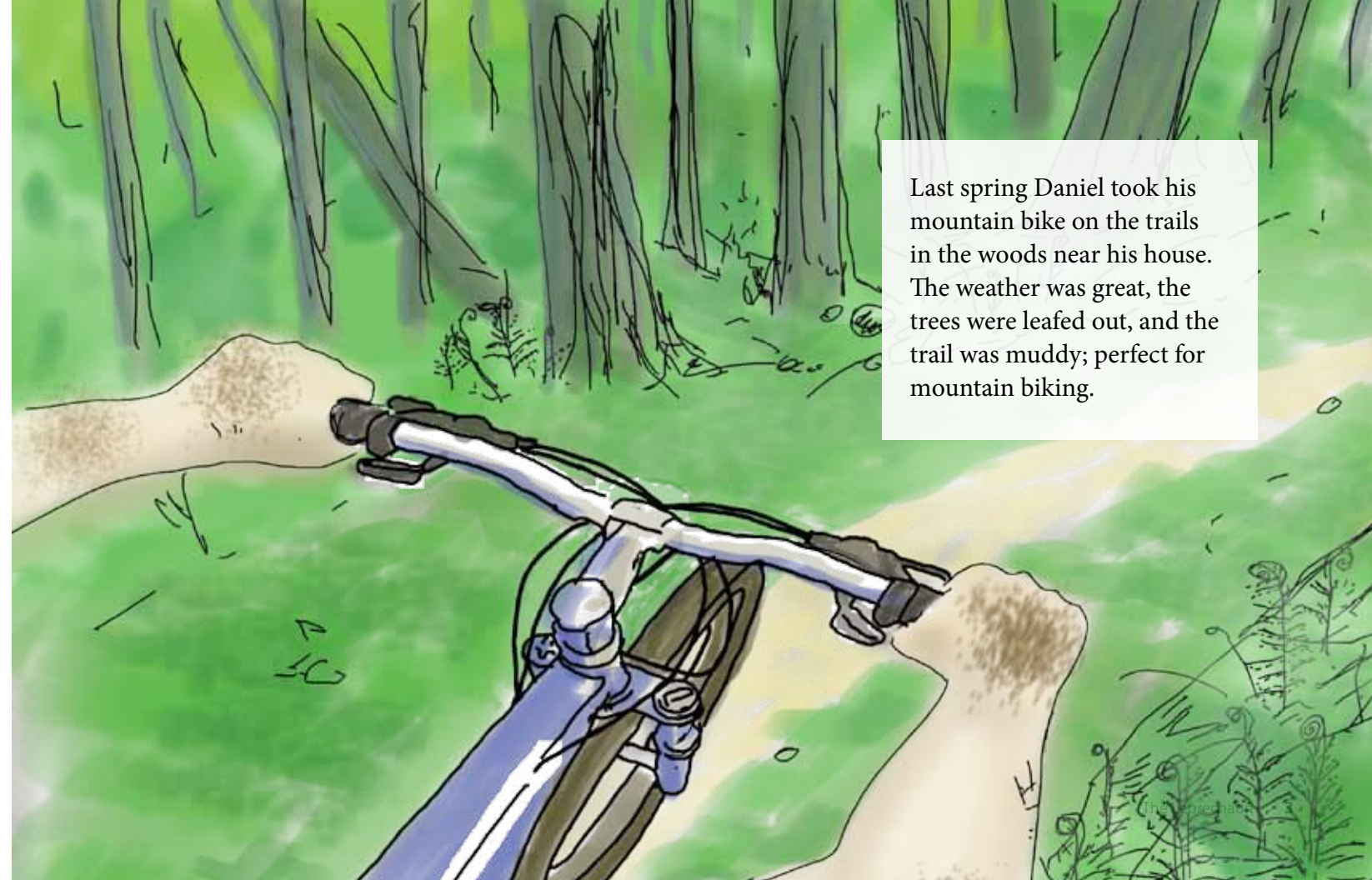


The Leprechaun



Last spring Daniel took his mountain bike on the trails in the woods near his house. The weather was great, the trees were leafed out, and the trail was muddy; perfect for mountain biking.

Daniel knew the trails well, and halfway through the ride, stopped to take a break. With a water bottle and candy bar in hand, he plopped down against a low stone wall. As he sat relaxing, he heard the songs of the birds, the gurgle of a spring stream, and then - behind him - a very out-of-place “tap, tap, tap”.

He listened intently.

Again, there was another “tap, tap, tap”.



Very slowly and very quietly Daniel pivoted around so that he could just peer over the of side of the wall. He couldn't believe what he saw. There was a tiny little man, about the size of a squirrel, working away. The little man was making a pair of shoes.

It was a leprechaun.



Daniel had heard about the legend of the leprechauns, but he never thought he would actually see one. Daniel's aunt had told him that if you can capture a leprechaun you must *never* take your eyes off him or her, for if you do, they will disappear.



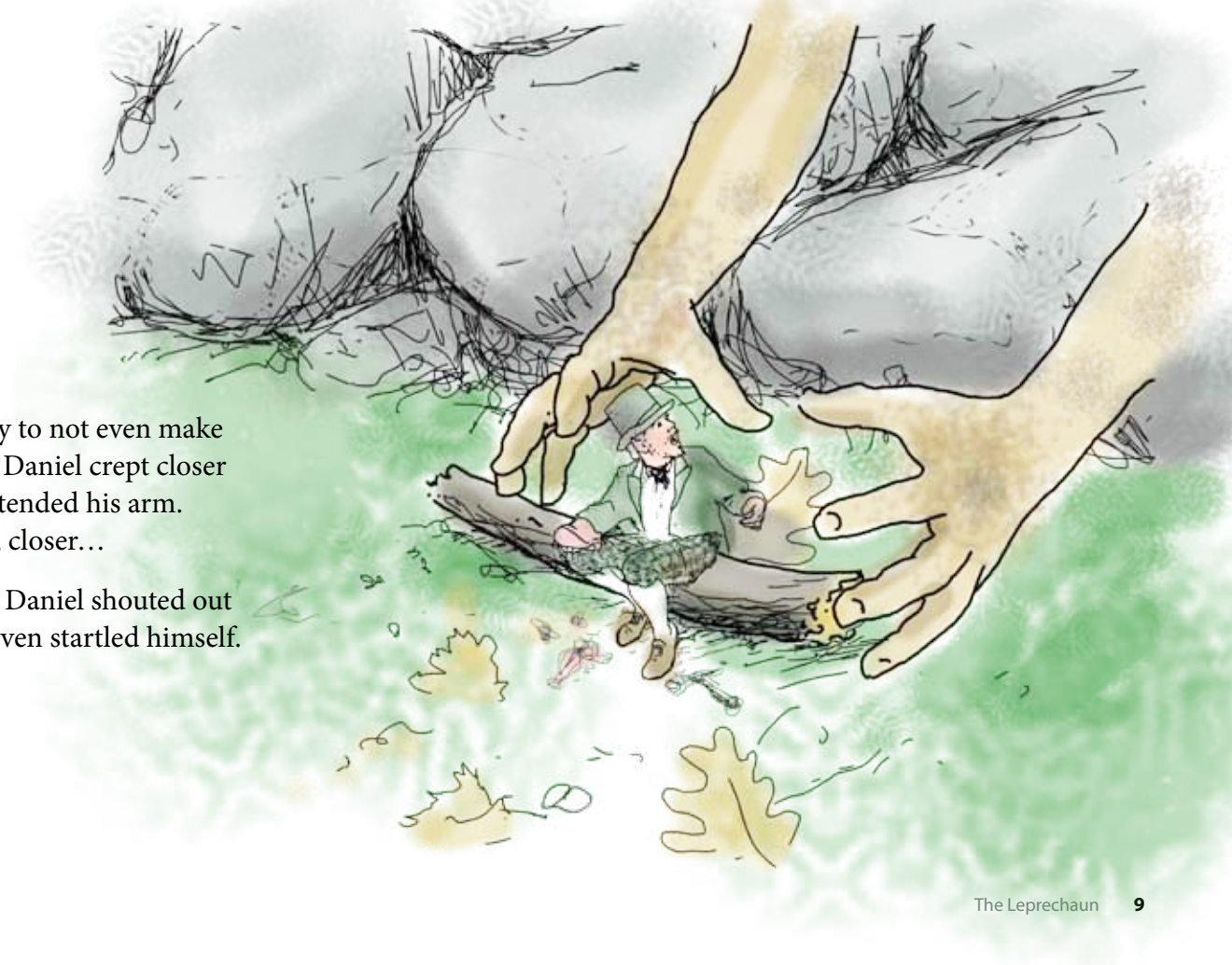
She also told Daniel that leprechauns will always tell the truth and if directly questioned, will tell you the exact location where they keep their hidden stash of gold.

However, leprechauns are extraordinarily clever and although they will always tell the truth, they will trick you. Dealing with a leprechaun is always a battle of wits.



Moving slowly to not even make a leaf crinkle, Daniel crept closer and slowly extended his arm. Closer, closer, closer...

"GOT YOU!" Daniel shouted out so loudly he even startled himself.



The leprechaun squirmed in Daniel's grip, and his high-pitched voiced begged Daniel to "go easy". Daniel was careful not to take his eyes off the leprechaun, not even to blink.

"What are you doing in these woods?" Daniel demanded excitedly.

"I was resoling a pair of shoes." said the leprechaun squirming in Daniel's tight grip..



This was true.

Leprechauns are known to make shoes for fairies. Their shoes are of excellent quality and highly prized. Leprechauns also make a very sensible line of work boots for trolls and goblins. The "tap, tap, tap" Daniel heard was the sound of the leprechaun nailing a sole onto a shoe.

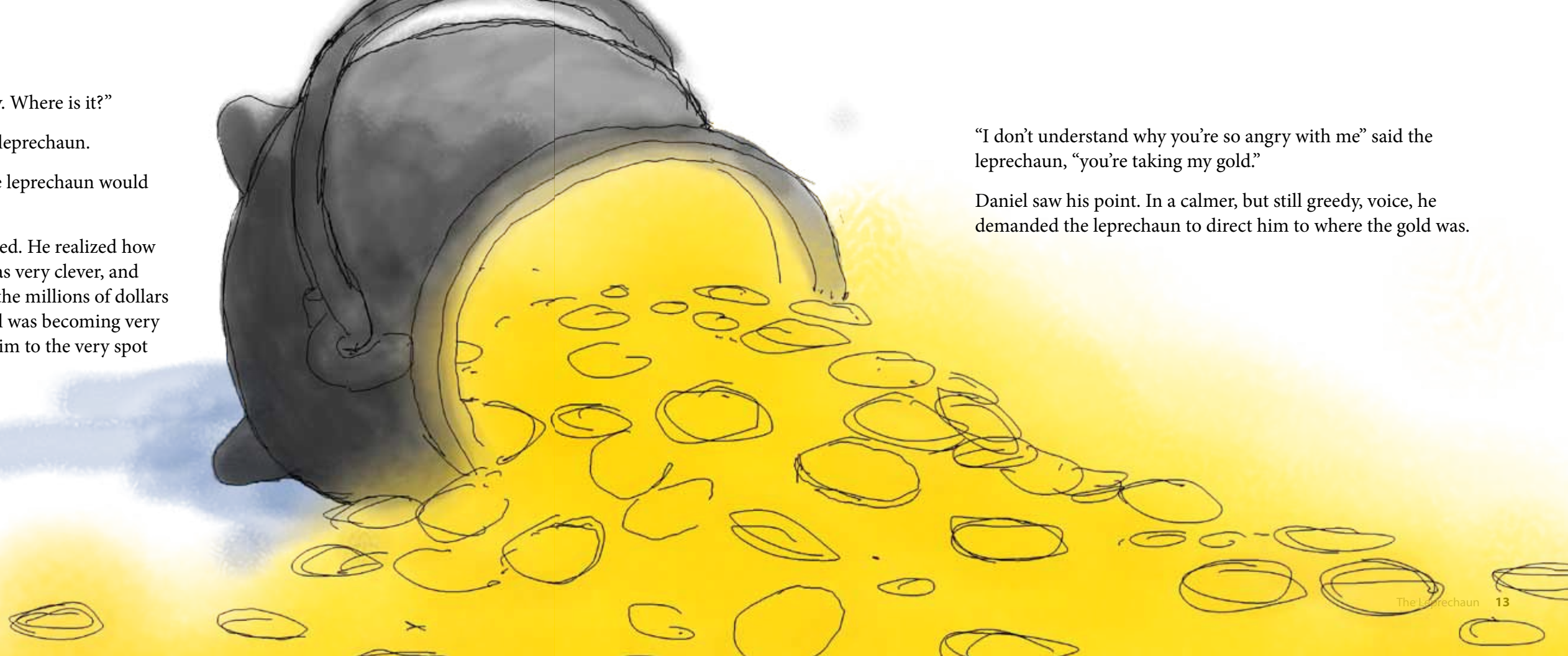


“The legends say you have a pot of gold nearby. Where is it?”

“Why it’s over there; to your right....” said the leprechaun.

Daniel almost glanced to his right. Had he, the leprechaun would have disappeared.

“I’m not taking my eyes off you!” Daniel shouted. He realized how careful he would have to be; the leprechaun was very clever, and Daniel was easily distracted as he dreamed of the millions of dollars that were tantalizingly within his reach. Daniel was becoming very angry and insisted that the leprechaun point him to the very spot where the gold was hidden.



“I don’t understand why you’re so angry with me” said the leprechaun, “you’re taking my gold.”

Daniel saw his point. In a calmer, but still greedy, voice, he demanded the leprechaun to direct him to where the gold was.



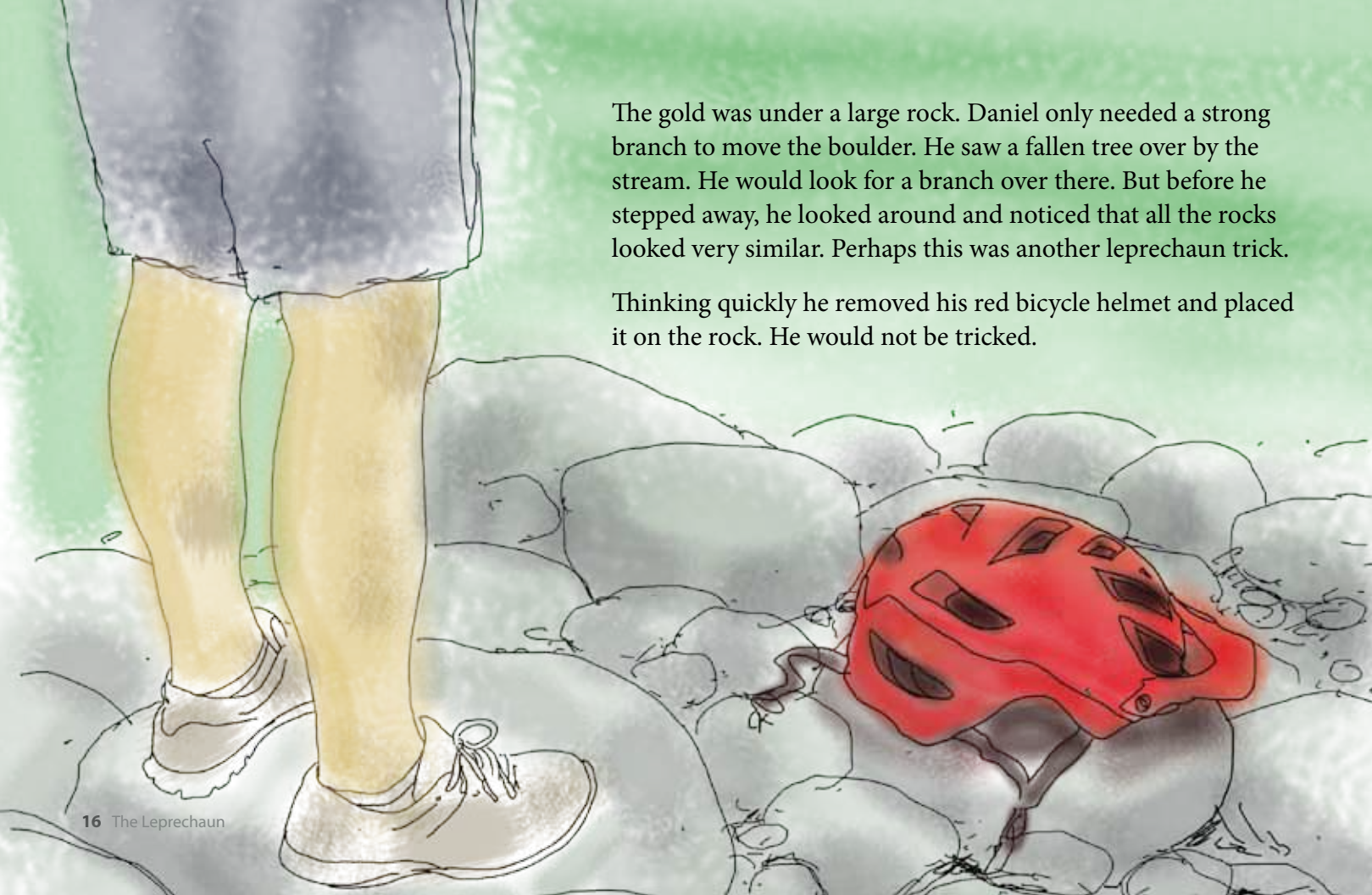
“Walk to your right - towards the boulder field” directed the leprechaun. Daniel walked carefully. Trying to navigate the wet slippery boulders without taking his eyes off the leprechaun was tricky. He knew one slip would allow the leprechaun to escape.

In the middle of a the rocky glen, amongst the tumble of rocks and boulders, the leprechaun pointed straight down.

“Here it is.” the leprechaun said in a defeated tone.

“Wow. I did it!” exclaimed Daniel as he looked down at the rock. He looked up and the leprechaun was gone.

“That’s OK, that’s OK.” Daniel explained to himself. He didn’t need the leprechaun now anyways.



The gold was under a large rock. Daniel only needed a strong branch to move the boulder. He saw a fallen tree over by the stream. He would look for a branch over there. But before he stepped away, he looked around and noticed that all the rocks looked very similar. Perhaps this was another leprechaun trick.

Thinking quickly he removed his red bicycle helmet and placed it on the rock. He would not be tricked.



He scrambled over to the fallen tree and after a moment or two, found a strong branch that would help pry away the rock.

He turned back towards the boulder field only to see that there was now a red helmet on every rock in the woods.

It would take the rest of the afternoon to try to find the specific rock; plenty of time for the leprechaun to spirit away his gold to another hiding spot.



Dejected and humbled, Daniel walked back to his mountain bike.
There, on the handlebars, was his helmet, carefully placed.

