



ROCÍO  
AND THE  
BELLED FOREST



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## About the Authors and the Youth Legislative Impact (Impacto Legislativo Joven) Honduras Program

The authors of this book participated in Youth Legislative Impact Honduras—a program organized by the National Congress, ParlAmericas, and the Honduran Women’s Political Forum in 2022, with the objective of training and strengthening the emerging political leadership among young Honduran women interested in promoting gender equity, social inclusion, and citizen participation in their country.

### Iliana Monzerath Liconq Leiva

Originally from La Ceiba, Atlántida, Iliana, 23, is committed to strengthening democracy, gender equality, and human rights. She recently graduated with a degree in international relations and has experience working with civil society and international organizations. She is currently studying law at the Central American Technological University and works with the National Human Rights Commission. As a student, she stood out for her leadership and academic achievements, presiding over the student association of her class in 2020 and graduating with Magna Cum Laude distinction. Her achievements also include working as a research assistant on the technical team of the UNDP Human Development Report in Honduras, where she collaborated on developing public policy proposals from youth.





## Mónica Alexandra Torres Rojas

Originally from Tegucigalpa, Monica, 26, is the daughter of a Honduran mother and Nicaraguan father. She is passionate about environmental and gender issues and restoring the rule of law. She graduated with an honour's degree in sociology from the National Autonomous University of Honduras and is currently an active member of the Honduran Network for Escazú (Red Hondureña por Escazú) and the Citizens' Organization for Transparency and Justice (Articulación Ciudadana por la Transparencia y la Justicia). Her commitment and dedication have led her to present research papers nationally and internationally. Her areas of interest and expertise cover a range of topics, including the socio-environmental situation in Honduras, human mobility, the struggle against gender-based violence, and the informal economy.

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Originally from San Pedro Sula, Lissy, 24, is passionate about service, strengthening democracy, cooperation, and sustainability. She graduated with a degree in international relations and has served as head of election observation missions at national and international levels. With extensive experience in citizen participation, public oversight, and international cooperation, she was recognized by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in 2021. She currently serves as Executive Director of Fundación Padrino and Public Relations Officer of Diálisis de Honduras. As a student, she presided over the international relations association and established the first Model United Nations at UNITEC SPS, resulting in a variety of new spaces for young people to develop proposals for advocacy and citizen participation at the national level.



**ParlAmericas** is the organization composed of the 35 national parliaments of North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean that facilitates the exchange of good legislative practices carried out in the region's parliaments. ParlAmericas also produces publications to support parliamentarians in their work of developing laws, monitoring the government's actions (the executive branch), evaluating budgetary allocations, and ensuring inclusive representation of citizens, leaving no one behind.

The International Secretariat of ParlAmericas is headquartered in Ottawa, Canada.

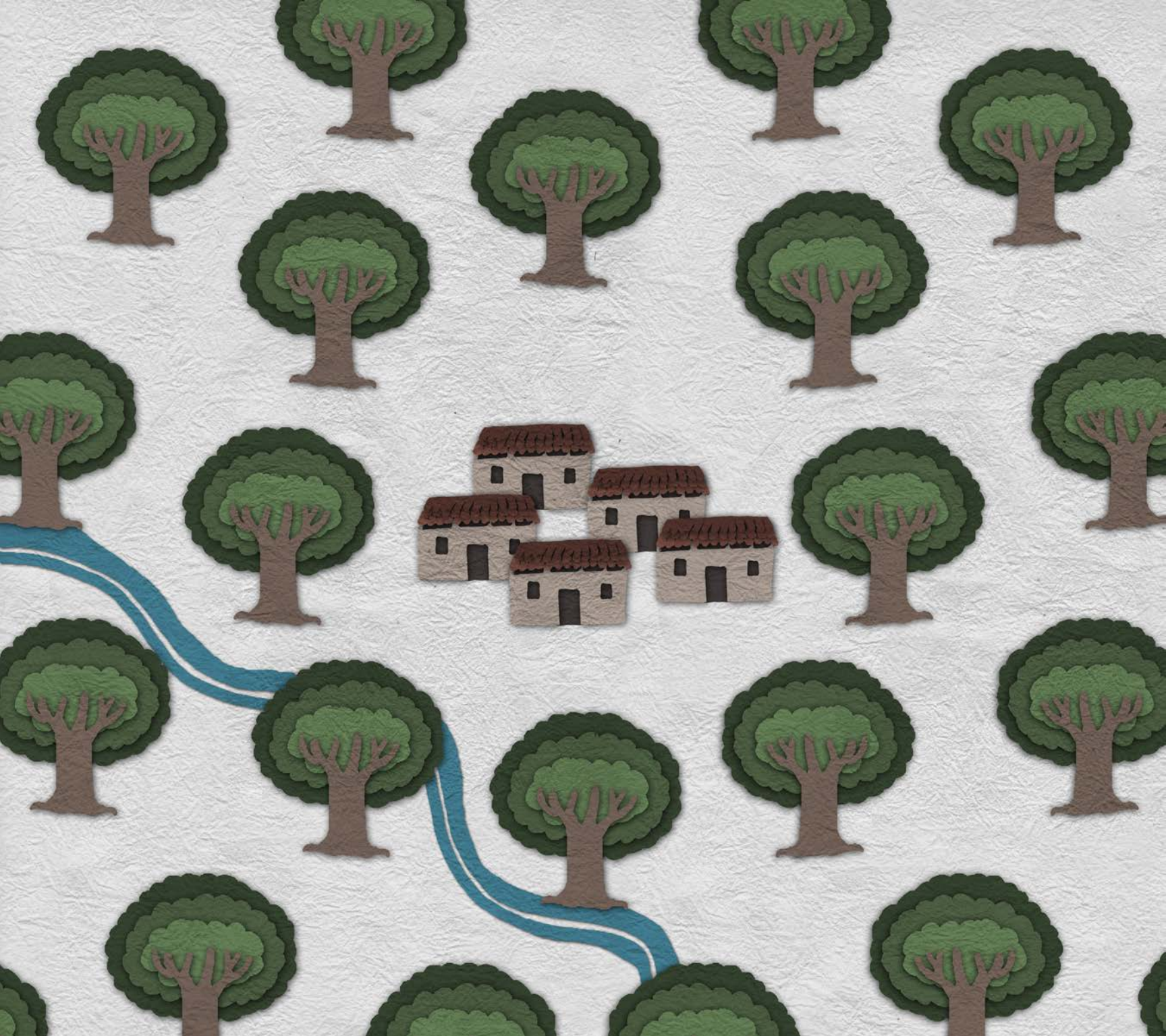


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## Among giant trees

and carefully searching on a map, surrounded by breathtaking scenery, was the village of Akoapa.

The residents of Akoapa did not need a watch to tell them the time because the birds alerted them of the sunrise and the rest of the animals of lunch time when they came to drink water from the river. Nor did they need a calendar to recognize the season of the year. They knew that when the river became bigger it was because of the winter rains and when it became smaller it was because of the summer heat.

*In this little village of many colors and sounds*

lived Rocío, a curious little girl who loved to talk. Akoapa had been her family's home for generations and she loved it.



With each new start of summer,  
Rocío would head to the river very early in the day.  
She loved to dive into the river  
and explore the forest that surrounded it.

## But one summer things were different.

The birds weren't singing with the same joy and the animals weren't showing up to drink from the river. The heat felt stronger and Rocío could see that her mother was worried.

– What will happen to the crops, to the tomatoes and the cucumbers?  
her mother sighed.



Her mother's sighs made Rocío head to the river to investigate. But as she got there, she realized that the river was not the same one she had known.

– How is this possible? she thought to herself.

She worried about her mother's tomatoes not having enough water to grow and the animals that would have to look elsewhere for water. Alarmed, she cried aloud:

– Will we also have to look for another home?



We need to do something!

Suddenly, she looked around and noticed that there was an oar next to her. It belonged to her friend Martín, the best student in her class. His love of learning was something Rocío admired. He not only liked going to school, but also knew the river and the forest like no one else. He walked along it every day with his parents when they went fishing, as they had done with his grandparents.

In the distance, Rocío saw him looking at the river with a frightened look on his face and decided to walk towards him. With a glance, they shared the same thought:

– What can we do? asked Martín.

During school breaks, Martín would join his family and harvest lots of fish for the village, but this year the fish had gone elsewhere.

– Don't worry Martín, we will investigate together.

They walked away from the river and realized that where there were once trees with thick, leafy canopies that shielded the sun's rays, they could now see more of the sky than usual.

*– There is something very different here! There used to be more trees!*

Just then Pepe, the river possum, showed up:

– Pepe, where have you been? I haven't seen you in the afternoons, asked Rocío.

**And Pepe said to them:**

**– Do you remember the big tree where I was born, where I lived with my family? That big tree is gone. It was cut down, so now we have to look for another home.**



The pine tree where the woodpeckers lived, the liquid amber they used to make tea, the macuelizo that delighted the locals with its yellow leaves, were no longer there.

— *If they keep cutting down the trees we will be left without our River!*  
exclaimed Martín.

— What does that have to do with it? asked Juan, appearing from behind a tree.

A tree shook in the wind and a wise old man's face appeared in the bark:

— That's true, I've lived here for 300 years. As guardians of this village, we not only provide homes, like Pepe's, but we also help keep the air clean, provide medicines, and keep the river from drying up. Our roots prevent the earth from shifting, which helps keep the water from drifting away.

As they were speaking with the old tree, they saw Margarita approaching them very sad, carrying an almost empty bucket.

— What's the matter, little girl? asked Pepe.

— This morning I went to the well to get water as usual, and when I got there, I saw a very long line. I waited until it was my turn and then guess what? There was almost no water left! - she said worried - If we run out of water, I don't know what we'll do....



Rocío invited her friends to the house to think of ideas for dealing with the situation. When they arrived, they were greeted by her mother and went to the garden. Martín took a notebook out of his backpack to take notes and made a proposal:

– What if we planted more trees? We could do it using what we learned in science class about planting seeds.

– Yes, but they take a long time to grow - said Rocío's mother as she served them watermelon fresh from her garden, and added - Besides planting new trees, we should also take care of the ones that are still with us!

– So we must find a way to protect the trees that are still in the forest, said Juan.

– But it's not just about the trees, we also have to take care of the water, Pepe explained.

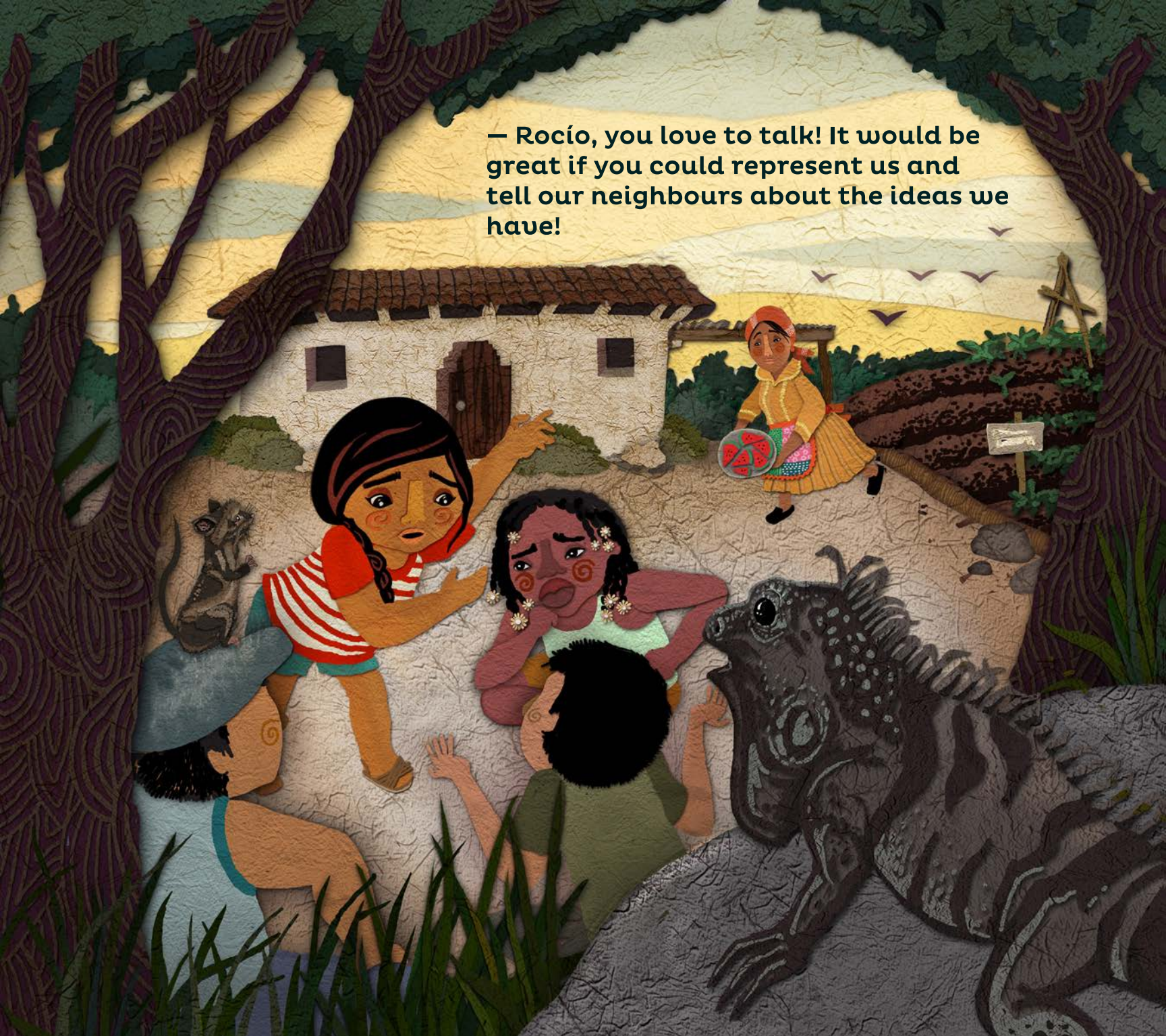
– What if we started collecting rainwater? Margarita suggested.

– You have very good ideas! exclaimed Rocío's mother, –But you won't be able to do it alone. Don't forget that "unity is strength." It would be a good idea to involve the community so that we can all work together.

Martín then proposed to gather the residents of Akoapa in the village square:



— Rocío, you love to talk! It would be great if you could represent us and tell our neighbours about the ideas we have!



– I can't! I like to talk with my friends, not in front of the whole village! I'd be too shy!

– Akoapa needs us! Margarita exclaimed, We'll be with you and will help you practice!

– Oh, I know! My older sister participated in last year's Congress for Children. She can teach us how to present ideas! exclaimed Juan.

After several days of practicing with her friends and following the advice of Juan's sister, the day arrived. Some of the residents of Akoapa were gathered in the square talking among themselves. Rocío stood on a chair so they could see her and began to explain timidly and with a trembling voice why it was a problem for the village that the river was getting shallower and that there were fewer trees in the forest. But upon seeing the confused look on everyone's faces, Rocío could not continue to speak, and she asked Martín to continue telling them what they had discovered.

— *The children are right!  
We must protect our resources!*

*the teacher Laura exclaimed.*

– Well, I still have water, but the truth is that I have less than before, said Mr. Jorge, who had a field of pineapples.





– We don't know who is cutting down the trees, said another neighbor. But we can help preserve water.

**We need to be more careful with how we use it!**

The conversation went on for a while. While some neighbours acknowledged the problem, others were unconcerned.



Days passed and several community members decided to act: some collected rainwater, others discovered new ways to irrigate their crops using less water.

But in the forest, trees were still being cut down in bulk and the river was still shallow. Now all the villagers agreed that it was time to meet again.

Arriving at the meeting, Rocío noticed that everyone looked disillusioned. But she was determined to help solve the problem and believed in the power of her community and her own voice. After listening to the opinions of several neighbours, Rocío decided to speak up. This time she took a deep breath to settle her nerves before sharing her idea:

— Those trees have been in Akoapa long before we have, just like the River. We have to do more!

How about tying a bell to each tree?

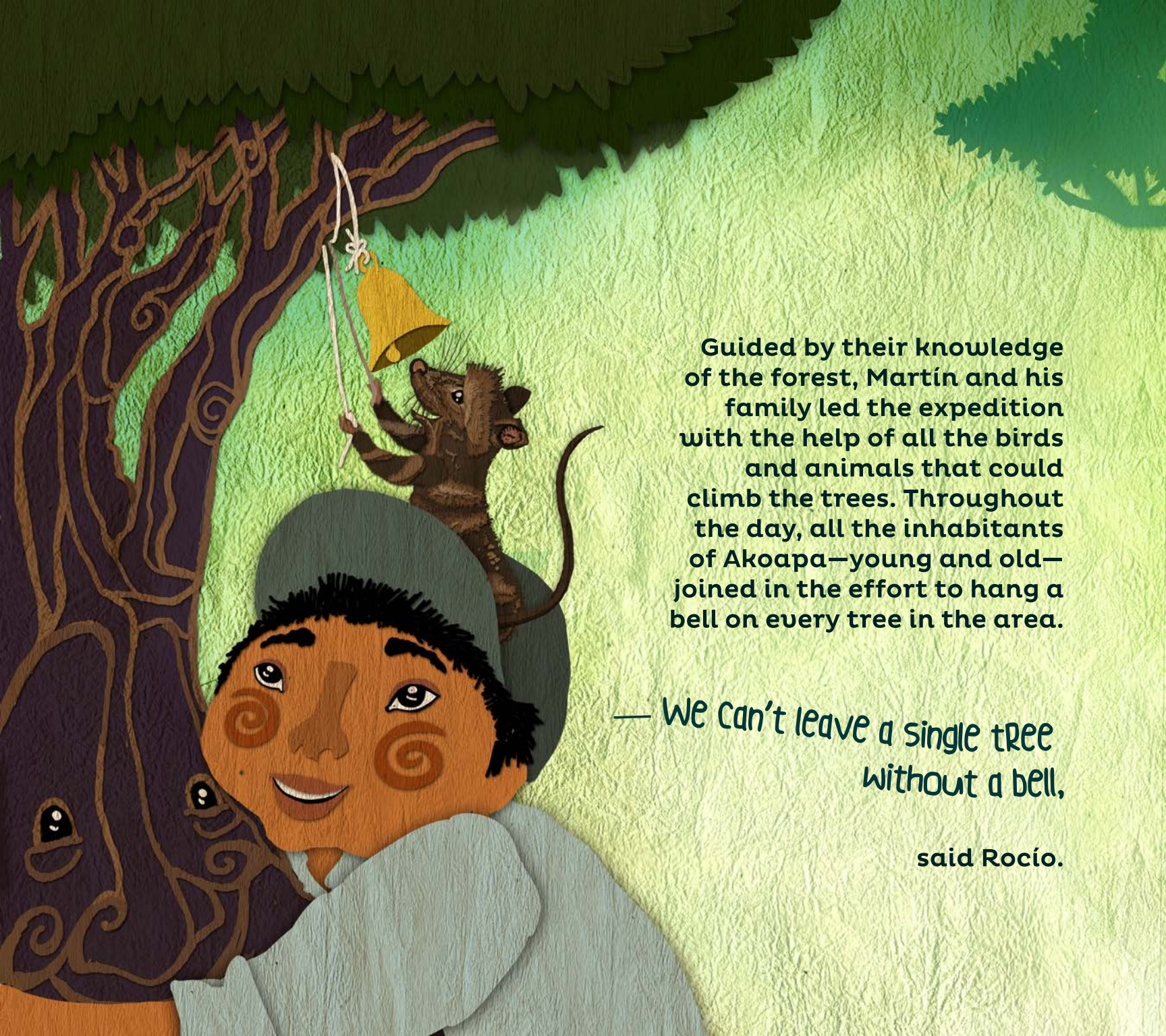


— Yes, so we can hear when they want to cut them down! exclaimed a neighbour, excited about the idea.

— I'm going to ask Pepe and our friends in the forest for help, said Juan.

Everyone thought it was a good idea. They decided to start in the area where Pepe the possum lived.





Guided by their knowledge of the forest, Martín and his family led the expedition with the help of all the birds and animals that could climb the trees. Throughout the day, all the inhabitants of Akoapa—young and old—joined in the effort to hang a bell on every tree in the area.

— We can't leave a single tree without a bell,

said Rocío.



At night, when the moon's reflection could be barely seen in the river, the bells could be heard. Alarmed, those who wanted to cut the trees got frightened and ran out of the forest. In this way, the sound warned the residents of Akoapa, who would head into the forest to make sure the trees were safe.





As time went on, word spread about the forest with bells on every tree and the story of how the Akoapa community had organized. Many found the creative way in which they managed to save their home quite interesting. Their achievement reached neighbouring towns, and several of them decided to do the same, until what began as a simple idea became a movement called



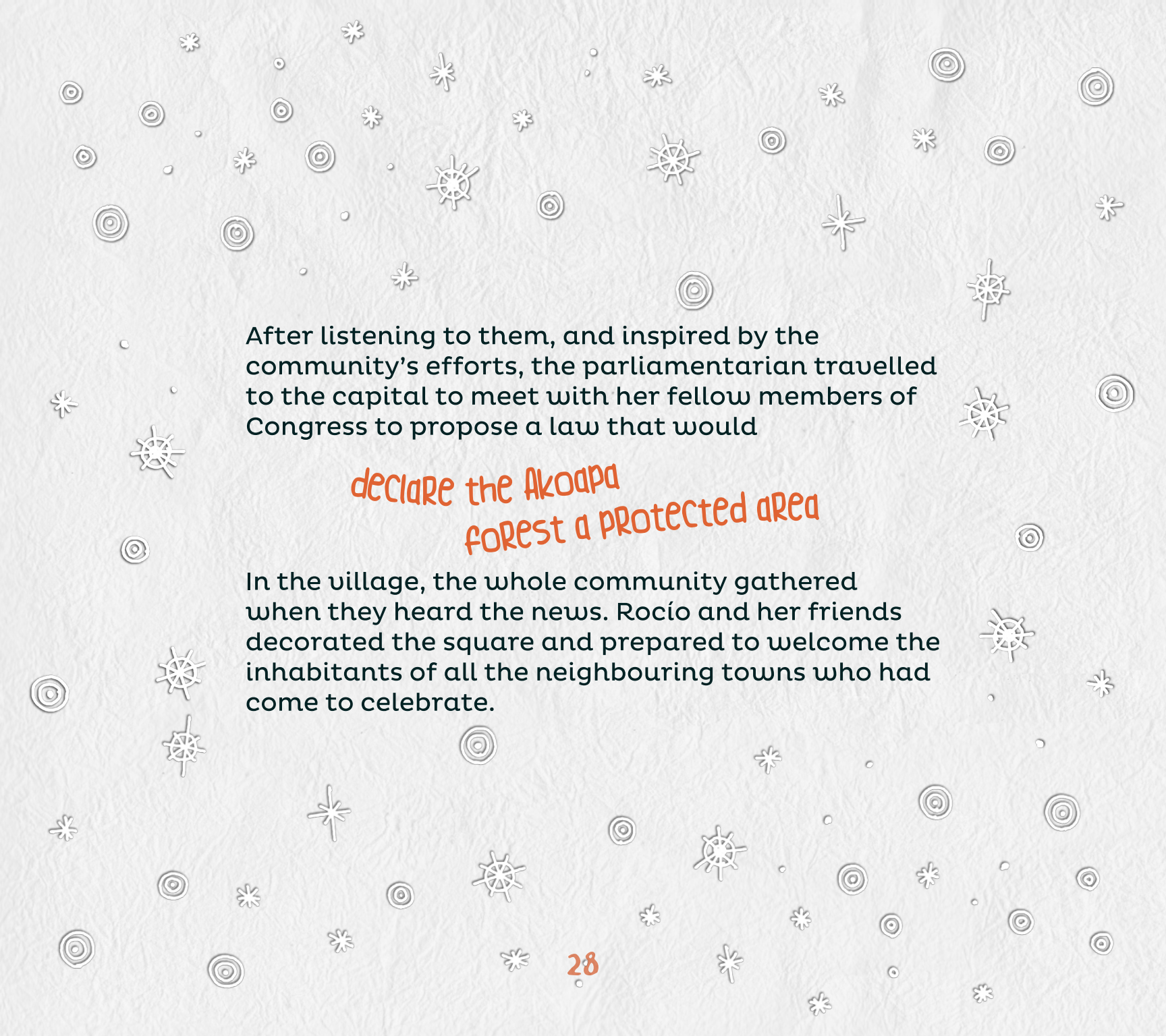
## "Bells of Akoapa".

A few weeks later, Member of Congress Ixchel decided to visit Akoapa to meet the leaders. Arriving early in the morning, she began to ask who had come up with the idea. She talked to neighbours, adults, and children, and noticed that they all agreed on one thing:

*the key had been the community's teamwork.*

At midday, Rocío and her friends accompanied the parliamentarian through the forest to explain how the idea worked and everything they had learned about the importance of protecting nature. They also shared their concerns: they had realized that the forest was immense and that, unfortunately, they would never be able to put bells on all the trees in the region.





After listening to them, and inspired by the community's efforts, the parliamentarian travelled to the capital to meet with her fellow members of Congress to propose a law that would

*declare the Akoadpa  
forest a protected area*

In the village, the whole community gathered when they heard the news. Rocío and her friends decorated the square and prepared to welcome the inhabitants of all the neighbouring towns who had come to celebrate.

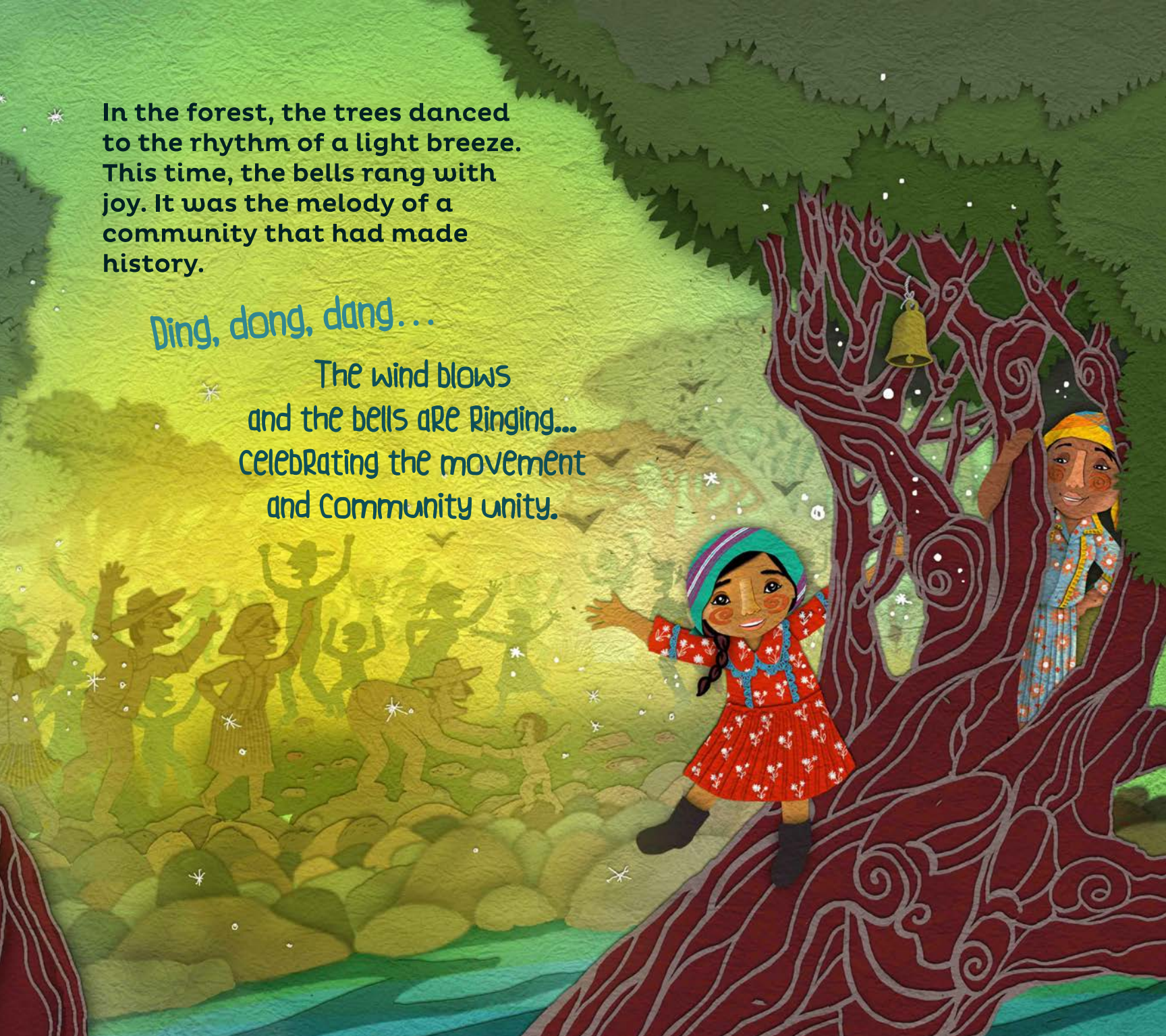




In the forest, the trees danced  
to the rhythm of a light breeze.  
This time, the bells rang with  
joy. It was the melody of a  
community that had made  
history.

Ding, dong, dang...

The wind blows  
and the bells are ringing...  
celebrating the movement  
and community unity.





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