**Meercat scare by Vanessa Carelse**

It was a cold winter’s morning in the bush and all the animals were still huddled up in their burrows, warm below the frosted ground. As the sun began to rise higher in the sky, the animals began to stir and slowly crawled out of their burrows into the warm sunlight.

Ruben and his nephews, Bryce and Hayden, were sitting in the sun on top of their burrow, with their ears twitching left and right listening for any sound of danger. The bush is not a safe place for small animals like the meerkat.

When the sun reached its peak in the sky, Ruben said “come on, it is time to go and collect food, but remember to keep an eye out for danger”. He reminded them to listen to their bodies, because it would warn them when they were feeling unsafe. Ruben told Bryce and Hayden to stay together and sent them to look for food by the hollow baobab tree near the stream.

The two brothers took off with lightning speed as they loved running free with the cool wind blowing through their fur. They felt safe and happy and free!

As they approached the baobab tree they slowed down, their ears perking up, listening for any strange sounds. They saw a bush on the other side of the stream with bright orange berries on it. “Wow” Bryce said, “let’s go and get those berries”!

Hayden saw the stream he would need to jump over and began to feel nervous. His paws started to sweat, his knees became shaky and his heart began to beat faster. He didn’t know if he could make such a big jump.

Bryce ran and launched himself over the stream and landed on the other side. “Wow, that was so exciting”, he yelled back at his brother. Hayden’s whole body was shaking and his fur was standing up straight. He was afraid … he didn’t want to fall into the cold stream, but he wanted those berries. “Come on Hayden, just do it”, Bryce yelled from the other side.

Hayden stood still for a moment, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then he took a few steps back and ran as fast as he could. At the edge of the stream he jumped and flew through the air... to the other side. “I made it” he shouted, “I made it”!

The two brothers filled their tummies with berries and sat down on the green grass by the stream. Suddenly Bryce’s ears perked up and twitched, his fur stood up straight and his heart started to beat faster. He remembered what Ruben taught them … “always listen to your bodies” he said, “and when you feel your early warning signs, that means that you may be feeling unsafe”. He tapped Hayden on the back and said quietly … “I think that we have company, there is something in that bush over there”. Hayden’s legs started to shake, “I don’t think I can move …” he said with wide eyes, “my legs are like jelly”.

Then a low growling sound came from the centre of the bush, the growling got louder and louder. Hayden was frozen with fear … Bryce grabbed Hayden’s paw and started to run, dragging his brother behind him. “We’ve got to run brother, we’ve got to run” he said. They ran down stream until they saw a narrowing in the stream and leaped over to the other side, landing on a heap of sand. They looked back to see Ruben, laying on the ground, laughing. They dropped to the ground with a huge sigh of relief, waiting for their heartbeat to slow down. They were relieved that it was only Ruben having a joke with them.

* When did Hayden first began to feel nervous? (when he saw the stream he needed to jump over).
* What happened in his body that reminded him he was feeling unsafe? (sweaty paws, shaky knees, racing heartbeat).
* What do we call the signals that our bodies give us … like shaky knees and our hearts beating faster? (early warning signs).
* After Bryce and Hayden sat down on the grass, what happened to make them feel unsafe? (they heard a noise in the bush).
* What early warning signs did they both feel in their bodies? (Bryce’s fur stood straight up and his heart was beating fast, Hayden’s legs were like jelly and his body was frozen with fear).
* How did the story end? (it was a good ending, there was no danger. Ruben was pretending to be a wild animal and made some growling noises. Then he jumped out of the bush and Bryce and Hayden realised it was a joke, and they felt safe again).