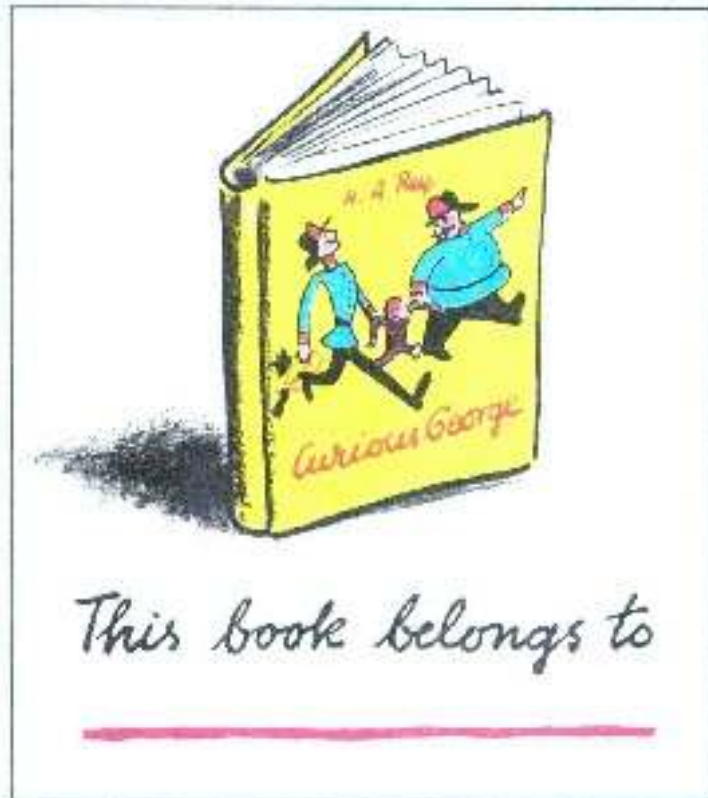


The Complete Adventures of Curious George

Margret and H. A. Rey







This book belongs to



The Complete Adventures
of
Curious George



MARGRET & H. A. REY



Houghton Mifflin Company
Boston

The Complete Adventures

of

Curious George

MARGRET & H. A. REY

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Boston

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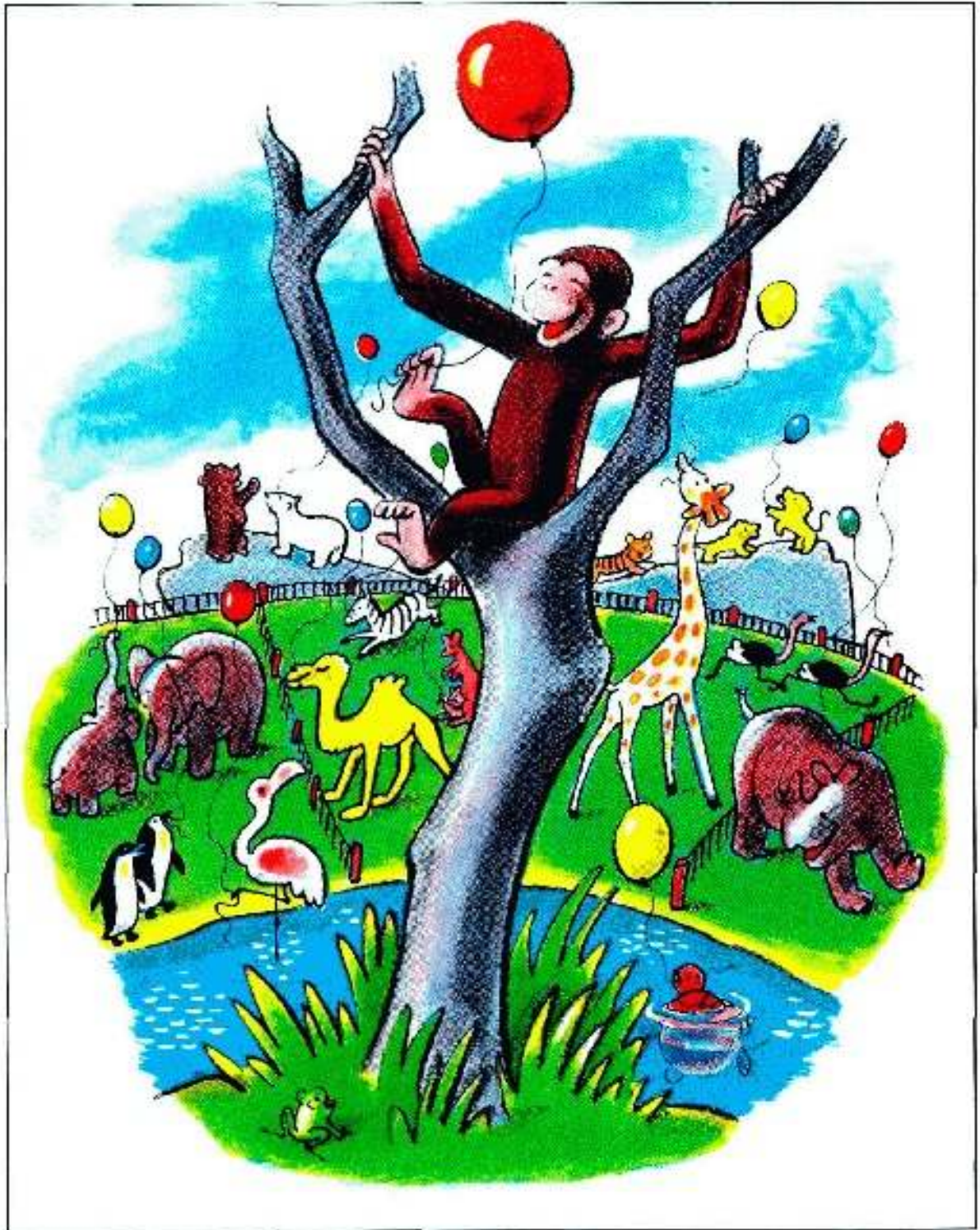
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An illustration from the original Curious George

An illustration from the original Curious George

Introduction

Curious George, quintessential childhood tale of monkeyshines and mischief, was the creation of wartime refugees who knew, better than George himself, what it meant to escape by the seat of one's pants. A self-taught artist, Hans Augusto Rey (1898—1977) and his Bauhaus-trained wife and collaborator, Margret (1906—1996), were German Jews who met and married in Brazil in 1935. After cofounding the first advertising agency in Rio de Janeiro, they returned to Europe in 1936, remaining in Paris until just hours before the German army entered the French capital on June 14, 1940. Then, fleeing by bicycle with their winter coats and several picture books strapped to the racks (including the watercolors and a draft of the as-yet-unpublished *Curious George*—then called *Fifi*), they crossed the French-Spanish border, caught a train bound for Lisbon, and then sailed to Brazil. Hans's Brazilian passport and Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy eased the couple's passage to the United States.

As a university student in Germany, Hans Rey had read philosophy and natural sciences and mastered several languages. It was largely by chance that this restless polymath, who also had a knack for drawing, embarked on a career in children's books. When an editor at the French house Gallimard admired his animal illustrations for a Paris newspaper, Rey, who was then in his thirties, responded by submitting the picture book later published in the United States as *Cecily G. and the 9 Monkeys* (Houghton Mifflin, 1942). The French *Cecily* marked not only Rey's debut in the field but also the first appearance of Curious George (who, under the name "Fifi," figures in the story as one of the nine). As more books for Gallimard followed, Rey also established a foothold in Britain, where Grace Hogarth, an American employed in London as Chatto & Windus's children's book editor, took an interest in his work. When wartime considerations prompted both Hogarth and the Reys to plan on resettling in the States, the editor secured from Hans the promise of a first look at whatever projects he might bring over with him.

Soon after the couple's arrival in New York, in October 1940, Hogarth, who had assumed the editorship of Houghton Mifflin's newly formed children's books department, came down from Boston to inspect the artist's wares. At canny Margret's insistence, Hogarth agreed to a then rare four-book contract. It was thus that in the fall of 1941 Houghton Mifflin published *Curious George* (the new title was the publisher's happy idea) as well as a novelty book called *How Do You Get There? Cecily G. and the 9 Monkeys* and a second lift-the-flap book, *Anybody at Home?*, followed a year later. (In 1942, Chatto & Windus issued the first British edition of *Curious George* under yet another title, *Zozo*: George was the reigning monarch's name, and in 1940s Britain, *curious* meant "gay.")

Margret, who was a famously tenacious negotiator, continued to mind the couple's business affairs while writing books of her own and contributing substantially to her husband's creative efforts as ad hoc art director and sometime coauthor. On occasion she even posed for drawings of George. In social situations, Hans typically made the gentler impression: when he roared like a lion, it was most often to make visiting children laugh. Nonetheless, Rey the artist was a steely perfectionist. In Paris, he had worked closely with the skilled artisans responsible for the printing of his books. To accommodate his wish to do so again, Hogarth chose a suitable New York printer, William Glaser, specialist in fine color work.

Rey may have assumed at first that his original watercolors were destined for reproduction by the same exacting—and costly—photolithographic process favored in Europe. Thrifty American publishers, however, reserved photolithography for picture books assured of a substantial sale, and

Rey had arrived in the United States an unknown. Moreover, the manager of the trade department and Hogarth's superior, Lovell Thompson, had concluded that the watercolors for *Curious George* looked "as if the author still planned to point them up ... and clean them up [in places]." Thompson ruled that a new set of "pre-separated" illustrations based on the watercolors should instead be prepared.

Whatever Rey's own first thoughts on the subject may have been, he quickly adapted to circumstance, as well as to the more graphic, less painterly aesthetic implicit in the method of reproduction made available to him. In preparing the separations for *Curious George*, Rey served a whirlwind apprenticeship, over the course of which he transformed a technique foreign to him into a uniquely expressive idiom for his art.

Curious George appeared to strong reviews on the same Houghton Mifflin list as Holling C. Holling's *Paddle-to-the-Sea* (which far outsold it up until the early 1950s) and in the same season as Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings* (Viking), which won the year's Caldecott Medal. The attack on Pearl Harbor followed later that same fall, and with the United States' entry into World War II came paper rationing and other wartime restrictions that severely limited the potential sale of most children's books.

Curious George's fortunes rose with the birthrate during the postwar baby boom years. One of the book's first reviewers had predicted that small children would "wear the book out with affection." With time and the publication of six sequels, Rey's spry mischief-maker came to occupy a permanent place in our collective imagination, a near relation to Dr. Seuss's Cat in the Hat, Don Freeman's Corduroy, and Maurice Sendak's Max. Sixty years after he first endeared himself to the mild-mannered man with the yellow hat, George remains a bright standard-bearer for the universal curiosity of children: their large-as-life need to touch and tangle with the world and to learn by doing—even if to do so means occasionally landing in thickets of trouble.

Over the years, the Reys, who had no children of their own, remained unaffected by their steadily growing fame and fortune. They continued to work hard and live modestly, first in New York's Greenwich Village and later in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and to lend their support to causes in which they believed, such as the civil rights movement. From time to time, typically at intervals of five or six years, they returned to their favorite character to tell a new story about him.

More often than not, the Reys had something up their sleeve. *Curious George Gets a Medal* (1957), in which George goes for a ride in a rocket, was published, presciently, weeks before the Soviets' surprise launch of the *Sputnik II* satellite, which carried the first animal into space (a small dog named Laika). Hans Rey, long fascinated by the prospects for space travel, had wished to share his enthusiasm for rocketry with the young. Then, a year after Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat* popularized the practice for storybooks, Margret Rey wrote *Curious George Flies a Kite* (1958) with a "controlled," or simplified, vocabulary aimed at helping children learn to read. *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* (1966) was conceived in part as an aid in preparing children for first-time hospital stays.

The Reys, however, took care not to allow their nobler intentions to overwhelm their beloved little monkey's blithely madcap appeal. From the first book to the last, George remains the most entertaining of characters—the ultimate innocent and incorrigible clown. For Hans and Margret Rey there was lesson enough for readers in the threadbare margin by which George survives his more spectacular pratfalls. Had not the couple learned a similar lesson, in a far darker key, themselves, cycling at the last possible moment through enemy lines in Occupied Europe toward an uncertain

future nearly half a world away?

For Curious George's creators, to land on one's feet was always the first order of business: the rest was joy.

—Leonard S. Marc

Curious George A Publisher's Perspective

By any standard of publishing, the Houghton Mifflin children's list of 1941 was a very fine list indeed. About twenty books saw publication that year; six stayed in print for about two decades, three still remain. The list was the work of Grace Hogarth, one of England's great children's book editors, who had come to live in Boston during the war. She convinced the Houghton management that the house needed a children's book department, such as those that existed in many British and American firms. She started the department, trained Lee Kingman Natti to succeed her, and managed to publish some of America's classic authors and books before returning to England after the war.

On October 18, 1940, Grace wrote to H. A. Rey in New York, saying, "I am, as you know, keen on all your books." But in a later letter she acknowledged that she had never seen *Fifi*, the original French version of *Curious George*. By modern standards, Ms. Hogarth moved with lightning speed. On November 7, she informed the Reys that she would give them a contract for four titles, with an advance of \$1,000—probably one of the most well spent \$1,000 in all of publishing history. "Keen," Grace Hogarth may have been, but she protected Houghton's finances with an eagle eye. H. A. Rey accepted the \$1,000, but noted that it was "considerably lower" than advances he had received in England and France. By November 13, both the print run of *Curious George* at 7,500 copies and the price of \$2.00 or less had been established. A week later the publication date of August 1941 had been set. Perhaps with a small list and few staff members, such decisions came even more quickly than would be possible in our high-speed technological age. Grace Hogarth would have preferred to publish *Raffy (Cecily G. and the 9 Monkeys)* first, but, as she wrote, "It has occurred to us that by 1942 the Nazis may be out of Paris, in which case we might be able to buy sheets of *Raffy* from Gallimard [the French publisher]." And therefore, *Curious George* became the first Rey picture book offered in the United States.

But it is only by happy circumstance that we can celebrate the birthday of George at all. He might well never have come into being. He was, after all, smuggled out of Paris on a bicycle as his creators fled the Nazis in 1940. Although *Curious George* was published to strong sales, three other 1941 titles—Holling C. Holling's *Paddle-to-the-Sea*, Virginia Lee Burton's *Calico*, and Richard Hubler's *Lou Gehrig*, all outshone George in book sales for many years. Laudatory but unexceptional reviews greeted the book; *Horn Book* called the saga "a satisfying funny book," but gave more praise to other titles, which have long since vanished from the canon of children's books.

In 1945, in fact, *Curious George* had sold negative-six copies; bookstores returned more than they bought that year. Many books with this kind of selling record have been and are still being put out of print at such a moment in their history. But Houghton continued to support the Reys and George through six more titles. Grace Hogarth and her successors had taken a shine to the insouciant little monkey, as had children themselves. Eventually, early readers of George began to pass down the

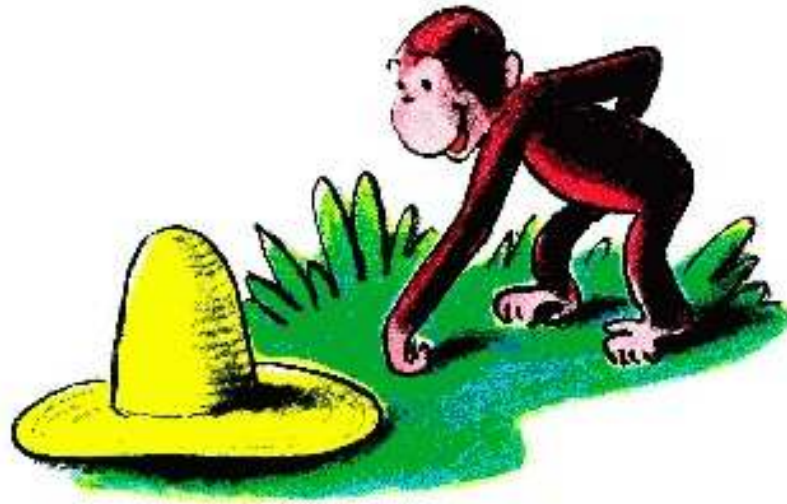
books to their own children. In 1958 *Curious George* managed to sell over 10,000 copies in a year for the first time. Today, close to 25 million copies of the *Curious George* titles are in print. Few—children's books ever stay in print for a decade. At six decades, George's story remains more vital than most that will be brought into print this year.

As human beings, the Reys were as remarkable as the character they created. Hans was a genius with children. I once saw him entertain an auditorium with probably five hundred children brought in by school bus to Boston for the day. I could have heard a pin drop as he drew and talked, a man as modest and gentle as his character. Margret, a force to be reckoned with in the universe, had served as Hans's model for *Curious George* and was unfailingly direct and curious herself. She could make grown men weep, and could—and did—terrorize her publishers. I would pick up the phone to hear Margret's voice saying, "You always wear hats, Anita. Is there something wrong with your head?" And, of course, because she demanded an answer, I could only reply, "Nothing, Margret, that a hat can't hide." When those who worked with her get together, we still tell Margret stories—she left a memory of her spirit and her courage with us all.

As Margret lay dying she called many of her friends and colleagues, in turn, to say goodbye. The last time I saw her, she was in her bed, too weak to talk much but still very present. She held my hand and sang in German. As I sat with her, I had a vision of Margret as a girl, speaking the language of her ancestors. She had always remained close to that child, as had Hans to the child within him. Now Hans, Margret, and their books belong to the ages. But their most enduring creation, *Curious George*, lives on—an ever-mischievous young monkey, beloved by children for sixty years.

—Anita Silver
Westwood, Massachusetts

Curious George



Curious George

This is George.

He lived in Africa.

He was a good little monkey
and always very curious.



One day George saw a man.
He had on a large yellow straw hat.

The man saw George too.

"What a nice little monkey," he thought.

"I would like to take him home with me."

He put his hat on the ground

and, of course, George was curious.

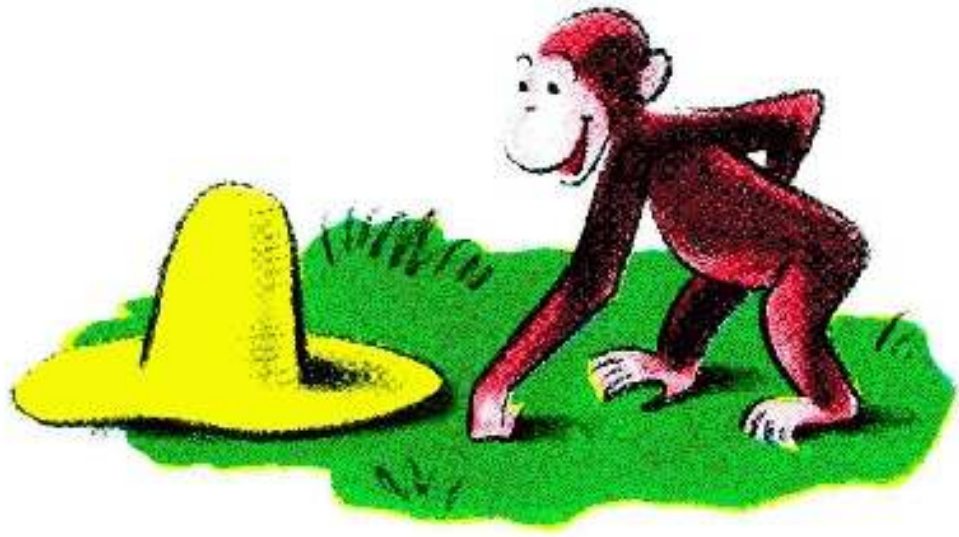
He came down from the tree

to look at the large yellow hat.



The hat had been on the man's head.
George thought it would be nice

to have it on his own head.
He picked it up and put it on.



The hat covered George's head.

He couldn't see.

The man picked him up quickly
and popped him into a bag.

George was caught.



The man with the big yellow hat
put George into a little boat,

and a sailor rowed them both
across the water to a big ship.
George was sad, but he was still
a little curious.



On the big ship, things began to happen.
The man took off the bag.

George sat on a little stool and the man said,
"George, I am going to take you to a big Zoo
in a big city. You will like it there.

Now run along and play,
but don't get into trouble."

George promised to be good.

But it is easy for little monkeys to forget.



On the deck he found some sea gulls.
He wondered how they could fly.

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