



The Lost Queen



Wild Ride



The Way of the Dodo

Reading Booklet

2016 key stage 2 English reading booklet



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Maria and Oliver are attending a party in the garden of a house that used to belong to Maria's family. They sneak away to explore the grounds.

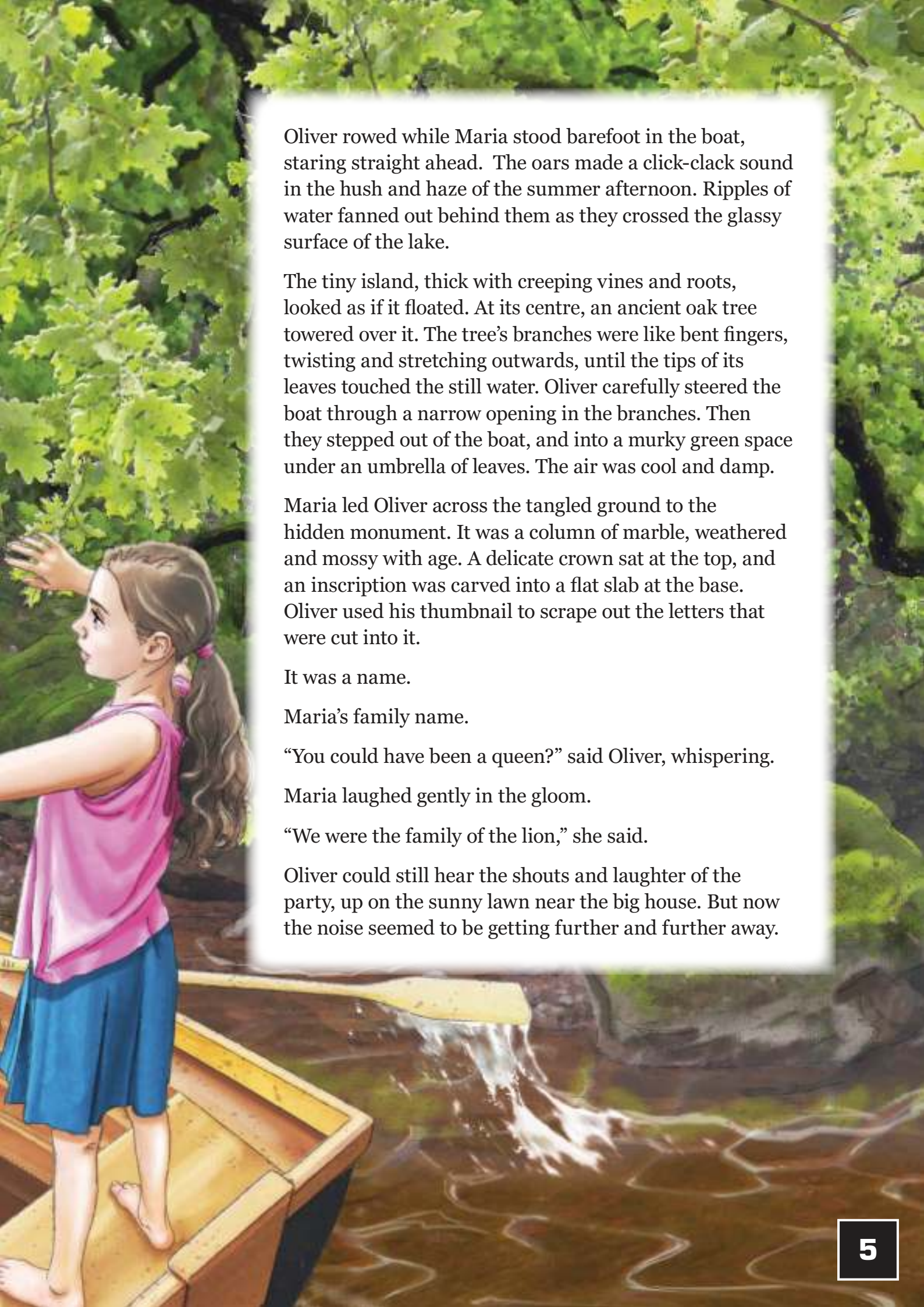
The Lost Queen

Maria and Oliver were quite a distance from the party when they found the little rowing boat in the grassy shallows of a small lake beyond the garden.

Glancing nervously behind her, Maria suggested that they row out to the island in the middle of the lake. Oliver looked at her questioningly. Maria explained that there was a secret monument on the island to one of her ancestors. This was a woman who had married a prince at the time when there was a struggle for the throne. The struggle had been between two rival families – one had a lion as its symbol, the winner had a bear.

“Come on,” Maria said impatiently.





Oliver rowed while Maria stood barefoot in the boat, staring straight ahead. The oars made a click-clack sound in the hush and haze of the summer afternoon. Ripples of water fanned out behind them as they crossed the glassy surface of the lake.

The tiny island, thick with creeping vines and roots, looked as if it floated. At its centre, an ancient oak tree towered over it. The tree's branches were like bent fingers, twisting and stretching outwards, until the tips of its leaves touched the still water. Oliver carefully steered the boat through a narrow opening in the branches. Then they stepped out of the boat, and into a murky green space under an umbrella of leaves. The air was cool and damp.

Maria led Oliver across the tangled ground to the hidden monument. It was a column of marble, weathered and mossy with age. A delicate crown sat at the top, and an inscription was carved into a flat slab at the base. Oliver used his thumbnail to scrape out the letters that were cut into it.

It was a name.

Maria's family name.

"You could have been a queen?" said Oliver, whispering.

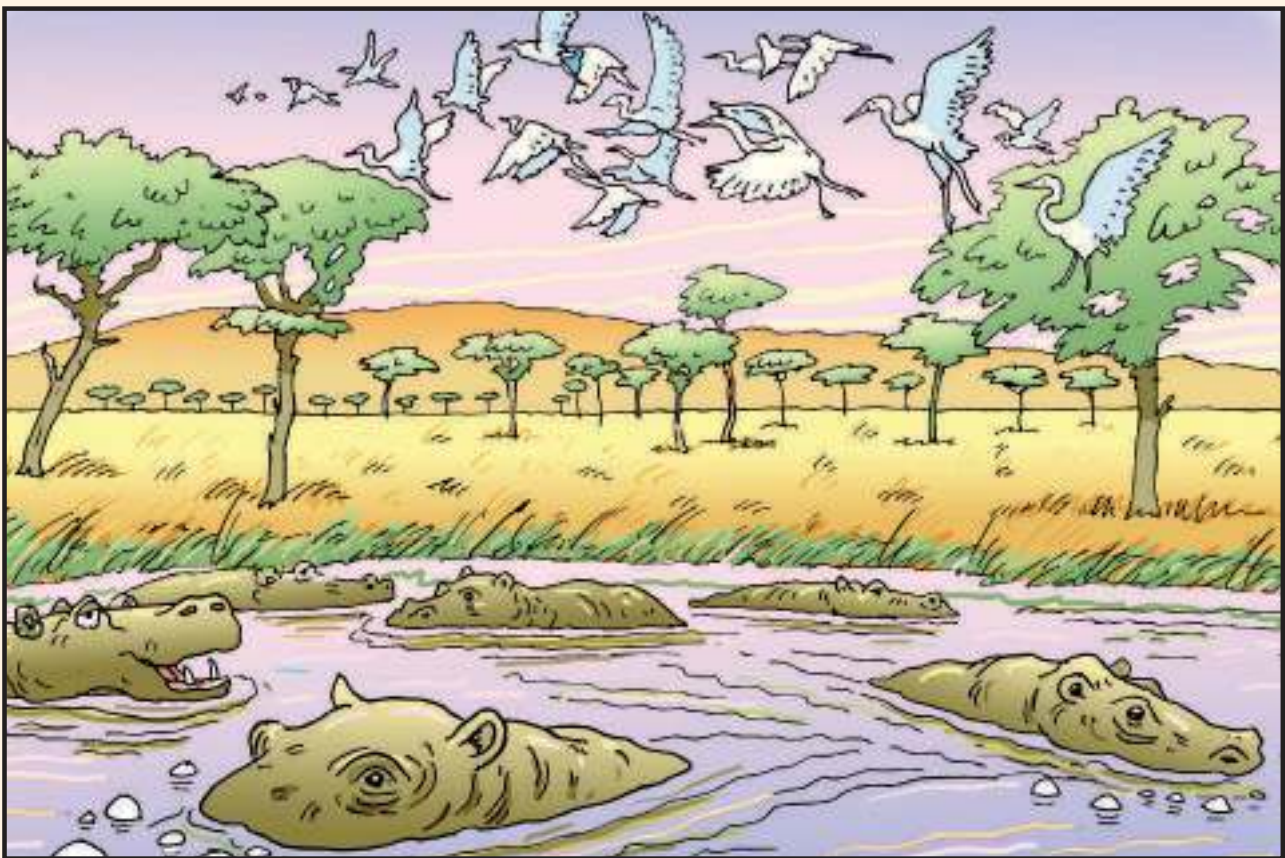
Maria laughed gently in the gloom.

"We were the family of the lion," she said.

Oliver could still hear the shouts and laughter of the party, up on the sunny lawn near the big house. But now the noise seemed to be getting further and further away.

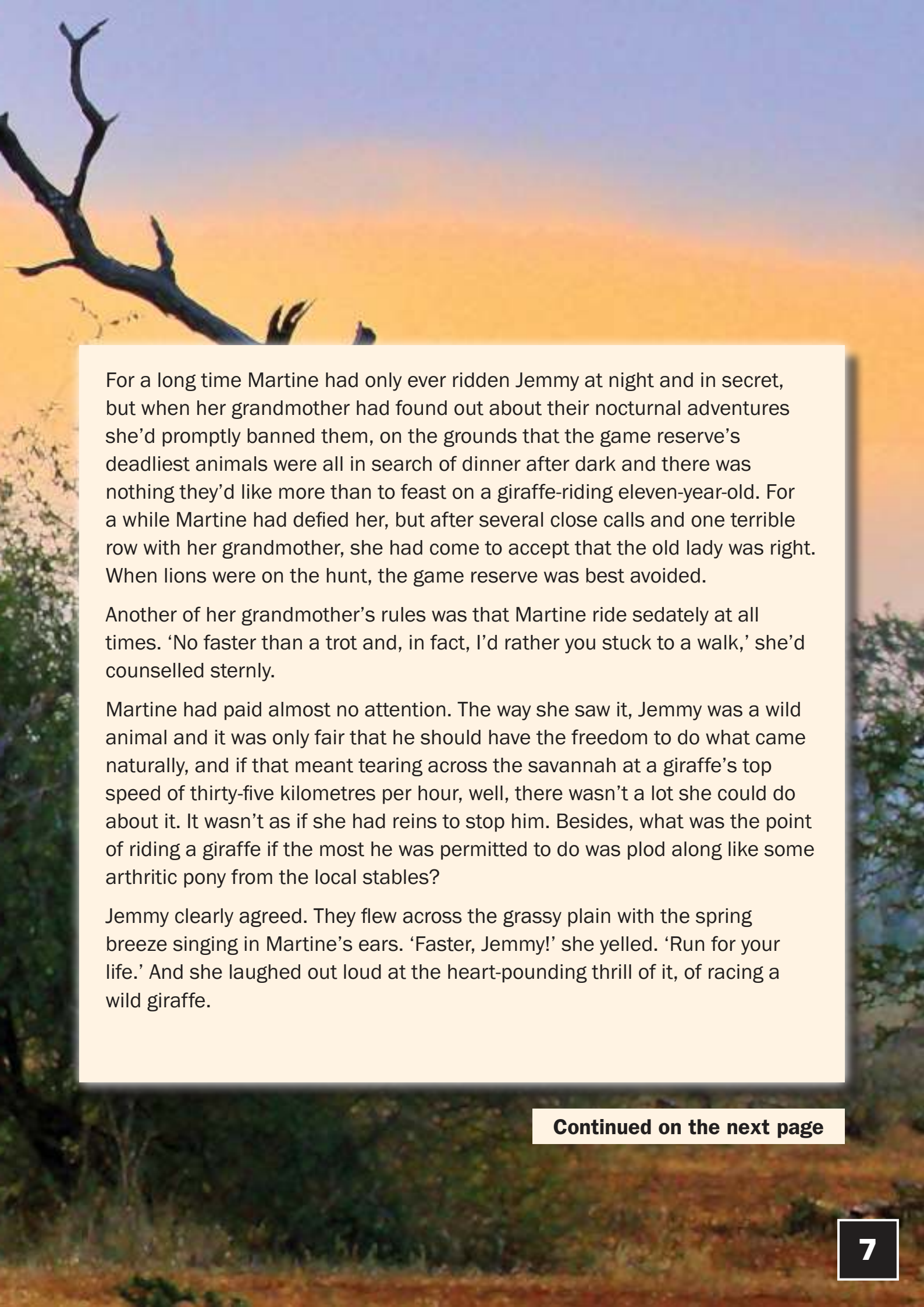
This story takes place in a huge grassland area in southern Africa. The grasslands there are called 'savannah'.

Wild Ride



Dawn was casting spun-gold threads across a rosy sky over Sawubona Game Reserve as Martine Allen took a last look around to ensure there weren't any witnesses. She leaned forward like a jockey on the track, wound her fingers through a silver mane, and cried, 'Go, Jemmy, go.'

The white giraffe sprang forward so suddenly that she was almost unseated, but she recovered and, wrapping her arms around his neck, quickly adjusted to the familiar rhythm of Jemmy's rocking-horse stride. They swept past the dam and a herd of bubble-blowing hippos, past a flock of startled egrets lifting from the trees like white glitter, and out onto the open savannah plain. An early morning African chorus of doves, crickets and go-away birds provided a soundtrack.

The background of the page is a photograph of a savanna landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. In the foreground, there is a dark, gnarled, dead tree branch extending from the left side. The ground is covered in dry, brownish grass and some green bushes.

For a long time Martine had only ever ridden Jemmy at night and in secret, but when her grandmother had found out about their nocturnal adventures she'd promptly banned them, on the grounds that the game reserve's deadliest animals were all in search of dinner after dark and there was nothing they'd like more than to feast on a giraffe-riding eleven-year-old. For a while Martine had defied her, but after several close calls and one terrible row with her grandmother, she had come to accept that the old lady was right. When lions were on the hunt, the game reserve was best avoided.

Another of her grandmother's rules was that Martine ride sedately at all times. 'No faster than a trot and, in fact, I'd rather you stuck to a walk,' she'd counselled sternly.

Martine had paid almost no attention. The way she saw it, Jemmy was a wild animal and it was only fair that he should have the freedom to do what came naturally, and if that meant tearing across the savannah at a giraffe's top speed of thirty-five kilometres per hour, well, there wasn't a lot she could do about it. It wasn't as if she had reins to stop him. Besides, what was the point of riding a giraffe if the most he was permitted to do was plod along like some arthritic pony from the local stables?

Jemmy clearly agreed. They flew across the grassy plain with the spring breeze singing in Martine's ears. 'Faster, Jemmy!' she yelled. 'Run for your life.' And she laughed out loud at the heart-pounding thrill of it, of racing a wild giraffe.

Continued on the next page

A streak of grey cut across her vision, accompanied by a furious, nasal squeal: 'Mmwheehh!'. Jemmy swerved. In the instant before her body parted company with the white giraffe's, Martine caught a glimpse of a warthog charging from its burrow, yellow tusks thrust forward. Had her arms not been wrapped so tightly around the giraffe's neck, she would have crashed ten feet to the ground. As it was, she just sort of swung under his chest like a human necklace. There she dangled while Jemmy pranced skittishly and the warthog, intent on defending her young, let out enraged squeals from below. Five baby warthogs milled around in bewilderment, spindly tails pointing heavenwards.



The pain in Martine's arms was nearly unbearable, but she didn't let go. She adored warthogs – warts, rough skin, ugly ears and all – but their Hollywood movie star eyelashes didn't fool her. In a blink of those lashes, their tusks could reduce her limbs to bloody ribbons.

'Jemmy,' she said through gritted teeth, 'walk on. Good boy.'

Confused, the white giraffe started to lower his neck as he backed away from the warthog.

'No, Jemmy!' shrieked Martine as the warthog nipped at the toe of one of her boots. 'Walk! Walk on!'

Jemmy snatched his head up to evade the warthog's sharp tusks, and Martine was able to use the momentum to hook her legs around his neck. From there, she was able to haul herself onto his back and urge him into a sprint. Soon the warthog family was a grey blur in the distance, although the mother's grunts of triumph took longer to fade.

Martine rode the rest of the way home at a gentle walk, a thoughtful smile on her lips. That would teach her to show off – even if it was only to an audience of hippos. At the game reserve gate, Jemmy dipped his head and Martine slid down his silvery neck as though she was shooting down a waterslide. That, too, wasn't the safest way of dismounting, but it was fun. She gave the white giraffe a parting hug, and strolled through the mango trees to the thatched house.

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This is an article about the dodo,
a bird that is now extinct.

An artist's impression of the
dodo from 300 years ago.

The Way of the Dodo



The dodo was first sighted around 1600 on an island in the Indian Ocean. It was extinct by 1680. Since then the phrase 'dead as a dodo' has been used to describe something which is lifeless or has disappeared from the world completely. Because of its rapid disappearance, a number of myths developed about the dodo, for example that it was a fat, silly creature that brought its fate upon itself.

But what is the **truth** about the dodo?

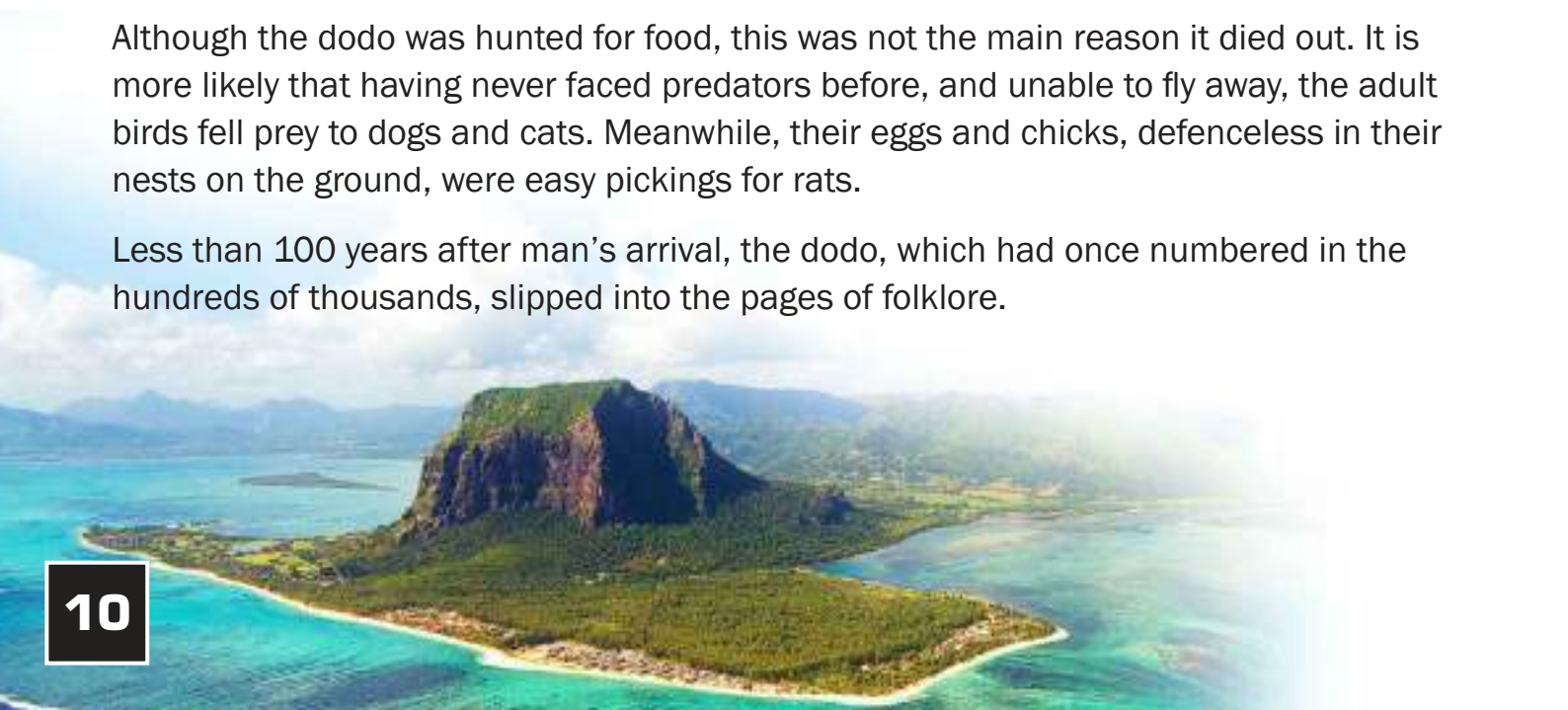
For thousands of years the island of Mauritius was a paradise. It was spat out of the ocean floor by an underwater volcano 8 million years ago. With warm sun, plentiful food and no predators to speak of, the isolated island became a haven for a variety of unusual species, including reptiles and flightless birds.

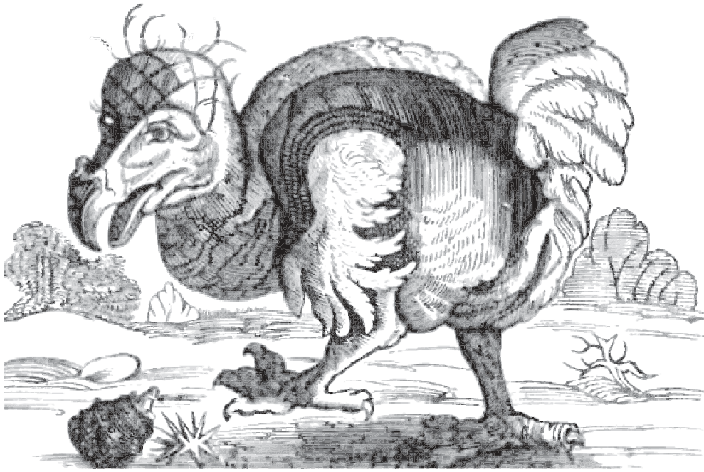
Then, in 1598, humans descended on this paradise, accompanied by their own animals – dogs, goats, cats (and a fair number of rats!). Curious and unafraid, the animals of Mauritius offered themselves up for slaughter and, within just a few decades, much of the island's unique wildlife had been wiped out forever.

One of the victims was a large, flightless relative of the pigeon. The island invaders started to call the bird a 'dodo', which meant 'silly bird'.

Although the dodo was hunted for food, this was not the main reason it died out. It is more likely that having never faced predators before, and unable to fly away, the adult birds fell prey to dogs and cats. Meanwhile, their eggs and chicks, defenceless in their nests on the ground, were easy pickings for rats.

Less than 100 years after man's arrival, the dodo, which had once numbered in the hundreds of thousands, slipped into the pages of folklore.





A drawing of a dodo from around 1646.

Until a few years ago, all knowledge of the dodo came from secondary reports from the time that were not always reliable, a handful of remains and just one complete skeleton. Nobody knew what the dodo really looked like. Before cameras, newly discovered animals could only be drawn or painted. However, many of the artists had no knowledge of natural history and were more interested in producing colourful paintings of animals than recording their true likeness.

Then, in 2005, a team of scientists unearthed thousands of dodo bones in some mud flats in Mauritius. The remains date back to over 4,000 years ago, when the island was suffering from a lengthy drought. The mud flats would have formed a freshwater oasis in an otherwise parched environment. It is thought that most of the animals, while trying to reach the slowly receding waters of the lake, became stuck and died of thirst or suffocation. However, clearly some dodos survived as they did not become extinct until much later.

This discovery is helping to rehabilitate the image of this much-ridiculed bird. The very fact that the dodo was still alive and well on Mauritius 4,000 years after a drought that claimed the lives of thousands of animals is an indication of the bird's ability to survive. The remains are also helping scientists to find out more about the anatomy of the dodo, for example that it was a much slimmer bird than any pictures suggest.

As scientists learn more about the dodo, and begin to see the bird in a new light, we are reminded that the dodo was badly misjudged. Maybe it is humans who should be judged, as we can have a devastating impact on the natural world. No other creature should be allowed to go the way of the dodo.



A modern reconstruction of a dodo.



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