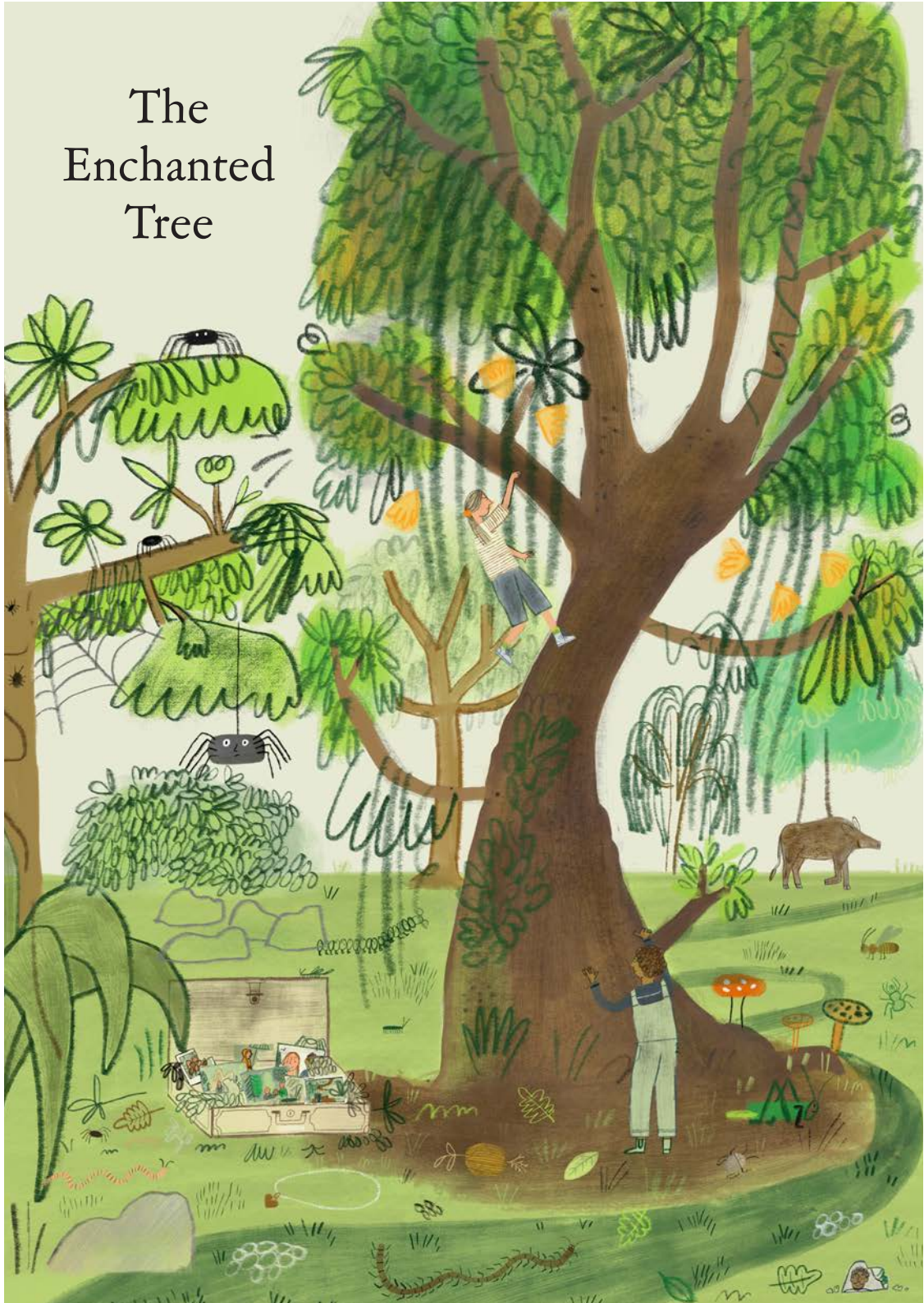


# The Enchanted Tree





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By the 2023-2024 Year 4 Cohort at  
Seymour Park Community Primary School and A M Dassu

Commissioned by Dr Khawla Badwan as part of the  
Voices of the Future Research Project

This work was supported by The Natural Environment Research  
Council [NE/V021370/1] and The Manchester Centre for  
Research in Linguistics, Manchester Metropolitan University

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Designed by Studio Bilo



## Chapter 1

### Where's Dad?

"One, two, three, four..." Ali covered his eyes with his hands, while Autumn, his adopted sister, and their dad raced past the campsite towards the forest to find a place to hide. "Five, six, seven, eight..." Ali was tempted to peek. This was the most fun he'd had on their holiday so far. Much better than the barbeque Dad had forced them to help him with last night.

Autumn ran underneath the towering trees. She hid behind one that was double her width and had the smoothest bark she'd seen. It felt as soft as a sheepskin underneath the wool. *Weird for a tree*, Autumn thought.

She looked around to see where her dad was hiding, but couldn't spot him anywhere. She picked a juicy berry from a lush green bush behind her and popped it in her mouth, the juice squelching down her chin as she chewed. *Mmmm. I'll ask Dad if we can pick these for tonight's dessert*, she told herself.

"Here I come!" shouted Ali, frantically searching around the dark, shadowy forest.

Autumn looked up and realised the best place to hide was high up in a tree. She'd get a proper view of the forest and see Ali coming too. She put her foot on the trunk and reached for the branch above. It didn't take long for Ali to spot Autumn's orange T-shirt sleeve as she started to climb. Ali raced over and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Found you!" he said, out of breath.

There was no way he was going to go up the tree after her. He was afraid of heights. In fact, he didn't really like being anywhere near nature because of the creepy-crawlies. He shuddered just thinking about them. Autumn was in her element here, but for Ali, this holiday had been his worst nightmare... until today.

"Ohhhhh!" Autumn frowned and climbed back down the tree. She took a berry out of her pocket and held her hand in front of Otto, her pet gerbil, whose soft white belly was now popping out of the pocket in her shorts.

"Where's Dad?" asked Autumn as Otto nibbled on the berry.

"I don't know." Ali shrugged. "You haven't found him yet?" Otto clambered out of Autumn's pocket, up her T-shirt and onto her shoulder. He started pounding his paw against her head.

“Otto, stop! What’s wrong?” She knew he was trying to tell her something.

What was he worried about? Otto pounded his paw on her head again.

“Is-is-is it Dad?” Autumn stuttered as her nerves tingled. She had a strange feeling inside but didn’t quite know what it was.

Ali pushed his glasses up his nose and rushed around the trees.

“Dad? Dad! Where are you? I give up. I can’t find you!” Ali gulped, taking in the silence of the forest. He suddenly had an uneasy feeling too.

The children searched for Dad in the thick green copse. Flowers swayed in the gentle breeze, releasing their perfume-like smell.

Goosebumps lined Autumn’s skin as she spotted something on the ground.

“Look – some footprints! Maybe they’re Dad’s!” said Autumn, staring at a muddy patch with a hopeful grin.

“I doubt it. They don’t match the soles of Dad’s boots.” Ali tried to hide the nervous feeling creeping inside him.

“They’re probably just another camper’s prints.” He straightened his shoulders and tried to look calm and cool so Autumn wouldn’t notice how panicked he felt.

“Well, he’s got to be near here. Come on… OWW!” screamed

Autumn as Ali stuck his leg out and tripped her up. She fell into a pile of sunset leaves. Autumn called them that because they were red, yellow and orange.

Her shoulders slumped. “We need to find Dad quickly, before it gets dark soon.”

“We’ll be fine in the dark. You’re not a scaredy-cat, are you?” laughed Ali.

“Don’t be silly, Ali!” Autumn didn’t want Ali to know she was afraid of the dark. She was supposed to be his older sister and braver than him. “If you help me find Dad, I’ll spend all my savings on a PS5 for you.” Autumn knew this would be the quickest way to get Ali to listen.

“Okay.” Ali rubbed his hands together. “Let’s get started then. Bet you I find him in a minute!”

“I knew you would fall for my bribe.” Autumn grinned.

The longer the children looked for their father, the more fearful Ali felt. His spine tingled with each step, wondering if a big creepy-crawly might jump into their path and leech onto them.

\*

After searching the forest, Ali and Autumn made their way back to their tent. Autumn was more worried than ever now. She wondered what life would be like without a dad as well as without a mum. Ali wondered if he would be able to convince Dad to go back home and cut the holiday short after they found him. Ali's knees were beginning to feel sore, so he crouched against a tall thick tree-trunk for a couple of minutes to rest and observe the campsite. He was sure he'd spot Dad pottering around the tent.

He heard tiny footsteps approaching and held his breath. Ali held his arm in front of Autumn to stop her from moving forward. Autumn put her hand in her pocket and let out a breath. Just then, Otto scuttled across a pile of crunchy leaves, his yellow fur almost camouflaged. It wasn't a wild animal creeping around, but her pet gerbil, who had somehow escaped from her pocket!

"Otto!" Autumn picked him up and stroked his soft furry back.

"Oh my God, it was Otto. I've had enough of this!" Ali ran back to the campsite, while Autumn walked, stroking her gerbil and scolding him for running off.

When Autumn finally reached Ali back at the tent, she noticed he was biting his lip.

"Where's Dad? I thought he'd be here," she asked as she gently put Otto back into his cage.

"I don't know."

They both noticed the silence. There was no kettle boiling, no cereal pouring, no joy in the air. The tent had no signs of life. No Dad.

"He's not here, Autumn." Ali frowned.

Autumn's lips trembled. "Where is he?"



## Chapter 2

### The Enchanted Tree

After searching the forest again for about an hour, the sun began to set. “This is all your fault!” yelled Autumn, her eyes now red around the rims. “Dad is lost in a huge forest! We’ll never find him. What were you thinking, Ali?”

“I just wanted to play hide and seek. I was bored. I didn’t know we’d lose Dad,” said Ali. He slouched with his head down, trying to focus on the birds chattering around them.

As they walked on crunchy brown leaves, a mist began to appear. With each step, it thickened. Soon they could only see a metre ahead of them. The children got down on their knees and crawled on grass to find their way around the forest in the mist. It hadn’t rained, but it was slippery and the grass smelled as if it had been freshly cut. Weird, thought Ali.

The siblings felt around as they crawled and checked behind every tree and bush, calling out to Dad constantly, but there was no sign of him.

Soon the mist cleared ahead of them and they came across a humongous, towering tree that looked different to the others. They noticed that the trunk was glowing through the tree’s bark and the branches twinkled, turning dark when one of them blinked.

Autumn and Ali stood up tall, mesmerised by the thick emerald-green vines with orange flowers that hung on the colossal tree. Their stomachs tightened. There was something different about it.

“Look, Ali, the leaves are beautiful. And it’s SO tall. I’ll climb it to get a better view. Maybe I’ll see Dad above the mist in the forest,” Autumn said as she gripped a branch and started climbing the tree. Ali watched, gulping as his sister climbed higher and higher. She’d told



him that her favourite thing to do when she'd lived in South Africa was to climb trees, but he still didn't understand how she wasn't afraid of falling from such a height. The highest Ali managed was up the stairs to his bedroom and even then, he didn't dare look down! Suddenly the tree started shaking.

"Earthquake!" screamed Autumn.

Ali pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose and looked on in horror. "I don't think there's an earthquake, Autumn..." Ali looked around. "There's nothing shaking around me."

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh, help me!" Autumn yelled. "I'm falling!"

"Don't-don't worry!" Ali bolted into position. "I'll catch you!"

Ali stood with his hands outstretched, ready to catch his sister like a firefighter with a net.

Autumn fell onto the branch above him, which slowed her fall.

Miraculously she landed on her feet.

"Hello, my dears. Don't worry, I won't harm you," the tree said in a deep gruff voice.

Ali's mouth dropped as Autumn edged back.

"Did-did-did the tree just speak?" Autumn's eyes were wide.

"I did indeed." From the middle of the trunk, a pair of gold bright eyes like two twinkling suns opened and glared at the stunned

children.

Ali stepped forward, intrigued, and touched the tree trunk. It felt like skin that was as soft as marshmallows but had been there for a million years. Weird.

"Um..." Autumn joined her brother at the tree. "Could you show us where our dad is, please?"

"Yes. Please?" Ali put his hands together and pleaded.

An unusual earthy odour surrounded them but the tree didn't speak. It smelled of an unusual gas. Ali feared they were in danger. Autumn shivered. Was it poisoning them?

A ringing sound came from the tree and then it spoke again, now with more confidence. "If you want to see your father..."

Autumn raised her eyebrows in amazement.

"You need to complete three tasks... but be quick before your dad is stuck in the forest for eternity!"

"You know where he is? We'll do anything to bring Dad back!" shouted Ali.

"Wait!" Autumn put her hand out. "How do we know that you actually know our dad?"

"Don't worry about that... I know where your dad is," replied the tree.

“Well, prove you know him!” said Ali with his hands on his hips.

“We both went to the same school and used to be best friends.”

Ali laughed. “My dad was not best friends with a tree!”

The tree released more of the same earthy odour. It gave the children a sickening taste in their mouths. A strong wind whipped around them and Ali suddenly felt tired. The tree was in control, not them, that was now clear.

“He’s called Ahmed. His favourite meal is macaroni cheese and his mum’s name is Sarah.”

Autumn gasped. “He knows Grandma’s first name as well as Dad’s!”

“Oh, and he’s as tall as a doorframe.”

Ali couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“Now if you want him back, you must complete three quests. If you don’t then I’ll remain a tree and your dad will be missing in this forest forever.”

## Chapter 3

### Ten leaves from the Evil Tree

“What’s the first quest?” asked Autumn, fiddling with the necklace her birth family in South Africa had given her. She hadn’t taken it off since she’d been adopted by Ali’s parents at just four years old.

“You must collect ten leaves from a tree and bring them back to me within ten minutes--”

“Oh, that’s so easy!” Autumn interrupted, grinning.

“Nothing in life is easy...” replied the tree.

“That’s what Dad says!” Ali looked down at his shoes and sighed as he thought of him.

An orange portal surrounded by a ring of fire appeared in front of the tree, glimmering and mysterious. It looked as if it was the tree’s mouth, floating just beneath its amber eyes.

“You can do magic too!” Ali said, stepping back with his mouth hanging open.

“I wouldn’t call it magic exactly,” said the tree. “Step through there



and follow your instincts...”

Confused, Autumn looked at the tree, but put her right foot into the opening, making sure not to touch the fire around the portal. She had to get her Dad back. As soon as both children stepped into the other world, the portal behind them disappeared.

Ali fanned himself. “It’s so hot here!”

Autumn swiped beads of sweat off her brow. “Is-is-this a tree nightmare?” She nudged Ali as both of them took in the fiery hot woodland.

“Look!” Ali pointed at a tree that was as tall as a skyscraper, and the only one not burning. “Let’s head to that. It looks cool there. The enchanted tree told us to follow our instincts!” Ali raced ahead, stepping on rocks to avoid the fiery grass beneath.

Autumn was uncertain about this place but she didn’t want to be left alone, so quickly followed behind.

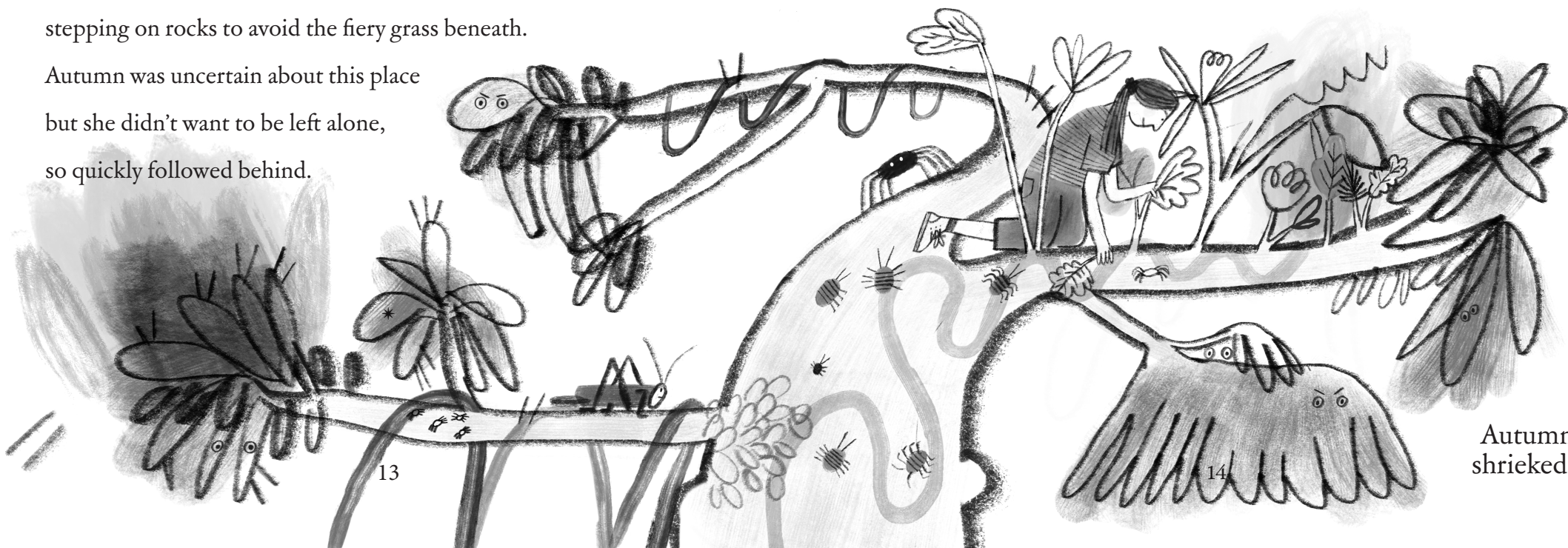
When they got to the tree, both Ali and Autumn were tempted to take its leaves. But as soon as they reached out, balls of fire ejected from their stems. They jumped back and gasped. Autumn heard rustling crickets in her ears. Then a million goosebumps crawled all over her body. She had a sudden urge to climb.

Autumn clambered up the vines covering the tree. “These aren’t fiery – look! I’ll go and see if I can find the ten leaves.”

“Be careful!” Ali sniffed the trunk, this time more cautious not to get too close. It smelled of smoke.

“They’re here!” Autumn shouted from above. “They’re all different colours – it must be these we need to take!”

Ali grinned. This is too easy, he thought.



Autumn  
shrieked.

Ali looked up at her in horror as she fell towards him, dropping the colourful leaves. They sprinkled down over him and he quickly collected them into his pockets. Autumn bounced off the spongy earth and dusted herself off, then screamed so loudly that birds flapped away into the distance. Ali turned and gasped... Autumn's hand was melting like ice cream! But Ali couldn't help her because he felt an uncontrollable urge to touch the leaves on the tree. He tried to pull his hand back, knowing they'd burn his hand too, but he couldn't stop himself from reaching. It was as if this evil, devilish tree was controlling him.

"Aaagh!" Ali screamed, trying to pull himself away. Autumn ran with a half-melting hand and rammed into him, sending Ali flying.

"Thanks!" Ali shouted, getting onto his knees. Just then a portal appeared, this time surrounded by a ring of icicles.

"Oh, thank God!" Autumn cried, running straight into it. "Come on, Ali! Let's gooo! Make sure you've got the leaves!"

Ali rolled through just as the portal started closing.

## Chapter 4

### A wild Boar

"Oh, my hand is back!" Autumn cried with relief as she twisted it around to make sure her hand was real.

"So that was an illusion?" asked Ali.

"Yes, indeed," said the enchanted tree. "It's the evil tree's favourite thing to do!"

"It's an evil tree?" asked Autumn. "That makes a lot of sense." Ali reached into his pockets and pulled out the colourful leaves; they were the colours of a rainbow. "These were real though!" he said.

"Oh, you got them! Phew!" Autumn laughed. The enchanted tree shuffled forward. Ali and Autumn stepped back, fearful. They didn't know it could move.

*Did this mean it could chase them?* Autumn tried to push the unnerving thought away.

"Place the leaves on my trunk. Space them apart, and then I'll give you the next task."

Ali gulped. *Another task already? The last one was traumatic enough!*

Once Ali and Autumn had placed the rainbow-coloured leaves on the soft bark, an aroma of sweet flowers surrounded them. Dad would've loved this smell, thought Ali. It was just like the air freshener he often sprayed everywhere after cooking at home.

"When are we going to see our dad again?" asked Autumn, as a small tear rolled down her blushed cheek.

"After two more quests," said the tree. "The next quest requires you to capture a wild boar."

"A boar?" Ali made a face. Oh no. A wild animal.

"What for?" asked Autumn.

"There's no time for questions. Now hurry up!" The tree raised its voice and added, "Off you go!"

\*

After tiptoeing through the forest for five minutes expecting to come across a boar, Ali sat on a rock. Autumn was worried about catching one but she didn't say anything. She had to be brave. She nudged Ali to budge up and sat on the smooth rock with him, looking out at the sunny, peaceful woodland.

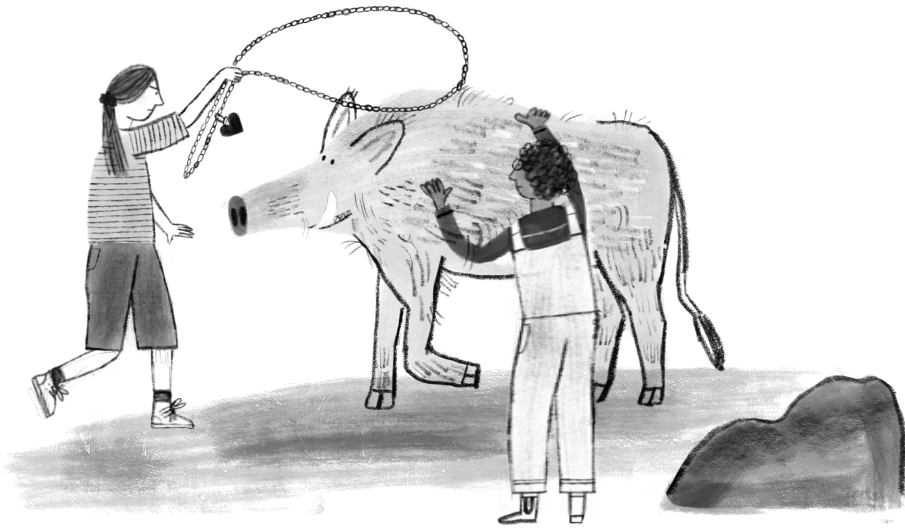
"Were we in the fiery portal the whole night?" asked Ali. "I've just realised it's daytime now!"

The sound of thundering hooves pounding into the ground echoed around them, making Autumn's ears prick up. "I think a wild animal is heading straight towards us..." she muttered.

Ali leaped into a bush behind the rock but this time Autumn didn't follow. She stood tall as a black boar emerged from a dense bush. Autumn fiddled with her necklace as it stared at her. Touching her mum's precious necklace gave her an idea. It was strange that Autumn didn't feel any fear, just sadness about what she was going to do. She had no choice but to sacrifice her necklace – her only memory of her beloved mother in South Africa...

She unclipped the sparkling silver necklace with a pendent heart from around her neck and passed one end of it through a small loop at the other end, creating a tiny lasso.

Grunting, the boar hurtled towards her, but instead of stepping back, Autumn swung her pretty silver lasso. The boar pounced forward and ran around her like a whirlpool, nearly knocking her over. She sidestepped quickly. Ali knew he had to help. He ran around to get behind the boar so it felt circled by them both.



After many attempts and failures to catch it with his bare hands, Ali lurched forward and managed to grab the boar from behind. Autumn took another shot with her makeshift lasso which had miraculously gotten bigger and put the necklace around the boar's neck.

"Amazing shot!" shouted Ali, grinning. Autumn started singing a beautiful melody as the boar thrashed around – the same song her mother had sung her to get to sleep when she'd been little. The song echoed throughout the forest and seemed to calm the boar. It slowly got onto its paws and came right up to Autumn with its eyes wide. The wild creature had instantly calmed. Ali looked on, amazed.

Now the only thing left to do was somehow get the boar back to the tree without snapping the necklace and losing control of the animal.

Autumn decided she'd sing the same song all the way back. Ali groaned and put his fingers in his ears, following his sister and the boar.

"You captured the boar!" the enchanted tree said, sounding cheery as the siblings approached.

"Yes, we did!" Autumn pushed her shoulders back and walked triumphantly.

"What will you do with it?" asked Ali, biting his lip.

"You'll see. Take your necklace and bring it closer."

Autumn unclipped her necklace as the boar stood on all fours in front of the tree. Its eyes were blank as if it was hypnotised.

A sudden gust whipped around them, creating a whirlwind. It zipped around the boar faster and faster, until the boar completely vanished. Even though it was gone, they could still smell its matted damp fur.

"What did you do with it?" Ali splayed his hands in frustration.

"It was so hard to capture!" Autumn was close to tears.

"You did your task, and I got what I needed to complete a part of me that was missing – that's all you need to know. No more questions." The enchanted tree sounded annoyed. "Unless you don't want to see your father again?"



## Chapter 5

### Find Your Inner Soul

The children gulped and straightened their shoulders to show they were ready and willing to do anything.

“Now to free me and find your dad, you must find your inner soul,” the ancient enchanted tree boomed. Its voice made the children’s ears ring.

“Huh?” said Autumn, covering her ears.

“What do you mean?” they both asked.

There was an eerie silence. Autumn reached out to check if the tree was okay. It smelled dusty and damp and they heard a slow banging noise coming from it. Her trembling fingers touched the tree’s now knobbly bark and, in almost a whisper, said, “How can we do that?”

“What is this dude talking about?” whispered Ali.

“That’s disrespectful – don’t call it dude. We can’t upset it... and I don’t know,” said Autumn with a sullen face.

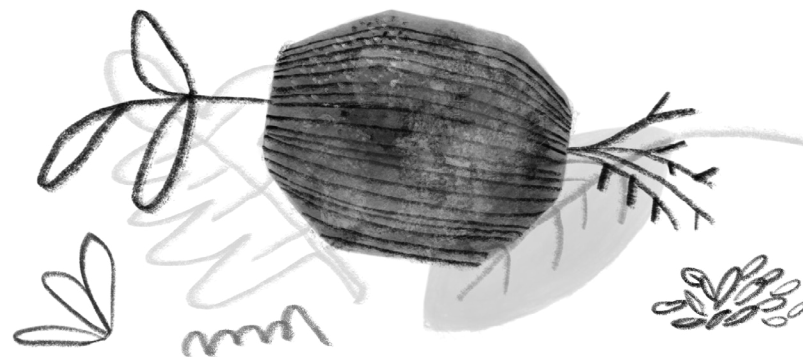
Bees buzzed around the forest from flower to flower. Dewdrops

glistened like silver and gold on the leaves. Was it morning now? The children had lost all sense of time.

Ali noticed an elk grazing silently close by. That elk has no idea what it feels like to lose your mum and then your dad too, thought Ali.

The tree suddenly expelled an odd hexagonal shaped seed, the size of a coin from an opening.

Autumn bent down to pick it up from the forest floor. “What on earth is this? It looks like something you’d find in the tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh.” She turned the metal seed in her hand and winced, passing it to Ali.



“It feels like it’s a hundred years old. Ewww, it smells of mouldy cheese!” Ali handed the dull, corroded seed back to Autumn.

“Find what another hates and you’ll find your inner soul,” the enchanted tree said in a soft voice.



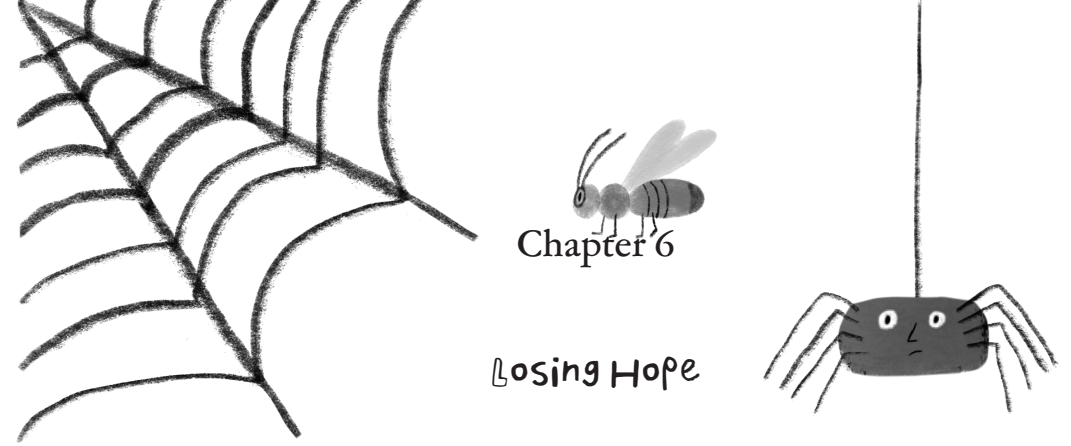
The children glanced at each other. That was the most peculiar thing they had ever heard.

Ali laughed at Autumn. "Well, that's easy. I hate you the most!"

Autumn didn't respond with her usual thump on his back. Instead, she swallowed back her tears. "I'm not the one you hate the most – the thing you hate the most are creepy-crawlies."

Ali was taken aback. He probably shouldn't be mean while Dad was missing, he realised.

"Now off you go," said the enchanted tree. "You will know when you find it."



After hours of searching for their "inner soul," Ali and Autumn gave up. They fell on their dirty, sore knees, inhaling the earthy wood surrounding them.

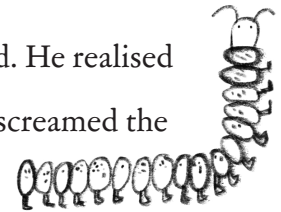
Ali saw a creepy-crawly and quickly stood up. It had been a long day and they still hadn't found how to complete the next task. "Let's keep going," he said. "There are too many bugs around here."



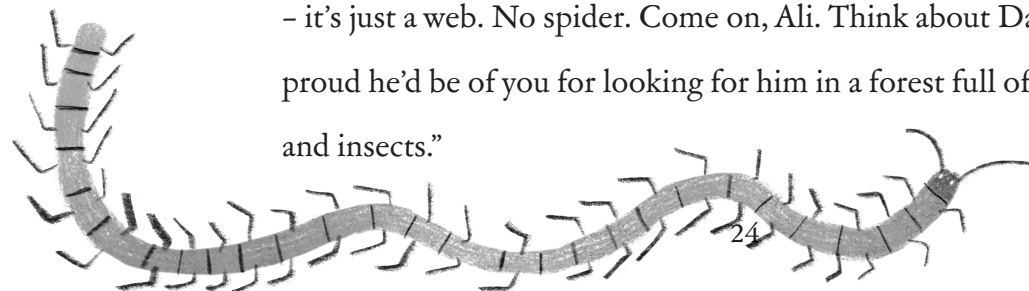
"Maybe that's the task?" Autumn asked, with her face in her hands.

"How can it be the task? I'm not doing anything!"

As they crept through the forest, Ali suddenly stopped. He realised he had just walked into an enormous spider-web. He screamed the loudest scream Autumn had ever heard.



Autumn quickly brushed Ali down. "Take deep breaths, Ali. It's okay – it's just a web. No spider. Come on, Ali. Think about Dad and how proud he'd be of you for looking for him in a forest full of creepy bugs and insects."



Ali sighed. Autumn was right. He had to keep going for Dad. “We need directions – we’re wasting time just wandering around here.”

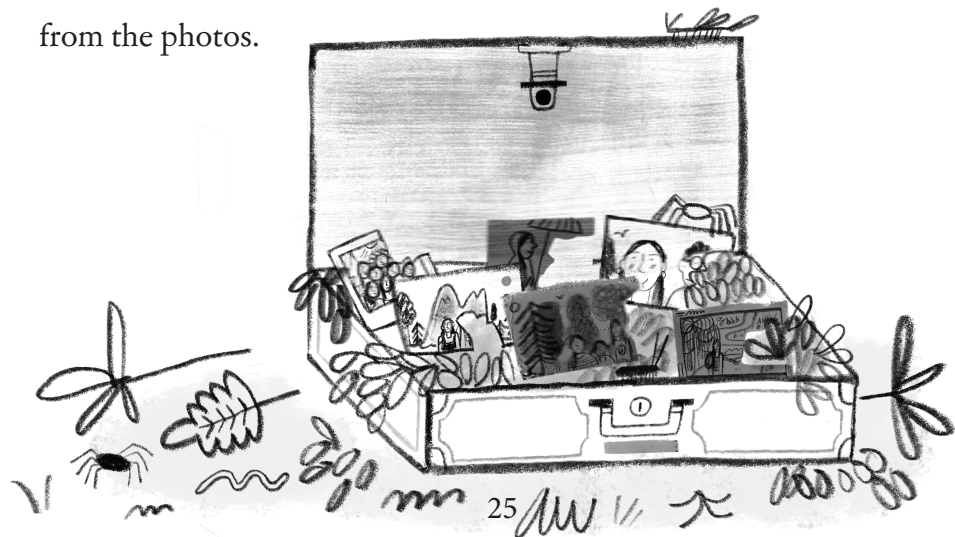
The children rushed back to the enchanted tree. “We don’t know how to do this task,” said Ali, shrugging.

“We need you to tell us,” said Autumn. “Please help us to help you.”

“Okay,” said the enchanted tree. After a moment, it expelled a heavily decorated box. The children stared at it lying at the foot of the tree.

“I’m not touching it,” said Ali. “There could be spiders inside!” Autumn sighed and carefully opened the box, peeling back the lid very slowly.

“If you’d kept going, you’d have found this,” said the enchanted tree. Inside were pictures of their family, including their mum from when they were younger. However, strangely their dad had been ripped off from the photos.



“How-how-did you get these?” asked Autumn.



“Hang on!” said Ali excitedly. “These are all places in the forest, aren’t they?” He pointed at a photo. “That one looks like that hill near here.”

“Wow, well spotted, Ali. Let’s go and take a look,” said Autumn, putting the photos in her shorts pocket. The pair ran towards the hill. When they got there, they found the missing part of the photo lying abandoned on the leafy ground. Ali put his part together with the part on the floor and their family was reunited.

Autumn smiled at Ali. She had a good feeling about this. She took out the second ripped photo from her pocket and stared at it. Autumn recognised the swamp in the photo too. “I remember this place,” she said.

“Yes, but there are snakes and bugs there,” replied Ali, kicking his boots into the leaves. He never wanted to go there again.

“Let’s just go, and I’ll deal with it,” Autumn said boldly. “Can’t believe Mum and Dad brought us here in the past and we don’t remember it. But that means we’ll be okay – if we’ve been here before, right?”

Ali sighed. “Okay.”

Ali remembered where the swamp was from when they’d looked for

their dad when he'd first gone missing, and so they reached the swamp quickly. Ali spotted the missing piece of the photo in a hole in a tree. Autumn stepped forward to pick it up, but Ali put his arm on hers to stop her. He swallowed. "I have to face my fears. It's the only way to get Dad back."

Autumn smiled at him. "You can do this, Ali. I believe in you." Ali took a deep breath and put his hand through a web to reach into the hole. A spider crawled onto his arm and he froze.

"Stay calm, Ali. You just need the photo and this will be over." Ali nodded and closed his eyes as he leaned in to pick up the photo. When he opened them, he noticed he didn't feel scared. He let the spider crawl down his arm and onto the tree trunk.

Autumn put her arm around him and grinned. "Ali, you faced what you hate and overcame your fear!"

Ali glanced at her. "It's all thanks to you. You encouraged me. Maybe we do make a good team after all."

\*

The last photo from the box showed their family in front of a cave. Despite feeling terrified, Autumn knew she had to get the photo. Ali had confronted what he hated most, and now it was her turn.

She remembered Dad telling her she was as brave as a mountain lion. She sighed deeply then stood tall, showing Ali the photo. "Ali, let's go to the cave. I think it's not far from here."

Autumn hugged Ali in front of the cave as if it would be the last time she'd see him. Her stomach was in knots and she felt sick.

"Shall I do it instead?" asked Ali.

"No, I have to. Otherwise we won't get Dad back. I've just got to force myself."

Autumn turned to the gloomy entrance and took a weary step into the dark eerie cave.

"You can do it," she heard Ali say. "You're much braver than me. There, I admit it."

Autumn smirked. She was so glad Ali was her brother. She felt around the smooth walls as the cave narrowed and focused on her favourite memory: building sandcastles on the beach with Dad. If she got the photo, they could do it again, she told herself.

Autumn squeezed herself into a narrow corridor, only just big enough for her to fit through. She counted each step to distract herself

from the temptation to run back out. As the corridor widened, she saw light. In the bowl of the cave, she spotted something on the floor – the final missing photo piece! She grabbed it quickly and retraced her steps as fast as she could.

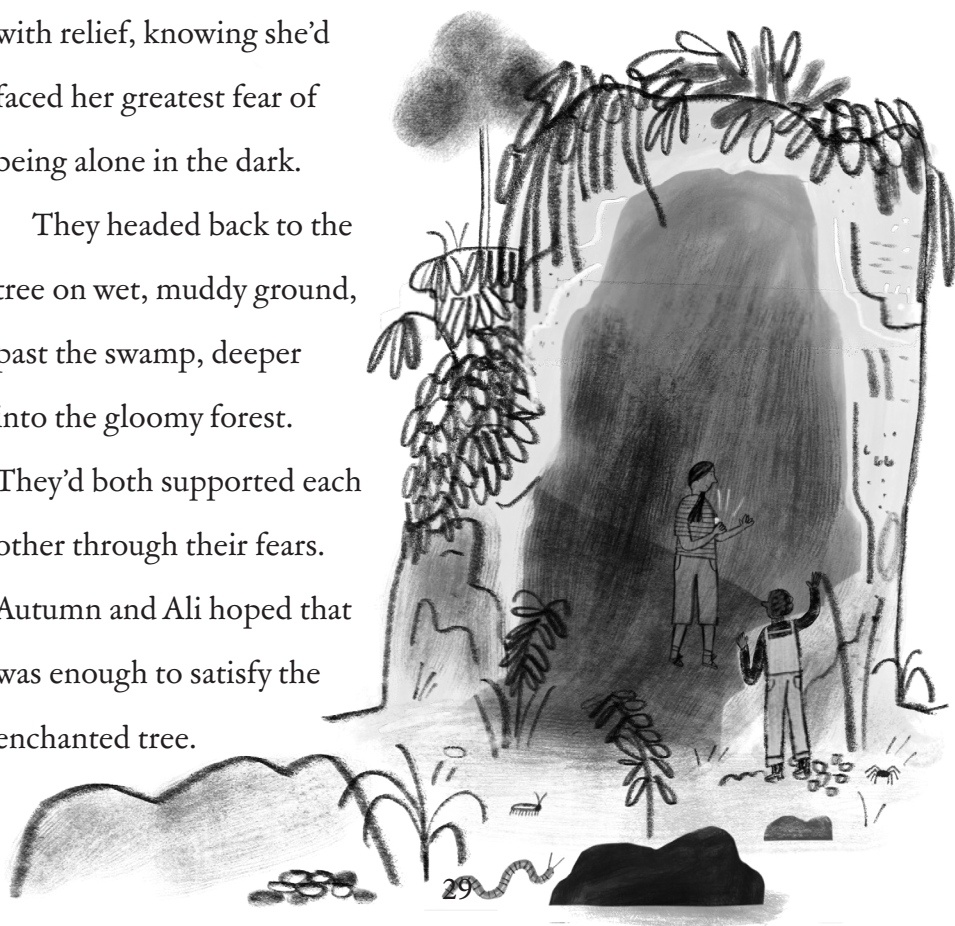
As Autumn stepped out, Ali ran and embraced her. “I’m so glad you’re alive!” he cried. “I’m sorry for being mean to you. I couldn’t imagine life without you as my sister.”

“I couldn’t imagine life without you as my brother.” Autumn sobbed with relief, knowing she’d faced her greatest fear of being alone in the dark.

They headed back to the tree on wet, muddy ground, past the swamp, deeper into the gloomy forest.

They’d both supported each other through their fears.

Autumn and Ali hoped that was enough to satisfy the enchanted tree.



## Chapter 7

### Dad

As soon as the exhausted children saw the emerald-green copse emerge, they found energy from somewhere and sprinted towards the tree. They’d done all the tasks! The tree had to tell them where Dad was now.

As soon as they reached the clearing where the enchanted tree stood, they saw a gloomy shadow lurking in the distance. The silhouette looked familiar to them. Ali and Autumn stared at each other. It couldn’t be!

“Dad!” As the children ran, he turned towards them. Huge tears of joy rolled down their faces when they wrapped their arms tightly around each other.

“We missed you SO much, Dad,” cried Autumn.

“I missed you too,” said Dad. “It was quite an experience!”

“Where were you?” she asked.

“We need to help the tree!” shouted Ali in a panic, remembering

they hadn't finished yet. "Before it takes you away again!"

"Hello, old friend," the enchanted tree said to their dad, blinking its amber eyes. "Time is running out. If you want to get out of here, please put your palms between the trunk and my lowermost branch."

Dad didn't need to reach; he effortlessly tapped the enormous tree. A massive beam of light shone from its trunk. Dad, Autumn and Ali covered their eyes. When the light dimmed around them, the children and Dad could see again.

In front of them stood a man as tall as Dad. He had a long beard, matted brown hair and amber eyes. He was wearing a long coat, brown and crumpled, that looked as if it was made of bark.

*Was this the enchanted tree's human form?* He stepped forward and shook hands with Dad.

"Good to see you, Sam! Come back with us to the campsite, old friend?" Dad smiled as if nothing odd had taken place between them.

"I'd like nothing more. Let's get out of here," said the man. "Thank you for freeing me."

Autumn held Dad's hand and Ali took his other. They all walked through the enchanted forest for the last time.

## THE STORY BEHIND THIS STORY

This story was commissioned as part of the Voices of the Future research project which aims to explore ways of working with children to develop a new lexicon of experience around the socio-cultural benefits of treescapes. This project developed participatory research tools for working with children creatively, going beyond the boundaries of a singular discipline.

The co-production of this story is underpinned by the commitment to attending to children's voices and imaginations in order to create worlds that speak to their fantasies. Through a series of workshops with 90 Year 4 children (the 2023/2024 cohort) and A M Dassu, the children were positioned as co-authors and co-editors as they undertook numerous tasks including character identifications, story line development, scene elaborations, detailed linguistic descriptions and elaborate editing. This beautiful collaborative work is a testament to children's ability to create exciting stories that speak to topics that matter to them.

I wish to acknowledge the children and staff at Seymour Park Community Primary School for their generous and generative collaboration. Thanks are due to A M Dassu, Maisy Summer and my colleagues on the wider Voices of the Future research team. I hope you enjoy reading this story and I also hope that this work will leave you inspired to try similar writing projects with different children in different educational settings.

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*This work was supported by The Natural Environment  
Research Council [NE/V021370/1] and The Manchester  
Centre for Research in Linguistics at Manchester  
Metropolitan University.*

For more information about this project:  
[treescapes-voices.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/](http://treescapes-voices.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/)

