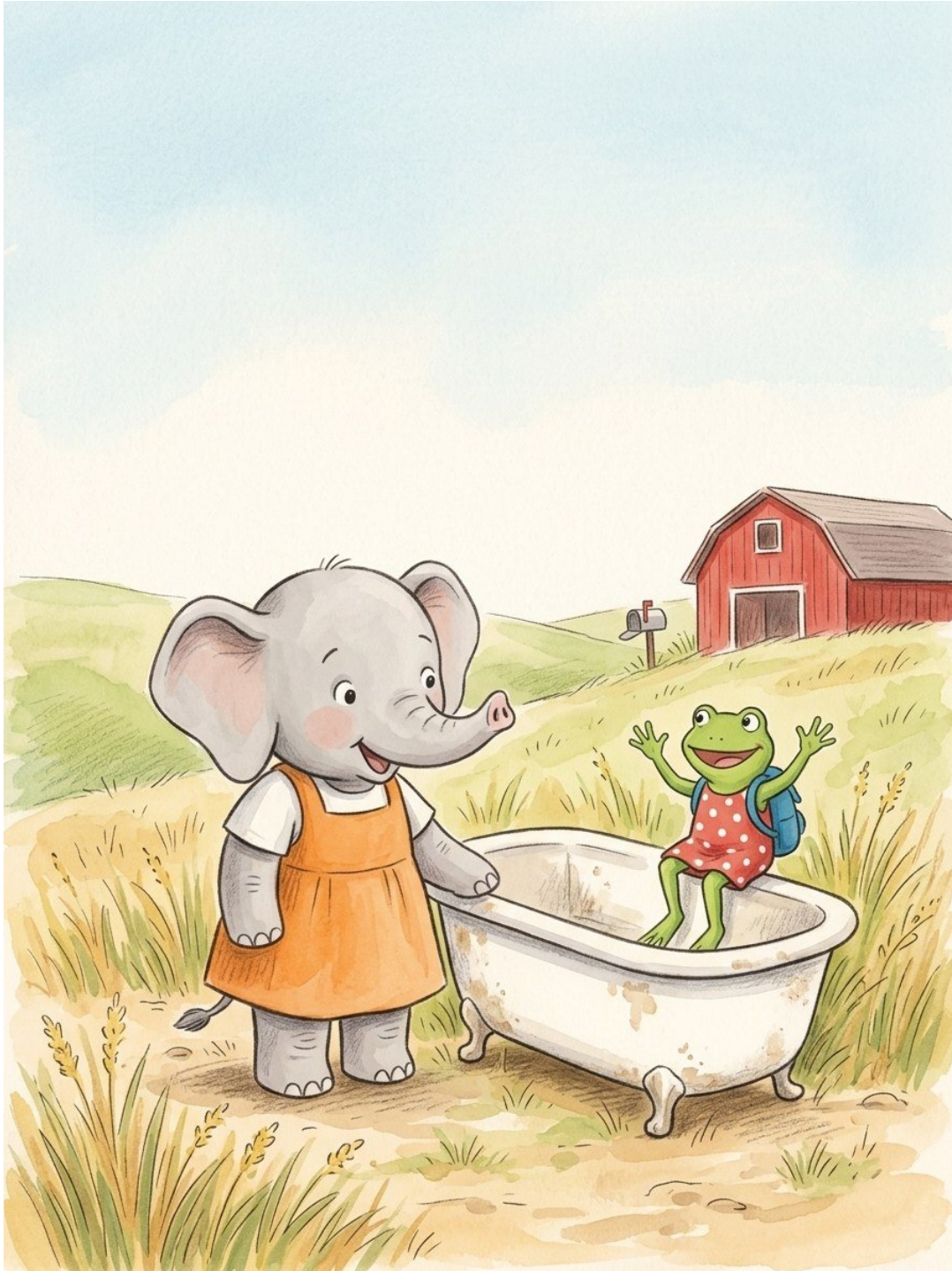




Tess and the Bathtub



It had not rained for weeks and weeks. The sun was hot every day, and the little pond got smaller and smaller. Now it was just a muddy puddle, no bigger than a sandbox. Fran the frog hopped up to her friend Tess, the elephant calf. "Come quick, Tess!" said Fran.



"I need your help." She showed Tess the puddle. A yellow sunfish and a fat gray catfish lay on their sides in the mud. They could not swim at all. "They need deep water," said Tess. "The big lake is just over the hill. I will find a way to get them there."



Tess ran to the farm, past the mailbox and around the pigpen. Behind the barn she found an old bathtub in the weeds. It was full of dust, with a cobweb in one corner. Tess wiped it clean, pushed the plug into the drain, and dragged it back to the puddle.



She sucked up water with her trunk and sprayed it into the bathtub, again and again. Then she gently lifted each fish and set it inside. The sunfish and the catfish wiggled their tails. Tess tied a rope to the bathtub and began to pull it uphill. The bathtub was very heavy.



In the middle of the hill, the rope slipped out of her trunk. The bathtub slid back down the hill, and water splashed over the sides. "Oh no!" cried Fran. Tess ran down after it. The fish were still inside, but a lot of the water was gone. "Pulling will not work," said Tess.



"I will push instead." She filled the bathtub again with the last of the puddle water. Then she got behind it and pushed with her head. Each time Tess stopped to rest, Fran put a rock under the bathtub so it could not slide back. Step by step, they went up the hill.



At last they reached the hilltop. Below them, the lake glowed pink and orange in the sunset. Tess pushed the bathtub down to the edge of the lake and tipped it over. Splash! The sunfish and the catfish dove into the deep, cool water and swam around and around.



Fran unzipped her backpack and took out a cupcake. "This is for the strongest friend I know," she said. Tess grinned and broke the cupcake in half so they could share it. Then they sat by the lake and watched the fish swim until the sun went down.