

Eco-story
written by **Guido Quarzo**

The tree



When we talk about trees, we usually think about woods, big forests or the earth's green lung, which we don't want to lose, because our planet's life depends on trees.

But I want to tell you a different story:

The story of a tree who lived among the houses, in the middle of a round clearing where there were no cars, surrounded by benches, where children could play and adults could sit and rest or read the newspaper.

Just one tree, but for **Sarah and Charlie**, that tree was a friend, because they knew it well.

They knew it better than any other tree.

Every afternoon, when they weren't at school and it wasn't raining, Sarah and Charlie would go there to play, and their favourite game was football.

In summer, when the tree was covered with leaves, its canopy was thick and impenetrable.

Sarah and Charlie played around the tree with their ball and, sometimes, the ball would end up getting stuck in it.

They couldn't see it and it wouldn't come back down.

The children were upset at losing their ball, but they would say "*never mind*" and play something else. Then they would get another ball.

In autumn, all the leaves would fall from the tree's branches and, by the time winter came, the branches would all be bare.

One winter's day, as Sarah and Charlie were crossing the clearing, they looked up and saw all the balls lost by all the children who had played there.

The tree had become a very strange type of tree, a ball tree!

"What type of tree could this possibly be?" asked the children.

Charlie invented a name for it and said that it was a "ballonaria" tree: there are so many real trees and imaginary trees that it's impossible to know all their names: maples, beeches, birches, poplars, plane trees... that means there could also be "ballonaria" trees!

"No!" said **Sarah** *"Mum told me that it's a maple tree... and maple trees lose their leaves, just like this one!"*

"But do balls grow on maples trees?" asked **Charlie**.

Of course not... but...

That tree, which might have been a maple and might have been a "ballonaria" tree, was there during every season and every game,

and was part of the lives of everyone who lived near it. It was part of the lives of Sarah and Charlie, of the air that they breathed, of the birds that flew over it, of the clouds, the rain and the wind that cleared the sky and brought the sun out to shine again.

The arrival of spring was accompanied by a gentle breeze that blew the balls out of the tree and down to the ground. It was as if they were all the fruit of the tree and the children were happy to get their balls back and to be able to play in the clearing again.

But why did the maple tree return the children's balls?

It could be a coincidence, but Sarah and Charlie were convinced that the plant had a specific reason for returning the balls.

Maybe it was because plants always give back what they take?

One day, the two children were sitting near the trunk of the ball tree and they imagined what their conversation with it would be like: *"It's very kind of you to give us back the balls we lose among your branches"* said **Sarah**.

"Oh, you're welcome!" replied the **tree** *"That's what all plants do!"*

"I don't understand" said **Charlie** *"Don't you ever keep anything for yourselves?"*

"Only what we really need... And then we always find a way to give something back: oxygen, food for other species, and even... beauty, if that doesn't make me sound vain"

“And does that go for all trees, really?” asked **Sarah** again.

“Yes, it goes for all trees, really: whether they live in a big forest, are part of a thick jungle or stand in line along a city street, all trees behave in exactly the same way”

All of a sudden **Charlie** jumped to his feet, as if he'd been stung by a wasp. *“I get it!”* he cried *“It's like a big circle! A circle around the whole of the Earth...”*

“Like a necklace made of plants!” said **Sarah**.

“Exactly!” cried the ball tree *“But a necklace or a circle can be broken and then you're in trouble, because everything is linked to everything!”*

Sarah and Charlie collect their ball.

“Everything is linked to everything” they repeat in unison *“We'll remember that, thank you tree!”*

Sarah hugged the rough trunk of the tree.

The tree, which had no eyes to see nor ears to hear with, no lungs to breathe nor arms to hug with, looked at them and hugged them with its whole body, leaves, branches, trunk and roots. Charlie and Sarah felt that hug, which was the hug of all the plants in the world.

Then the two children started playing in the clearing again, in the warm spring sun.

Colour me

