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Goddarman's Monkey

by Mark Weston

"Nancy? NAAANCY?! Where in the *hell* is she?"

Lawrence Goddarman awoke from his nap to find no one in the store, no one at all. He stiff-armed the double glass doors, too impatient to wait for the automatic sensors to kick in, and came barreling out into the chill air. Nancy stood leaning up against the cement wall, one leg bent beneath her, a smoldering cigarette forked fashionably between two fingers. She cringed and crushed out the glow at the end of the half smoked Pall Mall. Mustering her strength, said, "I'm here, Doc... uh... sir... I mean, Mister Goddarman... sir..."

She had meant to sound relaxed and casual, but it came out like it always did--choked and frightened. Like a goddam child, she thought. Just like a little kid. Goddarman stood, fists balled in anger, eyes smoldering. Nancy couldn't even look at him.

"I didn't want to smoke around the animals, sir. I just figured... well... you were asleep and all... well... I'm sorry."

She was on the verge of tears. Larry saw that she was about to cry and unclenched his fists. His shoulders sagged.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scream. I was just
(*cranky from the morphine*)

tired. I overreacted. I apologize... go on and finish..."

"Ok." Her whisper was tired and small.

His breath flagged out a smoke signal in the February morning. There was something about a woman's tears that always stripped Larry of his will. He paused for a moment, letting his gaze linger on the weeping girl against the wall, feeling that he should say something, offer something. He wasn't very good at this. His eyes dropped to the ground and he walked back into the shop.

The animal sounds were deafening in his drugged ears, the

monkey loudest of all, swinging and chattering gaily from behind its bars. The odor of cedar and urine was warm in his nose and throat. The air, thick with humidity, made the place seem heavier, ominous. It didn't do much for his headache either.

"...too goddam hot in here..."

The monkey screeched in reply as Larry strode past the cast iron cage. It scampered across the bars, following him, then in one tremendous leap it connected with the top of its cage and hung there with one elongated paw, swinging. *Man, I hate that thing*, thought Larry. He turned his head back to glance at it. *Man, I hate you too*, its eyes seemed to say.

Larry went into the bathroom and slapped cool water on his face from the rusty basin, a futile attempt to rid himself of the remnants of sleep. He grabbed one of the neatly stacked white hotel towels from the ledge under the medicine cabinet. To his oversensitive skin the towel seemed to scrape the water from his face with a thousand tiny needles. He tossed it carelessly into the mildewed corner. The reddened face in the mirror gazed out at him hatefully. Its two bloodshot gaping holes seemed to accuse him of some unthinkable crime. *What the hell do you think you're doing?* they asked. *Who do you think you are?*

"Up yours."

He walked out into the coffee room and tripped over the cot, painfully banging his knees on the tile floor hard enough to make his eyes water. He hobbled around for a while, mumbling and swearing until his knees stopped complaining. Out in the pet store, the German Shepherd pups in the front display were yapping away at the monkey. Larry wasn't the only one who hated that thing. It screeched and rattled its cage. Ping! Ping! Ping! *I hope that damn thing breaks its face on those bars*, thought Larry. More screeches assaulted his ears in answer.

Hurriedly he poured a cup of coffee, but he missed the cup and poured most of it onto his hand.

"JESUS CHRIST!"

Larry did a little dance, then ran into the bathroom again to let the cold relief of water lick his wounded hands. The high pitched chatter of the monkey sounded to Larry like laughter. He quickly wiped

off his hands then escaped into the quiet sanctuary of the pharmacy, where the cries of the monkey were only muffled squeaks. Muddy was there behind the counter. Larry had hired him around the time that he bought the pet store.

"What's all the racket about, Doc?" Muddy flashed a knowing grin full of crooked teeth. He looked like a rabid dog ready to take a bite out of any body part that a person dared venture too close. "Tripped over the cot again?"

"And burned myself with that mud, Muddy. Where the hell'd you learn to make coffee anyway?"

Muddy laughed.

"Take a break, man."

"Sure. Thanks." Muddy was still grinning. Muddy always grinned. "By the way, Doc, tomorrow's the day my brother's gettin' married. Remember...? ...Doc?--you said you'd gimme the day... Hey Doc...you OK? You look like hell, man."

"What? Huh?...oh, oh right. Sure. Go ahead. Wish him my best."

"Thanks. Seriously though, man. Go see a doctor. You look like shit... Hey Doc, you awake?"

"Take a break, Muddy. You're hurting my ears." Larry sat at the counter with his head in his hands. Muddy walked away shaking his head and grinning. Always grinning. What the hell was wrong with that guy? How in the hell could anyone take a guy like that seriously? One thing he had straight, though. Larry did feel like shit. He sat and gripped his hair with his hands. The white counter swam with black spots under his eyes.

Larry considered getting another syringe of morphine. He looked up guiltily and saw Muddy flirting with Maggy, the girl at the register up front. Larry's eyes locked with Muddy's. The grin was gone. *What's up, Doc? Whatcha thinkin' 'bout?* Larry laughed nervously. His head swam and he began to totter on his stool. The right hand shot out for support and collided with the aspirin display, sending tiny white shrapnel in all directions as it smashed on the loop-de-loops. *I'm orbiting consciousness*, he thought. *Orbiting the moon.*

"Jesus, Larry, you OK?"

But Larry heard nothing. Larry was unconscious.

"Here... have another sip." Nancy sweetly offered the glass again.

"No, no. I'm fine. Really. I'm fine." Larry tried to sound grumpy and mad, but the truth was, he was loving this. When was the last time he'd had such a good looking girl taking care of him? *Shit*, he thought, *when have I ever? And damn, she is beautiful.* He fought back the smile, but it came anyway. Nancy blushed.

"You're staring at me, Mister Goddarman." Nancy looked away. She was scared of Larry. She often thought that she might love him... And well, wasn't it ok? He was divorced now. It was just that he never seemed to notice her. He was always so *pissed*.

"Chrissake, Nan, why do you call me that? Why in the hell don't you call me by my *name*?"

"Ok...L...Lar...Mister..." she was pleading now, "Mister Goddarman..."

The look in her eyes pinned Larry to the cot.

"Oh, all right. LARRY." She tried it out on her tongue again in a whisper. "Larry." She was pleased. "Larry."

The bell on the pet shop door jingled, and Nancy hopped up instinctively. She handed Larry the glass with a weighted smirk. Larry's stomach did a flip at the touch of her skin. She was gone. *Wow. I must be flippin' my lid.* He had to laugh. *She's only twenty. Then again, who gives a flying fuck? I mean, with Sara gone...* He flinched at the thought of Sara. *Bitch. Of all the fucks in Michigan, she had to run off with goddam Bill Scarsdale. Bitch. Doledrum Ridge isn't exactly a big town either. Everybody in town prob'ly knew she was fucking Bill goddam Scarsdale before I even had a clue. Screwing the police and goddam fire chief! For all I know, they all know about the morphine, too... no... impossible... no way.*

Larry forced his mind to go elsewhere. He considered Nancy

again. She was a senior at the Doledrum Community College down the road. She smelled good. She'd been working here since he'd bought out the former management of Doledrum Fish and Pet. It was just Doledrum Pet now (Larry hated those goddam fish), just like his original business--Doledrum Drug. The other management had run the place right out of money, the fools. They were arrested for tax evasion or something, (not that Larry didn't do a little of that himself, how could he resist when he was dealing purely in cash?), and they were forced to sell. Larry had snatched the place up, pets and all.

"Just needed some management, was all..."

He realized that he had been talking to himself and he snapped his mouth shut. What would people say? It would be all over town in an hour. "Doc's talkin' to hisself. Heard him when I was in buying a bone for Chopper. Talkin' to hisself just like a mad hatter." Everyone in town called him Doc. Everyone except for Nancy.

"How ya doin', Champ?" Muddy stood in the doorway grinning.

"Pretty shitty, Muddy." *Champ?!*

"Ha! There's the sense of humor!"

You're an idiot, Muddy. Dumber 'n a crud.

The music from the pharmacy drifted into the coffee room. It was one of those lousy new rock and roll bands. "What'a-got-cha-got-ta-give-it-to-ya-mah-mah, What'a-got-cha-got-ta-give-it-to-ha-pah-pah, What'a-got-cha-got-ta-give-it-to-ya-dauh-tah-ya-do-a-little-dance-and-ya-drink-a-little-wah-tah!"

"Hey, Muddy!" Larry grinned cheerily, "When you go back out there," Larry grinned some more, "...turn off that African shit. It's smut. Bad for business...Champ."

"O god no- not 101- the Country One!" Muddy mocked over his shoulder as he escaped around the corner. Static fuzz came over the speakers, sterile and undemanding as Muddy changed the station, then it was good old Hank Williams back on the air.

Nancy's soft footfalls announced that she was back in the room. Larry turned his head to look at her, eyebrows raised, questioning.

"Just sold a Shepherd pup." A modest smile stretched her lips.

"Good."

"How you feeling?"

"Good."

"Good." She smiled again.

Larry's mind spun, digging for a scrap of conversation. Anything, anything at all.

"Hey...uh..." Nancy looked at him attentively. "What... uh... what's your major?" *Oh great, Larry, I bet she only gets asked that about thirty times a day.*

"Evolution." Her voice dropped a note in seriousness. Larry jumped.

"Oh, yeah?" All of a sudden, his heart didn't seem to be pumping the blood as well as the second before, and the words grated against his throat.

"Sure. I don't know what kind of job I'll end up with, but it's the happiness that counts, ya know?"

"How can you major in something like that, I mean you're talking about one specific thing, right?"

"Well, that's not all, anthropology, really. Evolution's just what I like best."

There was an uncomfortable pause as both of them struggled for conversation, and Nancy's hands nervously tucked her hair behind her ears.

"Maybe you should get that monkey off your back," ventured Nancy hopefully.

The mouthful of water that Larry had been occupied with flew through the air in a fine spray as he coughed it out. "Wha...what'd you say?!" he blurted out, half screaming.

Nancy backed off a little, wide eyed. "I said maybe we should put that monkey in the back...I mean it scared a little kid half to death today when he came in the door...never mind..." Her voice had faded into a whisper as she viewed Larry gasping for breath. She glanced at him like a mother fretting for a sickly child. "You look like you're about to pass out again."

"No, I'm fine. I'm gonna sleep," he said shakily. "Why don't you go back out there." Larry motioned toward the pet store with great

effort. Nancy seemed hurt.

"Oh. Well, just lemme know if you need..." She stopped midsentence to glance at the floor. "Ok." She stood up with a sigh and patted out the wrinkles in her jeans, then was gone in three short strides, lightly shutting the door behind her.

Larry put both hands over his face. *Why'd you freeze up in there, champ?* Why had he? Larry wasn't even sure.

"Maybe I'm dying..."

He stood up and slowly made his way into his office, and settled down easily into the desk chair. The palms of his hands made a smooth "Shhhhhh" noise as he pushed them over the surface of faded and worn rosewood desk. They slid forward until his head rested on the scarred surface. It was to this sacred monument that he always found himself drawn, day after day. He let himself rest there for a moment, breathing shallowly, the dying sun bathing his head in orange light from the window. Then, inevitably, he drew the key ring from the right front pocket of his khakis, and unlocked the drawer below. The tumblers drew the bolt back with a snap, and he easily slid the drawer open on its well-oiled track. He dug around for a moment, and produced a syringe, a strip of rubber tubing, a small amber vial.

The pharmacy was able to get morphine in this form for people with things like terminal cancer and such. There was Jerry Crawford down the road and Millie Johnson across the highway; (*and then just little old me and my soul cancer.*) they had prescriptions. They could get the stuff at the pharmacy so that they could administer it to themselves at home, instead of spending the rest of their dying lives at hospitals. There was always the problem of the nausea that often comes hand in hand with morphiates, but, of course, in this day and age, they have stuff for that, too. The doctors figure it's ok to let the dying be addicted, so why be addicted at a hospital when you can be addicted at home? Larry had no problem with that. Larry always made sure to order just a little more to stash in his desk.

"Soul cancer..."

Larry shot a little spray up from the syringe
(*just like in the movies*)

to get the air out, then wrapped the tubing around his arm, slapped at the bulging powerlines of his veins to make them stand up. It hit you harder that way when you let it go. A moment later he knew such bliss...

(ohmygodohmygod)

such heaven...

(ohmygodohmygodohmyGOD)

such magic...

The tears built up and his eyes began to water, but Larry was the farthest thing from crying. The truth was, he felt just fine, just groovy. He went back to the cot and stretched out the entire length of his gaunt frame with great pleasure, to think things out. He lay for a long time like that, an eternity, unmoving, hardly breathing. He thought about the monkey. Evolution. That monkey was hell and gone from human. What is it about animals that makes humans so separate? *No restraint on desires*, thought Larry, then laughed. *Yeah, right. Look at you. OK, fire, then.* That was a third grade lesson. Something a person learned watching Saturday morning cartoons. The fact that Wile E. Coyote could blow up a highway with bombs and rockets was of course, absurd. That was the point wasn't it? Or King Louie in *The Jungle Book*. He needed "Man's Red Fire" so that he could be more human. Sure.

Larry's drugged thoughts began to run down slower and slower like the gears in a dying clock, pulling toward the ultimate comfort of sleep, and finally dreams.

Huge tufts of snow gently caressed Larry's features, stuck in his ears, settled in his hair, melted like tears onto his cheeks. He looked around and discovered that he was standing in a vast field of white, no trees, no structures, no horizon, just a faded, gray, windless sky woven with ever falling puffs of snow. There were no footprints. *How did I get here?* Larry called out into the nothing. His voice sounded dead, flat, muffled by the blanket of snow. He tried to turn and look behind him, but he found that he could not move, his feet seemed cemented to

the ground. He tried again to wrench his feet free, but lost his balance and fell forward, comically, doing a faceplant in the snow, and his feet slid out of his loafers, exposing his week-unwashed socks.

He rolled over, fighting with his white coat that had become strangely entangled with his head. He struggled to his feet, mercifully free from the coat, and stood bewildered at the loss of his shoes.

Hey, boy! You feelin' ok? Looks like you've got one hell of a monkey on your back! Ha! Ha!

Larry whirled around in search of the voice. It was Muddy, standing in the untracked snow, grinning.

I say! That IS quite a monkey!

Larry spun again, and saw Bill (goddam) Scarsdale, hands on his hips, sporting a Muddy-style grin.

I don't know what in the hell you're talking about, said Larry, but both men erupted in hilarious laughter. Larry's face began to contort in anger and turn various shades of red until he thought he might explode. Then, with a blood-curdling war-cry, Larry charged at Bill (goddam) Scarsdale, arms spread. He wanted to kill him. Bill easily stepped aside, and Larry went headlong into the snow once again.

Oh, ho! Looks like he's got it in for old Bill, eh, folks? Ha! Ha!

Bill loomed over Larry, his feet planted only inches from Larry's snow encrusted head. Bill's badge and gun seemed to shine in an unseen sun. He raised one size thirteen boot, and slowly ground it into Larry's face, laughing all the while.

You're wife is REAL damn good, son. Thanks for being a crappy husband, you needle freak!

Bill raised the boot once again, this time meaning to bash in Larry's face. Larry tried to roll, but it seemed like someone had parked their car on him. The boot came down with a sickening crunch on Larry's nose, and Bill picked it up again, ready for more, but suddenly Larry could move. He rolled over twice...

...and landed hard on the cement floor, breaking his fall with his head. Dizziness added to the groggy fingers of sleep that still tickled his brain, and he had to sit for awhile on the cold tile floor to remember where he was. He could feel something warm and thick running down his skull, down his forehead, until it stung at the corners of his eyes. He dragged himself up in a daze to find the bathroom, but tripped over the cot again, and found himself sprawled out on the floor. He got up again and groped for the lightswitch in the blackness; he found it and flipped it on. He threw up his arm in front of his eyes to save himself from the searing pain that ripped through his head, then slowly shuffled into the bathroom.

He stood confronting the gore of his image in the mirror. Its one visible eye peered out from the mask of blood in accusation. His right hand moved absently up to the goose-egg on top of his head, then jerked away at the initial pain of contact. He touched it more tenderly this time, wincing. The bump was about the size of half a tennis ball. He laughed in disgust and began to cleanse himself of the blood

(...damn head wounds bleed like hell...)

that mated his hair, and stained his face and jacket in a crimson exclamation.

His pale skin began to show as he scrubbed, and it seemed like forever before the pink tint of blood was gone from his skin. he washed his hair with the cracked and dirty bar of Ivory soap that sat eternally in the soap-well of the sink. He carefully began to towel his hair dry as he gazed into the mirror. In the backward reflection he saw the coffee room door to the pet store swing languidly into the room, coming to a rest against the toppled cot with a squeak, revealing the darkened store beyond...

and a small hunched figure skittered across the window ledge at the other end of the store, silhouetted momentarily by the oval moon, then was gone. Larry wasn't even sure he'd seen a thing,

(haunted)

or of his own sanity,

(haunted)

or if he was awake, or of anything at all.

He stood stupidly, mouth agape, head cocked, listening. He turned the grey dial of his Pulsar to his face. Three o'clock. Nancy had of course locked up and left by now. She hadn't awakened him before she left, she never did. The haggard face in the mirror eyed him puzzled, baggy-eyed and unshaven. His whole face seemed to sag. He hacked at the mirror, turned and slung the towel into the corner and strode out into the pet shop.

The faint smell of cigarettes hung stale in the humid air, mixed with the usual perfume of cedar and urine. Yellow light from the halogen street lamps painted the fur of the pups in the front display in a curious crimson.

...strange the way light plays tricks sometimes...

He reached the front of the store, by the window and the cash register.

It was your imagination, pal, thought Larry as he peered out the window at his Oldsmobile, parked at its regular post. He faintly wondered why Nancy had smoked in here, she never smoked in here, but the smell was unmistakable.

That was when he saw the cage door. It was open. The monkey was gone.

He shuffled over to the deserted frame in bewilderment.

Did she sell it?

The thought seemed impossible. The monkey had been there for years, eternally wielding the same price tag.

She sold it without the cage? Why would anyone buy the damn thing without a cage?

The store seemed unnaturally quiet to Larry without the twenty-four hour chatter of the monkey, even after hours and during the night. Not even the pups or the birds made any noise. He walked over to the front display where they lay silently.

He had noticed before that the streetlight had cast a strange red glow on their fur. They were red, all right, their throats had been slit.

Larry stood, mouth agape.

"What the hell?!"

He was awake now, as if torn from a terrifying nightmare,

drenched in sweat, adrenaline screaming through his veins.

Are you awake?

He had to be.

Suddenly infuriated at his own weakness, Larry let out a primal scream. The window panes rattled. He slammed his fist down on the linoleum counter four times.

"ARE-" SLAM

"YOU-" SLAM

"AWAKE-" SLAM

"FUCKHEAD?" SLAM!

With the last blow, the counter gave and his fist went right through with a crunch. He ripped it out of the splintered hole. He gazed unseeingly at the angry red scrapes that went to his elbow, and at the bloody fist, peppered with splinters.

...call Scarsdale...

...no way.

got to call Sheriff Scarsdale.

Sheriff Bill Scarsdale.

Larry's energy was gone now; the tears came as he slumped against the counter.

tired. so tired.

He made his way around the counter toward the telephone.

NO PERSONAL CALLS

announced his own handwriting on the sign scotch-taped to the handset. He picked it up and lifted it to his ear, dazed. He stared off into the back of the store at the shadows of racks and the pet food displays, trying to remember whom he had meant to call. His eyes settled on the empty cage. A beam of light fell on the bottom of the cage and

there were cigarette butts there.

Nancy? Has she completely flipped?

He hung up the telephone and slowly stepped over to the cage. His hand reached in and flicked aside some of the ashes.

...two..four..five..six. Six butts.

He daintily extracted one of the foul smelling stubs and rolled it over between his thumb and forefinger to see

Pall Mall; Nancy's brand.

the label stamped in pale grey block lettering. He flicked it away and wiped his hand off on the back of his pants. A white book of matches caught his eye on the floor beneath the cage. He dimly made out **Doledrum Pub** on the cover. He bent down to pick it up.

WHOOSH!

A hurtling glass bottle nearly took off his ear, where his nose had been a second before. Larry dove to the floor to get a taste of the olive green imitation Berber carpet just as the display case glass crashed to the floor in pieces. The sound of a child's bare feet pattered away through the coffee room.

Pitpitpitpitpitpitpitpit...

Wheezing sounds came from Larry's throat as his lungs did their overtime thing to his heart's arrhythmiatic tune. His head spun sickeningly

(Too many hours on the merry-go-round, Larry.)

and Larry fought back a sudden wave of nausea. He heaved anyway despite his efforts, emitting a clear, foul-tasting fluid. Larry hadn't eaten in three days.

The heavy taste of metal seemed to pinch the sides of his tongue and saliva glands. He sat up and distastefully extracted the hairball that his mouth had gained when Larry had tried unsuccessfully to eat the carpet.

Clink! Clink!

Larry could faintly hear the bottles in the pharmacy being tossed around; and something else hit the ground with a loud thud. Then there was silence.

It's that thing. It's that goddam little monkey.

No shit, Sherlock.

The conversation in his head rambled on as Larry fumbled around in the dark trying not to run into the island as he sought out the door.

I'm gonna kill it! I'll kill it! I'll kill that little sonofabitch!

He found his way back into the coffee room and instantly toppled over the cot that had somehow migrated over to the entranceway.

"FAAAAAAHHHHUUUUUCK!!"

In a fit of screaming rage he smashed the wooden frame to splinters on the wall. This done he was delivered again into a foggy calm, and he made his way into the pharmacy.

The place was unnaturally dark, and Larry extended both hands to protect himself from any further migrating furniture. He could hear bottles tinkling in clumsy hands near the pharmacy counter, and he cautiously approached by ear.

Suddenly he was hit with a revelation.

Lights. Turn on the lights, genius.

Larry's lips curled in self-loathing.

...idiot.

He turned and headed straight across the room to the bank of lightswitches. Simultaneously, he flicked all ten on with both hands.

...tick...tickticktittititizzot!

The cold fluorescent tubes zapped on, blinding Larry with the excruciating light.

Larry cried out as he plastered his palms to his eyes and staggered a few steps toward the counter. Slowly, he pried his fingers open as his eyes adjusted. By some amazing coincidence, he was facing the pharmaceutical counter dead center.

...oh, my god...

...jesus christ...

The monkey had killed all of the birds. There were guinea pigs there, too.

...oh, my god...

It had strung them up with packing string, wing to wing like chained paper children, cut out with scissors. From each tufted chest protruded a hypodermic needle. The birds hung over a perfect circle of dead guinea pigs, murdered in the same fashion. Directly in the center, hanging from the line of limp birds, was the monkey. It hung there by one paw, lightly swaying. Its black eyes were cold, unmoving. It dropped to the counter with a dull thump, landing perfectly in the center

of the circle. It stood on its hind legs.

Lazily, its arm moved out and grasped the enormous syringe that stuck out of one of the silent guinea pigs at its feet. It had something in its other paw. A tiny amber vial of

(morphine.)

morphine. Its black, primal eyes never faltered in their fixed gaze. Larry's own sweet baby blues that had once caused women to swoon, were now bloodshot and glazed with the tears that now gathered on the rims of his lower eyelids. Every scratch, every bruise, every ache in his body screamed, cried out for the soothing void of the narcotic emptiness. Every cell in his physical being begged him not to make them feel for even one second longer.

The hollow, stainless steel needle gently squeaked into the rubber seal of the upturned vial, slowly drawing the line of fluid closer and closer toward the neck of the bottle.

(...it's too much...)

The syringe was full now, and the monkey tossed the useless vial to the side.

(...it's too much...)

A tiny spray of liquid shot into the air.

Larry's feet seemed cemented to the ground.

(...it means to kill me...)

The monkey was standing upright now.

(Mister Goddarman!)

(...way too...)

(Oh, Mister Goddarman!)

(...much...)

(ISN'T IT TIME YOU TOOK YOUR MEDICINE, MISTER GODDARMAN?! ISN'T IT TIME?!)

The Monkey's legs propelled its miniature body into the air in a graceful bounding leap. It became a momentary silhouette against the blue lights and the horrible feathered wreath. It did not remain so for long, however; for even the youngest child knows that what goes up... must come down.

Consciousness had come and gone as it played its deceitful, spinning games with Larry's skull; but it unfortunately seemed that this time it was here to stay, at least for a while. Larry's throat let out a shrill squeak that should have been a moan. Every part of his body that was capable of feeling pain, throbbed with a dim, desperate ache. His leg muscles went into cramped spasms as he attempted to stretch them out.

Who parked his truck on my head?

Larry could hear voices over the ringing in his ears, they were impossibly loud, close.

"Well, your insurance should cover the.... damages.... Was anything stolen?"

Was that the sheriff's deputy?

"No, but if I get my hands on the sick bastard who did this..." The woman's voice choked off with sobs.

That Nancy? What are they talking about?

Larry slowly allowed his sleep encrusted eyes to open a squint, fighting back the urge to clamp them tight against the blinding rays of sun. Where was he? His blurred vision swam with black stripes.

Larry heard the conversation suddenly cut short as the entrance bell rang. Voices greeted the newcomer.

"Sheriff..."

(...definitely the deputy...)

"Mornin', Bill..."

(Muddy.)

"...sheriff...Mister Scarsdale...who?...why?..." Sobs again.

(Why is she crying?)

"There now, missus, it's gonna be all right. It'll be ok."

(That's that Scarsdale bastard.)

"Now, Sheriff, what's going to be done about this?" Here was a voice that Larry could not identify. Dry, haggard, slightly overanimated.

The Sheriff didn't answer right away, he seemed to be cautiously

deliberating.

Larry's eyes came into focus,
(*What the hell?*)

but what he was seeing was wrong. Absolutely impossible. His stomach squirmed with fear.

"Well, sir..." began the sheriff.

Larry sat up.

"Hey, Sheriff! That thing isn't dead!" spouted the deputy.

"I'll be...."

Bill Scarsdale's behemoth face loomed at Larry through the cast iron bars. With primitive rage, Larry let out a riotous war cry, a chorus of chattering, inhuman screams. He simultaneously launched his tiny body at the monster with one thought on his mind: the death of Bill Scarsdale. Larry's flight path was blocked by the cast iron bars, deflecting him and spinning him around. He landed face down on the mat of soiled newspapers and cigarette butts.

"Oh, ho! Looks like he's got it in for old Bill, eh, folks? Ha! Ha!" A chorus of laughter came from behind the grinning sheriff.

Larry got up slowly and sat on his haunches, wide eyed in disbelief.

"You're an ugly little monkey, aren't you? Yes, you are!" said the sheriff's monstrous face, in a high pitched mocking tone. "In all seriousness," he said, smirking and turning around, "I need you folks to come down to the station to fill out a report. Ok?"

"Ok."

"All right, then. That's where I'm headed now...." Bill paused, as if to say something more, then, thinking better of it, turned and walked out. Larry watched as the deputy, followed by the grinning Muddy, left, trotting after the sheriff.

Slowly, he cast his new eyes around him in horror and disbelief, and soon his gaze fell on *him*.

Every dog has his day, thought Larry. Mine's bound to come back. Isn't it?

ISN'T IT?

Nancy watched the police cruiser pull away, then turned back to face Mister Goddarman. She fumbled uncomfortably with her purse; she was always so damned nervous being alone with him.

(Larry, remember to call him Larry.)

Her nervous eyes rested on the little monkey. *That* was making her jumpy too. It hadn't moved in five minutes. It just sat and glared at Larry. She'd worked here for years, and had never seen it sit still for more than five *seconds*. Nancy decided that she needed a cigarette very badly. She pawed through her purse in search.

"Where are my damned cigarettes?" she mumbled.

"I smoked them."

"What?!"

"It's true. You left them here last night, and well, I smoked them.

"I didn't know you smoked!" laughed Nancy in surprise.

"People change, Nancy, people change." A confident smile appeared on his face. "There's another thing that I want to change." He grabbed her firmly around the waist, smiling.

Nancy blushed, then smiled despite herself.

(...my god...he's actually acting human.)

He bent down to her upturned face and kissed her long and full, open mouthed.

A tiny sound of pleasure escaped her throat, and behind Nancy's closed eyes, she finally allowed herself to fall in love.

Mister Goddarman, however, did not close his eyes. They remained wide open, and they were cold. Cold and wild. His gaze fixed on the monkey in triumphant arrogance.

The two mouths slowly parted.

"We should go to the police station now."

"Okay," came Nancy's small reply.

"I'll go warm up the car for you. I won't have you freezing to death out there," said Goddarman. It was the voice of a man who demanded control. Nancy wouldn't have preferred it any other way.

She watched as he ran out to the car. Her dreamy bewilderment at Larry's change was stopped dead for a moment by the monkey's mournful cries. Nancy turned. Its large, sad, monkey's eyes glinted as it emitted its painfully sorrowful howl. It gripped the bars with its two forepaws. The howls gradually wound down to choking whimpers.

For some unknowable reason, Nancy was moved to tears. Her stomach was fraught with butterflies.

"Ohhhwwah..What's wrong, little man?" she whispered tearfully.

The monkey pronounced a series of sad, high pitched chatter that could have been language, in some other time, some other place.

"Cheet-cheet. Cheet-tuh-cheuw...."

It fell silent, slowly letting its head hang down. The motion seemed to imitate some lonely hopeless human despair.

Nancy slowly extended her index finger and stroked its soft fuzzy head.

"I'm sorry, little monkey," she whispered, "It'll be another million years before I'll understand you. You'll just have to wait for evolution to catch up. I'm sorry."

The horn honked and Nancy was jerked out of the spell. She jumped up and hastily wiped the tears off of her cheeks, laughing at her foolishness.

You can be so silly sometimes, Nancy. Really!

She turned and skipped out the door, and into the awaiting Oldsmobile. The car purred away.

The monkey remained behind, head hung in despair. From a distance it might have seemed to a passerby, had there been one, that the scene resembled an abstract portrait of an old, tired, lonely man, imprisoned for life, back hunched from ages of weariness, without hope of ever reaching the outside again. It didn't matter if that first passerby was not an artist at all, for it seemed that the monkey was going to remain there, in the same manner, for a long, long time.