



TREE TALK

by Simon Cooke



“We’re lost!” Ruby exclaimed, as she struggled to keep up with her brother. They were trying to find their way back to the campground, but the forest looked the same in every direction.

“If we’re lost, it’s your fault,” Sefa said. “You ran off after that pīwakawaka.”

“I was trying to take a photo for the climate change competition,” Ruby explained. “The best photo and best article win awesome prizes, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember,” Sefa replied. He wanted to enter an article in the competition, too, but he couldn’t think of anything to write. He stopped and sat down on a fallen log.

Ruby sat beside him. “We’d better stay here. When you’re lost, it’s best to stay where you are. We’re not far from the campground, so we’ll hear Mum and Dad when they start looking for us.”

“I guess you’re right,” Sefa said. He kicked angrily at a young rimu sapling.

“Feel better?” Ruby asked.

“No,” Sefa replied. “Now my foot hurts.”



“Ow!” Rimu cried. “One of those possums attacked me!”

“I don’t think they’re possums,” replied a young kahikatea.

“They don’t have any fur. Maybe they’re a type of tree?”

“Well, they’d better not plant themselves here,” Rimu replied.

“There’s no room.”

“Silly saplings!” boomed Tōtara from far above. “They’re not trees. They’re humans.”

“I know all about humans,” said a tall mataī. “They’re destroying the planet.”

“These are young humans,” Tōtara said. “We can’t blame them. They’re not responsible for all the damage.”

Mataī waved its leaves. “You have your head in the clouds again, Tōtara.”

“Are all humans bad?” Rimu asked.

“No. Some do good things,” Tōtara said. “Mataī, do you remember when the loggers came? Then some humans climbed us. They protected us until the loggers left.”

“True, but other places haven’t been so lucky,” Mataī argued.

“Will these humans go away?” Kahikatea asked.

“I don’t think so. They are lost,” Tōtara replied.

“Then let’s help them,” Rimu said.

“I have an idea,” Kahikatea said. “We can ask the other trees to lay a trail of leaves and berries to show them the way out.”

Mataī relaxed its roots. “OK, I’ll help, too. I’ll give them some of my berries to eat. They still have a long way to go. They’ll need energy.”



“Hey!” Ruby shouted as something hit her on the head. She looked up. “Someone’s throwing berries at me.”

Sefa rolled his eyes. “There’s no one here. Oh! I got hit, too!”

“I told you,” Ruby said.

Sefa looked up. “They’re just ripe berries falling from that mataī. Maybe a kererū is shaking them loose.”

Although it was mid-afternoon, it was cold and gloomy under the canopy. Sefa and Ruby huddled together.

“When do you think Mum and Dad will find us?” Sefa asked.

“Soon,” Ruby replied. “Don’t worry.”

Leaves rustled and branches creaked. “It sounds as though the trees are whispering,” Ruby thought. Calmed by the sounds of the forest, they both closed their eyes.

Ruby felt strange. Her arms were branches covered with leaves. Her feet were roots deep in the earth.

“Sefa! What’s happening?” Ruby cried.

They felt the wind in their branches.

They heard the forest talking.

“Ouch, something bit me!” Sefa yelled.

“That’d be a possum,” Rimu said.

“Serves you right for kicking me.”

“Sorry,” Sefa replied. “I didn’t know.”

“Know what?” Mataī asked. “That trees are alive? That they can talk?”

“Trees can’t talk,” Sefa said. Then he realised what he’d said, and he blushed.

“We don’t talk like humans,” Tōtara said.

“Humans are all squeaks and giggles.

We speak through our roots.”

“What do trees talk about?” Ruby asked.

“Mostly about who will reach the sky first,” Rimu said laughing.

“And who’s hogging all the sunlight,” added Kahikatea.

“That’s Tōtara,” Rimu whispered to Ruby and Sefa.

“Humph!” Tōtara said. “I heard that, you cheeky sapling. But these days we mostly talk about how the climate is changing.”



“More floods,” Matai agreed. “More forest fires. And humans are causing it.”

“But we can fix the damage, can’t we?” Ruby asked.

“We bike to school,” Sefa said.

“I guess we all need to take more responsibility,” Ruby said.

“We could ask Mum and Dad to bike to work.”

“They need the exercise,” Sefa laughed.

“It might help if we buy less stuff,” Ruby suggested. “And recycle more things instead of throwing them away.”

“And plant more trees!” Sefa added.

“Little humans with big ideas,” the trees murmured.

“I think people would try harder if they knew trees could talk,” Sefa said. He rustled his leaves in excitement. “That’s given me a brilliant idea for an article for the climate change competition!”



When Ruby opened her eyes, she half expected to have branches instead of arms.

“What just happened?” Sefa asked sleepily.

Before Ruby could answer, she heard voices calling.

For a moment, she thought the trees were talking again.

But then the ferns parted, and a woman in a bright yellow jacket appeared.

“Mum!” Ruby shouted.

“How’d you find us?” Sefa asked as they hugged Mum.

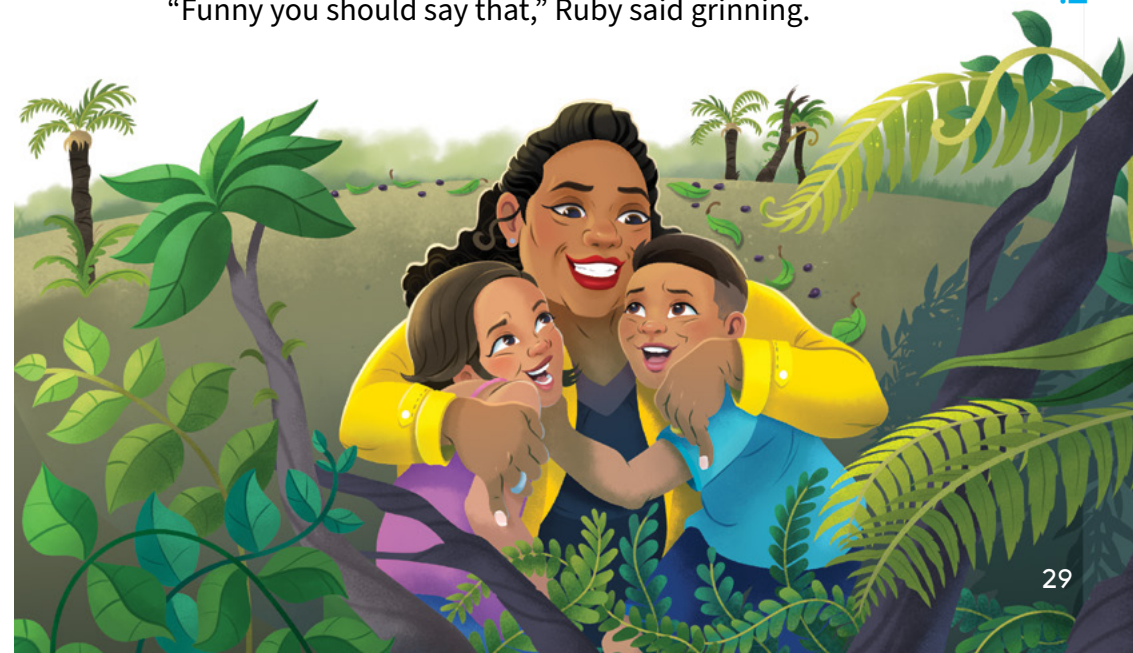
“I just followed the trail of leaves and berries you left to show your way. Very smart!”

“It wasn’t us,” Ruby said.

“I think it was the trees,” said Sefa. “They must have made a path so we could find our way back to the campground.”

Mum laughed. “The trees made the trail! Next, you’ll be saying they can talk.”

“Funny you should say that,” Ruby said grinning.



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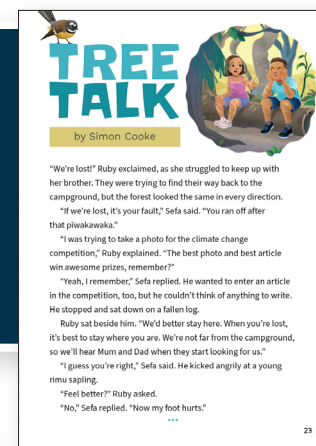
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