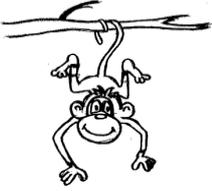


Charlie, the Mischievous Chimp

By Shirley Young



Once there was a privately owned zoo called Parklands. The owner of the zoo, Mr Drake, loved his animals and looked after them extremely well.

Each group of animals had their own large enclosure filled with trees and vegetation similar to their natural habitat. The chimpanzees particularly had a lovely enclosure, with a swing attached to a tree, a slide, and many balls and toys to play with. They even had a full-length mirror attached to one fence, which they loved to prance in front of and look into!

Charlie was the big male chimp in charge of the chimpanzee family. He had four 'wives' whose names were Bessie, Clara, Cindy and Annabel. They all had several babies who played around them and clung to their fur.

Each day many visitors came to the zoo. It was a great day out for families and as they walked through the park to see the animals their children were always delighted with the antics of the chimps.

Now Mr Drake had given the chimps a selection of hats to play with, and they loved to pull them on and off. Among them was a straw boater, a top hat, a baseball cap and a cowboy hat. Cindy in particular delighted in putting on the big straw hat with the artificial flowers on it. She would then admire herself in the long mirror and dance with glee. Sometimes she even put on two hats at once! The visitors laughed and applauded.

But occasionally Clara was jealous when she saw that Cindy was getting all the attention. So she would snatch the hats off of Cindy's head and put them on her own. Then a great chase would take place between the two

female chimps, and they would argue and gnash their teeth at each other, much to the delight of the crowds.

Charlie, however, had commandeered the big cowboy hat for himself. No one else was allowed to touch it. Often when he felt grumpy, he would fling himself down on the grass and ram the hat down over his eyes and ears, as if to say **DO NOT DISTURB!** He would then pointedly turn his back on the visitors who were looking at him through the wire fence.

Just recently he had become extremely fed up with all of the people staring through the fence at him. And matters were made much worse when he overheard one little boy say: "Mummy, doesn't he have a funny face!"

"Of all the nerve!" thought Charlie. "That child is no oil painting himself! He should go home and try looking in the mirror!" In fact, Charlie had become so bored and naughty lately that he had even started going over to the fence and sticking out his tongue at the visitors!

He had also become impatient if Bert, their keeper, was a little late with his favourite bananas. And occasionally he had become so angry that he would thump and bang on the wooden table in their enclosure. All this had earned Charlie a stern rebuke from Mr Drake, who had warned him that he would not tolerate such bad behaviour in the zoo. If Charlie continued to misbehave he would have to leave!

This had quietened Charlie down for a while because he loved living at the zoo with all of his family. However, he was still often bored and longed for something exciting to happen.

And so it happened that, on one very warm summer's day when the zoo was closed to visitors, Charlie stretched himself out on the grass and wondered what to do. Suddenly he heard voices accompanied by loud clattering and banging. He immediately sat up and looked about with great interest.

Just opposite the chimp's enclosure stood a big building that housed Ronnie the rhino. Charlie watched closely as men in painter's overalls began erecting ladders against the side of Ronnie's house in readiness to paint it. They spread out a large dust-sheet on the ground, opened various tins of paint and then laid out their brushes and rollers. After a while, one man climbed up one of the ladders and began to brush a lovely bright yellow paint around the top half of the wall. At the same time, another man was painting the bottom half a pretty green. Still another painted the 'RHINOCEROS HOUSE' sign in bright red.

Charlie leapt to his feet and rushed across to the wire fence, gripping it with his fingers and toes. Now he was no longer bored but intensely interested. His eyes were glued to the workmen as he watched them go up and down the ladders and brush different highly coloured paints onto the side of Ronnie's house.

Time passed, and as it grew close to the lunch hour, the workmen came down the ladders and went to get something to eat. They put the lids on the paint pots but left them where they were, so they could continue painting when they returned. As soon as they disappeared down the driveway, and the whole zoo lay quiet in the noon day sun, a mischievous thought began to take shape in Charlie's mind. He chuckled to himself and chattered his big teeth in delight.

As quick as a flash Charlie shinnied up the largest tree nearest to the fence and swung himself out along one of the branches. Hanging only by his powerful arms, he swung himself sideways, to and fro, to and fro, like a big pendulum. Then, just at the right moment, he launched himself at the top of the wire fence. He made it! He clung on tightly and in a few seconds had heaved himself over the curved protection at the top and scrambled down the other side.

Delirious with excitement, Charlie raced across to Ronnie's house. He quickly prized the lids off the paint pots. Then grabbing one of the brushes

exactly as he had seen the men do, he plunged it into the red paint. Oh how he loved red!

With great energy but little skill, Charlie set about splashing the paint right, left and everywhere. Some flew onto the walls of Ronnie's house, some onto the ground, and some even went down the front of his own fur. Next he tried some yellow, then blue, then green. Charlie thought it looked lovely.

Meanwhile, Bessie, Clara, Cindy and Annabel were lined up on the inside of their compound fence eagerly watching and encouraging Charlie's artistic exploits. They clapped their hands and danced up and down with excitement. In fact Cindy was so carried away that she didn't even realise that she was jumping up and down on her own favourite straw hat!

Just then Charlie spied a tin of white paint. He scowled at it and gnashed his teeth crossly. He didn't like white. He much preferred bright colours. In disgust, he picked up the offending white paint pot and hurled it at the wall with a great clatter. Red, yellow, blue, green and white paint now ran in great criss-crossing streams down the side of Ronnie's house.

Ronnie the rhino, who had been having a lunch time doze inside his house, woke with a start as the paint pot clonked on the wall, and went outside to investigate. When he saw Charlie and the mess of paint smeared all over the side of his house, he snorted in dismay and quickly shut his eyes. He felt he would have a headache, or worse still, a nightmare, if he was to stare at that conglomeration of colours for too long! So muttering under his breath about ignorant chimps with no artistic talent, he stomped off back inside.

But Percy, the green parrot who lived in the nearby aviary, thought otherwise. He greatly admired Charlie's work. "Good old Charlie! Good old Charlie!" he shouted over and over again. Percy's encouragement, plus that of the female chimps, only excited Charlie to further exploits.

So, exactly as he had seen the painters do, he put the handle of one of the paint pots over his left arm, grabbed a brush and ran lightly up one of the ladders. Charlie was good at climbing, and he felt he looked very professional as he splashed more and more paint on the wall.

Percy the parrot jumped up and down with excitement on his perch and continued his shouting. The female chimps clapped their hands and danced in delight.

So Charlie, who was now completely carried away by his own popularity and sense of importance, began to show off even more. Carelessly he turned on the high ladder and wildly waved at his admirers. But as he did, the ladder slipped sideways. Down went the ladder! And down went Charlie with it - **THUMP** - straight onto the ground! He gave one groan and then lay still and quiet.

The female chimps gasped in dismay. Bessie rammed her fist into her mouth and the others covered their faces with their hands.

Just then they heard angry shouts and running feet. The chimps peeped through their fingers to see what was happening. The workmen had returned from their lunch hour and were very angry when they saw the awful mess that Charlie had made of their morning's work.

Close behind them ran Mr Drake, the owner of the zoo, and behind him, the vet who looked after the animals. As Mr Drake tried to calm the irate painters, the vet headed straight for Charlie and began to check him over.

"Bring over that large piece of wood please," said the vet. "We'll use that as a stretcher to carry him into the zoo hospital so I can take a better look at him."

Some time later, Charlie came to and opened his eyes. He found himself lying on his back under the shade of a tree. He was back in the chimpanzee compound with two men staring down at him - Mr Drake and Bert, the

keeper of the chimps. Charlie blinked, tried to get up, and felt a stab of pain run through his right hip and down his leg.

"Hallo Charlie," said Mr Drake, "just take it easy now."

"Pride goes before a fall, eh?" grinned Bert. "But it's nice to see you're still with us Charlie."

"Oh, he'll be with us for some time yet," said Mr Drake turning to Bert, "providing he behaves himself, that is! The vet said he just knocked himself out when he fell. No bones broken, but he has badly bruised his hip and leg. He just needs to take it easy for a while."

But then, pointing his finger at Charlie, Mr Drake's expression changed to one of sternness. "I'm not at all pleased with you Charlie, m'lad. In fact I'm very cross! Those workmen have walked off the job because of what you did and now I have to find new contractors. And it's costing me a lot of money! I've warned you before about showing off, Charlie - you ought to be ashamed of yourself! And it's time you started setting a good example to the young chimps, so this is the last warning. If I have any more trouble like this, you'll have to leave the zoo."

Charlie hung his head in disgrace. He felt sorry that he had let down his kind owner.

"I don't think he'll play up any more after this episode, Mr Drake," put in Bert. "You're going to be a good boy from now on, aren't you Charlie?"

Charlie nodded vigorously and peeped up at Mr Drake with big sorrowful eyes.

Mr Drake loved Charlie and now he couldn't keep from smiling. "All right," he said. "But remember your promise . . . no more showing off! It only leads to trouble." Then he said to Bert, "Perhaps Charlie would like something to eat now."

Bert opened his bag and handed Charlie the biggest banana he could find. Charlie accepted it gratefully, glad that he was forgiven and determined to be a good chimp from now on.

Some time later, when the zoo had all been redecorated, visitors once again came to see the animals. Charlie had fully recovered and walked about the enclosure wearing a cowboy hat and keeping a careful eye on the young chimps who were kicking a ball.

"Oh Mummy! Look at that chimp wearing a big hat!" shouted a child excitedly.

Hearing this, Charlie graciously strolled across to the fence, swept off his hat with a flourish and bowed politely to the crowds. Everyone laughed. Charlie *really* was a good boy now!

The End

