

ONE

Dana loved dawns like these, when the world was blinded by humidity. The October fog caressed her throat with a lush moisture that made her want to throw her head back and drink up its coolness before the sun burnt it off. From the empty dirt and gravel parking lot, she could barely make out the form of the main building and knew only by memory where the electric fence lay. She could imagine she had emerged from her truck not in South Carolina but somewhere else entirely—another country, another continent.

A hunched figure about four feet tall raced through the half-darkness. Dana cried out and clutched her briefcase strap so fiercely it buckled in her grip. She peered into the mist. Nothing—no movement, no sound to track. She dropped her briefcase to free her hands and began to pant-hoot, softly at first and gradually louder and more urgent—*Hoo, hoo, hoo*—until her voice erupted into a shriek—*WRAAAAA, WRAAAAA*. From inside the electric fence, several chimpanzees called back, but another, closer one hooted behind her.

Dana jerked her head toward the hoot, which she immediately recognized as that of Barafu, a female chimp who had arrived at the sanctuary from a medical laboratory only the month before. Through

the fog, a dark shape moved along the branch of a nearby tree before it stopped and settled almost invisibly into the surroundings. Dana could not believe it. Until now, Barafu had sat impassively in her holding cage, chewing her fingers until they bled, staring with the glassy, heartbreaking incomprehension of someone who had endured too much.

Dana removed her lunch from her briefcase, took an apple from the brown bag, and crouched beneath the tree. At first, she could not get her legs comfortable, so she shuffled, finding the right droop to her butt, the right tension in her thighs, a balance to her body that connected her to the earth. As much as she hated to admit it (and would not to anyone other than herself), her body no longer stretched and settled as easily as it once had. She prodded the pine needles with her free hand as though she were foraging for food. From the tree, Barafu watched, but the mist guarded her expression, so if she was curious or fearful, Dana could not tell.

Dana grunted, then took a crackling bite of the apple. With a fluid motion, she stretched the fruit toward Barafu, offering, watching the chimp for the moment when the fog brushed away from her face and Dana could judge what was going to happen next.

Barafu stiffly—in a manner far too elderly for her age—began her descent. The two primates, chimpanzee and human, faced each other in the lifting fog. The chimp brought her hand across her nose, wiping it, and stared at the apple. She lifted her gaze to Dana's with an unspoken question in her eyes: *May I have that apple?* Dana paused, studying the fruit as though reluctant to part with it. Barafu extended her arm, gestured with her fingers. *Come on, please.* Because Dana could not break a small portion of the apple off the way some of the chimps would, she placed the whole fruit in Barafu's upturned palm.

Instead of rushing back up the tree or into the shrubbery with her prize, Barafu began eating the apple at once, crunching loudly, pausing only to remove the woody stem from between her gum and cheek and then push it toward the center of her mouth. Except for a decided sag on the right side of her face, Barafu was a beautiful chimp with large, deep-set eyes and a full, contemplative mouth. Dana reached out tentatively, as if by touching the chimp's arm she could learn Barafu's

heart and history. The chimpanzee edged closer, offering her left side and back for a grooming. Dana almost forgot to breathe as she worked her fingers through the ape's wiry hair. She had touched many chimps in her lifetime, but each new encounter was a miracle of intimacy: the warmth rising off the body, the solid, yielding muscle underneath, the individual shape and smell of each chimpanzee. Her fingers found a ridge of hard scar about four inches long on Barafu's back, the hair gone from the skin around it. Barafu, once at the mercy of humans, let *this* human touch her. The trust was almost too great for Dana to bear. *Oh, Annie*, she thought, *Annie*. Touching Barafu's scar felt like a connection to long ago, when Dana was even more helpless than she was now.

Barafu tensed, and Dana stopped grooming. The chimp stared at something in the thinning fog, her mouth stretching into a tight grimace of fear that exposed her gums. A hunter, Dana thought, and she prepared to spring between the intruder and the ape, but instead another chimpanzee, the adolescent male Nyuki (Swahili for "Bee," from the strange buzz he was able to create with his lips) ambled toward them with the leisurely knuckle-walk of a chimp coming into his own.

Nyuki? But he had been in a *separate* holding cage. A small panic whirred inside her. The two cages had different entrances and locks, making it unlikely that both chimps had escaped. Something must have gone wrong inside the building.

From inside the electric fence, the Group A dominant male, Mwenzi, roused his group with a raucous shout and shaking of branches, startling the others into a hooting, screaming crowd. The more distant voice of the dominant male in Group B woke his own group. Nyuki paused, his head cocked to listen to the ruckus. Then, as though he had orchestrated the distraction, he lunged toward Dana's briefcase, snatched it up, and carried it out of her reach. Vibrating his lips with his peculiar buzz, he emptied the briefcase. Papers slid across the dusty ground.

"Here, Nyuki. Do you want a pear?" She took it out of the bag and dug her fingernails into the fruit's flesh until she had a mashed piece of pulp on the end of her fingers. "Come on, Nyuki, Barafu. I'll give you this inside."

As the chimps ambled toward her, Dana walked backward to

the main building, leading them with the pear. Either chimp could overpower her, even break her neck with a well-timed leap, but they remained calm, patient for the food they were sure she would share. Dana reached behind her to feel for the door. Not surprisingly, it swung open easily.

The crackle of sticks and stones beneath car tires punctuated the air: someone arriving for work. Barafu screamed and dashed past Dana into the building, followed closely by Nyuki, who snatched the paper bag from Dana as he rushed past. Without waiting to identify the car, Dana lunged through the front door after the chimps and bolted it from the inside.

The hallway was strewn with papers, books, a smashed coffeepot (worried, Dana inspected the glass for blood but found none), staplers, floppy disks, reams of data reports, scientific journals, and an overturned computer monitor with its cable hanging limply over its screen. Six or seven pens stuck out like seedlings from the grate of an air vent; an elaborate squiggle of pen marks decorated the wall above it. Dana stepped over a pile of framed family pictures assembled in the middle of the floor—one of the chimps must have scavenged them from the offices. On top, fittingly enough, was the image of her brother, his blue eyes squinting against the sun, T-shirt hanging loosely, one arm on the hood of Dana's truck as though he owned it.

From the soft buzzing, Dana could tell that Nyuki was in her office, so she peeked in. He had climbed onto Dana's desk to eat her lunch and was licking the hummus off the pita bread. He raised an arm threateningly when he saw her.

"Relax and eat your lunch," Dana told him. "I'm not going to take it." She closed the door, locking it behind her.

The building had six large holding cages, each with its own outdoor area and with open bars between them to allow physical contact with neighbors. These cages were used solely for new arrivals not yet ready for the outdoor groups and for what the assistant director, Mary Nakagawa, called "the hard-timers"—chimps who were dangers to themselves or others or who, for whatever reason, could not adapt to the social hierarchy of a large primate group. As Dana neared the end of the hall,

her stomach lurched: all the cage doors were open.

She rushed toward the first, which belonged to a chimp family confiscated from a small Florida zoo. In one corner, thin Maggie crouched, nursing her infant son, Mbu, but the rest of her family—her ten-year-old son, Sifongo, and her adult daughter, Neema, who was in estrus—had vanished. Dana grunted reassurances before closing and locking the holding cage.

The next cage was Barafu's, to which the female chimp had returned of her own accord. Barafu lowered her chin and hugged herself. She stared at Dana in her frightening, dull, unnatural way, then held out a long arm. Stepping inside, Dana hooted, offering the pear, now bruised and soft, ready to lock the two of them inside if Barafu made a dash for the exit, but Barafu gingerly removed the fruit from Dana's palm. A glimmer of pleasure was in Barafu's face, an enjoyment of the moment, a huge triumph for such an emotionally wounded chimp. As Dana stepped backward into the hall, Barafu knocked the door shut with her free arm like a teenager closing herself in her room.

Across the hall, Kitabu and her beloved rag doll were gone.

Someone was pounding at the front door, but Dana could not answer it now. She hurried to the other cages. Tekua, the sizable and sometimes hysterical male infected with the HIV virus, and, worst of all, Benji, dubbed "Psycho Chimp" by some of the less sympathetic graduate students, were both gone. Dana checked Nyuki's cage to see if any of the escaped chimps had wandered in, but it was empty. Her lungs could barely work from the panic. The nearby population, sparse as it was, had no idea of the danger now lurking in the woods.

"Dana!" a muffled voice—Mary's—yelled through the thick door. "What's going on?"

By the time Dana got back down the hall, Nyuki had figured out how to unlock her office. He burst into the hallway but then, seeing Dana, ducked back inside with a playful shriek. Dana closed and locked the door again, hoping to give herself enough time to unbolt the front entrance.

As Dana opened the door, Mary slipped through in a single side step. Mary Nakagawa was a small-boned woman who stood only as tall as

Dana's chin. Despite the size difference, Mary looked at Dana squarely, and at once the hallway filled with breathable air.

"Who escaped?" Mary asked.

"We're still missing five."

"Jesus! Five? How—"

"It looks like someone let them out. We're still missing Kitabu, Sifongo, Neema—and worst of all, Tekua and Benji."

Mary briefly closed her eyes. "We're screwed."

"Pretty much."

"What about the nursery?"

Dana had not thought about the nursery, but if someone had chosen to sabotage the sanctuary by liberating animals, the pale-faced, large-eyed juveniles would be prime targets.

They ran through the thready fog and down the short path leading to the small outbuilding, Dana a few strides ahead of Mary, her long legs carrying her over the gravel. At the entrance, Dana fumbled with her keys, but Mary had already selected the right one from her ring and now fit the key into the lock, pushing the door open with her shoulder as soon as the bolt slid. They rushed inside. All the doors—to the food and medical supplies, to the examining room, to the infirmary cage—were closed, secured. The groups of orphaned children, already awake and playing with the branches, gourds, fake rocks, and ropes, appeared undisturbed behind the windows.

Dana rested her forehead against the glass. One small victory. She wished she were the kind of person who could hang onto such a triumph, for strength if nothing else. Instead, her imagination—her overanalysis of what could be—had already predicted the closure of the sanctuary, her firing, and, even worse, the grim repercussions of primate worlds colliding. No, she was getting much too far ahead. She pushed away from the glass. "Come on. We need to round up the chimps. I really don't want to have to call the police."

Mary grimaced. "That'll give us permanent status on the dean's shit list."

"Like we don't already have that."

They left the nursery building, Dana first, Mary barely a step behind.

The sun had risen fully, and with it most of the fog, though some mist lingered in primeval strata, woven through the trees and the Spanish moss like transparent scarves. With her free hand, Dana shielded her eyes against the hazy brightness, searching the trees as they strode toward the main building. A woodpecker hammered against a tree in the distance, and a few birds twittered as they chased one another among the branches, but no large, dark forms moved with them. She dried her palms against her shorts. The chimps, especially *these* five chimps, had few survival skills, their innate ones having been stripped from them after years of captivity. And too many people in these parts owned shotguns and hunting rifles.

“I don’t see them,” Mary said as they neared the top of the path. “I *know* Kitabu can’t be far because she’ll need a toilet soon.”

Several graduate students came across the parking lot in a cluster, trailed by the steam rising off the coffee cups they carried.

“Escapes!” Dana shouted through cupped hands.

The students snapped out of their morning laziness. The more experienced among them, the ones who had been with the sanctuary since its opening, had rounded up escapes before, particularly during the first year, when the kinks in the security of the outdoor enclosures were easily discovered by the innovative animals. These students knew firsthand how the chimpanzees’ intelligence and ability to fashion tools out of available resources made perfect containment impossible. Once, the alpha male Mwenzi had used folded palmetto fronds as protective mitts to climb the electric fence. Usually, all it took to lure the chimps back in was a special meal or toy, but today, Dana suspected, would be different.

While two of the graduate students entered the main building to secure it, the rest prepared to scour the woods. Dana left behind the tranquilizer gun; that approach would just have to wait until the sanctuary’s veterinarian, Andy Holloway, arrived. Although the university required that she know how to use a tranquilizer gun, she had never leveled a barrel at another primate, human or chimp. She was not going to start now.

The forest group fanned out in different directions, each person

armed with a bag of fruit and a compass to navigate among the endless pines, sweet gums, and oaks that cushioned them from human civilization. They carried two-way radios, but Dana did not want to frighten the chimps with the electronic hiss and squawk of radio communication, so they were turned off, available only for an emergency or a sighting. Dana pocketed her compass; she knew these woods as nowhere else on earth. This was home, more so than her small house ten miles away, or her childhood home in Oklahoma, or the one-story ranch she had shared with her then-husband in Arizona. Even before the sanctuary buildings existed, she had walked among the loblolly, shortleaf, and longleaf pines, learned the peculiar arrangement of many of the groves, how a white oak might punctuate them, how the underbrush of ferns and cherry laurels spread out from their bases. She knew where the stream that traversed the property forked, and where she was at any moment in relation to it. She could tell by the sponginess of the ground where the land dipped low enough to nurture live oaks and where it rose just high enough to shift into a different landscape. In the wetter portions of the tract, she navigated by cypress knees, the raised knobs projecting from the roots that allowed the trees to breathe. The large framed map in the main building always struck her as unreal because of its absence of tangible landmarks and modulations of terrain, of sections that were always moist underfoot or difficult to navigate, of the tangle of roots rising from the ground. A graduate student had once asked her why she regularly patrolled the woods, when the chimps were contained within its heart and not in its perimeter, and Dana found herself unable to express why intimately knowing the buffer zone between chimps and humans seemed so crucial.

As she trudged, she listened for cracking twigs and shaking branches, soft grunts of satisfaction. The scent of pine dampened by dew and fog hung acridly about her. This was a relatively new smell, a five-year-old aroma, that reminded Dana of nowhere else. Her early childhood in Oklahoma had been scented with dust and electric skies, the evaporation of rain on pavement. Her teenage home in Rhode Island had a briny city smell: salt, exhaust, the mingling of Portuguese bread and Italian sauces. In Arizona, where she had been a professor, the air

had a sweet dryness to it, the pollen of nonindigenous plants and desert and the purity of mountains clinging as one. But in South Carolina, she found a primordial density to the forest—layers of pine, rotting wood, boggy peat, both silky and thick, wet and hot, ancient and neonatal. She liked to believe her nostrils had picked up the pungent trails of both past and future.

Although wild chimps could move in complete silence, Dana had not expected it of these novice climbers. Occasionally, she heard the soft rustle of pine straw, but when she turned, she could see no sign, not even a dark shoulder, of a chimpanzee. Instead, she saw a large pine cone that might not have been there before, or a thrush scratching up a flurry of pine needles in search of grubs, or a squirrel darting across the ground.

After thirty minutes, she stopped in the center of a small clearing. She would have to return to the compound without a single chimp. *Please, please, please*, she prayed as she scanned the trees encircling her. Nothing. She could not afford to wait any longer; she had to notify the university and the local authorities. As soon as she did that, the loose chimps would be hunted down by armed police officers and excited residents spreading out in bands across the area. She wanted to call her father and shout at him that *this* was what happened to captive chimps. She kicked a fat, decaying stick and sent it tumbling and disintegrating across the forest floor. When the stick came to rest, she stared at the soft remnants, blinking as she sometimes did from the bewilderment of finding herself out of control, not desperately so but on the verge, a glass teetering on the edge of a counter.

She started back toward the compound.

She had taken three steps into the woods beyond the clearing when an anomaly of shadow in the underbrush caught her eye. Something looked strange, though she could not tell what. She stepped back, squinting. Then, as amazingly as an optical illusion coming into focus, the motionless form of Sifongo materialized, crouched in a small gap between a bush and a clump of ferns. His eyes met hers with a flicker of amusement, and she realized with a laugh he had been following her. Now that she could visually separate Sifongo from the surroundings,

she noticed that Kitabu, wearing her favorite pair of navy-blue athletic shorts, was sitting under the boughs of a pine tree a few feet behind Sifongo. The juvenile female was watching Dana intently, one arm stretched over her head and tugging on the opposite ear.

Dana laughed. Kitabu rushed through the brush, her mouth wide in an eager play face, and leapt onto Dana, the muscular arms grasping her neck and shoulders. Kitabu tried to tickle Dana, but Dana knew the chimp's most sensitive spots and got to Kitabu first. The chimp writhed with panting laughter.

"Sifongo!" Dana called to the other chimp, gesturing with her arm. "Come." Although the primatologists at the sanctuary specialized in teaching the youngest captive chimps how to act like chimps and not humans, Dana allowed the use of spoken language for practical reasons. All the chimps understood, in varying degrees, English, since spoken language enabled easier communication between the species, especially for the newer graduate students, who had yet to learn a gestural vocabulary. Calling the chimpanzees by names had two purposes: to let a chimp know he was being singled out, and to assist the staff in accepting the chimps as individuals with their own personalities and needs. Oddly, many students who wanted to study primates had no concept of chimps' hominid nature. Chimps had individualized facial features, gestures, habits, likes and dislikes, and, most of all, temperaments. They were more like humans than some students had imagined.

Kitabu settled into Dana's arms, straddling her hip like a human child and not the chimp she was, and took the banana Dana offered. Then, mimicking Dana, Kitabu gestured for Sifongo to come out of the underbrush.

Sifongo, at ten years old, was not about to be ordered by the young Kitabu, but he understood Dana's role as dominant human female. Among a staff of mostly women, with male graduate students filling the lower ranks of the human hierarchy, only Andy, the veterinarian, was accorded greater respect by the chimps. That Andy worked under her did not faze Dana, who understood the sexism of chimp society. Dana looked Sifongo in the eye, grunted, and walked a few paces toward the compound. She paused to look over her shoulder at Sifongo. When she

began walking again, she heard the crackle of Sifongo emerging from his hiding place and following them through the woods. Every twenty feet or so, Dana stopped to make sure he was still with them, which he was, although he was not always directly behind them. Sometimes, he stopped to strip a few leaves off a sapling twenty feet to the right or left.

When they emerged at the edge of the parking lot, Dana noticed that Andy had arrived; his red SUV was parked at a forty-five-degree angle to the other cars, as though he had leapt in panic from it. Kitabu scrambled down from Dana's arms and scampered, leading with her right hip and shoulder, toward the door. When the door would not open, she pounded on it, shrieking.

One of the graduate students, Barbara, opened the door. "Kitabu!" she cried. "You're home."

Kitabu gave Barbara's knee an affectionate smack as she hurried inside. Dana knew she was headed for the toilet.

"I have Sifongo here in the parking lot," Dana said. "Getting him inside might be a challenge."

Sifongo settled into a dusty depression in the ground.

"Spinach for breakfast!" Barbara called.

Although he started to shift his weight forward as though to move, the chimp settled back down and looked about him, tipping his head back to see to the tops of the trees. He blinked as he took it all in.

Mary came out of the building, a streak of reddish dirt across one cheek. She always had dirt somewhere on her person, and Dana loved her for it. "We found Tekua a hundred yards into the woods," Mary said. "He has a broken leg. We think he tried to leap between trees but missed. Even after he was sedated, we had quite a tussle with him, though he's out now."

Dana pulled a clean tissue from her pocket and handed it to Mary, who knew exactly where the dirt was without being told. Dana returned her attention to the male chimp. "Sifongo, come!"

The male chimp hunched his shoulders slightly, as though pretending he had not heard his name and was just minding his own business. He began studying the bottom of his foot, picking bits of crushed leaves off it.

“Who’s still out?” Dana asked.

“Neema and Benji.”

Dana waved the remaining banana at Sifongo. “*Si-fon-go!*” When Sifongo continued to ignore her, she slapped the banana into Barbara’s hand. “Keep at it. I have to call the dean.”

A chimp inside Group A called out. Sifongo jumped to his feet and dashed toward the electric fence, leaping onto it in a flash. As the shock ran through him, he fell to the ground with a shriek. The three women rushed to him. He bared his teeth in fright and flung out his arm, giving Dana only a moment to jerk her head backward before the limb landed across her face with a numbing, dark impact. She squeezed her eyes shut against the pain and covered her nose with her hands to catch the pooling blood.

“Let me see,” Mary said.

“I’m okay. I don’t think it’s broken.” She lowered her hands from her face and looked at her palms, half-expecting to see a lost tooth there.

Upon seeing the blood, Sifongo cried out. Inside the enclosure, a chimp responded by screaming and tearing through the bushes—Dana could see the rapid progress by the thrashing of leaves—until it crashed into open ground: Sifongo’s sister, Neema. Neema dashed back and forth along the fence line, her red, swollen rump in full view.

“We’ve found Neema,” Mary laughed. “Inside another cage. How the heck did she get in *there?*”

Grinning, Dana wiped her hands on a clump of pine needles. The irony of Neema’s choice of destination poked at her like Kitabu’s fingers. She tossed the needles aside with a laugh. “So much for gradual introduction. Boy, is she going to get a quick sex-education lesson.”

“Why else do you think she went in there?” Barbara asked. “Heck, Mwenzi is a pretty virile guy. And she’s at the height of her cycle.”

Neema calmed to a slow pace. Sifongo grunted, then took a couple of steps closer to his sister, then stopped, looking the fence up and down. From behind the shrubbery, Mwenzi called out. Neema froze, her expression changing from concern for her brother to interest in the other male. Slowly, she knuckle-walked toward a shaking bush, giving only one long look over her shoulder at her brother before she disappeared

into the vegetation. Dana rubbed the old, jagged scar on the back of her hand and found the numbness where the nerves ended.

Sifongo went to Dana and threw a heavy arm over her shoulders, grunting apologetically. Dana hugged him. She knew he had not meant to harm her, that he had been frightened and confused by the harmless but punishing electric shock. After wiping her nose with the back of her scarred hand, she allowed Sifongo to work his fingers through her hair in a conciliatory grooming.

Mary squatted next to them. Her gaze drifted from Sifongo to the forest behind the parking lot. “That leaves Benji,” she said. “Our worst nightmare.”

Dana let her eyelids flutter shut. She loved Benji the way a parent might love a mentally ill child—desperately, passionately, fearfully, the whole of it as large as it would be for any child. But Benji had no allegiances, no restraint, nothing to keep him from viciously attacking whomever he came upon, whether a staff member or a young child playing in his backyard three miles away. She could not bear the thought of the two worlds colliding.