



JOHNNY MEE'S
ISLAND -- ADVENTURES
IN PARADISE

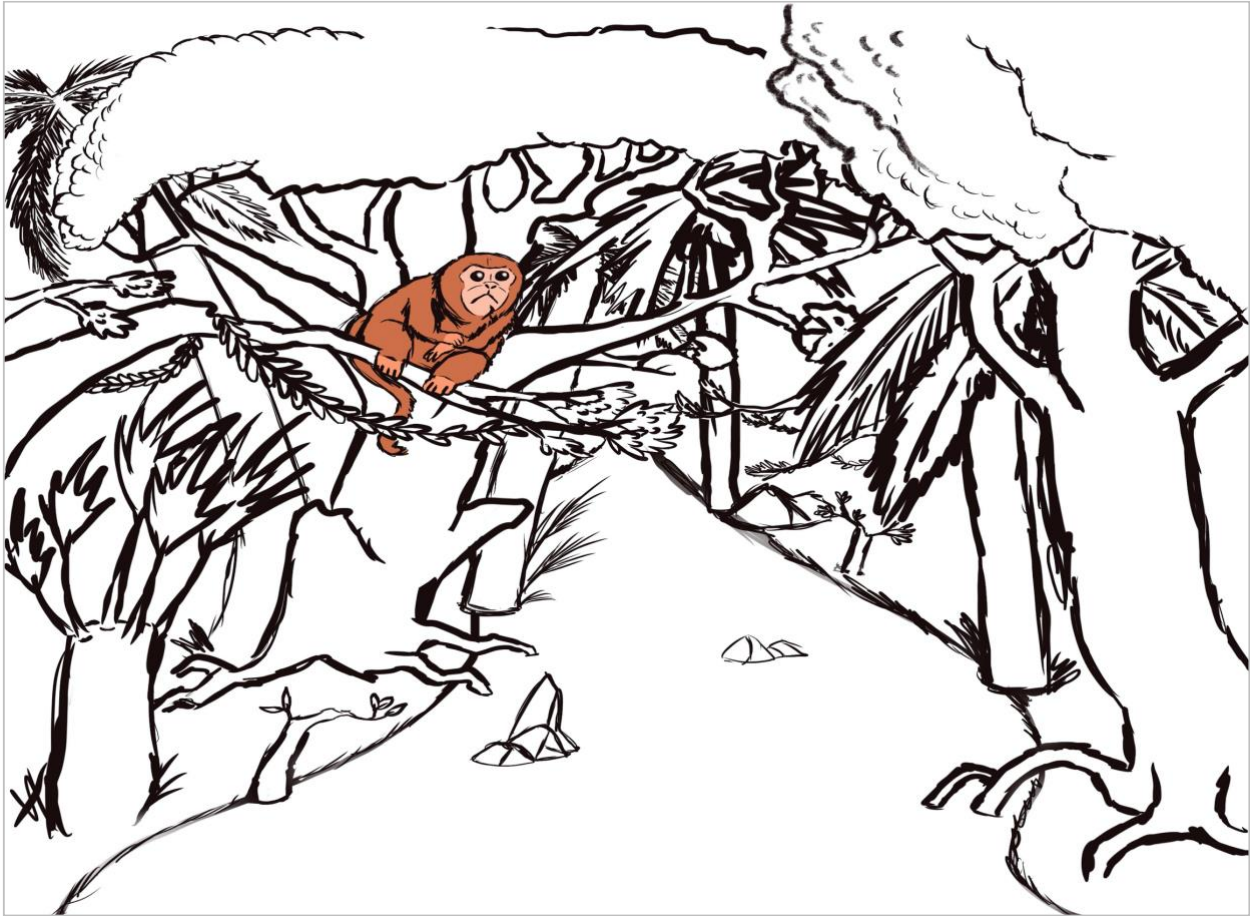
-Sneak Peek-



John Q. Roxborough

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Hail Caesar – King of the Forest



There before us, was a sight unlike anything I had ever seen – THE FIRST MONKEY!

It greeted the morning with a slow stretch of its arms, and a gaping yawn that exposed two rows of rough, brownish teeth.

Three months earlier I saw this same animal roaming the treetops, effortlessly plucking a hand full of luscious leaves, devouring them in one easy motion. There was no doubt in my mind, he was obviously the leader of the troop. We called him CAESAR.

The name seemed to fit. He was a fully-grown male, his body covered by a reddish-brown coat of silky hair, He sat majestically in the groove of two v-shaped branches. His long, gangly arms wistfully stroking his majestic beard.

“HE'S EITHER THINKING DEEPLY OR DOING ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!” I thought aloud.

He carries the air of a royal Duke casually observing his kingdom. Today his castle is a giant breadfruit tree, filled with a combination of green and yellowish fruit, hanging tantalizingly from its long spacious branches.

There are five smaller monkeys sitting on branches or just hanging around: “Those would be the females of the troop,” I spoke confident in my knowledge. “He is definitely the king of this forest.”

On an adjacent tree is the Mini-me of monkeys, he looks exactly like Caesar – just smaller. This budding prince didn’t move around much, and he certainly didn’t seem threatened by our presence. As far as he’s concerned, we don’t exist at all.

They all look secure on their perches in the sky. We intend to change that. “These HOWLER MONKEYS are special animals,” said Junior, who was seeing this troop for the first time.

“The big one is definitely an adult male.”

“That’s a big boy!” said Wilkie. “I thought the monkeys on the island were all pretty small.”

I had to chime in: “I’m sure you’re right. The females are a lot smaller. See the brownish color of their coats – a sure giveaway, but males can be larger and more aggressive.”

Hearing us speak, you may be tempted to think we were primate experts - or something, this could not be further from the truth. EVERYTHING I KNOW, I LEARNED FROM MY BROTHER, Charlie. But he is not with us. For this plan to work, we would have to figure this out on our own.

“They are called Howler Monkeys because of the loud, woofing sound they make when they open their mouths to talk or belt out a command,” offered Wilkie; the new expert on primates.

Junior’s eyes light up in recognition: “In second-grade, Teacher Bishop, told us when they howl, they sound like the priests in the monasteries who used to sing those old-time songs – GREGORIAN MONKS, he called them.”

On cue, several females started bobbing their bodies up and down, making that low howling sound.

Standing there and soaking it all in I must admit their calls sound more like a greeting than a sign of danger, but the air around us rumbles when they belt out their low-pitched wails.

Despite their impressive size, howlers DON'T EAT MEAT OR FRUIT; THEY LIKE LEAVES - young freshly budded leaves from a few choice trees, just like the ones that flourish in this orchard. And they eat lots of them.

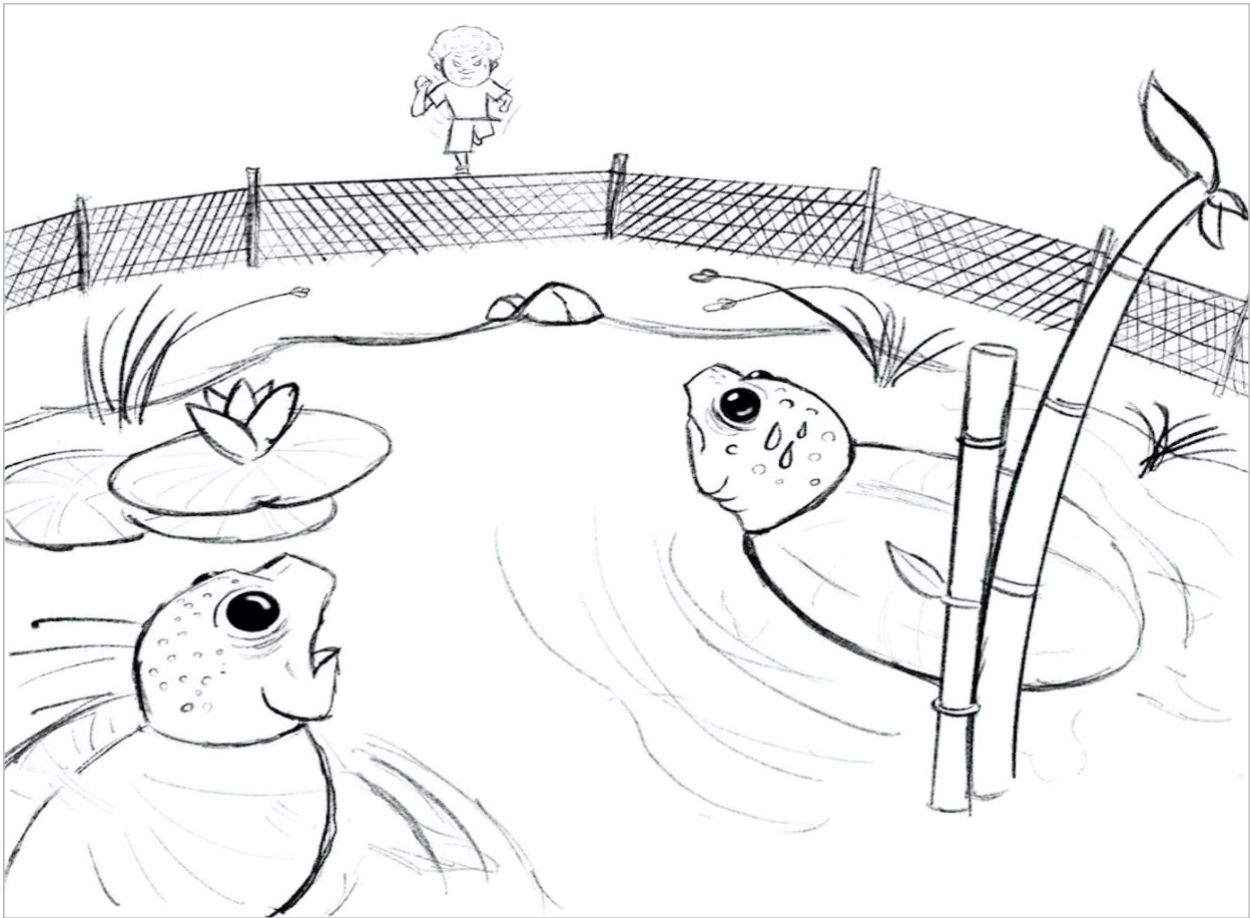
“You know what my uncle Sam told me?” said Wilkie, “Their main diet is leaves, but they ALSO EAT EGGS. To me, that is just strange.”

“If they eat leaves, where do they get eggs to eat?” Asked Junior. “That’s odd.”

“I have no idea, man. I’m guessing they raid any bird’s nests they can find. Maybe they get bored of eating the same leaves every day. I know I would get tired of it pretty fast.”

These monkeys have long tails, which they use for balance. This is what separates them from humans and apes.

A mule by any other name



Animals are everywhere on this island.
I think they outnumber humans – at least in my village.
Some have human-like qualities, like when they're eating together they resemble one big happy family, UNTIL ONE OF THEM GETS MORE FOOD than the other one. Then, it's everyone for themselves.

As with humans, there are also some really strange creatures out here; take for example the mule - after you determine what it is, you have to decide what to do with this information.

“Johny Mee, WHAT’S A MULE?” Asked my little sister, Joan, when she first laid eyes on the creature grazing next door to grandmother’s house, “and what exactly does it do? “

“Well, a mule is a relative of a horse and a donkey,” I assure her.
“Somehow, a donkey and a horse get together, and THAT’S what the result looks like.”

“Oh, boy!” She said skeptically, unable to make heads or tails of it, “so, is it a horse, or is it a donkey?”

My first answer obviously did nothing to help her confusion. “Joan, you just don’t understand, it’s NOT a horse, NOR is it a donkey. It’s JUST A MULE.”
“Sooo...a mule, is a mule, is a mule?”

“Exactly! It’s as simple as that. It has the face of a donkey and the body of a small horse. Maybe, it’s like one of those figures you find in Greek stories, we could call it Horseficus, or something.”

She shook her head, vigorously: “Nope! DON’T LIKE THAT NAME, and, it’s time to go home. I’ll ask Heidi about it when we get there!”

My little sister is three years younger than me, and she always has to have the last word – and the first one too! We say goodbye to our grandmother, we call her DuDo, and set out for our home in the village.
I was sure the question would come up again, little sisters are like that -
THEY NEVER FORGET.

The whole thing set me thinking, ‘whose idea was it to make a mule anyway’? That is NOT a handsome animal. Then it hit me – I’ll ask Heidi the question first, that way I can still be the smart big brother. Heidi is my older sister, and she’s in Convent school. She would love to tell me the answer, high school girls think they know everything, anyway.

When we get home, I head straight for her room: “Heidi, I have a question for you. Where are you?”

There’s no answer. I check all the rooms - No one’s here.

Ah! Now I hear voices coming from the back yard. They’re excited about something. As I get closer, I realize they’re TALKING ABOUT A TRIP.

Mother and Heidi are sitting together – they're glad to see us.

“Children, how are you doing? Did you have a good time at grandmother's --?”

“---Yes, mother, and WE SAW A MULE!” said Joan, “Johny Mee, told me it's a cross between a horse and donkey, and that makes no sense at all.”

She's obviously more interested in the mule story than the trip. I would have none of it. “We had a great time, Mother. But please, can you tell us about the trip you are talking about?”

“Yes, son. Your sister WANTS TO TAKE YOU ALL TO THE ZOO. I think you'll be able to ask the people there any questions you have about mules, or any kind of animal.”

A huge smile came over Heidi face: “Yes, and we can do it today. We'll leave right after lunch.”

I was in a full state of disbelief: “TODAY!... The ZOO? In La Puerta de Espana? I'll get ready in a jiffy! Have no fear, the Jungle Prince is here!”

The Master of Illusion



It's been one week since we took Tommy back to the farm and it's gotten harder and harder for me to sleep at night. I keep thinking about the animals in the small coop, and the gloom that surrounds them.

Thanksgiving is fast approaching, and I feel if we do nothing, our well-fed friend would be someone's dinner companion - and not in a good way. "Brian, do you think he knows what happens next, right before Thanksgiving Day?"

"Who, Tommy? No. But WE DO! That makes me feel even worse."

I breathe deeply hoping to come up with some type of plan: “I say, we cut him loose. Set him free - like Shawshank! At least, then he has a chance. But I forgot – I’M PRETTY SURE HE CAN’T FLY” ---
---“Maybe we’re wrong. Maybe he doesn’t know how to fly because he never had to do it.”

“Possibly - I hear eagles take their young and drop them from the side of cliffs,” said Brian, thoughtfully, “if they fly, they are going to be all right, if not, then...”

...“I don’t know, Brian. If it could only run, then we can cut him loose and he’ll find a life outside. But man, if we go to the top of a tree and drop him, HE WILL FLY LIKE A ROCK. It would be all over in three seconds flat!”
Brian’s eyes lit up: “HEY! I think I got it!”

“What is it?”

“Why don’t we buy him from the owners. You understand?...Pay the farmer to sell him to us. That way, everybody wins.”

“Wow, that is an awesome idea, Brian. All we need is enough money to make sure they want to do it.”

Our brilliant plan had one minor hitch – we didn't have enough money to buy a prizewinning turkey. I thought I might ask my friends to help, but I knew they didn't have any money themselves. As my father says, 'WE'RE SO BROKE - WE DON'T HAVE TWO NICKELS TO RUB TOGETHER.'

In that case, CASE CLOSED! The turkey is toast! Tom's wild and carefree, wandering days appear to be over.

“Among ourselves, we don’t own A PARROT ON A STICK - how are we going to buy this turkey?” Asked Brian, who felt the same way sense of hopelessness that I did.

Then it hit me: “I know who can help us; my brother Julien. He’s got money. He loves animals, all types of them, and I'm certain he's never seen a bird like this one.”

“I like it. Let’s go see what he thinks about it.”