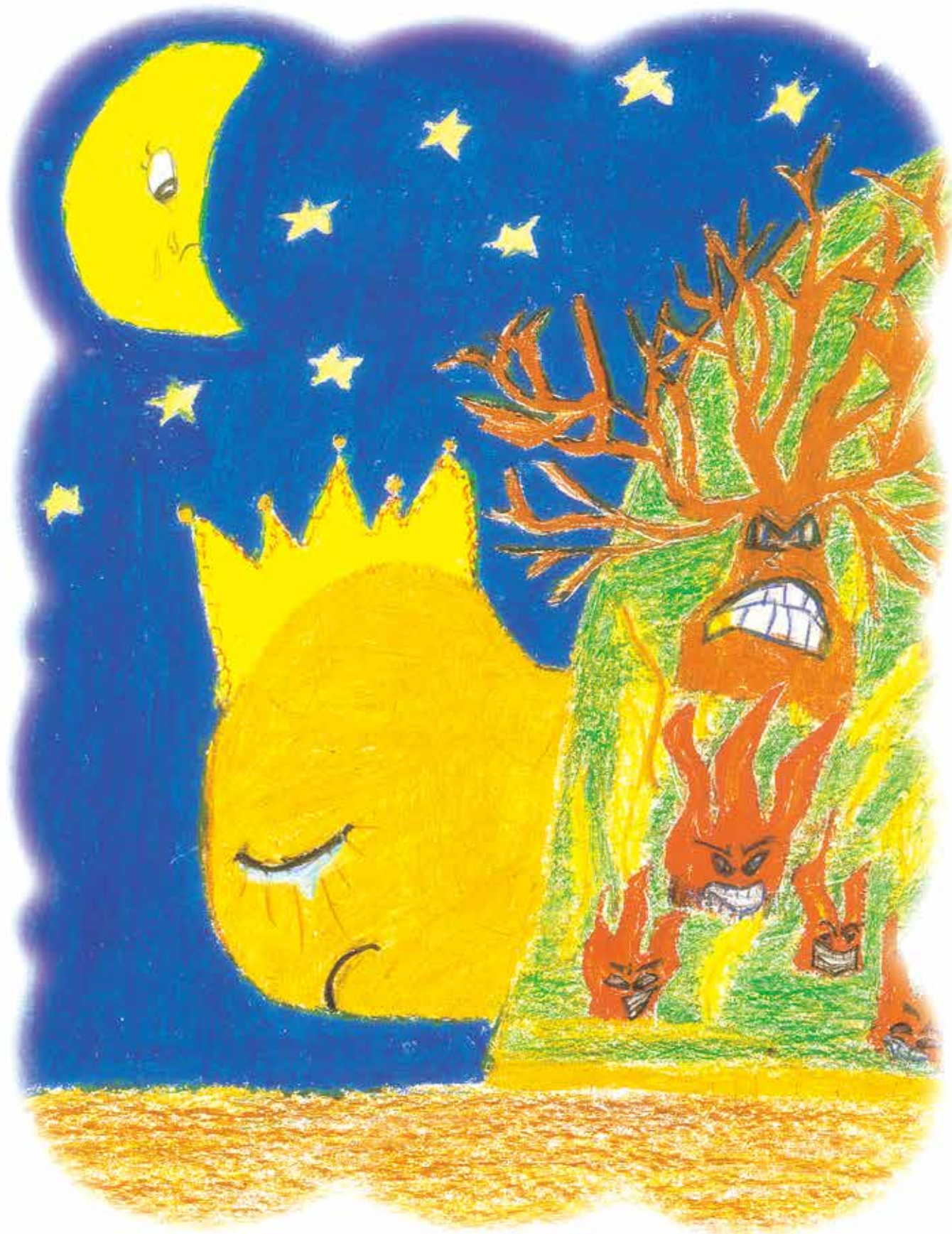
When the giant turtle reached the sea, he immersed himself in the cool water to ease his pain. As the dwellers on his back saw water rising all around them, they screamed, “Flood! Flood! We will drown!”







For the first time, the giant turtle realized that there were people living on his back. Not wanting to bring pain into their lives, he crawled back onto the beach.



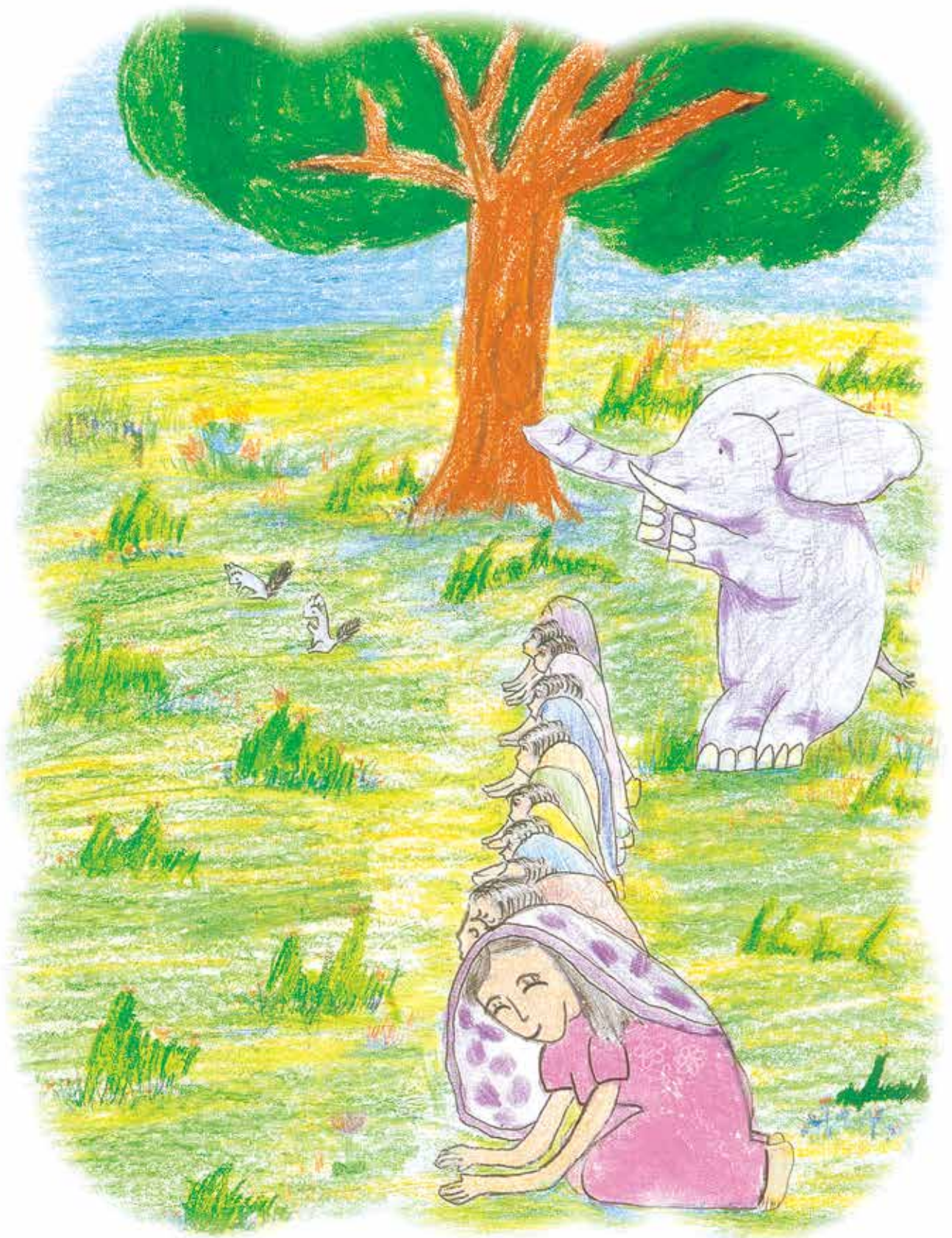
For another thousand years, he let the fires burn his skin and the rumble of the city shake him. During the days he held back the tears, but in the night he let them flow. So great was his pain and so silent were his tears that no one knew of his sacrifice.





Finally the giant turtle decided that he needed to return to the sea. Slowly raising his head, he spoke to the people, "Do not be afraid. I will not hurt you. You see, I am a giant turtle, and you are living on my shell. I must go back into the water, or I will die."

One by one, the people gathered their belongings and moved back onto the beach. The giant turtle eased their buildings and homes and palaces off his back. The people created new villages and cities on the earth, and their lives went on as before.



All were grateful for the kindness of the giant turtle. They bowed to him, saying, “ For thousands of years, you gave us your back on which to build our world, and now you save our lives. You are king turtle! Surely, you will become a Buddha in the future.”

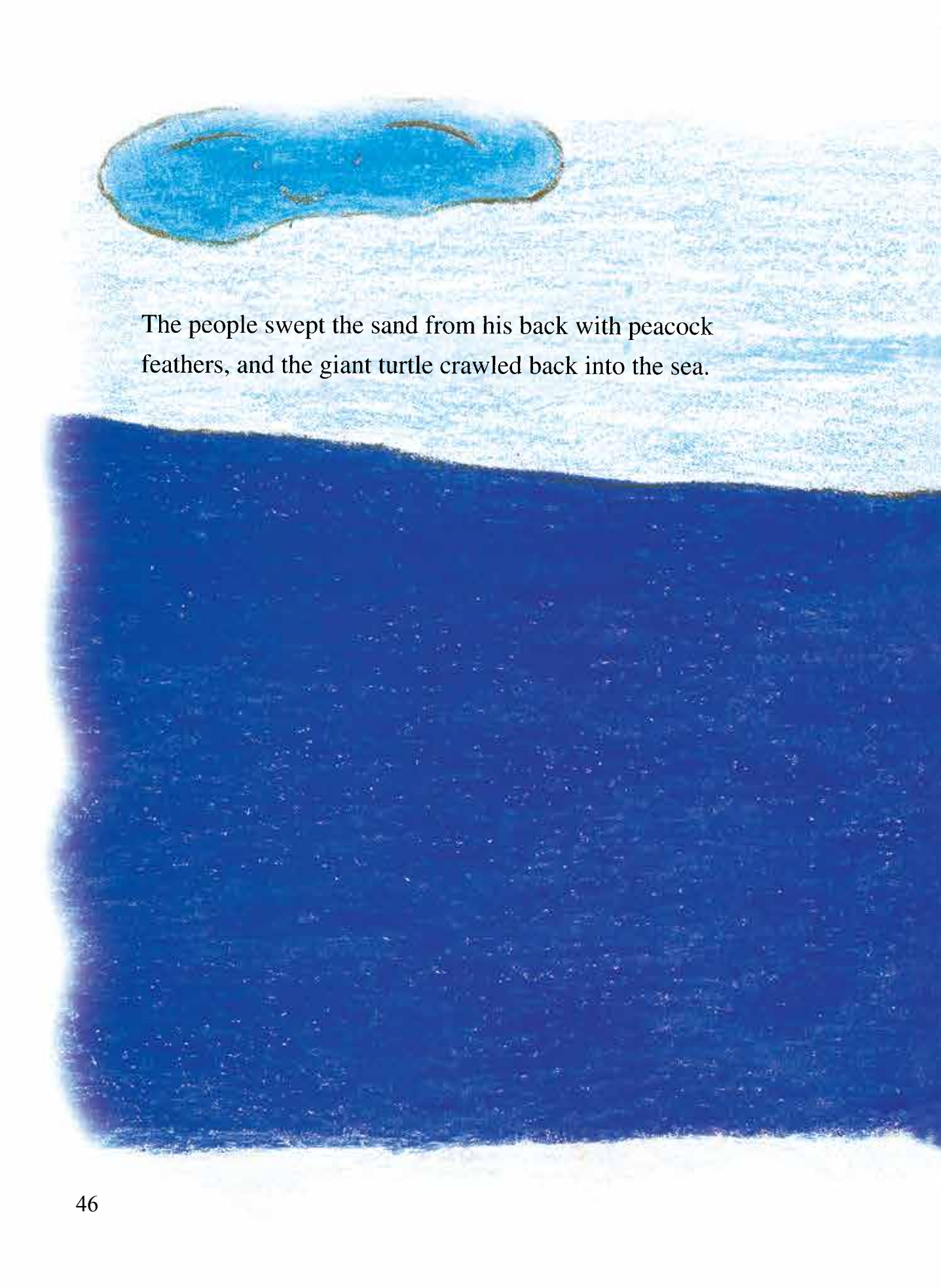


Then the birds flew high above the turtle and placed garlands of fragrant flowers around his neck. Monkeys rubbed his



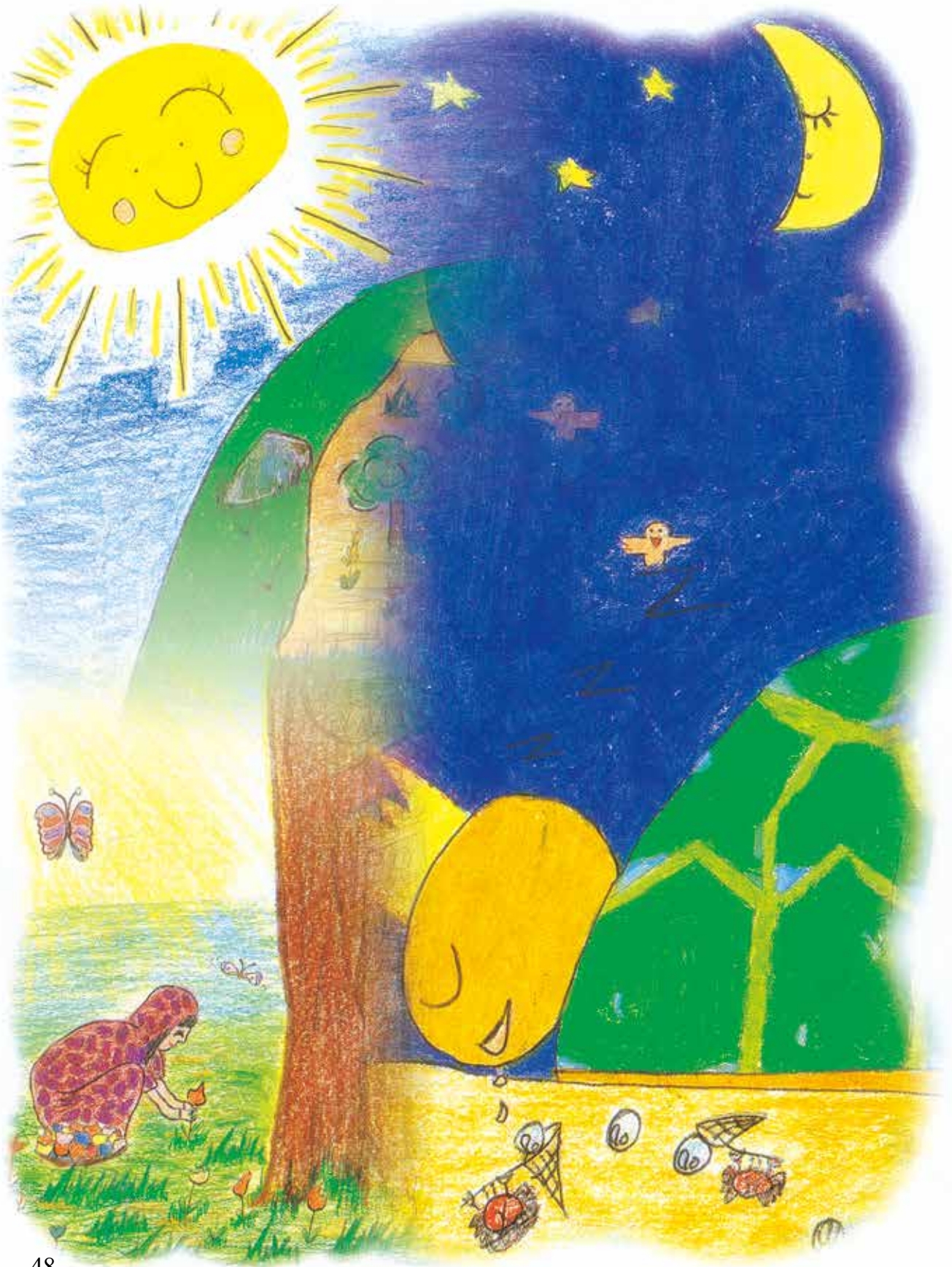
sores with healing herbs, and elephants trumpeted sweet music to soothe his ears.





The people swept the sand from his back with peacock feathers, and the giant turtle crawled back into the sea.



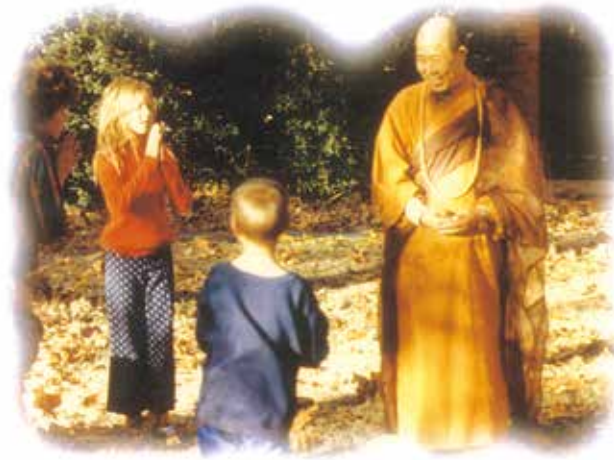




After the telling of this tale, the Buddha said, “ I was the king turtle and the people who lived on my back became my disciples.”



One day, he crawled onto the sandy beach to take a nap.
Because he was so large, as large as a continent,
he napped for a very long time, for thousands of years.



Words spoken by Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

“Children, do you want to take the responsibility to rescue the world and mankind? If you do, first of all you have to build up your character and develop your virtue. This means to be a good and noble person and to be well educated with wide knowledge. And you won’t smoke or drink. You won’t take drugs or gamble. You won’t have any bad habits.”

