

What Do You See When You Look At A Tree?



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Emma Carlisle

What Do You See
When You Look
At A Tree?



For Phil



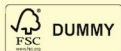
The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew carries out vital scientific and horticultural work to protect and restore trees and forests around the world. Kew Gardens is home to 14,000 trees including many that are rare and endangered. Around 40,000 trees grow at Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden in Sussex.

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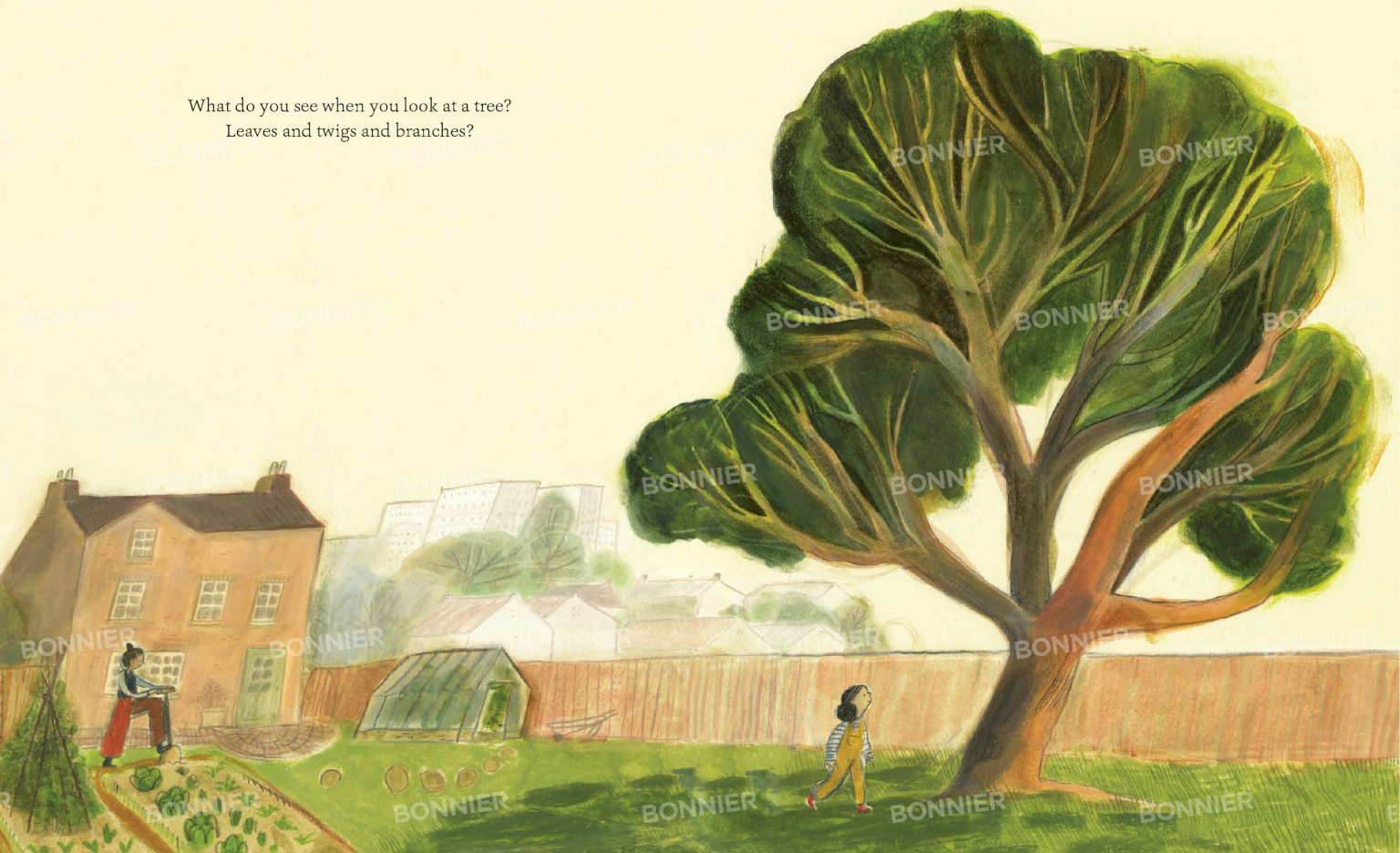


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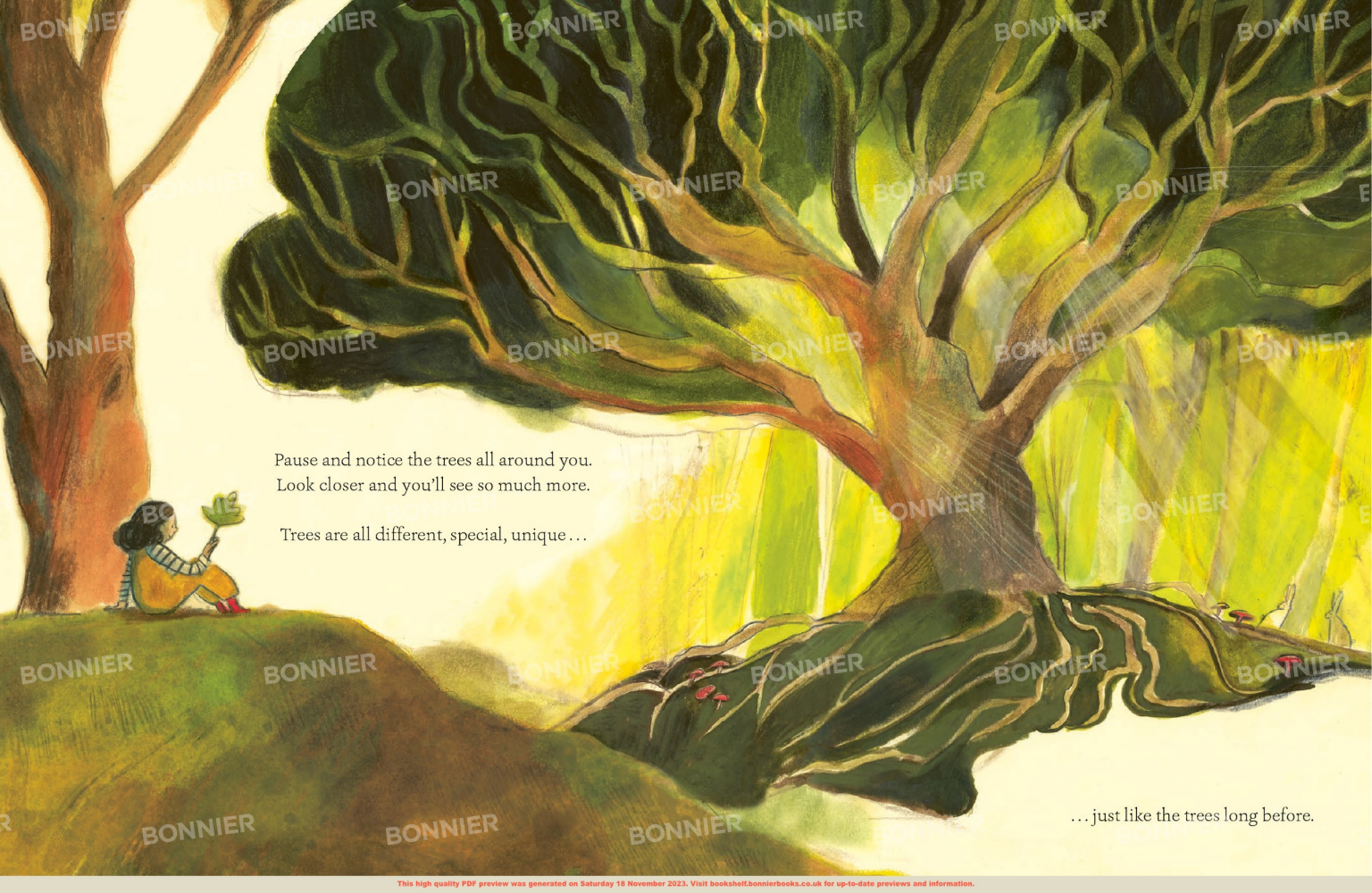
B P P

What do you see when you look at a tree?
Leaves and twigs and branches?



Or do you see a living thing
that moves and breathes and dances?





Pause and notice the trees all around you.
Look closer and you'll see so much more.

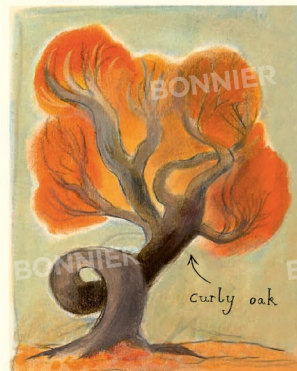
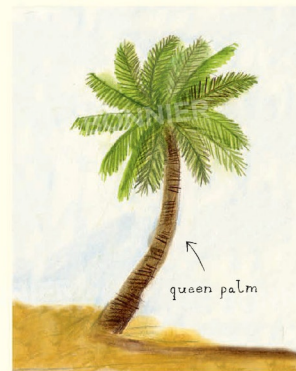
Trees are all different, special, unique ...

... just like the trees long before.

Is this tree here like any other?



Do any of these trees look the same?



Most trees have branches, leaves and a trunk.
But each has its own special name.



Does it lean
on its friends?

Does it swoop
down low?

Does it have branches perfect for climbing?

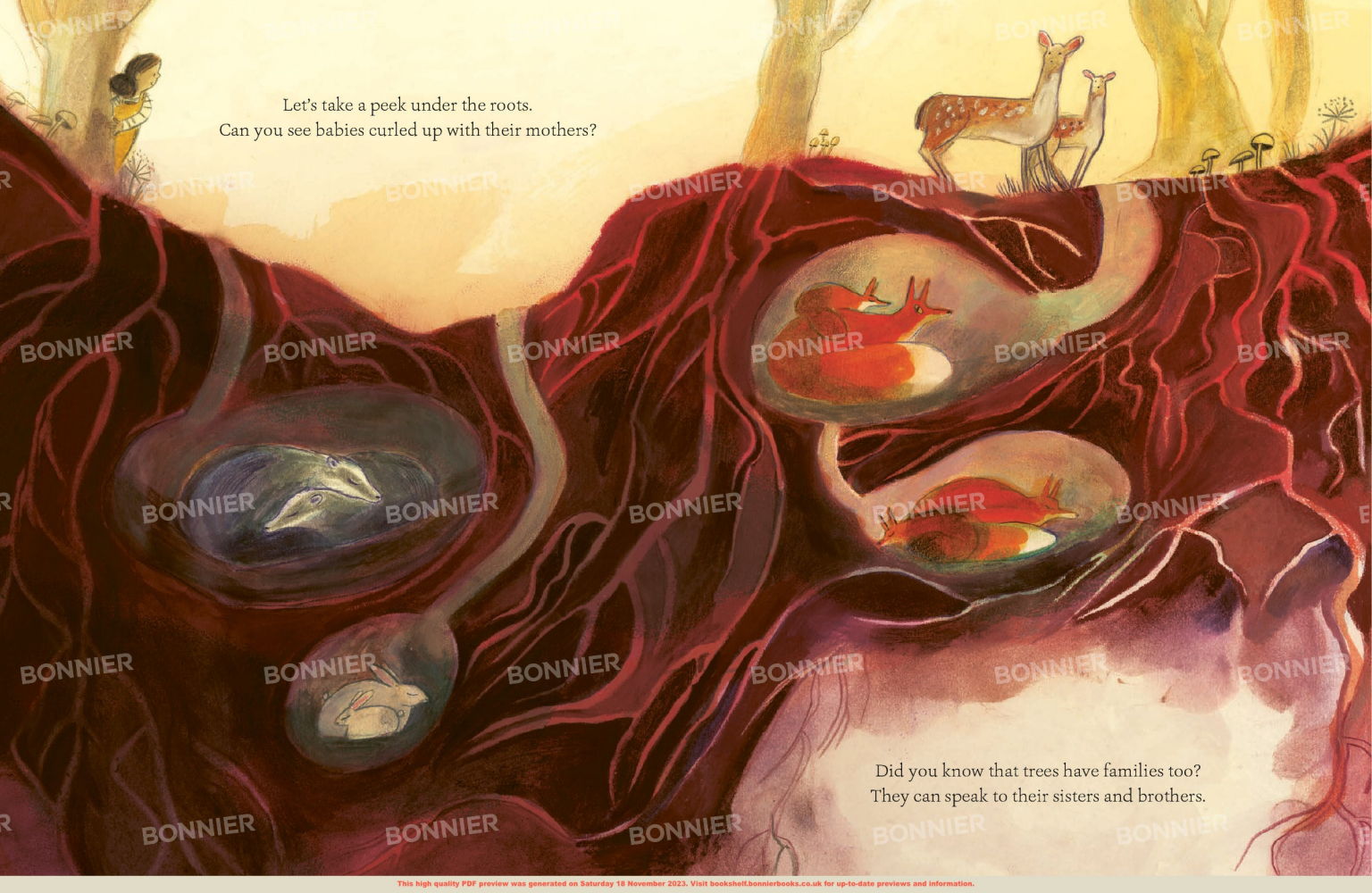


Or does it stand proud on a faraway hill,
waiting for the sun to start shining?



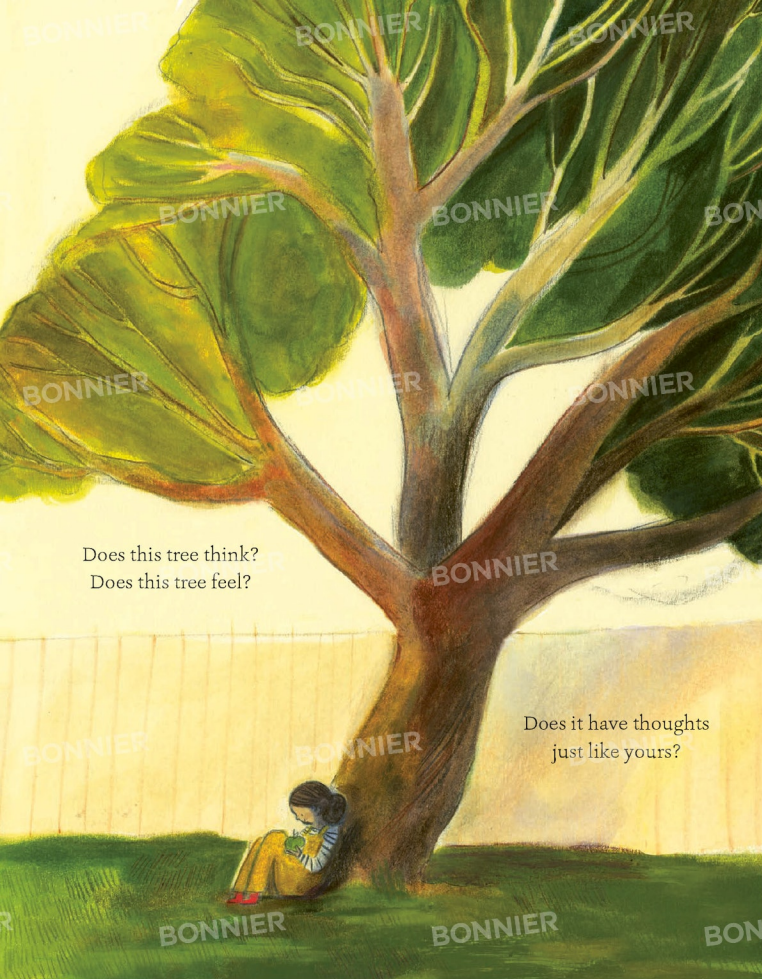
Come a little nearer. What do you see?
Is there an egg in a nest?

Do squirrels dance rings around its great trunk?
Can you see the robin's red breast?



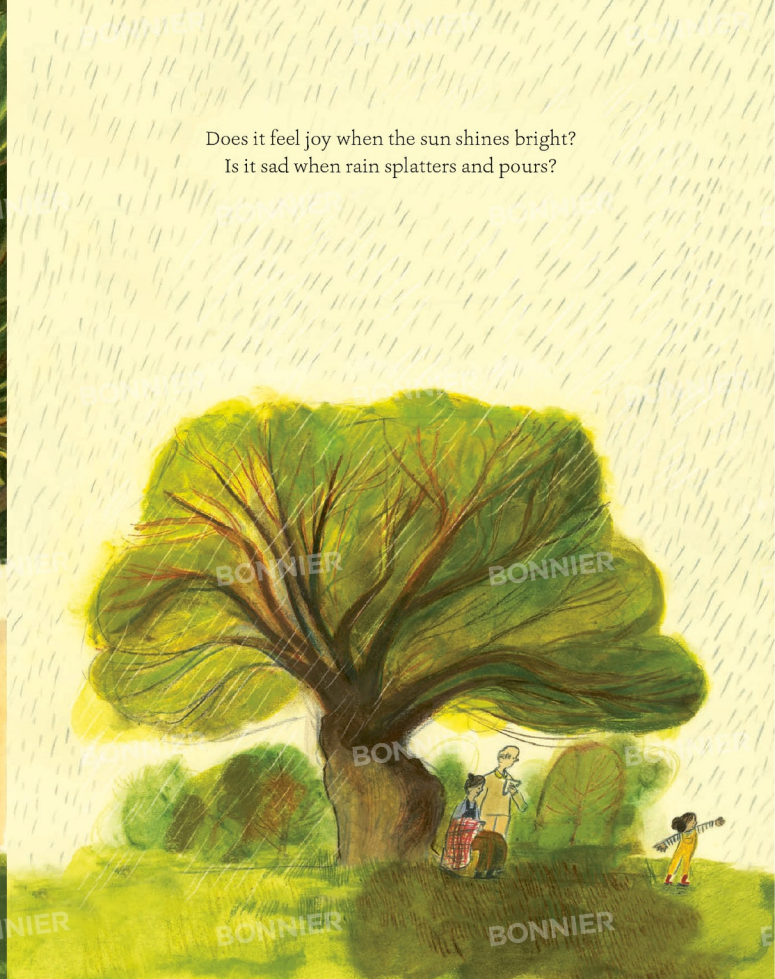
Let's take a peek under the roots.
Can you see babies curled up with their mothers?

Did you know that trees have families too?
They can speak to their sisters and brothers.



Does this tree think?
Does this tree feel?

Does it have thoughts
just like yours?



Does it feel joy when the sun shines bright?
Is it sad when rain splatters and pours?

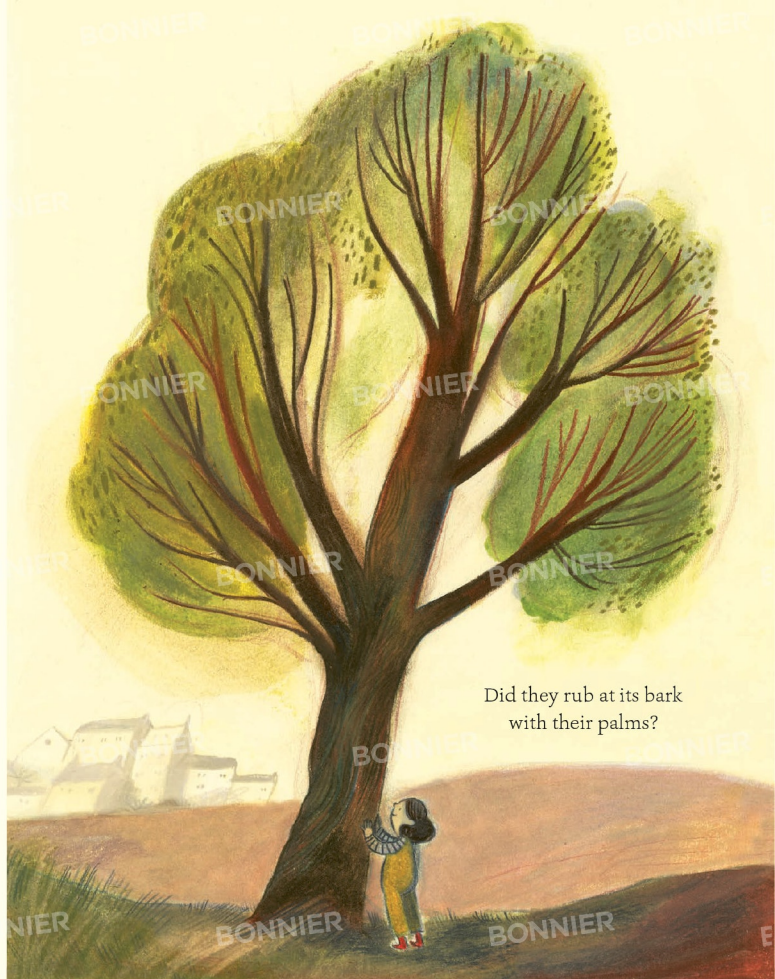
What has a tree seen over hundreds of years?



Who else made a home in its arms?



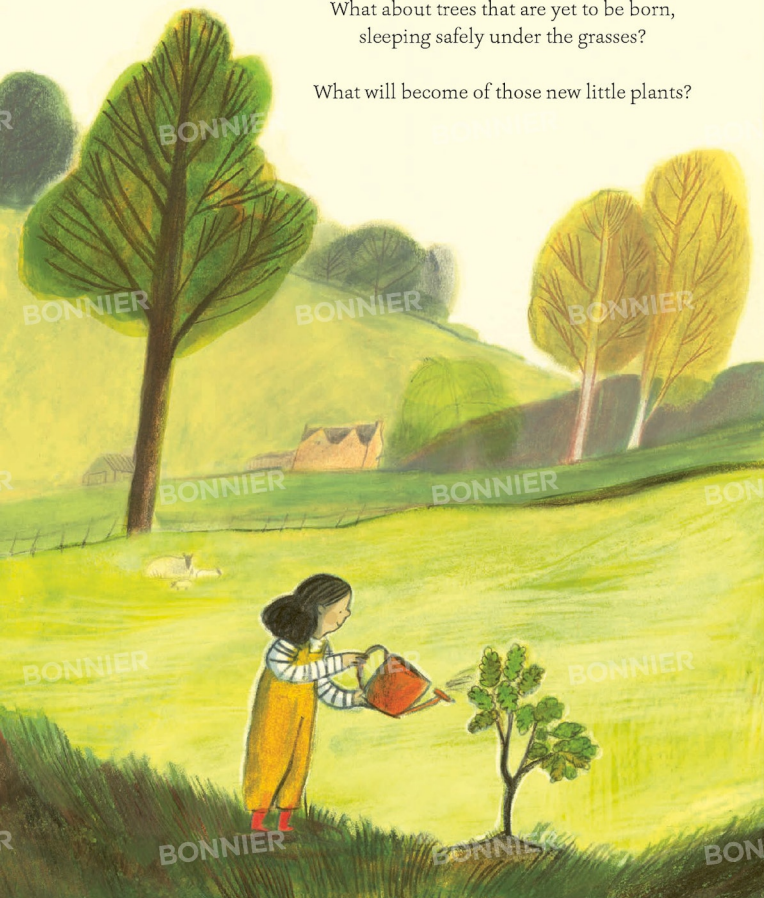
Did children before you play in its shade?



Did they rub at its bark
with their palms?

What about trees that are yet to be born,
sleeping safely under the grasses?

What will become of those new little plants?

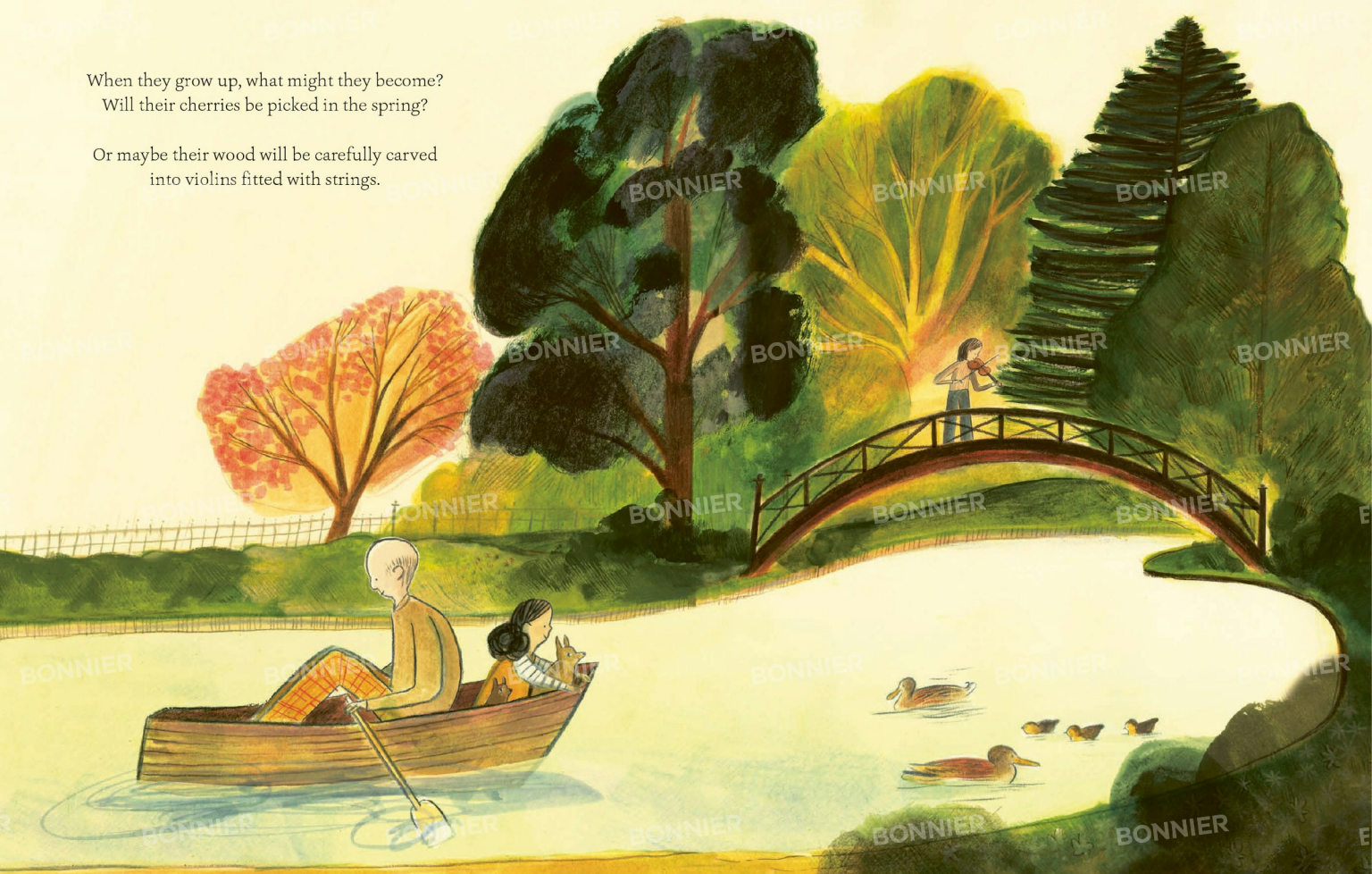


Who will love them
with each year that passes?



When they grow up, what might they become?
Will their cherries be picked in the spring?

Or maybe their wood will be carefully carved
into violins fitted with strings.



Have you ever curled up
with a tree in your hands,
as stories or songs in a book?

Have you read till the moon
and the stars filled the sky,
as you sat in a cosy old nook?

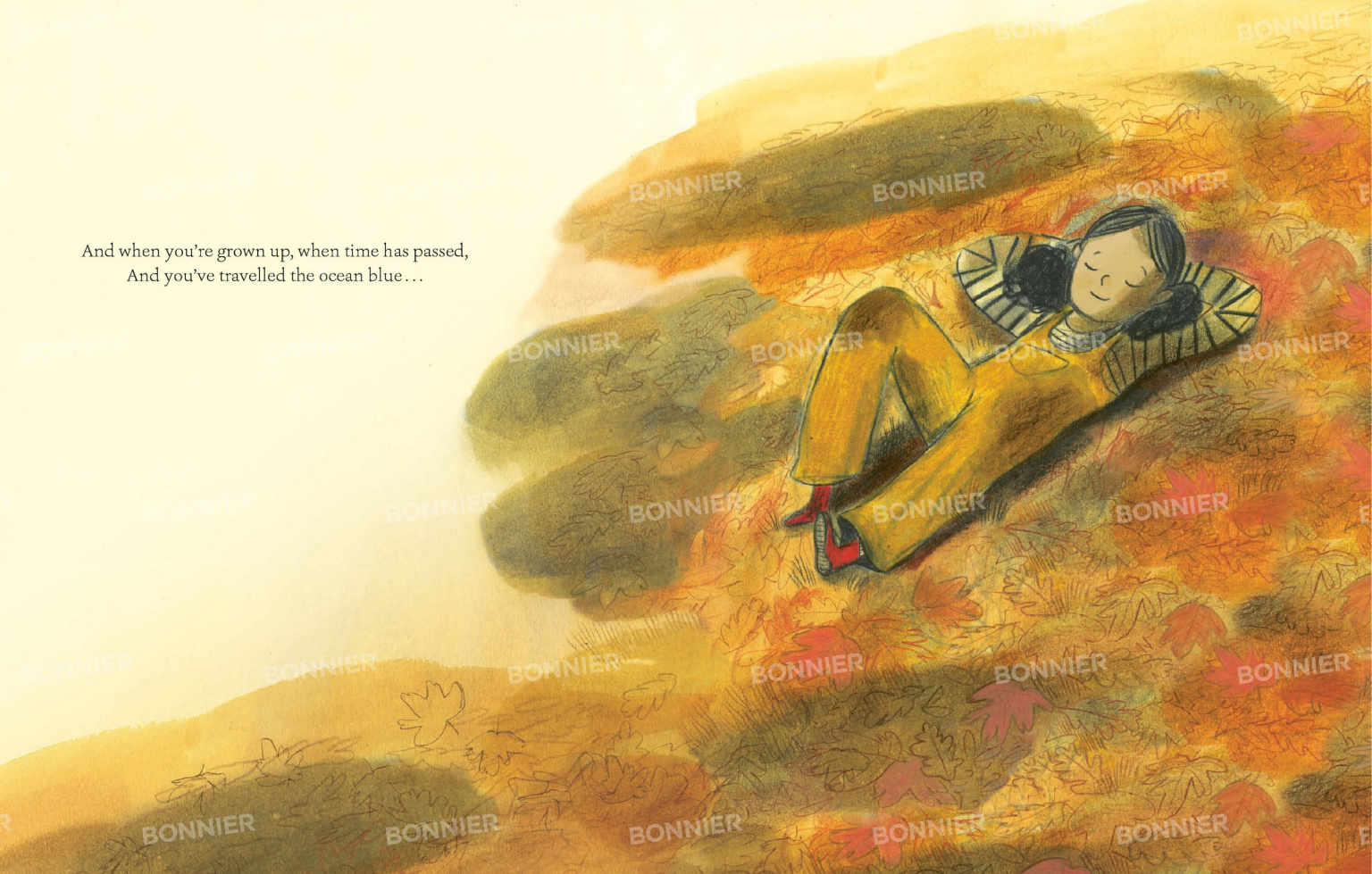


When you are bigger, where will you go?
What new places will you explore?

Will you go on adventures to faraway lands?
And gather stories from shore to shore?



And when you're grown up, when time has passed,
And you've travelled the ocean blue...



... will you return to that very same tree,
that gave so much to you?



Listening to Trees

Slow down, take a deep breath and look around. What can you see?

What can you hear? Branches creak and leaves rustle, but did you know that trees can talk to each other? Science tells us that trees are far from silent - in fact, they are secretly speaking to one another all the time... right beneath our feet.



So, can trees speak?

Well, yes, but not with words. A network of fungi that grows around trees' roots allows them to share nutrients and information with one another. This fungal network is called the *wood wide web*, and it can stretch for hundreds of miles!

What do trees talk about?

Trees might exchange warnings about diseases or insects that pose a threat. They can also share food with one another, and, in some cases, healthy trees can support trees that are sick or dying.

Trees have families, too.

When trees intertwine their root systems, they create family networks that can help and support one another. The biggest, oldest trees in the forest are called *mothers*, and just like human mothers, they take care of their

offspring to give them a better chance of survival. Through this wood wide web, mother trees provide saplings with extra nutrients. They also use their large roots to carve out space for saplings to grow. Trees can even store memories to share with future generations!

How to Be More Like a Tree

There is so much we can learn from trees. They are a reminder to take our time, look out for one another and look after ourselves, too. Here are some different ways we can all be more tree...

Take Your Time

Trees can take hundreds of years to mature, growing little by little each day. They live long lives and see many things. Trees remind us that we need to be patient in order to grow strong.



Rest

In wintertime, many trees become dormant, a bit like how animals hibernate. They do this to protect themselves from the cold and ready themselves for spring. Trees remind us that we too, should make time for rest and relaxation.



Self-Care

Trees cannot survive without sunlight. Scientists think sunshine is vital to human happiness, too. When we feel positive and calm, our brains release a chemical called serotonin. Studies have shown that our brains release more serotonin when we are outside in the sunlight.



Spread Your Roots

Tree roots are buried deep beneath the soil and spread out over huge areas. This helps the tree to stay grounded while also allowing it to find new nutrients so that it can continue to grow. We can spread our own roots and grow by exploring the world around us. But it's just as important to stay centred by surrounding ourselves with the people who know and love us.



Unlikely Friendships

In a forest, every tree is valuable. If trees only looked after themselves, they wouldn't reach old age. That's why healthy trees support sick trees and young trees learn from older trees. We too, can do this in our everyday lives by working as a community.



Be Authentic

No two trees are the same, just as no two humans are exactly alike. Every tree twists and bends in its own way. Trees can teach us to be proud of our uniqueness and stand tall. Celebrate what makes you you.

A Note from Emma Carlisle



The idea for this book came when I started a daily walk around where I live in Plymouth, Devon. Every morning, I took a cup of tea to a small patch of grass. I wanted to make sure I had time to relax before work. I live by the sea, where most people like to sit by the shore and listen to the waves, but I wanted somewhere quieter where I could read a book, write in my journal or watch the world go by.

To begin with I saw all the trees around me the same way - nothing special or unique. However, the more I visited, the more I noticed how each tree was different. The curve of a branch, the variety of colours, the way people interacted with them - using them for shade on sunny days and shelter when it rained. The more I noticed these trees, the more I started noticing every tree I walked past. It made me think about trees as individuals. How long had they been there? What could they see from the tips of their branches? Soon I found myself asking bigger questions: How old is this tree? Does it think or feel like I do? I started taking photos of trees, researching their history and drawing them in my sketchbook. I even visited an ancient woodland that is spoken about in myths and legends.

I hope this book inspires you to look closer at trees, whether it's from your bedroom window, in a local park or on your walk to school. Who knows what else you might notice? A butterfly on the last flower of the summer, a flock of geese flying overhead or small sprigs of grass poking between the pavement... nature is all around you.

Emma
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