



Lata Loves Trees

Lata's best friend is a tree, she spends all her free time with it. But when something unjust happens to her tree, she decides to take a stand.



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Let's Read



The Asia Foundation



It was late afternoon. The green leaves of the tree shone in the sunlight. Behind the house Lata was sitting in the krishnachura tree, which was full of flowers. Lata was hugging the tree and talking to it. Lata was in fourth grade. Her curly hair, eyes, and skin were the color of clay. *krishnachura is a tree with fern-like green leaves and bright orange-red flowers



While most children grow up in their elders' laps, Lata had grown up in trees. Everyone nicknamed her Briksho Lata. She didn't have many human friends. Instead, all the trees in the village were her friends. She did have an enemy though. Chanchal was a boy from the village who was three years younger than Lata. He constantly followed Lata around, teasing her. *briksho means tree



One day when Lata was younger, she sat in her favorite krishnachura tree. It was also smaller back then. One of Chanchal's goats was eating leaves from the tree. Lata grabbed the goat's rope and yanked it away from the tree, accidentally hurting it.



Lata's father was so angry at her, he scolded her for behaving cruelly without thinking. He scolded her a lot. Her mom comforted her. Chanchal clapped happily, he was glad Lata got in trouble.



Ever since then, Lata and the tree had the closest bond. She climbed to its highest branches to read, sleep, and play. When she was angry with her mother, she hugged the tree and cried. Today, she excitedly hugged the tree and told it that she was going to Dhaka with her aunt tomorrow!



After a few days in Dhaka, Lata was homesick. She was so happy to head back to her village on the train with her uncle. She had bought a lot of colorful flower garlands for her krishnachura tree and she couldn't wait to drape them on her tree's branches and see how beautiful it looked. When the train arrived, she ran home to her tree with the garlands in hand. She was shocked to see that her tree had been cut down. Father said, "This tree wasn't useful. It didn't have fruit or good wood so I cut it down. I'll plant a red guava tree here for you instead. You love red guava, you can eat its fruit!"



Mother explained, "You don't study. You don't eat. You talk about the tree all the time. That's why your father cut this tree down. It's good, you're growing up now. You can't keep climbing trees!" Hearing this, Lata froze. She couldn't say anything to anyone. Her chest tightened and her eyes filled with tears, but she didn't cry. She sat quietly on the tree stump of her beloved krishnachura tree. She sat there for hours. All the villagers came, but no one could move her no matter how hard they tried. Evening came and her mother tried to reason with her, her brother pulled at her, and her father scolded her. But nothing moved

Lata, she sat in stillness and silence. She didn't even eat anything.



When night fell, everyone went back to their homes. Lata was still sitting in the same place. The fireflies came out all around her. Lata didn't realize when she fell asleep on the stump. When she awoke later that night, she was in her own bed. Maybe someone had brought her in while she was asleep? Lata got out of bed and went right back to what was left of her friend: the tree stump. She stood silently on the stump. When the villagers awoke to the call of the birds they were all amazed to see Lata still standing on the stump.



Even Chanchal was surprised. He came and asked, "Lata, have you become a tree?!" "Yes," Lata nodded. "But you don't have any branches or leaves!" Chanchal noted. So Lata raised both her arms. Usually Chanchal would laugh, but this time he didn't. Even he felt it was wrong that Lata's tree had been cut down. He happily gathered leaves and decorated Lata like a tree.



When Chanchal finished arranging the leaves all around Lata, he stood beside her holding some leaves in his hand. He said, "You're a big tree. I'm a small plant." He laughed, finding joy in the leaves. Some children in the village saw what Chanchal was doing and joined in. They added leaves to Lata's tree and gathered their own leaves.



Seeing the children, the elders of the village laughed, thinking it was a silly game. Soon all the children of the village had joined in and become trees. The elders were no longer entertained. The children wouldn't respond or move. The elders scolded them, ordering them to stop.



The elders told them, "Stop this game. Go back to your homes." The children replied, in a serious tone, "Trees don't have houses. The whole world is a home for trees. We should take care of trees and of their home and ours: Earth."

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Original Story Lata Loves Trees. Author: Tasnima Iqbal, Akashleena Nidhi. Illustrator: Afrin Jahan, Tamanna Tasneem Supti.

Published by The Asia Foundation - Let's Read,

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