

Chimpanzee

Chimpanzee

She had a monkey on her shoulder. She didn't remember how it came to be, just that it had been that way for a long time. She had a monkey on her shoulder longer than she didn't have a monkey on her shoulder. That much she knew. She didn't talk about it. Often, she would pretend it wasn't there. Even when it was chattering in her ear. Even then, she would pretend it didn't exist. It was easier that way.

She sat in a quiet room. She wore a smart jumper and black trousers. She tried not to think about the monkey on her shoulder. She picked at her fingernail and looked at the reception desk in front of her. The receptionist's bright red nails flew across a keyboard. They clicked against the keys. She looked at her own bitten down nails. She clenched her fists.

"Look at the state of you." The monkey on her shoulder said. "You look terrible. You should have dressed up. They won't hire you. Biting your nails like a ten year old. They won't hire you." She could feel her throat tightening up. She took a deep breath. She had heard that taking a deep breath helps calm you down.

The monkey, as she imagined it, was quite large. Not as big as a gorilla, not as small as a capuchin. Probably chimpanzee size, if she had to say. It hunkered against her back. Its knees pressed against her lower spine. Its claws gripped onto her shoulders. Its fangs hovered inches from her ear.

"You can go in now." The receptionist said.

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“Ok.” She stammered. Her chest felt tight and she could feel the chimpanzee’s claws dig into her shoulders. Its feet wrapped around her stomach and squeezed. She tried to get up but her legs felt weak. Only when the receptionist threw her a puzzled look did she manage to stand.

“Just through that door.” The receptionist said, motioning with her head.

“Off you go.” Chimpanzee snarled. “Try not to cry this time.”

“Would it...could I go to the bathroom first?” She said, her voice shaking slightly.

The receptionist looked puzzled all over again.

“Of course...I’ll let them know.” The receptionist replied. “It’s just down there.”

She walked with purpose, Chimpanzee weighing heavier with each step. She walked past the bathroom and through the door marked EXIT. She quickened her pace and Chimpanzee weighed heavier and heavier. She walked home quickly, brushing the tears from her eyes before they could fall down her cheeks. Chimpanzee laughed.

“So? How was it?” Her mother asked.

“It was ok.” She replied, looking down at her hands.

“Liar.” Chimpanzee said.

“How did you leave it with them?” Her mother asked. “Any idea whether you got it or...”

“They said they’d call...” She shrugged and went to leave the room.

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“Liar.” Chimpanzee said again. Her mother called after her but she didn’t look back. She went to her bedroom and sat on her bed. She stared at the wall. She stared at the wall for so long she didn’t notice the light of day disappear into dusk.

“What is wrong with you?” Chimpanzee whispered into the dark room. “I’m serious. What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I don’t know.” She whispered back.

“Why can’t you function like a normal person? Why do you always fuck it up?” Chimpanzee wondered.

“I don’t know.” She whispered back.

“Why are you like this?” Chimpanzee asked.

“I don’t know.” She whispered back.

It was a birthday party. All her friends were there. And Chimpanzee. Chimpanzee was always there. She sat with her friends. She drank a glass of wine. She was chatting and laughing and singing along to the music. Chimpanzee nuzzled against her shoulder. People stood up to make room. Chairs were moved. She was sitting next to someone she didn’t know. She smiled. He smiled back.

“What the hell are you going to do now?” Chimpanzee wondered. “Get up and go sit with your friends.” She concentrated on the music, swaying slightly with the beat.

“Good song.” The man said, swaying with her.

“Yeah.” She said.

“Good one.” Chimpanzee snarled. She tried to think of something else to say but her mind went blank. Chimpanzee dug its claws in.

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“So...” The man said. Another smile. She smiled back. “What do you do?”

“Oh here we go.” Chimpanzee said, embracing her so tightly that she felt her chest constrict.

“Oh well, you know...I’m actually...” She stumbled, her mind racing. She was forgetting her words. Chimpanzee was cackling against her ear.

“Oh for fucks sake.” Chimpanzee snarled. “Get up. Ditch this guy.”

“I’m just going to run out for a smoke.” She said quickly. She stood up before he could reply. She went outside, to the front of the house. She lit up a cigarette and paced.

“You should just go home.” Chimpanzee said.

She paced for another fifteen minutes. Then she went home. Chimpanzee hugged her close.

At night she would find reprieve. Chimpanzee wouldn’t leave. Chimpanzee would never leave. But it would unhook its claws and climb off her shoulders. It would climb the wall, then the ceiling. It would hang directly above her bed. She would lie there and stare at Chimpanzee. Chimpanzee would stare back. She would wait for sleep to take her. She would wait and wait.

Stare and wait.

Stare and wait.

Sometimes she would lie there all night, staring. Sometimes she would close her eyes and hum. If she were lucky, she would fall unconscious before dawn. She wasn’t usually very lucky. Chimpanzee would snigger and whisper. Not loud enough to disturb the silence of the night, but loud enough to disturb her.

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She would stare and wait.

Chimpanzee would snigger and whisper.

She sat at her desk. Chimpanzee clung to her shoulders. She looked around and marvelled. A new job. A new start. That's what everyone told her. That's what she told herself. The phone rang and she jumped slightly, still not used to the sound.

“Hello?” She answered. “Yes, I've got them here...no problem...I'll see you then.”

She put down the phone and stared at it for a long moment. Chimpanzee chuckled softly.

“The boss wants to see you.” Chimpanzee said. She shrugged her shoulders.

Chimpanzee kicked her sharply in the stomach. “They're going to fire you.” She shook her head. She took a deep breath. “You've been here a month and they want to get rid of you already.” She stood up abruptly, trying to drown out Chimpanzee with the frantic movement. Chimpanzee snorted. She startled the woman whose desk was next to hers. She tried to offer the woman an apologetic smile without looking directly at her. Chimpanzee threw its head back and cackled.

She sat in a bathroom cubicle and cried. She put her hand in her mouth so that no one would hear her sobs. Chimpanzee pounded its fist against her back.

“You're going to fuck it all up.” Chimpanzee said with glee. “You thought you could do it but you can't.”

“I thought I could.” She agreed, still choking back tears.

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“You can’t.” Chimpanzee sang. She nodded her head. She cried for two more minutes. Then she composed herself and went back to work. When she got back to her desk, she put headphones on. She played music loudly in her ear, trying to drown Chimpanzee out. It wrapped its claw around her neck and kept a tight hold. Her throat burned and tears pricked her eyes. But she was grateful for the quiet.

“So how’s the new job?” Her friend asked. She took a sip of coffee before answering.

“Its great.” She replied, making sure to inject some enthusiasm into her voice.

“You hate it.” Chimpanzee said in her ear. Her friend nodded eagerly and patted her gently on her arm.

“I’m so glad.” Her friend said. “I knew it was only a matter of time. You seem so much happier.”

“I am.” She lied, nodding along, mimicking her friend’s smile.

“Tell her about how you want to die.” Chimpanzee snarled.

She sipped her coffee and asked her friend a question. And then another. And another. She listened. She smiled. She laughed. Chimpanzee wrapped its long arms around her chest. It felt heavier than ever.

She stood in front of the mirror and looked. Chimpanzee looked. She tried to think of a reason to stay. She tried to think of her family and her friends. She tried to remember what it was like to feel happy.

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To feel hopeful.

To feel.

“What’s the point?” Chimpanzee asked. She tried to think of an answer. “You have everything you need. There’s no reason for you to be like this. There’s something wrong with you.”

“I know.” She whispered back. She turned away from the mirror. She couldn’t look anymore.

“If you’re not happy now, you’ll never be happy.” Chimpanzee said, bouncing against her back.

“I know.” She whispered.

“So really you have to ask yourself. What’s the point?”

“I don’t know.” She whispered. “I don’t know what to do.”

“I think you do.” Chimpanzee replied.

Her mother tried to hug her but Chimpanzee was in the way. She struggled out of the embrace and looked at the ground.

“Just tell me.” Her mother pleaded. “Tell me how I can help you.”

“You should have done something when you had the chance.” Chimpanzee snarled.

“Please.” Her mother took her hand. “Tell me.”

She couldn’t look at her mother. She tried to raise her gaze to meet her but she couldn’t lift her head. Chimpanzee nuzzled against her neck and weighed her down. She wanted to speak

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but she couldn't find the words. She wanted to hug her mother but she couldn't lift her arms. Instead she squeezed her hand. Her mother squeezed it back. She could hear her mother's wristwatch cut through the silence. She listened as the seconds ticked by. Tick, tick, tick. She waited and listened. Chimpanzee waited. Her mother waited. Then she began to speak. Just a whisper. So quiet that her mother had to lean in close to hear her.

"Its ok." Her mother whispered back. "You can tell me."

Tick

Tick

Tick

And then she did.

She sat in a quiet room. She wore a smart jumper and black trousers. She thought about the monkey on her shoulder. Chimpanzee pounded her back with its fists. It kicked her stomach. It screeched in her ear. Chimpanzee was angry.

"So..." The woman in front of her began. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She thought for a moment. She listened to Chimpanzee snarl and screech. She opened her mouth but she found that words would not come. She couldn't speak. Instead, she nodded her head. The woman in front of her nodded back before adding, "Take as much time as you need."

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It would take her a long time. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. She would need it all. And then, she began to talk about Chimpanzee. Chimpanzee screeched and hollered but somehow she found that she could talk over Chimpanzee's screeching. The more she talked the quieter Chimpanzee got. And then one day Chimpanzee was lost for words. And she could hear herself louder than ever before.

And one day she understood. Eventually, the monkey on her shoulder would climb down.

Chimpanzee would never leave her.

Chimpanzee would live inside a cage she had built for it.

She held the key. That much she knew.

The End