

The illustration depicts a young woman with brown hair styled in a bun, looking towards the right. She has freckles and is wearing a dark blue dress with a white collar. Her hands are held out, showing a small white egg on her index finger and a white caterpillar on her middle finger. The background is a lush green garden filled with various butterflies and insects, including a yellow butterfly, a blue dragonfly, a ladybug, and several moths. The title 'The Story of Maria Merriam' is written in a white, cursive font with a speckled texture, set against a background of golden-yellow decorative swirls.

The Story of  
*Maria  
Merriam*

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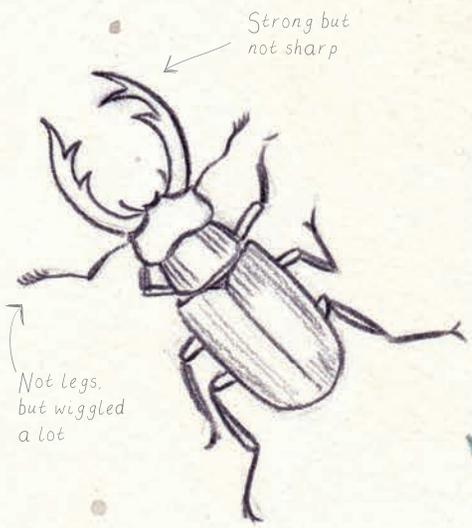
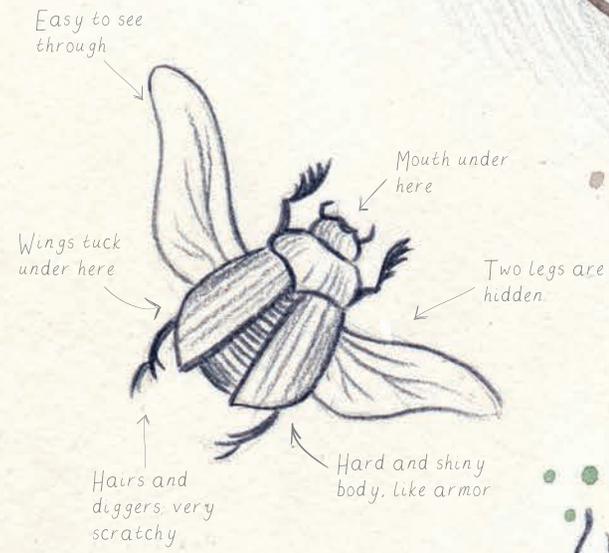
THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

“Maria! Dear Maria!” echoed the voice of young Maria’s mother, calling for her daughter into the evening-lit summer garden when, from among the heads of cabbage, she spotted some movement and a faint light. “Maria, is that you?”



Up sprang Maria, a girl of thirteen years with wavy brown hair, freckles, and dirty knees. She had a small net in one hand and a candle in the other. Maria had been catching moths and beetles so that she could look more closely at them.

“Mother, you won’t believe the beautiful creature I saw! To fly, it uncovered four wings that it seems to keep hidden under pieces of brightly colored armor. I wish I knew what to call it.”





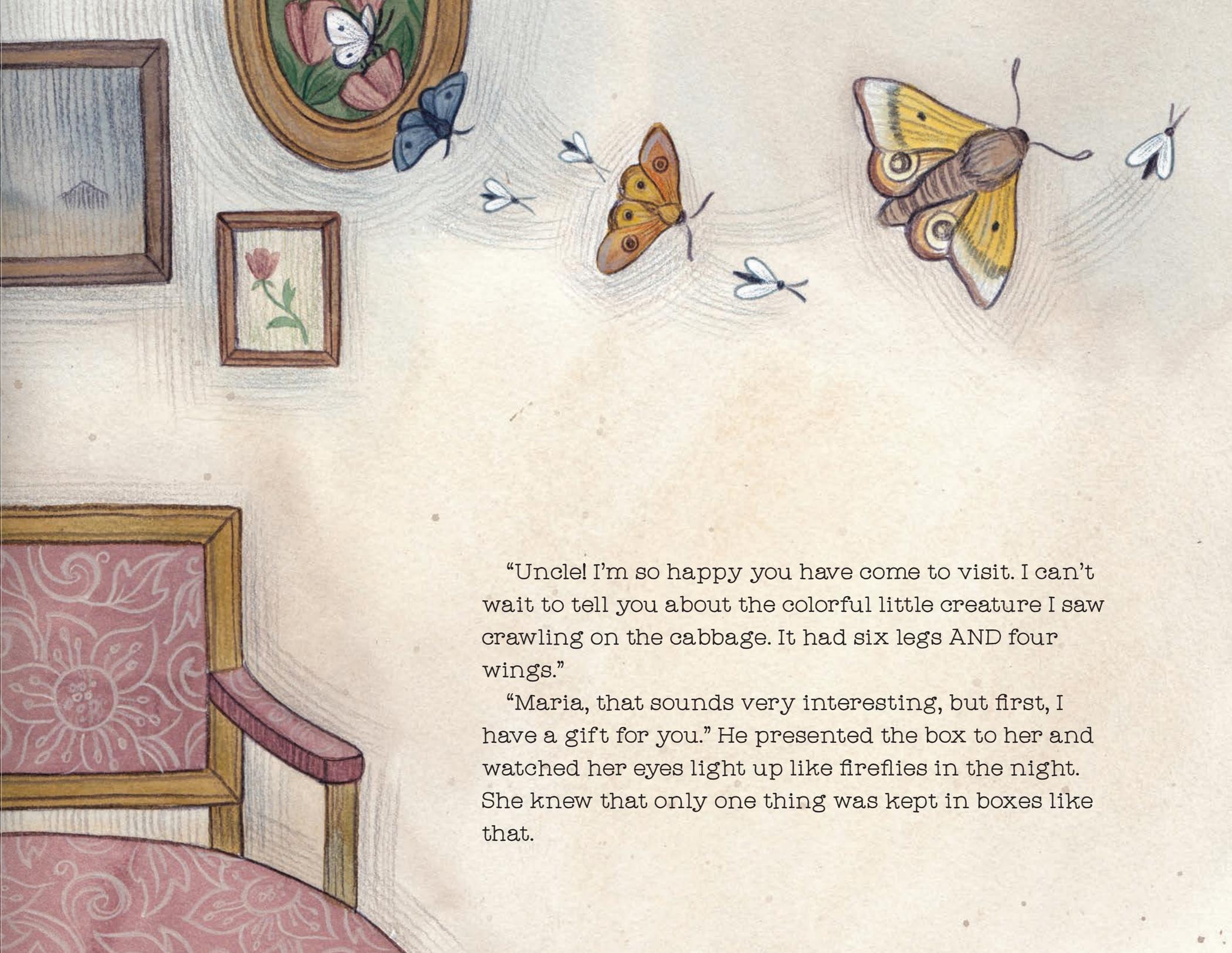


Maria thought insects were incredible. Why were they all so different? Why did some fly while others only crawled? And where did they come from?



“Maria, you must come in now. Your uncle is here with something for you.” Maria’s uncle was a silk manufacturer. He knew of his niece’s interest in insects and had an extraordinary surprise for her. Through the window he could see her coming inside, so he pulled a small wooden box out of his bag and held it behind his back.





“Uncle! I’m so happy you have come to visit. I can’t wait to tell you about the colorful little creature I saw crawling on the cabbage. It had six legs AND four wings.”

“Maria, that sounds very interesting, but first, I have a gift for you.” He presented the box to her and watched her eyes light up like fireflies in the night. She knew that only one thing was kept in boxes like that.

“Really? For me?” Maria gently took the box in her hands and opened it with bated breath. Inside were several tiny black caterpillars no bigger than dandelion petals. They were on a bed of mulberry leaves. “Silkworms! Oh, Uncle, thank you so very much! I love them!”

