

TONI AND THE

Dandelions

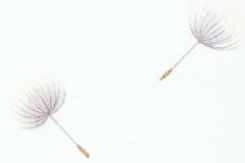
WRITTEN BY VIVIAN HITCHMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE PILCHER



To LAUREN, GREG & TOM

FOR ALWAYS BELIEVING



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TONI AND THE
Dandelions

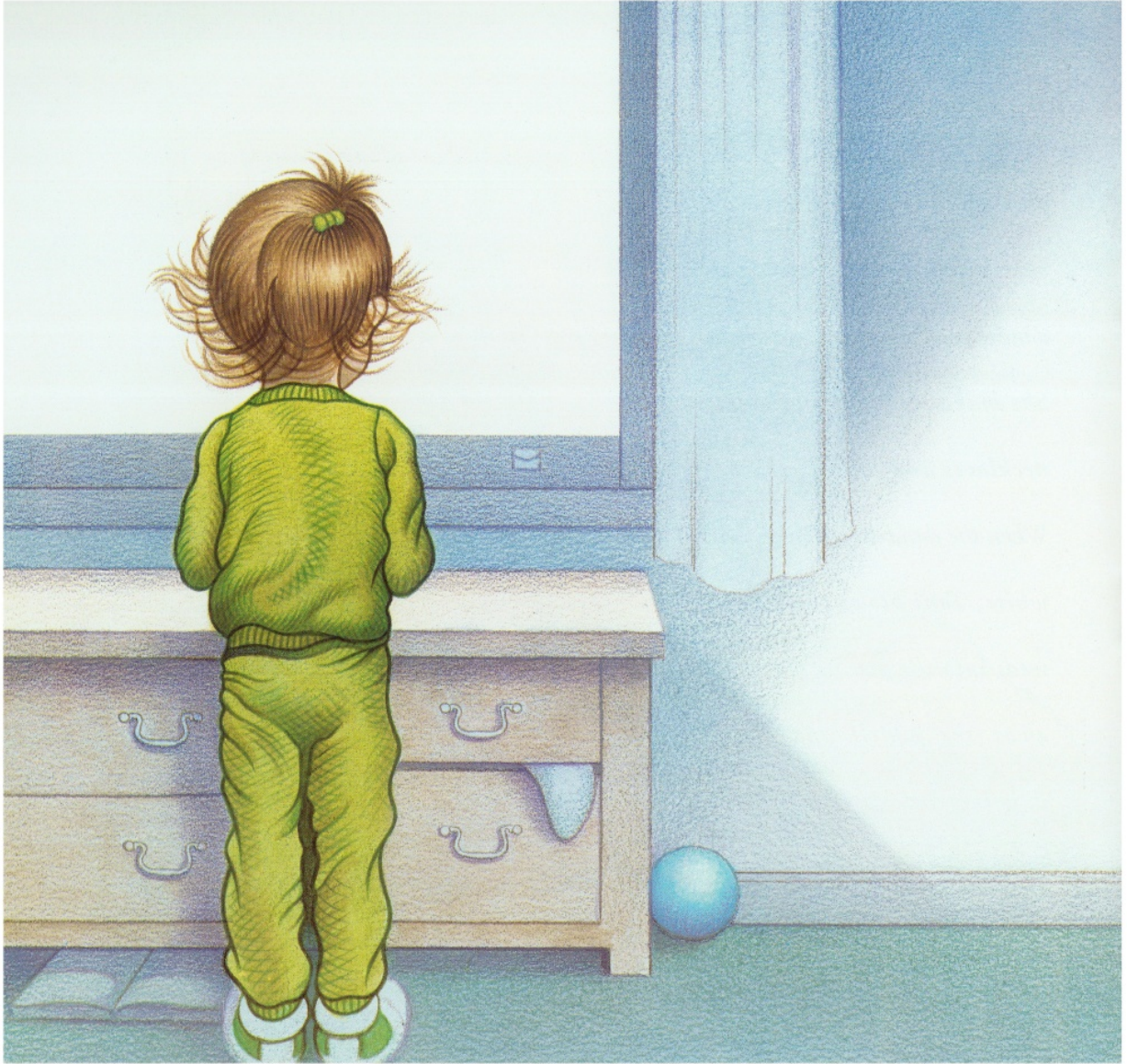
*"A weed is just a plant whose
virtues have not yet been discovered."
Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

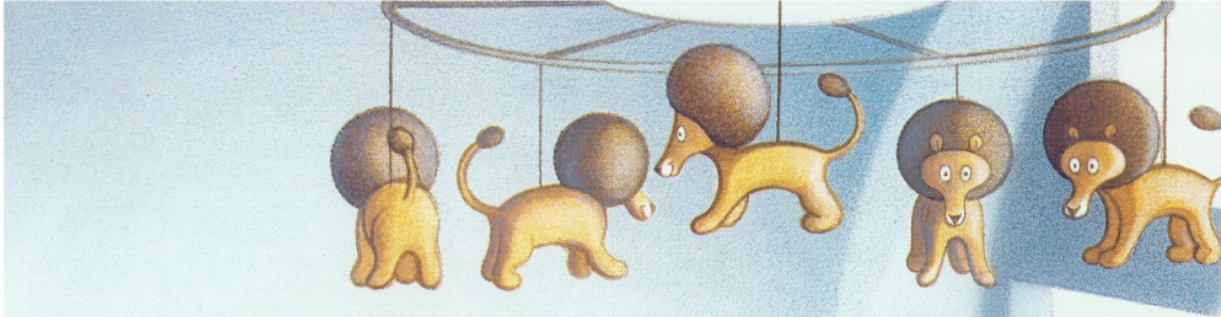




Toni loves dandelions. Every spring, Toni and her pet cat, Roop, play with the dandelions in the orchard. Toni serves dandelion soup, dandelion salad and dandelion tea. She makes dandelion bracelets, necklaces and flowery crowns. When the dandelion flowers turn white, Toni blows their fluffy seeds into the air. As they float away she whirls and twirls, dancing the dandelion-twirl.







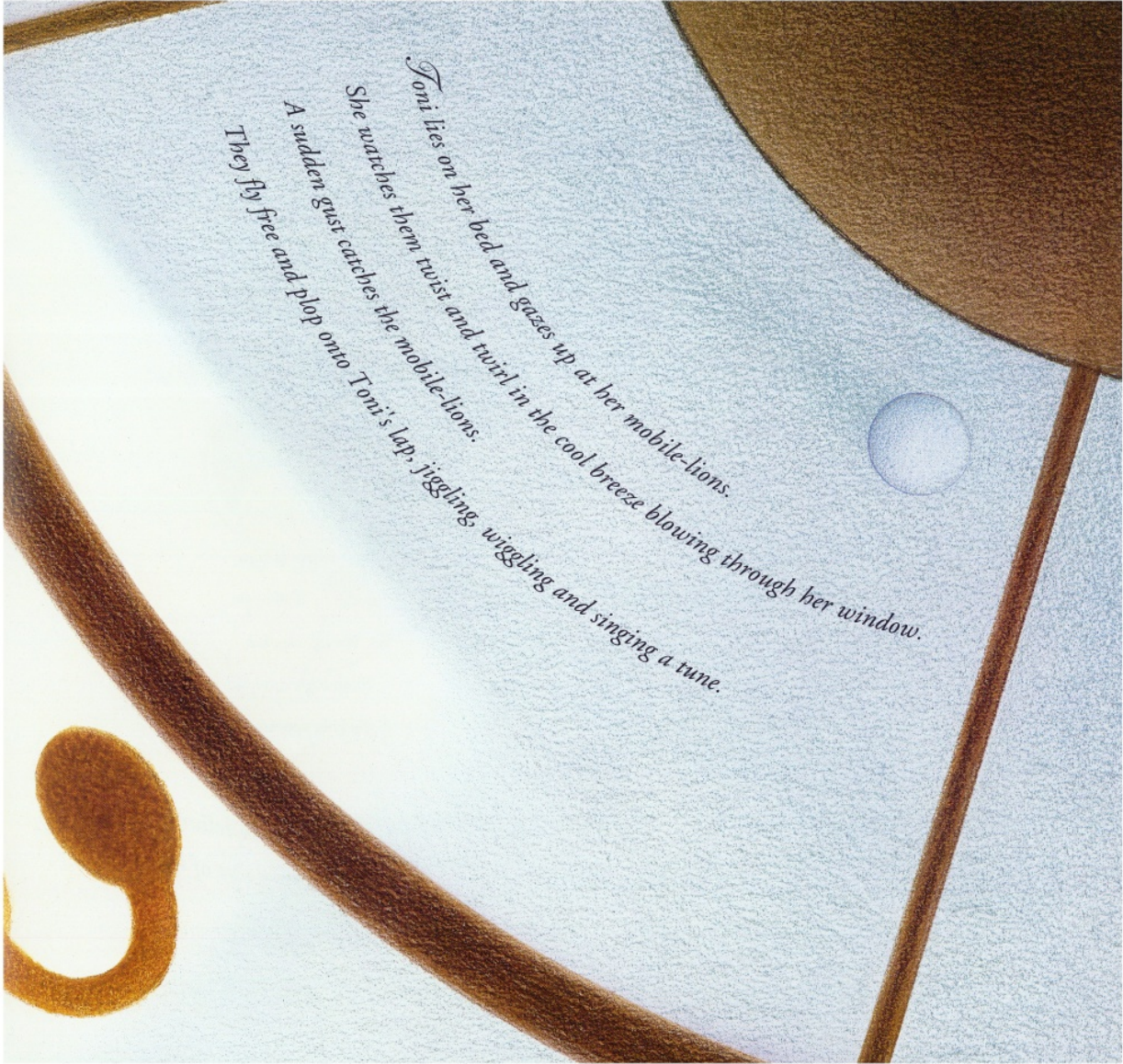
But this spring, Toni has a problem. Her father plans to mow down the dandelions in the orchard.

"Dad never cuts the dandelions in the orchard," Toni tells Roop.

"We need all those dandelions to dance the dandelion-twirl."





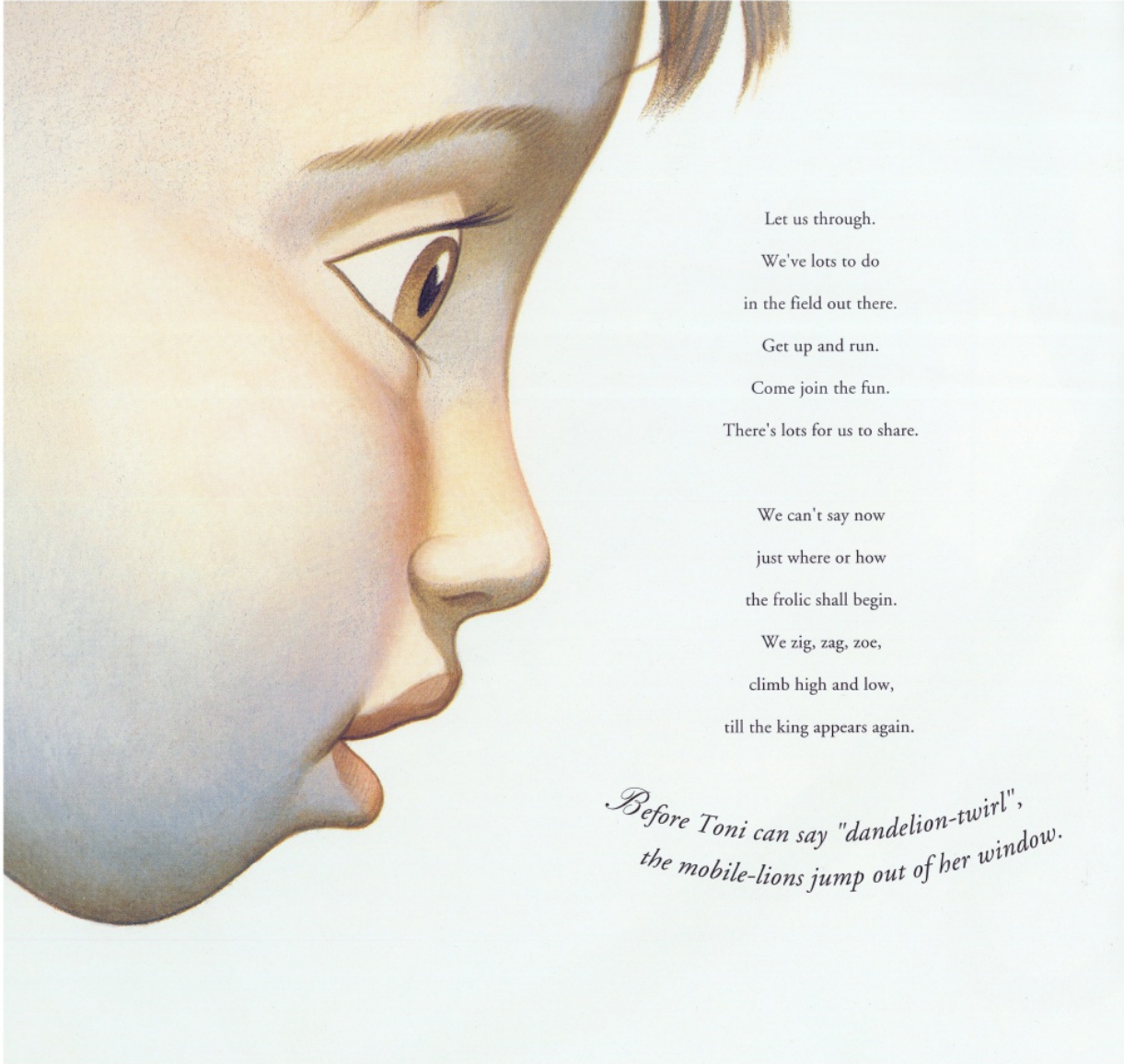


Toni lies on her bed and gazes up at her mobile-lions.

She watches them twist and swirl in the cool breeze blowing through her window.

A sudden gust catches the mobile-lions.

They fly free and plop onto Toni's lap, jiggling, wiggling and singing a tune.



Let us through.
We've lots to do
in the field out there.
Get up and run.
Come join the fun.
There's lots for us to share.

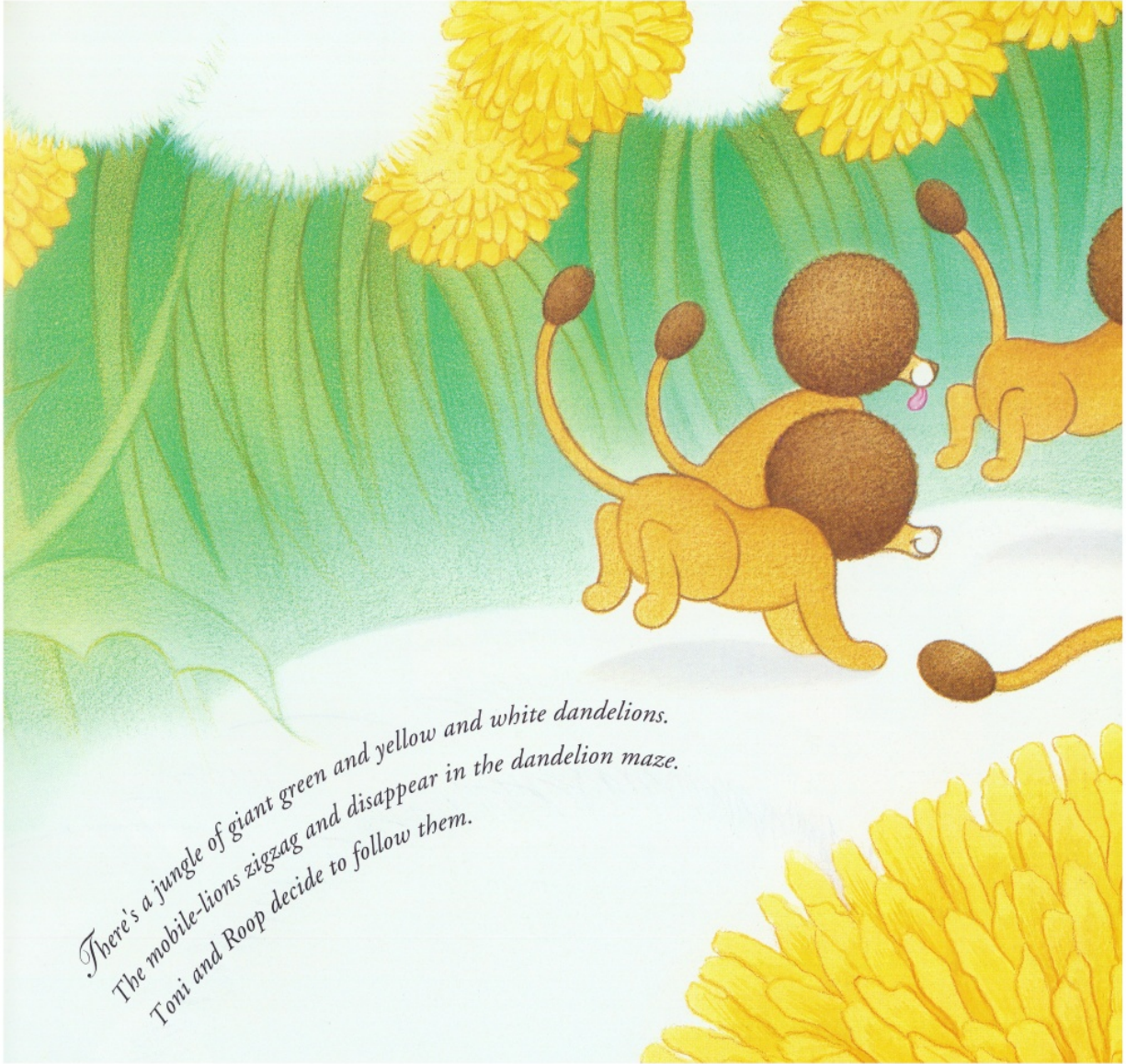
We can't say now
just where or how
the frolic shall begin.
We zig, zag, zoe,
climb high and low,
till the king appears again.

*Before Toni can say "dandelion-twirl",
the mobile-lions jump out of her window.*

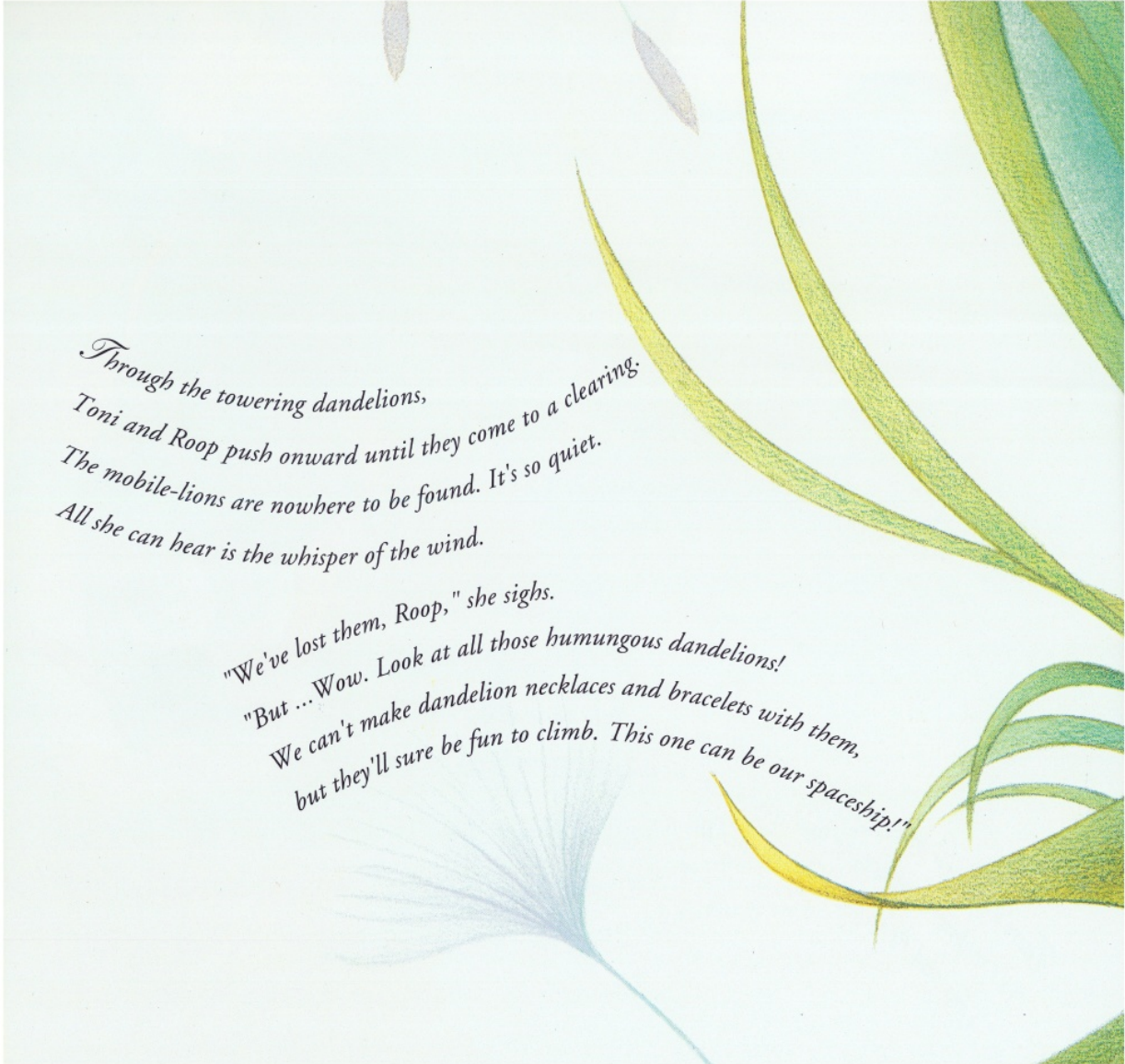




*Toni bounces from her bed to chase the mobile-lions.
When she looks through her window,
she sees a big change in her yard.*



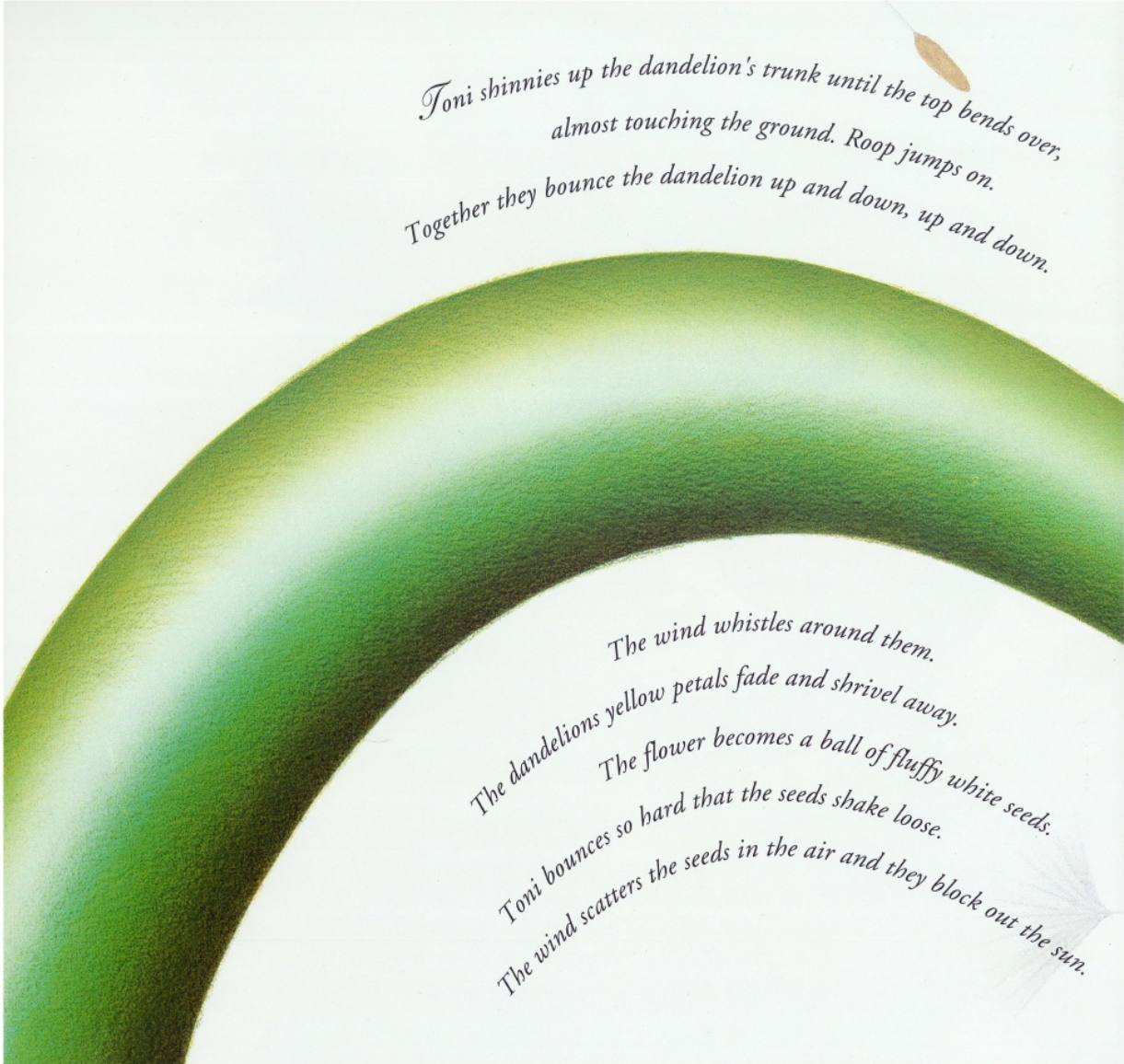
*There's a jungle of giant green and yellow and white dandelions.
The mobile-lions zigzag and disappear in the dandelion maze.
Toni and Roop decide to follow them.*



*Through the towering dandelions,
Toni and Roop push onward until they come to a clearing.
The mobile-lions are nowhere to be found. It's so quiet.
All she can hear is the whisper of the wind.*

*"We've lost them, Roop," she sighs.
"But ... Wow. Look at all those humungous dandelions!
We can't make dandelion necklaces and bracelets with them,
but they'll sure be fun to climb. This one can be our spaceship!"*





*Toni shinnies up the dandelion's trunk until the top bends over,
almost touching the ground. Roop jumps on.
Together they bounce the dandelion up and down, up and down.*

*The wind whistles around them.
The dandelions yellow petals fade and shrivel away.
The flower becomes a ball of fluffy white seeds.
Toni bounces so hard that the seeds shake loose.
The wind scatters the seeds in the air and they block out the sun.*







*"Poop, these fluffs are the stars around our spaceship!"
Toni exclaims as she slips off the dandelion.
"Let's try to catch one."*

*But Toni doesn't see the eyes that are peering at her
through the haze of dandelion seeds.
She barely hears the chanting around her.*





All we want is to
flip and swing
and laugh and roar
till our bellies are sore.

Zig, zag, zoe
high and low.
Dandelees
and dandelows.

Kick and jump,
sway and bump.
Flip and swing
hey, let's all sing.

All we want is to
flip and swing
and laugh and roar
till our bellies are sore.

"The mobile-lions!" Toni gasps.

A thundering roar brings Toni to her feet. In front of her stands an enormous lion.

*"My name is Simon!
King of the lions,
king of the dandelions too.
I grow these flowers
and dance for hours
to the dandelion-twirl tune.*

*I grow these flowers,
my dandelion flowers,
I'm the gentlest lion around.
But I am the strongest,
by far the bravest,
the bravest lion to be found."*

*Toni stands up straight and tall
and announces,*

*"My name is Toni, and I'm not
the queen of anything but I'm
still strong and brave."*

*Simon nods and then asks,
"Would you like to dance the
dandelion-twirl with us?"*

*Toni's face lights up as she
exclaims, "The dandelion-twirl!
I love the dandelion-twirl!"*







*"Come on then," Simon says.
Kicking up the feathery seeds, the mobile-lions twist and twirl,
and flip and swing.
They jump and do cartwheels over the giant dandelions.
They laugh and roar till their bellies are sore.*



*Over and over, the mobile-lions swing Toni and Roop high into the air.
Wiggling and giggling, the two drop down into the soft dandelion seeds.
"This is the best dandelion-twirl we've ever had!" Toni giggles.*



The Dandelion Twirl

1st VERSE

Thank you to my new friends.
I love to dandelion-twirl.
With flips and swings
I twist and sing
for I am the dandelion girl.
Yes, I am the dandelion girl.

We cartwheel into the grass,
with a roar and a gleeful laugh.
We teeter and hoot
from a dandelion root
till we fall to the ground at last.

Where are the dandelions?
Save all the dandelions.
Give us the dandelion-twirl,
please.
Give us the dandelion-twirl.

Come on, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.
Just watch, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.

2nd VERSE

But all of my Springtime fun
could end with the flick of a thumb.
When my father mows down
all the dandelion crowns
late in the afternoon sun.
Yes, late in the afternoon sun.

To my dad I must explain,
mowing dandelions is a terrible shame.
Simon, please help me
to make him see
we need dandelions for dandelion
games.

Where are the dandelions?
Save all the dandelions.
Give us the dandelion-twirl,
please.
Give us the dandelion-twirl.

Come on, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.
Just watch, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.

3rd VERSE

Simon gives dandelions to us all.
His mane becomes a soft grey ball.
His fluffs drift high,
then fall from the sky,
to grow dandelions great and small.
To grow dandelions
great and small.

So let's all rise and sing
and ask for one last thing.
Simon, give us your roar,
your lionous score,
for you are the dandelion king.

Where are the dandelions?
Save all the dandelions.
Give us the dandelion-twirl,
please.
Give us the dandelion-twirl.

Come on, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.
Just watch, I'll give you the
dandelion-twirl.



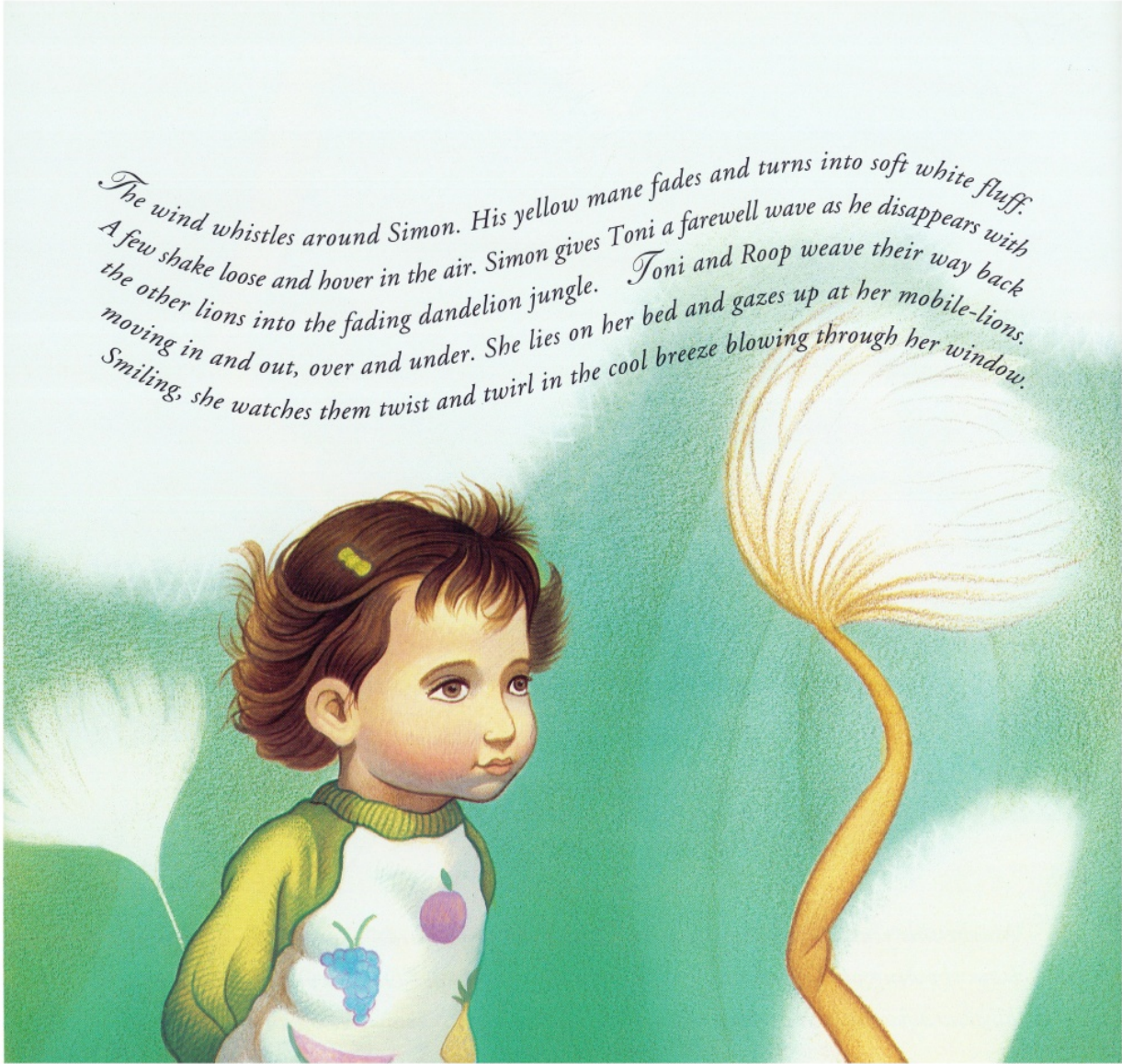


*"It's time to go, Toni," Simon says gently. "Come back and visit me soon."
"But I can't," Toni replies. "There won't be any dandelions left after my dad
mows the orchard. You can't dance the dandelion-twirl without dandelions."*



“Maybe this year I won’t grow any dandelions in the orchard,” Simon offers. “After all, I am the king of the dandelions.” Toni looks surprised. “Don’t worry,” Simon adds. “I’ll grow a few for your dandelion-twirl.” “I like that plan,” Toni agrees, with a sigh of relief.

The wind whistles around Simon. His yellow mane fades and turns into soft white fluff. A few shake loose and hover in the air. Simon gives Toni a farewell wave as he disappears with the other lions into the fading dandelion jungle. Toni and Roop weave their way back moving in and out, over and under. She lies on her bed and gazes up at her mobile-lions. Smiling, she watches them twist and twirl in the cool breeze blowing through her window.









Toni sits up and looks out of her window. She sees her father. He waves to her and yells, "Toni, I've decided not to mow the orchard now. It's been too cool and there hasn't been enough sun for many of the dandelions to grow this year. It's strange though, there's one large patch of dandelions outside your window." Toni smiles and looks towards the sky. "Just enough for the dandelion-twirl. Right, Simon?"

Dandelions

Dandelions were first brought to North America about 300 years ago. Early settlers from Europe had enjoyed eating dandelion leaves as a salad back home. When they came to their new land, they brought the tradition with them. Many people today still eat dandelions. They cook the leaves like spinach, or boil them to make tea and medicine. They dry the roots and grind them into coffee. They make wine with the flower. The name dandelion comes from the French dent de lion and means "lion's tooth". The plant was given this name because the jagged leaves look like a lion's tooth. Another name for the dandelion is Taraxacum officinale, which in Latin, means "medicine for disorders". Medicine made from dandelions was thought to be good to take when certain parts of the body, such as the liver, kidneys and digestive organs, were upset. A dandelion drink, made from the root, was also used to clean the blood. If you are going to eat dandelions, pick the leaves before the plant flowers, or else they will be bitter. Boiling the leaves several times can help to get rid of the bitterness. Another way is to keep the plant away from light by placing a container over it for several days or weeks. This is called "blanching". When the leaves begin to turn yellow or white, you can eat them. Always remember to pick dandelions from areas which have not been sprayed with dangerous chemicals. It might be better to buy your fresh or dried dandelion leaves from a health food store or specialty vegetable market.

Where and Why Dandelions Grow

Dandelions can be seen in many different places. We get the most dandelions when spring is warm and sunny. They need the sun so they have energy to make their seeds and flowers. Millions grow in hay fields, orchards, roadsides, and empty lots. But because dandelions also grow in the middle of beautiful gardens and lawns, they are thought of as weeds. Every year people

try to get rid of dandelions by spraying or mowing them down. Some people attempt to yank them out of the ground. Tugging usually only splits the strong root. But as long as the dandelion root is 4 millimetres across (less than the size of your baby finger) it can grow a new plant again. That's why so many dandelions grow in all the wrong places. It is hard to get rid of them. In the best conditions, their roots can grow 2 metres deep in the ground (about as tall as your dad), and be 3 centimetres thick (a little larger than a quarter). There are also so many dandelions because they spread easily. The yellow dandelion flower becomes a fuzzy white head made up of hundreds of tiny seed tufts. All these seeds are carried away by the wind to another place. There, they root and grow into more dandelions. There can be 10,000 to 20,000 seeds floating in one square metre of air, at one time. Butterflies and bees are attracted to dandelions because of their bright colour and their nectar, or honey. These insects also help dandelions grow by carrying pollen from one dandelion to another. The pollen helps the new dandelion make seeds.

How Dandelions Grow

If you want to grow your own dandelion plant, ask a parent or teacher for help. But first you should know a few facts about dandelions and how they grow. The young dandelion root is thin and doesn't hold much food. It needs all its energy to grow big and strong. That's why, even in good weather and soil, it takes three to four months for the dandelion to flower. The yellow dandelions that you see this spring, rooted last year. Their seeds blew away and grew into plants last summer. But they had no flowers because the roots were not strong enough. During the winter, the roots rested. This spring they have lots of energy to grow, first the plant, and two weeks later, the flower.

Growing Your Own Dandelion Plant

The seeds may be collected from last year's dandelions or from plants flowering now. After letting the seeds dry and turn brown, plant them 1-3 millimetres deep. Cover them with the soil. Water them well and keep them moist. In two weeks the first shoots and roots should appear. Not all the seeds will germinate. Some seeds may be hurt or unhealthy. About 85% of the seeds planted should root successfully. If you are growing the dandelion plants indoors through the winter, keep them warm and make sure they receive exactly 12 hours of light a day, the same amount of light they receive outside in their best flowering seasons, the spring and the fall. Plant food will also help them grow. In three to four months, the dandelions should flower.

1 lots of dried dandelion seeds

2 a clear plastic bottle with the top and neck cut off

(take off all labels so you can watch the roots grow)
or a wooden box with a glass front (see diagram)

3 a layer of stones to line the bottom of container

4 enough soil to fill container

5 a small greenhouse built with fluorescent lighting
and plastic glass

CLEAR PLASTIC BOTTLE

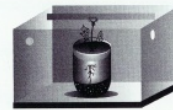


WOODEN BOX



GREENHOUSE

REMOVABLE TOP WITH
FLUORESCENT LIGHT



SMALL HOLES FOR VENTILATION

