

Level 3

# Ajay of Agumbe and the Signal Snake

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**Illustrator:** Rajiv Eipe

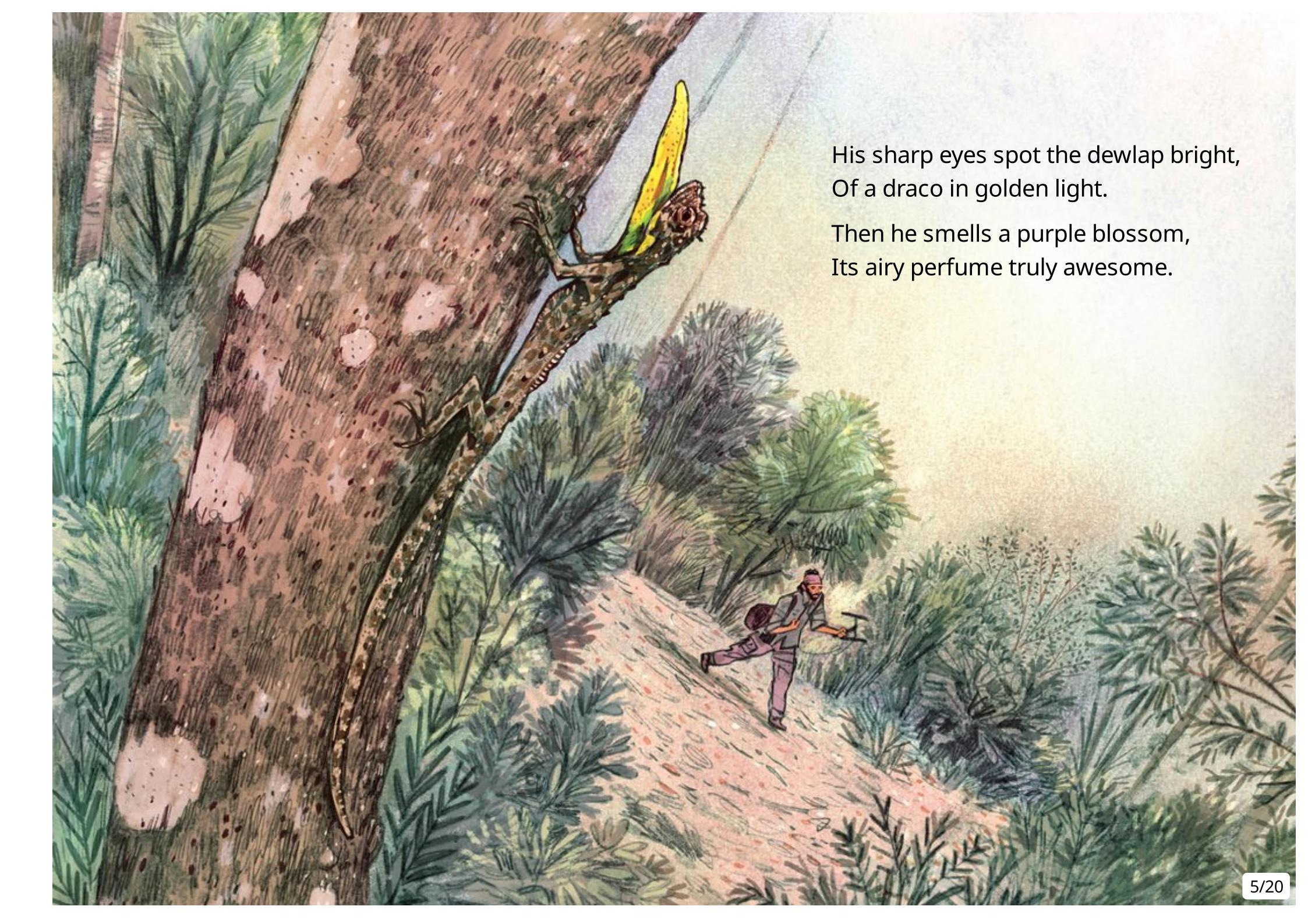


Ajay of Agumbe is off to find  
His study snake, of the king cobra kind.  
Using an antenna that is easy to spot,  
And a radio that, strangely, is not!



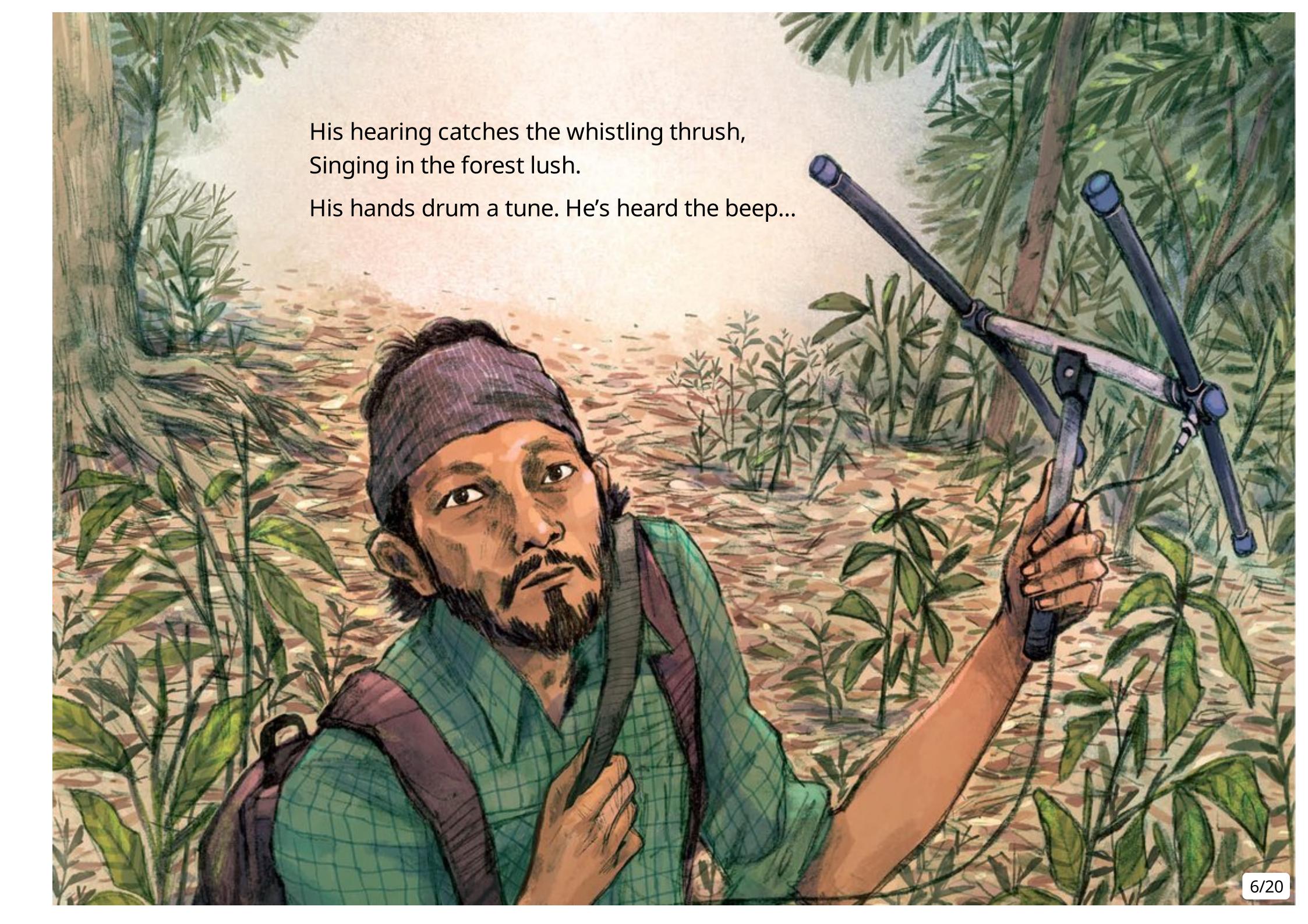
On high alert, his senses find  
Forest treats of every kind.  
A task that is really so much fun,  
And never quite done!





His sharp eyes spot the dewlap bright,  
Of a draco in golden light.

Then he smells a purple blossom,  
Its airy perfume truly awesome.



His hearing catches the whistling thrush,  
Singing in the forest lush.

His hands drum a tune. He's heard the beep...

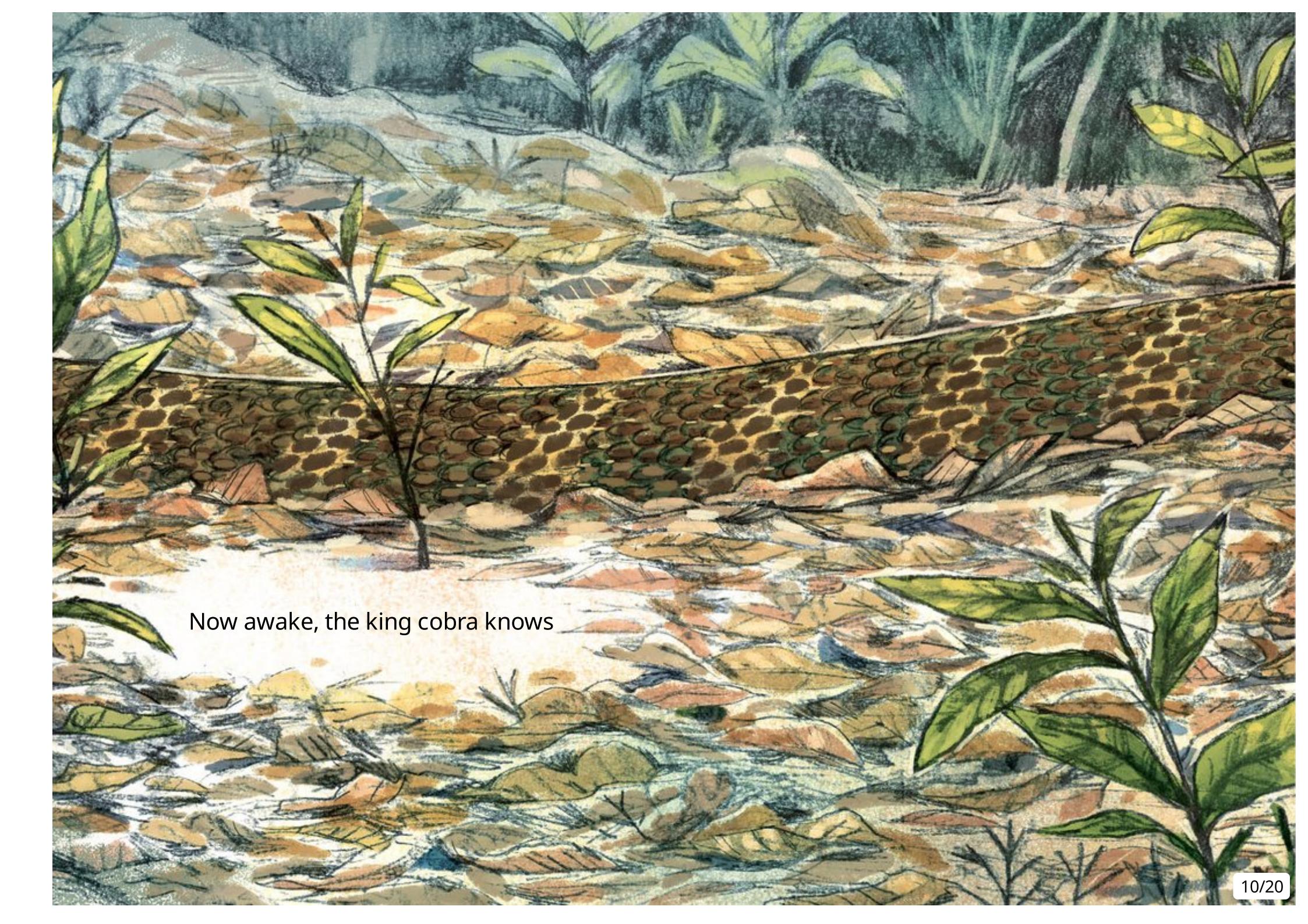


Of the Signal Snake, who's still asleep.  
Fast asleep, but looks awake,  
Her eyes wide open, after all she's a snake!  
Seeing this is always so much fun.

For now, the sleeping is done.

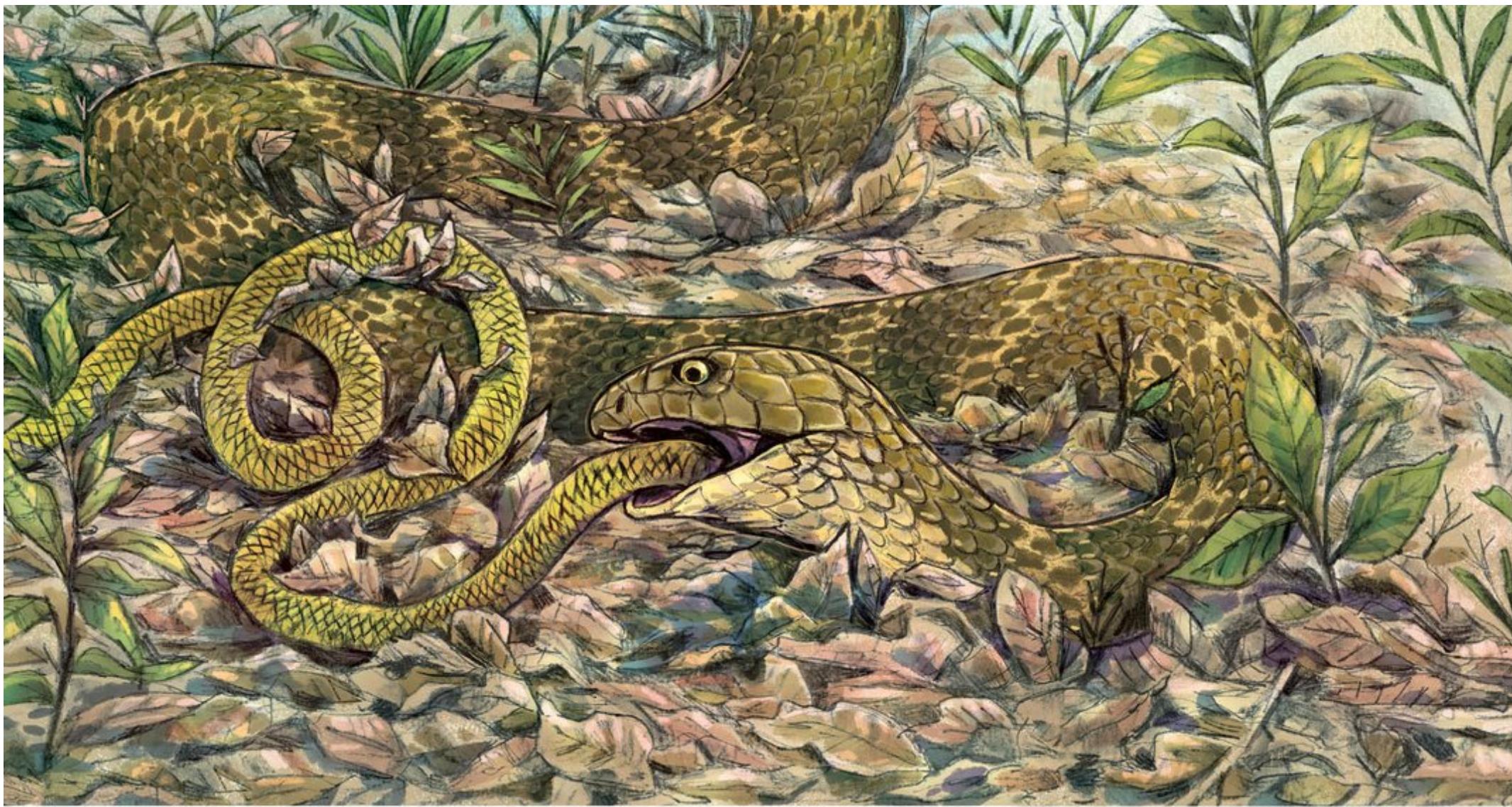




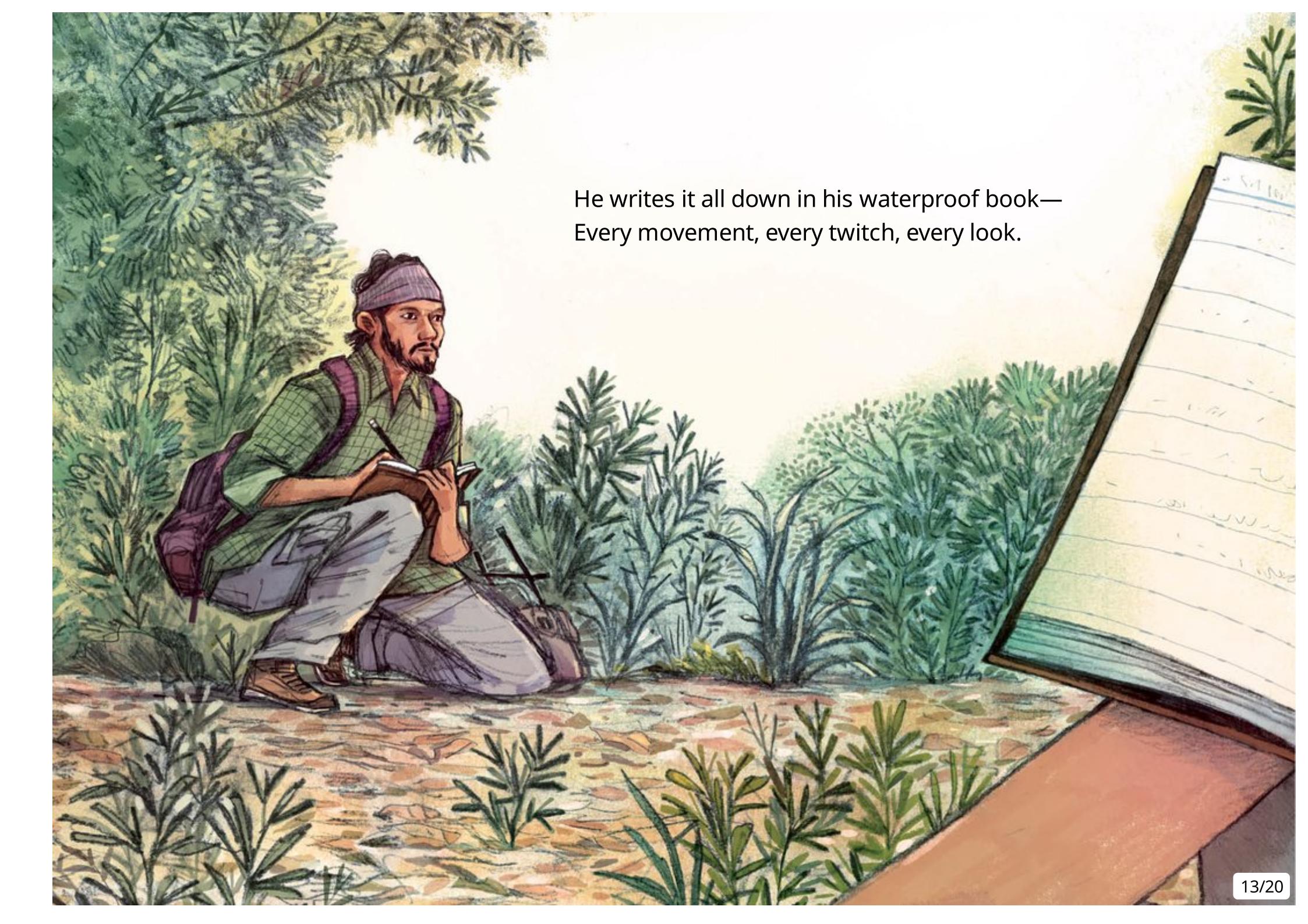


Now awake, the king cobra knows



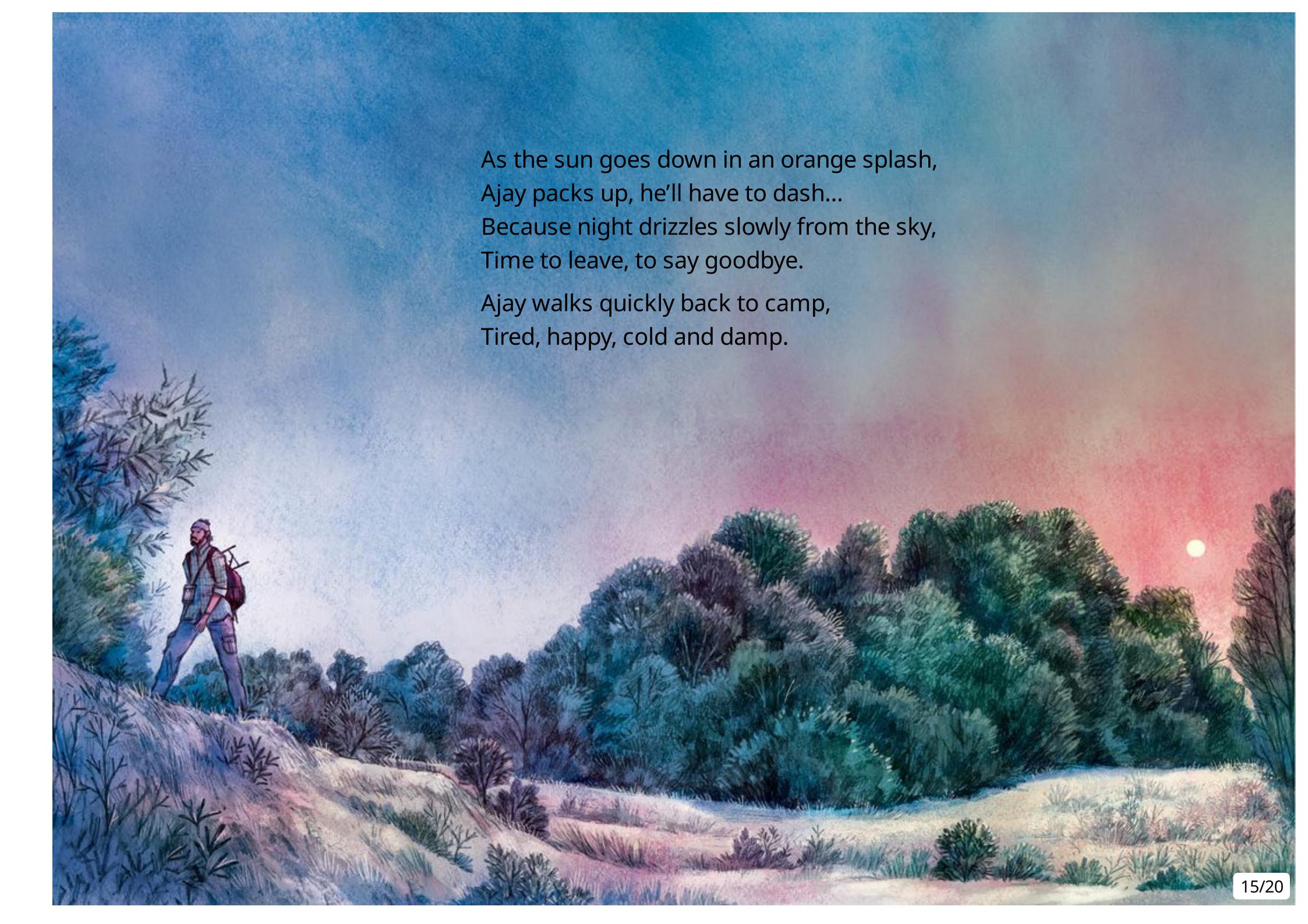


Her scientist friend is pretty close.  
Her tongue smells a delicious deal,  
A young rat snake, a first-class meal.  
She catches and swallows her favourite feed,  
While Ajay closely watches the deed.



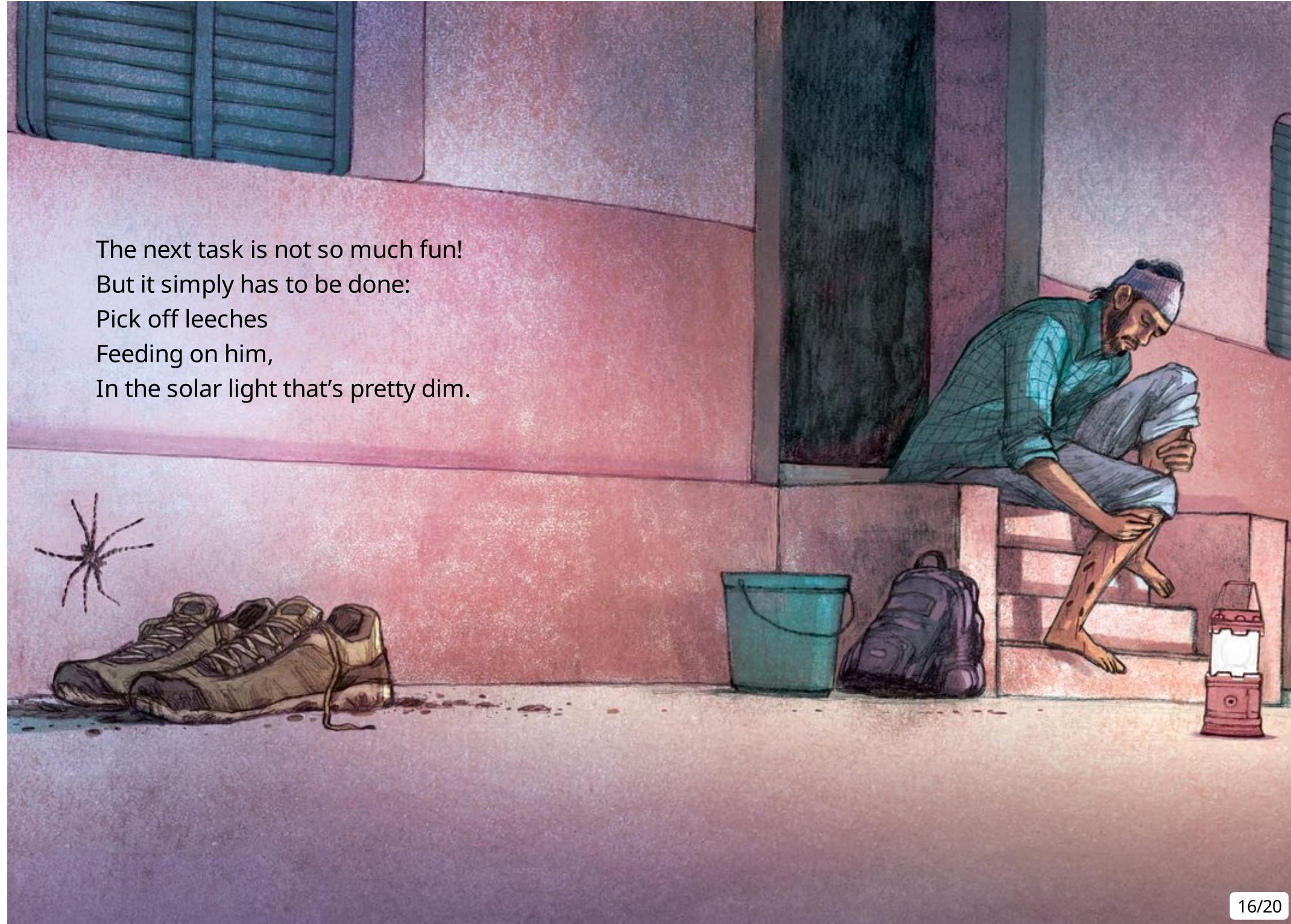
He writes it all down in his waterproof book—  
Every movement, every twitch, every look.

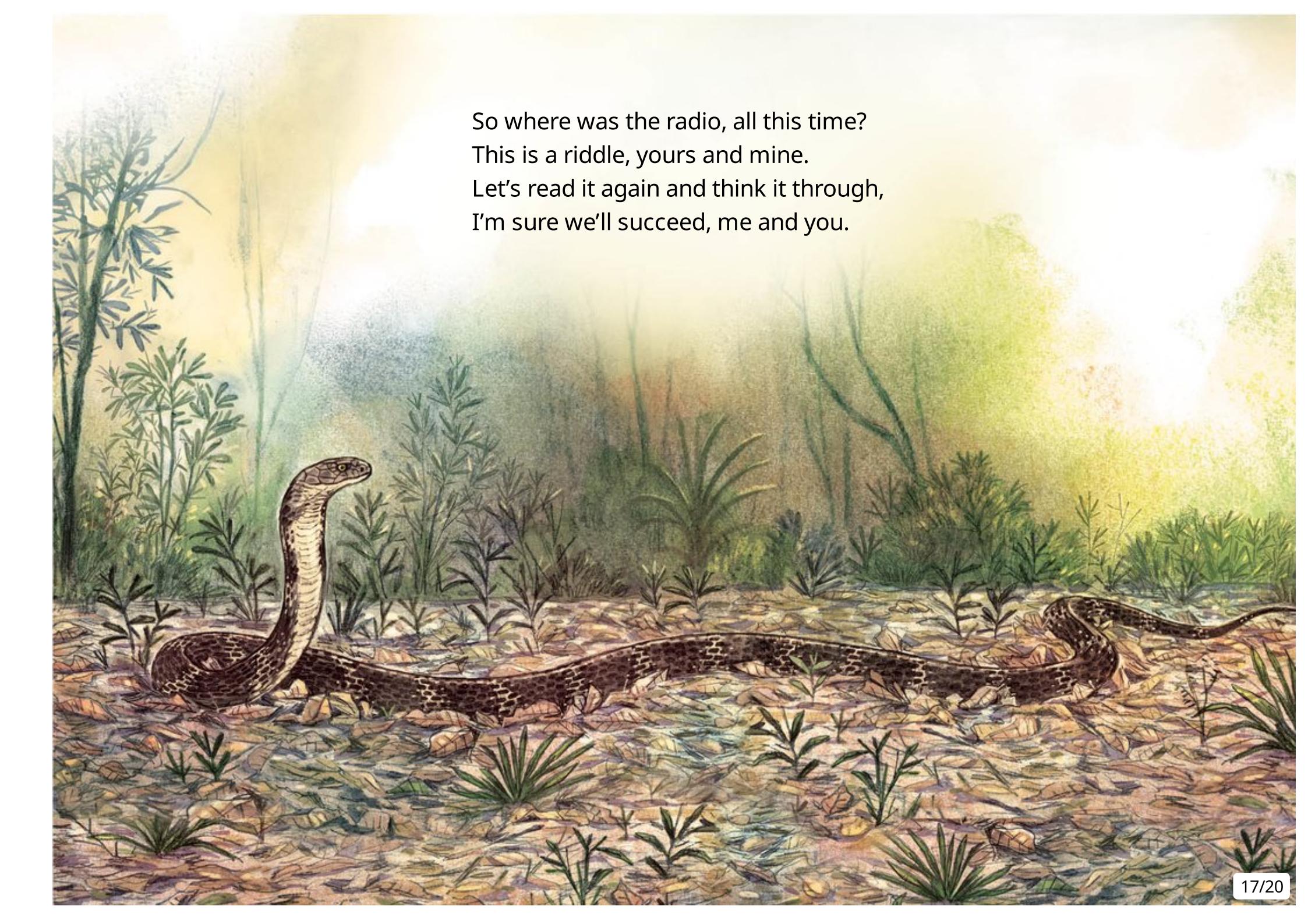


A painterly illustration of a hiker walking through a forest at sunset. The scene is set in a valley with rolling hills covered in dense green and blue-toned foliage. A path leads through the trees towards a bright horizon where a full moon hangs over a pink and orange sky. In the lower-left foreground, a hiker wearing a blue jacket, brown pants, and a backpack walks away from the viewer, moving along the path.

As the sun goes down in an orange splash,  
Ajay packs up, he'll have to dash...  
Because night drizzles slowly from the sky,  
Time to leave, to say goodbye.  
  
Ajay walks quickly back to camp,  
Tired, happy, cold and damp.

The next task is not so much fun!  
But it simply has to be done:  
Pick off leeches  
Feeding on him,  
In the solar light that's pretty dim.



A detailed watercolor painting of a cobra in its natural habitat. The snake is coiled low to the ground, its body forming a large S-shape. Its head is raised, hood expanded, and it is looking towards the left. The cobra's skin is patterned with dark brown, irregular blotches on a lighter background. It is surrounded by tall, green grasses and small, leafy plants. The background is a soft-focus wash of yellow and green, suggesting a bright, possibly overcast day.

So where was the radio, all this time?  
This is a riddle, yours and mine.  
Let's read it again and think it through,  
I'm sure we'll succeed, me and you.

## Where is the radio?

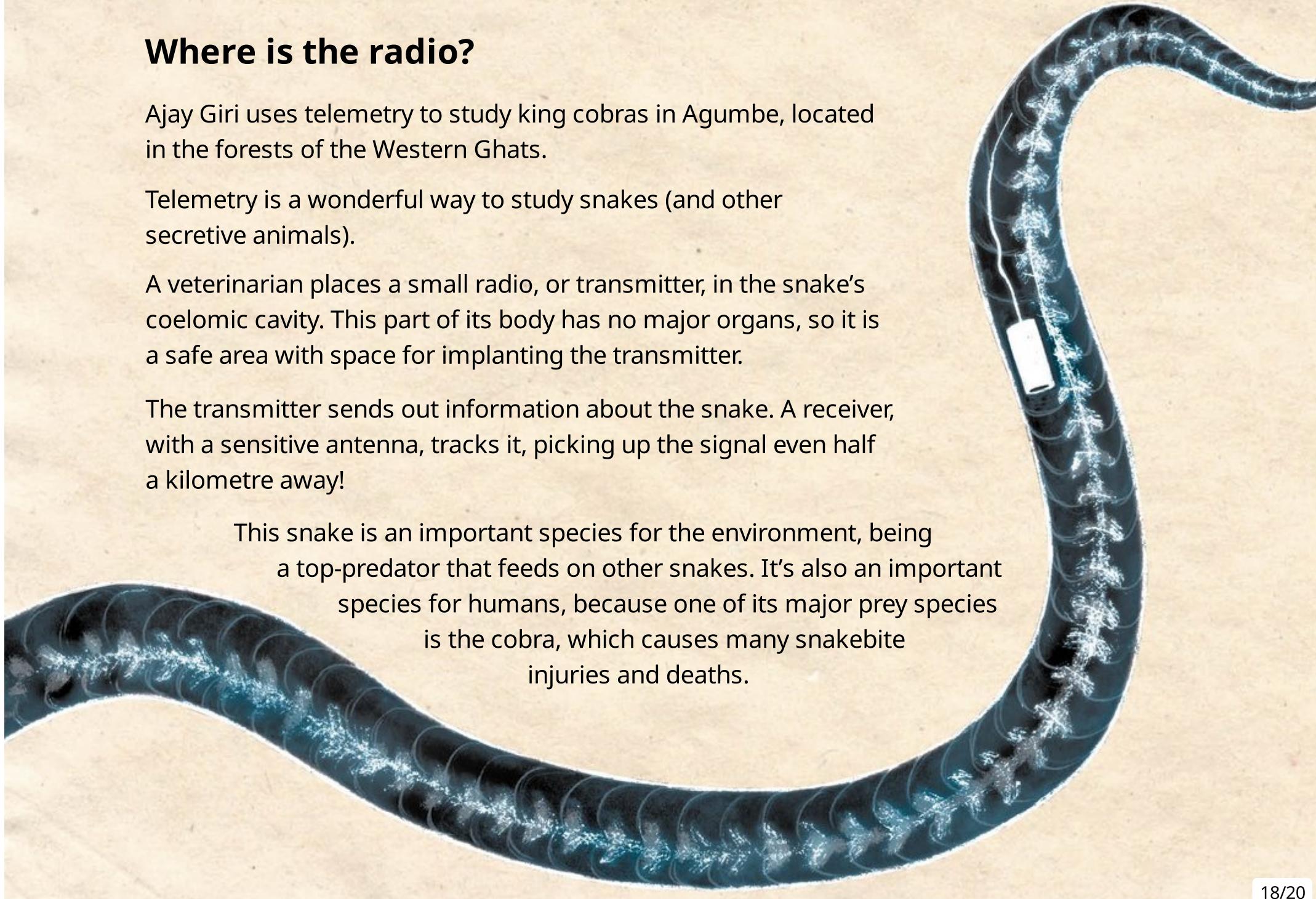
Ajay Giri uses telemetry to study king cobras in Agumbe, located in the forests of the Western Ghats.

Telemetry is a wonderful way to study snakes (and other secretive animals).

A veterinarian places a small radio, or transmitter, in the snake's coelomic cavity. This part of its body has no major organs, so it is a safe area with space for implanting the transmitter.

The transmitter sends out information about the snake. A receiver, with a sensitive antenna, tracks it, picking up the signal even half a kilometre away!

This snake is an important species for the environment, being a top-predator that feeds on other snakes. It's also an important species for humans, because one of its major prey species is the cobra, which causes many snakebite injuries and deaths.



With telemetry, Ajay is finding out interesting things about the life of the largest venomous snake in the world:

- He knows whether the snake is alive. Sometimes, the beeps stop and we think the snake is dead, but it may simply be in a burrow: a cool, quiet place in which to shed its skin (a process known as ecdysis) or digest a heavy meal.
- The snake's BPM (heartbeats per minute) from which we can calculate its body temperature.
- Once, he watched a king cobra as she swept up leaves with her body. In a couple of weeks, she built up a mound nest in which she laid her eggs. Of the 3,000 species of snakes in the world, this is the only one that builds a nest!





## Meet Ajay Giri

Ajay grew up in Akola, Maharashtra, and now lives in Agumbe in Karnataka. As a child, he loved watching wildlife, especially snakes and fish. Later, he began rescuing snakes from people's houses. His mother realised that he was playing an important role in the community. "You can do this," she said, "but please be careful. Don't do anything foolish."

Ajay takes her advice seriously. He doesn't do anything foolish. He doesn't show off, or play with snakes to impress people. The rescued snake, often a huge king cobra, is released close by, so it can remain in its own familiar habitat and continue its life comfortably. If released far away from its home, a snake may not be able to survive.

Ajay is Field Director of the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station, which was started by herpetologist Romulus Whitaker. It is run by the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust.





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# Ajay of Agumbe and the Signal Snake

(English)

Ajay is off to work. His office is in Agumbe. His job is to find the king cobra. We can see the antenna he carries, but where on earth is the radio that transmits to it? Walk with Ajay as he follows the king of snakes.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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