

## GORILLA BAIT

Ed and Gene worked at a zoo. Ed had bad teeth; Gene's hair was always messy. They worked at the zoo because they had no problem cleaning up animal shit and spraying the filth and bacteria off the cages. Everybody knew Ed and Gene liked to drink. There was a tavern nearby; Ed and Gene sometimes stopped for beers before work, to chat it up, or they'd pull over at a local gas station and just drink in their trucks.

A gorilla at the zoo named Mr. Soggy had a large cage. The cage was large because it was meant to house two gorillas, but one of them had passed away recently, Soggy's mate. Soggy was getting old; when his mate passed, he became extremely aggressive. Soggy was habitually pissed off at the crowds. When dinner came, Soggy waited for it to be set, then he'd lumber off for an hour, working himself up. He only ate when he knew he was alone. Until surveillance was checked, it wasn't known if he was eating or hiding the food somewhere.

Ed and Gene worked nights. They usually started at 11. Ed had been around for a year or two longer than Gene, so he held the keys. Ed and Gene were supposed to make sure everything was safe and the animals were content.

Ed and Gene both had a secret: they *hated* animals. They especially hated the exotic ones. It sickened them that animals could spend all day, sitting in their cages, doing nothing, while people pampered them, fed them, and *washed* them. It was as if

they were helpless. Why couldn't animals take care of themselves? They made messes, left, right, *hissed*, *squealed* when you entered to clean -- they had no gratitude.

There was no gratitude in an animal's eyes when one delivered its meal. Ten years could pass, morning, noon, night, a *hundred thousand* meals, it was always the same stupid look. They knew what you were doing.

Ed threw rocks at the birds. Sometimes Gene took a bucket of water -- he'd *toss* it onto the leopards. He'd listen to them grumble, watch them run around inside their pens.

Soggy the gorilla was the most useless of all. He sat, drooped his chin, waited for nothing, some *freak* unbound of meaning, sitting a hole in the earth, biding time. With his mate gone, Soggy's only pleasure was staring down his keepers, following them, turning his head as they passed. Ed had never seen a more insulting animal. He would purposely *kick* Soggy's food through the slot, *against* the wall, *spill* it out onto the floor. Ed got a good laugh out of it, watching Soggy watch him. Soggy held his composure.

"I hate that motherfucking gorilla," Ed told Gene.

Some days, Ed or Gene would come to work drunk. Some days, one of them would be *really* drunk. One day, they both happened to be *trashed*. No one noticed. Ed had a cooler full of beer. He kept it cool, tied to a line, left in the penguins' pool.

Soggy, earlier that day, had barreled, teeth *barred*, at a crowd. Ed and Gene were told; they thought it funny, until they'd heard Soggy had rubbed shit all along his cage bars, against the walls. It smelled *rancid*, like rotting meat. Ed and Gene knew how long it would take to clean up the mess. "That motherfucking gorilla," said Ed.

Ed and Gene, drunk, held off Soggy's cage until last, about quarter past one. Beside a few janitors, Ed and Gene were alone.

It was a full moon. Ed and Gene pulled the beer from the icy water; they finished it off. Ed and Gene lay back against plastic artificial mounds of snow, the penguins locked within cramped holding cages, watching, as Ed and Gene took a well-deserved break. The sound of rushing water, the breeze of the air conditioning...

"Gene," said Ed, "this job can suck my *cock*. I hate it."

"Same here, brother."

"You know what I hate *most* of all?"

"What?"

"That fucking *gorilla*. That soggy-nigger-jigaboo jackass baboon. I hate it."

"I hate it, too."

"I hate the looks it gives me. I hate the way it thinks it runs everything around here--"

"Yeah."

"--when we're the two who *really* run this place. Why should we have to pick up its shit?"

"Yeah."

"It knows how to make a mess. Can't it pick it up?"

"This zoo should be shut *down*. Zoos treat these things like they're fuckin' *royalty* or something."

"Pampered fuckin'... These monsters. Fuckin' motherfucking disgrace, animal *cunts...*"

"We should get back, man."

"I'm not cleaning up that ape's shit."

"Well, if you're not, I ain't, either. But then we'll both be fired."

"Fuck..."

"Come on. We gotta pick up that shit. Ain't nothing new."

Ed and Gene lumbered to Soggy's cage. A few crickets chirped in the night air. The air, infrequently traced with the scent of gorilla feces...

Ed unlocked the door to Soggy's shed. Soggy, who had been sitting, facing the sun as it had set, turned to look... He made no motion. Soggy stared at Ed.

Gene arrived with a bucket and mop. He saw Ed staring at Soggy. "Geeze, Ed. Ha ha! What an ugly sonofabitch."

"Fuck him. I didn't do nothin'," said Ed. "This ape thinks he's better than me."

"You gonna take that?"

"*Fuck you!*" Ed screamed at Soggy. *FUCK YOU!*" Soggy lifted his lip, bared two teeth. "That's right, get in your *fuckin'* cage!"

Soggy turned his back.

"You see that?" said Gene.

Ed, *furios*, turned from the cage, *ran* off, *cursing* under his breath. He was filled with *rage*. Gene checked his watch.

"Gene."

"Yeah?"

"I've had it. I'm gonna teach this ape a lesson."

"How's that?"

Ed walked to Soggy's bars. He unzipped his pants. "Hey, *shit* turd."

Soggy didn't look.

Ed began *peeing* through the bars, into the dirt. Soggy turned around.

Gene *laughed*. Ed had to sit down to keep from falling.

"Good piss. Good piss, ape."

Soggy stood up. Very quickly, he *ran* to the cage bars. He *threw* something--

A clod of wet shit *struck* Ed in the chest. "Ahh! *Motherfuck! Ahh!*" Ed *grabbed* a broomstick, *swatted* it against Soggy's cage. The *clang* of the bars *startled* Soggy. He took a step back. Then he let out a low *grumble*.

"*Fuck* you," said Ed.

"Get him."

Ed took the broom, *shoved* it through the bars, aiming for Soggy. Soggy *darted*, *backed* off. Ed, scowling, stuck the stick in further, *further*, getting closer to Soggy.

"There you go," chuckled Gene. "You almost got him there."

Ed worked the stick, farther, *faster*...

Soggy -- with one hairy mitt he grabbed the stick, *pulled* it and Ed in. Ed *inhaled*, *skidded* his feet... Ed's right hand, clutching the broomstick, went through the bars. Soggy *wrapped* his paw over Ed's little hand, over the stick. He *SQUEEZED*...

Gene heard the *snap, crunch* of hand and stick, saw blood, loose skin *OOZE* from under Soggy's fist. Soggy *SHOOK, wrenching* half of the broomstick free. It *CLATTERED* against the earth. Ed *SHRUNK, SPUTTERING*. Soggy let go, walked off... Ed *fell* back against the concrete.

"Oh, *Jesus*," said Gene. "What a fucking thing." He leaned over Ed. Ed's hand was mangled, beyond recognition. It was bone, blood, and splinters. "Fuck me, Ed. He got you bad."

"Oh, *fuck*..." Ed had tears in his eyes. He was pale...

Gene looked for the emergency kit. He found some gauze. He ran back to Ed, kneeled down. He began wrapping the wound.

"Oh, Jesus, Ed."

"What you doing?"

"It's bleeding everywhere."

"Oh. Wrap it. *Wrap* it."

"That's what I'm doing."

"It's fucking *done*, ain't it?"

"Yeah. And so are we."

"Ehh. Ohhhh! That fucking thing."

"Well... I think, Ed, you ought to see a hospital, at least. I bet they'll foot the bill."

Ed shook his head. "No. He thinks this is funny. I'm a cripple for life. We need to pay him back."

"How we do that?"

"I got mace in my truck. Nobody likes mace, 'specially apes."

Ed thought. He liked the idea. "Yeah. Yeah. You want to grab it?"

"Yeah, I'll get it." Gene *ran* out the pen. He *sprinted* through the zoo, past all the other animals... He heard a *roar*, some *squawking*. Gene reached the front entrance, headed through the gate, into the parking lot. There were over three hundred spaces, but only three cars. Two of them were Ed and Gene's. The third looked like it belonged to that Mexican spick janitor, the one who Ed and Gene hated.

Gene opened Ed's glove compartment. He found the mace, *ran* back.

Gene reached Ed. He saw a large puddle of blood. Ed was passed out.

"Ed. Ed."

Ed opened his eyes. "Gene?"

"We're gonna teach that ape a lesson."

"Yeah. Go for it."

Gene *banged* on the bars. Soggy wouldn't move. He looked asleep... Gene *banged louder*. "*Come on, motherfuck. Come on.*"

"Not so loud, Gene. People'll hear."

"This cunt."

Ed sat up. "Open the *fucking* cage."

"The *cage*?"

Ed reached for his keys, but Gene had them, and Ed didn't have enough fingers.

"You gotta do it. It's the silver one."

Gene found the silver key, thick and shiny.

Ed tried rising to his feet. He stepped in his blood. "*Ahh.*"

"Here, let me help you."

Gene pulled Ed up. Ed *stumbled* to the bars, clenched one with his remaining hand. He steadied himself. "I'll open the door; you tease him over. He's fast, so don't go in all the way."

"Okay."

"He comes close, I'll shut the door; you *spray* him."

"Okay."

"Ready?"

"Yeah."

Ed couldn't get the door unlocked, so Gene did it. Ed couldn't open the door, so Gene did it. Gene stepped through... He set one foot on the dirt... "Mr. *Gorilla*. You old, soggy bastard."

Ed bit his lip...

"Come on, Mr. Soggy."

Soggy remained still.

"Mr. *Gorilla*," said Gene. "Come *here*, Soggy. Come *on*, Soggy."

Gene took another step. Then another. Then another... "*Soggy!*" Soggy didn't move.



Gene crept further. Soggy was about twenty feet away. Gene held the mace, his hand shaking. "Soggy!"

Soggy *whipped* around-- Gene *sprayed* the mace--

Soggy *lunged*-- Gene *tripped* back, *turned*--

"Run!"

Gene reached the door, *hit* his side against it, *spun*-- Soggy, behind him, *reached* out-- Gene held up the mace-- Soggy *blocked* the spray with his hand. Soggy grabbed Gene's blue custodial shirt and ripped it off-- Soggy opened his mouth, his eyes black. He took Gene's shoulder, held him, *plowed* his mitt and *Gene's face EXPLODED*--

Ed took the mace from Gene's hand. He *sprayed* the mace--

Soggy let out a *roar*. He *collapsed*, *rolled* about the ground-- Ed grabbed Gene.

"Gene..."

"Huhgh?"

"Get up."

"Wha' happened?"

"Soggy got the best a us, bud. We gotta go. Come *on*."

"Oh, shit, Ed. Oh, *shit*. I can' feel nothing, Ed."

"Come on! Get up!"

"I can' see nothin'. I can' see nothin'!"

Ed wiped blood from Gene's eyes. Gene saw Soggy, *tossing* around.

"Wha' happened?"

"Get out here." Ed started pulling Gene. Soggy rolled over, closer... Soggy caught Gene's ankle, *whipped* him to the dirt. "AGHHH!"

Soggy, eyes swollen, *twisted* Gene's ankle with a *CRACK*. Gene *screamed--*

Ed *kicked* Soggy in the head. Soggy *moaned*, released Gene--

"Come on, Gene! *Come on!*"

Gene shuffled back. Soggy *rolled* on top. "EGHD!"

"Fuck! *Gene!*" Soggy was on top of Gene.

Gene *wrapped* both his arms around Soggy's neck; he *squeezed*.

Soggy *shook...*

Ed picked up the broken broomstick, aimed the sharp end at Soggy-- with one hand he *buried* it into Soggy's chest. The stick didn't go far, but Soggy felt it... He *kicked* Ed back--

Ed *wheezed* at the stars...

Gene held on to Soggy. For five minutes, they wrestled... Soggy *turned* on his chest, *snapping* off the stick. He tried standing, but was too weak. Gene held on...

Eventually, Soggy relaxed. He settled... Remained still. Gene didn't know if Soggy was dead or not, so he continued hanging on, re-set his grip. He held on for another fifteen minutes, until his arms gave out...

The entire zoo was *ALIVE WITH SCREAMS*. Gene hobbled up, out of the pen, into the dark...