



Madiba's Favourites

The Lion, The Hare and The Hyena



In this story from Kenya, told to Phyllis Savory by Guido Mariko, the hare and the hyena again try, as they so often do, to outwit each other.



A lion named Simba once lived alone in a cave. In his younger days that solitude had not worried him, but not very long before this tale begins, he had hurt his legs so badly that he was unable to provide food for himself. Eventually he began to realise that companionship had its advantages.



Things would have gone very badly for him, had not Sunguru the Hare happened to be passing his cave one day. Looking inside, Sunguru realised that the lion was starving.



At once he set about caring for his sick friend and seeing to his comfort.



Under the hare's careful nursing, Simba gradually regained his strength until finally he was well enough to catch small game for the two of them to eat.



Soon quite a large pile of bones began to accumulate outside the entrance to the lion's cave.



One day Nyangau the Hyena, while sniffing around in the hope of scrounging something for his supper, caught the appetising smell of marrow bones.



His nose led him to Simba's cave, but as the bones could be seen clearly from inside he could not steal them with safety.



Being a cowardly fellow, like the rest of his kind, he decided that the only way to gain possession of the tasty morsels would be to make friends with Simba.



He therefore crept up to the entrance of the cave
and gave a cough.



“Who makes the evening hideous with his dreadful croakings?” demanded the lion, rising to his feet and preparing to investigate the noise.




“It is I, your friend, Nyangau,” faltered the hyena, losing what little courage he possessed. “I have come to tell you how sadly you have been missed by the animals, and how greatly we are looking forward to your early return to good health!”



“Well, get out,” growled the lion, “for it seems to me that a friend would have enquired about my health long before this, instead of waiting until I could be of use to him once more. Get out, I say!”





The hyena shuffled off with alacrity, his scruffy tail tucked between his bandy legs, followed by the insulting giggles of the hare. But he could not forget the pile of tempting bones outside the entrance to the lion's cave.

"I shall try again," resolved the thick-skinned hyena.



A few days later he made a point of paying his visit while the hare was away fetching water to cook the evening meal.

He found the lion dozing at the entrance to his cave.



“Friend,” simpered Nyangau, “I am led to believe that the wound on your leg is making poor progress, due to the underhand treatment that you are receiving from your so-called friend Sunguru.”



“What do you mean?” snarled the lion malevolently. “I have to thank Sunguru that I did not starve to death during the worst of my illness, while you and your companions were conspicuous by your absence!”



“Nevertheless, what I have told you is true,” confided the hyena. “It is well known throughout the countryside that Sunguru is purposely giving you the wrong treatment for your wound to prevent your recovery.”



For when you are well, he will lose his position as your housekeeper – a very comfortable living for him, to be sure! Let me warn you, good friend, that Sunguru is not acting in your best interests!”



At that moment the hare returned from the river, his gourd filled with water. “Well,” he said, addressing the hyena as he put down his load, “I did not expect to see you here after your hasty and inglorious departure from our presence the other day. Tell me, what do you want this time?”



Simba turned to the hare. “I have been listening,” he said, “to Nyangau’s tales about you. He tells me that you are renowned throughout the countryside for your skill and cunning as a doctor. He also tells me that the medicines you prescribe are without rival.



But he insists that you could have cured the wound on my leg a long time ago, had it been in your interest to do so.
Is this true?"



Sunguru thought for a moment. He knew that he had to treat his situation with care, for he had a strong suspicion that Nyangau was trying to trick him.



“Well,” he answered with hesitation, “yes and no. You see, I am only a very small animal, and sometimes the medicines that I require are very big, and I am unable to procure them – as, for instance, in your case, good Simba.”



“What do you mean?” spluttered the lion, sitting up and at once showing interest.

“Just this,” replied the hare. “I need a piece of skin from the back of a full-grown hyena to place on your wound before it will be completely healed.”

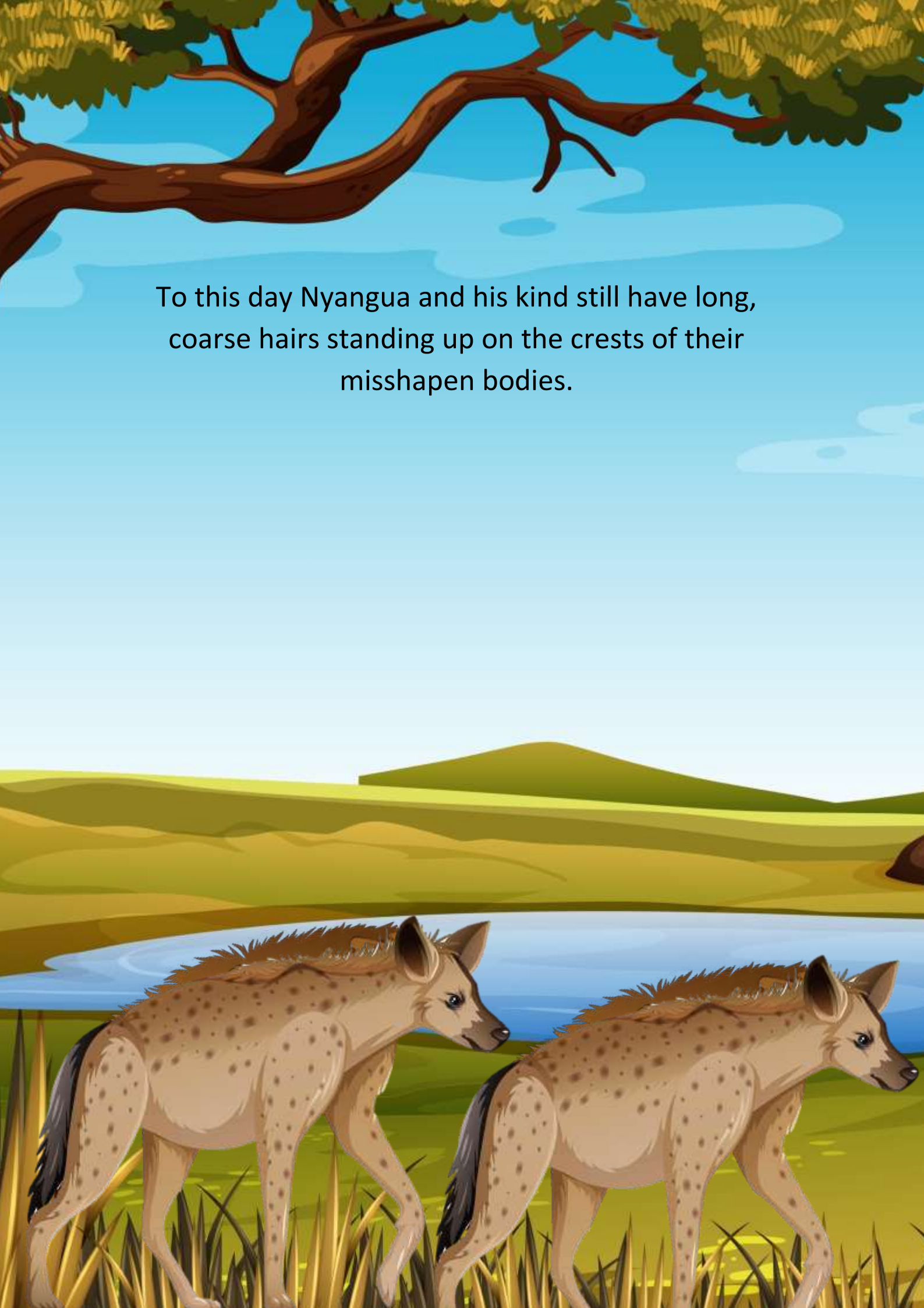


Hearing this, the lion sprang onto Nyangua before the surprised creature had time to get away. He tore a strip of skin off the foolish fellow's back from his head to tail and clapped it on the wound on his leg.



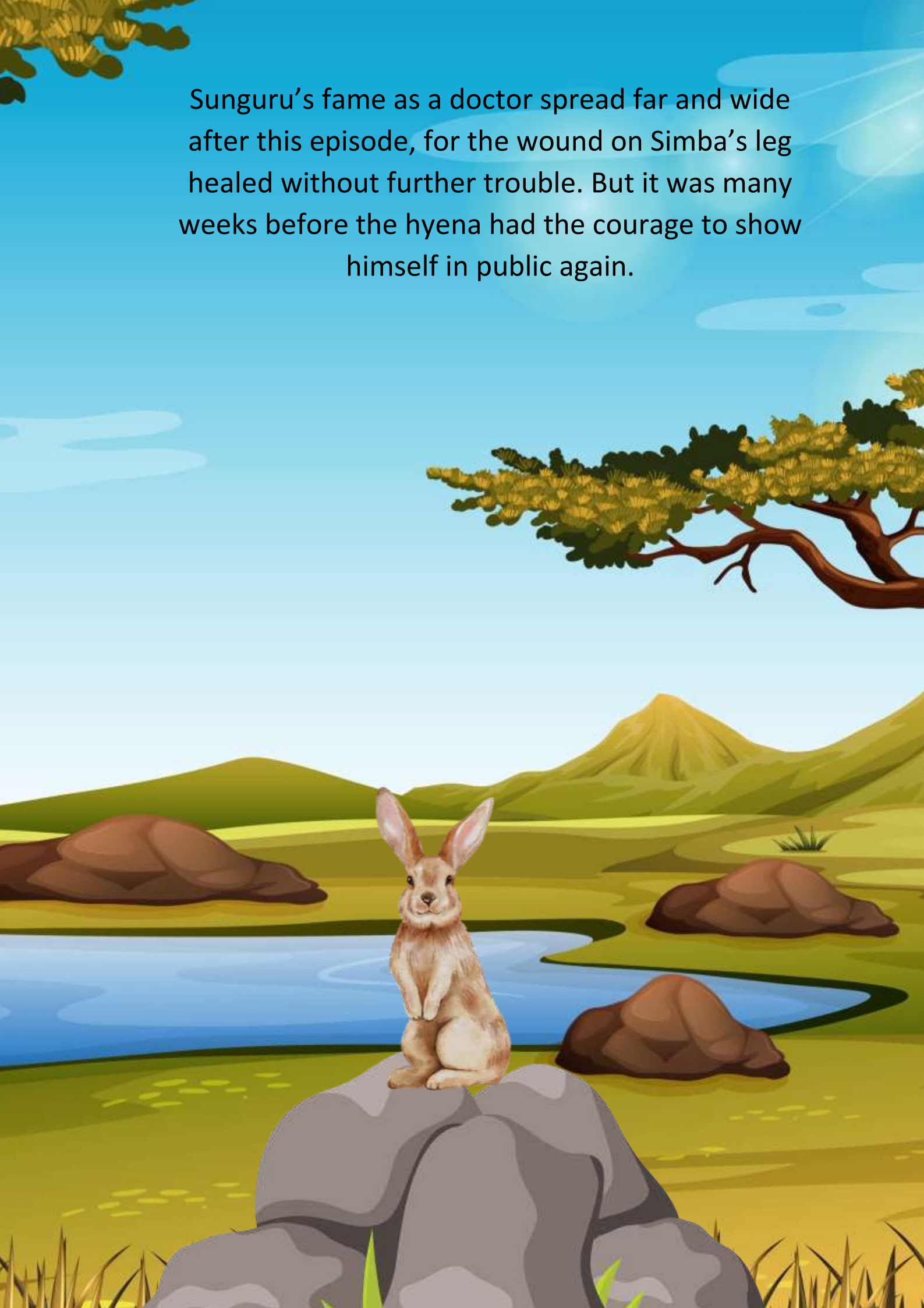
As the skin came away from the hyena's back, the hairs that remained stretched and stood on end.





To this day Nyangua and his kind still have long, coarse hairs standing up on the crests of their misshapen bodies.

Sunguru's fame as a doctor spread far and wide after this episode, for the wound on Simba's leg healed without further trouble. But it was many weeks before the hyena had the courage to show himself in public again.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY