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Praise for MONKEY MAGIC

“I read *Monkey Magic* to my five-year-old son Robert. He loved this book and is even more inspired to become a Wildlife Warrior!”

—TERRI IRWIN, naturalist and owner of Australia Zoo

“It’s a wonderful, magical story. I’m sure children will both benefit from it and love it.”

—ZAC GOLDSMITH, environmentalist, politician and writer

“A gripping adventure with an important message.”

—JEREMY STRONG, bestselling children’s author

“A super book! Please buy it, treasure it in your library and share its message with your family. Then open up the website and text all your friends to follow the instructions so all of you can do your best to help save the orangutans and the rainforests of Borneo in which they live before it is too late.”

—DAVID BELLAMY, television presenter, conservationist and writer

“*Monkey Magic* is magic. A very relevant adventure story about greed, good and evil with a big message for all children and adults alike. Highly recommended.”

—FANNY LAI, Executive Director, Singapore Zoo

“It’s a wonderful book and an exciting adventure! The book deserves to be read and enjoyed by as many children as possible. I couldn’t stop once I’d started. The author combines magic with descriptions of real orangutans fantastically well.”

—ANGELA ROYSTON, author of more than 200 children’s books

“A gripping adventure that will touch the heart of any child. A must read for any child or parent. It ensnares you into the fight of good against evil, the struggle against greed, crooks—and the fate of the orangutan. *Monkey Magic* has the detail, mystery and surprises required in a really good book.”

—DR CHRISTIAN NELLEMAN, Editor, United Nations report
“The Last Stand of the Orangutan”



Grant S. Clark has spent much of the past fifteen years writing about primates (the human kind) jumping on each other and chasing balls in his job as a sports journalist. He is British and lives with his family in Singapore. In this, his first novel, he draws on his experience of spending time in the rainforests of Borneo.

Ten percent of the author's royalties will go to conservation charities that help orangutans.

Learn more at www.monkeymagicbook.com.

MONKEY MAGIC

The Curse of Mukada



GRANT S. CLARK



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To Linda, Amy and Rosie



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Chapter 1

PLANE SCARY

Dad had always promised to take me on one of his faraway journeys, to an exotic land where the smells and tastes were as different to home as the sights and sounds. He's a scientist: an expert on apes and monkeys. A "primatologist", to give it the proper name.

My father, Dr Jeremy Alexander, had spent most of his life doing monkey business. Tracking baboons in the jungle or helping zoo-reared orangutans adjust to life in the wild—all part of a day's work for Dad. He liked to say his job was to protect apes and monkeys from their closest relatives.

He meant humans, of course.

For years, I hadn't let myself believe he would *really* take me on a trip—mainly to avoid the disappointment in case it never happened. But, deep down, I knew Dad would

stick to his word; that's how he was. When I was small, he once bought thirty bags of ice from the petrol station and crushed them with a spade before helping me mould the pieces in the garden. As I stuck a carrot-nose onto the icy face, he said: "There you go, Romy. So what if there's no snow in London again this winter? I promised you'd see a snowman here."

There was as much chance of finding a snowman where we were heading now as there was of spotting a hamster surfing on the moon.

He'd told me a month before the December holidays that the two of us were going to Sarawak, part of the giant rainforest island of Borneo, in Southeast Asia. If you've heard of Singapore or Bali, Borneo is somewhere between the two and far, far bigger than both put together.

I should know—I spent every night for four weeks before we left scouring maps of Asia.

Dad's task was to work out why orangutans were behaving strangely at the Mukada Nature Reserve. More and more of the ginger-haired apes were migrating to the coast, an area they normally avoided and that was home to proboscis monkeys. The proboscis—famous for their huge rubbery snouts—didn't enjoy orangutans poking their noses

around, and the orangutans were falling sick.

We were coming to figure out why.

"Look! The airport," Dad cried, pointing through a window ringed by water droplets. He had to shout to be heard over the whining of the engine in our tiny, rickety plane. I'd held his hand most of the way from the last airport (our third on the journey) and got the feeling from his squeezes that he was almost as frightened as me. My stomach lurched and his grip tightened as the plane suddenly dropped, then jolted upwards.

My other hand clasped the beautiful necklace of blue



lapis lazuli beads that Mum had given me as a gift—not for *me*, unfortunately, but for our hosts. I was happy to wear it for now and clenched it tightly.

As we swooped to our left over the giant rainforest, the airport stood out—excuse the expression—like a monkey’s bottom; the grey strip of tarmac was the only break in the blanket of jungle. Lush trees looked like broccoli heads crammed together. We passed a mountain covered in the same green tufts all the way to its peak, the pattern broken only by a ring of white cloud halfway up.

“Aren’t you glad you waited for this trip?” Dad shouted, his smile making his thick brown beard seem even bushier. “Sure beats spending January in Ukraine.”

I’d complained last year about missing out on his three weeks at a zoo in chilly Ukraine. He was right: this trip was better, and worth waiting for.

“Glad?” I replied. “It’s hula time!”

That expression was our family language for fun, for happiness, for excitement. Whenever anyone had reason to be cheerful in the Alexander family, we’d break into a hula. Strapped into my vibrating seat, I couldn’t do the wobbly hipped dance, but Dad knew what I meant.

“Well, I’m pleased you came, hula girl.”

Of course, he’d never have brought me had he known the danger that lay ahead. But, even looking back later, I wouldn’t have changed anything for the world, however perilous the next few days would be. I was about to have the most unforgettable—and scary—time of my first eleven years and seven months of life.

* * *

The plane tilted to the left as the wheels hit the ground with a shudder, making our landing even more terrifying. The pilot grappled with flashing gadgets and a mad joystick. Then suddenly, he was in control: the reverse engines had done their job, and we were slowing on the bumpy, potholed tarmac.

“Phew!” I said, finally releasing Dad’s hand. “I was worried then.”

“Didn’t scare me for one second,” he smiled. “Let’s go first class on the way back, though.”

If only! The same plane was due to pick us up in a week’s time, but I put that to the back of my mind. There was so much to look forward to before then: the beach was supposed to be dreamy, the rainforest dazzling, and,

of course, there were the orangutans—my favourite animal for as long as I could remember. For most of my life, I'd fallen asleep cuddling Robbie, my stuffed toy orangutan. Although I had grown out of that, Robbie still sat at the end of my bed.

Was it the orangutans' human-like expressions, their delicate touch, the thirst for fun? Whatever it was, they were the most lovable and fascinating of animals. And to think they might be extinct by the time I got to Dad's age—it filled me with such shame and sadness.



Chapter 2

GOLDEN TOOTH

We were the only passengers on the plane, so the green jeep at the end of the runway was almost certainly Dr Nazir, the chief warden of Mukada Nature Reserve. He was due to drive us to our forest lodgings. I was suddenly reminded of my most secret fear for the trip: what would the restrooms be like? I grimaced at the thought of a grimy, insect-infested toilet bowl.

The plane pulled up by a small building with a corrugated iron roof that sat on it like an ill-fitting hat. It was as if we regained our hearing as the roar of the engine gave way to velvety silence.

The man waiting for us was dressed head to toe in brown khakis—the uniform for people in Dad's line of