



THE WISE AND THE WILY

Animal Stories of the East

Kala Thairani



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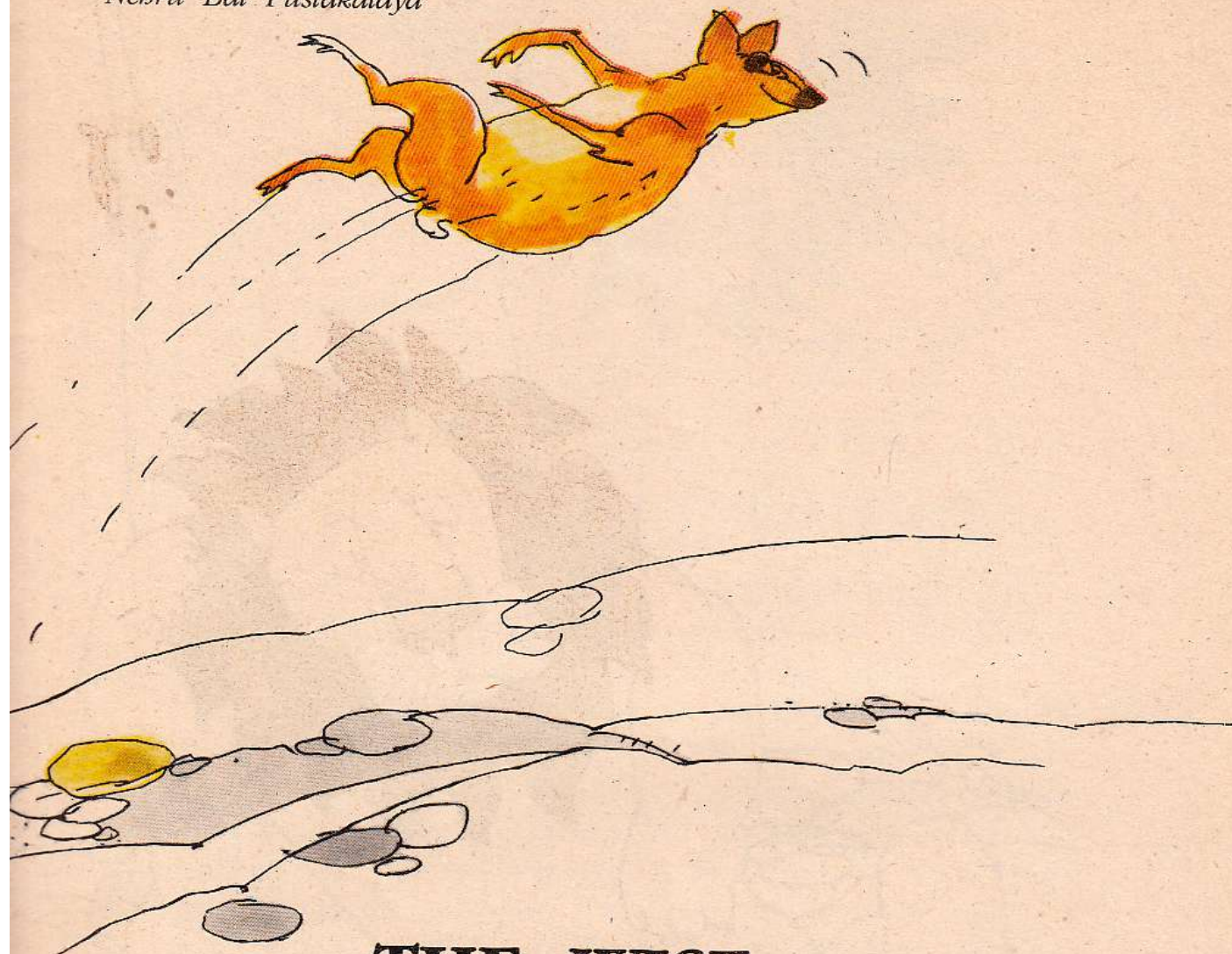
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Nehru Bal Pustakalaya



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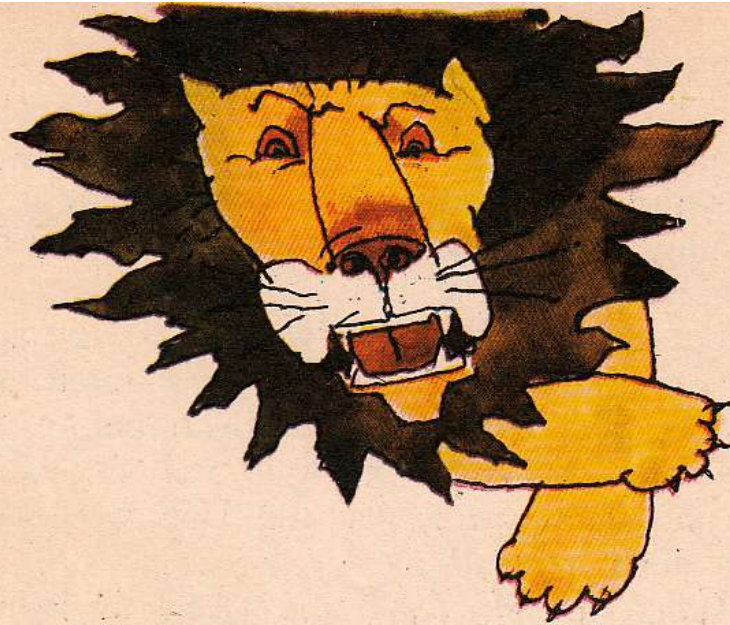
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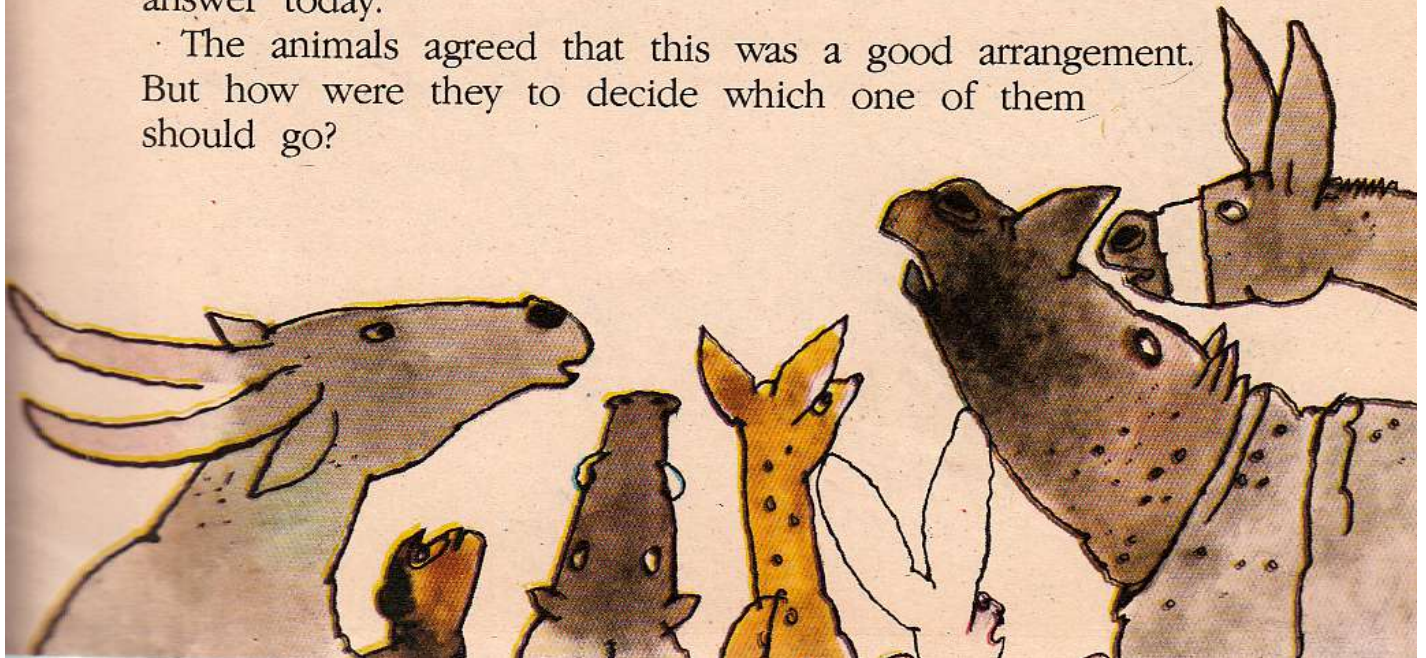
Why is the Rabbit Called Wise?

It was noon and the sun shone hot and bright. The Lion, king of the forest, was resting under a tree. The daily hunt for food had begun to exhaust him.

"I am the king of the animals," he thought to himself, "why should I struggle for my food?"

So he commanded all the animals to assemble near his den before nightfall. When the animals presented themselves, he said, "Every day I hunt for my food and so you are afraid to roam the forest. If one of you were to come to me every morning, I will not have to hunt and you can go about without fear. I want your answer today."

The animals agreed that this was a good arrangement. But how were they to decide which one of them should go?



After much thought they worked out a plan. Each evening they would meet and draw lots for the animal who would be the Lion's meal.

The plan worked very well. The Lion got his food daily and the animals went about freely and were happier than they had ever been before.

Then a day came when it was the Rabbit's turn. But he protested, saying that the Lion would not be satisfied with such a small meal.

"Don't be silly," said the Deer. "A light meal is good for the stomach occasionally."

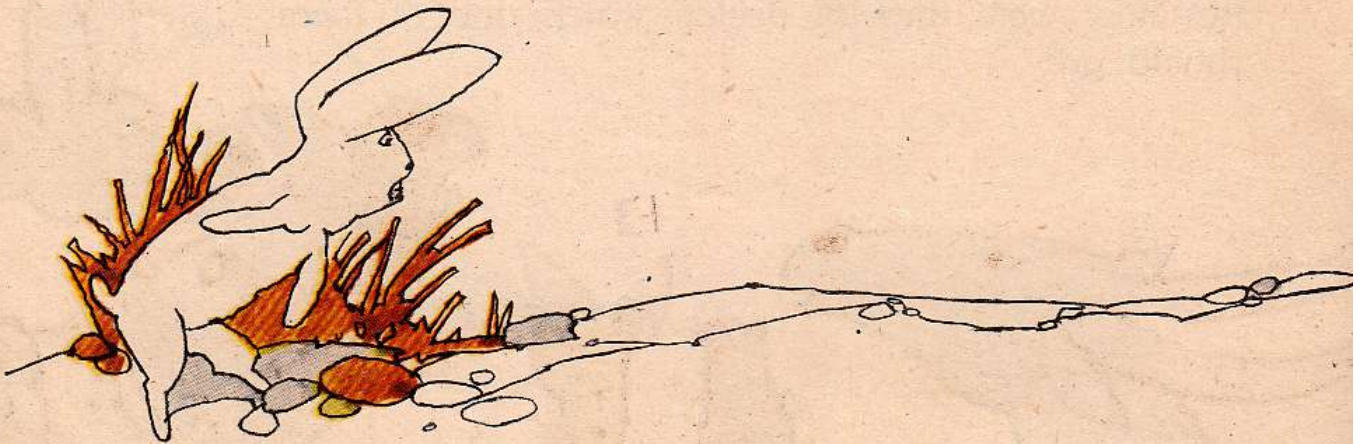
The other animals also insisted that the Rabbit abide by the rules.

"All right, I will go," said the Rabbit, "but you'll see I'll be back tomorrow."

The others laughed at him.

That night the Rabbit paced up and down, deep in thought. He did not want to die. "There has to be some way of dealing with this tyrant," he said to himself.

By daybreak he had thought of a plan. Then he went to sleep.



When he awoke, the sun was high up in the sky. With a light step he started on his journey. As he neared the Lion's den the Rabbit shouted, "At last I have reached here, Your Majesty!"

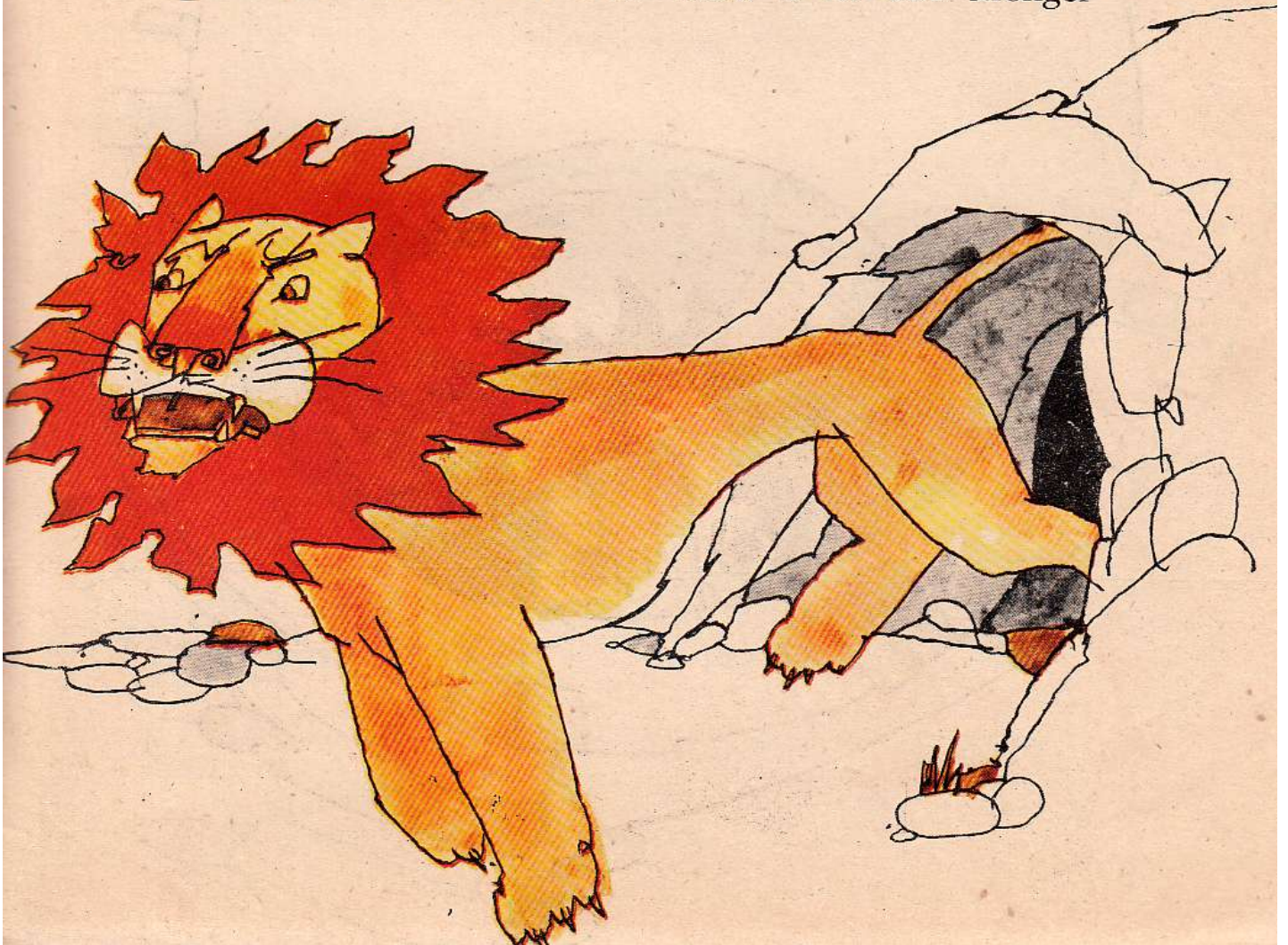
The Lion stepped out of his lair, his face dark with anger. He had been waiting since the morning, and now to see one little Rabbit when he could have swallowed a dozen!

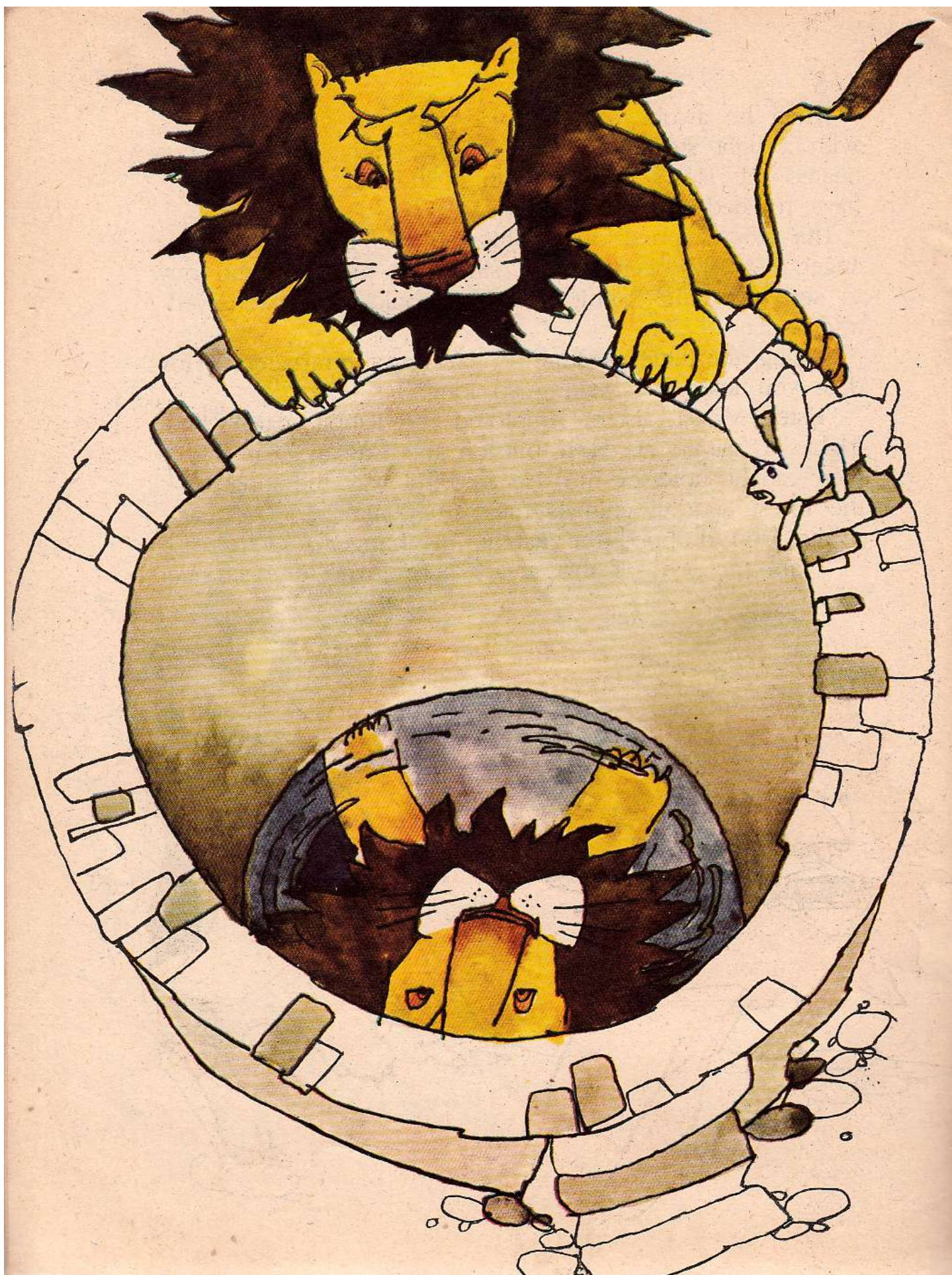
Seizing the little creature in his paws he roared, "How dare you keep me waiting so long?"

"Listen Master, listen," implored the Rabbit, pale with fright. "I started at dawn but on the way a great big Lion caught hold of me. He said he was the king of the forest and all animals must obey him."

The Lion dropped the Rabbit, his hunger forgotten.

"I am the lord of this area. There is no one stronger





or more powerful than me," he thundered. "Show me this creature."

The Rabbit shook his head. "No, no, Your Majesty. I am afraid to go anywhere near him. You must not try to meet him either. You are no match for him."

"Take me to him. I will not rest till I have finished him off."

"He is very powerful, Master..."

"Don't argue. Lead the way or I'll kill you."

Together the Lion and the Rabbit went to the spot where there was a deep well.

The Rabbit ran up. "He lives down there," he said pointing into the well. "I beg you not to provoke him to a fight."

The Lion moved closer and looked down into the well. His reflection stared back at him.

"Look at the way he's glaring at me!" thought the Lion and roared with all his might. The echo of his roar answered him. Then the Lion made as if to attack. His reflection threatened likewise.

Furious, the Lion leaped forward, and went hurtling down.

"Oh! Oh!" the Lion's voice could be heard faintly from the depths of the well. After struggling in the water for some time he drowned.

The Rabbit looked into the well. "He will not bother us again," he said and sighed with satisfaction. He ran and told the animals what had happened.

There was much rejoicing. The animals danced round the little Rabbit and carrying him on their shoulders, said he was their hero. And from that day the Rabbit has been called 'wise' and all the animals turn to him for help and advice in all their problems.

In Burmese tales the Rabbit is endowed with supreme wisdom.

Sivalu and the Elephant

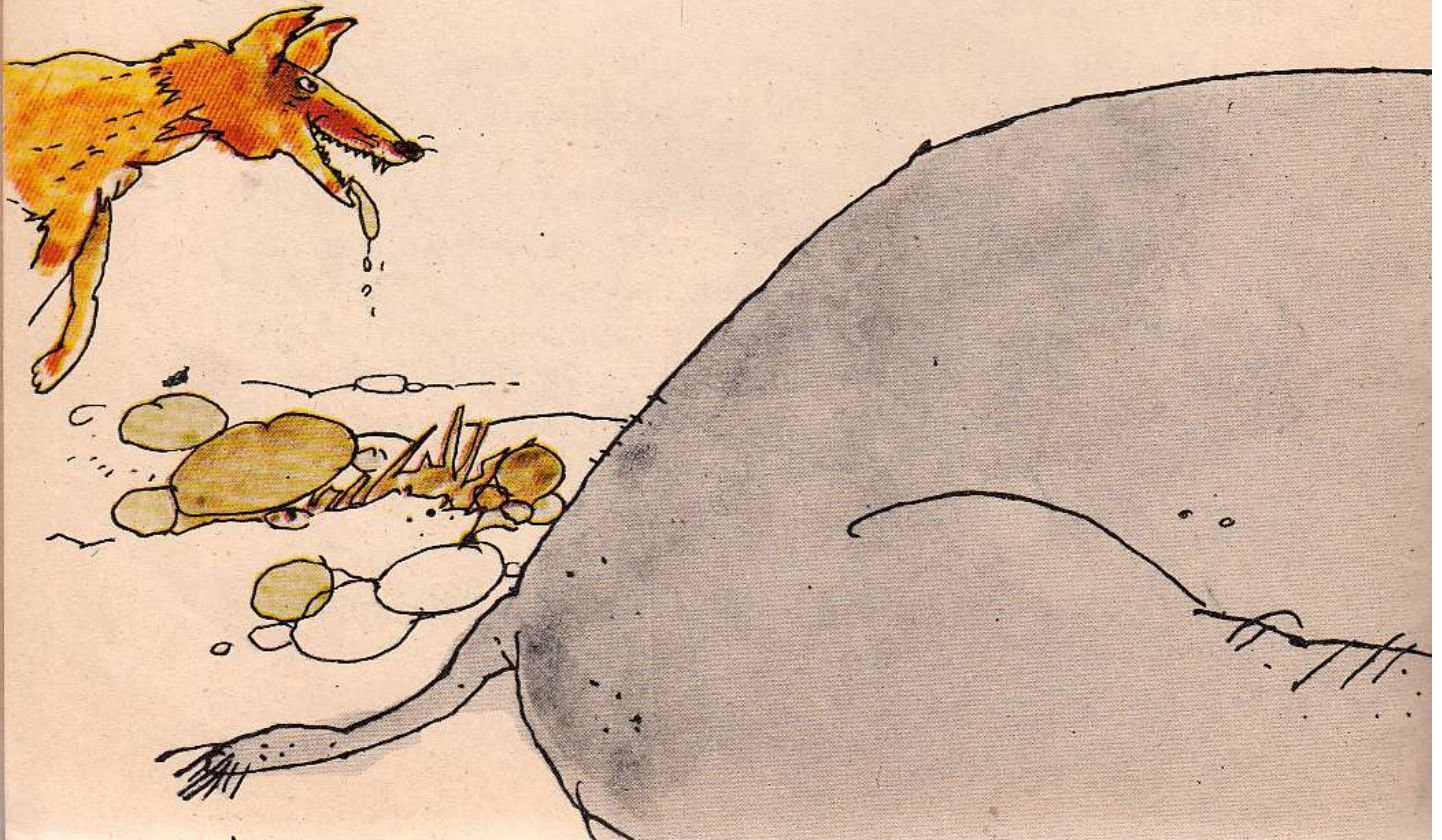
One day late in the afternoon Sivalu the Jackal was roaming the forest when he came upon an Elephant that had just died. He went round the body to investigate the cause of death. After he had made sure that the Elephant had died a natural death, he decided to eat it. But try as he may, he could not cut through the hide.

Suddenly he heard the footfall of a Lion. "There goes my meal!" he said to himself. But he was not one to give up without a fight.

When the Lion appeared, the Jackal respectfully touched the ground with his head and said, "Your Majesty, please accept my humble compliments. I am guarding this Elephant for you. Kindly eat it."

Flattered by the Jackal's words but too proud to take what belonged to another, the Lion declined saying, "My good fellow, this Elephant is yours. I will not eat what another has killed." And the Lion walked away.

Sivalu heaved a sigh of relief. He was about to start



on his meal again when a Tiger suddenly loomed up.

"Troubles never come singly!" the Jackal muttered under his breath. "How shall I dispose of this rascal?" Flattery had worked with the Lion but he would have to handle the Tiger differently. Quick as a flash he knew what he had to do.

With hurried steps he went up to meet the Tiger. Looking this way and that in apparent fright, he said, "Uncle, you have come at a wrong moment. The Lion has just killed an Elephant and asked me to guard the body till he returns. He is especially angry with Tigers and said that if a Tiger came I must immediately tell him."

"What is our offence?" asked the puzzled Tiger.

"It seems he once killed an Elephant and when his back was turned, a Tiger came along and helped himself





to the kill. So the Lion has sworn death on all Tigers."

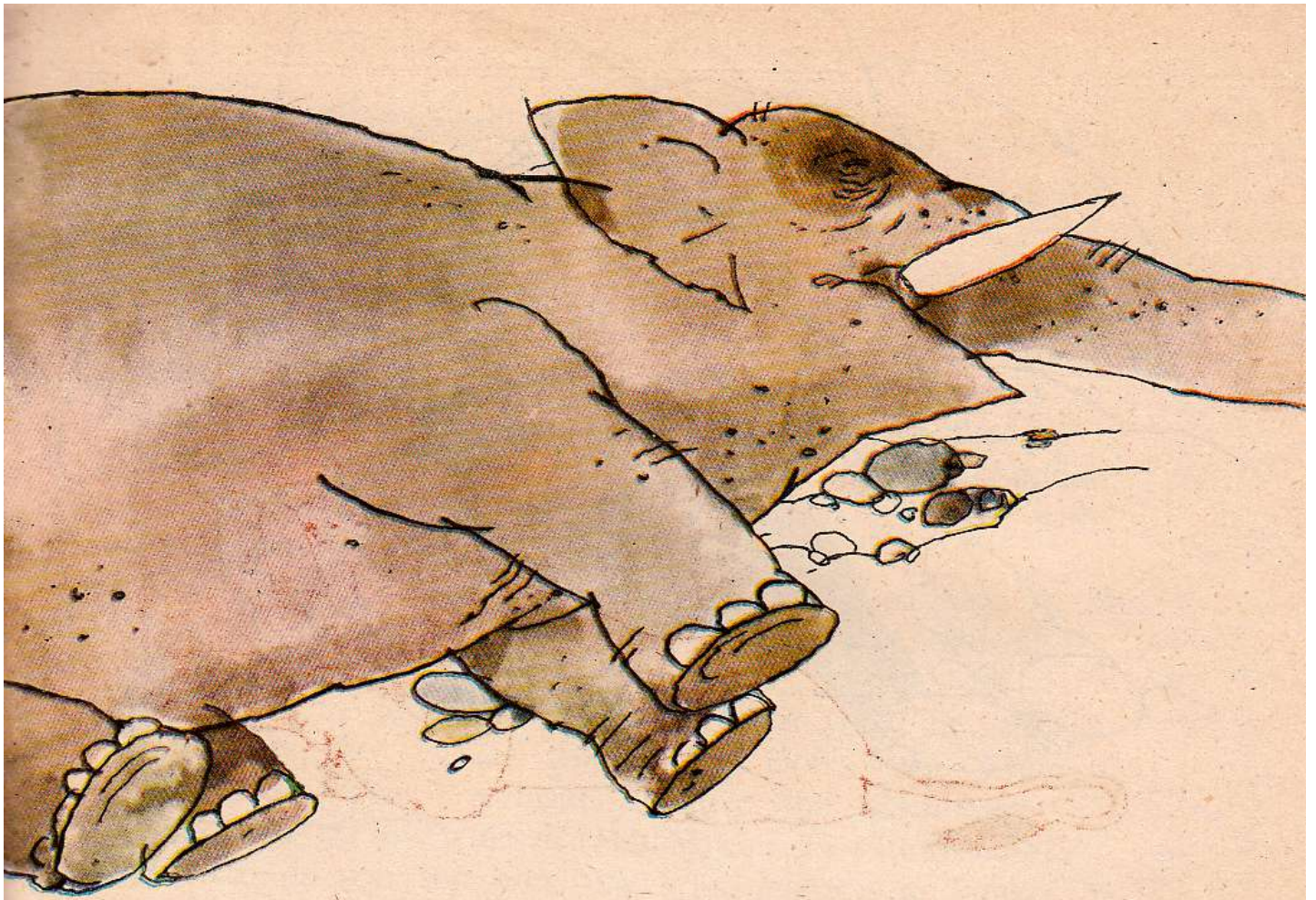
The Tiger said imploringly, "Kind friend, tell me which way the Lion has gone, and I'll go in the opposite direction." And as soon as the wily Jackal pointed with his paw the Tiger took to his heels.

No sooner had the Tiger disappeared than a Leopard appeared on the scene.

"Ah, here comes Spotty! He has sharp teeth. I will make him cut the body and then send him packing," thought the Jackal.

He greeted the newcomer warmly, "My dear friend, I am so happy to see you. You couldn't have come at a better time. Here lies an Elephant killed by a Lion. I am guarding it for him. But I want you to have a good feed before he returns."

"No, no," replied the Leopard. "If the Lion sees me



eating his dinner, he will make mincemeat of me."

"Don't be a coward," the Jackal said. "Am I not your friend? I will watch out for the Lion and warn you the moment I hear his footsteps."

Reassured, the Leopard bit into the Elephant's hide and cut it without difficulty. As soon as that was done, the Jackal let out a howl, "Hurry! Hurry! The Lion is coming!"

Looking neither left nor right, the Leopard shot forward like an arrow and disappeared from sight.

By now it was getting dark. Dusk had fallen on the forest like a grey veil. Sivalu surveyed the quiet, deserted scene with satisfaction and sat down to have a hearty dinner.

In the Indian jungles Sivalu is the wily one.



On His Majesty's Service

An old Lion lived alone in a rock cave. He ate whatever was easily available because he no longer had the strength to venture far out to hunt for food.

One summer day, as he sat brooding over his plight, he had a visitor.

"Good day, Your Majesty!" said the Jackal, bowing. "Why are you looking so unhappy?"

"I am tired of eating the same food everyday," the Lion replied with a sigh. "It's a long time since I ate fresh pig's flesh. I cannot go far and no Boars come near the cave."

"What am I here for? I'll bring a Boar to you," promised the Jackal.

After walking about in the jungle he at last spotted a Boar resting in the shade of a tree.

Going up to him the Jackal said, "I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Why? What's the matter?" the Boar asked.

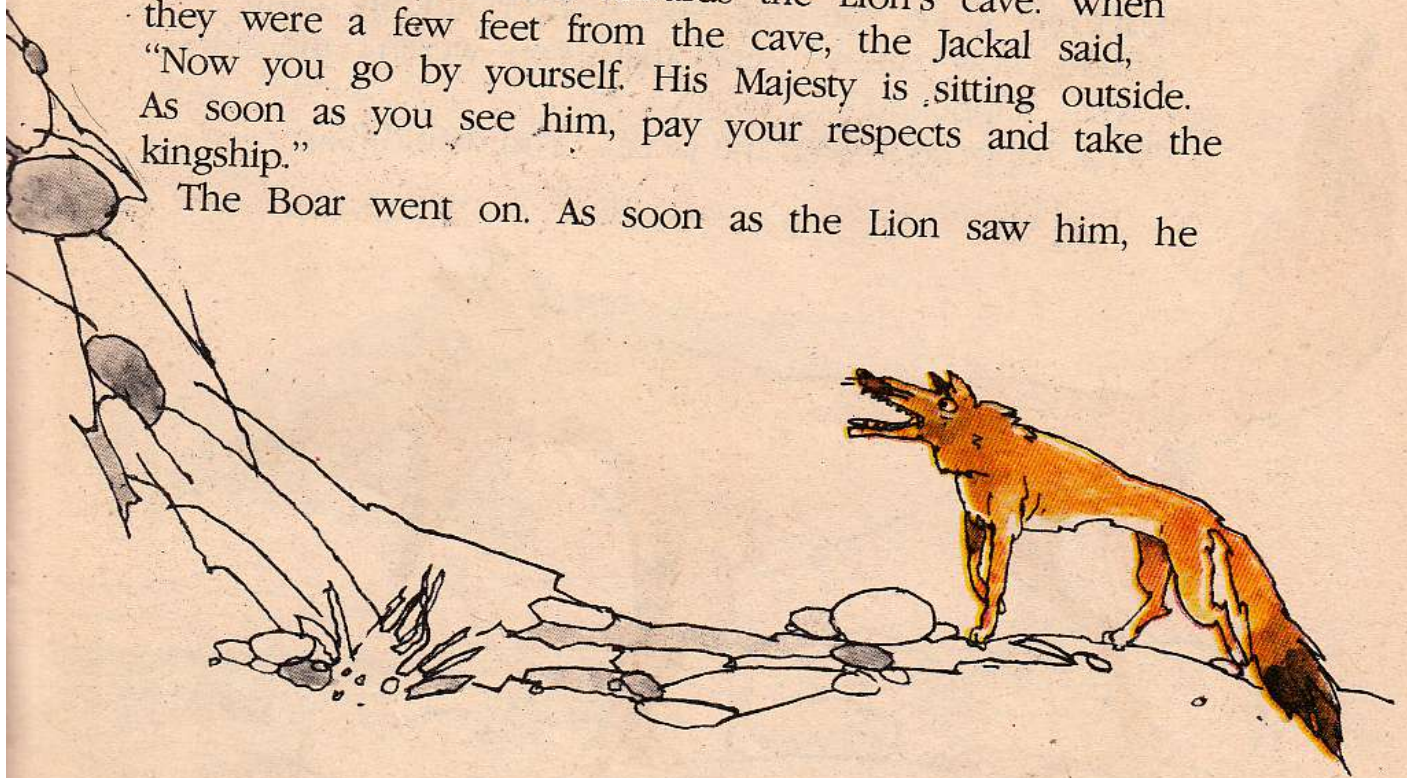
Pointing towards the rock cave the Jackal said, "You know that our king has become old. He now wants to appoint his successor and has chosen you for the honour." The Boar looked doubtful. So the Jackal added, "If you don't believe me, why don't you go there with me?"

The Boar was flattered. "It will indeed be grand to be king," he thought. "Just imagine!" he said to himself, "All the animals will bow before me!"

He got up promptly. "I'll come with you," he said.

Together they walked towards the Lion's cave. When they were a few feet from the cave, the Jackal said, "Now you go by yourself. His Majesty is sitting outside. As soon as you see him, pay your respects and take the kingship."

The Boar went on. As soon as the Lion saw him, he



got up and sprang at him. In blind fear the Boar pushed the Lion with his paws. The Lion fell back and the Boar bolted.

Seeing the Boar in flight the Jackal came up to the Lion. "Why didn't you hold the Boar?" he asked.

Crestfallen, the Lion replied, "I admit it was my fault. I have become slow in my movements. Now I will never get a Boar."

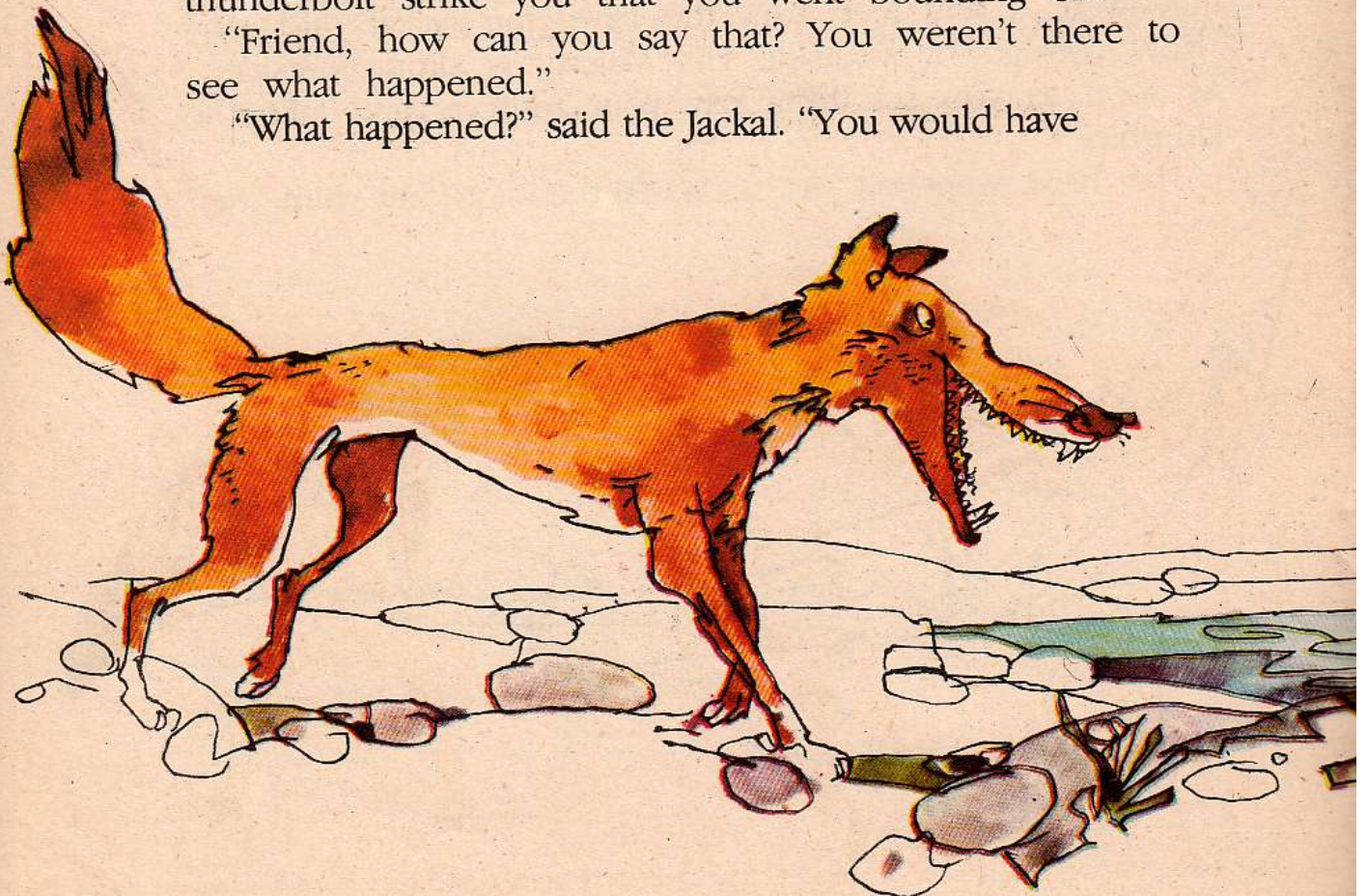
Seeing how sad the Lion was, the Jackal said, "Before the day is over, I shall bring that Boar to you again."

Taking the same path as the fleeing animal the Jackal saw that the Boar had stopped near the river. Terrified and out of breath, the poor creature looked as if he was about to collapse.

"What's the matter?" cried the Jackal. "Did a thunderbolt strike you that you went bounding off?"

"Friend, how can you say that? You weren't there to see what happened."

"What happened?" said the Jackal. "You would have



been king if you had stayed. His Majesty was merely wanting to show you honour. Would you be here if he wanted to eat you?"

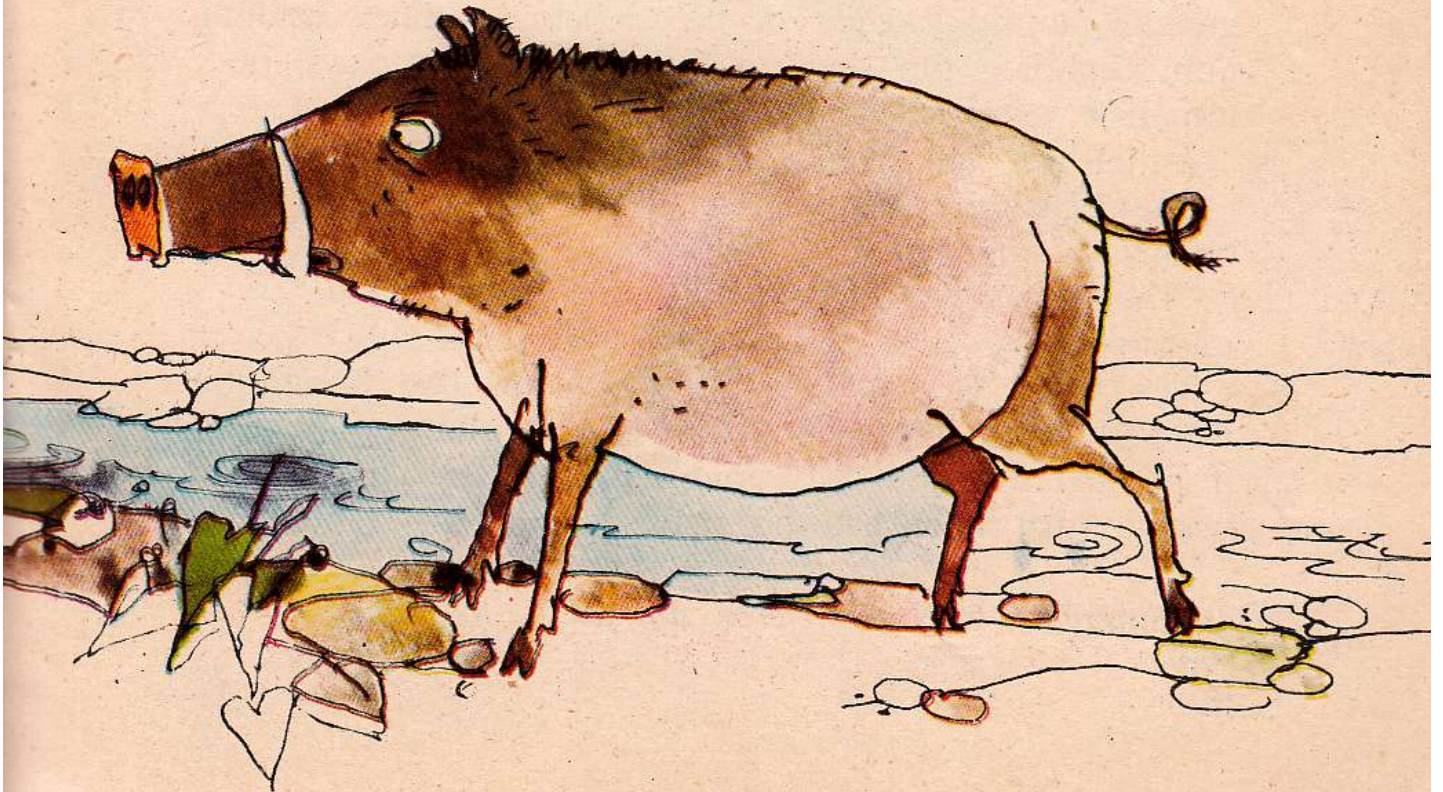
The Boar nodded. "Perhaps you are right. If he had wanted to eat me, he wouldn't have let go of me so easily."

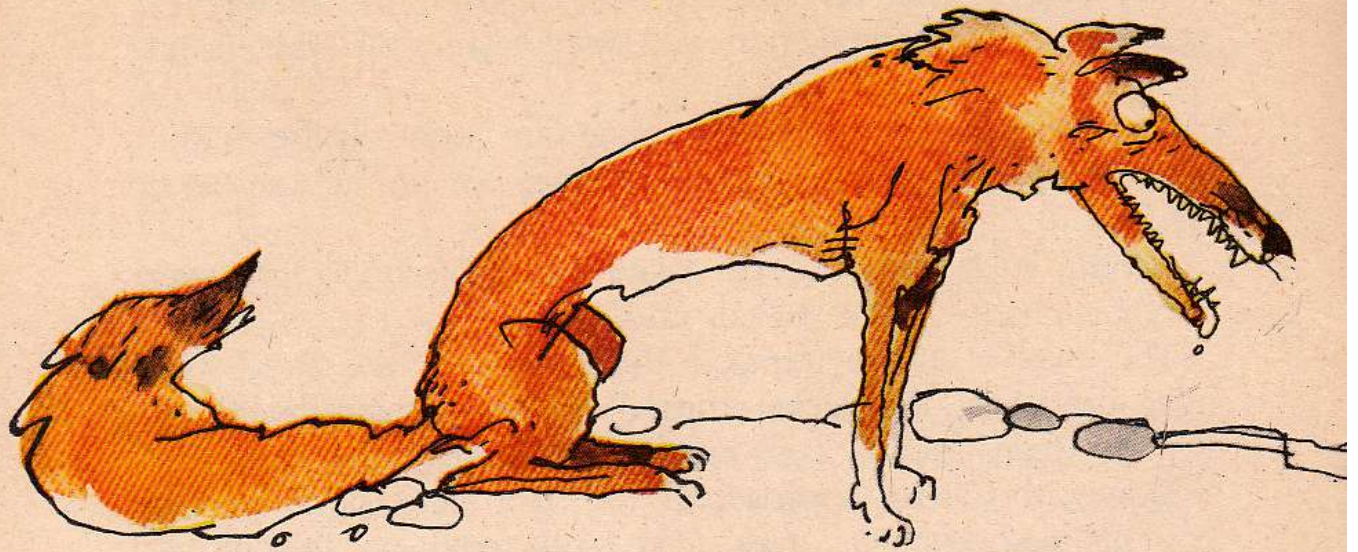
"Come with me. I have asked His Majesty to give you another chance," the Jackal said.

The two of them retraced their steps. When they were near the cave, the Jackal turned to his companion. "Go without fear, friend. Tell him to hand over the kingship."

Slowly the Boar approached the Lion and bent low to pay his respects. His eyes were still fixed on the ground when the Lion sprang forward. Seizing the Boar's neck with great force he broke it. Next he broke the bone of the head. Grunting with satisfaction the Lion was about to eat the brains when the Jackal raised his paw and said, "Don't."

"Why not?" the Lion asked in surprise.





"Do kings eat in this manner? There is blood on your body. You must go to the river and wash yourself first."

The Lion agreed and went off to bathe.

The moment the Lion's back was turned, the Jackal seized his opportunity and ate up the Boar's brains. Then he sat like a watchman on duty.

The Lion returned looking clean. His eyes shone greedily at the thought of the delicious dinner awaiting him. Grabbing the skull of the Boar in his paws, he turned it over, searching for the brain.

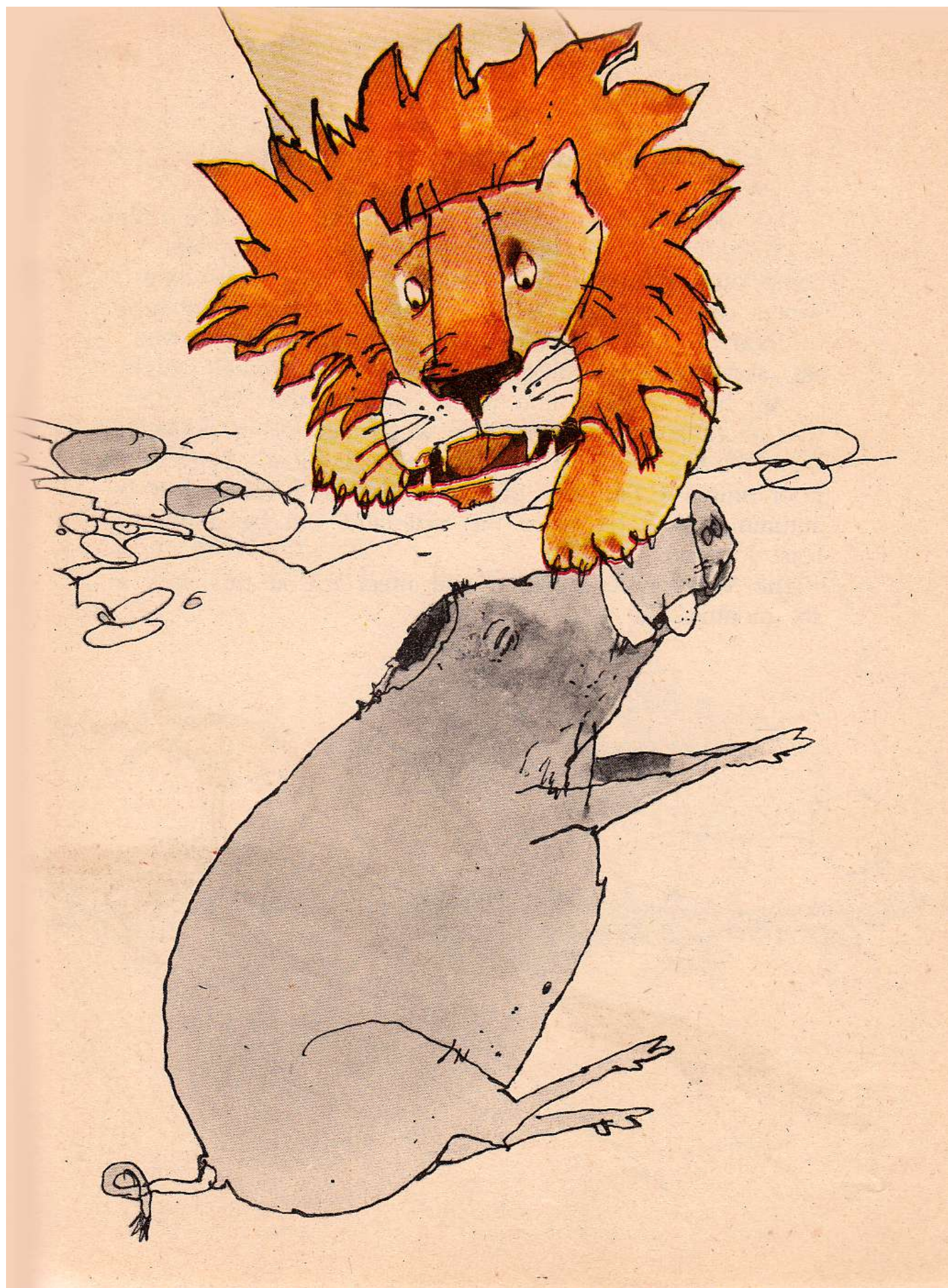
Astonished, he asked, "Where's the brain?"

The Jackal pretended even greater astonishment. "Whose brain?"

"The Boar's brain of course!" replied the Lion impatiently.

The Jackal laughed. "Surely you know that having once escaped death, the Boar would not let himself be caught if he had a brain? No," said the Jackal, shaking his head wisely, "that Boar had no brains."

In Sinhalese tales the clever animal is the Jackal.



Company for the Feast

One fine spring morning in the upper part of a valley in Tibet where birds sang joyously, and animals had come out to breathe the soft cool air after their long winter confinement, a hungry Wolf was roaming in search of food. At last he came upon a young Kyang, a wild ass, about a year old, grazing on newly sprouted grass.

"Ah, he'll make a fine meal!" thought the Wolf and was about to pounce on him when the Kyang noticed him. "Please, Uncle Wolf, don't eat me now," begged the poor animal. "I'm very thin after the hard winter but by autumn I shall be twice this size and will be a good feast for you."

The Wolf agreed. "Come and meet me at this spot in six months," he said.



When autumn came the Wolf set out to meet the Kyang. Going across the hills he encountered a Fox.

"You seem in a great hurry," said the Fox. "Where are you going?"

"I have an appointment today with a fat Kyang," replied the Wolf and told him how they had arranged to meet six months ago.

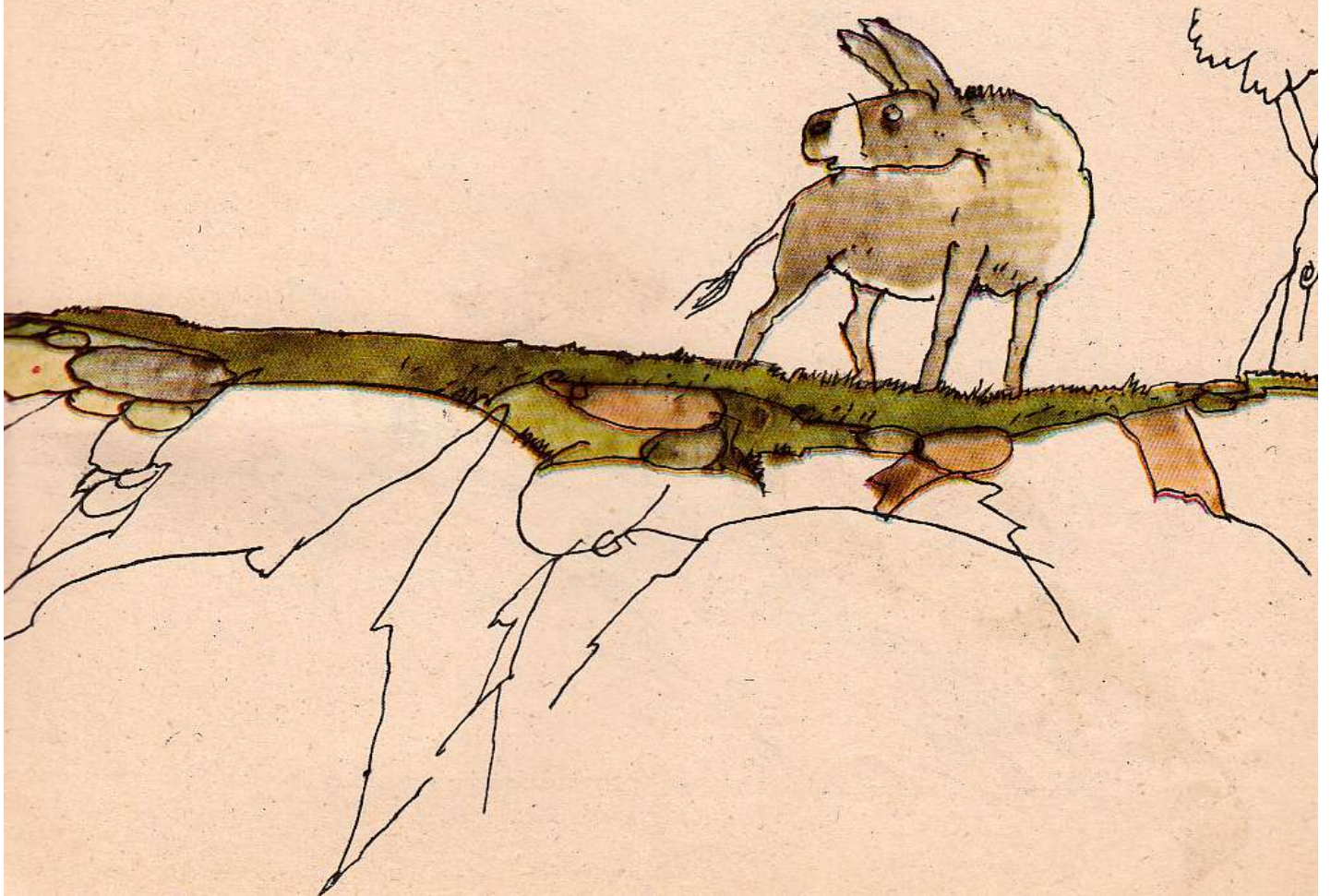
The Fox did not want to be left out. "The Kyang is too big a meal for one. Could I come and share in the feast?"

"Come along," said the Wolf and the two of them went on together.

On the way they met the Hare. "Hullo! Where are you two going?" he asked.

The Wolf told him.

The Hare felt sorry for the Kyang. It was so wonderful



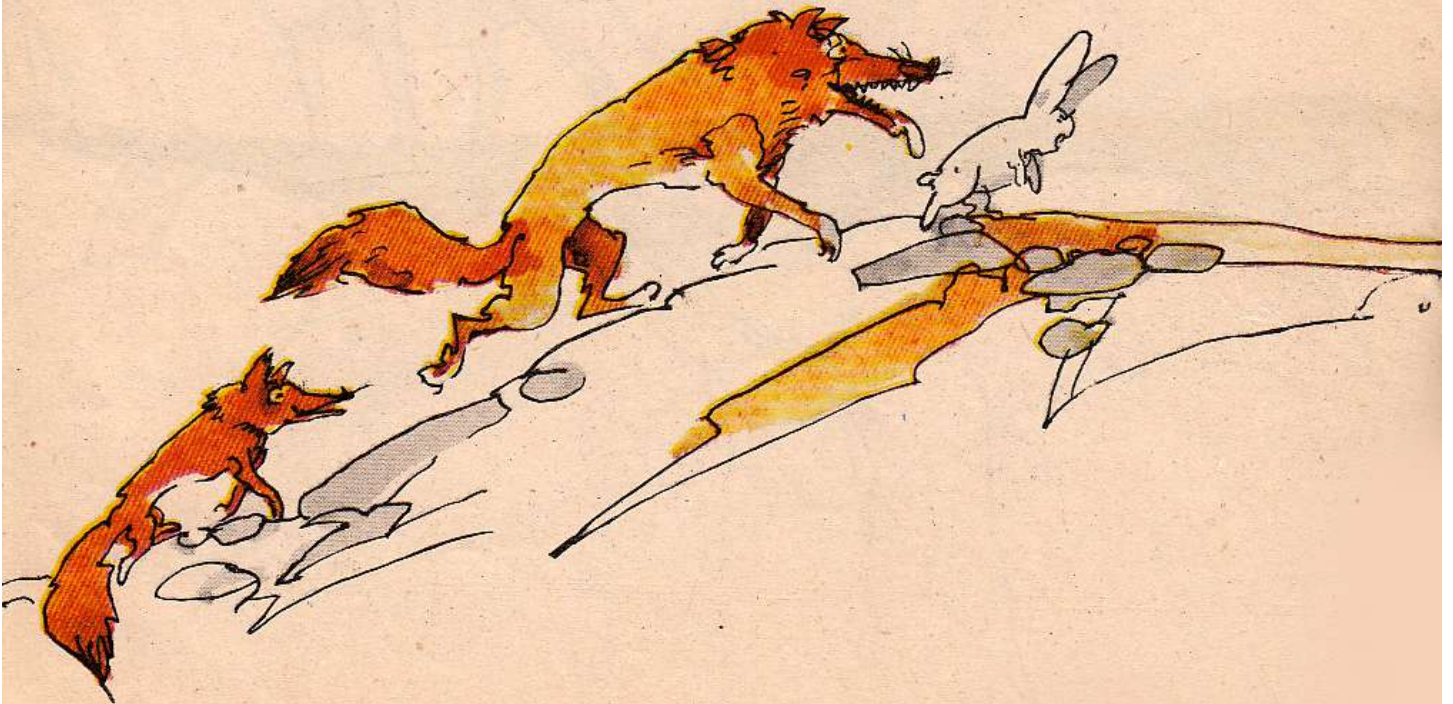
to be alive and roam among the hills and green pastures. Why should the poor thing die for these selfish creatures? The Hare decided to save the Kyang but he had to be careful not to arouse their suspicions.

"The Kyang is a very large animal," the Hare said. "You'll get sick if you eat all of it. May I also join you?"

"The more the merrier," replied the Wolf. So the three of them went on together.

When they got to the meeting place, they saw that the young Kyang was waiting for them under a tree. His eyes had a sad, hunted look but he was now big and fat. The Wolf licked his lips and his eyes gleamed greedily.

"Look at him. A worthy feast for us," he said to his companions.



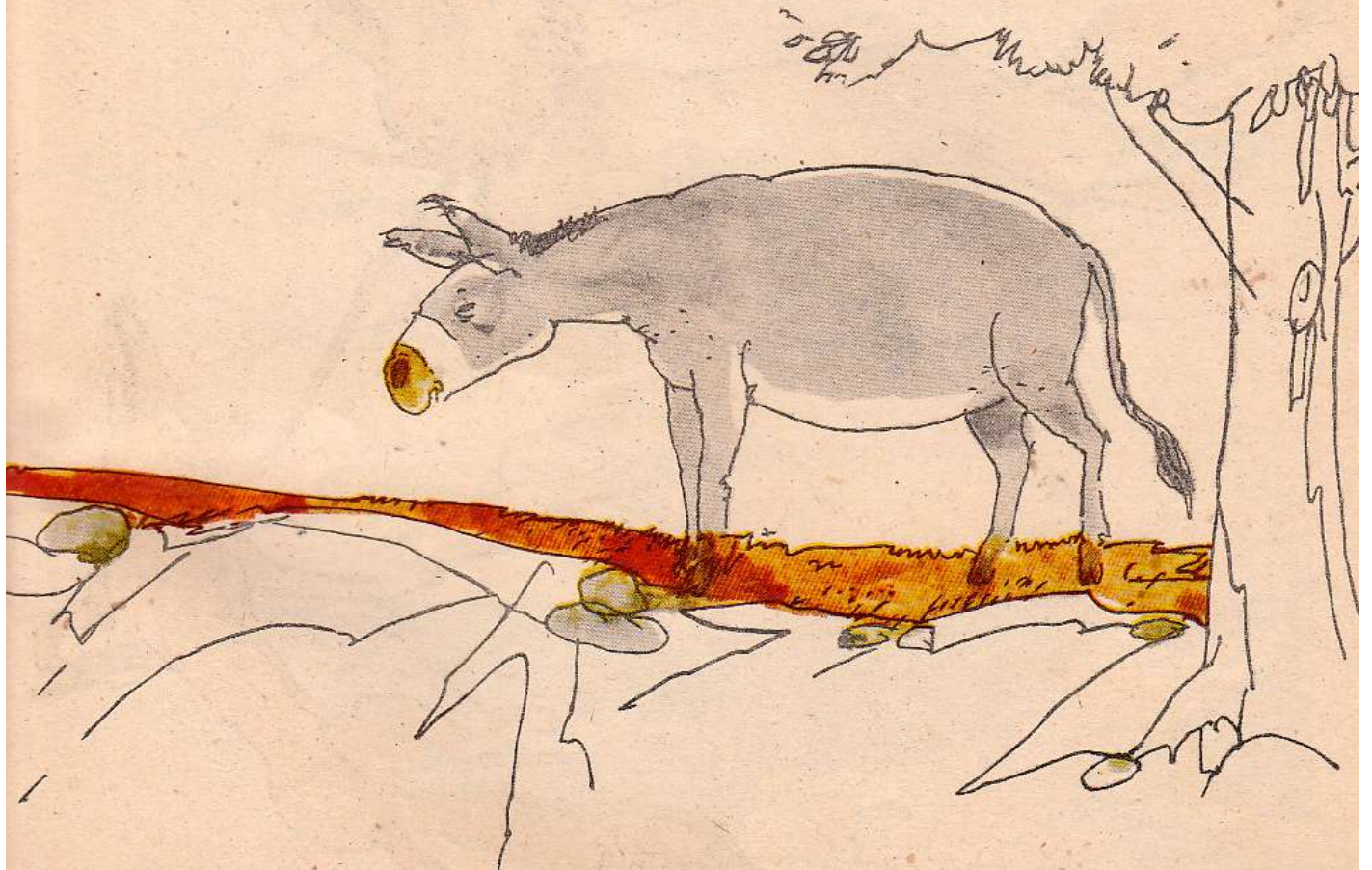
Just as the Wolf seized the Kyang by the neck, the Hare interrupted, "My friends, this is a crude, wasteful way of killing a fine young Kyang. Don't you think it would be better to strangle him? That will leave his body intact for us."

The other two were impressed.

"Leave everything to me. Over the hill is a shepherd's hut. I will go and borrow a rope from him."

The Hare went off and presently returned with a long rope. He made a big slip-knot at one end and two small slip-knots at the other end.

"Now listen carefully," he said. "The Kyang is a strong animal and it will need all three of us to strangle him. We'll put a big slip-knot around his neck. You stand at the farther end holding the small slip-knots. I'll be in the middle with the loose end grasped tightly in my

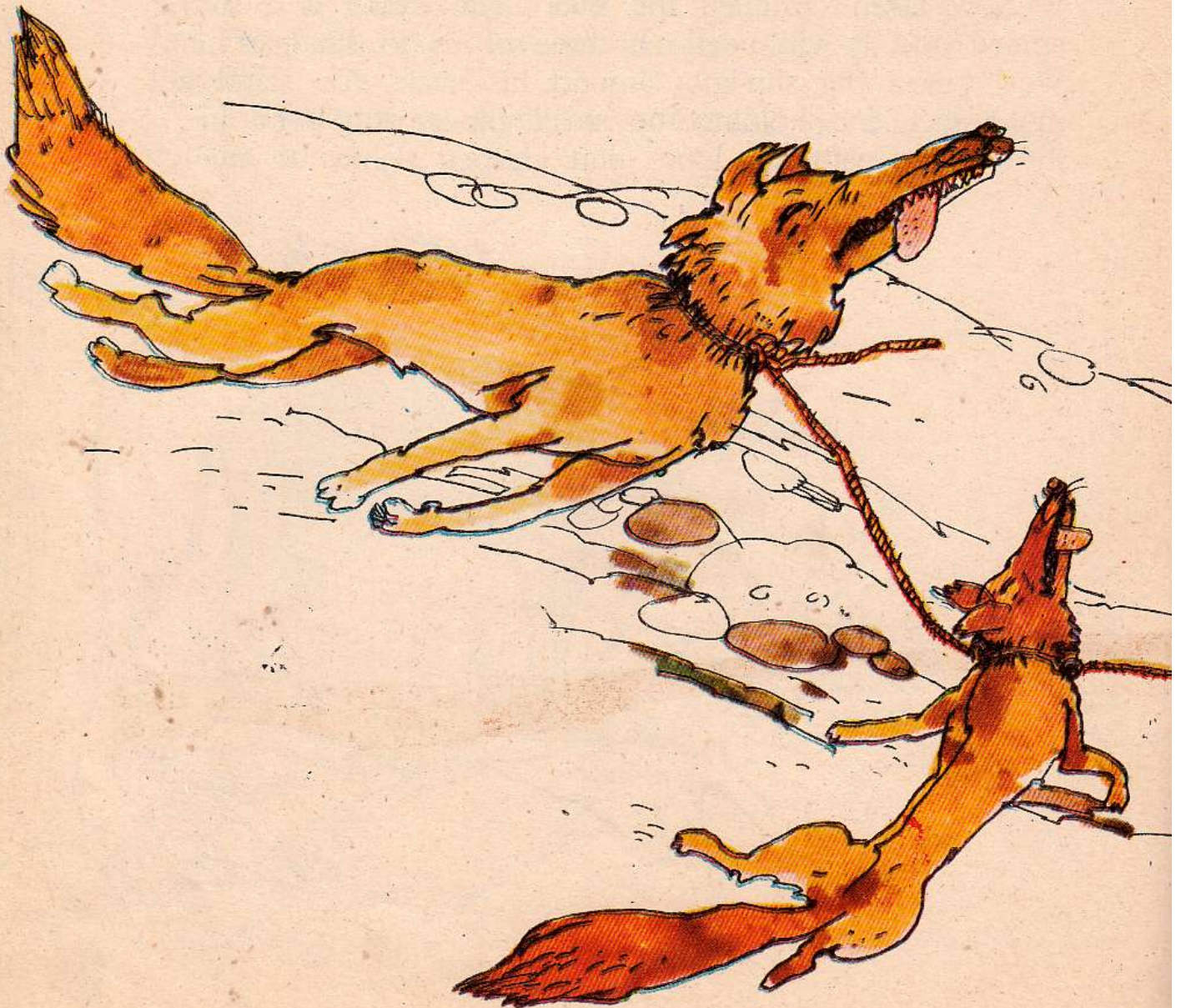


teeth. As soon as I give the signal, pull hard."

So saying, he slipped the big loop over the Kyang's neck, the small loops over the necks of the Wolf and the Fox and grabbed the loose end between his teeth.

"Pull," shouted the Hare.

The animals pulled. The Kyang came forward a few paces, the Wolf and the Fox felt themselves being dragged along the ground while their loops tightened, choking them.

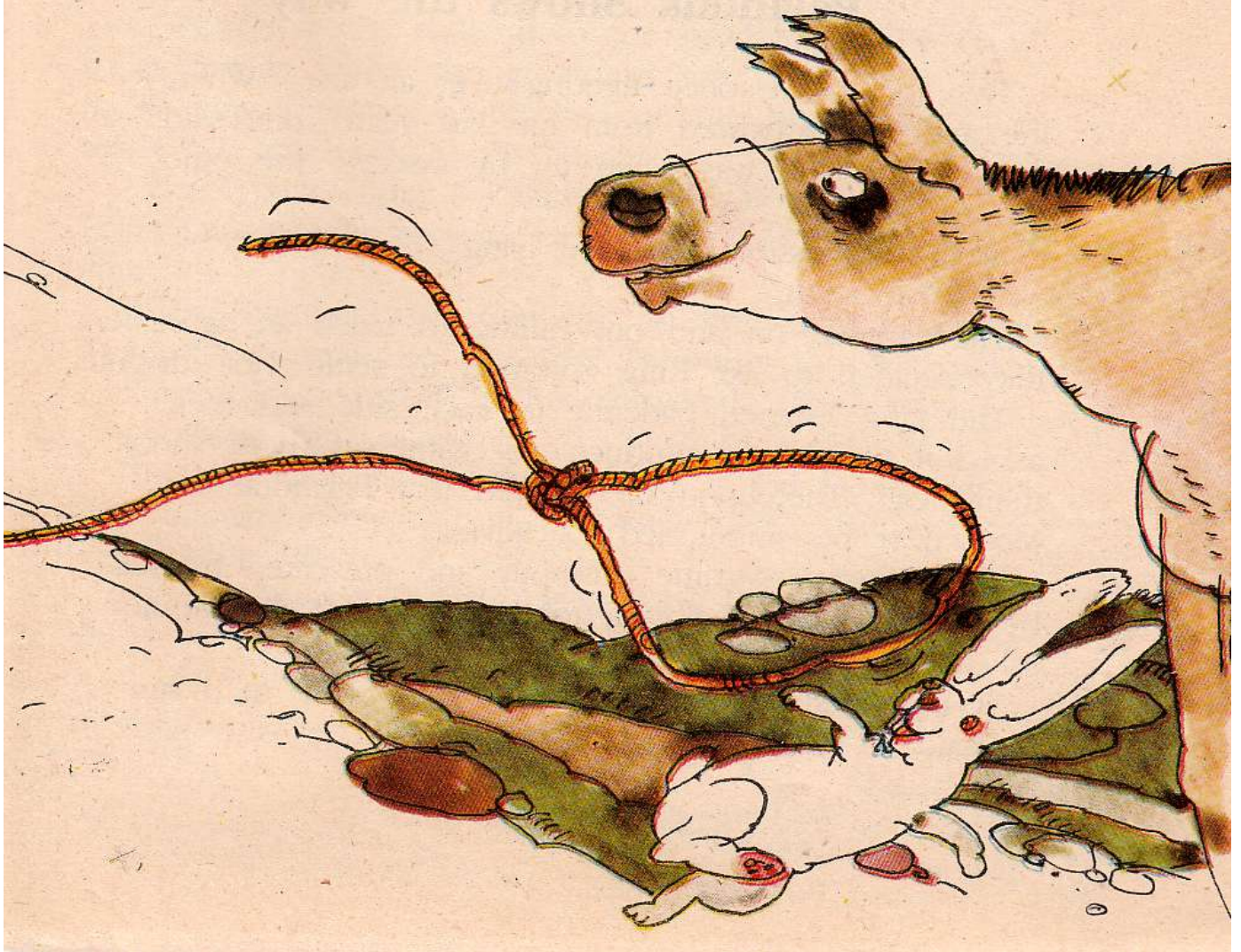


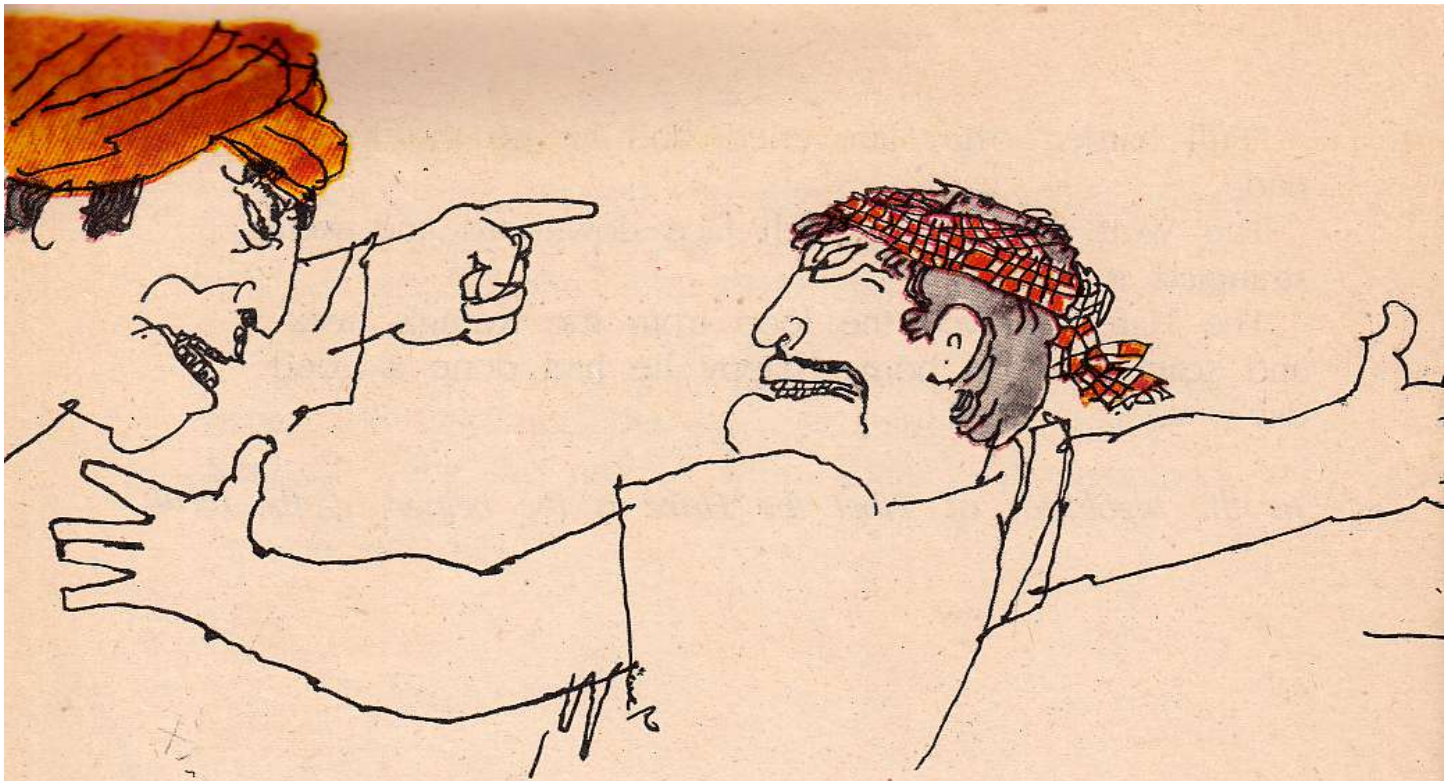
"Pull harder," the Hare cried, and let go the loose end.

The Wolf and the Fox fell face downward and were strangled to death.

The Hare removed the loop from the Kyang's neck and scampered off home, happy he had done a good day's work.

In the highlands of Tibet the Hare is the helper of the weak.





Pelanduk Shows the Way

Two men were once fighting over an axe. "Where's the axe you borrowed from me last year?" one said.

"I told you it was eaten up by insects," the other replied.

"That's impossible. You are lying."

"It's the truth."

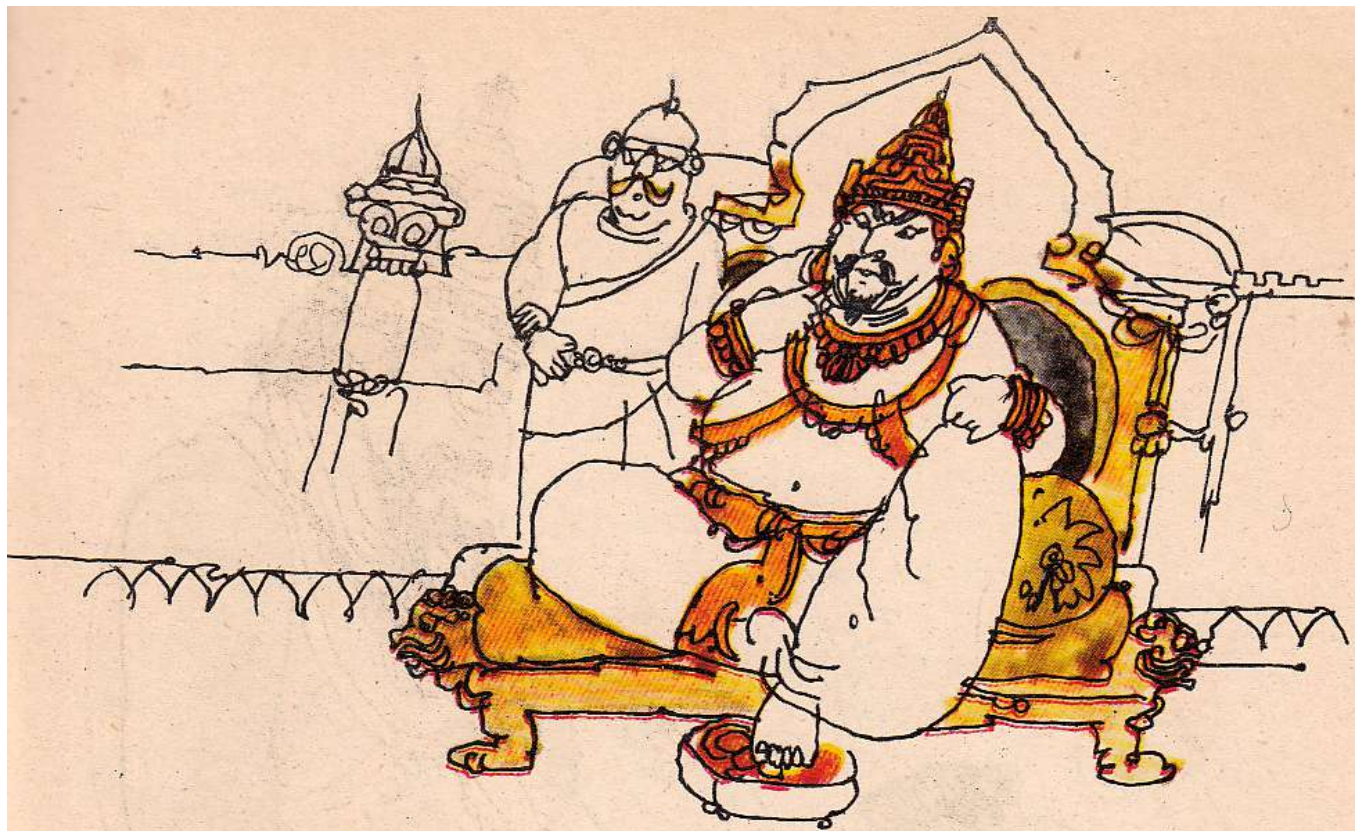
They argued on and on. Failing to reach an agreement they decided to ask King Solomon to settle their dispute.

The king listened patiently to each side and then asked if they could produce any witnesses. Both shook their head. Thereupon he ordered that Pelanduk the Mousedeer be summoned for advice.

The Mousedeer came promptly and presented himself before the king. The king told him of the dispute and asked him for his opinion.

"I beg forgiveness, Your Highness. I came in a hurry," he said. "I seek your permission to first go and have a bath."

The king nodded. "Go but be quick."



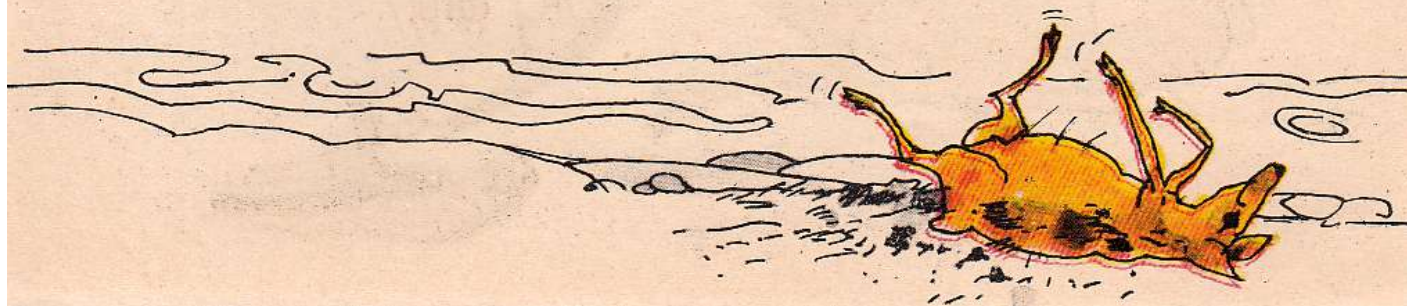
As Pelanduk was walking to the nearby river he came to a clearing where the grass had just been burnt. He threw himself down, and rolled on the burnt ashes, then made his way back to the king.

"What's this?" King Solomon asked when he saw Pelanduk. "People become clean after a bath but look at you!"

"Your Highness, the river was on fire when I reached there. To prevent the fire from spreading to your palace I jumped inside it," Pelanduk answered. "That's why I am covered with ashes."

The king and his ministers stared at the Mousedeer incredulously. They had never heard such a fantastic story in all their life.

"Do you expect me to believe this tall tale?" asked the king.





"It's the truth," Pelanduk replied.

The king was very angry. The impertinent little fellow! How dare he make fun of the great King Solomon?

The king's voice was stern, "I warn you, Mousedeer, this is no place for your jokes. Ask anyone here whether such a thing can happen. It is just impossible."

Dropping to his knees the Mousedeer said, "Your Highness, if you and all present here don't believe me, how can you believe the borrower of the axe? You say the river cannot catch fire; is it possible for insects to eat up an axe?"

The king was silent. He saw what Pelanduk meant. It was as clear as daylight. The borrower was lying. King Solomon ordered the man who had borrowed the axe to return it to its owner without delay.

Grateful for Pelanduk's help the king bestowed many favours on the Mousedeer and made him the judge of the forest. From that day it was Pelanduk who was the arbitrator in all cases referred to King Solomon.

In the jungles of Malaysia Pelanduk is without equal in wit and wisdom.





The Sacred Lime Pit

One day Kantchil the Mousedeer happened to pass by a farmer's house which had its front door ajar. The farmer and his wife were out working in the rice fields. Kantchil could not resist peeping in. What he saw delighted him. There was a big freshly made banana cake, wrapped in banana leaves. Softly Kantchil tiptoed inside and took a bite. It tasted delicious. He took another bite, and then another. Finally he picked up the cake and came out, walking as he ate. So absorbed was he that before he knew where he was going, he fell headlong into the farmer's lime pit.

He tried to jump out but the pit was too deep. So he sat down to think.

Before long Matjan the Tiger peered over the edge of the pit. Kantchil, held the empty banana leaf before his eyes, and stared intently at it. "Tuhan, Tuhan!" he said.

"Why do you take the name of God?" asked the Tiger.

Kantchil seemed not to hear. He continued to look at the banana leaf as though he were reading.

"Today is doomsday. Those who take shelter in the holy pit alone shall survive. Tuhan, Tuhan!"

"Who says today is doomsday?"

Kantchil looked up. "Can't you see that I am reading from the holy book?" he asked with irritation. "Why do you interrupt?" And he continued, "On the day when the

sun shows but half its face, and the wind shows all its force the world shall come to an end. Look, only half the sun is visible and hear the wind. Yes, today is doomsday. Only those who seek shelter in the sacred lime pit shall survive!"

The Tiger began to tremble. "May I come into the pit too?"

"No. You aren't clean," Kantchil replied.

"But I am."

"No. You are always sneezing. It's disrespectful to sneeze in a holy place."

"I promise not to sneeze."

Kantchil again turned to read from his banana leaf, "He who pollutes a holy place by sneezing shall be thrown out."

"I won't sneeze I promise," the Tiger said and jumped down.

"Don't disturb me," said Kantchil and went on, "Tuhan, Tuhan! Save us from disaster."

Babi, the Boar, looked over the edge of the pit. "Who says the name of Tuhan down there?" he asked.

"It's doomsday today," the Tiger answered. "Kantchil read it in the holy book. Only those who stay in the sacred lime pit will not be destroyed."

Babi was frightened. "I'm coming down to join you."

"No," Kantchil replied. "You're always sneezing. It's written in the holy book that he who pollutes the holy place by sneezing must be thrown out."

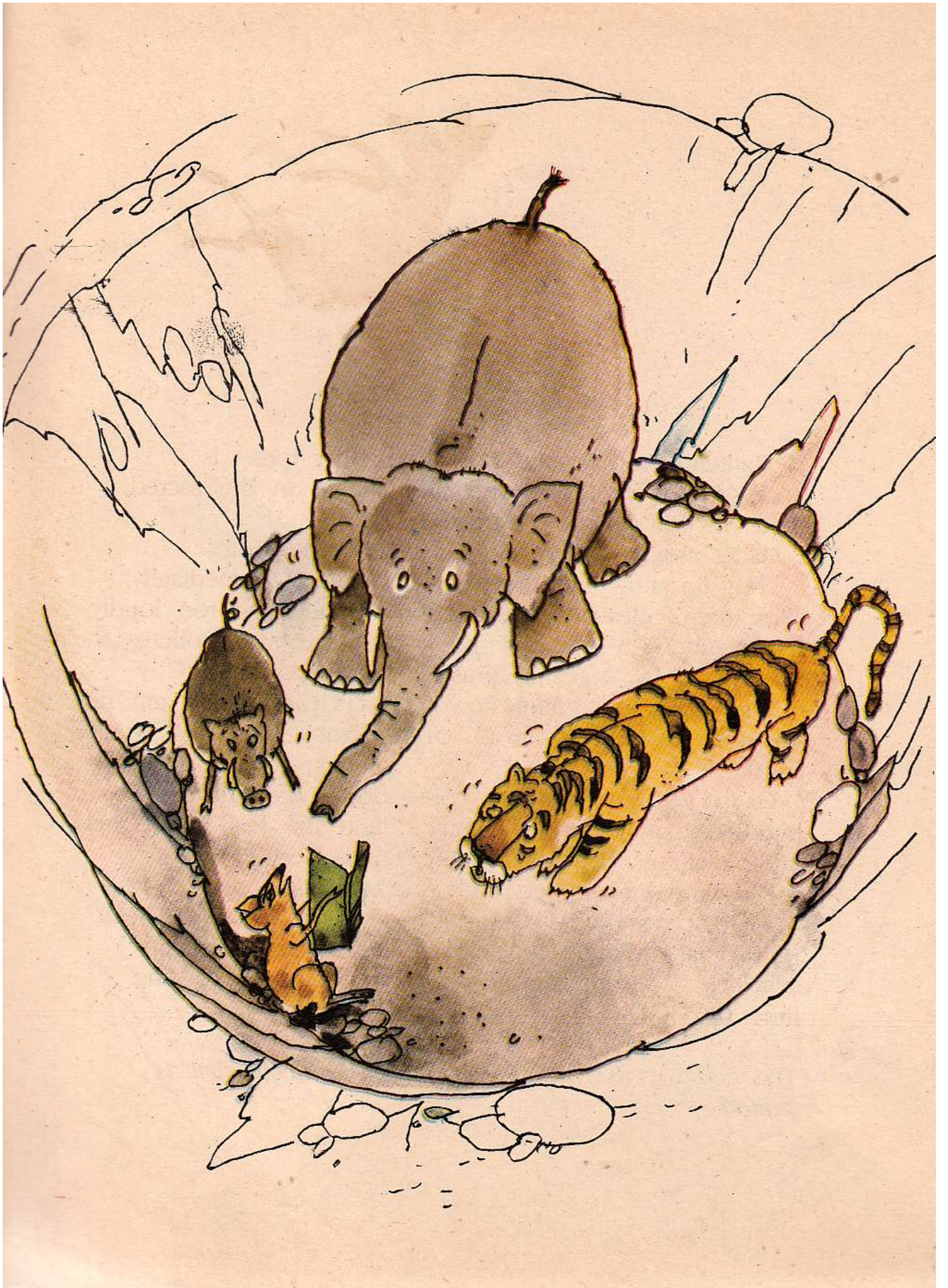
"I swear I will not sneeze," the Boar said and came down.

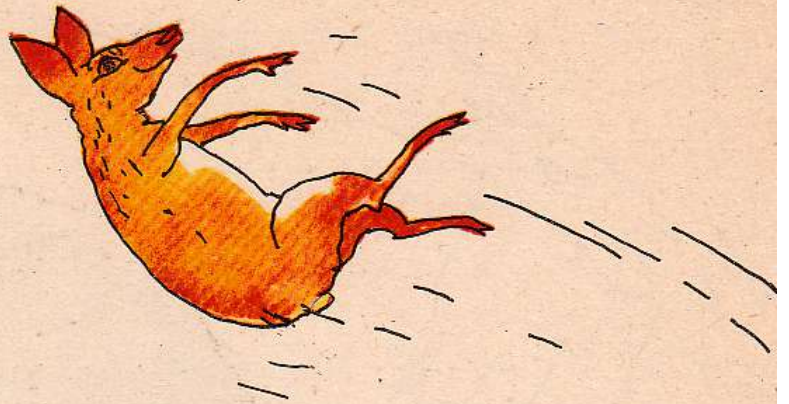
Kantchil continued to pray, keeping his eyes on the banana leaf. "Save us. Tuhan, Tuhan!"

"Who says the name of Tuhan down there?"

Looking up, the Tiger and the Boar found Gadja the Elephant peering down.

"Why are you all hiding?"





"Kantchil read in the holy book that today is doomsday. Only those who find shelter in the sacred lime pit will escape destruction."

Gadja shook in panic. "I'm coming down too."

"No, no, no," the three inside shouted immediately. "You aren't clean. You sneeze too much and too loudly. It is written in the holy book that one who pollutes the holy place by sneezing must be thrown out."

"Please let me come down," Gadja pleaded. "I am not going to sneeze. I'll stand on my trunk so that I won't sneeze."

Gadja was permitted to come down and all four sat huddled together while Kantchil held the leaf before his eyes, reciting, "Tuhan, Tuhan!"

Suddenly he stopped and clutched his nose.

"May it not be!" he said. "May it not b-e-e. A-tchee!"

"He has polluted the place," the animals cried in anger, and seizing him firmly, threw him out of the lime pit.

The hero of the Indonesian forest, Kantchil's wit is famous.



