

THE MAGIC SPELL

By SERMANITA MANGILAYA *



MANY YEARS ago there was a chieftain who had a handsome son named Ukay. The young man was gentle and kind, and spent many hours each day wandering in the meadows and forest, making friends with the birds and the wild animals. As he grew older he became friendly with the animals, and even learned to talk with some of them.

In the forest where Ukay liked to roam there lived a wicked witch. She amused herself by sticking thorns into the monkeys' hands and feet, by putting red ants into birds' nests to destroy the young birds, and by sending flies to torture the panting deer.

Now, strange as it may seem, when this witch saw Ukay growing taller and handsomer each day she fell in love with him and wished to marry him. She made herself young and beautiful in order to win his love, but the young man

knew it was the witch of the forest. He remembered her cruelty to the animals and would have nothing to do with her.

"If you care more for monkeys than you do for me," she said, "go to them and be a monkey like them, and all your people with you." Saying these words, she cast a magic spell over the whole village, turning the houses into trees and all the people into monkeys. To Ukay she said, "You thought more of kindness to animals than you did of me. Never shall you regain your own human shape until some human being does you a deed of kindness."

Many years passed and in time another village grew up close to the forest that had once been the realm of Ukay's father. A church was built, and then the wicked witch was obliged to leave, for magic cannot exist near the holy cross.

Poor Ukay, now a monkey in form, longed to be a man again, but whenever he went near the villagers they stoned him and drove him away. One day as he sat in a tree, he saw a lovely young girl come out of the church and walk toward his tree. She sat down in its shade and burst into tears.

Up to that moment Ukay had been hoping for human kindness toward himself. Now, as he saw this poor girl crying, the tears came to his own eyes. He clambered down to her and put his monkey head on her shoulder. In his sympathy for her sorrow he quite forgot that he was no longer a man—only a monkey.

The girl jumped in horror as the monkey touched her. Then, as she lost

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her fear, she looked at Ukay more closely. She saw how cruelly the stones thrown by the villagers had bruised his poor body. Her lips trembled as she said, "Poor monkey! They have hurt your body as they have hurt my feelings. Come, let me take you home and I will bathe your bruises." To show her kind feeling, she patted him on the head. At that moment Ukay gave a great leap of joy, for a human being had at last been kind to him. The girl was astounded to see a handsome young man dressed in rich clothes. She could not understand until Ukay told her about the magic spell. Besides, all the inhabitants of the former village were released from the magic spell and they all became people again.

The next morning Ukay was made chieftain, and soon after, the maiden, who fell in love with him, became his wife. "And they lived happily ever after."