

"Class, please listen up!" Mrs. Taylor tenderly pulled back her narrow, thin lips and revealed her flashing, pearl-white teeth in a patient, generous smile. The students perched obediently in their seats, immediately obeying their teacher's orders. "Today we will be having an all-day field trip to the zoo!" The class abruptly began chattering excitedly with each other, exchanging cheery glances and joyous whispers. "Hush, now! Let's all go down to the bus *quietly*."

The students roughly shoved back their plastic chairs and silently got into a crooked, single-file line. Mrs. Taylor led them out down the hallway and to the entrance of the school, where a bright yellow bus was waiting for them. "Please choose a seat," Mrs. Taylor said, as the eager students clambered noisily into the bus and slumped comfortably in the worn, wrinkled leather seats. Mrs. Taylor plunked down in a seat up front. Once everybody was settled, the bus rattled away, swerving out of the school and heading for the local zoo.

When they arrived, everybody piled out of the bus and remembered their manners not to shove each other. Mrs. Taylor led them inside the zoo and smiled as a collective gasp arose from the children. All around them were all sorts of animals—tigers, lions, bears, panthers, monkeys, apes, gorillas, everything you could imagine. It was, indeed, something to gasp about. "I'm glad to see they have lots of space to run around and be free," one of the students, Phoebe, commented. Mrs. Taylor glanced at her and nodded. "Me, too."

They decided to explore the "Big Cats" section first. The class immediately rushed to the tiger exhibit, peering curiously at the large stretch of land before them. One solitary striped tiger emerged from the shade of a few oak trees and crept over to a bucket of fresh food, proceeding to eat the chunks of meat inside the bucket. Mrs. Taylor didn't think it was the most pleasant thing to watch, but her students thought it was fascinating.

They moved on to the panthers, then the lions, and so on until they had looked at all of the big cats. "Let's look at the monkeys!" a boy suggested, and they all rushed to another section. Pressing their noses against the rusted wire, they watched the monkeys swing from branch to branch in their large cage. Everybody, including Mrs. Taylor, was impressed by the monkeys' swiftness and agility. "Did you know monkeys are primates?" Mrs. Taylor said. "Humans are primates, too. So technically, we are related to monkeys."

"Only we're not that hairy," Phoebe piped up all-knowingly.

Mrs. Taylor chuckled. "Yes," she said, "and we can't swing as well as them either." She marveled as one female scrambled up a tree as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

Phoebe tightly clutched her paper bag containing her lunch, her sparkling blue eyes staring amusedly at the monkeys and her tangled golden pigtail stuck into her mouth, as usual. She admired the monkeys' human-like features and the swift way they swung from tree to tree, simply and easily. She had often wished to be a monkey herself.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed, suddenly torn from her whirlwind of thoughts as she felt a painful yank at one of her braids. She glanced down to see a young monkey viciously attacking her precious pigtail, which had accidentally stuck through the wire cage bars. "Ouch! Hey, stop!" she cried, as the little monkey attempted to chew the golden strands with his razor-sharp teeth. "Hey!" She reached through the cage bars and tried to free her braid from the monkey. Suddenly, she felt the creature release her pigtail, but grab her paper lunch bag instead! "Give me that back!" Phoebe shouted furiously, reaching helplessly through the bars.

"What's going on here?" Mrs. Taylor demanded, coming over.

"That monkey's got my lunch!" Phoebe exclaimed, staring as the monkey tore open the bag and greedily snatched out a juice box.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Taylor muttered, as a cluster of curious students came over to see what was going on. Her bushy golden eyebrows slumped over her eyes in a thoughtful frown. Suddenly she yanked back her narrow lips in a proud smile, her eyebrows springing up to their normal shape. "I've got a banana with me!" she exclaimed, clawing wildly through her paper bag and roughly jerking out a fresh banana. Phoebe tightly pulled back her lips as far as they could go in an overjoyed smile. She would get her lunch back!

"Here, monkey, monkey!" cooed Mrs. Taylor, temptingly presenting the curved yellow fruit to the startled monkey. Its pink ears twitched as it pinned its beady black eyes on the banana swishing gently through the air, clasped loosely in Mrs. Taylor's hand. Then it abruptly snatched up Phoebe's lunch bag and clambered over to Mrs. Taylor, its small face twisted eagerly. It watched as the banana slowly made its way inside the cage and towards the little primate, then let out a shrill,

screeching shriek as the paper bag was suddenly torn from its fumbling fingers and the banana was briskly swept back out of the cage, both to the safety of Mrs. Taylor. "Got it!" she exclaimed, clutching the banana in one hand and Phoebe's lunch bag in another. She handed the paper bag to Phoebe, who hugged it to her chest gratefully. "Thank you!" she said, her sapphire-blue eyes big and round with happiness. The students cheered.

"Now let's go have our lunch!" Mrs. Taylor said, and they all paraded over to a small grassy picnic area near the primates section. The children sprawled cheerily in the soft grass, hungrily chewing their sandwiches and slurping their juice boxes. After lunch, it was time to leave. As Phoebe clambered into the bus, she glanced at the zoo at the monkeys' cage, a small smile on her freckled face. She would never forget this field trip.