



The
Fireflies
After the Typhoon

by
Anna Kuo

Illustrated by Siri Vinter



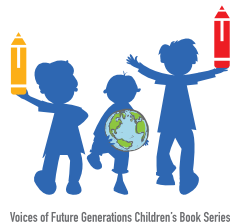
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Voices of Future Generations Children's Book Series



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This book is printed on recycled paper, using sustainable and low-carbon printing methods.

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foreword



The Environmental Quality Protection Foundation was established in 1984 as the premier non-profit organisation focusing on major global environmental issues based in Taiwan. Our main tasks include tree planting, environmental education and international participation. Novelty and non-obvious approaches are the core of our initiatives and programmes.

The next generation leads the future we want. In the climate change era, we will have difficulties adapting without reopening our minds. I am so glad to take part in the Voices of Future Generations book series to promote the the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for its 25th anniversary and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In all the desperate, deep thinking, optimistic, and creative stories we obtained from all over the world, we see that children are telling the most important stories for Mother Earth and the people whose lives rely on her.

Ying-Shih Hsieh
Chairman, Environmental Quality Protection Foundation, Taiwan



preface

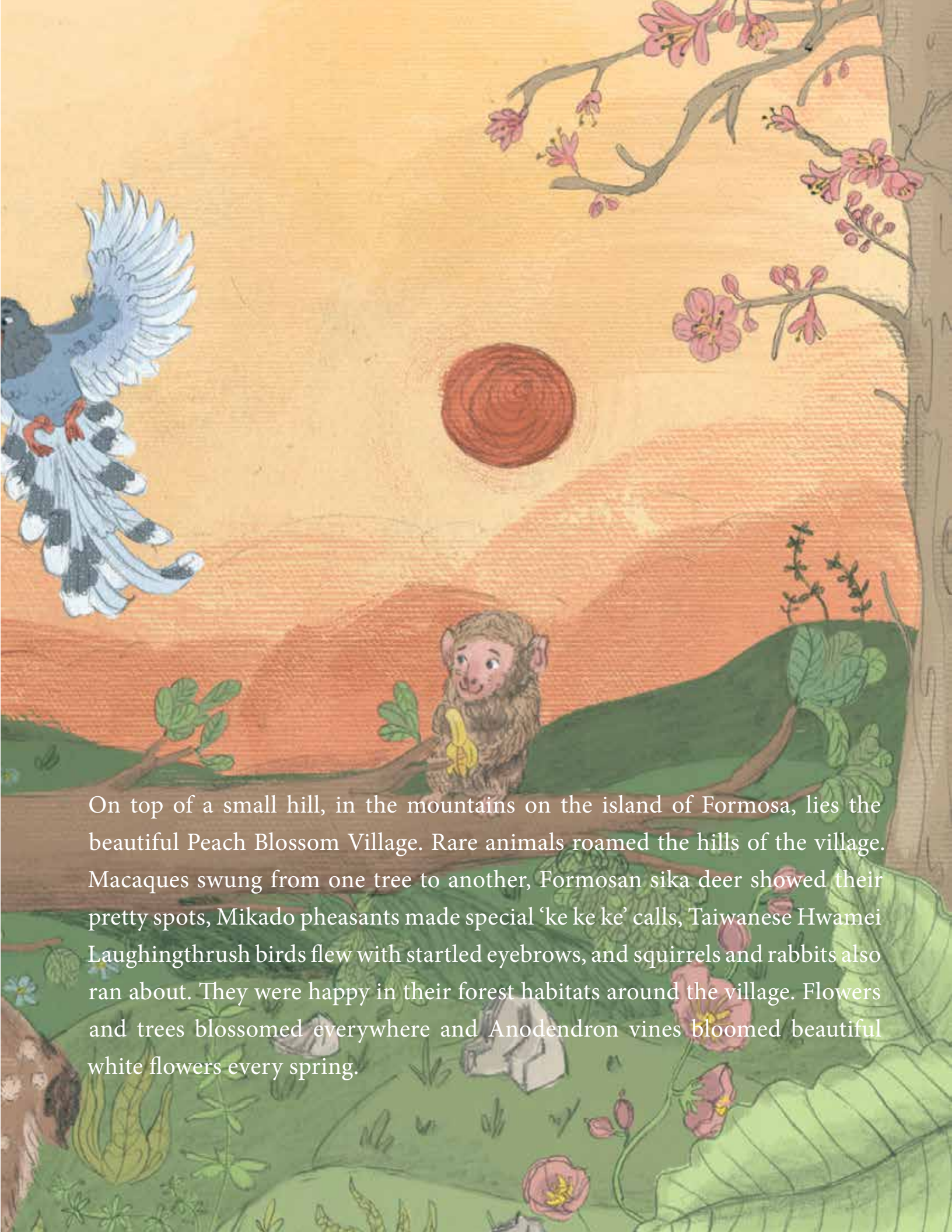


Typhoons and earthquakes are real life experience in Taiwan, the beautiful *formosa*. To breathe simultaneously with typhoons and earthquakes is the ultimate homework for Taiwanese people. This book, *Fireflies After the Typhoon*, speaks of exactly that dependency relationship between people and the natural environment. Listening deeply to the voices and opinions of our children on the Sustainable Development Goals is crucial. All humans are tenants of the natural world — none have the right to dominate Mother Earth. The *Voices of Future Generations* Children's Book Series provides a chance for adults to listen carefully to the voices from our future generations and respect the rights of children to speak for the Earth.

Hui-Chien Ku
Assistant Professor of the Department of Applied Chinese at Ming Chuan University and
United Daily News Column Writer



chapter 1



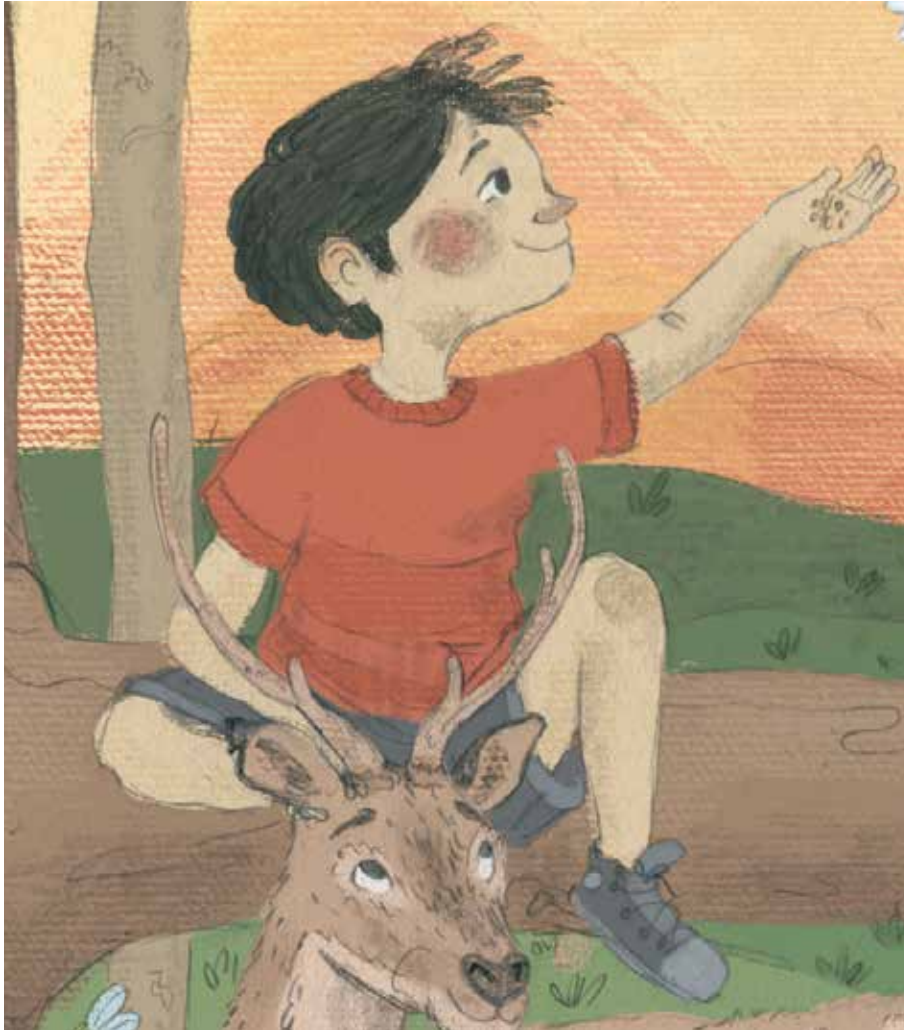
On top of a small hill, in the mountains on the island of Formosa, lies the beautiful Peach Blossom Village. Rare animals roamed the hills of the village. Macaques swung from one tree to another, Formosan sika deer showed their pretty spots, Mikado pheasants made special 'ke ke ke' calls, Taiwanese Hwamei Laughingthrush birds flew with startled eyebrows, and squirrels and rabbits also ran about. They were happy in their forest habitats around the village. Flowers and trees blossomed everywhere and Anodendron vines bloomed beautiful white flowers every spring.

The villagers had peaceful lives in harmony with their surroundings. The children, especially, spent a lot of time in the forests – it was their playground, their school and their forage grounds. They often gathered nuts, fruits and mushrooms to give to their families and to share with neighbours.





They loved to watch in the evenings, as the fireflies danced among the trees, their little lanterns lighting the deep, dark green of the forest shadows with cheerful signals of life and love.



A boy named Tongyan grew up in this green, lively environment. He was a respectful and quiet boy, curious and interested in everything that grew, but often solemn. He usually got along with everyone at school because he did not argue, but he felt happiest in the forest.

Every day, after school, he would explore the woods and streams with his friends, observing the life cycles of all the special animals and plants living in balance with each other and their surroundings. All seemed well until one fateful day...

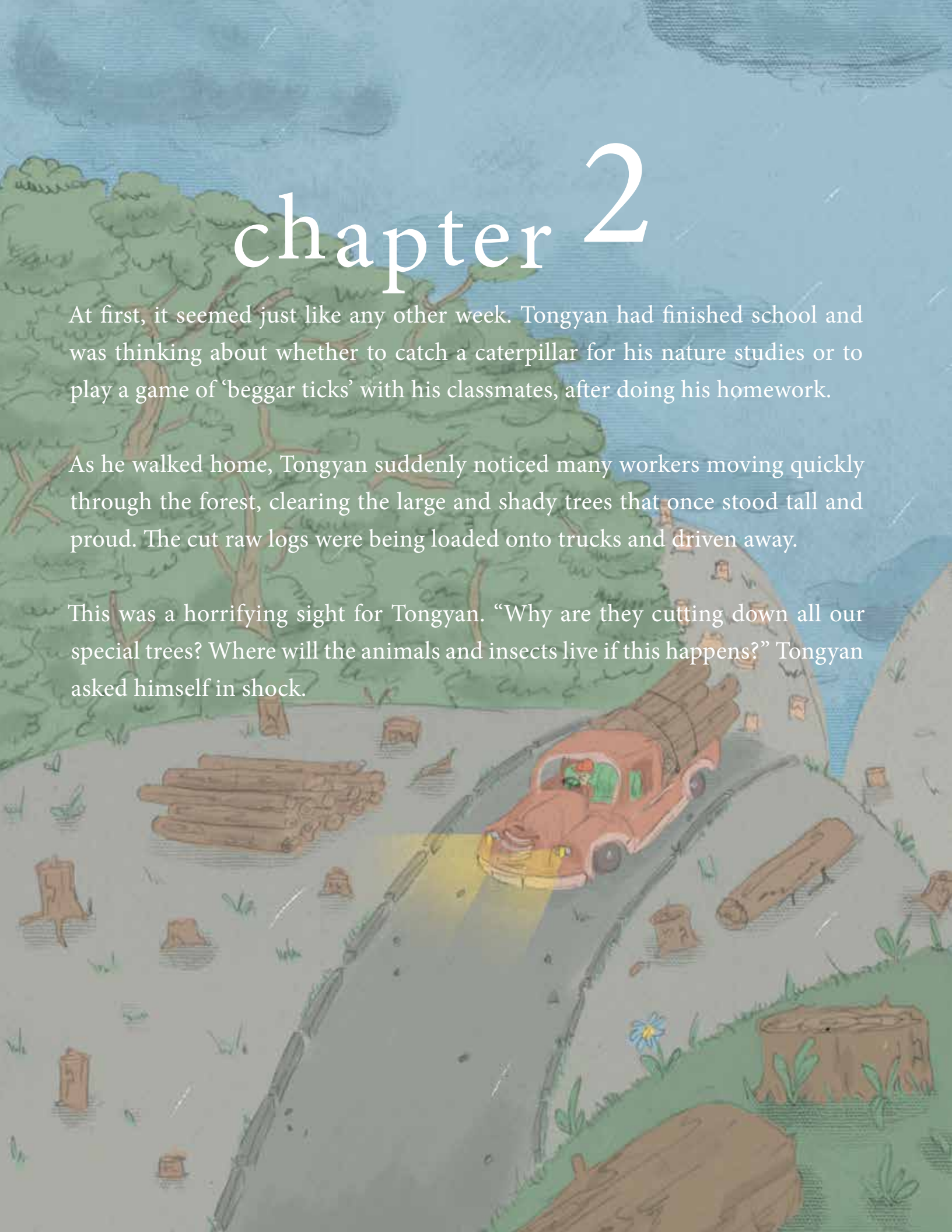


chapter 2

At first, it seemed just like any other week. Tongyan had finished school and was thinking about whether to catch a caterpillar for his nature studies or to play a game of ‘beggar ticks’ with his classmates, after doing his homework.

As he walked home, Tongyan suddenly noticed many workers moving quickly through the forest, clearing the large and shady trees that once stood tall and proud. The cut raw logs were being loaded onto trucks and driven away.

This was a horrifying sight for Tongyan. “Why are they cutting down all our special trees? Where will the animals and insects live if this happens?” Tongyan asked himself in shock.





When he arrived home, he found his parents discussing important matters in low, serious voices at the low table on their verandah. Tongyan wanted to ask what they were talking about and approached them respectfully. Before he could even raise his question, his parents turned to him. “Go do your homework quietly. We have to tell you something serious, after dinner,” they ordered.

Tongyan did not understand why he was being sent away and why his parents were so secretive. However, he was a good boy and knew not to let curiosity get the better of him. He went to his room to work on his maths, science and Chinese studies, as he had been told.

After dinner, Tongyan sat with his family in the living room and they stared at each other without a word. His parents had a solemn, serious look on their faces. It was his father who broke the spell of silence. He said, “You must have noticed many men, cutting down all of our village forests as you walked home today.” Tongyan nodded.

His father also said, “They have now resolved to plant these betel palms. The village elders have held a long discussion about this, over the last few weeks. We all have money problems in this village and they want better lives for ourselves and our families.





This may mean that you cannot play outside in nature with your friends like you used to in the woods, but so long as we take good care of those betel palms, they say, we will be able to make more money and buy many things for ourselves.”

Tongyan was a respectful boy. He did not argue or say anything. Deep inside, he was sad and confused by the decision. He could not understand why some village men had decided to harm and take away his wildlife friends, his playground, and his discoveries, just for the sake of being able to buy more things.

chapter 3

Three years passed and the children watched as the diverse wildlife of Peach Blossom Village was almost completely replaced by a productive, and industrial, monoculture of straight and stiff betel palms. The palms stuck out of the primly tended soil like rows of spiky toothbrushes.



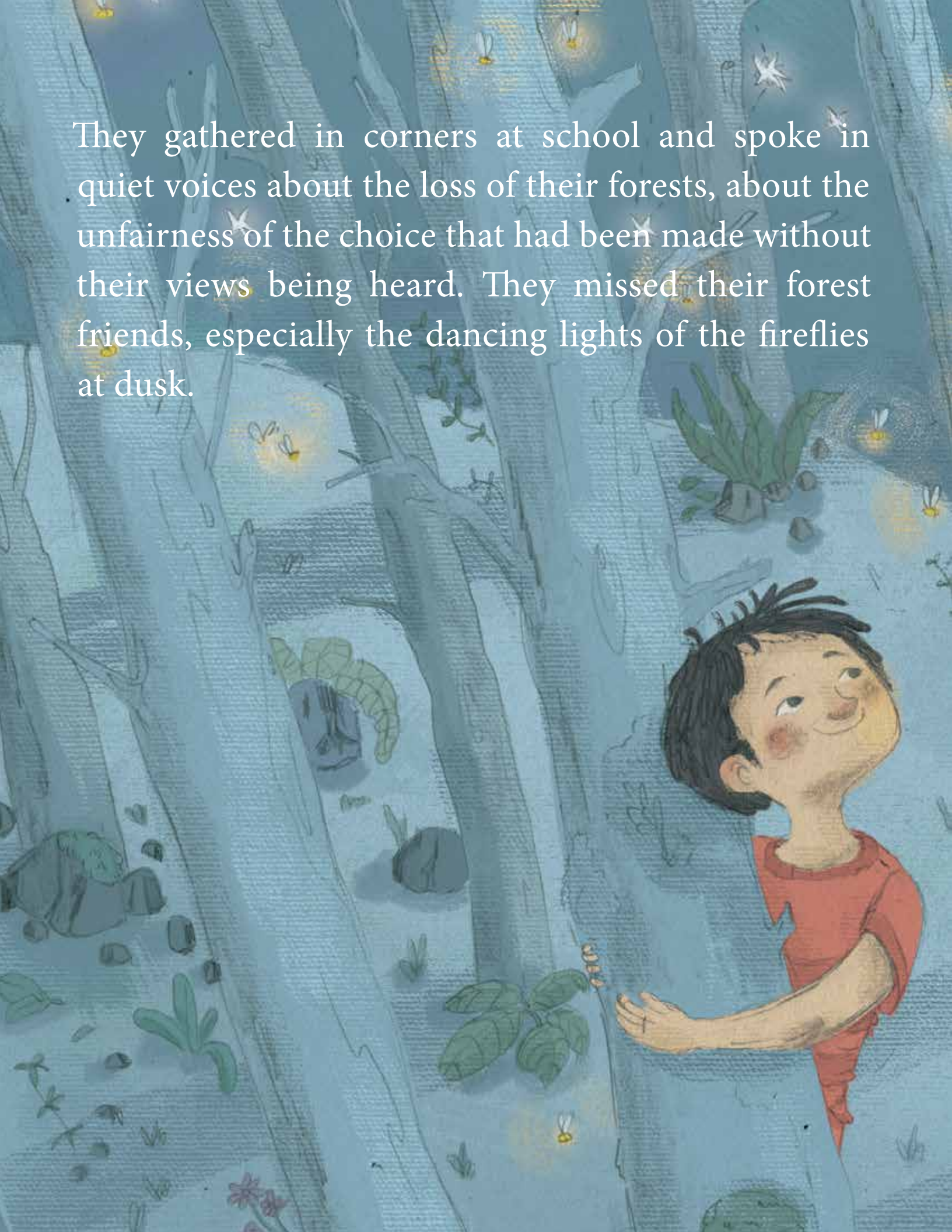
The village adults had new jobs, working in the plantations and keeping everything growing in straight rows, also harvesting the betel palms. Betel palms produce betel nuts. Some say that betel nuts can protect your body and keep your spirits up, so many folks eat them. That's why planting betel palms can make a lot of money.

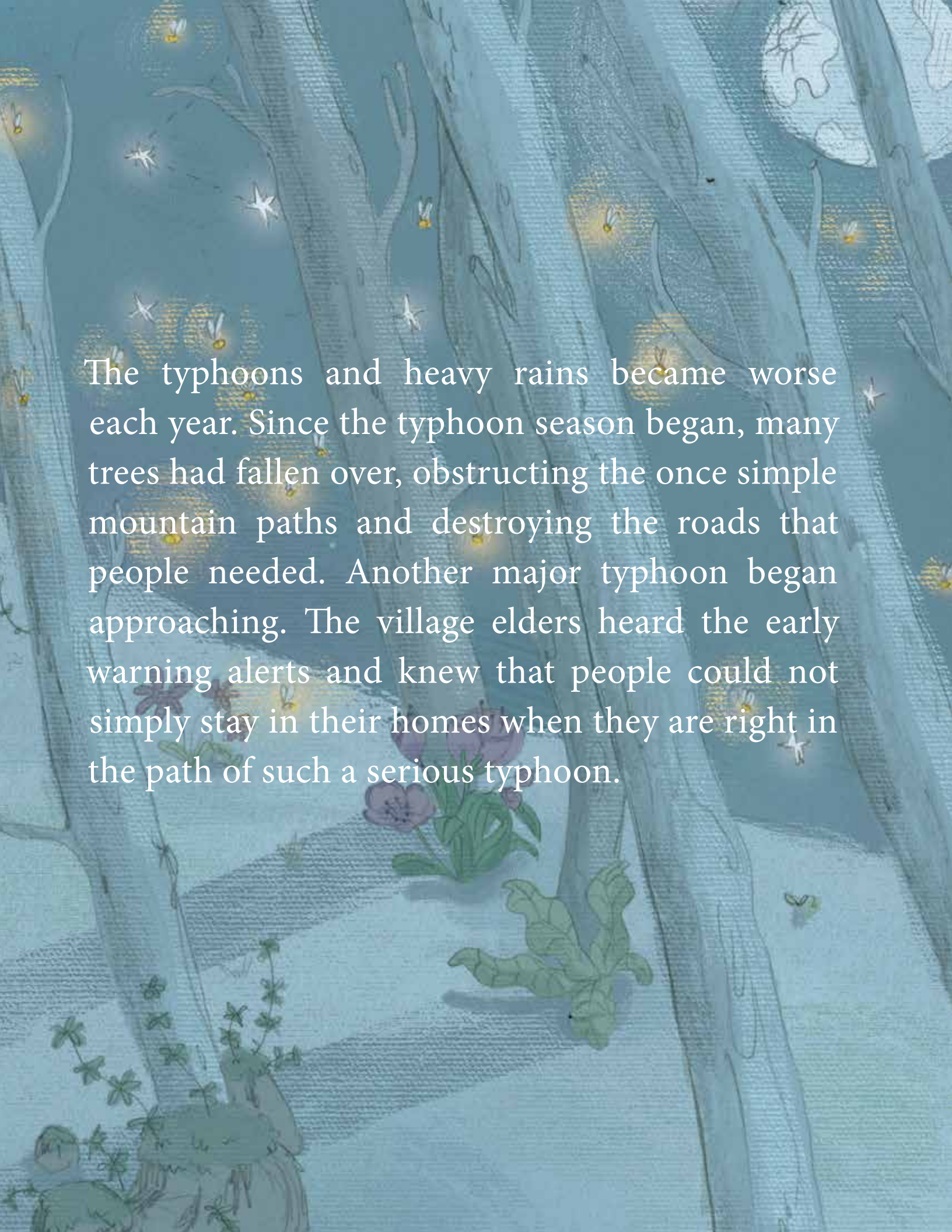


Unfortunately, Tongyan and the people of the village could no longer hear the birds singing in spring, could no longer smell the fragrance of blooming flowers and could no longer see children dashing off to play and make hideouts in the forests. Children mainly stayed indoors, watching their new televisions or playing video games.

The streams were fierce yet sullen, carrying chemicals for growing palms away from the village and over the rocks. People had begun to worry about whether they could drink the water. Some neighbours living downstream even complained of ill-health. Some of the children were very sad. Their hideouts were felled or forbidden.

They gathered in corners at school and spoke in quiet voices about the loss of their forests, about the unfairness of the choice that had been made without their views being heard. They missed their forest friends, especially the dancing lights of the fireflies at dusk.



A blue-toned illustration of a forest path at night. The scene is filled with fireflies, some glowing yellow and others white, scattered across the path and among the trees. A large, pale moon is visible in the upper right corner. The path is illuminated by a soft light, and there are some plants and flowers in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is serene and magical.

The typhoons and heavy rains became worse each year. Since the typhoon season began, many trees had fallen over, obstructing the once simple mountain paths and destroying the roads that people needed. Another major typhoon began approaching. The village elders heard the early warning alerts and knew that people could not simply stay in their homes when they are right in the path of such a serious typhoon.

At first, they were grateful for the new televisions and radios which gave them warnings and updates about the storm as it was tracked. They were all advised to evacuate to emergency shelters at the foot of the mountain before the typhoon arrived. As was explained — there would always be time for plans once the typhoon had passed overhead.

Tongyan and his parents packed as many of their belongings as they could and then travelled down to the shelter. They were careful and arrived in good time, before the storm became worse.

The gloom of the storm clouds was heavy all afternoon. Soon the mighty typhoon could be seen travelling towards them all, speeding across the sky. The force of the typhoon struck hardest at night. Its powerful winds and downpours destroyed every road connecting the little community to the rest of the island. The vegetation covering the earth was ripped away mercilessly.



Villagers hiding in the shelter looked at each other, knowing that their homes, property, the things they had bought with the betel money and all that they had worked to build might be broken up or blown away.





But this was not the worst to happen. All the people of the island had expected to get back to their lives, once the typhoon left, having blown over on its way past them to China. No one foresaw the serious landslide that was to come right afterwards.

A torrent of roaring mud, gravel and stone swept down through the village, bringing many giant boulders that crushed everything in their path. There was nothing the villagers could do against the force of nature. They could only look on helplessly from their tiny shelter, as the boulders rolled over their houses like a mass of angry, stampeding animals. The noise of destruction shook them to their very souls.

The Peach Blossom Village suffered from the typhoon's destruction. A devastating landscape greeted the refugees leaving the shelter. Homes, fields, their new clinic, their old school and their traditional community centre were completely buried beneath mud and debris. No one could see any hope for their future. Tongyan and all the children were angry and very worried. They felt powerless and lost. What could they do to rebuild their homes? How could they find a new future?



chapter 4

The entire village, including the elders, the parents and the children, felt dusty, sad and tired. Tongyan ran out to the big stone that stood where the school had once been and found his friends also waiting there. The children talked and talked.



They believed that the terrible impacts of the disaster were a result of planting the betel palms. “Our teachers explained that in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,” Tongyan said slowly, “everyone recognises that we have a right to education about nature and that this right should be respected.”

An older child added, “This is how we know that the decision of our village council, three years ago, taken without thinking about the future, has brought about terrible things.” They remembered that they had learned in school about palm trees shallow root systems, which were poorly adapted to holding the soil together. “There’s no way those toothbrushes could hold up against the landslides,” said another child.



Tongyan then began to wonder out loud, “In the same Convention, it says that we have a right to a clean environment and that our needs should be taken into account when adults make choices for us. I am not so sure these two rights have been respected.” He added, “Our parents, even us children, knew that the decision of the elders was not right. But we did not ask questions and we kept quiet. We must help out and find a good way to share our views.” The children resolved, together, to make a change in the way of doing things. They wanted to be a part of decision-making and they needed their voices to be heard.



Tongyan spoke seriously to his parents: “In our eyes, planting all those betel palms for money has led to many terrible losses. It has destroyed our wonderful forests and our friends, as well as everything that we built and bought. If only we had planned for the future rather than cutting down so much, so fast, maybe we would not face this disaster today.”

Tongyan's parents listened and then spoke to their fellow villagers. The older men who had made decisions alone were worried. They reflected upon the parents and the children's words. They agreed that their decision to grow betel palms was a very bad choice. Everyone decided to correct this mistake and work together to rebuild Peach Blossom Village so that it could develop sustainably.



chapter 5

Happy voices rang out and visitors wandered towards the new village centre, where the school and playground had been rebuilt. “These colourful flower beds and climbing vines are amazing!” said one visitor. “We can’t even tell that this village has been restored after a disaster!” replied another. “Hush! Are those the rare Swinhoe’s pheasant and Taiwan blue magpie?” called another, as she stepped off a forest canopy trail.



This beautiful village with many visitors was the reconstructed Peach Blossom Village. The villagers had decided to replant native trees and plants that were beneficial to their local environment. They had dedicated themselves to restoration, so that the animals that once lived around their village could return to their homes.



They grew colourful hanging gardens and invited eco-tourists to stay with them in order to see rare species and to learn Chinese. The villagers also held special races and festivals according to their old traditions. Students from many lands came to visit and to help. Everyone kept the grave lesson about harming an ecosystem in their hearts and agreed to care for their environment together, working towards the future they wanted.

Tongyan and the other children had become a part of the process in a children's council. They helped as they could, giving their ideas and a new point of view. They even made a new special hideout in the forest and nicknamed it "Paradise of New Hope."



They gathered just before dusk and, when their parents called from the verandas, they walked back slowly towards their homes, trailing their fingers backwards among the leaves. On arriving home, Tongyan said, “Look, Mother! Our forest fireflies are back, dancing and blinking in the dark!”



about the author

Anna Kuo (11) lives in Taipei City, and studies in the Ying Chiao elementary school. She is a citizen of the Republic of China. She enjoys reading, swimming and travelling and also likes to learn languages, write and research.

In the future, she wants to be a doctor and a writer. She hopes that with this story, she can express the ideas of cherishing resources, caring for our environment, creating world peace, and helping future generations have a more sustainable, better world.

She thanks her family and friends and her teachers, especially her outstanding Chinese teacher Chang Man Chuan (張曼娟) her English teacher Emily Tsao (曹依琳). She also thanks Mr. Jen Hua Pin (任華斌) for his excellent drawings.



about the illustrator

Siri Vinter comes from Norway where the winters are white, the forests have trolls and the Northern lights dance across the sky. During her MA in Children's Book Illustration at Cambridge School of Art, she discovered her love for creating illustrations with a screen-printed feel, reminiscent of the 1960s. She is inspired by nature, cluttered rooms, folklore and atmospheric movies.



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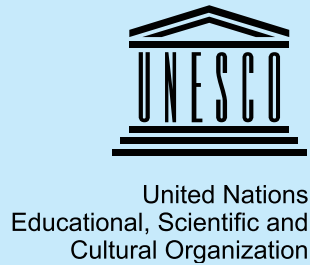
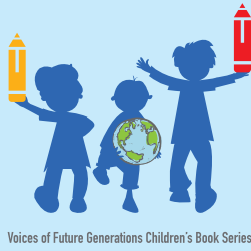
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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

All children are holders of important human rights. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, over a hundred countries agreed a UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the most important human rights treaty in history, they promised to protect and promote all children's equal rights, which are connected and equally important.

In the 54 Articles of the Convention, countries make solemn promises to defend children's needs and dreams. They recognize the role of children in realizing their rights, being heard and involved in decisions. Especially, Article 24 and Article 27 defend children's rights to safe drinking water, good food, a clean and safe environment, health, quality of life. And Article 29 recognizes children's rights to education that develops personality, talents and potential, respecting human rights and the natural environment.

— *Dr. Alexandra Wandel*
World Future Council



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The UN Sustainable Development Goals

At the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, governments and people came together to find pathways for a safer, more fair, and greener world for all. Everyone agreed to take new action to end poverty, stop environmental problems, and build bridges to a more just future. In 283 paragraphs of *The Future We Want* Declaration, countries committed to defend human rights, steward resources, fight climate change and pollution, protect animals, plants and biodiversity, and look after oceans, mountains, wetlands and other special places.

In the United Nations, countries are committing to 17 new Sustainable Development Goals for the whole world, with targets for real actions on the ground. Clubs, governments, firms, schools and children have started over a thousand partnerships, and mobilized billions, to deliver. The future we want exists in the hearts and minds of our generation, and in the hands of us all.

— *Vuyelwa Kuuya*
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL)



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Thanks and Inspiring Resources

'Voices of Future Generations' International Commission

Warmest thanks to the International Commission, launched in 2014 by His Excellency Judge CG Weeramantry, UNESCO Peace Education Research Award Laureate, which supports, guides and profiles this new series of Children's Books Series, including Ms Alexandra Wandel (WFC), Dr Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger (CISDL), Dr Kristiann Allen (New Zealand), Ms Irina Bokova (UNESCO), Mr Karl Hansen (Trust for Sustainable Living), Ms Emma Hopkin (UK), Dr Ying-Shih Hsieh (EQPF), Dr Maria Leichner-Reynal (Uruguay), Ms Melinda Manuel (PNG), Ms Julia Marton-Lefevre (IUCN), Dr James Moody (Australia), Ms Anna Oposa (The Philippines), Professor Kirsten Sandberg (UN CRC Chair), Ms Patricia Chaves (UN DSD), Dr Marcel Szabo (Hungary), Dr Christina Voigt (Norway), Ms Gabrielle Sacconaghi-Bacon (Moore Foundation), Ms Marcela Orvañanos de Rovzar (UNICEF Mexico) and others.

The World Future Council consists of 50 eminent global changemakers from across the globe. Together, they work to pass on a healthy planet and just societies to our children and grandchildren. (www.worldfuturecouncil.org)

United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) which celebrated its 70th Anniversary throughout 2015, strives to build networks among nations that enable humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity by mobilizing for education, building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation, and protecting freedom of expression. (en.unesco.org)

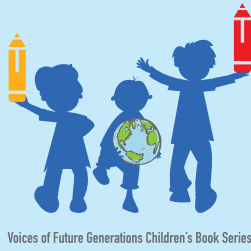
The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its three Optional Protocols, by its State parties. (www.ohchr.org)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. (www.unep.org)

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) envisions a just world that values and conserves nature, working to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. (www.iucn.org)

Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL) supports understanding, development and implementation of law for sustainable development by leading legal research through scholarship and dialogue, and facilitating legal education through teaching and capacity-building. (www.cisdl.org)

Trust for Sustainable Living and its Living Rainforest Centre exist to further the understanding of sustainable living in the United Kingdom and abroad through high-quality education. (www.livingrainforest.org)



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About the 'Voices of Future Generations' Series

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Voices of Future Generations Children's Book Series, led by the United Nations and a consortium of educational charities including the World Future Council (WFC), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), the Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF), the Fundacion Ecos and the Trust for Sustainable Living (TSL) among others, also the Future Generations Commissioners of several countries, and international leaders from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other international organizations, has launched the new Voices of Future Generations Series of Children's Books.

Every year we feature stories from our selected group of child authors, inspired by the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and the world's Sustainable Development Goals, and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself. Our junior authors, ages 8-12, are concerned about future justice, poverty, the global environment, education and children's rights. Accompanied by illustrations, each book profiles creative, interesting and adventurous ideas for creating a just and greener future, in the context of children's interests and lives.

We aim to publish the books internationally in ten languages, raising the voices of future generations and spread their messages for a fair and sustainable tomorrow among their peers and adults, worldwide. We welcome you to join us in support of this inspiring partnership, at www.vofg.org.









This lovely story offers important insights on how to prevent and recover from natural disasters and how to peacefully live with the natural world. With creativity, courage and kindness, Anna's words provide a new vision for future generations that can inspire us all.

Anna Oposa
Councillor, World Future Council,
and Executive Director of Save Philippine Seas

This vivid and insightful story shows how the power of inter-generational communication and cooperation can help to rebuild communities. Congratulations on a wonderful book!

Jacob Van Uexkull
World Future Council

This is a beautifully written and compelling story that people of all ages from around the globe can learn from. It is an honour to have this book as a part of the *Voices of Future Generations* Children's Book Series.

Professor Marcel Szabó
Commissioner for Future Generations, Hungary

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