

## 12. Monkey Pants

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

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### Monkey Pants

Monkey Pants was the first person Dodo met on Ward C-1. He lay in the only other crib in the room. A boy around his age, just six inches away. Inside a steel crib adjacent to where Dodo lay in traction in his own steel-caged crib in a hot, overcrowded ward of ninety beds. It was the first stroke of luck Dodo had had in a while.

His neighbor was a small, painfully thin white child with dark hair—about eleven or twelve, Dodo guessed. He wore no hospital gown but rather a diaper and an undershirt, and was contorted in a way that seemed impossible. He lay on his side in a ball, his neck and shoulders hunched, curled in an odd tangle of twisted hands and feet, one leg impossibly reaching toward his face—the ankle nearly at his chin—the other leg lost in a cacophony of twisted arms, elbows, knees, and fingers, with one hand thrust out of the twisted cacophony of limbs gathered near his chest to cover his eyes. The boy looked as if he had tied himself up in knots and was hiding from himself.

Dodo had never seen anything like it. But because the child was twisted impossibly and curled like a primate, Dodo called him Monkey Pants, for he looked like a monkey with no pants. In reality, Dodo never learned his real name.

It was the impossible sight of Monkey Pants that brought Dodo back to consciousness and reality, as the explosion of suffering and shock that had descended on him during the first few days at Pennhurst State Hospital for the Insane and Feeble-Minded was compounded by the injuries sustained in his fall off Miss Chona's roof. The fall had reduced him to a state of absolute immobility. He broke both ankles, shattered his hip, and snapped his right fibula. He lay in the Pottstown hospital handcuffed to a bed, in traction, for a week. The handcuffs never left him after he regained consciousness even though he was in traction. The cops were obviously mad.

But the handcuffs were removed when he arrived by stretcher at the Pennhurst admissions office, where another doctor examined him.

He arrived there confused, for he was taken to the institution's hospital wing, not back home to face the music for the disaster at Miss Chona's. The fact that Aunt Addie and Uncle Nate were not at the hospital was not a tip-off, because he had never been in a hospital, even after he lost his hearing. He simply assumed that the white hospital people were prepping him for the arrival of his aunt and uncle, who would take him home.

But after several minutes of lying on the stretcher and not seeing his aunt

and uncle anywhere, he became impatient, and he began to struggle to get out of bed. Two attendants held him down while the doctor produced a needle full of something that made him woozy, and after a few moments, he was in a fog.

The doctor measured his height, estimated his weight, moved his arms, checked his eyes, spoke to Dodo briefly, which Dodo could not understand for the doctor was a mumbler with a foreign accent, and even if he weren't a mumbler, the fog made it impossible for Dodo to decipher what the doc said to him. It took all of a half hour for the doctor to declare him an imbecile.

The attendants placed a hospital gown on him and gathered his effects, which someone, probably Aunt Addie, had carefully packed, including a shirt, a tie, some smaller items, shoes, socks, and several marbles he always carried around for good luck that Miss Chona had given him, and put them in a bag. He never saw them again.

He was wheeled out past two sets of doors and down several long corridors, and then something terrible began to seep into the dense fog that had lowered onto his brain. His sense of smell, always keen, had heightened since he'd lost his hearing, and while he had caught a slight sense of a new terrible scent, a tinge, a kind of warning, just a slight one, like a tiny thread coming loose on a shirt, when he first awoke, it rose quickly and disappeared, like a goblin that suddenly pokes his head out of the floor for a moment, then vanishes. Just a brief flicker of something awful.

But now, as the stretcher wheeled out of the cheery, polished, gleaming floors of the admissions office and spun through several sets of doors and corridors, through an underground tunnel and up a ramp, the cheery atmosphere gave way to a dim corridor, and the odor grew and morphed and developed its own life. It seemed to sprout from the granite walls as the stretcher moved, like moss or vines rising from the floor and covering the walls, the smell becoming a living, breathing thing, gorging on the walls, the windows, and finally him, evolving from strong to horrible to overpowering. He felt as if he were drowning. As the stretcher spun through the corridors, turning one corner and the next, he nearly passed out, but the motion kept him conscious, and the smell poured on him, coming again and again, stronger and stronger, morphing into new life the way his sunflowers grew in back of Miss Chona's yard. He loved watching them grow, smelling them as they did. They smelled so wonderful he often imagined that it was the fragrance that made the flowers, not the other way around. Their fragrance gave wonderful messages. Pretty. Happy. Joyful. But the smells here bore a different message. Cruelty. Anger. Powerful loneliness. And death. And as the stretcher rolled deeper into the corridors, his throat finally surged, and the contents of his stomach ran up his throat.

He raised his head and vomited over the side of the stretcher. The vomit landed on the pants of one of the attendants accompanying him, whereupon the two men stopped, departed for a moment, and returned with a straitjacket. They sat him up—his legs still in traction—and placed it around his chest and arms, tightened it, then proceeded. He was rolled to an end corner of a long room tightly packed with beds—Ward C-1—and left. He tried to sit up, but he could not move, so he lay on his back, exhausted. He sobbed for a bit, then slept.

When he awoke and turned his head to look about, Monkey Pants was the first thing he saw.

They were only six inches apart, and at the first sight of Monkey Pants

twisted into horrible knots, Dodo burst into tears again.

Monkey Pants seemed nonplussed by it all. Seemingly unmoved, one eye peered through the tangle of arms and legs nonchalantly as Dodo wept. Dodo noted the boy's nonchalance and felt the boy was being cruel, and he decided to tell someone about Monkey Pants and, at the very least, not look at old Monkey Pants any longer.

Dodo was in traction and couldn't shift onto his side, but he could turn his head, so he looked in the other direction.

There was no one on his other side, but the sight was not reassuring. There were rows of beds in the crowded ward, all of them mercifully empty, for it was daytime and apparently the people had gone elsewhere. So he turned back to Monkey Pants, who peered at him with one eye through tangled arms and legs.

The two boys stared at each other a long time, and in that moment, Dodo had his second stroke of luck that day, the first being that he'd been dropped on the ward in the middle of the day when the ward attendants had already paraded the unlucky patients to the day room. For Monkey Pants, whose condition in thirty years would fall into the yawning labyrinth of spinning medical terminology known as "cerebral palsy," a clumsy, useless term, nearly as useless as the idea of confining a child with his physical challenges to an insane asylum where he was normally sedated every morning, had somehow been forgotten by the nurse who doled out the daily knockout drops that day. As Dodo stared into the eye of Monkey Pants, he could see, clear as day, that there was a boy in there.

"Monkey Pants," he said.

The boy could only see him with one eye, the other eye covered by his hand. But the eye peering at Dodo moved slightly. The eyebrow raised just a bit. Then Monkey Pants shifted his fingers and revealed a second eye.

Then Dodo saw, or thought he saw, Monkey Pants chuckle.

He could not hear it, but the tangle of limbs he was staring at shifted slightly. He knew what a pleasant chuckle looked like.

The fact that Monkey Pants laughed at him irritated him, so he said it again. "Monkey Pants."

And he saw it this time. For certain. Monkey Pants lowered his hand and his mouth moved into a twisted grin. Then he spoke.

His face twisted with the effort, and Dodo couldn't understand him at all because he could only lip-read. Moreover, Monkey Pants's lips moved about in an odd manner. But Dodo felt so grateful to talk to a living person.

It was as if someone had opened a window and cranked in a blast of fresh air. They hadn't let anyone come to see him at the hospital. He caught the lips of one of the policemen guarding his room telling a nurse something about his attacking people. And while he had no chance to explain to anyone, even Aunt Addie, what had happened, he knew whatever trouble he was in involved white folks, and that was a problem. If only Miss Chona was here, she would straighten it all out. She would help him explain. Aunt Addie and Uncle Nate would be cross, but they, too, would help. Where were they? Then the thought of Miss Chona lying on the floor with her dress pulled up, shaking so crazily, and the ensuing struggle with Doc Roberts, and the memory of Aunt Addie's furious face as he ran off from the police overwhelmed him and the tears came again.

The casts on his legs itched. He had a headache. He needed to go to the bathroom and was afraid he would soil himself. He felt insanely thirsty. He raised his head and looked about the room again. Not a soul. There were

empty beds everywhere, and in the middle of the far wall, a glass enclosure in which attendants sat to watch the patients. The attendants' room was empty.

He turned back to Monkey Pants and sobbed. "I want to go home."

Monkey Pants shifted. The spasm of bundled arms and legs seemed to twist even more as he painfully, slowly extracted an arm from around his head, showing a dark head of hair and an angular, handsome face. His mouth moved again, but his face and mouth puckered and Dodo could not read his lips. He shook his head, not understanding.

Monkey Pants paused for a moment, seeming to reconsider, then moved his eyes.

His eyes looked left. They looked right. They looked up. They looked down.

Dodo, staring at him, cried impatiently, "What you doing, Monkey Pants?"

Much later, he realized his good fortune. The two of them had been alone in the ward on that first day, and what an incredible stroke of good fortune it had been, for his injury and a misdiagnosis of his mental abilities had placed him in a ward of so-called lower functions. The attendants had led the entire ward, a pitiful drugged group of humanity, ninety men in all, on a daily parade from the ward to the day room, an empty room bare of furniture save two benches, to stare out the window for hours, toss feces at one another, and bang their heads against the walls if they so pleased. The two patients assigned to clean the ward of urine and feces, burnishing the floor with a polisher before turning their attention to the two "babies," Dodo and Monkey Pants, two boys among men, to clean their beds and their bodily waste, moving them from one side to the other like pieces of beef, had not arrived. They were alone. And for the first four hours, Monkey Pants gave Dodo a spellbinding, extraordinary performance lecture on the art of survival in one of the oldest and worst mental institutions in the history of the United States.

But this did not come easily. Watching Monkey Pants give a lecture was like watching an octopus trying to shake hands with a flamethrower. Nothing worked right. The boy fought to communicate. His chest constricted. His lips contorted. His limbs flapped around wildly in spasmic bursts. They seemed to have their own mind about which direction they wanted to go in. He worked like a madman, his limbs flailing, mouth moving in unintelligible bursts, then stopping as he exhausted himself, only to continue after catching his breath, only to exhaust himself again. This happened several times before Dodo deduced that Monkey Pants was trying to say something important.

"What do you want?"

Monkey Pants went at it again, but the flailing limbs and spastic shaking head didn't make sense, and after some effort and squinting, Dodo burst into tears of frustration and despair.

"What's wrong with you?"

The outburst and tears did not bring sympathy. Instead, Monkey Pants's frustration and impatience began to show. His chest constricted and his limbs thrust about in squirming impatience with even greater agitation, which caused Dodo to stare in amazement, for there was clear irritation in the movement.

Then just as suddenly, Monkey Pants quit. His thrashing arms and legs, which pounded against the iron bars of the crib, stopped. He lay on his back

and his legs and arms slowly came together and rose like spider's legs, wrapping around each other in an impossible fashion near his head. And from there, with his legs and arms twisted like pretzels and crammed near his chest and head, he stared at Dodo, his gaze as steady as headlights. Dodo watched as Monkey Pants's eyes went up. Then down. Then up. Then down. Then left. Then right. Then the same business again. Up. Down. Left. Right. He was trying to say something. What?

Unable to make neither heads nor tails of the business, Dodo grew tired of it, and a song suddenly flew into his head. Why this happened, he was not sure. But the loss of hearing had not decreased his love of music. Indeed, it had intensified it. He often dragged his uncle Nate to a dressing room backstage at Mr. Moshe's dance hall where Uncle Nate listened to records on an old turntable kept back there. He liked to place his hands on the phonograph speaker to hear the music as the record played. It didn't matter that he could hear just a tiny bit of it. Just the act of listening fired the music inside him. And when Uncle Nate sometimes led a group of workers cleaning up Mr. Moshe's theater in singing his favorite old gospel hymn, "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," Dodo sang along out of tune, much to the amusement of the men.

"I know a song, Monkey Pants," he said. "Wanna hear it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he sang.

I'll go where You want me to go.

I'll say what You want me to say.

Lord, I'll be what You want me to be.

Monkey Pants stared, unblinking, wide-eyed, his eyebrows lifted. His face eased into something like a smile, and in that moment, Dodo felt comforted and a little less lonely.

Monkey Pants suddenly became agitated again. Lying on his back, he began to rock, twisting to the left and right, his thin gawky arms and legs moving crazily as he attempted to further unravel his face from his arms and legs. It seemed impossible. His arms and legs awkwardly twisted themselves together like spaghetti then pulled apart, then wrapped themselves around each other again; but with great effort, his limbs began to unbend themselves and his arms arced toward the ceiling. His right arm, which seemed to move on its own more than any other part of him, seemed to free itself first. It swung wide into the air over his face toward the ceiling, then pinned itself to the right side of the crib, as if a pressure hose had burst loose and sprayed water everywhere. The left arm followed, grasping an ankle that seemed to want to move on its own, slowly pushing a crimped-up leg off his chest and away from him, so now his upper body was once again clear of his ankles, legs, and feet. Then the left arm swung out wide through the bar of the steel crib toward Dodo.

Dodo could see the boy's face fully now as he lay on his back, his head turned toward him.

The two boys stared at each other, and in that moment, a remarkable thing happened.

It was as if the magic of the hymn Dodo offered up had marched into the room. Both boys became fully aware of the plight of the other. A knowledge, a wisdom, passed between them that no one outside of them could possess—a knowledge that they were boys among men, with remarkable minds trapped inside bodies that would not allow one-thousandth of any of the thoughts and feelings they possessed to emerge.