

THE TREE

WITH THE

FLOPPY FRINGE



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Imagine, the biggest, darkest, scariest forest you've ever stood in, with tree's so tall and bushy that they block out all the light on the ground below, and where the animals creep around in the darkness, making strange noises.

Well, Zen Forest is the opposite of that.

It's not dark or scary, it's just a lovely big friendly forest (most of the time) - and the only strange noises you hear is laughter.

It's where Poppy and Zander live.

Poppy is a Polar Bear and Zander is a Gander, which is a male Goose - as he likes to remind everyone - and they're the best of friends.

Polar Bears and Geese normally don't live in forests, but this is Zen, and things are different here.

“So, you can’t see a thing because of your floppy-fringe?” yelled Poppy the Polar Bear, looking up at the tree branches above her.

“That’s right” sighed Alvin the Ash tree, “my branches and leaves are so thick, I can’t see through them anymore”.

Poppy scratched her head with her giant paw. She was on her way to meet her best friend Zander the Gander when she heard the voice from the treetop ask her for help.

“When was the last time you had a haircut?” she shouted up to Alvin.

“Oh ... good question,” Alvin tried to remember. “I had one when I was 4 ... then one for starting school ... so that would mean it was 140 years ago!”

Poppy tried to imagine what she would look like if her fur kept growing for 140 years.

“I think it’s time you had a trim”, she told Alvin, “don’t worry, my friend Zander can help us”.

“Is he a hairdresser?” asked Alvin excitedly.

“No, he’s an actor” replied Poppy, “we’ll just get him to pretend he’s one”.

Poppy raised herself up onto her back legs - she stood 7ft tall - and yelled-

“Zaaaaaaaander!”

It was a mixture of a scream and a ground-shaking roar that echoed all around the forest. Behind Poppy, the

sound of twigs breaking under a webbed foot could be heard as Zander rushed to her.

“Here he comes,” smiled Poppy to Alvin.

Just then, a 2-foot-tall Gander wearing a Ninja headband forward rolled from the tree line and leapt into a Karate kick – aimed at no one.

“Where are they?” he squawked angrily.

“Who?” replied Poppy.

Zander twirled a Bamboo pole above his head as he ran around Poppy’s legs.

“Whoever was attacking you” he shouted, still searching for the attackers.

Poppy giggled.

“I wasn’t being attacked; I just need your help.”

“Oh, right” said Zander disappointedly.

Poppy pointed towards the tree-top and the big bushy leaves.

“Zander, there’s someone I want you to meet”.

“Hello Zander”, the voice boomed down at him.

Zander stood open-beaked as he gazed towards the sky.

“I’ve never seen that before – a talking cloud.”

Poppy and Alvin laughed.

“No silly,” Poppy corrected him, “it’s Alvin the Ash Tree. He needs our help. He’s got so many branches he can’t see through the leaves. It’s a big floppy fringe”.

Zander stepped forward. He’d replaced his Ninja headband with a Doctor’s mask and stethoscope.

“Okay, how many fingers am I holding up?” he shouted up to Alvin.

“You don’t have any fingers” Alvin replied.

Zander nodded and scribbled some notes on his patient clipboard.

“It’s just as I thought”, he announced, “he needs an operation.”

“I think it’s just a haircut,” replied Poppy.

The light was starting to fade in the forest, and soon it would be dark.

“Zander and I are going to go home before it gets dark,” Poppy informed Alvin, “but we’ll be back in the morning with a plan to cut your fringe”.

“Do you promise?” asked Alvin.

“Yes, promise.” Poppy nodded. “We’ll bring help too. As the saying goes, many hands make lemonade”.

Zander raised his eyebrows.

“Many hands make light work Poppy”, he quietly corrected her.

“Do you both know what you’re doing?” asked Alvin, a little unsure.

“Yes, of course”, laughed Zander as he flapped his way to the top of the tree. He’d changed out of his Doctor’s costume and spiked his feathers with hair gel.

“Trust me,” Zander reassured him, “I’m a Hairdresser”.

The Next Day ...

Word quickly spread throughout the forest about Alvin's hair-raising predicament, and a small army of furry and feathered friends gathered to help.

Zen Forest shook as a battalion of tiny feet, paws, claws, hooves, and wings marched through the trees towards Alvin the Ash.

“What’s that for?” asked Zander, looking at the wooden sticks and large rubber band Poppy was carrying.

“I’ve got an idea” she replied, “If it works everyone will think I’m a genius”.

“And if it doesn’t work?” he asked?

Poppy placed a reassuring paw on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, I’ve brought you a safety helmet.”

“That’s nice”, replied Zander, not fully understanding. “Hang on - what?”

The long grass around the treeline bent backwards as the forest rescue squad emerged into the clearing and stopped in front of Alvin.

Poppy dropped the wooden planks and rubber band onto the grass.

“Alvin, we’re here to give you a haircut” she shouted, “and we’ve brought some friends to help”.

“Can’t he just wait until Autumn?” yelled a voice from the back of the pack, “he goes bald every Autumn”.

Zander was so taken aback he dropped his Fireman's hat.

"No, he can't wait" he replied, "imagine not being able to see anything, would you like that Rabbits?"

The rabbits all shook their heads.

"Would you like that Raccoons?"

The Raccoons all shook their heads.

"Would you like that Moles?"

The Moles looked around, trying to figure out what direction the voice came from. Zander forgot that Moles have poor eyesight.

"Never mind Moles".

Whilst this conversation was taking place, Poppy hammered the two planks of wood into the grass using her paws, then stretched the rubber band between them until it was tight.

"Come over here Zander" she instructed her friend.

Poppy grabbed hold of the band and walked backwards. The band stretched, and stretched, and stretched, and stretched, until it was ready to snap.

"Stand here", she replied to Zander, nodding down to the band clasped in her paws.

Zander made his way between the planks and stood with the rubber band at his back.

"Okay Alvin", yelled Poppy, "we need to clear the branches in front of your eyes. I'm going to take them out in one go."

Everyone in the crowd cheered. Alvin cheered. Zander cheered.

“I’m going to fire Zander right up through them like a cannonball”.

Everyone in the crowd cheered. Alvin cheered. Zander didn’t cheer.

“Hang on a seco-”

TWANG.

Poppy let the band go and instantly Zander shot up into the air as fast as a bullet. He rocketed through the heavy branches and emerged out the top of Alvin’s head, heading for the clouds.

“Poppooooooooo” he shrieked, “you’ve done it again”.

Poppy covered her eyes with her paws.

“Sorry Zander” she said quietly, “I didn’t stop to think.”

Zander flapped back down to earth, a little dazed but uninjured.

“Did it work?” yelled the Moles.

Poppy rushed over to her best friend.

“I’m sorry Zander, are you hurt? she asked him sheepishly.

Zander shook some sense back into his head.

“I’m okay, but you need to think before you rush in – I don’t need a rubber band to reach the top of the tree.”

“Of course,” groaned Poppy looking at his wings, “you’ve got everything you need.”

“Yes, I have”, replied Zander, “every Fireman has a ladder.”

Zander dusted himself down and turned to face the others.

“Okay” he sighed, “anyone got any other ideas?”

By the time afternoon came around, Poppy, Zander, and their forest friends, had made several failed attempts at cutting back Alvin’s branches.

The Chipmunks tried to chew through them. The Monkeys tried to dance on them. The ants even tried to carry them away.

All with no success.

At one point, four angry Squirrels in yellow vests appeared from inside the tree and started yelling in funny accents.

“That’s odd,” thought Poppy, “I wonder why they’re wearing those funny vests?”

Alvin was beginning to fear that he’d never get a trim, when just then, the Raccoon’s arrived back carrying a large silver saw. It had jaggy teeth all the way down it and a handle at either end so two could work it together.

“Wow, where did you get that?” asked Poppy.

The Raccoon’s dropped the saw onto the grass and everyone gathered around it.

“We found it,” replied Papa Raccoon.

“What is this thing?” asked Poppy curiously, “where did you get it?”

“It was in a bin at the edge of the Forest,” informed Papa Raccoon, “I saw humans leave it in there. They use it to saw through wood – I think it’s called a hammer”.

Poppy picked up the saw in her giant paws.

“I think this will help, but it’s dangerous so I need to make sure no one gets hurt. We have to be super careful and when we’re finished it’s going back in the bin.”

Zander picked up the saw and raced towards Alvin.

“Zander wait!” yelled Poppy, “don’t rush in, safety first!”

Very carefully, Poppy and Zander worked their way through the branches; taking their time and trimming only what they needed to from Alvin’s fringe, so that he could see again. It took longer, but it was safer.

“I can see again!” exclaimed Alvin – a smile beaming across his giant wooden face.

Poppy clapped her giant paws as down below all of Alvin’s forest friends cheered in delight.

“Hello Archie!” Alvin shouted to the tree beside him, “good to see you again”.

“You too Alvin”, Archie replied.

“Hello Ashley, Anthony, Annie, Austin”. Alvin said hello to all his Ash tree friends around him.

Zander flew up to the branch that Poppy was sat on and landed beside her.

“Well, we did it” he smiled, placing a wing on her shoulder. Poppy grabbed him and gave him a bear hug so tight, it almost turned his face red.

“Right, let’s put this hammer back in the bin,” said Poppy picking the saw up, carefully.

As she was making her way down the tree, the saw got stuck on Alvin’s trunk.

“Here, let me help” said Zander, he pulled the handle towards him, trying to free it.

The jagged teeth on the saw dug deeper into Archie’s trunk.

“I’ll get it this way”, Poppy pulled the handle at her side. The saw went deeper again.

As they pulled the handle back and forth, trying to free it, they were completely unaware they were sawing through Alvin’s tree trunk.

“Excuse me!” Alvin desperately tried to get their attention, “I think you’re cutting me down”.

As the sound of cracking wood filled the air, Poppy and Zander looked up and watched as Alvin started to fall.

“Look out” screamed Poppy as she clutched Zander to her chest and leapt from the branch. She skidded across the grass on her side and waited for Alvin to land on top of her.

But he didn’t.

Eventually, Poppy rolled onto her back and looked up. Alvin was still leaning but he hadn’t fallen ... because the other Ash trees, had caught him.

“Are you okay?” Poppy shouted.

Alvin gave her a little smile.

“Yes, my friends caught me”.

The other tree's slowly raised Alvin back into place.

"You have great friends", Poppy told him.

"As have I" said the muffled voice inside her arms. Poppy slowly opened them and watched as Zander got to his feet. He walked up her body until his beak was almost touching her nose.

"You saved me", said Zander quietly, "that's what action hero's do".

"No Zander," Alvin replied, "that's what friends do".

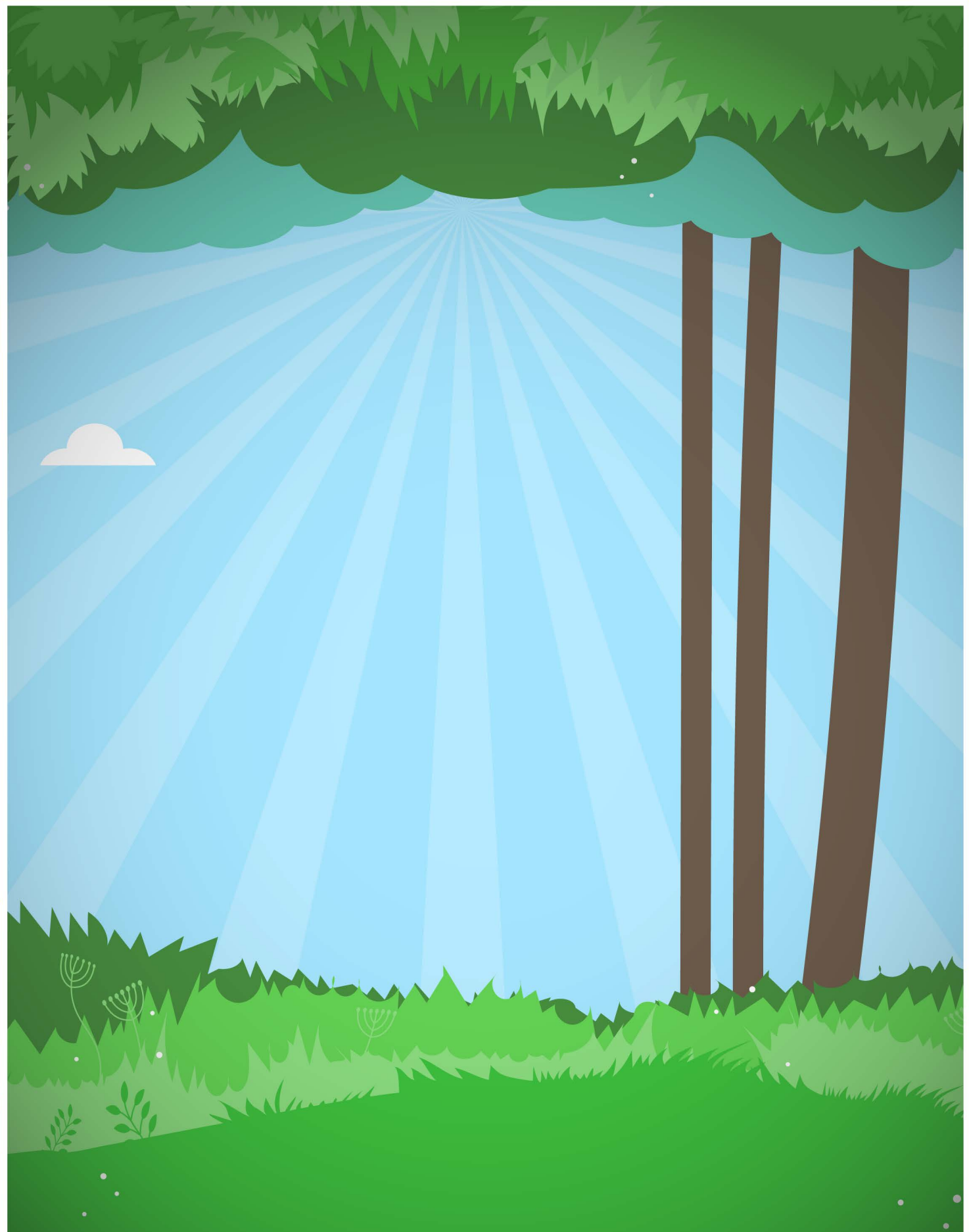
That was the day Poppy and Zander helped the tree with the floppy fringe.

And what a day it was.

They learned new things and were reminded of things that they already knew; like how important it is to not rush in, to take your time, and to think things through.

They learned that trying to figure things out on your own is a lot harder and to always ask others for help when you need it.

But most importantly, they reminded each other what it really means to be a friend. If you try hard every day to be kind, to look out for each other, and be a super friend ... that's better than being a superhero.



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