



## The Monkey Bridge

Once, in the mountains of the Himalaja, a giant monkey ruled over eighty thousand monkeys. Through the rocks, where they lived, flows the Ganges, before reaching the valley where the cities lie. And there, where the sparkling water falls from rock to rock, stood a magnificent tree. In spring it carried tender white flowers; and later he was laden with such wonderful fruits, as there were no others, and the sweet winds of the mountain gave them the sweetness of honey.

How happy were the monkeys! They ate from the fruits and lived in the shadow of the wonderful tree. From one side of the tree the branches extended over the water. When the flowers opened, the monkeys ate or destroyed them on those branches, so that no fruit could grow on them. And if there still grew one, they plucked it, even when it was not greater than the heart of a flower, because her chief, who was aware of the danger, had warned them. He said: 'Beware, that no fruit falls into the water, the river will carry them to the city, where the humans will, once they have eaten the fruit, will search for the tree. They will come along the river up to the mountains and find the tree. Then they will pluck all fruits and we will have to flee from here.'

So the monkeys obeyed and for a long time no fruit fell into the water. But the day came that a ripe fruit, covered by an ant's nest among the leaves, fell into the water and was carried away by the current of the river, down the rocky hills, until the valley in which the great city Benares lay, on the shores of the Ganges.

That day, when the fruit swam before the city of Benares, driven by the little waves of the river, bathed King Brahmadata in the waters of the Ganges, between two nets, held by a few fishermen. He dived and swam and played with the little sunrays caught in the water. The fruit was carried along into one of the nets.

'Wonderful!' exclaimed the fisherman who saw it first. 'Where on earth grows a fruit like this one?' And he took it and showed it with sparkling eyes to the king.

Brahmadatta wondered and admired the beauty of that fruit. 'Where might that tree stand, which carries such fruits?' he asked himself. He called some foresters at the near riverbank and asked them, if they knew about this fruit and where one could find it.

'Sir,' they said, it is a mango, a wonderful mango. A fruit as this does not grow in a valley like ours, but high up in the mountains of the Himalaja, where the air is pure and the sunrays clear. Without doubt this mango-tree stands at the riverbank, a fruit fell into the water and was carried until here.'

The king ordered his servants to taste the fruit, and after they had done so, he also ate and gave some to his ministers and courtiers. 'Indeed', they said, such a fruit is divine, none other is like this one'.

Days and nights passed, and Brahmadata became more and more restless. The longing to taste once more such a fruit, grew stronger, the more days passed. At night he saw the miraculous tree in his dreams, and on each branch he saw a hundred golden cups full of honey and nectar.

'This cannot go on! We must find the tree!', said the king one day and gave order to prepare a boat, to sail up the Ganges, up to the mountains of the Himalaja, where one could find this tree. Brahmadata himself also joined the journey.

And the journey was long, it led them along the flower and rice fields, but one evening the king and the crew reached the mountains of the Himalaja. They stared into the horizon, and what did they see? There, in the moonlight stood the desired tree, and its golden fruits sparkled through the leaves.

But what was it that moved there between the branches? What strange shadows hushed through the leaves? 'Look!' said one of them, 'it is a troop of monkeys'.

'Monkeys!' exclaimed the king, 'and they eat the fruit! Surround the tree, so that they cannot escape. At dawn we will shoot them, and then we eat their flesh and the mangoes.'

These words came to the ears of the monkeys. Trembling they said to their leader: 'Aye! You warned us, beloved chief, but some fruits might still have fallen into the water, because humans have come here. They surround our tree and we cannot escape, the distance between this tree and the next is too far to jump over. We heard a human say: 'At dawn we will shoot them and eat their flesh and mangoes.'

'I will save you, my little ones!' said the chief, 'fear not, but do as I say'. So the mighty chief comforted them and climbed to the highest branch of the tree. And fast as the wind shooing through the rocks, he jumped a hundred bows and landed on a tree at the opposite riverbank. There, at the edge of the water, he took a long cane with the roots and thought: 'I will bind one end of the cane to this tree, and the other to my foot. Then I will jump back onto the mango-tree to build a bridge, over which my people can flee. Hundred bows I have jumped. The cane is much longer than a hundred bows, so that I can tie its end to this tree.' His heart was full of joy, and he jumped back to the mango-tree.

But aye! The cane was too short, and he could only grasp the end of a branch. He had not thought that the cane would need to be longer to bind it to his foot. With a mighty effort he clinged to the branch and called his eighty thousand subjects and said: 'Walk over my back to the cane, and you will be safe!'

One after the other the monkeys walked over him to the cane. But one among them, Devadatta by name, jumped heavily on his back. Aye! A piercing pain flashed through the body of the monkey chief, his back was broken! And the heartless Devadatta run along and left his chief back alone, suffering.

Brahamdatta had seen it all, and tears were running down his cheeks, as he stared at the broken monkey chief. He ordered that he be taken from the tree, to which he kept clinging. He bathed him in the sweetest scents, clad him in a yellow robe and made him drink sweet water. When the chief was bathed and clothed, they made a bed for him below the tree. The king sat at his said and spoke to him. He said: 'You made of your body a bridge for others. Did you not know that your life would end here, if you did so? You gave your life to save your followers. Who are you, blessed one, and who are they?'

'Oh King', answered the monkey, 'I am their chief and leader. They lived with me in this tree, and I was their father and I loved them. I do not suffer when I have to leave

this world, as I have saved the freedom of my subjects. And if my death can be a lesson for you, then I am more than happy. It is not your sword, which makes you a king, it is love alone. Do not forget, that your life is only little what you give, when with your sacrifice you can assure the happiness of your subjects.

Do not rule with power over them, because they are your subjects; rule over them with love, because they are your children. Only this way you are really a king. When I will be no more, do not forget my words, o Brahmadata!

The blessed one then closed his eyes and passed away.

The king and his people mourned him, and the king built a temple for him, pure and white, so that his words should never be forgotten.

And Brahmadata ruled with love over his people and they were happy ever after.