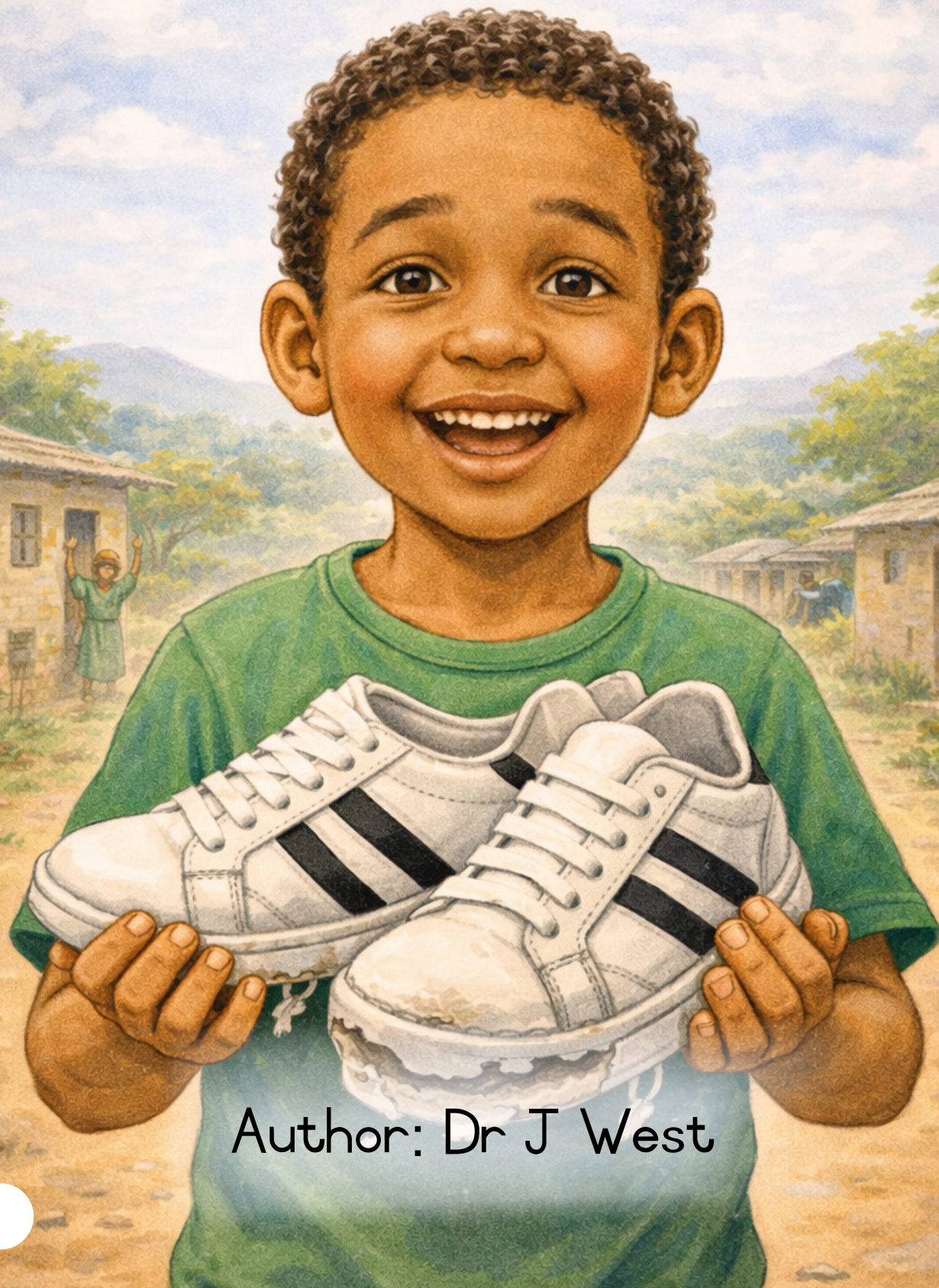


Turbo Thabo

and the Adi-Flop



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In the heart of Mzansi, where taxis hoot and vuvuzelas blare, where chickens cross the dusty road like they don't even care, lived Turbo Thabo, a kid with lightning in his legs.

Thabo lived in a buzzing kasi where the spaza shops line the street. He loved only three things more than his gogo's stew: Running, rhythm, and a fresh pair of shoes that flew.

Rhyming jingle:
In the streets of
Mzansi, under Jozi-
blue sky,
Turbo Thabo ran
so fast the taxis
blinked an eye.
“Yoh, that laaitie’s
quick,” the
neighbours used to
say,
“One day he’ll be on
TV, winning gold on
race day!”





There was just one problem
with our future star.

His takkies were finished,
they had gone too far. The
sole was peeling, the laces
were torn, one shoe had a
hole big enough to see the
lawn.

On the school field, Coach
Naidoo frowned.

“Eish, Thabo, your shoes have
seen too much ground.
You’ve got talent, my boy,
like proper Olympic stock,
But your takkies look like
they survived a taxi rank
rock.”

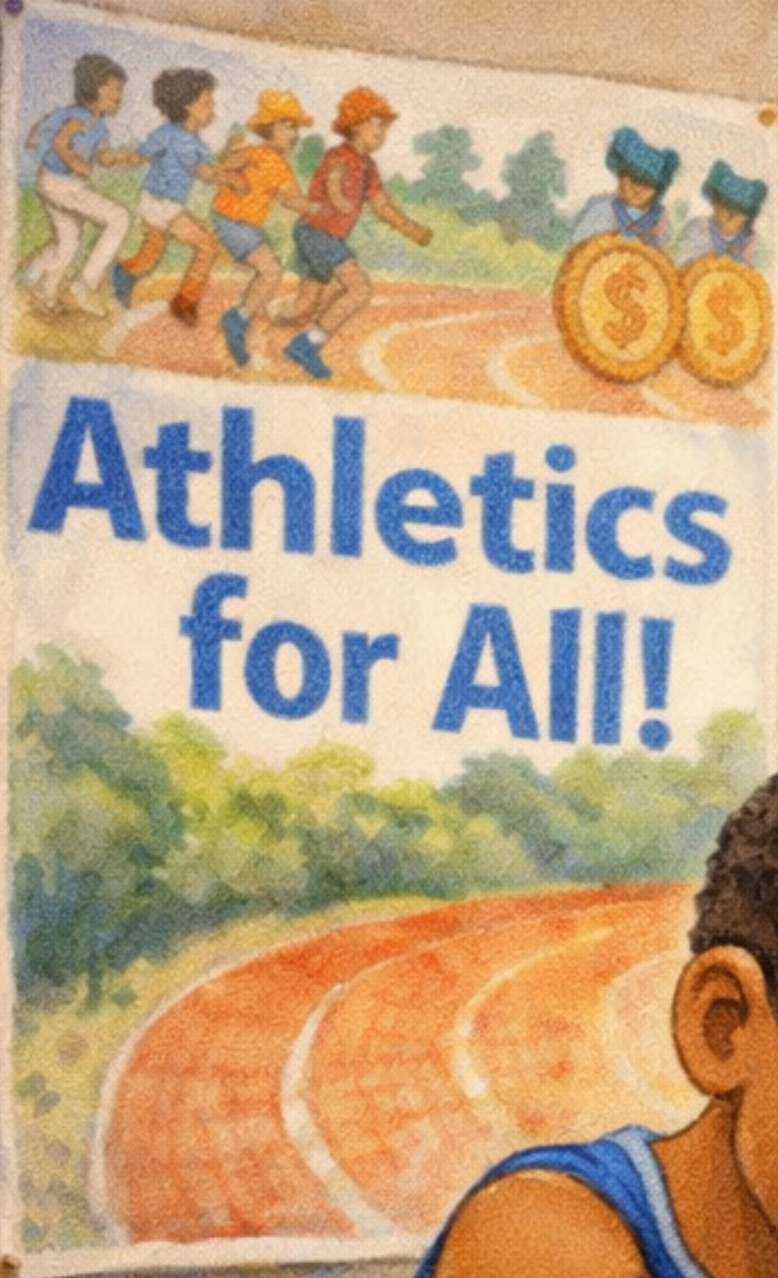
At home, Gogo sighed as she
washed in a tin basin,
“My child, life is tough, but keep on
pacing.

When there’s money, we’ll buy
new shoes, you’ll see.
For now, run barefoot... like we
did, shame, back in my history.”

Thabo nodded, but his heart felt
sore,
He wanted “proper brands” like he
saw in the store.
He dreamed of shiny stripes and
cushioning air,
Of shoes that whispered, “Bru,
we’ll take you anywhere.”

Rhyming jingle:
Old shoes, tired shoes, flapping on
the ground,
Every stride that Thabo took
made a slapping sound.
“One day,” he whispered, “I’ll have
stripes so fine,
Real adidas on my feet, and a
world-record time.”





Rhyming jingle:
Big race coming, hearts
pumping fast,
Thabo wanted a moment
that would forever last.
But with takkies so broken
they could barely stay on,
He wondered, "Will my
dream be over before it's
begun?"

Posters went up on the school corridor wall.

"The Great Gauteng Inter-Schools Athletics for All!" The stadium in town, proper tartan track, medals, TV cameras, snacks at the tuck shop shack.

Trials were set for the very next week,

Thabo didn't sleep; he was too hyped to speak. He kept picturing himself in the 100 metre dash, crowd shouting "Turbo! Turbo!" as he finished in a flash.

But in the middle of his dream, his old shoe tore again, the sole folded under and he nearly landed in the drain. He looked down sadly at the ragged, flapping mess, "How can I be a champion when my shoes are such a stress?"



On Saturday morning,
the kasi buzzed with
sound,
Music from taxis, kids
running around.
Thabo walked past Bra
Zama's spaza, trying not
to stare,
But something in the
window went sparkle-
sparkle there.
There they were –
shiny, white, and bright,
Shoes with three black
stripes just catching the
light.
A crooked sign said,
“SPECIAL! REAL
ADIDAS – CHEAP-
CHEAP!”
And Thabo's heart did a
hopeful leap.

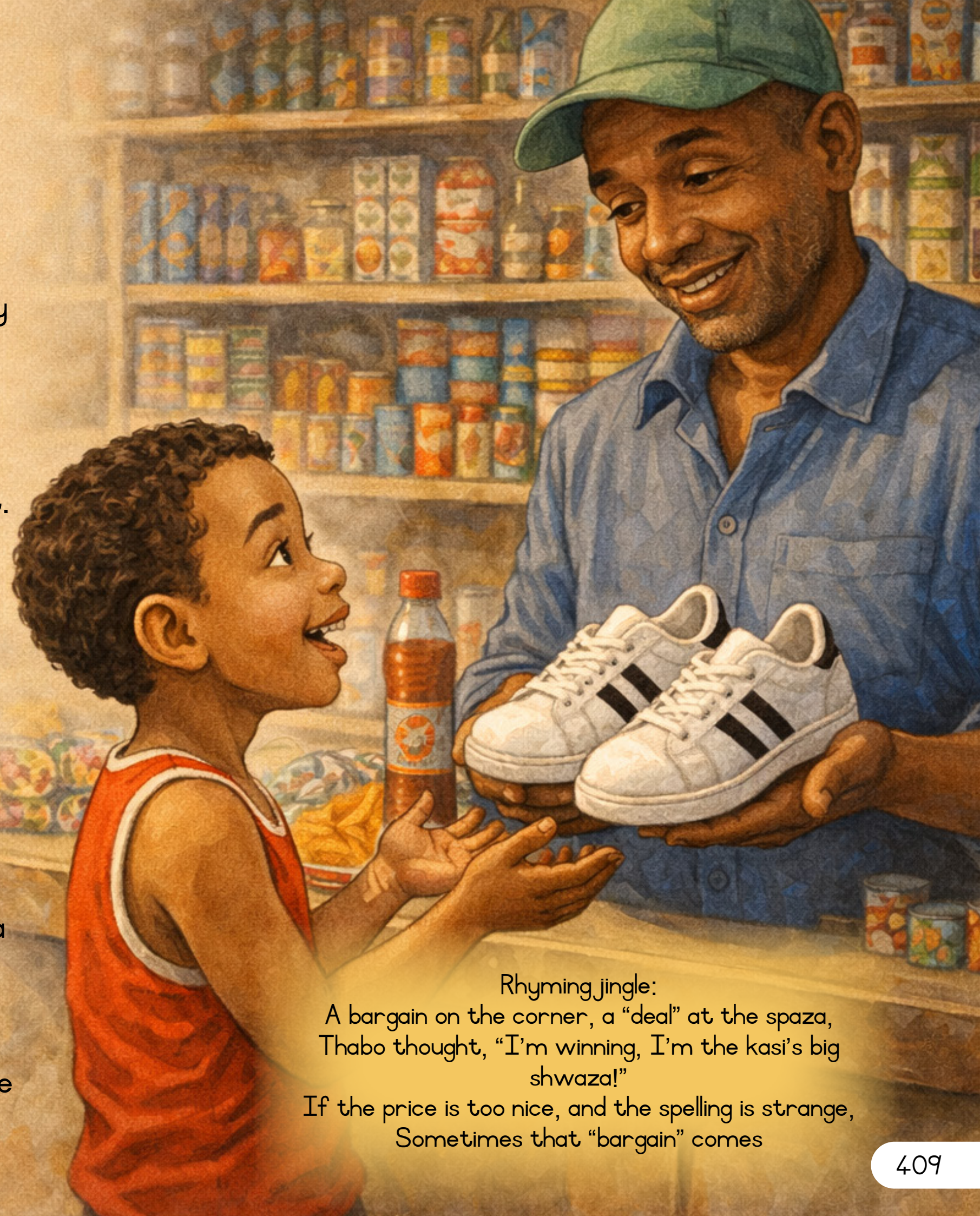
“Eish, bra, where did you get those?” Thabo asked, eyes wide. Bra Zama shrugged, wiping crumbs from his side.

“From my cousin in town – they fell off a truck...Don’t ask too many questions, just buy it!”

The logo looked... almost right but not quite. Was that an extra “i” hiding in the light? The box said “Adibas – Just Seet It” in skew print. But Thabo’s brain pushed away the suspicious hint. Thabo checked his pockets, coins clinked low, money from helping Gogo and sweeping next door. He counted again, then looked at the price, it was way too cheap, but oh, they looked nice.

“Are you sure they’re real, Bra Zama? Like, real-real?” Thabo asked, stomach doing a nervous wheel. “Of course, my boy,” the shopkeeper grinned. He handed over coins; Bra Zama sealed the deal, packed them in a box that didn’t quite feel real.

But Thabo hugged the box like his dreams came true. with a painful exchange.



Rhyming jingle:

A bargain on the corner, a “deal” at the spaza,
Thabo thought, “I’m winning, I’m the kasi’s big
shwaza!”

If the price is too nice, and the spelling is strange,
Sometimes that “bargain” comes



At home, Thabo crept in like a secret spy,
Hiding the box whenever Gogo walked by.
But Gogo's eyes were sharp as an eagle
on patrol, "You're acting funny, my child.
What's going on with you?"

He showed her the shoes with a proud
little dance, "Look, Gogo! Real adidas! I got
them by chance." Gogo squinted at the
logo, leaned in close, her eyebrows climbed
higher than the tip of his nose.

"My boy," she frowned, "this thing is not
right. These stripes look suspicious in
the light and this spelling – Adibas? What
nonsense is that? I can tell you that is
fake right off the bat.

But Thabo just laughed, "Ag Gogo,
you're old-school. These are new
style, you know, township-cool. As
long as I can run, that's all that
matters, I'll show them flames
when the starter gun chatters."

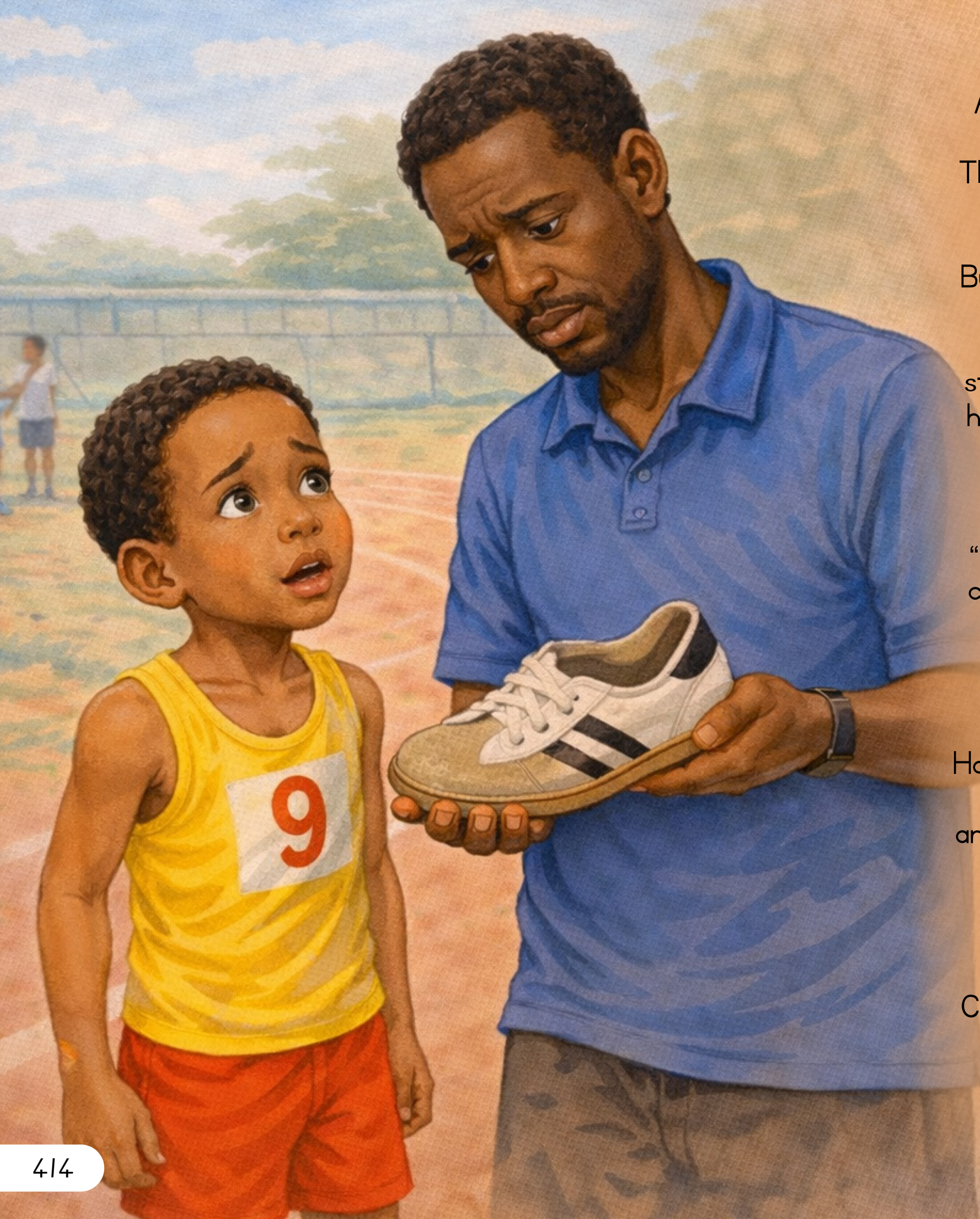


Monday's sun rose like a big golden grin, perfect for training, for medals to win. Thabo laced up his "Adibas" with flair, feeling like a superstar with brand-new air.

At the field, Lebo whistled, "Shoo, bru, those are lit!" Even Coach Naidoo said, "Eish, you're looking legit." But when Thabo jogged, a pinch bit his heel. Like a crab on the beach refusing to let feel.

He tried to ignore the scratching inside, maybe they just needed a longer test-ride. He sprinted one lap, then another, then more, but each step felt worse than the step before.

By the time training ended, his socks were red, blisters like tiny balloons spread on his tread. He limped home slowly, trying really hard not to cry, as his fake-Adi dream started to quietly die.



After practice, Coach called Thabo aside, “Why are you limping, my boy? Did you twist your stride?” Thabo shrugged, “It’s nothing, Coach, just need to be tough.”

But Coach knelt down and said, “No, this looks rough.”

He checked the shoe, pressed the thin sole, the stitching was crooked, the inside had a hole. “Thabo,” he said gently, “I don’t think these are real. They’re counterfeit — fakes. Do you know the deal?”

“Counter... what?” Thabo frowned in confusion. “Counterfeit, my boy. It’s like a brand illusion. They copy the logo, they copy the style, but the quality is trash, it won’t last a mile.”

He explained how fake goods aren’t checked for safety or strength,
How they break under pressure, don’t last any length.
“They can hurt your feet, your body, your health,
and they’re also illegal — they mess with the country’s wealth.”

Rhyming jingle:

“A fake is a fake, even if it looks cool,”
Coach said softly, “Don’t let a logo make you the fool.
Real things cost more ‘cause they’re tested and strong,
Fakes fall apart when the race gets long.”



That night, Thabo soaked his feet in warm salt water, while Gogo fussed over him. “See now?” she said, gently patting his knee, “I told you, my child, some bargains are not free.” He stared at the shoes lying quiet on the floor, They looked so perfect from far, but up close, even more. He saw loose threads, a glue stain on the side, and the inside label that said “Made by Adibas Pride.”

His tummy twisted like a washing machine spin, “Maybe tomorrow I’ll still win,” he whispered thin. “I’ll just push through the pain, I’ll run like a flame, I can’t tell Lebo and them – it’s too much shame.”

As he dozed off, he dreamed of the race, but the track turned into a giant shoelace. The crowd shouted, “Check the label!” from far, and his shoes melted like cheap chocolate in the car.

Rhyming jingle:

Night before the race, worries in his head,
Thabo tossed and turned in his creaky little bed.
“If I pretend they’re real, maybe they’ll behave,”
He hoped that courage alone could make his ankles
brave.

The next day, Thabo lined up with the other boys in his heat, blisters already burning on both his feet. The starter shouted, "ON YOUR MARKS!" strong and clear, Thabo breathed deep, trying to swallow his fear.

"GET SET!" he bent low, fingers gripping the track, right then his left shoe made a worrying crack. "GO!" shouted the starter, the others sprang out, but Thabo stumbled forward with a strangled shout.

The sole peeled away like a banana skin. His ankle twisted sharply, pain shooting in. He crashed to his knees, the world spinning loud, while the other runners bolted ahead, chasing the crowd.

Rhyming jingle:

At the bang of the gun, the dream fell flat. His fake shoes betrayed him and that was that. The crowd went silent as Thabo hit the floor, those "bargain" takkies couldn't carry him anymore.



Paramedics hurried with a small first-aid kit, helped him up gently, made him slowly sit. Lebo ran over, eyes big and wet, “Yoh, broer, are you okay? That was hectic, hey.”

The coach came too, his face kind and grave, “This is not your fault, my boy, you’re still brave. Sometimes we learn lessons the harder way, but your talent is still here – it didn’t run away.”

Thabo’s ankle was sprained, his race day was done, his fake-Adi “dream shoes” had completely won...
At destroying his chance, his confidence, his pride, all for a cheap logo on the side.

He watched the finals from a plastic chair,
Ice on his ankle, heart full of despair.
The loudspeaker shouted names of kids
who took the lead, but none of them knew
about his hurt and his need.





The next week at school, Miss Dlamini walked in, holding a box of random things with a grin. “Today’s LO lesson,” she said, “is a bit of a surprise. We’re talking about fake goods and being street-wise.”

She held up two T-shirts – both bright and bold, one bought in the mall, the other parked in the cold. “Which one is real? Which one is fake? What clues do you see? What’s at stake?”

They spotted spelling errors, crooked tags inside, loose threads dangling, colours that didn’t quite abide. Then she explained how fakes can be dangerous too. Not just shoes that split, but food and chargers and glue. “Some fake products can even make you sick,” she said, “Cheap chemicals, bad wiring – they don’t care who’s dead.

And all this illegal stuff hurts our economy as well, so that cheap bargain might be more trouble than you can tell.”

Rhyming jingle:

Fake shoes, fake phones, fake creams for your face,
May seem like a bargain but can put you in a bad place.
Being smart as a shopper is part of being strong,
Think before you buy – is this right or wrong?

When the lesson was done, Miss Dlamini softly said,
“Does anyone have a story about fake goods in their
head?”

The class went quiet; eyes slid to the floor, until
Thabo slowly raised his hand from the back door.

He told them about the spaza, the “Adibas” shine,
the too-low price that felt almost divine. He showed
them the blisters, talked about the race, about the
shame and the pain and the fall on his face.

“Yoh,” whispered someone, “I bought a fake watch
too.

It stopped after three days and turned my arm
blue.”

Another said, “My cousin’s charger nearly blew a plug,
The plastic melted, left a smoky hug.”

Miss Dlamini nodded, “Thank you for being brave.
Stories like this help others to be safe. We’re not
here to laugh; we’re here to learn.

Real awareness is the best prize you can earn.”

Rhyming jingle:

Telling the truth can feel heavy and sore, but it opens
a window, it unlocks a door. Thabo’s story echoed
through the classroom air,
Turning private pain into something they could share.





Later that week, Coach and Gogo had a plan, they walked to the spaza with Thabo holding Gogo's hand. Bra Zama looked nervous when he saw them come in.

"Eh, my people," he said, "what brings you here today?"

Gogo folded her arms in that no-nonsense way. "These fake takkies hurt my child, we need to talk about what you sell in this spaza, please."

Coach explained calmly about counterfeit goods and the law,
About safety standards and the quality flaw.

Bra Zama sighed, rubbing his forehead deep,
"I just wanted stock what was cheap-cheap-cheap.
"I didn't know they were so bad, I swear, I bought them from a guy at the taxi rank there. Next time I'll check, I'll ask for papers too, I don't want to hurt the kids who come to my queue."

Rhyming jingle:

Some sellers also get tricked by the fake,
Thinking it's just business and profit to make.
But when people talk openly and share what they know,
The whole community can help each other grow.

Thabo still dreamed of proper stripes
on his feet, no shady deals, no spelling
mistakes, no knock-offs hiding in
cardboard fakes.

He started washing cars on Saturdays
in the sun, helping neighbours carry
groceries when shopping was done. Soon
the coins in his jar became notes in a roll,
slowly climbing closer to his real-shoe goal.
Instead of buying cooldrinks and chips
every week, he saved and saved, even
when temptation would speak.

Rhyming jingle:

Saving is slow, like a tortoise in a race,
But it reaches the finish at a steady
pace.

Thabo learned that patience, not
shortcuts and fakes,
Builds dreams on a foundation that never
breaks.





Finally, one bright Friday after school, Thabo walked into the sports shop, trying to act cool. There on the shelf, under proper light, real adidas shoes sparkled clean and bright.

He checked the logo, the stitching, the tag, no crooked letters, no glue that would drag. He looked at the box, solid and strong, with a barcode and warranty, it all felt “right”, not “wrong”.

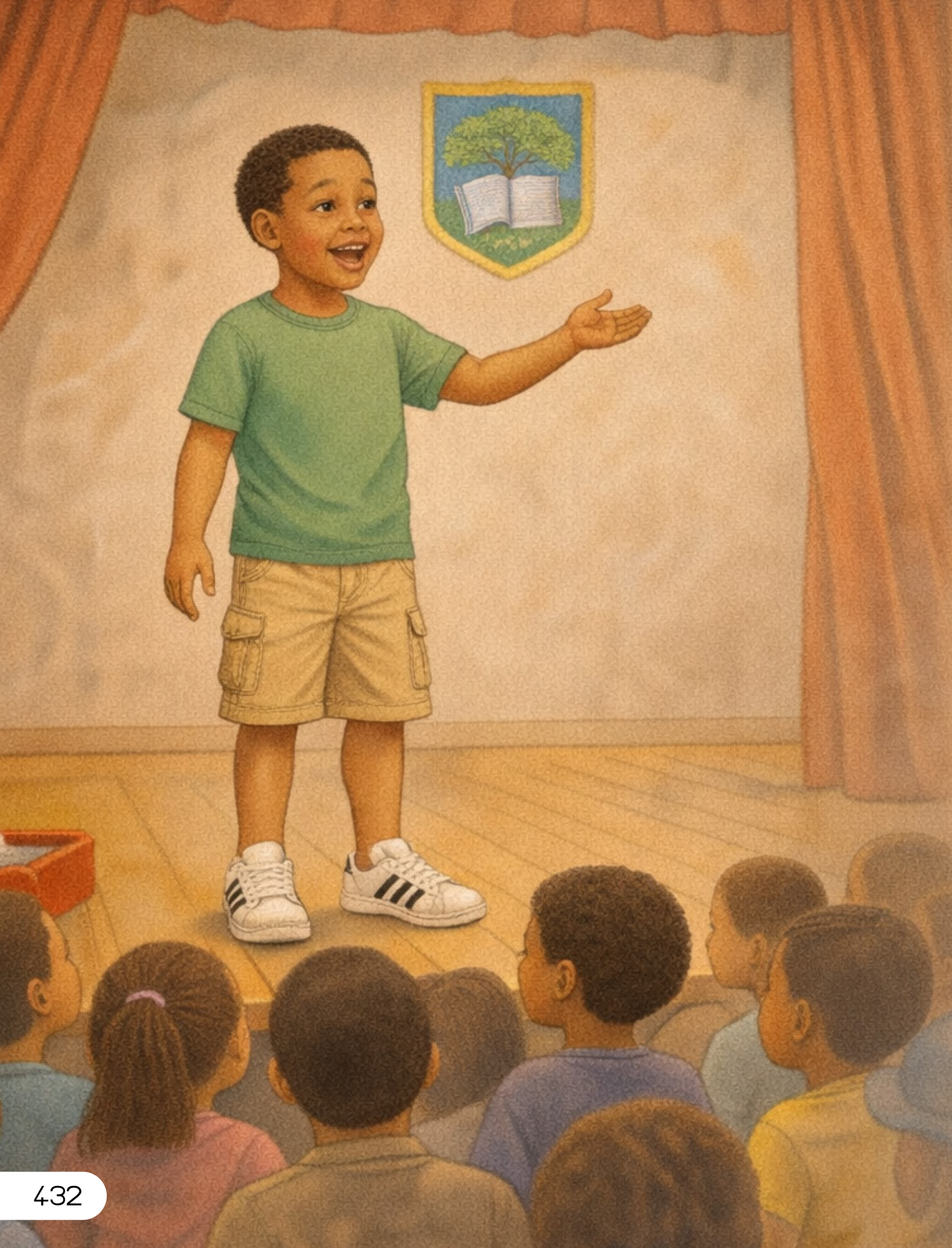
He paid with shaking hands, heart doing flips, Gogo smiled proudly and said “Now these have passed all the tests, they’re made to protect your feet, to give you your best.”

When he put them on, they hugged his feet tight, not pinching, just holding, feeling exactly right. He jogged around the shop, light as air, like his ankles were wrapped in cushioned care.

Rhyming jingle:

Real stripes, real strength, real comfort inside,
no hidden danger, nowhere to hide.

A true pair of takkies may cost a bit more,
But they’ll carry your dreams from the start to
the score.



At the next school assembly, Thabo took the mic, sharing his journey from fake to real.
He ended his talk with a grin and a clap,
Dropping a slogan like a proper rap:
“If the price is too nice and the logo’s skew,
Don’t let that ‘bargain’ break you in two.
Your feet, your health, your dreams, your vibe,
are worth more than any counterfeit bribe.”

The hall exploded in laughter and cheer,
They chanted, “No more fakes!” loud and clear.
Miss Dlamini nodded, Coach wiped a tear, Gogo
waved from the back with quiet pride and
cheer.

And from that day on, in that South African town,
kids looked at “specials” with a careful frown.
They asked more questions, they read each tag,
they refused to let counterfeits steal their swag.

Final rhyming jingle:
So remember this story when you’re keen to buy,
and a “too-good” deal is winking at your eye.
Check the facts, check the label, ask, “Is this legit?”
‘Cause your safety and your future are the real perfect fit.

The End