

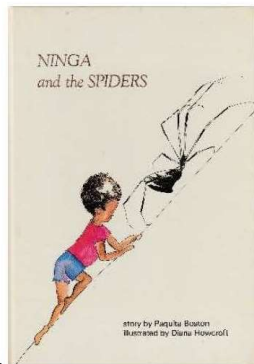
England has Tom Thumb



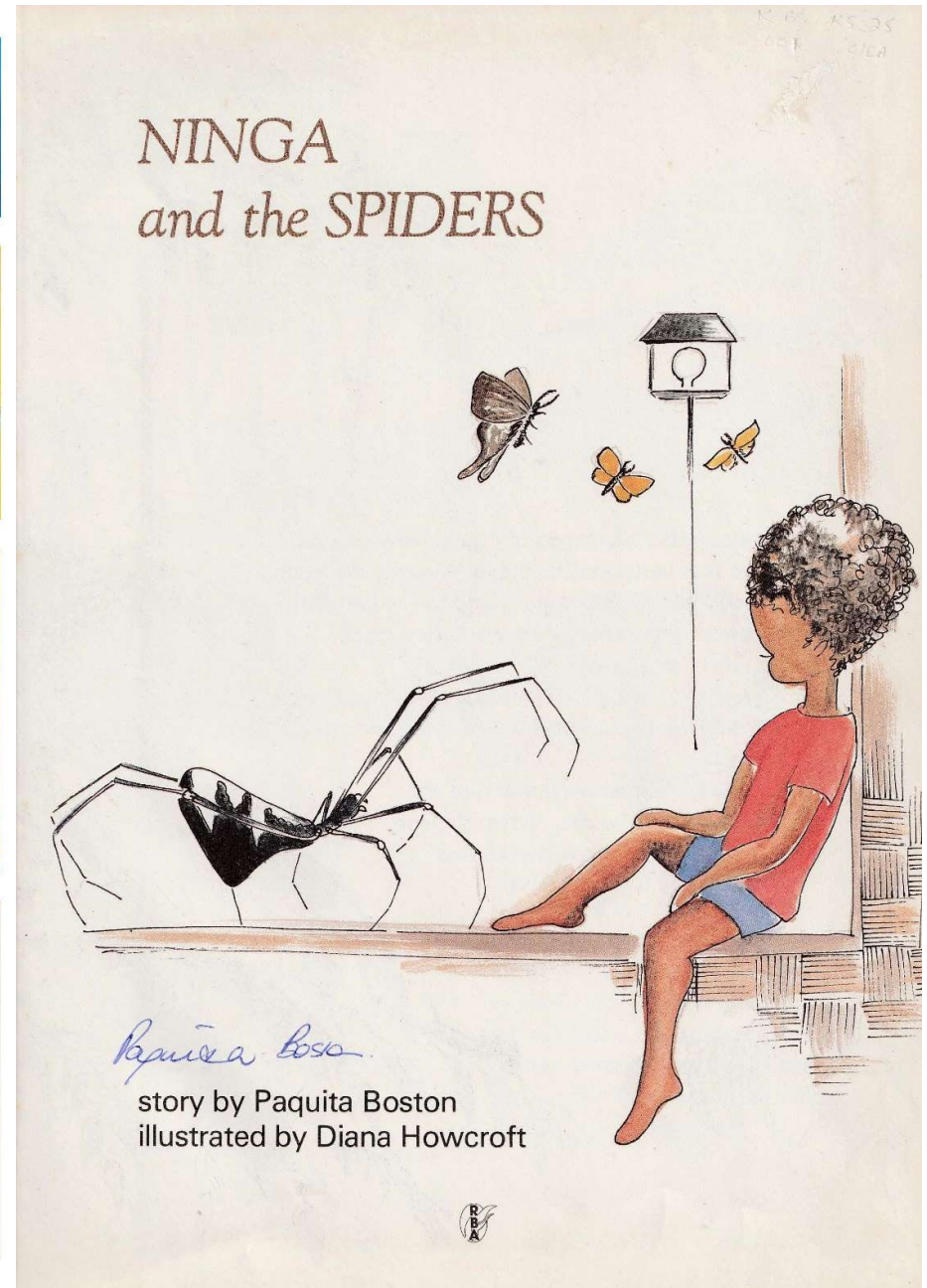
Denmark has Thumbelina

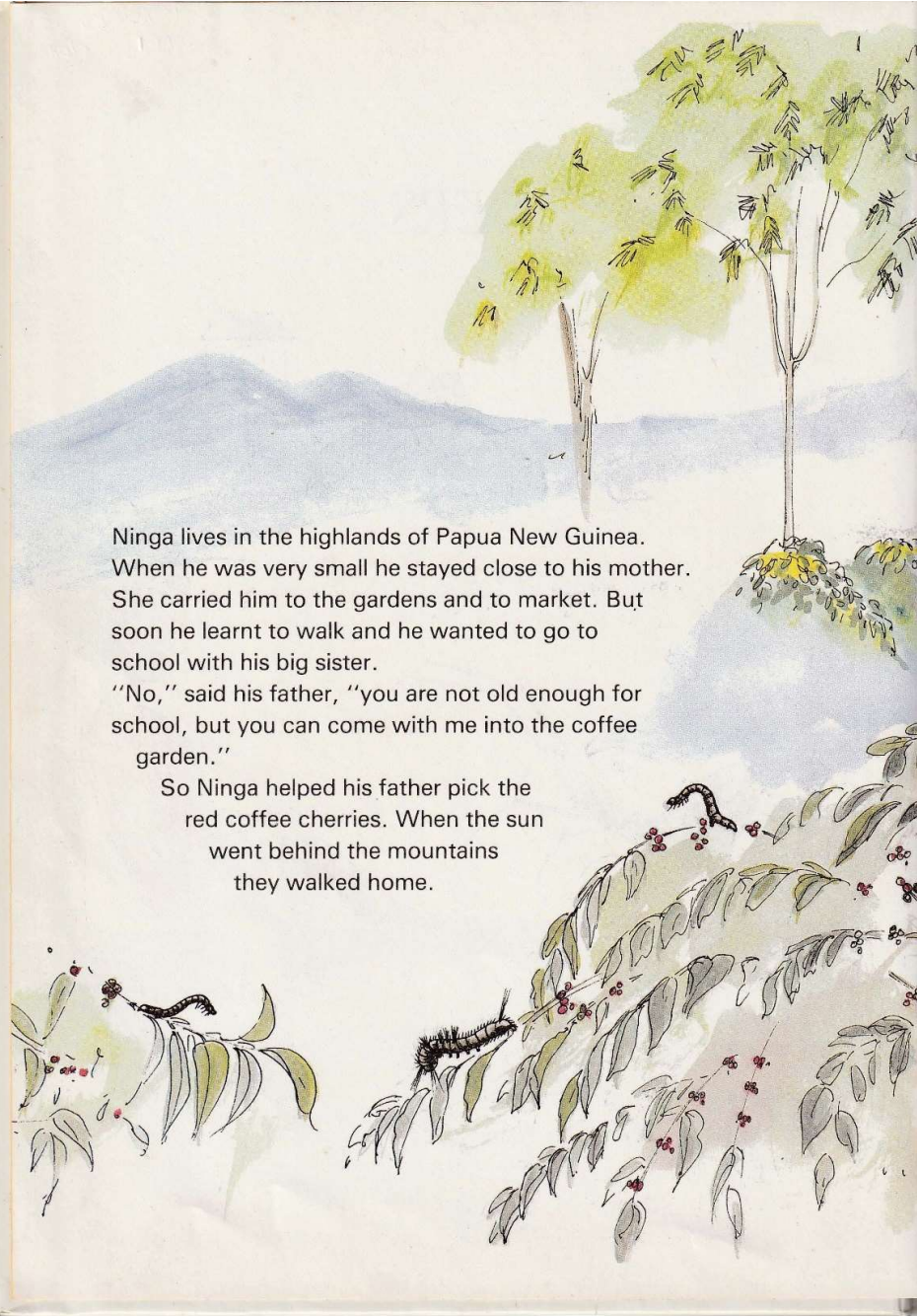


Australia has Digit Dick



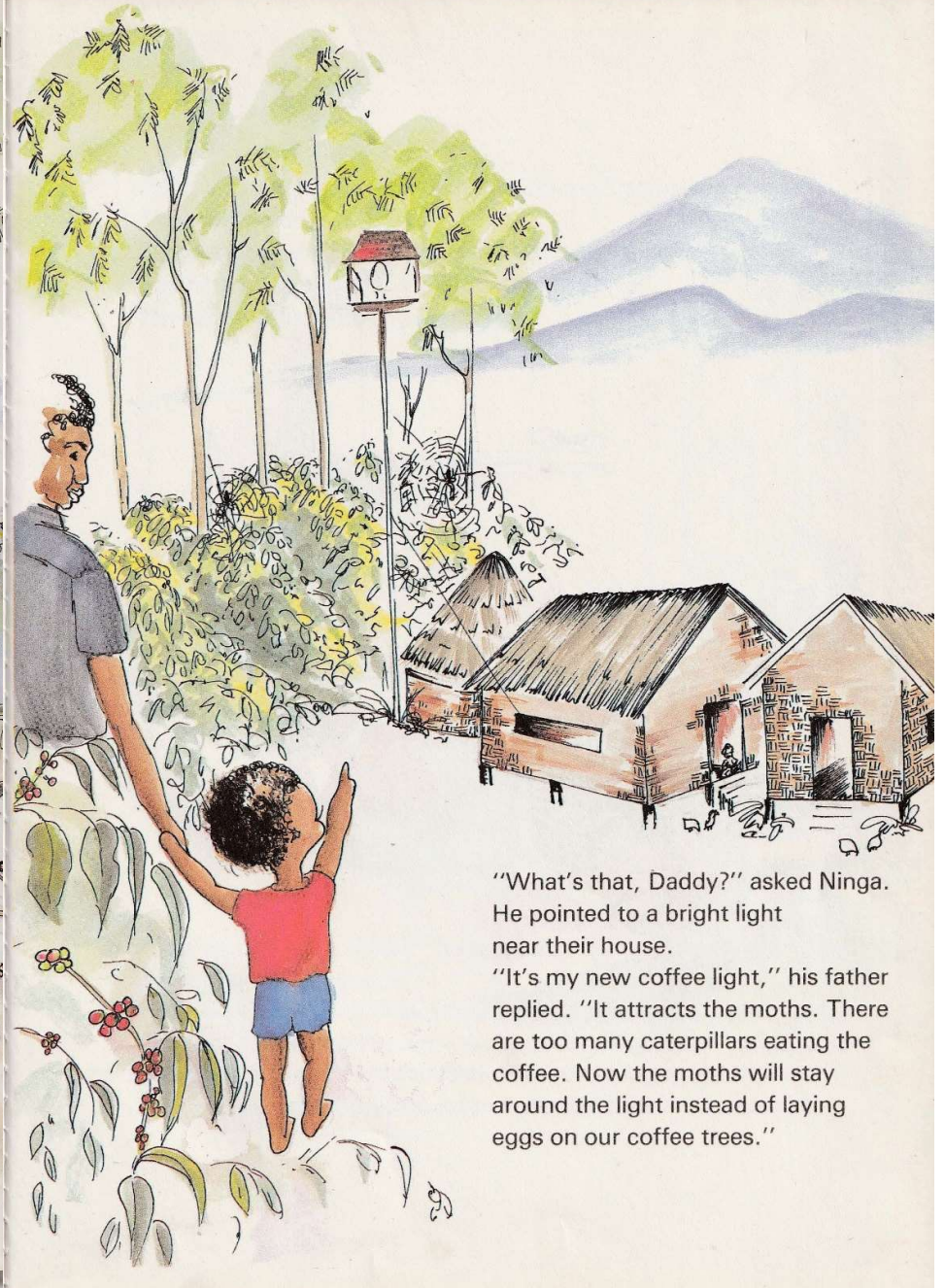
Papua New Guinea has Ninga Pinga.





Ninga lives in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. When he was very small he stayed close to his mother. She carried him to the gardens and to market. But soon he learnt to walk and he wanted to go to school with his big sister. "No," said his father, "you are not old enough for school, but you can come with me into the coffee garden."

So Ninga helped his father pick the red coffee cherries. When the sun went behind the mountains they walked home.



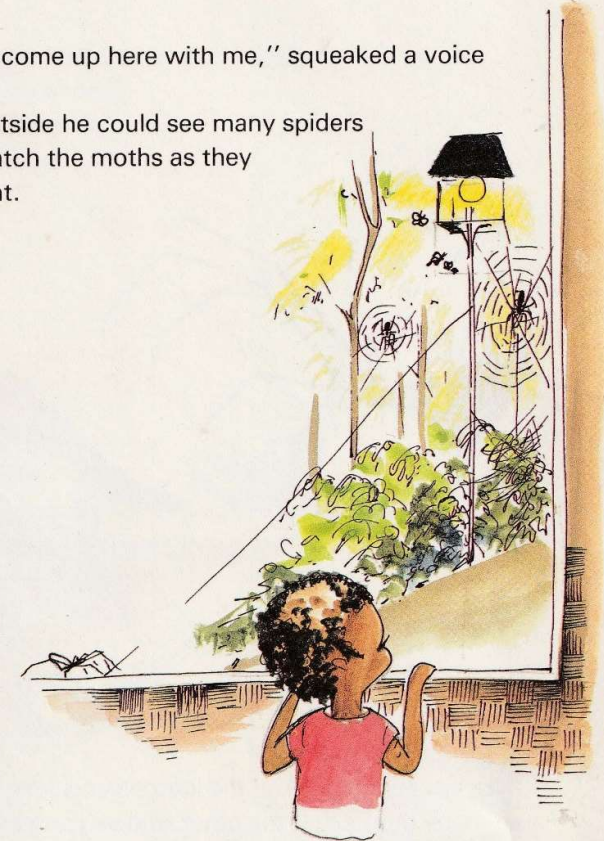
"What's that, Daddy?" asked Ninga. He pointed to a bright light near their house. "It's my new coffee light," his father replied. "It attracts the moths. There are too many caterpillars eating the coffee. Now the moths will stay around the light instead of laying eggs on our coffee trees."



That night Ninga could not sleep because the strong light shone on to his mat. He closed his eyes but he could still see it.

"If you can't sleep, come up here with me," squeaked a voice from the window.

Ninga stood up. Outside he could see many spiders spinning webs to catch the moths as they flew around the light.



"The spiders are so busy," he said out loud. "Working hard while every one else is asleep."

"Not me," replied a cheeky little silver spider on the window ledge. "I'm not asleep and I'm not working. I *steal* my food," he boasted in a squeaky voice.

"It's bad to steal," said Ninga.



"Nonsense," squeaked the little silver spider. "Anyway, there are so many moths that the other spiders can't eat them all. They just wrap them up and leave them hanging for me on their webs."
"How do you get over there?" asked Ninga.
"Follow me," squeaked the little silver spider and showed Ninga a silk rope to climb.
"I'm too big," said Ninga.
"No you're not. Just do every thing I do," squeaked Silver.
Indeed, when Ninga looked down at his hands and feet he had to agree. He was very small. He had shrunk.
"Do come," squeaked Silver. "It's such fun. Unless you are afraid."

Now Ninga was a brave little boy and so he followed Silver up the silk rope. Silver ran easily on his eight legs, but Ninga found balancing on the silk rope very, very difficult.



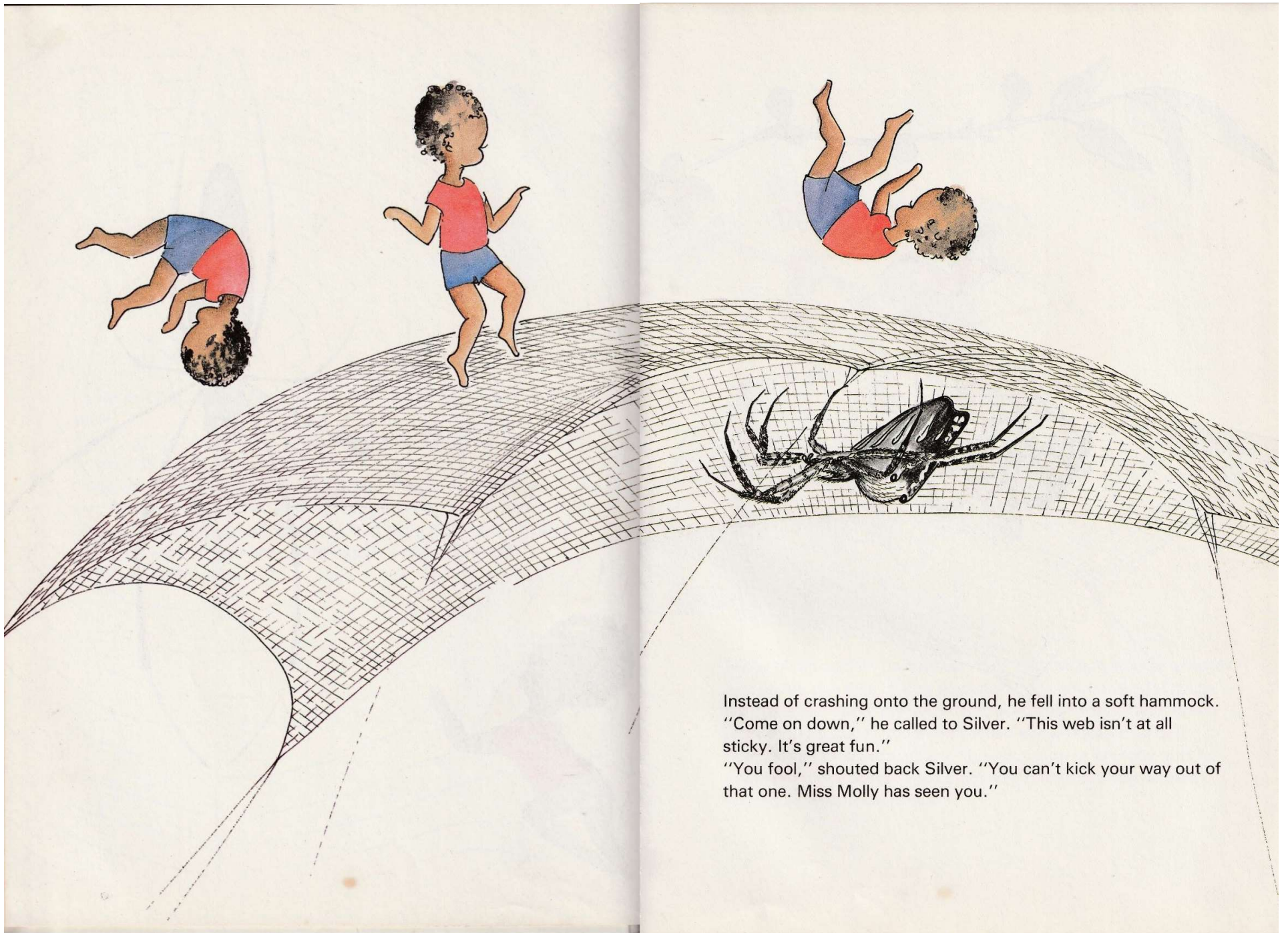
When he reached a big strong golden web it was more like climbing a ladder.

"Look out," shouted Silver, "don't touch the cross ropes, they're sticky."

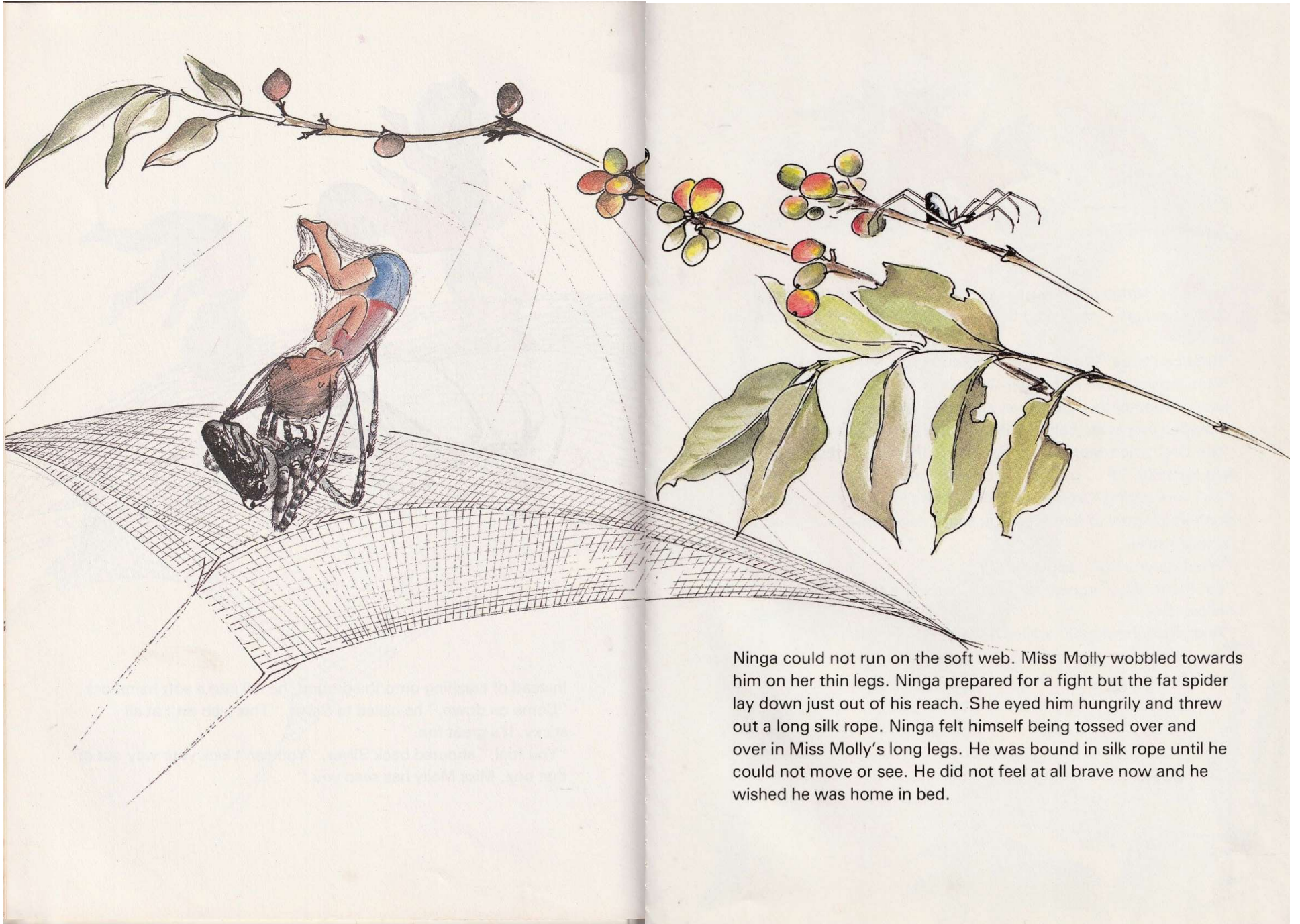
But it was too late. Ninga's hands were stuck. He pulled and the whole web shook.

"Now you've done it," squeaked Silver, "Mother Maculata cannot see very far, but she'll feel her web shaking and Oh! Here she is!" Ninga screamed as a huge spider on long, long legs came running down the web. Ninga kicked at the spider's head. The web broke and Ninga fell.





Instead of crashing onto the ground, he fell into a soft hammock. "Come on down," he called to Silver. "This web isn't at all sticky. It's great fun." "You fool," shouted back Silver. "You can't kick your way out of that one. Miss Molly has seen you."



Ninga could not run on the soft web. Miss Molly wobbled towards him on her thin legs. Ninga prepared for a fight but the fat spider lay down just out of his reach. She eyed him hungrily and threw out a long silk rope. Ninga felt himself being tossed over and over in Miss Molly's long legs. He was bound in silk rope until he could not move or see. He did not feel at all brave now and he wished he was home in bed.



Suddenly, Ninga felt that he was swinging through the air.
"There you are," squeaked Silver, "I'll hang you up here, safe and sound."
"But I can't see," wailed Ninga. "Can't you unwrap me?"
"Stealing you from Miss Molly was easy. I just threw her another food parcel, ran down and put a rope around you. Then I dragged you away before she had time to bite you with her poison."
"Oh, Oh," cried Ninga, shivering at the thought of the danger he had escaped. "P . . . p . . . please unwrap me."
"As I was saying," squeaked Silver, "stealing you was easy, but I don't know how to free you. You see, I never unwrap the food parcels I steal."
"What do you do?" asked Ninga.
"Eat them, silly," squeaked Silver, "suck the soft bits through my hollow jaws."
"And what about me?" wailed Ninga.
"Oh, I won't eat you. Besides you're too heavy to carry home. Too heavy for my rope, too. Oh dear, it's breaking."





There was nothing Ninga could do about it. Slowly the rope broke and he fell down onto a sharp thorn.

"Are you all right?" shouted Silver.

"Yes, this thorn has torn off my ropes," shouted Ninga.

"I'll just jump down now and run home."

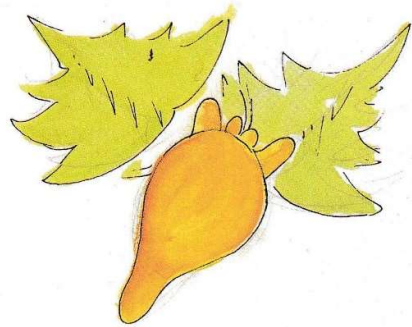
"I wouldn't do that," said a soft voiced flower.

"Why not, little blossom?" asked Ninga.



"Things are never quite what they seem my dear," the little flower answered. "Look at me. I'm not a flower at all." And she uncurled a little and waved eight little legs at Ninga. "Goodness me," said Ninga. "You're a spider." "Yes," said the little flower, "I *am* a spider. And if you jump down there, you'll be attacked by a much bigger spider. Look, can't you see him peeping out of his hole in the ground? You should look before you leap you know."





So Ninga climbed carefully down the thorn bush. At the bottom he met an ant.

"Hello, ant," said Ninga. "You must know the way to my house. You ants are always coming inside to eat the sugar."

"Ant," laughed the ant, "Oh ho ho. That's good. It tricked you too."

"Remember," said the little blossom from up above, "things aren't *always* what they seem."

"You can't be a spider," said Ninga to the ant, "because you've only got six legs."

The spider that looked like an ant waved his two hands at Ninga.

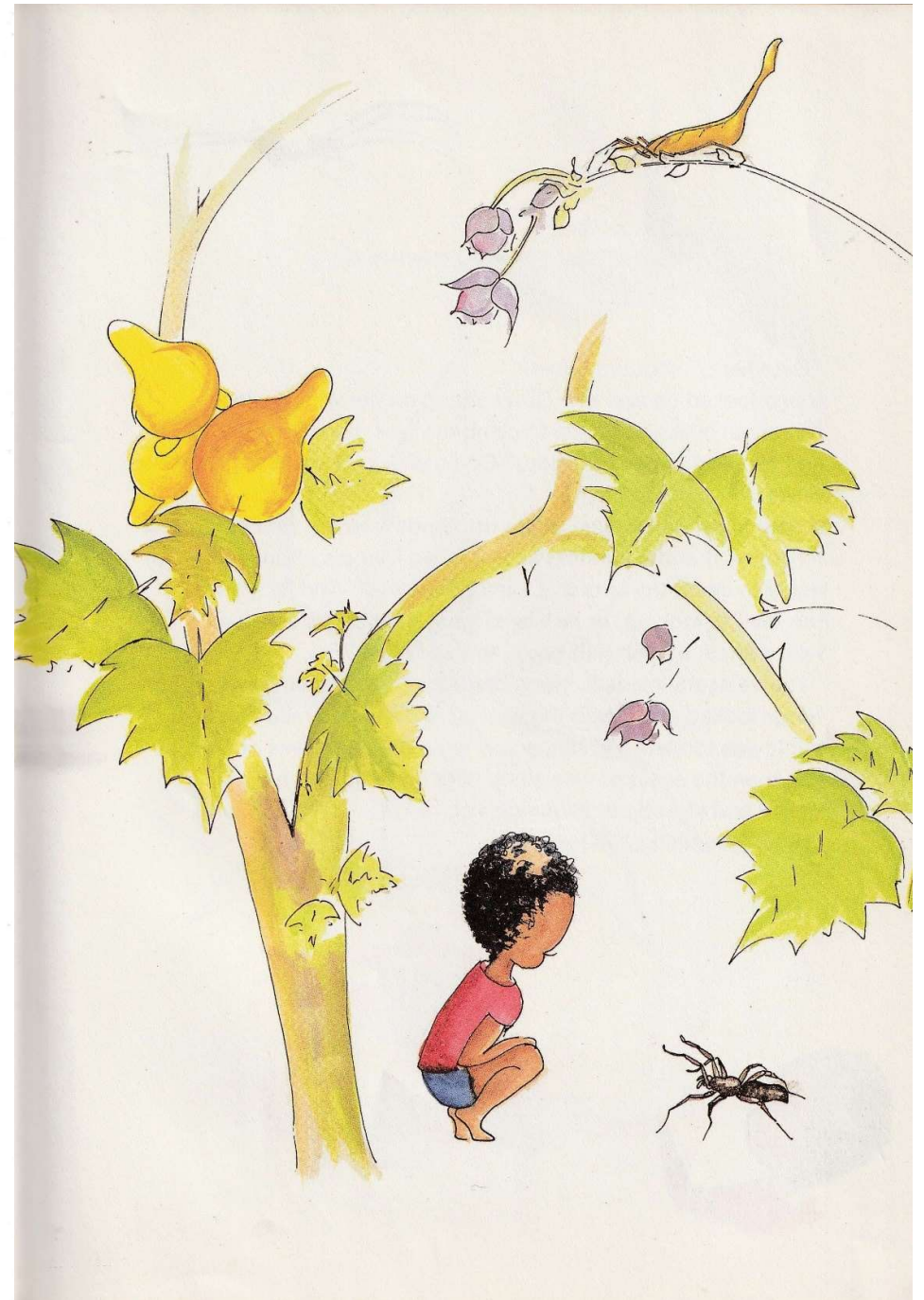
"These are really legs," he said, "but I hold them out in front. That way the birds don't eat me."

"Why not?" Ninga asked.

"Ants don't taste nice, silly. That's why I copy the ants."

The strange little spider walked off laughing to himself, with his hands held up high.

"Oh dear," sighed Ninga. "I wish I knew more about you spiders, and I wish I knew the way home."





"Over here," shouted Silver.

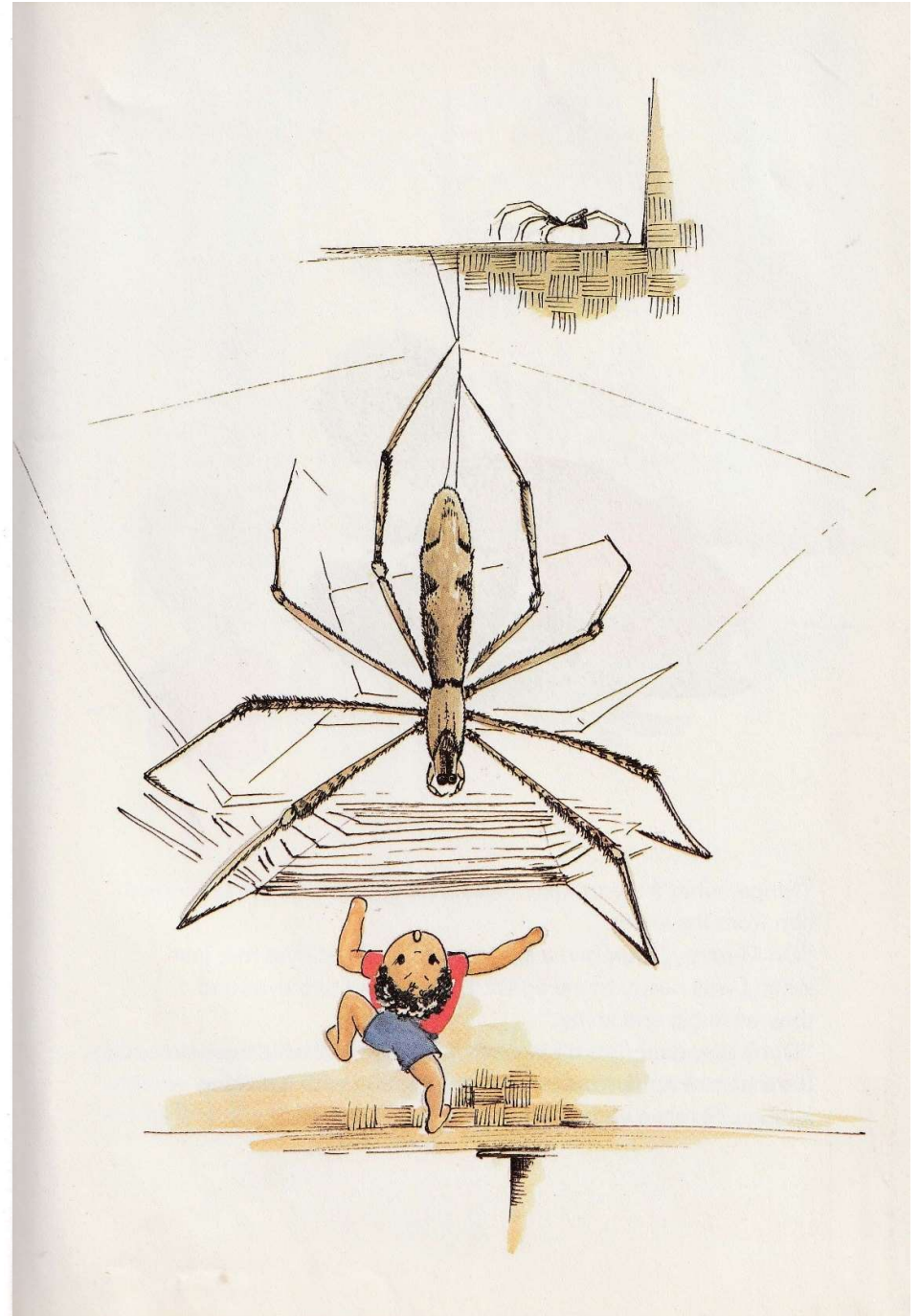
Ninga looked up and saw Silver sitting on the window ledge. Ninga ran over and began to climb the wall. It was hard work and his head began to droop. "Come on, you'll make it," squeaked Silver.

If only Silver had looked under the window ledge. He had forgotten that the cunning ugly-looking Dinopis often hid there, ready to catch the ants that climbed the wall. And Ninga was too tired to look up, or he would have seen Dinopis waiting with a sheet of web held ready to throw over him.

"You've nearly made it. Hang on to this," squeaked Silver.

Ninga looked up to grab the web rope Silver had ready for him, but it was too late. All Ninga saw were the huge eyes of Dinopis and then the sheet of web came over his head and he kicked and kicked but it wouldn't come off.

"Help," he cried, "Oh help, help."





"Ninga, what's the matter?" asked his mother, as she untangled him from the sheet.

"Oh Mummy, Mummy, a spider threw a sheet over me, just when I was nearly home again. He only had two eyes and they were big and shiny."

"Don't cry, dear," said his mother. "You must have been dreaming. It's that new light. You can't sleep properly with it shining in here. I'll make you a curtain."



Now every night before he closes the curtain, Ninga stands at the window watching the spiders. His father was smart to attract the moths with the light, but Ninga thinks the spiders are even smarter.

Ninga was never sure if his adventure had been a dream or not. Wherever he went he looked for spiders and tried to get to know them.

He learnt that there really is a little silver spider that steals food from other spiders.

Ninga saw that Miss Molly can even tie up little birds and bats. Then they cannot kick when she bites. Mother Maculata cannot do this and so sometimes, like Ninga did, her dinner fights and escapes before Mother Maculata can bite.

Ninga grew to recognise Little Blossom and he kept her secret. If the birds knew that she was a tasty spider and not a flower at all, they would gobble her up. Ninga keeps the ant-spider's secret too.

Ninga remembers not to play with the ground spider, in his hole. Dinopis no longer terrifies him but Ninga does feel sorry for the ants that Dinopis catches in his sheet of web.

You too can get to know spiders. If you live in Papua New Guinea or in Northern Australia you can meet all Ninga's spiders and many more.

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

Miss Molly: *Cyrtophora moluccensis*
Mother Maculata: *Nephila maculata*
Little Blossom: *Arachnura melanura*
Dinopis: *Dinopis subrufa*



In 1980 the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute sent Spiderman Dr Michael Robinson and his wife, ecologist Barbara Robinson, to the Wau Ecology Institute in PNG. They taught me and my talented illustrator Diana to appreciate our spiders.

We produced this book, now out of print but on line, for you and the children of Haus Pikinini to read. 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 lots of children who need a house to call home.

Meet Donna at [Haus Pikinini Orphanage PNG - Paradise 4 Kids](#)

If you donate some dollars they will turn into many more kina, to buy shoes and school uniforms and all the things children need. Go to Haus Pikinini on Facebook to see the kids at home in Wau.

