

The
**ONE
AND ONLY
Ivan**



Katherine Applegate

KATHERINE APPLGATE

The
ONE
AND
ONLY
Ivan

illustrations by
Patricia Castelao

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Dedication

for Julia

Epigraph

*It is never too late to be
what you might have been.*
—George Eliot

Glossary

chest beat: repeated slapping of the chest with one or both hands in order to generate a loud sound (sometimes used by gorillas as a threat display to intimidate an opponent)

domain: territory

the Grunt: snorting, piglike noise made by gorilla parents to express annoyance

me-ball: dried excrement thrown at observers

9,855 days (example): While gorillas in the wild typically gauge the passing of time based on seasons or food availability, Ivan has adopted a tally of days. (9,855 days is equal to twenty-seven years.)

Not-Tag: stuffed toy gorilla

silverback (also, less frequently, grayboss): an adult male over twelve years old with an area of silver hair on his back. The silverback is a figure of authority, responsible for protecting his family.

slimy chimp (slang; offensive): a human (refers to sweat on hairless skin)

vining: casual play (a reference to vine swinging)

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hello

I am Ivan. I am a gorilla.

It's not as easy as it looks.



names

People call me the Freeway Gorilla. The Ape at Exit 8. The One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback.

The names are mine, but they're not me. I am Ivan, just Ivan, only Ivan.

Humans waste words. They toss them like banana peels and leave them to rot.

Everyone knows the peels are the best part.

I suppose you think gorillas can't understand you. Of course, you also probably think we can't walk upright.

Try knuckle walking for an hour. You tell me: Which way is more fun?

patience

I've learned to understand human words over the years, but understanding human speech is not the same as understanding humans.

Humans speak too much. They chatter like chimps, crowding the world with their noise even when they have nothing to say.

It took me some time to recognize all those human sounds, to weave words into things. But I was patient.

Patient is a useful way to be when you're an ape.

Gorillas are as patient as stones. Humans, not so much.

how I look

I used to be a wild gorilla, and I still look the part.

I have a gorilla's shy gaze, a gorilla's sly smile. I wear a snowy saddle of fur, the uniform of a silverback. When the sun warms my back, I cast a gorilla's majestic shadow.

In my size humans see a test of themselves. They hear fighting words on the wind, when all I'm thinking is how the late-day sun reminds me of a ripe nectarine.

I'm mightier than any human, four hundred pounds of pure power. My body looks made for battle. My arms, outstretched, span taller than the tallest human.

My family tree spreads wide as well. I am a great ape, and you are a great ape, and so are chimpanzees and orangutans and bonobos, all of us distant and distrustful cousins.

I know this is troubling.

I too find it hard to believe there is a connection across time and space, linking me to a race of ill-mannered clowns.

Chimps. There's no excuse for them.

the exit 8 big top mall and video arcade

I live in a human habitat called the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade. We are conveniently located off I-95, with shows at two, four, and seven, 365 days a year.

Mack says that when he answers the trilling telephone.

Mack works here at the mall. He is the boss.

I work here too. I am the gorilla.

At the Big Top Mall, a creaky-music carousel spins all day, and monkeys and parrots live amid the merchants. In the middle of the mall is a ring with benches where humans can sit on their rumps while they eat soft pretzels. The floor is covered with sawdust made of dead trees.

My domain is at one end of the ring. I live here because I am too much gorilla and not enough human.

Stella's domain is next to mine. Stella is an elephant. She and Bob, who is a dog, are my dearest friends.

At present, I do not have any gorilla friends.

My domain is made of thick glass and rusty metal and rough cement. Stella's domain is made of metal bars. The sun bears' domain is wood; the parrots' is wire mesh.

Three of my walls are glass. One of them is cracked, and a small piece, about the size of my hand, is missing from its bottom corner. I made the hole with a baseball bat Mack gave me for my sixth birthday. After that he took the bat away, but he let me keep the baseball that came with it.

A jungle scene is painted on one of my domain walls. It has a waterfall without water and flowers without scent and trees without roots. I didn't paint it, but I enjoy the way the shapes flow across my wall, even if it isn't much of a jungle.

I am lucky my domain has three windowed walls. I can see the whole mall and a bit of the world beyond: the frantic pinball machines, the pink billows of cotton candy, the vast and treeless parking lot.

Beyond the lot is a freeway where cars stampede without end. A giant sign at its edge beckons them to stop and rest like gazelles at a watering hole.

The sign is faded, the colors bleeding, but I know what it says. Mack read its words aloud one day: "COME TO THE EXIT 8 BIG TOP MALL AND VIDEO ARCADE, HOME OF THE ONE AND ONLY IVAN, MIGHTY SILVERBACK!"

Sadly, I cannot read, although I wish I could. Reading stories would make a fine way to fill my empty hours.

Once, however, I was able to enjoy a book left in my domain by one of my keepers.

It tasted like termite.

The freeway billboard has a drawing of Mack in his clown clothes and Stella on her hind legs and an angry animal with fierce eyes and unkempt hair.

That animal is supposed to be me, but the artist made a mistake. I am never angry.



Anger is precious. A silverback uses anger to maintain order and warn his troop of danger. When my father beat his chest, it was to say, *Beware, listen, I am in charge. I am angry to protect you, because that is what I was born to do.*

Here in my domain, there is no one to protect.

the littlest big top on earth

My neighbors here at the Big Top Mall know many tricks. They are an educated lot, more accomplished than I am.

One of my neighbors plays baseball, although she is a chicken. Another drives a fire truck, although he is a rabbit.

I used to have a neighbor, a sleek and thoughtful seal, who could balance a ball on her nose from dawn till dusk. Her voice was like the throaty bark of a dog chained outside on a cold night.

Children wished on pennies and tossed them into her plastic pool. They glowed on the bottom like flat copper stones.

The seal was hungry one day, or bored, perhaps, so she ate one hundred pennies.

Mack said she'd be fine.

He was mistaken.

Mack calls our show "The Littlest Big Top on Earth." Every day at two, four, and seven, humans fan themselves, drink sodas, applaud. Babies wail. Mack, dressed like a clown, pedals a tiny bike. A dog named Snickers rides on Stella's back. Stella sits on a stool.

It is a very sturdy stool.

I don't do any tricks. Mack says it's enough for me to be me.

Stella told me that some circuses move from town to town. They have humans who dangle on ropes twining from the tops of tents. They have grumbling lions with gleaming teeth and a snaking line of elephants, each clutching the limp tail in front of her. The elephants look far off into the distance so they won't see the humans who want to see them.

Our circus doesn't migrate. We sit where we are, like an old beast too tired to push on.

After our show, humans forage through the stores. A store is where humans buy things they need to survive. At the Big Top Mall, some stores sell new things, things like balloons and T-

shirts and caps to cover the gleaming heads of humans. Some stores sell old things, things that smell dusty and damp and long forgotten.

All day, I watch humans scurry from store to store. They pass their green paper, dry as old leaves and smelling of a thousand hands, back and forth and back again.

They hunt frantically, stalking, pushing, grumbling. Then they leave, clutching bags filled with things—bright things, soft things, big things—but no matter how full the bags, they always come back for more.

Humans are clever indeed. They spin pink clouds you can eat. They build domains with flat waterfalls.

But they are lousy hunters.