

The Great Kapok Tree

One hot, sunny day, two men walked into the rainforest. The larger man pointed to a great Kapok tree and then left. The smaller man took his heavy axe and struck the trunk of the tree with all his might. Whack! Whack! Whack! Chop! Chop! Chop! Soon the man grew tired. He sat down to rest underneath the great Kapok tree. Before he knew it, the heat and hum of the forest had lulled him into a deep and peaceful sleep.

A long, strong boa constrictor with fierce yellow eyes lived in the Kapok tree. Suddenly, he slowly slithered down to where the man was sleeping and hissed in his ear: "Señor, this is a tree of miracles. It is my home, where all of my family have lived. Do not chop it down." As suddenly as he appeared, he disappeared again amongst the long grass which covered the rainforest floor.

Then, a troupe of excitable monkeys scampered down from the canopy of the Kapok tree, their long tails flicking the air behind them. They chattered hurriedly to the sleeping man: "Señor, you chop down one tree and then another. Without these trees, there will be nothing left to hold the earth in place. When the rain comes, the soil will be washed away and the forest will become a desert." The monkeys then scrambled back to their favourite tree which was opposite the man, found their favourite branch, and sat and watched to see what would happen next.

Next, a small, bright green frog with crimson-red eyes crawled along a leaf which was gently swaying in the light breeze, tickling the man's ear. He quietly squeaked into the man's ear: "Señor, a ruined rainforest means ruined lives. You will leave us homeless if you chop down this great Kapok tree." Once he had said his message, the frog turned and hopped away, taking shelter within a nearby clump of jade-green leaves.

A few minutes later, four porcupines scampered down from the tree, their great spikes sticking up on end menacingly. They gently whispered to the man: "Señor, do you know what all animals and humans need to live? Oxygen. And do you know what trees produce? Oxygen! If you cut down the trees, you will destroy what gives us life." Then they ambled off across the rainforest in search of water, for they were extremely thirsty.

Finally, a jaguar leapt down from a branch and padded over to the man, growling: "Señor, the Kapok tree is home to many birds and animals. If you cut it down, where will I find my dinner?"

A little while later, a small child from a nearby tribe who lived in the rainforest tiptoed over to the man and knelt beside him. He murmured softly in his ear: "Señor, when you awake, please look at us with new eyes." The small child then edged away and sat back on a rock, watching the man intently.

The man awoke with a start. All around him stood the creatures who depended upon the great Kapok tree. The man looked about and saw the sun streaming through the trees, he smelled the flowers and he felt the mist rising from the forest floor, but he heard no sound. The creatures were strangely silent. The man picked up his axe and swung back his arm ready to strike the tree. Suddenly he stopped and looked at the animals and the child. He dropped the axe and walked out of the magnificent rainforest.