



The Three Monkeys

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Easy
5 min read

There were once three monkeys who were going for a voyage in a balloon. (This was in Monkey-land, far, far away and ever so long ago.) The three were so much alike that it was impossible to tell one from the other, and to make matters worse each of them answered to the name of James. Such a thing would never do in the crew of a balloon, so the old monkey who was in command decided that each of the three should have a different name. The first was to be called James, the second Jemmy, and the third Little James.

So far so good. The three monkeys climbed into the balloon, the ground ropes were untied, and the voyage was begun. When they had reached a height of some hundreds of feet, the captain wished to give an order, so he called to the first monkey: "James!"

"Aye aye, sir," said all the three, running up to him.

"I called James," said the captain, looking from one to the other.

"Well, I am James," answered the first monkey.

"No, no. James is my name," said the second.

“And mine too,” said the third.

“How can you be James if I am he?” cried the first angrily.

“I tell you James is my name!” cried the second.

“No, mine!”

And so the three monkeys began to quarrel and dispute. Words led to blows, and soon they were tumbling about all over the car of the balloon, biting, scratching, and pummelling while the captain sat in his chair and bawled to them to stop. Every minute it seemed as though the car would overturn, and the end of it was that Little James got pushed over the side. He turned a beautiful somersault, and fell down, down, down through the air, landing in a soft bed of mud, into which he sank so that only his face and the top of his yellow cranium were visible.

“Help! help!” bawled Little James at the top of his voice.

Up ran a pair of monkeys belonging to the neighbourhood and stood looking at him.

“He’s in the mud, brother,” said one.

“Up to his neck,” said the other. “How silly!” And they both began to grin.

“Help!” cried Little James again, more faintly, for he was sinking deeper, and the mud was nearly at the level of his mouth. “Pull me out! Pull me out!”

“Ah, but how?” asked the first monkey, looking at him gravely.

“Wait a minute,” cried the second, “I have an idea!” and he pulled out of his pocket one of those leather suckers on a string which boys use to lift stones. Moistening the disc, he clapped it on to Little James’s head, and began to tug on the cord with all his might.

“Hey!” cried the other monkey, running to help. “Pull, brother, pull, and we’ll soon have him out!”

Crack! The cord snapped suddenly, and the two monkeys tumbled head over heels. Never mind; they got

another cord to repair the damage, and this time they succeeded in pulling Little James clear of the mud.

Did I say Little James? Alas! it was only half of him! His rescuers had pulled so hard that he had broken off short in the middle, and his two legs were left embedded in the mud.

“Dear me!” said the first monkey, scratching his head. “This is very sad. The poor fellow has lost his legs. What shall we do?”

“Let us make him some wooden ones!” said the other.

So said, so done. They made him a beautiful pair of wooden legs, and Little James hobbled painfully home. By the time he reached his house he felt so ill that he went straight to bed. “I believe I am going to die,” he said to himself. “I must make my will and set down the cause of my death.”

So he sent for pen and paper and began to write. Before very long, however, he stopped and began to scratch his head in perplexity. “If I am going to die,” he thought, “I must be going to die of something! Now, what am I going to die of? This must be carefully considered,[9] for above all one must write the truth in one’s last testament!”

So he pondered and pondered, but he could not make up his mind as to the cause of his death. Was he going to die of the fall from the balloon, or of his broken legs, or what? Just then he happened to look in the mirror by the bedside, and saw that there was a lump on his forehead, which he had got while fighting with James and Jemmy in the balloon.

“Why, of course,” cried he, “I am going to die of that big bruise on my forehead!” So he wrote it down in his will, and then, happy at having solved the difficulty, turned over on his side and died.

And, as I said before, this all took place in Monkey-land, ever so long ago.

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