



ROOTS OF TOMORROW: A FOREST DIVIDED

Adventure Book



START



The valley still smelled of smoke.

Not the sharp smoke of flames – that had passed months ago – but something dry and lingering, rising from the soil as the heat settled in. Diego stepped off the truck and paused, taking in the landscape before him.

What had once been dense rainforest now stretched out in uneven patches of blackened earth and fragile green. Rows of young trees stood in careful lines, their leaves bright but identical. Beyond them, charred trunks reached into a pale sky, stripped of everything they once held.

CONTINUE

It was quieter than he expected. No birds. No insects. Only wind moving across ash. Diego felt the silence in his stomach before he could name it. He had come to learn, but suddenly the valley felt personal.

"First time seeing it?"

Diego turned. Rafael Torres, the restoration director, approached, sleeves rolled, boots dusted grey.

"It's different from what I imagined," Diego admitted. Rafael nodded, as if he had heard that many times before. "It always is." He gestured across the valley. "Six months ago, this was completely burned through. Now we're restoring it – and faster than anyone thought possible."

They walked along the planting rows. Workers moved steadily in the heat, placing seedlings into the ground and passing water between them. A boy hurried past them carrying a tray of seedlings, nearly losing his balance on the uneven ground.

"Careful," Rafael called.

"I've got it!" the boy replied with a grin as he steadied himself.

"That's Bruno," Rafael said. "A local school-leaver. He's been here since the first weeks after the fire."

CONTINUE



Bruno slowed and walked alongside them, glancing at Diego with curiosity. "You're the new intern, right?"

Diego nodded. "Agroecology."

Bruno pointed proudly across the valley. "We're bringing it back. Fast."

Diego followed his gaze. From a distance, the project looked impressive – organised, efficient, purposeful. But the longer he looked, the more something felt slightly off. The trees were all the same height, the same shape, the same shade of green.



Too uniform.

CONTINUE



A forest is not just a collection of trees. It is a complex system made up of many species interacting with each other and their environment.

In healthy forests:

- different plants grow at different speeds and heights
- roots and fungi connect underground
- insects, animals, and microorganisms support nutrient cycles

When only one or a few species are planted (monoculture), the system becomes simpler and more fragile.

It may grow quickly - but it is less able to adapt to drought, disease, or climate change.

A forest's strength comes from diversity, not uniformity.

Source: FAO Forest Restoration; UNEP Ecosystem Restoration for People, Nature and Climate.

By midday, the heat had intensified. The air felt heavier than it should have, pressing down without relief. Diego worked alongside the others, learning quickly – how to plant efficiently, how to record progress, how to keep pace with the system.

When he asked about the seedlings, a supervisor answered simply, “Fast-growing species. Best for recovery.”

It sounded reasonable. Still, the unease remained. Later, he paused near a dry streambed. The soil cracked beneath his fingers, dry to the core. He frowned slightly. Had it always been like this?

“Diego!” Bruno called. “We’re heading back!” Diego stood and brushed the dust from his hands. As he turned to leave, something caught his attention at the far edge of the valley.

A patch of land had been left untouched. There, the growth was different – uneven, tangled, unpredictable. The soil looked darker, as if it still held water. It felt... alive.

CONTINUE

“Coming?” Bruno called again.

Diego hesitated for a moment longer, then turned and followed.

That evening, the camp filled with hopeful conversation. Rafael spoke about expansion – more land, more planting, more impact.

Bruno leaned toward Diego, lowering his voice slightly. “This is just the beginning,” he said.

Diego nodded, but his thoughts drifted back to the valley – to the dry streambed, the identical rows of trees, and the patch of land that didn’t follow the pattern.

A question settled in his mind. What kind of forest are they bringing back?

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Trusts the project and commits fully to Rafael’s approach. Go to page 6



Explores the valley alone to understand what he noticed. Go to page 8



Speaks with local community members about the land. Go to page 10

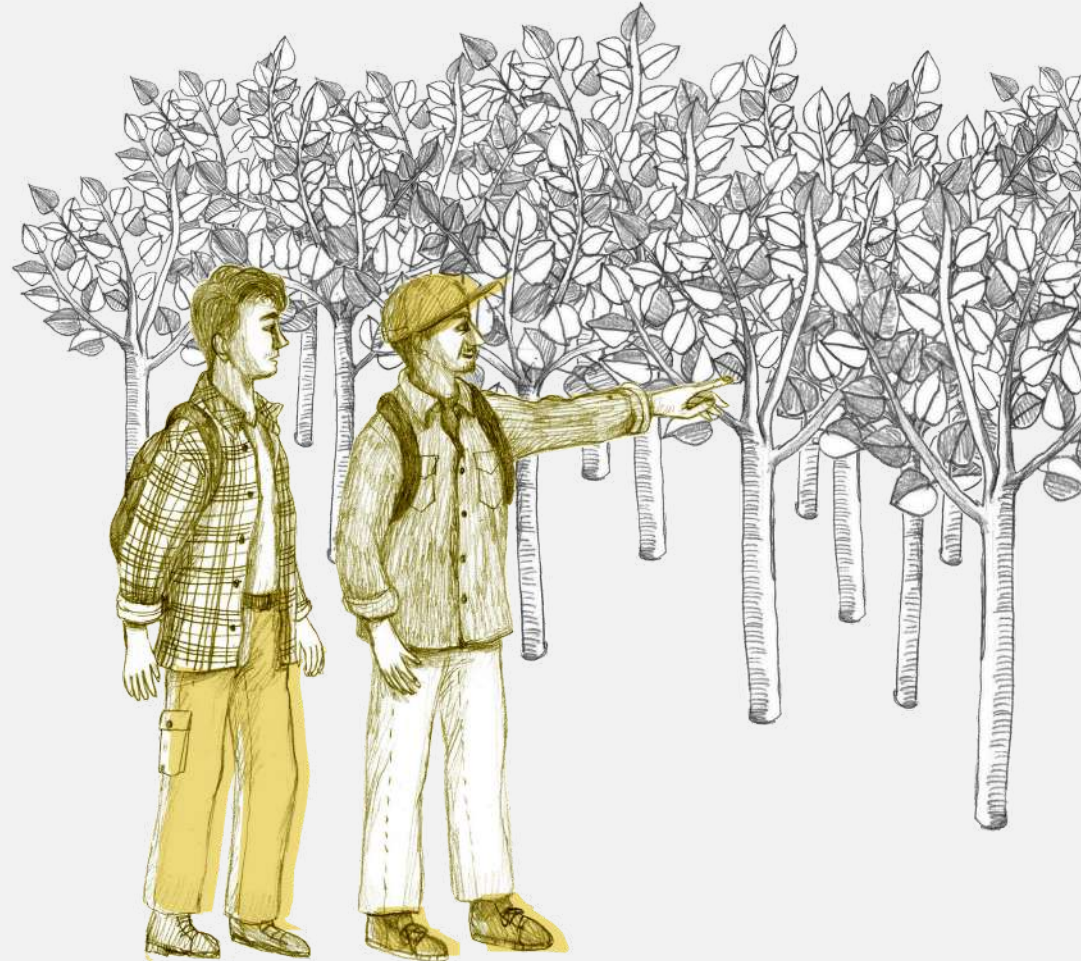
Rafael found Diego early the next morning, already walking the planting rows.

“Good,” he said. “You’re up early. That helps.”

They moved through the valley as the sun climbed, light catching on the neat lines of seedlings. From this angle, the project looked even more convincing – green spreading steadily across the burned land. Rafael stopped near a cluster of workers. “This is what scale looks like,” he said. “We’re restoring hundreds of hectares. Creating jobs. Attracting investment. And capturing carbon while we do it.”

Diego nodded, watching the steady rhythm of planting.

“It’s not perfect,” Rafael continued, “but nothing at this scale ever is. What matters is that it works.”



CONTINUE

Bruno joined them, wiping sweat from his forehead. “We’re ahead of schedule,” he said proudly.

Rafael smiled. “Exactly.”

For a moment, Diego let himself believe it fully – that speed was necessary, that uniformity was temporary, that this was what recovery looked like.

But as they walked on, the rows stretched on unchanged. Efficient. Controlled. Predictable.

And the question from yesterday lingered, quieter now, but still there.

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Commits fully and supports Rafael's approach. Go to page 12



Asks deeper questions about how the system works. Go to page 14

Diego returned to the edge of the valley alone.

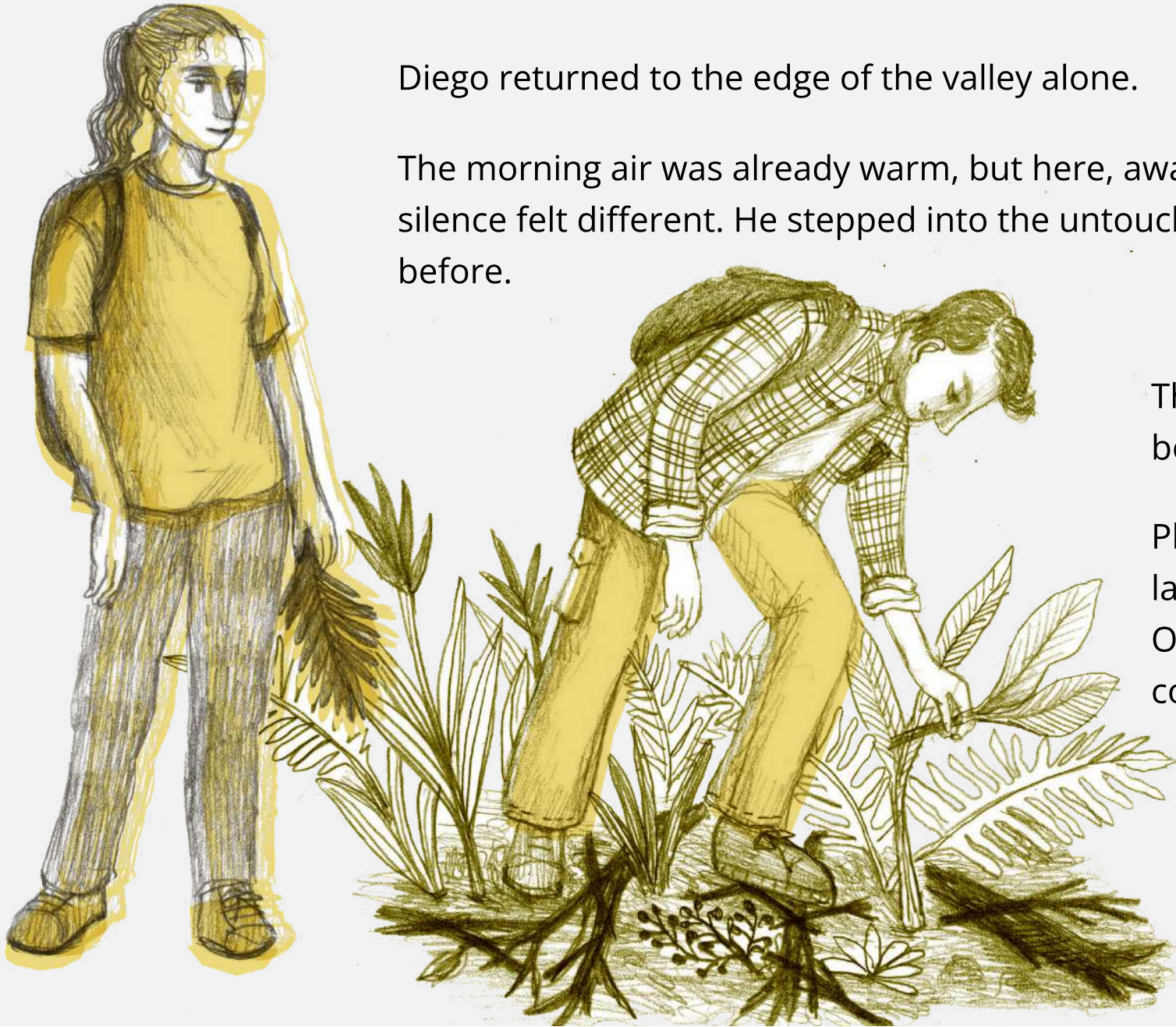
The morning air was already warm, but here, away from the planting rows, the silence felt different. He stepped into the untouched patch he had noticed the day before.

The ground was softer beneath his boots.

Plants grew unevenly – small, tangled, layered. Some he didn't recognise. Others climbed over fallen branches, competing for light.



CONTINUE





Water is one of the first systems to respond to environmental change.

After wildfires, soil can lose its ability to retain moisture.

If replanting is not carefully managed, new vegetation can increase water demand before the system has recovered.

Different species affect water differently:

- some conserve moisture
- others consume large amounts quickly

When water systems are stressed, the effects spread:

- streams dry earlier
- soil becomes less stable
- communities face shortages

Changes in water often reveal deeper problems in how ecosystems are being restored.

“Not what they’re planting, is it?”

Diego turned. Marisol, a local forest technician who knew the valley before the fire, stood a few steps behind him, watching. “No,” he admitted.

She walked past him, crouching to touch the soil. “This is how a forest starts,” she said. “Messy. Slow. Connected.” She pointed toward the rows in the distance. “That’s something else.”

Diego glanced back at the ordered lines of identical trees. “They said it’s for recovery,” he said.

Marisol shook her head slightly. “Recovery for what? For the land – or for the report?”

Diego didn’t answer. Instead, he looked down at the soil again – darker, cooler, alive. For the first time, the difference felt undeniable.

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Assumes the project still knows what it’s doing. Go to page 12



Trusts Marisol’s concerns and learns more. Go to page 18

Diego followed a narrow path beyond the project site until the planted rows disappeared behind him. Suddenly, he hears voices. A small group had gathered under a simple shelter. Buckets, tools, and water containers sat nearby.

"...The stream dried up two weeks earlier than usual this year," says a woman standing at the center of the group, her voice calm yet resolute. "And now they're planting even more trees that will need even more water!"

The woman turns and walks toward Diego.

"My name is Isabela Mora. I'm a community organiser from the nearby village," she says, extending her hand. "You're with the project, aren't you?" she asks, studying him intently.

Diego nods. "I've just arrived."



CONTINUE

Isabela studied him for a moment, then gestured toward the valley. “Then you should understand what’s happening.”

She pointed toward the distant planting zones. “They say it’s restoration. But we see less water. Fewer native plants. More pressure on land we depend on.”

A man nearby added, “It looks green. That doesn’t mean it’s alive.”

Diego hesitated. “They say it will help the ecosystem recover.”

Isabela’s expression didn’t change. “Maybe. But not all growth is the same.”

The group fell quiet. Somewhere in the distance, machinery hummed. Diego realised he was standing between two versions of the same story – and they didn’t match.

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Remains neutral and returns to the project. Go to page 12



Supports the community and their concerns. Go to page 18

By the end of the week, the valley looked greener.

From the ridge, the rows stretched further than before, filling in the blackened gaps. New sections had already been marked out, flagged for planting. Trucks arrived daily, unloading more trays of identical seedlings.

Jonas Kline, the investor liaison, arrived that afternoon. He stepped out of a white vehicle, sunglasses shielding his eyes as he surveyed the valley. His clothes were clean, his posture precise – out of place against the dust and heat – but his quick glance at the rows betrayed nervous calculation.

Rafael greeted him warmly. “You’re seeing it at a good moment,” he said. “We’re ahead of schedule.”

Jonas nodded, scanning the rows. “It looks strong,” he said. “Consistent.”



CONTINUE

They walked together along the planting lines, Diego and Bruno trailing behind.

“Satellite imagery will pick this up clearly,” Jonas continued. “Investors want visibility. Progress they can measure.”

Rafael glanced at Diego. “That’s what makes this model work.”

Diego looked out over the valley again. From a distance, it did look like success – green replacing ash, order replacing chaos.

Bruno leaned toward him. “Told you,” he said quietly. “It’s working.”

Diego didn’t respond immediately. The trees were growing. But they were all the same. And the dry streambed still hadn’t changed.

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Supports the project and its expansion. Go to page 20



Quietly investigates what’s happening beneath the surface. Go to page 14

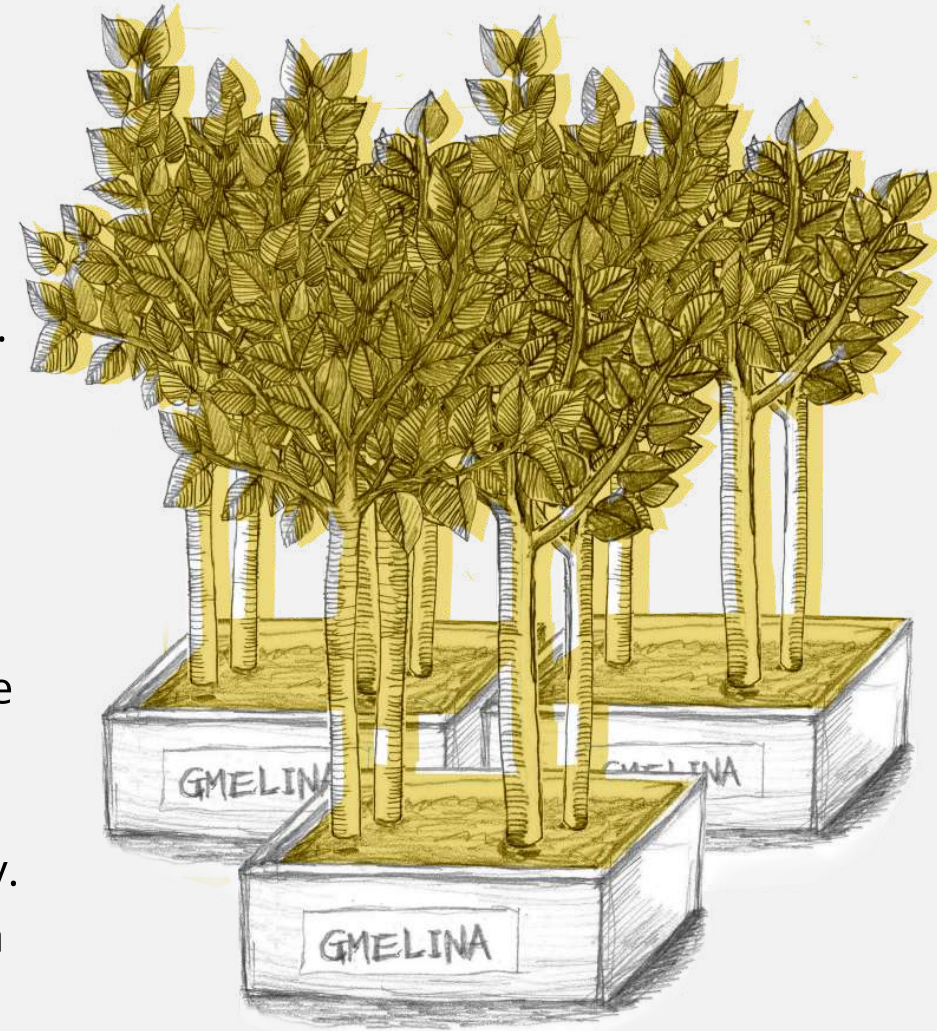
Diego began paying closer attention.

He spent more time in the nursery, checking the labels on seed trays. The names repeated themselves – the same species, over and over. Fast-growing. Drought-tolerant. Selected for efficiency.

Not diversity.

He walked the irrigation lines next. Some sections ran dry before reaching the end of the rows. In others, the soil had already hardened, struggling to hold moisture. At the edge of the site, the streambed remained dry.

Diego looks up and notices a man standing a short distance away. Dr. Tomás Cortez had arrived earlier that day, visiting as part of a regional tour focused on youth-led conservation projects. His presence had spread quickly through the camp – a quiet excitement, a sense that something important was being seen.



CONTINUE

Now, away from the main activity, he stood beside one of the surviving trees, examining the bark with careful attention.

Diego hesitated, then stepped forward. "Would you like to see part of the burned area?" he asked.

Cortez nodded. They walked along a narrow, charred trail where the fire had passed hardest. The ground was still uneven, the soil dry in places, fragile in others. In the distance, the rows of planted trees stretched in ordered lines.



CONTINUE

Diego hadn't planned what to say. But as they walked, the words came.

He spoke about the project – the speed, the uniform planting, the pressure to expand. He spoke about the dry stream, the lack of diversity, the sense that something was missing.

Cortez listened without interrupting. When Diego finished, he reached out and rested his hand against the bark of the surviving tree.

"A forest is a story," he said quietly. "It's made of many characters – soil, water, fungi, insects, time."

He looked toward the rows of identical seedlings in the distance. "When you erase those characters," he continued, "you don't just simplify the system. You erase its future."

Diego followed his gaze. The valley stretched out in green lines – ordered, efficient, incomplete.

CONTINUE

Cortez turned back to him.

“The question,” he said, “is not whether you can plant trees.”

He paused, then added:

“It’s whether you’re willing to be a guardian of the forest – or just its designer.”

He gave a small nod, then continued along the trail.

Diego remained where he was. For the first time, the choice felt clear.

This wasn’t just about planting. It was about what kind of future he was helping to build. And whether he was willing to take responsibility for it.



WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Confronts Rafael with
what he has learned.
Go to page 22



Gathers more
evidence before
acting. Go to page 24





Reforestation often focuses on planting trees.

Restoration focuses on rebuilding ecosystems.

This includes:

- biodiversity (many species, not just one)
- soil health
- water cycles
- long-term resilience

Some projects prioritise fast-growing trees to quickly capture carbon or show visible results. These can be useful in the short term but may not support full ecosystem recovery.

A restored forest is not measured only by how many trees are planted - but by how well the system functions over time.

Not all green landscapes are healthy ecosystems.

Marisol took Diego deeper into the valley, away from the planted rows. The path narrowed as they moved through patches of surviving vegetation. Here, the air felt slightly cooler. The soil darker. She stopped beside a cluster of young plants growing close together.

“This is how recovery begins,” she said. “Not in lines. In layers.”. Diego crouched beside her. The ground was uneven, alive with small differences – roots crossing, leaves overlapping, insects moving through the soil.



It was quieter than he expected. No birds. No insects. Only wind moving across ash.

Diego felt the silence in his stomach before he could name it. He had come to learn, but suddenly the valley felt personal.

CONTINUE

Later, they met Isabela near the edge of the community land. She listened as Diego described what he had seen.

“We’ve been saying this,” she replied. “The water is already changing. If this continues, it won’t just affect the forest – it affects us.”

Bruno had followed them partway, quieter than usual now.

“But it looks like it’s working,” he said. “Everything’s growing.”

Marisol shook her head gently. “Looking alive is not the same as being alive.”

Diego stood between them – the project, the land, the people – and felt the weight of the decision growing clearer. If the forest was going to return, it wouldn’t happen by accident.

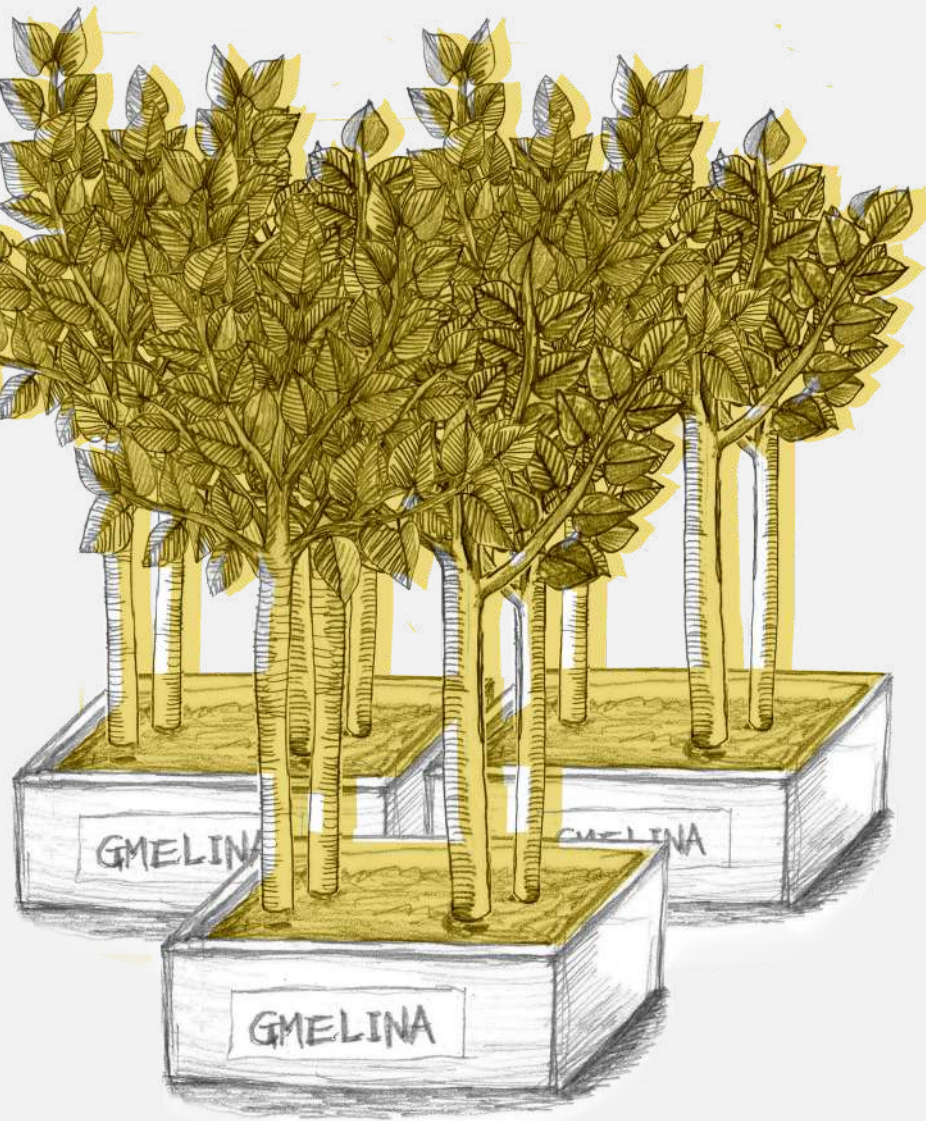
WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Advocates for changing the restoration approach. Go to page 22



Starts building a small alternative model with Marisol. Go to page 24



The expansion began immediately.

New areas of the valley were cleared and marked. More seedlings arrived. More workers were brought in. From the ridge, the transformation was undeniable – green spreading rapidly across land that had been ash only months before.

Jonas visited again, this time with a small media team. “Visible progress is critical,” he said, watching as cameras captured the planting rows. “This is what success looks like.”

Rafael stood beside him, nodding. “We’re proving restoration can work at scale.”

Bruno moved through the crowd, energised by the attention. “They’re going to show this everywhere,” he said to Diego. “People will see what we’re doing.”

CONTINUE

Diego looked out over the valley.

From a distance, it did look like success.

But closer, the signs remained. Soil drying too quickly. Water lines stretched thin. The same species planted again and again, filling the land with uniform growth.

It was working – but only in one sense.

As the cameras moved on, Diego stood at the edge of the field, watching the rows extend further into the valley.

The forest was returning. But it was not the forest that had been there before.

WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Continues supporting the expansion.
Go to page 26



Steps back and challenges the
direction of the project. Go to page 22



Diego found Rafael near the edge of the site, reviewing maps with Jonas.

"We need to talk," Diego said.

Rafael looked up, sensing the tension immediately. Jonas remained where he was, listening.

"This isn't restoration," Diego continued. "Not the way we're doing it. The system is too narrow. The water's already under pressure. The biodiversity"

Rafael raised a hand. "We're rebuilding what was lost. At scale. That matters."

"At what cost?" Diego asked.

CONTINUE

Jonas stepped forward slightly. “What matters is that the system holds,” he said calmly. “Investors support results, not uncertainty.”

Diego felt the weight of both their perspectives – the urgency, the pressure, the expectations. Behind him, Isabela and a few community members had gathered, watching.

“We’re already seeing the effects,” she said. “Water levels are changing. This isn’t just about trees.”

Rafael exhaled slowly. “If we slow down now, we risk losing everything – funding, support, momentum.”

“And if you don’t,” Diego replied, “you risk building something that won’t last.” The silence that followed felt heavier than the heat.

This was no longer a question of right or wrong. It was a question of what kind of risk to accept.

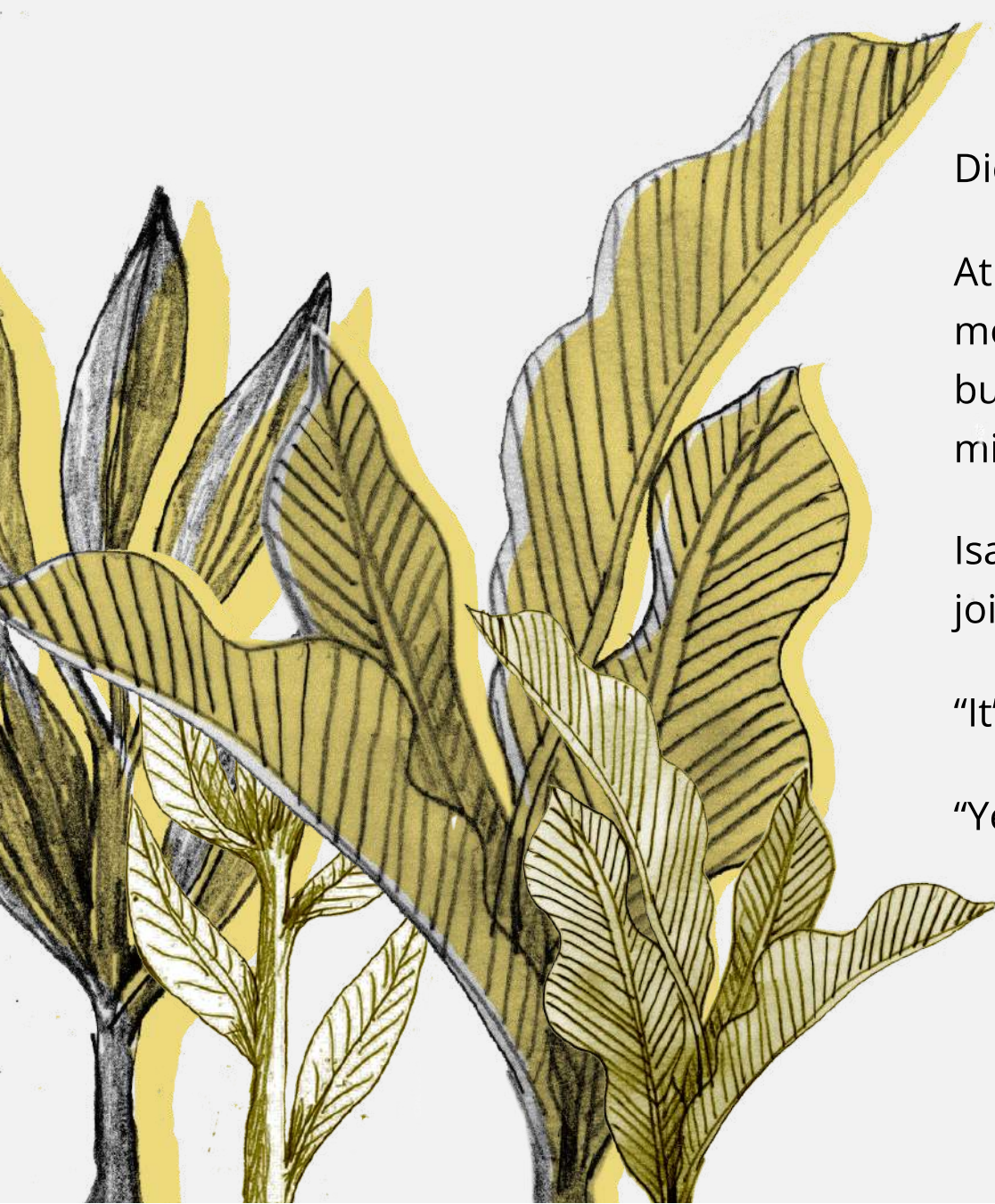
WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Pushes publicly against the project and exposes its flaws.
Go to page 28



Works with Rafael and others to adjust the approach gradually.
Go to page 31



Diego and Marisol began quietly.

At the edge of the valley, where the land still held moisture, they planted a small test area – not in rows, but in clusters. Different species. Different spacing. A mix of fast and slow growth.

Isabela helped organise local support. A few volunteers joined. Bruno came too, though more cautiously now.

"It's slower," he said, watching them work.



"Yes," Marisol replied. "But it holds."

CONTINUE



Nature-based solutions are actions that use ecosystems to address climate challenges.

They can be powerful - but only when designed carefully.

If projects prioritise:

- speed over complexity
- scale over local conditions
- appearance over function

they may fail to deliver long-term benefits.

Successful restoration requires:

- local knowledge
- ecological diversity
- long-term monitoring

Without these, solutions may look effective – but remain fragile.

Source: IUCN Nature-based Solutions.

Over the next days, the difference became visible. The soil stayed cooler beneath the mixed plants. Moisture lingered longer. Small insects returned. It wasn't dramatic. It was steady.

Rafael visited once, standing at the edge of the plot. "It won't scale fast enough," he said.

"Maybe not," Diego replied. "But it might last."

Beyond them, the larger project continued – rows expanding, systems accelerating.

Two approaches, side by side. Two different futures.

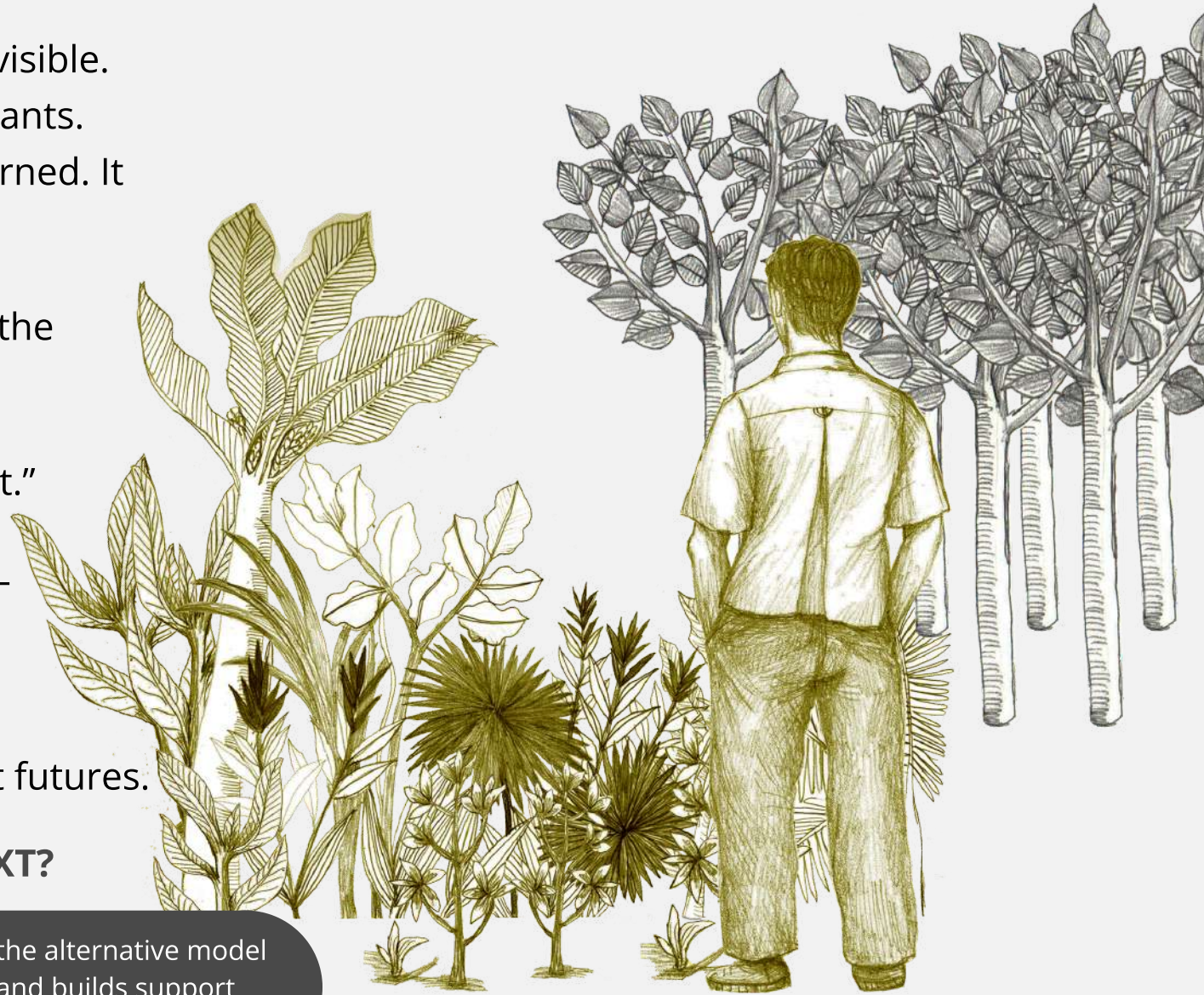
WHAT DOES DIEGO DO NEXT?



Pushes to scale the alternative too quickly across the valley. Go to page 26



Expands the alternative model carefully and builds support over time. Go to page 31



The valley turns green. From above, it looks like a success – dense, uniform, efficient. Satellite images show uninterrupted canopy cover. Reports celebrate rapid restoration. Carbon targets are met ahead of schedule, and new funding flows in.

For a while, it feels like the project has worked. But on the ground, the changes are different.

The soil dries faster with each passing season. The irrigation system stretches further, struggling to keep up. The trees grow quickly, their trunks straight and tall, but beneath them the forest remains quiet. Few plants take root in the shade. Fewer insects return. The land holds shape, but not life.

Marisol leaves the project before the next planting phase begins. She says little when she goes, only that the forest needs more than speed. Isabela continues to raise concerns about water and long-term impact, but her voice is no longer central to the decisions being made.

Rafael stays. He works harder than ever, determined to protect what has been built.

CONTINUE

Bruno walks the rows one evening, his hand brushing against the identical leaves.

"It still looks like a forest," he says.

Diego stands beside him, looking out across the valley. This time, he doesn't try to agree. Because now he understands the difference. Looking like a forest is not the same as being one.

The valley stands – green, ordered, and fragile. A system that functions. Until the conditions change.

Until the water runs thinner. Until something breaks that cannot be replaced as easily as it was planted.



THE END

The story spreads faster than anyone expects.

What begins as a conversation becomes a report, then an article, then a wider investigation. The language shifts – from “restoration success” to “questions of sustainability,” from “innovation” to “risk.”

Diego speaks carefully, but clearly. He describes what he has seen – the monocultures, the water stress, the absence of biodiversity beneath the surface.

The response is immediate.

Funding is paused. Investors withdraw or hesitate. The project slows within weeks, then fractures under the pressure.

Some workers leave. Others stay, uncertain. The momentum that once drove the valley forward disappears almost overnight.

CONTINUE

Rafael steps back from leadership. He does not argue publicly, but the distance between him and Diego is clear.

Jonas moves on to other projects.

The land remains in transition – not fully restored, but no longer expanding. Sections of the valley hold, others begin to struggle.

Marisol continues working with small groups, focusing on restoring native species where she can. Isabela pushes for a new approach, one rooted in the needs of the community, but progress is slow without stable support.

Bruno walks through the valley, no longer rushing between planting rows.

“Was it worth it?” he asks one evening.

CONTINUE

Diego looks out across the uneven landscape. He thinks of what was prevented – and what was lost.

“I don’t know,” he says honestly.

Because now he understands something harder than before. Truth matters.

But without structure, without continuity, it can leave the land as uncertain as the systems it tried to replace.

The forest does not disappear. But neither does it fully return.

It remains in between – waiting for a future that has yet to take shape.



THE END

The change does not come all at once. At first, it is small – a few plots redesigned, a few decisions reconsidered. Mixed planting replaces uniform rows in certain areas. Water use is monitored more carefully. Native species begin to return, slowly, unevenly.

There is resistance. Progress slows. Reports become more cautious. Some investors step back, unwilling to accept uncertainty. But the project does not collapse. It adapts.

Rafael remains, though his approach begins to shift. What once felt like compromise becomes something closer to understanding. The system changes, not through a single decision, but through many small ones.

Marisol's knowledge becomes central to the work. She moves freely between the community and the project, guiding restoration that reflects the complexity of the land. Isabela ensures the community is no longer on the edge of decisions, but part of them.

Bruno learns to see differently. He no longer measures success by how quickly the valley turns green, but by what returns – insects, moisture, variation.

CONTINUE

Seasons pass.

The forest grows, not in straight lines, but in layers. Some areas remain fragile. Others begin to stabilise. The soil holds water longer. Small sounds return – not all at once, but enough to be noticed.

One evening, Diego stands at the edge of the valley. The forest is still young. Still incomplete. But it is no longer silent. The recovery is slower than anyone first promised. But it is real.

And this time, the future of the valley does not depend on how it appears from above – but on how it lives from within.



CONTINUE



Diego remembers the words: A forest is a story.
And for the first time, he understands that
restoration is not about rewriting it – but
protecting the voices within it.

THE END

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

5

2

3

4

Next



Whose knowledge should guide environmental solutions?

Different characters brought different perspectives:

- scientific research
- indigenous ecological knowledge
- community experience
- economic priorities

Which voices did you trust most – and why?

In real-world environmental challenges, how should these perspectives be combined?



What does “restoration” really mean?

The project in the story aimed to restore the forest – but not all approaches led to the same outcome.

Do you think planting trees is enough to rebuild an ecosystem?

What else might be needed for a forest to truly recover?

Consider the difference between:

- looking like a forest
- functioning as a forest



Which ending did you reach – and what choices led you there?

Think about the decisions Diego made along the way.

Did you prioritise speed or ecological integrity?

Did you trust the system, challenge it, or try to change it from within?

Notice how early choices shaped later outcomes.

In real environmental decisions, small choices often determine long-term results.



How should we balance speed and sustainability?

In the story, fast action brought visible results – but also risks.

When facing urgent environmental damage, is it better to act quickly, or carefully?

What are the risks of moving too fast? What are the risks of moving too slowly?

Think about how you would make decisions under pressure.



What does responsibility look like in complex systems?

Diego had to decide whether to:

- support the system
- expose its flaws
- or try to change it from within

What would you have done in his place?

Do individuals have a responsibility to challenge systems, even if it creates instability?

Or is it better to work gradually within them?

There are no simple answers – but these are the kinds of decisions shaping real environmental futures.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Next



IPCC – Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), Working Group II (2021–2022)

<https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

FAO – State of the World's Forests (SOFO 2020 and updates)

<https://www.fao.org/publications/fao-flagship-publications/the-state-of-the-worlds-forests/en>

UNEP – Ecosystem Restoration Report (2021)

<https://www.unep.org/resources/annual-report-2021>

IPBES–IPCC Joint Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change (2021)

https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2021-06/20210609_workshop_report_embargo_3pm_CEST_10_june_0.pdf



This adventure book is a creation of Erasmus+ Green Saga Project

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Project code: 2024-2-LT02-KA220-YOU-000293123



**Co-funded by
the European Union**