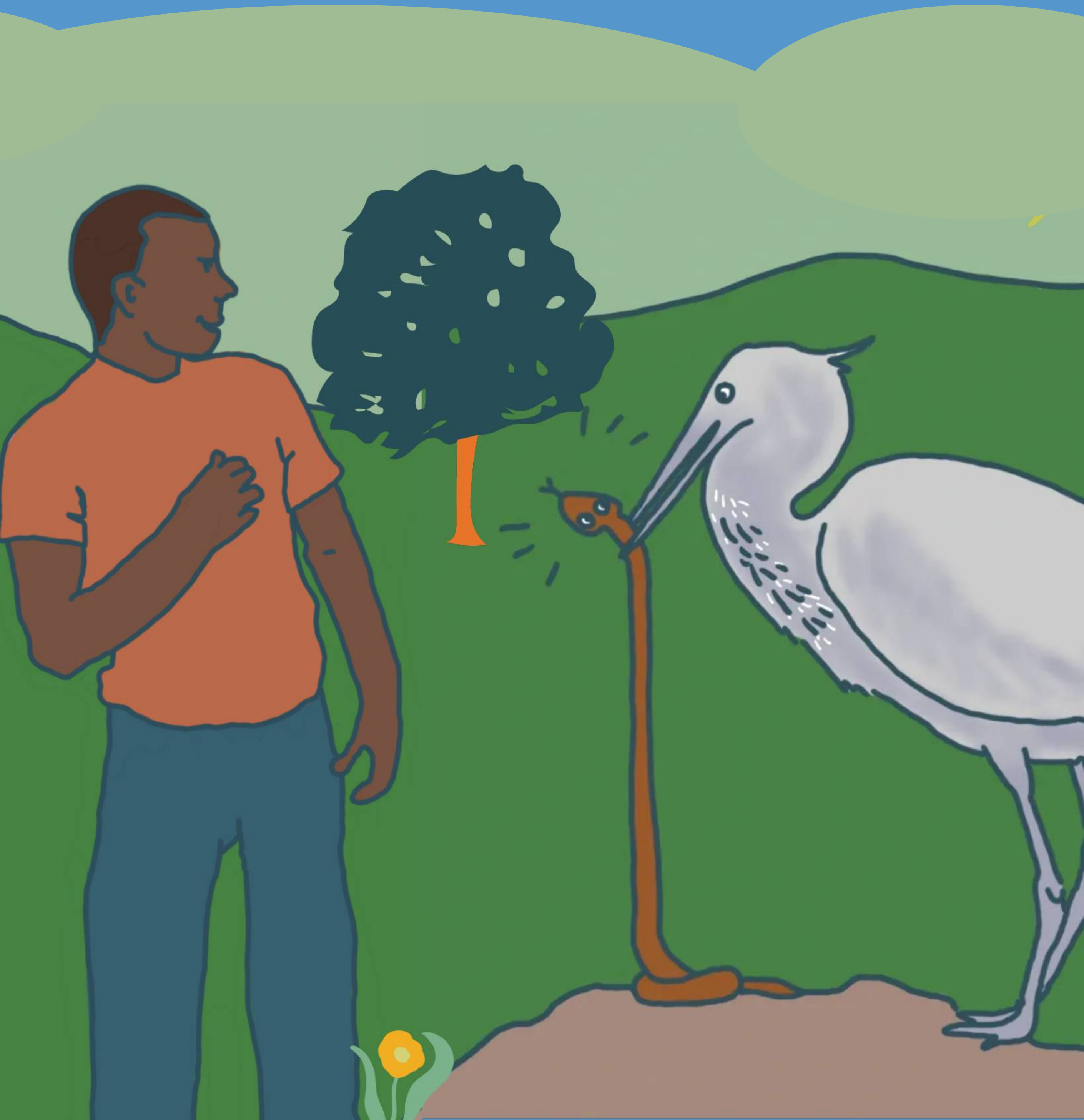




The Snake, the Farmer and the Heron

AN AFRICAN FABLE





Million word gap project

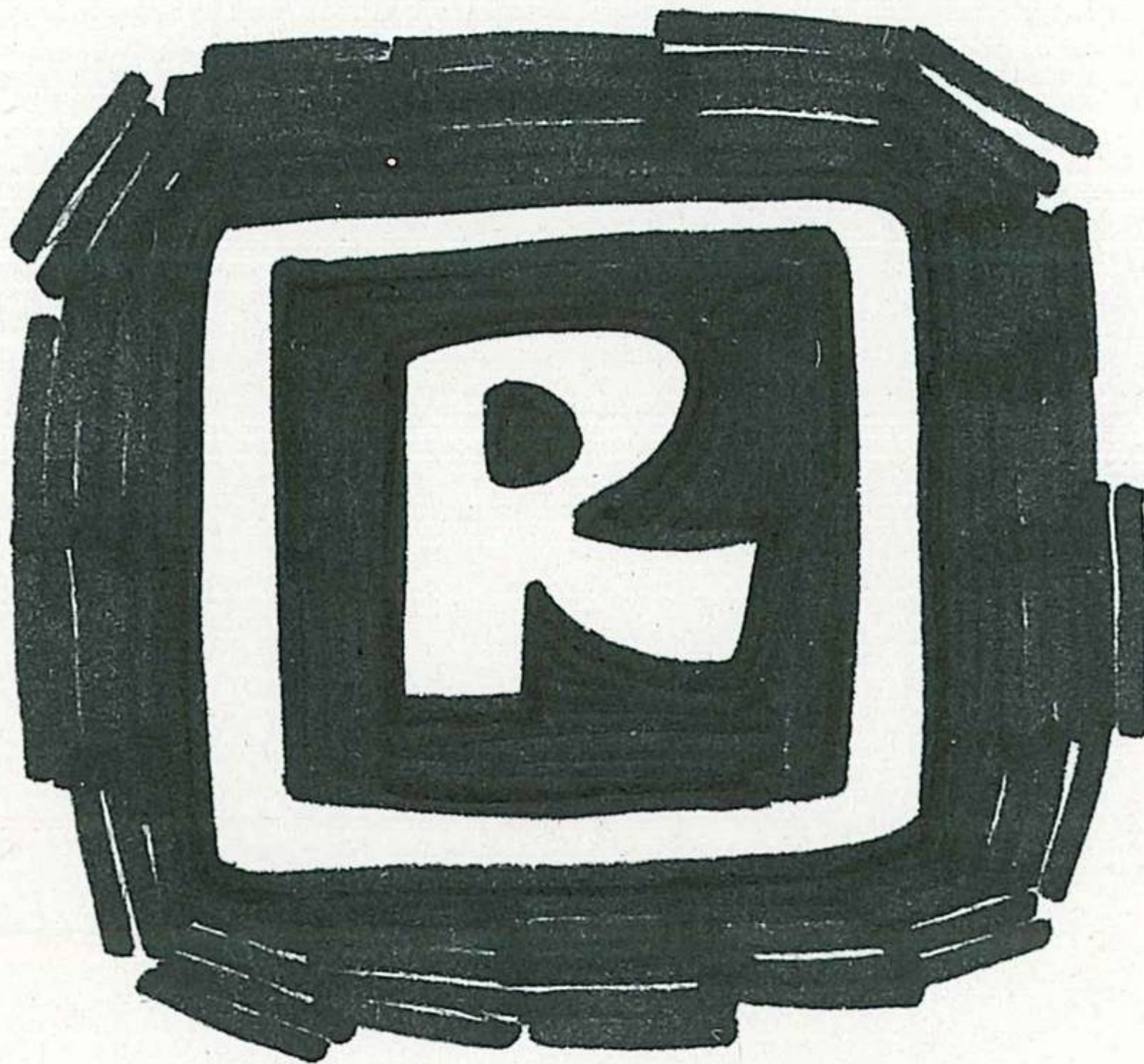
Children whose parents read to them have heard 30 million more words before they start school. Help your children prepare for school.

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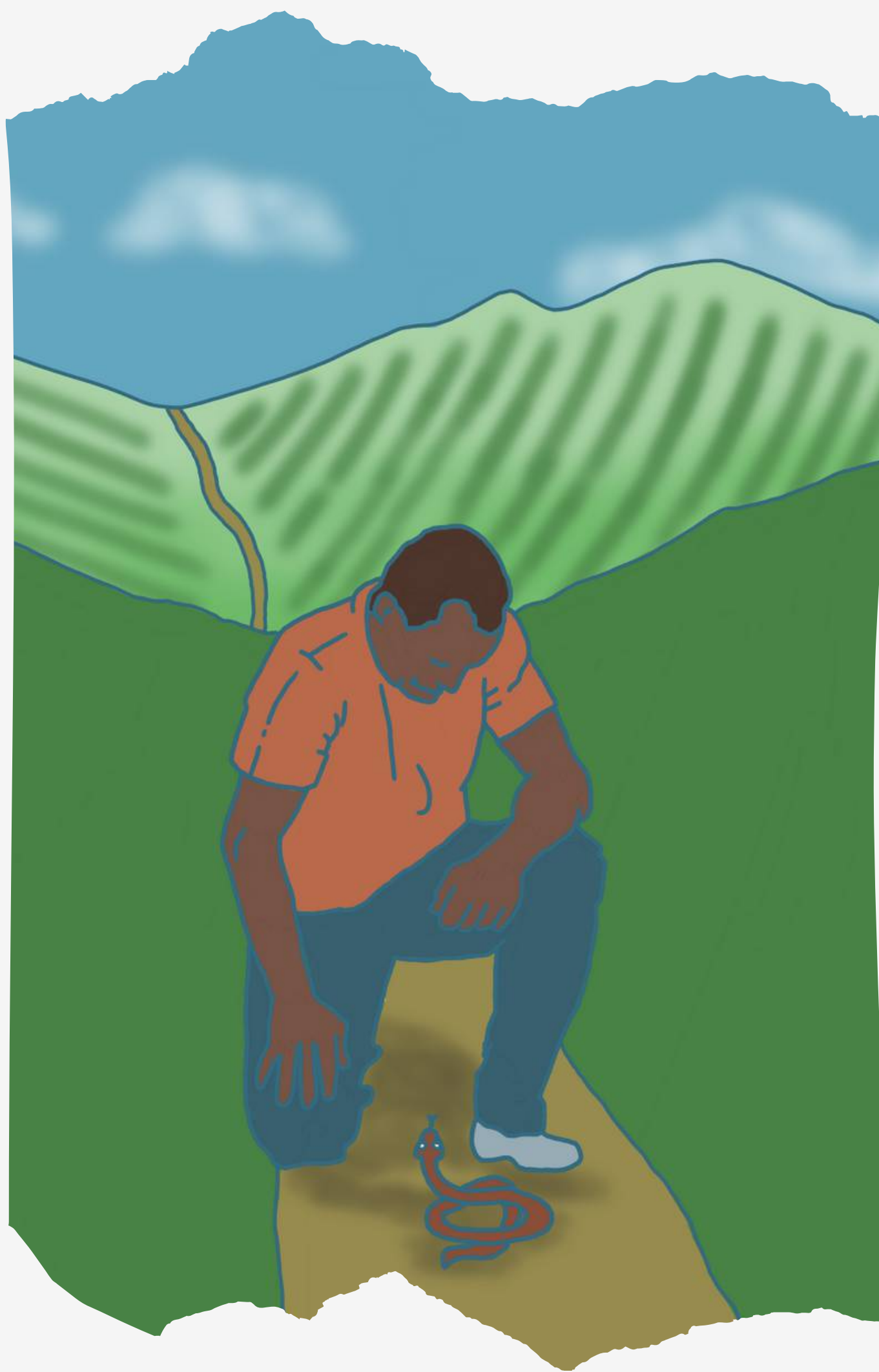
ROBYN VAN ZIJL

Long ago, in a faraway village, a farmer had spent the whole day working hard in his fields. As the evening grew chilly, he walked home along the dusty path. On his way, he found a snake, shivering and frozen in the cold.



The snake, weak and trembling, looked up at the farmer and begged, "Kind farmer, please help me. Let me rest inside your warm belly so that I can regain my strength. I promise I won't harm you."

The farmer, believing in kindness, felt sorry for the snake. He opened his mouth and allowed the snake to slide inside, where it curled up, warm and safe, in his stomach.



The snake rested there, and soon it regained its strength. But when the farmer asked the snake to leave, it refused.

Terrified, the farmer sought the help of a wise heron who lived near a nearby river.



The heron listened carefully to the farmer's tale. Being a creature known for its wisdom; the heron agreed to help. She gently slid its long beak into the farmer's mouth and pulled the snake out, throwing it onto the ground before it could strike.



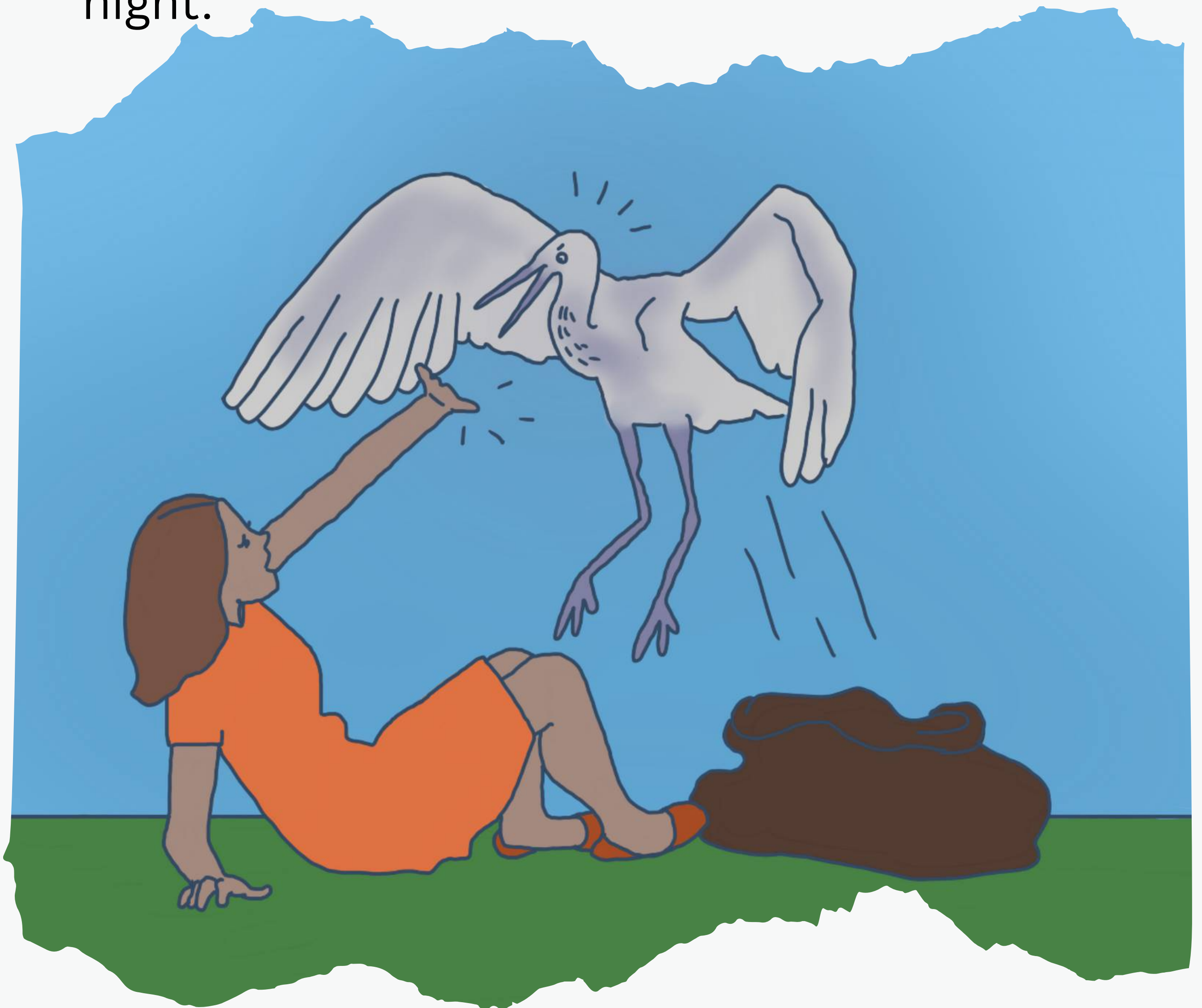
The farmer thanked the heron for saving him, but something still troubled him. His stomach still felt uneasy, as if the snake had left some poison behind. The heron, wise as she was, suggested that the farmer eat white meat to cleanse himself of any poison that might remain.



As the farmer thought about this, he realized that the heron was made of white meat. His eyes gleamed with a sudden thought. He seized the heron, stuffed it into a sack, and hurried home, intending to cook it for dinner.

When the farmer got home, he told his wife everything that had happened. His wife was a kind-hearted woman, and was deeply troubled by her husband's actions. She knew that the heron had only helped them out of kindness. Feeling sorry for the bird, she decided she would release it.

As she opened the sack to let the heron go, the bird suddenly flapped its wings in panic. With a swift motion, it pecked at her eyes, gouging them out before flying away into the night.



The Moral of the Story

The tale of the Snake, the Farmer, and the Heron holds two important lessons.

First, it teaches us that kindness often does not come back to us in the same way. Like water that flows downhill, kindness moves forward, helping others, but may never return to us. We should not expect to be rewarded for being kind, but instead, be kind simply because it is the right thing to do.

The fable also has a darker lesson.

Sometimes, kindness is not repaid, but instead is met with harm.

The farmer's kindness to the snake was repaid with betrayal.

The heron's kindness to the farmer was met with betrayal. And the wife's kindness to the heron, in trying to set it free, was punished with pain.

In life, we may sometimes show kindness, but instead of gratitude, we might face hardship or hurt. Even in those cases, we must remember to be kind, because kindness is its own reward – even if it doesn't always come back to us in the way we hope.