

Lion on the loose

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Once it started raining, it just wouldn't stop. The sky wept great tears in an endless stream until the clouds had entered everyone's hearts and made them feel as gray and weepy as the weather. But still, it rained on and on.

Everyone stayed at home, gloomy and bored. "I wish we could DO something," moaned Geeti, "Nothing exciting ever happens to us," said Vikki.

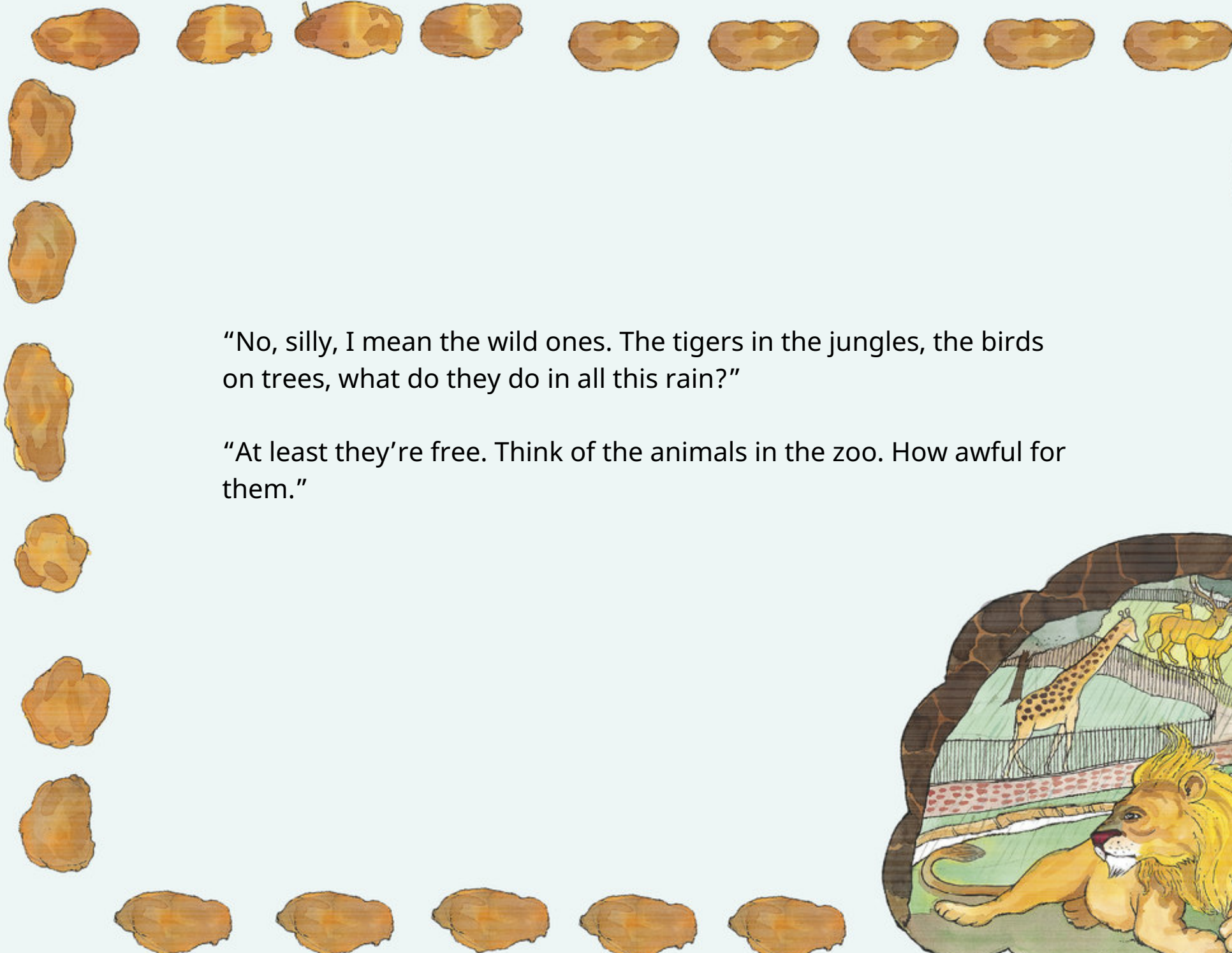
Mummy wouldn't let them go out, but she tried to cheer them up by making hot, crisp pakodas for them. The children helped too, cutting the potatoes, onions, spinach and cauliflower.

The pakodas were yummy. They ate them hot, dipping them into spicy green chutney. Soon the children were bursting full. So mummy put the leftover pakodas on a plate and covered them so that they could eat them the next day, with cold lassi and leftover rotis.



The children now stood at the window, "I wonder what the animals and birds do?" asked Geeti thoughtfully.

"They must be cooped up in their cages."



“No, silly, I mean the wild ones. The tigers in the jungles, the birds on trees, what do they do in all this rain?”

“At least they’re free. Think of the animals in the zoo. How awful for them.”





And it was true. The animals in the zoo were worried and irritable. The wetness was terrible for the creatures, big and small. The more it rained, the more everything filled up with water.





The moat around the lion's enclosure filled up with water too. The lion watched. He was an old fellow, who had never been out of the enclosure.



He had never seen anything like this before. As the water lapped the sides of the moat temptingly, the old fellow decided to make a go for it. He sniffed here, and he sniffed there.

He put one paw delicately into the water and then, with one big breath, he jumped right in.



At first he sank. Then he panicked. He thought for one awful moment that he was going to die. But he didn't. His mighty head popped up and he paddled along until he could feel the wall just under his chin.

Putting his big paws onto the wall, he heaved himself up with a, "Dum laga kar, hoyee shah!"

And then he was out. Out and free. Free to walk around the world, just as he had seen hundreds of people do. Now, he, the mighty raja, was going to have the adventure of a lifetime.

No one saw him for it was night and all the zookeepers were fast asleep. Lion walked out, king of everything he saw. Softly, softly, he crept on padded feet to the enclosure next to him. He grinned at the bear who awoke with a start. He winked at him and laughed softly.



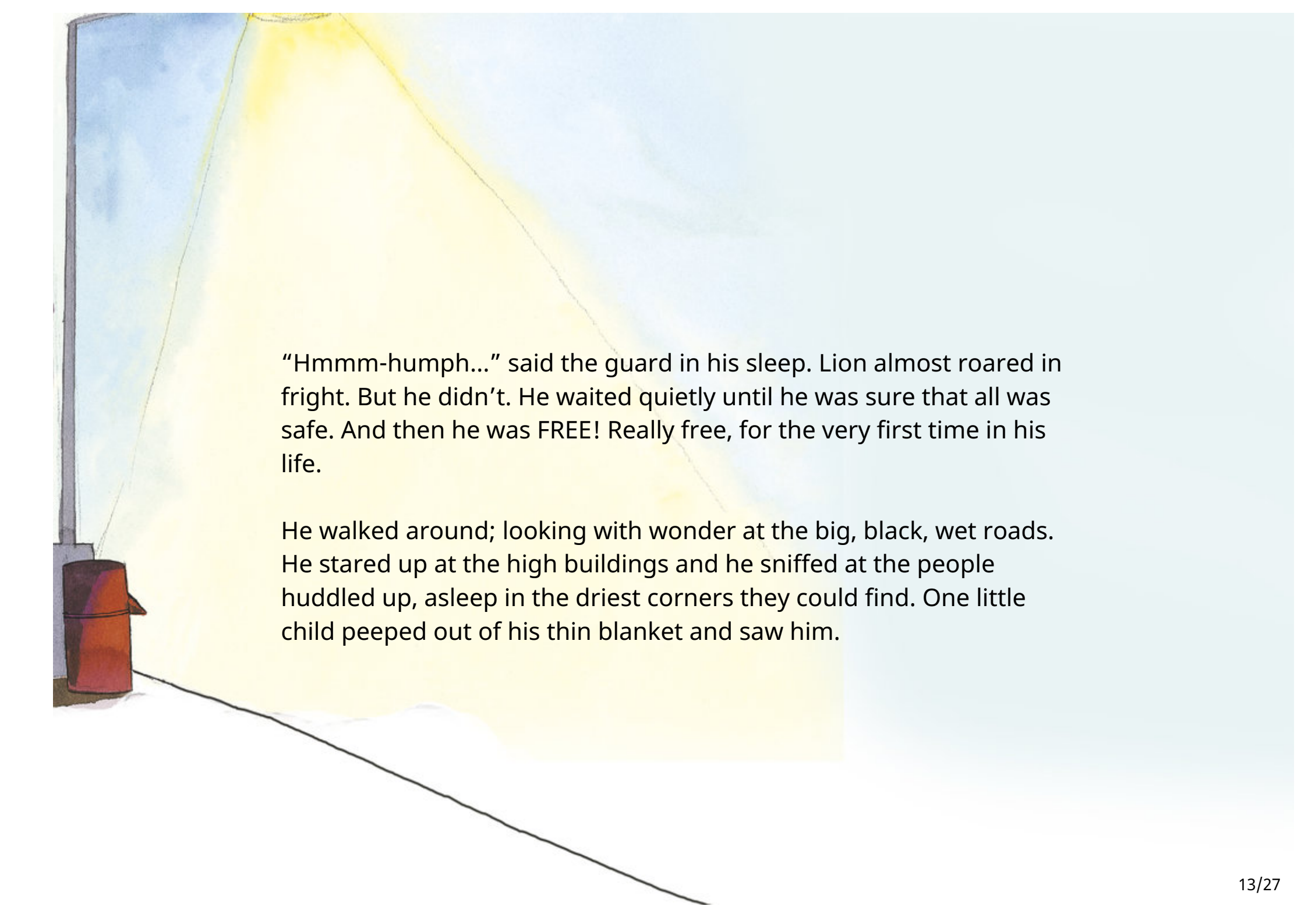
He looked in at all the cages and thought how wonderful it was to be free. Then he had an idea. He was going to be really, truly free. What was the use of freedom if he was still within the four walls of the zoo?

So, asking for the way at every cage he passed, Lion reached the main gate.



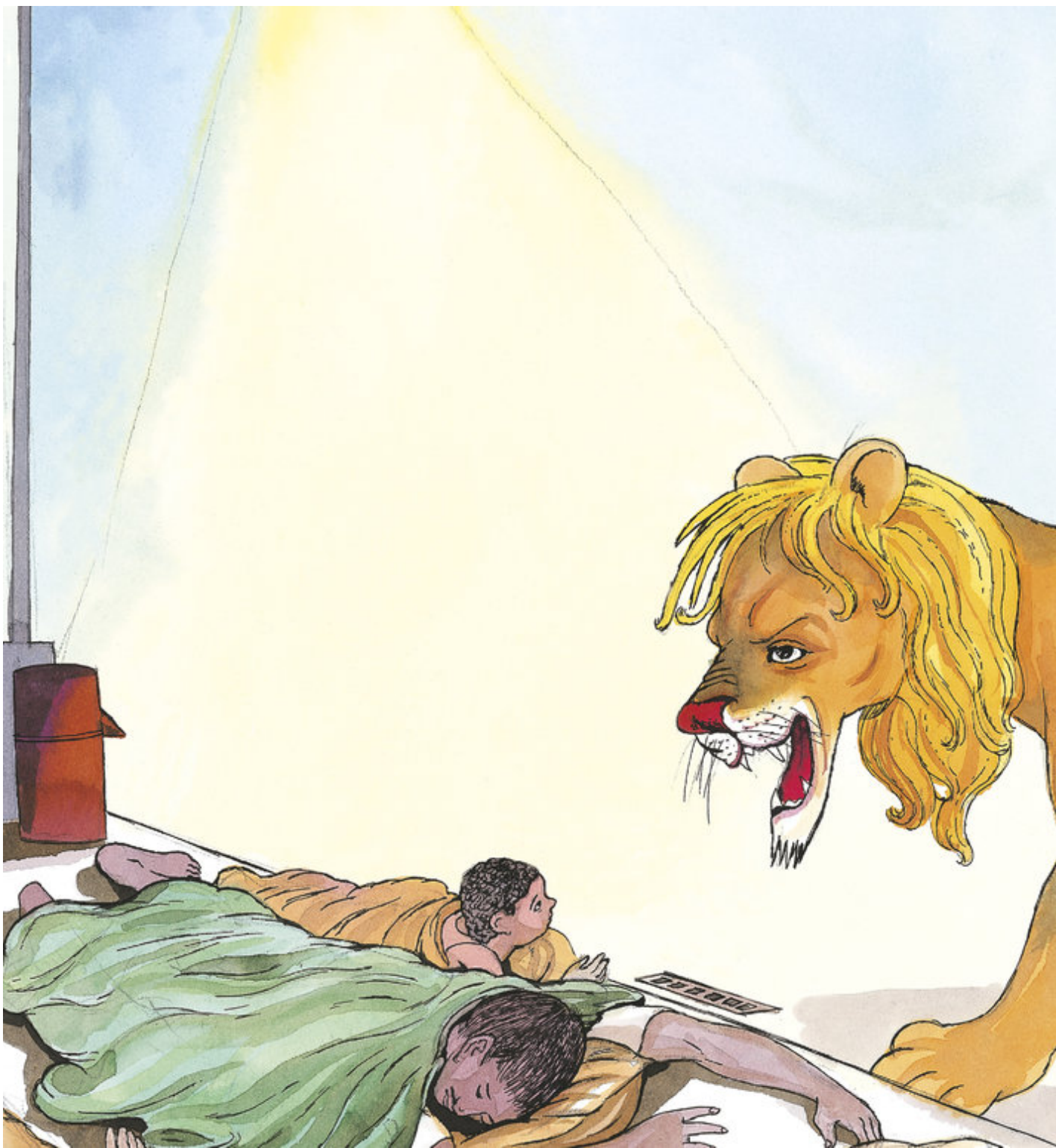
He could smell a human. He carefully peered into the ticket booth. Lion was a clever old fellow and knew that the guard wouldn't let him just walk out. So he waited and watched. The guard didn't move. He snored gently.

When Lion was sure that the man was fast asleep, he padded his way past him softly.

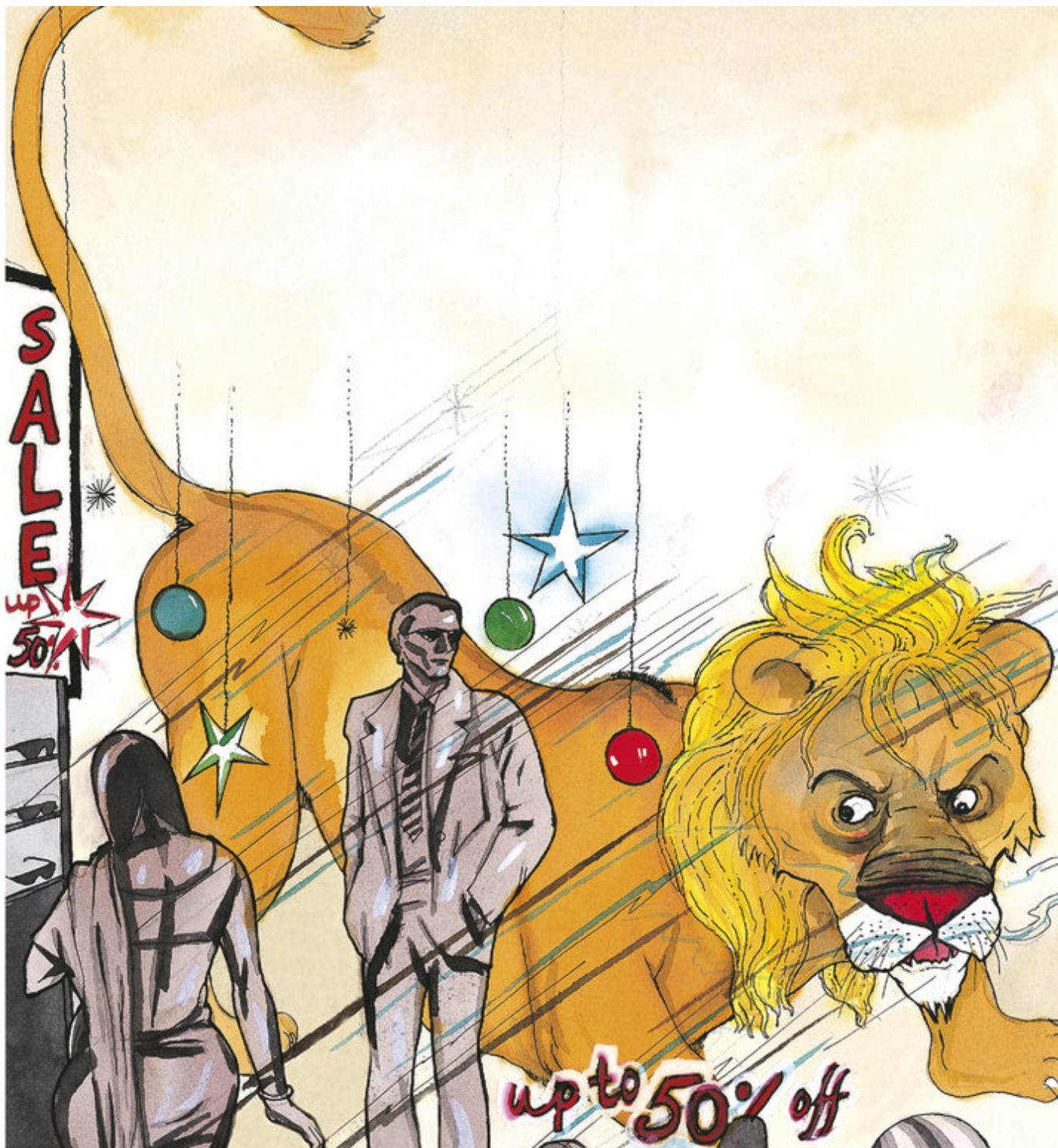


“Hmmm-humph...” said the guard in his sleep. Lion almost roared in fright. But he didn’t. He waited quietly until he was sure that all was safe. And then he was FREE! Really free, for the very first time in his life.

He walked around; looking with wonder at the big, black, wet roads. He stared up at the high buildings and he sniffed at the people huddled up, asleep in the driest corners they could find. One little child peeped out of his thin blanket and saw him.



"Papa," he whispered, "there's a lion on the loose!" "Yes, yes," said his Papa sleepily, "he'll go away, now get back to sleep."



And Lion went on. This was the longest walk that he'd ever had. He was in the bazar now. But, of course, everyone was fast asleep.

He peered into shop windows, fascinated by the glittering things that shone there.

He walked on and on. On and on. Until he was one very wet, hungry and tired lion. He now suddenly caught the smell of yummy fried pakodas.

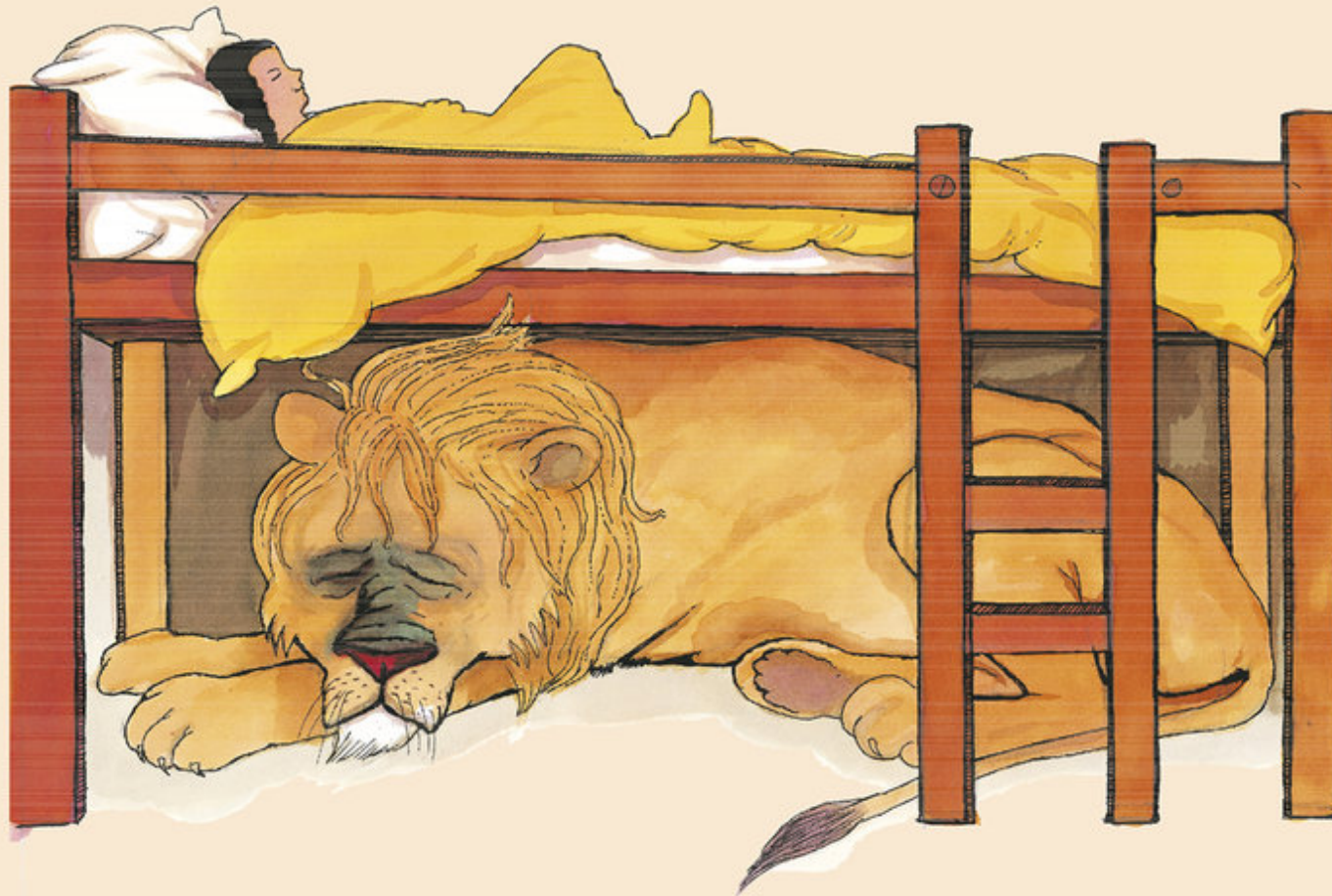
He had never smelled anything so invitingly warm or warmly inviting. Sniff! Sniff! Sniff! He found the window to Geeti and Vikki's room open. Quickly, quietly, he jumped right in. He saw the children asleep in their soft, warm beds. And he felt like getting in with them. But first to find out where that delicious smell was coming from. Sniff! Sniff! Sniff!

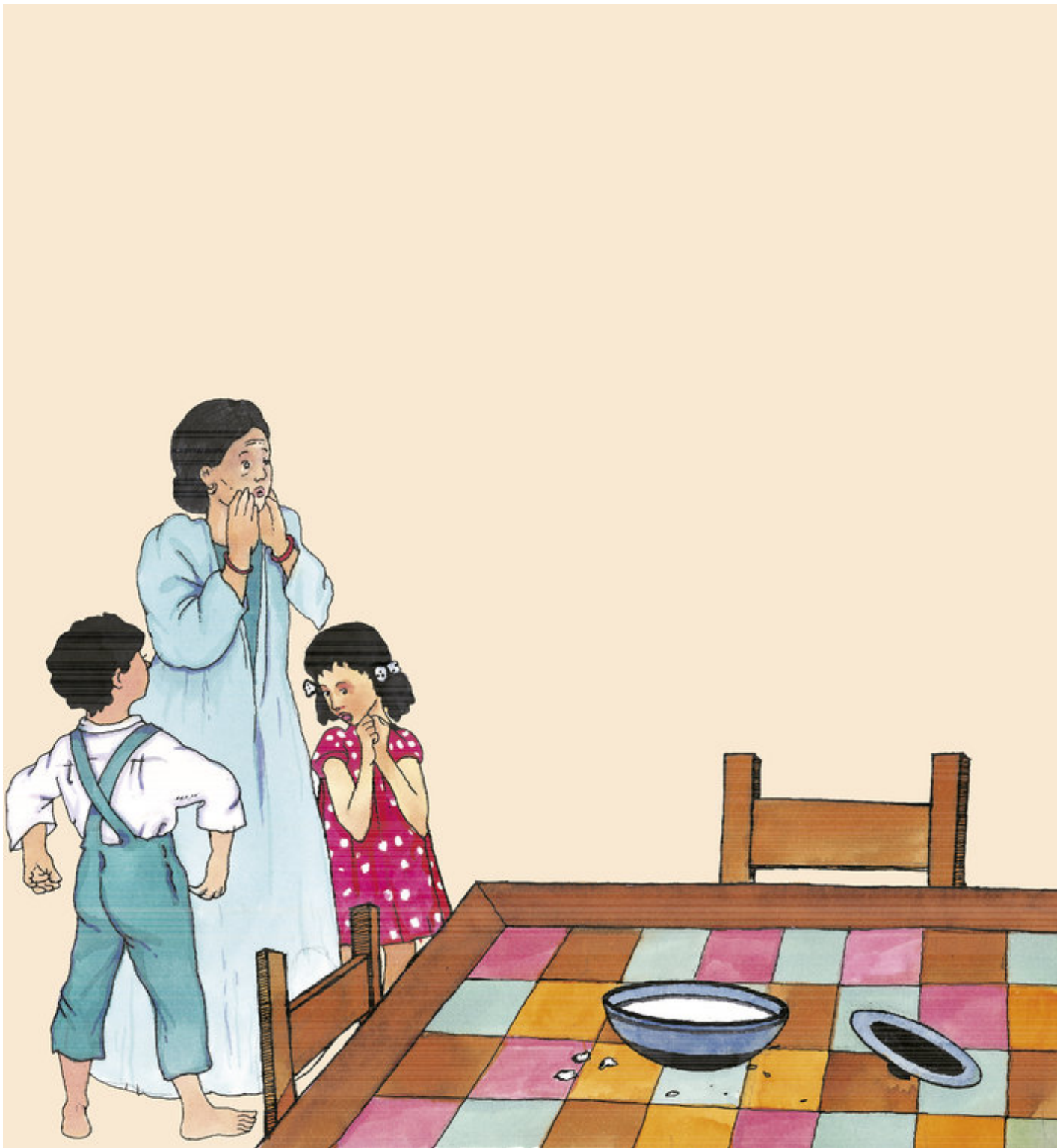
Of course, with his sharp lion's nose, he found the pakodas. And with his sharp lion's teeth, he quickly chomped them up. They were delicious. Not like the smelly raw meat he got. He loved the crispy pakodas. He licked the plate clean.



And now, to bed. Slipping back into the children's room, Lion tried to get into Vikki's bed. But it was too small for one big lion. Then he tried snuggling into Geeti's bed, but it was too small for one big lion. So, he crawled under the bed and found it wonderfully cozy and just right for one big lion.

Soon he was fast asleep...





Next morning, mummy woke up to find the pakodas missing.

“Vikki, Geeti, did you eat all the pakodas last night?” “No mummy, not at all,” the children said.

“It must have been you who ate them. Don’t lie to me, children. Who else could it be?” “Oh, it must have been the lion who ate them, mama!”

“Lion, what lion? Geeti, don’t be silly.”

“She’s not being silly,” said Vikki.

“There’s a lion under our bed!”

“What?” shouted mummy as loudly as she could.

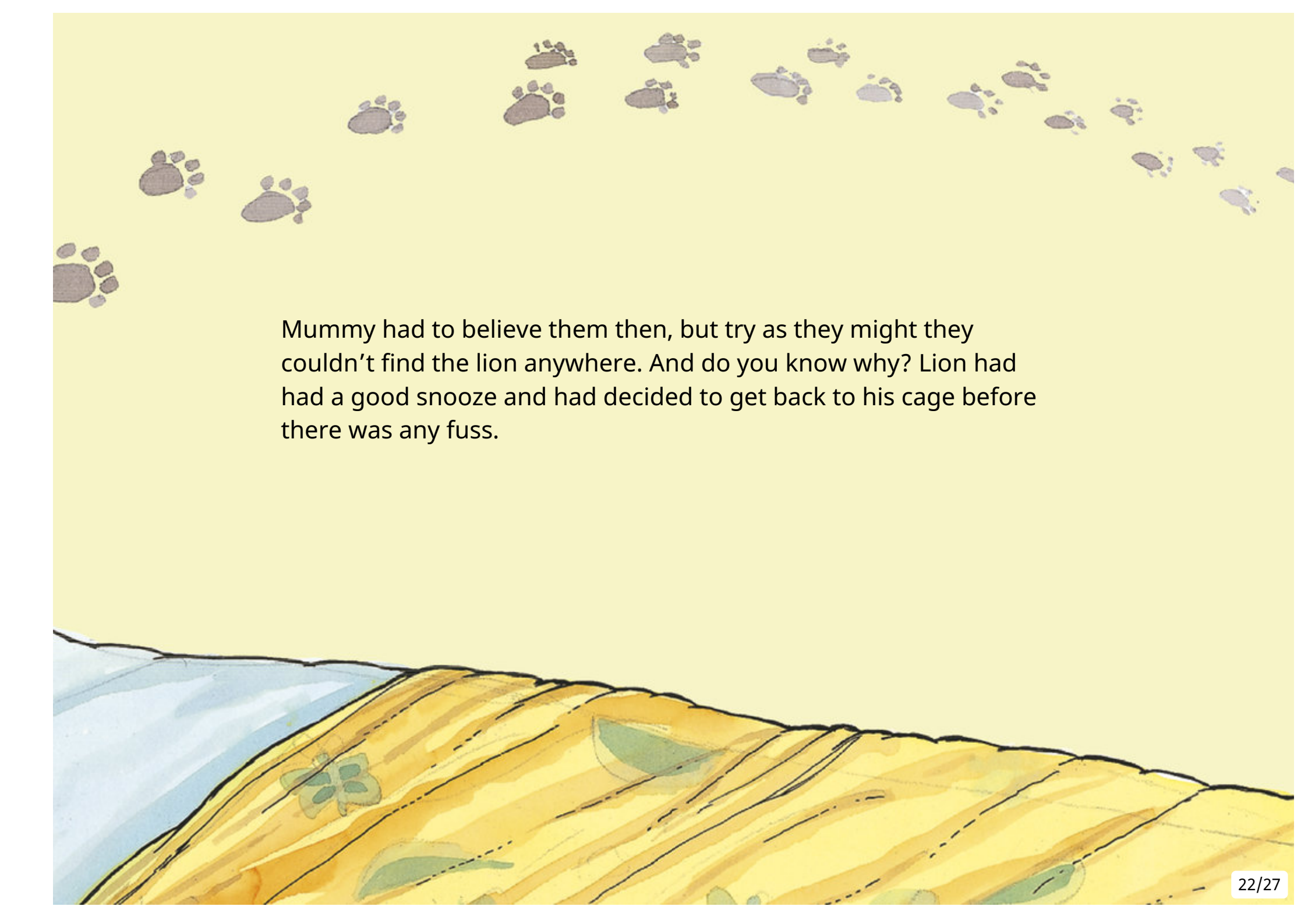
And she rushed right away to look for the lion under her children’s bed.

She looked, but there was no lion there. “Oh children,” she said crossly, “you gave me a fright. Of course there’s no lion there.”



“But there was, mummy,” protested the children.
“Look, there are lion paw prints on the carpet.”
“And a big wet patch on our beds.”
“And lion hair on my sheet!”





Mummy had to believe them then, but try as they might they couldn't find the lion anywhere. And do you know why? Lion had had a good snooze and had decided to get back to his cage before there was any fuss.



So he slipped away at dawn and no one saw him going. Except the same little boy in a blanket, who had seen him earlier.

The little boy patted Lion's nose and thought, 'Grown ups never believe us children, so I'm not going to tell anyone that the lion was taking a walk tonight.'

The old lion slipped past the guard who still lay asleep and swam back into his cage. What an adventure it had been! But he was glad to be home.

As soon as the rain stopped, Geeti and Vikki went to the zoo. They stood outside Lion's enclosure and whispered to each other.

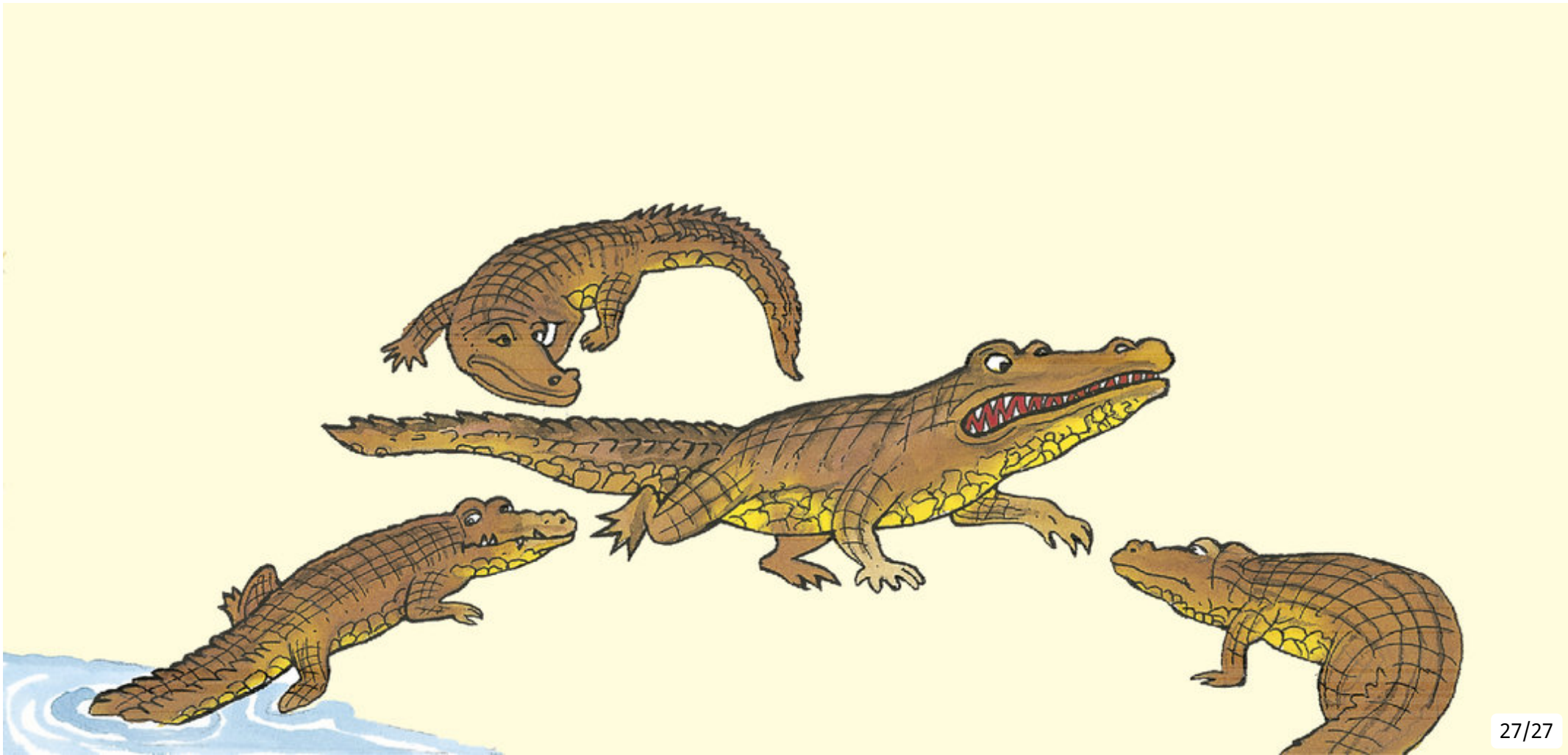


I'm sure that our Lion recognized them too, for he let out a big, rumbling ROAR of thanks to his little friends.

Maybe, next time it rains very hard, Lion may come to your house, so remember to have some freshly fried pakodas ready for him.

This story is almost true. Once, in Jaipur, Rajasthan, it rained so hard that a zoo lion's moat got flooded and the lion really did swim out of its enclosure. It walked all around the zoo and then got so wet that it went and sat in the ticket booth, from where it was caught and returned to its cage. That's why I thought we should let the old lion take a really good, adventurous walk in the story.

*(Actually, some baby crocodiles also swam out of their enclosures,
but that's another story for another day.)*



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Lion on the loose

(English)

Do rainy days make you feel that the world is full of possibilities? The lion in the story certainly believes so! Read this story to meet him as he takes a rainy day holiday from the zoo and have as much fun as the children in the story. After all, the author maintains that this story is 'almost true'!

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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