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#WRAD2022

ISBN-13: 9780798182157



9-12 years

An Anansi Mystery: The Haunted Library

Bontle Senne, Mogau Kekana

When twin sisters, Karabo and Siphe, overhear some workers complaining about strange goings on at the construction site for the new library, Karabo is determined to find out more. Along with their friend Bandile and his trained police dog, Zuko, they sneak into the building to investigate. But they soon stumble upon a much greater adventure than they anticipated – with dancing ghosts, dangerous quests and one very strange magical creature . . . Will Siphe be able to save her sister when Karabo, as usual, lands herself in big trouble? And what will happen when the five friends uncover the truth about the haunted library?

R160,00 | * Price is subject to change



#WRAD2022



Chapter 1

The screaming started just as Karabo was about to tell her twin sister, Siphe, a story about their annoying maths teacher, Mister Maimane.

“Do you hear that?” Karabo asked, turning to Siphe, and grabbing hold of her sister’s arm.

Siphe nodded and they both turned to look in the direction of the sound. Malume TC, the old man who always shouted at them for laughing too loudly in the street, was standing at his usual spot under a lonely lemon tree. Malume started a slow walk to stand on the narrow strip of pavement in front of his one-room house, looking in the direction from which the screams were coming.

The sound seemed to be getting closer. After a few seconds, Siphe and Karabo saw a dozen men in dusty blue overalls running towards them. They had stopped screaming but they were still making a noise as they raced down the pavement. The old man cursed and stepped aside to avoid being trampled. Siphe pulled Karabo behind a car parked on the street and away from the men – some were still shouting as they passed; others were crying.



One of the men slowed down and the others left him behind.

Stopping just in front of the old man's house, he took off the white plastic hard hat Siphe had seen builders wear on construction projects all around their township.

When he bent down, doubling over so that he could put his hands on his knees, he started to take deep breaths to calm himself just like Gogo taught Karabo to do when she got angry.

From their hiding place behind the car, Siphe saw that the man's hands were trembling. His hard hat dropped to the ground and she watched him clench his hands into fists to stop the shaking.

The old man shouted: "Hey, wena! What's going on?" stabbing one finger in the air, pointing at the obviously shaken man. "Why were you all running and making so much noise in the street?"

"I'm sorry, Malume, we didn't mean to cause any problems," the man said with an unsteady voice: "It's just that . . . things are not right."

Siphe tried to pull Karabo away, knowing they needed to get home soon to start on their homework. But Karabo shook her head and put a finger to her lips in a gesture Siphe instantly understood – neither of the men had noticed that they were there. Karabo had decided that they should stay and listen.

Malume TC spoke again over the other man's loud breathing: "Heh? What are you talking about? What's not right?"

"You know the new library we're building on Albertina Street? The project has been nothing but problems since it started two months ago. I'm sure you've heard about it, Malume. Every day on the construction site, there have been strange noises. Sometimes it sounds like children whispering or laughing but, when we go to investigate, no one is there."

Siphe rolled her eyes, but then she saw her sister's face and the excited smile creeping from ear to ear at the ridiculous story they were hearing.

Malume TC folded his arms and shook his head. When he narrowed his eyes to really look at the man, he said: “You young people watch too much TV! And these wrong things you see on your cell phones and on this YouTube thing that tricks you into believing all this funny business.”

The man scooped up his hard hat, stood to his full height, closed his eyes, and explained: “I wish it was that simple, Malume, but it’s not. I never thought anything like this was possible. I used to think it only happened in the movies, like you say. But now I’ve seen and heard things happening at the library site with my own eyes and ears, and I’m telling you it’s real! Purple and red lights coming from rooms with locked doors that should not be locked at all. We can’t open them because there are no keys, so we break down the doors, but the rooms are always empty. Our tools move by themselves or just disappear, even during the day when we’re all on site. Doors slam when there’s no wind and no one around.”

The look on Karabo's face had shifted from excitement to worry. What they were hearing didn't sound like a funny story anymore.



Malume TC frowned, as though he was also taking the man's story more seriously now.

"I did read something about this library project in the newspaper a few weeks back," Malume finally admitted. "They said the problems started when the contract was given to the big construction company that the mayor wanted, instead of going to the local company that the people wanted. They were asking questions about how the big company got the contract and some people said they thought the bosses had paid to get that contract. What do you think?"

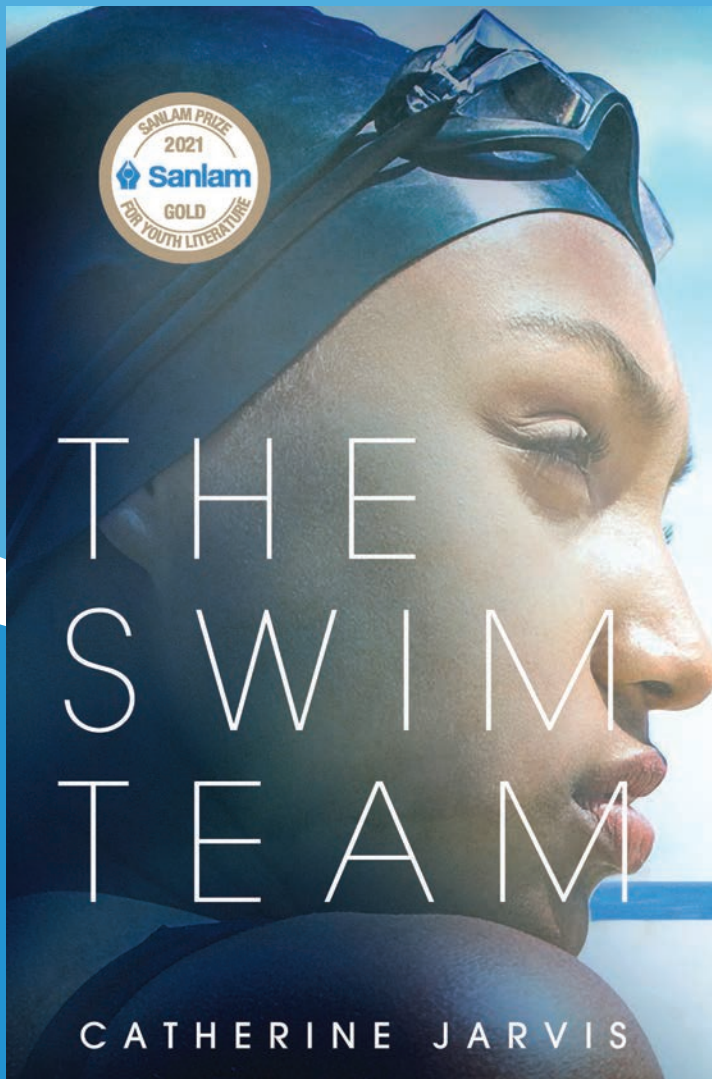
The man was quiet for a few seconds before he spoke. "Malume, I don't know anything about paying anyone. A job is a job. We're just builders. We wanted the other company just like everyone else in the township, but we're trying to do a good job now with this new employer. The only thing I really know is that this project is cursed."

"Cursed? What nonsense!" the old man laughed.

“You can laugh Malume,” the man sighed, “but I know what I know. That library isn’t even finished yet and it’s already haunted. There are ghosts or angry spirits or *something* in that place and whatever it is, it will not let us finish this building.”



ISBN-13: 9780624092926



14+ years

The Swim Team

Catherine Jarvis

When you're in the water it's just you. Before St Anne's, I used to think about how being in the water gave me so much space to move around freely, and it would feel like I'd escaped the cramped flat I lived in with my mother and the Sudanese couple with their screeching infant. I could ignore my life and listen to the roaring of the water with every stroke I made, and concentrate on nothing but the rhythmic movement of freestyle. Now I swim to escape this school - the school I was so desperate to get into.

Khetiwe is the poor scholarship girl from Yeoville at the exclusive St Anne's Academy. Kind of like a new inmate in prison, she has to be unafraid of the others so they don't give her a whipping, and maybe that'll earn her a little respect. Because, really, this place too is full of crazy, violent thugs, but here they're sixteen-year-old girls masked in Chanel and clothed in Puma.

R230,00 | * Price is subject to change

Chapter 1: The Changeroom

Even at 7:30 am the changeroom is stuffy; the windows are clamped shut and the damp is rising off our bodies. Swimming costumes plop to the floor, girls strut naked, pulling out school uniforms from personal lockers, and friendly chatter is volleyed about. They have perfect swimmers' bodies: lean, toned legs and arms, broad shoulders, shallow stomachs – like they have been training their whole lives. Probably have. If it wasn't for the glances at me, none friendly, you would say they were in total harmony with their environment, having seen each other naked countless times before.

I am huddled in the far corner of the changeroom, my wet costume still slicked to my body, and I'm trying not to seem like I'm staring at their exposed bodies. I know I should be getting dressed right now, but I'm paralysed by the newness of it all. Like if I take off my costume, will they all be curious to see how my body compares with theirs? Will I be some kind of spectacle? Because, ja, I don't belong

with these girls. I can tell by the liberal spurts of perfume they're embalming themselves with and how even their white school socks are Nike. Before I got all this new gear, every sock I owned had a nice round hole in it for my big toe to poke through. But, the biggest difference of all is, I'm not white and my life before now, couldn't have been more unlike theirs.

"Get dressed," one of the girls hisses at me – maybe she's trying to be helpful. She says it while wringing out her costume, water splattering the floor, but then she turns away from me as though she never made contact at all.

I peel off my costume with my right hand and hold onto the towel with my left, trying to cover myself up while undressing at the same time. I just look ridiculous and body parts are spilling out on show, anyway. I hear the sniggers.

I just continue, nonchalant. That's the style I've adopted here: you don't scare me and I don't care. I once watched this documentary about prisons in America and the interviewer asked a new inmate – convicted to life in prison – whether he was feeling scared. The inmate was all shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Nah, man, not afraid of nuthin'", which is a surprising thing to say considering he will probably never leave and prison is full of crazy, violent thugs. Then one of the warders beamed into the camera and said that the prisoner had the right attitude, otherwise he would get eaten alive in there.

So I'm kind of like that new prisoner – I must pretend to

be unafraid of the others so they don't give me a whipping, and maybe that'll earn me a little respect. Because, really, this place too is full of crazy, violent thugs but here they're sixteen-year-old girls masked in Chanel and clothed in Puma.

"God, just drop the towel already," a girl with perfect eyebrows says in a raised voice from across the room, her annoyance wafting towards me. Farrah. She's standing in her laced and padded bra, her damp brown hair loose at her shoulders and her hands, impatient, on her hips.

The other girls quieten, like they're waiting for something.

When I don't do anything, Farrah says, "What's the matter? Scared to expose that tummy of yours?"

The hate hits me from out of nowhere. I know meanness doesn't need a reason but, come on, I've been lurking in the corner of the changeroom keeping out of everyone's way, trying to make myself scarce. Then this?

It might be a test and, like a new inmate, I know my reaction is important. Everyone is expectant. The chatter stops; the wringing of costumes and brushing of hair can wait till after this moment.

I just stare back at Farrah: I'm so not scared of you. Holding her gaze, I drop my towel to the ground with a flourish. I am now practically naked besides my panties. But her eyes don't flicker.

"Oh, so it's because you're embarrassed to show us your underwear. Makes sense now. Not quite as shiny and new as your uniform, hey?"

And then she points at my crotch. Six pairs of eyes follow the arrow.

My hands instinctively want to cover the panty, to protect it from their prying eyes. She has a smirk on her face and a few girls giggle – caught between amusement and shock. I should have changed in the toilet cubicle.

But it's too late for that now. Instead I turn my back on them, facing my little corner, and fumble through my bag, hoping they will return to their usual tasks so I can continue to put on my clothes. I can feel the heat rising up my cheeks and the blood pounding in my ears. So much for nonchalance.

The door swings open and Miss Wilson, the swimming coach, enters. She is wearing a white t-shirt French-tucked into tiny white shorts and white sneakers with a pink Nike tick slashed on the sides. When I first met her, all I could do was stare at her perfectly sculpted calves. You wouldn't say that calves are the most attractive thing in the world but hers totally are. A hush falls over the group and the other girls look up at her, entranced, turning their gaze away – thank god – from me.

It's a very strange thing that I noticed in the pool this morning. The only way I can describe it is infatuation. They're all a little bit in love with her because she represented South Africa in the 2012 London Olympics. (I admit, I was also a little starstruck when I realised that I'm being coached by an Olympian.)

I seize the distraction to put my clothes on. The bra in my

bag is old; it is the only one I have and I've had it for a while now. The elastic is all stretched and loose and it's now a dull-grey colour. I know I definitely can't let them see it. I slip on my new school shirt and the bra at the same time, trying to cover it almost immediately. I keep shooting covert looks in the others' direction but I'm no longer interesting to them.

The coach is addressing us all, but she stays standing in the middle of the doorway, letting much-needed air into the stuffy room.

"Girls, I hope you are not giving Khethiwe a hard time, hey?" she says, and there is no smile on her face; her eyes are cold. The girls all drop their gaze – like oops, sorry – and mutter their nos. Even the ringleader is doing the same. I just continue putting on my clothes, hoping against everything that she won't ask me whether I'm being treated nicely, like I'm some little girl who needs help.

"Farrah. I want to see you now. Outside."

Farrah's perfect eyebrows are now raised in puzzlement but Miss Wilson ignores her and instead holds open the door, standing aside to wait for her. Farrah has no choice so she troops off, head held high, trying desperately not to look meek.

Before Miss Wilson swings the door closed, her eyes meet mine. Then I know that she must have heard it all. A sliver of pity drops from her eye, but I want to throw it back at her. Because pity is worse than shame, even if it's coming from a good place.

The rest of the girls are murmuring to each other, throwing looks my way as though it's somehow my fault Farrah is in trouble. I hear raised voices outside but I continue to get dressed like everything is normal and I wasn't just humiliated a moment ago. Put on socks, put on shoes, throw on a ton of aqueous cream so my legs aren't dry as hell, fix hair in the steamed-up mirror.

The bell sounds for breakfast and the other girls start to leave, ignoring me. I am the last to go – actually, I wait until the last girl leaves by pretending to be busy with my kitbag (if I could fit in it, I would burrow inside and never leave).

The coach and Farrah are still there when I do eventually make my way outside. The coach sees me as the door slams and she says something to Farrah, then puts her hand on her shoulder. The girl turns her head to look at that soothing hand. It's just a friendly pat – no hard feelings. But she seems grateful that the coach has somewhat forgiven her, like she wants that hand to stay on her shoulder forever. I turn around quickly to avoid Miss Wilson because it is bad enough that she is trying to fight my battles.

“Hey, Khethiwe!”

Damn. I turn back to look at the coach but don't move closer to her.

“You did great today. You'll be acing the swim meets soon.” She's smiling, this brilliant genuine smile, as though she means it. Maybe she does.

I give her a smile back and mutter, “Thanks.”

Farrah is watching with a perfect snarl, still standing underneath the coach's shadow.

"Let me walk with you," she says, her snarl mutating into a smile. The coach looks pleased, thinking that she's worked her magic. Ja, sure.

She waves us off and strides back to her small office attached to the damp changeroom.

With that, we're alone.

The 25-metre pool stretches out before us, water still rippling and unsettled after we thrashed about in it for an hour and a half. Patches of water blot the sides of the pool where we've heaved our soaked selves out of it. I like this pool. It's much nicer than Yeoville where I used to train. And, really, it is the only place here where I feel I belong; where I'm not an intruder.

That's the beauty of swimming. When you're in the water it's just you. Before St Anne's, I used to think about how being in the water gave me so much space to move around freely, and it would feel like I'd escaped the cramped flat I lived in with my mother and the Sudanese couple with their screeching infant. I could ignore my life and listen instead to the roaring of the water with every stroke I made, and concentrate on nothing but the rhythmic movement of freestyle.

Now I swim to escape this school – the school I was desperate to get into. I knew that it wasn't going to be easy, being the poor scholarship girl. Pierre, my neighbour and

probably best friend, said in his French-Congolese accent that I shouldn't worry because a school uniform is like the invisibility cloak in Harry Potter – it will hide my poverty. Too bad it took me so long to put on the invisibility cloak this morning. Not that the other girls didn't already know I was poor – it's not like I need it tattooed on my forehead. They can just tell. They can hear it in my accent and see it in my not-so-perfect teeth. There are so many little indicators that tell them I'm not one of them.

The rest of the team have already turned the corner and are on their way to the dining hall. I feel their absence immediately. It's just me and Farrah now. Farrah starts walking: big leaps, her body upright, no slouching. What kind of person walks like this? But I match her strides, my kit bag thumping against the back of my knees.

Once we pass the swimming pool gates, a stone pathway unfolds before us, covered with big outstretched trees and silence. It really feels like someone could get away with a murder here in this lonely faraway spot.

Breaking the silence, Farrah says, "You think Miss Wilson actually means what she just said about acing the swim meets?"

"Maybe."

"Well she's just saying it because she feels sorry for you, you know? You're the poor township girl who landed at St Anne's Academy. I don't need to tell you that you don't belong here because you know that already. And you're not

even that good a swimmer.” She pronounces the last insult with emphasis as though that’s her trump card.

At least we are alone. So no one can hear what she is saying to me.

At least we are alone. So no one can hear what I’m about to say to her. It’s not shame I’m feeling right now; it’s venomous anger.

“Listen here, mediocre white girl, I am not afraid of you. You think you can tell me I don’t belong here when I beat you by a length this morning?” I spit out at her, and I’m this close to saying, “Tsek, you rubbish,” but I hold that one in.

Farrah is looking at her nails, in an effort to appear unconcerned, and then she says, “I’m recovering from a shoulder injury. I’m actually embarrassed you think you could beat me for real.”

I remember seeing blue plasters on her shoulder when we were swimming earlier. Blind with fury, I bump my shoulder into hers with as much force as I can muster as I move away from her. She yelps and clutches her injured shoulder.

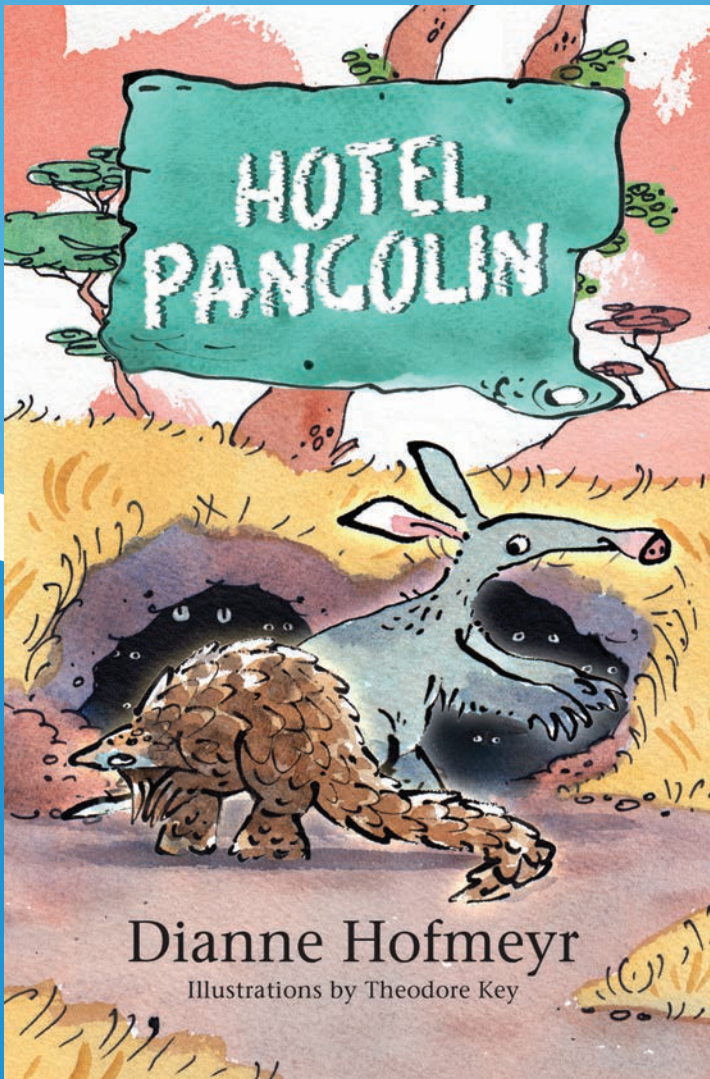
“That was a huge mistake,” she says to me. “You are messing with the wrong person.”

I start marching along the path, leaving her swearing at me, and immediately I’m overcome with remorse for what I’ve done. How could I purposefully try to hurt someone, no matter how cruel they are? I know I shouldn’t have let my

anger get the better of me. I send a plea upwards that I haven't made her injury any worse.

One thing I know for sure though: by hurting Farrah, I have ensured that this feud is not over; we've only just dived into the pool.

ISBN-13: 9780624092384



6-9 years

Hotel Pangolin

Dianne Hofmeyr, Theodore Key

Two very different nocturnal creatures learn the give and take of friendship on the African savannah, when they decide to open a hotel. Armadillo, impulsive and full of ideas, is the perfect foil to Pangolin's calm and careful nature. The tempo of each chapter follows a pattern: Armadillo, the dreamer, suggests a half-baked idea. Pangolin refuses for rational reasons, then falls under Armadillo's spell, with the inevitable conflict that follows. Funny and adventurous, the story explores friendship and individuality. In the end it's the tiny gifts left by the animals who came to stay that help Pangolin appreciate what true friendship means.

R140,00 | * Price is subject to change



A NEIGHBOUR

Pangolin woke to the sound of scratching
and scabbling next to his ear.

SCRITCH

SCRATCH

SCRABBLE

From the light slanting into his burrow,

he could tell it was still daytime. Far too early to be awake.

SCRITCH

SCRATCH

SCRABBLE

It wasn't a snake. Snakes don't dig.

It wasn't a porcupine. Porcupines aren't that noisy.

It was a creature with claws.

"Oi! Stop that noise!" Pangolin called out.

But the digging went on.

SCRITCH

SCRATCH

SCRABBLE

Pangolin uncurled and shouted through

the wall of his burrow. "Did you hear me?
I said *stop that noise!*"

The digging stopped.

"What noise?"

"That noise you're making."

"It's *you* making the noise. You're the
one who's yelling."

"I'm not yelling. I'm asking you to be
quiet."

"Digging a burrow is a noisy business."

Pangolin knew that voice. It *had* to be
Warthog. Only warthogs speak through
their noses in that snouty way. And there
was no way Pangolin wanted Warthog
living next to him.

"Warthog, *please* go away. You've dis-
turbed my sleep."

"I'm not a warthog."

The creature started digging again.

SCRITCH

SCRATCH

“If you carry on, you’ll dig right through my wall and break into my burrow—”

Just as Pangolin’s words were out, a little waterfall of earth ran down the side of his wall and a tiny gap appeared.

“*There!* Now look what you’ve done!” Using his tail for balance, Pangolin stood up on his back legs to inspect the damage.

“What have I done?”

“You’ve broken through my wall. There’s a hole in it.”

A pink piggy eye peeped through the hole. “You mean *our* wall. It’s very dark in there. I can’t see you.”

“I don’t *want* to be seen. I want my wall fixed.”

“You’re *very* grumpy.”

“You would be too if someone bashed into your home.”

“I wasn’t bashing. I was digging.”

“My roof might collapse. It would be a disaster. I’d have to move. Please *stop!* I *don’t want* you living next to me.”

“See . . . you really *are* very grumpy.”

“No, I’m *not!*”

“Yes, you *are!*”

“Stop saying I’m grumpy, when clearly I’m not.”

“If you’re not grumpy, then what are you?”

“I’m . . . slightly annoyed.”

“Only *slightly?*”

“You certainly would be too, if you woke up to find someone bashing down your burrow.”

“See! I told you! You’re *grumpy!*”

“Warthog, please stop telling me I’m grumpy.”

“I’m only trying to make conversation.”

“Well, *don’t*. I’m in no mood for conversation. You woke me up.”

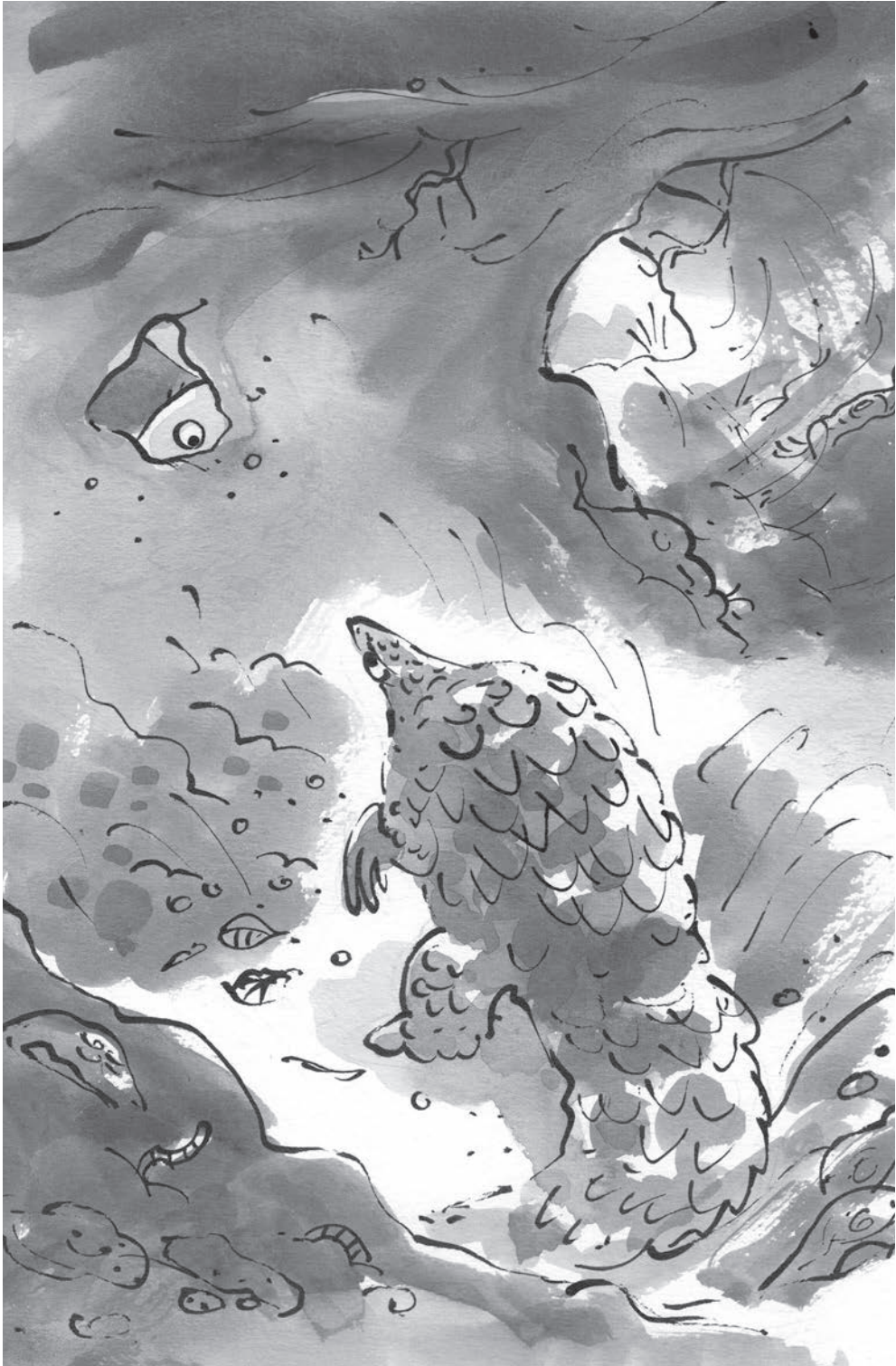
There was a moment of silence. Pangolin was just about to curl up again when the eye at the hole blinked.

“Excuse me, but I think you should know I’m *not* a warthog.”

“What are you then?”

“I’m an *aardvark*.”

“Warthog! Aardvark! What’s the difference? I knew you were some sort of pig.”



“There’s a *big* difference – Warthogs have tusks. Besides it’s *very rude* to call someone a pig.”

“But you *are* one. Aardvark means *earth pig*.”

“I know who *I* am. But who are *you*?”

Pangolin huffed up and shook out his scales so they made a rattling noise. “I’m a *pangolin*. One of the most sought-after creatures in the whole world.”

“Sought after? Why?”

“It would take too long to explain.”

“I don’t mind listening. I like making conversa—”

“Let’s just say, humans sell pangolins for our scales. Our scales are turned into medicine.”

“I see. Well, not really – I actually can’t

see a thing. Are you some sort of fish?"

"Some sort of *fish*?"

"You said you had scales."

"I am absolutely *not* a fish. Would a fish sleep in a burrow? No, I'm an *animal*. With scales."

"Like a lizard?"

"No! *Not* like a lizard! Lizards are reptiles. They lay eggs. I'm *not* a fish or a reptile. I'm a *mammal*. I've existed on this planet for eighty million years. Pangolins were alive at the time of the dinosaurs."

"The *dinosaurs*? You must be *really old*!"

"Not me personally, Aardvark. My *species* has existed for eighty million years."

The eye didn't blink.

"And *you*, Aardvark, have been on this

planet for *only* five million years. That's a fact. And humans for eight million. *Another* fact."

"Seems you like facts."

"*Technically*, I do. Did you know that I'm the *only* mammal in the world with scales? My real name is, in fact, *Smutsia temminckii*. But you probably don't speak Latin."

The piggy eye at the other side of the wall blinked. "I don't think anyone *speaks* Latin anymore, Pangolin . . . unless you're the sort of animal that thinks it's important to call yourself by your Latin name. But for your information, my name is the very first in the English dictionary."

Pangolin dropped to all fours and turned away. What an upstart this Aardvark

was. It was useless trying to talk to him.

“Pangolin, for someone with scales, you’re very thin-skinned. If we’re going to be neighbours, can’t we at least be friends?”

Pangolin was silent.

“I have an idea . . .” Aardvark started to say.

Still Pangolin was silent.

“Would you like to hear my idea?”

Pangolin sighed. “You’re going to tell me in any case, even if I don’t want to hear it. So? What is it?”

“We could leave this hole between our burrows open and be proper neighbours!”

Pangolin turned back and stared as hard as he could at the piggy eye.

“And if we were neighbours, I could tell you stories before bedtime.”

Silence.

“Do you like stories, Pangolin?”

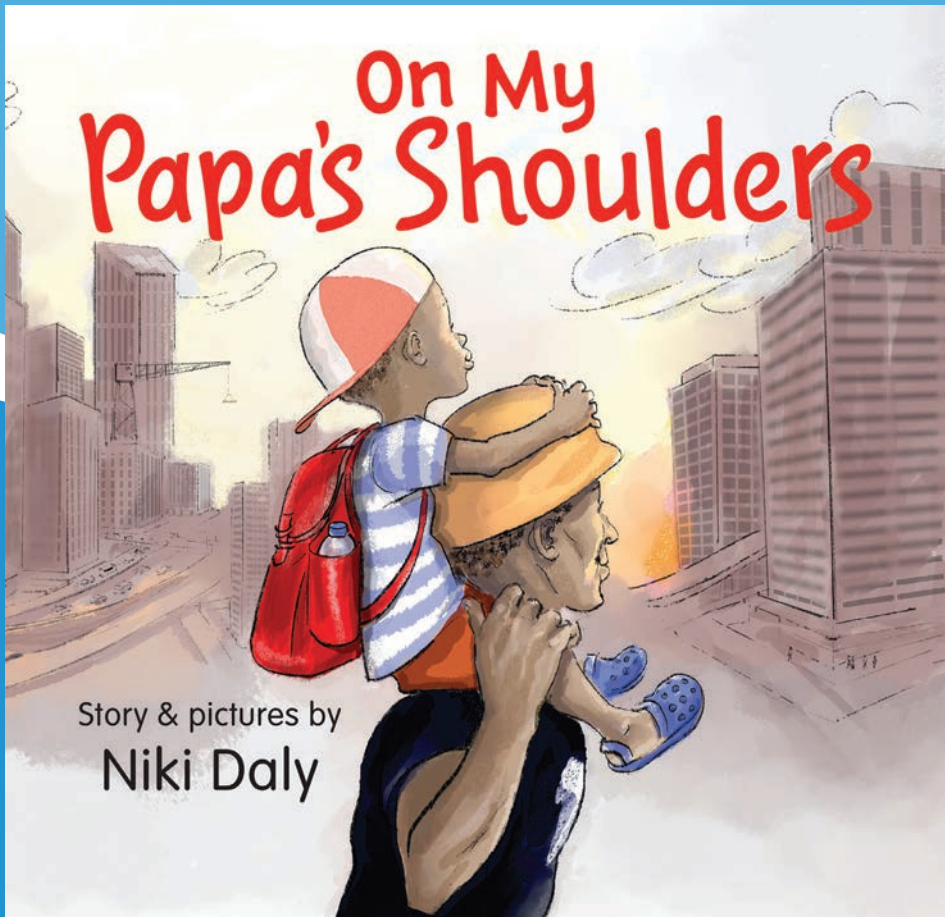
Silence.

“Or . . . I could fix the hole if you prefer . . .”

“I *do* prefer.”

“If I closed it up, Pangolin, do you think we could still be friends?”

ISBN-13: 9780624092452



0-6 years

On My Papa's Shoulders

Niki Daly

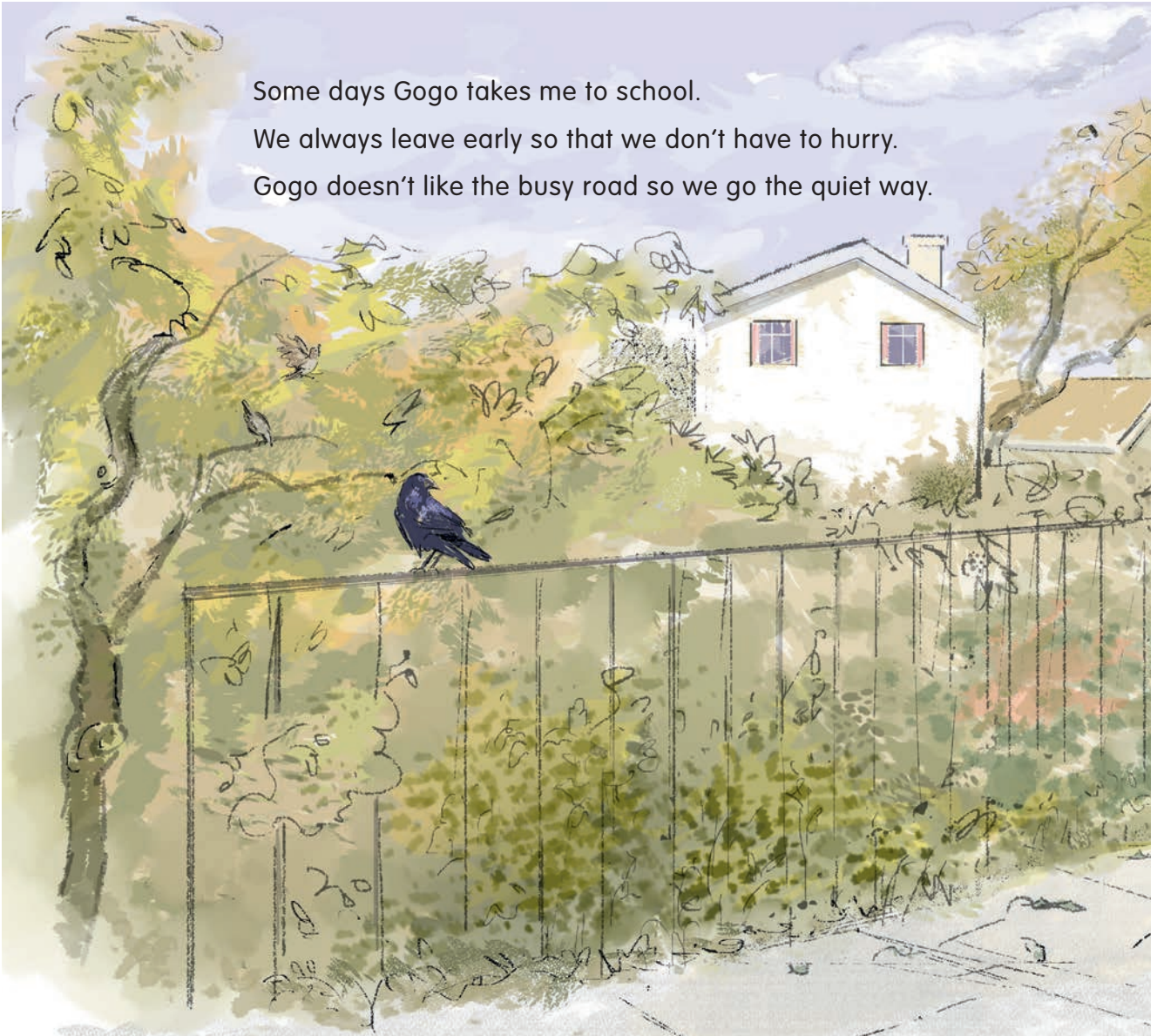
Walking to school with Mama, Gogo or Tata is fun. But riding high on Papa's shoulders is the BEST!

On my Papa's Shoulders invites young readers along on a little boy and his Papa's walk to school, where they have their own special way of saying goodbye.

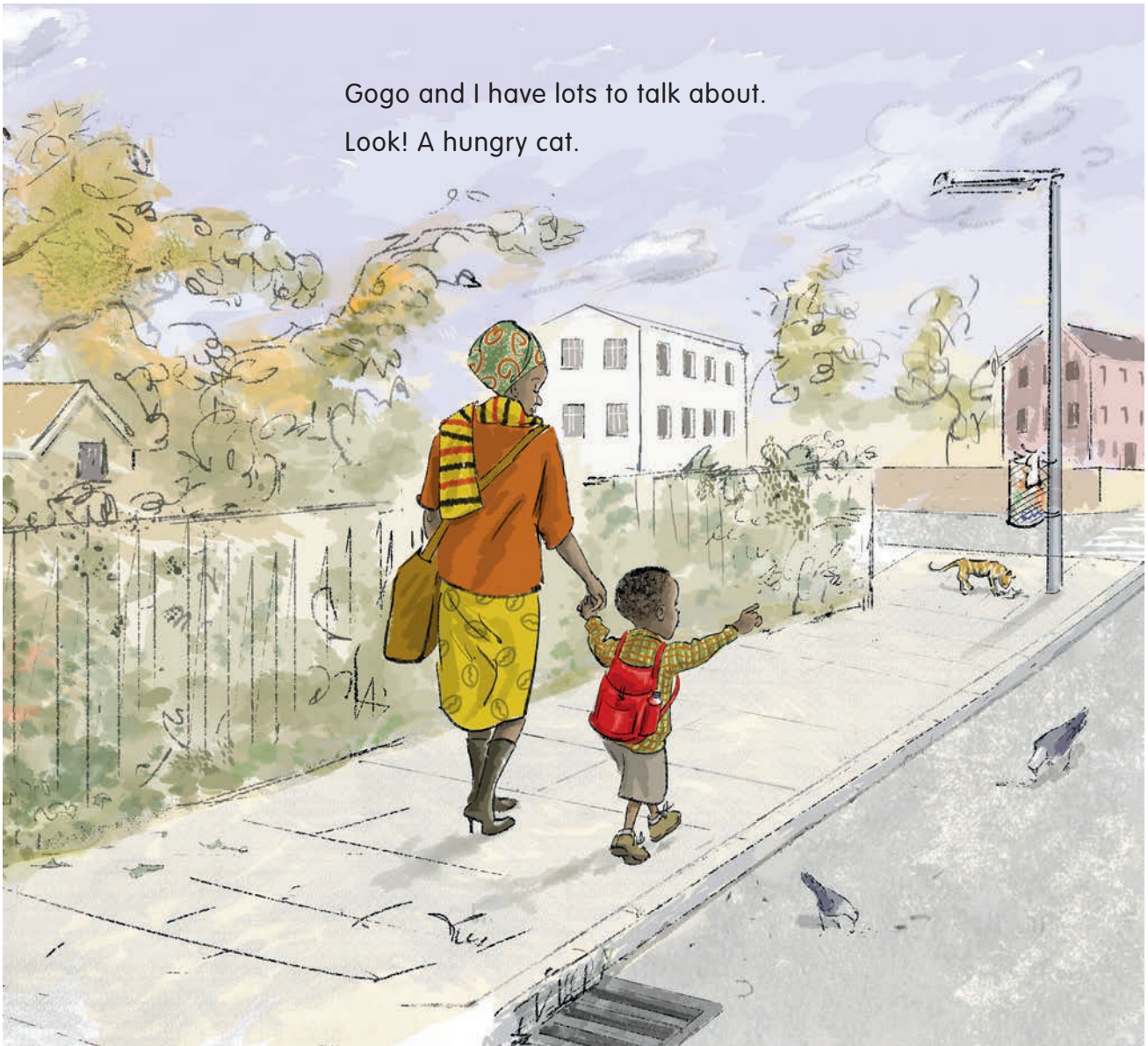
Niki Daly was awarded a Molteno Gold Medal in 2009 for his contribution to South African children's literature. In 2020 he received a South African Literary Award for *It's Jamela*, an anthology of stories about one of South Africa's most endearing picture book characters.

R170,00 | * Price is subject to change

Some days Gogo takes me to school.
We always leave early so that we don't have to hurry.
Gogo doesn't like the busy road so we go the quiet way.



Gogo and I have lots to talk about.
Look! A hungry cat.



Gogo lets me share some of
my lunch with him.









Then we walk and talk some more.

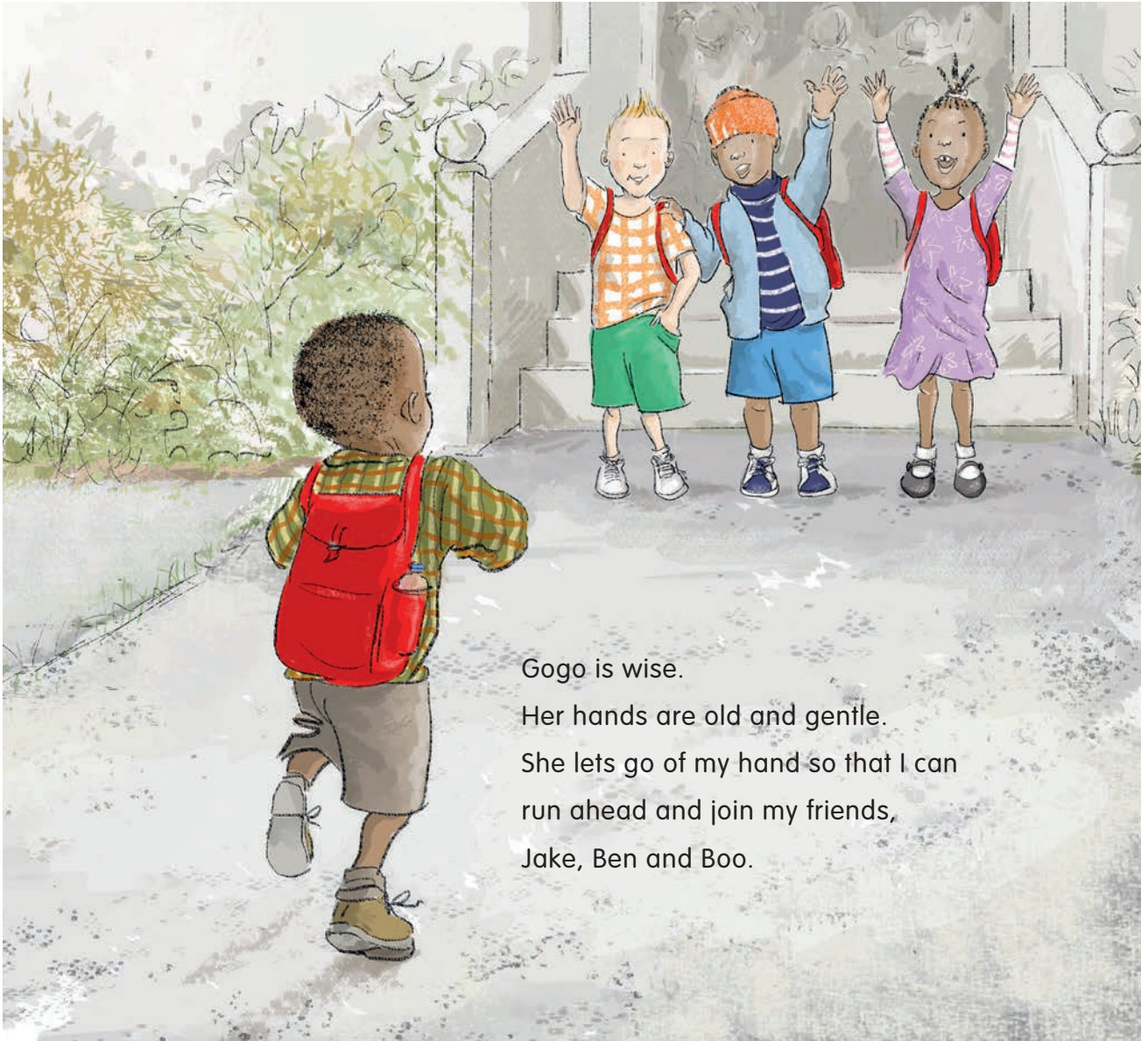
“Tell me about your friends?” asks Gogo.

I tell her about my best friends Jake, Ben and Boo.

“We must hold our friends gently in both hands,”

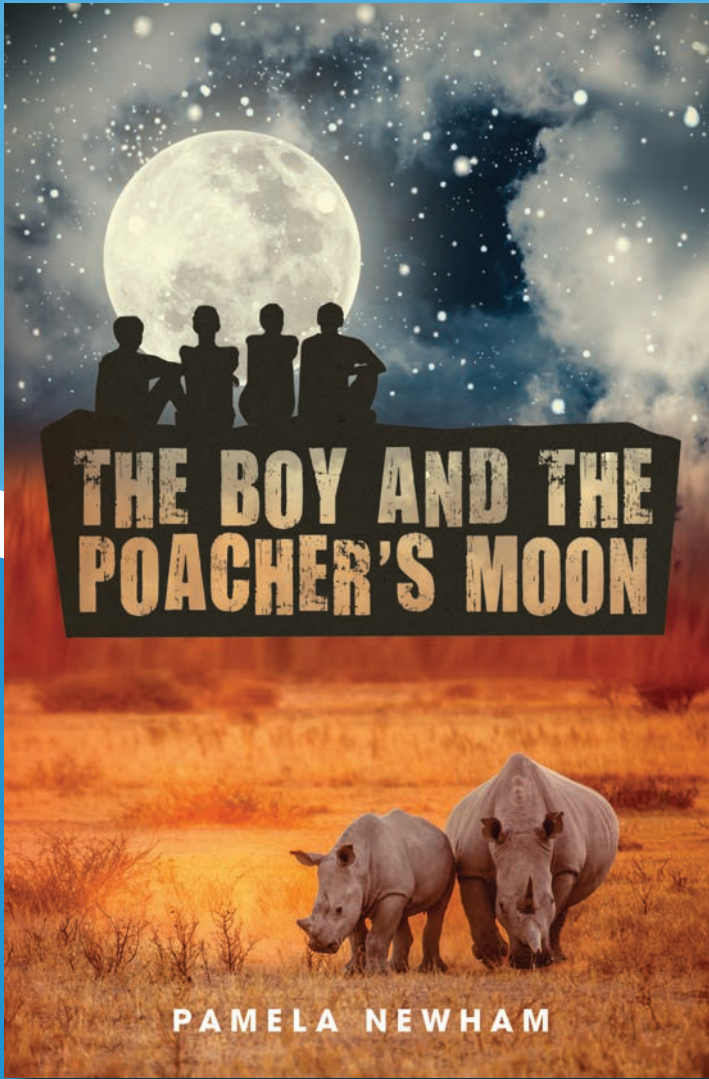
Gogo always says.





Gogo is wise.
Her hands are old and gentle.
She lets go of my hand so that I can
run ahead and join my friends,
Jake, Ben and Boo.

ISBN-13: 9780798180405



12-14 years

The Boy and the Poacher's Moon

Pamela Newham

Billy is one of four teens chosen as the finalists in the Wild2Save Eco competition. They get to spend a long weekend in the Kruger National Park, competing to win a bursary to study conservation. But even on their first night in the bushveld, they run into a group of rhino poachers and land in grave danger. With the help of a mysterious "boy" and the Whistleblower, the four friends are able to thwart the poachers' plan and expose the villains.

R165,00 | * Price is subject to change



#WRAD2022

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The boy heard it first. The call of an owl. The second time it hooted, the two men on the track in front of him stopped and stood as still as tree trunks. They did this, the boy knew, because the call of an owl could mean something else.

Sometimes, at night in the bush, these were the sounds men made to signal to each other. Men all searching for the same thing.

His legs felt like lead. The axe he carried across his shoulders was heavy, and his neck ached. He was thirsty too but knew he would have to wait. Only when their leader felt it was safe would he be able to take the Coke bottle filled with water out of his backpack and have a drink. He hoped that would be soon. Daylight was not their friend. The same call came again, but this time, the owl swept down over their heads. The boy jumped. Nearly called out. Moamba clicked his tongue, and they moved forward.

The boy did not know what the leader's real name was. The other man called him Moamba because he came from Mozambique.

Another half an hour went by before Moamba stopped.

The bush was thick, and the boy's arms and legs were covered in scratches.

"We will camp here," Moamba said. "Eat and sleep. But first, you must hide that." He nodded towards the sack carried on the shoulders of the man the boy called Lebadi. The boy called him that because of the scar on his cheek. Lebadi eased the hessian sack off his shoulders and let it fall heavily onto the ground. A frenzy of flies rose from the sack, and the stench made the boy feel sick.

Moamba placed the hunting rifle he had been carrying against a tree trunk. He pointed and said to the boy, "Dig there under that tree, moshanyana. Not too deep."

The boy took the axe from his shoulders and walked over to the spot Moamba had pointed out. He began to hack away at the soft, dry sand. An axe was not the best tool for the job, but it was all they had. When it was deep enough, he and Lebadi hauled the sack over to the hollowed-out ground and dropped it in. Then they covered it with sand and branches.

Once the task was complete, the boy opened his backpack and pulled out the Coke bottle, which he handed to Moamba. Then he took out a loaf of bread, a can of pilchards and another of baked beans.

Moamba drank some of the water and then handed the bottle to Lebadi. It was only after Lebadi had finished drinking that the boy was able to drink the last bit of water in the bottle.

Lebadi opened the cans with his knife. Then the men and

the boy took turns in tearing off chunks of bread and scooping out the fish and beans.

The boy did not know when he would next get a chance to eat, so he crammed the food into his mouth. Even though he could still smell what was in the sack. Even though it made him feel sick.

The smell of death.

2

Billy spotted the bus as soon as he walked out of the airport terminal. It was yellow with “WILD2SAVE” written in massive orange letters on the side and a cartoon sketch of a lion cub in a school uniform. A small, plump woman, dressed in a khaki skirt and shirt, was waiting next to the bus. She started waving as Billy walked towards her. He took a deep breath.

“So, here you are at last,” she said, rushing up to him. “You must be Billy. I’m Bokkie Kriek. We’ve talked on the phone. You found us okay?”

But before he could explain that he was late because the plane had been delayed, she went on, “You’re the last one, so we’re going to have to get going. Is this all your luggage?” She glanced at his backpack. “You can take that on board with you. All right?”

Billy nodded and climbed onto the bus behind Bokkie.

The man at the wheel had a brush cut and the shoulders of a rugby lock forward. He nodded at Billy.

“This is Karel Smit,” said Bokkie. “Now, quickly go and find yourself a seat.”

That wasn’t difficult. The bus was big enough to seat about

twenty people, so the three other passengers looked lost. As strangers thrown together on a bus or train usually do, they had each chosen a seat to themselves. Billy forced himself to smile at the boy and two girls as he walked down the aisle. He dropped into the seat behind the boy.

He'd barely sat down before Karel started the bus, and it lurched forward. Billy looked out of the window. He couldn't believe he was actually in Johannesburg. Not that he was going to see anything of it.

"Welcome everyone, and congratulations!"

Bokkie was standing in the front of the bus, smiling.

"You're the fantastic four, you know. The ones who made it to the finals of our WILD2SAVE Eco Competition. We know it wasn't easy. Sixty schools entered, and now here you are. The ones who ended up with top marks. It's taken a lot of hard work, and you should be extremely proud of yourselves." She clapped her hands and looked at each of them in turn.

"Mmm, now I wonder which one of you is going to win that bursary? Exciting, hey? You know what that means? When you finish matric next year, one of you will be able to go to university to study conservation. And ALL your costs will be covered. Worth winning?"

The boy in front of Billy called out, "Yesss!", and they all laughed.

Bokkie continued. "Okay, but forget about all that. This is your weekend to relax and have fun. A weekend at the Kruger Park. Your prize for getting this far. You won't believe all the

exciting things that lie ahead of you. Okay, I'm going to hand out your itineraries for the weekend, and while I'm doing that, I think it's time for you to get to know each other." She reached down and took some folders out of her briefcase.

Billy glanced around. Sitting across the aisle from him was a girl with long dark hair, wearing a bright pink baseball cap. She'd been texting ever since Billy got on the bus and hadn't glanced up once while Bokkie was talking.

The boy sitting in front of Billy turned around. "Hey, dude! Howzit? I'm Vusi Mabuza from Durbs. And sitting behind you is Jabulani Ntuli. She's a Jozi girl."

Billy turned around. Jabulani looked up from the wildlife magazine on her lap. She smiled and pushed her glasses further up her nose. "Hello. Just call me Jabu."

Billy's throat was dry. The way it always was when he met strangers. He said, "Um, hi, um, Jabu." He turned to face forward again. "Hi, Vusi, I'm, um, Billy Samuels from Cape Town."

He and Vusi bumped fists.

"Okay, from Cape Town, hey? Didn't know they had any wild animals there. Thought you only had Table Mountain and the sea. Oh, and gangs. They're pretty hectic, hey." He paused and eyed Billy. He widened his eyes. "You aren't in a gang are you, dude?"

Billy stared at Vusi for a moment and then shook his head. Behind him, he heard Jabu click her tongue.

"What kind of question's that?" she asked. Before Vusi

could answer, she said, "So, Billy, what made you enter the WILD2SAVE competition?"

"Er, actually, I'm really interested in conservation. I've read a lot, and I've watched wildlife programmes on TV but . . ."

"Oh," said Vusi. "TV. Wow! But have you actually ever seen a wild animal, dude?"

Billy felt his face get hot. "Um, porcupines, baboons, small buck, things like that. I saw an elephant at the circus once," he added lamely. And then immediately wanted to kick himself.

Vusi laughed. "I'm just yanking your chain, dude. About the gangs. Everything. You'll get used to me."

Billy gave a weak smile. He knew Vusi wouldn't joke about gangs if he lived in a place where they were a constant threat.

But Vusi had turned his attention to the girl in the pink baseball cap. She was still busy with her cellphone.

Billy flopped back in his seat. Aaargh! Why did he always sound like an idiot? He wished he could be like Vusi. Never without a smart answer. Nothing shy about him.

Vusi had moved across and was sitting next to the cellphone girl.

"WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat?" Vusi asked.

"What?" she said and looked up, startled.

"You haven't stopped since we got on the bus," he said. "Am I interrupting a long conversation with your boyfriend?"

By the expression on her face, Billy could tell she was not happy to be interrupted. "I'm just . . ." Then she glanced at

the three curious faces watching her, shrugged and swiped her phone.

“So, what’s your name?” asked Vusi.

“Surina Govender,” she replied.

“Riiight,” said Vusi. “I’m guessing you’re from KZN too.”

“No actually, Bloemfontein,” Surina said. She raised her eyebrows at Vusi and tilted her head to one side. Then she turned her big dark eyes on Billy.

He gulped. “Um, hi,” he said. “I’m Billy.”

Vusi pointed to himself. “And I’m Vusi, and that’s Jabu. So now we all know each other. Bloem, hey? What do you do for fun in Bloemfontein? Seems pretty dead to me.”

“Oh really?” Surina said in a bored voice.

“What do you think, hey Billy? Ever been to Bloem?”

Billy shook his head.

“Oh well, I guess you just ain’t a travellin’ man, my bru.” Vusi’s attempt at an American accent was dismal.

Surina looked at Vusi and sighed. Then she gave Billy a smile and rolled her eyes. She turned back to her cellphone.

Billy felt his mouth go dry again. He wanted to say something, but his mind was one big fat blank. He was saved by Bokkie trotting up the aisle towards them.

“Good, you’re all getting to know each other,” she said, handing them each an itinerary. “Have a look through it, and if you’ve got any questions, just ask. You’ll see that before we get to Kruger, we’re going to stop off at our farm, which is also the WILD2SAVE headquarters. My husband, Schalk, can’t

wait to meet you all. You'll also get to meet Thandi. She's a young ranger at Kruger, and she will be showing you around this weekend. Sound good?"

They all nodded, and Vusi said, "A farm, hey. What do you grow there?"

Bokkie had a strange way of twitching her nose, Billy noticed. With her big brown eyes and soft ginger hair, she did look like a little buck. Maybe that's where she got her name from.

"Well, we don't actually grow things or keep cattle on the farm anymore because we're busy setting it up as a wildlife sanctuary," she said. "Our plan is to keep injured animals or those that are endangered. We're also going to set up a learning centre to teach young guys like you about conservation."

"Sounds cool," said Vusi.

Jabu asked, "What animals have you got?"

"We're just starting out so not too many yet. Some impala, kudu, a few zebra. But we do have something very special, which you'll see when . . ."

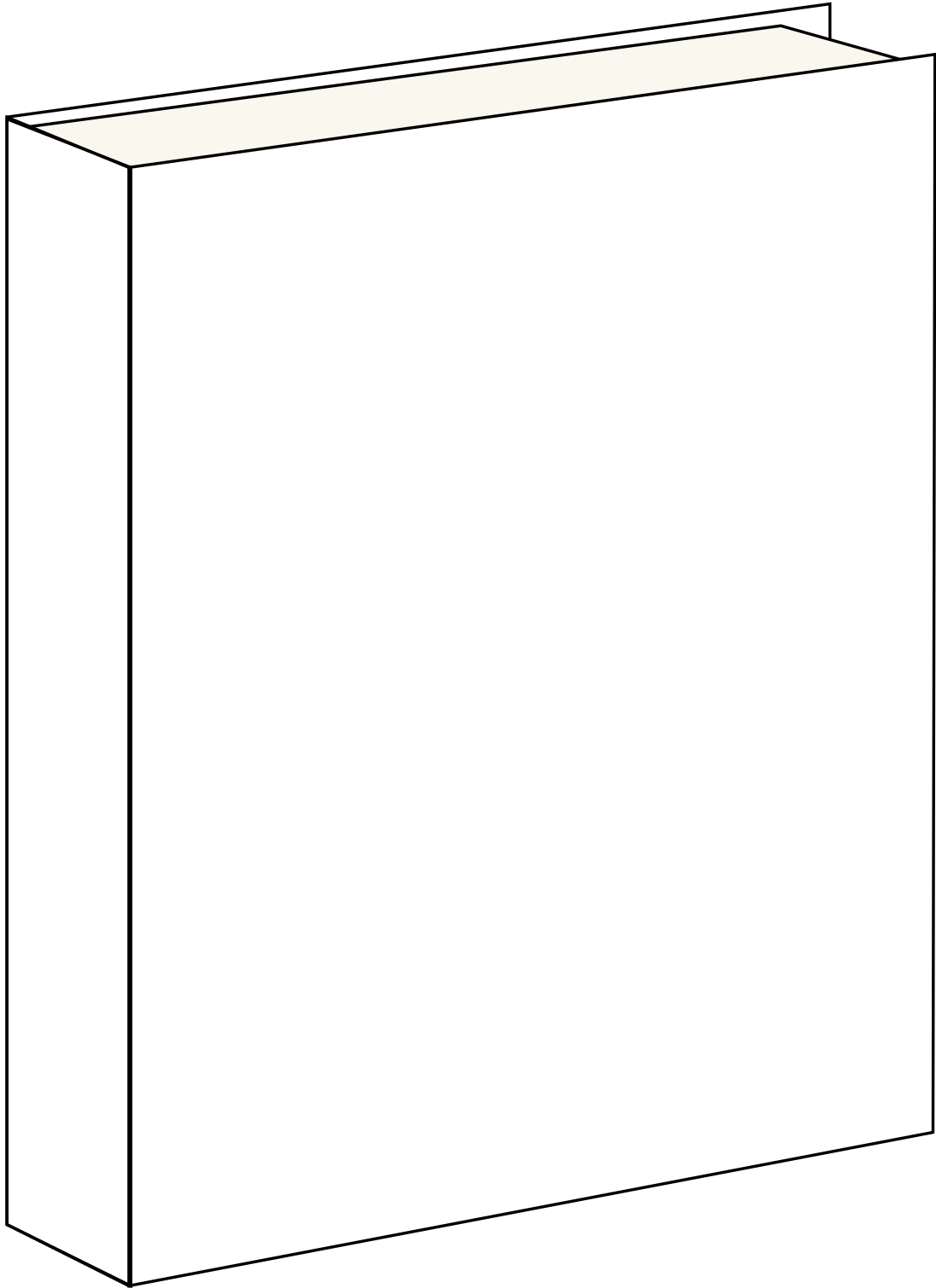
There was a loud shriek. All eyes turned to Surina.

"What's up?" asked Vusi.

Surina held up the itinerary. "It says here that when we get to Kruger, we have to hand in our cellphones." She looked at them, her dark eyes wide. "But that's insane. I can't survive without my phone!"

Billy and Vusi glanced at each other, then burst out laughing. The look on Surina's face was something else.

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