

Rajah King of the Jungle

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Rajah: King of the Jungle

Night fell swiftly in the jungle, coating it with jet black ink. Night always fell swiftly in the jungle. It was in the natural order of things.

On the surface, hiding secrets of Time itself, the jungle was as calm as calm can be. But underneath the calm, the jungle night pulsated with fear. It quivered with danger. Black as black can be, it was a theatre of suspense.

Rajah, the tiger, wearing his cloak of terrifying beauty, glided through his kingdom, the jungle, which had become an ocean of shadows.

His eyes, like burning embers, radiated ferocity that set the jungle alight with fear. And the moon, Chanda Mama, stole gracefully over Rajah's dazzling stripes, making the dark ones merge with the shadows and the fiery ones leap out to dance with his heavenly light.

Rajah roamed through the night and heard the distant hoot of the secretive owl, the laugh of the elusive hyena...and the metallic twang of some nameless creature.

Rajah saw the radiant Chanda Mama rise, becoming enormous as he hung above the treetops before sinking behind them.

Gradually, a blushful golden light rose from the other side, from across the river. The jungle breathed out a freshness which filled the hearts of all creatures with goodness. As dawn spread its warm glow, dewdrops shone like diamonds in a murmuring breeze – Mother Earth was under a spell.

Thirsty after his nocturnal walkabout, Rajah studied his ferocious features in the river water while he drank. He admired his own reflection and lapped up the deliciously cool nectar with a slow darting tongue. Having drunk his fill, Rajah turned his back on the river to face his jungle – an impenetrable mass of tangled trees, shrubs and shadows. But what did he see? – Two pinpoints of light, cold and hypnotizing. A shiver made his back ripple into an arc.

Ananta, the majestic Lord of the Underworld, sprang up from the thick undergrowth! Boldly, he spread out his supremely fearsome, hooded head inlaid with its mysterious mark.

If the mighty tiger set the jungle alight with fear, the King Cobra froze it with dread!

Rajah stopped in his tracks, inches away from Ananta.

'Move out of my way.'

'Move out of my way.'

The King of the Jungle and the Lord of the Underworld spoke to each other with their eyes, one pair radiating fire, the other emitting venom – there couldn't be two monarchs in the same dominion as there couldn't be two suns in the sky.

But neither creature gave way, both doing split-second calculations in their heads:

Ananta thought, *'If the tiger lifts his clawed paws to strike, I will wrap myself around him like lightning and inject my deadly venom in to his neck. He will die on the spot.'*

Rajah thought, *'Should the snake make the slightest attacking move...I will dispatch him to the next world with just one blow of my mighty right paw.'*

Neither the King of the Jungle nor the Lord of the Underworld budged an inch. Whoever retreated first would have admitted defeat. No junglebodies were around to witness the deadly confrontation. Only the jungle itself. It trembled with fear.

If they got into a fight, one of them would surely die. The jungle had to prevent such a fate befalling either.

Silently, it reminded the two of a certain ancient treaty.

'Rajah...!' called half the jungle behind him.

'Ananta...!' cried the other half.

This treaty had been made by their ancestors thousands of years ago, the inherited memory of which still throbbed in them. It bade Rajah and Ananta never to cross each other's paths. If perhaps they happened to, it was no sign of cowardice to withdraw and go their separate ways. But...

'Move out of my way,' the two adversaries spoke to each other with their eyes as if looks could kill! And the jungle cried:

'Rajah...!'

'Ananta...!'

The ancestral treaty throbbing in them, each creature dropped his gaze. Ananta glided away in a rhythmic serpentine movement as graceful as it was lyrical – a poem

