

LEVELED BOOK • M

The Sleeping Dog



An Ituri Folktale Retold by Ned Jensen
Illustrated by Dave Cockcroft

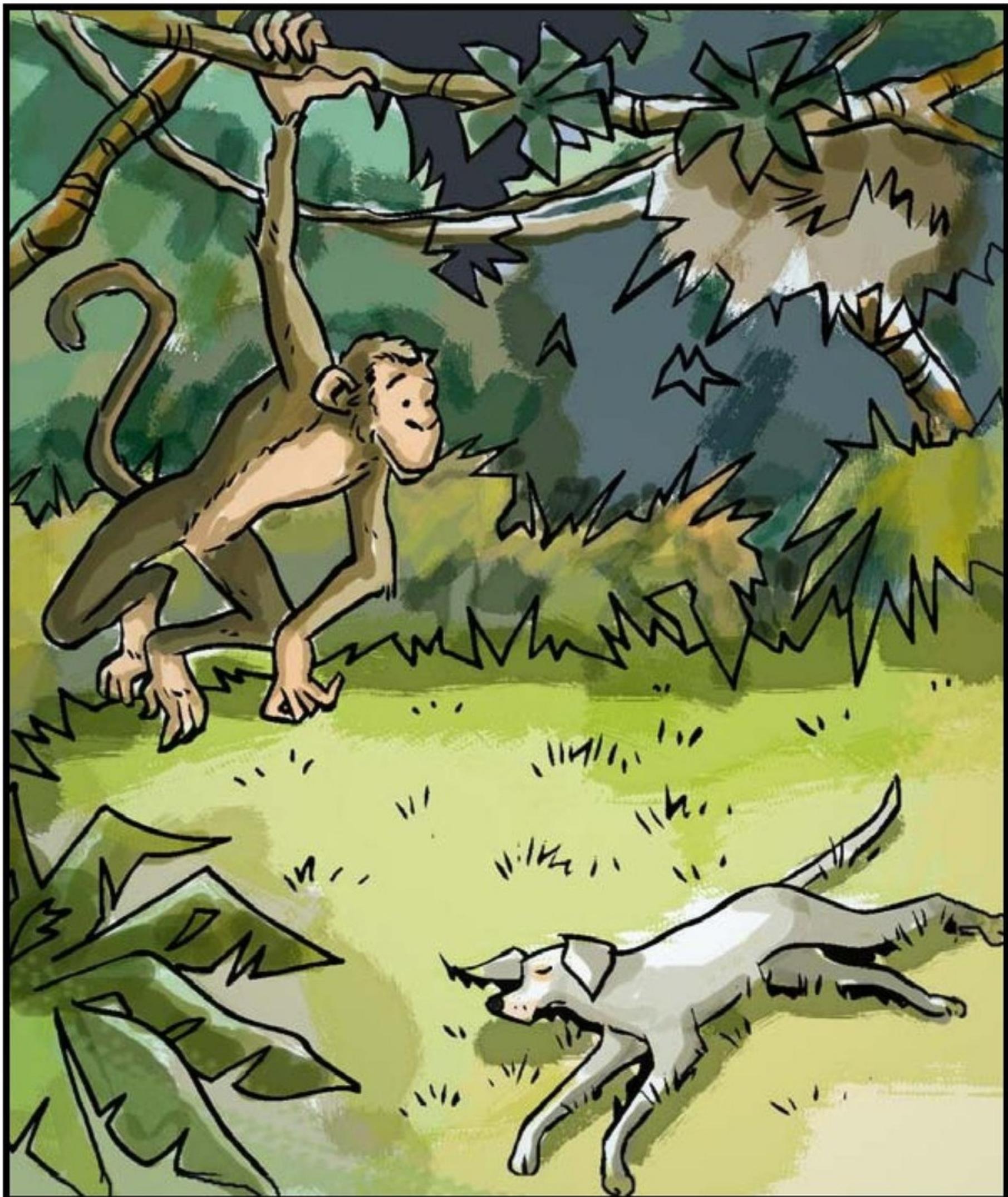
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Long ago, in the time before there were people, a dog was found sleeping in the middle of a dark forest. It was sleeping on its side with its legs spread in front of it. It was happy. It was the first dog ever to live on the Earth. Most of the time, the dog just slept.



The dog sleeping all day wasn't a problem. But it became a problem when a monkey saw it lying there. Now, the monkey was a nice enough animal, but it caused more than its share of trouble.

The monkey jumped from a tree to the ground. It looked at the dog from the front and then from the back. The monkey couldn't make head or tail of this creature. So the monkey climbed into a tree and hung upside down to see if the dog looked different from that angle. The dog looked just the same upside down.





The monkey couldn't figure out what the dog was. Remember that this was the very first dog on Earth. No one had ever seen a dog before. The monkey wanted to tell the other animals what it had found. Monkeys, as I'm sure you know, have big mouths.

Many animals came to see what the monkey had found.

"So," the monkey began, "this is the new creature I have found. Have any of you ever seen one before?"

An elephant bent its head way down and looked at the dog. "Well," said the elephant, curling its trunk as it spoke, "it's not an elephant."

"Thanks a lot," said Monkey. "You aren't being very helpful."



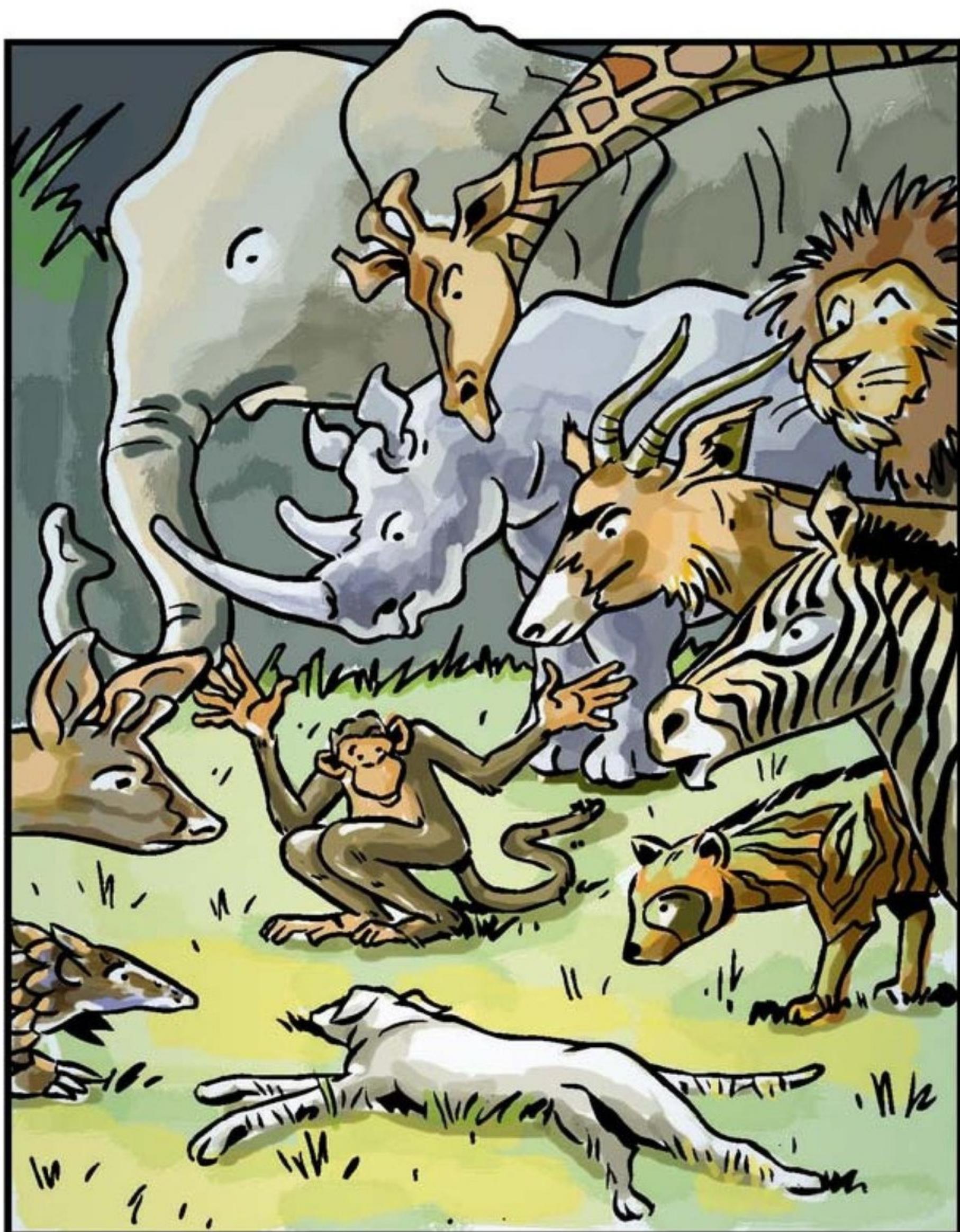
Next in line was a gentle okapi. It took a good look at the sleeping dog. In a voice the others could barely hear, the okapi said, "Sorry, I can't help you. It's not an okapi, and I'm sure it isn't a giraffe."





Now it was the pangolin's turn. Its body was covered with rough scales. The pangolin was very slow. If the pangolin had any thoughts about the dog, no one would hear them. The pangolin looked at the sleeping dog for a very long time. Then it rocked back and forth, settled to the ground, and fell asleep without saying a word.

The monkey asked every animal to take a turn. They each looked at the sleeping dog. Not one of them knew what it was or whose family it belonged to.





A tortoise was sitting quietly in a tree. No one was sure how it had gotten up there, but that is another story. The tortoise was very smart and was also very old. It knew what the dog was. In fact, it knew just about everything there was to know.

“Have you given up?” the tortoise asked the monkey.

The monkey replied, “Yes, I think so. We cannot decide whose family this creature is from.”

Tortoise replied, “You might want to call him ‘Dog’ unless you have a better name. If you ask me, and you didn’t, ‘Dog’ is the perfect name.”

Hearing its name spoken, the dog woke up. It was not happy to be awake. It saw all the other animals staring at it.





“Who was mean enough to wake me up?” the dog asked. It wasn’t feeling very polite. The dog bared its big, pointed teeth and growled. It barked and barked. All the animals scattered. They were afraid that the dog wanted to eat them.



The tortoise was safe in its tree, since dogs can't climb trees. "You can't get me. But from now on, all the animals will run from you, and you will chase them," said the tortoise, laughing as it tucked its head into its shell.

Even today, a dog will chase anything it sees, unless, of course, it is sleeping. Dogs still like to sleep, too.

That night Monkey sang a new song:
“So now we all know why
You let a sleeping dog lie.”



On that day, though, the animals had already made the mistake of waking up the sleeping dog. But a lesson was learned, and it has been passed down over time. Even today, it is best to let a sleeping dog lie.



The Ituri people are an African tribe who live in the tropical rainforest in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Reading Recovery	19
DRA	24