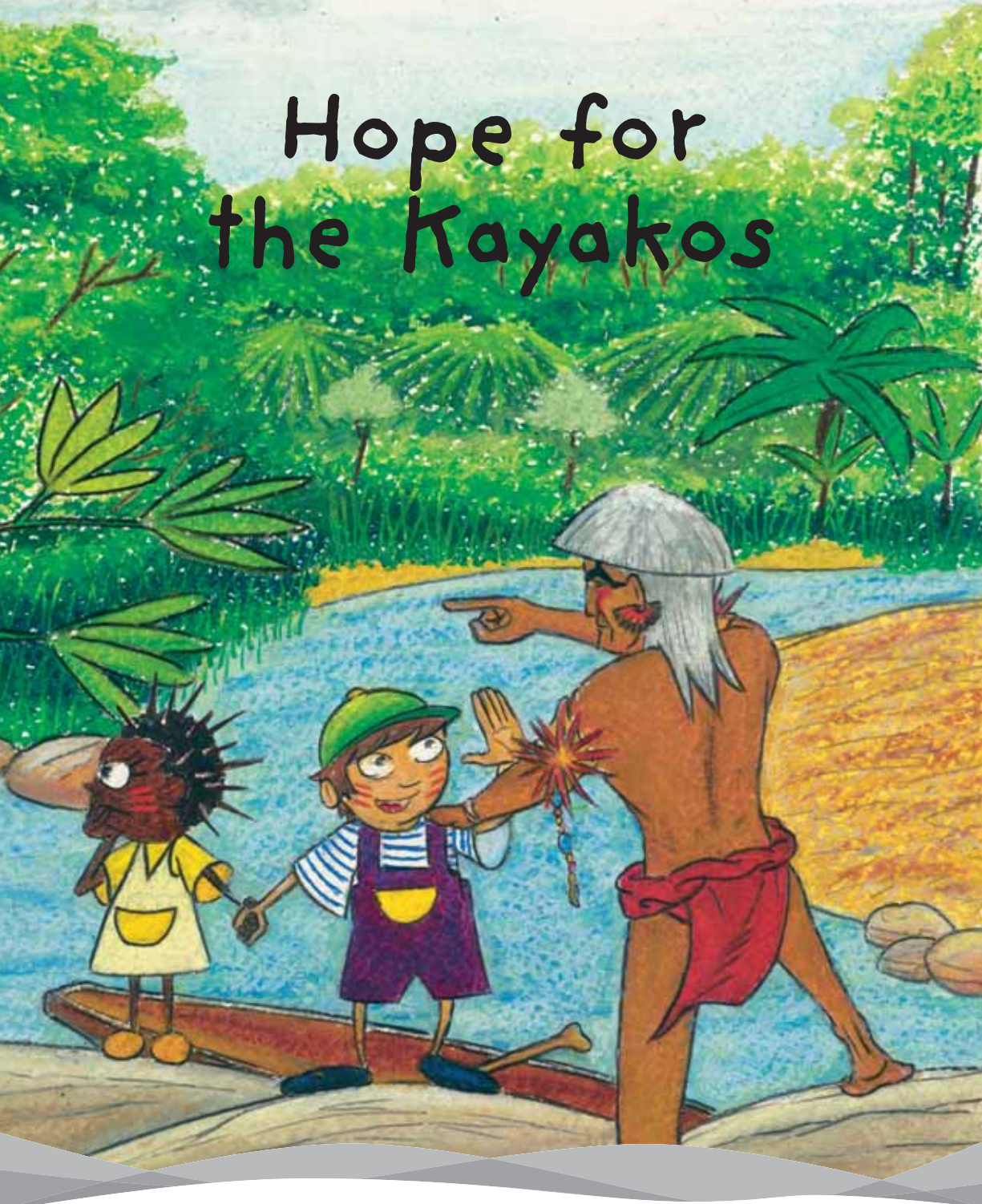


# Hope for the Kayakos



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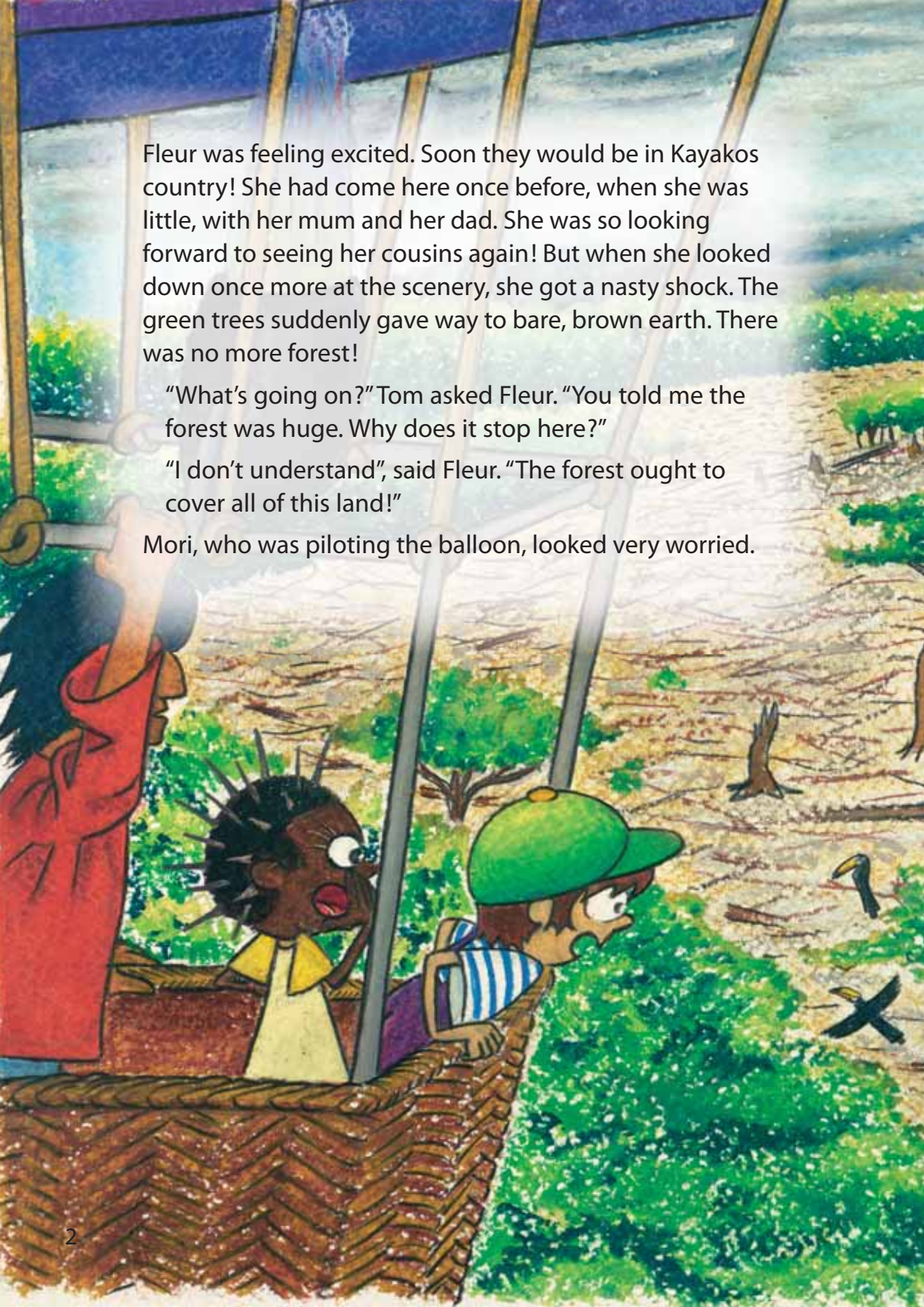
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What an amazing sight! Floating along in the hot-air balloon, Tom and Lila gazed down in wonder at the tropical rainforest. It looked like a beautiful ocean of green! They could hear birds in the tree-tops. Tom and Lila had never seen a rainforest before. With their friend Fleur, they were on their way to meet the Kayakos. They were distant cousins of Fleur's mum, and the Kayakos people had lived in this forest for thousands of years.



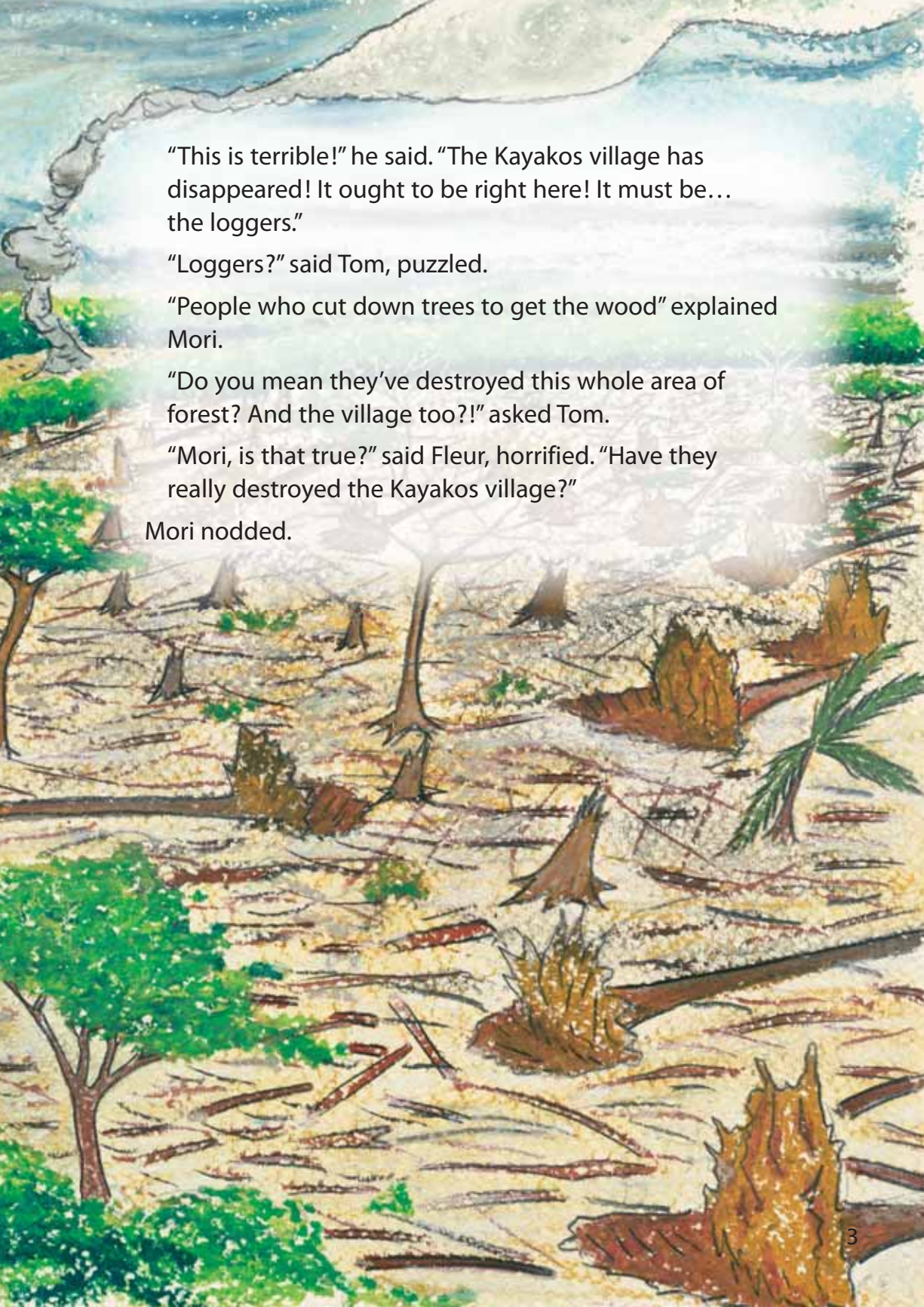


Fleur was feeling excited. Soon they would be in Kayakos country! She had come here once before, when she was little, with her mum and her dad. She was so looking forward to seeing her cousins again! But when she looked down once more at the scenery, she got a nasty shock. The green trees suddenly gave way to bare, brown earth. There was no more forest!

“What’s going on?” Tom asked Fleur. “You told me the forest was huge. Why does it stop here?”

“I don’t understand”, said Fleur. “The forest ought to cover all of this land!”

Mori, who was piloting the balloon, looked very worried.



“This is terrible!” he said. “The Kayakos village has disappeared! It ought to be right here! It must be... the loggers.”

“Loggers?” said Tom, puzzled.

“People who cut down trees to get the wood” explained Mori.

“Do you mean they’ve destroyed this whole area of forest? And the village too?!” asked Tom.

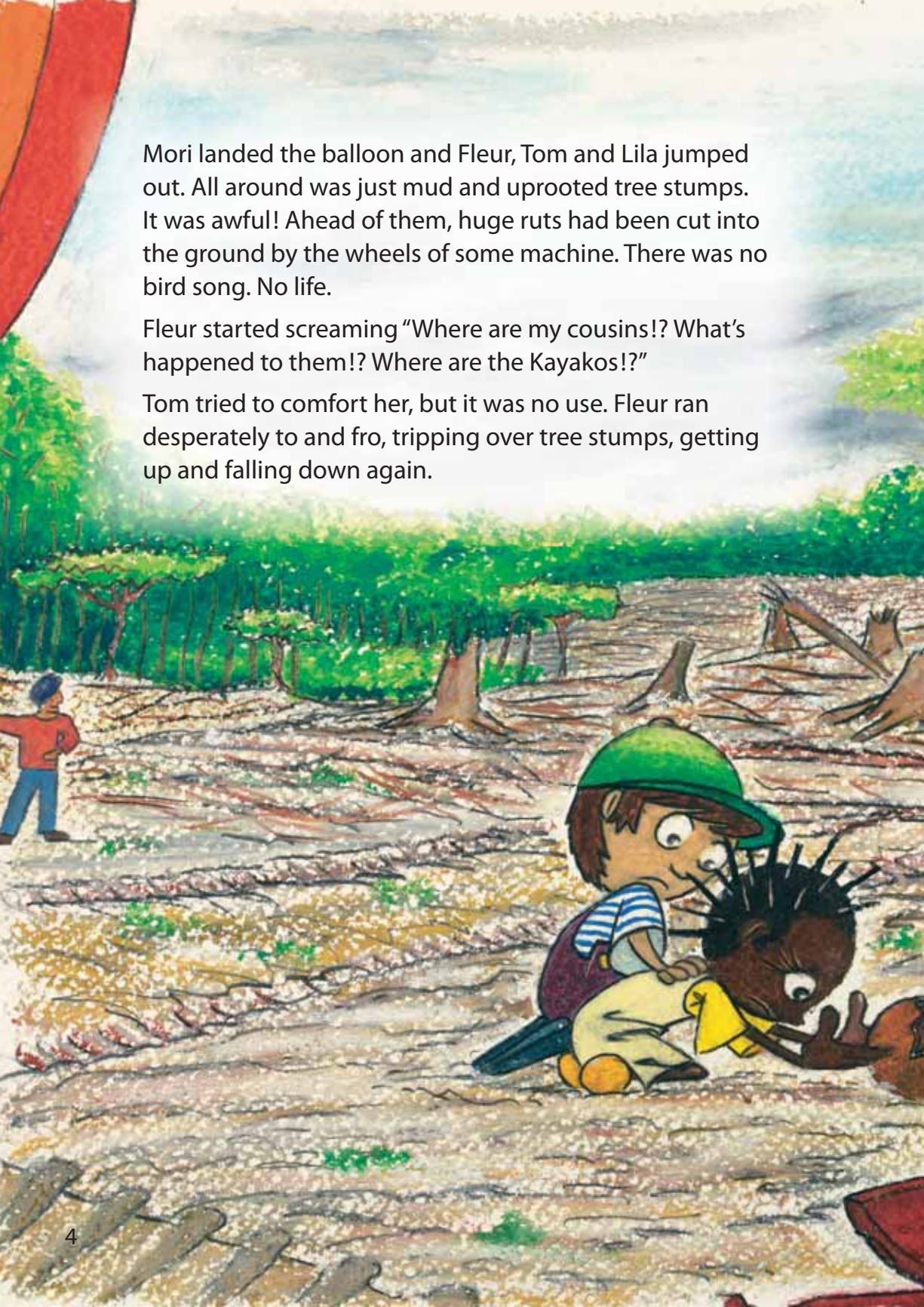
“Mori, is that true?” said Fleur, horrified. “Have they really destroyed the Kayakos village?”

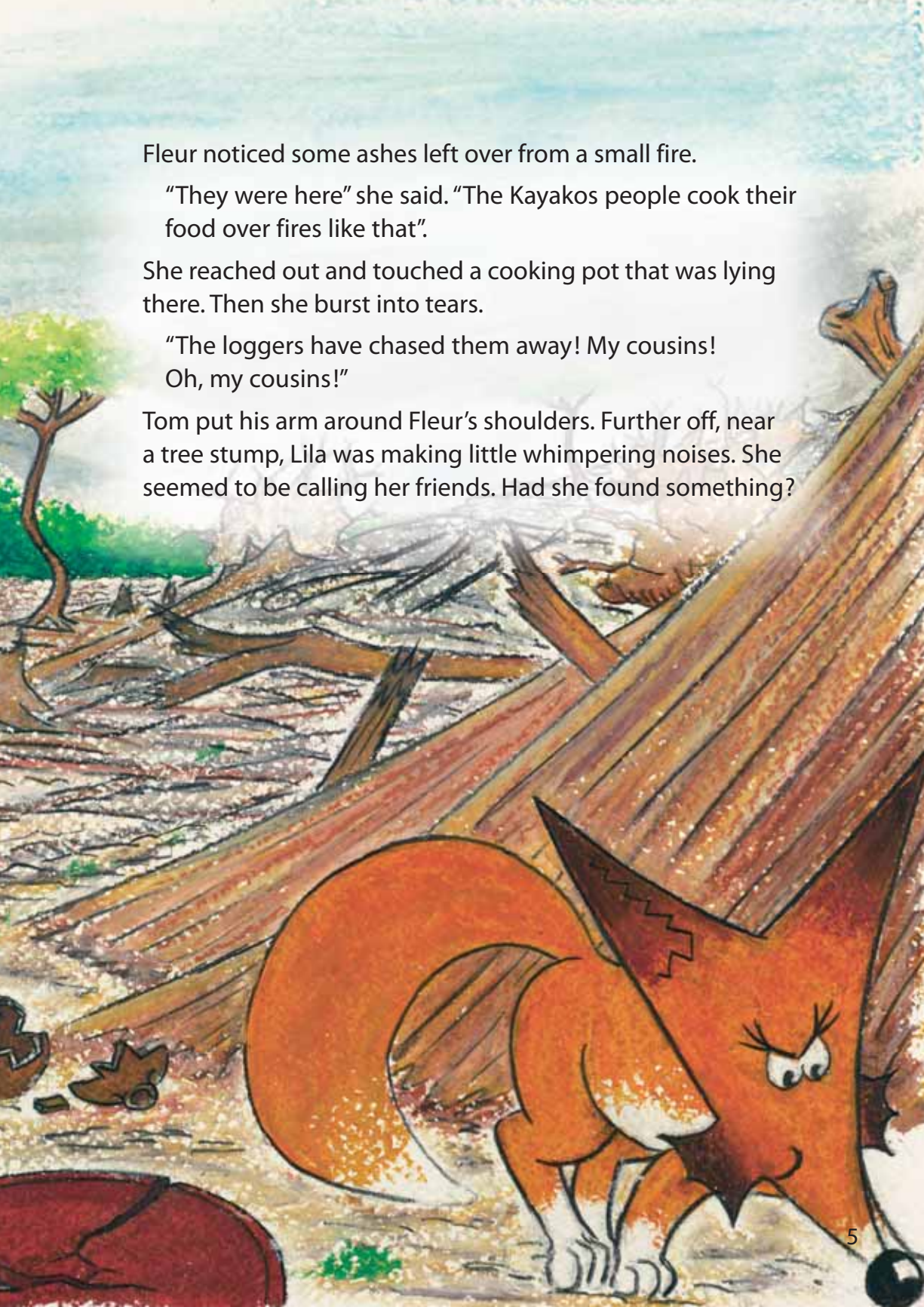
Mori nodded.

Mori landed the balloon and Fleur, Tom and Lila jumped out. All around was just mud and uprooted tree stumps. It was awful! Ahead of them, huge ruts had been cut into the ground by the wheels of some machine. There was no bird song. No life.

Fleur started screaming "Where are my cousins!? What's happened to them!? Where are the Kayakos!?"

Tom tried to comfort her, but it was no use. Fleur ran desperately to and fro, tripping over tree stumps, getting up and falling down again.





Fleur noticed some ashes left over from a small fire.

“They were here” she said. “The Kayakos people cook their food over fires like that”.

She reached out and touched a cooking pot that was lying there. Then she burst into tears.

“The loggers have chased them away! My cousins!  
Oh, my cousins!”

Tom put his arm around Fleur’s shoulders. Further off, near a tree stump, Lila was making little whimpering noises. She seemed to be calling her friends. Had she found something?



Tom and Fleur went towards Lila.

“Listen!” said Tom. “I can hear singing! It’s a very sad song”.

“It’s a Kayakos song!” said Fleur.

When they reached the tree stump, they found an old man sitting there. Fleur recognized him.

“It’s Naori! My mum’s oldest cousin!”

The old man stopped singing.

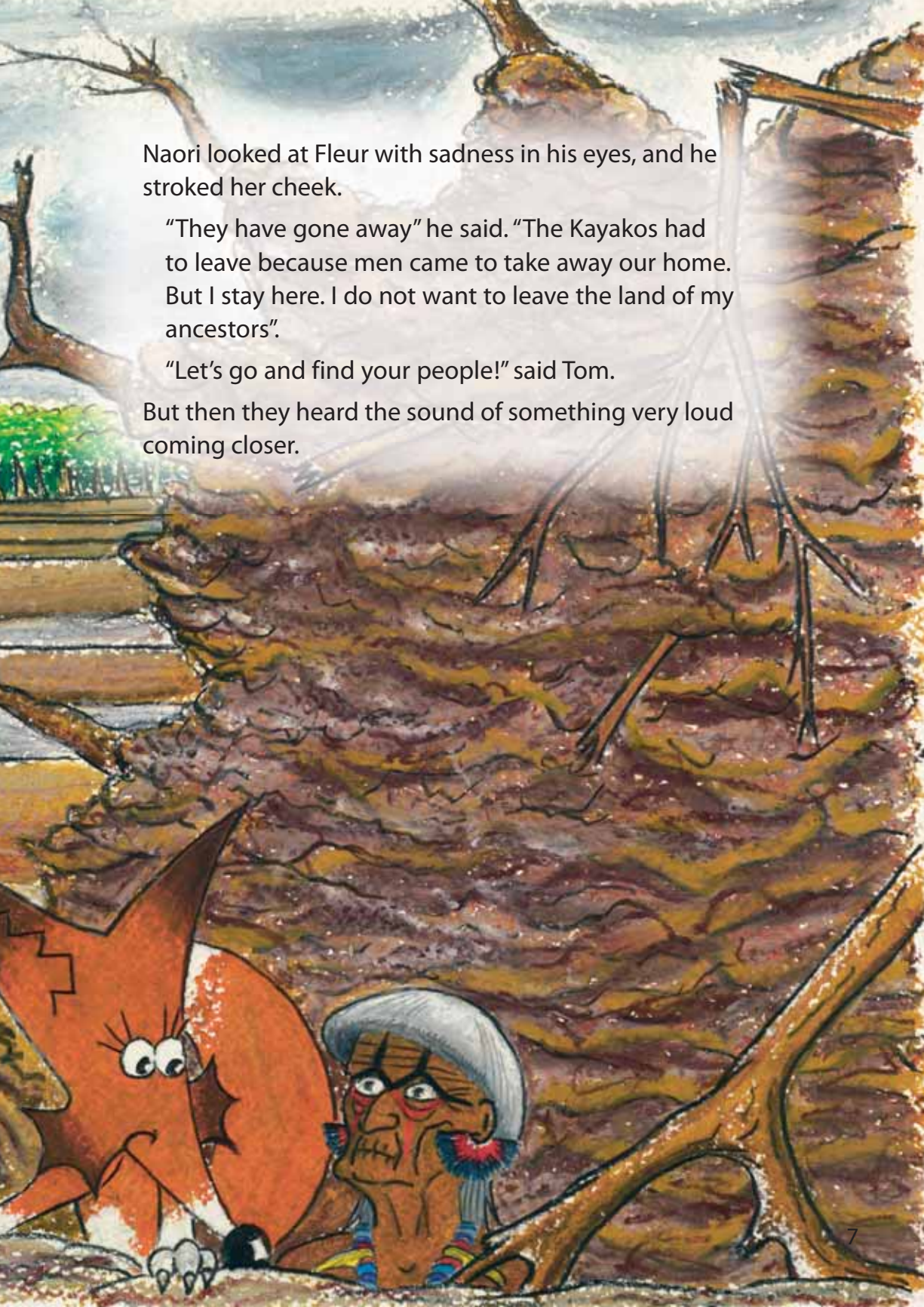
“Fleur, daughter of our cousin Saronie...

I am glad to see you” he said, solemnly.

They hugged each other tightly.

“What’s going on, Naori?” asked Fleur. “Where are all the Kayakos people?”





Naori looked at Fleur with sadness in his eyes, and he stroked her cheek.

“They have gone away” he said. “The Kayakos had to leave because men came to take away our home. But I stay here. I do not want to leave the land of my ancestors”.

“Let’s go and find your people!” said Tom.

But then they heard the sound of something very loud coming closer.

A lot of bulldozers and tractors with huge wheels arrived. They started tearing down more trees and flattening the earth to make a road.

Tom stood in front of them and held up his arms.



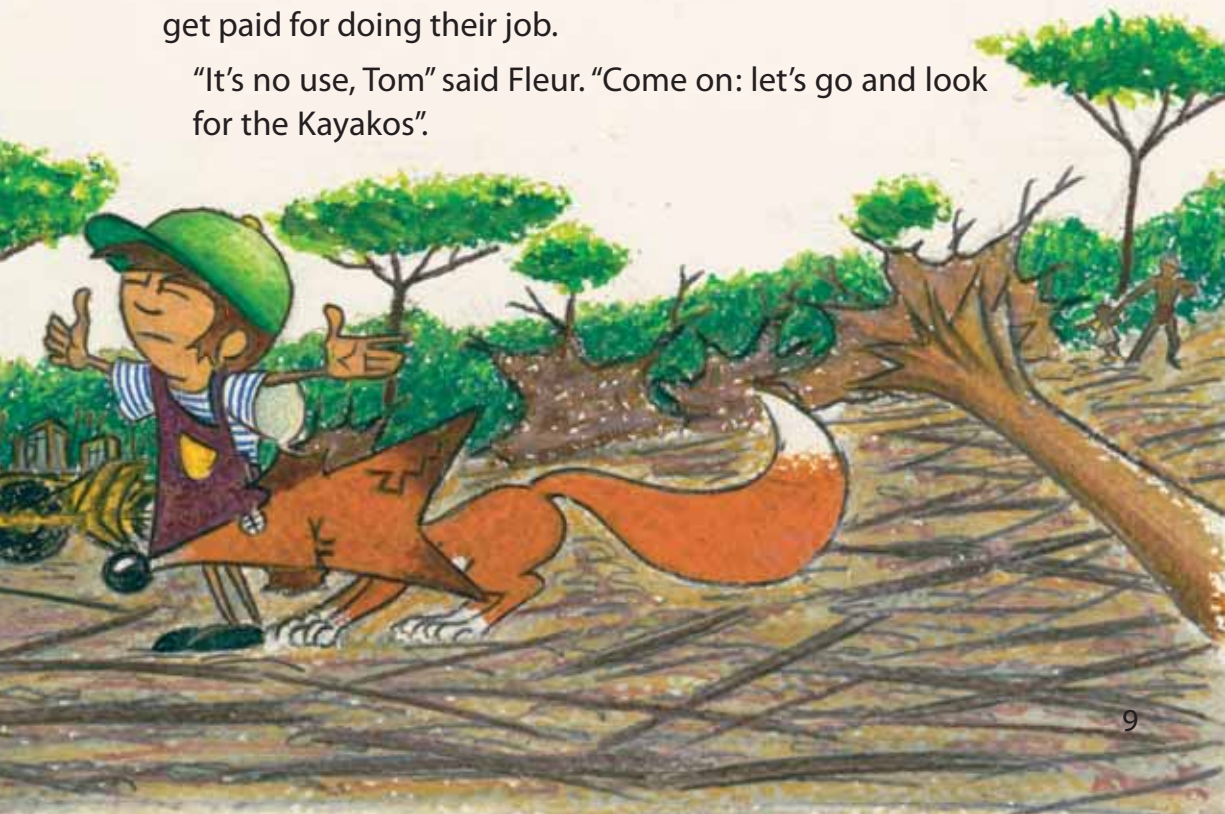
“STOP!” he shouted. “Don’t tear down the trees! They are our friends! We need them!” He tried to explain that trees take carbon dioxide gas out of the air, and if there are no more trees the carbon dioxide gas will make the world hotter and hotter. “We need trees to stop that happening!” said Tom.

But the tractor drivers didn’t understand. Their boss told them to get on with their work, and Tom had to shout above the noise of the engines.

“If the earth heats up, the climate will change! In some places there will be droughts and people will have no water! In other places there will be floods and people will drown! We’ll have more and more storms and hurricanes! Many kinds of plants and animals will disappear forever! The world will change completely and even the human race may not survive!”

The tractor drivers didn’t want to know. They just wanted to get paid for doing their job.

“It’s no use, Tom” said Fleur. “Come on: let’s go and look for the Kayakos”.



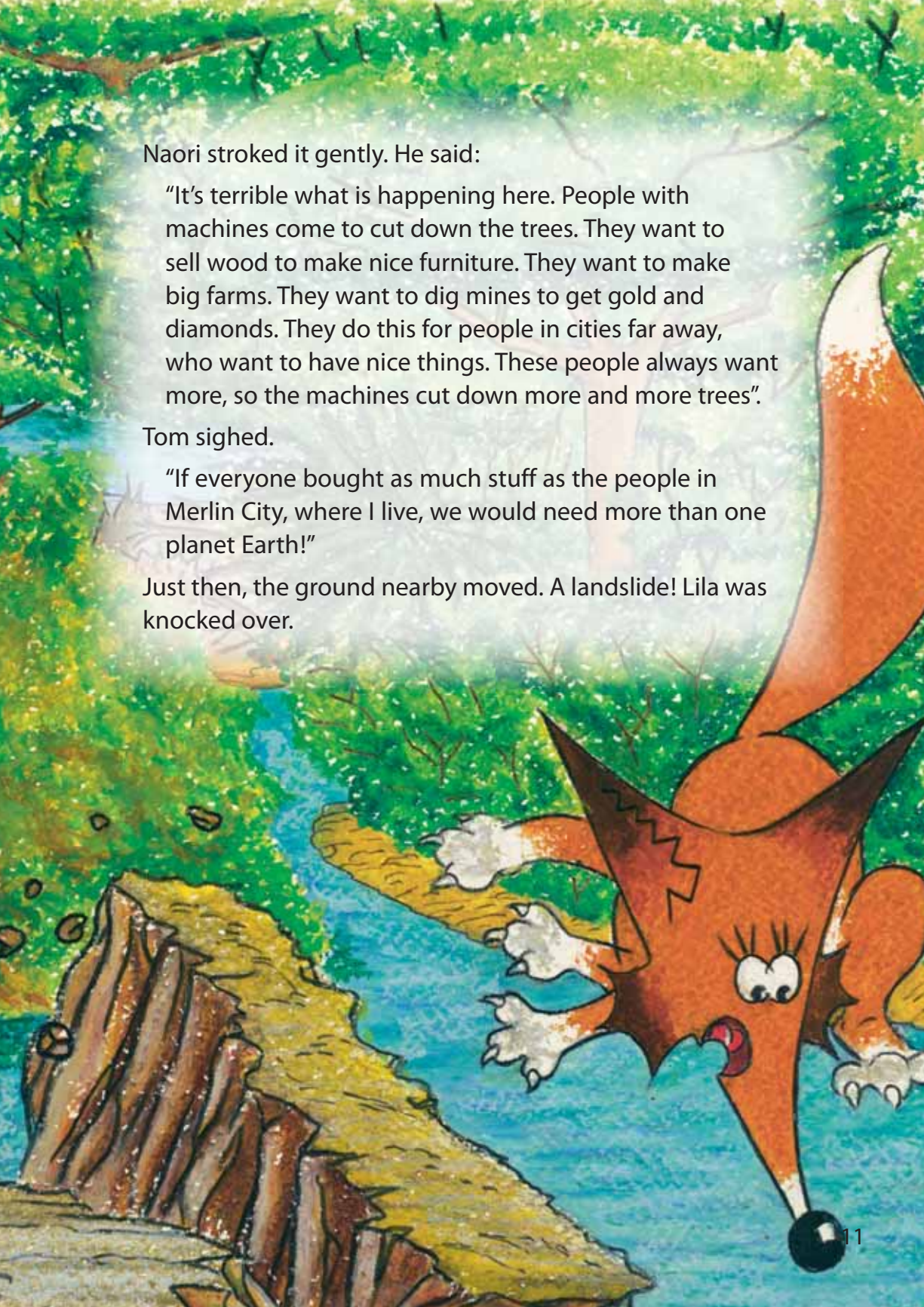
Fleur, Tom, Lila and Naori were walking away, towards the forest, when Naori stopped.

“Listen!” he said. “Do you hear that?”

He bent down and put his ear to the ground. He put his hand into a hole in the dry mud and pulled out... a frog! It was green with red legs, and it sat trembling in Naori’s hand.

“The poor little thing’s terrified of the tractors” said Naori. Then the cry of a bird caught Lila’s attention. It was a toucan, sitting there because it was too exhausted to fly.





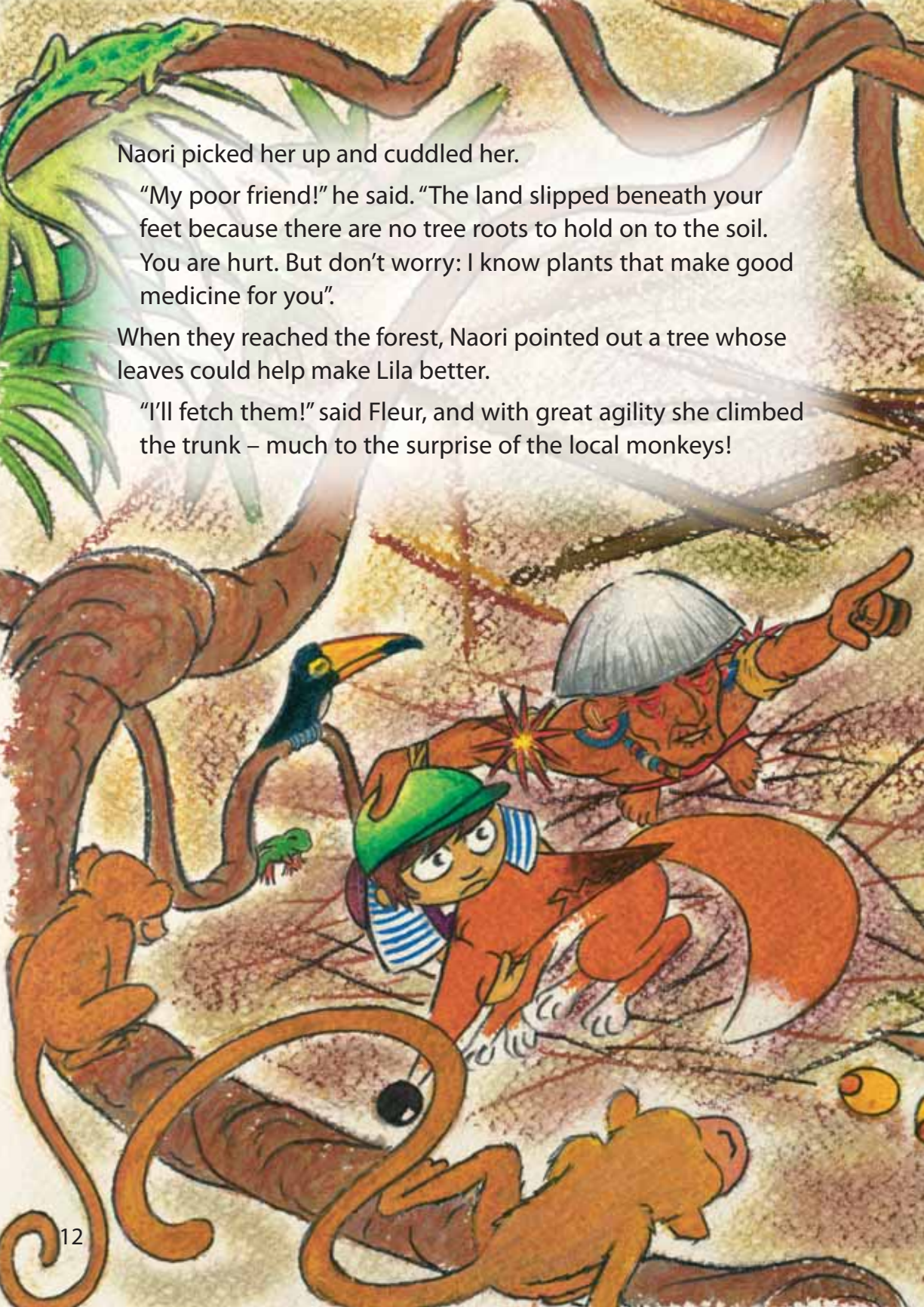
Naori stroked it gently. He said:

“It’s terrible what is happening here. People with machines come to cut down the trees. They want to sell wood to make nice furniture. They want to make big farms. They want to dig mines to get gold and diamonds. They do this for people in cities far away, who want to have nice things. These people always want more, so the machines cut down more and more trees”.

Tom sighed.

“If everyone bought as much stuff as the people in Merlin City, where I live, we would need more than one planet Earth!”

Just then, the ground nearby moved. A landslide! Lila was knocked over.

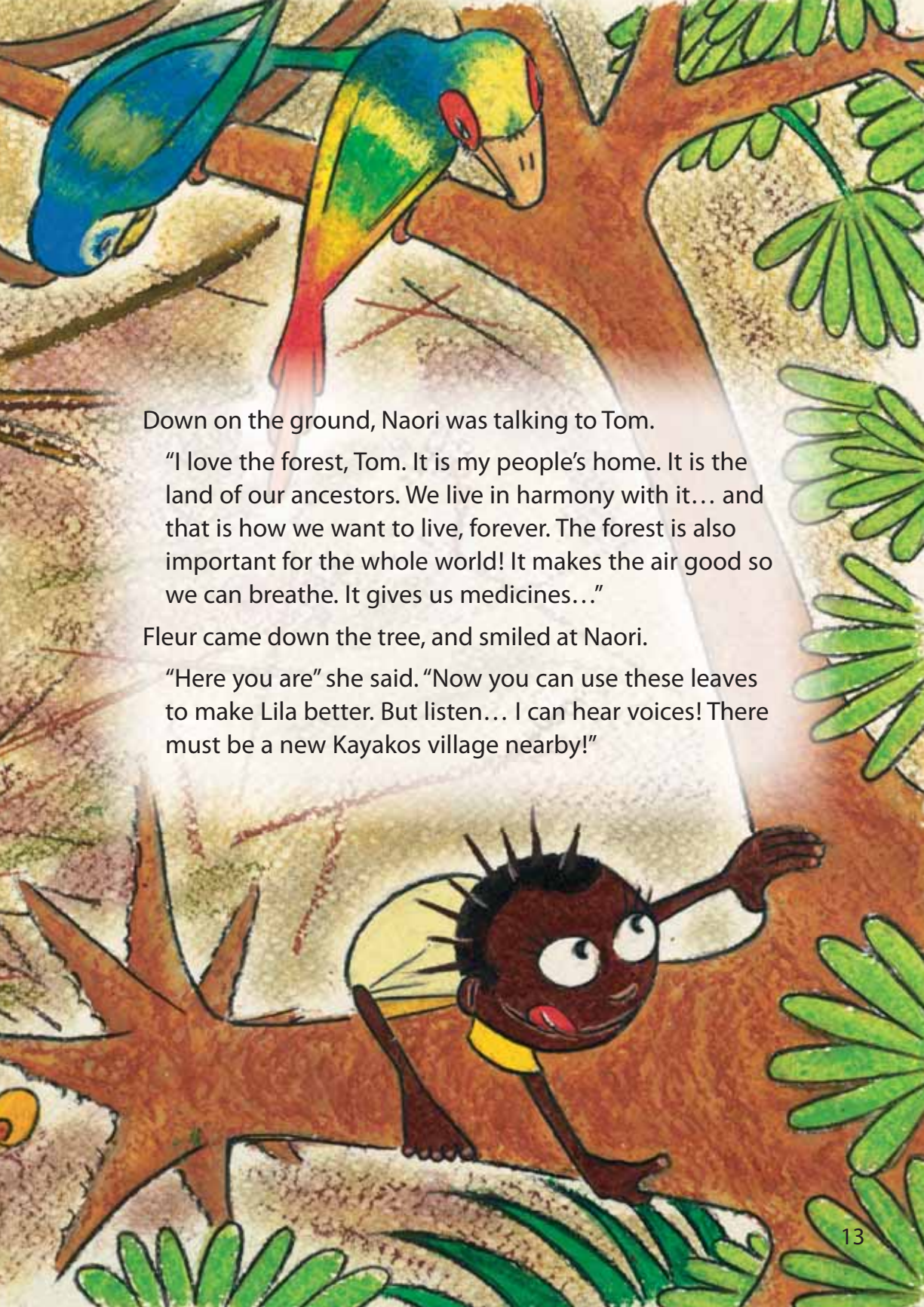


Naori picked her up and cuddled her.

“My poor friend!” he said. “The land slipped beneath your feet because there are no tree roots to hold on to the soil. You are hurt. But don’t worry: I know plants that make good medicine for you”.

When they reached the forest, Naori pointed out a tree whose leaves could help make Lila better.

“I’ll fetch them!” said Fleur, and with great agility she climbed the trunk – much to the surprise of the local monkeys!



Down on the ground, Naori was talking to Tom.

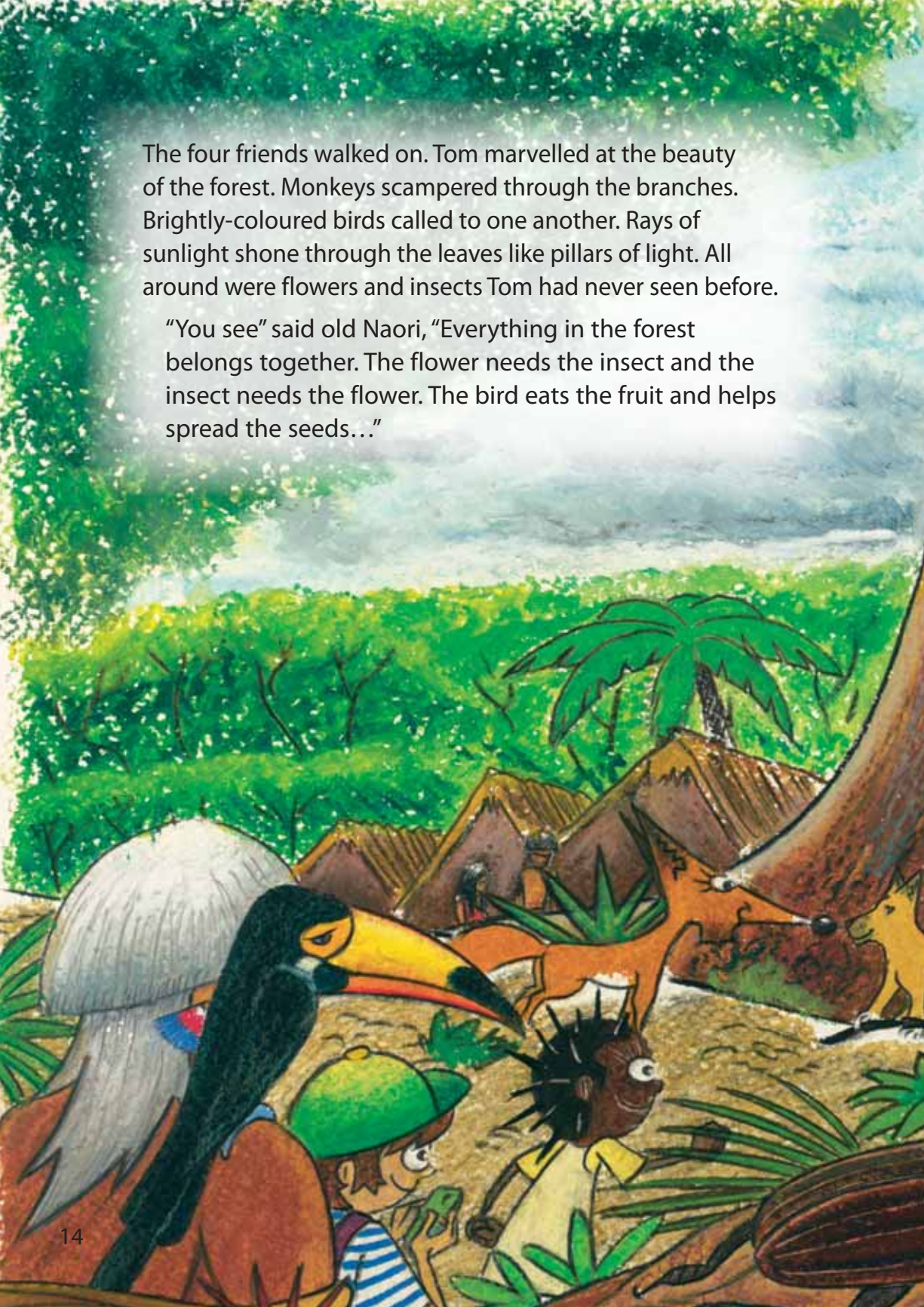
"I love the forest, Tom. It is my people's home. It is the land of our ancestors. We live in harmony with it... and that is how we want to live, forever. The forest is also important for the whole world! It makes the air good so we can breathe. It gives us medicines..."

Fleur came down the tree, and smiled at Naori.

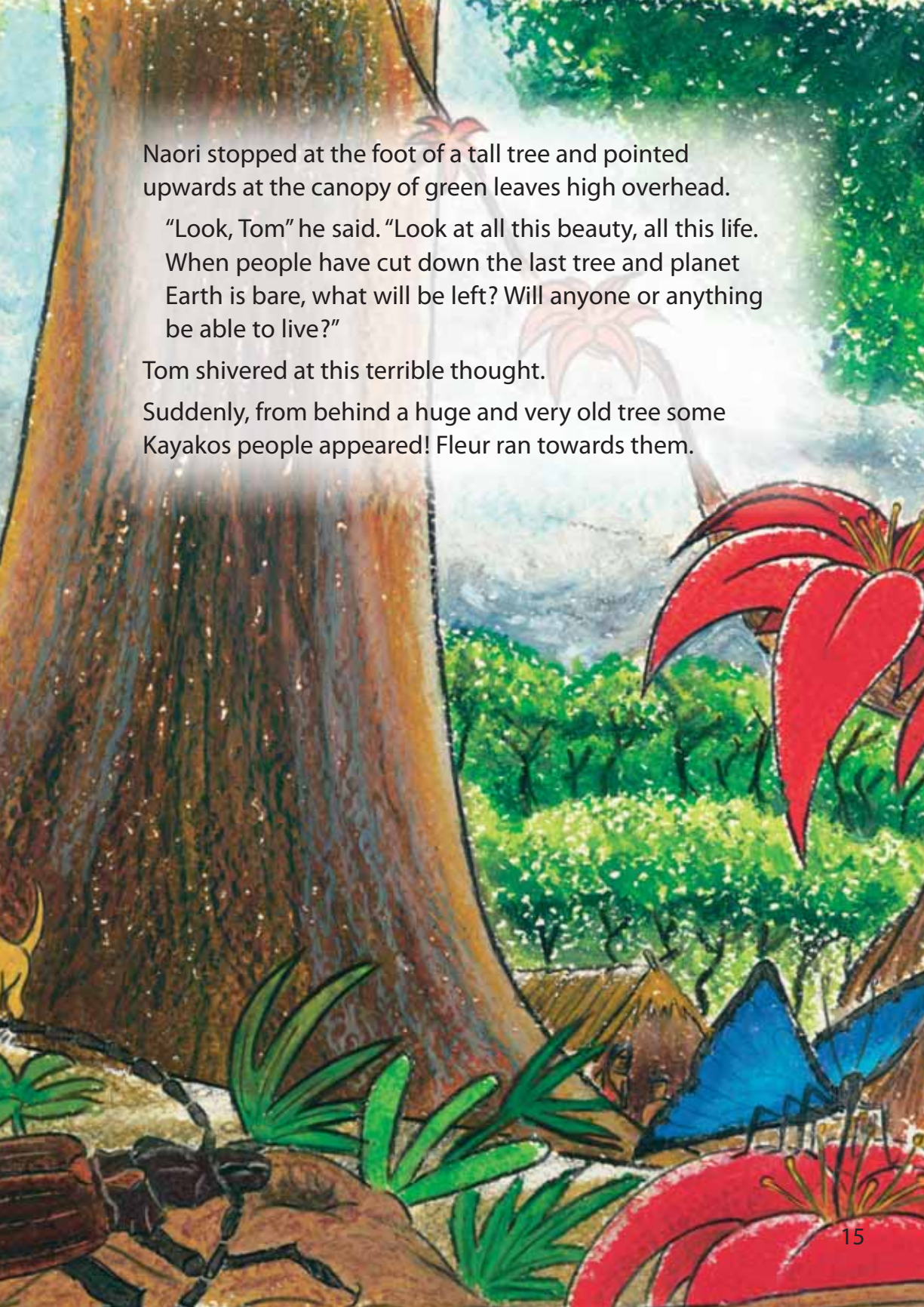
"Here you are" she said. "Now you can use these leaves to make Lila better. But listen... I can hear voices! There must be a new Kayakos village nearby!"

The four friends walked on. Tom marvelled at the beauty of the forest. Monkeys scampered through the branches. Brightly-coloured birds called to one another. Rays of sunlight shone through the leaves like pillars of light. All around were flowers and insects Tom had never seen before.

“You see” said old Naori, “Everything in the forest belongs together. The flower needs the insect and the insect needs the flower. The bird eats the fruit and helps spread the seeds...”







Naori stopped at the foot of a tall tree and pointed upwards at the canopy of green leaves high overhead.

“Look, Tom” he said. “Look at all this beauty, all this life. When people have cut down the last tree and planet Earth is bare, what will be left? Will anyone or anything be able to live?”

Tom shivered at this terrible thought.

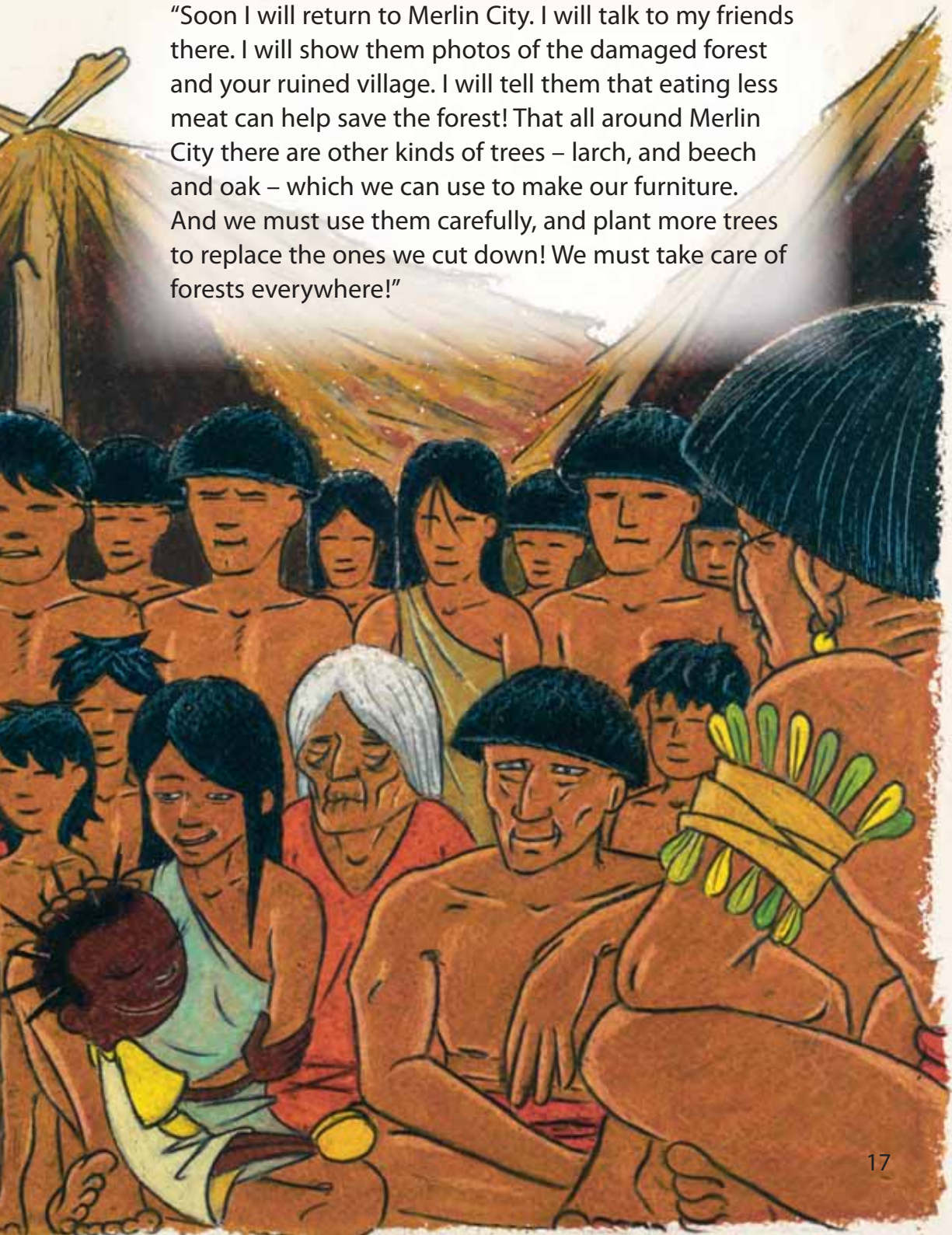
Suddenly, from behind a huge and very old tree some Kayakos people appeared! Fleur ran towards them.

She was so happy to find her cousins again, and to see they had re-built their village. The village people gathered around to meet Tom.

“Listen, my friends” said Tom. “I come from Merlin City. It’s a place where people eat too much and use too many things! Our meat and vegetables come from farms where forests once stood. Our furniture is made from tropical wood! I never realized how much harm our way of life is doing to you and your home. I am very, very sorry!”



“Soon I will return to Merlin City. I will talk to my friends there. I will show them photos of the damaged forest and your ruined village. I will tell them that eating less meat can help save the forest! That all around Merlin City there are other kinds of trees – larch, and beech and oak – which we can use to make our furniture. And we must use them carefully, and plant more trees to replace the ones we cut down! We must take care of forests everywhere!”



Night was falling. Fleur and her friends sat round a fire with the villagers, and Tom explained some more things he wanted to do when he got home.

“I will tell the Mayor to make more nature reserves to protect the animals and plants, and the rivers and lakes too! I’ll tell people to buy more things that are made or grown near Merlin City and not so many things that come from the other side of the world!”

Old Naori said “You are very wise, Tom, and the Kayakos trust you. We would like to give you a present”.

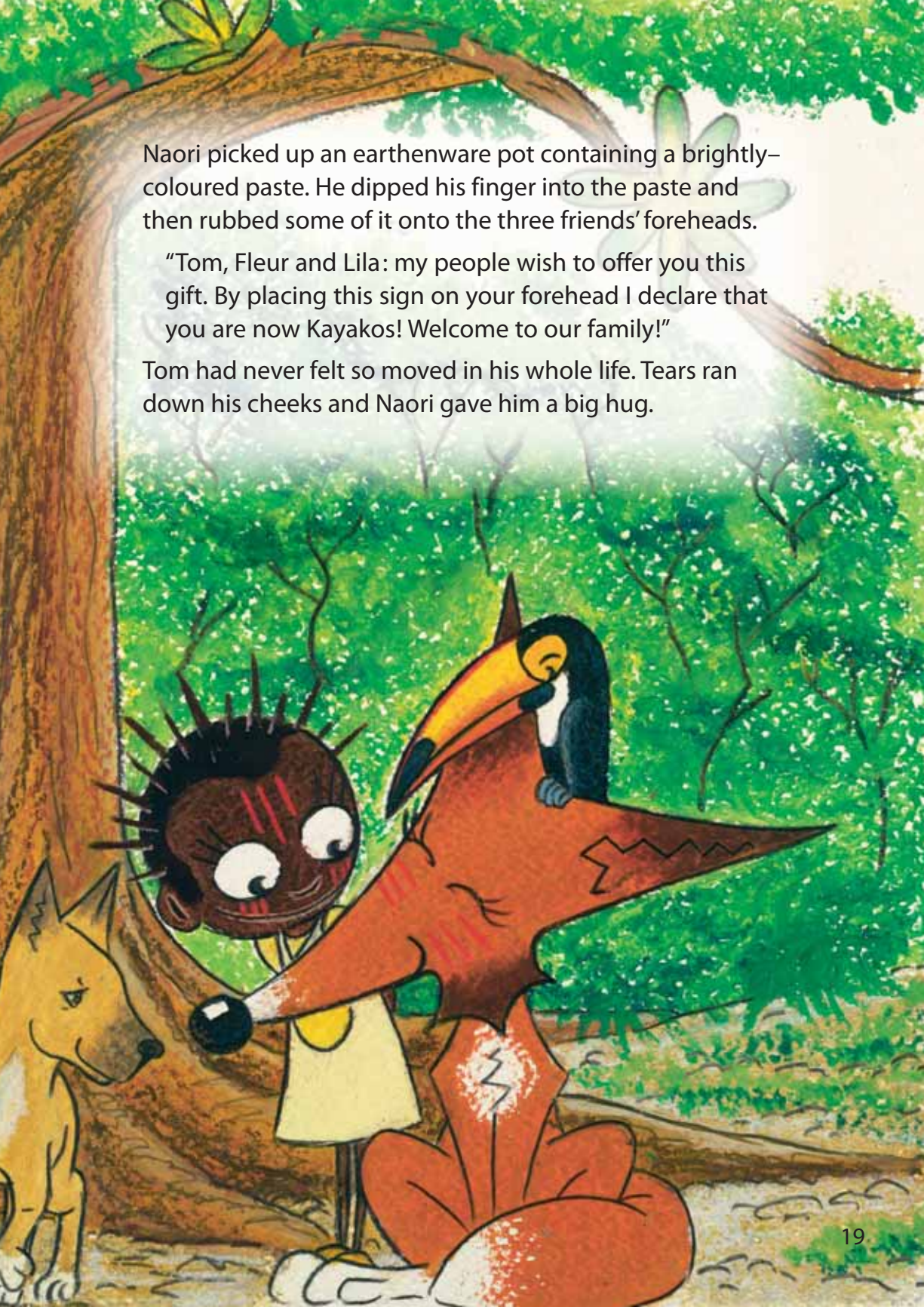
All the village people began dancing around Tom.



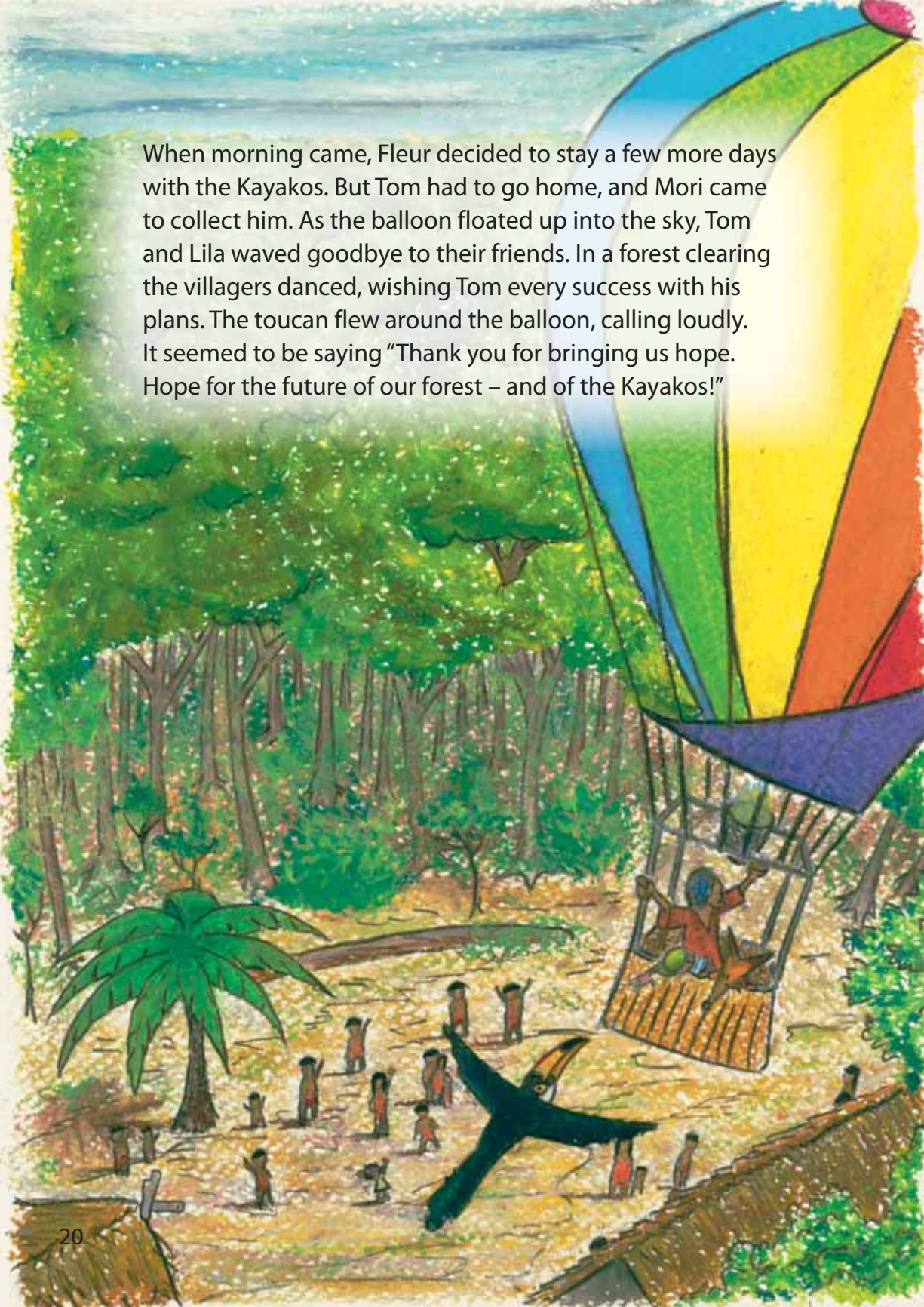
Naori picked up an earthenware pot containing a brightly-coloured paste. He dipped his finger into the paste and then rubbed some of it onto the three friends' foreheads.

“Tom, Fleur and Lila: my people wish to offer you this gift. By placing this sign on your forehead I declare that you are now Kayakos! Welcome to our family!”

Tom had never felt so moved in his whole life. Tears ran down his cheeks and Naori gave him a big hug.



When morning came, Fleur decided to stay a few more days with the Kayakos. But Tom had to go home, and Mori came to collect him. As the balloon floated up into the sky, Tom and Lila waved goodbye to their friends. In a forest clearing the villagers danced, wishing Tom every success with his plans. The toucan flew around the balloon, calling loudly. It seemed to be saying "Thank you for bringing us hope. Hope for the future of our forest – and of the Kayakos!"



European Commission

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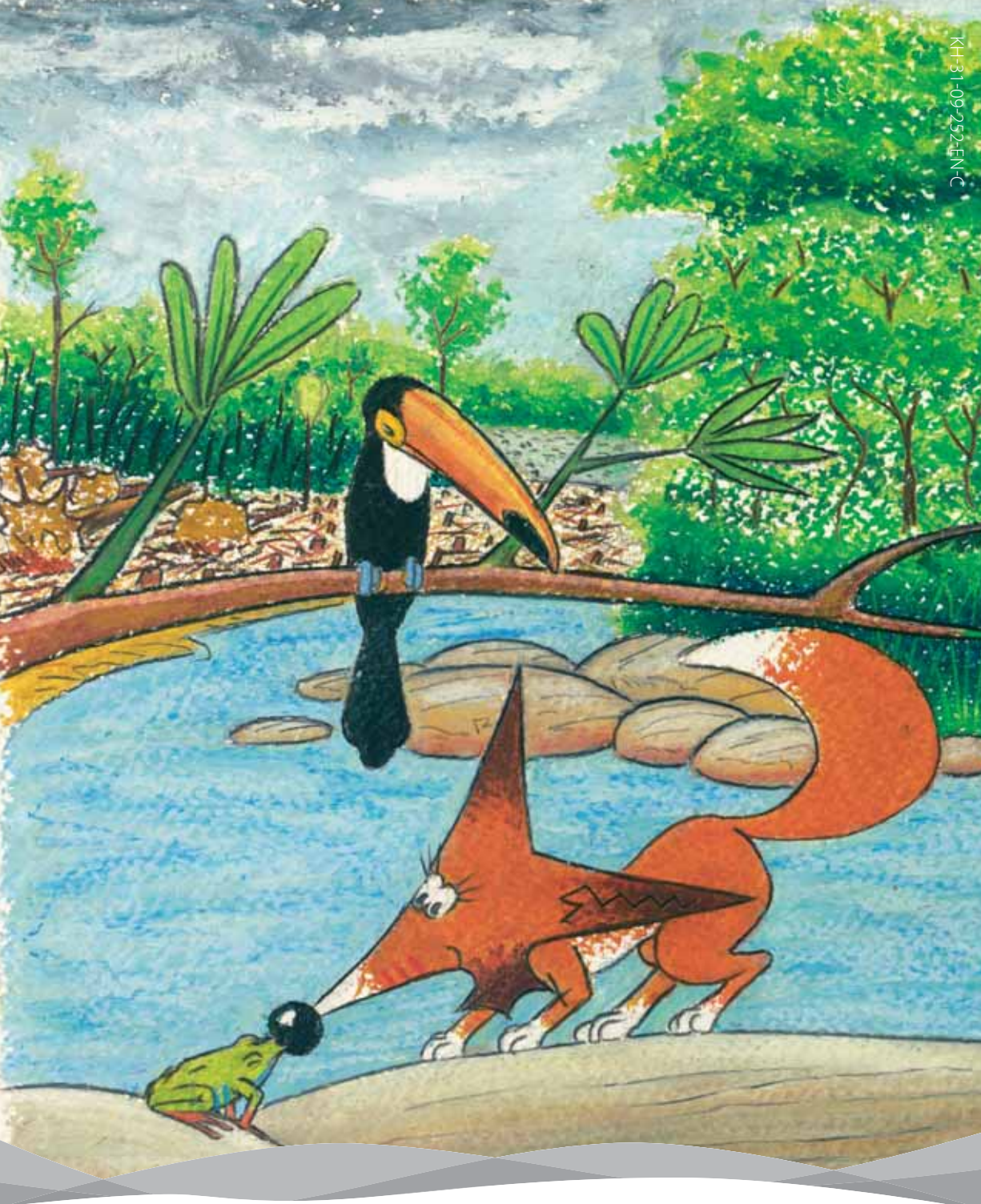
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