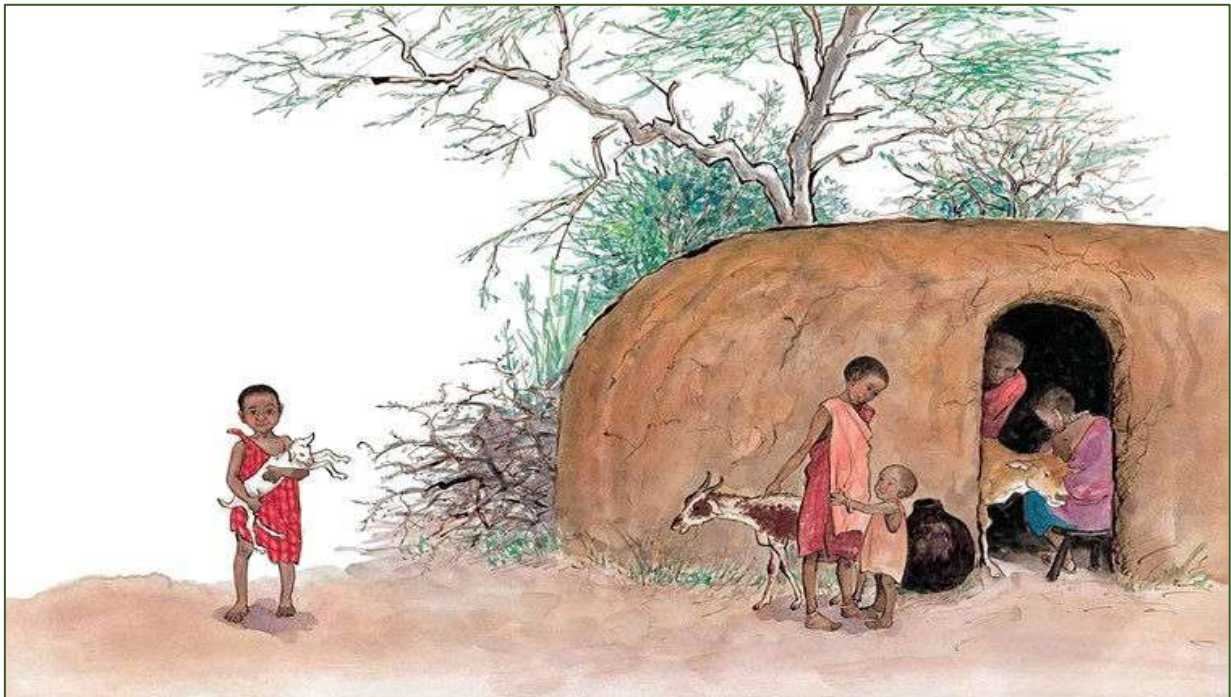


# THE FIRST BEAR IN AFRICA

My name is Meto.

Here is the house where I live with my family and our animals, in a very small village in the middle of the African savanna.



This morning, I hear the noise of a motorcar coming towards us.

“Father, Father!” I say. “We’re going to have visitors!”

It is a family of tourists who have come to say hello to us!

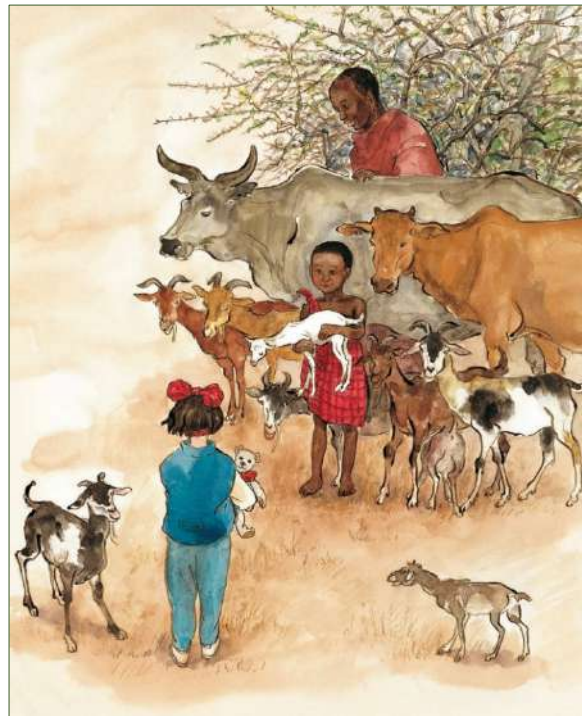
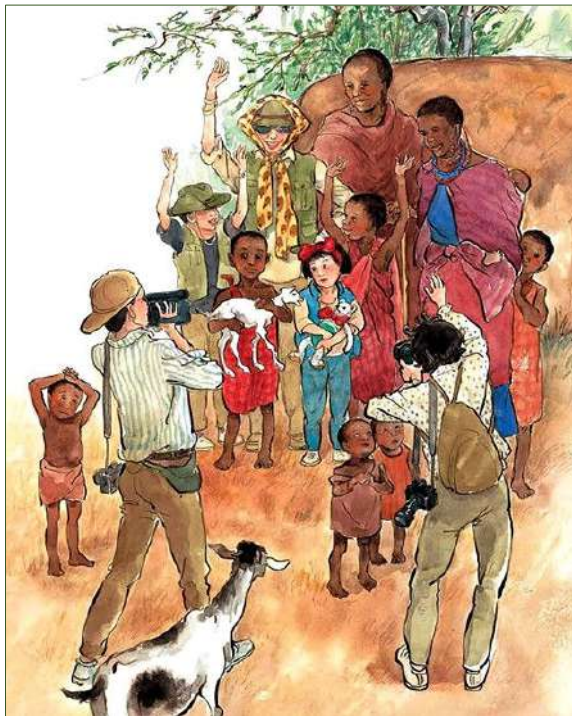
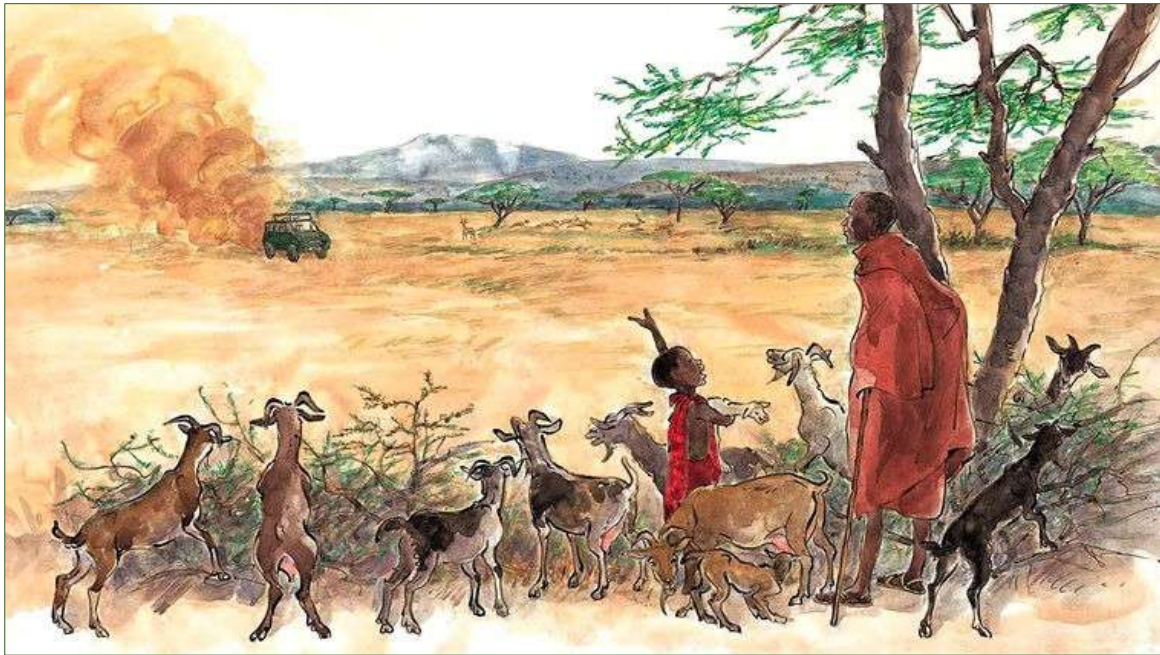
They must have come from far, far away.

They don’t speak our language.

They wear so many clothes!

And they watch us all the time from behind their photographic machines.

I smile. They look funny.



**“Meto, show your goats to the little girl,” says my father. “It looks like she loves animals, too.”**

**It is true, the little girl also holds an animal in her arms. It is very small, and has a bright red ribbon around its neck, just like the one the little girl has in her hair.**

**I have never seen this kind of animal before—it is not from our savanna.**

**After a very short visit, the family has to go.**

**I feel sad they are leaving.**





"Good-bye," they yelled to us from their car.

"*Kwaheri*," we call back to them. Good-bye.

But no! The girl has forgotten her little animal!

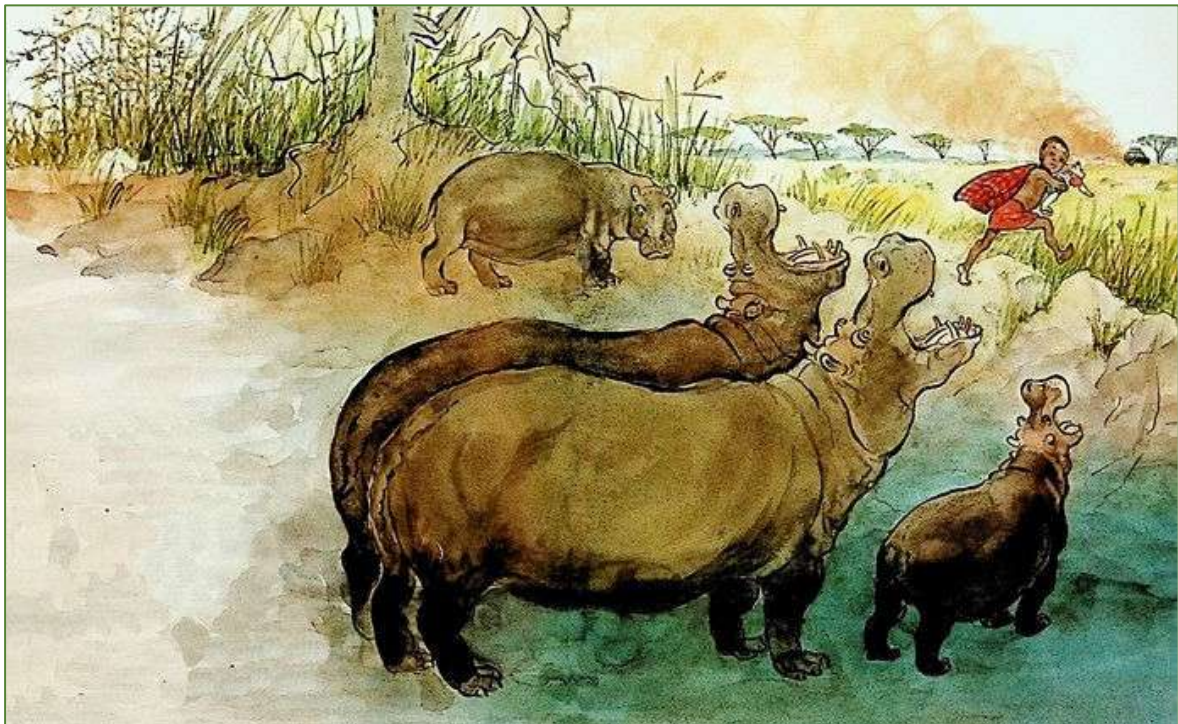
"Wait!" I call and run after her. "Wait!" I have to catch up with them.

I take a shortcut by the marshes.

"Hello, *Meto!*" *Kiboko*, a hippopotamus, calls to me. "What are you carrying in your arms? It

looks like a beautiful little creature—let me have it for my son!"

"Oh, no, *Kiboko!*" I yell back. I do not stop to explain.



A little farther away, *Simba*, a lion, is taking a nap with her family. I must be very quiet. I tiptoe.

"Wait!" *Simba* roars. "I smell a strange smell. Is there a new animal in my kingdom?"

The car is getting farther and farther away.



**"Hello, *Tembo!*" An elephant! "You have big ears—can you hear the car?"**

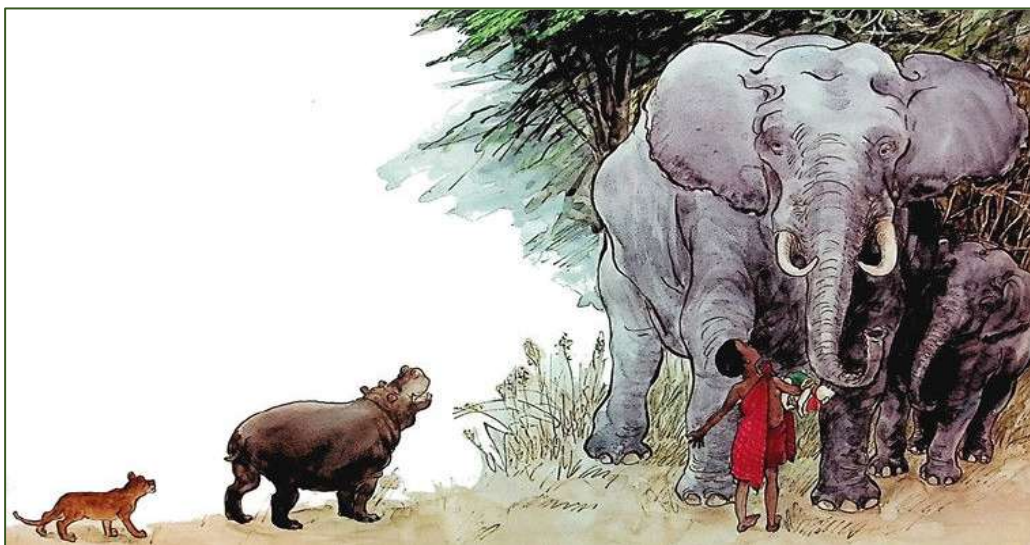
**"Yes, *Meto*. But I also hear a young girl crying." *Tembo* points his long trunk to show the way.**

**"I must find her to give her little animal back to her."**

**"I have never seen anything like this animal," *Tembo* says.**

**"It comes from a country far, far away. It has to go back with that little girl."**

**"Run, *Meto!* Quick! If I can hear her, she must still be close by!"**



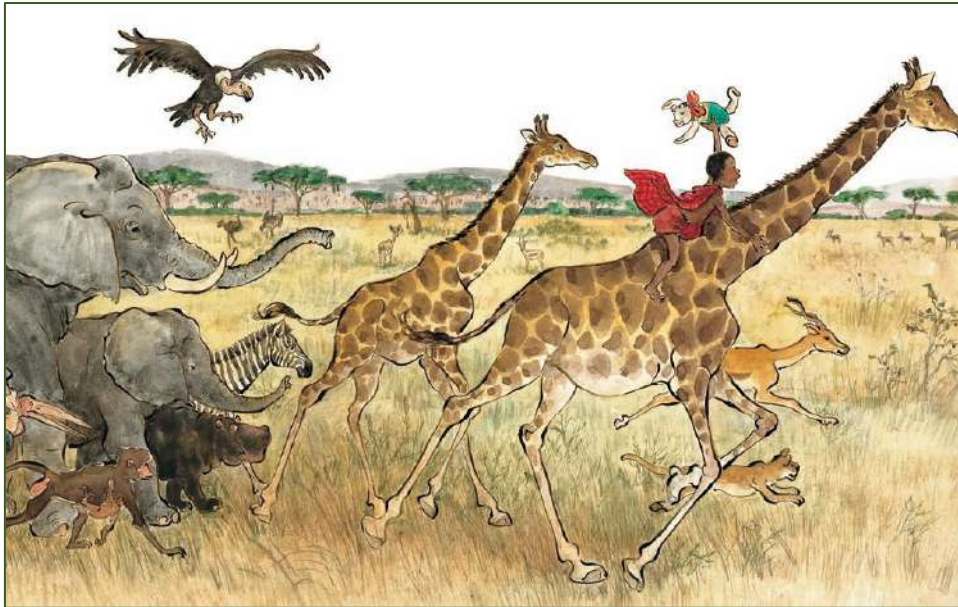
**"Hello, *Twiga!*" A giraffe. "With your long neck, could you tell me if you see a green car?"**

**"Yes, I see it," the giraffe says. "It is getting close to a giant bird."**

**"That must be the plane that will take them back home! Help me, *Twiga*. I must give this little animal back to the girl!"**

**"How peculiar the animal is! I have never seen a tourist like this one before. Come on, *Meto*. Climb on my back!"**





**Twinga gallops, moving his long legs with all his might.**

**“Wait for us!” Kiboko, Simba and Tembo shout from behind.**

**“We want to find out who this strange animal is, too!”**

**“Faster, Twiga! Faster!” I shout. “They’re leaving!”**

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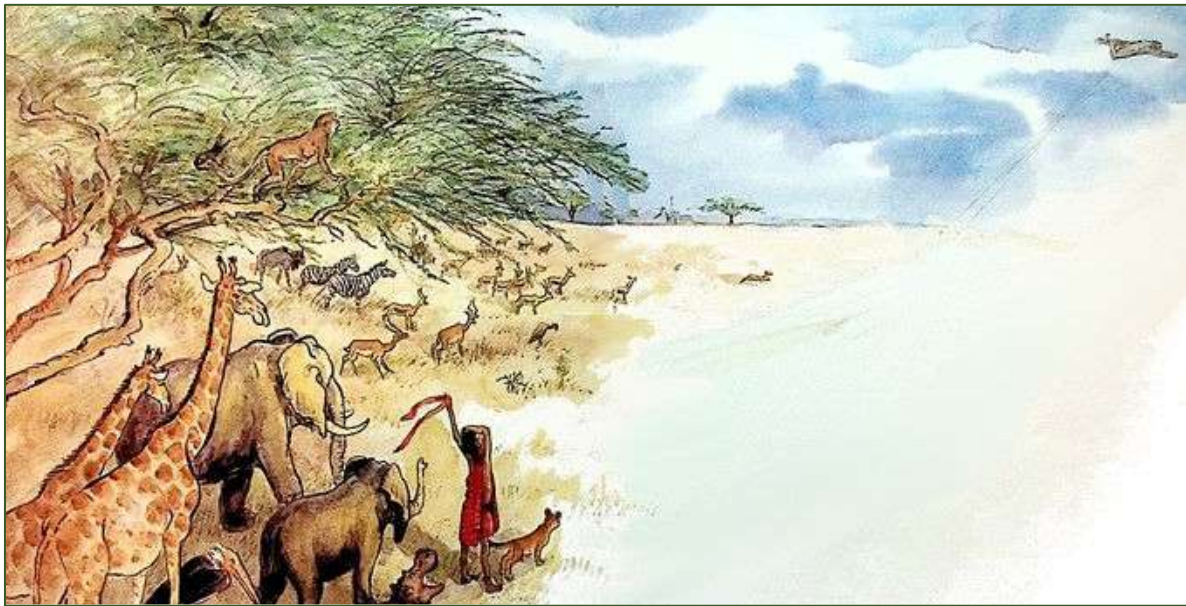
**“My bear! My bear!” the girl cries.**

**Bear! That must be the name of the little animal!**

**“You have found him!” she says. She gives me her red ribbon. “For your goat,” she says, and runs back to the plane.**



Soon the airplane carried the little girl and her animal disappears into the clouds.



The news spreads quickly through the savanna.

“That little animal—he was a bear,” says a bounding antelope.

“A bear?” wonders an old zebra. “But there are no bears in Africa.”

“He was here, I promise!” answer a lion cub. “The first bear in all of Africa.”

“How extraordinary!” they all marvel.



Satomi Ichikawa  
*The First Bear in Africa*  
Philomel, 2001