THE WALKING TREE

Deepa Agarwal
THE WALKING TREE

By Deepa Agarwal
Illustrated by Ajanta Guhathakurta

Children’s Book Trust, New Delhi
In the middle of a dense forest grew a pretty little tree with slender branches. The breeze loved to whisper in its ears. The birds liked to sit on its branches. At times the monkeys came swinging by their tails.
The little tree liked to listen to all their stories. “Where are you coming from?” it would ask the breeze.

“I have been to the top of the mountain where I blew a cloud high up to the sky. And, it began to rain! When the rain stopped, I went down to the valley and pulled the children’s kites along. Then I did a naughty thing. I went into the town and tugged people’s washing off their lines and flung it far, far away!”

The little tree laughed. “What fun you have!” It asked the birds, “Where are you coming from?”
“Oh, I have been very busy,” replied one, wagging its head. “First I got up early so I could catch a nice, fat worm. Then I sat at a kind lady’s window and sang. She gave me some grain to eat. Since I had to make my nest, I started gathering straw and twigs.”

“You want to know where we have been?” asked the monkeys, jumping down from the neighbouring tree. “First we went to the temple where people fed us sweets and bananas. We smelt guavas ripening and plucked some from an orchard. A man chased us off with a stick. We saw some children wearing caps. We grabbed one or two and put them on! See?”

The little tree laughed. “You really have fun!” The little tree sighed when it was left alone.
It felt sad that it could not roam around. “I never go anywhere,” it sighed. “What do you mean?” asked the big tree standing next to it. “We are trees, we stand tall and strong and firm in one place. We are there for the birds and the squirrels to live in and the monkeys to sleep on at night. If we didn’t stay in one place, how could we grow and bear fruit? How could we hold on to the soil so that it wouldn’t be washed away?” “I don’t care,” said the little tree. “I want to go all over the place like the birds and the breeze. I want to go running everywhere like the monkeys. Oh, how I wish I could!”

The moment the little tree said this, something happened. All of a sudden the little tree felt its firm roots loosening and coming free from the earth! It was like magic. “Oh! Oh!” it cried out. “I have been set free! I am going to see the world.” It set off walking down the road that led out of the forest.
As it walked along, it came across a group of gypsies sitting by the road and cooking. When they saw the walking tree, they were frightened and ran away. They thought it was haunted.

The little tree stood there and laughed. It looked at the fire. It had never seen one before. The little tree reached out a branch to touch it. Immediately the fire ran up the branch and began to spread all over.
“Ow! Ow!” cried the little tree. “That hurts!”
The fire laughed and spread out more.
“Help! Help!” cried the little tree. “Save me, someone!”

Luckily the breeze heard its cry. It flew to the mountain and pushed up a cloud. It began to rain and the fire was put out.

The little tree breathed a sigh of relief. “I had better get away from this terrible place as fast as I can,” it said. “Thank God, I can walk.”
The little tree set off again. A good many of its branches had been burnt off and it looked a sorry sight. It walked till it reached a town. It had never seen a town before. It stood and watched the sights.

Two children who were gathering firewood saw the little tree. They began to break its branches.

"Help!" cried the little tree. "Save me, someone!"

The birds heard the tree. They pecked at the children’s hands and frightened them away.

The little tree moved off again. It had lost several more of its branches by now.

It began to walk down the main road of the town. All the motorists got confused on seeing a tree walking in the middle of the road. They blew their horns and banged into each other trying to avoid it.

"A tree!" the traffic policeman cried. "Trees are not to walk on the road."

Another policeman tied the little tree with a rope and took it away.
“Help! Help!” cried the little tree. “Save me, someone!”

The monkeys came to the little tree’s rescue. They snatched the policeman’s cap. The policeman ran after them.
The little tree ran too, all the way back to the forest.
“Who is this?” asked the big tree as the little tree came back and stood quietly in its old place. “It is me.”

“The little tree?” The big tree was silent for a while. “You have changed a lot. So, have you seen the great, wide world? And how did you like it?”

“Yes, I have seen the world,” the little tree said. “And I realized the forest is the best place to be.”

In time the little tree grew fresh leaves and branches. The breeze and the birds and the monkeys told it new stories.
The little tree was happy being a tree to whom the breeze talked, where the birds could build their nests and the monkeys could sleep at night.