

Paul left the zoo at the completion of his shift the following morning. He was tired, stressed, and had a strong craving for scotch. Things hadn't gone quite as expected last night, and now he had to deal with the consequences.

He had watched in horror when the chimpanzee's foot had tangled in the rope. If it had been any one of the other chimps, it wouldn't have been a problem. They would have been able to extricate themselves from the mess after they'd regained consciousness. But no, it had to be the chimp that had died. And Paul had known immediately that he was the target chimp, since it was Paul who had obtained his DNA sample nearly two weeks ago and sent it off to his mystery employer.

Following the testing session, Paul had removed all evidence of his being down at the primate enclosure and quickly retreated to his office. After cutting the loop he'd previously created, the security guard reconnected the cameras and sat staring at the screen for a considerable time.

His eyes had remained fixed on the dangling primate. He was hoping that the gas had failed, that the primate would suddenly come to life just as his playmates did earlier. It wouldn't matter to Paul if the gas wasn't effective. He'd been witnessed carrying out his task. He would still get paid.

Paul had originally intended to feign ignorance regarding the primate's passing. When queried about it, he'd planned to state that the chimp appeared to have been sleeping, that he could not possibly have known that he was dead. It *was* plausible. After all, he wasn't an animal expert. He was a security guard. Now he couldn't do that. If the casualty had occurred in the nocturnal mammalian section, he would have gotten away with it, but Chimps aren't in the habit of sleeping like bats.

After a tortuous twenty minutes, Paul had finally forced his eyes away from the chimpanzee and rang the on-call vet. If left too long the body would go cold. No doubt he would then be reprimanded for not noticing the inverted primate sooner.

When the vet arrived at the enclosure, Paul was certain that he could smell alcohol on his breath. He calculated that it was a little late for an after-dinner wine and hoped that the vet had put more than a couple away.

The short, rather stubby figure had stood dumbfounded at the viewing window when he saw the dead chimpanzee. His surprise at the odd sight produced exaggerated arcs in the man's bushy eyebrows. They reminded Paul of a furry McDonald's sign.

When the vet had inquired about what had happened, Paul had informed him that the chimp had simply awoken and ascended the climbing ropes. After perching in the hammock for a few minutes, the security guard stated that he saw the primate fall. There was no struggle, no fuss. He simply hung there.

After sectioning off the remaining chimpanzees, Paul had assisted the vet in freeing the body. It

was then transported to the zoo's morgue where an autopsy would be undertaken to determine the cause of death.

As Paul exited the zoo and walked the short distance to the garage, he grew increasingly pessimistic about his future at the zoo. He'd previously been assured that an autopsy would indicate that the chimpanzee had experienced a fatal stroke. Despite this, he couldn't shake the fear that a blood analysis would indicate the presence of some chemical or another that was used in the gas. Even if it wasn't, someone would probably suggest watching the video footage of the chimp's demise to ascertain how he came to be tangled in the rope. The loop Paul had created would then be discovered.

He would be dismissed at the least. If the zoo could establish that he had committed an act of cruelty, then there would be charges. Paul would once again be unemployed, living the life he had worked so hard to extract himself from almost a year ago.

*Shit!*

After reaching his car, Paul stopped and fumbled around in his bag for the keys. It took him longer than usual due to the extra items he had brought with him. As his hand continued searching in, out, and around the contents with insectile rapidity, he realized how eerily quiet it was in the garage. It was pre-dawn, and given that the daytime workers had not yet begun to arrive, it was almost empty. He looked around and breathed a sigh of relief when his fingers touched the cool metal of his keys.

The security guard unlocked the car and climbed inside. He frowned at his spookiness and put it down to the events of the previous evening. He could still see the chimpanzee hanging there not moving; his brown eyes open, staring into the camera.

As he lifted the key to the ignition, he was startled by a slight noise coming from the rear of the vehicle. It sounded like the rustle of fabric. He told himself to stop being stupid, but he could not resist the pull of his eyes to the rear-view mirror.

The mirror revealed an unspectacular pit of empty darkness. There was no bogeyman in the back seat, no plastic bag raised over his head, no gun leveled at his brains. Paul gave a short nervous laugh. He was just about to look away from the mirror when a darkened shape moved into view. It was accompanied by the sound he had heard moments ago.

Paul felt the flush of adrenalin reach his extremities almost immediately, and a thick heat forced its way to the surface of his skin. His heart pounded heavily against his ribs, the initial beat of such intensity that it resembled the impact a soccer ball makes when caught at the chest.

He knew he should move. Try to throw himself out of the car. Confront his attacker. *Something*. Yet he couldn't act. Like a trapped animal he sat there, awaiting his fate, his eyes locked on the mirror.

The outline of his attacker's head came quickly into focus and suddenly confusion rippled through Paul's fear. As the shape moved forward, the two distinct flickers of eye shine that met his

monopolized his attention.

He never saw the knife coming.