

The Littlest Monkey

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Once upon a time there was a zoo, with lions and tigers and monkeys and elephants and giraffes and all sorts of animals.

The zookeeper looked after all the animals as best he could, but there was not much money.

The zoo was old and the animals were in cages with big bars, like cells in a dungeon.

Very few visitors came to the zoo, because it made them sad to see the animals in their cages with no room to play.

Every animal needed its own special kind of food. The monkey needed fruit, especially bananas. The elephant needed peanuts. The giraffe needed leaves and the lions and tigers needed fresh meat.

One day the zookeeper heard the hippo crying out in hunger, and he had no special river weed to feed her.

"If only I had some more money," he thought. He looked over the wall of the zoo to the faraway palace. It shone in the sun. Inside was the princess, who wore beautiful sparkling dresses covered in diamonds and rubies and emeralds and sapphires.

She has golden cars and silver aeroplanes and a platinum credit card. Ever since here father, the good old king, had been too sick to rule the kingdom, she had been shopping as if there were no tomorrow, and there had been no money for the zoo.

"I'll write her a letter!" thought the zookeeper. "Dear princess," he wrote, "please come to the zoo for a special presentation."

When the princess read the letter next morning, she thought, "Oh how lovely. I remember going to the zoo with my Daddy when I was a little girl."

She put on her sparkliest dress and drove to the zoo in a golden car. Her friends all came too, in more golden cars, and in big black cars came all her body guards.

When the Princess saw the zoo she was sad. She remembered a pretty zoo, with happy animals playing, and gardens full of flowers. This zoo was grey and worn out, and the animals just sat still and stared at her with big sad eyes.

Before the zookeeper could say anything, she called out, "This zookeeper has not been looking after my zoo. Guards, seize him! Take him to the dungeon."

The guards seized the zookeeper and took him away in a black car. Then the Princess and all her friends drove away.

After a while the animals began to feel hungry.

"What are we going to do?" said the Mummy monkey. "We have to help the zookeeper."

"I know," said the littlest monkey.

The littlest monkey went to the corner of the cage, where it was a bit broken. She squeezed, and squirmed, and wriggled, and writhed, until at last she popped through and was outside the cage. She scampered and scurried over to the zookeeper's office, and clambered and climbed up to an open window, and stretched and strained until she could reach the keys, hanging on a hook beside the door.

Then she hopped and hurried back to the cage and handed the keys to through the bars to her mummy.

"Good girl," said her mummy and opened up the door of the cage.

Out came Daddy Monkey and Mummy Monkey. Then they opened up all the other cages.

"To the palace!" said the littlest monkey.

Outside the palace, the animals all hid in the bushes and thought about what to do next. There were guards at all the gates and all the doors, and guards walking slowly around the outside of the palace.

"Look," said the littlest monkey, pointing to an open window on the second floor. "Can you reach that window, giraffe?"

"I think so," said the giraffe, and ran over underneath the window. The littlest monkey scuttled and scrambled up the giraffe's neck and into the window.

She crept and crawled through the corridors of the palace and made her way down to the dungeon. Soon she found the zookeeper's cell. He was sitting on the floor, looking very sad, but he smiled when he saw the littlest monkey.

"Littlest monkey, how lovely to see you," said the zookeeper. "You'd better not stay, or the guards might catch you."

"I'm here to let you out," said the littlest monkey.

"But how can you let me out?" asked the zookeeper. "The guard has the key."

"I know!" said the littlest monkey.

And she sneaked and she snaked up behind the guard, who was asleep in his chair, with his keys dangling from a ring on his belt.

And the littlest monkey very carefully, very slowly, lifted up the keys and undid the ring, and very quietly, very quickly crept back to the zookeeper.

"Here you are," said the littlest monkey.

"Good girl!" said the zookeeper. He took the keys and unlocked the door of the cell.

Together they tiptoed back to the window where the giraffe stood waiting, disguised as a tree by holding a branch in her mouth.

The littlest monkey slid and slithered down the giraffe's neck, just as if it were a slippery dip.

"Come on," she said to the zookeeper.

"I can't do that, I'll squash the poor giraffe," said the zookeeper. "What can we do?"

"I know," said the littlest monkey. She ran to the animals, who were hiding behind the bushes, and brought back the elephant and the gorilla. The gorilla climbed on the elephant's back and held up his arms.

"Jump and he'll catch you," said the littlest monkey.

The zookeeper jumped, and the gorilla caught him. Then they both sat down on the elephant.

"To the zoo," said the littlest monkey.

The animals all started off, but the guards saw them and chased after them, shouting and waving their arms.

The lions and tigers turned towards the guards, and showed all their teeth, and went "Raarrrrr!"

The guards were so scared they all ran home and hid under the bed. At last the zookeeper and all the animals arrived back at the zoo.

"Now what?" asked the zookeeper. "We need the Princess to help us. If only she knew what it was like to be locked up, without enough to eat, and with nobody to help her. But how will she ever find out what it's like to be poor and hungry? All she has to do is click her fingers to get anything she wants."

"I know!" said the littlest monkey.

The next morning the Princess received a letter that said "Top Secret. For the Princess Only".

"How exciting!" she said, and opened the letter.

The letter said, "Dear Princess, There is an enormous treasure in the lion's cage at the old zoo. Come alone. Tell no one. A secret admirer."

The Princess closed the letter quickly and looked around to make sure no one had seen. She left the palace by herself, wearing a head scarf, dark glasses and a funny old coat.

There was no one at the zoo. All the cages were empty. All was quiet.

The Princess found a cage with a sign that said "LIONS. DO NOT ENTER". The door was open. The Princess went inside.

"Now, where is this treasure?" she wondered. She took off one of her shoes and began to dig a hole with it. Just then the door banged shut.

"Oh no!" cried the Princess. She tried to open the door but it was locked. "Help! Help!" cried the Princess. No one came.

The Princess called until her throat hurt. Then she sat down and cried. The sun was hot and there was no shade. She was beginning to feel hungry. "How will I ever get out of here," she whimpered.

Suddenly she heard a scampering, skipping sound, and she saw a little monkey going past outside the cage. "Help, help," she cried. The little monkey stopped.

"Can you help me to get out of this cage?" cried the Princess. "I'm so hungry and lonely."

"It's not a very nice cage, is it?" said the littlest monkey. "The zookeeper didn't have enough money to look after the animals properly, so he just did the best he could. But they were always hungry, and all they wanted was to get out of their cages."

"Oh, I know just how they felt," said the Princess. "If I get out, I'll make sure there's enough money to look after all the animals properly. But who can help me?"

"I know!" said the littlest monkey.

Off went the littlest monkey. Soon she came back with the zookeeper, followed by all the other animals. The zookeeper opened up the cage and let the Princess out.

She was so glad to be out that she hugged the zookeeper and tickled the tiger under the chin.

The next day the Princess came to visit the zookeeper and they began planning new homes for all the animals.

There was a great big river for the hippo and the crocodile, a mountain for the mountain goats, and a huge park for the tigers and lions.

The littlest monkey now had a special playground with swings and slippery dips and flying foxes and trees to climb and a pool to paddle in.

The zookeeper and the Princess decided to get married and live at the zoo with all the animals.

And they all lived happily ever after.