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The Monkey-bridge



giant-like monkey once ruled over eighty thousand monkeys in the Himalaya mountains. And through the rocks where they lived streamed the river Ganges before reaching the valley where cities were built. And there where the bubbling water fell from rock to rock stood a magnificent tree. In the spring it bore tender white blossoms; and later it was laden with fruit so wonderful that none could be compared to them, and the sweet winds of the mountain gave them the sweetness of honey.

How happy the monkeys were! They ate the fruit and lived in the shade of the wonderful tree. From one side of the tree the branches spread over the water. Therefore, when the blossom appeared the monkeys ate or destroyed the flowers on those branches that the fruit might not grow on them, and if a fruit did grow they plucked it, were it no larger than the heart of a blossom, for the chief, seeing the danger, had warned them, saying: "Beware, let not a fruit fall into the water lest the river carry it to the city, where men seeing the beautiful fruit might search for the tree; fol-



With a mighty effort he clung to the branch

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lowing the river up into the hills, and, finding the tree, they would take all the fruit and we should have to flee from here." Thus the monkeys obeyed and for a long time never a fruit fell into the river. But the day came when one ripe fruit hidden by an ant's nest, unseen between the leaves, fell into the water and was taken by the flow of the river down, down the rocky hills, into the valley where the large city of Benares stands at the bank of the Ganges. And that day, while the fruit passed by Benares, pushed along by the little waves of the river, the King Brahmadatta was bathing in the water between two nets which some fishermen held while he plunged and swam and played with the little sunrays caught in the water. And the fruit floated into one of the nets.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the fisherman who saw it first. "Where on this earth grows such a fruit as this?" And, seizing it, with sparkling eyes he showed it to the King.

Brahmadatta gazed at the fruit and marvelled at its beauty. "Where is the tree which bears this fruit to be found?" he wondered. Then, calling some woodcutters from near the river-

bank, he asked if they knew of the fruit and where it could be found.

"Sire," they said, "it is a mango, a wonderful mango. Such a fruit as this grows not in our valley, but up in the hills of the Himalaya, where the air is pure and the sunrays undisturbed. No doubt the tree stands on the river-side and a fruit having fallen in the water has been carried here."

The King then asked the men to taste of it, and when they had done so, he also tasted it, and gave of it to his ministers and attendants. "Indeed," they said, "such a fruit is divine; never can another be compared to this."

The days and the nights went slowly by and Brahmadatta grew more and more restless. The longing to taste of the fruit once again became stronger as each day passed. In the night he saw in his dreams the enchanted tree carrying on each branch a hundred golden cups of honey and nectar.

"Indeed it must be found," said the King one day, and he gave orders that a boat be prepared to sail up the river Ganges, up to the Himalaya rocks where perhaps the tree might

be found. And Brahmadatta went himself with the men.

Long indeed was the journey passing the fields of flowers and rice, but at last the King and his followers reached the Himalaya hills one evening, and gazing in the distance what did they see? There, beneath the moonlight, stood the longed-for tree, its golden fruit glittering through the leaves.

But what was moving on each branch? What strange little shadows were sliding through the leaves?

"See," said one of the men, "it is a troop of monkeys."

"Monkeys!" exclaimed the King; "eating the fruit! Surround the tree that they may not escape. At dawn we will shoot them and eat of their meat and of the mangoes."

These words came to the ears of the monkeys and, trembling, they said to their leader: "Alas! you warned us, beloved chief, but some fruit may have fallen in the stream, for men have come here; they surround our tree, and we cannot escape, for the distance between this tree and the next is too far for us to leap.

We heard words coming from the mouth of one of the men saying: 'At dawn we will shoot them and eat of their meat and of the mangoes.' "

"I will save you, my little ones," said the chief, "fear not, but do as I say." Thus consoling them, the mighty chief climbed to the highest branch of the tree. And as swift as wind passing through the rocks, he jumped a hundred bow lengths through space and landed on a tree near the opposite bank. There, at the edge of the water, he took a long reed from its very root and he thought: "I will bind one end of the reed to this tree and the other end to my foot. Then I will spring again to the mango tree; thus a bridge will be made over which my subjects may flee. A hundred bow lengths I have jumped. The reed is so much longer than a hundred bow lengths that I can bind one end to this tree." And his heart filled with joy he sprang back to the mango tree.

But, alas! the reed was too short and he was only just able to seize the end of a branch. It had not occurred to him that the reed should have been long enough to allow of the fastening

to his foot. With a might effort he clung to the branch and called to his eighty thousand followers: "Run over my back on to the reed, and you will be saved."

One by one the monkeys ran over him on to the reed. But one among them called Devadatta jumped heavily upon his back. Alas! a piercing pain seized him; his back was broken. And the heartless Devadatta went on his way leaving his chief to suffer alone.

Brahmadatta had seen all that had happened and tears streamed from his eyes as he gazed upon the stricken monkey chief. He ordered that he be brought down from the tree to which he still clung, that he be bathed in the sweetest perfumes and clothed in a yellow garment, and that sweet water be given him to drink. And when the chief was bathed and clad, he lay beneath the tree and the King sat at his side and spoke to him. He said: "You made of your body a bridge for others to cross. Did you not know that your life would come to an end in so doing? You have given your life to save your followers. Who are you, blessed one, and who are they?"

"O King," replied the monkey, "I am their chief and their guide. They lived with me in this tree, and I was their father and I loved them. I do not suffer in leaving this world for I have gained my subjects' freedom. And if my death may be a lesson to you, then I am more than happy. It is not your sword which makes you a king; it is love alone. Forget not that your life is but little to give if in giving you secure the happiness of your people. Rule them not through power because they are your subjects; nay, rule them through love because they are your children. In this way only you shall be king. When I am no longer here forget not my words, O Brahmadata!"

The Blessed One then closed his eyes and died.

But the King and his people mourned for him and the King built for him a temple pure and white that his words might never be forgotten.

And Brahmadata ruled with love over his people and they were happy ever after.