

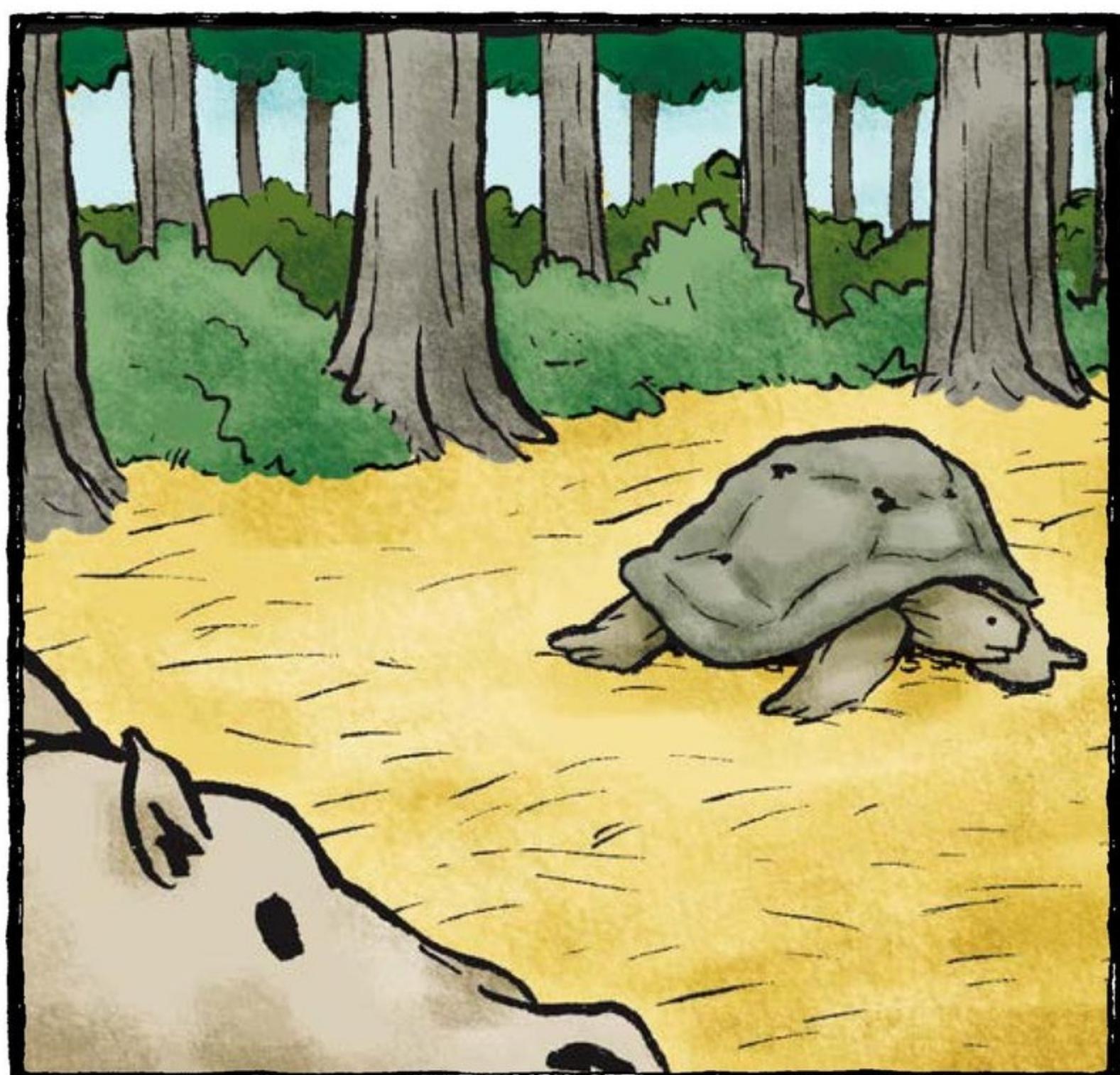
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Gwen and the Tortoise

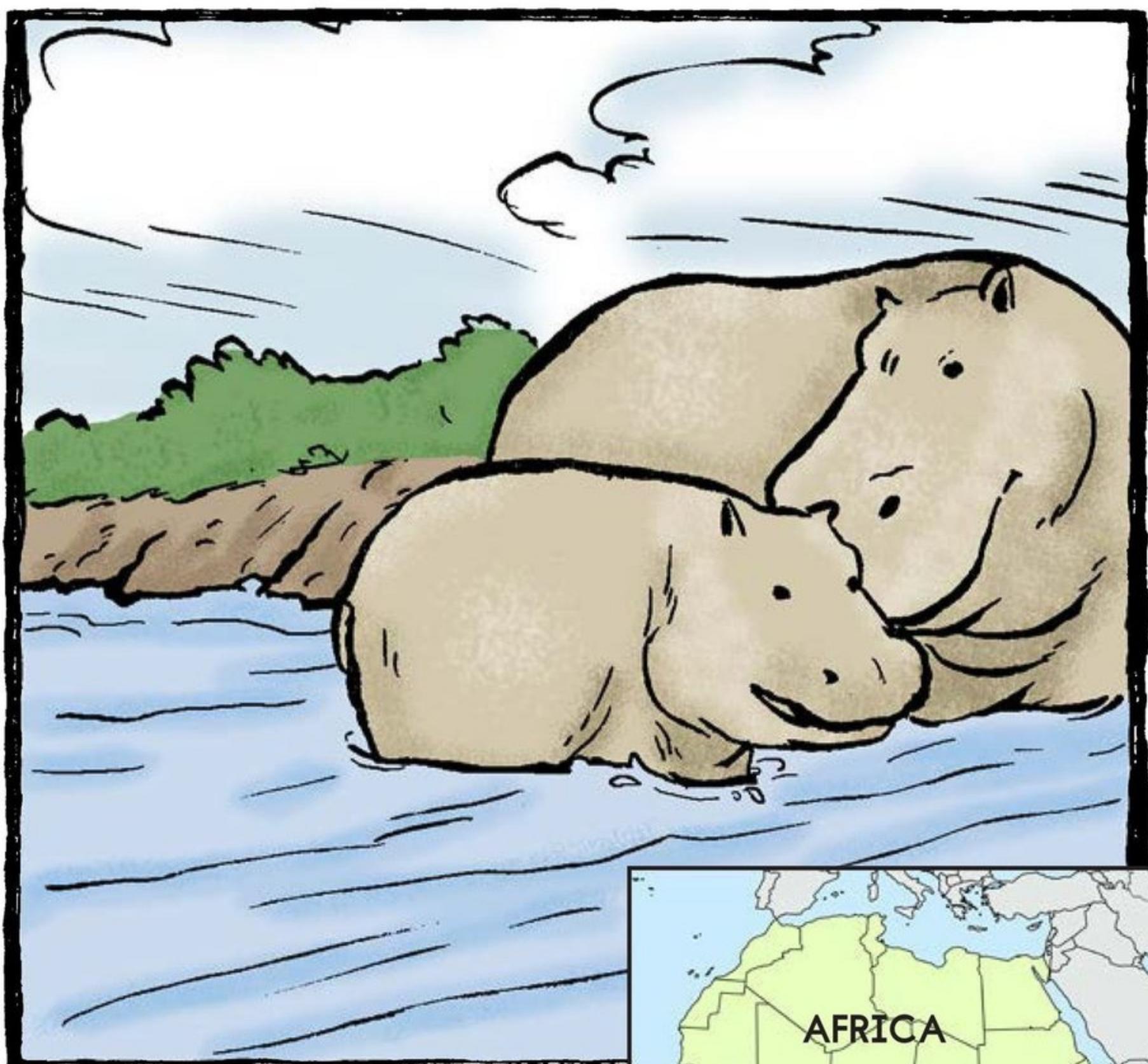


Written by Katie Knight • Illustrated by Chris Baldwin

Owen and the Tortoise



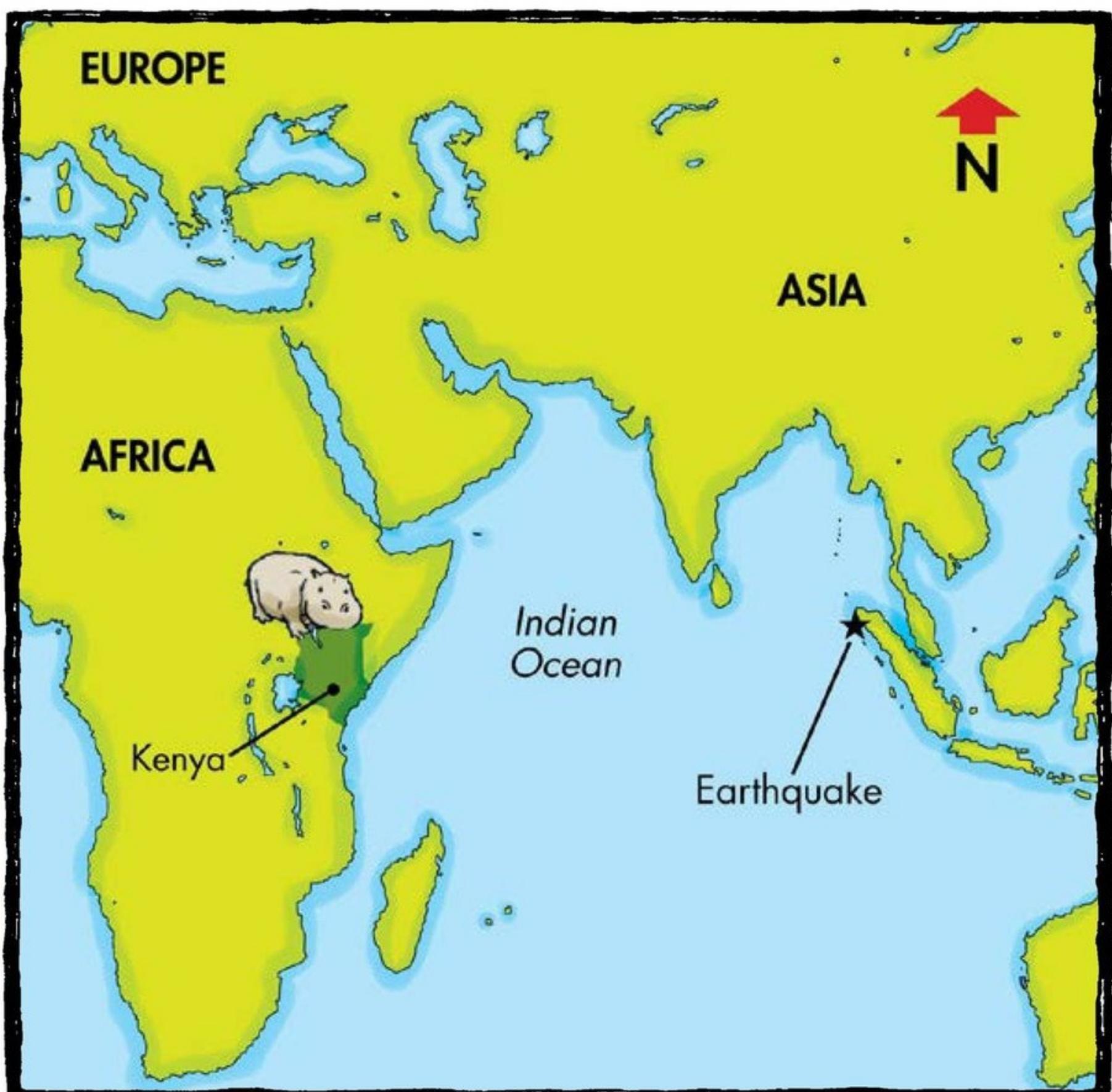
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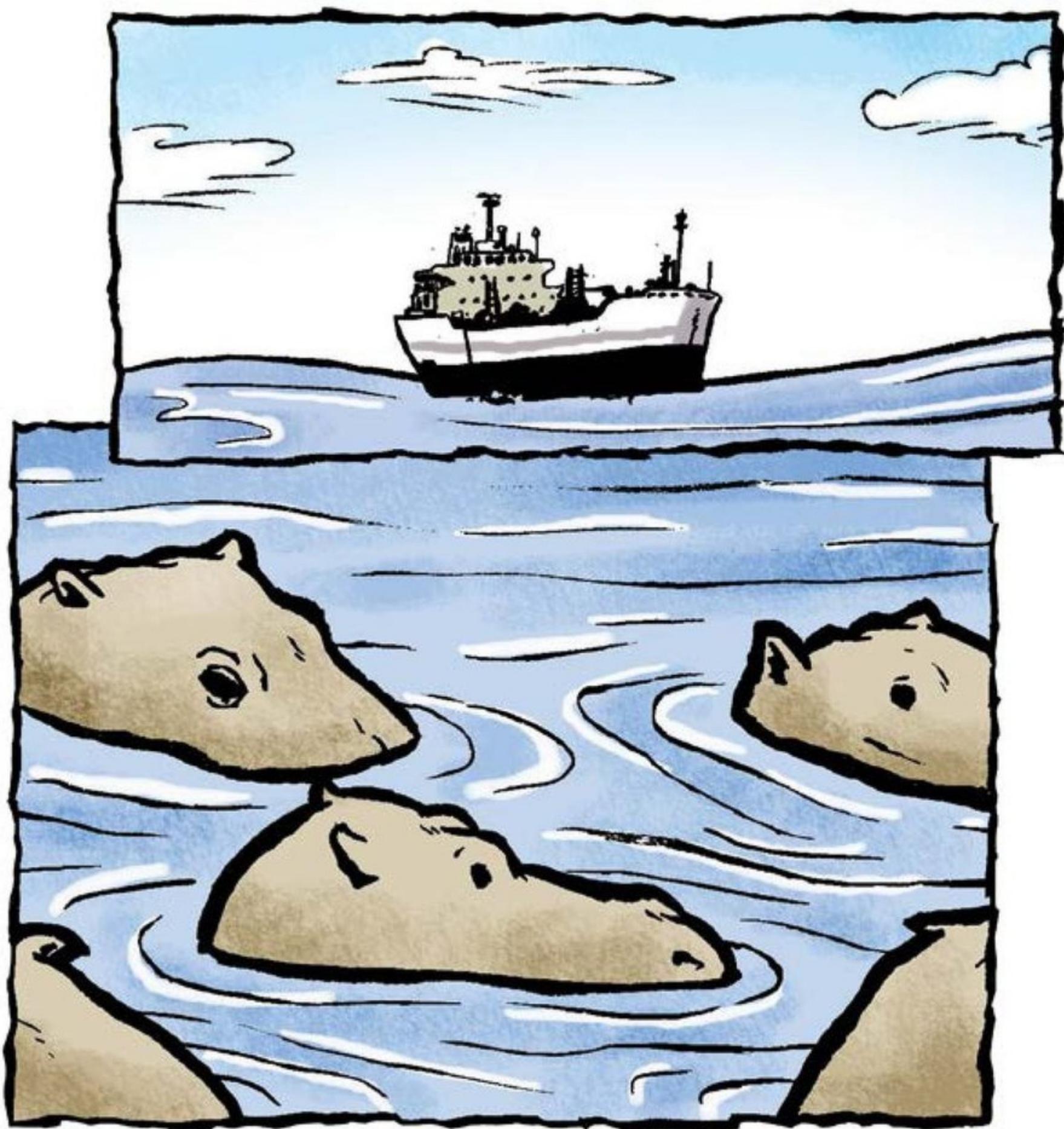


It was a hot, sunny day in **Kenya**, a country on the eastern coast of Africa. A young, one-year-old hippo named Owen followed his mother into the Sabaki River. The water felt good as it washed over Owen's warm skin.



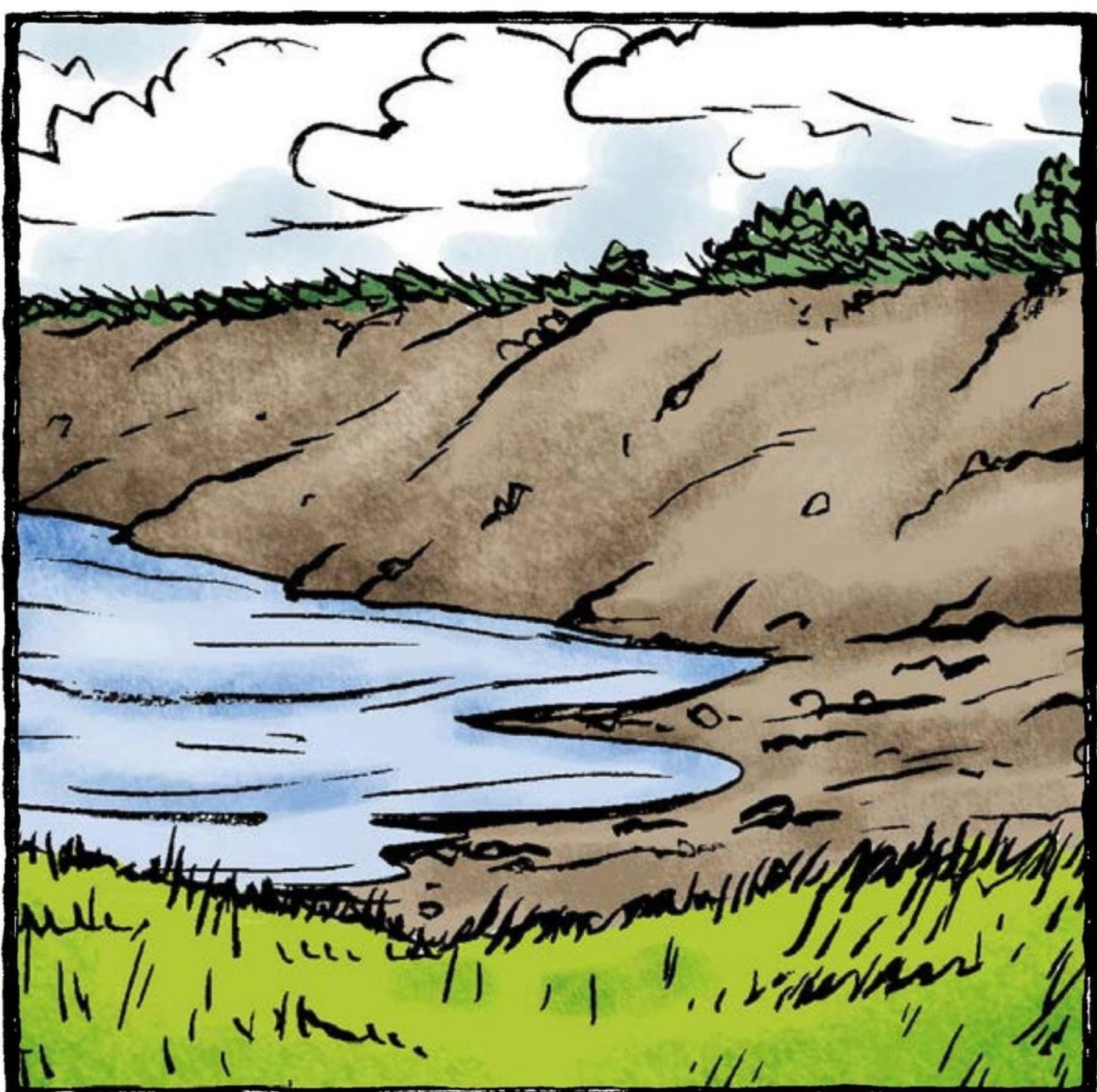
Deep under the ocean, a long way from where Owen bathed, the earth began to shake. The shaking caused a giant wave, called a **tsunami**, to form. Hundreds of miles away, Owen was not aware of the giant wave.

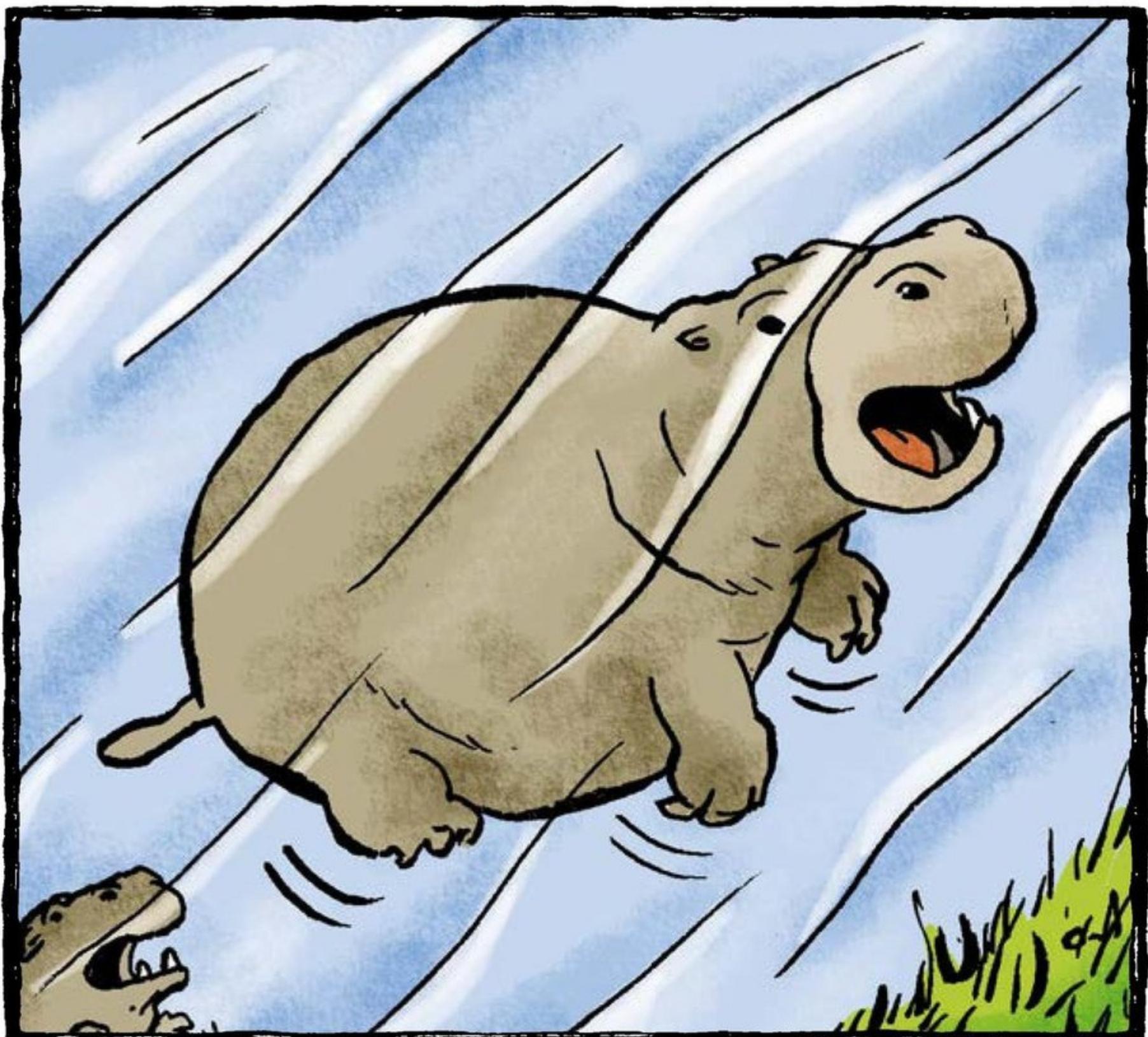




As the tsunami silently made its way toward the Kenyan shore, **carefree** Owen was having fun bathing in the river. Ships at sea slowly rose and fell as the giant wave passed harmlessly beneath them, seeking shore.

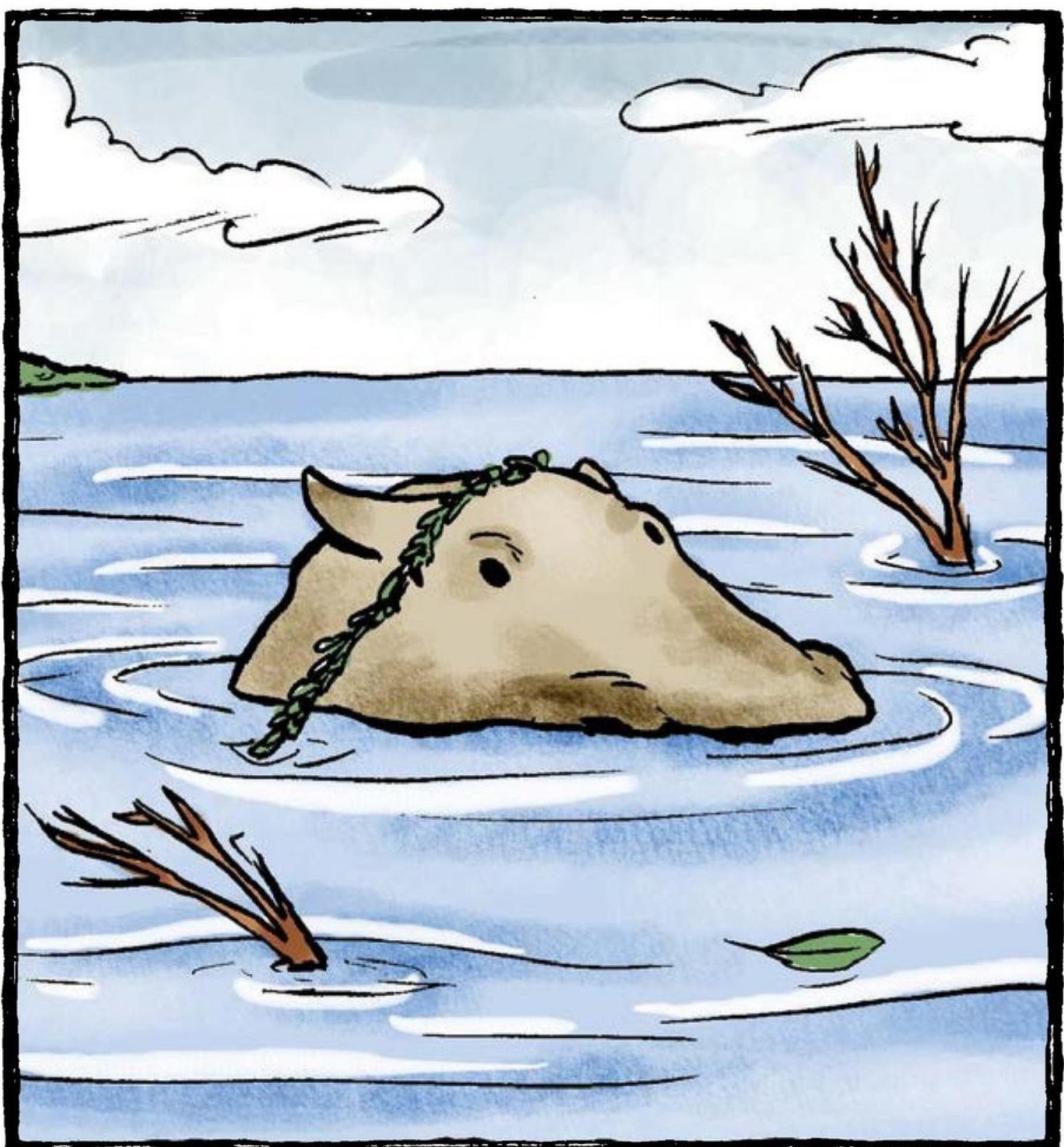
Finally, as the wave came near the Kenyan shore, something strange happened. Water near the shore was sucked into the ocean, creating a strong **current**. Rivers began to empty and flow back into the sea. It was as if someone had pulled a plug from the bottom of the ocean.





The water in the Sabaki River suddenly rushed out to sea. Owen, like all hippos, was a great swimmer. But the strong current was simply too **swift**. Owen felt himself being pulled away from his mother and going with the water out to sea. He was helpless, and there was little he could do.

Owen continued to struggle against the strong current, and he soon tired. He finally gave up. Soon he found himself **surrounded** by salty seawater. He had been pulled from the safety of the river into a strange and **vast** new place.





Owen spat and sputtered as he tried to stay **afloat**. The saltiness of the ocean burned his **nostrils**.

It seemed only a matter of time until Owen would slip beneath the water and drown. Then, as suddenly as he had been pulled into the ocean, he felt himself racing back toward land. The tsunami had ahold of him. The giant wave was taking him back toward shore.



As the wave neared shore, it seemed to grow bigger and bigger, swallowing up the little hippo. Then, as all waves nearing shore do, the wave began to **crest**. A white frothy top spilled over, and the tsunami poured forward onto the shore.

Owen, caught up in the huge breaking wave, was tossed about like a cork. As the wave broke, it threw Owen onto the shore with a *KAA-THUD!*

The little hippo tumbled and rolled, bumping into the **debris** the rushing water had brought along with him. Owen was pushed farther inland.

Finally, the wave ran out of energy, and its water spread thinly over the land. Owen lay bruised and tired, far from the Sabaki River and his mother.

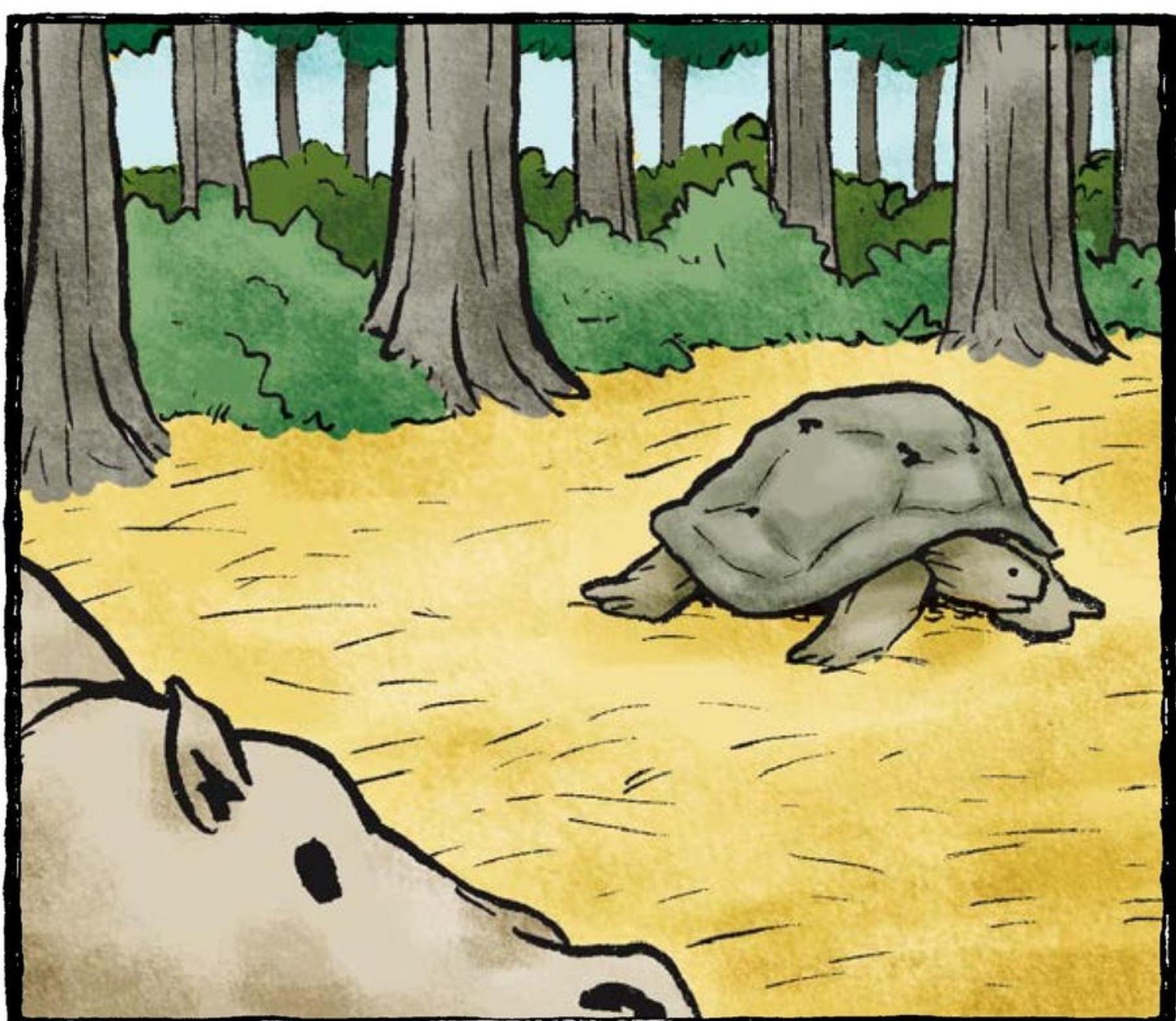




It was not long until a wildlife ranger, who was checking the damage the tsunami had caused, came across the little hippo. He was surprised to see a hippo so near the ocean's shore. He knew that hippos lived inland along the banks of rivers.

The ranger called for help, and Owen was transported to a wildlife park. Owen began to recover and gain strength, but Owen missed his mother.

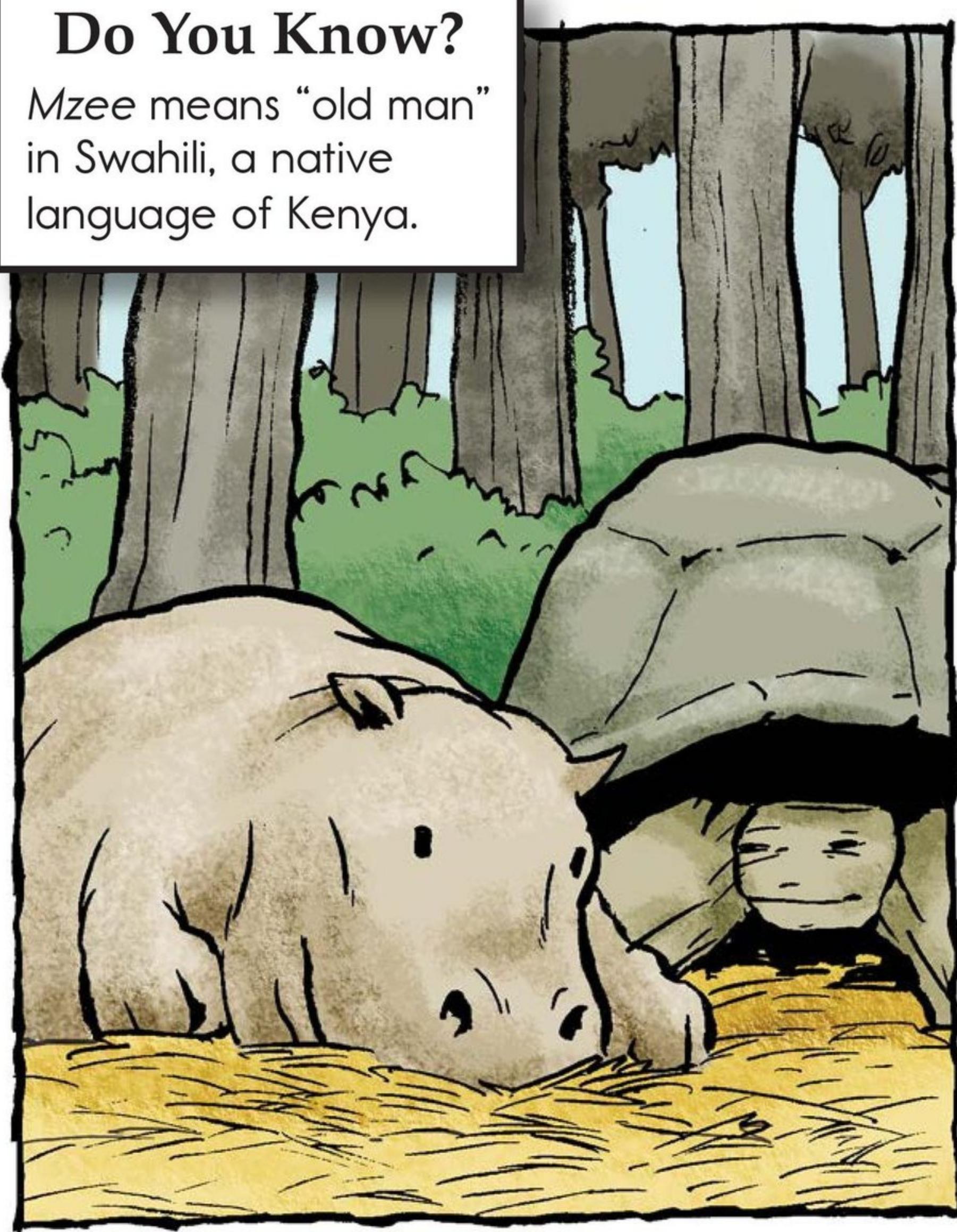
Owen spotted a large, gray 100-year-old tortoise named Mzee. The tortoise was similar in color to Owen's mother.



Owen was immediately drawn to Mzee. The old tortoise didn't seem to mind having Owen cuddle up to him or follow him around.

Do You Know?

Mzee means "old man" in Swahili, a native language of Kenya.





The real Owen, left, and Mzee live together in Kenya.

Owen and Mzee now eat, swim, and sleep together. Everywhere Mzee goes, Owen is at his side.

Owen even tries to protect Mzee when someone comes near. It is just what he would do if Mzee really were his mother.

Owen was very lucky to survive the tsunami. And he was luckier to find a new mom, even if it was an old tortoise.

Glossary

afloat	carried on the surface of water (p. 9)
carefree	free from worry or upset (p. 5)
crest	the top of something, such as a wave or hill (p. 10)
current	the swift moving water of a river or stream that flows in a certain direction (p. 6)
debris	pieces left after something is destroyed (p. 11)
Kenya	country on the east-central coast of Africa (p. 3)
nostrils	the holes of the nose through which animals breathe (p. 9)
surrounded	to be encircled, or to be enclosed on all sides (p. 8)
swift	moving at great speeds (p. 7)
tsunami	great wave caused by an earthquake, volcano, or landslide (p. 4)
vast	very great in size (p. 8)

Note to readers:

This fictional account is based on true events that happened to a one-year-old hippo in the country of Kenya as a result of the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004.

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