



Tales From Under the Marula Tree

The Bears and The Money Honey



It was a very hot day and Frisky, the young lion,
was very thirsty.

“Dad, when will it be our turn at the waterhole?”
he asked impatiently.

“If you ask me one more time, I’m going to bite
your tail off!” snarled Gruff.

“Do you think you’re the only one who’s thirsty?
We’re all thirsty! So stop your whining!”



Frisky let out a stubborn grunt, but not loud enough for his father to hear. Lately, his father had been so grumpy he could really bite his tail off. But Frisky's grunt had not been soft enough. Stealthy, his mother, had heard it. She flattened her ears and glared at him furiously.

"If your father hears you grunting at him, he will send you flying!" She scolded.

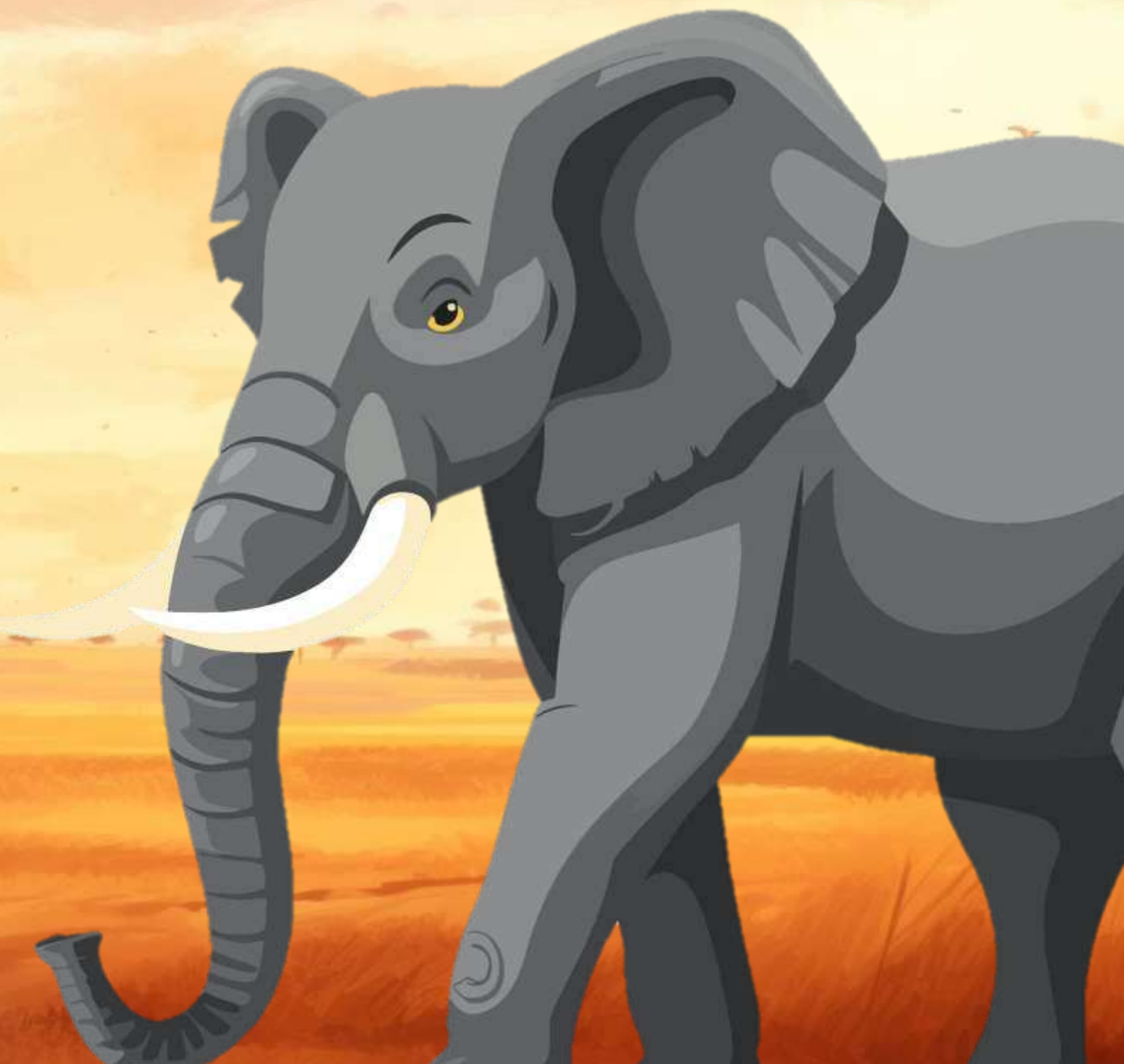
"But I'm thirsty," Frisky moaned.



“It’s not fair!” whined Frisky. “Just listen to the bears splashing in the water while we’re dying of thirst! Why isn’t anyone doing anything about it? If the elephants were still here, they wouldn’t have allowed this.”

“But the elephants aren’t here anymore, they’ve left for greener pastures,” said Stealthy. “So stop whining.”

“But why isn’t anyone doing anything?” asked Frisky again.



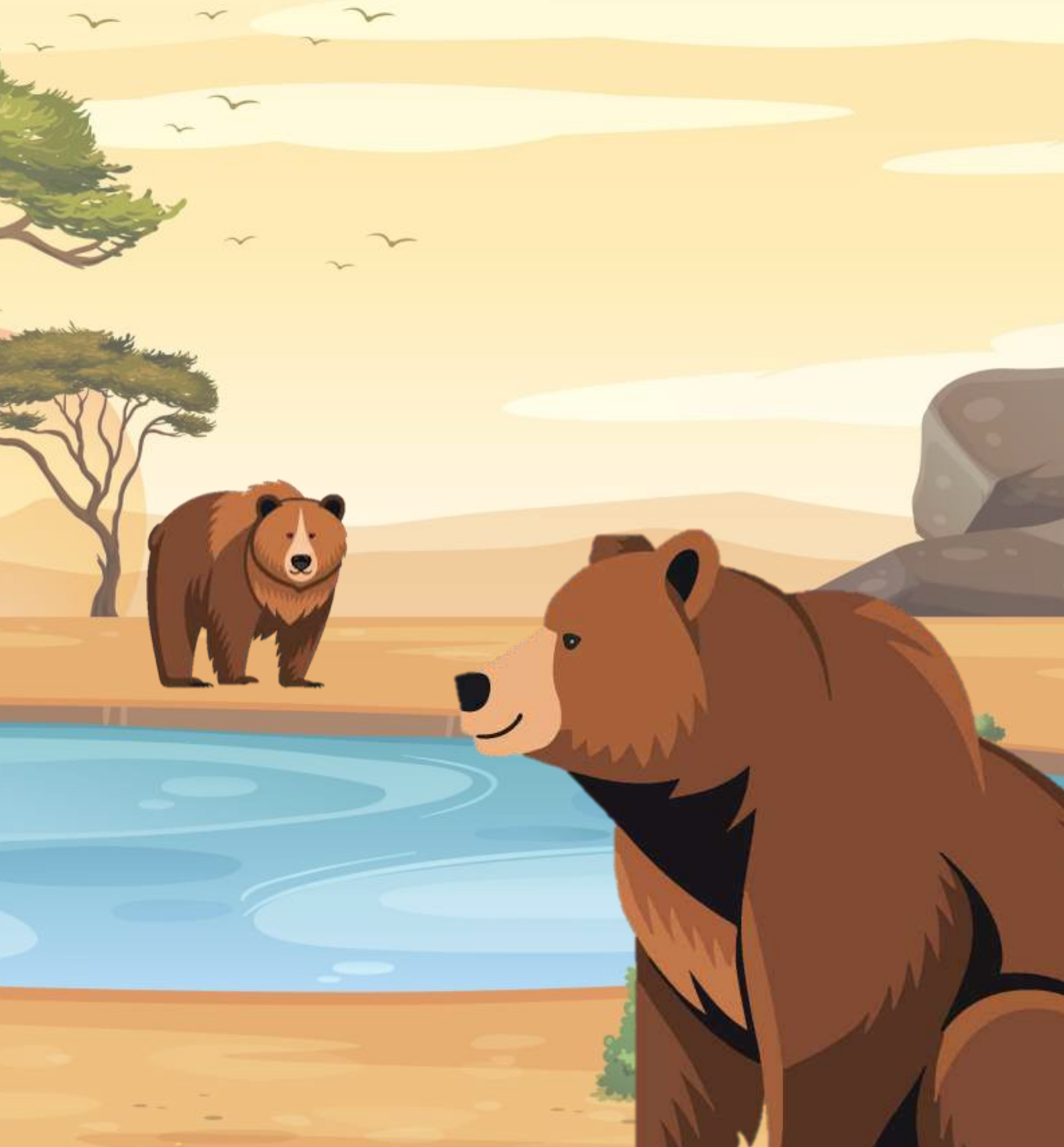
“There are too many of them and they are too strong,” grunted Stealthy . “You should be happy you’re a lion; at least you’ll get a turn to drink before the others.”

“If there’s any water left!” From behind the dry thorn bushes Frisky could see the bears jumping and dancing in the waterhole. They couldn’t care less that they were turning it into mud.



That whole day the other animals sat and waited in the scorching sun for the bears to finish at the waterhole. Only at dusk, when it was not that hot anymore, they sauntered off lazily, the precious water dripping from their pelts.

“It cannot go on like this,” the older animals complained that night. “We have to make a plan. The bears must go.”



“Let’s dig a big snare-pit and let them fall into it,” said Grimace, the hyena.

“And who’s going to dig it?” asked Gruff. “Only the elephants would have been able to and they’ve left. The other animals are too weak with thirst.”

“Let’s block the fountain so that the waterhole dries up. Without water, the bears will leave,” said Thick-Neck, the rhino.

“Are you crazy?” asked Grimace. “How will we survive without water?”

The animals argued like that for hours on end, pushing and shoving to get a few sips of water.



Frisky shook his head. Maybe he had to make a plan himself. But making a plan is not that easy. Frisky thought and thought and thought. He thought the whole night through, but when the sun came up he still did not have a plan.

He was still lying dead still when Hopeful, the vulture, touched down next to him and wobbled closer. Frisky leapt up in panic.

“Oh, sorry, I thought you were breakfast.” Hopeful sounded disappointed.

“Breakfast my foot!” said Frisky angrily.



“Relax, don’t be so cranky,” said Hopeful. “I’m also hungry you know.”

“Humph,” growled Frisky. “With this drought there’s more than enough carrion around for you bent-beaks!”

“Maybe,” said Hopeful, “but only if we could fly high enough so we could see far. But now with the full moon, the moon winds are blowing so strongly up there they could drag you right out of the veld.” With that, the vulture took off and slowly flew away.



If only the moon winds could blow the bears out of the veld, thought Frisky.

“Why are you staring after old Hopeful like that?” someone suddenly asked from behind.

Frisky whisked around. It was his friend Toughie, the badger.

“I was just thinking about what the old beak told me,” said Frisky and then told Toughie about the moon winds.

“Ha!” laughed Toughie. “Now, where would the bears get wings to fly out that high?”



“It was just a thought,” said Frisky and swallowed dryly. The day had barely started and he was already thirsty. “The older animals don’t have a plan. We’ll have to get rid of the bears.”

Toughie sniffled. He was also thirsty again. “You’re right, Frisky. We’ll have to think hard. I’m tired of getting just a mouthful of muddy water every night.”

“Maybe we can ask the ostriches to lend the bears some of their wing feathers,” said Frisky and pointed to a flock of ostriches that were flying past. “Their wings are big enough to carry a bear.”

Toughie shook his head. “Even if the ostriches did lend them their feathers, why would the bears want to fly?”



“Maybe if they were after something they loved,” said Frisky. “Something they can only find high up in the sky.”

“You mean moon honey?” asked Toughie with a dreamy look in his eyes.

“Moon honey?” Frisky shook his head. He had never heard of that before.

Toughie looked around him and whispered: “My grandfather says in the old days when the moon was full you could smell that it was dipped in honey. Golden honey ...”



“That’s the answer!” said Frisky excitedly. “We have to convince the bears that there’s honey on the moon. Toughie, do you know where we can get a little bit of honey?”

Toughie hesitated.

“It’s to get rid of the bears!” Frisky urged.

“Alright, let me show you. But if my dad finds out I told you about our honey stash, he’ll send me flying,” said Toughie.



That evening, when the bears stumbled out of the waterhole to look for food, they saw a young lion lying next to the footpath. He was licking his front paws.

“I smell honey,” grumbled Crooked-Claw, the leader of the bears. “What’s a lion doing with honey? Honey is bear food!”

“Please don’t hurt me,” begged Frisky. “it’s only a lick of moon honey that I got from the badger.”

“BADGER!” bellowed the bears..



“Did someone call me?” Toughie came crawling out of an aardvark burrow, chewing all the way.

“The honey, Badger! We want the honey!” shouted the bears.

“Which honey?” Toughie asked innocently and licked his paws.

“HONEY!” bellowed the bears, raging with hunger.

“Oh, this moon honey,” Toughie said casually and looked at his paw.

“Moon honey?” The bears looked at each other and then at the full moon hanging over the veld like golden honey.

“Where did you get moon honey?”



“Oh, it’s only a little piece that got stuck to an ostrich’s wing when he flew too close to the moon,” said Toughie.

“OSTRICH!” the bears bellowed.

“Who’s shouting like that?” asked the ostriches, still half asleep.

“Fly to the moon and bring us honey!” growled the bears.

“To the moon?” the ostriches shook their heads. “You must be crazy. Do you have any idea how high the moon is?”



“We also wanted to borrow their wing feathers,” said Frisky, “but they wouldn’t hear of it.”

“Borrow?” The bears looked at each other and grinned. “Who said anything about borrowing? Give us your wing feathers! We’ll fetch the honey ourselves.”

The ostriches tried to fly away but the bears were too fast for them. They grabbed the ostriches by their long legs and yanked them from the air. Feathers were flying all over while the bears plucked the ostriches’ wings.



“FOLLOW ME!” bellowed Crooked-Claw and took it off with a swoosh. The whole night sky was suddenly filled with bears flying higher and higher, all of them eager to be the first to reach the moon.

At first, it seemed that Frisky and Toughie’s plan was not working. The bears only flew higher and higher. But as soon as they got close enough to the moon to smell its honey, the moon winds grabbed them.

“HELP! HELP!” echoed the bears’ screams as they were blown further and further away.



“Goodbye!” shouted Frisky and Toughie after all the bears had disappeared roaring in the distance.

The ostriches were furious. They wanted to trample Frisky and Toughie. But the other animals had heard the bears’ screams and came running to help.

“Well done, you two,” said Gruff proudly after he heard the whole story.



“And thanks a lot to the ostriches who gave their wing feathers to the bears.

Without you, we would still be dying of thirst.”

The ostriches felt flattered and fluttered their long eyelashes. They had forgotten all about trampling.



No one has ever seen a bear in the veld again. The swallows brought news of how the bears had been blown across the sea to where they still live today. Everyone was very relieved. Only the ostriches were upset when their new wing feathers were too weak for flying. Their only hope was to get their old feathers back from the bears. And that is why, to this day, ostriches walk with their heads close to the ground, searching the veld for bear tracks. It is no use of course, because the bears are still nowhere to be found.



“I would love to see a bear just once,” sighs Tiny-Toes.

“Biggest cock-and-bull story I’ve heard,” mumbles Uncle Fiddle-Foot.

“What’s bugging Uncle Fiddle-Foot tonight?” asks Knuckles.

“Why is he so grumpy?”



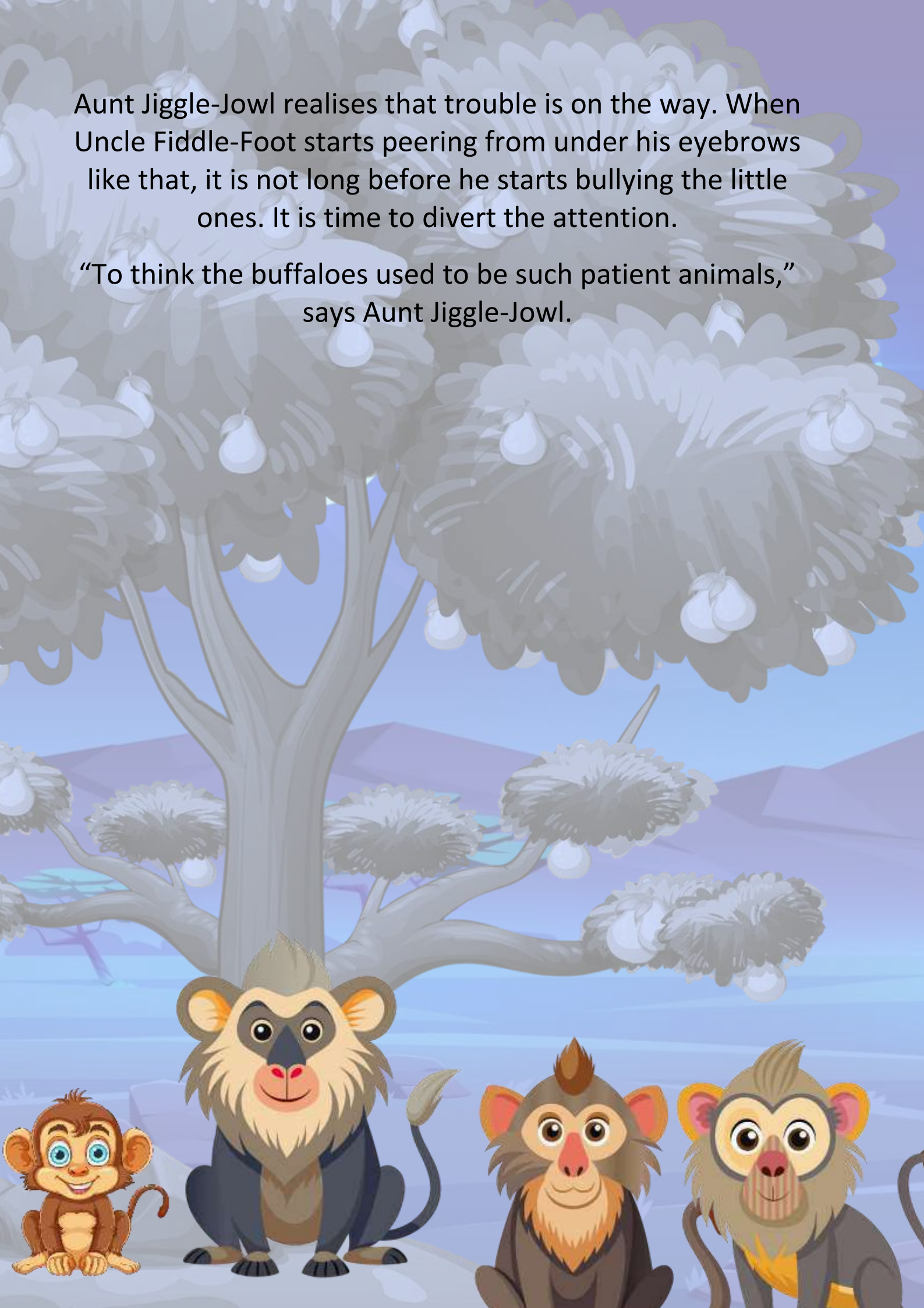
“Oh, the old nuisance has been cranky ever since the buffalo chased him into the umbrella-thorn bush the day before yesterday,” laughs Aunt Babbles. “He’s still struggling to get some of the little thorns out. Especially those on his behind. He could have had them all out a long time ago, but nobody wants to help him look for them!”

The little ones giggle and Uncle Fiddle-Foot glares at them angrily.



Aunt Jiggle-Jowl realises that trouble is on the way. When Uncle Fiddle-Foot starts peering from under his eyebrows like that, it is not long before he starts bullying the little ones. It is time to divert the attention.

“To think the buffaloes used to be such patient animals,” says Aunt Jiggle-Jowl.



“You know, it’s ever since they lost their stripes that they’ve been so grumpy.”

“Did the buffaloes used to have stripes?” asks little Bumpkin.

“Don’t know the story of how the buffaloes lost their stripes?” asks Aunt Jiggle-Jowl.

“No, Aunty!” shout the little ones.



