

Folk Tales from Siam

The Men and the Monkeys

Once upon a time there was a great monkey hunter—and a very clever monkey...

In a forest near Chiangmai lived many monkeys. Day and night the forest rang with their chatter. Monkey hunters often came to catch them—to sell them to circuses or zoos, or to people who wanted them for pets, or to people who liked monkey stew. None of the monkeys which were caught had ever returned.

One morning a monkey hunter entered the forest with many traps. And in each he left a banana. The next morning the hunter found a monkey caught in each trap. They were screeching and screaming at the top of their lungs, as all monkeys do when they are trapped. Except for one. This monkey was sitting peacefully, making not the slightest sound. The hunter was surprised. Every monkey he had ever caught always made an awful racket.

As he put the monkeys in his wagon, they screamed and cried and begged to be let free. Except for this one. He was quiet and calm and did not even shed a single tear. In fact, he did not act like a monkey at all.

The hunter was very impressed.

When the hunter returned to his home with the monkeys, he sold some of them to a zoo, some to people who wanted to make monkey stew, and some to people who wanted them for pets. The rest he kept in a big cage in his house, because he also liked monkeys and he had more monkeys than anybody else in town. One of the monkeys he kept was the monkey who had impressed him so.

Every day he had his servants feed the monkeys. They grabbed at the food and fought among themselves for it, and screamed and cried and dashed about their cage. All except this unusual monkey, he sat quietly in a corner of the cage, never fought with the other monkeys and waited until they had eaten their fill before he slowly stepped forward and ate what was left. The hunter had never seen a monkey like him before and became very proud of him.

Once a week the hunter had his friends to his house for dinner and to see his monkeys. And all of them were amazed by this monkey who was so different from the rest. They said they had never seen any monkey like him. This pleased the hunter very much. And, as time passed, he became so proud of this monkey that he began to think of him as a friend.

“Why, he’s such a well behaved monkey I shouldn’t even have to keep him in the cage,” he told his friends one evening. “I could take him out and he could sit right here with us.”

“Yes, let him sit with us,” said his friends. “Yes, take him out.”

And that’s just what he did. But as soon as he put the monkey down, the monkey sprang toward an open window, dashed through it and raced back to the forest.

“I’m back, I’m back!” he cried. “I tricked the monkey hunter! I’m back!”

All the monkeys came scampering down from the trees and surrounded him. Never before had a captured monkey returned. They screamed and sang and danced around him.

“Tell us about men,” one of them chattered to him. “Yes, tell us,” chorused the others. For they were all anxious to know how men lived and this was the first of their kind to escape and be able

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to tell them.

The monkey scratched his chin and thought for a long moment. "I saw many men," he began.

"They visited the hunter's house every week."

"Tell us about them," the monkeys screamed. "Yes, do."

"Well, first of all, they talk a lot," he went on. "And they often talk at the same time too. They make an awful lot of noise."

"That's nothing," said the monkeys, making a fearful chatter. "Tell us, what else?"

"They eat and drink a lot too. In fact, they eat and drink almost as much as they talk."

"That's nothing," said the monkeys, munching on bananas and berries and gulping drinks of coconut milk.

"What else?"

"And they talk while they eat too. And play silly games. And throw away food that they don't want and just leave it lying around."

But some of the monkeys now were playing so noisily he could hardly be heard. And others began scampering about, chasing their tails. While others, tossing away their banana skins and coconut shells, began swinging through the trees.

"Wait," he called to them. "You haven't heard everything."

But the monkeys drifted away, chattering and playing. Men weren't interesting. In fact, they didn't seem to be any different from them.