

# **Pictures from the Mountains**

Edu-play for youth

Slavka Cíváňová

Translated by Lucia Faltin

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A list of characters

**SILVESTER BARAN**<sup>1</sup> 13-year old son of the Environmentalist Michal Baran

**MICHAL BARAN** Silvester's father, aged 39, environmentalist and activist

**RADOSLAV PÍLA**<sup>2</sup> Director of National Forestry Office, developer

**TEACHER** Biology teacher

**JOURNALIST** Female character

**MAŤO, ZUZA, PEŤO**<sup>3</sup> Silvester's classmates

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. note: the surname, Baran, is equivalent to the word ram in English

<sup>2</sup> Transl. note: the surname, Píla, is equivalent to the word saw in English

<sup>3</sup> Transl. note: English equivalent: Matt, Suzie, Pete.

## Notes

- *Pictures from the Mountains* is an educational play on environmental protection and forced deforestation of Slovak forests. It is intended for upper-level primary school pupils. The play reflects the events surrounding logging and subsequent protests in the valleys Tichá dolina and Kôprová dolina in 2017. It quotes actual media reports and coverage of the event.
- The play, however, doesn't place the very events in any specific time frame. On the contrary, it brings it in sync with current events – extensive forced deforestation in the Low Tatra mountains, the Čergovské mountain range and elsewhere in Slovakia.
- The intention is to raise awareness among children of the forced deforestation, man-inflicted forestation, the issues surrounding water and the woods, of the approaches to dealing with the consequences of bark beetle infestation in Slovak forests, and of storm-caused calamities; to introduce the notions such as primeval forest, totally deforested area or forest management.
- Specialist studies use specific statements from interviews and video recordings made by an environmentalist who publishes on YouTube, under the *Green Land According to Erik Baláž* [*Zelená krajina podľa Erika Baláža*].
- The text also uses quotations and paraphrases from the Anton Bielek publication *Pictures from the Mountains* [*Obrázky z hôr*] (Anton Bielek: *Obrázky z hôr*, Prague, 1935).
- The protests by teenagers against the logging are inspired by youth protests across Europe and Slovakia, initiated by the 16-year old Swede Greta Thunberg, against overall inactivity of the public and authorities in the struggle against climate change. They also use statements by the protest convenors in Slovakia.
- The author wishes to express her gratitude to the activists and environmentalists Erik Baláž and Karol Kaliský for their consultations.

**Sunday afternoon. Silvester is getting ready for school the next day.**

*(Silvester is seated by his computer, with headphones on, playing computer game. He has a biology textbook open on his desk. In between different levels of the game, he's trying to memorise names of trees and their basic characteristics. Sound effects complement the game. Silvester is fervently commenting the game.)*

**SILVESTER** Go! Yes, yes, yes! Bang! Bang! Gotchya! Aaaahhh! Go, go, go... Aaaahhh! OMG! C'mon ... NVM.<sup>4</sup>

*The game is over. The sounds indicating the state in between levels appears. Before Silvester launches the game again, he grabs his textbook and memorises the names.*

Quercus cerris, Quercus robur, Quercus petraea, Fagus sylvatica, Pinus sylvestris, Pinus cembra, Picea abies.

Quercus robur – English oak, 45-metre tall, lives up to 1,000 to 1,300 years ... *(to himself)*  
That long?

Fagus sylvatica – European beech. Beechnuts are vital food for forest wildlife.

Pinus sylvestris – Scots pine – the least demanding and sturdiest of wood species. Ten thousand years ago, pine woods, were the most widespread forests in Slovakia.

*(Silvester, happy with what he just learned, launches another game.)*

OK, got it ... Next level!

**MICHAL B.** *(observes Silvester, asking him in a while)* What are you doing?

**SILVESTER** *(with headphones on, doesn't hear his father's question)*

**MICHAL B.** *(shakes him)* Helloooo, Silvester, what are you doing?

**SILVESTER** *(shudders, takes off the headphones)* Studying.

**MICHAL B.** Like this?

**SILVESTER** What? Wrong?

**MICHAL B.** You've got the game running and headphones on.

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<sup>4</sup> Transl. Note: NVM = never mind.

**SILVESTER** Well! I designed it myself. Look. I'm taking it to a competition.

**MICHAL B.** Hm. Great.

**SILVESTER** Would you test me?

**MICHAL B.** What do you mean now?

**SILVESTER** Biology.

**MICHAL B.** OK, let's see.

**SILVESTER** (*Silvester is trying to recite the text. He's getting stuck, coming back to the texts, failing to remember the Latin names.*) Picea abies – European spruce, farmed as economic wood; used in construction and furniture manufacturing. It is often attacked by bark beetle. Those most exposed are the non-indigenous man-planted spruce monocultures. Pinus cembra – Swiss pine – its seeds are pine nuts that serve as fodder to rodents, birds, as well as bear. This pine is vulnerable species and is protected by law.

**MICHAL B.** Listen, do you have any idea what you're talking about?

**SILVESTER** You bet I do.

**MICHAL B.** You know all too well that I've spent my life doing this. You can't trick me, pal!

**SILVESTER** Dad, and you, in turn, know all too well that I've never been interested in woods and trees. I'm learning because we have a test, not because I'd be too concerned ...

**MICHAL B.** (*surprised by Silvester's honesty*) Right, sure ... You're studying because of the test. Makes sense ... Alright. So, what's a monoculture? Ha? And vulnerable species?

**SILVESTER** C'mmon Dad! I'm not like you! I don't have to know everything about the trees.

**MICHAL B.** Come, let's go.

**SILVESTER** (*annoyed*) Where? Can't you tell I'm studying ...

**MICHAL B.** (*looks at the computer*) With the game on? Turn it off and let's go. We'll learn about the trees in the woods, not by the computer ...

**SILVESTER** I'd say it can also be done by the computer.

**MICHAL B.** Stop the nonsense. Wrap up warm, I'll get some snack and off we go. Anyway, I have to check something in the woods ... At least I have a witness.

**SILVESTER** Witness to what?

**MICHAL B.** I'll explain in the woods.

*Silvester and his father step out of the house. Just in front of the entrance door they notice a pile of manure dumped.*

**SILVESTER** What's that?

**MICHAL B.** Manure ... Careful, don't step in it.

**SILVESTER** Yuck! Stinks ... You put it here?

**MICHAL B.** *(swears to himself)* Bastards ...

**SILVESTER** Why?

**MICHAL B.** They want to intimidate me, I guess. Get in the car. I'll call the police and report it. ... We'll get rid of it when back. *(retrieves a mobile phone from his pocket, dials, listens and waits. Silvester remains standing and watching his father.)* Hi, this is Michal Baran, I'd like to report intimidation.

Yes, thank you ...

**SILVESTER** *(asks by gesturing)* What?

**MICHAL B.** *(covers the phone and whispers)* Putting me through ...

**SILVESTER** Aha...

**MICHAL B.** Hello, this Michal Baran, I want to file a criminal complaint.

Yes, thank you...

-

Hello, this is Michal Baran ... Yes. I'd like to ...

-

Someone dumped a pile of manure by my house.

-

No idea? Big ... A few wheelbarrows.

-

No, I don't think it was my neighbour ... *(raises voice)* No, it didn't land here by chance either

...

-

I suspect misconduct of intimidation and want to report it.

-

Why? I have been repeatedly pointing out illegal logging in the valleys Tichá and Kôprová.

-

Tomorrow? Yes. 7.30? Yes, I'll be there. Thank you. Bye.

## **Father and son in the forest**

*We only hear the voice of Silvester reading the text from the book Pictures from the Mountains. Father and son walk through the woods.*

**SILVESTER** *Energetically we walked up. Through the rounded hillside, the path led to the lower ridge of the uppermost spur, and disappeared into the forest. We found ourselves in the cold. Needles of fir-trees swept over our heads. The nature of the woods changed. There is a massive stump lying in the path here; over there it is crossed by a fallen tree. Quietly, only a running snake might rustle at your feet. As far as eye can see, there is nothing but mountain after mountain; ear only hears the blunt sound of one's own step besides the occasional jolt of jay bird.*

*They stop. Splendid view of the valleys opens in front of them.*

**MICHAL B.** Here we are! This is where we'll be learning about the trees.

**SILVESTER** C'mon, Dad, don't take it too seriously; not that I've never been to the forest with you ...

**MICHAL B.** But you haven't yet been here ... I wanted to show you something. Something that matters a lot to me. See that tree over there?

**SILVESTER** Which? Where?

**MICHAL B.** In the direction of the Kriváň mountain. There, beneath the rock ...

**SILVESTER** The lower one? With the twisted branches and the wide trunk?

**MICHAL B.** Exactly. That's a Swiss pine, the oldest tree in the Kôprová valley, and possibly in the entire Tatras. It's over thousand years old.

**SILVESTER** Over thousand years?! How can you tell?

**MICHAL B.** I don't know it precisely. I could find out, but I would hurt the tree. And that's not what I want. Yet, by using a simple calculation I can come to a close estimate. The trunk is about 1.5 metre thick. It has 2 to 3 year-rings per millimetre. The diameter of the trunk is 75 centimetres, which is 750 millimetres, multiplied by two is comes to 1,500 year-rings. One ring equals one year. So, this tree might not only be a thousand years old, but perhaps even much more.

**SILVESTER** That means the tree started growing around the year 1,000?

**MICHAL B.** Maybe even earlier.

**SILVESTER** I can't even imagine how it looked like here then ...

**MICHAL B.** Close your eyes for a moment ... C'mon ... (*Silvester closes his eyes.*) Now imagine wild horses galloping beneath the Tatras, aurochs grazing in the woods, bear living even in the lowlands, and packs of wolves in the mountains being large and strong. This is somewhat how it looked like at the time when this tree sprouted out.

**SILVESTER** (*opens his eyes*) But how come the tree is still here and all else has changed so much since?

**MICHAL B.** Perhaps because many people don't know where exactly it grows. And it will grow here for further hundreds of years, unless someone turns up determined to identify its precise age at all cost; hence, destroying it.

**SILVESTER** How did you discover the tree?

**MICHAL B.** My father showed it to me. It was as if he revealed a major secret to me, as if I suddenly learned of something very precious, which I have been bound to protect from then on.

**SILVESTER** I feel stupid now for having told you that I was never too keen on trees and woods.

**MICHAL B.** That's why brought you here.

**SILVESTER** I know. And now it is also my secret. I, too, shall keep preserving it.

**MICHAL B.** (*smiles*) I'm glad. Look around ... This is the largest area of wilderness in Slovakia. It is how the genuine Tatra forest should look like. Swiss pines ordinarily live here. The trees grow wide apart, there are lots of upturned trees, dead trees that decompose gradually. There are blueberries, as well as free space. In the past, the pine woods formed a ring on the upper border of the forest around the entire Tatra mountain range.

**SILVESTER** Why they don't anymore?

**MICHAL B.** For over the centuries, people destroyed most of the forest. They set it on fire to turn it into grazing lands. That's why today pine trees are such vulnerable species and are protected by law.

**SILVESTER** Right, that's what I was studying.

**MICHAL B.** And now you'll also understand it. (*continues explaining*) If we still had such an extensive complex of natural forests in the Tatras, those natural calamities that we've had here over the past fifteen years, would be far less devastating.

**SILVESTER** I don't get it ... Why would such forest be more resistant to natural disasters?



**MICHAL B.** Because this primaeval forest is natural. It survived dozens of storms, bark-beetle attacks, and it still stands strong.

**SILVESTER** Yet they told us at school that, once bark beetle attacks the forest, there is nothing one can do. The forest has to be brought down, the wood that can still be used, and a new forest has to be planted ...

**MICHAL B.** That might be the case in farmed forests, city parks, tree alleys or in farmed countryside, but not in protected areas. If a gale pulls out a tree in the protected area or it is attacked by bark insects, it's better to be left the nature to do its job. Though it is a lengthy process and the dead trees will be there for a longer time, death of trees is as natural as that of all live organisms. Moreover, dead trees draw primaeval species of organisms that enrich the soil. In just fourteen years the forest will look different – young trees will emerge in between the dead ones. Yet the nature chooses different trees than what man would plant. By the time young spruce spring out, it is rowans that start emerging on the decaying tree trunks instantly after the disaster. The spruce can then grow on the decaying tree trunks outside the reach of grass or mould, and in the shade of the rowan. In twenty years, the spruce will have gradually outgrown the rowan, and it becomes dominant. This is how a natural rowan – spruce forest comes about. Trees of different ages and species interweave. That makes the forest strong and resistant.

If, after calamity has struck, we remove dead trees from the forest, while logging we destroy the soil and living conditions for the forest species. Instead of natural regeneration, we create forests by non-natural planting according to our ideas. The concept of an eternally green forest without dry trees certainly does not belong to what the nature intends, and definitely not to protected areas. Such an approach gradually degrades complex forest ecosystems to the level of corn field that is at the mercy of human care. The end result is vast, artificially forested clearings, destroyed soil, reduced forest ability to retain water in the country, and a dramatic decline in biodiversity – or natural forest diversity.

In seventy years, such dense and monoculture farmed forests become unstable. They are again prone to calamities. It becomes a vicious circle.

**SILVESTER** So why do people do this?

**MICHAL B.** They are sometimes driven by mistaken belief that it is the best and only solution. And often for money. They want to speed up wood production to log it and sell. Today, wood is an important trade commodity. Land in national forests is yet another trade asset. It is used to build hotels, cableways and roads. Hence, vast territories of protected forests are being logged.

**SILVESTER** But they told us at school that this also has to be done, because we need wood. All kinds of things are made of wood. And wood should replace plastics. Mountains are here for the people, and people want to go there for leisure and tourism.

**MICHAL B.** Yes, but ... Logging has to be wisely regulated. We should identify zones for tourism, development, as well as those designated for total protection. Logging should be banned in all ancient mountain forests, primeval forests. At least five percent of the territory of Slovakia should be kept free of any interference. If, in hundred years, we want to have a stable, diverse and functional forest, we should leave it to the nature at least in the national parks. So that you understand, I'm not blaming foresters for this situation. They only do their job. What we miss, however, is public discussion and, particularly, monitoring and legislation that would more effectively protect forests against developers and wood marketeers.

Come, let's descend a little lower. We'll pass there through a man-planted spruce forest.

**SILVESTER** When was it planted?

**MICHAL B.** It was somewhere back in the mid-19th century that people started planting spruce monocultures. That is also how far the roots of organised forest farming in Central Europe reach to.

**SILVESTER** Who planted the forests before?

**MICHAL B.** No one. In natural forest, there is no need to plant seeds or harvest. Seeding happens naturally from times immemorial.

**SILVESTER** But it has to happen somehow ...

**MICHAL B.** It does indeed! Tree seeds are spread by the wind or birds. Swiss pine is planted, for instance, by the spotted nutcracker that likes pine nuts. Whatever it doesn't eat up by the Autumn, it stores for the rainy day in moss or in between the roots of trees. And then it forgets all about the seed stocks. Hence, it plants the seeds. It's this simple and effective. Been like that for centuries. It's just us, humans, who complicate things.

*Silvester and his father find themselves in the spruce forest that is obviously different from the pine one.*

**MICHAL B.** Now look around ... We're in a typical spruce monoculture. We had hundreds of thousands of hectares of those in Slovakia. Over the past ten to fifteen years, it were these monocultures that fell prey to the gale and bark-insect calamities. The spruce-only forests

planted by man in the Tatra mountains don't exactly represent the nature's intent. Remember when we were up there, in the pine forest? Now try to tell me what made it different.

**SILVESTER** Dunno.

**MICHAL B.** You do ... Just tell me what you saw.

**SILVESTER** The trees up there were further apart. And there was more light.

**MICHAL B.** Precisely. In farmed forests, trees are planted too densely. As the trees grow bigger, they have increasingly less space, less nutrients in soil and less light. The lack of light and nutrients make their roots dry out.

**SILVESTER** (*looks through the woods and then up in the tree crown*) Yes, they're just bare tree trunks. The branches are only high up in the crowns.

**MICHAL B.** It is like being malnourished for the trees. And if, in such case, the bark beetle attacks, they don't have enough energy to fight for themselves. That's why it is especially these forests that die out at large. In natural conditions, the trees are further apart and able to develop wider crown. That, in turn, enables them to generate sugar through photosynthesis. They can then turn the sugar into resin that helps them fight off the bark beetle.

Do you know what photosynthesis is?

**SILVESTER** Yeah, we learned recently. Photosynthesis comes from Greek photos – light, synthesis – binding, composition. It is a unique process on Earth that results in the emergence of organic compounds and oxygen by binding solar energy and its transformation into chemical energy.

**MICHAL B.** Wow! What do you think it means in practice?

*Silvester shrugs his shoulders.*

**MICHAL B.** Production of sugar from the sun, water and air. Sugar is the essential fuel used by a tree to produce wood to grow, resin to protect itself or to generate seeds to multiply. Plus, a tree invests a lot of energy in the soil, too. It supplies it to the fungi and microorganisms in soil. In exchange for the sugar, they pay the tree back with phosphorus, vitamins, water and other substances.

**SILVESTER** So, the trees that have more green branches can generate more sugar. Are they thus more resistant to pests?

**MICHAL B.** Spot on! And that helps them live for several centuries ...

Speaking of which, there's one more thing. Forest is a wonderful tool to stabilise the climate. Trees store energy from the sun in form of carbonaceous substances. In the forest, carbon

accumulates for centuries, even millennia; first in tree trunks and, once the tree has died, in soil. Old forests accumulate vast amounts of carbon that would otherwise end up in the atmosphere and function as greenhouse gas. When we cut down an old forest and replace it with young trees, most of the carbon from the harvested wood escapes into the atmosphere. Worse still, after such massive logging, even the carbon in the soil is bound to end up in the atmosphere.

**SILVESTER** So trees can help us prevent climate change?

**MICHAL B.** Yes. But first we must save all old forests that already contain lots of carbon.

We also have to give a chance to the other, already devastated forests to develop naturally, so they accumulate further carbon.

Come, I've got to check what I wanted to, and we'll go home.

**SILVESTER** What are we going to check? You said you'd tell me in the forest.

**MICHAL B.** Do you remember the wind storm in the valleys Tichá and Kôprová a couple of years ago?

**SILVESTER** Yes. I was just a small kid then, but I remember. We went there together to have a look.

**MICHAL B.** Now they want to launch the logging also in the two valleys to prevent the spread of bark beetle.

**SILVESTER** But you just told me that a forest in the protected area that has been affected by calamity is best to be left to natural revitalisation.

**MICHAL B.** Yes. When it is a forest you care about. In this case, however, some people are after something else ... What is at stake here, is wood worth hundreds of thousands of euros. Logging hasn't yet begun, but I heard they went to the forest to bring in the equipment. If it's true, we've got to stop it.

**SILVESTER** Is that why they dumped the manure by our house?

**MICHAL B.** Yes.

### **Radoslav Píla is preparing for the logging**

*Silvester and his father are descending into the valley. We only hear Silvester's voice reading from the Pictures from the Mountains.*

**SILVESTER** *We walked on. The valley narrowed, the stream jolted happily in its limestone cradle. Along the pebbly banks moss carpets spread, unforgettable, dotted by forget-me-nots, chicory, and clad in the scent of thyme. The cold of the forest and the silence of solitude surrounded us. Beware, though! In front of us, not far, one hears the branches rattle. What is it? Bear, a wolf?!*

**PÍLA** *(aggressively, tensely)* Ah, Mr Baran! What brings you here? Sunday stroll?

**MICHAL B.** *(straight to business)* Getting ready for logging?

**PÍLA** None of your business.

**MICHAL B.** You have no right. This is a national park! Not a farmed forest where all you need is a permit from the foresters.

**PÍLA** We've got all permits alright, Mr Baran!

**MICHAL B.** No, you don't Mr Píla. You don't have the environmental impact audit concerning your logging. *(He pulls out a mobile, trying to photograph the equipment that was brought in. Píla hits his hand, Michal drops the mobile, attempts to pick it up. Píla grabs him by neck.)*

**PÍLA** Get out! With that kid! You might have an accident here ...

*Silvester and his father return home late in the evening.*

**MICHAL B.** Well, I hope you've learned plenty for school tomorrow.

**SILVESTER** *(smiles)* I have indeed. Thanks, Dad. What are you going to do about the logging?

**MICHAL B.** We won't let it happen. I'll get in touch now with the other environmentalists. We'll probably hold a protest ... and will prevent the logging directly on site. *(trying to change topic)* Come here. *(heading towards a bookcase, looking for a book. He finds it eventually and pulls out of the shelf)* Take this. It used to be my favourite when I was your age. Your Grandpa gave it to me.

**SILVESTER** *(reading the title)* Anton Bielek: *Pictures from the Mountains*. *(bored)* C'mon, Dad! What is it now? Some old stuff. I don't have to overdo it with the studies.

**MICHAL B.** *(smiles)* At least leaf through it.

**SILVESTER** Aaaah, OK. Have a good one!

**MICHAL B.** You too. Tomorrow you'll show me the game you designed.

**SILVESTER** Sure! Deal! Night ...

*Silvester enters his room, online chat clicks on his mobile phone.*

**MAŤO** BTW. Ready for the biology? I don't get the Latin names.

**SILVESTER** Y. I went to the forest with Dad ... He explained it to me

**MAŤO** Lucky you ... Got the project, too?

**SILVESTER** yy

**MAŤO** What about?

**SILVESTER** About water in dead trees. Dad showed me also that in the forest.

**MAŤO** GR8. I've got zilch ...

**SILVESTER** I'm no good at the Latin names either ... Forget them. Doesn't matter ...

**MAŤO** Try the "doesn't matter" with the teacher tomorrow...

**SILVESTER** I sure will ... NP :-D

**MAŤO** LOL :-D Looking forward to that ... :-D

*Silvester in his bed. With lights off, he uses a torch under the duvet, leafing through the book his father gave him, and reading. One hears his father making a phone call in the other room.*

**SILVESTER** *(reading the book)* I stand and watch. I take a step, but I seem to be frozen in place. I believe I hear howling. I focus my ears; indeed, deeply, angrily and horribly, the howl was carried down the valleys.

**MICHAL B.** I went to the valleys. They're launching the logging. Don't know ... Perhaps tomorrow. They've got the equipment and tractors in place already ...

-

I'm off to the police station tomorrow.

-

I found a pile of manure in front of my house today.

-

I bet it's related. Píla thought that I'd be busy removing the manure on Sunday and won't be sniffing about his business ...

**SILVESTER** *(reading the book)* I already knew there was no escape for me, as the wolf monster spawns a human through the hills. If there's only a single wolf, I can manage. ... If there are more, God knows what happens.

**MICHAL B.** *(on the phone)* First thing tomorrow I'll file an appeal against the breach of law in connection with the launch of logging. I'll turn to the National Environmental Inspectorate.

-

Yes, they can stop the works.

-

I got furious when I saw it today. He goes on and on about forest protection, while he serves as company secretary in about a dozen of businesses that trade with wood and run development projects. That is the Director of the National Forest Administration? No one cares ... It's obvious he wants to sell the wood.

-

Yes, even Woodlandia is his project. Got it? Fun park in the middle of the national park ...?

I'm flabbergasted!

-

Sure, they cover each other's' back, their businesses and interests.

-

Alright. Let's meet tomorrow and plan how to proceed. We'll call in the media. Engage specialists. Launch the protest.

*Silvester suddenly gets off his bed. Sits by his computer. Opens his programming software and starts designing new game.*

### **Anonymous**

*Morning. Father and Silvester are leaving home.*

**MICHAL B.** Come, hurry, so that we aren't late again.

**SILVESTER** *(tying his shoe laces, finishing his breakfast roll)* Comin' ...

**MICHAL B.** Get in the car, I'll pick up the mail. *(Silvester is waiting by the car. Michal is opening an envelope he received in the post box.)* What is it? Why aren't you getting in?

**SILVESTER** You didn't unlock...

**MICHAL B.** Ah, sorry. OK now...

*They are sitting in the car. The father opens the envelope. It's from an anonymous sender.*

*DON'T SNIFF AROUND. ELSE YOU'LL BE SORRY.*

**SILVESTER** What is it?

**MICHAL B.** Anonymous ...

**SILVESTER** What? No kiddin'?

**MICHAL B.** Well ... Like from some poor thriller. No worries. At last the police will recognise the intimidation. *(after a short car ride)* Alright, here we are. Don't forget anything and ring me when the biology lesson is over.

**SILVESTER** Sure thing, Dad. Bye!

### **Biology lesson**

*Biology lesson at school. The teacher opens the class register.*

**TEACHER** Silvester Baran, come to the whiteboard.

*Silvester walks to the whiteboard.*

First, you'll present your project to us and then I'll test you on forest farming and natural disasters. Your floor. We're all ears.

**SILVESTER** My project is about dead trees in the forest.

**TEACHER** Weren't you supposed to be working on the water in the forest?

**SILVESTER** Yes, I was. It's related though ...

*(Silvester presents the project to his classmates. Photographs and videos appear on the screen. He manages to explain even the most complex points with ease and comprehensibly.)*



Because dead trees can retain lots of water in the forest. Actually, they work like water reservoirs. That's why they're so vital for the forest. As the tree decays, it gradually turns into a kind of sponge. Such trunk soaks up water just like a sponge. On the contrary, when the weather is dry, the soil takes water from the dead tree trunks. Such trees thus help the vital trees survive in the forest during dry periods.

I brought this piece of wood from the forest to show you. I took it from a trunk of such dead tree. *(He retrieves a plastic container containing a piece of wood covered by moss.)* When I press this wood ... Watch, like this ... the water runs out like from a sponge. *(He squeezes the wood. Indeed, it is as soft as a sponge and the water runs out.)*

All trees in the forest are of equal value – even the dead and old ones. If we cut down whole parts of the forests, there will be nothing left to retain water in the country. During heavy rainfall, the water then gushes into the valleys and villages like a slide.

I prepared this small experiment, so that you can picture it.

*On his desk, Silvester has two large Perspex containers ready. Only contains only soil, the other one has different plants planted in the soil, smaller shrub and grass ... Each container has an external drain. Beneath each there is another one to catch the water. Silvester takes a watering can filled with water and starts watering the soil in the containers. The one with soil only starts almost instantly letting out muddy water that flows into the drainage container. The container with the plants retains the water for long, ultimately it lets out some clear water.*

**TEACHER** Excellent. This was a fine project. It merits an A.

**SILVESTER** I also designed this simple computer game yesterday. *(He launches the game – projected on the screen – with simple animation; explains the rules.)*

This is a forest in a protected area. In a middle, there is the oldest tree in the entire country. Here's an environmentalist. His objective is to protect the area, trees, wolves and bear, and especially this oldest tree. The environmentalist fights against those who log wood, sell land. On top of that, they want to get that oldest tree. He has to stop them from stepping into the

protected area, and to defend it. It is a simple game right now. But I want to improve it further.

*(Silvester gets to play the game. His classmates start cheering him up. They are jumping off their seats, laughing and shouting when he succeeds.)*

**TEACHER** Silence. Quiet! Do sit down!

*(to Silvester)* I see you applied your logic.

**SILVESTER** I will improve it further. I might even register it for the programming competition.

**TEACHER** Alright ... Meanwhile, would you explain to us what you understand as forest management, why is it important and how to protect forests against calamities. Since you are designing games about it, I bet you've got it under your belt.

**SILVESTER** Forest management is a branch of national economy that aims to manage forests.

**TEACHER** Correct.

**SILVESTER** Still, sometimes it takes forests merely as a source of wood in order to increase yield. And it makes non-natural interferences that damage the forests.

**TEACHER** *(grows alert)* And which do you say are those non-natural interferences?

**SILVESTER** For instance, when, in national parks, wood is being logged after gales and then spruce monocultures are being planted instead.

**TEACHER** And what if the bark beetle attacks the decaying wood after the gales?

**SILVESTER** Dry wood and bark beetle are a natural part of forest. Natural forest is capable of handling both by itself. It might take longer, but ...

**TEACHER** Well, you got this one wrong, Silvester... *(self-important, sternly)* The consequences of calamities caused by gales in the forests have to be dealt with promptly. At the same time, inevitable measures must be taken to prevent further spread of bark insects.

**SILVESTER** That's not true. These human interferences damage the forests. Really, I saw it in the woods yesterday. My father explained it to me. He did!

**TEACHER** You failed to understand the material, Silvester. Take your seat. You get a D.

**SILVESTER** What? You didn't get anything?! Would I have been better off to recite the Latin names instead? *(He charges out of the classroom and slams the door.)*

## Evidence

*Silvester, being so upset, forgets to phone his father to tell him how he did at biology. He is walking alone up the mountain. He is in righteous anger and is dismayed for not being understood. His father is trying to reach him on the phone, but there is no signal in the woods. Silvester gets high up in the pine forest where he was recently with his father. From there, he has a view of the entire valley. He sees that wood logging has already begun in the valley. He hears the sound of chainsaws, that of falling trees, of lorries hauling timber, the staggering fleeing animals, the screeching of frightened birds ... Yesterday's fight between his father and Radoslav Píla is playing in a loop in his mind. Desperate, he keeps repeating an excerpt from the Pictures from the Mountains. He sets off to a run. He wants to tell his father as soon as possible that the logging has begun.*

**SILVESTER** *Grave-like silence. Then, suddenly, terrifying "hoo, hoo" sounded through the valley and, an echo-like "hoo, hoo" anew from somewhere beneath from where I stood. Well, one brute by me and over there, in the distance, sensing prey. Who knows how many are rushing towards me. Hoo, hoo.*

**MICHAL B.** You haven't got logging permits.

**PÍLA** Really? As far as I know, we, foresters, have legal responsibility to remove, within six months, the damage caused by the calamity.

**MICHAL B.** As far as I know, for any interference in the protected areas you are required to have permits issued by environmentalists.

**PÍLA** Not sure you realise this, but there is a chance that the bark beetle spreads excessively ...

**MICHAL B.** Nonsense! You want to sell the wood ...

**PÍLA** I reject such claims, Mr Baran. The logging is justified! And it will go on!

**SILVESTER** *I gather my strength and run. I stop briefly, look back and there goes again the terrifying "hoo, hoo" ... I run. The wolf just at my heels. I got home having nearly lost my senses.*

*Silvester is coming home totally exhausted. His upset father is waiting for him.*

**SILVESTER** (*out of breath*) Daddy, do you know what happened?!

**MICHAL B.** Where have you been, young man? What time is it?

**SILVESTER** (*surprised by his father's anger*) I ... I was ...

**MICHAL B.** (*doesn't let him finish*) You promised to ring me after your biology lesson. Not only you didn't call, but I couldn't even get to you! Didn't it occur to you that we might be worried?

**SILVESTER** But, Dad, the teacher made me so upset! I told her exactly what you had told me in the forest yesterday. Yet she told me I didn't get the material and gave me a D.

**MICHAL B.** Was that why you didn't get in touch? Where have you been all that time?

**SILVESTER** In the forest. I went through the same places we visited yesterday. I wanted to photograph them for her. To prove that it was unfair to give me the D.

**MICHAL B.** Ah, come here. (*He realises what Silvester is going through and embraces his son.*)

**SILVESTER** From above, I saw they launched the logging. Look, I photographed it. (*He shows his father the images on his mobile phone.*)

**MICHAL B.** (*takes the mobile phone and looks through the images*) They did start, after all ... I went to the police station today, as well as the National Environmental Inspectorate. I thought they'd stop it. And they didn't ...

**SILVESTER** Why not?

**MICHAL B.** Don't know. Perhaps they didn't have time. Or Mr Píla has friends everywhere ...

You can't even imagine how much you helped me with the photos. We've got lots of work to do, young man, Mr Silvester Baran – the environmentalist.

Sorry to have yelled at you.

**SILVESTER** (*moved by his father's apology*) Hm ... no worries ...

**MICHAL B.** So that you know, we'll go to the mountain cabin for the weekend. Just the two of us. Gentlemen's ride. We'll do a hike, barbeque and, if the weather holds, we'll sleep under the stars by the cabin.

**SILVESTER** (*jumps up in excitement and hugs his father*) Uuuuuuaahhhh ... Dad! How cool is that?!! How many days to the weekend? Let's go fishing, too!

**MICHAL B.** Sure thing ...

**SILVESTER** And mushroom picking!

**MICHAL B.** Whatever you say ...

**SILVESTER** Come, I'll show you the new game I designed. About an environmentalist who has to save the forest from logging.

### **Live chain**

*Michal B. convenes protests against wood logging in the valleys. Environmentalists gather in the valley and form a live chain. Police intervenes. Live action is blended with statements to the media, and a TV report that contains footage from the logging and protests.*

**JOURNALIST** (*live broadcast, complemented with video footage*) Yesterday, the National Forest Administration launched logging of calamity-affected wood in the precious valleys within the Tatras National Park. Naturally, we were on site.

*The televised report offers images from the logging and the protests, and is complemented with a commentary.*

**COMMENTARY/REPORT** While environmental activists consider the decision to be gross interference into the precious ecosystem, the Ministry of Environment argues that the logging won't have negative effect on the area.

**JOURNALIST** (*live*) Why the logging? We asked the Director of the National Forest Administration, Mr Radoslav Píla,.

**PÍLA** The logging had to start. Otherwise, in addition to the bark beetle, we'd be facing the risk of forest fires ...

**JOURNALIST** Yet environmentalists don't support your arguments.

**PÍLA** Excuse me, we are professionals. We know what we're doing. We are responsible for all activities related to forest protection. We're no bunch of amateurs playing forest guard.

*Televised report.*

**COMMENTARY/REPORT** Independent researchers, along with public figures – artists and sportsmen – stood up in defence of the environmentalists. They appealed to the foresters to accept the existence of the national park, and stop the charade under which pressure is exerted to cut down the forests that would destroy the natural values of the area.

**JOURNALIST** *(live)* Directly in the valleys, the environmentalists protested strongly against the logging. We spoke to the protests convenor Mr Michal Baran about what's next.

**MICHAL B.** We will create a live chain, surround the valleys and cordon the territory. We will declare the valleys a territory protected by the people. We will use our own bodies to protect the assets and nature, if the state fails at doing that.

*Switch to live footage featuring Radoslav Píla.*

**PÍLA** Such blockade will obviously cause us major losses. Yet, if they cordon off the area, we will stay in place anyway with the equipment, and will wait for the police to sort it out. The longer it takes, the greater the danger that we lose forest workers and the National Forest Administration loses additional finance. Someone shall be then held responsible for that!

*Televised report. Logging across extensive territories that spans over a number of years is documented by animation.*

**COMMENTARY/REPORT** Ecologists and activists consider logging to be the utmost ecological disaster we witness today. Since 1990, logging increased by 75 percent. The logging doesn't only occur in the Tatras valleys, but also, for instance, in the Čergov range or the Low Tatras ... in the valleys Jánska, Demänovská, Vrátna, at Čertovica, as well as at Záhorie ... Just in the Low Tatras, over 70 square kilometres of forests disappeared within the past few years. According to Michal Baran, the convenor of the protests, this isn't just marketing pitch. The loss of forests is evidenced by satellite images.

*Live. Silvester and his father are watching this last shot on TV at home. When the report is over, the Michal turns off the TV. They remain seated in silence.*

**JOURNALIST** *(live)* The conflict in the valleys started to escalate in the afternoon when forest workers called the police to intervene with the ecologists.

*On live footage, Michal Baran finds himself in conflict with Radoslav Píla.*

**PÍLA** Get out! You're breaking the ban on entry to the forests!

**MICHAL B.** This is no ban on entry! It's just an invalid piece of paper. You have no official stamp!

**PÍLA** Yeah? Invalid? Would you then explain to me why the police are ID-ing you and not me?!

**MICHAL B.** Because, in the Tatras, everything is upside down! Miss, why don't you film this! We came draw attention to the breach of law on nature protection and of European legislation. And look, it is us being dealt with for offence, while these here are breaking laws and keep destroying biotopes of European worth. (*The police are trying to remove him from the site.*) I ask: Is it us to be breaking the law here?! Who should be led out of the forest?!

**JOURNALIST** (*as part of the report*) In the valleys Tichá and Kôprová, environmentalists didn't get far, as yet. The police removed them from the site and the loggers carried on their work using two tractors. According to our information, the environmentalists are planning a protest by the Ministry of Environment in Bratislava on Monday.

### **At the cabin**

*Silvester and his father are walking up the hill. We hear Silvester's voice reading from the Pictures from the Mountains.*

**SILVESTER** *The valley grew increasingly narrow. We walked across the meadows one after another along a narrow footpath. We entered fir growth. When we found ourselves on the clearing, in front of us a log cabin appeared in between the trees.*

*Silvester's mobile phone beeps – text message.*

**MICHAL B.** Still have a signal? Who is it?

**SILVESTER** (*Silvester is looking at the display.*) Guys on the Messenger ... asking when we are to play the new game I designed. Well ... I'm out of signal, too ... won't reply ...

**MICHAL B.** See, our communication network is still imperfect. You can have 4G or 5G. And all it takes is to get to the mountains and it doesn't work ... The trees have much better ...

**SILVESTER** Aaaauch, Dad, fooling me again. Trees don't talk. They don't speak to each other.

**MICHAL B.** That's what you think.

**SILVESTER** I sure do. How on earth would they communicate with each other?

**MICHAL B.** Just like that. You use World Wide Web. The net the trees use is called Wood Wide Web. (*Silvester rolls his eyes. Michal continues.*) Trees talk secretly with each other. They communicate, trade and even wage wars. They do so with the help of a network of fungi that grow around and within their roots. Fungi provide trees with nutrients. In turn, the trees supply them with saccharides. The network is so dense that it can be several kilometres long within the extent of our single step. By engaging with the network of fungi, the trees can exchange nutrients with each other. Older mother trees use the network of fungi to supply their seeds and young trees with saccharides. That gives them greater chance of survival. And the trees that are diseased or dying may release their stocks into the network to be used by their healthier neighbours. The trees also use fungi to send messages one to another. If they are attacked by pests, they can release chemical signals through their roots, thus alerting their neighbours to increase their protection.

**SILVESTER** (*amazed by all the information*) But why do the trees do it?

**MICHAL B.** Why? Because the covert network creates a community that benefits all individuals.

**SILVESTER** Are you telling me that, beneath the surface, there is a whole different world?

**MICHAL B.** Yes. Forest is much more than what an eye can see.

**SILVESTER** Sounds like some crazy fantasy or sci-fi, or a computer game ...

**MICHAL B.** As incredible as it may sound, that is the case. Directly under your feet, there is a world of innumerable biological pathways that link the trees and enable the forest to operate as a single superbody. It communicates, exchanges information and food. (*As they are walking and chatting, a cabin appears in front in between the trees.*)

Here we are!

*Evening. Bonfire is burning in front of the cabin. Silvester and his father are lying in sleeping bags by the bonfire. They are chatting, surrounded by darkness. The sky is dotted by millions of stars. We hear Silvester's voice reading from the Pictures from the Mountains.*

**SILVESTER** *The surrounding silence resembles a temple. Tree crowns have grown black, the Moon appeared above our heads. Here and there, one spots a patch of dark blue sky and the stars – as if someone hung thousands of golden fairy lights on tops of the slender fir trees. The entire splendour of a summer night hovered above us. Air was filled with the scent of*



*mushrooms, thyme and mountain grass. In that mysterious peace, amidst the nocturnal silence, I felt like a baby in a cosy cradle.*

**SILVESTER** We never slept like this, outside the cabin by the bonfire.

**MICHAL B.** We didn't have the chance. Either the weather was no good, or I didn't have the time, or you were too little ... Still, I always pictured that, once you grow up, we'd be going to the cabin like now and sleep under the stars.

**SILVESTER** Did you, too, use to go to the woods with Grandpa like this? And did you sleep under the stars?

**MICHAL B.** Grandpa was a logger. As such, he was always in the woods. Even while logging, he taught me a lot about the solidarity between the trees, and about the close ties between humans and forest. Perhaps the times were different. People were more connected with nature. As a boy, I liked to lay on the ground in the forest and watch the tree tops in a daytime.

**SILVESTER** Do you think the protest you're holding in Bratislava next week will make them stop the logging?

**MICHAL B.** They must end it. It has to stop. I was just putting together my material for the protest. The reality in Slovakia is far more dire than it seems. The logging doesn't only go on in our valleys, but virtually everywhere. In the mid-1990s we harvested 5.3 to 5.5 million cubic meters of wood here. Today it is 9.4 to 10 million cubic meters per year, which is almost double the amount. When IO was at the university, they taught us that 5.5 million cubic meters were the maximum, if we wanted to keep our forests at least to survive. Just imagine! Over the past ten years, 163 hectares of primeval forest disappeared in Slovakia.

**SILVESTER** Primeval forests? We have primeval forests in Slovakia?

**MICHAL B.** We sure do ... Did you think primeval forests are only in Amazonia? Primeval forest a natural, intact, freely growing forest with no human interference. Not even direct interference, which means logging or other industrial exploitation; or indirect – that is pollution or other ecological burden. Primeval forest protection is of utmost importance in terms of the preservation of biodiversity, and in light of research and public good. The forest in the Kôprová valley that we walked through together, is a precious Swiss pine forest. Thousand years ago, the primeval forest looked virtually the same as it does today. All other forests in Slovakia have changed substantially. People cut them down and planted anew, turned them into hunting grounds and sites of industrial harvesting. Yet the Swiss pine primeval forest in the Kôprová valley doesn't change.

**SILVESTER** (*falling asleep*) I had no idea I was in a primeval forest. Fingers crossed, Dad, so you can save it. I'll be helping you.

*Silvester and his father are falling asleep, the bonfire is growing small, and the text from the Pictures from the Mountains sounds into the background.*

**SILVESTER** *Silence reigned around the bonfire. The Moon was drawing close to the mountain tops. We went to sleep. Fragrant hay served as our bed. We laid covered by blankets. I turned onto my back. Dark blue sky dotted with the splendour of stars above me, silence around me so mighty that you think you hear the heart of the Earth beating. Then the thoughts started fading away, the thread of thoughts fell apart. Half-dream and then sweet sleep ...*

### **Protest in Bratislava and burning down the cabin**

*Michal B. is convening the protest in Bratislava. He addresses a crowd on the square and keeps giving media interviews. The very same evening his forest cabin, where he spent the weekend with Silvester, burns down.*

**MICHAL B.** (*standing on the stage and addressing the public*) I ask: who is it that breaks the law? Who should be escorted from the forest by the police? If the foresters don't trust us, let them look abroad to see how similar situation was dealt with there. The method we propose has been tested and proven on the Polish side of the Tatra mountains, in Germany – in the Bavarian Forest, or in the Czech Šumava.

**JOURNALIST** (*standing beneath the stage commenting on the events on the square*) Today, in protest against logging, environmentalists raised their tents on the SNP Square in Bratislava. The activists intend to remain in place until the end of the week. They want to win over the public. What's on the agenda is a screening of a film on forest self-renewal, statements by public figures, concerts and workshops.

*In the evening the Michal is on the phone with Silvester.*

**SILVESTER** Dad, I saw you on TV.

**MICHAL B.** Yes, today there were journalists and a TV crew.

**SILVESTER** Do you think it can do the trick?

**MICHAL B.** No idea. There was no one from the National Forest Administration. The Ministry hasn't made any statement yet.

**SILVESTER** I'd love to be with you. Must be cool, to sleep in a tent in the centre of Bratislava, on the square.

**MICHAL B.** Well, it isn't that romantic ... The trams keep ringing around, tourists are peeking into the tents, thinking it's some kind of festival.

**SILVESTER** Still, must be cool! The whole of Slovakia is watchin' you.

**MICHAL B.** We shall see how it goes. Tomorrow we'll be heading towards the President's palace. There should be additional protests in Prague, by the Slovak Embassy. (*Suddenly, he changes the topic.*) Have you done your homework for tomorrow?

**SILVESTER** I sure have.

**MICHAL B.** No way getting bad grades while I'm gone.

**SILVESTER** No worries.

**MICHAL B.** Alright. I'll ring you tomorrow. Take care, sleep tight.

**SILVESTER** Night, Dad!

*Night. Silvester's mobile rings by his bedside. He reaches for it and responds half asleep.*

**SILVESTER** Dad? What's up? Why are you calling?

**MICHAL B.** Silvester, Silvester, are you alright? Where are you? What are you doing?

**SILVESTER** I'm fine. At home. Sleepin'. It's night, isn't it?

**MICHAL B.** Our cabin burned down. (*breaks in tears*) Someone set it on fire. I was worried about you. That, you might be ...

**SILVESTER** (*also starts crying*) Dad, come home.

**MICHAL B.** I can't. I've got things to finish here.

**SILVESTER** No, you don't. Come home. It isn't worth it.

**MICHAL B.** Gotta go. The police arrived.

**SILVESTER** Dad, tell them about it anonymously. ... When it starts burning, you'd be sorry.

**MICHAL B.** Yeah, sure ... (*realises the connection*) I sure will. Speak later. Try to get some sleep.

*Silvester takes the book his father had given him. He is in bed. His bedroom is dark. He uses his torch to read under the duvet.*

**SILVESTER** *The wind picked up. The mountains roared, the forests roared. The roar fell heavily upon the soul. The darkness grew thick, as if emerging from the mountains and pouring down the valleys. Some gloom, loneliness and a sense of solitude reigned upon him.*

*Morning. Silvester is having breakfast. While eating, he has TV on with the news. He is watching the report about their burned-down cabin.*

**JOURNALIST** Last night the cabin owned by the environmentalist Michal Baran burned down, while he protested in Bratislava against the logging in the Tichá and Kôprová valleys.

**MICHAL B.** I'm convinced that someone set the cabin on fire. I'm afraid the fire is related to my environmental activities.

**JOURNALIST** How did you learn the cabin was on fire?

**MICHAL B.** One of the neighbours noticed the flames as they spread. He rang me as soon as he'd found out. It was also him to ring for help. He couldn't tell where the fire started. But the fire was apparently spreading fast. Whole burning pieces of the roof were flying in the air. Everyone was afraid the fire would spread to the forest or the neighbouring cottages. The cabin was our special place. Just this past weekend I went there with my son. And now it's gone.

**JOURNALIST** The police and fire crew suggested that it was the thatched roof that caught fire. Michal Baran said that there was easy access to the roof from the hill behind the house. Yet neither the police or the fire brigade had, as yet, confirmed whether it was arson or an accident. Everything is subject to investigation.

*Silvester turns off the TV. He takes his rucksack and leaves the house.*

### **Silvester is convening student protests**

*Silvester doesn't go to school. Instead, he walks through the forest towards the cabin. Where he spent the weekend with his father, is only a burned site. Everything is sealed off by police*

*tape, though there is no one on the site anymore. Silvester is walking around. He eventually sits on a step that used to lead to the door of the cabin. He is about to cry. He doesn't know what to do. Ultimately, as if making up his mind suddenly, he stands up, makes a selfie in front of the burned down cabin and hurries through the forest back to school. He enters his classroom. It is interval. He walks to his desk, puts down his rucksack and sits down.*

**SILVESTER** Hiya.

**MAŤO** Skipping school? Missed the math. And Slovak. We had a test.

**PEŤO** Must've been campin' in Bratislava.

*Everyone breaks in laughter.*

**ZUZA** Yeah, sure ... protesting with Daddy.

**PEŤO** Or he might have been designing some stupid computer game.

**ZUZA** Heeeeeelp! Don't take our forests from us.

**SILVESTER** Whackoes! *(after brief silence)* Someone burned down our cabin last night. To the ground. I went to check it out this morning. There's nothing left.

*The classroom is dead silent.*

**MAŤO** Like ... for real?

**SILVESTER** Yeah.

**PEŤO** Sorry, pal.

**MAŤO** Because of your old man's protests?

**SILVESTER** Probably. It's been investigated. Awful. Just this past weekend I slept over there with my father.

**ZUZA** Darn, had they done that a day before, you might've burned to death!

**MAŤO** Is there anything we can do to help?

**SILVESTER** I want to hold a school protest. You all know my father. You know he's right. He used to come here to school to talk to us about forest protection. We all grew up in the valleys. It's our forest.

**MAŤO** Sure thing! We're all yours!

**SILVESTER** Let's do it this Friday. We'll come to school but won't go inside. We'll be protesting in front.

**ZUZA** I'll write a note to all kids at school.

**PEŤO** And I'll set up a Facebook group. We'll call it Our Forest.

**SILVESTER** You're cool, guys!

**ZUZA** We'll make these signs. (*shows everyone an A4 sign inscribed with a black marker: #ourforest*) We'll take photos with those and put them as badges on our profiles.

**MAŤO** I'll make a short video with you. Why the protest. You'll say it all – what happened, how the logging started, how your father launched the protests with his fellow environmentalists, how your cabin burned down.

**PEŤO** At the protest the kids can play your computer game. We'll put out a PC and a screen.

**ZUZA** Know what else?! (*All turn to Zuza.*) My aunt works for the local paper. I'll tell her to come on Friday and bring along the crew from TV Tatry.

**SILVESTER** Zuz, what a PR manager you are! (*Everyone giggles.*)

*A group Our Forest opens on Facebook. It publishes an invitation to join the protest and an event: Our Forest. Kids keep clicking in "Going" to the protest. The number of Likes keeps growing, as do Comments, support statuses and images bearing the hashtag #ourforest.*

**SILVESTER, ZUZA, PEŤO, MAŤO** We, the seventh graders at the Hilltop Elementary decided to join the protests against the logging in the Tatras valleys. We call upon all our schoolmates to join our protest in front of our school on Friday. The protest will begin with the school bell signalling the first lesson. Though we won't be in the classrooms, but in front of the school to let everyone know out loud that we disagree with the logging in our forest. We share all the views and demands put forward by the environmentalists who have been protesting in Bratislava for a few days now. Come on board! Because this is #ourforest.

*Friday morning. Preparations for the protest are in full swing. Some 300 pupils assembled in front of the school. There are also a few teachers, even parents hang. Silvester steps on the provisional stage and speaks to his schoolmates.*

**SILVESTER** Hi! Hello, everyone! My name is Silvester. I'm thirteen. Silvester isn't the most ordinary of names. It comes from the Latin Silvestris, which means "of forest" or "from the forest". My father chose the name. Perhaps because it is connected to what's dearest to his heart: the forest ...

It is because of my father that I stand here today. My father, Michal Baran, is among those environmentalists who have been protesting for some days against the logging in Tichá and Kôprová valleys. Whatever is going on in our valleys, also goes on across Slovakia. Because of unrestrained logging and the pressure by developer lobby, we are losing what's most precious in this country: our forests. I very much appreciate you being here today. I'd like to ask you to repeat the protests every Friday until the illegal logging in Tichá and Kôprová valleys comes to a halt. Many thanks for being here and helping to protect our forest!

*Massive applause follows Silvester's address.*

**ZUZA** Thank you, Silvester. And now a few announcements. Today, each of you has a chance to speak up and express your opinion. Plus, there is a screen in front of the school. We're showing some documentaries about the forests. Kids can play computer game about forest protection. Senior class prepared workshops and games for the juniors. And, finally, the guys from the senior class and their band Timber Lads will give a cool concert. All for our forest.

*Suddenly and unexpectedly, Michal Baran steps on the stage. Silvester is surprised, standing speechless in the crowd beneath the stage.*

**MICHAL B.** Hello, everyone. I am Michal Baran – my son Silvester mentioned me just a short while ago. I bet you're curious whether I knew about this protest beforehand and whether I helped Silvester to make it happen. Nope. I had no idea until last evening when a father of Silvester's classmate rang me in Bratislava, asking whether I knew what the kids were up to. I had no clue, just as Silvester had no clue I'd turn up here today. I must say that I'm very proud of my son, as well as all the kids, and each and every one of you for being here today, because you care about the fate of our forests. These are early days and we may need much more time to make those in power realise that our forest is also theirs. Fingers crossed! Let's keep going!

*Major applause. Michal Baran steps off the stage. He finds Silvester in the crowd and embraces him.*

*After the protest, the kids are sharing their impressions.*

**MAŤO** Silvo, that speech of yours ... it was something!

**ZUZA** And then your Dad ... Imagine, the biology teacher was in tears!

**SILVESTER** No kiddin' ...

**PEŤO** Sure thing, I saw her, too. Weeping.

**SILVESTER** Must be allergies ... *(All burst in laughter.)*

**ZUZA** Listen. Guess how many responses we keep gettin' on Facebook. Even kids from other schools keep writin', even from different cities. Sayin' they want to join in. Gentlemen, we better stay calm and carry on!

**SILVESTER** You bet! Every Friday, as promised. Until they stop the logging.

**ZUZA** I'll send out instructions for next week. And you guys share photos from the protests. Even the national media got in touch. Wanna to come. It'll be sooooo hot this Friday!

*The second nationwide protest. Journalist questions Silvester before the protest begins.*

**JOURNALIST** The pupils from the Hilltop Elementary school convened today at what is already the second protest against logging in the Tatras valleys. The protest has grown into a nationwide event. We approached the lead convenor of the pupils' protest. Silvester Baran is just 13 years old. What's on the agenda this Friday?

**SILVESTER** We're preparing a nationwide protest that will be held in parallel in a number of cities: in Bratislava, Nitra, Poprad, Liptovský Mikuláš, Ružomberok, Kremnica, Zvolen, Košice, and elsewhere. A total of 23 Slovak cities joined in. Our protest will consist of a morning pupils' and student protest. In some cities it will be linked to a march.

**JOURNALIST** Silvester, what are your demands? What is it you want to achieve?

**SILVESTER** We ask that the logging in the valleys Tichá and Kôprová ends. But we also oppose logging in the protected areas. We ask that the areas concerned are declared untouchable.

**JOURNALIST** You're school kids. You protest in front of your school. Does it mean you won't be attending classes?

**SILVESTER** No, we won't. Because we realise that there's no point in us sitting in the classroom and keep preparing for the future, while our forests are being cut down. The forests that are so vital for the future of the entire country.

**JOURNALIST** If you don't go to school, you'll have unexcused absence, right?

**SILVESTER** Yes, that's right. We expect that. Still, our future is more important than unexcused absence.



**JOURNALIST** Who do you expect to meet your demands?

**SILVESTER** We are addressing those in power, that is government officials, management of the National Forest Administration, foresters, developers, wood companies, everyone who is responsible for the current situation.

**JOURNALIST** Nice to speak with you, Silvester, thank you. Fingers crossed. It seems we've got quite an issue to face, and it is the children who have to explain it to us. It is for the second time in Slovakia that the young are sending us a clear message. Let's stop the deforestation in Slovakia. After all, the forests are ours.

### **Logging ends**

*Main news on TV.*

**JOURNALIST** Now onto the next issue ... Today, the National Forest Administration stopped the controversial logging in the protected was of Tichá and Kôprová valleys. The decision comes from the National Environmental Inspectorate. Environmentalists have been protesting against the logging for weeks. The deforestation even triggered massive nationwide student protests. The environmentalists, pupils and students consider the cessation of logging to be their major success.

So much from us today. Start your day tomorrow with our morning news. Have a good evening.

*Life in the valleys is getting back to normal. We hear Silvester's voice reading from the Pictures from the Mountains.*

**SILVESTER** *The mysterious silence merged with the magnificence; the grandeur of forms, the romantic view, the wealth of plants are so enchanting that you are walking in religious awe through this temple of eternal silence, afraid to stir up noise with a sharp step and to trigger echo with a voice that suddenly springs from your chest. Black firs, green beech interlaced with meadows, deep valleys with creeks filled with trout, steep hills full of raspberry, honeysuckle and shrub, with stone ribs high above. As far as an eye can see all this creates an idyllic whole.*

### **In years – father and son in the forest**

*Years have passed. Father and son are in the forest. They are sitting on a boulder beneath the oldest tree in Kôprová valley. They are looking down into the valley which, years ago, they saved from deforestation.*

**MICHAL B.** See, in the spot over there, where only broken trees were left after the calamity, there is now a new growth. Wonderful, healthy, natural forest. Remember what they told us when we blocked the logging twelve years ago?

**SILVESTER** That if they don't cut down the wood infested by the bark beetle, the forest would disappear.

**MICHAL B.** And it would be renewed in 300 years at the earliest. And look, what's around us today! Splendour. I was close to giving up back then, had you not launched the protests with your schoolmates. Who knows how things would have turned out ...

**SILVESTER** I barely knew what I was going. Yet I remember this sense of enormous injustice. It is only now that I see the point of it all. The days and weeks that followed, changed my entire take on the world. I have no idea where I gathered the courage in those days.

**MICHAL B.** It was also because of me, though, that you won the competition with the computer game you designed.

**SILVESTER** Yeah, sure. The idea was yours. And today, it is also because of you that I keep designing complex software for environmental protection. *(looking through binoculars)* Dad, look down, over there ... *(pointing out in a direction)* They are dry branches of the Swiss pine. How come they grow so low?

**MICHAL B.** *(looking through the binoculars for a while)* Ah, I guess I know what it's about. When, years back, we managed to get the logging in the valleys to stop, the deputy Minister arrived with media entourage to show us how the aid to the forest looks like. He planted beautiful plants of the Swiss pine. He seemed like a doer, like an action man. The public might have had an impression that it was a good deed and what was the aid to look like. I told them that it's nonsense, that Swiss pine grow naturally in totally different environment, starting at about 400 metres higher. Yet no one cared. It is only today we see the result. Swiss pine is no ordinary tree. In the lowlands it gets suppressed by any other tree. But it is the only tree that can thrive in the adverse zone of the knee timber, here, beneath the rocky mountains.

Sometimes we should be less eager to help and spend instead more time watching in humility, just as the nature does.

*Silvester is reading from the Pictures from the Mountains. The forest in the valleys changes in time and seasons. Silvester ends the reading and closes the book.*

**SILVESTER** *And then, years followed years, as one drops a pebble in the water. Change after change rushed on the wings of the gale of times, flower after flower dried out, fell, dream after dream faded, and the bosom that used to find the world too small, forever retained the love for the native mountains. In the instants of silent thought, as if along the vibration of the Moon, ancient scenic images appear in my soul. Pictures from the Mountains.*

**The End**