

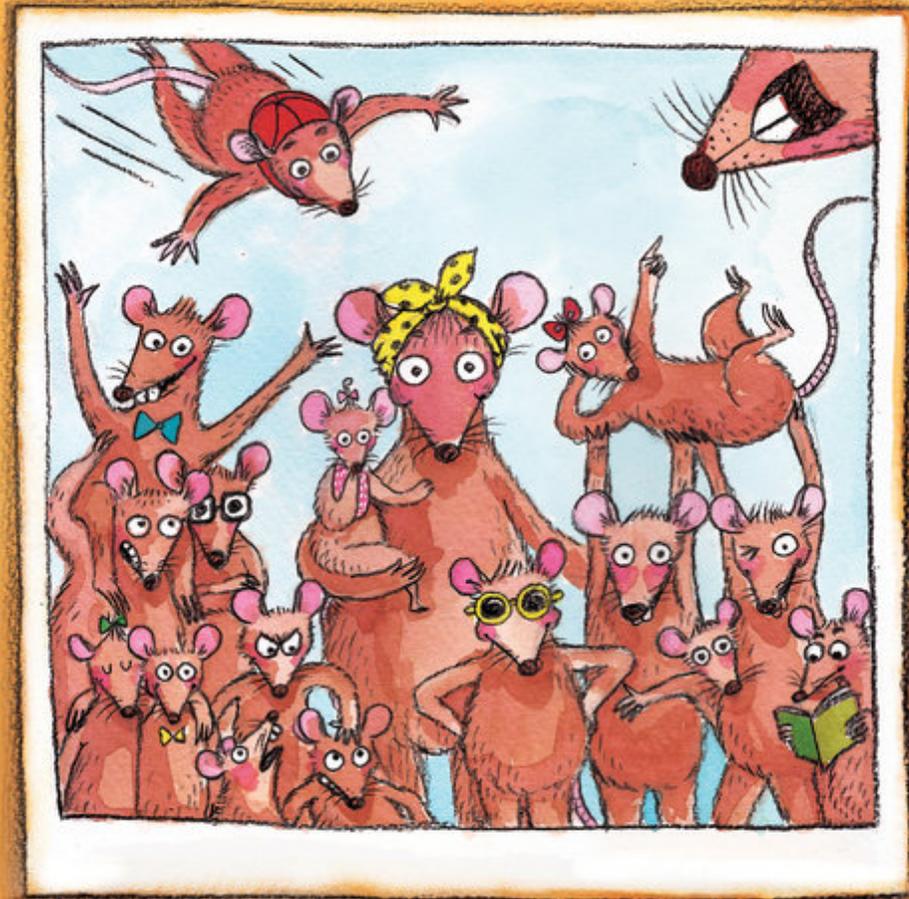


# Miss Bandicota Bengalensis Discovers the Old Caves

Author: Aditi Ghosh

Illustrator: Sunaina Coelho

Level 4



## Meet Miss Bandicota

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was a little Indian mole rat who grew up in a maze of burrows with her mother, seven sisters and ten brothers. They were terrific pests, the nineteen of them, always out on a rampage.

Most of the Bengalensis family went out to nearby farms to forage for food.

But after she narrowly escaped a farmer's rat trap, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis decided never to attack a farm.

"Whatever else can you do?" her mother had asked.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis had smiled simply and said, "I can burrow."



So every night she would start digging a tunnel. And every morning, she found herself somewhere different, in search of a new adventure, friends and food.

Once, she ended up on the beach of Bordi, where she met Porpita porpita and sand bubbler crabs. She also saw the sea for the first time.

Wherever she went, so did her explorer's kit with sunglasses, binoculars, magnifying glass and, of course, her favourite – sticker bandages.

Let's explore another part of India with Miss Bandicota!

Somebody stuck her tiny nose out of a hole in the ground. Who was that?

**Miss Bandicota Bengalensis!**

She had just emerged from a new burrow after a long night of digging through layers and layers of pink, white and brown rock. It was nearly sunrise.

Just as she was about to set her sunglasses on top of her nose, she caught a fleeting glimpse of something odd.





She rushed back into her burrow,  
only to raise her head again  
more cautiously.

She peered nervously into what looked  
like a round glass window encircled in a thick black rim.  
From behind it, a huge black eye peered back at her.



Miss Bandicota Bengalensis couldn't believe her eyes.  
Could it be a... magnifying glass?

Before she could say anything to the huge black eye, it asked,  
"Who are you?" in a gentle human voice.

"I'm Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. Who are you?"



“I’m Tiku, an explorer,” said the human child, moving back one step.

The boy was smiling at Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. Not too big, not too small – he looked just right to be an explorer.

“I have set out to roam the Bhimbetka Hills today,” he said proudly.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis examined the green cap on his head, the pair of binoculars slung around his neck, the brown backpack hanging from his shoulders and the large magnifying glass in his hand.

Tiku was all set. She nodded in approval.

So she said eagerly, holding up her magnifying glass and travel kit,  
“I love exploring too! I make burrows that go to new places.”

Tiku grinned. “I know a secret trail through this forest.  
Do you want to come along?”

As you might have guessed, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was always up for  
anything new.





She scurried out of her burrow. The two new friends began their journey, treading on a narrow, dusty path.



It was winter; the forest was dry and bare. Leafless branches cast a faint web of shadows that quivered in the breeze.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis hopped lightly from one shadow to another.

She would land gingerly on her toes, so as not to disturb the patterns of light and shade.

Now and again, she turned around to make sure that the wooded patterns had reappeared on the ground.

The chilly morning breeze brushed softly by them. A pair of hornbills were calling in duet, their cries piercing through the silence. As they climbed ahead, the road grew steeper but they kept up a steady pace.

Soft rustling on their right brought them to a halt.

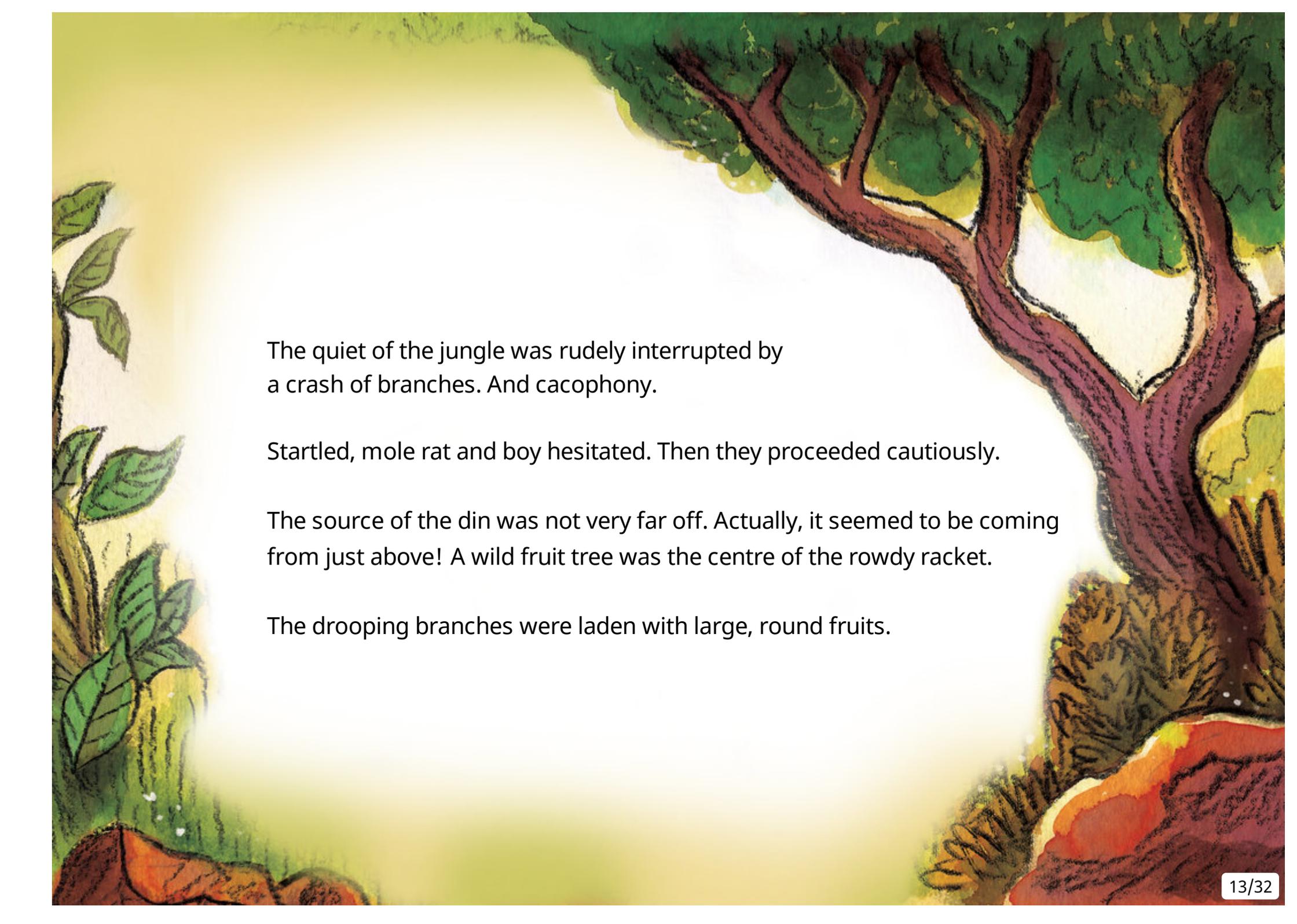
A strange animal crossed their path; it looked a bit like a cow, and bit like an antelope. It was tall and seemed strong. It had bluish-grey skin, two curved horns between its ears, a distinctive white patch at its throat and a small black beard below it.



“What's that?” whispered Miss Bandicota Bengalensis.

“Nilgai,” said Tiku, his eyes shining.

Before Miss Bandicota Bengalensis could ask any more questions, the nilgai vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.



The quiet of the jungle was rudely interrupted by a crash of branches. And cacophony.

Startled, mole rat and boy hesitated. Then they proceeded cautiously.

The source of the din was not very far off. Actually, it seemed to be coming from just above! A wild fruit tree was the centre of the rowdy racket.

The drooping branches were laden with large, round fruits.



The ground below was covered with more ripe yellow-green ones. Many had burst open. The soft pulp was a brilliant saffron.

A sweet scent filled the cove.

“What tree is this?” Miss Bandicota Bengalensis shouted out to the noisy langurs.

“This is a bael tree. Don’t you know it?” said an elderly-looking langur, surprised by the question. “We Indian langurs have been feasting on its fruit for thousands of years.”

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis shook her head, for she had never tasted bael before.

“Well, never mind, jump right in,” he offered. “There's plenty for everybody!”

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis pounced on it, prying open the cracked woody shell with gusto. Tiku busied himself collecting dried leaves while she gorged on the fruit.

Refreshed by their break, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis and Tiku hiked up the mountain path with renewed vigour. As they climbed, the forest cleared.



Further ahead, the road wound through a rocky terrain of sandstone and quartzite.

A giant boulder stood precariously at the bend. A lone shimul tree towered over from behind. Its prickly trunk spread out young silvery branches. It had shed most of its leaves. Deep crimson flowers had just begun to bloom.

“I must have a fresh shimul flower for my collection,” announced Miss Bandicota Bengalensis's explorer friend.

Promptly, they both rushed to scale the boulder.



As Tiku leaned over to take hold of the lowest branch, he slipped, and with him went Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. They rolled down the boulder and slid down the dusty slope.

**BUMP... BUMP... BUMPITY... BUMP.**



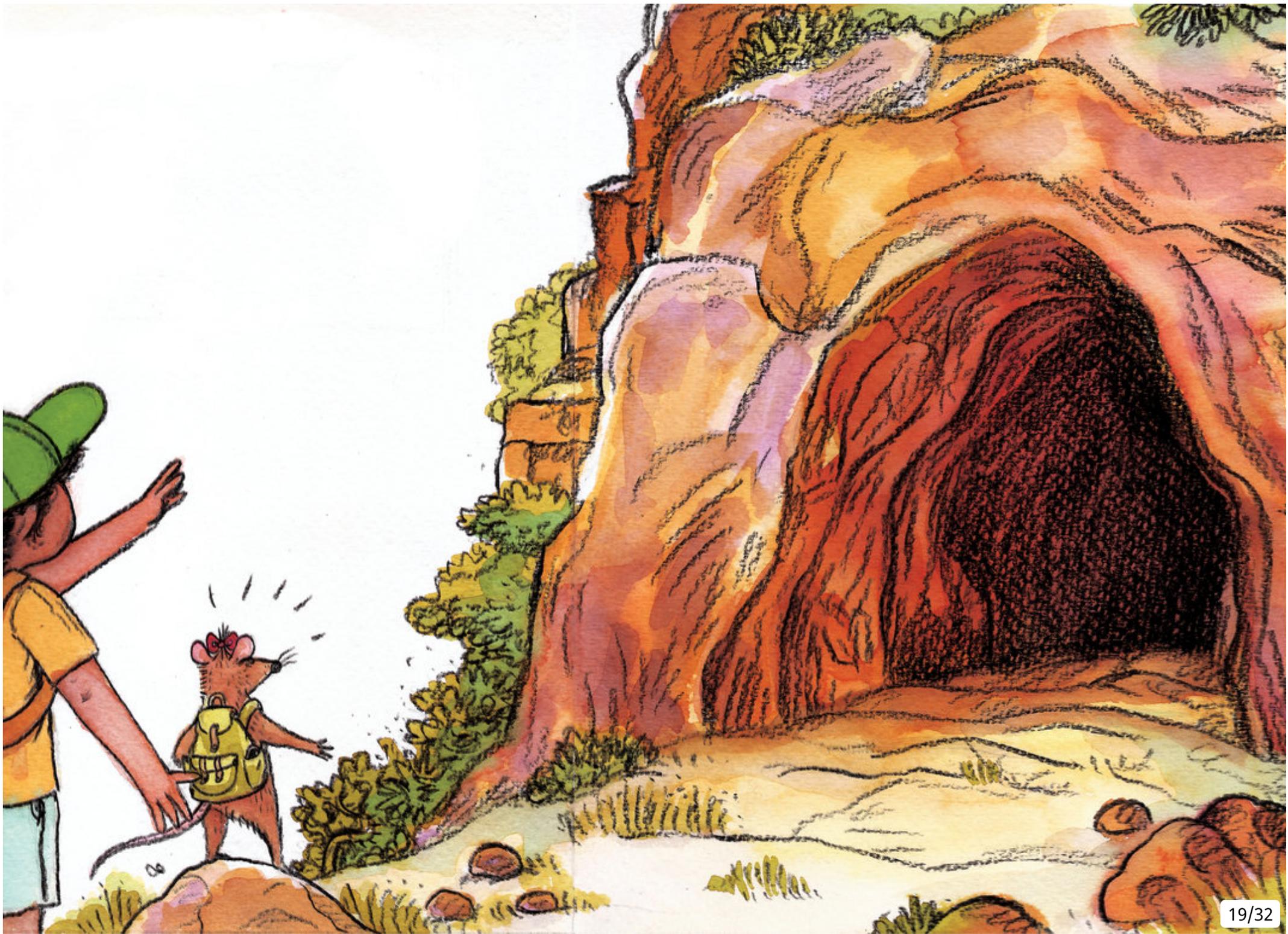


The poor boy had scraped his knee and was clutching his leg in pain.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was beside him in a flash, a sticker bandage ready in hand.

Tiku thanked her as he stuck it on. Dusting themselves, they both stood up, giggling at the silly accident.

As Miss Bandicota Bengalensis turned towards the road, her eyes fell upon a breathtaking sight.





“Look! We have discovered the largest burrow in the world,” she said, awestruck.

Tiku smiled affectionately and patted Miss Bandicota Bengalensis on her back.

“Welcome to the caves of Bhimbetka!”

She couldn’t contain her excitement. Or wait to explore the mysterious caves.

Most of all, she was brimming with questions – “Who made these caves? When did they make them? How did they make them? Who lives in them?”

“One at a time, my dear friend,” said Tiku, laughing as they entered the caves.

Inside, another surprise awaited them. The walls had paintings of strange animals and stick-like men. They seemed to tell a story from long, long ago.

Once again, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis looked up at her friend questioningly.

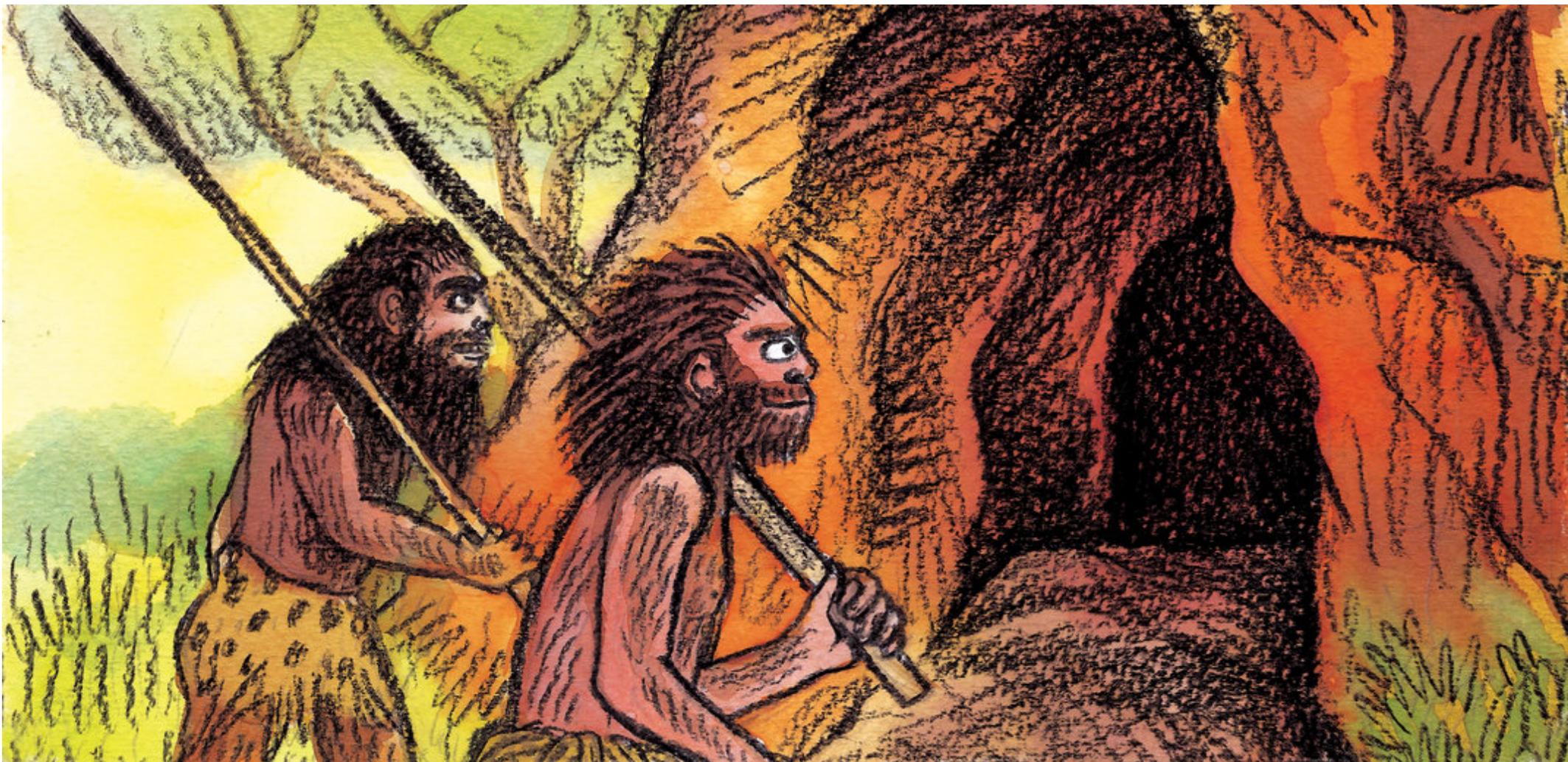
And so he told her the story of the old caves.

“A very, very long time ago, layers and layers of limestone and sandstone settled one on top of the other over hundreds of millions of years. They formed the Vindhya mountains. The largest ones at the northern fringe of the Vindhyas were the Bhimbetka Hills.

“For millions of years, the sun and wind and rain scoured the hills in fascinating ways to create these spectacular caves.

“Some archaeologists say it may have been Mr. Homo Erectus's family that first wandered into the Bhimbetka caves. About a hundred thousand years ago, they must have used these caves as rock shelters.

“They may have dug the little cups or holes we see in these caves even today. Later, our ancestors made the Bhimbetka caves their home.



“They lived on animals like deer and wild fowl. They made weapons like bows and arrows, and spears to hunt the animals with and to protect themselves in the jungle.

“Theirs must have been a life of adventure and peril, but it was the only one they knew. Often, they were attacked by dangerous animals like wild boar and elephant. Sometimes they fought bravely, sometimes they had to flee for their lives.



“Whenever they returned with an animal they had killed, they celebrated their victory with music and dance.

“Some of these hunters were artists too. They painted their stories on the walls of their homes to tell us of their adventures from tens of thousands of years ago.”

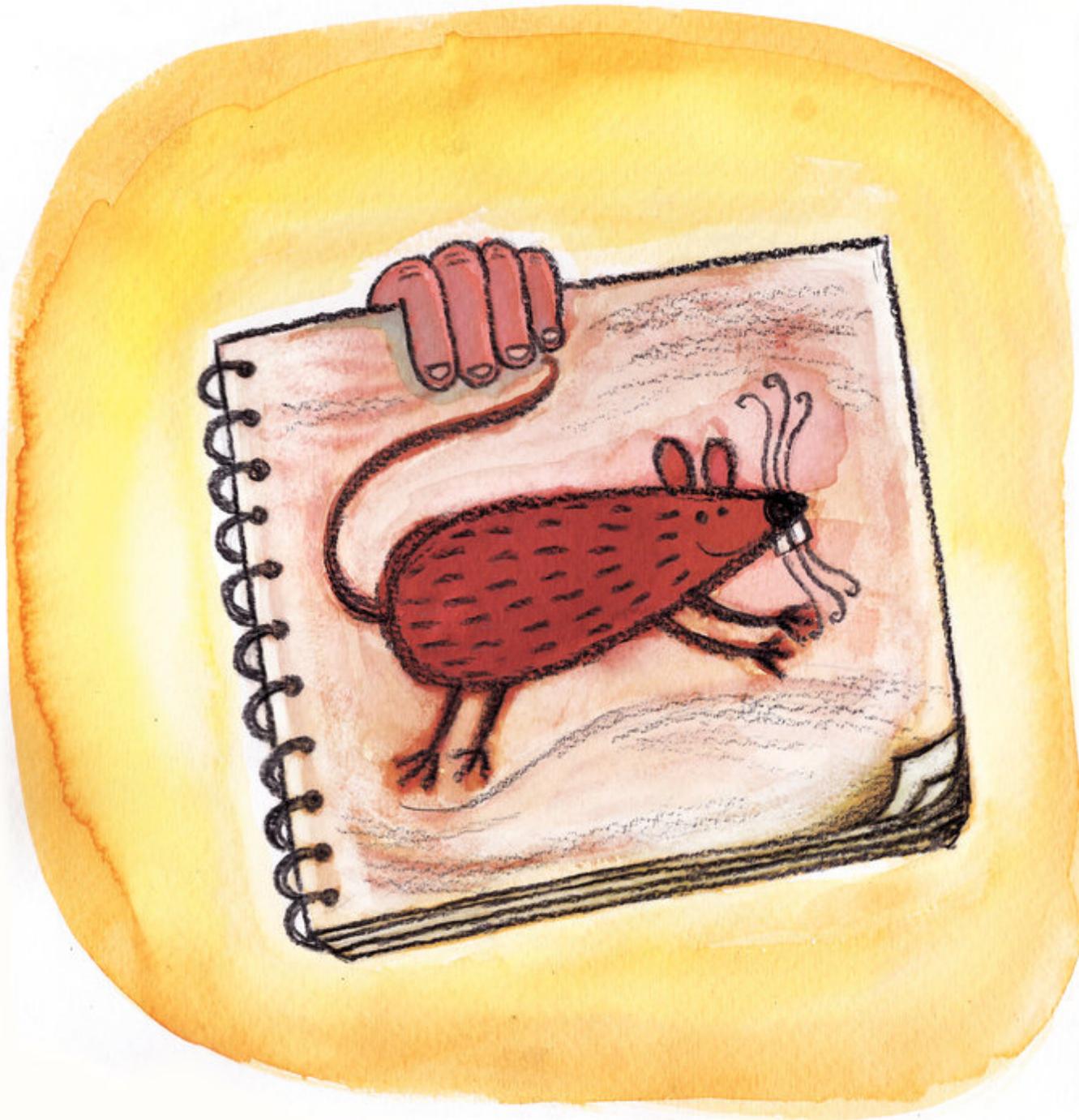


Miss Bandicota Bengalensis stood staring at the pictures. The stories of the old caves seemed to come alive.

The two explorers walked into another cave. Its walls were covered with hundreds of images of animals. Miss Bandicota Bengalensis studied them intently under her magnifying glass.

Meanwhile, her friend was drawing them in his diary. Pointing at one, he asked, "Can you tell which animal this is?"





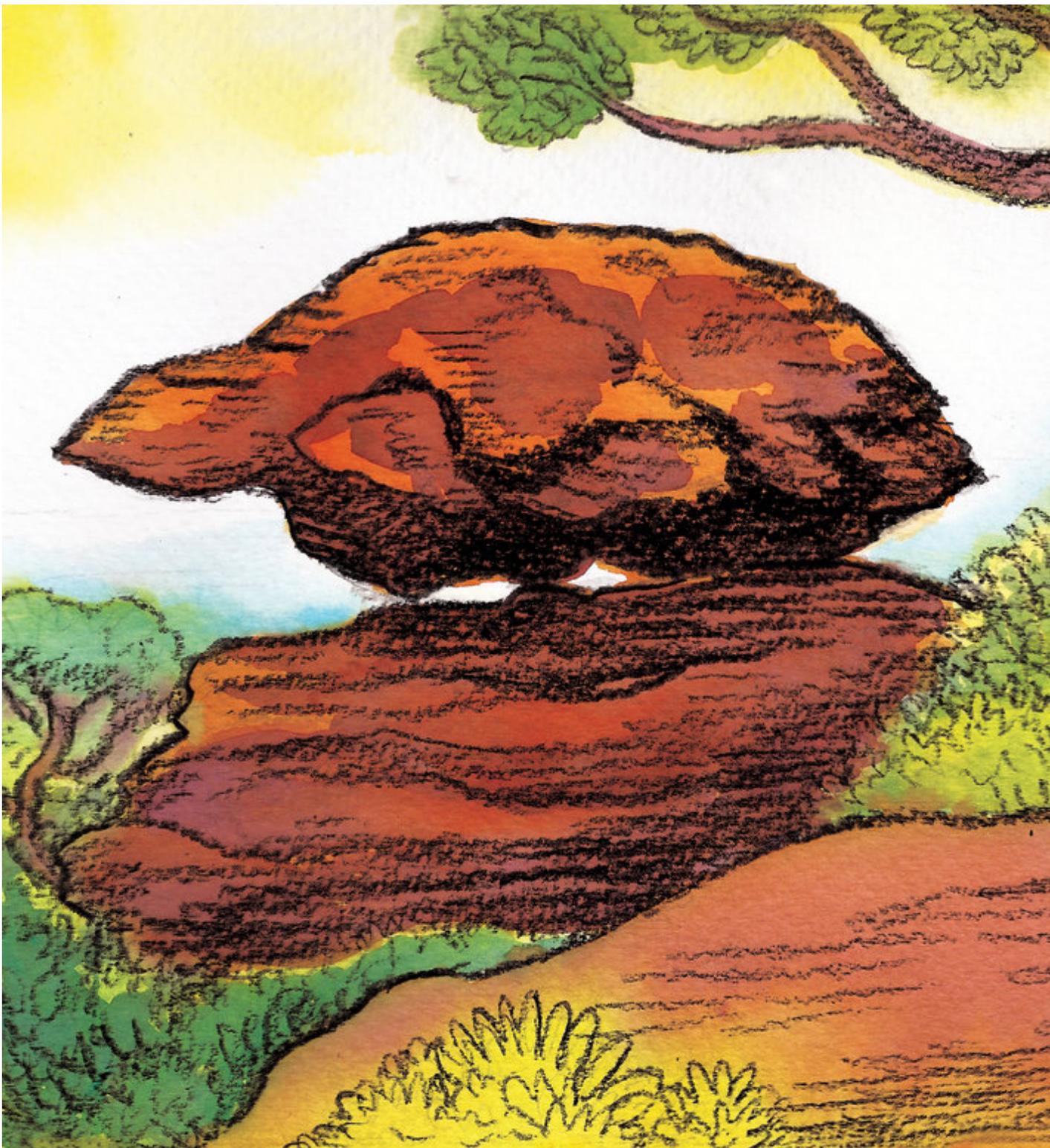
Miss Bandicota Bengalensis looked at it closely. Then she turned to him, beaming, and exclaimed, "That looks like a mole rat!"

After a morning of learning, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis started zipping through the rock shelters. There were hundreds – some narrow, some wide, some tall, some large and some mere crevices, just like burrows!



A few hours later, while she was still whizzing around, her friend called out urgently, "Come along, quick. I must show you the most special rock in the Bhimbetka Hills. My father is waiting for me up there."

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis sprinted to catch up and, together, they ran to the edge of the cliff.



“Look over the tortoise-shaped rock, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. You will see the Betwa river basin.”

As she drank in the view through her binoculars, Tiku ran off to his father.



A cool afternoon breeze blew over the cliff, making her drowsy. She snuggled comfortably into a niche under the tortoise rock. As her eyelids drooped, she heard her friend holler, "Will you be here to explore tomorrow?"

A silent wind carried her sleepy reply back to him: "Tonight, I must dig a new burrow... to explore a new place tomorrow..."



## Guess what!

Team up with Miss Bandicota and guess the names of these animals Tiku has drawn.

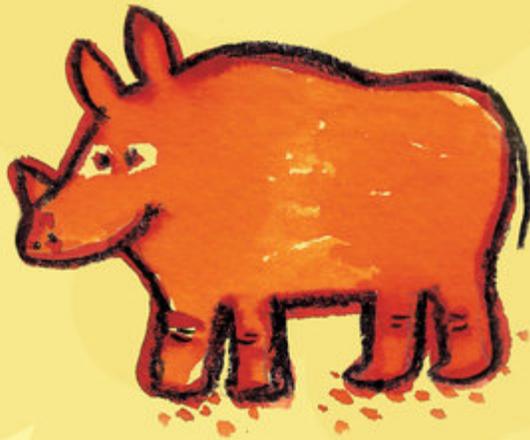
All are believed to be native to India. Here are some clues to help you along.

\*Its African cousin is the largest land mammal

\*One of the grandest birds, best known for its rain dance



\*The biggest striped member of the cat family



\*It has a single horn as its scientific name indicates

# The trees of central India

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis discovered the old caves of Bhimbetka in the middle of a jungle near the Vindhya mountains, in Madhya Pradesh.

This state has the highest forest cover in the country. It is famous for its teak, sal and bamboo forests and vast stretches of mixed tropical jungles.

Our ancestors lived amid trees and, over the years, discovered their many uses.

1. Palas is the official state flower of Madhya Pradesh. The tree is also called the flame of the forest because it blooms in orange and scarlet clusters of flowers. The seeds, leaves and gum of this tree are found to be medicinal.
2. The amla tree bears a light greenish-yellow fruit also known as the Indian gooseberry. It is one of the best known natural sources of Vitamin C.
3. The babul tree is native to India and grows wild in dry and sandy environments. It is a tough and thorny tree that survives drought and flood. The tender twigs of the babul were traditionally used as toothbrushes.
4. The mahua is an indigenous tree, considered holy by many tribes of the forests of central and north India. Its flower is edible and used for making honey, syrup and jam.

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# Miss Bandicota Bengalensis Discovers the Old Caves

(English)

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was no ordinary Indian mole rat. She was quite the adventurer. Every evening, she set out with her explorer's kit – sunglasses, binoculars, magnifying glass and a strip of sticker bandages. “An explorer is always prepared,” she said. Through the night, she dug in a new direction, to a new sea, up a new hill... Now, join Miss Bandicota and her new friend in exploring one of the oldest hills and caves of India.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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