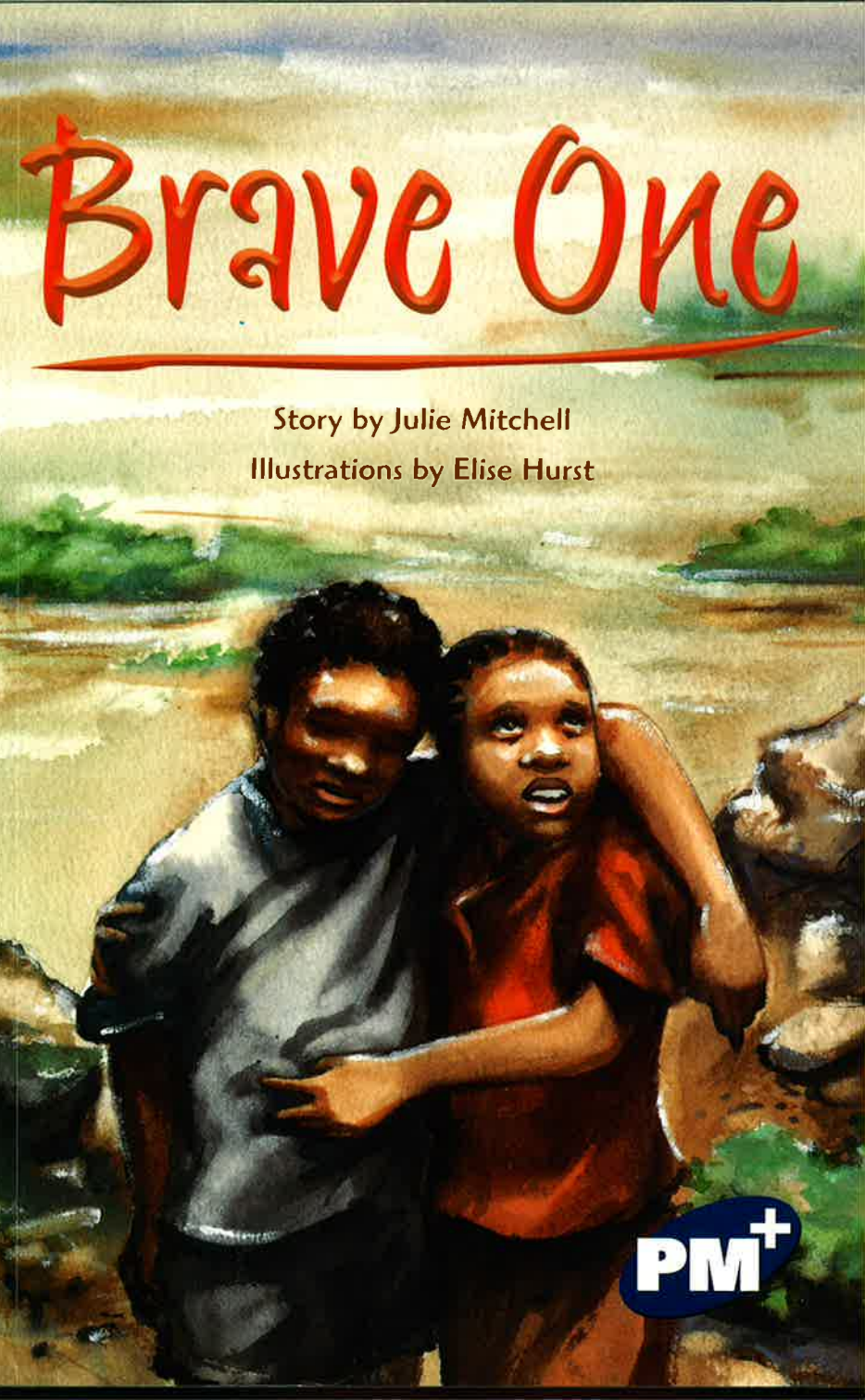
Brave One

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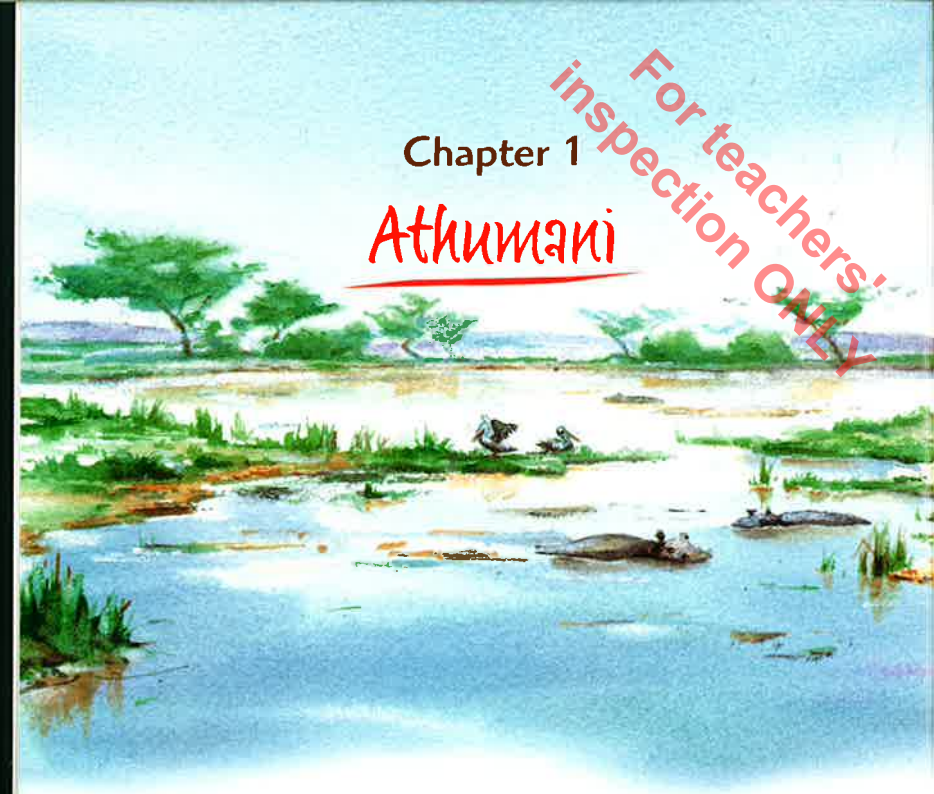
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Chapter 1

Athumani

Pili walked back towards her village from Lake Rukwa, her basket filled with wild mangoes and her mind filled with images of the lake's abundant life: glistening hippos spouting water; pink-legged spoonbills sifting through the mud flats; crocodiles gliding towards the unwary; fleets of pelicans; and everywhere, the small white butterflies. The lake was a place of wonder, and Pili had hoped it would wash away her sour mood. But as she walked on, her mood only grew darker.

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For one thing, it was hot and she ached for the refreshing monsoonal rains. The dry season should have ended weeks ago, but still the rains had not come and the trees and grasses of southwestern Tanzania hung limp in the humid air.

The endless heat was a burden, but Pili was more troubled by her brother, Kiondo. Kiondo and his silly poem. *Athumani, son of Ali, bravest hunter of his tribe* ..., it began, and Pili could see Kiondo in her mind, his eyes bright and his chest puffed out as he recited the words.



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The poem described how Athumani's people had been starving, and the young man had gone alone and hungry into the grasslands. There, he had followed a herd of antelope, and when the lions took an injured animal, he had fought them off and dragged the carcass home to his village.

Pili did not doubt Athumani's bravery, but she resented the effect the poem had on Kiondo. Her brother was fourteen – barely a year older than her – and they had always been close, but now Kiondo had an attitude. Boys were tougher than girls, he said. They were stronger and braver, too. No girl would have even tried to do what bold Athumani had done.

Still angry with Kiondo, Pili descended the gentle slope which led to her village. Now she could see the sheet-metal roof of Bwana Selim's store, the straw-thatched roofs of the mud houses which lined the dusty street and, among the trees, the palm-thatched roofs of the outlying huts.



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I hope Kiondo is out in the cassava field, Pili thought as she walked through the village. But when she reached the worn track that led to her home, she could see him beneath the doum palms, untying a bundle of roots.

He looked up, and gave her a huge smile. Pili's anger fell away. Kiondo was her brother and she loved him. She would forgive him, and everything would be all right again.

"What do you have in your basket, little sister?" Kiondo asked as she approached him.