



# *Daddy Longlegs at Birch Lane*

*by Beverley Brenna*

*Illustrated by Sandra Blair*

SMITHSONIAN'S BACKYARD



*Daddy Longlegs at Birch Lane*



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*For Wilson, Eric, and Connor — B.B.*

*The illustrations in this book are dedicated to my mother,  
who always says, "That's my daughter. She draws pictures." — S.B.*

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Summary: Observes the spring hatching of a daddy longlegs or harvestman and follows her until  
the autumn when she herself is ready to lay her eggs.

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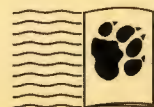
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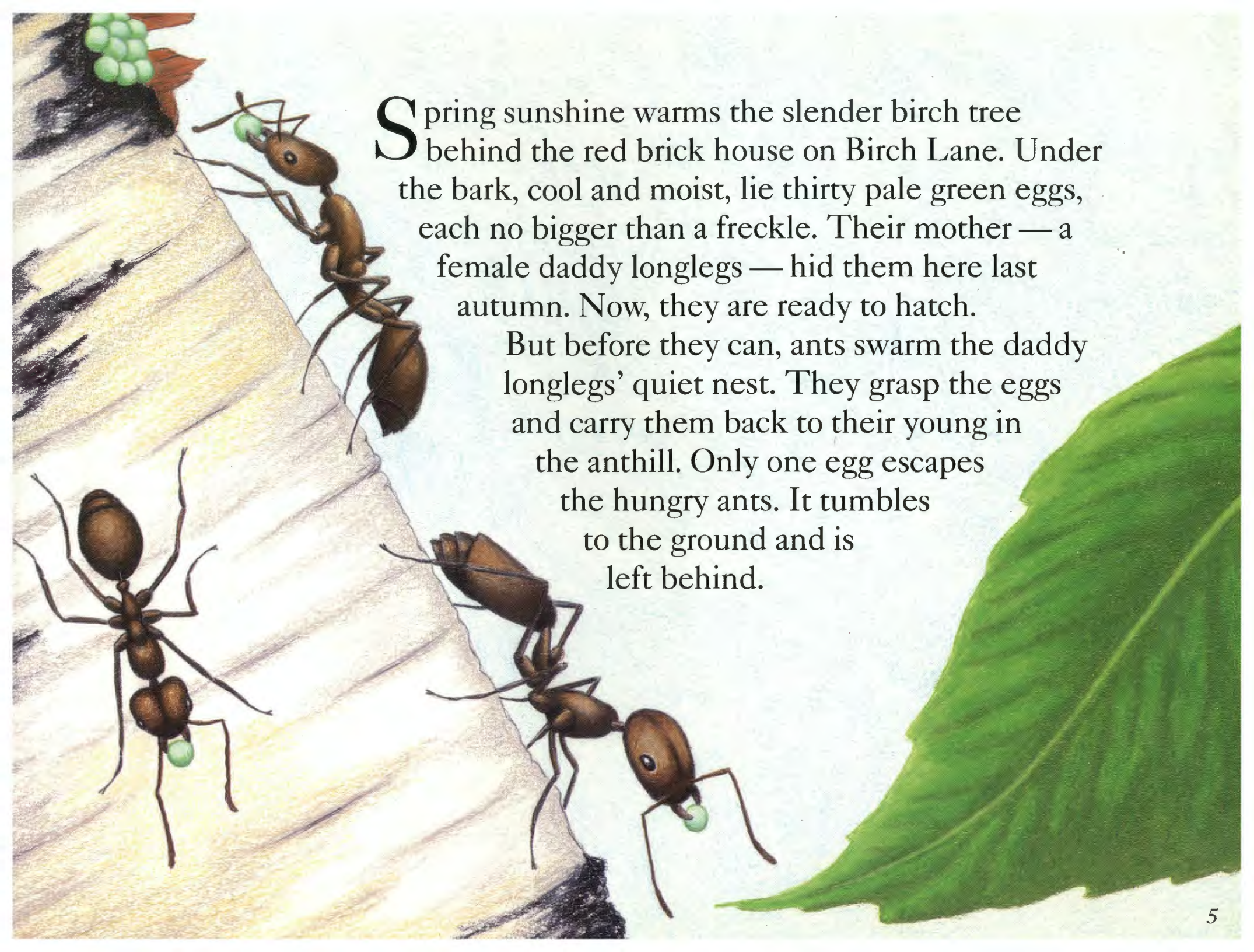
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Where Children Discover...







An illustration showing a tree trunk on the left with a large green leaf on the right. Several brown ants are depicted on the tree trunk. One ant at the top is carrying a small green egg. Another ant below it is also carrying a green egg. A third ant is shown further down, and a fourth ant is at the bottom, also carrying a green egg. The tree trunk has a textured, layered appearance. The background is a light, pale blue.


Spring sunshine warms the slender birch tree behind the red brick house on Birch Lane. Under the bark, cool and moist, lie thirty pale green eggs, each no bigger than a freckle. Their mother — a female daddy longlegs — hid them here last autumn. Now, they are ready to hatch.

But before they can, ants swarm the daddy longlegs' quiet nest. They grasp the eggs and carry them back to their young in the anthill. Only one egg escapes the hungry ants. It tumbles to the ground and is left behind.







An illustration of a dandelion seed head on the right side of the page, showing its characteristic white and black segments. On the left side, there is a large green leaf with several holes, suggesting it has been eaten by insects. The background is a light, hazy sky.

Soon, a small hole appears in the side of the egg, and a “daddy longlegs” harvester pokes out one knee. Then, the shell splits, freeing her round, orange body and eight long, gangly legs. A dewdrop hangs from a nearby dandelion leaf, and Harvester drinks greedily.

Her two bright eyes sit back-to-back on tiny bumps on top of her body. They search for a place where she can hide from animals that might eat her. Then, her lanky legs carry her underneath the leaf. It is these legs, bending sharply at the knees, that earn her and other harvesters their nickname, daddy longlegs.



An hour after Harvester has hatched, her skin is too tight for her growing body. She hangs onto a blade of grass and wiggles until her skin splits down the back, showing a new layer underneath. Harvester sticks one leg into her mouth and, gripping with her jaws, tugs the old skin off.

She pulls at each of her legs until her body is out completely, leaving behind an empty casing.













Hunger drives Harvester to explore the yard. She climbs down into the grass, tucking her legs against her body as the shadow of a bird passes over. She stays as still as a pebble, and the bird does not see her.

Harvester waits until the danger has passed. Then she unfurls her legs and zig-zags over the lawn. The claws at the ends of her legs help her balance. Her two longest legs “taste” everything she comes across, telling her what is good to eat.





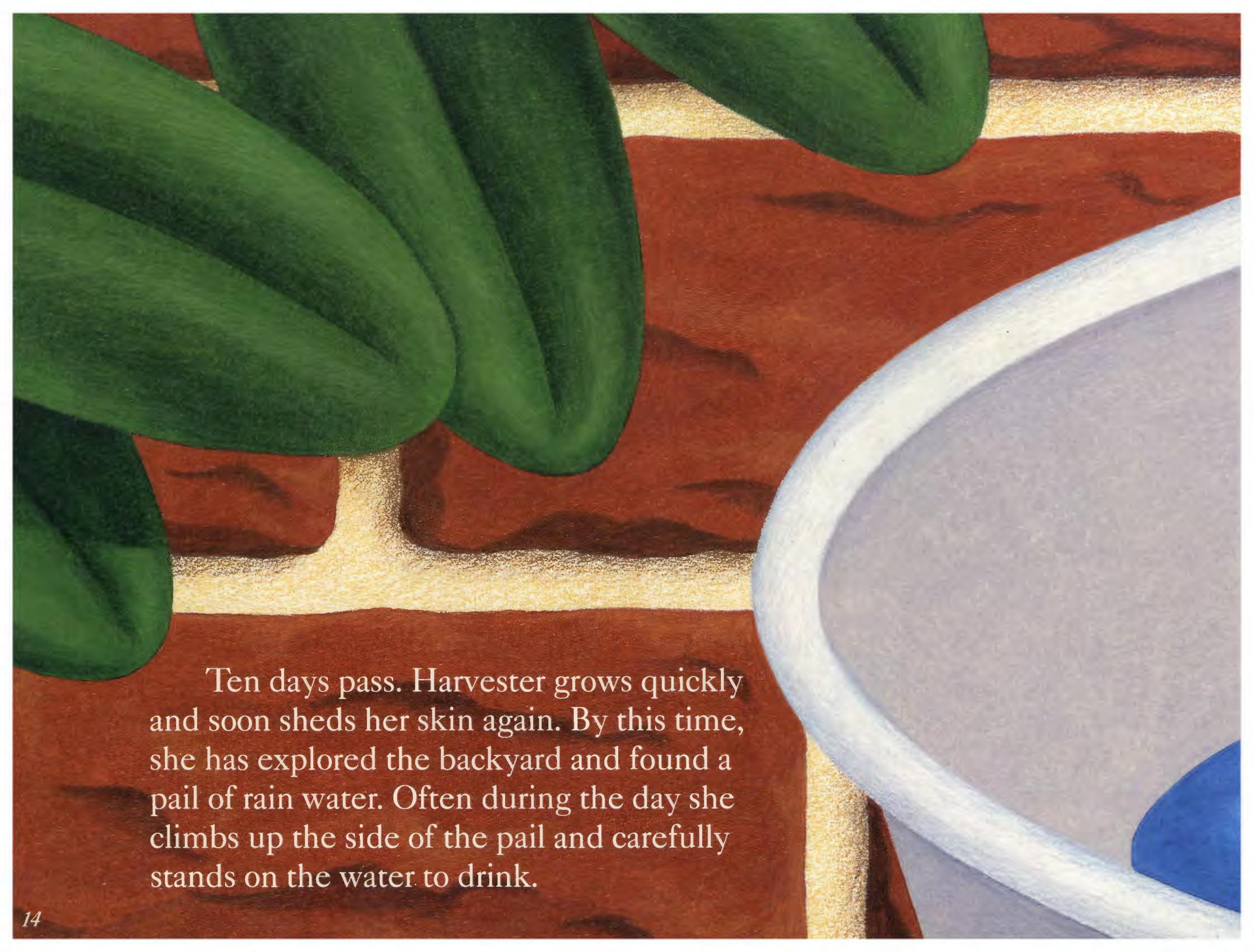
Parachuting on a long thread, a young garden spider floats to the ground nearby. Harvester pauses to investigate, but the spider is too big for her to tackle. Instead, she crawls onto a stiff, black beetle that is lying upside down. Carefully brushing one of her legs against it, she tastes to see if the beetle will make a good meal. It suits her, and she eats hungrily.

Finished, Harvester cleans her legs by pulling them through her jaws. Then she finds another dew drop to rinse her mouth and rests in the shade of the birch tree.



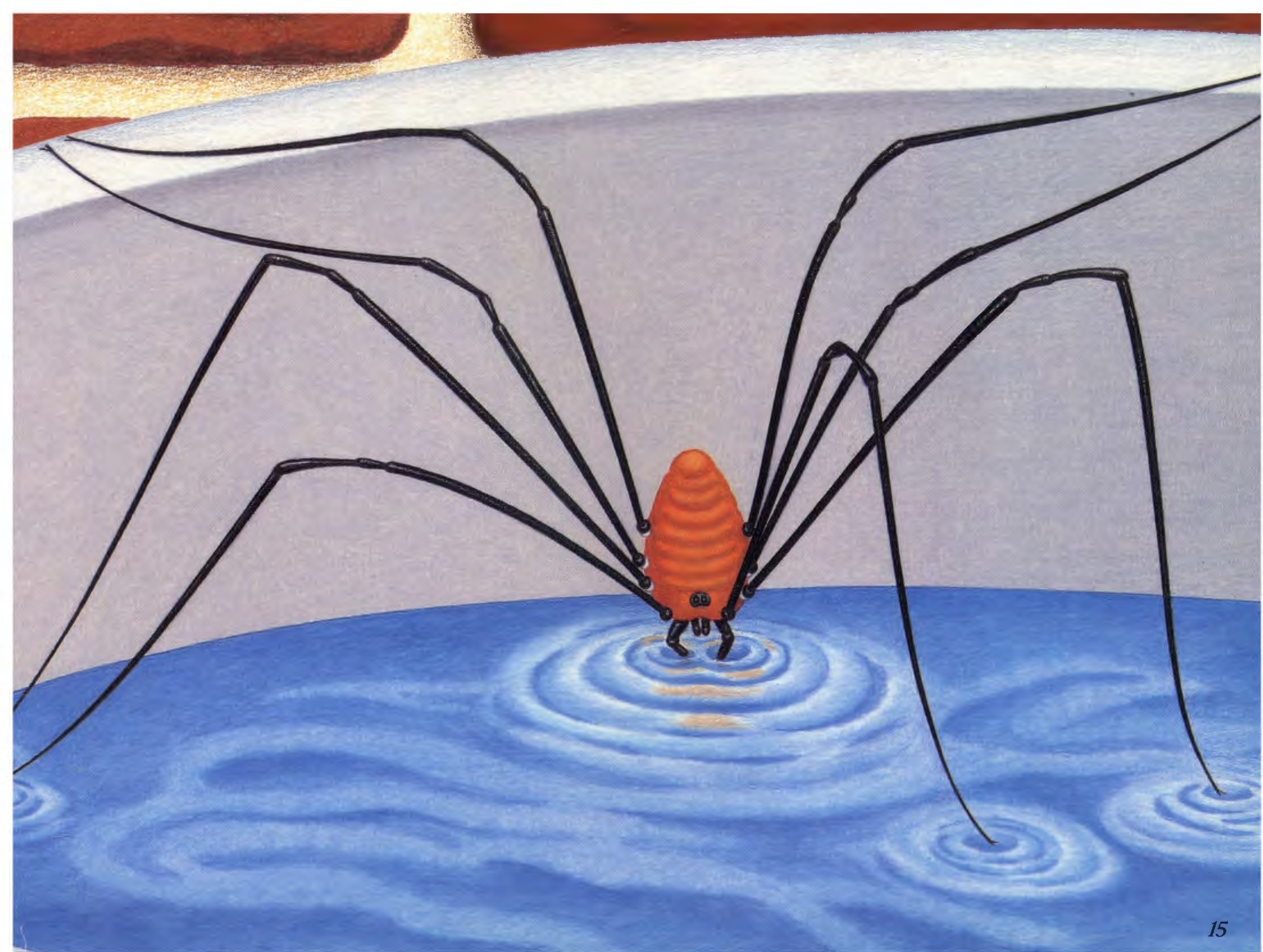






Ten days pass. Harvester grows quickly and soon sheds her skin again. By this time, she has explored the backyard and found a pail of rain water. Often during the day she climbs up the side of the pail and carefully stands on the water to drink.

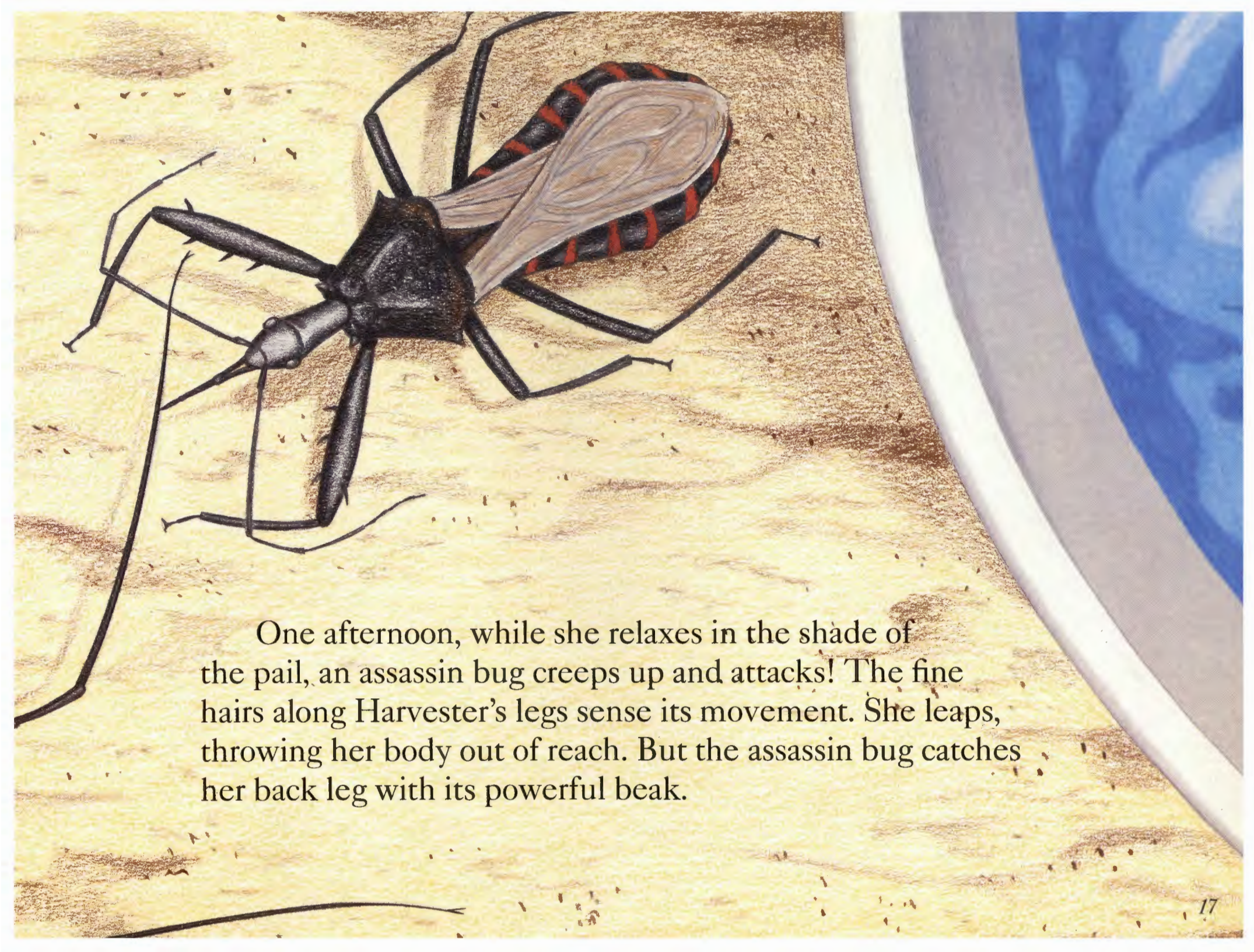










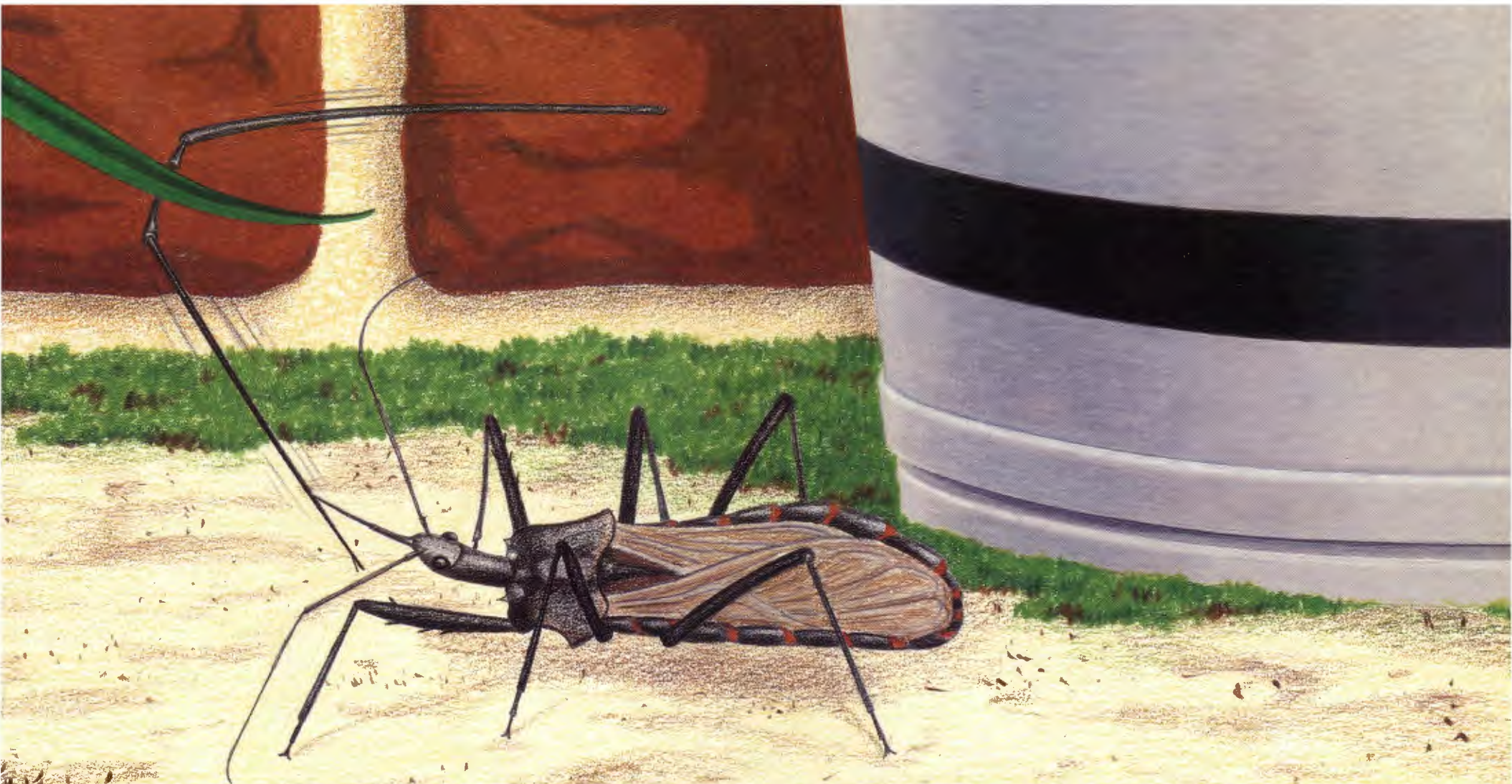


One afternoon, while she relaxes in the shade of the pail, an assassin bug creeps up and attacks! The fine hairs along Harvester's legs sense its movement. She leaps, throwing her body out of reach. But the assassin bug catches her back leg with its powerful beak.



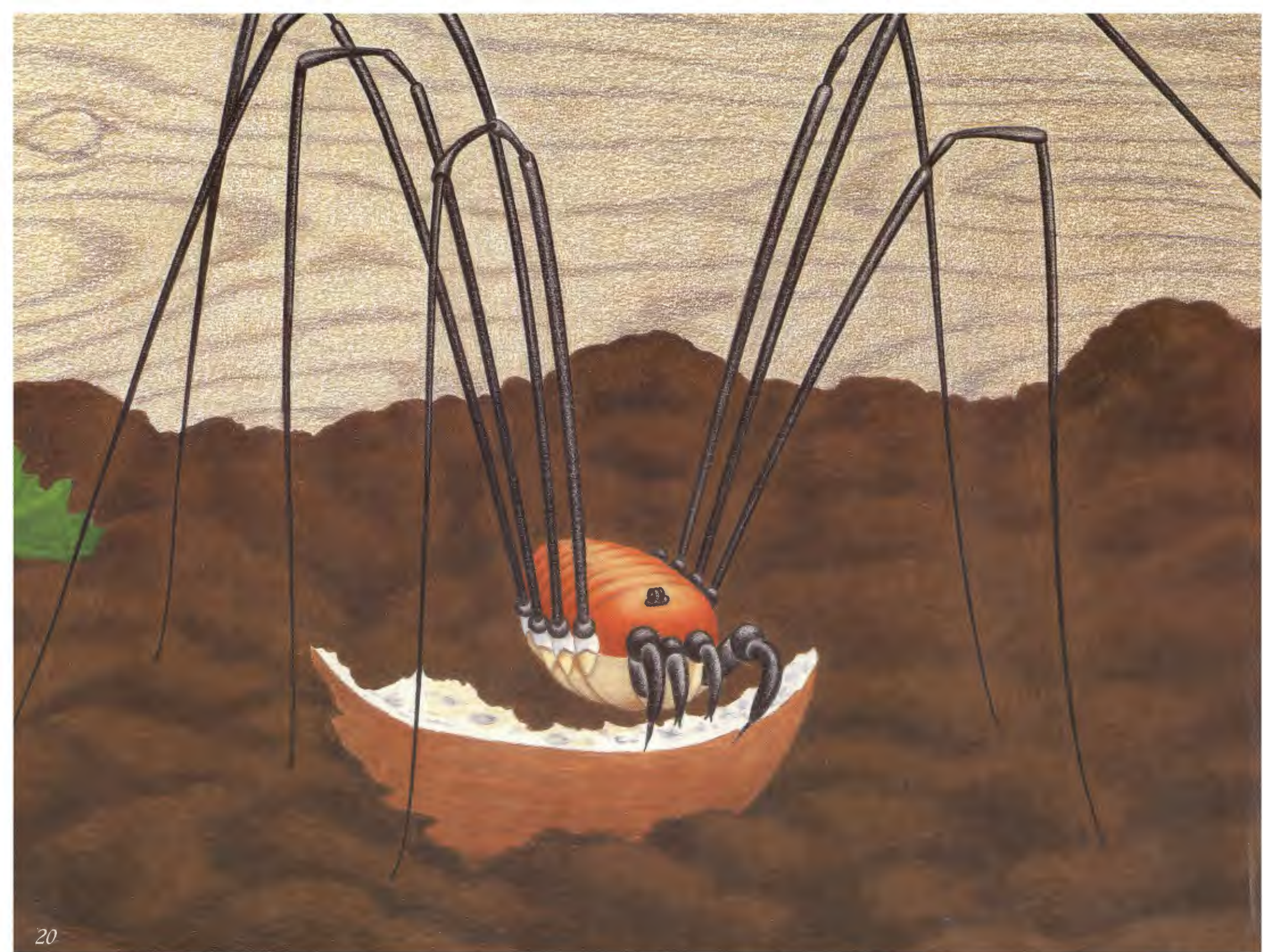




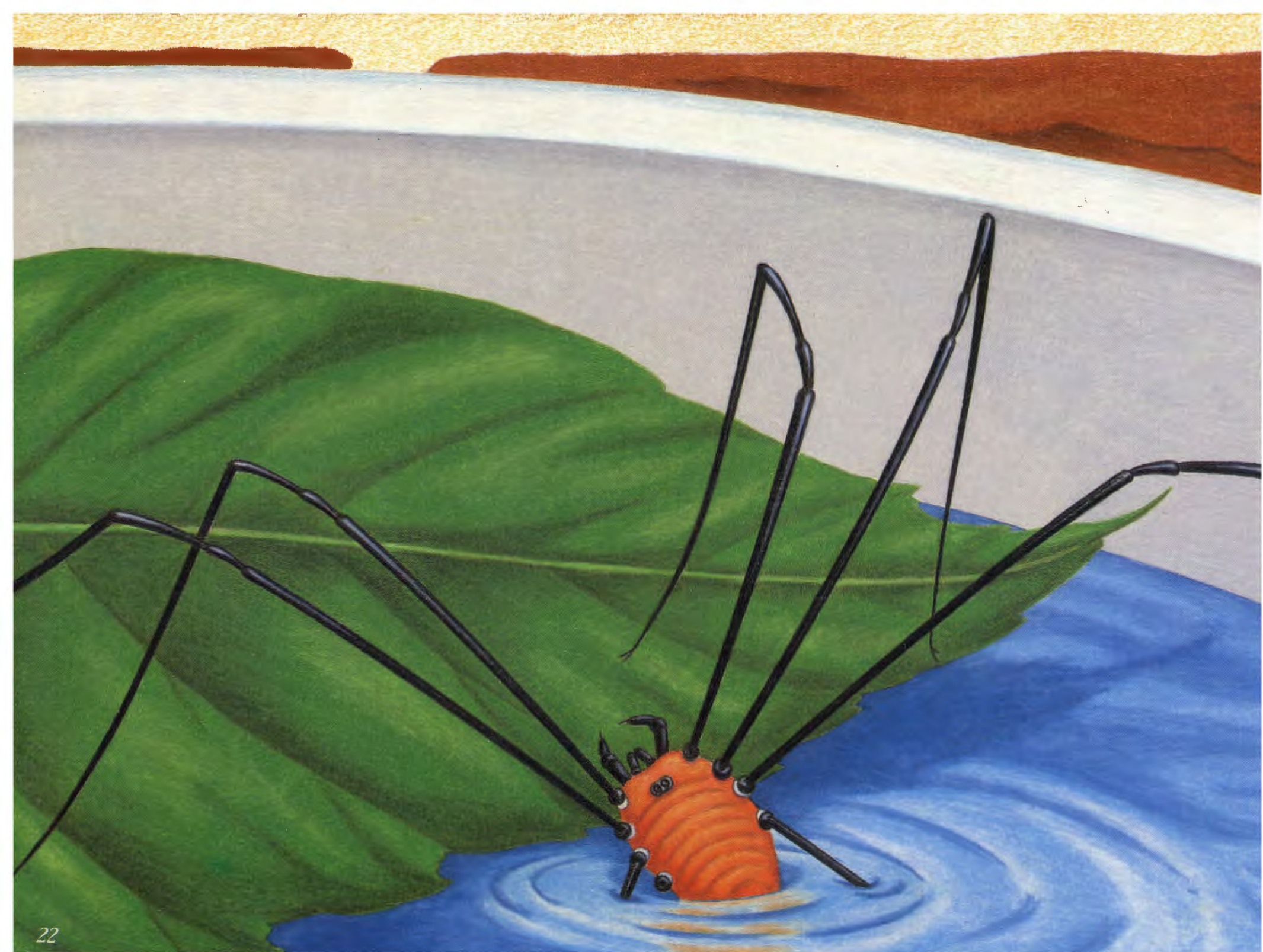


Harvester shakes, breaking the leg from her body, and skims away. The assassin bug fights with the wriggling leg just long enough for Harvester to escape. She quickly hides herself in the tall grass. From now on, she'll have to make do with seven legs instead of eight.

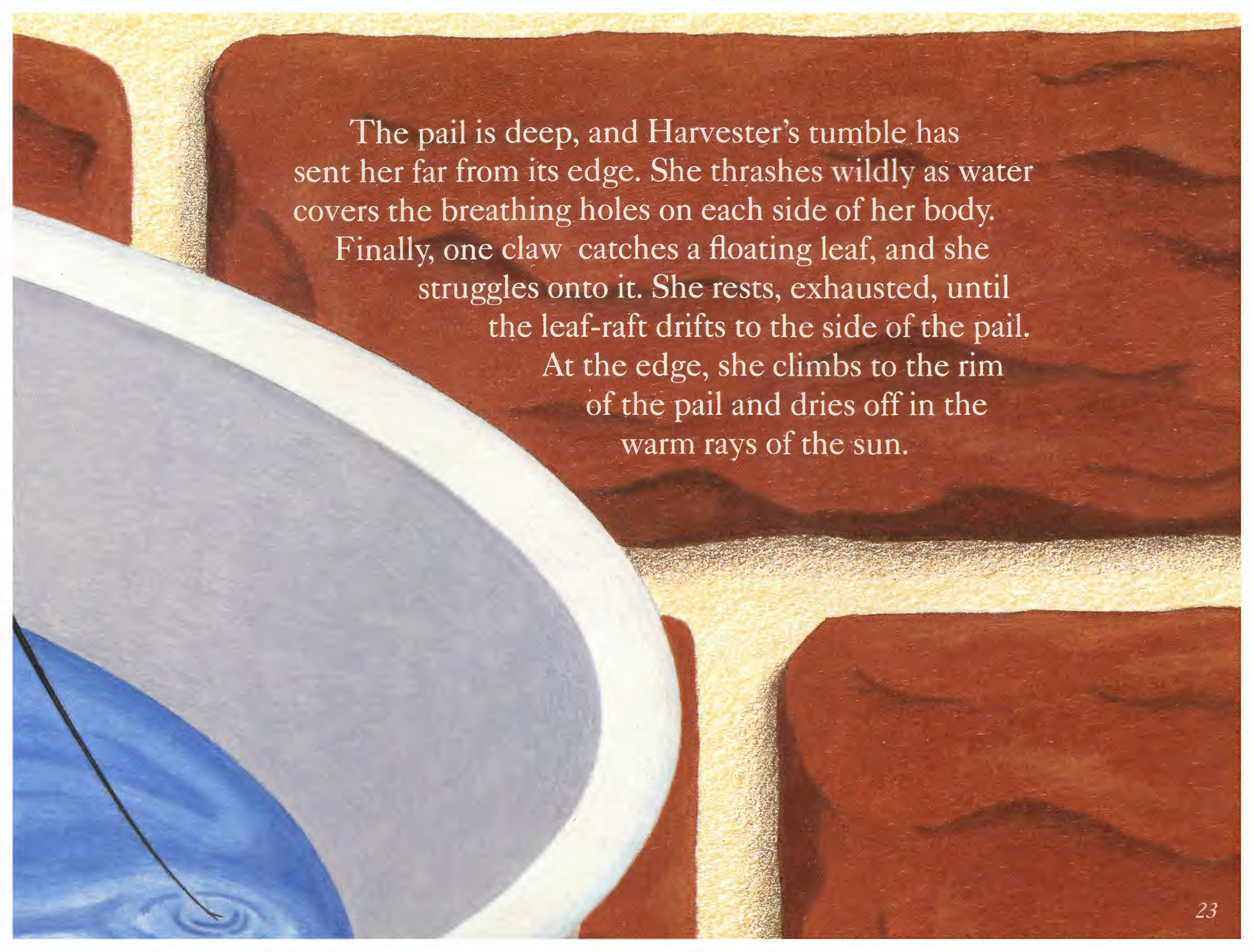












The pail is deep, and Harvester's tumble has sent her far from its edge. She thrashes wildly as water covers the breathing holes on each side of her body.

Finally, one claw catches a floating leaf, and she struggles onto it. She rests, exhausted, until the leaf-raft drifts to the side of the pail.

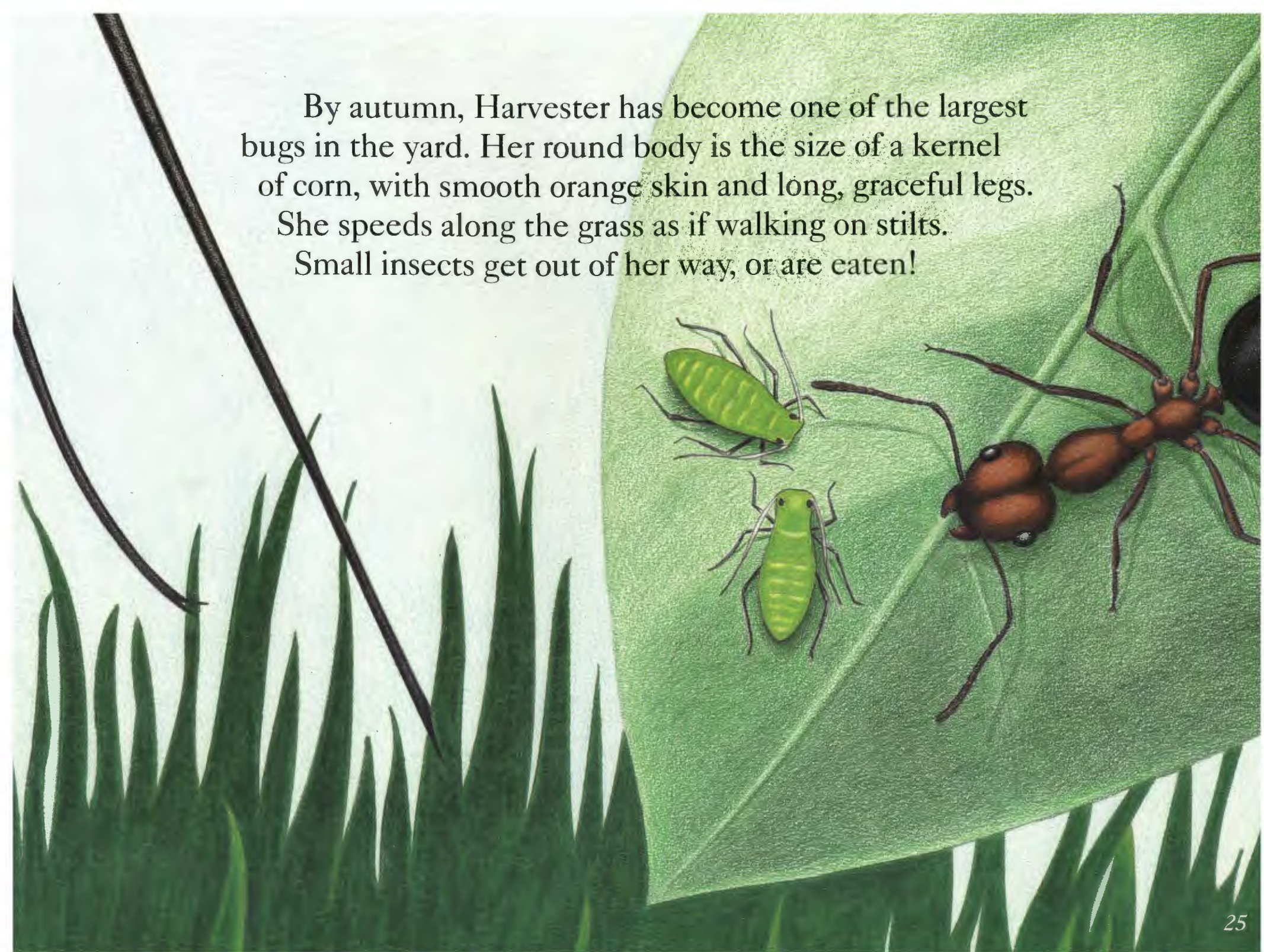
At the edge, she climbs to the rim of the pail and dries off in the warm rays of the sun.








By autumn, Harvester has become one of the largest bugs in the yard. Her round body is the size of a kernel of corn, with smooth orange skin and long, graceful legs. She speeds along the grass as if walking on stilts. Small insects get out of her way, or are eaten!

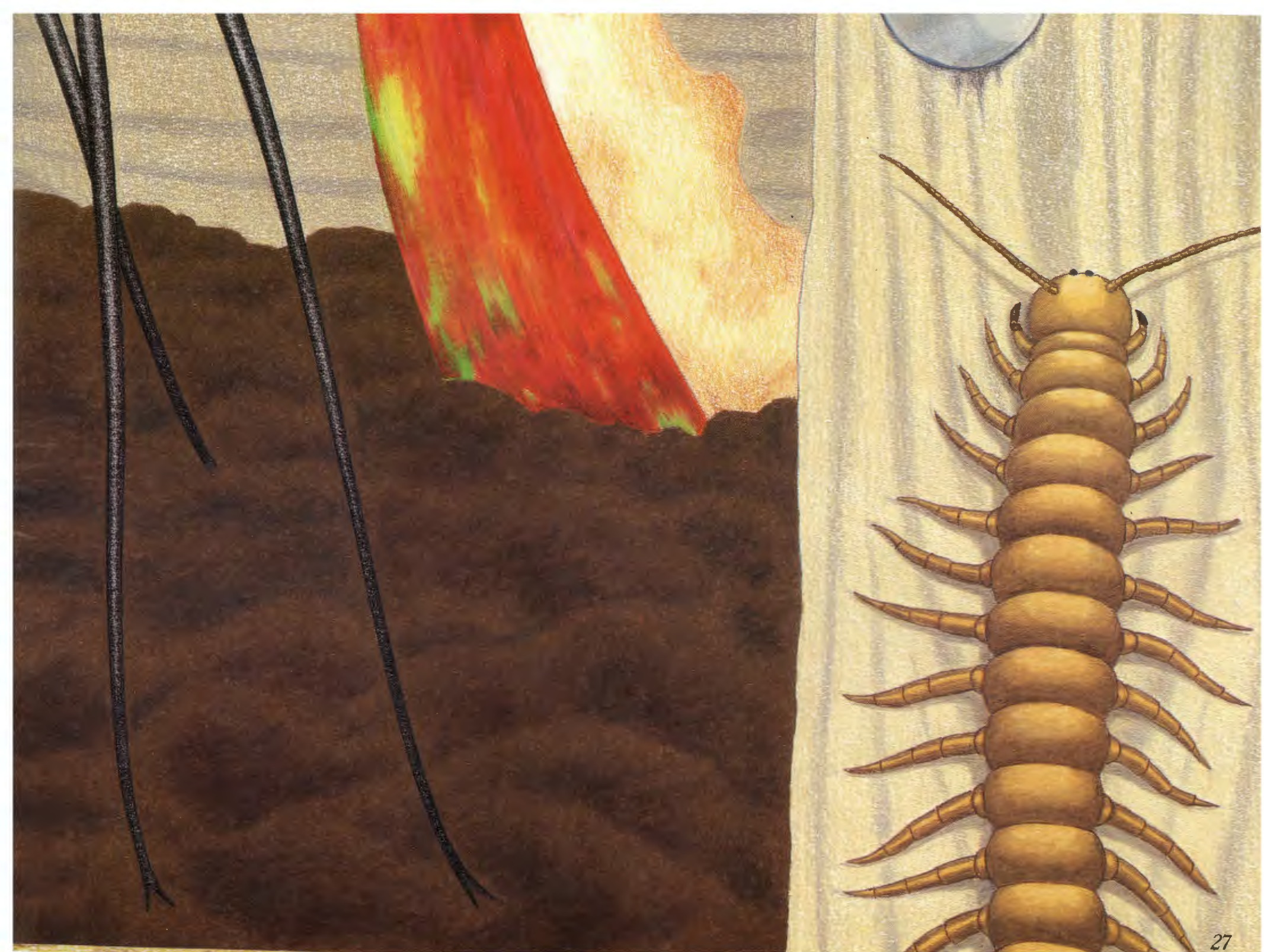






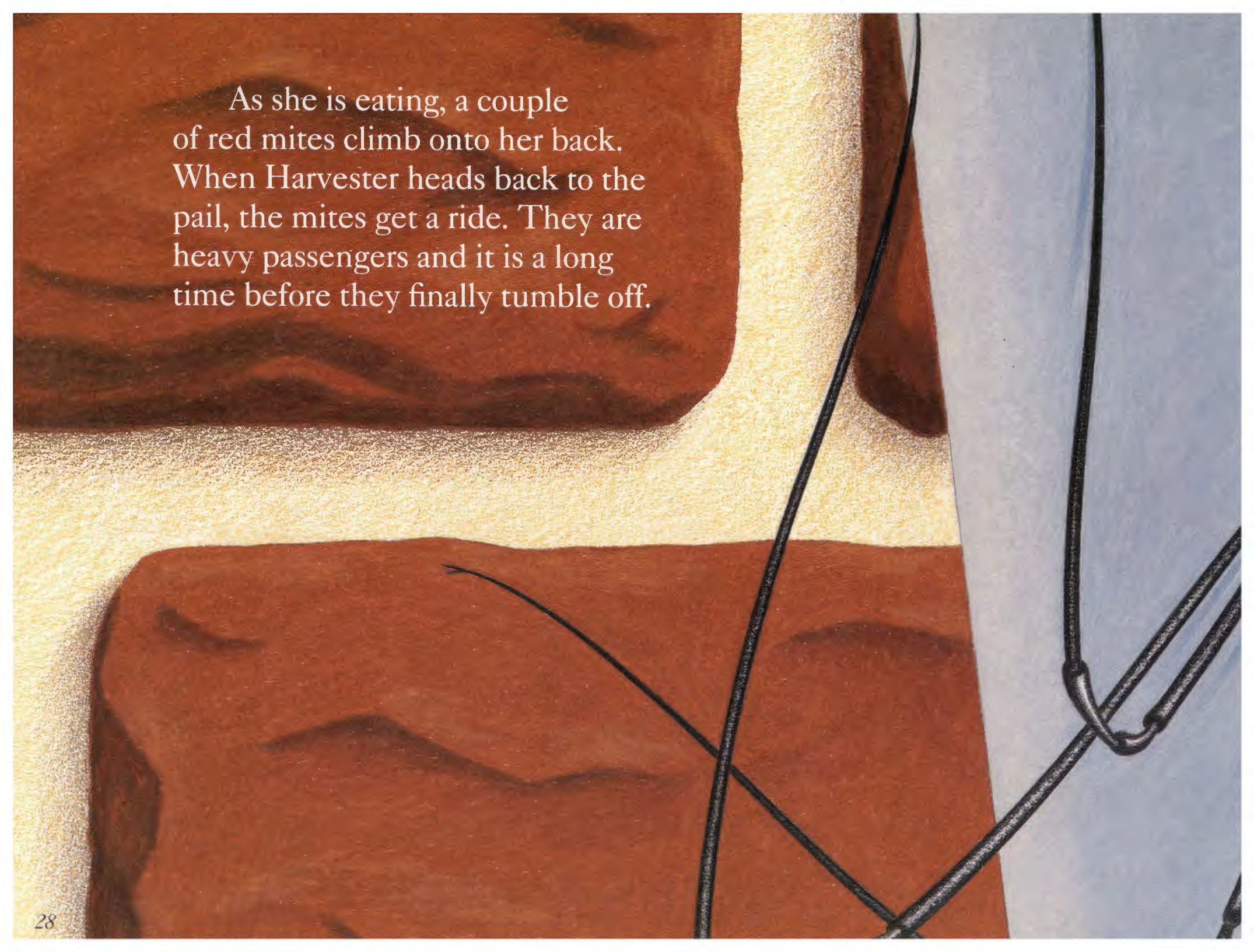
When a centipede surprises Harvester eating a tangy piece of apple at the compost heap, she doesn't run. Now that she is older, she has a new way to protect herself. She turns and squeezes a strong smelling liquid from glands near her eyes. The centipede moves away, disgusted, and Harvester goes back to her meal.







As she is eating, a couple of red mites climb onto her back. When Harvester heads back to the pail, the mites get a ride. They are heavy passengers and it is a long time before they finally tumble off.





In an instant, she turns and eats  
the biggest one. Then she crawls up  
the side of the pail for a long, cool drink.









### *About the Daddy Longlegs*

About 3000 species of harvesters, or “daddy longlegs,” are found all over the world. This story is about *Leiobunum calcar*, a species of harvester that is found in the United States. Unlike spiders, which have two obvious body sections, or insects, which have three body sections, harvesters are unique with their bodies consisting of only one part. Harvesters do not spin webs, and they are not poisonous.

Like spiders, harvesters carry their sense organs on their legs, usually on the longest pair. Because they use their legs for tasting, smelling, and hearing the things in their environment, harvesters must keep them clean. Harvesters’ legs are also important in defense, and they can shake off and part with a leg to distract an enemy. Although they cannot grow a new one like a spider can, harvesters can survive without a few of their limbs.

### *Glossary*

*assassin bug*: a common insect that swiftly grabs and poisons its prey.

*casing*: a thin, cast off skin.

*centipede*: a worm-like animal that can have as many as 181 pairs of legs.

*garden spider*: a common orange-yellow and black spider which builds webs to catch its food.

*mites*: tiny arachnids that live in foods, on plants, or on other animals.

### *Points of Interest in this Book*

*pp. 6-7, 12-13* dandelions.

*pp. 8-9* clover.

*pp. 10-11* plantain.

*pp. 14-15* rhododendron leaves.

*pp. 24-25* ant, aphids.







## SMITHSONIAN'S BACKYARD

*...is a world of wonder for children intrigued by the wildlife outside their bedroom windows. These entertaining stories have an educational message that answers the many questions about the habits and habitat of the animals in our own backyards. The series excites children about reading and learning, through interactive storybooks, audiocassettes and stuffed animal toys developed under the direction of curators for the National Museum of Natural History (a Smithsonian Institution Museum).*

