





Room to Read[®]

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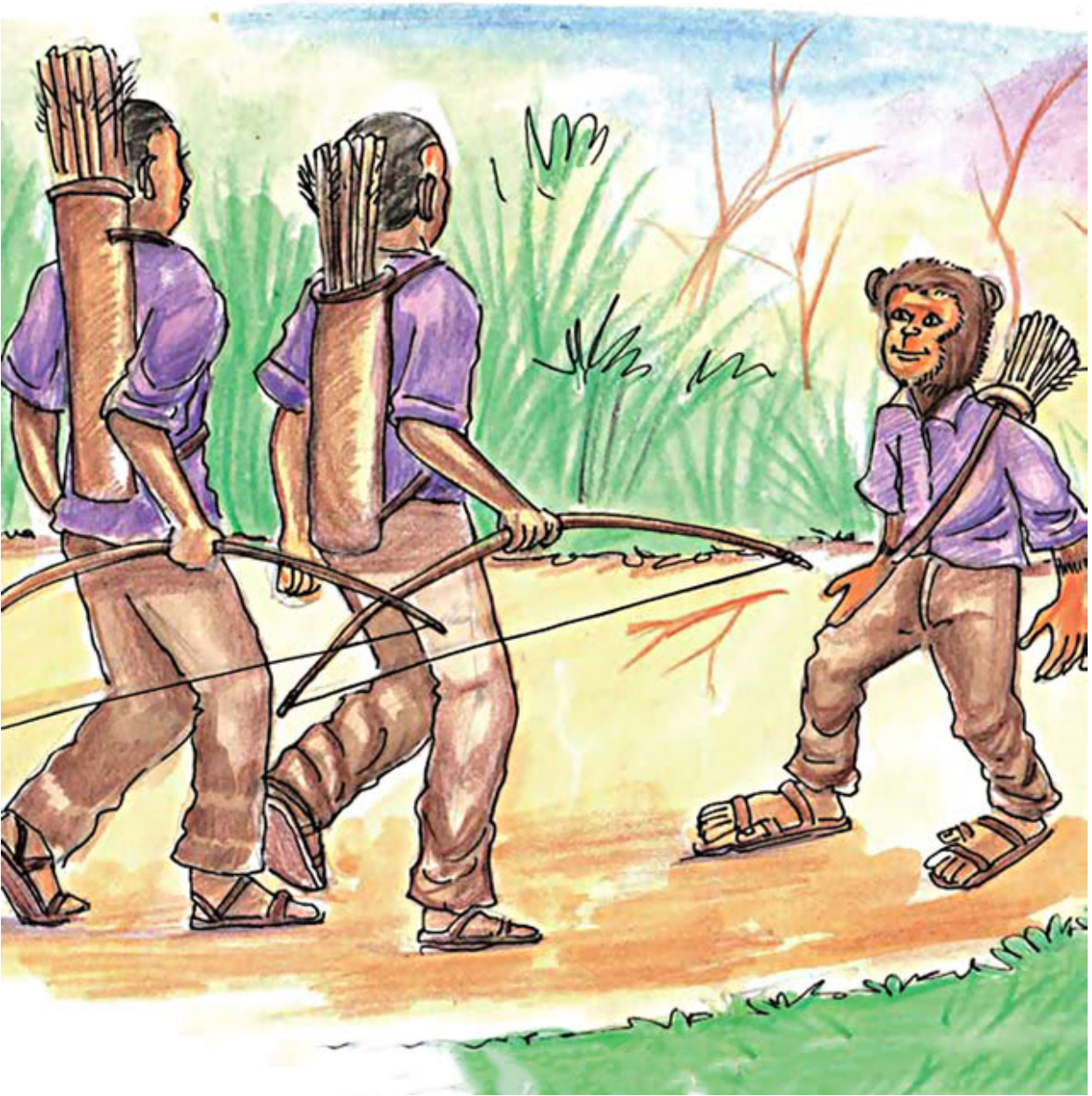
Once upon a time, the land at Mwese Village was very fertile. People had

no fear of pests such as monkeys and quails. There were plenty of wild fruits and other yummy grasses for them to eat. Mwese villagers were good farmers. They cultivated maize, groundnuts, paddy, beans, sweet potatoes and cassava. One year, there was a drought. The crops withered. They did not harvest as much as they did in other years. Wild animals suffered, too. They sought food and water. The monkeys invaded people's farms and ate what little was there. The villagers had a difficult time keeping them off. They threw stones and arrows, but the monkeys refused to go away. They would simply hide nearby only to come out again when

they saw there was no one around.
Mzee Malele was the leader of
Mwese Village. He called a meeting
and said, “My brothers and sisters,
we must now guard our crops in
turns. We must do so during the day
and the night.”

The villagers agreed. The timetable was drawn. Each had his or her turn. Only the children, the elderly, and the sick were excused. Whoever was on duty had to be fully armed. The monkeys knew that it was not going to be easy for them. People were guarding everywhere to stop the monkeys from invading their farms. The monkeys thought they were now going to die of hunger. They called a meeting to discuss what to do. After long discussions, they decided that one of the monkeys should chop off his tail. The others then could him dress him like a man and send him to ask for the job of guarding the crops.

The monkeys knew their monkey-in-disguise that would have to allow the other monkeys to come and eat. So, they chose one who would undertake this task. The one they chose was most courageous. They cut off his tail. In two weeks' time, the wound had healed. They called him Mr. Maseleni. They helped him dress up. It was difficult to differentiate him from human beings. Mr. Maseleni vowed that he would help his fellow monkeys. Soon, he was ready to go and ask to become a guard. Mr. Maseleni met a group of villagers on their way to guard duty.



He introduced himself, “I am from Mapori Village. I’m looking for a job guarding farms.” The villagers

directed him to the village chief's house. At the village, Mr. Maseleni met with the chief. Chief Jumbe summoned a village council. They discussed the new application. After a long discussion, it was agreed that Mr. Maseleni should be given the job. It was also decided that he would live at the chief's home.

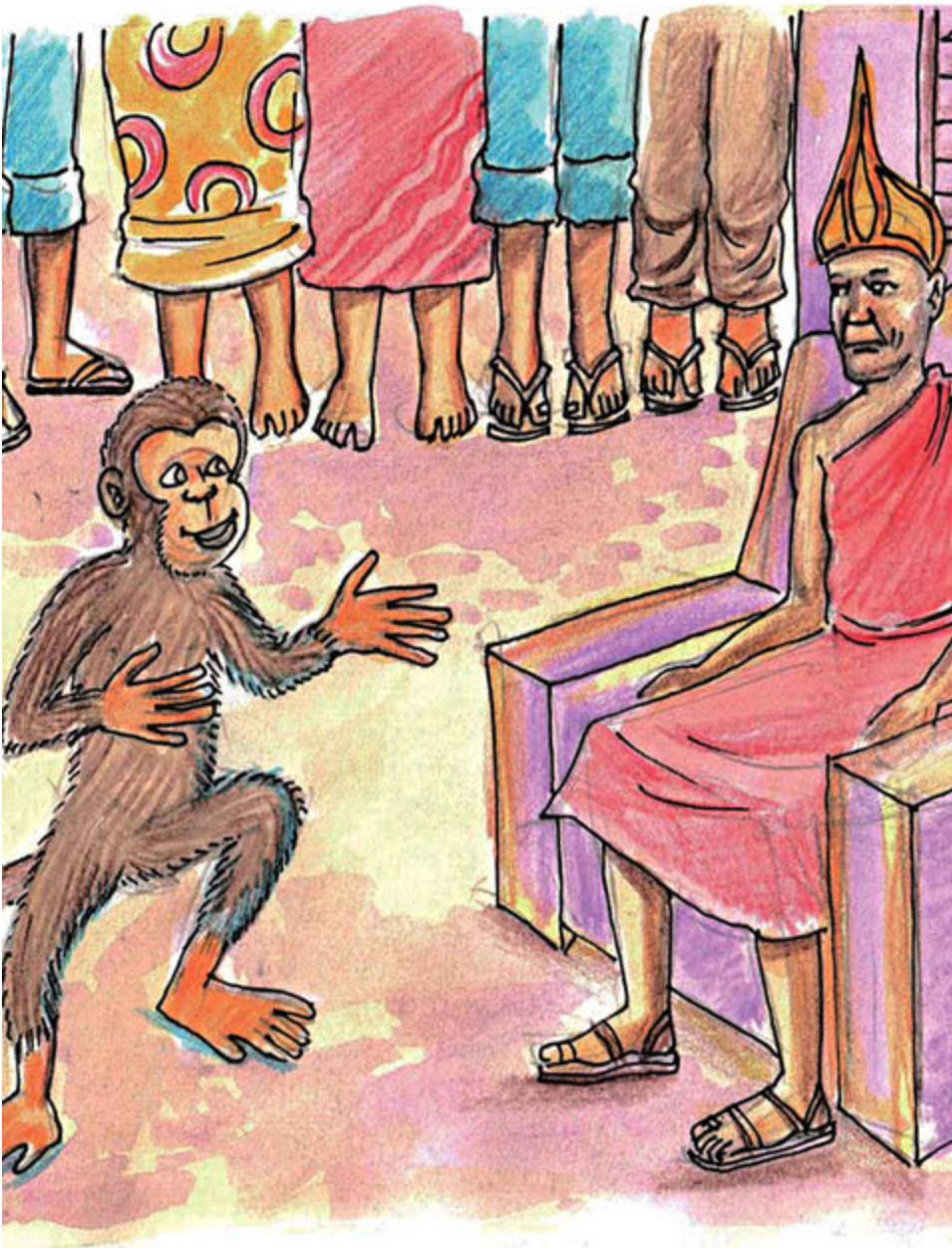
Mr. Maseleni began his job immediately. He did well at first. When the monkeys came, he chased them away fiercely. Now that he could eat, Mr. Maseleni was not keeping his promise! When his fellow monkeys ran and jumped on tree branches, he beat them mercilessly. The villagers took to liking Mr. Maseleni. They decided to raise his salary. The monkeys stopped coming to the farms. They were afraid that Mr. Maseleni would catch them and beat them up. They became weak with hunger. As their condition worsened, they called a meeting. At the meeting, they decided to secretly

send another monkey to Mwese Village. This monkey could reach out to Mr. Maseleni to remind him of his promise. They also sent the message that if he did not to honour his promise, they would give him back his tail. When Mr. Maseleni got the message, he pretended not to understand. “Go, tell them, they don’t know me. I don’t know them. I’m not a monkey. I’m the chief guard here.” The messenger went back to the other monkeys. The monkeys thought that they would die of hunger. So, they decided to find a way of sending Mr. Maseleni his tail.

On the following day, the monkeys started their journey to Mwese Village. The villagers woke up to the noise of the monkeys. When they came out of their houses, they were greeted by dust. Some monkeys were dancing, others were singing: Mr. Maseleni Let's give him his tail back! Let's give him his tail back! Ti-tit-iiii! Ti-tit-iii! Let's give him his tail back! Let's give him his tail back! When the villagers heard the message in the song, they were surprised. When Mr. Maseleni heard the song, he knew that his days were numbered. The villagers headed to the village chief, where the monkeys were also

heading. Every villager came out with a weapon. They threw arrows at the monkeys. But Chief Jumbe stopped them and said, “Leave them. It appears they have a message. If they cause any trouble, then we’ll attack them.” The leader of the monkeys came forward. He said, “We’ve come to hand back Mr. Maseleni his tail. He is one of us. We dressed him to look like a human being so that he would help us steal the maize.” “But, he has not honoured his promise. Each time he sees us, he chases us away. He beats us mercilessly,” said the leader. Chief Jumbe and all who were around were surprised. He decided that Mr.

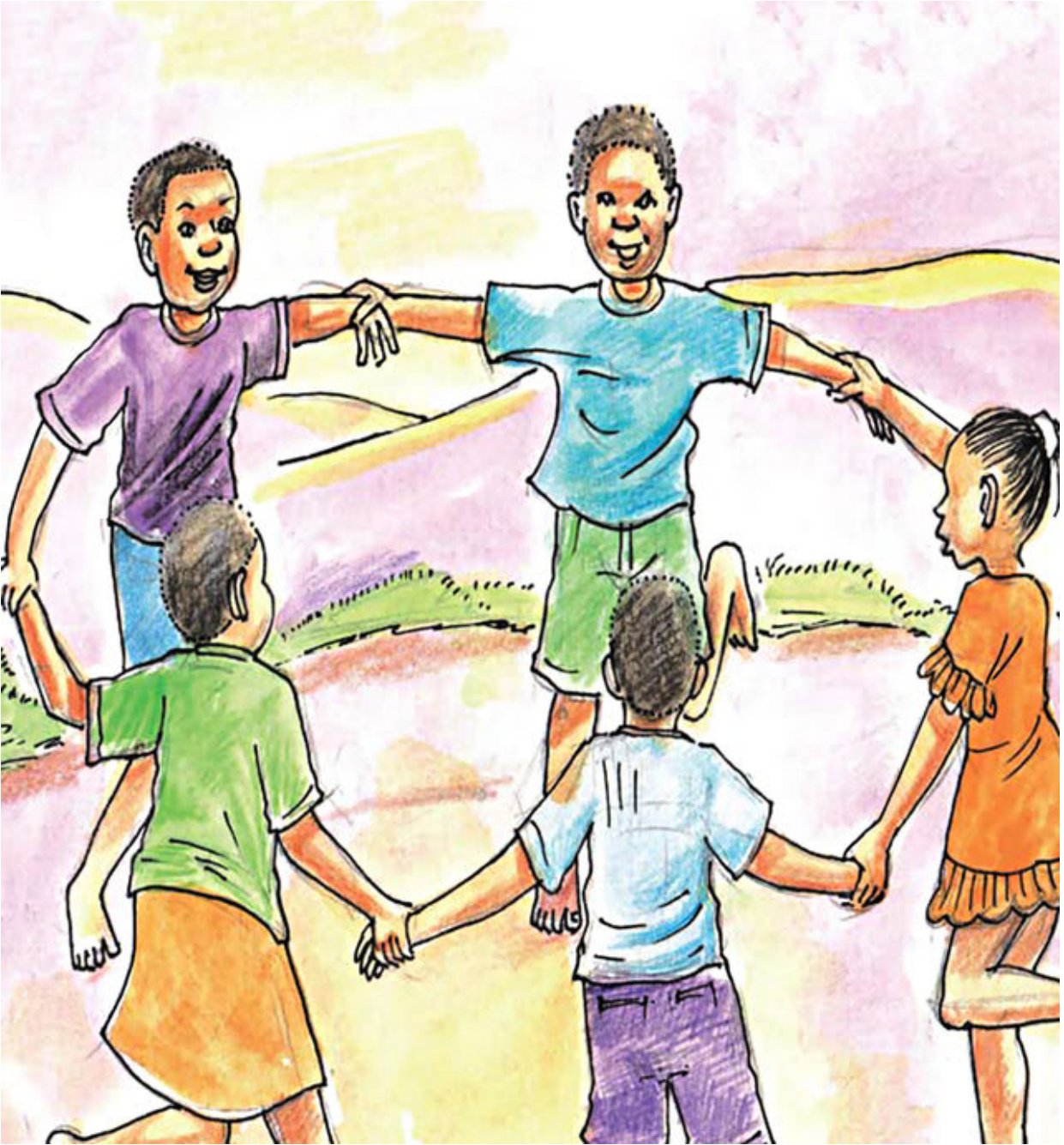
Maseleni be brought forward. When asked, Mr. Maseleni had no explanation. He stared at the ground.



Then, suddenly, the monkey who was carrying the tail jumped. He pushed

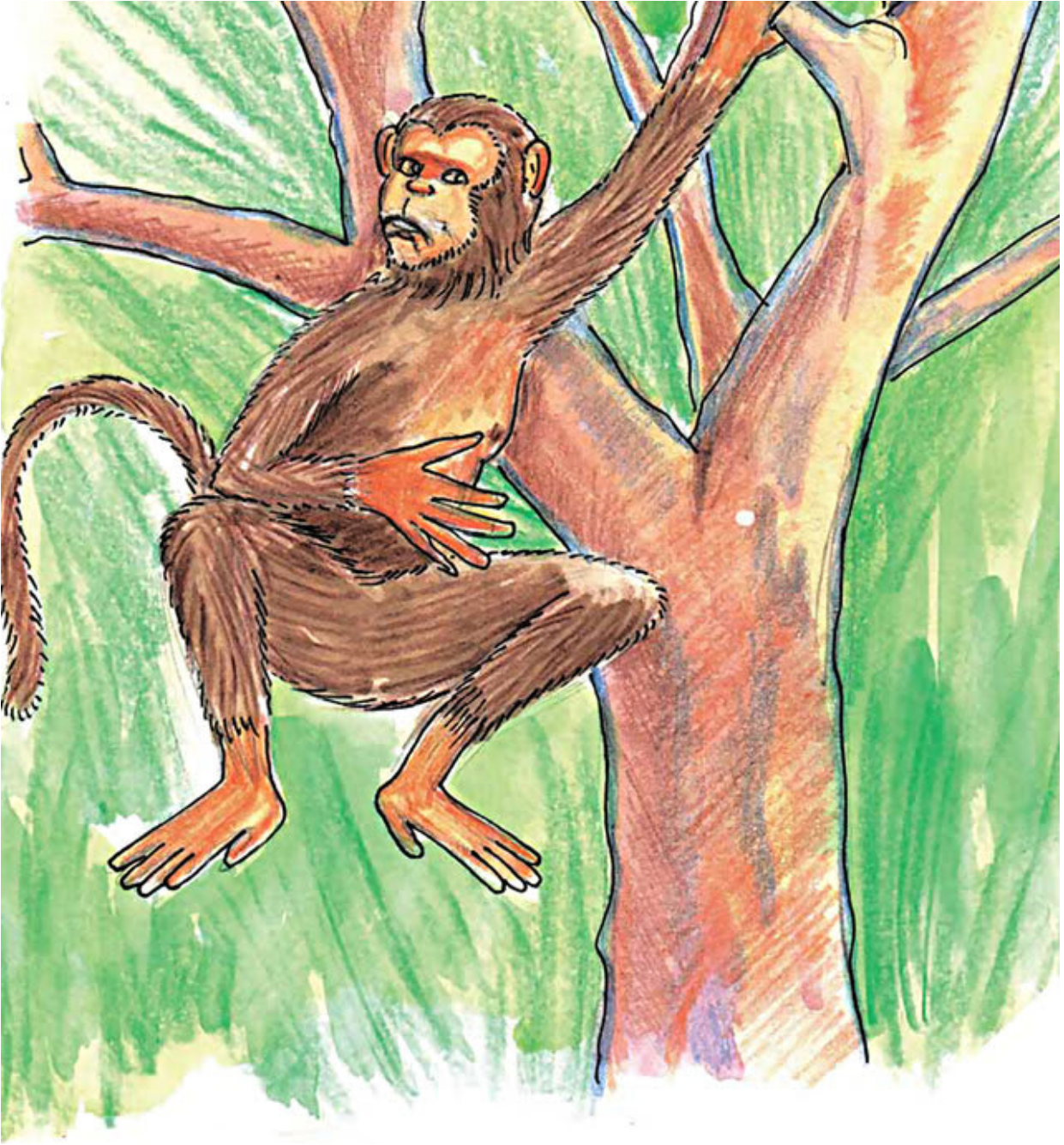
the tail into Mr. Maseleni's back and it stuck there. Immediately the monkeys took away Mr. Maseleni. The villagers heard Mr. Maseleni crying for help. He begged the monkeys not to turn him into a monkey again. They dragged him to the forest. The villagers were surprised. They were happy that their maize was ready for harvesting. They no longer feared the monkeys. Mwese villagers no longer wanted to hire someone from outside their village. Chief Jumbe issued a directive that all visitors must be checked well. This helped to note all who were good and those who were

bad. The chief also wanted them to harvest their maize together.



From that day on, every villager took turns in guarding the crops. The children from Mwese Village even

started a game for evening time. They sang about Mr. Maseleni. Let's give him his tail back! Let's give him his tail back! Ti-tit-iiii! Ti-tit-iii! Let's give him his tail back! Let's give him his tail back! Then they would give someone a tail made of rope.



The monkeys went to the forest along with Mr. Maseleni. They gave him the punishment to guard all the other

monkeys. To this day, whenever there is a group of monkeys one stays back in the trees to watch out for danger. Whenever, there is a danger coming, the guard notifies them and the other monkeys can run away. Some monkeys call this guard Mr. Maseleni.



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Mr. Maseleni (English) The Mwese people were good farmers and lived a happy life. They grew all types of grains and nuts. The animals were also happy because there was always plenty of food. But one year there was very little rain and the crops were scarce. So the animals began eating whatever food they could find in the village. The villagers did not like this and started to chase them away. What do you think they will do to get out of this problem? This is a Level 4 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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