



Madiba's Favourite Folktales

The Message



A Nama variation on the theme of how death came into the world, retold here by poet, novelist and short-story writer George Weideman, who heard it from Grandma Rachel Eises. In the countless versions of his ancient tale the message is sometimes brought by the chameleon and the lizard, while sometimes the hare bungles the message all by himself. In this variation, Tick and Hare are the messengers.

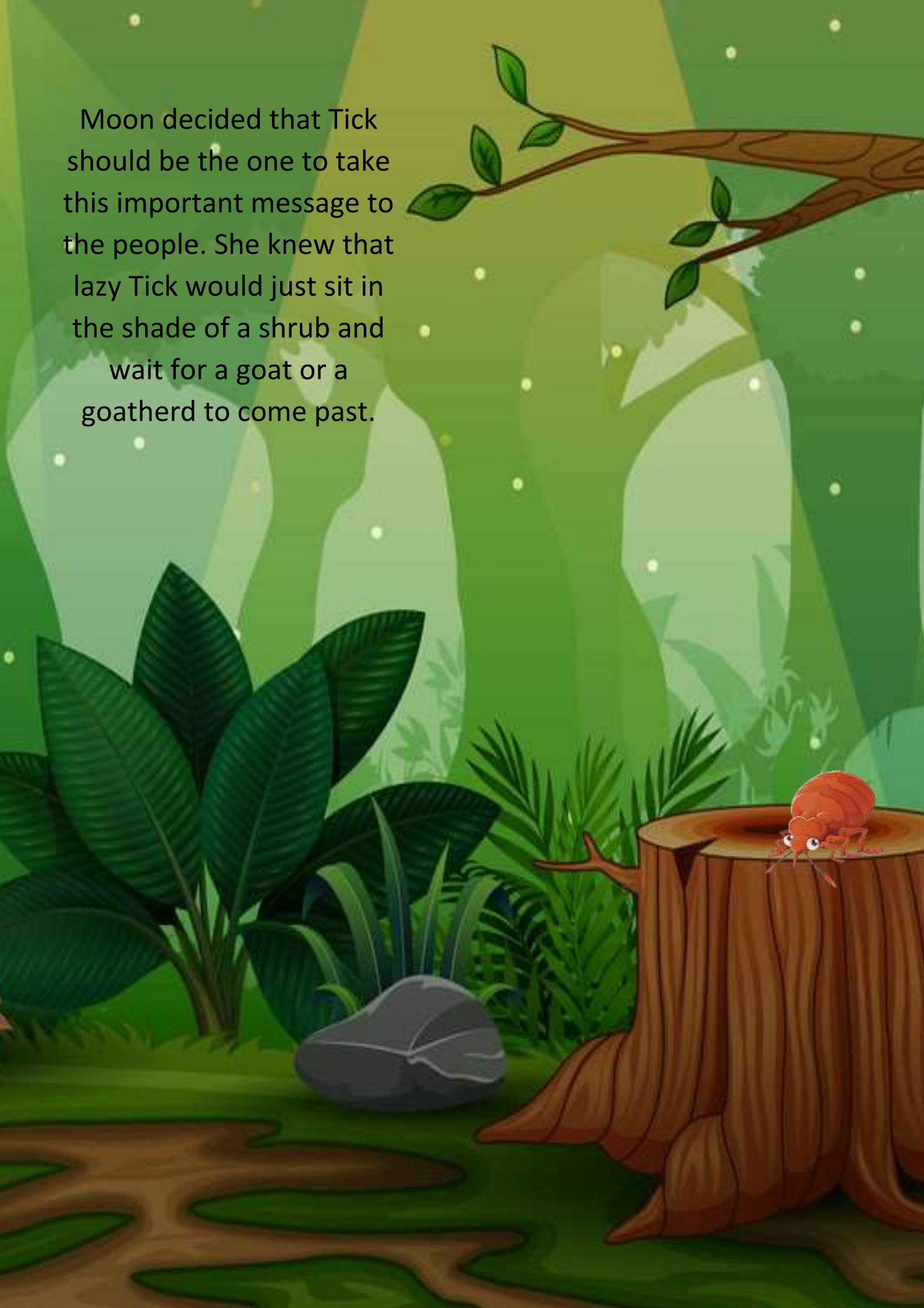
This is the story of Full Moon, Tick and Hare, the message that Moon sent to the people a long, long time ago. This was no ordinary message. Indeed, it was a most important message.



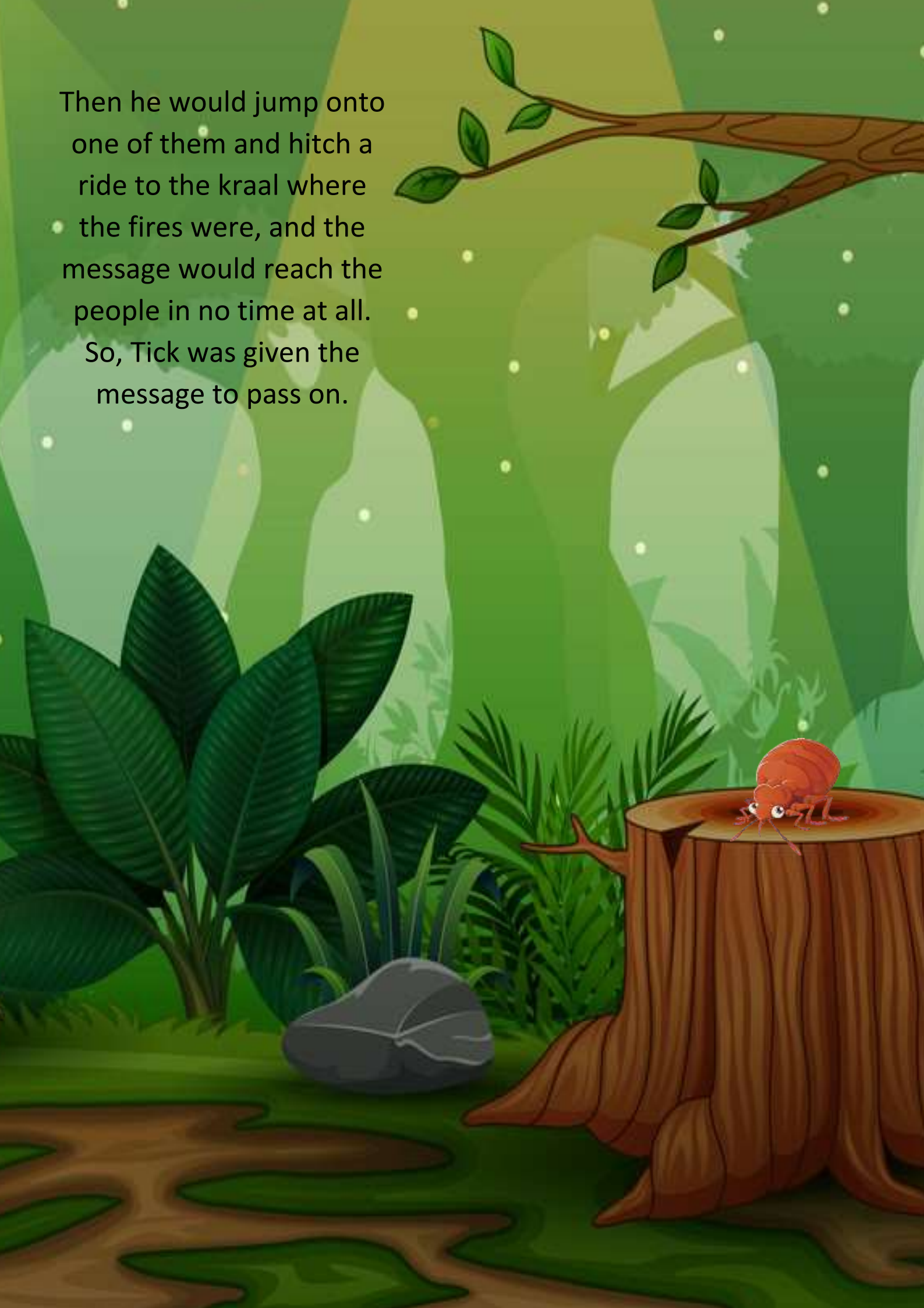
Because, you see, Moon does not really die. She comes back again, as we see each time at full moon. And Moon wanted the people to know this truth: “Just as I die and come alive again, so you also shall die and live again.”



Moon decided that Tick should be the one to take this important message to the people. She knew that lazy Tick would just sit in the shade of a shrub and wait for a goat or a goatherd to come past.



Then he would jump onto one of them and hitch a ride to the kraal where the fires were, and the message would reach the people in no time at all. So, Tick was given the message to pass on.



But unfortunately, Tick was not only lazy – he did not see very well either. When Tick departed from Moon with the message, it was still night. He crept under the nearest tufts of grass and slept until the goats started grazing. There he awaited his opportunity.



As the first shadow fell across the tuft of grass, Tick crept out, crawled up the shinbone in front of him and held on right.



But, ohhh ... Tick had made a terrible mistake. As he kept repeating the message over and over to himself, so as not to forget it, the earth disappeared from underneath him and the tkau trees and the milk bushes grew smaller and smaller.



Only then did he realise that his goat had feathers instead of fur! The sandgrouse squawked as she prepared to land on a far-away bush.



She shook her feathers vigorously, and Tick flew through the air and landed on a tuft of reeds.



That same evening Moon peeped through the milk bushes on the far side, hoping to see the people dancing for joy at hearing the good news. But it was very quiet and the fires were burning low.



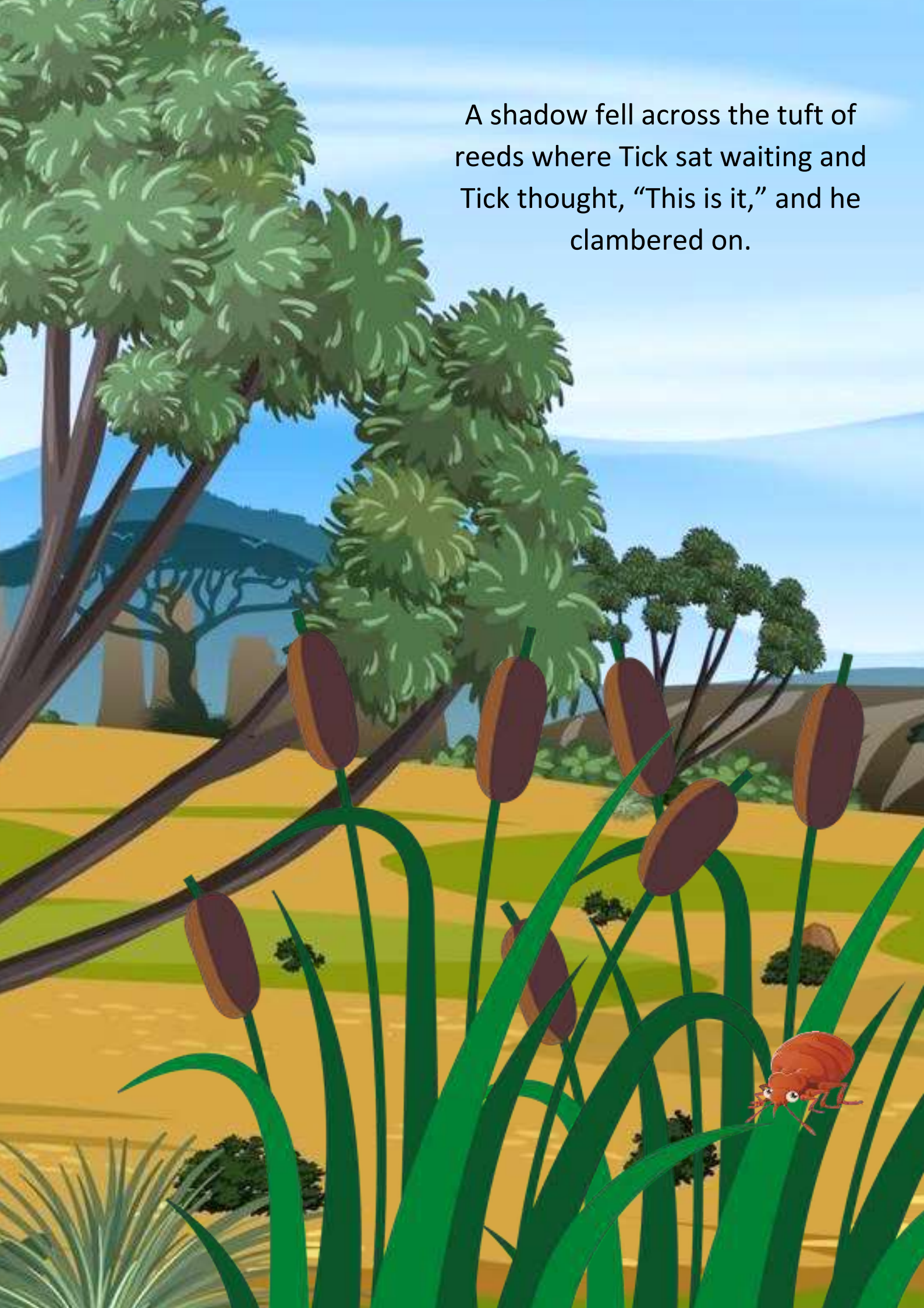
From the weeping of the children,
she could hear that someone was
very ill. Then Moon realised that
Tick had not yet delivered the good
news to the people.



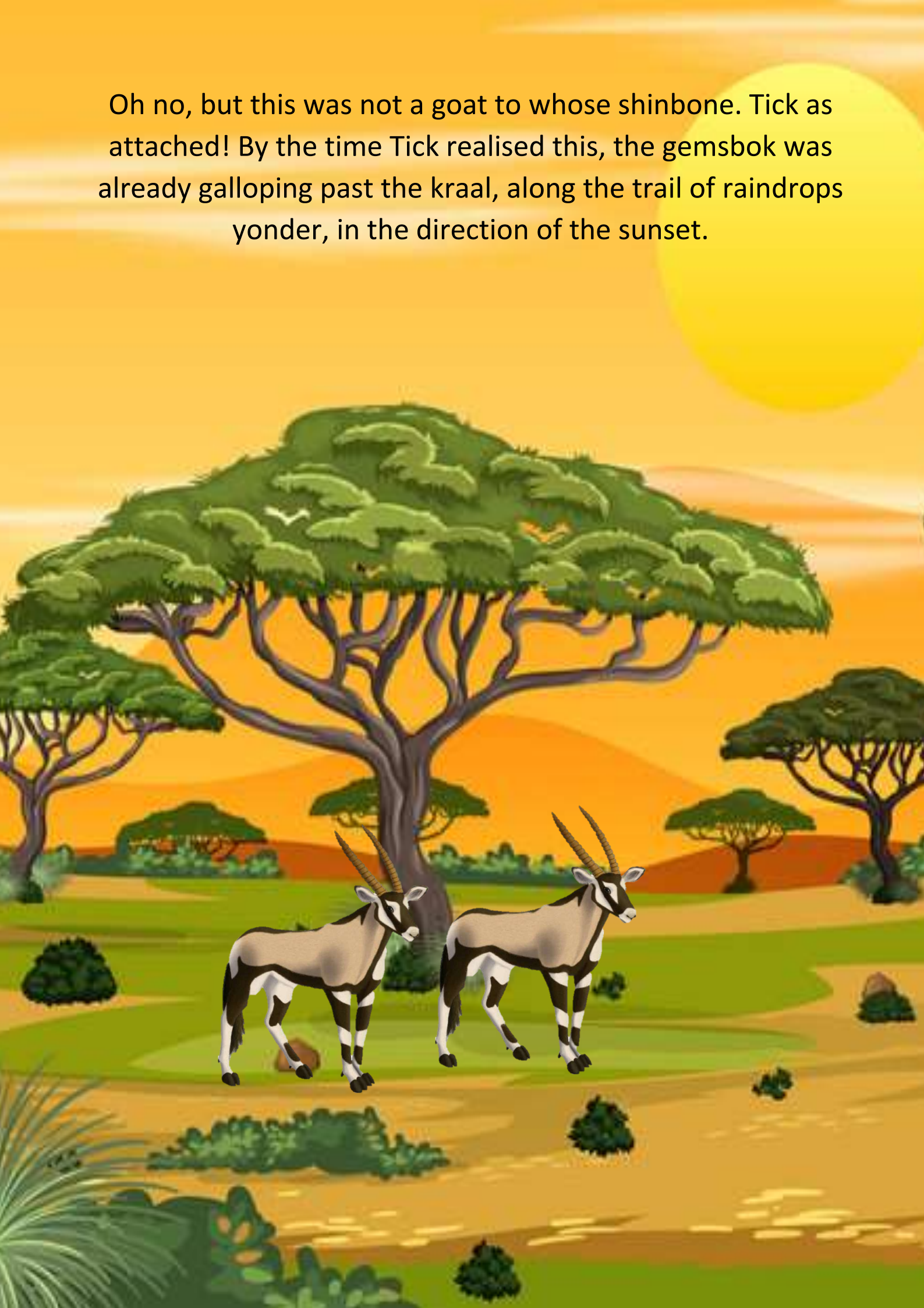
That night a few drops of rain fell, so on the second day the sand around Tick was humming with springbok and gemsbok gambolling for joy.



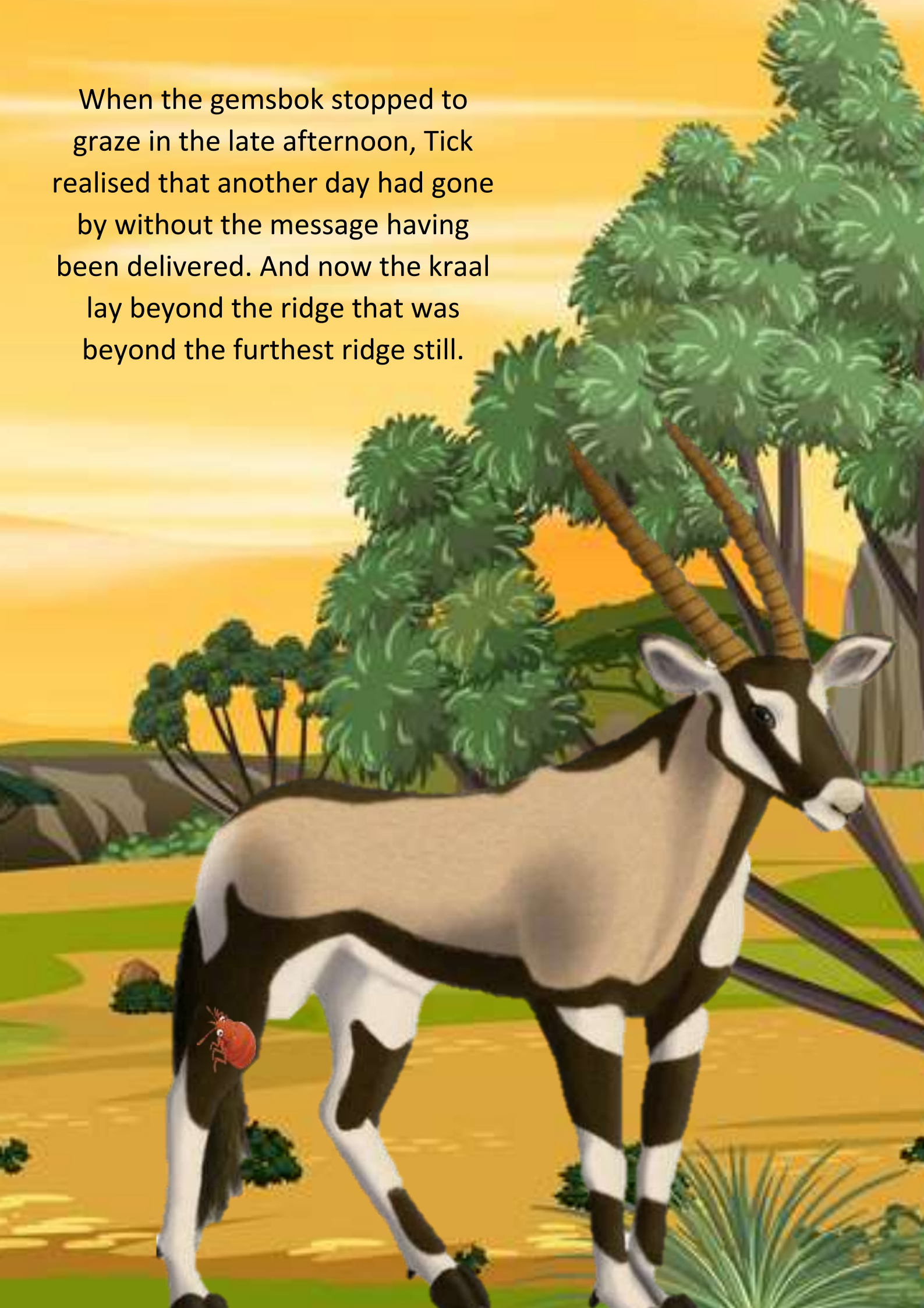
A shadow fell across the tuft of reeds where Tick sat waiting and Tick thought, "This is it," and he clambered on.



Oh no, but this was not a goat to whose shinbone. Tick as attached! By the time Tick realised this, the gemsbok was already galloping past the kraal, along the trail of raindrops yonder, in the direction of the sunset.



When the gemsbok stopped to graze in the late afternoon, Tick realised that another day had gone by without the message having been delivered. And now the kraal lay beyond the ridge that was beyond the furthest ridge still.



A while later, when Moon peeped through the milk bushes, she saw that the fires were even smaller than on the previous evening and she heard the people wailing. Someone was very, very ill indeed, and Moon realised that Tick had still not delivered her message of joy to the people.



On the third day, while Tick was sitting on a sorrel plant, Hare came to nibble the juicy leaves. And Tick told him about his problem.



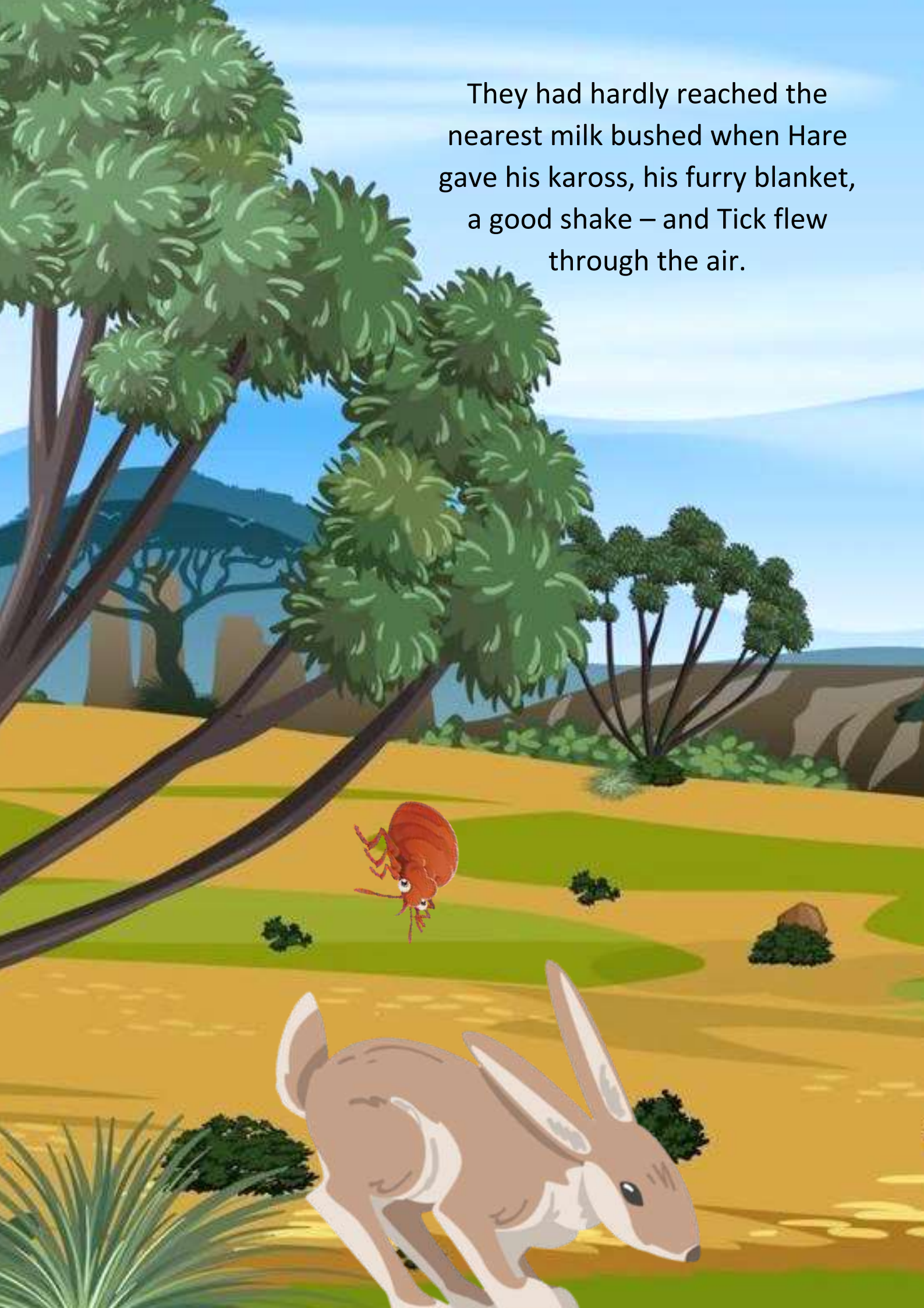
Hare, who was terribly inquisitive, immediately wanted to know what the message was, and Tick rattled it off: “Just as I, Moon, die but come alive again, so shall you also die and live again.”



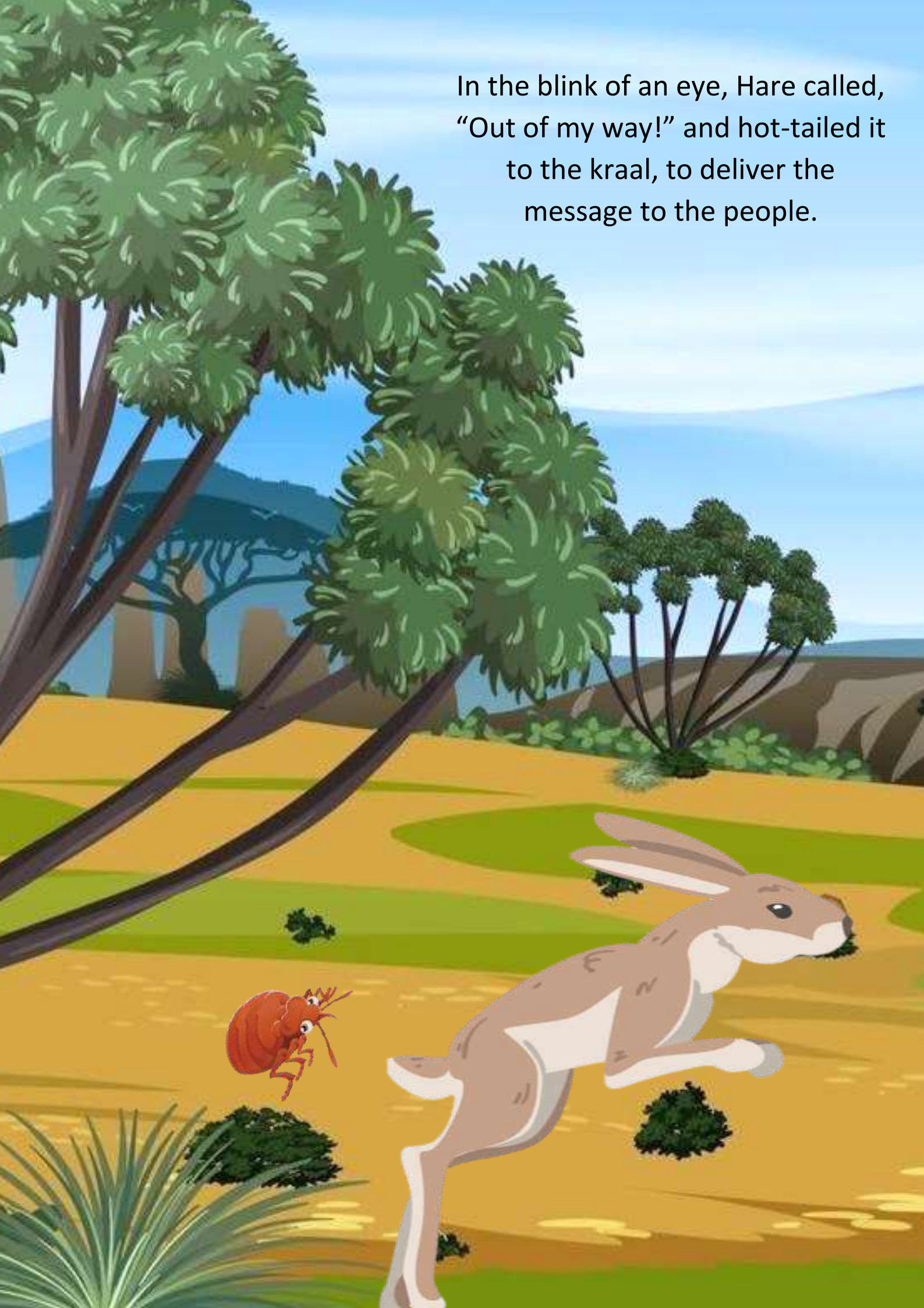
“This is an important message,” thought Hare to himself. “If I can deliver it to the people, I shall be in favour with Moon.” At once he offered to take Tick to the kraal.



They had hardly reached the nearest milk bushed when Hare gave his kaross, his furry blanket, a good shake – and Tick flew through the air.



In the blink of an eye, Hare called,
“Out of my way!” and hot-tailed it
to the kraal, to deliver the
message to the people.



However, whereas Tick was near-sighted, Hare was short-sighted. All he thought about was the fame and fortune he would receive for delivering the important message



He did not keep repeating it to himself, as Tick had; he hot-footed it so that his ears and his fluffy white tail just glanced over the pebbles and the tufts of grass.



But when he arrived at the kraal, all out of breath, Hare could not quite remember the message as Tick had told it to him. He kept repeating it, but the more he repeated it, the more the words were scrambled and the more confused he became.



Dusty and pale, he collapsed on the ground and delivered the following message to the people: “Just as I die, and remain dead, so shall you die and perish.”



All the people of the kraal began wailing and covering themselves in sand and ash, and at that very moment, the very, very, very sick man breathed his last.



That night, when Moon peeped through the milk bushes, she did not see a single live coal. The kraal was deserted. The people had all left. There was no sign of life.



When she looked closely, she could not see Tick anywhere, but Hare was still at the fireplace, repeating the scrambled message in a daze.




Moon was furious. She grabbed a log of burnt-out wood and hit Hare across the face with it. Hare took such fright that he dropped his kaross into the ashes of the fireplace.



Then he snatched it back and hit Moon in
the face with it.



The illustration depicts a vibrant forest landscape. A large, leafy tree with a brown trunk stands on the left. In the background, rolling green hills are visible under a bright, yellowish sky. In the foreground, three rabbits are sitting on the ground. The rabbit on the left is looking towards the right. The rabbit in the middle is looking forward. The rabbit on the right is looking forward and has a noticeable gap in its upper lip, which is the cleft palate mentioned in the text.

Since that day, Hare has had a
cleft palate ...

... and the pale ash-dust is still visible on Moon's face.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY