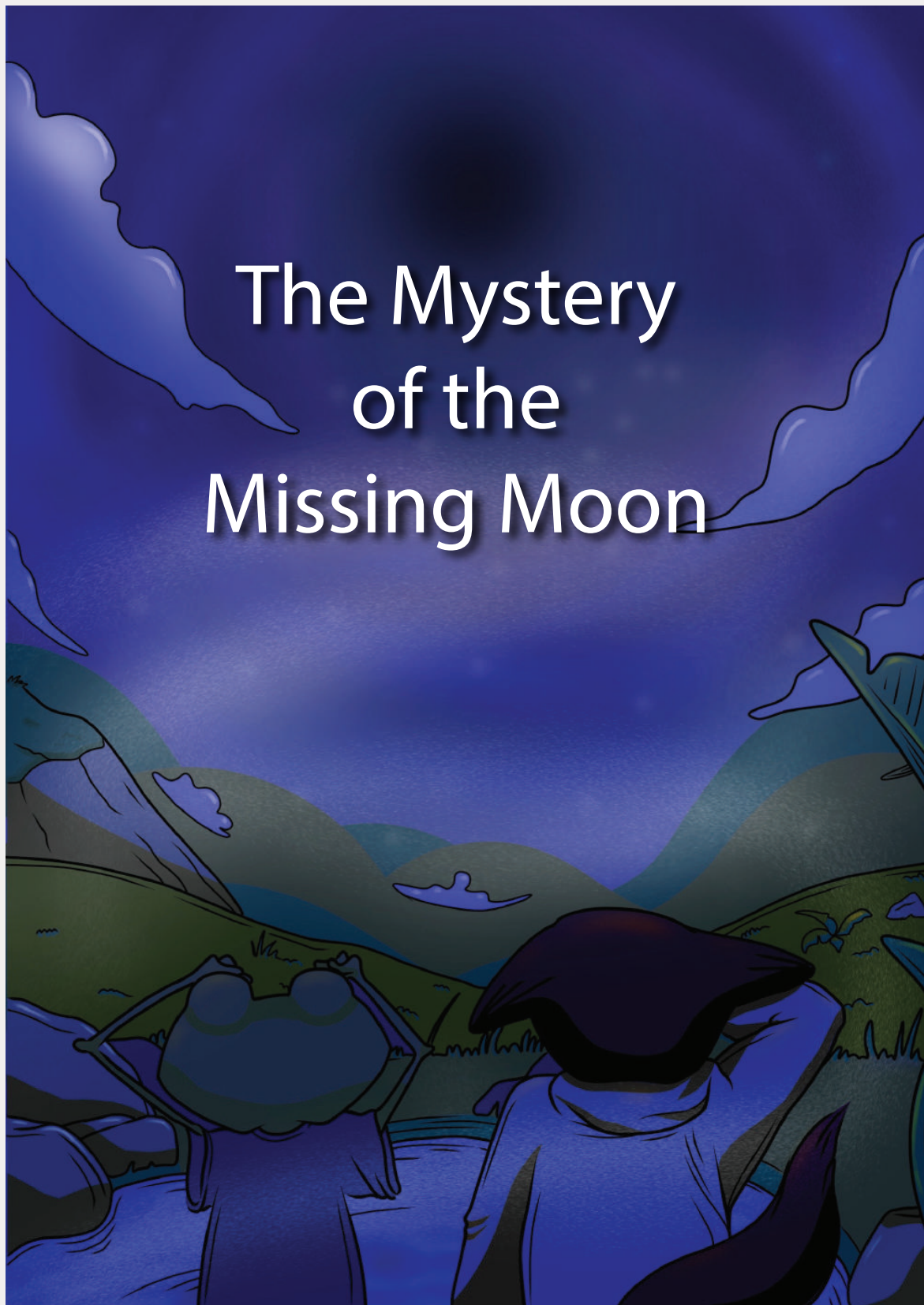


# The Mystery of the Missing Moon



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# Table of Contents

<b>Main heroes</b>	1
<b>Summary</b>	2
<b>Story's Text</b>	3





# Main heroes

Sheila, the sweet she-wolf, the only black wolf of the pack

Fred the funky frog

Wendy, the warm wind

Oliver, the old owl

Pete, the pessimistic/proud parrot

Maggie, the moody mole (only in one scenario)





# Summary

The tale tells the story of Sheila, the sweet she-wolf, and Fred, the funky frog, and their adventure to solve the mystery of the missing moon. In the valley where the story takes place, frogs and wolves do not get along at all and have strong prejudices against each other. Even their shared love for music is a reason for discord, and their mutual dislike pushes them to send up into smoke the organisation of the Moonlight concert. The heroes' quest will encourage them to realise that they have much more than they think in common and it will bound them forever in friendship.



The story that I'm about to tell you happened so long ago. And yet, it feels like it was yesterday.

Trust me, I was there. You were there too, and we were not alone, remember?

There was Sheila, the sweet she-wolf, and Fred, the funky frog, and many others.

All of them – well, I should say all of us - so unique and different but still so alike and, from that moment on, forever bound.

Like all good stories, this tale tells of a great mystery, the mystery of the missing Moon, and of a wonderful concert, the Moonlight concert, the most spectacular music event in the animal world.

Everything happened in a mild night of spring, when all the creatures of the Valley, from the forest to the pond, couldn't get to sleep: the Moon was gone and the famous concert seemed destined to be cancelled...

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, frogs and wolves didn't get along well at all: going around the forest, you could often hear some old wolf mumbling "I can't stand those lazy frogs, good for nothing, that's what they are! They only know how to chill on a rock in the sun!" Similarly, at the pond, it was not rare to hear a group of frogs complaining, between a jump and another, of "those wolves! Always so arrogant and snob, they are as cold as the colour of their eyes!"

Nobody in the Valley could remember why or when they started disliking each other and so, little by little, every animal began to think that their mutual dislike was as old as time and, therefore, simply normal.

Even their shared love for music and singing, especially during those nights when the Moon is full and round as a baseball, it was a reason of great discord and heated arguments. The Moon, my friend, how beautiful is She! So pale and yet so bright, so mysterious and yet so comforting... everybody loved the Moon, but nobody loved Her like the wolves and the frogs. The oldest and wisest animals in the Valley used to say, in fact, that it is thanks to the Moon that, long ago, wolves and frogs both fell in love with music in the first place.

It still saddens me to think that, maybe, this is one of the reasons why the bitterest moment of the year was indeed the week before the first night of full Moon: across the Valley, everybody used to wonder: who should be in charge of the organisation of the Moonlight Concert, wolves or frogs?



# 1st Decision Point

Who should be in charge of the organisation of the Moonlight concert?

- 1) Frogs
- 2) Wolves





## Option 1 - Frogs

After years of heated discussions, all the inhabitants of the Valley agreed that such a difficult decision was to be taken during the Animals' General Assembly: every first day of spring, all animals would gather around the most ancient tree of the Valley and, with the blessing of the Moon, decide who will be in charge of organising the Concert. And this worked for some time but that day my friend... nobody could have ever imagined such a disaster:

"Do you really expect us to stand aside and look? What will happen to the concert if it is left in the hands of a bunch of lazy frogs? I tell you, it will be a disaster, a disgrace for the whole Valley and for the Moon herself. We oppose it!" Thundered Mr. Wilful, speaker of the wolves. "And don't look at me like this, with your big, yellow eyes, miss Fortune, how could you possibly imagine that we, the wolves, will ever accept such a decision?" Miss Fortune, speaker of the frogs, took a deep breath which swelled her smooth chest, and addressed the whole assembly with angry words: "my fellow animals of the General Assembly, finally you have all come to see who these wolves really are! They have no regard for rules, they believe they're above everything and everyone! I'm glad that we, the frogs, do not have and will never have anything in common with them! Let's vote, and may the best frog win!" The whole assembly started to murmur noisily: "unacceptable! What a shame! Stop this nonsense!"



## Option 2 – Wolves

After years of heated discussions, all the inhabitants of the valley agreed that such a difficult decision was to be taken during the Animals' General Assembly: every first day of spring, all animals would gather around the most ancient tree of the valley and, with the blessing of the Moon, decide who will be in charge of the organisation of the Concert. And this worked for some time, but that day my friend... nobody could have ever imagined such a disaster:

"I will never vote for a wolf to organise the Concert on such a beautiful spring night! What will happen to the concert if it is left in the hands of a bunch of insensitive and selfish wolves? I tell you, it will be a disaster, a disgrace for the whole Valley and for the Moon herself. We oppose it!" Croaked miss Fortune, speaker of the frogs, "and don't look at me like this, with those ice eyes, Mr. Wilful, how could you possibly imagine that we, the frogs, will ever accept such a decision!"

"My fellow animals of the General Assembly" thundered Mr. Wilful, speaker of the wolves, stepping forward firmly and determined: "although disrespectful and inappropriate, I'm happy that you all had the chance to hear Miss Fortune's words, because they allow me to say that we, the wolves, are glad to have nothing in common with them, not now, never! Let's vote, and may the best wolf win!"

The whole assembly started to murmur noisily: "unacceptable! What a shame! Stop this nonsense!"



## *Continuation of both scenarios*

The discussion went on and on, with loud cries and bitter accusations pouring in from all sides. Everybody was raising their voices above that of the others in the attempt to prevail and so, when the president of the Assembly hit the gavel to announce the end of the session, no agreement had been reached. Suddenly, silence fell around the ancient tree: nobody, neither frogs nor wolves, dared to say a word because, in the bottom of their hearts, they knew that they had just lived the saddest day that the Valley had ever seen.

Slowly, everybody started heading home, looking down, staring at their paws to avoid crossing glances. Only Sheila, the sweet she-wolf, the only black wolf of the pack, left alone and quietly to head in the opposite direction to the forest, towards the pond. It was, in fact, almost sunset and from there, from the pond, the stars and the Moon always seem to shine with a different, warmer light at night, and she was in desperate need of feeling heartened and relieved.

She lay down not far away from the water, but behind a little blooming tree so as not to draw attention, waiting for the sun to turn smaller and smaller at the horizon, and slowly give its way to the night. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath trying to fill her chest with the sweet smell of the blooming flowers, hoping that their early freshness would replace the feeling of sadness that she was carrying from the Assembly.

"What do we have here? A wolf?! What are you doing so close to the pond?" croaked someone from behind. She turned once and again, but she couldn't see anybody. Suddenly, Fred, the funky frog, jumped out from the bushes where he was hiding and was now staring at her suspiciously with his round, yellow eyes. Sheila looked back at him, but there was no diffidence in her eyes, nor wariness.



Will you answer me, wolf?" Said Fred in a breath, and Sheila noticed that there was no more suspicion in his voice, rather true curiosity.

"My name is Sheila, not "wolf", and I'm just trying to enjoy the night-fall, to find some calm and let go of all those senseless words said during the Assembly. What's your name?"

"Fred", said the frog jumping a little closer. "Well Fred, would you like to sit here with me? Tomorrow is another day and we will start pretending the other doesn't exist again. That is, until the next assembly of course, where we'll fight again and again. But for now, there's room right here next to me, and the Moon is about to shine in the Valley. I know you enjoy it as much as i do".

Fred seemed a bit confused: "I must have some water in my froggy ears!" He thought at first, "is this she-wolf really inviting me to stay?" Sheila addressed him with a sweet look, the look of someone who has had enough of arguing for the day, just as much as he had. "Well, I've nothing to do anyway..." croaked finally Fred, landing right next to Sheila after a long jump.

A gentle breeze was blowing through the branches of the tree, carrying and amplifying the smell of its flowers, and interrupting the silence that had fallen between the two animals. They spent the next few minutes contemplating together the sun, which was now not more than a small dot on the horizon, ready to slip behind the hills that encircled the Valley.



When the last ray of sunlight faded away behind the edge of their world, Sheila and Fred both held their breath and closed their eyes, almost unconsciously. With their eyes still closed, they felt the night falling upon the Valley, slowly, like a blanket laid on a bed to warm the winter. But something was wrong, they both felt it: a strange and cold feeling running up their spines. "What's going on?" Said suddenly Fred, as if he had just woken up from a bad dream. "Why aren't your fellows howling? Why aren't mine croaking?" Sheila opened her eyes and she immediately realised that the night was darker than ever. Instinctively, they both looked up to the sky and were petrified: the Moon was gone and there, where She used to shine, there was only a black hole. Fred rubbed his eyes twice to make sure he was truly awake, and so did Sheila. "I cannot believe my froggy eyes! What in the world is happening?"

The voices of a thousand animals began to fill the silence of the night: they were cries of astonishment and dismay, of disbelief and confusion. And then it was silence again. The gentle breeze got stronger and stronger, as if even the wind was looking for the Moon across the four corners of the Valley.

"It's our fault..." said Sheila in a single, broken breath. "What do you mean? I did nothing!" Replied Fred feeling accused. "Not your fault in particular. I mean, ours, wolves' and frogs'. We just gave the Valley its worst day and now, even its worst night!"

"I truly don't understand what you are talking about, wolf..." said the frog jumping away from her and landing on a rock to be able to stare at her from above. "You really don't see it? We were supposed to find an agreement to organise the Concert and instead we just got stuck in senseless discussions, we stubborn! And now the Moon is gone... don't you understand? Singing will never feel the same again without Her..."

Fred opened his mouth to reply but he felt a lump in his throat that left him speechless. He lowered his head instead and, this time, he did not jump, but slid slowly beside Sheila.

They remained silent without being able to look up to the night sky for a few seconds, when, all of a sudden... the branches of the tree began to shake in the wind, and something incredible happened: the wind seemed to blow in a circle around the two animals while, all around them, not a single leaf was moving. And then, as if the wind itself was trying to climb around the trunk of the tree, it appeared to have hit one of the branches and fell down. "Ouch! Why am I always so clumsy, my poor windy head!"

"Did you just hear what I heard, wolf? Did we just see this thing hitting its head on a branch?" Croaked Fred, clearly surprised but mostly amused. "My funky friend, first of all I'm a lady and not a "thing", my name is Wendy, the warm wind".

"We are pleased to meet you, Wendy! Aren't we, Fred?" Said Sheila giving the frog a warning look. Fred raised his shoulders first, and then nodded saying "sure we are, I mean, it doesn't happen everyday to see the wind hitting her head on a branch..."

"Dear Wendy, what is going on? Where is the Moon? Do you know anything? It's our fault, isn't it?" Continued the sweet wolf, hoping to gain a little clue that would help her making sense of something that, only few minutes before, she would have never been able to imagine, not even in a nightmare.

Even Fred, who until then had not missed a chance to make a joke, was now sitting on the edge of a rock waiting impatiently for an answer, any answer.

"My dear friends, I am really sorry to say that I do not have an answer to your questions. She is gone, and the night is now darker and colder than ever..."

Wendy took a little break but then continued: "I've searched the four corners of the Valley, hoping to find something, anything... I didn't, and I felt so hopeless... but then, I had an idea, and I went to see Claude, the cosy cloud".



And who is that now?" Croaked Fred. "Claude is the closest friend of the Moon, I used to blow gently to take him to the Moon when She was feeling tired, in order to allow Her to rest a bit on his soft, cosy pillows of cloud. If anybody knows anything, I thought, it must be him!"

"And did he? Come on, wind, don't leave us hanging!" Fred was jumping all around as if he was stepping on hot coals. "Calm down, you impatient "fellow, let her speak" said Sheila, but she was also very excited to know the rest of Wendy's story.

"Well, he didn't know much either, but he gave me something... I can't really make sense of it myself and so, when I saw you two together... I mean, it doesn't happen very often, never actually, to see a wolf and a frog who, instead of arguing, are simply enjoying the sunset together... there you go" and she handed a small bag over to the two animals. The small bag was as light as a feather and was fastened with a small golden thread. When they opened it, a faint light and an incredible smell of stars came out: it was full of moon dust! "This is incredible! So the Moon is still here somewhere!" Said Sheila almost in tears from joy. "But I don't understand, where did She go?" Said Fred opening his froggy eyes widely. "I don't know, but there's more: Claude also gave me this little piece of paper, it's a message from the Moon and you might wish to have a look". "You bet we do!" Croaked Fred jumping so high to take the small piece of paper, which was rolled up and also closed with a small golden thread. Then, he read out loud: "when hoping for a new start, a common passion can lead the way".

While reading, Fred noticed that the letter had been written with the darkest ink he had ever seen, as dark as the night...

"What is this supposed to mean? I don't understand..." said Fred in a tone of voice which was somewhere between frustrated and intrigued. "It's an enigma! Its solution will bring the Moon back, I'm sure!" Replied Sheila, as excited and confident as ever.

"This is the spirit, my sweet friend!" Said Wendy, "I believe that I've done my part for now, this is your mystery to solve and I wish you the very best of luck! I'm sure that we'll meet again" Wendy caught the momentum and soared clumsily, causing the branches of the flowering tree to shake dizzily and filling the air not only with sweet perfume, but also with new hope.

Sheila and Fred watched her flying away in the night sky and remained quiet for a little longer. "What a strange fellow" said finally Fred. "Strange doesn't mean bad, fortunately" answered Sheila turning to Fred, "and now that we know that the Moon is still around, what should we do?"





## 2nd Decision Point

What should Sheila and Fred do?

- 1) go home and tell their parents what has happened
- 2) take on the adventure!



## **Option 1 – they decide to go back home and tell their parents the whole story**

What's wrong with you? You're so quiet, Fred, that's not you! Are you ready to go? We will find Her!" Said Sheila barely containing her excitement.

"Listen, wolf, and stop rotating your tail, you're not a dog!" Immediately, Fred felt he wanted to apologise for what he had just said, but he did not. He only hoped that Sheila could see from his look that he was sorry for being rude. It hadn't been so bad, after all, to spend time with her... he continued: "this whole story is scratching that part of my froggy brain that, usually, makes me want to do something that my parents would call irresponsible. And look at us, a wolf and a frog, what can we do? I won't lie to you, I appreciated this little moment with you and that warm wind, and you know how much I miss the Moon, but I can't go any further. Let's go home and let the adults handle this mystery..."

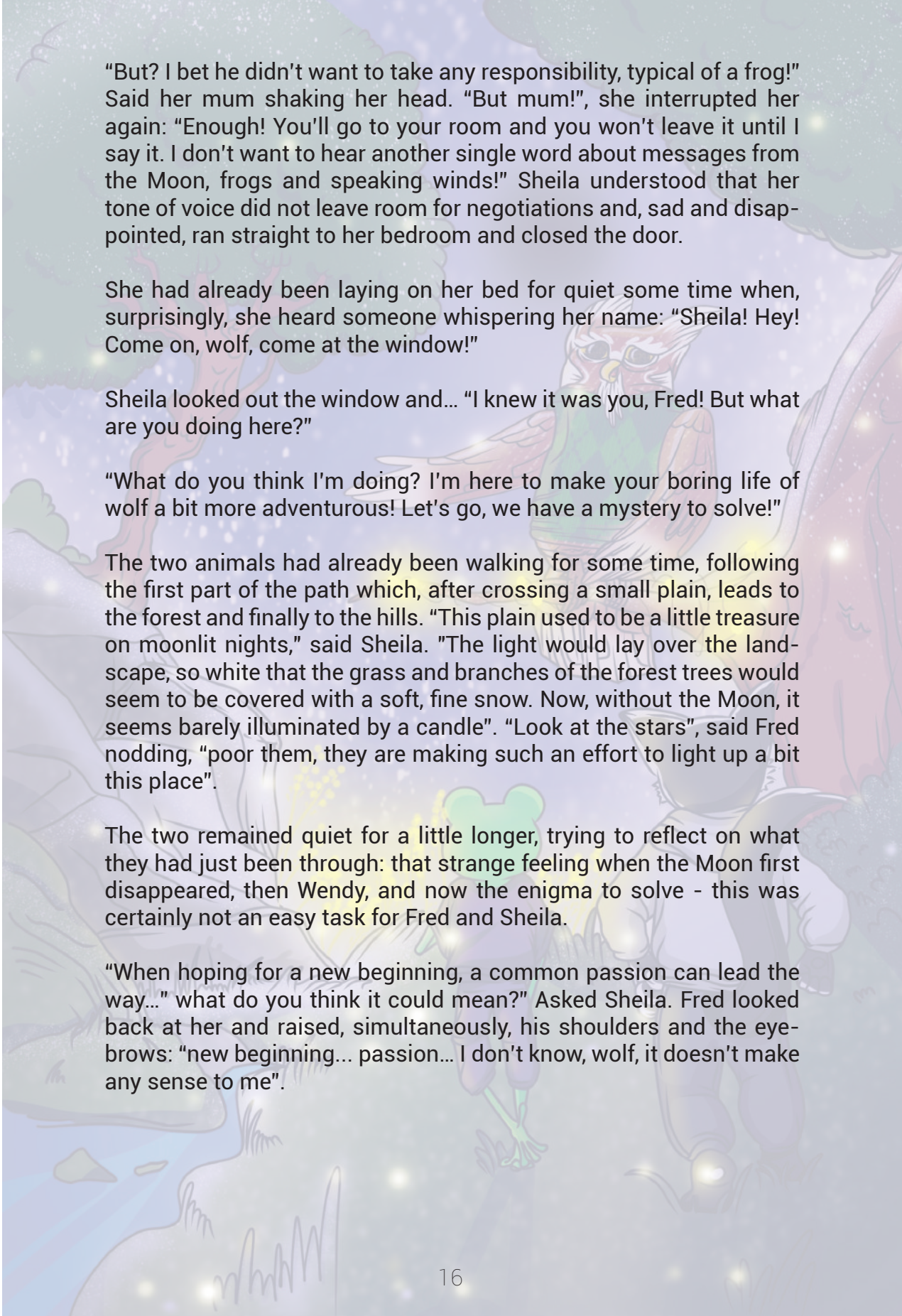
Sheila remained quiet for a while, looking down, playing with the leaves that had fallen from the tree after Wendy's take off. "I am sorry to hear this, Fred, but maybe you're right... we should go home and wait to see what happens. I'll say goodbye then".

The two animals gave a last look at the black hole that the Moon had left in the sky and, without being able to cross glances, left in opposite directions.

"You must have lost your mind!" Said Sheila's mother pricking her ears; "you are seriously telling me that you have spent all this time with a frog? You should know better, Sheila, I'm shocked by your behaviour!" "But mum" replied Sheila still excited from what Fred and herself had just gone through and longing to share the good news: "you are not listening to me: the wind, Wendy, she searched the four corners of the Valley and then she went to see Claude, the cloud, and gave us a message from..."

"Do you even hear what you are saying?" Her mother interrupted her, "A message? From the wind? Or was it from the cloud? That frog must have tricked you, my darling, that's what they do: they only know how to joke and fool others!" "This is not true, Fred was as sorry as I was when the Moon disappeared, I saw it, he truly was and he



A whimsical illustration of a forest at night. In the center, a wolf-like creature with large, expressive eyes and a green vest stands on a path. To its right, a bird with large, colorful wings (red, orange, and green) is perched. The background is a soft, glowing blue and purple, with stylized trees and a path leading into the distance. The overall mood is magical and mysterious.

"But? I bet he didn't want to take any responsibility, typical of a frog!" Said her mum shaking her head. "But mum!", she interrupted her again: "Enough! You'll go to your room and you won't leave it until I say it. I don't want to hear another single word about messages from the Moon, frogs and speaking winds!" Sheila understood that her tone of voice did not leave room for negotiations and, sad and disappointed, ran straight to her bedroom and closed the door.

She had already been laying on her bed for quiet some time when, surprisingly, she heard someone whispering her name: "Sheila! Hey! Come on, wolf, come at the window!"

Sheila looked out the window and... "I knew it was you, Fred! But what are you doing here?"

"What do you think I'm doing? I'm here to make your boring life of wolf a bit more adventurous! Let's go, we have a mystery to solve!"

The two animals had already been walking for some time, following the first part of the path which, after crossing a small plain, leads to the forest and finally to the hills. "This plain used to be a little treasure on moonlit nights," said Sheila. "The light would lay over the landscape, so white that the grass and branches of the forest trees would seem to be covered with a soft, fine snow. Now, without the Moon, it seems barely illuminated by a candle". "Look at the stars", said Fred nodding, "poor them, they are making such an effort to light up a bit this place".

The two remained quiet for a little longer, trying to reflect on what they had just been through: that strange feeling when the Moon first disappeared, then Wendy, and now the enigma to solve - this was certainly not an easy task for Fred and Sheila.

"When hoping for a new beginning, a common passion can lead the way..." what do you think it could mean?" Asked Sheila. Fred looked back at her and raised, simultaneously, his shoulders and the eyebrows: "new beginning... passion... I don't know, wolf, it doesn't make any sense to me".

"I'd be glad if you could call me by my name, Fred, it's Sheila not "wolf"!"

"Ok, Sheila, I wanted to ask you a question: do you really think that the Moon left because of us and our disagreements? I mean, everybody knows we are not really fond of each other... why disappearing then? Is she trying to..." Fred stopped when he heard someone whimpering in the distance: "poor me! Poor, unfortunate parrot destined to pass unnoticed for the rest of his life! What a misfortune, all these beautiful colours, all for nothing!"

"Hey fellow!" Said sweetly Sheila. "Wolf, wait!" Fred jumped right in front of her: "listen, this one is clearly having a hard time, do we really need to entertain every strange fellow we meet on our way? Come on, let's go!" "Nonsense, you don't mean it, Fred!" Replied Sheila moving towards the parrot. "Hey, you, what is your name?"

The parrot barely lifted his head to look in their direction: "Who? Me? Oh sweet wolf, you saw me then... you are one of the few who still do... my name is Pete, the pessimistic parrot".

"Oh boy, there we go..." said Fred in a whisper, giving Sheila a quick look that seemed to mean "see, I told you!"

Sheila pretended not to see it, and then turned to Pete again: "nice to meet you, Pete, I am Sheila and this funky fellow here is Fred. Why are you crying, if I may ask?" The parrot seemed, for a moment, genuinely interested in the two adventurers and gave them a look that seemed full of questions. He was wondering: 'what are a she-wolf and a frog doing together? And at this time in the night, too? What do they have in mind?' But, instead, he started whining again: "why would that interest you? And if I tell you, what difference would it make? Nobody we'll ever see my beautiful feathers now that the Moon will never shine again! Poor, unfortunate parrot..."

"My colourful friend, you shouldn't say this! We can still admire all the shades of your beautiful feathers, you're as colourful as a rainbow! Isn't he, Fred?"

Fred hesitated for a second, but Sheila gave him one of those looks that is, at the same time, encouraging and demanding: "hem, sure... Look at you... I mean, you are so... no wait, what colour is that on your



Pete burst into tears: "what a bitter fate, what an unhappy world, the one where hundreds of different shades are no longer a beautiful whole, but just something confused and blurred... I might as well have been born in one colour!"

Sheila was about to say something but Fred took momentum and jumped so high to reach the branch where Pete was hanging. "Listen, fellow", he said, "first of all, cheer up! I didn't know that parrots could be so melodramatic but, anyway, not all is lost! We'll solve this mystery, I promise! And then we'll all go back to admire your feathers. Come on, Pete, think of all the beautiful things that you like to do, I don't know, flying?" "Yes I do like flying" said Pete, "good, what else? Do you like berries? Me I love berries!" "What else do you love, Fred?" Asked Sheila, as if she had just had an idea. "Well, I don't know... let me think... jumping I guess and... Swimming, I'm a frog, I definitely love swimming..."

The two animals hesitated for a second as if the same, perfect idea was slowly growing in their minds, like a seed that opens up in the early days of spring. "Music!" Said together Fred and Sheila, "we love music! Our common passion is music!" "That's very good to know, friends, but we were talking about my feathers, weren't we?" Said Pete a bit confused. "Do you like music, Pete?" Asked Sheila barely containing her excitement. "I do but..."

"Well, Pete, listen then:

What do we do when we feel lost ? Now that there's no Moon that shines for us

What do we do ? We sing a song to know we're not alone

Suddenly, a small, faint shooting star briefly illuminated a stretch of sky. The three friends stopped to look at it, and then "there goes another one!" Sheila exclaimed. One after another, dozens of tiny, tired shooting stars tried to light up the sky, all falling in the same direction, towards the hills.

"Look! Look!" Exclaimed Fred, jumping all over the place. "We made it!" Replied Sheila, "The stars are showing us the way!"

## **Option 2: they decide to take on the adventure!**

"What do you think? We shouldn't wait another minute! Come on, let's introduce a bit of adventure in your boring life of wolf!"

The two animals had already been walking for some time, following the first part of the path which, after crossing a small plain, leads to the forest and finally to the hills. "This plain used to be a little treasure on moonlit nights," said Sheila. "The light would lay over the landscape, so white that the grass and branches of the forest trees would seem to be covered with a soft, fine snow. Now, without the Moon, it seems barely illuminated by a candle". "Look at the stars", said Fred nodding, "poor them, they are making such an effort to light a bit this place up".

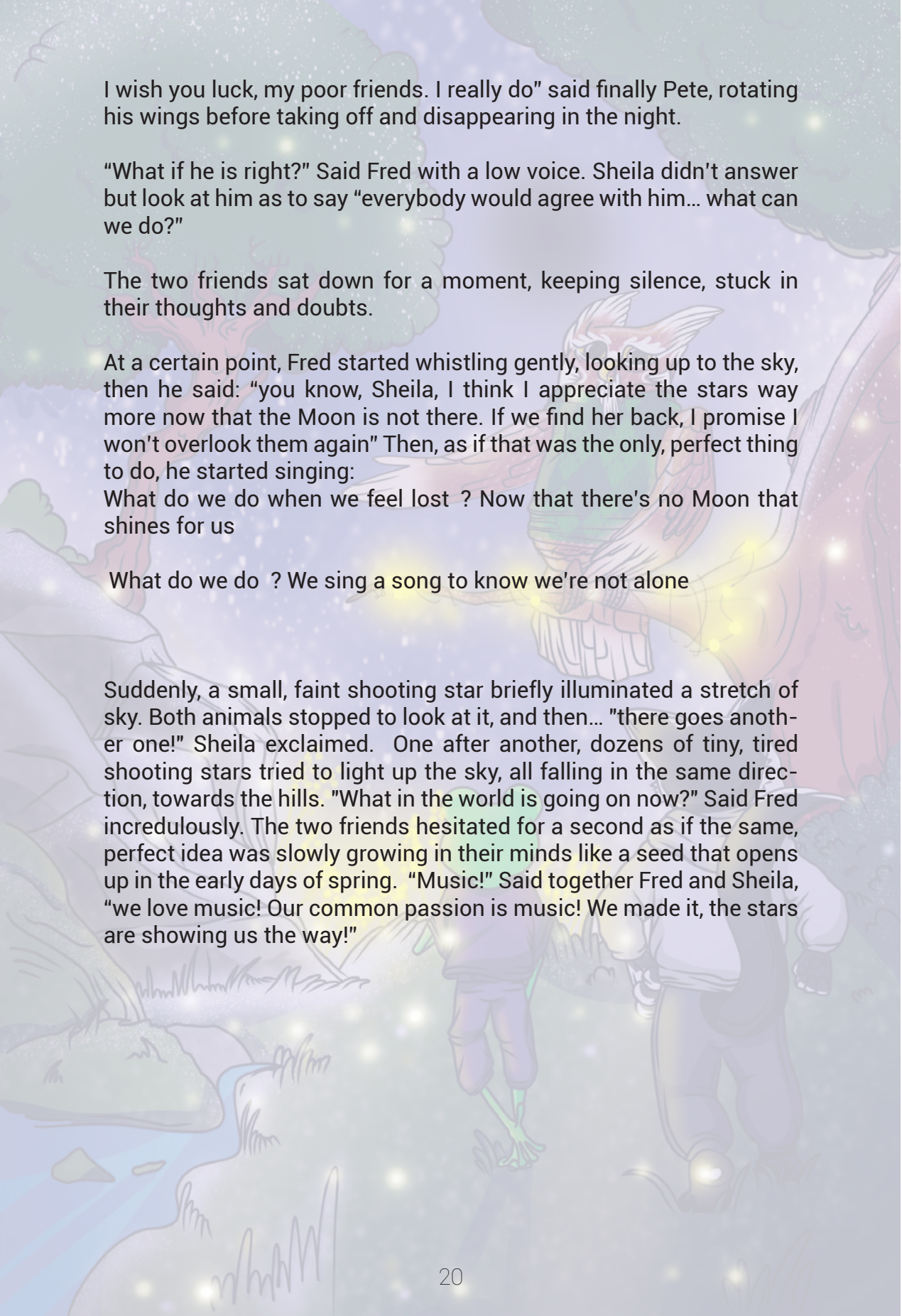
The two remained quiet for a little longer, trying to reflect on what they had just been through: that strange feeling when the Moon first disappeared, then Wendy, and now an enigma to solve - this was certainly not an easy task for Fred and Sheila.

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"I'd be glad if you could call me by my name, Fred, it's Sheila not "wolf!"

"Ok, Sheila, I wanted to ask you a question: do you really think that the Moon left because of us and our disagreements? I mean, everybody knows we are not really fond of each other... why disappearing then? Is she trying to..." Fred stopped when he saw a small figure gliding quickly from above their heads and landing on the branch of a tree right next to them: "well well well, look what we have here! A frog and a wolf walking side by side, in such a night, what an unusual event at least!"





I wish you luck, my poor friends. I really do" said finally Pete, rotating his wings before taking off and disappearing in the night.

"What if he is right?" Said Fred with a low voice. Sheila didn't answer but look at him as to say "everybody would agree with him... what can we do?"

The two friends sat down for a moment, keeping silence, stuck in their thoughts and doubts.

At a certain point, Fred started whistling gently, looking up to the sky, then he said: "you know, Sheila, I think I appreciate the stars way more now that the Moon is not there. If we find her back, I promise I won't overlook them again" Then, as if that was the only, perfect thing to do, he started singing:

What do we do when we feel lost ? Now that there's no Moon that shines for us

What do we do ? We sing a song to know we're not alone

Suddenly, a small, faint shooting star briefly illuminated a stretch of sky. Both animals stopped to look at it, and then... "there goes another one!" Sheila exclaimed. One after another, dozens of tiny, tired shooting stars tried to light up the sky, all falling in the same direction, towards the hills. "What in the world is going on now?" Said Fred incredulously. The two friends hesitated for a second as if the same, perfect idea was slowly growing in their minds like a seed that opens up in the early days of spring. "Music!" Said together Fred and Sheila, "we love music! Our common passion is music! We made it, the stars are showing us the way!"

## ***Continuation of both scenarios***

"Hurry up, Fred! Look!" Said Sheila pointing at the last shooting star: "there, they all seem to fall beyond the hills!" "Wolf, I'm doing my best, we frogs we are sprinters, we are not made for cross-country running! Anyway yes, I see, what do you think we will find?"

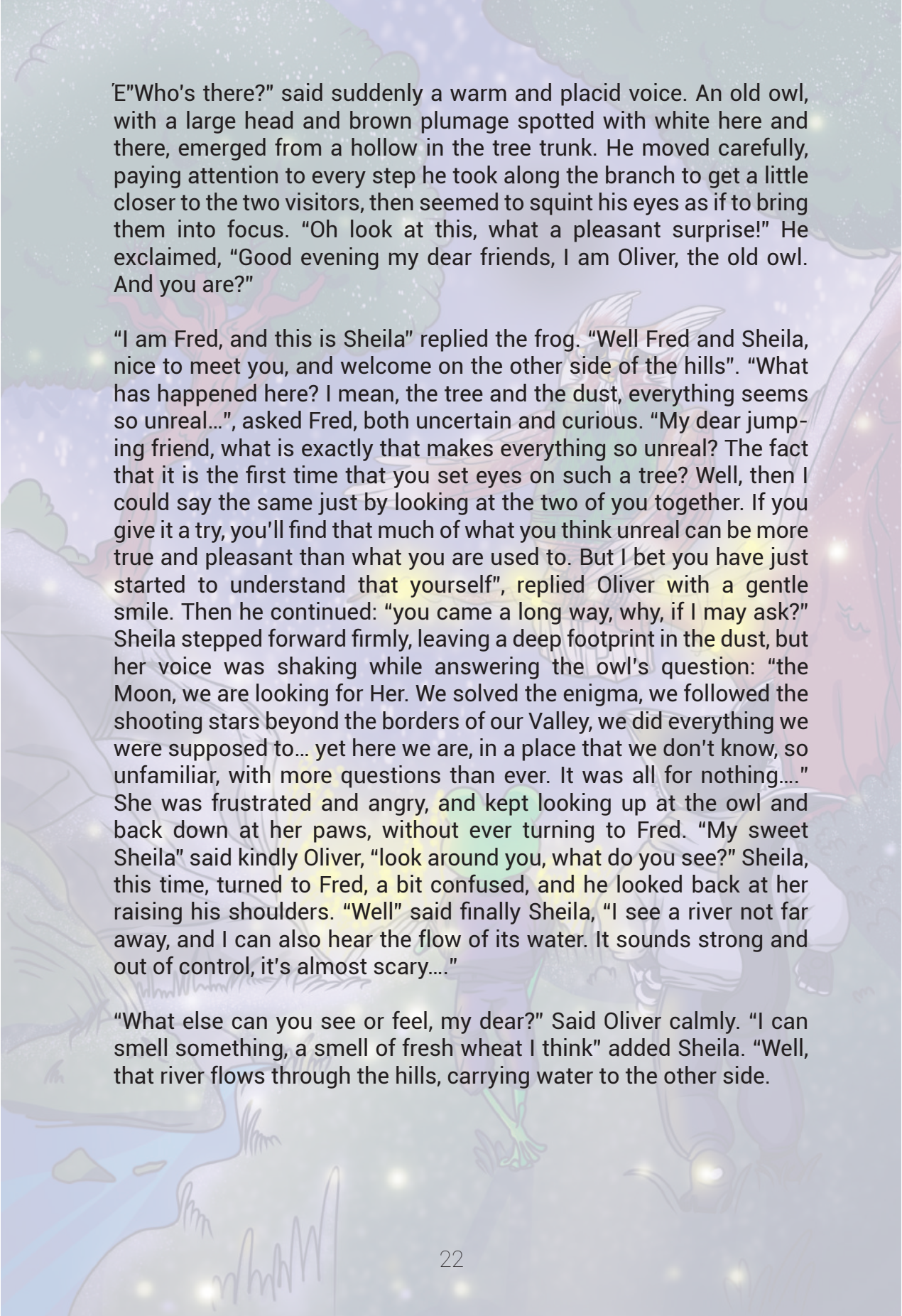
But Sheila was running at wide strides and had now left him behind. "There!" She exclaimed, "look at that tree, wow!"

Right before joining Sheila on the top of the hill, Fred took a moment to look back to the Valley, which was now behind them: "from here" he thought, "it doesn't seem that big..." "Come on, Fred!" Called him Sheila. When he turned, he stood amazed: "for pond's sake, look at its leaves, it's beautiful!" Down the hill, on the other side, an old tree was shining as if by magic in the night, spreading a fine white light all around, like it was surrounded by a thousand fireflies: its wide branches and their crown of leaves were entirely covered by moon dust and the tree stood, calm and solitary, as white as after the first light snowfall of winter.

The two animals went down the hill, as excited and hopeful as if it was Christmas Eve. They stood enchanted for a few moments under the large branches, it was a marvellous sight: it was like the old tree spread an aura of magical relief, as if all the sadness of the world had been forgotten. Fred turned to look at the footprints they had left on the moon dust that had settled at the base of the tree, and that was shining like so many silent, tiny candles. It felt like being in a dream, or perhaps, in that place between sleep and awake, where you still remember dreaming.

"Moon? Moon where are you?" Shouted suddenly Sheila, but she received no answer. At once, doubt and disappointment grew in her heart, like a seed that needs no water or patient care to open up...

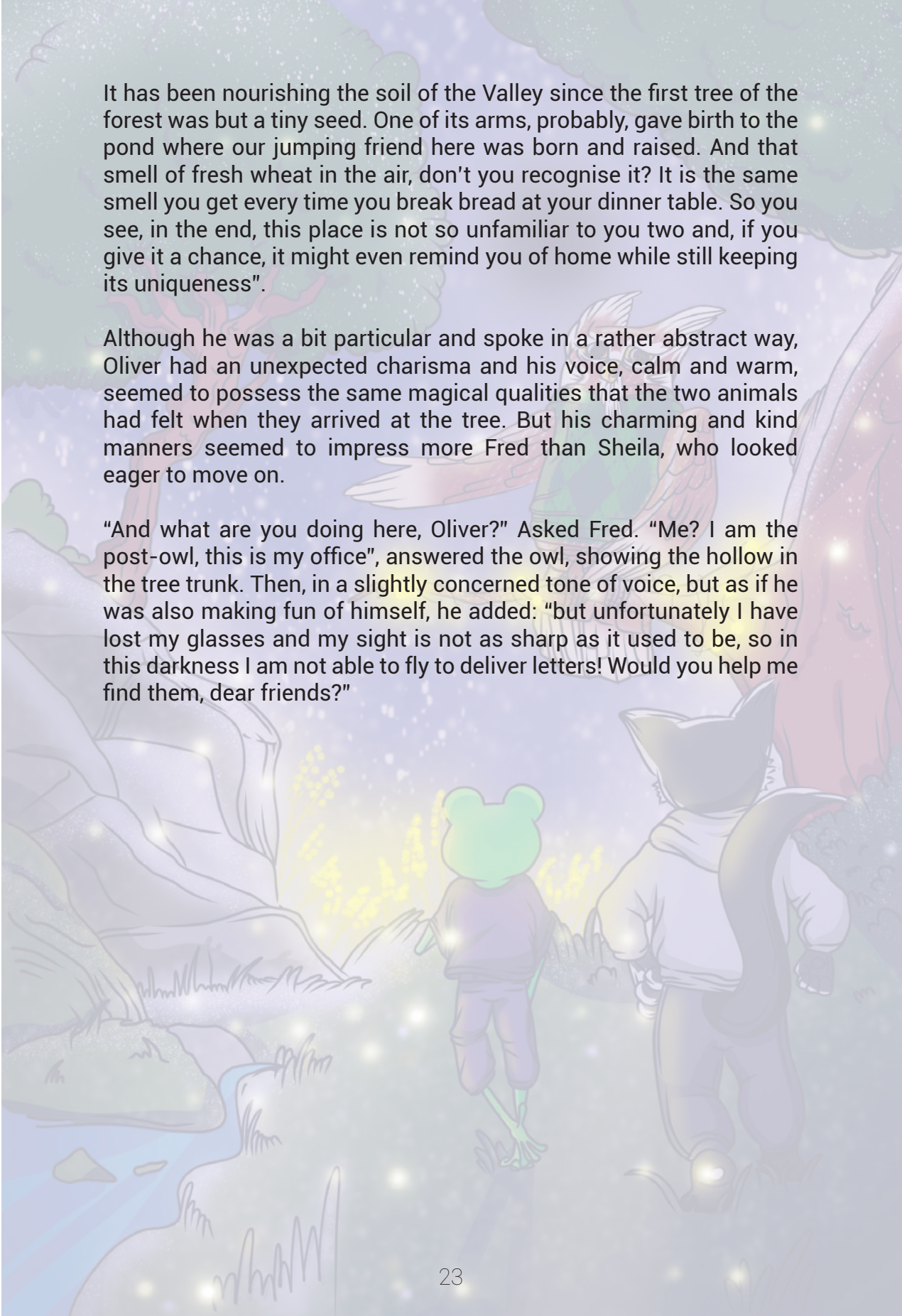




"Who's there?" said suddenly a warm and placid voice. An old owl, with a large head and brown plumage spotted with white here and there, emerged from a hollow in the tree trunk. He moved carefully, paying attention to every step he took along the branch to get a little closer to the two visitors, then seemed to squint his eyes as if to bring them into focus. "Oh look at this, what a pleasant surprise!" He exclaimed, "Good evening my dear friends, I am Oliver, the old owl. And you are?"

"I am Fred, and this is Sheila" replied the frog. "Well Fred and Sheila, nice to meet you, and welcome on the other side of the hills". "What has happened here? I mean, the tree and the dust, everything seems so unreal...", asked Fred, both uncertain and curious. "My dear jumping friend, what is exactly that makes everything so unreal? The fact that it is the first time that you set eyes on such a tree? Well, then I could say the same just by looking at the two of you together. If you give it a try, you'll find that much of what you think unreal can be more true and pleasant than what you are used to. But I bet you have just started to understand that yourself", replied Oliver with a gentle smile. Then he continued: "you came a long way, why, if I may ask?" Sheila stepped forward firmly, leaving a deep footprint in the dust, but her voice was shaking while answering the owl's question: "the Moon, we are looking for Her. We solved the enigma, we followed the shooting stars beyond the borders of our Valley, we did everything we were supposed to... yet here we are, in a place that we don't know, so unfamiliar, with more questions than ever. It was all for nothing..." She was frustrated and angry, and kept looking up at the owl and back down at her paws, without ever turning to Fred. "My sweet Sheila" said kindly Oliver, "look around you, what do you see?" Sheila, this time, turned to Fred, a bit confused, and he looked back at her raising his shoulders. "Well" said finally Sheila, "I see a river not far away, and I can also hear the flow of its water. It sounds strong and out of control, it's almost scary..."

"What else can you see or feel, my dear?" Said Oliver calmly. "I can smell something, a smell of fresh wheat I think" added Sheila. "Well, that river flows through the hills, carrying water to the other side.



It has been nourishing the soil of the Valley since the first tree of the forest was but a tiny seed. One of its arms, probably, gave birth to the pond where our jumping friend here was born and raised. And that smell of fresh wheat in the air, don't you recognise it? It is the same smell you get every time you break bread at your dinner table. So you see, in the end, this place is not so unfamiliar to you two and, if you give it a chance, it might even remind you of home while still keeping its uniqueness".

Although he was a bit particular and spoke in a rather abstract way, Oliver had an unexpected charisma and his voice, calm and warm, seemed to possess the same magical qualities that the two animals had felt when they arrived at the tree. But his charming and kind manners seemed to impress more Fred than Sheila, who looked eager to move on.

"And what are you doing here, Oliver?" Asked Fred. "Me? I am the post-owl, this is my office", answered the owl, showing the hollow in the tree trunk. Then, in a slightly concerned tone of voice, but as if he was also making fun of himself, he added: "but unfortunately I have lost my glasses and my sight is not as sharp as it used to be, so in this darkness I am not able to fly to deliver letters! Would you help me find them, dear friends?"



## 3rd Decision Point

Should Sheila and Fred help Oliver?

- 1) No, they have no time, they need to move on
- 2) Yes, there's always time to help a new friend





## **Option 1 – they have no time, they need to move on**

"I wish we could, truly" answered Sheila in a breath, "but we have to go. The Moon is still somewhere out there and the sun will rise in a few hours, we cannot waste more time... thank you for your kind words, Oliver". Fred opened his eyes wide in astonishment as he looked at Sheila, but Oliver spoke before he could open his mouth: "of course, of course, I do not want to distract you two from your adventure. You better go, my dear friends, may you find the Moon back, and much more than that! Ah, one more thing: when She disappeared, what a shock that was, I saw something falling from the sky, over there, on the other side of the river. You might wish to go and have a look" "Thank you, Oliver!" Said Fred, feeling as confident as he had never felt before.

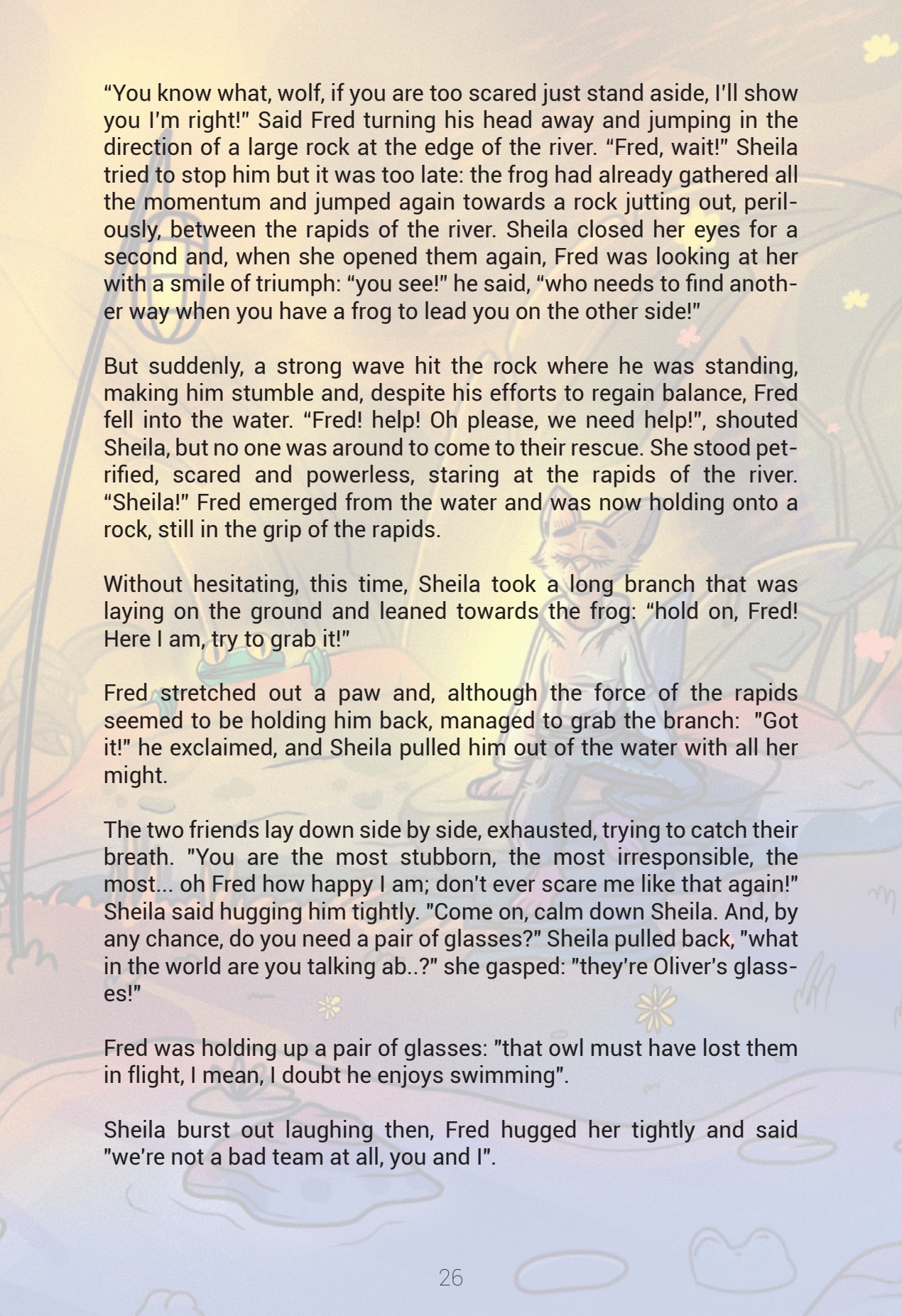
The two animals took the small path that leads to the river, but there was tension between them, although they were both trying to hide it, and so they walked quickly without saying a word.

After each step, the sound of the rapids of the river grew louder and more frightening. "We'll never make it across" said finally Sheila as she looked worriedly at the river, which seemed to be about to flood: its water was as dark as if it had absorbed the colour of the moonless night and seemed to grow in strength and breadth by the second. Soon, the river bed would have not been enough to contain the flow of the river, and the rocks that sprouted here and there between its rapids would have become no more than tufts of grass in the grip of a stormy wind.

"Of course we will!" Replied Fred without the slightest hesitation, "we just need to find the right spot from where to cross, trust me, I'm the expert here when it comes to swimming!"

"All those talks with Oliver must have gone to your head, Fred, don't you see the rapids? They'll take us away as soon as we put a paw in! We need to find another way" replied Sheila irritated and determined.





"You know what, wolf, if you are too scared just stand aside, I'll show you I'm right!" Said Fred turning his head away and jumping in the direction of a large rock at the edge of the river. "Fred, wait!" Sheila tried to stop him but it was too late: the frog had already gathered all the momentum and jumped again towards a rock jutting out, perilously, between the rapids of the river. Sheila closed her eyes for a second and, when she opened them again, Fred was looking at her with a smile of triumph: "you see!" he said, "who needs to find another way when you have a frog to lead you on the other side!"

But suddenly, a strong wave hit the rock where he was standing, making him stumble and, despite his efforts to regain balance, Fred fell into the water. "Fred! help! Oh please, we need help!", shouted Sheila, but no one was around to come to their rescue. She stood petrified, scared and powerless, staring at the rapids of the river. "Sheila!" Fred emerged from the water and was now holding onto a rock, still in the grip of the rapids.

Without hesitating, this time, Sheila took a long branch that was laying on the ground and leaned towards the frog: "hold on, Fred! Here I am, try to grab it!"

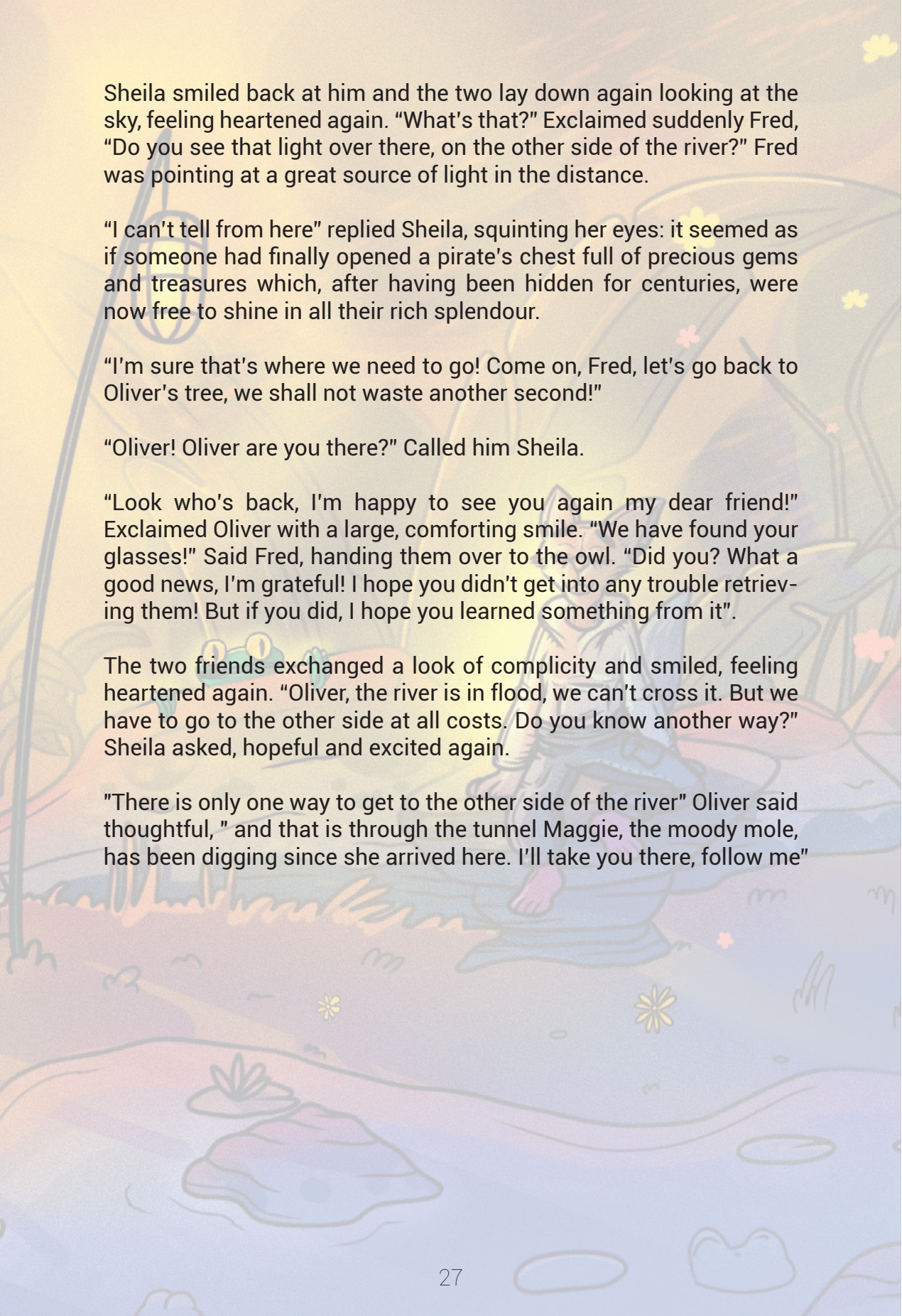
Fred stretched out a paw and, although the force of the rapids seemed to be holding him back, managed to grab the branch: "Got it!" he exclaimed, and Sheila pulled him out of the water with all her might.

The two friends lay down side by side, exhausted, trying to catch their breath. "You are the most stubborn, the most irresponsible, the most... oh Fred how happy I am; don't ever scare me like that again!" Sheila said hugging him tightly. "Come on, calm down Sheila. And, by any chance, do you need a pair of glasses?" Sheila pulled back, "what in the world are you talking ab..?" she gasped: "they're Oliver's glasses!"

Fred was holding up a pair of glasses: "that owl must have lost them in flight, I mean, I doubt he enjoys swimming".

Sheila burst out laughing then, Fred hugged her tightly and said "we're not a bad team at all, you and I".





Sheila smiled back at him and the two lay down again looking at the sky, feeling heartened again. "What's that?" Exclaimed suddenly Fred, "Do you see that light over there, on the other side of the river?" Fred was pointing at a great source of light in the distance.

"I can't tell from here" replied Sheila, squinting her eyes: it seemed as if someone had finally opened a pirate's chest full of precious gems and treasures which, after having been hidden for centuries, were now free to shine in all their rich splendour.

"I'm sure that's where we need to go! Come on, Fred, let's go back to Oliver's tree, we shall not waste another second!"

"Oliver! Oliver are you there?" Called him Sheila.

"Look who's back, I'm happy to see you again my dear friend!" Exclaimed Oliver with a large, comforting smile. "We have found your glasses!" Said Fred, handing them over to the owl. "Did you? What a good news, I'm grateful! I hope you didn't get into any trouble retrieving them! But if you did, I hope you learned something from it".

The two friends exchanged a look of complicity and smiled, feeling heartened again. "Oliver, the river is in flood, we can't cross it. But we have to go to the other side at all costs. Do you know another way?" Sheila asked, hopeful and excited again.

"There is only one way to get to the other side of the river" Oliver said thoughtful, " and that is through the tunnel Maggie, the moody mole, has been digging since she arrived here. I'll take you there, follow me"



## Option 2 – they decide to help Oliver

"I wish we could do that, Oliver, really" Sheila said impulsively, without taking the time to think twice: "we have to keep going if we are to have even the slightest hope of finding the Moon before the sun rises". "Of course, of course, my dear friends, I don't want to distract you two from your adventure. May you find the Moon back, and much more than that!" replied Oliver in his usual calm voice and addressing the two animals with a warm smile. "Oliver, wait, when is the last time you had your glasses with you, do you remember?" Asked Fred, giving Sheila a look full of wonder and incredulity for what she had just said: "Since when Sheila, the sweet she-wolf, does not do everything she can to help someone?" his eyes seemed to say, honestly and without judgment, and Sheila felt a small cramp of remorse in her stomach. And yet, it was not all remorse what she felt: on the contrary, a part of her felt lighter and, somehow, relieved. In a blink of eye, she realised that Fred, the same frog who a few hours earlier, not far from the pond, had been looking at her with stranger's eyes, now seemed to understand her as if he were one of her closest friends, and that was for Sheila but a reason to smile.

"Well, let me think" pondered Oliver, passing through the white feathers under his beak as if that would help him remember. "I'm quite sure I had them with me after having delivered the last few letters on the other side of the river yesterday" he exclaimed finally. "Alright then, we'll find your glasses, Oliver, promise! Won't we, Sheila?" Said Fred, as confident as he had never been before, looking at Sheila out of the corner of his eye. Sheila remained quiet for a few moments and then, giving them both a heart-lifting smile, said: "of course, Oliver, you can count on us!"

The two animals took the small path that leads to the river, walking at large strides, quickly, as if the magical qualities they had felt in the proximity of the tree had really succeeded in lightening their hearts and clearing their minds of sad thoughts and the fear of not being able to accomplish their mission.

But after each step, the sound of the rapids of the river grew louder and more frightening; "it seems like it is about to flood!" Exclaimed Shiela as the river was in sight:



the water was as dark as if it had absorbed the colour of the moonless night and seemed to grow in strength and breadth by the second. Soon, the river bed would have not been enough to contain the flow of the river, and the rocks that sprouted here and there between its rapids would have become no more than tufts of grass in the grip of a stormy wind.

"What's that? Do you see that light over there, on the other side of the river?" Asked suddenly Fred, pointing at a great source of light in the distance.

"I can't tell from here" replied Sheila, squinting her eyes: it seemed as if someone had finally opened a pirate's chest full of precious gems and treasures which, after having been hidden for centuries, were now free to shine in all their rich splendour. "it can't be a fire" said finally Sheila, "I mean, the light seems cold, it seems..."

"Hey hey hey, would you please step aside!"

A mole emerged right under their feet and was shaking off the earth that was left on her nose. "Look at that, there really is no respect anymore, don't frogs and wolves watch where they put their paws normally? I really need a doormat now that I think of it, it would certainly prevent careless travellers like you two from messing up the entrance to my den!"


"Holy pond!" Exclaimed Fred, "you scared me! Who are you?"

"Who am I? I'm the one who asks questions here my froggy fellow! Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

"We are really sorry, you are right, we didn't notice that this was the entrance to your place, please accept our apologies. My name is Sheila and this is Fred. What is your name, dear mole?"

The mole observed them attentively, suspiciously and annoyed, puffing loudly from time to time; she dusted off the entrance to her hole again, babbling confused words to herself, as if the two animals did not exist, complaining of the disorder, of the noise of the river water, of the darkness of the night, and of whatever else went through her mind. Then, suddenly, her look changed as did her attitude, and she stood up, spreading her arms wide in welcome:





"What a pleasure to have you here! Visits at this time of night are rare, but my grandmother used to say that a mole's den is always open for those seeking shelter! What's more, it's not often you meet a she-wolf and a frog around here, beyond the hills, I look forward to hearing about your adventures! What brings you here? Please, come in! Are you hungry? Oh right, how silly of me, my name is Maggie, the moody mole".

"That explains it all..." whispered Fred giving a quick look to Sheila who rolled her eyes.

"Thank you Maggie, you are very kind and welcoming, we would love to stay here with you but we are looking for..." " Sheila hesitated for a second: "what a nice pair of glasses you have Maggie, but aren't they a bit too big for you?"

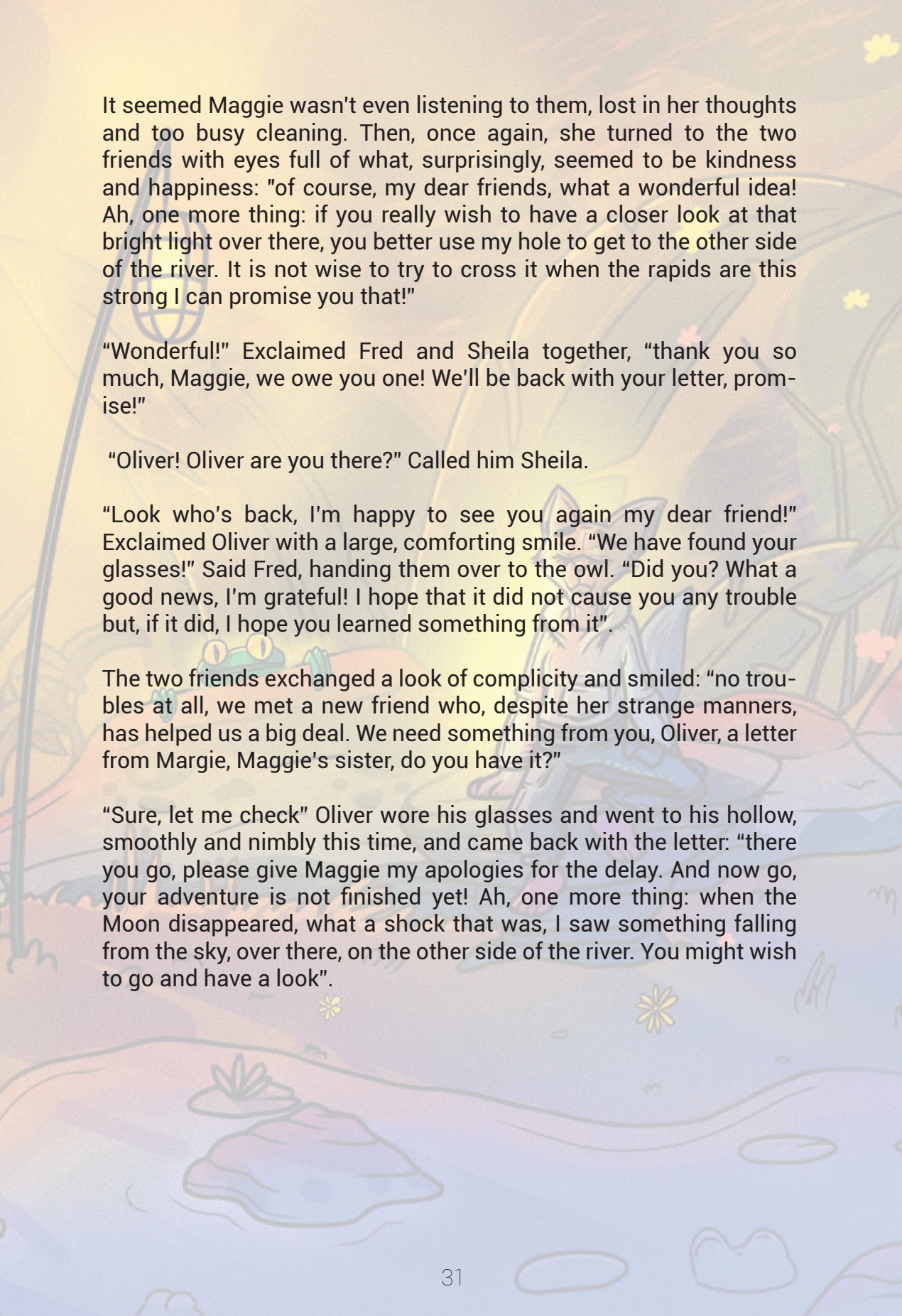
"What? Oh, you mean these? They're not mine, I found them yesterday while I was digging, some careless traveller like you two must have lost them" her tone of voice had changed again and Maggie seemed now more annoyed and moody than ever:

"Lucky for me, anyway, God knows how useful they are now that the Moon has disappeared, you can't see a palm from your nose".

"Dear Maggie, those are Oliver's glasses, he needs them back, otherwise he won't be able to fly and deliver all the letters for our fellow animals!" Exclaimed Fred impatiently. "Who? Oliver? That bird still owes me a letter from my sister Margie, the messy mole, I've been waiting for ages!" Maggie replied, resuming sweeping the dust from the entrance of her den.

"Ok Maggie, let's make a deal: we'll give Oliver his glasses back and in return we'll go and retrieve your sister Margie's letter, shall we?" Sheila was appealing to all her sweetness and sensitivity in pronouncing each single word in order not to offset the mole. "Good idea, I'm sure your sister will have so many nice things to say to you" Fred continued amused.



A whimsical illustration of a forest scene. In the foreground, a river flows from the bottom left towards the right. A green frog with large eyes sits on a rock in the water. On the right bank, a blue owl with large eyes and a white belly sits on a log. The background is a soft-focus forest with trees and a warm, golden light. Small yellow and pink flowers are scattered throughout the scene.

It seemed Maggie wasn't even listening to them, lost in her thoughts and too busy cleaning. Then, once again, she turned to the two friends with eyes full of what, surprisingly, seemed to be kindness and happiness: "of course, my dear friends, what a wonderful idea! Ah, one more thing: if you really wish to have a closer look at that bright light over there, you better use my hole to get to the other side of the river. It is not wise to try to cross it when the rapids are this strong I can promise you that!"

"Wonderful!" Exclaimed Fred and Sheila together, "thank you so much, Maggie, we owe you one! We'll be back with your letter, promise!"

"Oliver! Oliver are you there?" Called him Sheila.

"Look who's back, I'm happy to see you again my dear friend!" Exclaimed Oliver with a large, comforting smile. "We have found your glasses!" Said Fred, handing them over to the owl. "Did you? What a good news, I'm grateful! I hope that it did not cause you any trouble but, if it did, I hope you learned something from it".

The two friends exchanged a look of complicity and smiled: "no troubles at all, we met a new friend who, despite her strange manners, has helped us a big deal. We need something from you, Oliver, a letter from Margie, Maggie's sister, do you have it?"

"Sure, let me check" Oliver wore his glasses and went to his hollow, smoothly and nimbly this time, and came back with the letter: "there you go, please give Maggie my apologies for the delay. And now go, your adventure is not finished yet! Ah, one more thing: when the Moon disappeared, what a shock that was, I saw something falling from the sky, over there, on the other side of the river. You might wish to go and have a look".



## **Continuation of both scenarios**

Once they reached the other side of the river, Fred and Sheila quickly resumed their journey towards the great source of light which, as they approached it, extended upwards more and more, reflecting in the night sky like Northern Lights, and painting it in a thousand shades of white and light blue.

"I've never seen anything like this" exclaimed Fred, his yellow eyes wide open, "It's the first time that I see the earth lighting up the sky and not the other way around, it all seems so unreal again".

"Do you remember what Oliver said?" Replied Sheila without taking her eyes off the sky, "if you give it a chance, what seems unreal can become even more true and pleasant than what you know. Come on, Fred, we're almost there, I can feel it!"

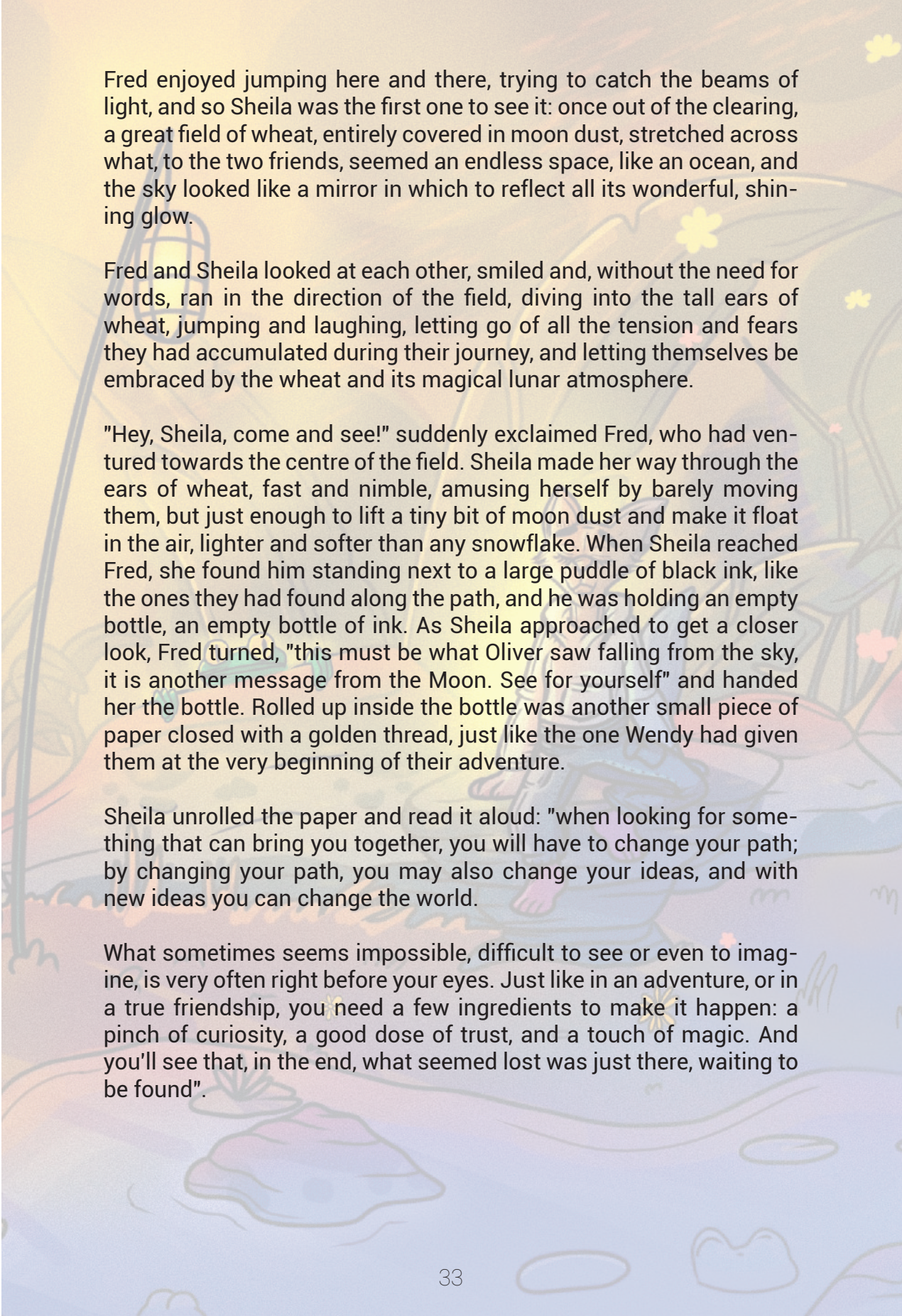
Suddenly, still distracted by the glow of the light, Fred accidentally jumped into a small puddle of black liquid: "what is that?" Exclaimed the frog jumping away surprised and embarrassed. "Look, you're leaving black footprints all over the place!" Noticed Sheila amused, then, she walked over to the small puddle of liquid to sniff it, "it looks like ink... but what's it doing here on the ground?"

"Hey, over there!" Fred exclaimed: many small black stains stretched all along the path in front of them. "But what does it mean? It looks as if it had rained ink..."

The two friends resumed their walk, following the small ink traces that seemed to extend in the direction of the large light source.

The path was winding but clear, and led through a small clearing of dense trees, where the rays of the great light crept nimbly through the branches, forming what at first glance looked like thin, glowing lianas. The small clearing seemed enchanted, and not just because of the light: even the shadows, which often frighten even the bravest of us, seemed to simply glide by at the feet of their holders, both trees and leaves, bringing out their shapes and their uniqueness.





Fred enjoyed jumping here and there, trying to catch the beams of light, and so Sheila was the first one to see it: once out of the clearing, a great field of wheat, entirely covered in moon dust, stretched across what, to the two friends, seemed an endless space, like an ocean, and the sky looked like a mirror in which to reflect all its wonderful, shining glow.

Fred and Sheila looked at each other, smiled and, without the need for words, ran in the direction of the field, diving into the tall ears of wheat, jumping and laughing, letting go of all the tension and fears they had accumulated during their journey, and letting themselves be embraced by the wheat and its magical lunar atmosphere.

"Hey, Sheila, come and see!" suddenly exclaimed Fred, who had ventured towards the centre of the field. Sheila made her way through the ears of wheat, fast and nimble, amusing herself by barely moving them, but just enough to lift a tiny bit of moon dust and make it float in the air, lighter and softer than any snowflake. When Sheila reached Fred, she found him standing next to a large puddle of black ink, like the ones they had found along the path, and he was holding an empty bottle, an empty bottle of ink. As Sheila approached to get a closer look, Fred turned, "this must be what Oliver saw falling from the sky, it is another message from the Moon. See for yourself" and handed her the bottle. Rolled up inside the bottle was another small piece of paper closed with a golden thread, just like the one Wendy had given them at the very beginning of their adventure.

Sheila unrolled the paper and read it aloud: "when looking for something that can bring you together, you will have to change your path; by changing your path, you may also change your ideas, and with new ideas you can change the world."

What sometimes seems impossible, difficult to see or even to imagine, is very often right before your eyes. Just like in an adventure, or in a true friendship, you need a few ingredients to make it happen: a pinch of curiosity, a good dose of trust, and a touch of magic. And you'll see that, in the end, what seemed lost was just there, waiting to be found".



The two friends stood in silence for a few seconds, reflecting on the words written by the Moon, her handwriting and the dark marks of the ink on the paper. Yes, the ink, so black, black as the night... Fred and Sheila's thoughts seemed to complement each other, to come together like pencil strokes to form a drawing or, in this case, a unique idea. Their eyes moved quickly, from the message, to the black ink stains on the ground, up to the night sky, to that black hole the Moon had left behind when She had disappeared.

Suddenly, the wind rose and, at first, the moon dust began to swirl in the air like small embers crackling in a large fireplace.

Then, Wendy landed right next to them, clumsy and messy as ever, raising a great cloud of moon dust that swept over the two animals: "oh Wendy! Look what you've done" said Sheila who, completely covered in dust, had turned as white as a snowman.

"Look at you, you look like a snow-wolf!" Said Fred bursting out laughing. "Forgive me, sweet Sheila, I really need to perfect my landing technique!" she paused, "So, there you are, how far you've come! And now, what happens?" Fred showed her the message, told her about Pete and Oliver, the river, and finally about the strange ink stains along the way.

"what seemed lost was just there, waiting to be found..." Wendy repeated thoughtfully, looking up at the sky, where the Moon used to shine.

Sheila then shook off the white dust and her fur turned black as before. It was at that moment that Fred and Wendy realised what had happened: "of course!" They both exclaimed as they watched Sheila regain her natural colour. "What?" The she-wolf asked, surprised by the exhilaration of her two companions. "You're black again! "What seemed lost was just there waiting to be found", how did we not think of this sooner!" Fred said, unable to contain his joy. "You mean..." whispered Sheila, "the ink!" Said Wendy, whirling around, "She drank ink! She never left: the Moon is there, waiting to be found!" Said Fred and Sheila together at last. Wendy looked at the two friends with eyes full of sweetness and love, then said: "now it's my turn, look". The wind picked up momentum as she gathered on herself and then whirled up into the air, rising metres and metres above their heads. Fred and Sheila watched her rise, light but powerful, so high they lost







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**Project Acronym:** Story Changers

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**Coordinator:**

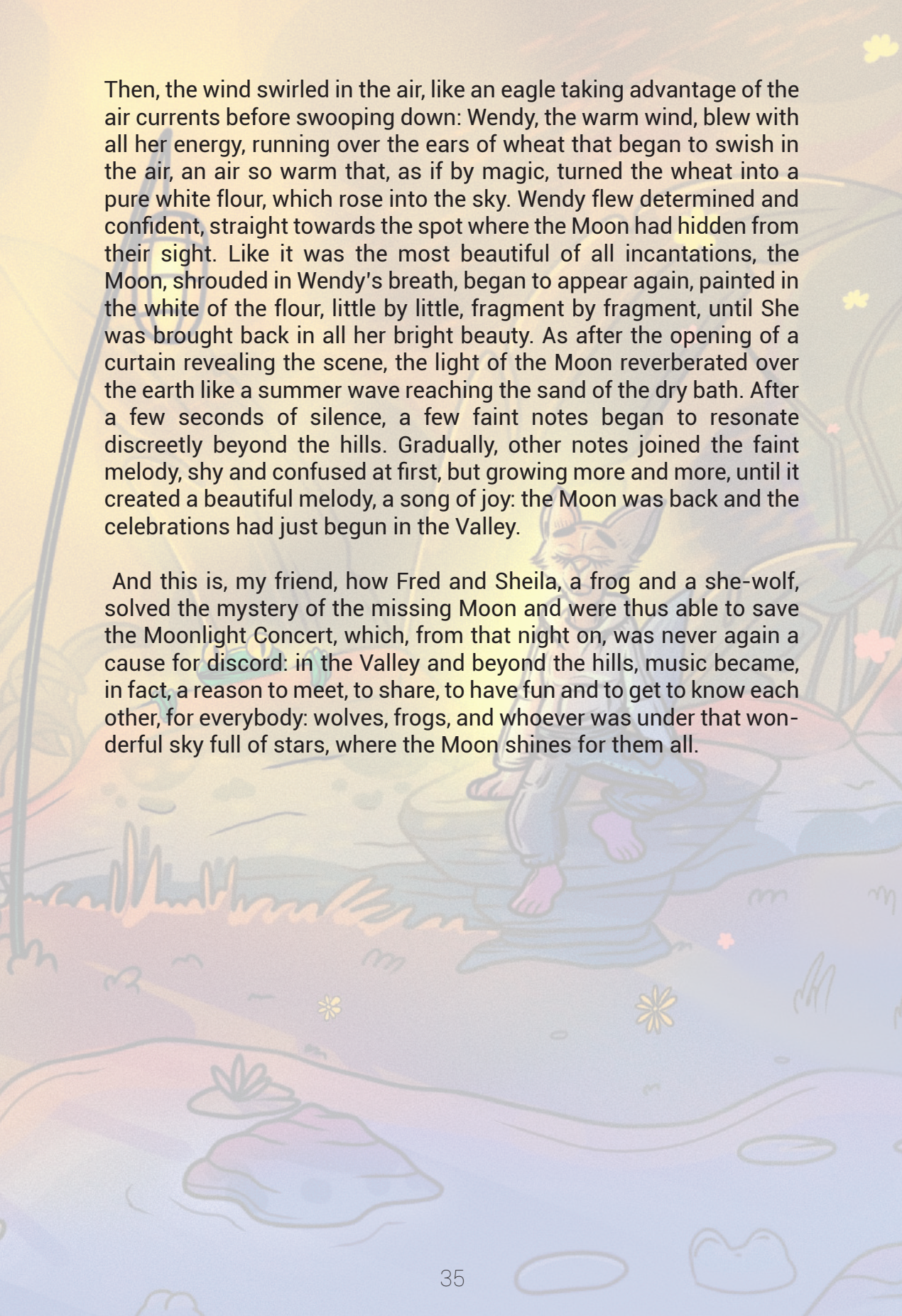
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Then, the wind swirled in the air, like an eagle taking advantage of the air currents before swooping down: Wendy, the warm wind, blew with all her energy, running over the ears of wheat that began to swish in the air, an air so warm that, as if by magic, turned the wheat into a pure white flour, which rose into the sky. Wendy flew determined and confident, straight towards the spot where the Moon had hidden from their sight. Like it was the most beautiful of all incantations, the Moon, shrouded in Wendy's breath, began to appear again, painted in the white of the flour, little by little, fragment by fragment, until She was brought back in all her bright beauty. As after the opening of a curtain revealing the scene, the light of the Moon reverberated over the earth like a summer wave reaching the sand of the dry bath. After a few seconds of silence, a few faint notes began to resonate discreetly beyond the hills. Gradually, other notes joined the faint melody, shy and confused at first, but growing more and more, until it created a beautiful melody, a song of joy: the Moon was back and the celebrations had just begun in the Valley.

And this is, my friend, how Fred and Sheila, a frog and a she-wolf, solved the mystery of the missing Moon and were thus able to save the Moonlight Concert, which, from that night on, was never again a cause for discord: in the Valley and beyond the hills, music became, in fact, a reason to meet, to share, to have fun and to get to know each other, for everybody: wolves, frogs, and whoever was under that wonderful sky full of stars, where the Moon shines for them all.