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When the Rowdy Monkeys Played Turtle

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Snug the boy-monkey was very fond of water. Not in the bathtub on a cold morning, mind you. He used no more than he really needed on his hands and face after romping in the fields. He loved water in big quantities: brooks, ponds, rivers.

He loved fast brooks where little wooden and birch-bark boats bobbed through the rapids and eddies and floated out of sight, perhaps to be found by some young monkey far downstream who would wonder where they'd come from.

He loved the ponds where frogs gave their spring concerts and turtles sunned themselves on driftwood just out of reach. He didn't like to bother the frogs, who were so timid and harmless. But a turtle dozing on a plank within easy throwing distance made a tempting target, and sometimes Snug tossed pebbles and green coconuts at them just for the fun of watching them waddle into the water.

Best of all he loved the river, because his father had a rowboat and was teaching him to swim. The lessons were going finely. Father-monkey had told him the secret: don't be afraid, keep your mouth shut, take deep breaths, and strike out slowly and steadily, like a frog's hind legs.

One warm afternoon Snug decided to take a swimming lesson all by himself, without permission, partly to prove he wasn't afraid, and partly because he knew he'd never be allowed if he asked.

So off he went. He put his clothes in the boat and waded along in the shallows, pushing it ahead of him and splashing happily.

Even good swimmers are careful in rivers. Swift currents and cold springs can scoop out deep holes near the shore and sandbars. Snug felt perfectly safe, with both hands gripping the back of the boat, until his footing suddenly vanished and his head was pulled under.

Sputtering, still gripping the boat, he dangled and drifted with the current for several minutes that felt like hours. He tried to climb in, but the little boat tipped and wobbled so much he nearly capsized it.

Then his feet touched bottom. In his relief at having something to stand on, Snug let go of the boat and waded ashore. The boat, with his clothes in it, went bobbing lightly off down the river, as if glad to be rid of its flopping, floundering

passenger.

There he stood on the riverbank with no clothes and no boat. He ran along the shore hoping a friendly current might nudge it back, but after a long chase he gave up and watched his best suit sail away toward the ocean, miles and miles below.

Then he noticed that it was nearly sunset. And he remembered: tonight was the evening parade and fireworks in the village.

He was far from home with nothing on, and the streets would be full of his friends, who would stare and laugh long before he could reach the shelter of his own house.

Snug trudged along hoping to find someone to help. But everybody had already gone to the village. At last he decided to hide in the bushes near the road home and wait until the coast was clear. The night breeze was growing chilly, so he was glad to crawl into an empty flour barrel. One end was open, and the other was broken in just enough that, by standing up, he could poke his head through and look around.

The hours of waiting were long. At last the parade and fireworks were over, and Snug set off for home with the barrel over him, stopping and ducking inside whenever he heard a noise. He reached an open field and thought it was safe to shed his wooden overcoat and make a dash for home.



Just then, around the corner came a gang of rowdy young monkeys. They saw the odd shape in the moonlight, and one of them shouted:

"Hi, look at the big turtle out for a stroll!"

Snug ducked his head inside just in time to miss a shower of green coconuts and stones. The gang kept up the game for several minutes, while the missiles banged and rattled against the barrel. When they tired of pelting the "big turtle," they came over, tipped the barrel on its side, and found the squirming monkey inside.

Snug tried to get out, but they surrounded him. "Let's give him a ride down the hill!" they shouted.

The field sloped toward the village. In a few seconds the barrel was spinning downhill with Snug tumbling and rolling inside, wondering what would happen when it finally stopped and let him use his legs again.

All the shouting brought a monkey-policeman around the corner just as the

barrel rolled slowly past and bumped to a stop against a post.

When the bruised, dizzy, unclothed Snug crawled out, the policeman grabbed him. He thought Snug was one of the rowdies who'd been causing trouble all evening. Before Snug could say who he was or how he came to be there, he was marched off to the lockup.

At home, nobody had worried at first. They'd guessed he was off following the parade. But when the fireworks ended and Snug didn't come back, they began to get anxious and ask around the neighbourhood.

About the time Snug was rolling downhill, a fisherman came into the village carrying a bundle of clothes and a frightening report. He'd found them in an empty boat drifting down the river miles away. Some monkey-boy had probably drowned.

Snug's father knew the suit at once. It belonged to his own precious Snuggie. He called his friends together, and a worried search party set off for the river.

In the lockup, the tired, sorry, half-dazed prisoner had been given an old coat and a blanket. He was trying to think how he could convince the policeman that he was Mr. Snuggleton-Monkey's only son and not a troublemaker, when the cell door opened and he heard someone say:

"Perhaps this is the young monkey you're looking for. He's obviously been swimming, even if he hasn't drowned. And he's had a good airing in a barrel, long enough to dry off."

In less time than it takes to tell, Snug was in his father's arms. With great rejoicing the search party escorted the grateful father and son home to Snug's anxious, nearly heartbroken mother.

The barrel was later sawed in half, down the middle and across the top, and made into an armchair. Snug's good mother padded it and covered it with bright cloth, so her dear little monkey could sit in it whenever he was tired and wanted to think about "playing turtle in a wooden overcoat."

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