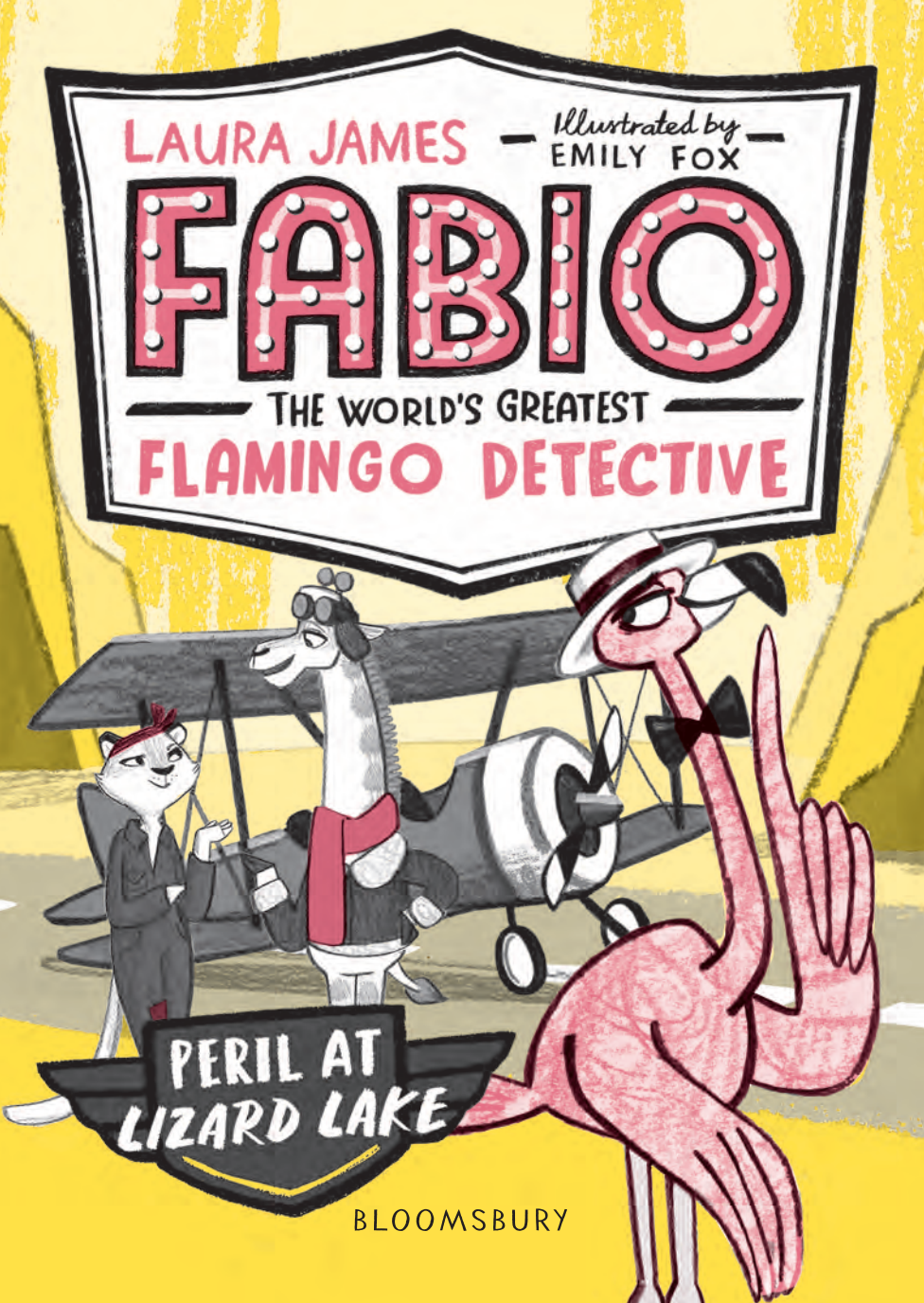
LAURA JAMES

Illustrated by EMILY FOX

FABIO

THE WORLD'S GREATEST FLAMINGO DETECTIVE



PERIL AT LIZARD LAKE

BLOOMSBURY

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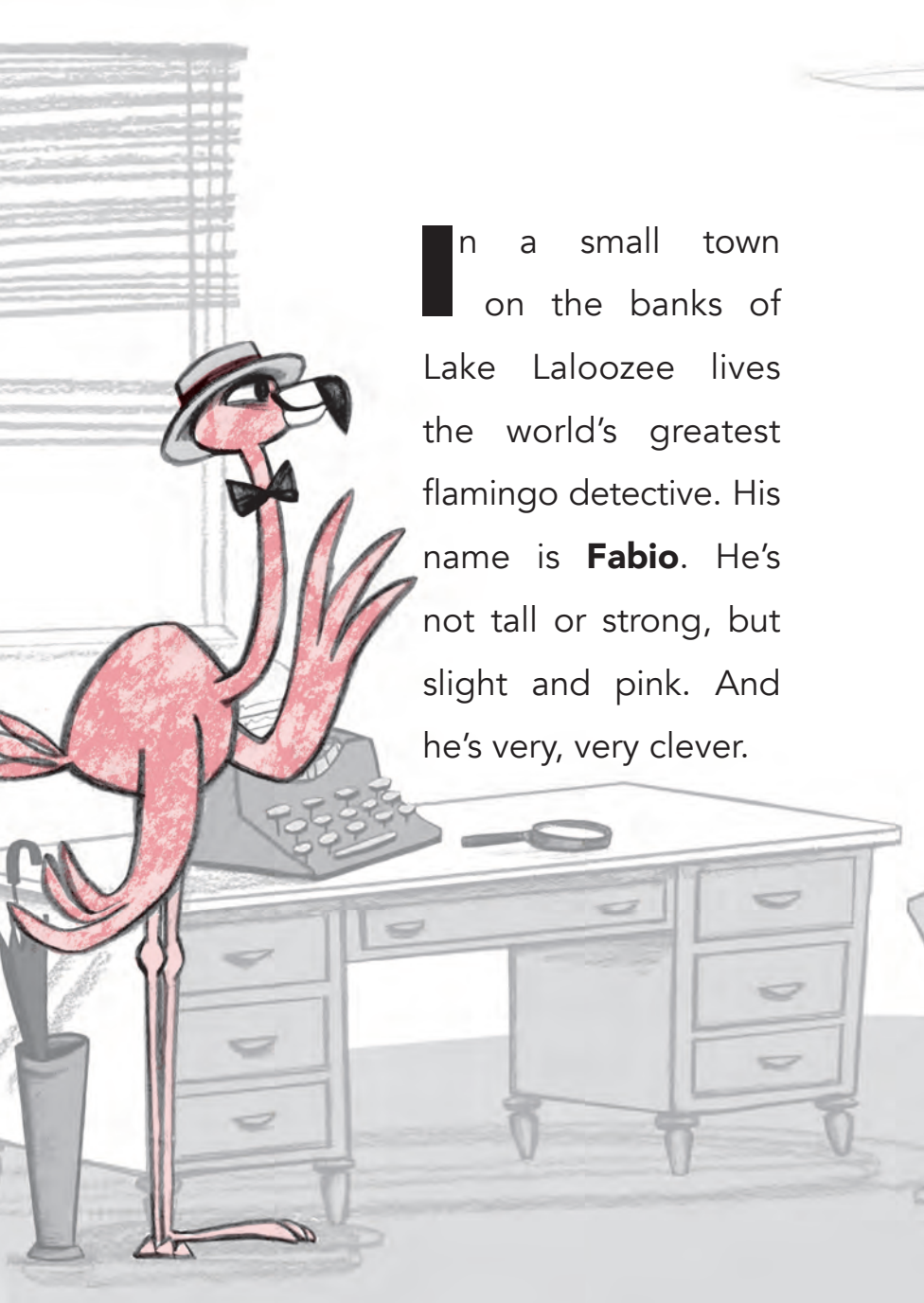
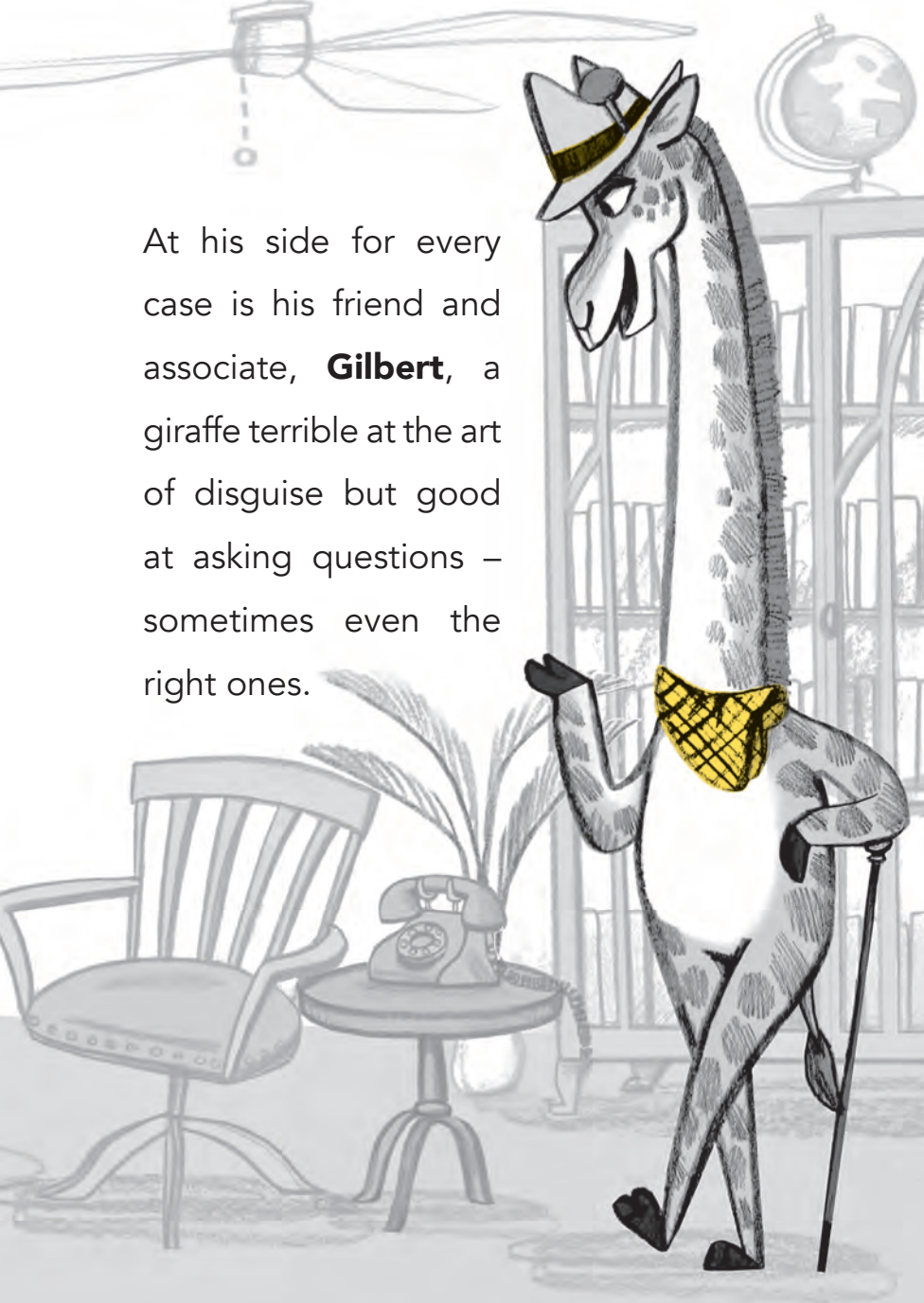


In a small town on the banks of Lake Laloozee lives the world's greatest flamingo detective. His name is **Fabio**. He's not tall or strong, but slight and pink. And he's very, very clever.

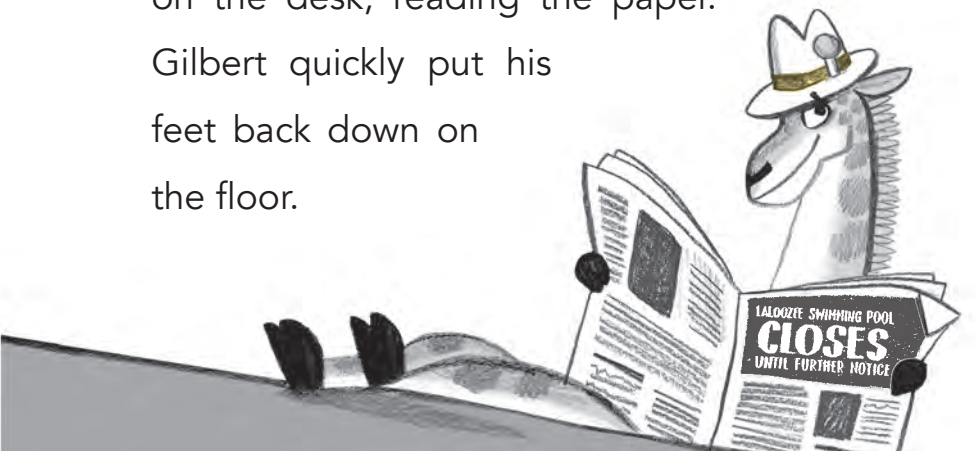
At his side for every case is his friend and associate, **Gilbert**, a giraffe terrible at the art of disguise but good at asking questions – sometimes even the right ones.



Chapter 1

Fabio walked wearily down Plume Street towards his office. The delights of his neighbourhood did not interest him that day.

He trudged up the stairs of his detective agency headquarters and entered to find Gilbert with his feet on the desk, reading the paper. Gilbert quickly put his feet back down on the floor.



‘Please tell me there’s something interesting in that pile,’ said Fabio, gesturing to the untidy stack of papers on Gilbert’s desk.

‘Slim pickings, I’m afraid,’ replied Gilbert. ‘There’s a case of a missing umbrella.’ Gilbert handed over the letter doubtfully. Fabio skim-read it and sighed.

‘Reply to Mr Wild suggesting that, as he thinks he lost his umbrella on the bus, he might like to return to the depot and ask if it has been handed in to the lost and found.’

‘Righto,’ said Gilbert, making a note.

'What about that one?' asked Fabio, glancing over at a scrap of paper.

'That was a telephone message,' said Gilbert. 'I think we must be listed incorrectly in the directory because everyone who's rung up seems to need a plumber, not a detective.'

Brrrrring brrrrring.

'That'll be another one!' said Gilbert, rolling his eyes. Then in his best telephone voice, 'Office of the world's greatest flamingo detective, Gilbert speaking,

how may I help you?'

Fabio took a stack of letters through to his office while Gilbert dealt with the enquiry. From the outer office he could hear Gilbert on the phone. His conversation sounded promising.

'… excellent! I'll head straight over. Thank you. Goodbye.'

Gilbert bounded into Fabio's office with a broad grin on his face.

Fabio stood up eagerly. 'A new case? Fit for the world's greatest flamingo detective?'

'Well, no, not exactly,' said Gilbert, a

little crestfallen. ‘But I think you’re going to like it. Something very exciting has just arrived. How would you like a day out of the office?’

‘That sounds like a splendid idea,’ replied Fabio, reaching for his hat. ‘Lead the way, my friend.’

It wasn’t long before they were racing through the streets of Laloozee in Gilbert’s sports car. Gilbert was bursting to tell Fabio the surprise.

He wasn't very good at keeping secrets, so it was taking quite a lot of effort not to give the game away.

They took the road out of town for about a mile and then swung left on to a dirt track. Fabio shut his eyes and held on to his hat until the car came to a stop.

'I bet you can't guess where we are!' said Gilbert, barely containing his excitement.

Fabio opened his eyes. 'An airfield,' he said decisively.

'How on earth did you guess that?' asked Gilbert, forgetting that Fabio

was something of an expert at making educated guesses.

'It was easy,' replied Fabio. 'Flat land, a big shed that could easily be an aircraft hangar and finally –' Fabio pointed – 'a windsock.'

'Oh,' sighed Gilbert. 'Nothing gets

past you. Well, you'll never guess what I've bought!'

'A submarine?' asked Fabio, with a twinkle in his eye.

'No! That would be … oh, ha ha, very funny,' replied Gilbert, realising he was being teased.

'Is it a plane, my friend?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, it is,' said Gilbert. 'Do you want to come and see it?'

Gilbert proudly led Fabio to the hangar and pulled back the doors to reveal a small silver biplane.

‘Isn’t she a beauty?’ he said, grinning. ‘I’m calling her Angel. Here, grab some goggles and hop in.’

With Gilbert’s help, Fabio climbed on to the wing and then into the front seat of the plane. Once he was safely strapped in, Gilbert took his place in the pilot’s seat.

‘I didn’t know you’d flown in one of these before,’ said Fabio.

‘Well, I haven’t exactly,’ confessed Gilbert. ‘But the stork who sold it to me taught me the basics – forward, up, down, that sort of thing. He flew her in

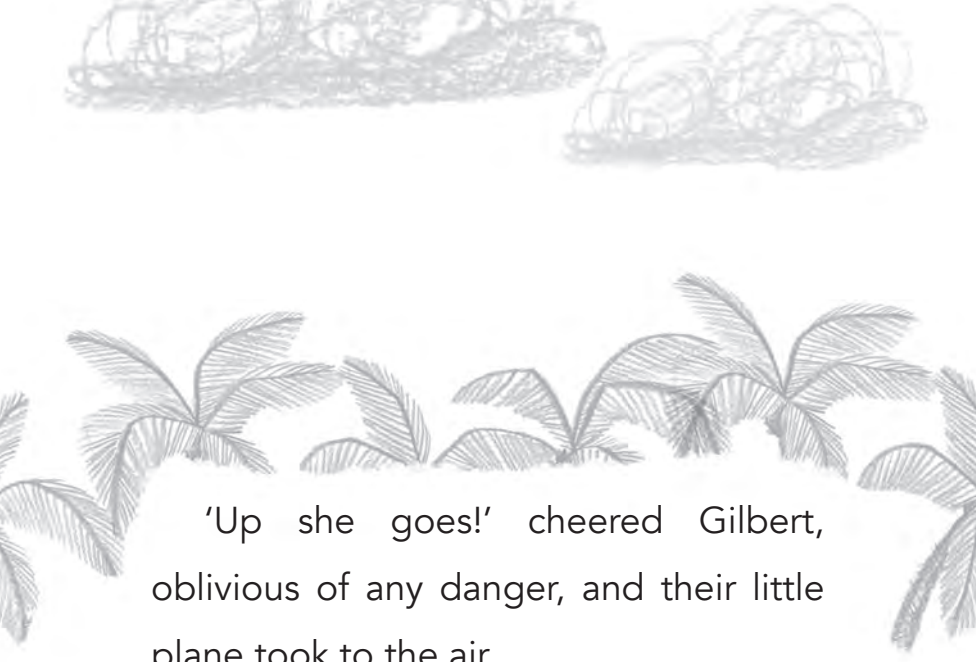
from the Coral Coast this morning. That was him calling the office. He said it's all very simple really. Logical, even. You'll like it, Fabio, I promise.'

Gilbert started the engines. 'Ready?'

'What, you mean … ?' But Fabio's voice was drowned out by the sound of the propellers starting and before he knew what was happening they were taxiing out of the hangar. At the top of the runway Gilbert tapped Fabio on the shoulder and gave him the thumbs up. Despite himself, Fabio did the same. But as Gilbert increased the throttle

and they prepared for take-off, Fabio suddenly yearned for that quiet day in the office.

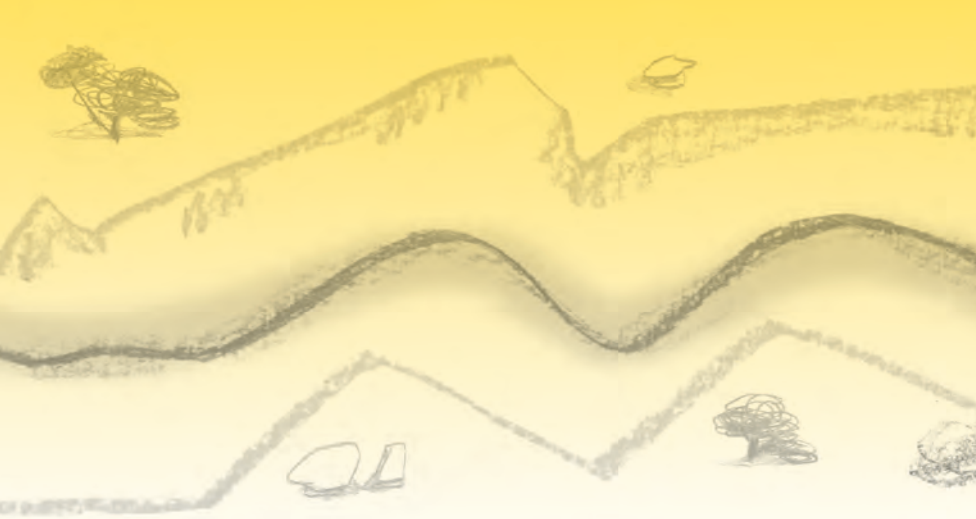
Their plane bumped off the ground once, and then again. The end of the runway and some very tall trees were rapidly getting closer.



'Up she goes!' cheered Gilbert, oblivious of any danger, and their little plane took to the air.

'Well, that wasn't too difficult,' he commented as Fabio noticed the wheels clipping branches below them.

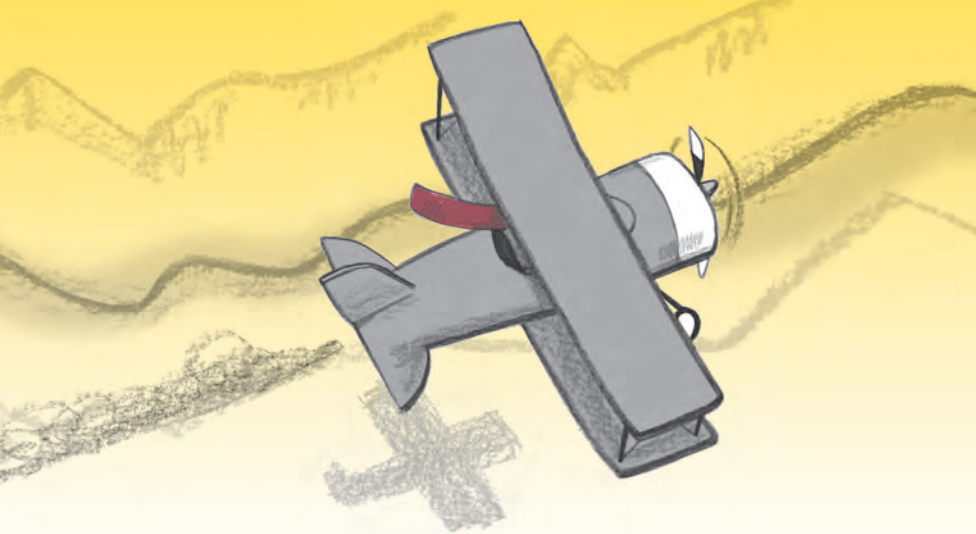
'I won't try anything fancy like a loop the loop on our first trip out,' shouted Gilbert over the noise of the engine, as he levelled the plane.



‘That’s very good of you, Gilbert,’ Fabio called back, but to his surprise he was enjoying himself.

The savannah stretched out below them. It was mostly lush grassland with the occasional settlement. The reflection of the morning sun twinkled on a tiny river as it meandered towards Laloozee.

Fabio hadn’t realised that flying



would suit him so well. He was about to tell Gilbert how much fun he was having when the engine spluttered. 'What was that?' he asked.

'Um, nothing,' called Gilbert, frantically looking at the instruments in front of him for clues.

The engine spluttered again.

'Gilbert? Did the stork who sold you

the plane refuel after flying all the way from the Coral Coast?' Fabio yelled back.

Gilbert's eyes finally found the fuel gauge just as the engine stopped completely. 'It appears we have run out of fuel,' Gilbert shouted. But he had no need to, as they were suddenly flying in eerie silence. 'Well, at least we can hear each other properly,' he joked, trying to stay positive.

'Didn't you check the fuel gauge before we took off?' asked Fabio.

'I didn't know I was supposed to,' replied Gilbert weakly.

'How did you think it stayed up in the air?'

As if on cue, the nose of the plane started to dive.

'Pull up!' shouted Fabio, as panic began to set in.

Gilbert wrestled the plane into a glide, but they were rapidly losing altitude.

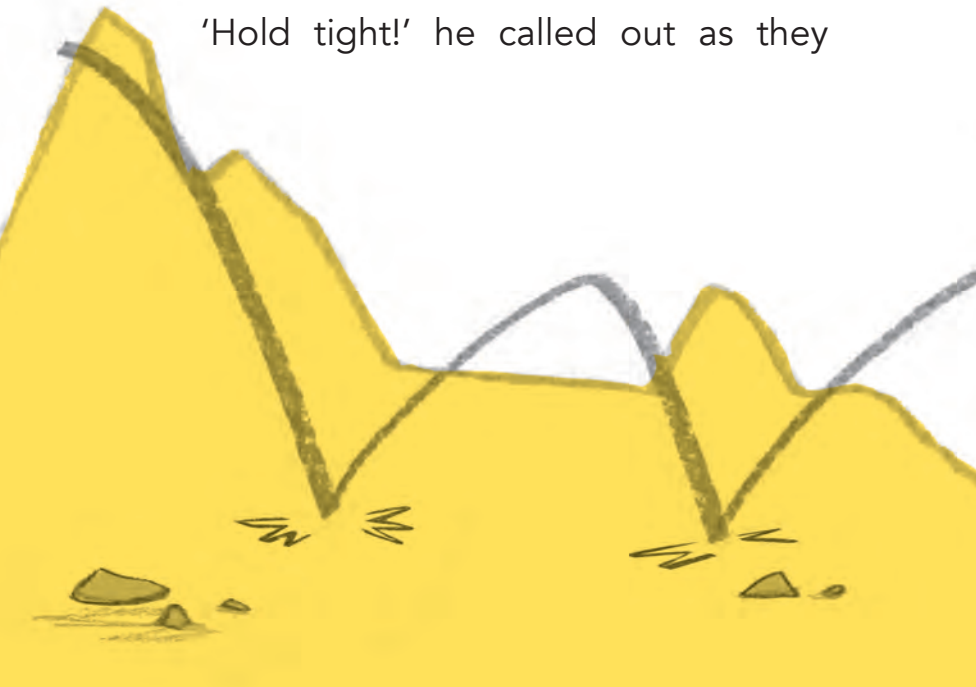
Fabio scanned the ground below, looking for a safe place to land.

'There!' he said, pointing to a clearing.

'I see it!' shouted Gilbert, as the ground got closer and closer.

Gilbert tried his best to follow Fabio's instructions and guide the small plane towards his suggested landing site. It wasn't easy.

'Hold tight!' he called out as they



connected with the ground. They bounced on touchdown before hitting the earth a second time, wing first. As it scraped along the ground, sparks flying, the wing acted as a brake and finally they stopped.

'Thank goodness this clearing was here!' said Gilbert cheerfully.

Eventually the dust settled and Fabio opened his eyes. He removed his goggles and looked around, a chill running down his spine. They were being watched.