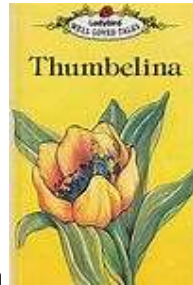


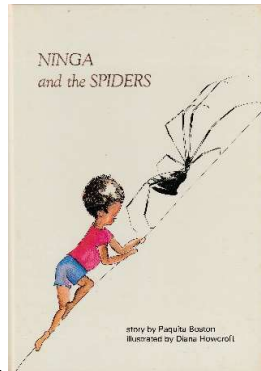
England has Tom Thumb



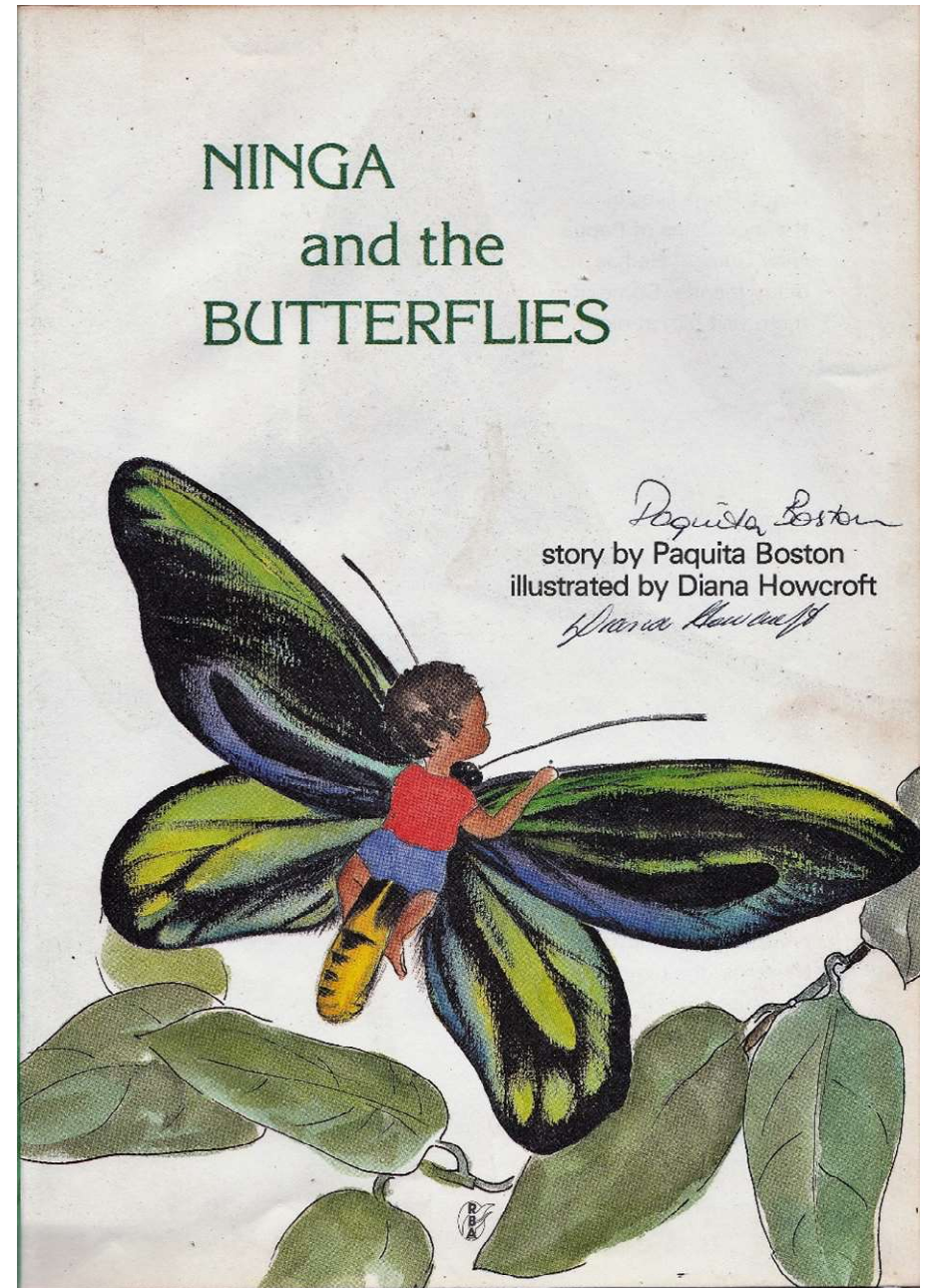
Denmark has Thumbelina

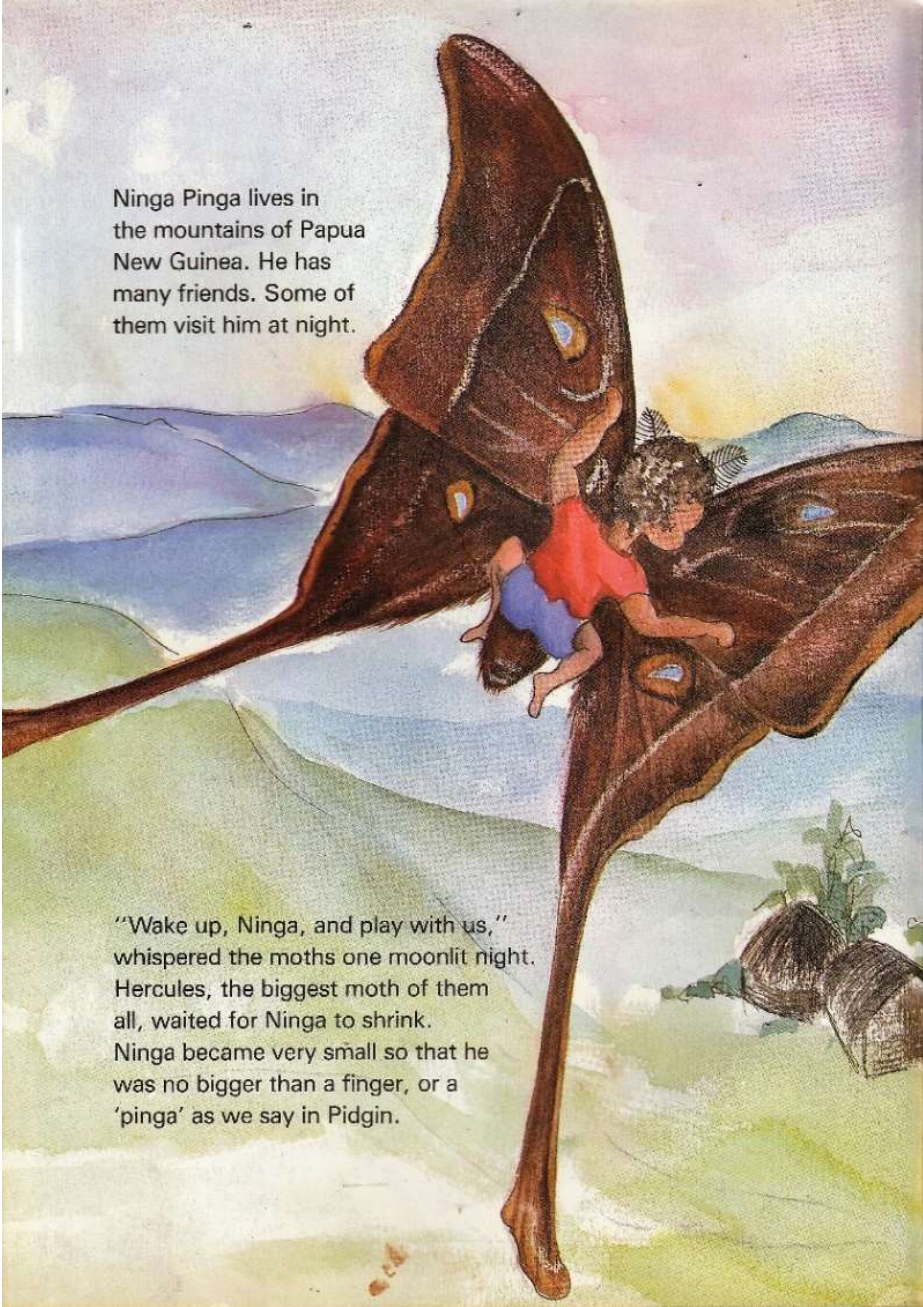


Australia has Digit Dick



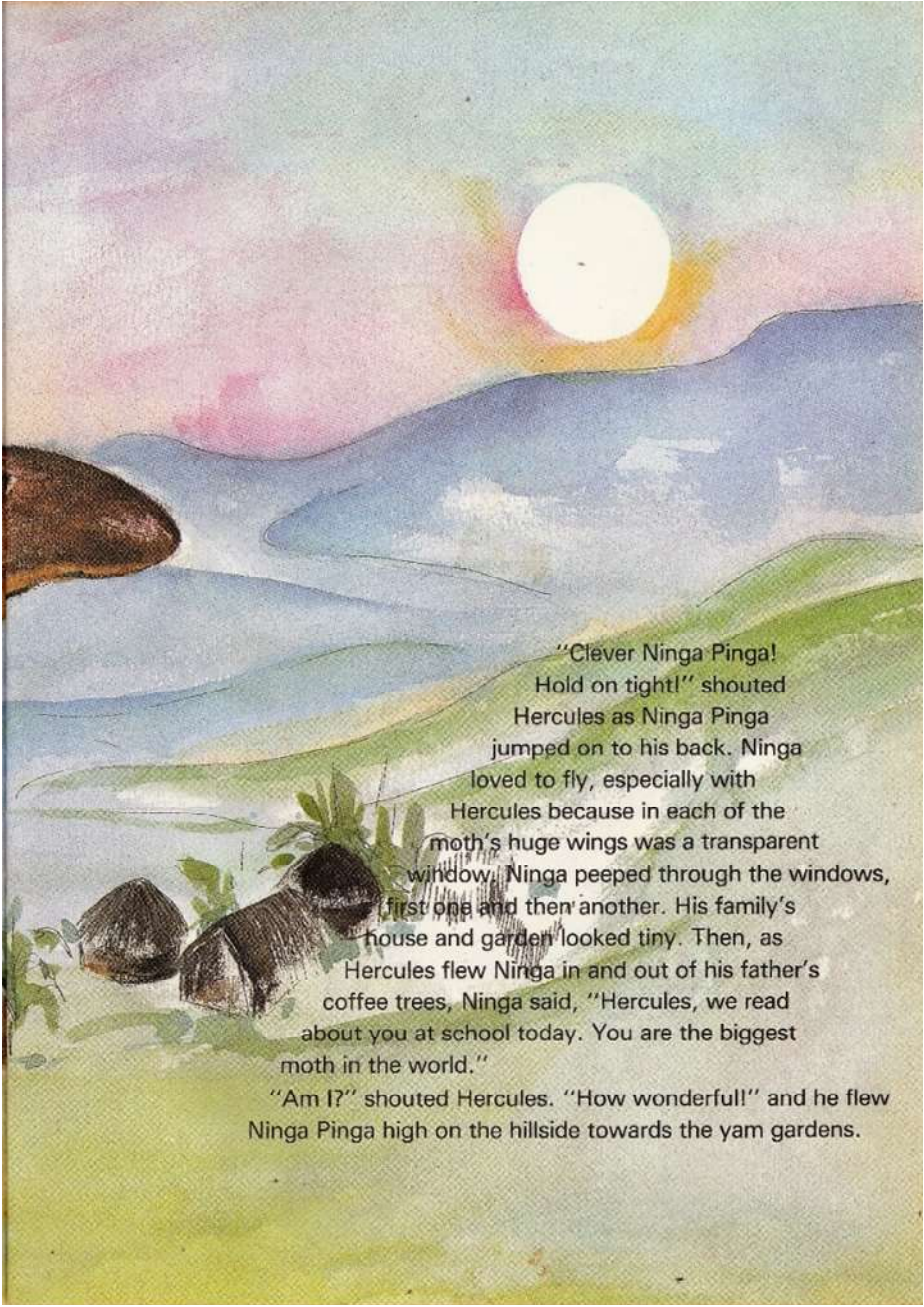
Papua New Guinea has Ninga Pinga.



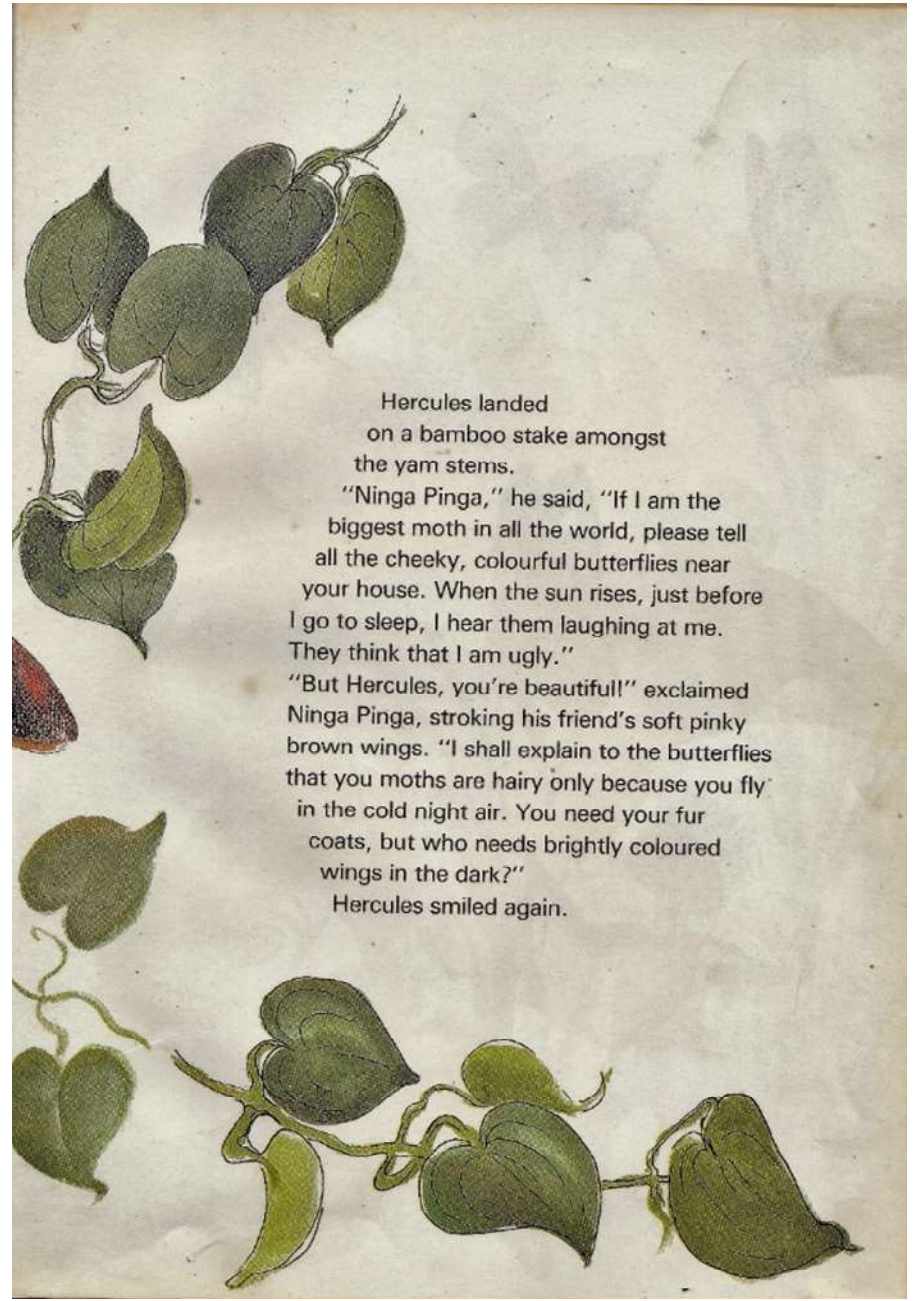
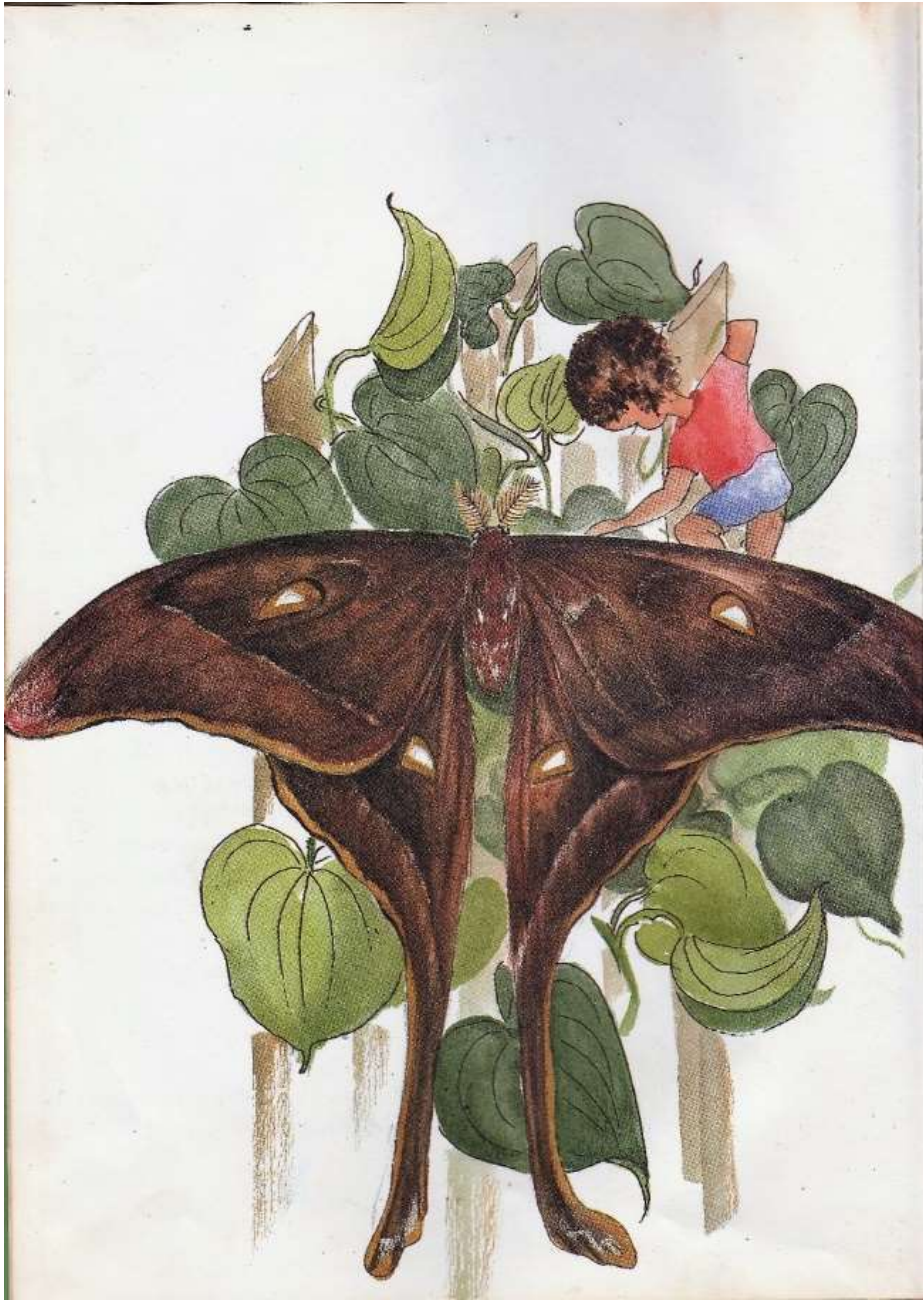


Ninga Pinga lives in the mountains of Papua New Guinea. He has many friends. Some of them visit him at night.

"Wake up, Ninga, and play with us," whispered the moths one moonlit night. Hercules, the biggest moth of them all, waited for Ninga to shrink. Ninga became very small so that he was no bigger than a finger, or a 'pinga' as we say in Pidgin.



"Clever Ninga Pinga! Hold on tight!" shouted Hercules as Ninga Pinga jumped on to his back. Ninga loved to fly, especially with Hercules because in each of the moth's huge wings was a transparent window. Ninga peeped through the windows, first one and then another. His family's house and garden looked tiny. Then, as Hercules flew Ninga in and out of his father's coffee trees, Ninga said, "Hercules, we read about you at school today. You are the biggest moth in the world."
"Am I?" shouted Hercules. "How wonderful!" and he flew Ninga Pinga high on the hillside towards the yam gardens.

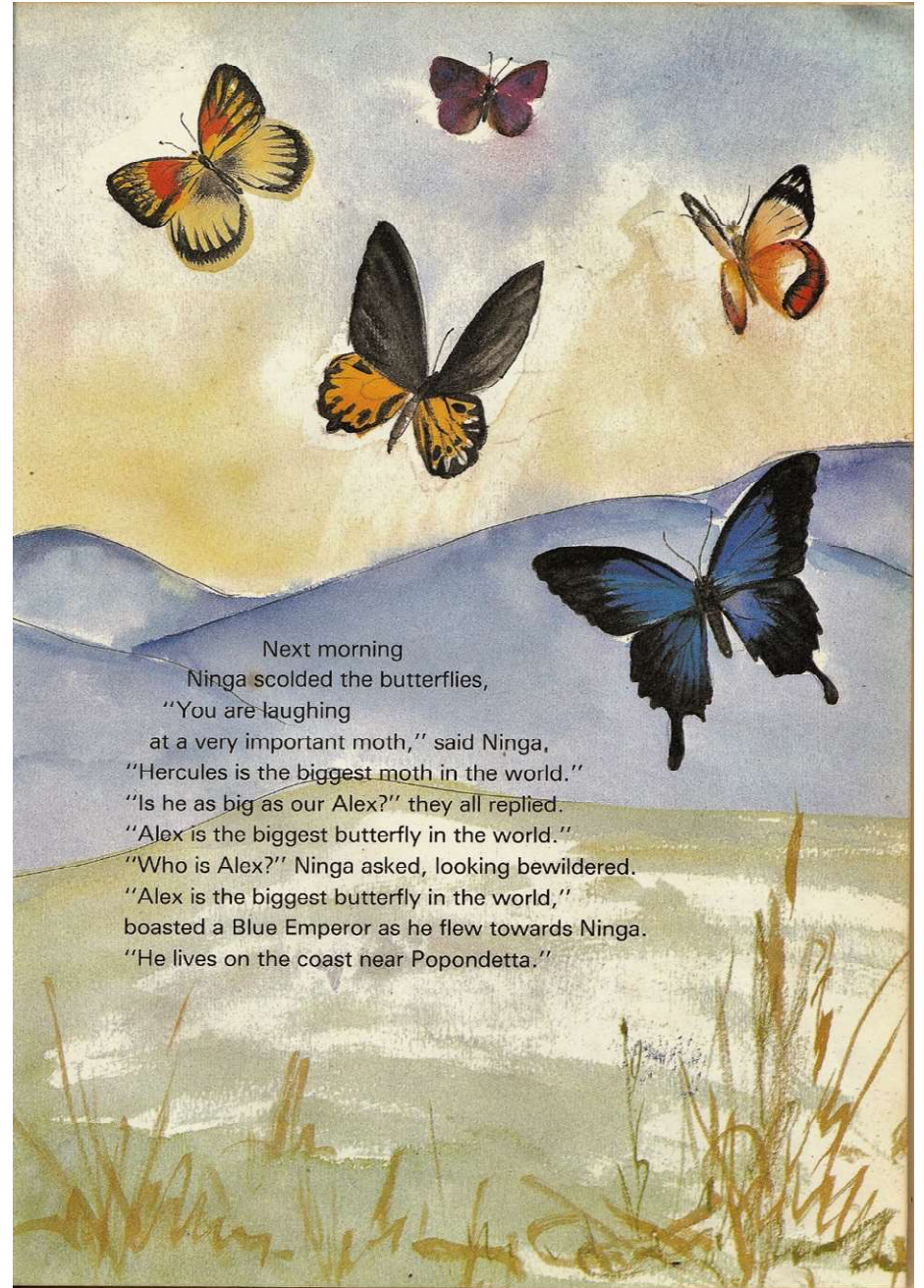


Hercules landed
on a bamboo stake amongst
the yam stems.

"Ninga Pinga," he said, "If I am the
biggest moth in all the world, please tell
all the cheeky, colourful butterflies near
your house. When the sun rises, just before
I go to sleep, I hear them laughing at me.
They think that I am ugly."

"But Hercules, you're beautiful!" exclaimed
Ninga Pinga, stroking his friend's soft pinky
brown wings. "I shall explain to the butterflies
that you moths are hairy only because you fly
in the cold night air. You need your fur
coats, but who needs brightly coloured
wings in the dark?"

Hercules smiled again.

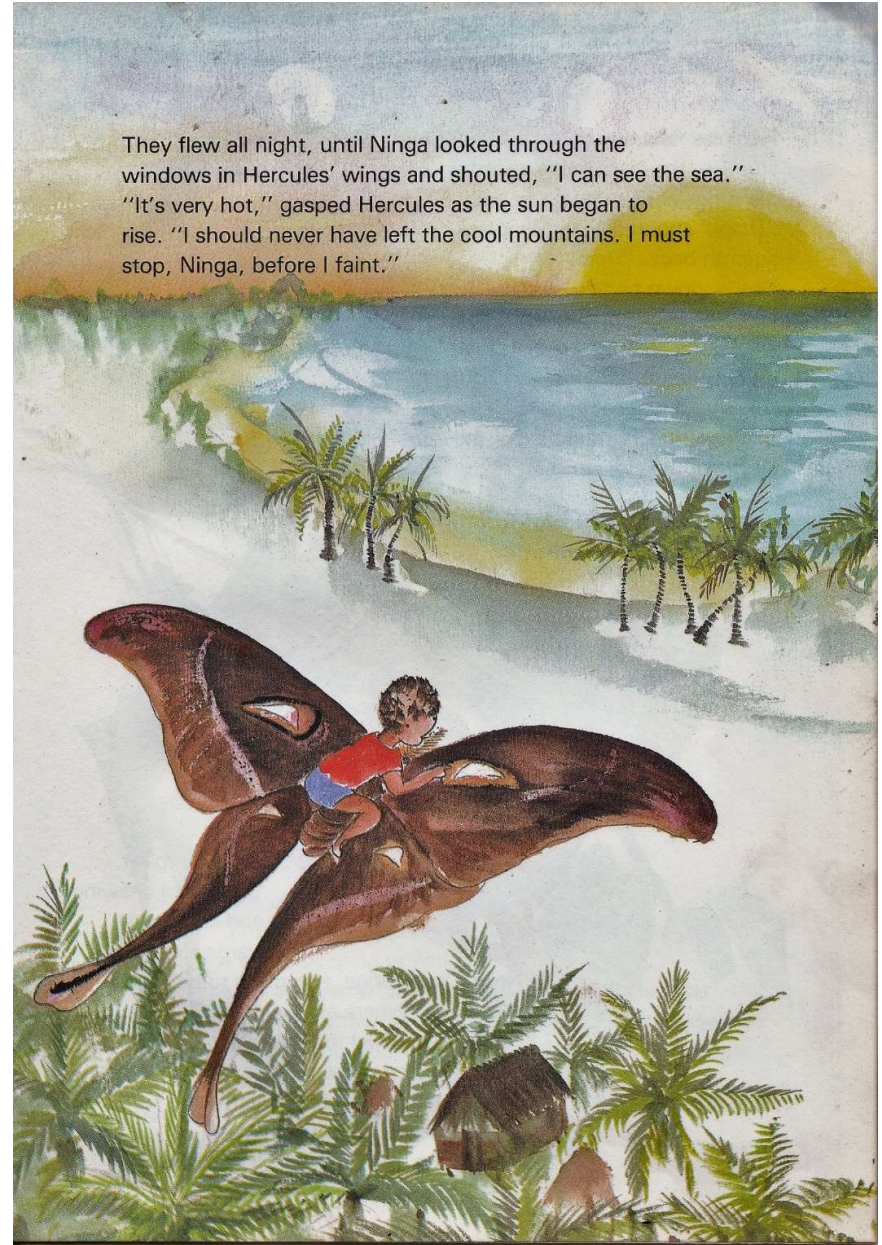


The following night Ninga lay on his sleeping mat as soon as it was dark. He shrank to the size of a finger and waited for Hercules. Soon the huge moth flew softly in through the window.



"Hello Hercules," said Ninga. "I have more news for you. The biggest butterfly in the world lives right here in Papua New Guinea."
"Bigger than I am? Where is he?" asked Hercules, fluttering about and anxiously waving his feathery feelers towards the corners of Ninga's home.
"Not here in the mountains," said Ninga Pinga. "He lives on the coast."
"Quick, on my back, Ninga Pinga," shouted Hercules. "Let's find that big butterfly and see if he's bigger than I am."

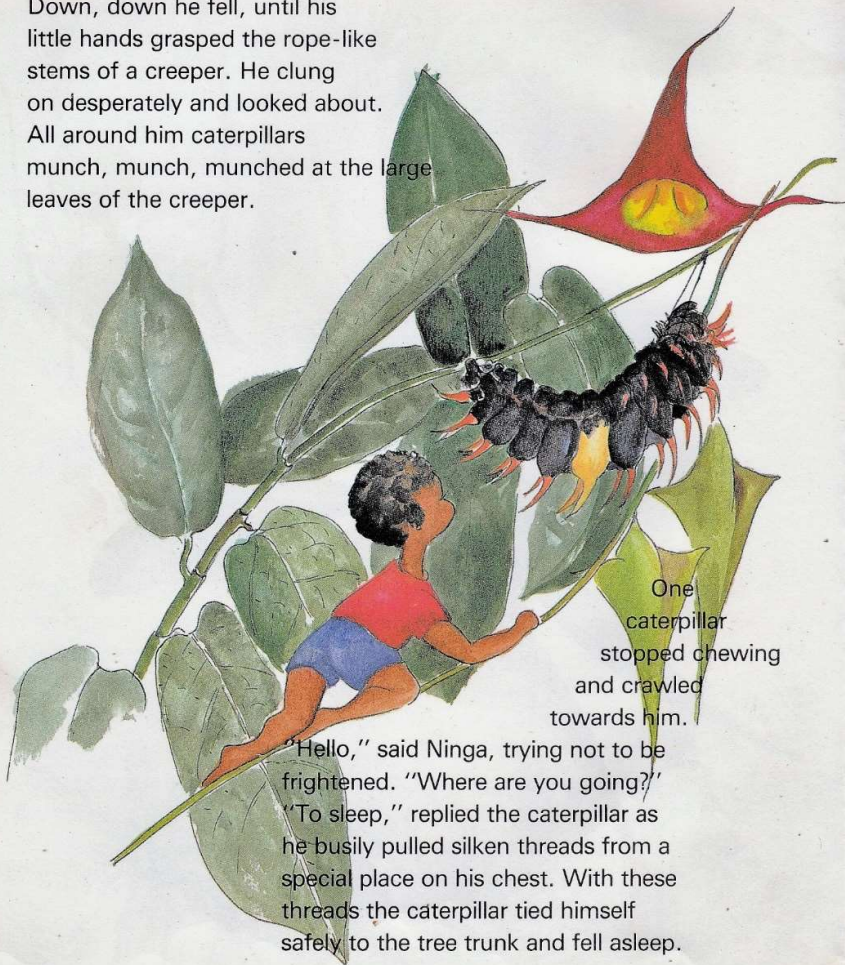
They flew all night, until Ninga looked through the windows in Hercules' wings and shouted, "I can see the sea."
"It's very hot," gasped Hercules as the sun began to rise. "I should never have left the cool mountains. I must stop, Ninga, before I faint."



Hercules flew down into a shady forest. Much to Ninga's surprise, the giant moth rested on a tall tree trunk, spread his wings and went fast to sleep.

"Help!" shouted Ninga Pinga as he slid down Hercules' smooth back. "Help!"

Down, down he fell, until his little hands grasped the rope-like stems of a creeper. He clung on desperately and looked about. All around him caterpillars munch, munch, munched at the large leaves of the creeper.



One caterpillar stopped chewing and crawled towards him.

"Hello," said Ninga, trying not to be frightened. "Where are you going?"

"To sleep," replied the caterpillar as he busily pulled silken threads from a special place on his chest. With these threads the caterpillar tied himself safely to the tree trunk and fell asleep.



Ninga saw other caterpillars also slept inside beds of the thick silken thread.

"I'm so lonely," he said to himself. "Everyone else is either sleeping or eating."

After a while Ninga noticed that some of the caterpillars had grown pretty silken bags around themselves as they slept. Suddenly a silken bag near Ninga Pinga moved. A damp, long-legged butterfly pulled itself out of its tight bed.

"Oh, aren't you beautiful!" exclaimed Ninga as the butterfly opened its wings. "You must be Alex for I have never seen such a big butterfly."

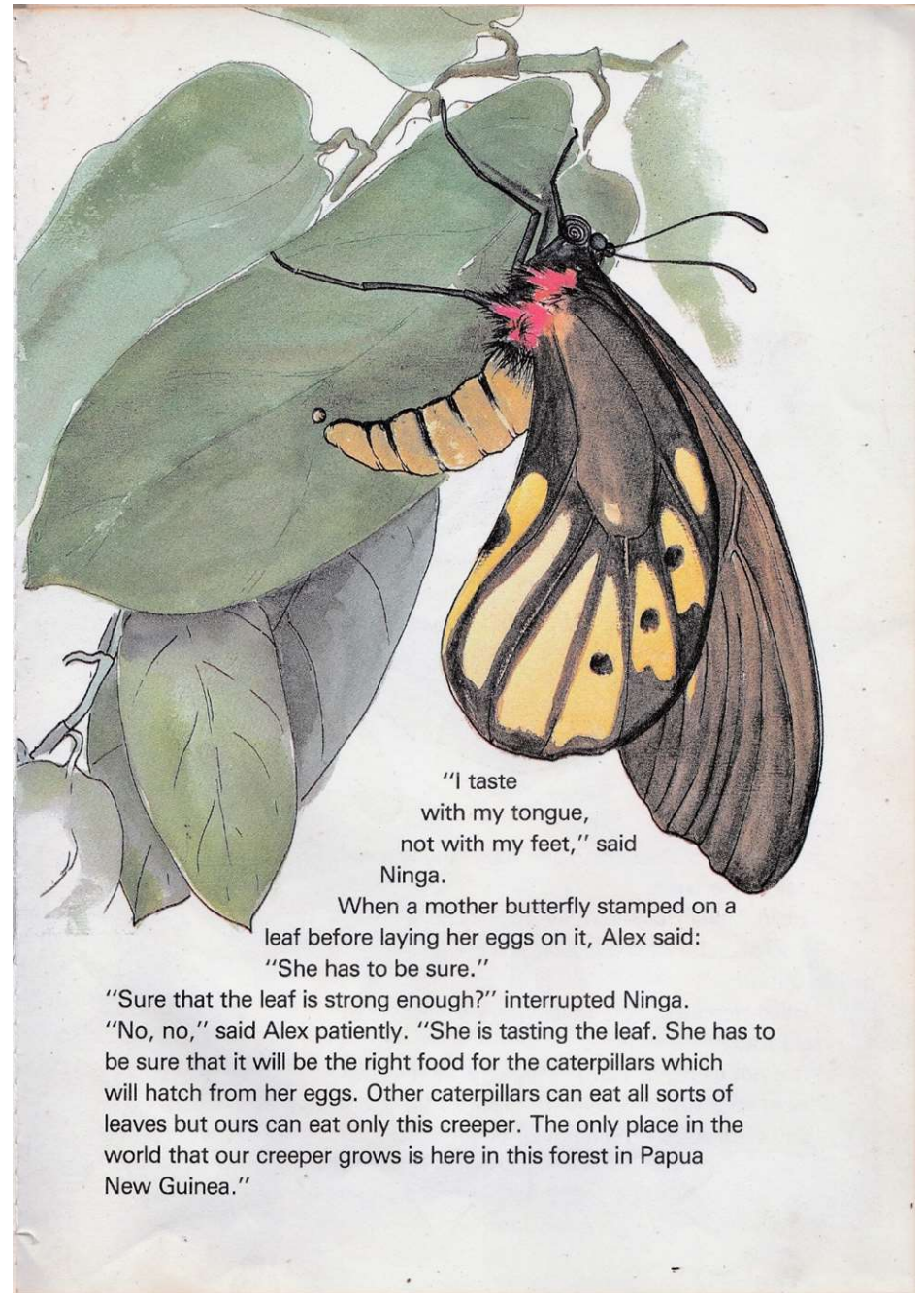
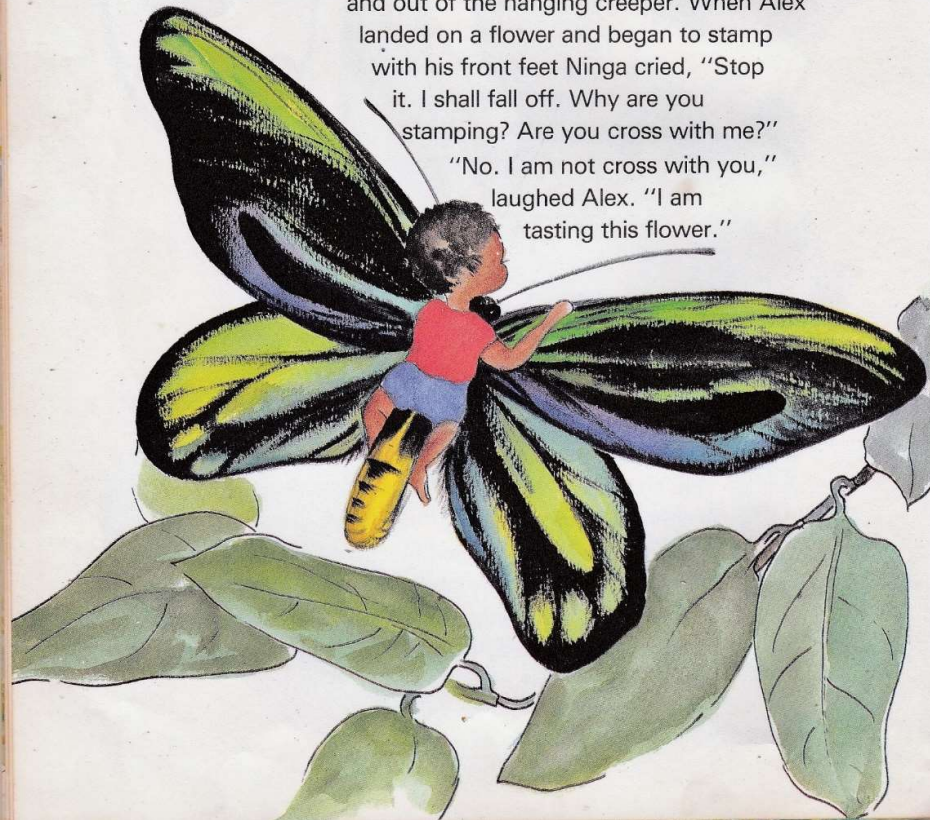
"Yes, I'm Alex," replied the new butterfly, drying his wings in the sun. "Who are you?"

"I am Ninga Pinga," Ninga replied. "I flew here in the dark with my friend Hercules. He's a giant moth."

"Giant you say? How big? Bigger than me?" asked Alex. Then, when Ninga said nothing, Alex added, "Never mind. We'll see who's biggest when he wakes up tonight. Would you like to fly with me?"

Ninga hung on tight as Alex flew in and out of the hanging creeper. When Alex landed on a flower and began to stamp with his front feet Ninga cried, "Stop it. I shall fall off. Why are you stamping? Are you cross with me?"

"No. I am not cross with you," laughed Alex. "I am tasting this flower."



"I taste with my tongue, not with my feet," said Ninga.

When a mother butterfly stamped on a leaf before laying her eggs on it, Alex said: "She has to be sure."

"Sure that the leaf is strong enough?" interrupted Ninga.

"No, no," said Alex patiently. "She is tasting the leaf. She has to be sure that it will be the right food for the caterpillars which will hatch from her eggs. Other caterpillars can eat all sorts of leaves but ours can eat only this creeper. The only place in the world that our creeper grows is here in this forest in Papua New Guinea."



In the light of the setting sun Alex flew Ninga back to Hercules.

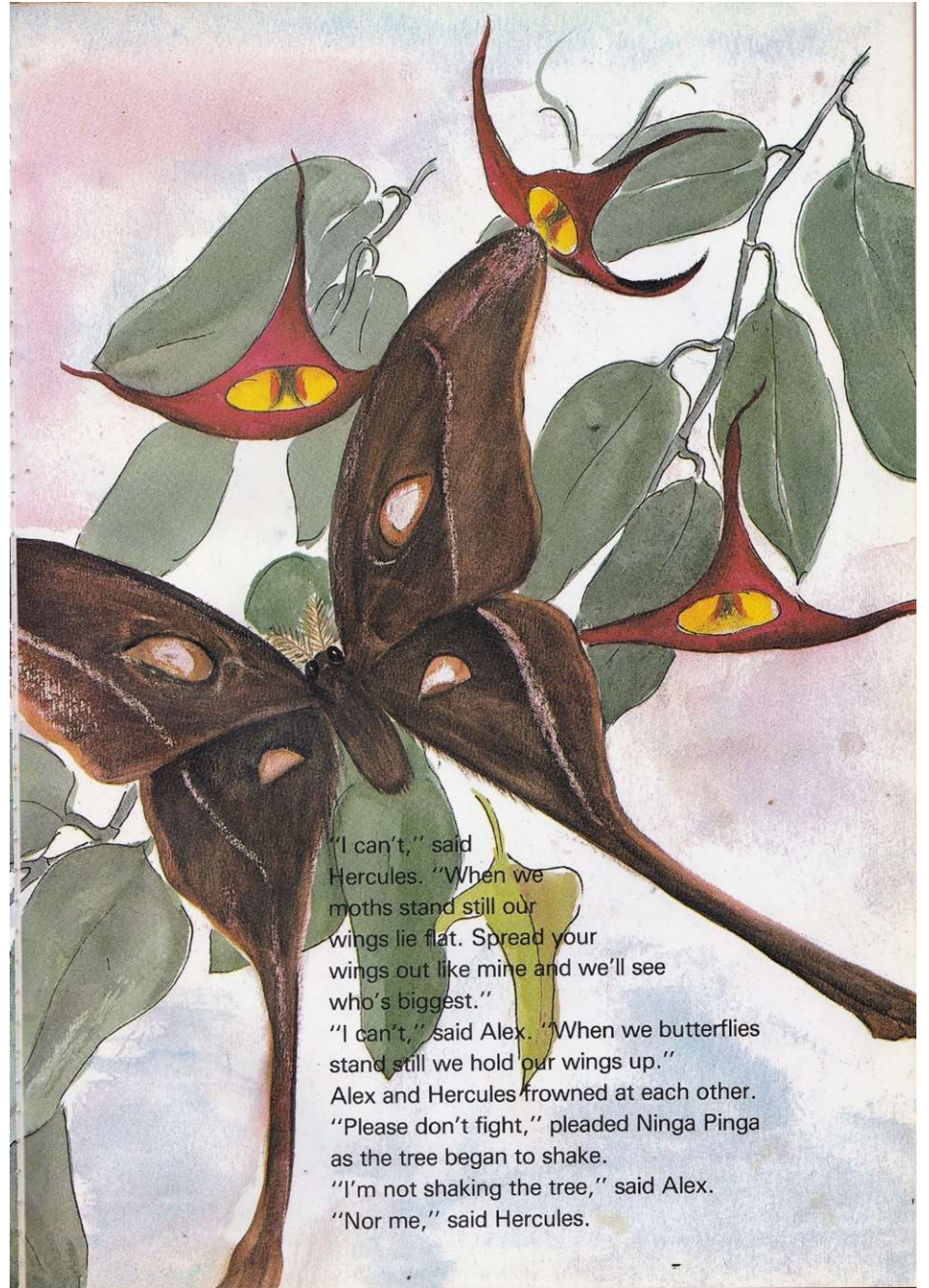
"Hello," said Hercules cheerfully as he woke up.

"You must be Alex because you are so big for a butterfly."

"Hello Hercules. You certainly are a large moth," said Alex.

"But not as big as I am," they both said together.

"Hold your wings up next to mine," Alex suggested, "and we'll see who is biggest."



"I can't," said Hercules. "When we moths stand still our wings lie flat. Spread your wings out like mine and we'll see who's biggest."

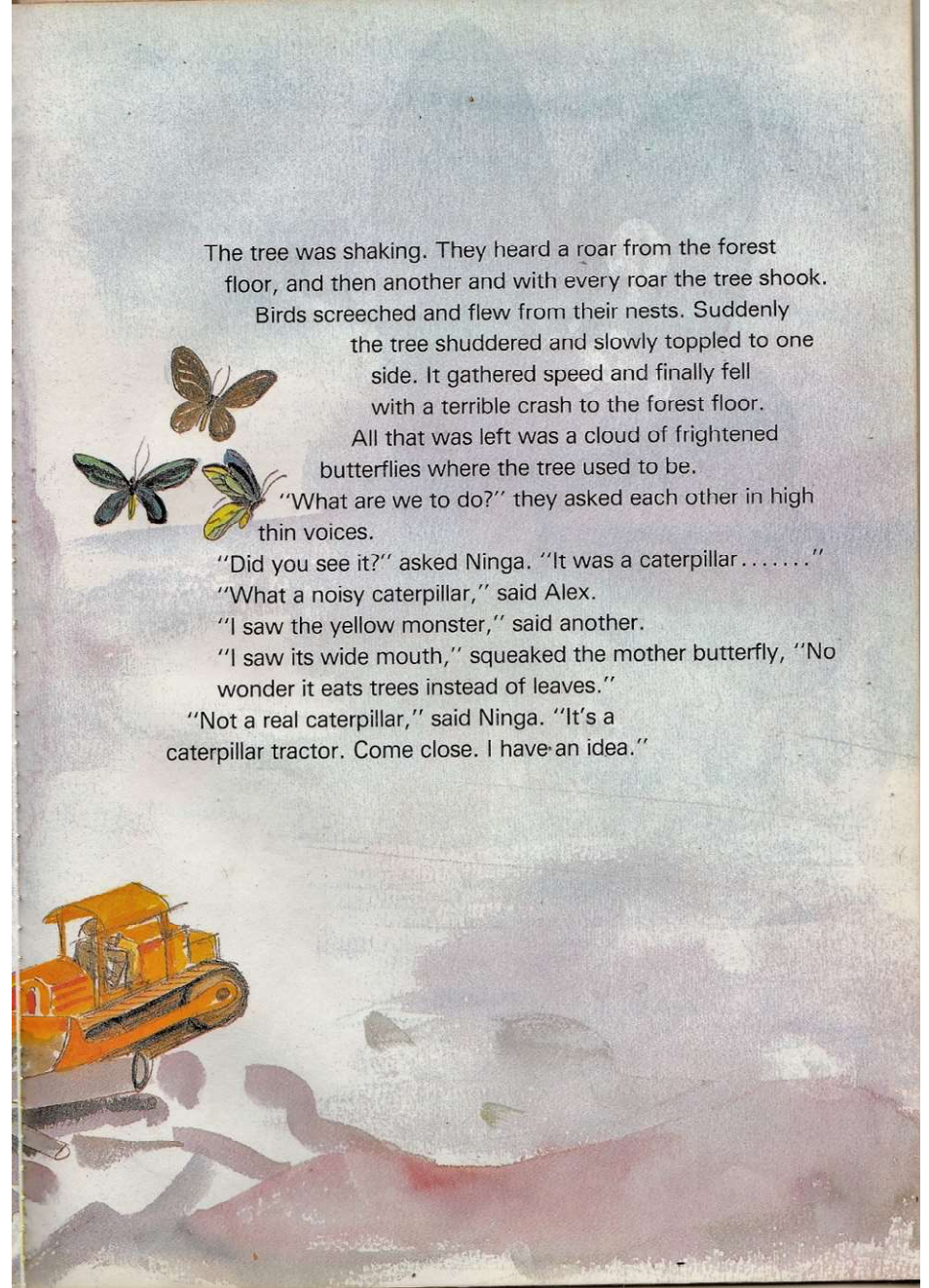
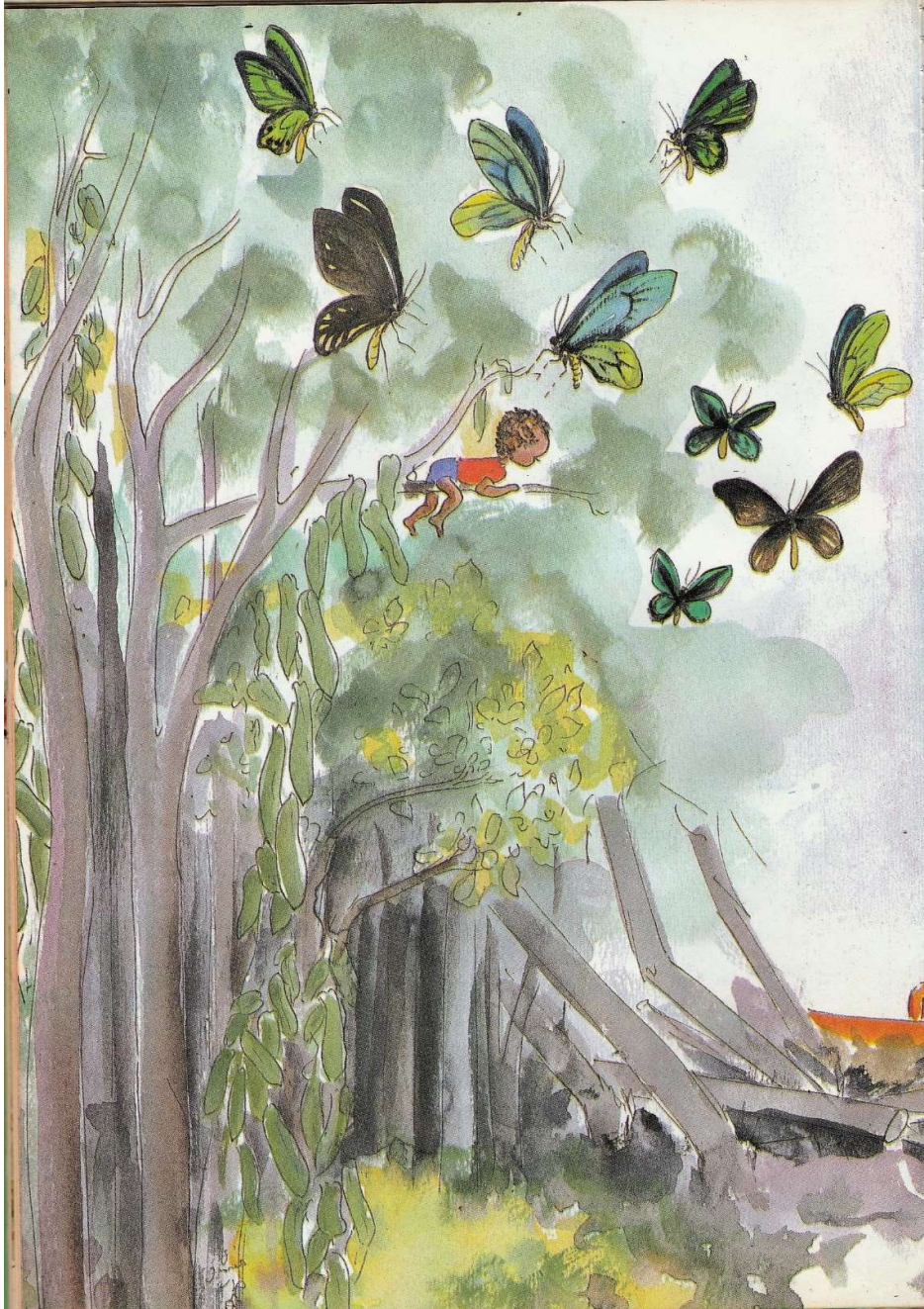
"I can't," said Alex. "When we butterflies stand still we hold our wings up."

Alex and Hercules frowned at each other.

"Please don't fight," pleaded Ninga Pinga as the tree began to shake.

"I'm not shaking the tree," said Alex.

"Nor me," said Hercules.



The tree was shaking. They heard a roar from the forest floor, and then another and with every roar the tree shook.

Birds screeched and flew from their nests. Suddenly the tree shuddered and slowly toppled to one side. It gathered speed and finally fell with a terrible crash to the forest floor.

All that was left was a cloud of frightened butterflies where the tree used to be.



"What are we to do?" they asked each other in high thin voices.

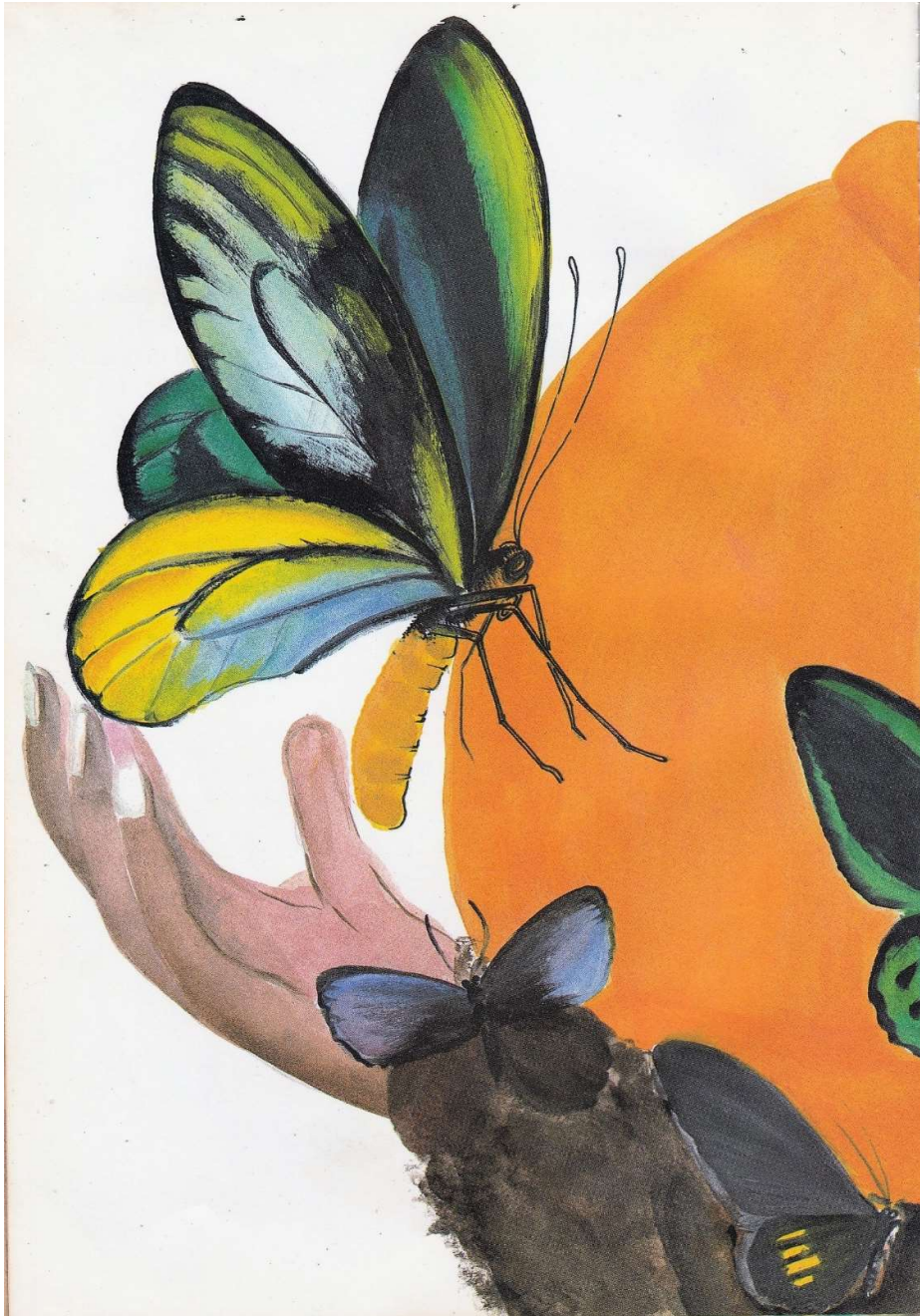
"Did you see it?" asked Ninga. "It was a caterpillar....."

"What a noisy caterpillar," said Alex.

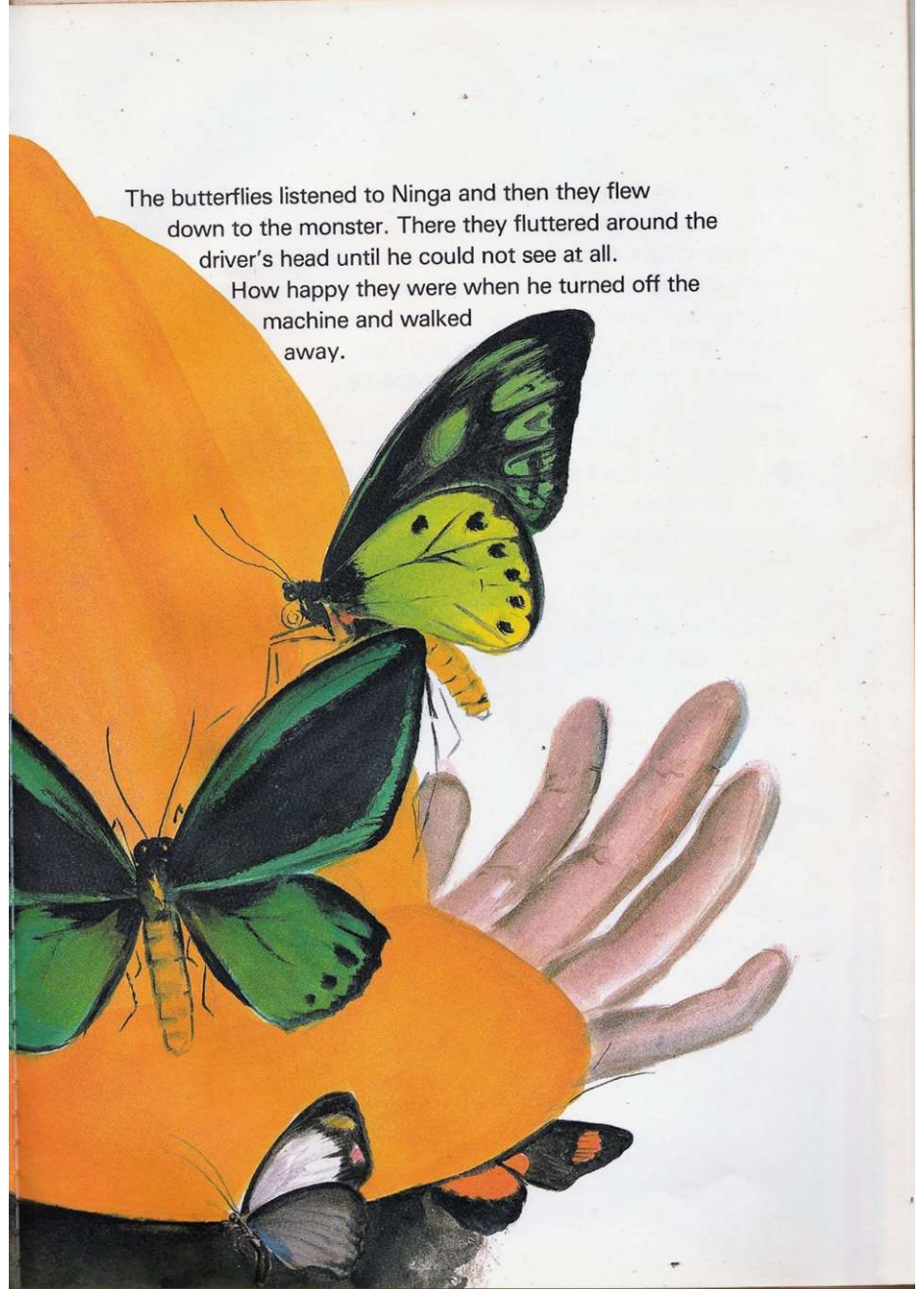
"I saw the yellow monster," said another.

"I saw its wide mouth," squeaked the mother butterfly, "No wonder it eats trees instead of leaves."

"Not a real caterpillar," said Ninga. "It's a caterpillar tractor. Come close. I have an idea."



The butterflies listened to Ninga and then they flew down to the monster. There they fluttered around the driver's head until he could not see at all. How happy they were when he turned off the machine and walked away.



However, soon after sunset Ninga felt their tree shudder in the warm night air.

"It's the big yellow monster again! Fly at his eyes, Alex!" shouted Ninga.

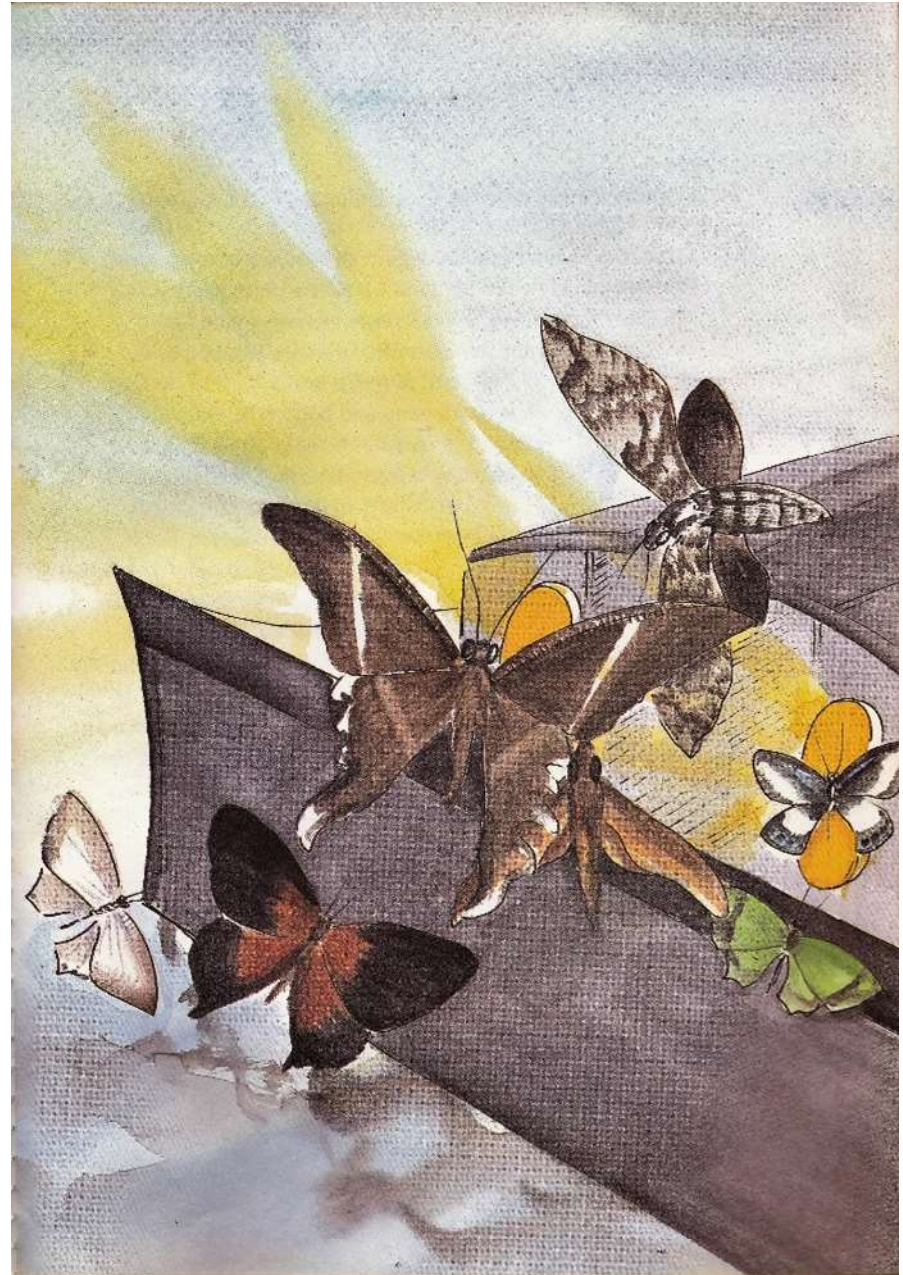
"I can't," said Alex. "It's dark now and I am too sleepy." The beautiful butterfly yawned and fell asleep.

The tree shook again and Ninga began to cry. Then the tree stopped shaking and the monster no longer roared beneath him. Ninga looked down through the creepers. He clapped his hands and laughed at what he saw.

Just like the moths who flew at the bright light near Ninga's home, the moths had fluttered out of the dark forest towards the bright head lights of the caterpillar tractor. They flew close together, casting dark shadows so that the driver could not see where he was going.

Very soon the puzzled man turned off the machine and went to sleep.

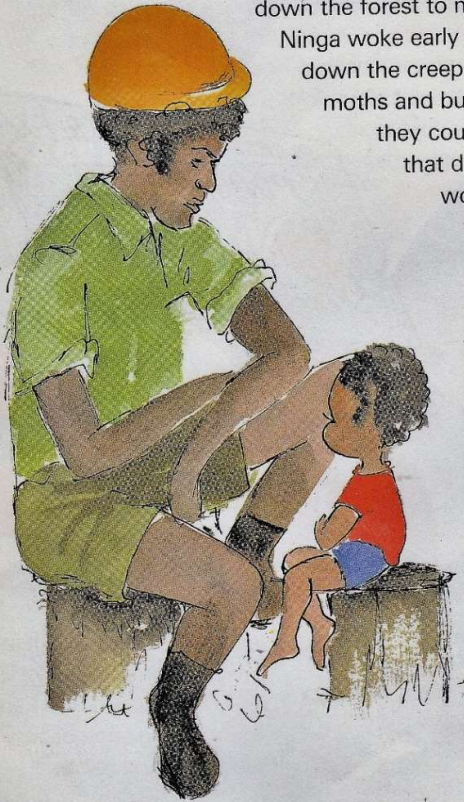
"Alex, Alex," Ninga Pinga whispered to the sleeping butterfly. "The moths have covered the monster's eyes with their wings. They have saved your home."



Ninga made himself a bed in the creeper and went to sleep, a very happy boy.

However in the night he dreamt that men came into the forest with poison spray to kill all the moths and butterflies. He heard the men saying that a lot more monster caterpillar tractors would tear down the forest to make farms.

Ninga woke early and began the long climb down the creeper to the ground. The moths and butterflies had done all they could to stop the monster that destroyed the forest, but it would not be enough. Ninga knew that people need somewhere to live and grow their food, but he also knew that this forest was special. He would have to return to boy size in order to save his new friends.



When he had changed from Ninga Pinga no bigger than a finger, to just plain Ninga, he walked towards the caterpillar tractor.

The driver was surprised to see Ninga alone in the forest.

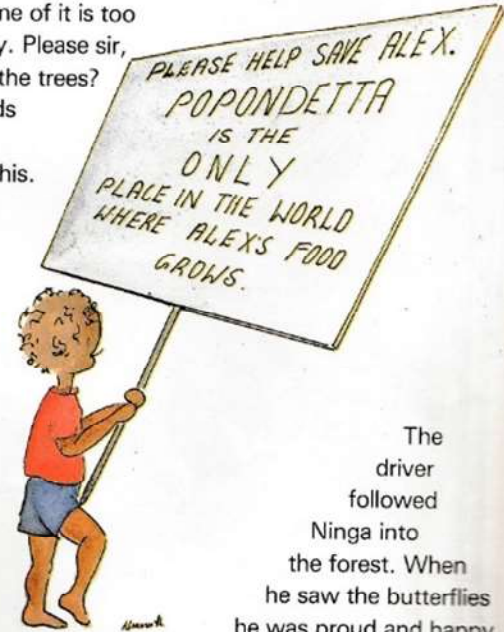
"Good morning," Ninga said to the driver. "Are you going to knock down all the trees?"

"Yes," said the man. "Many people want to come and farm here."

"Not all the land is good for gardens and farms," said Ninga. "Some of it is too steep and some too stony. Please sir, could you leave some of the trees? I have some special friends who need them."

The man thought about this. "I could leave the trees in the valleys and the gullies," he said at last.

"Thank you," breathed Ninga. "Thank you, thank you. I shall tell my friends that their home is saved forever. You see, sir, there is nowhere else in the world for them."



The driver followed Ninga into the forest. When he saw the butterflies he was proud and happy to be saving such beauty for all the world to see.

Ninga never forgot his trip to Popondetta. On the long walk home he met other moths and butterflies. He even saw brightly coloured daytime moths, and butterflies in moss forests that rested with their wings out flat like a moth! He saw a caterpillar scare away a hungry bird because it looked like a snake, while another caterpillar rolled itself in a leaf to hide!

At last he reached home. He lay wearily on his sleeping mat and was fast asleep when a soft wing brushed his cheek.

"Hercules," he murmured, "you beat me home."

The next day Ninga's teacher wrote his two friends' names on the blackboard, and announced that some of the forest near Popondetta with the special creeper was to be saved forever.

Ninga smiled to himself and remembered his adventure with his new friends. You too can get to know many moths and butterflies in Papua New Guinea.

Here are the scientific names of Ninga's friends if you want to look them up in books:

Hercules: *Coscinocera hercules*
Alex: *Ornithoptera alexandrae*

The special creeper is called *Aristolochia schlechteri*



This book was written and illustrated in 1981. We thanked Peter Clark, Officer-in-Charge, and Michael Parsons, Research Officer at the Insect Farming and Trading Agency in Bulolo, Papua New Guinea for their assistance.

The book is now out of print. We put this book on line for the children of Haus Pikinini to read, primarily to cheer them up while they were recovering from chicken pox.

Haus Pikinini is in Wau, where Ninga lives, where I used to live. Diana used to live in Bulolo nearby. Our friend Donna has made Haus Pikinini a place to call home for 30 little kids who need one. It is supported by P4K-PNG and friends and, hopefully, people like you. Go to Haus Pikinini on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/hauspikinip4k/> — and you will meet Donna. I hope you find the donate button because if you send her some dollars they will turn into many, many kina and the children will be so happy when your kina buy them shoes and school uniforms and all the things children need.

Happy Reading, Paquita Boston

