

THE BOY AND THE TOAD

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One late afternoon, Roberto was walking with his friends near the lake, on the outskirts of the country town where they lived.



The children saw a cane toad, with wrinkled skin and bulging eyes.

“Wow, how ugly it is!” exclaimed one of the boys.

Roberto was the only one who had a slingshot.

The other two challenged him:

“I dare you to hit the toad with a rock!”



Roberto took out his slingshot, picked up a stone from the ground and aimed at the toad, which was nearby...
But something was stopping him from throwing the stone.



“Go, shoot!” shouted his friend.

“Don’t you have the courage?” provoked the other. Roberto was torn. He wanted to prove to his friends that he was brave and had a good shot, but he didn’t want to hurt the toad. As much as some people think it is ugly, it was still a living being, a little animal that lives in nature.

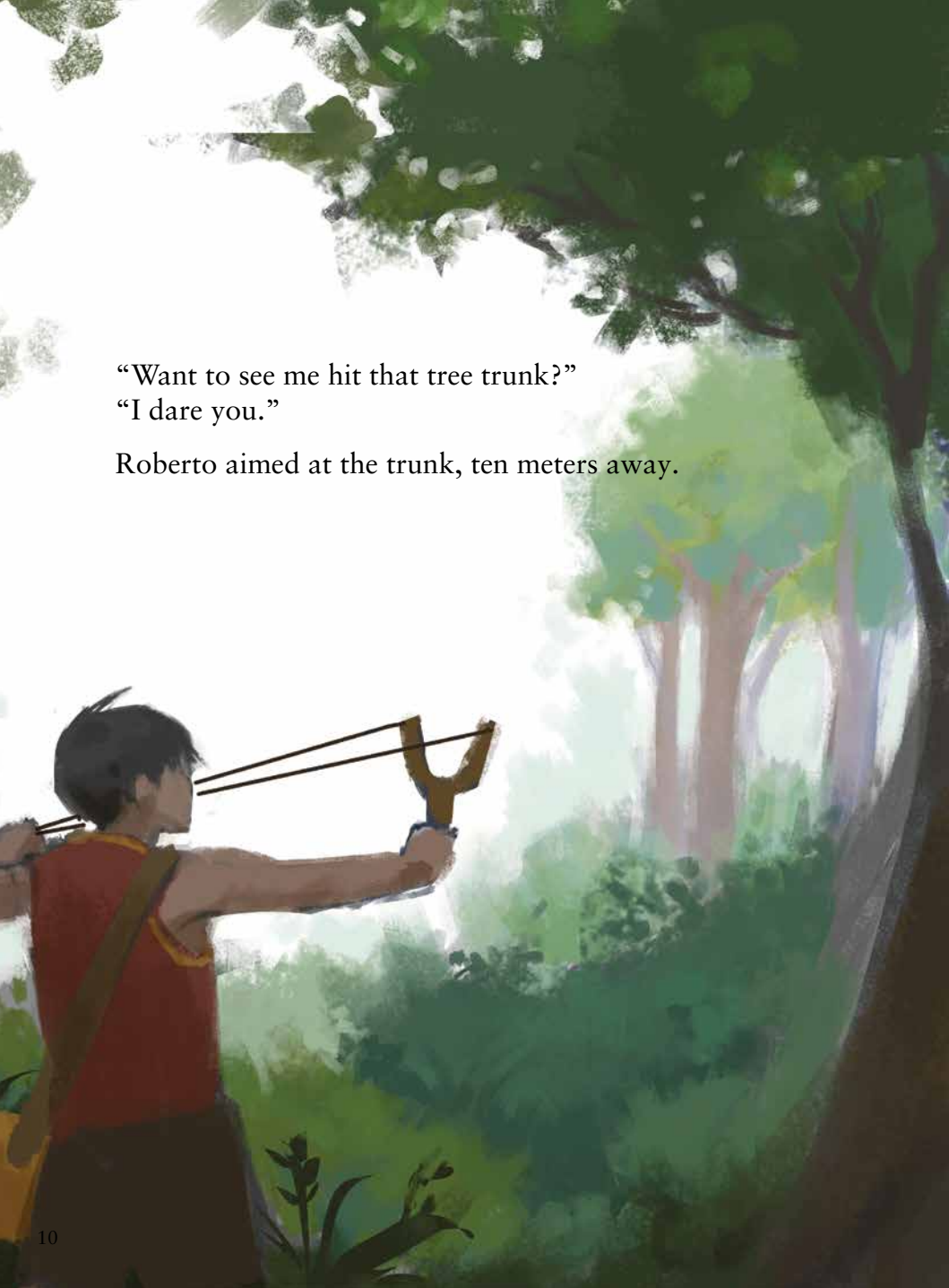


The kindness that existed in Roberto's heart spoke louder.



He didn't throw the stone, and the toad jumped happily into the lake.
"Ah, why didn't you shoot?" complained the friend.
"I don't want to hurt any animals."
"But it's a disgusting useless animal. Furthermore, it is dangerous. I heard it pees on people's eyes.
Roberto doubted what his friend said, but preferred not to argue and changed the subject.



An illustration of a young boy with dark hair, wearing a red tank top and a brown sash, aiming a slingshot. He is positioned on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right. The background is a lush, green forest with several trees and dense foliage. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The style is painterly and soft.

“Want to see me hit that tree trunk?”
“I dare you.”

Roberto aimed at the trunk, ten meters away.

Shot...
And hit it.



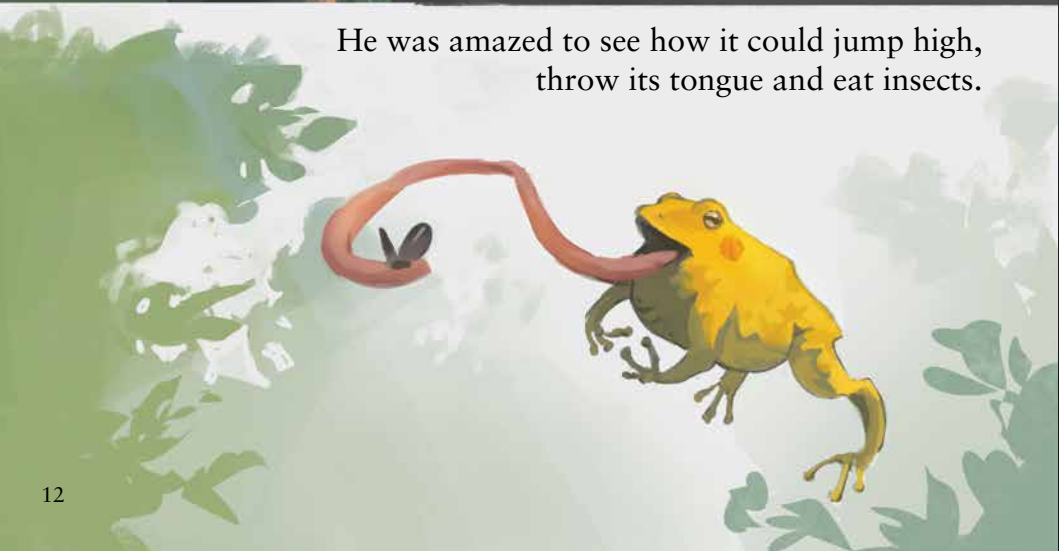
“Wow, you’re really good!” exclaimed his friends.
The boy was happy with their admiration.



At sunset, Roberto was going back home when, by coincidence, he saw the cane toad again.



He was amazed to see how it could jump high, throw its tongue and eat insects.



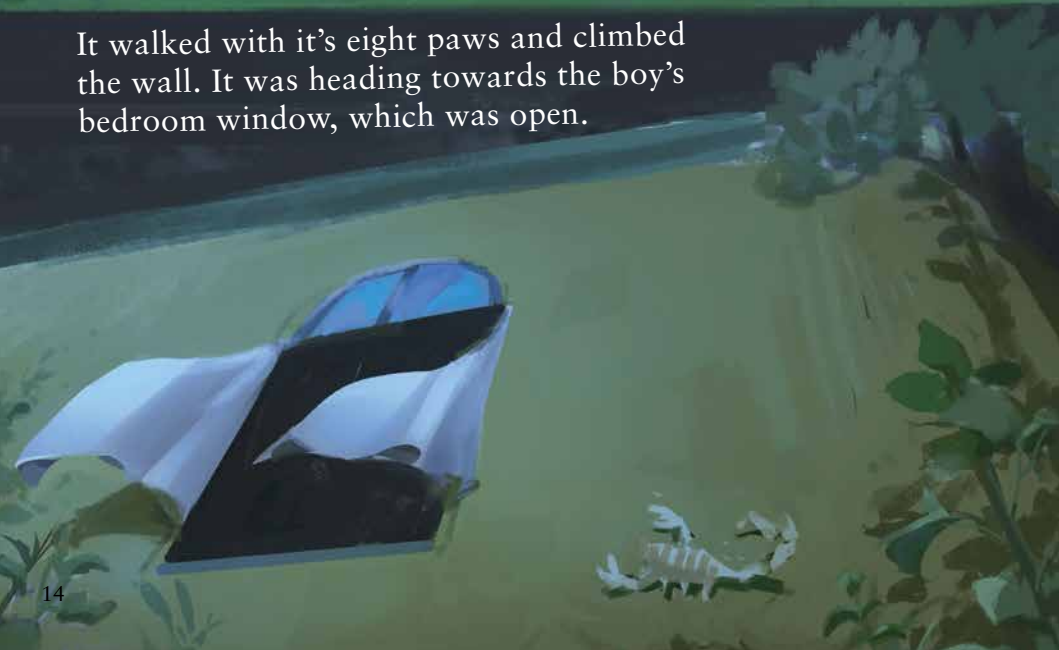
Before going to sleep, Roberto searched on the internet and found that toads don't spray poison on people. That's just a legend. They do no harm to humans. On the contrary, they fulfill an important role in nature, helping to control the number of insects and other pests. The boy asked himself: *What are the other pests?* But he ended up not searching any further, as he soon fell asleep.



Little did he know that there was an infestation of scorpions in that region. That night, a yellow scorpion appeared in Roberto's backyard.



It walked with its eight paws and climbed the wall. It was heading towards the boy's bedroom window, which was open.



Suddenly, a tongue stuck to the scorpion and pulled it.



The cane toad grabbed the arachnid and swallowed it.

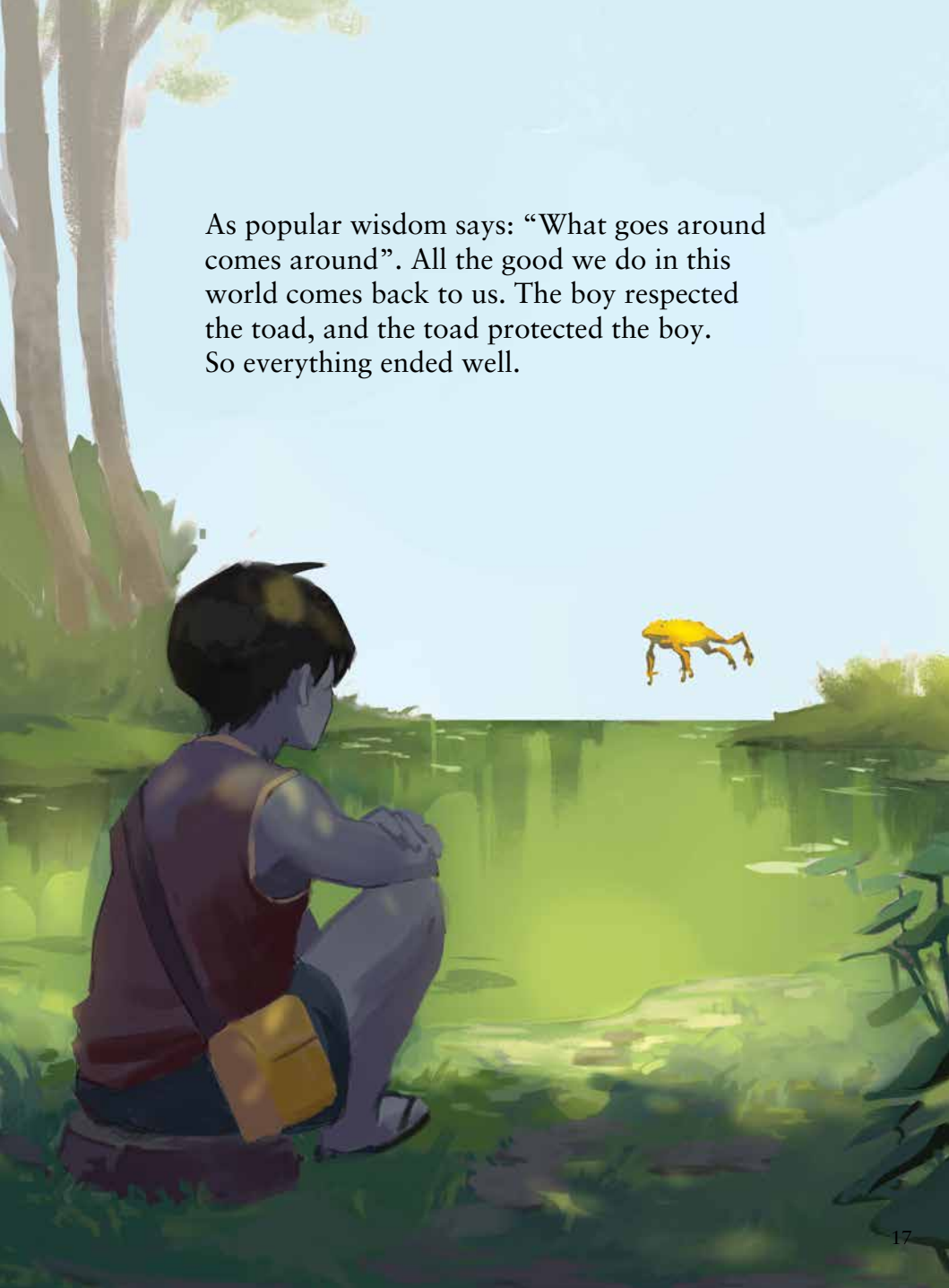


Satisfied, the toad left.

The boy slept peacefully all night. He had no idea that his act of kindness hours earlier helped free him from a dangerous situation. The toad, whose life was spared and whose qualities were appreciated by Roberto, returned the boy's love and ate the poisonous scorpion, which was heading to the boy's room and could have stung him.



As popular wisdom says: “What goes around comes around”. All the good we do in this world comes back to us. The boy respected the toad, and the toad protected the boy. So everything ended well.



Curiosities about the cane toad (*Rhinella icterica*)

It is also called the bullfrog or common toad. It is most active at night. It can live far away from water, seeking it out only to reproduce.

It feeds on insects in general, as well as other bugs or animals such as scorpions (the toad is immune to scorpion venom). It can also eat plants and organic waste. It is one of the few toad species that is omnivorous (eats everything).

It is able to inflate its lungs to appear larger to its predators, which are alligators, snakes, fish, rats and birds.

Males are greenish-yellow and females are beige or yellow with dark spots. They are larger than the males. The males croak to attract the female. The song is a sequence of short, repeated notes, like the sound of a small engine.

In Brazil, there are various rumours about the cane toad, that it pees in the eyes of those who approach it, or that it sneezes poisonous milk. None of this is true. They're just popular beliefs.



The toad is unable to squirt poison on purpose. It has large glands behind its eyes and all over its back. When pressed, they release a toxic, white, milky liquid.

Toads are not normally dangerous to humans. But it's important to teach children that toads are not toys or pets. Children should not pick up toads with their hands, to prevent them from accidentally squeezing the poison glands and then putting their hands in their mouths or eyes.

It's also important to prevent dogs from playing with toads. If they grab the amphibian and press on it, they could end up ingesting the toxin. If this happens, take your dog to the vet immediately.

Curiosities about the yellow scorpion (*Tityus serrulatus*)

It can go for months without food, but it doesn't live long without water. Its favourite foods are cockroaches, crickets, termites and spiders. The scorpion's predators are toads, skunks, lizards, bats, owls, seriemas and chickens.

Their reproduction is curious. Females give birth without the help of males, in a process called parthenogenesis. The female's eggs divide and produce around twenty embryos. When they are born, the mother carries the young on her back for around a fortnight. They then become independent.

Scorpions seek refuge in places such as garbage cans, rubble, power boxes, holes, rotten logs or under rocks, where these nocturnal creatures rest during the day. Contrary to popular belief, scorpions don't attack people. They only sting to defend themselves against someone who has invaded their territory.



If you find a scorpion, move away and stay calm. Tell an adult, who should call a technician from the Zoonosis Control Centre to remove the animal and check if there are any others in the area. If the scorpion needs to be removed immediately, the adult can use a broom and dustpan.

In the event of a scorpion sting, it is recommended not to suck out the venom or make tourniquets or incisions. Simply wash the area with soap and water and go immediately to a health centre or hospital.

Many people think that scorpion stings are fatal, but the mortality rate is relatively low: 4 deaths per 10,000 occurrences.

If scorpions appear in the area where you live, here are some tips to avoid accidents: use screens on drains; try to put thresholds on doors; keep gardens trimmed and yards free of rubble and leaves; store household rubbish in well-sealed bags, as the waste can attract



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cockroaches, which are the scorpion's favourite food; avoid putting your hand in holes, under stones or in rotting logs; wear gloves and shoes when dealing with rubble and building materials.

Remember: scorpions only seek out houses that offer them shelter and food. Keep your home clean!

Conclusion

While it's important to keep scorpions away from our homes, it's also worth remembering that they're not exactly villains, but part of the ecosystem, helping to balance the insect population.

Similarly, the toad, though not always liked, plays an important role in nature. That's why it's necessary to preserve toads, as well as all other animals and the areas where they live, to help maintain the ecological balance.

Diogo Luiz



Female

Pedro Reis



Male

Writer



Flávio Colombini

I'm a writer and film-maker. I live in downtown São Paulo, Brazil. There are no toads here. But one day I read an article in the newspaper about the cane toad, which is discriminated against because it's ugly and for the lies spread about it, even though it plays an important role in nature. I thought it deserved a book of it's own and I created the story you've just read. I have written many other books and made fun films and videos for children. You can find out more about all my work by visiting my website: www.flaviocolombini.com/english

Illustrator



Luiza Beda

I'm an illustrator and I'm also a nature lover. I grew up in the countryside, where there were lots and lots of frogs of all kinds. At first, it was a bit scary, because they make strange noises all of a sudden and also appear without you inviting them. But in the end, I found them to be good company. When Flávio invited me to illustrate a book about toads, I was very excited. I could finally draw my own colourful toad and adventurous boys on a sunny day. I hope you enjoyed the book too! If you want to see other drawings I've done, look me up on www.instagram.com/luizabeda.