

The Various Adventures of Monkey Boy

“What Goes Boing in the Night”

By Anders Fischer

There is a city where the buildings tower like trees, creating a canopy of cement and steel above the urban floor, and where police sirens shriek like owls on the hunt for the rats that scurry in the shadows. And on the damp streets of that city, beneath the dense tangle of power lines that stretched from branch to branch, a woman ran like a frightened rabbit from two hungry wolves.

But it wasn't food these wolves sought, rather they were compelled by appetites of a different sort. One wanted acceptance in the world, but his slight income and limited vocabulary found him only alienation from the social elite; so he sought to take what he felt he deserved. The other wanted only a hug, but a childhood of chastisement by his far handsomer peers left him unskilled in the etiquette of earning one. And so these two wolves gave chase after the frightened rabbit. But they found their hunt ended abruptly by a creature that wanted something far too grand to know.

Not far away, Detective Alice Malarkey wanted a donut. She knew it was a terrible stereotype, but she couldn't help herself. They were just so crumbly and delicious. And staring down at that smoldering carcass, the smell of burnt meat stinging the air, what could she say: it made her hungry.

“It's a damn shame, but that's just what happens in this city,” spoke a voice muffled by the chewing of nicotine gum. “You think one day everything's sunny, bright and cheery; maybe there's a unicorn. But then night falls, the jackals come out, foaming at the mouth like they've been garglin' dish detergent; and they burn you down and smear over all your hopes and dreams the kind of spongy diarrhetic crap one gets by garglin' dish detergent. It's terrible, it's tragic, it's the city. A damn shame.”

“You know, Dan,” Alice interjected, “it's just a taco stand.”

“It *was* a taco stand, kid. Now it's just ash and soot and melted cheese, like hope, like humanity.”

“Was it a good taco stand?”

“Like Heaven in high heels.”

“Right... Well... Anyway, looks like the work of our mad bomber, wouldn't you say?”

“Like a hornet on meth, he strikes clumsily and without warning.”

“Or something. Why don't you go see if you can't track down the vendor? I'll finish up here.”

Dan rounded up the uniforms while Alice snooped around a bit. Not that there was anything to snoop around for. Whoever this guy was, he knew how to cover his tracks. No fingerprints, no DNA traces, he never hit places with security cameras: so no physical description. And the panicked witnesses offered little in elaboration. There was no conceivable pattern in his targets either: Frank's Discount Diamonds, Rear Window Photography and Prints and now La Maison Taco. The only thing that connected these crimes was the use of high explosives and a single message scrawled nearby each of the targets, but even that was inconsistent.

The jewelry store read: “I have seen the avarice of Man.”

The photo hut said: “I have listened to the rhetoric of oppression.”

And now at the taco stand: “I shall sing the song of liberty in the voices of the damned.”

Alice stared at this latest incarnation, smeared in taco sauce against the nearest building, and shrugged. It didn't tell her anything new. She already deduced that the crimes were possibly more about the people at the establishments than the establishments themselves. Nobody sang any songs of liberty for taco stands. Taco *vendors*, on the other hand... She thought that maybe it was a race thing or that some ethnic, cultural, or minority group was lashing out. It was flimsy – and was, she admitted, a completely knee-jerk theory – but it was all she could come up with.

Her blood sugar was too low, that was the problem. It was a truly sick and dispiriting state of affairs when whackadoos could get high-powered explosives, but a cop couldn't get a donut to save her life.

A rustling down a nearby alley stole Alice from her lamentations and she instinctively drew her gun. Though she figured it would just turn out to be the missing taco vendor, she hoped she would get lucky and find just the bomb-centric maniac she'd been looking for.

“Yeah, lucky.”

She inched carefully around the corner and into the alley, the light from the streetlamp only scarcely dispelling the gloom, from wherein the sounds of someone digging through a trashcan emerged. Alice crept in, her eyes adjusting slowly to the advancing darkness. But as she neared she caught a quick glimpse of her quarry before it noticed her and jumped away. It was only an instant and all she could actively recall was a white shadow flying away into the night. But in that instant before perception faded in hazy memory, she could swear she saw some kind of...

...monkey boy.

The precinct was a dismal place, especially at night. It was filled with dread and despair and grizzled old cops driven to jaded depression by the dark and unspeakable things they had seen in the night. Vice sergeants stared into space, trapped in the memories of the terrible consequences of human desperation. Homicide detectives scoffed half-dejectedly at the idea of civility when their own lives were guided tours through still-vital atavisms. And the SWAT guys all had their own war stories about lost friends and mistakes in the heat of battle.

And then there was the rookie, Ricky, who...

“Hey, guys, buck up. Every cloud has a silver lining and every dog has his day. So let's go out there and make the world safe for peace, justice and the American way!”
... who just didn't get it yet.

As for Alice, she used to be just like Ricky; they all were at some point. Joining the force was a calling, a moral imperative; they thought they could make a real difference in people's lives. And she liked to believe she had done that; but as time went on, she was continuously shown an especially grimy image of the world, she saw the truth under all the veneers. It was wearying, demoralizing and it took its toll: her eyes became almost permanently bloodshot, her red hair became tangled and raggedy through negligence and – worst of all – she, like all the more seasoned officers, became entrenched in the belief that there was nothing worth saving anymore, that the world was

dark and miserable and beyond redemption. Her calling became a job, one with no respect and crap pay.

But then she caught a glimpse of a white shadow in the black sky and was heartened and intrigued. Perhaps her understanding of the world wasn't absolute and there were still secrets – however asinine – that evaded exposure. It wasn't much, but it gave her room to believe that perhaps there was still some unseen hope waiting to be discovered.

Or maybe she was just going crazy. Either way – in a life where repetition made violent crime humdrum – this was something interesting and it perked her up a bit.

“Remember, guys,” Ricky cheered again “life is like a box of chocolates...”

“Yeah, full of crap nobody wants,” one of the detectives yelled.

To which Alice – now officially in happy mode – felt inclined to respond:

“Oh, I don't know. You do get the odd coconut now and again.”

She patted the uppity detective on the head, irritating him slightly, and asked “You guys seen Dan?”

“Interrogation B. They found your taco guy.”

Everybody else was tired, upset, angry or even scarred, but Dan Malady was broken and nobody really knew why. He used to be one of the sharpest cops on the force, a poster child for law and order. Literally. They actually had posters of him scattered around the city that called him “the malady for which crime has no cure” or something stupid like that that only advertisers could possibly think was clever.

But something changed. One night he went out, full of fervor and life, and returned blank, like there was nothing in the world that mattered anymore. He still came to work, still did his job, but his passion for it was gone, his passion for living was gone. He usually looked as though he were just waiting, waiting for something to finally come and take him; but there were other times, times where a real and terrible fury seized his face, times – like now – where Alice could see Dan staring off into space, grinding his teeth into his nicotine gum and remembering that night.

But before she could ever question him on it, he would say:

“White guy.”

“What?”

“Our perp. He's white as a ghost that just saw himself in a mirror.”

Alice looked through the two-way glass to see a young kid in one of those embarrassing fast food uniforms sitting at a table and talking to Officer Lane.

“Kid's name is Max Smith,” said Dan.

“And he's clearly white,” added Alice. “So much for the race theory. It was always a stretch anyway. So what is it then? What are we missing?”

She hit the intercom button and signaled Lane to repeat his last line of questioning.

“Okay, let's go over this one more time.”

“You said ‘one more time’ six times ago,” snapped the sweaty and exhausted taco vendor.

“Yeah, well I'm old and I forget things, see, so let's do it again. What happened tonight?”

“I already told you. I was getting ready to close up when this strange voice started talking to me from nowhere.”

“What did it say?”

“What I already told you it said.”

“Which was?”

“It said: ‘Your shackles are broken.’”

“And then?”

“And then I saw this shadow. Don’t know what it was. But... I tell you, man... it wasn’t human.”

Alice shot Dan an incredulous look and Dan just shrugged.

“How do you know it wasn’t human if you couldn’t see it?”

“I just know. It was too big. It was shaped all weird and it just felt *wrong*. I can’t really explain it, but it definitely wasn’t human.”

“And what did it do exactly?”

“It just kind of stood there for a while and then it said again: ‘Your shackles are broken. Run and be free.’ And then it threw a grenade in the cart.”

“A grenade?”

“Yeah, a grenade. So, I jumped out and I ran and I kept running ‘til you guys found me.”

“And you didn’t see anything? A face? A scar? Something we can use to find this guy?”

“No, I told you this seven times now. I didn’t see... oh, wait...”

“What is it?”

“Well, now, like I said I didn’t *see* anything, but I kind of heard something. See, when this guy was moving in the shadows, he wasn’t really walking, right. He was kind of bobbing up and down, like he was bouncing instead of walking.”

“Bouncing?”

“And he was making this weird noise while doing it. Sounded kind of like ‘boing-boing.’”

Alice’s mind snapped out of the inquiries and returned to earlier that night, to the alley and the white shadow, the same white shadow that leapt so expertly into the sky, and her previous curiosity turned to disappointment. What if the hope that waited to be discovered wasn’t hope at all?

Her face apparently betrayed her thoughts and Dan asked her:

“Kid, you got something you want to say?”

“Not really. It’s just that tonight after you left, I found something in this alley. Somebody was down there and when I investigated, he just jumped away.”

“Jumped? Where?”

“I don’t know. Up.”

Dan chewed his gum pensively for a few minutes.

“Did he make a boing sound?”

“No,” said Alice, “more of a whoosh.”

Dan just stared at her for a moment, chewing his gum in an almost scornful way, and then turned his attention back to the vendor. Left with nothing to contribute beyond this clumsy connection, Alice did the same.

But the young Smith also had nothing more to contribute. And in the end, he gave them little more than they had already.

Alice left the room with Dan still glaring at her like she had told him she saw Jesus in her morning coffee. This coming from a guy who once described a price increase at a nearby café as ‘a hobo – urine-stained and reeking of sweat and shit and sin – dry-humping his unwilling wallet.’ Alice moved through the precinct, past the grizzled old veterans and their silent demons, past Ricky and his cheerful platitudes, past the front desk and the frazzled young woman arguing with the sergeant. She would be happy to go home and conk out. *After* grabbing some donuts; God did she need some donuts.

But as she neared the exit, her ears perked and her mind jumped awake, encapsulated some new information and carried it and parsed as she made for her car. It was the girl at the desk who said it, who dispelled any concerns she may have had for her sanity, who sparked a new curiosity unlike anything she had known before, who kept insisting that she was attacked and that she was rescued by some strange...

“...monkey thing.”

Alice never did get those donuts; she never even got to sleep. She was kept awake by fevered thoughts and theories about the mysterious simian creature that was prowling the rooftops and maybe blowing up taco stands.

The girl from the night before – according to the desk sergeant – was Joyce Darling, 23; she was coming home from a movie when she was attacked and chased by two guys, who were then apparently beaten up by a strange monkey-type assailant. A car was sent out to check the alley and, sure enough, the two guys were there and still licking their wounds. But no sign of any monkey boy and neither of them was confessing to anything.

But the truly interesting thing about this was that the alley where Joyce was attacked was only five blocks from the alley where Alice thought she saw this same creature. And this only strengthened her growing belief that it was connected to these bombings. It didn’t fit, of course. Beating up some muggers wasn’t the MO, but there was something to this. The city couldn’t have two animal-human creatures with a knack for jumping running around, could it? It was just too coincidental.

But beyond that, this was something *new*, in a city where the same-old reigned supreme. Whatever this creature was – whether friend, foe or neither – it was different and it galvanized Alice’s curiosity. She was genuinely intrigued and her once-empty investigation was suddenly overflowing with significance.

So as the sun peaked cautiously over the horizon, Alice found herself navigating the ruined halls of a Den Street apartment complex. Nestled firmly in a part of the city known affectionately as The Caves, the building’s exterior displayed more gang tags than windows. Those same windows were either broken or barred and those that weren’t decorated with signs warning intruders of a security system that was likely long ago stripped for parts were adorned with decidedly more amateurish notices alerting those intruders of the bloody fate that awaited them beyond the threshold. The building was like most in that neighborhood: broken, worn, its paint flaked off like a bad rash, revealing a surface of deep red; it was a rotting corpse in what used to be a festive downtown.

Though the funny thing was that – with recent influxes of students – The Caves were slowly becoming gentrified, but the several fires and tussles Alice observed on her way to this building suggested the neighborhood wasn’t going to change without a fight.

The halls Alice now explored were highly reminiscent of the frame which contained them. The wallpaper was torn, the inhabitants were all squabbling and there was this unmistakable odor that she had whiffed only once before: when investigating the murder of two vegans, she had to check out their home, a home that believed in conserving water and so hadn't flushed their toilet in over three weeks. But she endured and made her way to Apartment 319 and knocked on the door.

It was answered promptly, but brusquely, by a frazzled and angry young woman. Her hair was wet and covered somewhat by a towel; her toothbrush hanged from her foamed lips and she glared with annoyance at the one who interrupted her getting ready for work.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"You are Joyce Darling, correct?" Alice asked in her best stern detective voice.

"Yeah, I'm also very busy and *very* late, so can we get to the point?"

"Sure. I'm Detective Alice Malarkey and I'm here to follow up with you about the report you filed last night."

"Look, I already told your desk clerk guy everything I know and he didn't believe me. Why should I waste my time talking to you?"

"Because I'm an officer of the law and I have a shiny nice badge to illustrate that point."

"So?"

"So I'm also the only one on the force who might be willing to listen. You going to throw that chance away?"

Absolute rage welled in Joyce's eyes and her hand clutched the door in eager anticipation of a cathartic slam. But no slam was forthcoming. Her rage relented, every muscle in her body visibly loosened and she motioned for Alice to come inside.

The apartment was nicer than the hall: newly painted, well-furnished with piles of books in nearly every corner. It was still messy, but whereas the rest of the building looked diseased, this space was simply cluttered, suggesting to Alice that Joyce was more student than Cave Rat, which helped put her mind at ease regarding the veracity of the girl's wild story.

They sat on the couch and Joyce told Alice of how last night she was on her way home from a movie when two guys started slobbering and hooting at her. She quietly scoffed and continued walking, but they followed her. Even as she turned corners in completely erratic and illogical directions, even as her stride became a run, they chased after her. She ran for blocks – no sign of any police, she was clear to point out – until she simply couldn't breathe anymore. She tripped and stumbled to the ground and they were almost upon her.

But then they weren't. And what followed, Alice would discover, was an utterly fantastical account of paranormal derring-do.

Joyce told her of how she turned around to see this almost amorphous white shape bouncing from wall to wall in the dark alley, the two thugs struggling vainly to stab it. But it proved too much a match for them, disarming them both and rendering them unconscious before leaping straight up and vanishing into the blackness.

It was moving too fast for Joyce to ever see it clearly; all she could make out was a white blur, but she insisted that despite it all, the strange thing left a clear image in her

mind, a distinct remembrance of a creature that was not quite Man, not quite Monkey, but something dangerously between.

“But you never really saw it?” Alice asked her.

“No, not with my eyes. It’s hard to explain, but it’s like I was seeing it with my mind and it was definitely some kind of half-man, half-monkey... thing.”

“There’s nothing else you can tell me?”

“Well, I’m not sure, but I think it may have disarmed one of the guys with its tail.”

“Its tail?”

“Yep.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You think I’m crazy too, right?”

“Actually, no.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I saw something last night very near your attack. I thought I was crazy, but we can’t both be nuts. Well, we can, but we can’t both be nuts in this exact way. Or... at least... it’s statistically unlikely.”

“So you do believe me?” Joyce gasped as though an elephant were just lifted from her chest. “So what do we do now?”

“Well,” said Alice, heading for the door, “You go off to work or school or wherever you were going and I will go put out an APB for this monkey boy; we’ll catch him in no time.”

“What?” Joyce jumped up and moved to impede her. “You can’t arrest him; he saved my life. When did that become a crime?”

“To my knowledge, it hasn’t yet. But you confirmed for me that this creature does exist and *my* sighting places him squarely at another crime scene where other witness reports don’t paint him in such a favorable light. Now if you’ll excuse me...”

Alice nudged past Joyce and moved to leave, but the girl shouted after her:

“You’re wrong, Detective.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I live in The Caves; I know bad people. I learn new and exciting ways to bring suffering to mankind just by going to breakfast...”

“You don’t eat at that place on the corner, do you? Because we once busted them for cannibalism, but they got off on a technicality, so...”

“Really? Oh. Never eating there again.”

“That’d be a wise decision.”

Alice opened the door and moved to the hall, Joyce still insisting all the while.

“BUT, I was trying to say that I know bad people and this monkey boy isn’t like them. Whatever he is and wherever he came from, he doesn’t want to hurt us.”

Alice stopped and looked back toward the distraught young woman and asked with the weary of a woman twice her age: “Then what does he want?”

And the girl looked back and answered with all the enthusiasm of a child half hers: “To help.”

As dusk came upon the city, most of its citizens left their long and tiring hours at work for the comfort of home and family. Sadly for her, Jessica Gato was not one of

those citizens and her shift at Dazzlin' Dan's Rhino Burger was just hitting its halfway mark and driving her to the point of total hair-pulling, karaoke-singing, spoon-eating madness.

"I want to speak to your manager!"

The man at the counter now was large, well... fat, well... bloated to the point of obscenity. He wore a very large hat and waved his receipt like a cudgel.

"Is there something *I* can help you with?" Jessica asked him with a great deal more courtesy than he deserved.

"Fine. I suppose you can, seeing as you're the one who screwed up my order."

"Did I? How?"

"See here," he foisted over his receipt and pointed to his evidence. "Says right here you put me down for a rhino burger cooked medium."

"Right. That's what you ordered."

"No, missy, that's not what I said. I wanted it well done, but a little rare."

"Yeah, that's medium."

"No, little lady, that's not medium. Don't tell me what medium is. I've been grilling for years; I know medium. I didn't want medium. I wanted well done, but just a little rare."

"O...kay..."

"So, look, just give me a refund or get me the manager."

"Okay, if you bring up your food, I can give you a refund."

"Well, I can't do that now, can I? I already ate it."

"Then, I'm sorry, but I can't refund your money."

"It isn't what I wanted!"

"But you still ate it, so clearly it wasn't that bad."

"I want the manager! I'm not moving from this spot until you get him."

But Jessica didn't have to get anybody. Dazzlin' Dan just knew to come. To reach him, all anyone in his restaurant had to do was call his title three times and he would appear – not unlike Bloody Mary – to address their grievances. He emerged from the backroom in a glittery silver coat and shiny top hat to the tune of his own haughty entrance music. There was a word for people like Dan, but Jessica was once kicked out of a Catholic seminary for saying it.

He sauntered over to the counter and asked in a booming, presentational manner:

"What seems to be the trouble, good customer?"

And before Jessica could say anything, the self-beleaguered blob thrust his receipt to Dan:

"She gave me the wrong order and now won't give me a refund. She gave me medium and I wanted well done."

"No, you wanted well done and a little rare; that's medium!"

"Hush, Jessica," Dan insisted while holding his abnormally large hand over her face. "The customer is always right. If he says you made a mistake, you made a mistake."

He removed his hand and held his finger in perfect scolding position. Jessica had been in this situation before; they all had. Dan was going to chew her out in front of the whole place and demand she apologize for being right and adhering to *his* policies.

But this time, before he could speak one trite condescending word, the lights went out. All of them. Even the streetlamps. Darkness filled the room, an impenetrable layer of

nothing covered every eye. And stranger still, Jessica could swear she heard something over the hushed murmurs of the crowd: an innocuous yet somehow unsettling sound. A small and repetitive noise, it came from outside and was only slightly audible through the walls and windows; but she did hear it, a kind of sproing-sproing.

It continued for a few moments, seeming to get closer, and then it stopped. But it was replaced with a sound altogether more ominous: a voice flew out through the night. Cracked and worn and carrying the twice-damned torment of one who escaped Hell for Los Angeles, it groaned and shoved its way into everyone's mind with one singular and venomous message:

“Let my people go!”

Glass shattered and something flew past Jessica's head into the kitchen, which subsequently burst into flames. Light flooded the room, revealing the panicked crowd as it rushed toward the door. More shattering glass and another fire broke out on the far side of the room, spreading quickly over the cheap booths and tables.

Jessica leapt over the counter, pushing both Dazzlin' Dan and the fat man in the large hat out of her path as she shoved her way through the mob and out onto the streets. Away from the smoke and the heat, she took a moment to collect herself, before turning back to watch everyone stream out of Rhino Burger as it slowly collapsed into its foundations. And as she watched, her relief turned to dread when she noticed one face and one hat missing among the crowd.

Alice was the first one on the scene; she even beat the fire department. Nobody knew this city like she did. The fire roared and crackled a manic laugh at all those who surveyed it. Dazzlin' Dan slumped on his knees, wiping his tears onto his smoke-tainted coat. And as Alice got out of her car, a girl in one of those humiliating Rhino Burger hats rushed up to her and grabbed her by the sleeve.

“You're a cop, right?”

Alice glanced to the flashing light on her car and answered: “Yeah.”

“You've got to hurry. I think there's somebody in there.”

Alice pushed the girl aside and ran up to the door, but there was a forcefield of heat keeping her out and there was too much smoke for her to tell if anyone was still inside. Even if there was, the likelihood of him not having choked to death by now was slim at best, but Alice wasn't going to risk being wrong. So she ran down an alley, hoping a back entrance might prove more accessible, but access quickly proved unnecessary as she discovered the alley contained the sagged and tarnished body of a large man, a large man with a very large and very smoldering hat.

But the truly remarkable thing wasn't that this man was still alive; nor was it the fact that he was neither laying on the ground, nor standing upon it, but rather floating slightly above; no, these things were interesting surely, but hardly remarkable, not when compared to the sight of what held him aloft. It was short, barely five feet in height and covered in white matted fur, stained in soot and grime. It clung to the brick wall with its four paws; and its tail – an appendage far longer than its entire body – was curled around the large man's waist, holding him in the air.

Alice could scarcely gather the necessary cognition to assess what she saw, much less react to it. She looked at this creature and it looked at her – its eyes glowing a deep and fiery yellow, like it had a sun burning in its skull – and, she thought, sort of sniffed at

her. She knew she should pull her gun, that she should arrest it, because here it was again at the site of a bombing, the worst one yet in fact. But she did nothing, she said nothing. She just stared into those searing yellow eyes as the creature lowered the large man to the ground and she stood back and watched as it scampered up the wall and disappeared again.

She was frozen. Paramedics arrived to tend to the man, the fire department dealt with the building and several psychological counselors kept Dazzlin' Dan from throwing himself onto a fire axe, but Alice just stood there and stared at that empty patch of sky until her own Dan arrived and helped her back to the station. And as they made their way to the car, they passed the bomber's latest signature: arrayed in burger patties on the street, it read:

"This is but a prelude. Bastille Day has come."

"A monkey boy?"

"That's right, Dan, a monkey boy. A boy that is also a monkey... or that is part monkey... or has the power of monkeys... or something."

They were in Alice's unfortunately-sized office. She told Dan everything: about both monkey boy sightings and about the incident with Joyce Darling. And Dan sat there on her couch and aloofly dropped a piece of nicotine gum in his mouth.

"Well, that's weirder than a tiger in a sundress at a vegan buffet," he said casually, which puzzled Alice to no end. The momentousness of this encounter seemed to be completely lost on him.

She was frantic, outraged, terrified and oddly delighted to discover that the world still held mysteries, that there was at least one thing that society hadn't found, explained and marked as its own, that there was still something raw and untainted, something pure. But even in the face of so grand a revelation, the best that Daniel Malady could manage was insouciance.

"You do believe me, right, Dan?" she asked him.

"Yeah, kid, I believe you. That Darling dame's story matches yours and even the guy from the alley tonight is talking about monkey things."

"And you don't find that just the least bit wonderful?"

"Yeah, *wonderful*. Now I got to track down some nutbag kid in a monkey suit before he blows up another building."

"I don't think he did it."

"You said yourself he was at the restaurant tonight and at the taco stand last night."

"But I don't think he was there to destroy anything."

"Then what *was* he doing there?"

"Maybe he was there looking for the real culprit."

"Oh, come on, kid, you're being more naïve than a pig eating bacon."

"No, I'm not. *God*, I'm not. Just look at tonight: he saved that guy *and* he saved Joyce. I think there's more going on here, Dan, and maybe Joyce was right after all. Maybe he's just trying to help."

"As a pig eating bacon."

"Would you stop comparing me to a pig!"

“Listen, kid, nobody helps anybody and anybody who tries regrets it, ends up curled into his bed like a kitten in a haunted house because nobody appreciates a good deed. Kindness is the poison you drink thinking it’s delicious sarsaparilla. Compassion is the gauntlet you endure for the *privilege* of being nice. And empathy is the knife you plunge into your chest once you finally hate yourself enough to do something about it. Altruism is the story we tell ourselves so we can sleep at night while the monsters collect our souls for their inhuman poker tournaments.”

Dan chomped down on another piece of gum and stared back through time, likely to a night nobody would want to remember.

“You don’t really believe that, do you?” Alice asked him after a while.

“I’m going to bring in this monkey boy of yours and you’ll see what I mean. We live in the treadmark stain on God’s skivvies and one day he’ll throw them in the wash with some bleach and be done with the lot of us.”

Dan certainly had his perspective, but Alice didn’t buy it. She saw the monkey boy, saw him like Joyce saw him and knew what she knew. Alice may not have lived in The Caves, but she was a cop. She knew bad men and this monkey boy wasn’t one of them. She could feel it around him: an innocence, a warming embracing comfort zone that drowned out the vile noise of the world around them. She didn’t know who he was or what he was, but he wasn’t the bomber; that much was certain.

But firm in her belief as she was, she couldn’t help but return to Dan’s words; they remained even after he departed, nagging her and taunting her. They leered and reminded her that while Dan was wrong in this case, he did have a point. She had seen nearly all the same evils he had seen, fought the same monsters only to see them return to their wicked ways. She struggled to hold back the social entropy ebbing at civilization daily and she knew – that for all her fronting at optimism – the same nihilistic shadow that loomed over him loomed over her. And there were times when she would look out her window and see nothing: no lights, no buildings, no streets, no cars, no city: just an endless and empty expanse of black and she would lose herself in misery.

But there were other times when she would look out that window and see someone helping an old lady carry her groceries or a man in a suit write a check to a street-peddling charity, but it was easy to lose track of those fleeting instances in the endless reaches of the abyss.

Fortunately for her, a reminder came in the form of a white shadow that flew out of the sky, bumped against the glass and shot up toward the roof.

And Alice followed almost reflexively. She raced out of her office and then up the stairs and there, on the roof, she saw him just waiting there for her: the monkey boy.

There was a light suspended above the door, so Alice could see him better than she could in the alley, though much of what she perceived before remained accurate. The monkey boy was no more than five feet tall, though he seemed to favor resting on all fours. He was covered in white hair that was dirty and knotted and looked like it desperately needed a good grooming. His tail was narrow and longer than the rest of his body. And his eyes glowed a peculiar yellow.

His hands, she noticed now, were distinctly human, but they were tipped with sharp claws. He seemed to wear no clothes, relying solely on his tangled mass of body hair to cover his modesty. Still, Alice tried hard not to look too low. But she did notice one peculiar adornment at waist level: a small belt, attached to which she could see what

looked like a sword in a metal sheath. But not just any sword. This sword was glimmering and new – a stark contrast to its filthy wielder – and shiny and yellow and shaped unmistakably... like a banana.

But this weird affectation aside, the monkey boy no longer seemed so haunting or mysterious to Alice. Looking at him now – a naked, dirty little wretch – he seemed only pitiable, but that aura of innocence remained.

Alice approached him carefully, making no sudden moves and striving not to alarm him. She knelt in front of him and looked into his wide yellow eyes. He cocked his head and returned her hopefully compassionate gaze with one borne more of curiosity. She simply smiled reassuringly and said as warmly as she could:

“Hi.”

And he smiled and replied: “Hi.”

That threw Alice back a bit, further back on the roof in fact. She fell backward and just laid there, staring up at the sky and wondering if she was dreaming all this. But then the monkey boy started sniffing her face and she snapped back to reality. The absurd, diminutive creature meanwhile tired of her face and moved to pick through her hair, presumably looking for lice. A little put off by his assumption, Alice leapt to her feet, startling him into jumping over to the door.

“You can talk?” she demanded.

The monkey boy gazed at her quizzically and answered: “Hi?”

And Alice just laughed, she laughed so hard she couldn't stay standing, so she fell back to the roof and sat there, trying to contain herself.

The monkey boy seemed to be put at ease by this for some reason and moved to join her. It looked longingly at her, like a puppy begging for a treat.

“Fine,” she said, “but I don't have lice.”

“Hi!” he squeaked and returned to combing through her hair.

“So what exactly are you?”

“Hi.”

“Where did you come from?”

“Hi.”

“What do you want?”

“Hi.”

“Well, that was enlightening.”

“Hi.”

“At least you're having fun.”

But the thing was: she was enjoying herself just as much. This inscrutable little imp had a curiously invigorating effect on her. He was just so inexplicable and he awakened a long-moribund fascination within her and resurrected childhood optimisms she buried long ago. Because he *was* innocent and odd and, try as she might, she couldn't pin on him any of the negative preconceptions that life had fashioned for her. She couldn't hate him like she allowed herself to hate so much else – even if he did pull something out of her hair and eat it – she couldn't write him off or ignore him. He was too different to be denied.

Alice noticed the scratching of monkey boy claws desist and she turned – with the worry of a mother when the baby monitor falls silent – to see if he was alright, but he

wasn't there. She jumped to her feet and looked about frantically, only to find him standing on the ledge right in front of her, sniffing the air. She knew what was happening.

"It's him, isn't it?" she asked "It's the bomber. You've been following him, I know you have. That's why you were at the crime scenes: you're tracking him. And you can smell him right now, can't you?"

The monkey boy answered in a tone of absolute solemnity and with the deepest conviction: "Hi."

And he jumped off the roof, to a lower roof and rushed off in a northwardly direction. Alice ran downstairs, grabbed her gun and ran after him. She'd never be able to keep up, she knew that, but if she ran north long enough, she'd probably find his destination. And so she raced through the streets, past disinterested pedestrian and motorist alike, but five blocks later there was still no bomber, no monkey boy and no air left in her lungs. She stopped to catch her breath and curse her inability to fly and strived to think of where along the monkey boy's apparent trajectory the bomber might strike next and – being equally unable to parse the logic of a madman – came up with nothing.

Fortunately, a telltale explosion from within the nearby Redwood Mall more or less resolved her dilemma. So, she steeled her nerve, readied her gun and went inside. The mall was – as its name would suggest – enormous, with thirty-seven floors of shops, ten food courts and one bathroom all arranged in a perimeter around a central ground floor lobby visible from each of them. Alice entered into this lobby and could see smoke coming from Floor 37. The elevators were automatically shut off due to the fire alarms going off after the explosion, so she had to run up the stairs.

Exhaustion set in, weariness nearly claimed her, but she made the trek and reached the now destroyed Fresh Fish n Lingerie Shoppe. Its traumatized clerk knelt beside a plastic tree, weeping into his truly demeaning mermaid uniform and mumbling:

"It isn't human. Some kind of monster. Get it away."

Alice moved to help him, but found herself too distracted by a very distinctive noise emerging from the smoke-filled shop. A simple two-beat sound was all it was, but it foreboded something truly abhorrent. Two beats:

Boing-Boing

But Alice knew what it meant and she waited, gun in hand, to greet its source.

Boing-Boing.

A shadow appeared in the store, a large impossible thing that slowly bobbed its way toward the door.

Boing-Boing.

As it reached the entrance, Alice could at last see it and it was no monkey boy. It was large and brown with round ears. It looked almost like a giant mouse, but it hopped on its hind legs, had a wider tail and a large pouch on its belly. But this wasn't an animal like the monkey boy was an animal: this was clearly just a costume. Its head was too large, the stuffing around its right eye was falling out and its mouth opened wide to stretch around an opening that revealed the face of a man.

Alice stared dumbstruck, as the man hopped forward, held a grenade in each hand and yelled:

"Worry not, oppressed slaves of the mall, for I have come to free you and there is no power in this world that can resist the righteous might of the Bangaroo."

Of course, he wasn't always named Bangaroo. There is not now, nor will there ever be, a time in human history where parents become so deluded as to name their child Bangaroo. They did however name him Sue, after their favorite song. And that was only the first of his many troubles, but hardly the most significant. That honor clearly belonged to his brief tenure as a clerk at Kindly Kangaroo's Toy Bonanza.

Everything started out innocently enough. He donned his nametag and vest and moved out to the salesfloor, giving a respectful nod to the display case that contained the costume of the one and only mascot Kindly Kangaroo ever employed. The story went that he gave up his noble posting one day to venture out into the world to teach children about good manners, indoor voices and low, low prices. Of course, the truth was that he went mad from the frenzy of retail and stabbed himself through the foam eye with a novelty pen. But management didn't like that story getting out.

Sue didn't heed any such dire omens. No, he began his work day with a song and a whistle, content in the knowledge he was helping to bring joy to children's lives. And on that note he went to stock and price the bike aisle, where he was greeted quite promptly by his first customer.

"Hello," Sue said cheerily, "How can I help you today?"

"Yeah, what's the price of that there bicycle?"

"Well, sir, you can see it right there on the tag."

"No, no, what's the *real* price?"

"That is the real price, sir."

"What! That's outrageous. I could get that price anywhere. Why should I shop local when the big boys give me the same deal?"

"Well, actually, sir, I'm something of a cycling enthusiast myself" He really was "And I can assure you that that particular bike would cost at least twice as much elsewhere."

"Ridiculous, I'll pay you half."

"I'm sorry, sir, but our prices are nonnegotiable."

"So it's either take it or leave it, huh?"

"Pretty much."

"Well, fine, screw you too. See if you ever get any of my business again."

A little shaken by the abrupt rudeness, Sue stared blankly at the shelves for a few moments. But he was able to put it behind him and move on with his day, stocking the bikes, the board games, the action figures and the dollhouses when another customer approached him.

"Hello," she said courteously, "Can you help me get something from that high shelf?"

"Sure" he said as he went to get a ladder from between the stacks, "what do you need?"

"That Debbie's Economical Starter House."

"Hang on one second, I'll get it right down for you."

He climbed the ladder and grabbed the surprisingly large box and – struggling to hold it – slowly worked his way back down the treacherous rungs.

"Hey, can I get some help down here?" another woman yelled from five aisles away.

“Just one minute,” Sue said while defying physics in his attempt to safely lower that box on so narrow and so wobbly a ladder.

“I need help now!” the faraway woman demanded once again.

“I’m helping another customer right now, you’ll just have to wait a minute.”

Against all odds, gravity, the onset of vertigo and quite probably divine will, Sue did reach the floor safely and handed the parcel over to the woman who asked for it. She graciously accepted and inspected the package, only to discover it cost five dollars more than she was willing to pay. So she handed it back to him and left the store. And sadly for poor Sue, there was no space for that box on the lower shelves, so he once again risked life, limb and psychological wellbeing to return it to its lofty perch with the other woman yelling at him all the while.

The box restored and the ladder returned to its nook, Sue approached her. She was an older woman, full of bile and self-entitlement. She scowled at him, but then that was probably the only expression her face could make.

“Now,” Sue asked her, “how can I help you?”

“Firstly,” she said sternly, “you can apologize to me.”

“For what?”

“For snapping at me.”

“I didn’t snap at you.”

“Yes, you did. I heard you. First you keep me waiting here and then you bite my head off.”

“Bite your... I didn’t bite your head off. I was helping another customer and I just asked you to wait.”

“Tersely.”

“It wasn’t... okay, fine, I’m sorry. Now, how can I help you?”

“I don’t believe you’re really sorry.”

“I’m really, very sorry. How can I help you?”

The old woman grumbled and guided him to a wall that held two Rowdy Roger Action Guys that were completely identical, except one had a green helmet and the other had blue.

“Which of these do you think my grandson – he’s nine – would like better?”

“Um... okay... Does he prefer blue or green?”

“I don’t know. You’re the expert here, I asked what *you* thought?”

“Well, I can’t say as I know your grandson’s favorite color, but blue’s usually a safe bet. I’d go with that.”

“And if he doesn’t like it, can I exchange it for the other one?”

“As long as he doesn’t open it.”

“He’s nine! He opens everything! So, you’re telling me that if he opens it and doesn’t like it, I just have to tell him he’s stuck with it?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“Well, that’s just great. Is this what they call customer service nowadays? I remember when you could walk into a store, be greeted with a smile and have people actually help you...”

A voice sounded from five aisles down: “Can I get some help here?”

“I’ll be there in one minute,” Sue yelled after him. “Ma’am, are we done here? I have other customers I need to assist.”

“No, we’re not done here! You have been very rude since the moment I came in here and I don’t feel like a valued customer.”

“I need some help down here.”

“One minute!”

“Go ahead and help him, but know that I am reporting this incident to your manager.”

The old woman stormed off in a huff and Sue marched down the five aisles to the shouty guy and asked:

“How can I help you?”

“Yeah, sorry, could you just help get down that Debbie’s Economical Starter House?”

And Sue looked up and groaned: “Just let me get the ladder.”

The day stretched on like this and Sue eventually found himself manning the only open register and enduring a water-torture-esque repetition of mundane tasks. Ring up a toy, ring up another, put them in a bag, take the cash, “Next.” Ring up a toy, ring up another, put them in a bag, take the cash, “Next.” Ring up a toy, ring up another, put them in a bag, take the cash, “Next.”

“This has got to be the slowest checkout I have ever seen,” huffed a woman holding a L’il Baby Antigone Doll (with real working noose). “Why is there only one checker?”

“I don’t know, you’d have to ask management. Can I ring up your doll please?”

“Well, that’s no excuse,” she tossed him the doll. “If you’re the only checker on at the moment, you should step up your game. Ten minutes is too long to wait.”

“I’ll try and remember that. It’ll be \$25.32.”

The woman quickly handed him a twenty and two ones and then started digging through her purse for loose change – removing first her checkbook and a small cardholder – and leaving Sue to stare down the endless sea of angry faces behind her.

Eventually she handed him a quarter, then two more, then a nickel, then a penny, two dimes, thirteen more pennies, another quarter, a fifty-cent piece that she then took back and replaced with a quarter, two dimes and a nickel. She found an extremely crumpled one dollar bill and handed that to him, then gave him a quarter, a dime, a nickel and three pennies. She gathered up her belongings and scolded Sue one last time for his inefficiency before finally departing.

Sue half expected her replacement to voice his irritation over the wait as well, but he was otherwise occupied with his phone at the time.

“So I told her,” he told his unseen associate, “baby, I don’t have any toothpicks, but I got a log you can use.”

“Uh, sir, are you checking out?”

The guy didn’t answer, just threw a vibrating game controller at Sue and went about his conversation.

“...And I was like, baby, look at this thing: this is too big to be just a bicep, alright, it’s more like a tricep.”

“Okay, sir, it’ll be...”

The guy hushed him and gestured angrily to his phone.

“And then I told her: no baby, I ain’t got no crabs. Crabs are too small for what I got goin’ on. Baby, I got lobsters.”

“Sir, there are other people waiting.”

“Hold on, let me call you back.”

He pocketed his phone and glared at Sue.

“I was havin’ a conversation. Okay, is that a problem for you? Am I holdin’ you up? You got somethin’ better to do? Or can you just not wait ten seconds to get your grubby mitts on my hard-earned money? Yeah, that’s right, some of us actually have to work for our money; we don’t get to just stand around a toy store all day. We work and we work hard. But you don’t care, do you? You just want your cash, so how much is it, hmm? How much to satisfy your greed?”

“Forty-two dollars.”

“Here’s fifty. Keep the change. Asshole.”

The guy stormed off and Sue secured the fifty and put it into the register. He looked back to find another man, an older man, plop a ripped package on the counter and then present a receipt.

“The returns department is over there, actually,” Sue pointed out.

But the man didn’t move, didn’t say a word. He just stood there, looking at Sue with a misplaced parochial sort of authority.

Several minutes went by and he asked: “Have you heard of Pavlov?”

“What?”

“Pavlov. The psychologist. Have you heard of him?”

“Yes.”

“And his famous experiment, you’ve heard of that?”

“Yeah.”

“And do you know what its primary failing was?”

“I didn’t know there was one.”

“It’s that men are *not* dogs! We are not dogs! We can learn from our actions. We aren’t slaves to ringing bells. We aren’t going to jump up and drool because some guy tells us to. We have free will, free will bestowed on us by God Almighty himself. WE ARE NOT DOGS! Do you know what I mean?”

“Not at all. What exactly can I help you with?”

“My toy ray gun didn’t come with batteries.”

“Returns is over there.”

“Thank you.”

The day slogged on like this, with one oppressor being replaced with another in an endless parade of inanity. And there were moments when Sue would look up past the stream of frowns to see that display case with the tattered kangaroo costume and he would swear it was looking back at him with its shredded eye and grinning a malignant grin.

But as day became night, the other clerks began the process of closing the store down and Sue finished off the final few customers who straggled to the front. The last of them was a woman with her son buying a simple teddy bear. Sue struggled through emotional and physical exhaustion and slid that bear through the scanner.

“Rough day?” the woman asked pleasantly.

“You have no idea,” Sue answered.

“I can imagine. There are some pretty crazy people out there.”

“And every single one of them shops at this store. It’ll be \$10.50.”

“Here you go. Yeah, retail always struck me as a god awful occupation.”

“It can be.”

“So you see, Billy, that’s why you need to go to college and get a degree. You don’t want to end up like him now do you?”

The woman and her son left, the doors were locked behind them and Sue toppled over his counter and oozed to the floor like sludge. He pulled himself to his feet and made the laborious trek toward the exit, knowing full well that he would have to repeat this cycle again tomorrow and then the next day and then the next week, month, maybe year.

He passed the battered monument to Kindly Kangaroo and it laughed demonically at him. In its eyes he saw only oppression. He saw movie ticket vendors chastised because a movie was considered subpar, he saw technicians condemned for not plying their craft for free, he saw a specialty goods retailer belittled by idiots sublimating their own stupidity; he saw himself with a million different faces and he saw his destiny: to wage war in the name of this forgotten underclass, to bring to the world a new understanding of their mistreatment and to restore civility to civilization.

So he dressed up like a kangaroo and started throwing grenades at people.

And now Detective Alice Malarkey stared down the gullet of this foam avenger to the face buried therein, aimed her gun and announced:

“You’re under arrest.”

“Rejoice, mall slaves,” Bangaroo was apparently not paying any attention. “I have come to free you from the shackles of minimum wage. What say you who so cower behind that tree? Do you not smell the delicious air of liberty?”

“I just want to go home.”

“Then go home you shall *because* you are free from your torment of fresh fish and scantily-clad women. No need to thank me.”

“Hold it right there,” said Alice, finally following her therapist’s advice and being more assertive. “This insanity ends here. You are going to drop the grenades, put your hands on your head and get on the ground now!”

But the Bangaroo simply ignored her, bounced over her head with a terrific boing and hurled his grenades into two nearby stores: Podiatry Palace and Just Toasters. The crowds spilled out quickly, just in time for the windows to explode outward, spitting glass and smoke and heat into the mall.

“Run, my people, run and be free!”

Alice rushed up to Bangaroo and held her gun at his head. But he quickly pulled another grenade from his pouch and tossed it straight up into the air. It exploded in a flash of light and a cascade of sound and all Alice could see was white, all she could hear was the ocean on a violent and windy day. As the white gave way to color and the waves to screaming and crackling, she saw the monstrous marsupial before her, holding her own gun. He simply dropped it into his pouch and then jumped over the railing, falling thirty-seven floors to the lobby below.

“Wonderful.”

Groggy and winded, Alice fought her way through the frenzied mobs – that screamed and ran and trampled each other like buffalo at a bridal expo – and practically

fell down all thirty-seven flights of stairs. But she made it and she worked her through the throngs of onlookers to find her target addressing the masses.

“Underclass of the mall, hear me. I am Bangaroo, your savior. I give you now this chance at a better life. Do not allow yourself to be chained to this nightmare and its cruelties. Go now and release yourself from the miseries this hell has inflicted upon you. Let not your mind dwell on this place or the darkness that resides within, for in a moment...”

Bangaroo reached deep into his pouch and pulled out an atomic bomb and dropped it on the floor before him.

“...It will no longer be here.”

The crowds followed his advice and stampeded their way toward doors, windows, flimsy walls, anything that could be used as an exit. But Alice pushed through the current and reached the bomb. It was on a timer, set to five minutes. She fumbled about for a disarm switch or something basic and easy to allow her to stop this thing, but found nothing, save the irritation of its creator. Bangaroo pulled her away from his toy, threw her to the floor and he loomed over her like a kangaroo loomed over a wallaby, just to prove who was bigger.

“Why do you interfere? You are a police officer; you serve the people, just as these mall drones do, and you are no doubt abused and underappreciated for your efforts. I fight for you as much as anyone here. Why do you resist me?”

“Just pathologically sane, I guess.”

“I see. Then you leave me with no recourse.”

He shoved his hand into his pouch and it reemerged with a sword. A truly bewildering one at that. It would be no exaggeration to say that it was the most inscrutable part out of all of this. It mystified and unsettled simply because it didn't fit. It was long, white, slightly curved and very smooth; it looked almost as though it were made of ivory. And its surface was adorned with black figures, ancient glyphs and runes burned into the blade itself, which suggested an eldritch and forbidden importance wholly inconsistent with a bomb-happy kangaroo.

Nonetheless, he lunged at Alice with that blade, but a crack of thunder, a gust of wind and a flash of white later, he was lying on the floor rubbing his cheek. Alice knew what this meant and its significance seemed to extend even to the masses, who all stopped their manic egress to stand and watch the ensuing conflict. Not a footstep was heard, not a voice sounded. Silence filled the mall that night: an all-encompassing stillness, disrupted only by the monkey boy snapping his tail like a bullwhip on the hard tile floor.

Bangaroo refused to be intimidated by this, it seemed, and he pulled a lit stick of dynamite from his pouch and hurled it at his latest adversary, but the monkey boy caught it with his tail and threw it right back, into some trashcans behind Bangaroo, the resulting explosion throwing the costumed nut forward toward his opponent. And Bangaroo didn't waste the opportunity. He used his newfound momentum to menace the monkey boy with his sword. But the monkey boy too had a sword, a much more thematically appropriate sword – it looked like a banana – and he pulled it from its scabbard – which looked like its peel – and deflected the Bangaroo's attacks.

The duo swashed and buckled, the clangs of their blades ringing like time itself and at any other moment Alice would have found it thrilling to behold, but right now she

still had the niggling issue of an atomic bomb to contend with. But how to contend with it remained a larger concern. There was no means to deactivate it and she dared not try to open it, lest she expose herself to radiological damage. Still, there had to be a way.

Bangaroo apparently didn't take kindly to her inspections and he rushed at her, sword in hand. She managed to evade him and watched as the monkey boy coiled his tail around his opponent's wrist and pulled himself in. But Bangaroo parried the attack and propelled the monkey boy to the floor. He charged, sword first, but the monkey boy jumped into the air and landed on the extended ivory blade.

There was a pause, as Bangaroo held his sword and the monkey boy perched upon it – the former apparently amazed by the peculiar feat – a pause which ended when the latter punched the former in the face, simultaneously disarming him and sending him to the floor.

The monkey boy sheathed his own sword and joined Alice by the bomb.

“Hi.”

“Hi. I don't suppose you have any super bomb-diffusing powers, do you?”

He inspected the bomb for a moment and then cracked his neck and then cracked his knuckles, then his back, his knees, his elbows and every other joint he had. And Alice started to notice that he was growing, actually growing in a gross series of perverse contortions and crunching noises, ultimately reaching nearly seven or eight feet tall. His hands, face and feet became grayish and matted, his white hair turned jet black, his sword disappeared and his tail sort of retracted – which, Alice imagined, couldn't have felt good – and in the end it seemed her little monkey boy had transformed into a gorilla.

And this gorilla took hold of the bomb in one mighty hand and threw it into the air.

The bomb flew through the ceiling and past the clouds, past the troposphere, past the stratosphere, past the thermosphere, the ionosphere *and* the exosphere, past the very boundary of space and time. It arrived instantaneously into one of the most distant portions of the ever-expanding universe, a region with no stars and no planets, only swirling molecules. And it was in this place that it finally detonated in a brilliant explosion of heat and energy that fused molecules, created stars, systems and even rudimentary life in the deepest seas of a large green sphere.

Evidence of the bomb's effects would not reach the place of its creation until some distant and far-flung future when a farmer would look up from his fields of digi-corn and – seeing a strange twinkling in the night sky – remark:

“Huh.”

Alice just stared dumbstruck at the hole in the ceiling and then at the gorilla boy – as it hardly seemed right to call him a monkey boy now – and then to the Bangaroo, who had recovered and was beating a hasty and bouncy retreat. But the gorilla boy wasn't having any of that and he started pounding the ground, causing the earth to shake, the floor to crack, Alice to stumble and the Bangaroo to fly backward into the gorilla boy's massive fist.

The earth settled and Alice slowly walked over to the two beast people. As she walked, she heard that same grotesque assortment of crunching bone and tearing flesh and she watched the gorilla shrink, his hair go pale and his tail shoot back out. He was a

monkey boy once more. Alice slapped a pair of cuffs on Bangaroo and sat next to his vanquisher.

“Thank you,” she said.

And the monkey boy just smiled at her.

But she wasn't the only one who wanted to thank him. The assembled masses who watched so peacefully erupted now with accolades and demands. They wanted pictures and autographs and interviews. They swarmed down into the lobby and the monkey boy's gleeful expression became one of abject terror.

Alice moved to impede the horde – though the logistics of how she would accomplish this remained something of a mystery – but fortunately the issue became moot, as the monkey boy changed once again. Alice watched his hair grow out a bit and his face turn bright red and wizened, like an old man with a bad sunburn. And as the crowds just started to reach him, he disappeared. Just like that. Gone.

And all that remained was the aftermath.

Ah, donuts! Truly mankind's greatest little achievement. Cakey golden morsels of delicious dough. It was a cliché, but Alice did so love them. And she earned them. The mad bomber was behind bars, she scored a philosophical victory over Dan and beat everybody to the collar. Oh, yes, she deserved a little treat.

So she headed to her office to relax, recuperate and indulge, but no sooner did she open the door than she discovered waiting inside her all-time favorite monkey boy.

“Well, hello there,” she said. “Or should I say ‘hi’? Well, either way, I figure if there's anyone who's earned himself a donut, it's you. Help yourself.”

The monkey boy peeked curiously into the box and poked at a few choice samples. In the end, he contented himself with picking a few sprinkles off the top.

“Yeah,” Alice laughed “I suppose you monkey boys need to watch your figure too.”

He just cocked his head and shrugged.

“Which begs the question: what are we going to call you? We can't keep calling you ‘monkey boy.’ You must have a name.”

He stared pensively at her forehead for a few minutes and then answered:

“Monkey Boy.”

“Whoa! Wait. What? Well, that's a development.”

“Hi?”

“I guess. But I said we *can't* call you Monkey Boy. Don't you have a real name?”

“Monkey Boy!”

“Okay, then, Monkey Boy it is. But I'll tell you something, Monkey Boy...”

She dropped the donuts on her desk and headed over to her file cabinet to deposit the rest of her notes on the mad bomber case.

“I get why Bangaroo did what he did and I'm willing to believe you were hunting him because you're genuinely looking to help out and he was the biggest criminal presence in the city at the time, but what still baffles me is the sheer unlikelihood of you two truly unusual characters appearing right alongside each other. That's just too coincidental. There has to be some hidden connection, something that unites you. And I think together, you and I might...”

The file deposited, Alice turned back toward Monkey Boy, only to find an empty office and an open window. With a heavy sigh, she sat down at her desk, grabbed a donut and watched the sun rise over the thicket of concrete.

“Maybe next time.”

**ã 2010-2011
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