

## Divide

Her name was Annie. She was an African elephant, born into captivity. She looked like her caretakers barely fed her, so I felt like I had to do something. There was a ten-foot ditch dividing us, but I held out the Snicker bar and she handled the rest. Her skin stretched until it looked like an old leather jacket. She exhaled deeply as she took the bar from me, blowing a hot gust of funk into my face, but I still smiled. She almost slipped, catching her footing and shoving the bar into her mouth before staring at me. Her big black eyes caught mine and I felt like I understood her. We kept eye contact for at least a minute before my girlfriend Kelly pulled on my arm.

“I don’t think you should be feeding the animals,” she said, nodding at a sign that said *Don’t Feed The Animals* in thick white print.

The *The* in the sign should have been lower cased, and I wanted nothing more than to explain to Kelly how if a sign is incorrect it didn’t really have to be followed, but I held my tongue.

We kept walking, the stench of feces joining us as we neared the monkey cages. My mind stayed with Annie.

“You really don’t want to visit my parents because there are KKK members in the area? That’s such a petty reason,” Kelly said, not making eye contact but still loosely holding onto my arm. I sighed and wished she could see where I was coming from. “Are you scared or something?”

I forced a snicker. “Of course not. I’m just not comfortable meeting your parents in Boonsborough. It just seems like a place I shouldn’t be, and I feel like it would be awkward.”

I *was* a little scared, but I was more nervous. Being black, the KKK and I didn’t get along. So going to where they lived would be like telling an eagle to visit an octopus.

“Stop being a baby. They’ve only had like two rallies since I’ve been alive. Let the whole race thing go. Racism is dead.”

I laughed at her last statement. I knew better than to tell her how wrong she was, so I let it go. Her calling me a baby hurt though. “Why can’t we just leave our parents out of this until we get married?”

“Travis, you told me your parents don’t even want you dating a white girl. If you won’t let me meet your parents, you need to at least meet mine.”

Her voice had gone up and I could tell she wanted to yell at me, but being in public held her back. She was right about my parents. I didn’t think of my parents as racist, but they always wanted me to bring home a girl with at least a little color in her skin. My brother and cousins married white girls, and they said I was their last hope to keep our roots brown.

We stopped in front of the chimpanzee cage. Sunlight spiked through the leaves and spotted circles on the dirt. One of the chimps was chasing another chimp around and screaming. The running chimp tripped and the pursuing chimp hopped on top.

Kelly gripped my arm tighter as the attacking chimp took a chunk out of the other chimp’s neck. Blood sprayed onto its chest. Someone screamed and some guy in a khaki shirt and shorts ran up with a rifle. He fired a dart into the aggressive chimp and it slumped over.

“Let’s go,” said Kelly, holding her stomach and looking queasy. She hated blood.

We went back to my car and I hopped in without opening the door for her. She rolled her window down, but it was hot and I told her to roll it up so I could keep the air conditioning cranking. She didn’t look happy, but she looked too sick to fight.

I looked over at the engagement ring on her finger and wondered if I was making the right decision. It was possible that we were rushing. I'd only known her for six months before I proposed. Maybe my parents were right, and I should bring home a minority of some sort.

Before I could finish thinking I heard Kelly vomit on the floor. There was a long pause as I darted my head back and forth between her and the road, my jaw hanging open. Orange chunks were stuck to her chin, and a string of saliva dangled from her bottom lip. She burped and looked over at me.

“Damn, did you have to throw up *all* over the floor?”

Her embarrassed look warped to anger. She swiped her arm across her chin and the orange chunk stuck to the hair on her forearm. We weren't in public anymore, so she didn't feel the need to keep her voice down.

“Don't act like this is my fault. I didn't bite that monkey and squirt blood everywhere. I tried to wind down the window so if I did this it would be on the street, but you *had* to keep your precious AC on.”

She kept talking about how inconsiderate and selfish I was, but I rolled down my window and let the noise of the highway drown her out. She didn't seem to mind talking to herself, and continued arguing until we made it to my neighborhood. As if she thought my parents would hear her and think less of her, she stopped talking.

The big tree in my front yard was dying, and yellow or brown leaves scattered across my lawn. I was surprised my parents didn't get the tree removed from the yard, but they hadn't and I didn't have much say in the matter.

I parked behind her blue Lexus and stopped the car. We sat in silence for a while. I saw her playing with her hands. At first I thought she was rubbing excess vomit from her hands, but I realized that she was taking off the engagement ring.

Sparkling with sadness, her eyes glared at me for a few seconds. Without speaking she tossed my ring in her puddle of vomit and scooted out my car. She slammed the door, and I watched as she strutted over to her vehicle. I saw her shoulders bounce as she cried in the front seat for a few seconds before starting the Lexus and pulling off.

A cold feeling crept over me but I wasn't sure if it was the AC or her absence. The smell of her vomit got strong as I sat alone, debating whether or not I wanted to fish the ring out her stomach juice. I felt my eyes burn as tears called my strength into question.

Annie popped into my head for some reason. I felt like there was some connection between us, but my mind was coming to terms with what had just happened so I couldn't think very clearly. I kept seeing the ten-foot divide between Annie and I. Shaking my head, I wished life wasn't as complicated as it was before I popped open my door and walked inside.