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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle and the Ape Bridge (7/21)

Queen Ermintrude had never seen her husband so angry before that night. He was grinding his teeth with rage, calling everyone a fool, throwing his toothbrush at the palace cat, running around in his nightshirt, and waking up his whole army to send them into the jungle to capture the doctor. Then he sent all of his servants – his cooks, gardeners, barber, and Prince Bumpo's teacher – even the queen, who was tired from dancing in tight shoes, was ordered to help the soldiers in their search.

All the while, the doctor and his animals ran as fast as they could through the forest towards the Land of the Apes.

Gub-Gub the pig had short legs and quickly became tired, so the doctor had to carry him. This made it quite difficult because they also had the suitcase and handbag with them.

The King of Jolliginki thought it would be easy for his army to find them since the doctor was in a strange land and wouldn't know the way. But he was completely wrong. The monkey Chee-Chee knew all the paths through the jungle – even better than the king's men. And he led the doctor and his pets to the thickest part of the forest – a place where no one had ever been –

and hid them all in a large hollow tree between high rocks.

"We better wait here," said Chee-Chee, "until the soldiers go back to bed. Then we can go on to the Land of the Apes." So they stayed there all night.

They often heard the king's men searching and talking in the jungle around them. But they were very safe because no one knew that hiding place except Chee-Chee. Even the other Apes didn't know the spot.

Finally, as the daylight began to shine through the thick leaves above them, they heard Queen Ermintrude say in a very tired voice that there was no point in searching anymore and they might as well go back and get some sleep.

Once all the soldiers had gone home, Chee-Chee brought the doctor and his animals out of the hiding place, and they headed to the Land of the Apes.

It was a long, long way, and they became very tired, especially Gub-Gub the pig. But when he cried, they gave him milk from coconuts, which he loved.

They always had plenty to eat and drink along the way because Chee-Chee and Polynesia knew all the different kinds of fruits and vegetables that grow in the jungle, and they knew where to find them.

Delicacies like dates, figs, peanuts, ginger, and yams were abundant. They made their lemonade from the juice of wild oranges, sweetened with honey they took from bee nests in hollow trees. Whatever they asked for, Chee-Chee and Polynesia seemed to be able to get it for them or something like it. One day they even gave the doctor some tobacco to smoke.

At night, they slept in tents made of palm leaves, on thick, soft beds of dried grass. And after a while, they got used to walking so much and were no longer as tired and enjoyed traveling.

But they were always glad when night fell and they could stop to rest. Then the doctor would make a fire from branches. After they had eaten, they sat around it in a circle, listening to Polynesia singing songs about the sea, or to Chee-Chee telling stories about the jungle. And many of the stories that Chee-Chee told were very interesting. Although the Apes did not have their own history books before Doctor Dolittle began writing them, they remembered everything that happened by telling stories to their children. And Chee-Chee spoke of many things that his grandmother had told him - stories from long, long, long ago, before Noah and the Flood, - about the time when men dressed in bear skins and lived in caves in the rock and ate their mutton raw because they did not know what cooking was. They had never seen fire back then.

He also spoke of the great mammoths and lizards, as long as a train, that roamed through the mountains at that time, nibbling the treetops. And often they were all so interested in listening that only when the story was over did they discover that their fire had gone out. Then they had to rush around to find more branches and build a new fire.

When the king's army had returned and told the king that they could not find the doctor, the king sent them out again and told them to stay in the jungle until they had caught him. So all that time, while the doctor and

his animals were going to the Land of the Apes and feeling completely safe, they were still being followed by the king's men. If Chee-Chee had known this, he would probably have hidden them again. But he didn't know....

One day Chee-Chee climbed a high rock and looked out over the treetops. And when he came down, he said they were now quite close to the Land of the Apes and would soon be there.

And that same evening they did indeed see Chee-Chee's cousin and a lot of other Apes, who were not yet sick, sitting in the trees on the edge of a swamp, watching and waiting for them. And when they really saw the famous doctor coming, these Apes made a tremendous noise. They cheered and waved leaves and swung from the branches to greet him.

They wanted his bag and his suitcase and everything he was carrying - and one of the bigger Apes even carried Gub-Gub, who had become tired again. Then two of the Apes ran ahead to tell the sick Apes that the great doctor had finally come.

But the king's men, who were still chasing them, had heard the sound of the cheering Apes. They now finally knew where the doctor was and hurried to catch him.



The big Ape carrying Gub-Gub walked slowly at the back and saw the captain of the army sneaking through the trees. So he hurried after the doctor and told him to run away.

Then they all ran harder than they had ever run in their lives. The king's men, who were chasing them, also started to run and the captain ran the hardest of all. Then the doctor stumbled over his medicine bag and fell in the mud, and the captain thought he would surely catch him this time.

But it so happened that the captain had very long ears, although his hair was very short. And when he jumped forward to grab the doctor, one of his ears got stuck in a tree and the rest of the army had to stop and help him.

By that time the doctor had got up again, and they went on again, running and running. And Chee-Chee shouted, "It's all right! We don't have much farther to go now!"

But before they could reach the Land of the Apes, they came to a steep cliff with a river flowing underneath. This was the end of the kingdom of Jolliginki. The Land of the Apes was on the other side - across the river. Jip the dog looked down over the edge of the very steep cliff and said, "Good heavens, how are we ever going to get across?"

"Oh dear!" said Gub-Gub. "The king's men are very close now, look at them! I'm afraid we'll be taken back to prison." And he began to cry again.

But the big ape who was carrying the pig promptly dropped him to the ground and shouted to the other apes:

"Boys - a bridge! Quickly! - Make a bridge! We only have a minute to do it. They've let go of the captain and he's coming as fast as a deer. Get to work, get to work! A bridge! A bridge!"

The doctor began to wonder what they were going to make the bridge out of, and he looked around to see if there were any planks hidden somewhere.

But when he looked back at the cliff, there was a bridge hanging there on the other side of the river, ready for him. A bridge made of living apes! Because while he had his back turned, the apes had - very quickly - made a bridge, simply by holding onto each other's hands and feet.

And the big ape shouted to the doctor, "Walk across it! Walk across it - all of you - hurry!"

Gub-Gub was a little afraid to walk on such a narrow bridge, at such a dizzy height above the river. But he made it across safely, and so did they all.

John Dolittle was the last to cross. And just as he reached the other side, the king's men rushed to the edge of the cliff.

They shook their fists and screamed with anger.

Because they saw that they were too late. The doctor and all his animals had arrived safely in the Land of the Apes, and the bridge was pulled across to the other side.

Then Chee-Chee turned to the doctor and said:

"Many great explorers and naturalists with grey beards have hidden in the jungle for weeks, waiting to see the apes do that trick. But we've never let them catch a glimpse of it before. You are the first to see the famous 'Ape Bridge.'"

And the doctor was very pleased!