

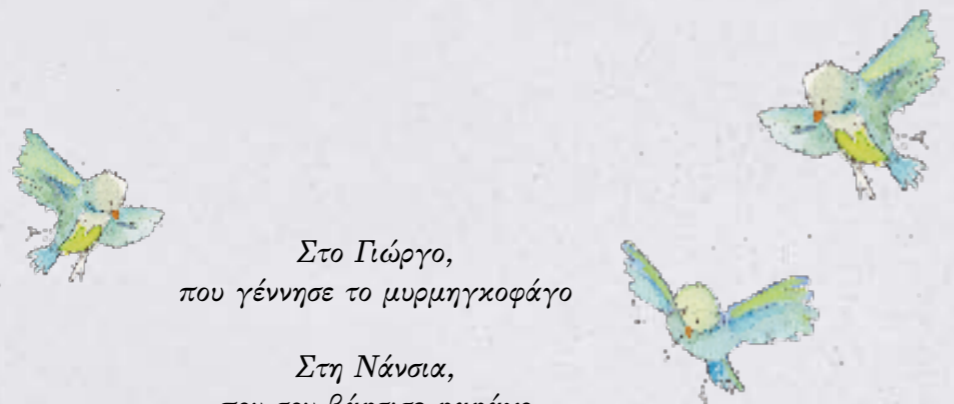
SOPHIA MADOUVALOU

*Mumbly The Toothless Anteater*  
*or*  
*The Elusive Fairy Tale*

ILLUSTRATION  
DESPINA KARAPANOU







Στο Γιώργο,  
που γέννησε το μυρμηγκοφάγο

Στη Νάνσια,  
που τον βάφτισε φαφάγο

Στον Ηλία και στη Μελίνα,  
που ονειρεύονται το άπιαστο παραμύθι

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Σοφία Μαντουβάλου  
Sofia Madouvalou

# Φαφάγος, ο φαφούτης μυρμηγκοφάγος

Mumbly The Toothless Anteater or The Elusive Fairy Tale

ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΗΣΗ

Δέσποινα Καραπάνου

ILLUSTRATION

Despina Karapanou



Εκδόσεις Πατάκη – Λογοτεχνικά βιβλία με πολύχρωμη εικονογράφηση

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Mumbly was born at the foot of the hill,  
out there in the countryside where the birds  
sing of the joy of life and  
the roofs of the houses  
take on the colour of the sky.

He had two huge, laughing eyes  
to see the world's beauty  
even to the furthest horizon,  
two perfectly round ears  
to hear the most distant sounds and  
a long, long nose,  
a real proboscis,  
to suck up ants unchewed.  
Yes, unchewed, for little Mumbly  
didn't even have one tiny tooth.  
That's why everyone called him  
Mumbly, the toothless anteater.

Now he may have been born without teeth  
but he had the longest  
and most playful tongue in the world.  
He would stick two feet of tongue out at his  
mummy when he was in a temper;  
but when he was happy  
he would bend it into gentle waves  
and lots of little hearts  
to show how much he loved her.



‘What’s behind that hill?’  
Mumbly asked his mother  
as soon as he began to walk.

‘Behind that hill  
there’s a green hill and a green tree.’

‘And behind that green hill  
with the green tree, what is there?’  
little Mumbly asked again.

‘There’s another green hill  
and another green tree,’  
his mother answered patiently.

‘And behind that green hill, what is there?’

‘There’s yet another green hill  
with a green tree,’ she replied,  
beginning to grow tired of his questions.

‘And behind the green hill  
with the green tree?’

‘There’s a green house with a sky-blue roof.’

‘And who lives in the green house?’

‘It’s the home of the elusive fairy tale,’  
his mother said, stroking his long nose.

‘And what is the elusive fairy tale?’

‘It’s the one that everybody wants  
but very few can have,’ his mother sighed.



‘When I grow up,  
I’ll go and catch the elusive fairy tale,’  
Mumbly declared, sucking up  
all his ant cream in one slurp so he would grow quickly.

‘To reach the elusive fairy tale  
you must first learn to swallow  
fat ants whole,’ his mother told him,  
and from that day on she stopped making  
ant soups and ant creams for him.

‘Now that you have grown,’ she told him,  
‘it’s time for you to start finding your own food.’  
And so she left him  
next to a busy ant road and walked off.

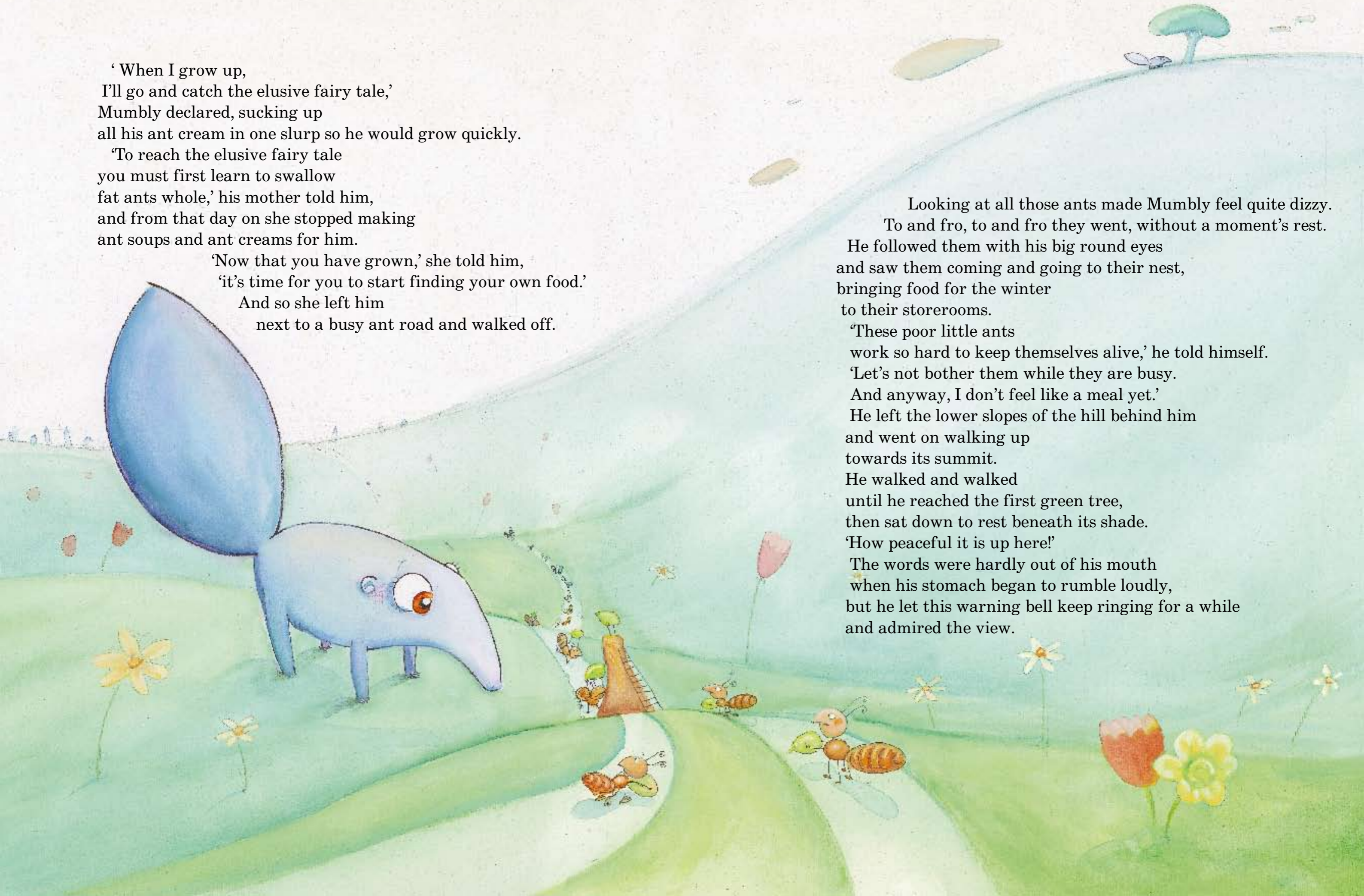
Looking at all those ants made Mumbly feel quite dizzy.  
To and fro, to and fro they went, without a moment’s rest.  
He followed them with his big round eyes  
and saw them coming and going to their nest,  
bringing food for the winter  
to their storerooms.

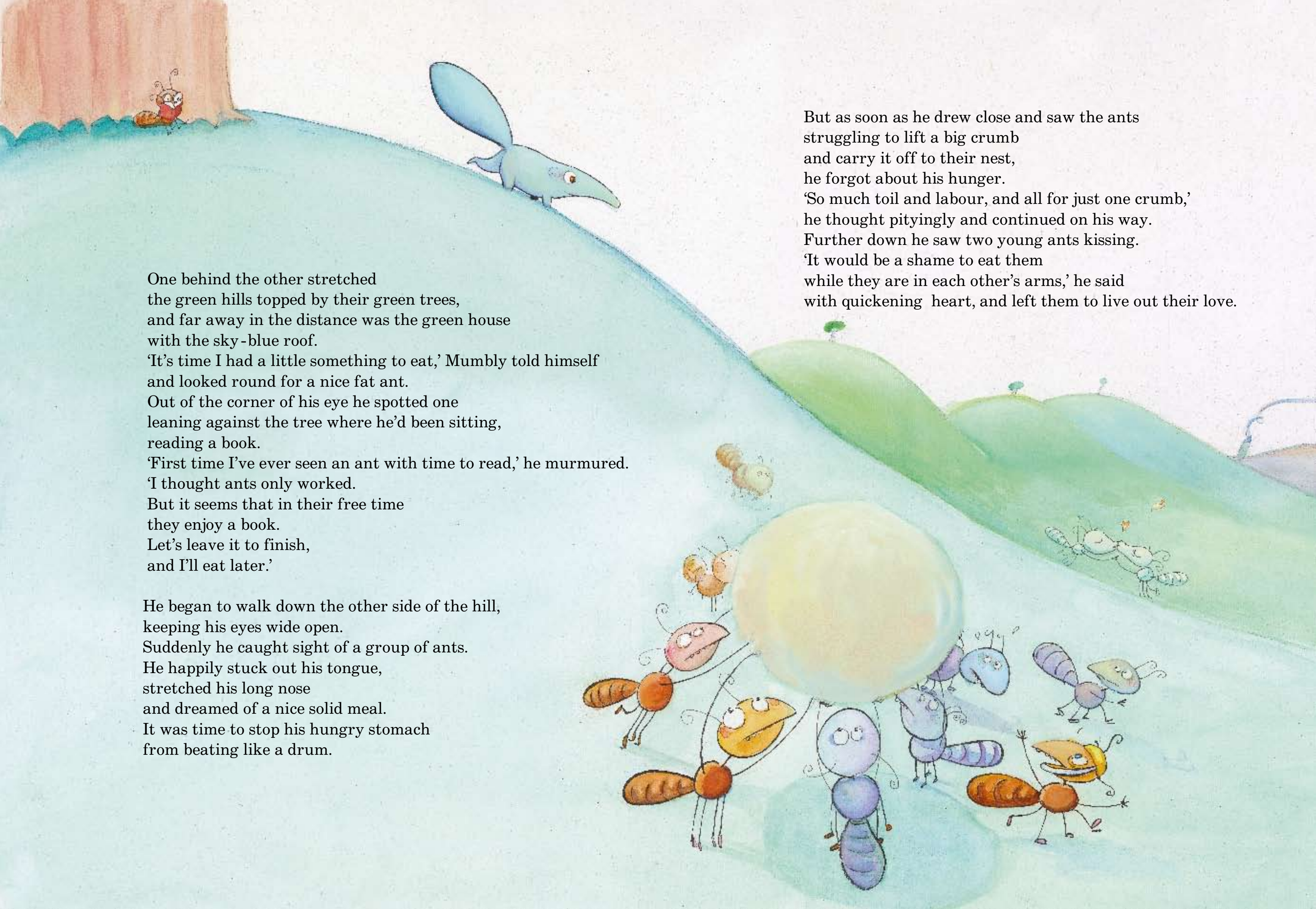
‘These poor little ants  
work so hard to keep themselves alive,’ he told himself.

‘Let’s not bother them while they are busy.  
And anyway, I don’t feel like a meal yet.’  
He left the lower slopes of the hill behind him  
and went on walking up  
towards its summit.

He walked and walked  
until he reached the first green tree,  
then sat down to rest beneath its shade.

‘How peaceful it is up here!’  
The words were hardly out of his mouth  
when his stomach began to rumble loudly,  
but he let this warning bell keep ringing for a while  
and admired the view.





One behind the other stretched  
the green hills topped by their green trees,  
and far away in the distance was the green house  
with the sky-blue roof.  
'It's time I had a little something to eat,' Mumbly told himself  
and looked round for a nice fat ant.  
Out of the corner of his eye he spotted one  
leaning against the tree where he'd been sitting,  
reading a book.  
'First time I've ever seen an ant with time to read,' he murmured.  
'I thought ants only worked.  
But it seems that in their free time  
they enjoy a book.  
Let's leave it to finish,  
and I'll eat later.'

He began to walk down the other side of the hill,  
keeping his eyes wide open.  
Suddenly he caught sight of a group of ants.  
He happily stuck out his tongue,  
stretched his long nose  
and dreamed of a nice solid meal.  
It was time to stop his hungry stomach  
from beating like a drum.

But as soon as he drew close and saw the ants  
struggling to lift a big crumb  
and carry it off to their nest,  
he forgot about his hunger.  
'So much toil and labour, and all for just one crumb,'  
he thought pityingly and continued on his way.  
Further down he saw two young ants kissing.  
'It would be a shame to eat them  
while they are in each other's arms,' he said  
with quickening heart, and left them to live out their love.

On and on he went, down and then up again  
until he reached another green tree.  
But before he had time to sit and take a rest,  
his round ears picked up the sound of a violent quarrel.  
He let them lead him on  
and found himself facing an almighty squabble.  
A huge ant was arguing furiously with a cricket.  
'Please don't eat me,' it said.  
'Eat the cricket instead! He's useless.  
He just sings zee, zee, zee all day.'  
'What does "zee,zee, zee" mean?' Mumbly asked,  
and learned it meant "I love you".  
'So joy and toil are squabbling,'  
smiled the toothless anteater and left them  
to go on with their argument.

'Besides, I don't want to put an ant  
with a nasty cross character into my mouth.'  
he thought, remembering something he had once heard  
his mother say: "You are what you eat".  
By now he had almost reached the foot of the next hill,  
and was so hungry he could hardly see in front of him.  
Suddenly he stumbled on an ant  
that had its leg in plaster.  
'The poor thing, how can I eat it?  
Let it get well first,' he told himself.  
A fly who had started buzzing round his head  
began to tease him:  
'Allergic to plaster are you, then?'  
it asked, bursting its sides with laughter.





Its guffaws were drowned by loud unhappy cries.  
Nearby, three ants were sobbing their hearts out.  
'Why are you crying?' Mumbly asked them.  
'Because we have been orphaned. We only just escaped ourselves.  
The lord of the anteater's noble daughter  
is celebrating her birthday and our anthill has been taken off  
to make an ant-cake for her party,' said the young ants,  
bursting into tears once more.  
'I'm so sorry,' murmured Mumbly.  
Just then a bee buzzed by.  
Following it with his gaze,  
the toothless anteater saw it hover over a flower  
and suck up its meal.  
'Why should I eat ants?' it suddenly occurred to him.  
'I can suck pollen from the flowers, just like her.  
What else was this long nose of mine made for?'  
Well, that's what he said, and that's exactly what he did.  
He plunged his great long snout  
into a bush of wild thyme  
and silently sucked up all the pollen  
from its little purple flowers,  
exactly as his mother had taught him to eat ants.

This was the greatest moment  
in the history of anteaters.  
Mumbly the toothless anteater  
was the first vegetarian of his species.  
Indifferent to this epoch-making event  
in anteater history, Mumbly continued on towards  
the green house with the sky-blue roof  
and countless windows.  
He ascended and descended two more green hills,  
came upon another two green trees,  
satisfied his hunger  
with the pollen from two yellow flowers  
and, feeling tired by now,  
fell asleep at the foot of the next hill.




When he woke, he saw a lovely meadow lying before him,  
with a warm and beaming sun  
painting the flowers with its colours.  
Feeling hungry,  
Mumbly began to run from flower.  
'I've never had such a tasty breakfast before,' he smiled,  
curling his long tongue into the shape of a daisy.

'He loves me, he loves me not,' he heard from behind him,  
accompanied by peals of laughter. He turned and saw a  
lovely young anteater staring at him and holding her sides  
with laughter.  
He looked at her and dreamed what only boys dream.  
She looked at him and dreamed what only girls dream.

Faced by such loveliness,  
Mumbly was completely tongue-tied.  
'Who are you?' he stammered once he had got his voice back.

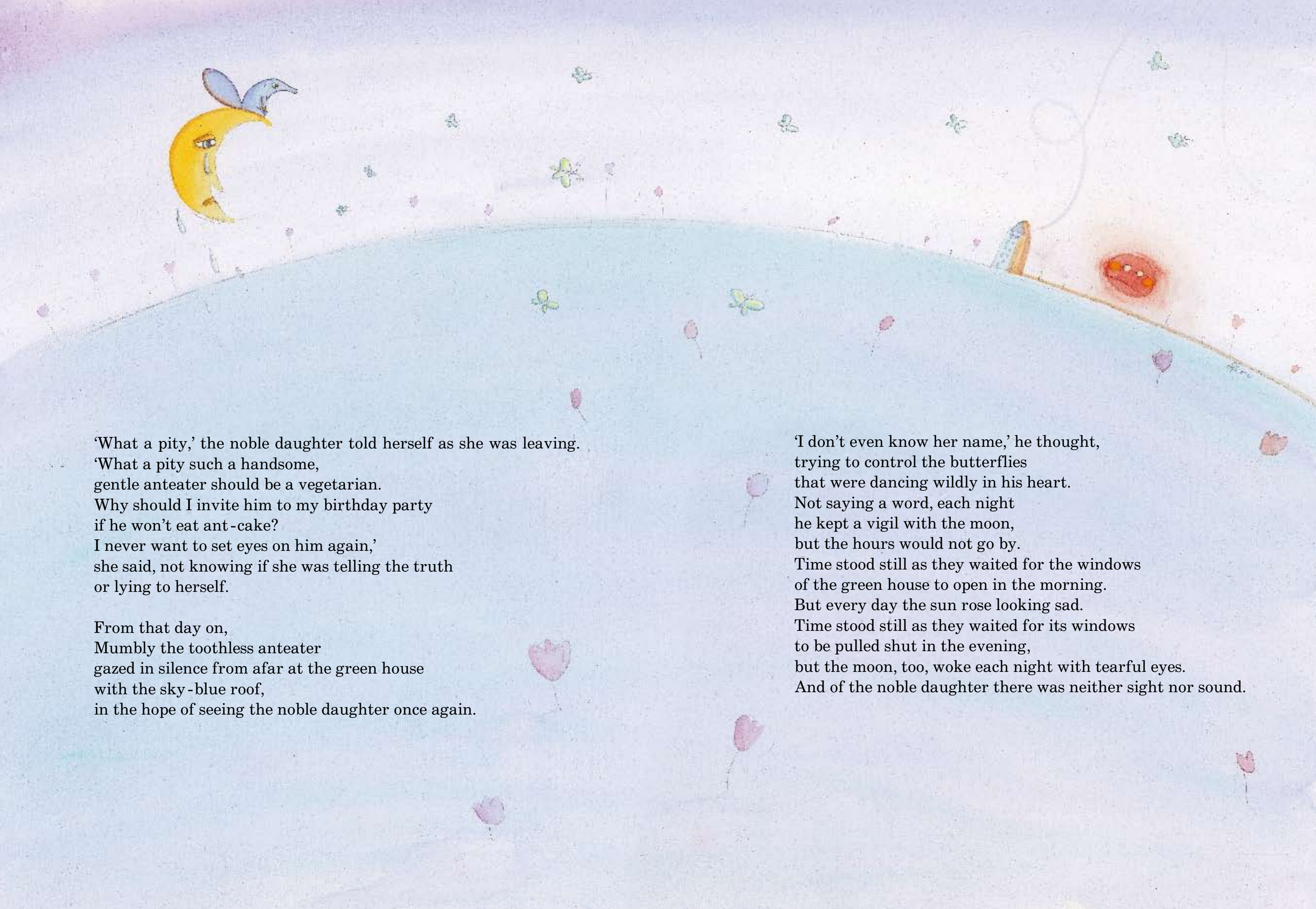
'I am the noble daughter of the lord of anteaters,'  
she replied, laughing once again.  
'I am sure I must be standing before  
the elusive fairy tale,' he told himself,  
and immediately he bound this thought into his heart  
for fear it should escape him.  
'And who are you?'  
'I am the toothless anteater  
from beyond the furthest hill.'  
'Well, it's the first time I've seen a vegetarian anteater,'  
said the noble daughter, starting to laugh once more.  
'You see, er, you see I, er, only eat ants that are invisible,'  
Mumbly blurted out.  
And his nose turned as red as a beetroot  
at the lie he had just told.





'I wasn't born yesterday,'  
retorted the noble daughter, pretending to be angry.  
'I know very well  
there's no such thing as invisible ants.  
There's fresh ants, deep frozen ants,  
sugared ants and pickled ants.  
Down in our cellar we've got thousands of varieties of ant,  
and if there were any such thing as invisible ants,  
then I would know about it.  
So leave off lying and tell me something true.'  
'Shall I tell you a great big truth?'  
said Mumbly, seizing the opportunity.  
'From the moment I first saw you,  
my heart's been beating wildly.  
Would you like to keep me company,  
be loved by me and love me in return?'

'What a cheek you've got,' the noble daughter laughed. 'What, I, the daughter of the lord of the anteaters, keep company with a vegetarian? Never!' And she turned her back on him. So the noble daughter left, leaving a bright glow on the path she walked along. Mumbly followed her tenderly in his thoughts until she disappeared inside the green house.



‘What a pity,’ the noble daughter told herself as she was leaving.  
‘What a pity such a handsome,  
gentle anteater should be a vegetarian.  
Why should I invite him to my birthday party  
if he won’t eat ant-cake?  
I never want to set eyes on him again,’  
she said, not knowing if she was telling the truth  
or lying to herself.


From that day on,  
Mumbly the toothless anteater  
gazed in silence from afar at the green house  
with the sky-blue roof,  
in the hope of seeing the noble daughter once again.

‘I don’t even know her name,’ he thought,  
trying to control the butterflies  
that were dancing wildly in his heart.  
Not saying a word, each night  
he kept a vigil with the moon,  
but the hours would not go by.  
Time stood still as they waited for the windows  
of the green house to open in the morning.  
But every day the sun rose looking sad.  
Time stood still as they waited for its windows  
to be pulled shut in the evening,  
but the moon, too, woke each night with tearful eyes.  
And of the noble daughter there was neither sight nor sound.

For seven whole days Mumbly  
waited outside the house with the elusive fairy tale,  
yet no news of his beloved reached him  
and neither did he see her shadow in a window  
or hear her voice in the garden.  
And then, when he was on the point of dissolving into tears,  
he overheard two little girl anteaters  
holding a whispered conversation.  
‘Tomorrow is the noble daughter’s birthday,’ one of them said,  
‘but I’m afraid there isn’t going to be a party.  
Seven whole days now Philenia  
has been shut away in her room  
looking unhappy and distracted.  
She won’t say a word to anyone.  
You’d think the cat had got her tongue.’  
‘And the worst of all is that  
she won’t even eat a single ant,’  
the other added.  
Mumbly’s little round ears  
could not have heard better news.  
‘Ah, so she’s been thinking of me, too,’ he thought,  
filled with new hope.  
‘Philenia! Ah, what a lovely name!’  
And his little round ears grew rounder  
still to capture the sound and hold it.  
‘Philenia!’ he shouted to the skies.  
‘Philenia...’ he whispered to the flowers,

and jumping for joy  
he shaped the end of his long tongue into a little star.  
Next he told himself,  
You must do something. Pluck up your courage  
and happiness is yours.’  
Love transformed him.  
He made a flute of his long nose  
and with enamoured fingers  
played all the joy  
and sorrow in his heart.  
At first he played slow  
and softly,  
then fast  
and loud.





Up on the ceiling,  
under the bed,  
over the armchair  
and behind the curtains  
ran his melody,  
and the singing wind carried it to the ears  
of the noble daughter and caressed them.

'How could there be a lovelier birthday song?'  
sighed Philenia, letting a tear of joy run down her cheek.  
She opened her heart,  
She opened the door of her room,  
She opened the door of the house,  
She opened the garden gate,  
She opened wide her arms  
And ran to meet him.

'I love you, too, and that's why I'll never eat ants again,'  
she answered, offering him a bunch of flowers.  
They looked each other in the eyes  
and burst out laughing.  
And twining their long tongues into a heart  
they vowed eternal love.

As soon as Mumbly saw Philenia coming,  
he ran towards her.  
'I love you,' he cried, 'and that's why I'll start eating ants again.'  
And he gave her an ants' nest tied with a scarlet ribbon.







What is the elusive fairy tail  
that everybody wants but very little have ?

Mumbly the anteater in his journey  
to the land of the elusive fairy tale  
realizes that every ant he meets  
is a creature deserving his respect,  
with as much right to life as he.



Thus he decides to follow  
the example of the bees  
and learns to live on nectar  
sucked from flowers.

What happens when he falls in love  
with an anteater princess?



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