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Monkey Kingdom

By Mark Linfield

The wilds of Sri Lanka,
land of myth and legend.
Where rocky pinnacles overlook
vast tropical forests.
And an abandoned city
lies shrouded in jungle.
The kings who once reigned
here are long gone.
These days, there's a new
dynasty in residence.
But this one is governed by
the law of the jungle.
I know what you're thinking.
"Being a macaque monkey
is just fun and games."
But, actually,
it's an intricate society
of 50 members
bound together
by a strict social order.
In this troop,
every waking moment
is a reminder of your place.
From a seemingly
innocent greeting.
Oh! He'll learn.
To your choice
of sleeping branch.
Upper class,
basking in the morning sun.
Lower class,
shivering in the cold.
Your social rank
even determines
what you can eat.
Nowhere is that clearer
than here.
The kingdom's
most prized fig tree.
Only those at the top
of the social ladder
can eat at the top of the tree
where the ripest fruit
is found.

And at the very top,
the alpha male himself,
Raja.
He is the king
of Monkey Kingdom.
See that move?
That's macaque for "Back off."
Raja arrived from the outside
and fought his way to the top.
So, you know,
he's earned the pampering.
But, if he wants to stay
on top,
he's gotta keep
the real power brokers happy.
The three females
on the other high branches.
The queens behind the king.
The Sisterhood.
Whether you remember them
by their red faces
or their ruthless natures,
you will remember them.
These ladies
get what they want.
Their children
get what they want.
Everything that is good
in the forest
is reserved for them.
Like royalty,
they were born into privilege,
and that's the way
it's gonna stay.
Do not get on their bad side.
Descending the tree,
we descend the social ladder.
With each branch,
the fruit is less ripe,
and the monkey lower in rank.
Until,
at the bottom,
the heroine of this story,
Maya.

Maya's got big, friendly eyes,
three distinctive spots
on her nose,
and, I think you'll agree,
a pretty rad hairdo.
She was born eight years ago,
at the bottom of the troop,
just like her mother.
And her mother before that.
When you're at the bottom,
you're either in the way,
or you don't even exist.
But every day,
you're paying your dues
to monkeys like Raja
without any chance
of promotion.
And so,
back under the fig tree,
Maya takes whatever scraps
fall her way.
A low-born like herself simply
can't improve her position
or dream of eating
from a higher branch.
Yet this is the story
of how Maya fights
to beat the odds
and make a better life.
For Maya and the troop,
home is Castle Rock,
a magnificent granite outcrop
at the center of the kingdom.
It's the most sought-after
residence for miles around.
It's a pretty sweet
neighborhood.
Sweeping views
of their territory
are perfect
for spotting rivals.
It's got plenty of rec rooms,
nature's finest roof,
and, of course,

the original jungle gym.
The monkeys think
they own this rock
but there are some tenants.
There's a mongoose
in the building.
Day after day
they ask him to play.
And his answer is always,
"No, thank you."
But rejection only increases
their determination.
They will play
with this mongoose
if it is the last thing
they do.
Nothing will stop them.
Even his absence.
Continuing their search...
"Sloth bear!"
"It's cool."
I knew he was in there.
"Just a bear."
Mama sloth bear
is keeping her cubs cool,
rehydrating them with
her saliva.
She's also keeping her cubs
safe from
this guy,
the unwelcome suitor outside.
Mama keeps her cubs well hidden
until he leaves, or...
That'll do.
He's not dead.
He's just asleep.
Every morning,
the troop leaves Castle Rock
to scour the forest
for breakfast.
Maya can't afford
to be a picky eater.
Don't worry.
Bambi's not on the menu.

And this squirrel won't seem
to give up his food. Oh.
But, uh,
maybe this is promising.
Ugh.
At nearly 40 years old,
Grandpa only moves
when the group tells him
it's worthwhile.
That's monkey-speak
for "Jackpot!"
But guess who got there first.
Mushrooms are like
potato chips for the sisters.
Once they start,
they just can't stop.
Maya waits. This is what
it means to be last in line.
By the time your turn comes,
there's nothing left.
Midday, a scorcher.
Too much lunch.
It's already Grandpa's
fourth nap of the day.
Raja and the sisters
enjoy the sweet dreams
of the high-born.
Maya, on the other hand...
The sisters' kids
don't feel like napping.
Maya makes
the best play structure.
She'd love to object,
but one swat
at the sisters' kids
and there would be big trouble.
Maya just has to take it.
Even if they use her tail
as a rope swing.
That's gotta hurt.
"Guys, don't mess
with the hair."
At just one month old,
these kids already know

Maya's place.
And it's not up there.
So they can poke Maya
in the eye repeatedly.
And forage for food
inside her mouth!
That's rude.
Maya will never know
the sweet life,
but she does get a break
occasionally.
To de-stress, macaques visit
their less
sophisticated cousins,
the langurs,
treating them like pets.
Seems to lower the blood
pressure and calm the nerves.
The langurs don't mind.
In fact,
they may not even notice.
Not the sharpest tools
in the shed,
these guys.
And if you want a super fun,
stimulating playmate,
you might have to keep looking.
Now, on the other hand,
a group of intelligent monkeys
is very hard to sneak up on.
Even engrossed in grooming,
Maya has the eyes of her troop
looking out for danger.
The alarm is sounded.
The close escape
is a chilling reminder for Maya
of why she can never leave
her group.
Life at the bottom may be hard,
but striking out on her own
would be too dangerous.
While Maya can't leave,
that doesn't mean something
good can't come to her.

His name is Kumar.
15 pounds of hunky monkey.
Like all young males,
this dashing newcomer
left his birth troop
to find a permanent home.
Maya sizes him up.
Kumar is giving Maya the eye.
If Raja catches Kumar flirting,
he'll drive the newcomer away.
Kumar can't get kicked out now.
It's courtship season.
Males throughout the forest
are pulling out their
best moves.
Kumar is no exception.
But he's got a problem.
There's that Raja again,
guarding Maya for himself.
If Kumar knows
what's good for him,
he'll stay under the radar.
"Nobody here, nope."
"I'm just waiting
for a friend."
Maya is smart enough
to pretend not to care.
Raja's position as alpha
gives him first rights
in all things.
Raja won't give Maya
the time of day.
Then, when she's finally
got an admirer,
guess who's hanging around.
Oh, sure. Now he's interested.
Come on, Kumar.
Just play it cool, man.
Kumar needs to try
something different.
Like, maybe, I don't know, uh,
the exact same thing from
the other side of the tree.
No matter. Maya knows raw

potential when she sees it.
Finally, with Raja distracted,
she takes matters
into her own hands.
"Where'd she go? What?
Wait a minute."
Raja knows he's been tricked.
Kumar would be wise to lay low.
Instead, he boldly strides
back into the group,
straight up to Raja.
His henchmen lend their muscle.
Kumar is expelled.
Maya watches him retreat.
This means goodbye.
Maya returns under Raja's
hostile stare.
It's back to business as usual,
or so it would seem.
Six months later,
something has happened
that changes everything.
Maya has given birth
to Kumar's son.
Welcome to the world, Kip.
Maya is consumed
by unconditional love.
She is lost in her infant.
To keep her milk flowing,
Maya no longer has the option
of skipping meals.
And with Kumar gone,
keeping Kip safe won't be easy.
The sisters enjoy
a network of nannies,
not to mention
paternal support.
Maya will have to do this
on her own.
Now more than ever,
Maya must overcome her rank
and beat the system.
Her son's future depends on it.
Little Kip has arrived

just in time
for monsoon season.
If you thought taking care of
a newborn baby was hard,
try doing it during weeks
and weeks of downpour.
Castle Rock would make
an ideal shelter
for an infant,
but it's reserved for the VIPs,
whose firsthand experience
of rain
is limited.
Kip would be much better off
under there.
Maya can only shake it off,
and try to prevent Kip
from getting dangerously cold.
Few of the kingdom's creatures
enjoy the rain.
At least the elephants get to
apply wet mud to their backs,
which works like sunscreen
when it dries.
Monsoon winds blowing off
the Himalayas
have brought more rain
in the last few weeks
than in the rest
of the year combined.
The water soaks deep
into the ground.
In a few months
it'll bring a glut of fruit.
But, before that...
It happens for a just
a few hours every year.
Thousands of winged termites
take to the air
to found new colonies.
For the macaques,
it's every holiday meal
rolled into one.
For Maya,

termites have the two best
qualities in a food source,
they are delicious,
and they are everywhere.
Even the sisters can't keep
this feast to themselves.
Maya has her very own
mound today.
And more food for Maya
means more milk for Kip.
Patience, little one.
Everyone in the kingdom
shows up for termite day.
Even scorpions gather
as much as they can
to stock the pantry.
Finally, Kip got his fill.
The termite feast comes
but once a year,
which leaves Maya
with 364 other days
to provide for her son.
Her growing son.
Kip is getting older,
reaching that age
when he starts to realize
he's part of a larger world.
Meanwhile, he's this close
to understanding that his skin
is actually attached
to his face.
Like any mother,
Maya probably wants
to freeze her child in time.
This, right now,
this is the perfect age.
Insects.
Plants.
The laws of physics.
They'll make sense in time.
It's monkeys
that are confusing.
Infants get a pass
to be annoying

in their early weeks.
Older monkeys just have to
look the other way.
Sometimes it's extremely hard.
But not everyone
plays by the rules.
Like the sisters and Raja.
Especially not for Maya's kid.
And so,
Kip discovers his place.
With termite season long gone,
cassia flowers
are what's on the menu.
For Raja, the sisters,
and their children, that is.
To feed herself and Kip today,
Maya will have to get creative.
Maya's nothing, if not scrappy.
She's got a plan B.
With other hungry monkeys
in tow,
Maya takes the lead.
It's an opportunity
the high-born
wouldn't even recognize.
The lily pond is a spot
known for predators.
But today,
the coast seems clear.
Maya digs in, harvesting
the seed pods of water lilies.
Grandpa will sit this one out.
When the easy pickings
are gone,
you've gotta get
a bit more adventurous.
Maya treads carefully.
It's Maya who makes
the first move
into the deeper waters.
Kip will go along for the ride.
The younger monkeys follow.
But even the bravest hesitate
over this next incredible step.

Did you know
monkeys could swim?
For Kip,
it's been a day of firsts.
First swim lesson,
first lily-seed pod
and now, this.
A monitor lizard.
7 feet long,
a deadly ambush predator.
His most lethal weapon,
the element of surprise.
Maya hasn't spotted the lizard.
In the chaos,
Maya has gotten Kip to safety.
But not before one of their
own has fallen.
After a night spent
wet, cold, and shaken,
the low-born recover.
Maya isn't sleeping in.
She's got a growing son
to feed.
Maya finds a patch
of caterpillars,
perfect for enriching her milk.
Kip should be eating
soon enough.
The sisters believe any food
patch is their food patch.
They mount an attack,
driving Maya away from her son.
Kip is stolen away.
Maya receives
her brutal punishment.
And Kip is carried off
into the forest.
Hours pass, and still,
Maya is looking for her son.
On the far side
of the ruined city,
the sisters keep Kip close.
Maya calls for her lost son.
Finally, the sisters

lose interest,
and Kip is free to leave.
Kip is lost
and dangerously exposed.
Maya has been patrolling
the territory for hours,
straining to hear
her son's calls.
At last.
This ordeal is over.
The lessons of yesterday
are clear.
Maya will need another way
to feed her son.
She must head
into uncharted territory.
For today's mission,
she brings backup,
leaving Kip safely behind
with a fellow low-ranker.
The upside to this score
could be enormous,
but so are the risks.
The predator encountered
at the edge of the forest
is unpredictable and loud.
The humans.
Maya gets a glimpse.
"Oh! They're terrifying!"
"Hmm."
"Chickens. Very small brains."
"Will they notice
if we take their eggs?"
The lookout gives the signal.
"All clear!"
"In. Confirming we are in."
"No one will ever know
we were here."
"We are like ninjas."
"They're coming.
Quick, last chance!"
"Mmm. I like pink flavor."
"Is this even food?"
"I don't care!"

"Leave nothing behind,
eat it all!"
"Mm, this is good!"
"Oh, this is delicious!"
"Mm, cake. Love cake!"
"Abort mission!"
"Happy birthday, kid."
Back in the forest,
Maya is reunited with Kip.
The underclass
will retire for the night
with an unfamiliar sensation
in their bellies.
Fullness.
Yesterday's raid can't be
a regular thing.
Maya needs long-term security
for her son.
The next morning,
a lone male surveys
the edge of the kingdom.
Maya will not be
expecting this.
Kumar is back.
He's grown stronger
and smarter in exile.
The young boys are playing,
training for the day
they leave the troop
and attempt Kumar's journey.
This could be the opening
he's been looking for.
A way to ingratiate himself
with the troop
and heal old wounds.
Maya has spotted him.
Finally, they are reunited.
And for the first time,
Kumar meets his son.
But if Maya's man wants
to stay, he's got work to do.
Step one, befriend the alpha's
lieutenants.
Step two,

put in some grooming time.
Soon, Kumar can sit back,
and the others come to him.
But this all means nothing
without the alpha's support.
Step three,
make up with Raja.
Kumar's opportunity arrives
in the form of
jackfruit.
Sloth bears have the best
noses in the forest,
so they always find it first.
Bad-tempered bears usually
keep monkeys away,
but jackfruit makes you
forget your place.
The sisters are quick
to remind you, though.
Because jackfruit isn't
just fruit. It's politics.
If Kumar's learned anything,
he won't steal something
out from under the alpha's
nose again.
No matter how good
that fruit looks.
Maya can only watch
as the fate of Kip's father
hangs in the balance.
Kumar makes a move,
but it's not for the fruit.
He offers his hand
in friendship.
And so, Maya's man earns
a seat at the table.
Raja will soon need
Kumar's strength on his side.
A rival group is sizing up
Castle Rock.
Lex, the leader of
this battle-hardened team.
Raja assesses the threat.
Maya moves Kip to safety.

Raja and the other males
must defend the troop
from invaders.
Branch shaking
is a full-on threat.
In the heat of the moment,
Raja leaves the high ground,
leading his troop
to the enemy.
Playing right into Lex's hands.
The home team follows,
answering Raja's call
for support.
The battle is on.
The combat drifts further
from the rock
and into the jungle.
Sensing easy victory,
the home team is drawn
even further still.
Lex is lying in wait.
The enemy is ready.
Raja's confused.
He can only see one invader.
Time for Lex's crew
to finish the job.
The home team is cornered.
Raja's troop runs for its life.
Castle Rock has a new king.
Raja is wounded.
Leaving the rock and taking
the fight to Lex
was a costly error.
His position as alpha
is on shaky ground now.
Kumar has his own battle scars.
But today, there is worse.
The troop lost
one of their own.
Maya had known this male
for years.
It's as though she
and the others understand
that this is farewell.

They haven't just lost
a friend today,
they've lost their rock castle
and the kingdom that sustained
them for generations.

Maya pushes on
as Kumar chaperones Kip.
Finally, Maya has some
protection for her son.
But the troop is vulnerable.
There's nothing to eat
or drink here,
and Lex's crew could return
to finish them off.
They must keep moving.
Remember him?

The low-born know a monitor,
even out of water,
and sound the alarm.

The nobility isn't familiar
with this creature,
because they never needed
to visit the lily pond.

For once, out in this alien
no man's land,
the commoners have the edge.

For Maya,
the lizard is nothing more
than a fleeting distraction.

With Kip in tow,
she presses on,
and the group
falls into line behind her.

The forest edge
is unfamiliar terrain.

Finally, a place to regroup.
But plover birds don't want
the monkeys near their eggs.

The sisters are on the
receiving end for once
and they do not like it.

Kumar leads Kip to cover
while Maya forges ahead.

Maya is the most equipped

for this challenge.
She knows some stuff about
looking for food
in dangerous places.
The first stop is a bust.
Maya keeps moving.
Adversity is nothing new
for this girl.
Not so for Raja.
Others take the lead now.
The sisters are bewildered.
Even Grandpa fares better.
When the troop finally enters
the urban jungle,
they are ravenous.
Using her instincts,
Maya leads them to the market.
Kumar makes the first move.
He makes it look easy.
His students watch and learn.
Maya is in the thick
of the action
while Kip stays safe above.
The sisters get an A
for effort.
Sure, there's some learning
to be done.
Progress, not perfection.
With stomachs full,
the troop can explore
whatever else the city
has to offer.
A seat for Grandpa.
A little drink from this thing.
"Oh, boy!"
"What is that?"
"It's furry,
about the size of a langur."
"Do you speak monkey?"
"Dude, what are you?"
"It likes being groomed."
Okay, maybe man's best friend
is also monkey's best friend.
"No, it's because we like to

bite each other's tails.
"Is that not a thing... Okay."
"Think he'll let me ride him?"
"Same time tomorrow?"
Our troop has sampled
city cuisine.
Kip has even met the wildlife.
All that's left
is a place to stay.
High above the palm.
Now, that's a sleeping tree.
Kumar leads them up.
The troop settles in
for the night, nice and cozy.
Hmm. Well, it's actually
not that cozy.
Okay, not at all.
What Maya and Kip wouldn't give
for their wooden branch
at home.
At least it's quiet.
"You're kidding, right?"
"It's gonna be a long night."
Nope, this won't do at all.
Castle Rock is home.
But before the troop
can win it back,
they have to build up
their reserves
for the tough fight ahead.
This will require a focused
assault on the town.
Wounds healed
and strength regained,
the troop is ready to head home
and reclaim
what's rightfully theirs.
Together, on the edge of
their territory,
they wash away the city
and relish the jungle
all around them.
The line between high-born
and low-born remains blurred.

It may not stay this way
forever, but for now,
it's enough.
Kip and his new friends
seem happy to be back.
But Maya can't relax yet.
The hardest part
of the journey lies ahead.
Kumar leads the troop home.
Maya and Kip
follow him closely.
The sisters, still humbled
from their time in the city,
trail behind them.
Raja is no longer at the front.
Kumar has Castle Rock
in his sights.
The enemy is home.
Lex senses something is wrong.
Kumar remains hidden.
Maya has left Kip at the rear
and is close behind.
The soldiers assume
their positions.
The enemy still hasn't
seen Kumar,
and the troop is nearly set.
Lex can see movement,
but can't know what's coming.
Grandpa is going in.
Kumar makes his move.
Not good for Lex.
Maya is on the front line.
Go, Grandpa!
Soon, our troop
scales Castle Rock.
Kumar lays his claim
as king of this castle.
Overpowered,
Lex and his team retreat.
Finally, the troop is home.
For Maya and the troop,
it's great to be back.
First, the jungle gym.

Yup, still good.
Then, it's time to catch up
with old friends.
And let's not forget
you-know-who.
It's pretty obvious that
he has missed them.
Now,
street smart from the town,
they collect rent
from their tenants.
"Look, we're all reasonable
forest creatures here.
"We're not gonna eat you,
"but we are gonna eat
your fruit.
"So, hand it over."
The youngsters have grown
in confidence
since their urban adventure.
Especially Kip,
whose curiosity has blossomed.
Castle Rock remains
a stronghold for our troop
as a year passes,
and another monsoon season
comes and goes.
The precious fig tree
is back in fruit.
And this time, Maya is in it.
These days, Maya enjoys a new
acceptance by the sisters.
Then again,
some things never change.
Yeah, yeah, you're still
a big deal. We get it.
The sisters are still
attended to by Raja,
but he's lost their support.
Whereas Grandpa
just keeps on going,
a role model for generations
of young monkeys.
Kip is now a well-fed

and healthy little boy.
He has a knack
for making friends,
and an independence
that is growing by the day.
Kip isn't just surviving,
he's thriving.
Kumar, now the alpha
of the troop,
snuggles against Maya
and their brand new baby girl.
This infant's future
will be secure.
She will know nothing
of the struggle
once endured by her brother.
Kip now has a vibrant future
ahead of him,
thanks to his mother.
Against all odds,
Maya made this possible.
I think he's chasing
for the jeeps.
A little bit angry, eh?
I'm getting nice little...
They've just started emerging.
You can see them behind me.
We've had a little bit of rain,
and it has obviously softened
up the termite mounds.
Some of them are coming out,
and the monkeys
are just picking them off.
About 17 weeks
we've been waiting for that.
It feels like we've been
filming here for six years.
What makes this
more exciting is
it's not just mongooses
that live down here.
About four weeks ago,
we saw a cobra
going in and out.

We're coming.