Koala and Tree Kangaroo: An Aboriginal folktale from Australia

From: *Teaching with Story* by Margaret Read MacDonald, Jennifer Macdonald Whitman and Nathaniel Forrest Whitman (August House, 2013).

One year there was no rain. The pools dried up. The streams dried up. The animals were dying of thirst.

Tree Kangaroo said to his best friend, Koala, “When I was little there was a time like this. My mother took me in her pouch and traveled. We went over a mountain and down a valley…over a mountain and down a valley…we came to a dry stream bed. My mother dug and dug and she found water. She had a sip and I had a sip. And we survived.

“Could you find that place again?” asked Koala.
“I don’t know. I could try.”
“Then let’s travel!”

They went over a mountain and down a valley. Over a mountain and down a valley. They came to a dry stream bed. “Is this the place?” asked Koala.
Tree Kangaroo looked all around. “I don’t think so.”
“Then let’s travel!”

They went over a mountain and down a valley. Over a mountain and down a valley. They came to a dry stream bed. “Is this the place?” asked Koala.
“I don’t think so.”
“Then let’s travel!”

Over a mountain and down a valley. Over a mountain and down a valley. Another dry stream bed. “Is this the place?”
Tree Kangaroo looked all around. “It looks right. I think this is the place.”
“Then let’s dig!” said Koala. “You can dig first. You found the place.”
Koala sat down in the shade.
And Tree Kangaroo began to dig.

He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he got soooo tired.

“Okay, Koala. It’s your turn to dig now.”

“I’m coming,” said Koala. “Just a minute.” Koala took two steps. “OOOOHHHH! I stepped on a thorn! I’ve got a thorn in my paw! I can’t dig yet.”
Koala sat back down in the shade.

Tree Kangaroo dug.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he got soooo tired.

“Okay, Koala. It’s your turn. I’m really getting tired now. You come dig for awhile.”

“I’m coming. I want to help.” Koala took two steps. “OOOOHHHHH! I’ve got a cramp in my TAIL. (In those days Koala had a long bushy tail.) You go ahead.”
Koala sat back down in the shade.

Tree Kangaroo kept on digging.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he got soooo tired.

“Come on Koala. I’ve had three turns. YOU take a turn now.”

Then Tree Kangaroo saw something in the bottom of the hole.
“I think I see something damp. We might be close to water.”

“Oh, you go ahead, Tree Kangaroo. You’ve done all that digging. You might as well have the fun of finding the water.”

And Koala kept sitting in the shade.
So Tree Kangaroo kept on digging.

He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he threw out the dirt.
He dug and he dug and he got sooooo tired.

“Koala come on….OH! I think I see it! The water is coming!”

Koala jumped up.
He RAN down to the hole.
He PUSHED Tree Kangaroo out of the way.
He stuck his head right down in that hole and started slurping water.

Koala’s long, bushy tail was sticking up out of the hole waving in Tree Kangaroo’s face.
Tree Kangaroo looked at that tail swishing back and forth …
Tree Kangaroo just reached out and SNATCHED that tail off!

Koala backed out of the hole. He looked at Tree Kangaroo. He didn’t say a thing.
He knew he had been lazy. He knew he had not done his part. He not been a good friend.

If you see Koala in the zoo, take a look at his tail. He has hardly any tail at all! When you see that remember…It is important to always do your part and be a good friend.