



Once Upon Our Planet

By Vitta Murrow

Once Upon a Savannah



Imagine an enormous open space,
serene in sound a neutral in colour.
Once an expansive forest, time has
transformed it into an
uninterrupted grassland. This is the
savannah.



At first, it presents itself as still and quiet. The swaying of grass the only sound. But upon careful listening, one may hear the muffed footfalls of a mighty cat, the gentle crunching of a leathery creature lunching, or even the sneak of a snake slicing through the grass.



Or, most importantly of all, the gentle rhythm of rain,
and the swish of water flowing into pools and drinking
holes for the residents of the savannah.

Vital showers of rain connect the savannah to a wide
sky full of activity.



A multitude of stars by night ...



... and a bath of sunlight by day.



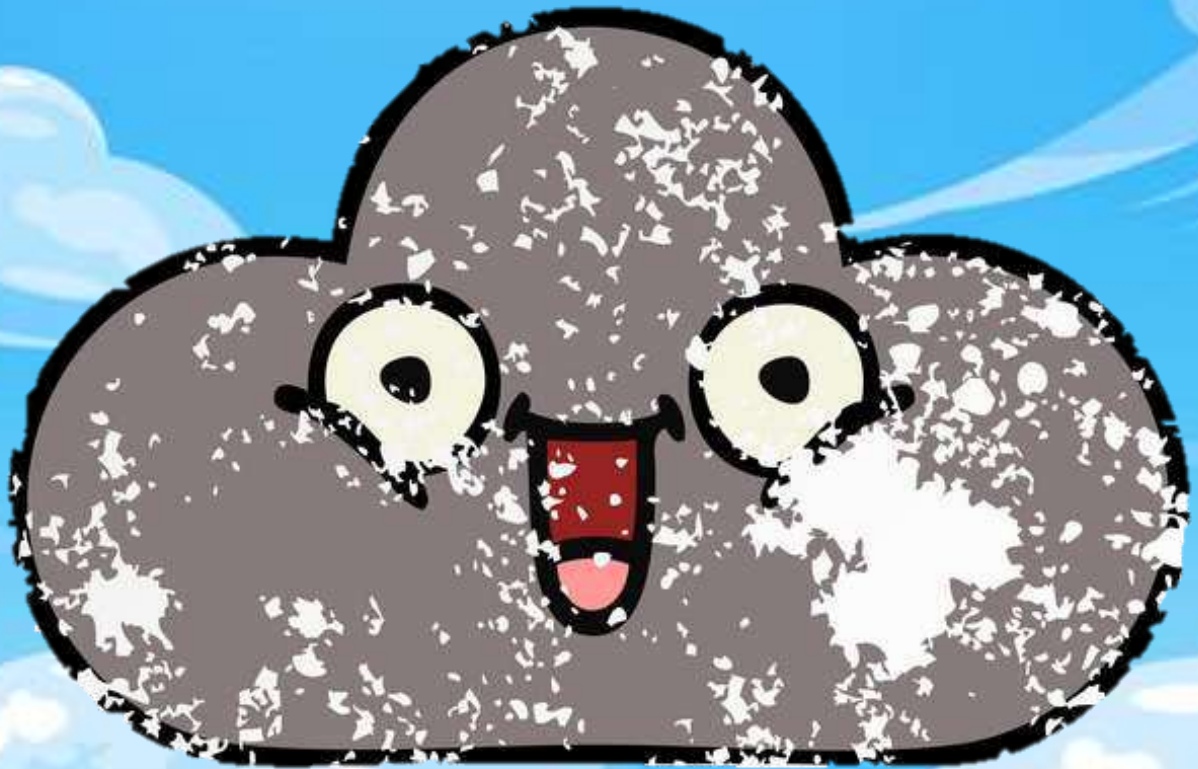
And two old friends who share the skyscape – Thunder and Lightning. This is their story.



Most relationships experience moments of tension, struggle or discord. Being in a friendship sometimes means one must 'weather the storm'. The bond between Thunder and Lightning was no different.



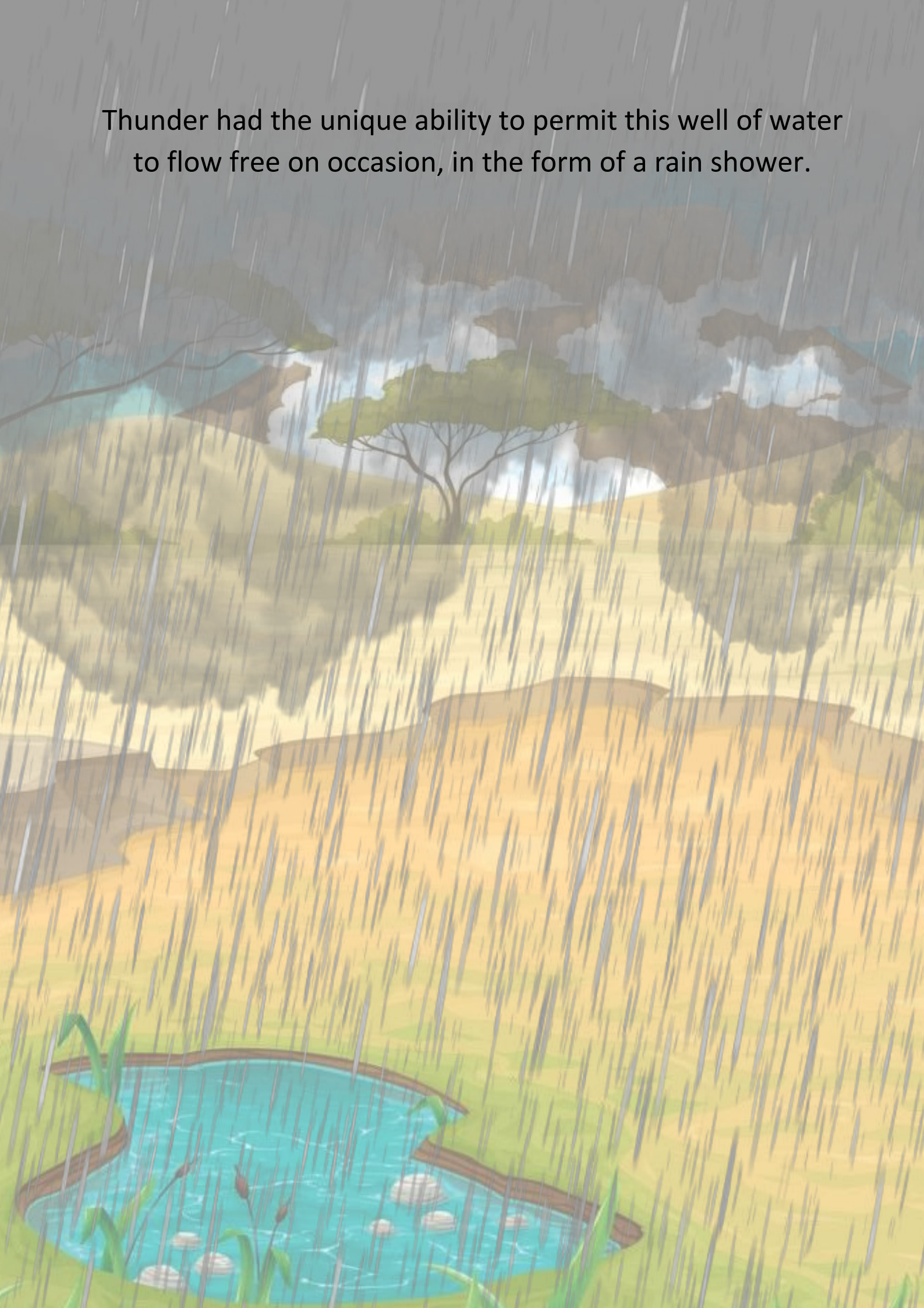
Thunder was built of a soft and formless material. A puff that took on many shapes. Thunder enjoyed mimicking the shapes found on the savannah.

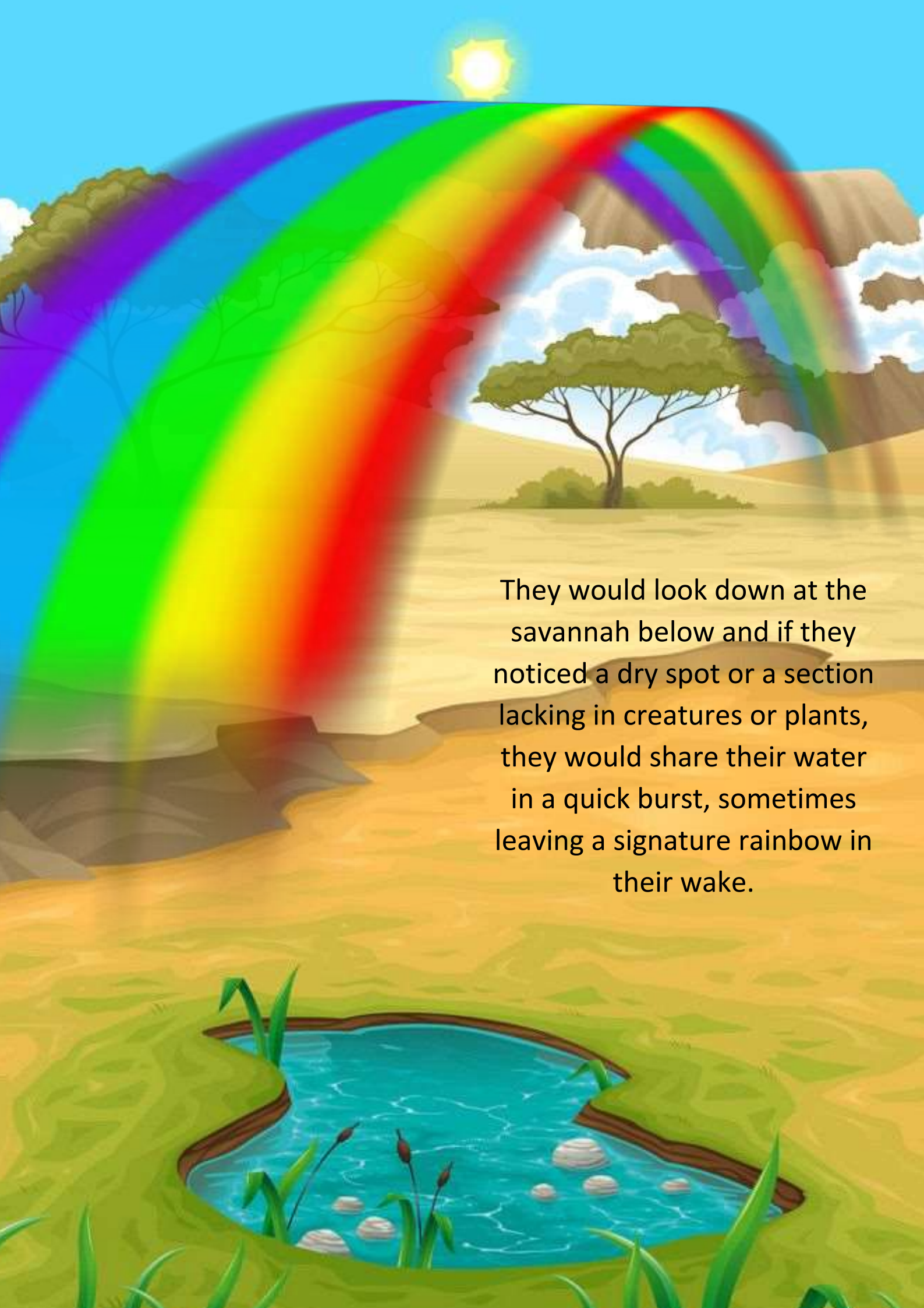


Sunshade-shaped trees, long-necked animals, humped beasts and spiky long reptiles. It was easy for Thunder to play around with their form, for their only mass was a well of water, which they nestled and protected in a bubble close to their heart.



Thunder had the unique ability to permit this well of water to flow free on occasion, in the form of a rain shower.





They would look down at the savannah below and if they noticed a dry spot or a section lacking in creatures or plants, they would share their water in a quick burst, sometimes leaving a signature rainbow in their wake.

Thunder was of a docile nature. Thunder said, “Sure”, or “Yes!” even if they weren’t sure or didn’t really feel in agreement. Thunder wasn’t always certain of their feelings or what they wanted.



And seeing as their only companion in the sky was Lightning, a being who almost always was knew their mind, Thunder deferred to them. Lightning beheld a confident and intense personality.



They were always first to appear, quick to speak up, and had a crisp and sharp tone, which meant they nearly always got their way. Every reaction from Lightning was a strong one. If they were hot – BAM! – sparks would shoot out from their centre. If they were irritated, they would lash out – ZAP! – even if it hurt the feelings of Thunder.



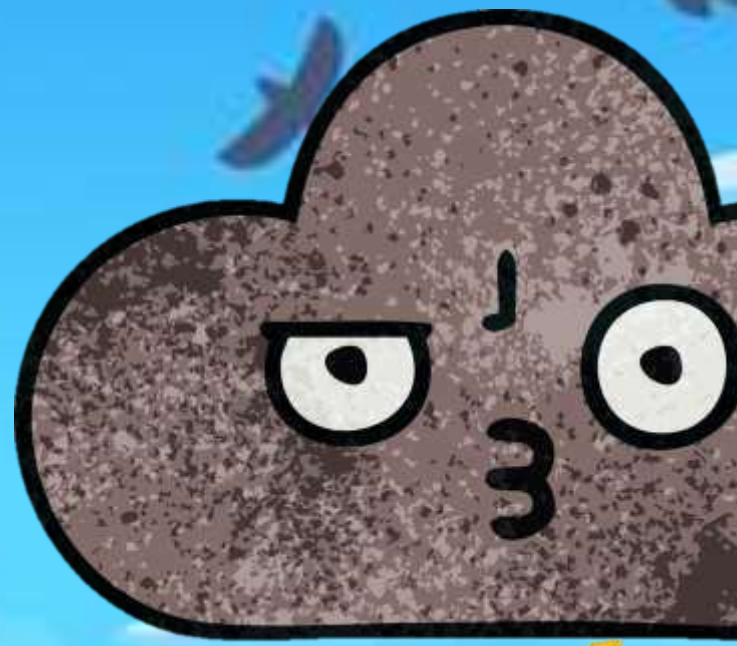
With Lightning never far, Thunder's control over the rain didn't last long. Lightning would boss Thunder around, telling them when to produce the rain – or not. "Drop the water now, Thunder!" they would command. Thunder felt pushed around, they would yield and let the rain fall. Thunder could never match Lightning's flashy dominance.



Lightning used other means to get their way too. “Look!” they’d point out. “Those beings are growing something in this odd spot. You should drop rain there!”



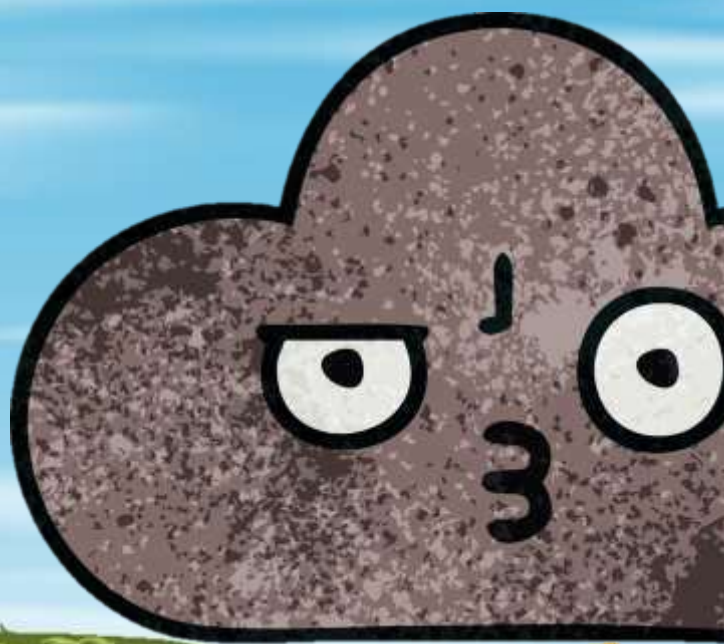
Thunder would look at the work of the beings and wonder. Is this a lasting spot to grow things? I don't usually offer rain here, because it just rolls away. Thunder preferred to bring rain in patterns that they could keep track of.



They didn't like to be told when and where, but Lightning was forceful, and Thunder found it hard to refuse. And so, alas, Thunder would say, "Sure," even if they weren't sure.



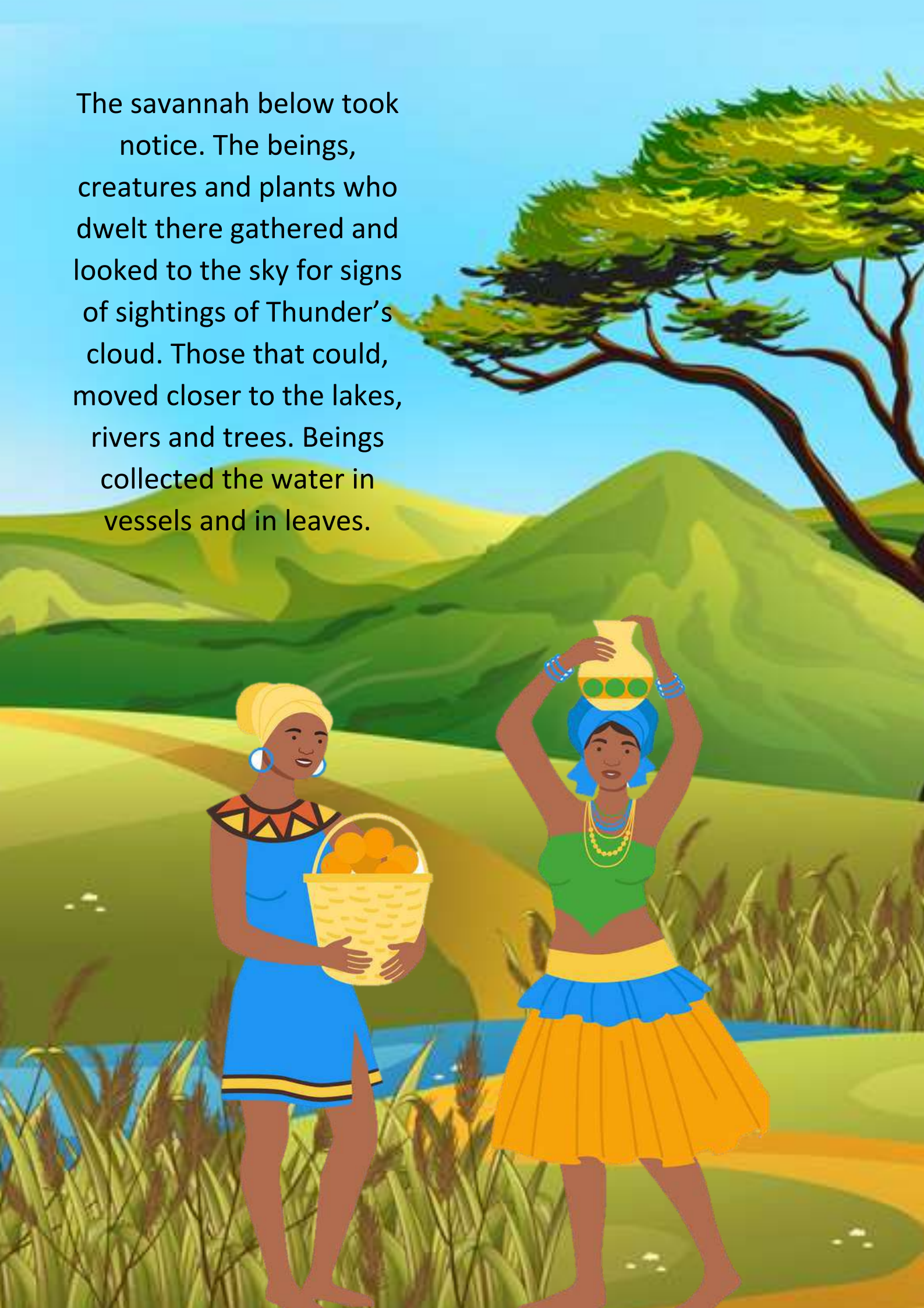
Lightning compelled Thunder with their vanity too. "That lake is too shallow, I need to be able to see my sparks more brightly. Maybe you should fill it up?" Yet it wasn't really a question. "Okay." Thunder conceded.



Sometimes Thunder would grumble to themselves, but it didn't make them feel any better. Instead, the only thing Thunder felt was sadness. Over time, Thunder grew very sad indeed. Until one day, Thunder felt so fragile that they tightened the hold around their sacred water and drifted to a far corner of the sky.



The savannah below took notice. The beings, creatures and plants who dwelt there gathered and looked to the sky for signs of sightings of Thunder's cloud. Those that could, moved closer to the lakes, rivers and trees. Beings collected the water in vessels and in leaves.



Animals grew tired from thirst, and instead of hunt or play they laid down for long rests.



The wet spaces shrank and the soil chapped and rippled. Soon animal families and groups of beings grew smaller. The plants they sheltered under and are from were no longer shady and green, but brittle and spare. When new little shoots didn't appear with the new season, change was imminent.



Without hope of seeing rain again, the animals and beings left their dens and clearings and marched away, leaving barren holes and empty containers behind. Their faces and forms trudged towards a new and uncertain home.



Thunder watched from their hiding spot in the far corner of the sky. A great sadness and disappointment came over them.



Lightning watched the change too. Even though they had not spoken for some time. Lightning knew it was time to talk to Thunder.

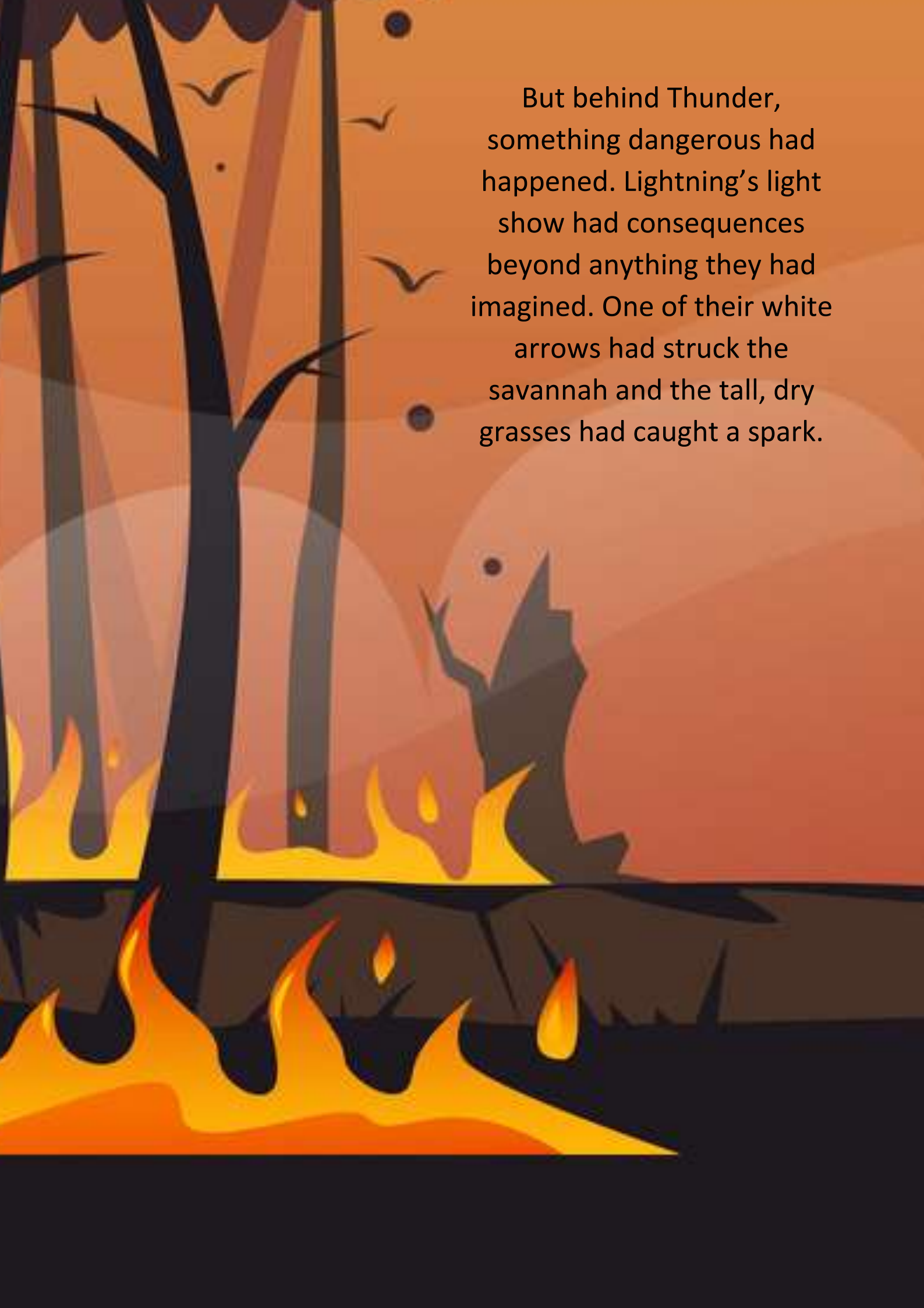


When night fell, Lightning tried to get Thunder's attention by putting on a show. Lightning lit up the sky with heat and electricity. Lightning's energy drowned out the brightest stars – their long white arrows turned the night as bright as day.



All this bluster pushed Thunder towards a new feeling, Anger. Anger at Lightning for being so pushy and angry at themselves for not having stood up to Lightning. Thunder was ready though, and hoped upon hope, as they watched the last animal shrink from sight, that it wasn't too late to act.





But behind Thunder,
something dangerous had
happened. Lightning's light
show had consequences
beyond anything they had
imagined. One of their white
arrows had struck the
savannah and the tall, dry
grasses had caught a spark.

As they swayed, smoke bloomed from their tips. The smoke took shape and became a blanket. The blanket covered the grassland quickly and beneath it the glow of a fast-growing fire lit the smoky blanket from behind. It looked, from above, like a phantom with a million orange eyes staring at the sky. Lightning looked down in horror at the monster they had created.

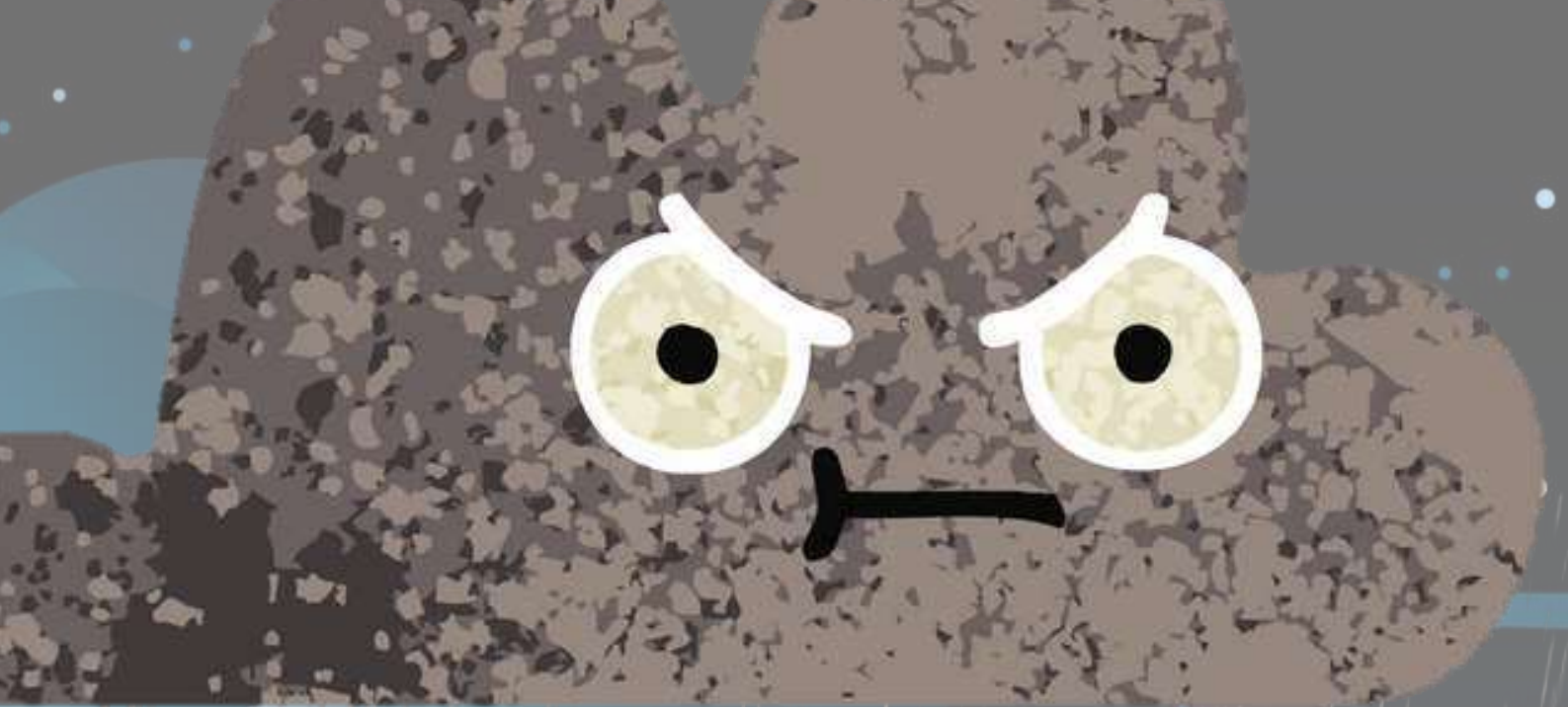


Thunder burst forth from their corner of the sky and charged at the orange-eyes smoke blanket. Lightening watched and saw for the first time that in power and might, Thunder was their equal. The very same Thunder who had always said “Yes” and “Sure” was transformed.

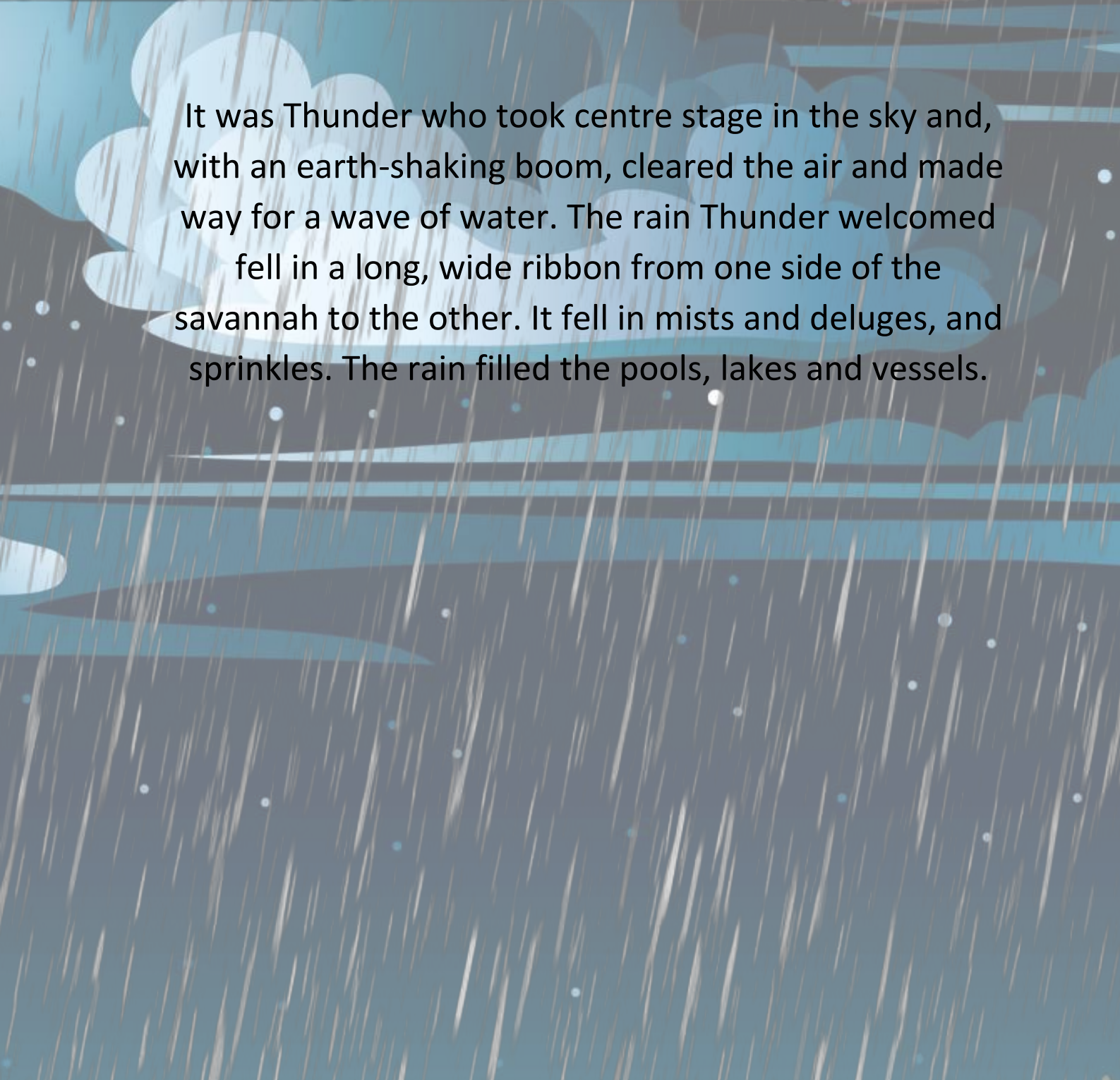


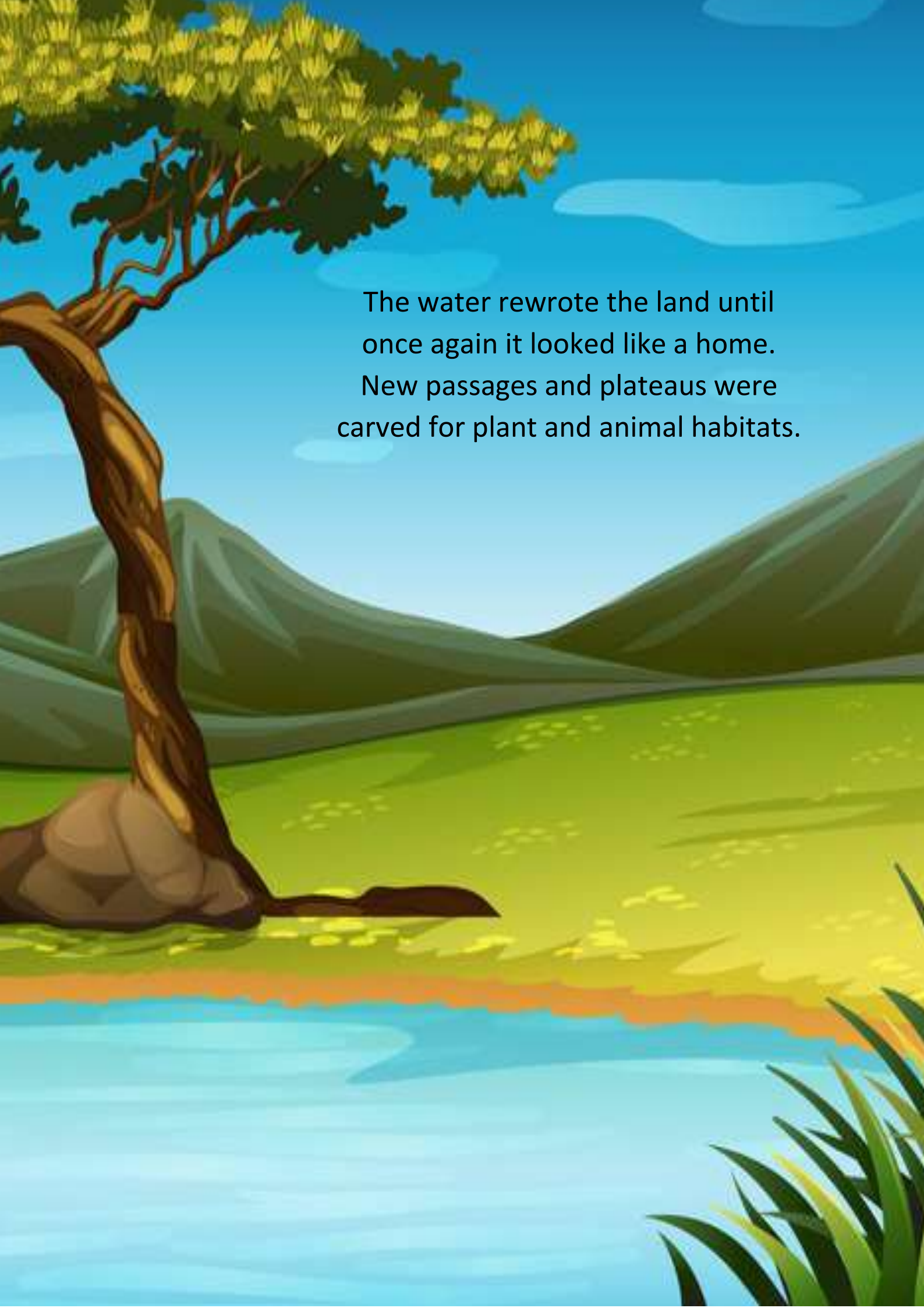
Lightning beheld a Thunder that was utterly in control, who was self-assured in the face of danger. Lightning was humbled and nodded to Thunder in a gesture of respect. Lightning made room for Thunder.





It was Thunder who took centre stage in the sky and, with an earth-shaking boom, cleared the air and made way for a wave of water. The rain Thunder welcomed fell in a long, wide ribbon from one side of the savannah to the other. It fell in mists and deluges, and sprinkles. The rain filled the pools, lakes and vessels.





The water rewrote the land until
once again it looked like a home.
New passages and plateaus were
carved for plant and animal habitats.

The waters reached the feet of the retreating animals and beings.



They turned just in time to see the savannah restored to a place of possibility.



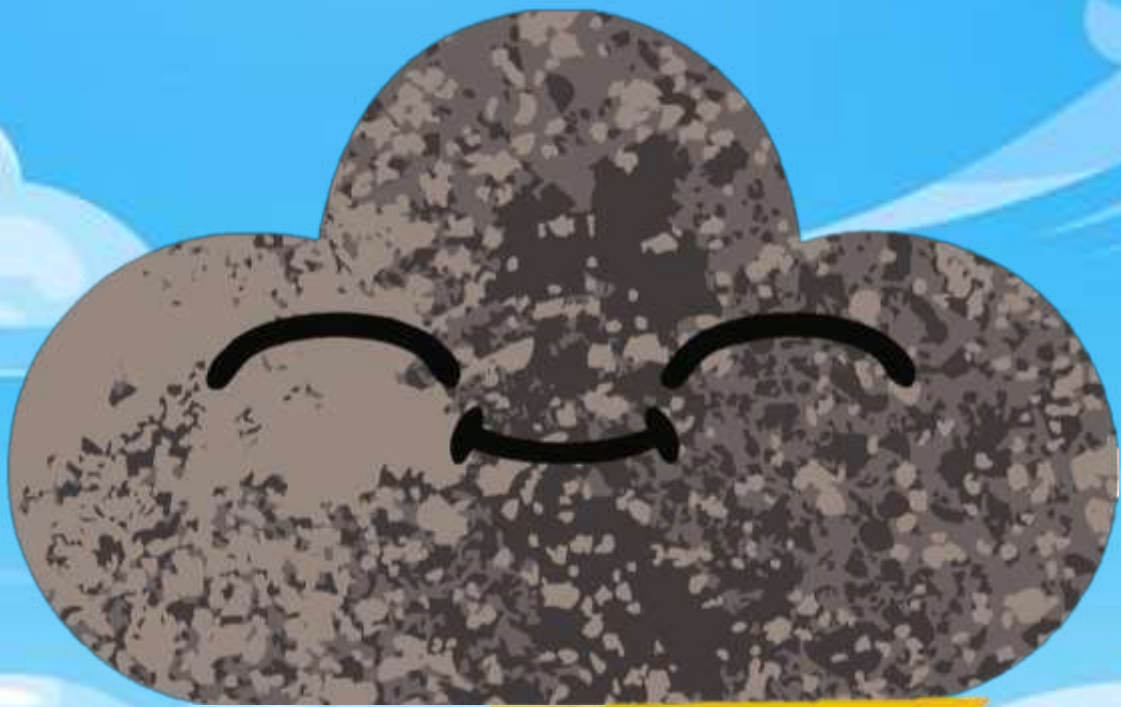
Thunder saw the power in their own voice. They saw the return of plants, animals and beings, and knew something had to change between them and Lightning.

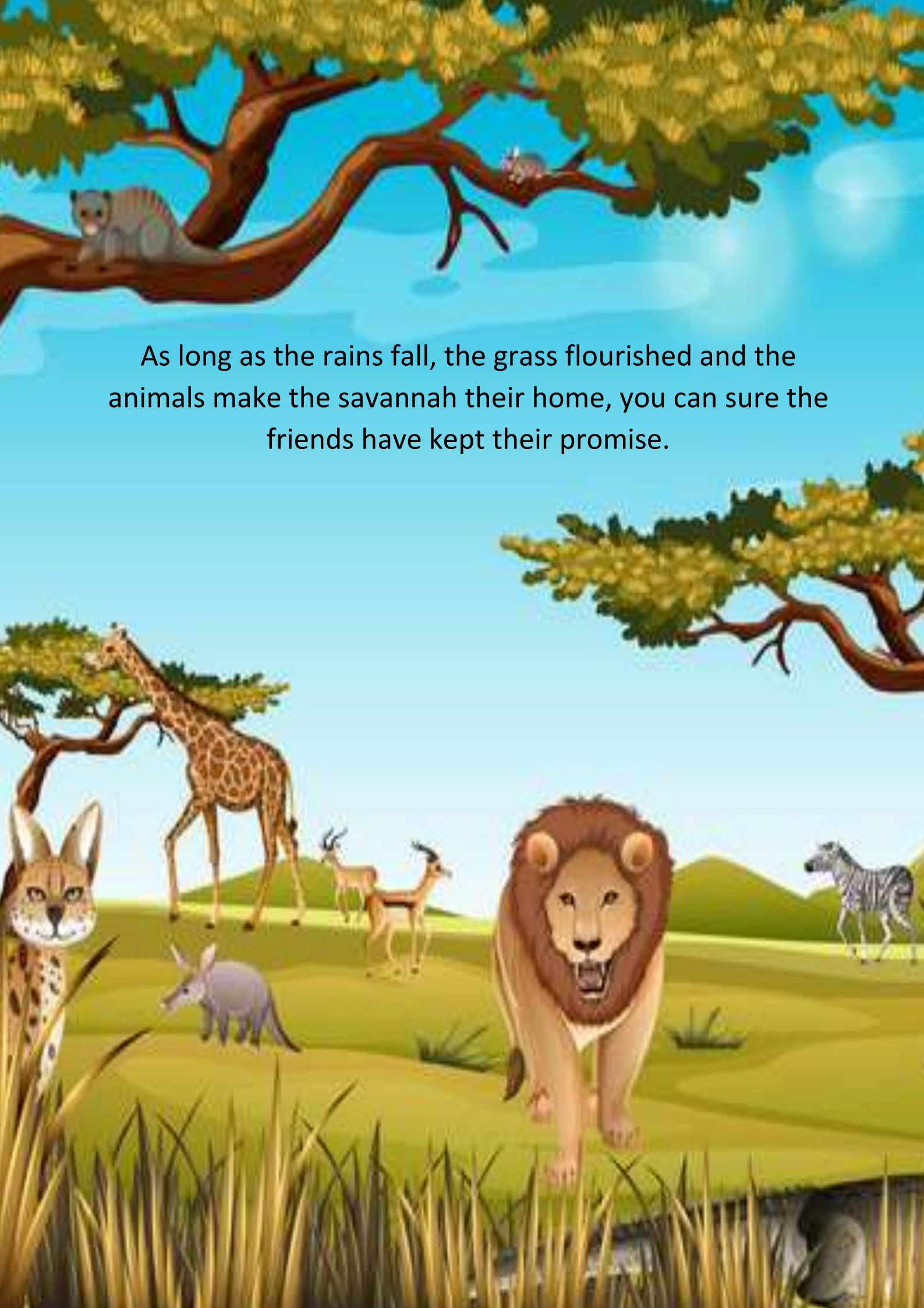


With the gentle pitter-patter of rain beneath them,
Thunder asked Lightning to promise each day to listen to
one another.



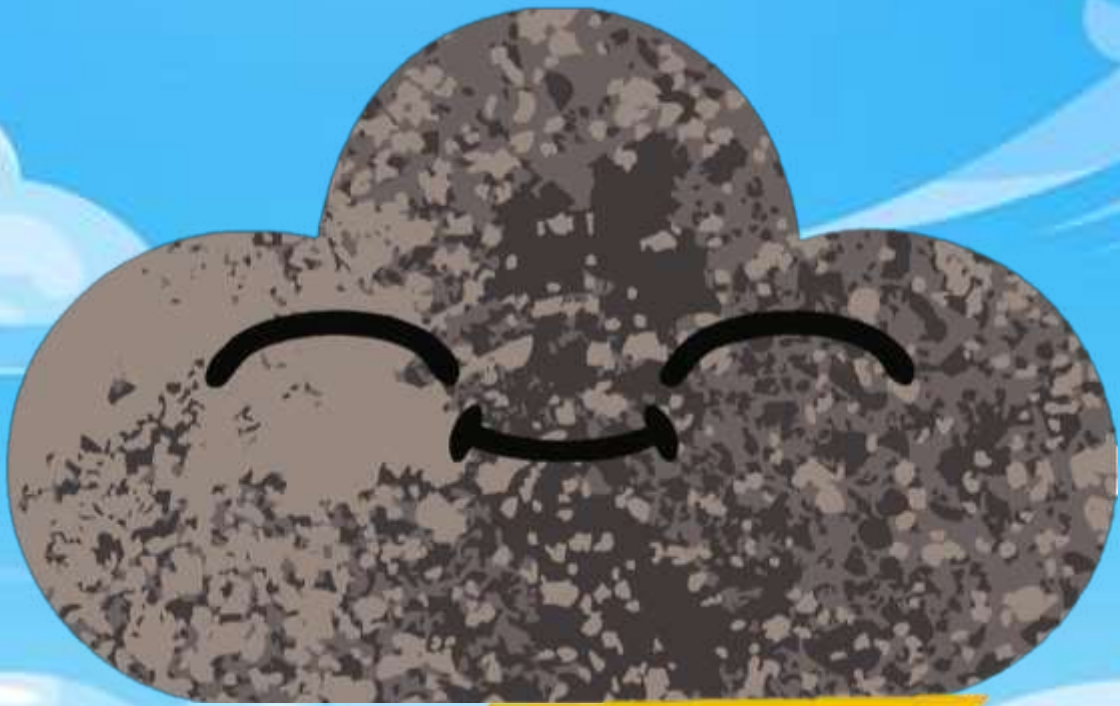
Lightning understood they had hurt Thunder. They were glad to see their friend at their side. Lightning agreed at once to do better. they saw that together the friends shared a power so strong it supported the very balance of the savannah.





As long as the rains fall, the grass flourished and the animals make the savannah their home, you can sure the friends have kept their promise.

If the lands become dry and the sky grows empty, we must look to the bonds between ourselves and ask whether we have set a good example to our two friends in the sky. Have we honoured our hearts, used our voices and lived in the spirit of friendship?





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY