

## The Oak Tree



**T**he sun was ripe and its bright beams were shining through thick emerald hair of trees. Leaves were dancing on wind, making soft rustle like dancers when their fluffy dresses whirl to the rhythm of tune. The forest musicians were competing in their performance, jiggling from one tree to another.

- “Look, here is the path we have to take, cried Bao. Do you see that stone? There is something written on it. But what is it?”... uuh, sighed the boy lowering his gaze.

- “I don’t know, I cannot read”, replied Leila. “I always wanted to know what those symbols mean, but they say I should not, because I am a girl. And girls do not have to know much, but rather help their mothers in the household”, continued Leila in a dull voice.

- “I also cannot understand how people get sense from those signs, because I do not have time to go to school. I have to help my brothers in the field. I work all day long and I am so tired. I am afraid that my brothers will be angry at me that I have disappeared. But what can we do? We got lost in this forest and there is no way out”, said Bao.

And the children went on following the path straight ahead. The sun disappeared behind the ominous cloud and the hasty wind started to blow. Suddenly they saw a big oak tree with a mysterious large hollow which promised asylum from the approaching storm.

- “No, we cannot stay here”, murmured Leila sobbing, “I need to bring woods I’ve collected today before the dinner. Let’s follow the path; it will lead us out this forest”.

As soon as the girl shed her last word they heard somebody crying. It was a little boy whom they found sitting beside the stump of a tree.

- “Why are you crying?” asked Bao the little boy. For a moment the boy stopped weeping, looked at strangers, and burst out crying even more.

- “I saw you before in the village but I don’t know you. What is your name?” questioned Leila worried.

- “I won’t tell you, because you will mock at me as others do. That is why I ran to the forest and I got lost”, mumbled the boy.

At that moment thunderstorm stroke the forest. The singing of birds disappeared and only the whistle of wind and creaking of trees could continue the tune competition.

- “Run, run”, shouted Bao. “The tree, let’s run to the oak tree over there”.

- “I am scared”, said Leila in reply... and her voice disrupted as they heard a strange sound, as if an invisible voice, at the big oak tree. There was nobody around, children became even more scared. The storm intensified and the sky turned pitch dark.

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The rain and the wind reigned over the village. Farmers abandoned their fields, leaving the nature alone, when the sky could talk to the earth through the language of water.

- “Where is Bao? What a disobedient child! He always disappears when we need to work. Now he is gone even in storm. I hope nothing bad has happened to him”.

Thunder was tearing the sky. It seemed that the sky would split in two, defeated by lightning. It was too dangerous to stay outside and even the cattle ran away searching for shelter in barns.

- “Leila, Leila. Where is our daughter? She did not come back from the forest. Poor child! What shall we do?! My poor little daughter. She must be crying...and alone”, sobbed the mother.

- “Maybe she is with other children in one of the houses. Let us not worry now. I guess she is in the blacksmith’s house. Children are often there when they don’t work in bad weather”, consoled Leila’s father.

There were many children at the blacksmith’s. Like adults, they left fields after the storm had attacked the village. But Leila was not there, neither was Bao, nor Kwame. The sad news was traveling across. The three kids were missing.

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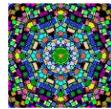
It was warm and light. The mysterious hollow of the oak another world, the world where everybody was happy and of forest animals, who always knew when the storm was the big oak tree. The entrance to the mysterious tree was the forest and children of people. This is how Leila, Bao and Kwame could access the “Happy World” of the oak tree, guided by the wise owl.



tree was an entrance to cheerful. It was the world approaching, and hid in open only for residents of

Song concerts continued. Tomtits and thrushes kept on playing tunes accompanied by woodpeckers with their drum beats. As the children proceeded further they entered the purple lit room with a large mirror, it was calm and quiet. Only the noise of little waterfalls disturbed the silence and tender skin of water. Fishes of different colours and shapes swam in the magic maze of the pond. The green water plants were a jungle where kid fishes played hide-and-seek. The water of the pond was so pure that Leila, Bao and Kwame could see their reflection like in the mirror. So the pond appeared to them at the entrance. It was much more to discover.

Beside the purple room there were long stairs leading up to more rooms of this happy palace. The stairs were lit with candles which changed the colour of their light every now and then. The walls now looked like a huge kaleidoscope mirrors with multi-coloured beads and pebbles. The first room on the second floor was a classroom. Here little squirrels, rabbits, little bears, wolves, and foxes were studying necessary skills of the forest life. An old owl taught them what and how to eat, what to do when in danger. They also learned how to help each other and treat each other well. Another classroom was for nestlings. They were taken care by swallows, who played with them at the moment as they had a break from their studies. This room looked like a big nest with a lot of toys.



There were many more rooms in this oak ‘palace’, where little animals could play and entertain themselves while adult animals did their daily duties. Some took care of the pond, another provided food, and some were involved in teaching animal children.

At the top of the oak tree there was a special room. The wise owl who guided Leila, Bao and Kwame around the “Happy World” explained that this room had a magic book which told that animal children had to play and enjoy their lives before they get adult. The older animals had to take care of little animals. Animal children should not work because it is the duty of the adults. Instead animal children had to go to school and learn; afterwards they play with each other.

Suddenly Leila, Bao and Kwame noticed that there was no roof in this oak palace. They could see the beautiful sky with millions of bright stars. The sky looked like a handful of jewels, scattered upon the fabric of the warm night.

- “This is our special record”, explained the wise owl. Every time we have a new baby child in the forest, fire flies light a new star so that everybody can see how many children we have. I know the two worlds, the one here in our “Happy Palace” and the one outside, when I turn into an invisible voice”, confessed the wise owl. “I assure you, my dear children, that in your daily world you also have this magic book which tells about your rights as children. The name of your book is called the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is easy to remember if you know the magic password “CRC”. Thus, your world can also be as wonderful and magic as this, if only everybody could know and strive for it. When you come back today to your families and other children tell them about the wonderful “Happy World” and about the magic book which makes this world be so special. But before that, I will become a strange voice again and talk to all the people in your village”, concluded the owl.



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Many people in the village gathered in the mayor’s house to discuss their plan to look for the missed Leila, Bao and Kwame. Everybody was in despair, parents could not stop crying. All of a sudden they heard a voice from nowhere which called their attention.

- “You want to see your children again. Now you are happy to see them again. You are never more thinking of them as your helpers in the field, rather as of little wonders who smile at you and kiss you before they go to bed. Your children were working hard in the fields, they did not go to school, some of you mocked them for their names, but now you are all missing them because they are little wonders which embellish your life. They all got lost in the dark forest of ignorance and coldness. They could even die in the storm and you would never see them again, those little wonders, the children and friends of yours. Fortunately, they are safe and sound. You will not believe their stories, but believe in the power of nature which was about to turn the world upside down with thunder and lightning and take your children away”, concluded the invisible voice.

- “We want to see our children. We love them, we never ever make them go to the forest to pick woods, or make them work in the field. Let them better play with other children when they come back from school. We want our children back”, cried the desperate voice of a mayor.

- “Yes, pleeeeeease we need them back, we need their tender smiles and cheerful laughter. Their bright eyes are the best prize in our lives”, supported a voice from the crowd.

- “Yes, yes, we need them”, multiple voices sounded in chorus.

With these words a wonder happened. The sky became clear and birds started singing again. Everybody left the mayor’s house. In the horizon there appeared the silhouettes of the three happy children Leila, Bao and Kwame. They were holding their tiny hands and running towards the village; a never seen rainbow appeared behind them. They were smiling and glad. So were all people in the village. Now all the children have chance to know about the “CRC” magic book, and every place in the world can become as miraculous as the “Happy World” of the big oak tree.

