

Monkey Lives!

Told by Aaron Shepard

Characters:

Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Monkey, Horse Face, Ox Head, Yama

NARRATOR 1: If you think Superman or Spiderman has been around a long time, think about Monkey. He has been China's favorite superhero for at least five centuries. He's amazingly strong, he can fly, and he has a few tricks those other superheroes never heard of. And he's always ready to do battle with demons, dragons—sometimes even the gods.

NARRATOR 2: Monkey stars in *The Journey to the West*, an epic comic fantasy from the sixteenth century. The part retold here is about how Monkey is taken off to the land of death—but not for long!

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NARRATOR 1: On the surface of the Eastern Sea, not far from the Dragon King's palace, Monkey landed lightly on a barren rock that jutted above the waves. Stretching himself out on it, he yawned and then studied the sky.

MONKEY: Now that I'm an Immortal, I think I'll fly up to Heaven and become a god as well. But that's all after a good nap.

NARRATOR 2: He closed his eyes and quickly drifted into sleep.

NARRATOR 1: All at once Monkey felt himself jerked to his feet.

MONKEY: Huh . . . ?!

NARRATOR 2: Two men were clutching his elbows. One man had the face of a horse, the other had the head of an ox.

NARRATOR 1: Horse Face held an official document, which he studied closely.

HORSE FACE: (*in a horse-like voice*) Is your name Monkey?

MONKEY: (*in a daze*) That's right.

OX HEAD: (*in an ox-like voice*) All right, get moving!

NARRATOR 2: They started to drag him off. Stumbling once, Monkey happened to glance back. There he saw himself, still lying on the ground!

MONKEY: (*in confusion*) What . . . ?!

NARRATOR 1: They rounded the rock and started across a desolate plain. The sea was nowhere in sight.

MONKEY: (*still in a daze*) Where is this? And how did I get here?

HORSE FACE: (*snorts; sarcastically, to OX HEAD*) He wants to know how he got here!

OX HEAD: (*to MONKEY, derisively*) You got here the same way as everyone!

NARRATOR 2: After a while they came to the wall of a city. Above the gate was an iron placard with characters inlaid in gold.

DEMON GATE OF THE LAND OF DARKNESS

MONKEY: (*in alarm, coming fully awake and starting to resist*) Land of Darkness?! But that's the realm of Yama, Lord of the Dead! I don't belong here!

HORSE FACE: (*sarcastically*) That's what they all say!

MONKEY: But I'm an Immortal! I've gone beyond death!

OX HEAD: (*derisively*) Tell it to the judge!

MONKEY: (*indignantly*) All right, I will!

NARRATOR 1: Monkey snatched his staff from its hiding place in his ear.

MONKEY: (*to staff*) Grow!

NARRATOR 2: . . . and in half a moment he was swinging five feet of it.

HORSE FACE: (*in terror*) We didn't mean it!

NARRATOR 1: . . . cried Horse Face, fleeing through the gate.

OX HEAD: (*in terror*) Can't you take a joke?

NARRATOR 2: . . . said Ox Head, racing after.

NARRATOR 1: Monkey followed them in, still swinging his staff. The demons of the city were terrified, and not one of them dared get in his way.

NARRATOR 2: By the time Monkey reached the Palace of Darkness, Lord Yama was waiting on the steps.

YAMA: (*nervously*) Sir, what seems to be the trouble?

MONKEY: (*indignantly*) The trouble? The trouble is you've brought me here!

YAMA: (*placatingly*) But sir, I assure you, you will be judged fairly and punished—I mean, re-educated—strictly according to your past deeds. Then when the evil you've done has been avenged—I mean, corrected—you'll be returned to the Land of Light for a brand new life.

MONKEY: I don't want to be reborn! I don't want to die in the first place! Don't you realize I'm an Immortal?

YAMA: (*in consternation*) An Immortal! There must be some mistake!

MONKEY: Exactly! I demand to see the Register of Life and Death.

NARRATOR 1: Yama led him into the Hall of Darkness, where a clerk dragged out several musty volumes. Monkey searched till he found his name.

MONKEY: (*demanding while holding up a hand for it*) Writing brush!

NARRATOR 2: . . . and the clerk gave him one dipped in ink. Monkey blotted his name from the register.

MONKEY: That should do it.

YAMA: (*protesting*) This is most irregular!

MONKEY: Tell it to the judge!

NARRATOR 1: He slammed the book shut and rushed out. Then he made his way back to the city wall, swinging his staff as he went.

NARRATOR 2: Just outside the gate, Monkey tripped and fell rolling. When he opened his eyes, he was back on the rock in the Eastern Sea.

MONKEY: Wonderful!

NARRATOR 1: . . . cried Monkey as he jumped to his feet.

MONKEY: Next stop, Heaven!