

# John Clayton

The jungle man swung from the thick vine. His sight immediately focused on the next to keep his momentum going. He was on a quest. He had heard from his chimp family that there was a female that looked like him that had suddenly arrived in the jungle but he would have to travel far. He couldn't contain his excitement. He nearly missed the next vine.

"Concentrate!" he admonished himself.

Movement like this required strength, agility and a deep knowledge of the jungle. All the traits he possessed but it also required intense concentration. He easily grabbed the next vine, but reminded himself that a fall from this height could have dire consequences. He knew that getting hurt in the jungle provided opportunities for others that did NOT consider him family. They would look at him as their next meal.

In particular were the leopards. He really didn't like leopards. He had to admit to himself that he was afraid of them; their fangs, and their slashing claws. They could climb trees too, he had seen that himself and it made him worried for the jungle family that raised him. He would always put on a brave face for them and would defend them but the fear of leopards would never go away.

"Dang it !," he exclaimed, he nearly missed another one! He had to concentrate!

According to what his chimp brother had explained to him he had to be getting near the place where the female was seen. It was a strange story of some giant silver bird coming down from the sky and making a huge noise in the jungle, even louder than elephants. Imagine that, louder than elephants!

He was trying hard to picture such a thing when he realized that he was almost there. It had to be the next clearing. There was the waterfall, the huge boulder and somewhere to the right was supposed to be the meadow that had a family of giraffes that were . . .

"Johnny ! Come in and get washed up, dinner's ready! ," his mother called out.

Although he heard her, he could almost see the meadow ahead.

*Keep swinging! Keep swinging!* he urged himself.

"John Michael Clayton ," his mother yelled, "get yourself in here now !!" It was never a good thing when his mother called him by his full name, let alone used his middle name too.

Disgruntled that play time had been interrupted, Johnny shuffled toward his uncle's farmhouse screen door (he and his mom and dad had been invited over for dinner).

Reluctantly, he opened the door but upon stepping through he turned and immediately froze. This time he was experiencing a different kind of fear, one that was real and present.

Standing in the doorway to the kitchen was his Aunt Alice. She was holding a wet and soapy wash cloth. The fear of leopards had returned in force.

"Come here Johnny. Let's get you washed up for dinner," she said.

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Now, the washing of hands was okay. The face washing wasn't too bad either even though it made him scrunch up his face, but the EARS! His Aunt Alice had turned ear washing into a finely tuned method of torture. He couldn't remember a time when he wasn't forced to make some kind of noise from the experience as she applied her grueling technique.

"Oh my gosh, just look at those ears," she exclaimed, "You could plant potatoes in there!"

Now Johnny had heard this many times before but his mind still went through the machinations of figuring out how the heck you could plant potatoes in his ear let alone how the heck you would harvest them. It was a real conundrum. He had been out in his uncle's potato field before so he knew they grew in dirt *and* that you had to dig them up. He had also seen a potato bug there.

The unwelcome picture of a potato bug scooting around in his ears popped into his mind.

"AHHhhhhh!", he cried.

"Oh come on, it didn't hurt THAT much.", said his Aunt.

"There. All done. You can go in and sit down but wait for grace before you dish up anything", she admonished. Free of her ministrations he gladly complied and headed toward the dining room table.

As he sat down the smell of grilled hamburgers and buttered corn on the cob lured his nose and likewise his stomach into forcing his mind onto nothing else.

The memory of his adventure among the green canopy of the jungle, his chimp family and rescuing the cute brunette girl in his third grade class wafted gently away toward the wheat field south of the farm house and evaporated just beyond the tractor shed.