

# Togu and the Trees of Life



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“Tunza” means “to treat with care or affection” in Swahili. UNEP hopes to inspire caring for the Earth through creative literature that sparks the interest and awareness of children, their parents and teachers.

**Director of Publication**  
Eric Falt

**Head, UNEP Children & Youth Unit**  
Theodore Oben

**Writer**  
Carole Douglis

**Illustrator**  
Adrienne Kennaway

**Other UNEP Contributors**  
Design and Layout - James Mwaniki  
Editorial Support - David Simpson, Naomi Poulton, Melanie Virtue, Matthew Woods, Cecilia Kibare

**Special Contributions**  
Fred Stolle, World Resources Institute, USA  
Adam Tomasek, World Wildlife Fund, USA  
Ian Redmond, Ape Alliance, UK

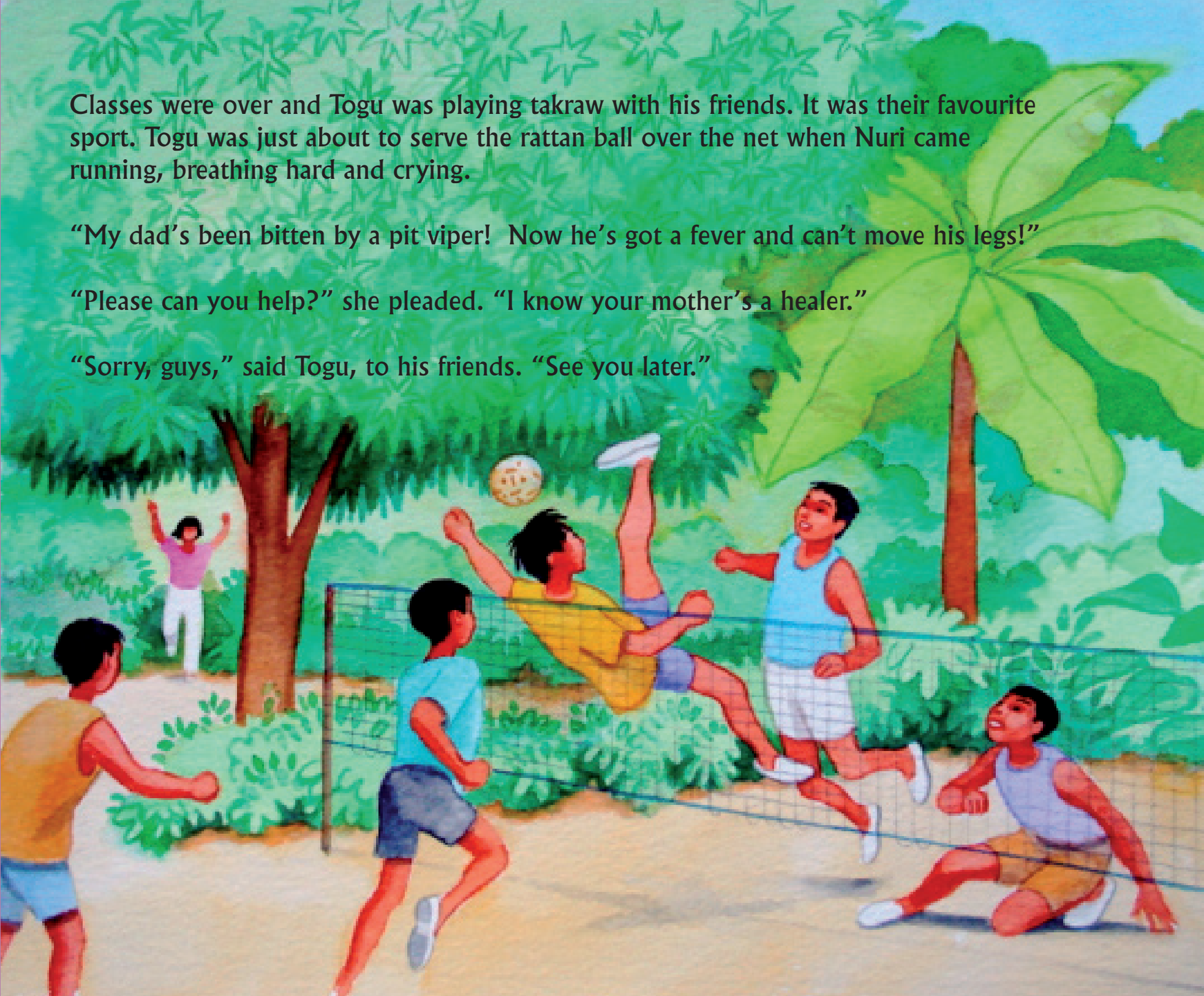
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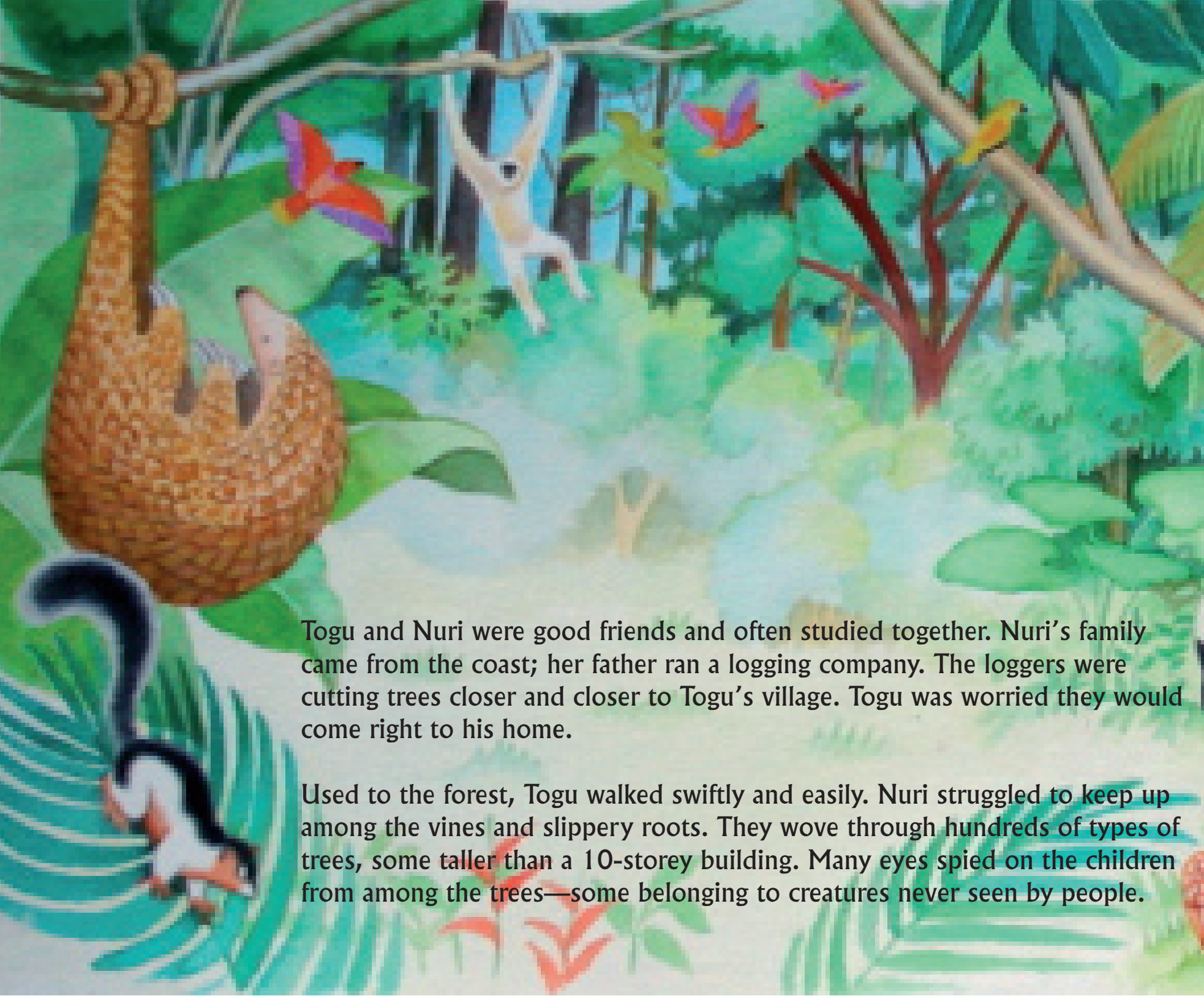
Classes were over and Togu was playing takraw with his friends. It was their favourite sport. Togu was just about to serve the rattan ball over the net when Nuri came running, breathing hard and crying.

“My dad’s been bitten by a pit viper! Now he’s got a fever and can’t move his legs!”

“Please can you help?” she pleaded. “I know your mother’s a healer.”

“Sorry, guys,” said Togu, to his friends. “See you later.”






Togu and Nuri were good friends and often studied together. Nuri's family came from the coast; her father ran a logging company. The loggers were cutting trees closer and closer to Togu's village. Togu was worried they would come right to his home.

Used to the forest, Togu walked swiftly and easily. Nuri struggled to keep up among the vines and slippery roots. They wove through hundreds of types of trees, some taller than a 10-storey building. Many eyes spied on the children from among the trees—some belonging to creatures never seen by people.





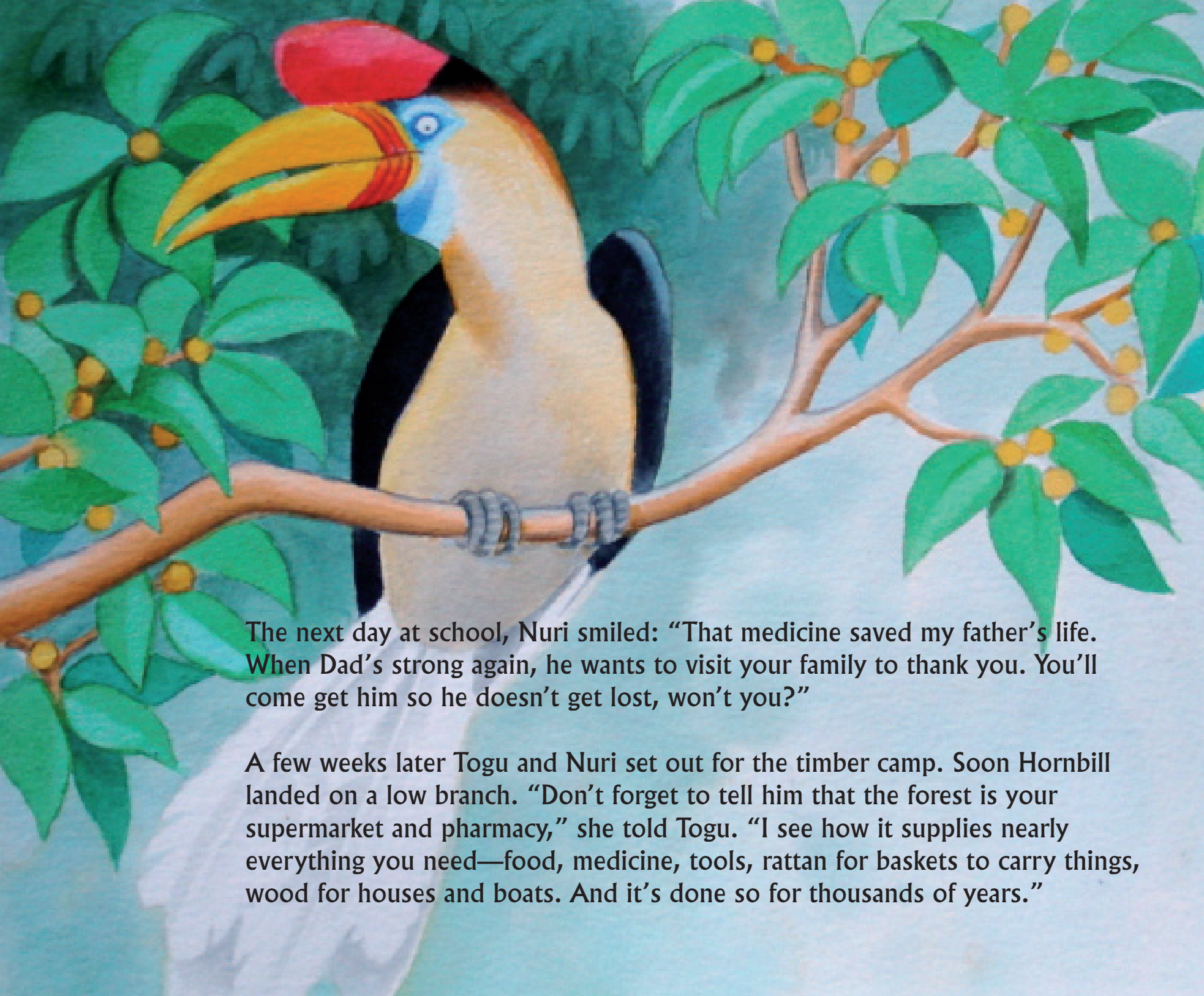
When the friends finally arrived at Togu's home, Togu's mom lost no time.

"Boil this root to make a strong tea," she told Nuri. "And pound these leaves to place on the bite."



Togu walked Nuri back to the logging camp, then slipped silently home.

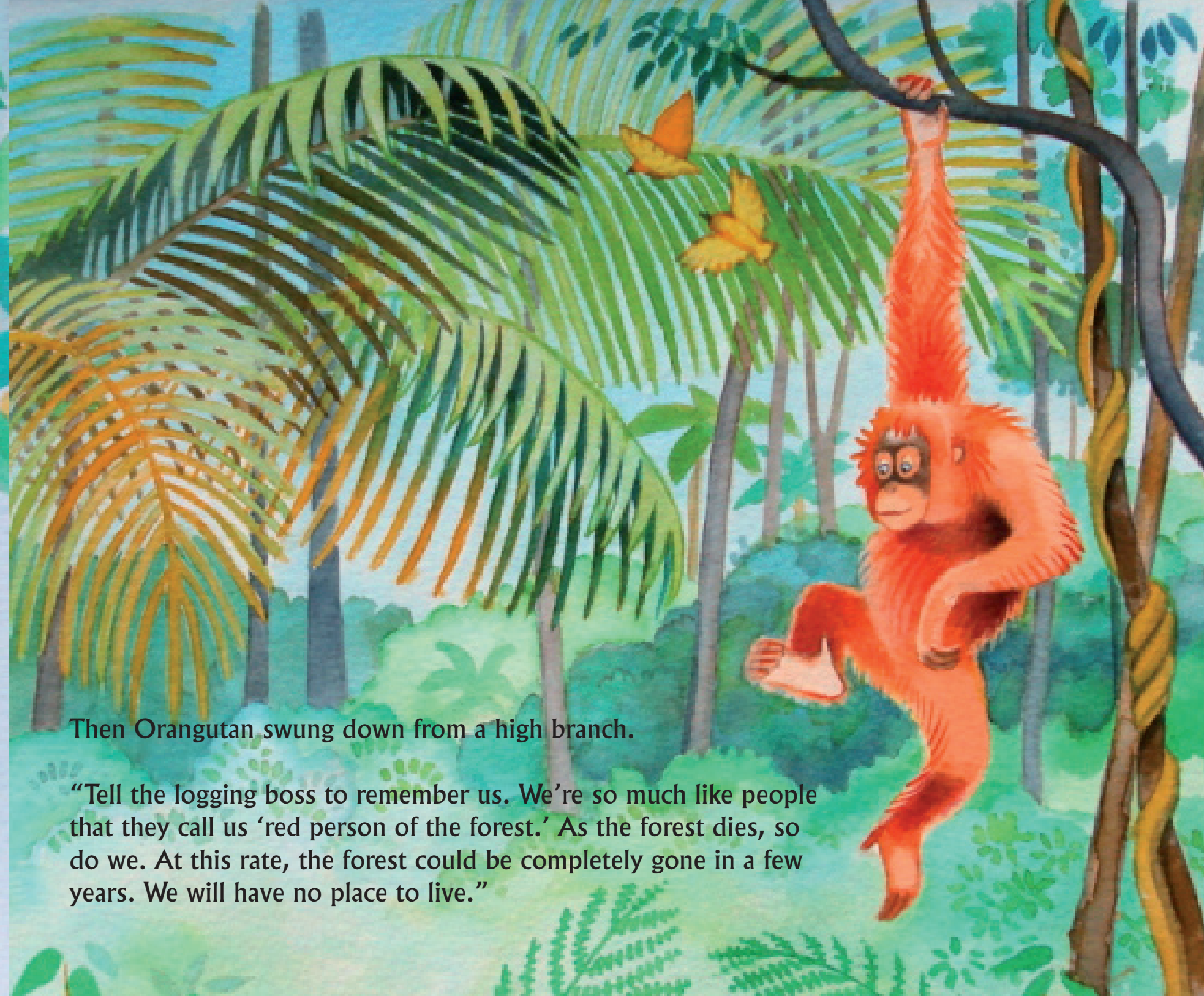




The next day at school, Nuri smiled: “That medicine saved my father’s life. When Dad’s strong again, he wants to visit your family to thank you. You’ll come get him so he doesn’t get lost, won’t you?”

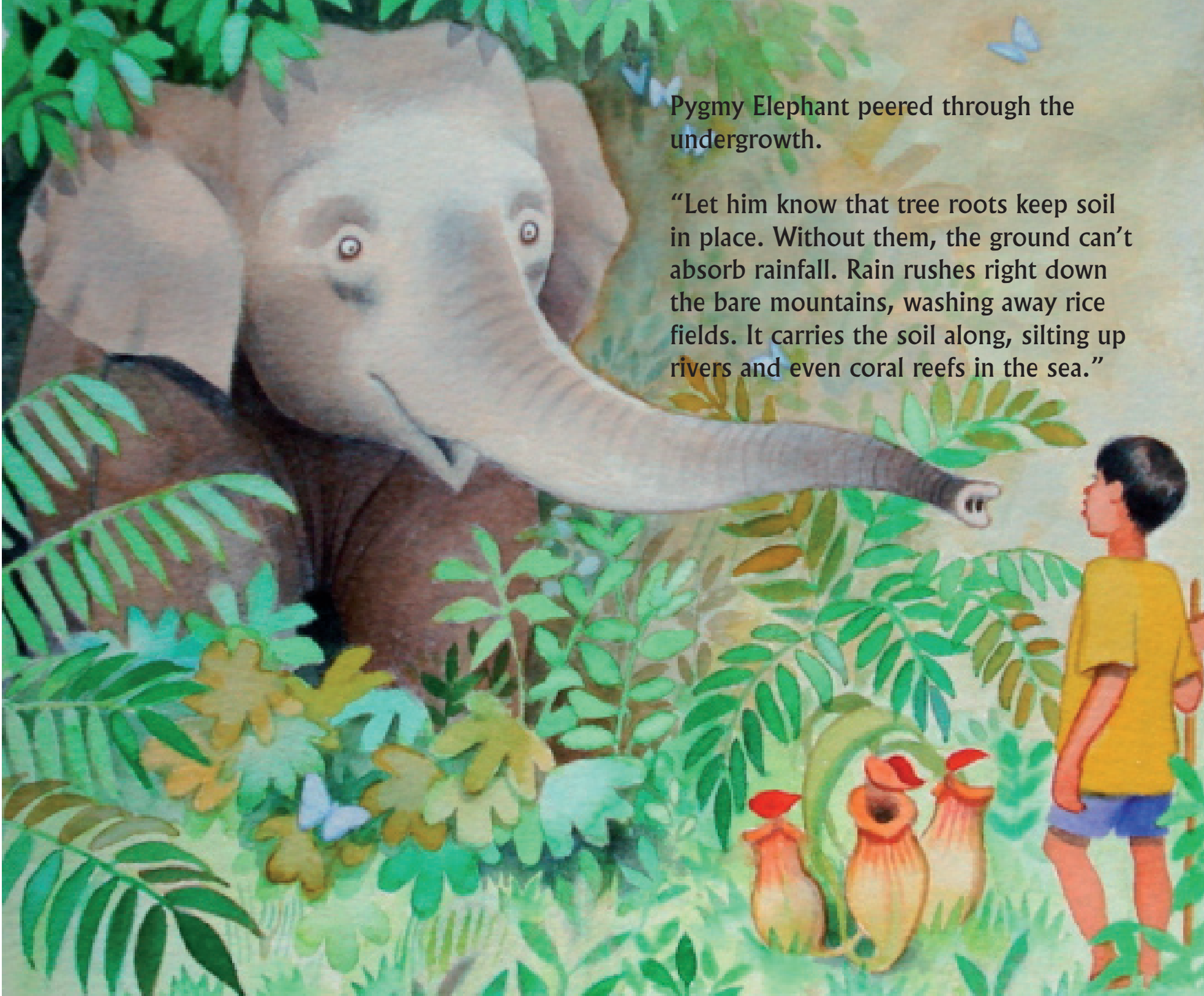
A few weeks later Togu and Nuri set out for the timber camp. Soon Hornbill landed on a low branch. “Don’t forget to tell him that the forest is your supermarket and pharmacy,” she told Togu. “I see how it supplies nearly everything you need—food, medicine, tools, rattan for baskets to carry things, wood for houses and boats. And it’s done so for thousands of years.”





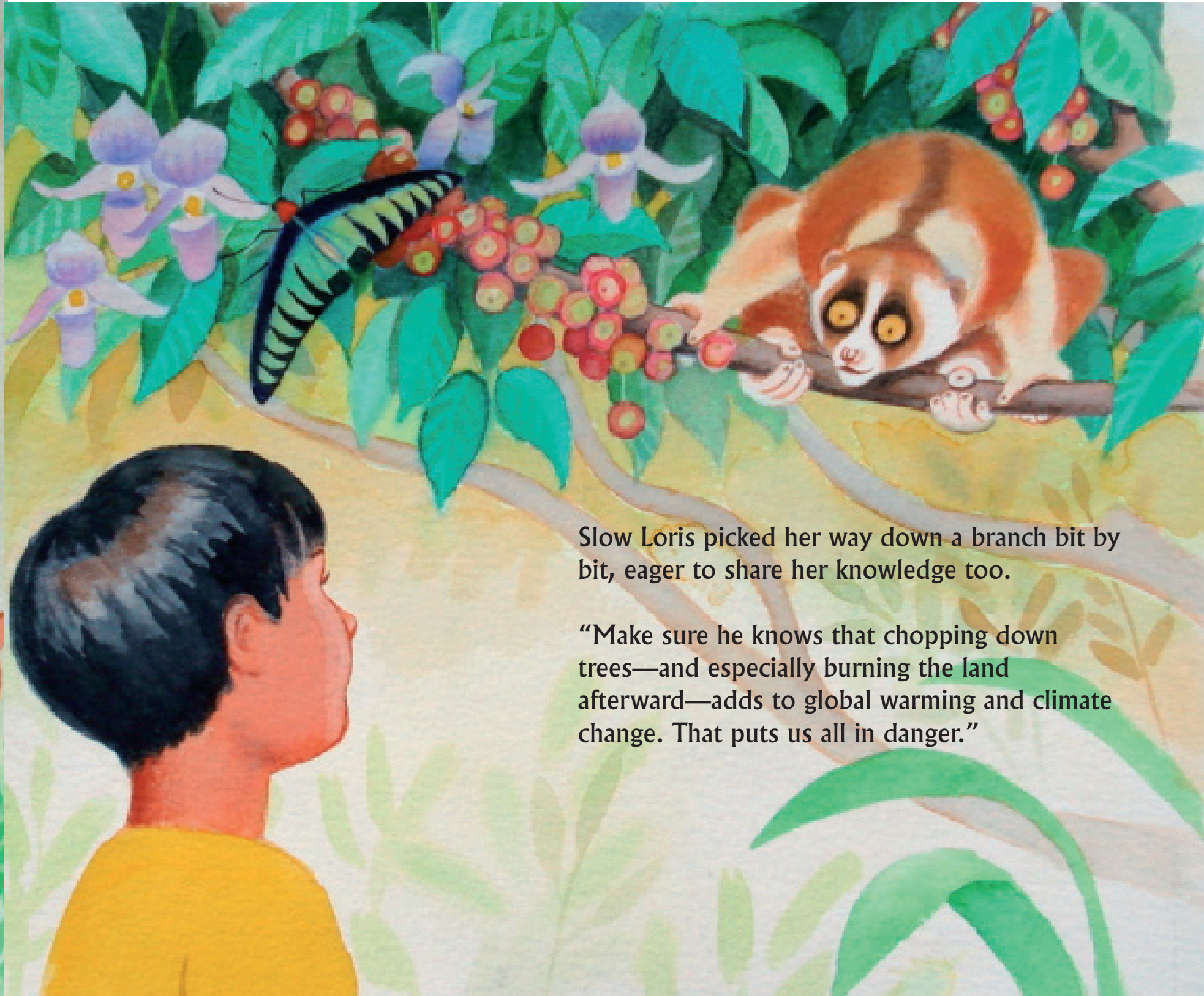
Then Orangutan swung down from a high branch.

“Tell the logging boss to remember us. We’re so much like people that they call us ‘red person of the forest.’ As the forest dies, so do we. At this rate, the forest could be completely gone in a few years. We will have no place to live.”



Pygmy Elephant peered through the undergrowth.


“Let him know that tree roots keep soil in place. Without them, the ground can’t absorb rainfall. Rain rushes right down the bare mountains, washing away rice fields. It carries the soil along, silting up rivers and even coral reefs in the sea.”



Slow Loris picked her way down a branch bit by bit, eager to share her knowledge too.

“Make sure he knows that chopping down trees—and especially burning the land afterward—adds to global warming and climate change. That puts us all in danger.”

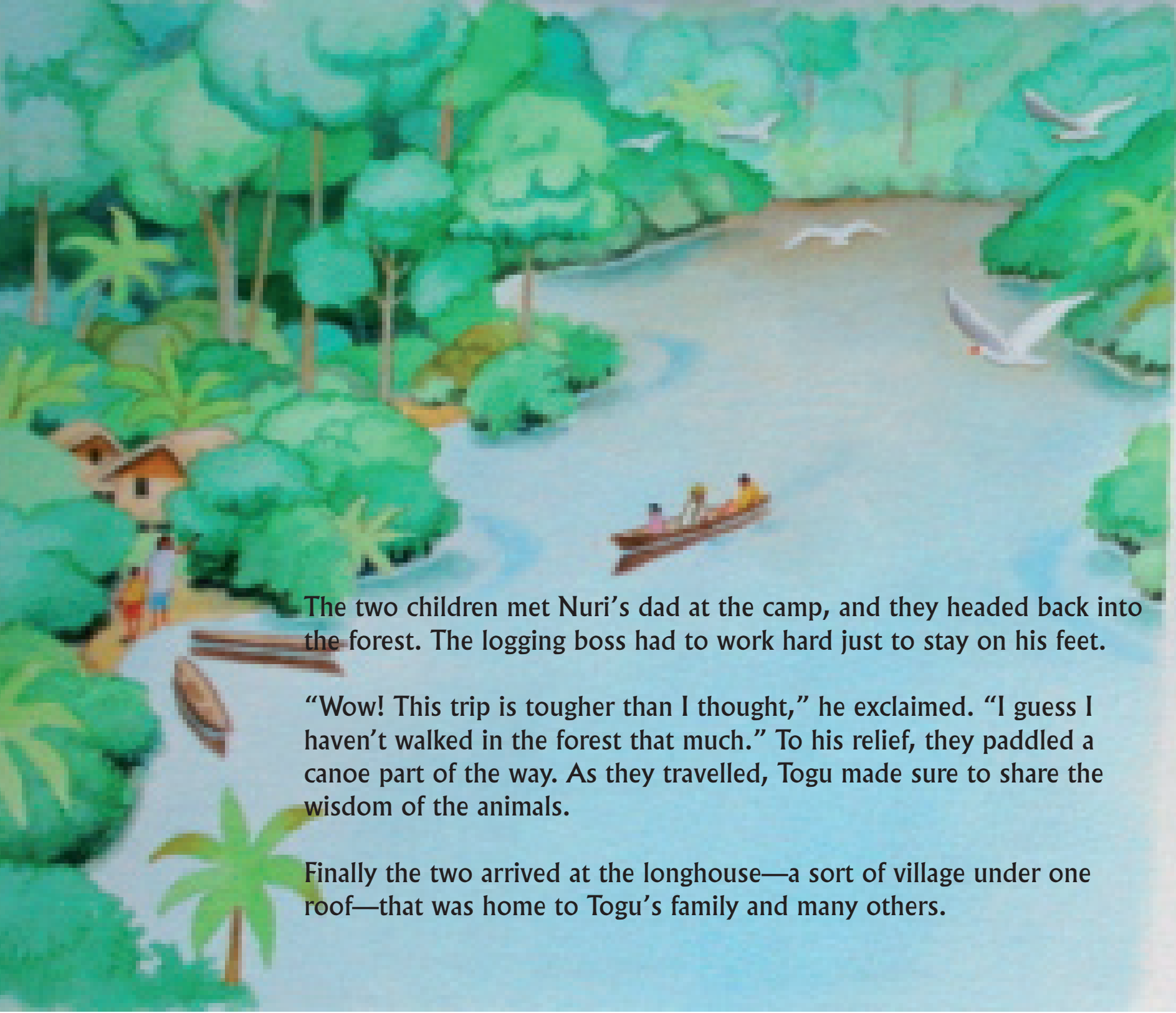




Clouded Leopard approached.

“Remind him that most modern medicines were developed from tropical plants. There are so many different species of plants in the rainforest that no one even knows them all. Someone could yet find a cure for cancer and other diseases here—if the forest remains.”

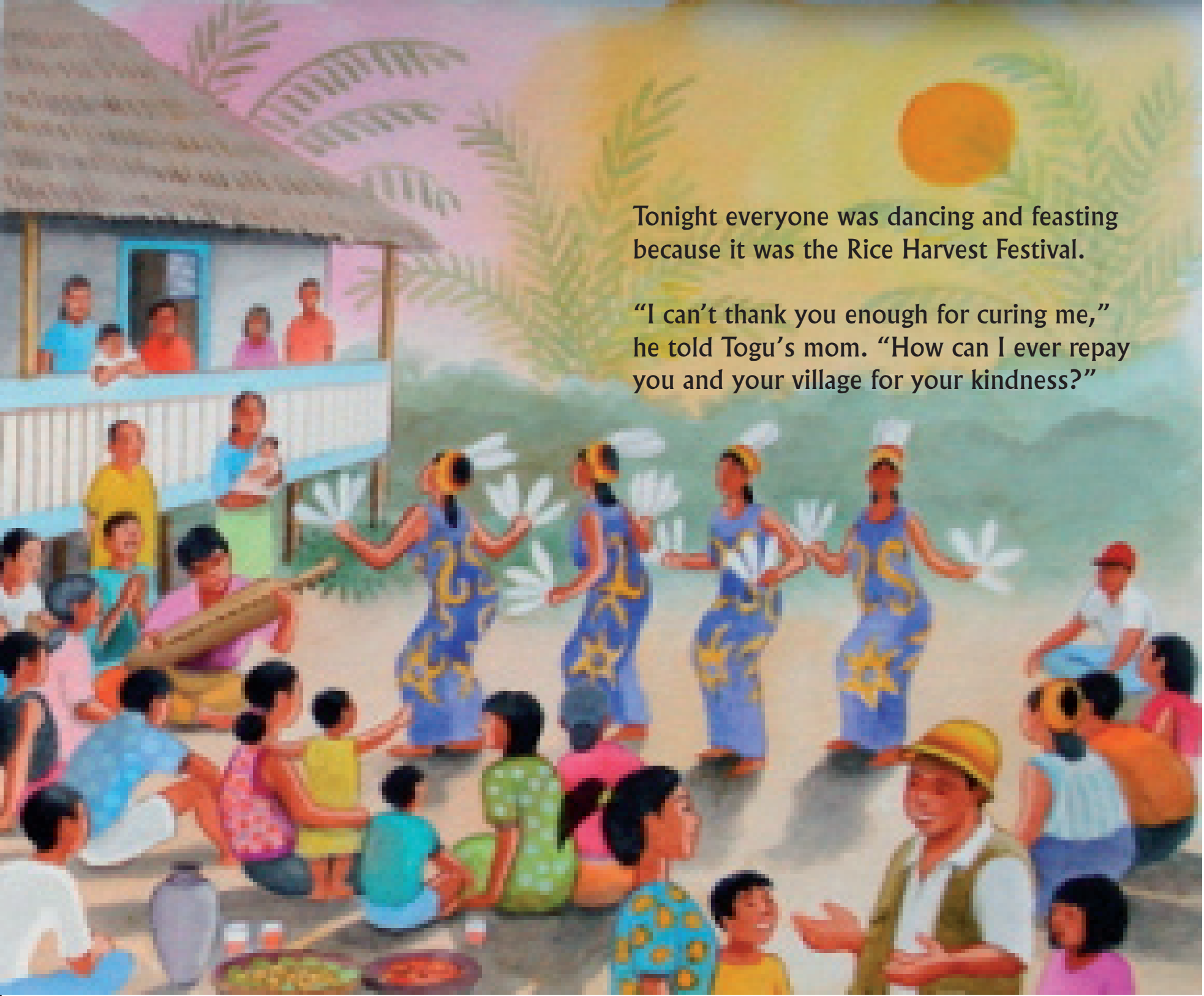




The two children met Nuri's dad at the camp, and they headed back into the forest. The logging boss had to work hard just to stay on his feet.

"Wow! This trip is tougher than I thought," he exclaimed. "I guess I haven't walked in the forest that much." To his relief, they paddled a canoe part of the way. As they travelled, Togu made sure to share the wisdom of the animals.

Finally the two arrived at the longhouse—a sort of village under one roof—that was home to Togu's family and many others.



Tonight everyone was dancing and feasting because it was the Rice Harvest Festival.

“I can’t thank you enough for curing me,” he told Togu’s mom. “How can I ever repay you and your village for your kindness?”

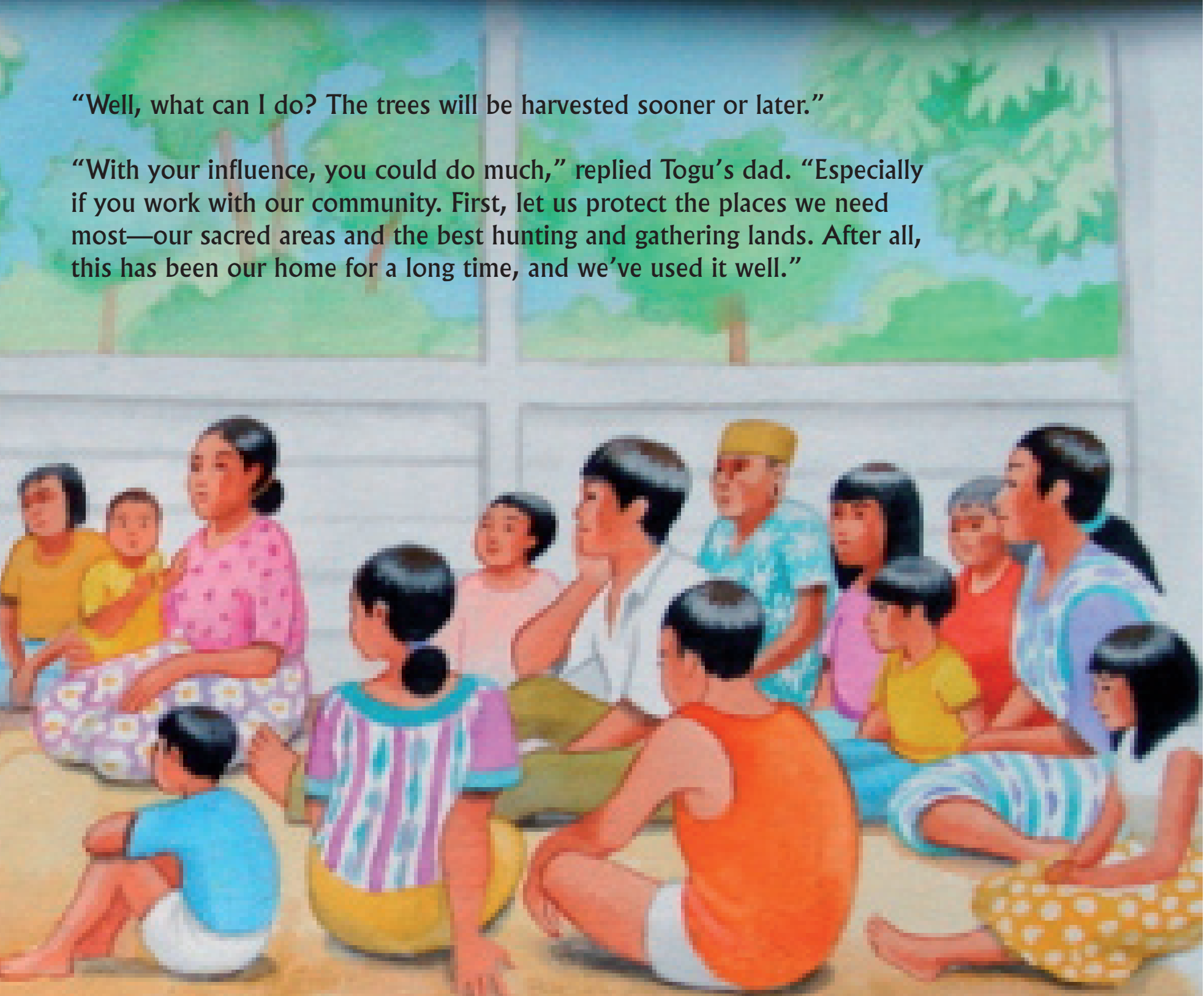
To answer that question, Togu and his mom gathered the villagers together at sunrise. Some of Togu's takraw buddies came too.


"The forest is our life," Togu's mom began. "The deer meat, bearded pig and fish you enjoyed last night, plus almost everything you see here, we get from the forest. We gather rattan, nuts, and spices to sell. Medicine, too, as you know, and not only for bites. Our plants treat fever, stomach and lung problems; they ease childbirth...."



“Well, what can I do? The trees will be harvested sooner or later.”

“With your influence, you could do much,” replied Togu’s dad. “Especially if you work with our community. First, let us protect the places we need most—our sacred areas and the best hunting and gathering lands. After all, this has been our home for a long time, and we’ve used it well.”



A painting of a forest fire. In the foreground, there are bright orange and yellow flames. In the background, there are tall, thin trees and a thick plume of white smoke rising into the sky. The overall scene is one of destruction and environmental impact.

Togu continued: “Where you do log, cutters could be more selective—just taking a few large, valuable trees per hectare, and leaving the rest alone.”

A takraw buddy went on: “Please don’t burn the land after you take trees. The smoke gets so bad it hurts our eyes and lungs. I learned it even blows to other countries, where people must stay inside and close schools and workplaces.”



An elder added: “The oil palm plantations planted after logging and burning take away more and more of our forest.” Then the fertilizer pollutes our streams.







Togu's dad said: "Maybe you could help the forest people by connecting us to customers for our rattan, fish, fruits and nuts. In fact, we might all gain if, with your connections, you could help bring tourists...."

"Um, I'm not sure about all this," said the logging boss, twisting his fingers nervously.

Then Togu jumped up: "There are also new ways for your company to profit!" Trees take carbon from the atmosphere and store it in their wood, right?

“We all want more carbon to be stored,” he continued. “Because in the air it traps heat from the sun, adding to global warming. But growing trees—that helps cool the Earth. In fact, other nations and companies now pay people to keep their trees alive and plant more.”

The man looked a little happier. “My, what you learn in school these days.”

“We can all plant trees,” Togu continued. “And we’re ready to start. Will you help?”

“Uh... I will speak with the company and see what I can do. Now I must get back.”

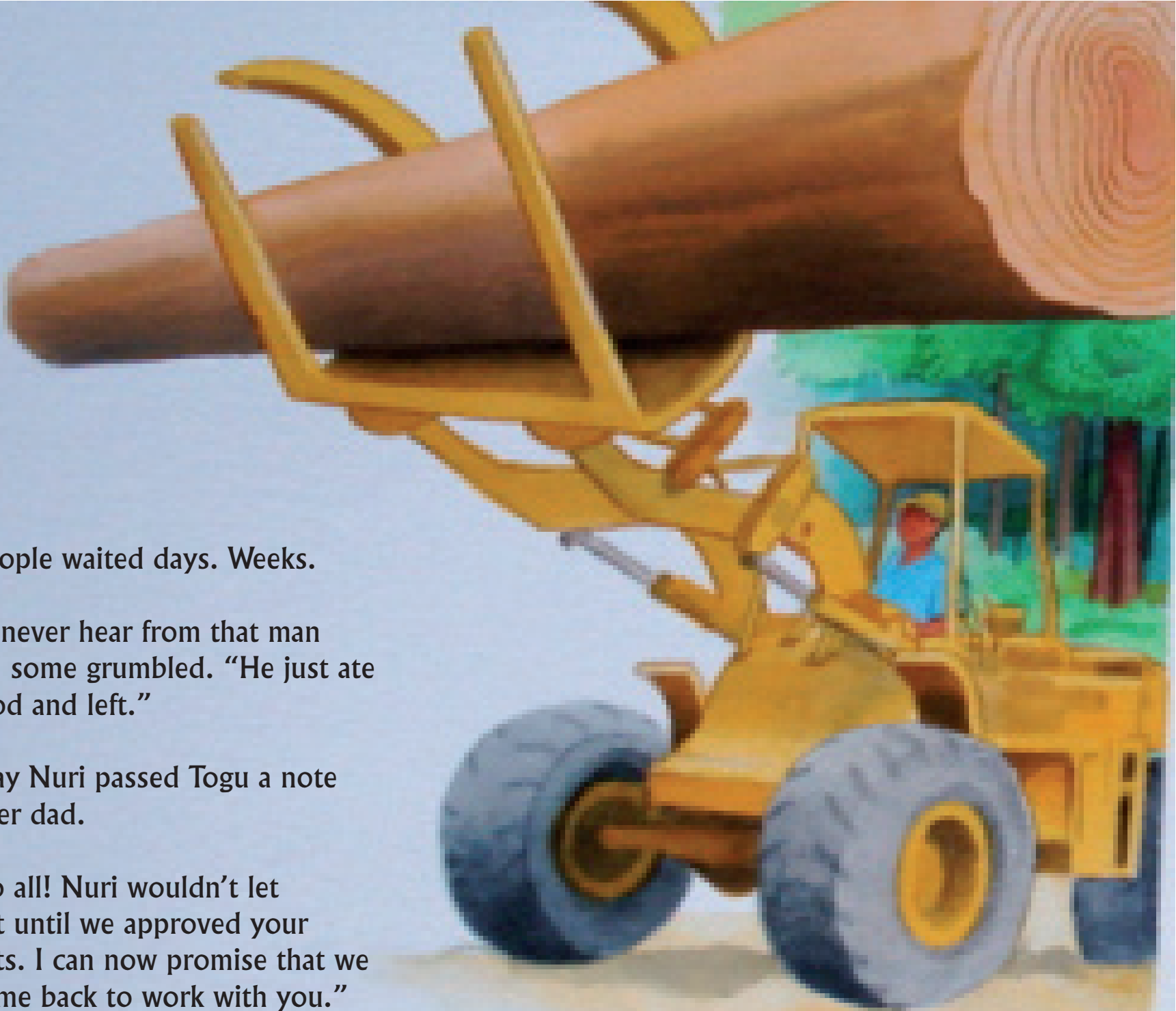


The people waited days. Weeks.

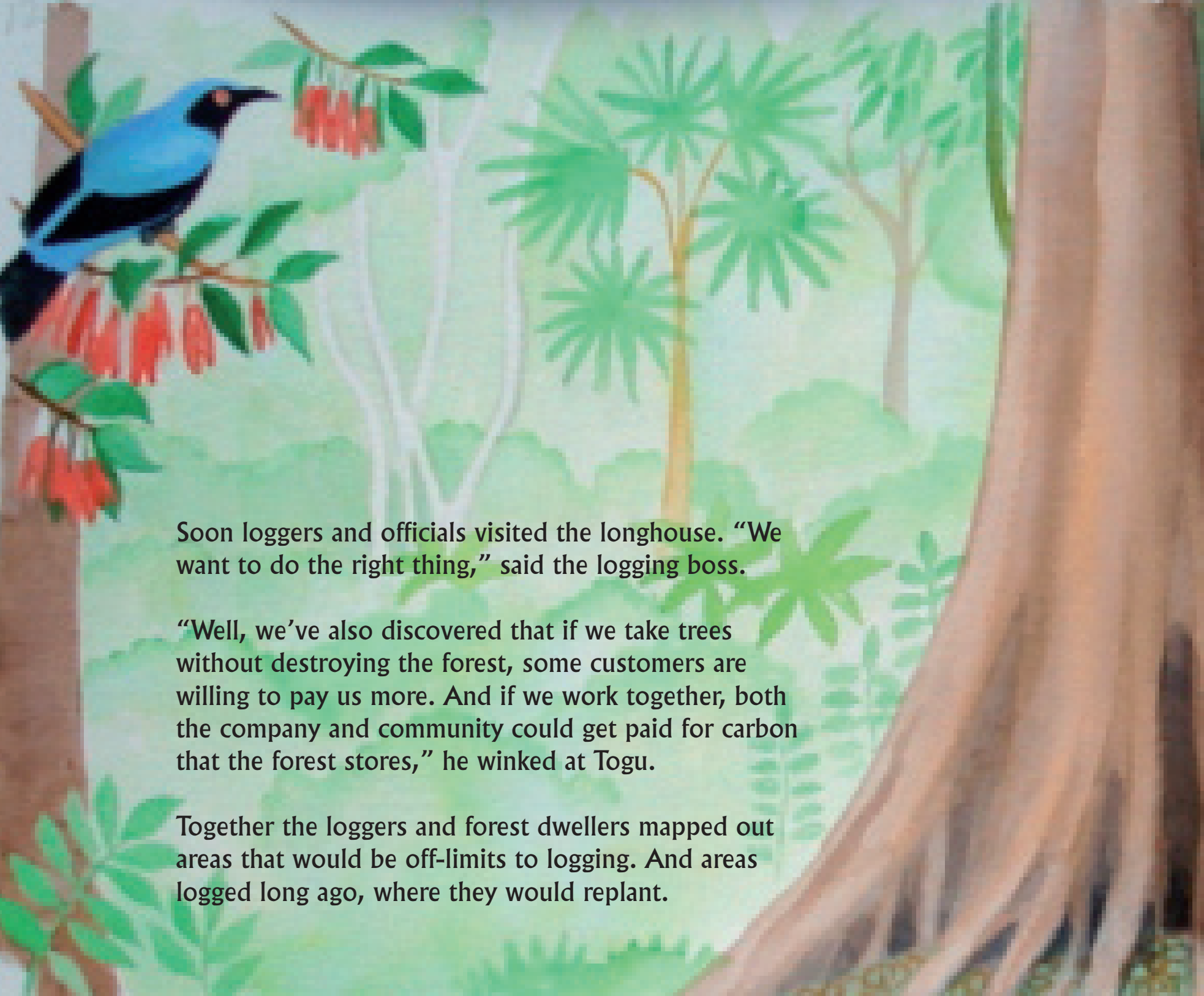
“We’ll never hear from that man again,” some grumbled. “He just ate our food and left.”

One day Nuri passed Togu a note from her dad.

“Yes to all! Nuri wouldn’t let me rest until we approved your requests. I can now promise that we will come back to work with you.”







Soon loggers and officials visited the longhouse. “We want to do the right thing,” said the logging boss.

“Well, we’ve also discovered that if we take trees without destroying the forest, some customers are willing to pay us more. And if we work together, both the company and community could get paid for carbon that the forest stores,” he winked at Togu.

Together the loggers and forest dwellers mapped out areas that would be off-limits to logging. And areas logged long ago, where they would replant.



“In return for your help, what do you need? School? Clinic? Computer center? Maybe a nice tourist lodge? Helping the community is part of what we need to do to prove that we’re harvesting responsibly.

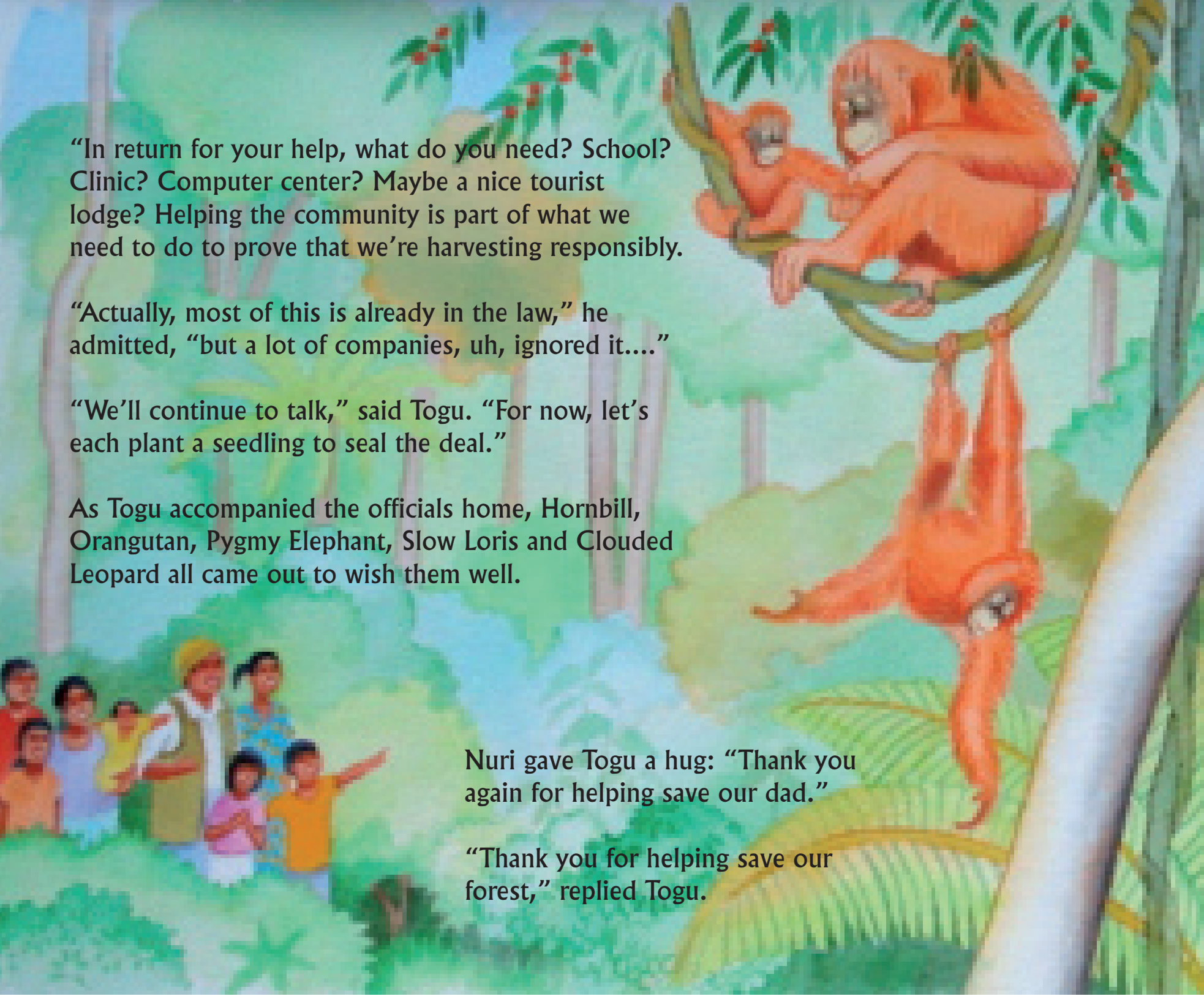
“Actually, most of this is already in the law,” he admitted, “but a lot of companies, uh, ignored it....”

“We’ll continue to talk,” said Togu. “For now, let’s each plant a seedling to seal the deal.”

As Togu accompanied the officials home, Hornbill, Orangutan, Pygmy Elephant, Slow Loris and Clouded Leopard all came out to wish them well.

Nuri gave Togu a hug: “Thank you again for helping save our dad.”

“Thank you for helping save our forest,” replied Togu.





## Some Facts and Figures on Forests

- 1) Long ago, forests covered about half the land on the planet. Today only half the original forest cover remains. Every year, people chop down another 130,000 square kilometres of trees—an area the size of Nicaragua or Greece.
- 2) Trees are still used for firewood and charcoal for cooking in much of the world. But most of the logs become paper and wood. Demand is increasing.
- 3) More than a billion people live in or near the forest like Togu and his friends. More than two billion people (nearly a third of us) rely on wooded areas to protect our water. Without tree roots binding the soil, rain causes erosion and floods instead of feeding healthy streams and rivers. Trees can even reclaim land that has become desert.
- 4) In addition to taking in carbon dioxide, trees release oxygen, which we need to breathe. One tree provides enough oxygen for a family of four.
- 5) Tropical rainforest—also called “jungle”—covers only about five percent of the land on Earth but contains about half the animal and plant species.
- 6) Scientists think the world’s rainforests contain more than 100,000 different types of plants. They also estimate that 70-90 per cent of the rainforest’s plants and creatures live in the canopy—the treetops—rather than the ground. Researchers are still finding “new” species—more than 400 animals and plants in Borneo alone over the last 10 years.
- 7) Jungles are so rich in life partly because of the warm tropical climate and partly because they have been evolving for millions of years without being disrupted by ice ages.
- 8) Most industrial countries chopped down most of their original, or “old-growth” forest many years ago, although people are replanting now. Today the biggest “old-growth” forests remain on the island of Borneo and other parts of Southeast Asia, and in central Africa, the Amazon of South America, and the far north near the Arctic Circle.



- 9) All these are shrinking, some very rapidly. Sometimes cleared land is left barren and unused. Sometimes people use it to grow crops, cattle, or plantations of rubber, coffee or palm oil trees. But most plantations of a single type of tree cannot provide the benefits of the forest for either people or animals.
- 10) Although laws exist in most countries to protect forests and forest peoples, sometimes they are not enforced. Logs are valuable. But products from living trees—nuts, fruit, medicine, fibre—and income from tourists visiting the forest can be worth even more. That's not even counting the services trees provide for conserving soil and water or the possibility of earning income from storing carbon.
- 11) As people learn more about the importance of forests, huge tree-planting projects are blossoming. For instance, the Green Belt Movement based in Kenya has planted more than 30 million trees throughout Africa. Logging companies in some countries plant millions too. Residents of Uttar Pradesh—a state in India—planted 10 million seedlings in a single day. Mexico plans to plant 250 million trees. The United Nations, through the Billion Tree Campaign, is encouraging citizens from around the planet to plant at least a billion trees in a year.

#### What you can do:

- 1) Find out more. Many scouting and other youth groups have programmes to help you learn about local forests and take care of them.
- 2) Plant trees! Whether you live in a city, on a farm, or near the forest, growing trees makes a difference. Be sure to choose the right kind for your area. And have a plan for keeping your trees alive. Visit [www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign](http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign) to learn how to plant and make your pledge to start.
- 3) When your family buys wood or furniture, try to find products that are “certified.” A certification label will tell you that it has been cut with the least damage to the environment.
- 4) Use both sides of a sheet of paper. Make sure to recycle as much as you can.
- 5) Look for “shade-grown” treats. Cocoa and coffee trees grow in the tropics. Some companies plant them in the shade beneath taller native trees—so you could help preserve the natural forest by eating chocolate!

