

The Monkey King

Far away in the East, high among the mountain forests, there once lived a band of monkeys. One day, when some of the younger monkeys were exploring, they spotted a tree growing on the banks of a river. Its branches were full of the most delicious-looking fruit. It was a mango tree.

"Look," called the smallest monkey. "A fruit tree."

"Stop," said his big sister. "Don't eat the fruit; it might be poisonous. Let's take one back to our king. He'll know if it's good for us."

The monkey king took the golden fruit, sniffed it and then tasted it.

"Umm-HMMHH! Absolutely delicious!" he exclaimed. "Are there any more where this came from?"

"Oh yes, hundreds of them," replied the little one excitedly.

Before long, they found the tree again.

"What a beautiful tree!" said the monkey king. "We could all live here, but we must be careful not to let any fruit drop into the water. If one were carried away down the river to the towns where the humans live, someone might taste it and come looking for this tree. Let us first pick all the fruit that hangs over the river. That way we will be safe."

For many months, the monkey band lived happily in the fruit tree. Everyone took great care not to drop any fruit into the water. But no one had noticed one last mango hanging over the river. One night, while everyone slept, a breeze stirred the branches and, unseen by anyone, the mango fell into the water and drifted downstream.

Some days later, the king of the humans

was bathing in the river when one of his men spotted the mango. The king picked up the fruit and wondered what it was.

"Here, taste that!" he ordered one of his guards.

"It's very good, your majesty," replied the guard, taking a bite. No sooner had the king tasted the fruit himself than he wanted more.

"I want to find that fruit tree," he said greedily. "It must be somewhere upriver. We will make a raft and find it."

In the mountain forest, the monkeys rested in the shade of the mango tree. Suddenly, the little monkey called out; he had seen the raft approaching with the king and his soldiers on board.

The king ordered his men to pick all the fruit while he rested in the shade of the tree. Hidden among the leaves above, the monkeys watched silently, waiting for the humans to go.

"It's been a long day," said the king. "Prepare a bed for me. We'll stay here tonight."

"Oh no!" whispered the monkey king. "We'll have to stay hidden. You little ones must try very hard to be still and quiet."

Then, just as the human king settled down to sleep, he looked up and spotted a tail hanging down.

"There are monkeys in MY tree!" he shouted. "They'll eat all my fruit! Quickly! Light some fires. Tomorrow, we can have some roast monkey with our fruit."

Hidden in the leaves above, the monkeys were very frightened.

"Don't be afraid," said the monkey king. "I have a plan."

He raced along the branch which hung over the river and, with one mighty bound, sailed through the air, landing on the other side. Quickly he pulled at a very long creeper and tied one end around his waist and the other to the nearest tree. Then the monkey king bounded back towards the mango tree. But the creeper wasn't quite long enough, and he could only just catch the tip of the branch in his hands.

The other monkeys watched in horror as their king hung in mid-air over the river.

"Come quickly !" he whispered. "I shall be your bridge to safety. Silently, the monkeys crept along the branch and across their king's back. Just as the last monkey crossed to safety, a soldier spotted the monkey king hanging over the river. The monkey king was unable to move; his back was now broken.

"Aha! Roast monkey for breakfast!" said the soldier, taking aim with his bow and arrow.

"STOP! DON'T SHOOT!" called the king.

From his bed under the tree, he had seen everything. He had seen how the brave monkey king had risked his life to save his people. Jumping up, he got onto the raft and paddled out to the middle of the river. He lifted the monkey king down, holding him gently in his arms.

"Why did you make a bridge out of your own body, knowing that you might be caught?" asked the king.

The monkey king smiled. "My monkeys are safe now. That is all that matters. If you want to be a good king, you must resolve to help other people."

With these words, the monkey king closed his eyes and died. The king's eyes filled with tears as he turned to speak to his soldiers.

"This monkey has shown me how to be a real king," he said. "Let us give him a fine burial."

And so it was that a great monument was built to commemorate the monkey king's selflessness and courage.

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