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The Darling



Everyone assumed that this monkey would never have a young one. The other monkeys were sad even to look at her. She was very close to the birds and the animals. Then, when the rainy season came to a close, she found out she was expecting a young one. Everyone felt overjoyed.

The green parrot used to pray daily to the Almighty to give the monkey a young one. She told the monkey that God had answered her prayers. The old tortoise searched for medicinal plants in the deep woods and the blue. Now he boasted that it was his wonder-drug that gave the monkey a young one. The white rabbit used to be misty-eyed whenever he saw the monkey. He said softly that God was moved by his tears and showed mercy.

As everyone awaited eagerly, the monkey gave birth to a handsome baby. Losing herself in happiness the monkey danced on one leg. She climbed up the guava tree and plucked the red-cored fruit for her friends.

To the mother monkey, the young one was the apple of her eye. For fear of lice she would not keep it on her head. For fear of ants she would not keep it on the ground. She tested the fruits she plucked before giving them to the baby. She peeled off the rind and bit the fruit to small pieces for its mouth. She collected clear water from the riddle of the blue lake, in the leaf of the jack fruit tree for the baby. Wherever she went the cute baby clung to her. At night she hugged it to her bosom and sang lullabies. If a leaf so much as moved in the darkness she would keep vigil with her eyes wide open.

The old tortoise warned the mother that too much pampering would make the young one an utter dunce. As everyone gathered outside the white rabbits hole, the parrot asked the mother not to pamper the young one and spoil it. As she had bitten a wild red chilli, the green parrot's beak turned deep red.

The mother monkey answered with a smile. 'He is very intelligent. Some day my darling baby will become the king of the jungle'.

The big eyes of the doe opened wider. The tortoise burst out laughing. The white rabbit laughed till he had tears in his eyes. The little squirrel gave his best wishes to the mother's hope of seeing her young one become the king of the jungle.

The mother's boast reached the ears of the spotted leopard who was hoping day in and day out to be the king. His anger was uncontrollable.

The spotted leopard was an awful bully. If he opened his mouth and let out a cry, huge trees would shiver. Even a wild tusker would die if he dexterously swung his arm to hit its forehead. The leopard feared that using his intelligence, the scrawny monkey would become the king. He was furious that even otherwise he could not overtake the lion and the elephant to become the lord of all the animals.

The leopard thought that he should scare the cute baby monkey and gain the respect of the forest. He awaited an occasion to trick the little one.

One day the mother monkey left her young one on a rock and went to take a dip in the blue lake. The spotted leopard was hiding in the wild grass. It stood and watched the mother mon-

key make the dip. The mother looked around and ensured that there was no danger. She closed her eyes, covered her ears and immersed herself into the water. The leopard leapt out in a flash and lifting the little monkey he fled like lightning that grazes the tree-tops.

“Kree... Kree... Kree”. From below the water the mother heard the cry. She leapt ashore. Her baby was gone. She heard the cry fade away into the deep forest. She stood numb not knowing what to do. Then she shrieked and rushed in the direction of the shrill cries of her young one. She had even forgotten to shake the water off her body.

The cry of the little monkey filled the forest. The tiny squirrel became mute. He could not even move his tail. The white rabbit saw the leopard racing away with the little monkey. He beat his breast and wailed. The leopard kept running.

The leopard was used to climbing rocks and trees. He reached the mountain top in no time. The poor mother monkey fell many times as she pursued the leopard. She rose frantically only to fall again.

As he sat atop the mountain, with the young monkey, the leopard had a mischievous idea. He pushed the young one towards the mother who was climbing up. The little monkey had not mastered the climbing up. The little monkey had not mastered the climbing skills of its elders. The poor thing fell on a rock. The mother could not save it. The baby's head dashed against a sharp stone and it writhed in front of its mother's very eyes. Seeing the little one bathed in blood, the mother fainted. The young monkey fell dead at its mother's feet.

The leopard never anticipated this turn of events. He merely wanted to expose to the world the 'courage' of the monkey who would be king. Sensing trouble, the leopard quietly climbed down the mountain and headed for the interior of the forest.

SAMPLE TEXT FROM A DUEL IN THE FOREST BY BANU SAFER MOHAMMAD
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