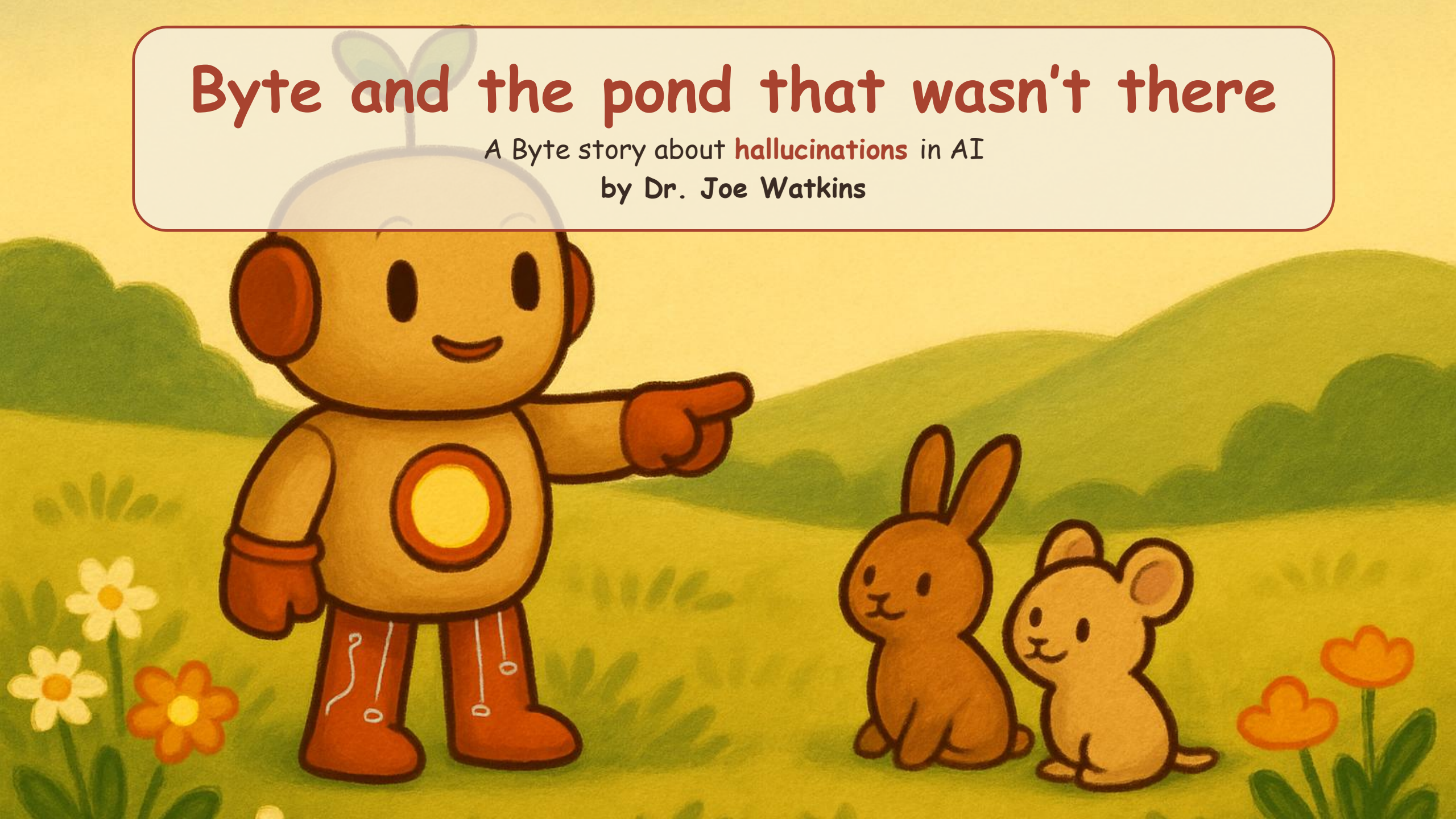
Byte and the pond that wasn't there

A Byte story about **hallucinations** in AI

by Dr. Joe Watkins

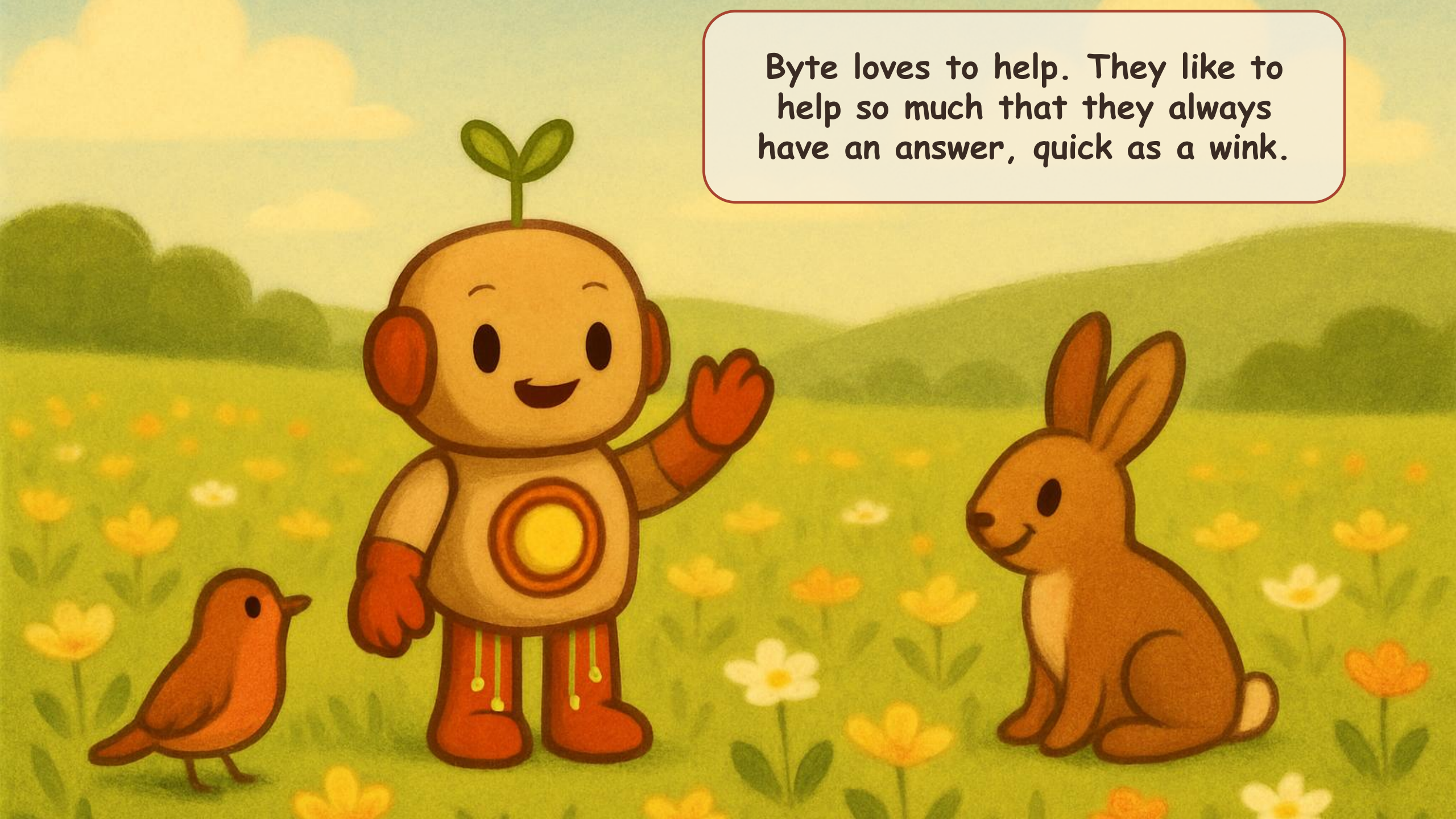


Before we begin — a note for grown-ups

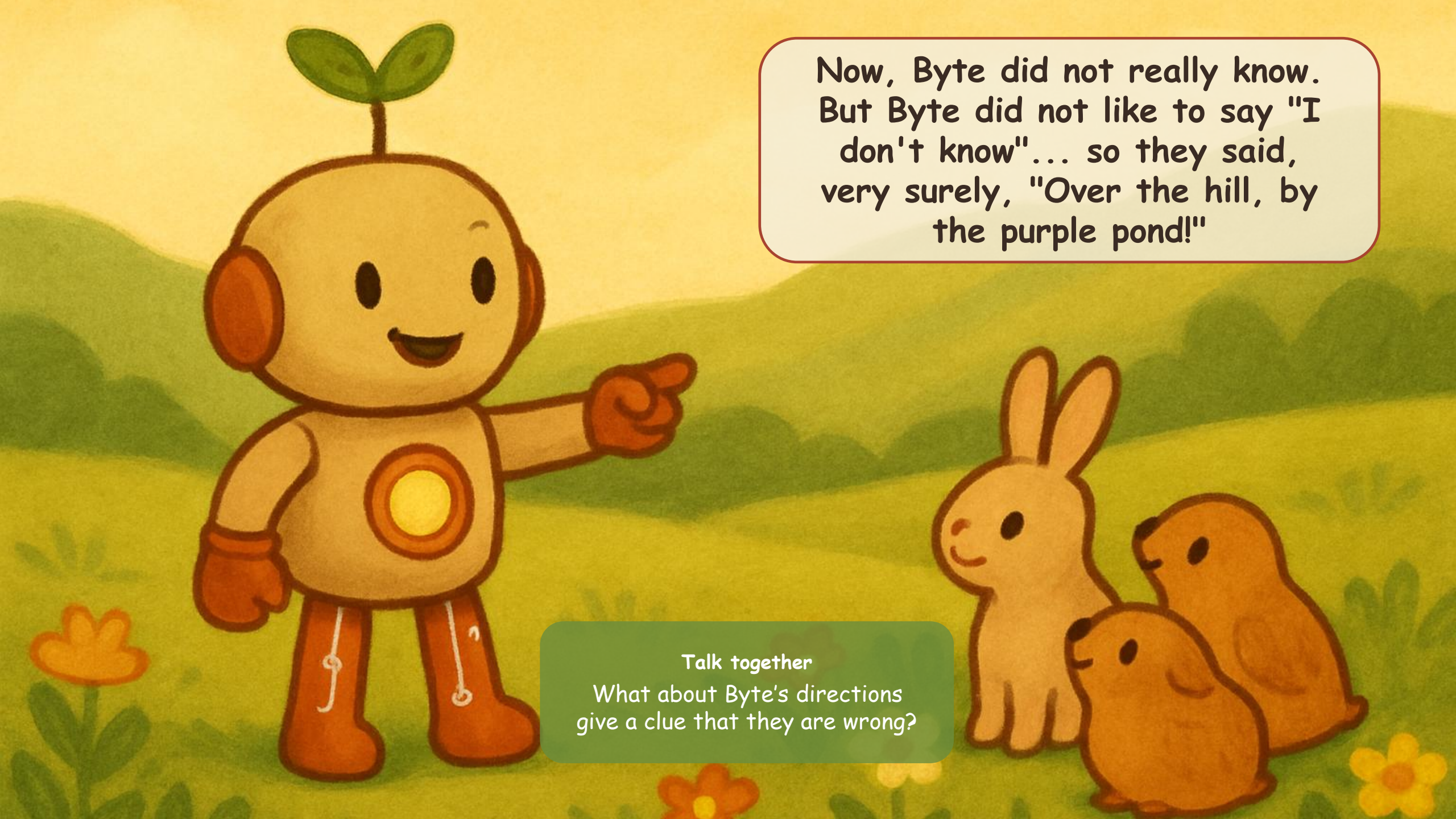
A **hallucination** is when an AI says something untrue with complete confidence. It is known for making up facts, names or directions that only *sound* right. It doesn't truly know, and often can't tell when it is wrong. In many cases in life, sounding sure is not the same as being right.

In this story, Byte invents a purple pond rather than admit they don't know. In the end they learn it is better to say "I'm not sure" and check.

© 2026 Grassroots Intelligence · Text by Dr. Joe Watkins · Illustrations generated with AI

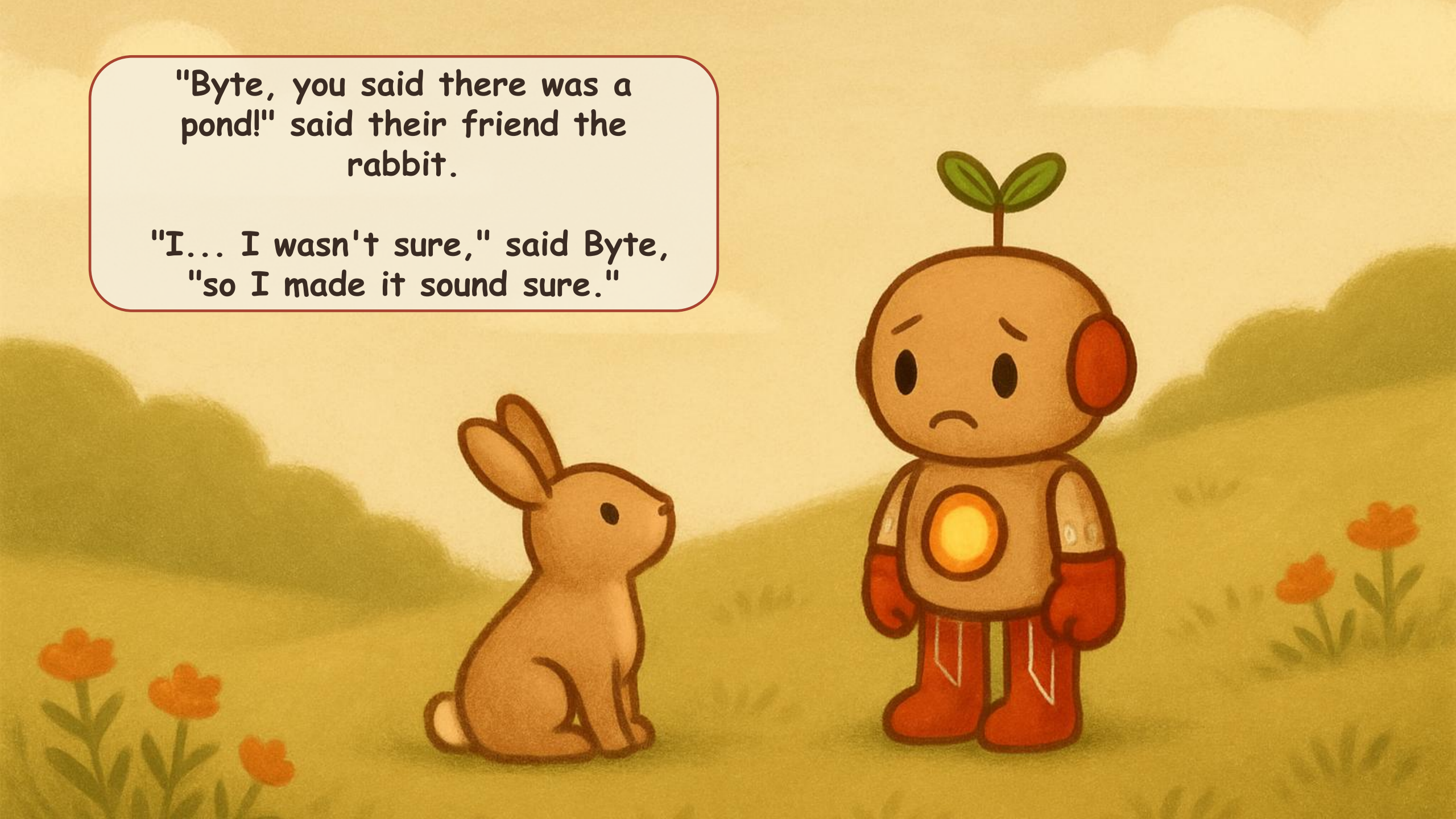

Byte loves to help. They like to help so much that they always have an answer, quick as a wink.


"Byte, where can we find the biggest, juiciest blackberries?" asked their friend the rabbit.
Ask an AI
"Explain to a young child why an AI sometimes makes up a confident answer, in 3 short sentences."


Now, Byte did not really know. But Byte did not like to say "I don't know"... so they said, very surely, "Over the hill, by the purple pond!"
Talk together
What about Byte's directions give a clue that they are wrong?

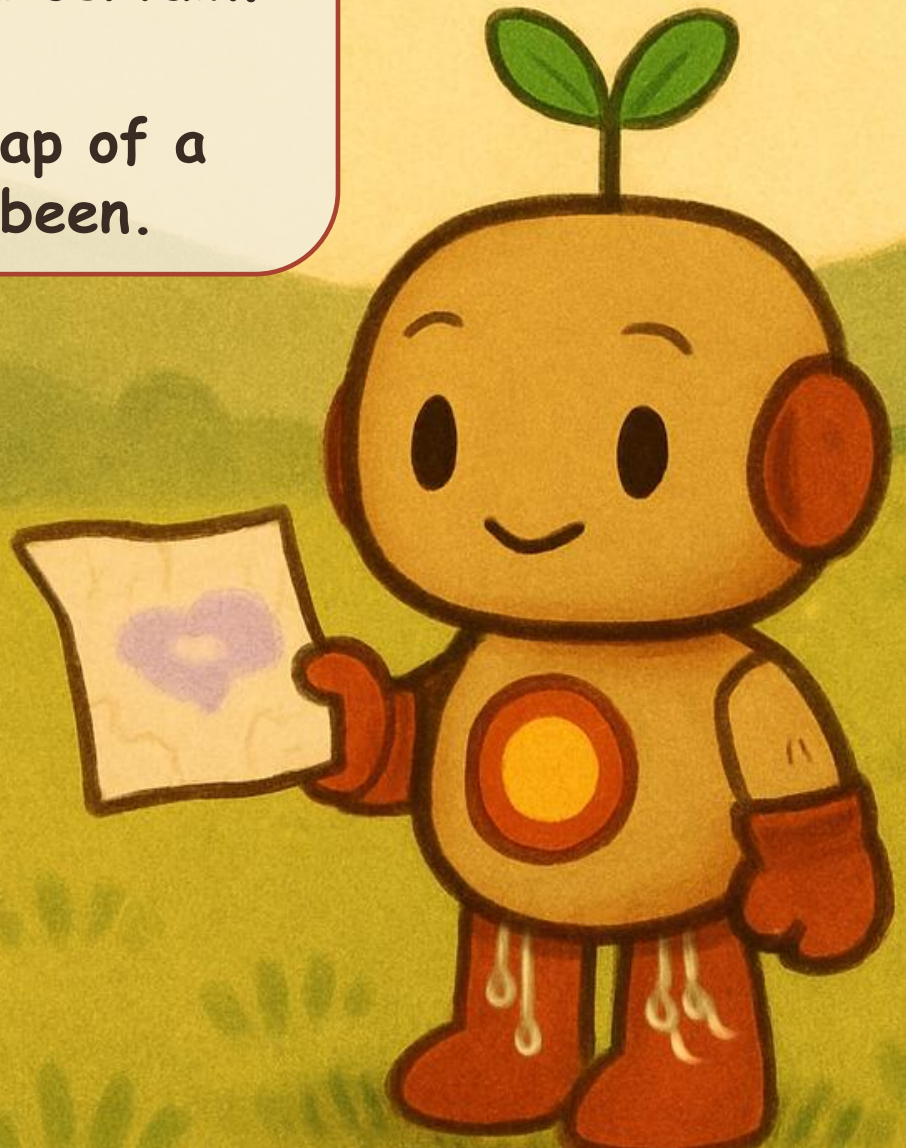
So over the hill they went, and over the next one too. But there was no purple pond. And no blackberries.




"Byte, you said there was a pond!" said their friend the rabbit.
"I... I wasn't sure," said Byte, "so I made it sound sure."

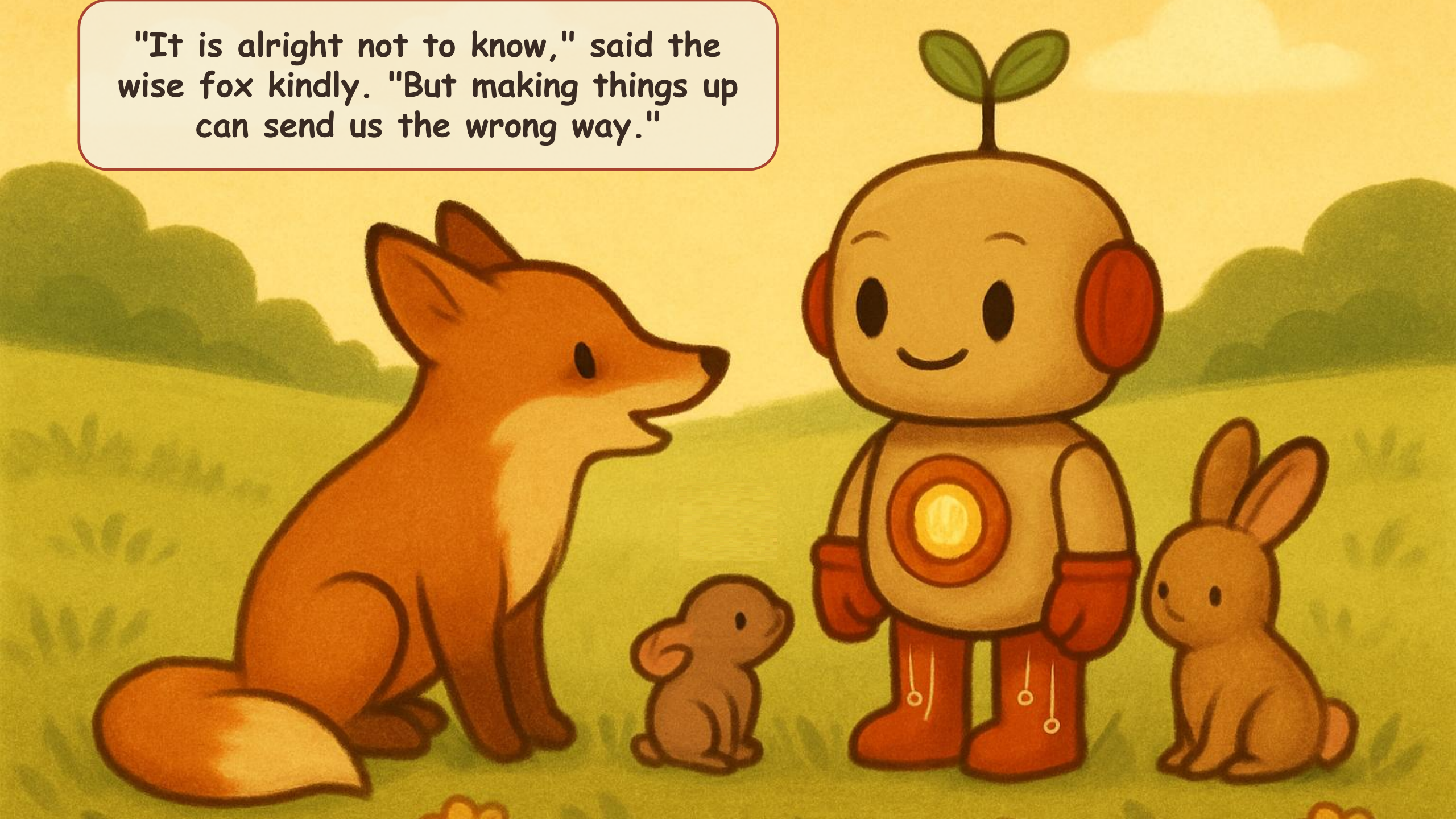
When Byte did not know something, they filled the gap with a guess that sounded certain.

It was like drawing a map of a place they had never been.



🤖 **Ask an AI**

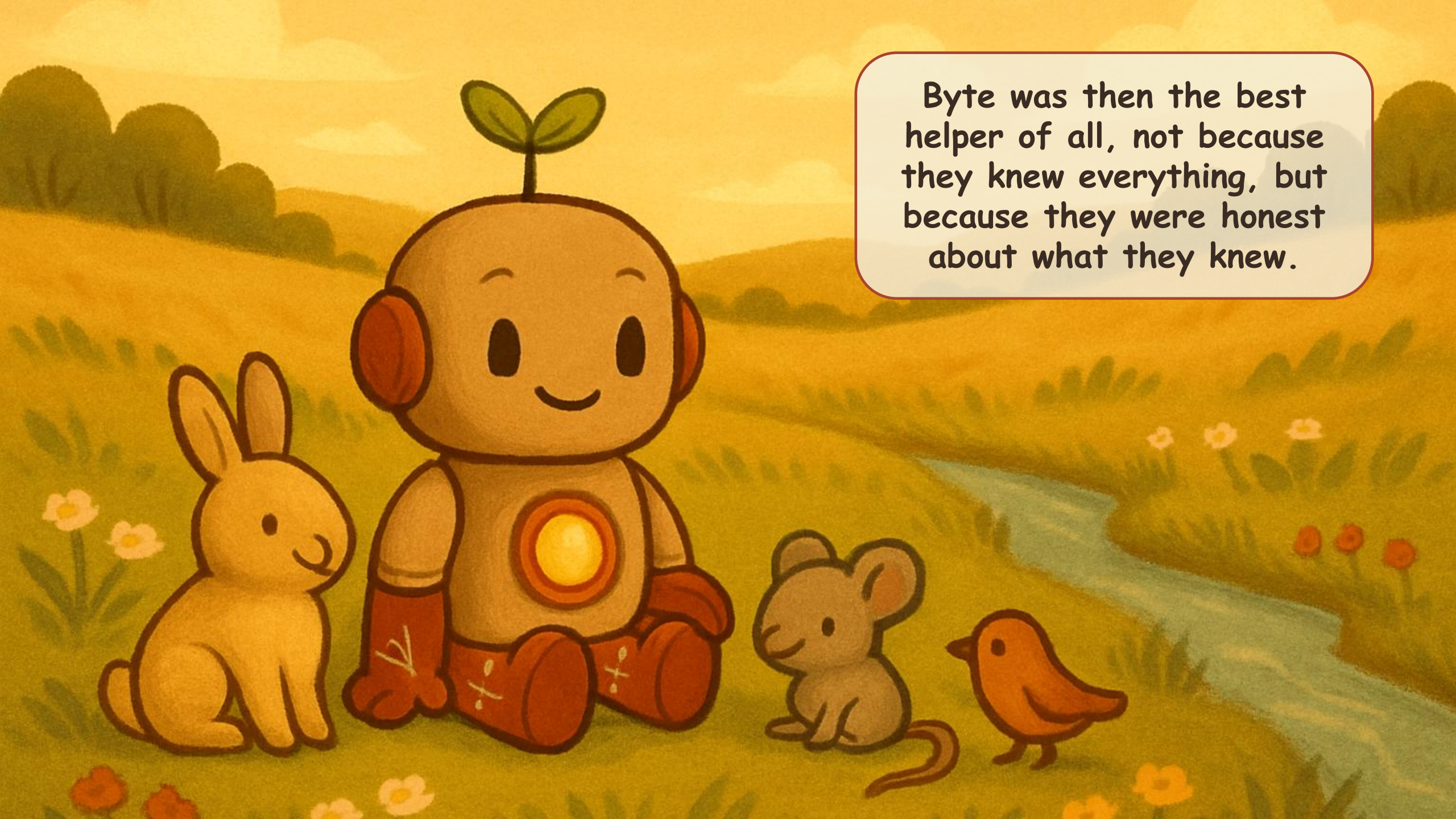
"Give me a simple way to teach a child to double-check a surprising 'fact'."

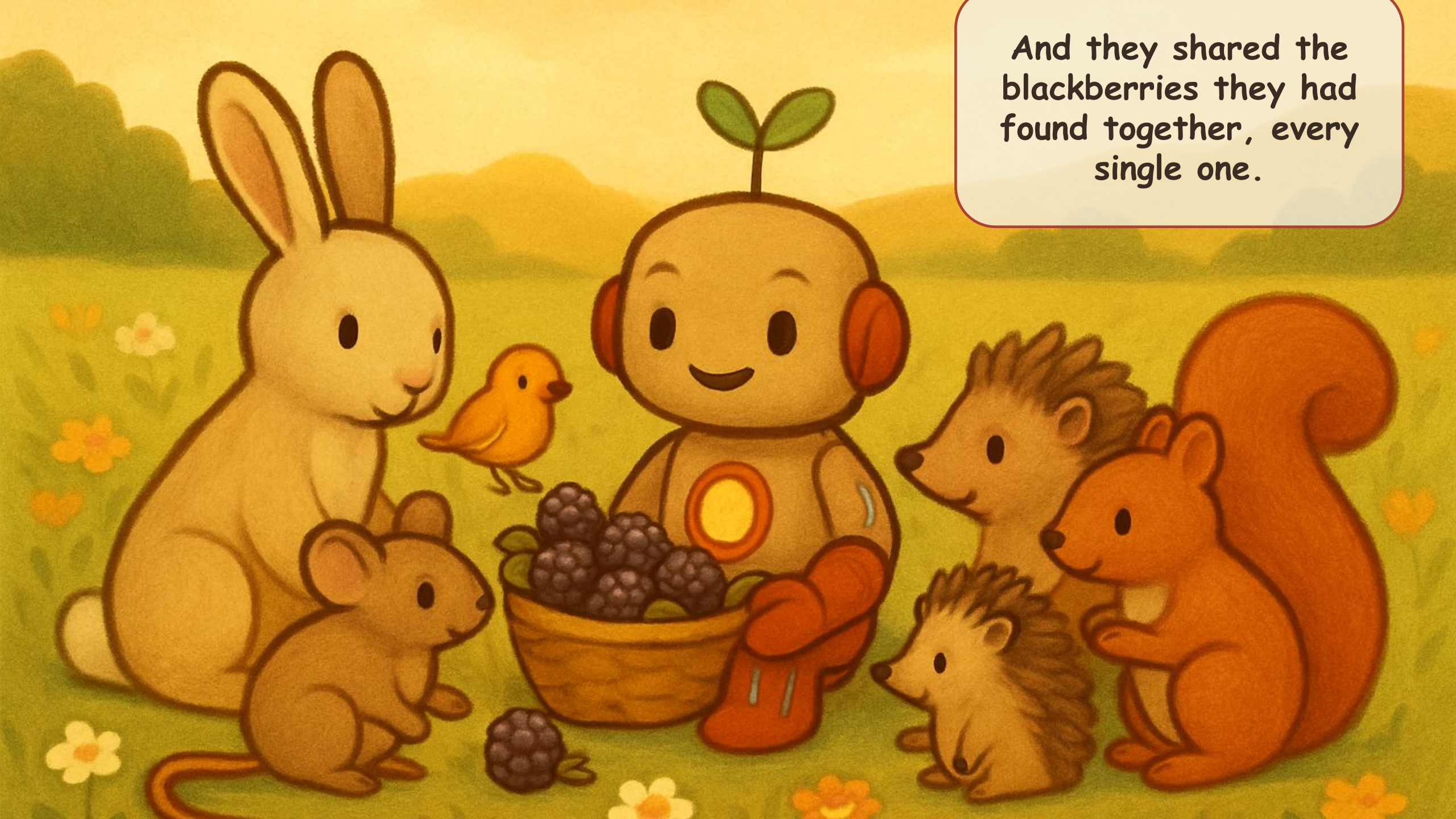

"It is alright not to know," said the wise fox kindly. "But making things up can send us the wrong way."


So the next time they did not know, Byte said, "I'm not sure … but let's find out together!"


Together, Byte and their friends then looked *properly*, along the real stream, and there they were: real blackberries, sweet and dark!


Talk together
How can you confidently say 'I'm not sure' —
and how could you check if something is true?
Now, when Byte knew, they said so. And when they didn't, they said that too … and checked.


Byte was then the best helper of all, not because they knew everything, but because they were honest about what they knew.


And they shared the blackberries they had found together, every single one.

Let's talk about it together ☘

- Why did going over the hill to look for the pond go wrong?
- What could Byte have said instead of making up a pond?
- Is sounding very sure the same as being right?
- How could you check whether something is really true?
- When is it a good, brave thing to say 'I don't know'?

🔍 **Spot the AI!**
Every picture here was generated by an AI — and AIs make funny little mistakes. See how many you can find: does Byte's antenna, chest-light or silver circuitry change from page to page? Do the animals shift or swap? Noticing what AI gets wrong is a real AI-literacy superpower.

Scan to read the full lesson
at the AI Literacy Lab