

Sunny by Joey Cole

Sunny was familiar with rejection from a young age.

Mere days after seeing sunlight for the first time, his raging father beat him nearly to death.

The sky, which just yesterday was vibrantly blue, was flushed with red as he was carried away from his own kind and put in the care of the standing people.

Handed desperately into the arms of his true mother, he was too blinded by the light of acceptance and her kind smile to notice the lack of thick black hair on her arms and posable thumbs on the feet of his new siblings.

For nine months he had a home and a family that cared for him, making it all the more confusing when he was taken away.

The night of his departure was one of his darkest. Alone and confused, he cried to himself as he sat in a cold steel cage stowed alongside suitcases and wooden crates.

When the doors finally opened, Sonny was comforted by the emerald green hills as they passed by his window on the drive to the Dublin Zoo.

The pale grey walls of the pavilion felt cold, as did the passing looks from the standing people, too pre-occupied to care that he was afraid and lonely.

At ten months old, Sonny finally met another chimp. A young female, rejected by her mother and raised by the standing people, just like him.

They were fast friends, curiously examining each other with long fingers and exploring their new enclosure, decorated lovingly with a sign that read "Vikki and Sonny's playhouse."

The pair would eat and play and sleep through the day until the standing people came to get him at night, carrying him away from a distraught Vikki, rocking back and forth and hugging herself through the night, alone again until the sun came up.

Sonny, too young to be left alone, went home at night with a young couple.

On the drive home he watched the world outside, thrilled and entranced by the strange, two wheeled contraptions some of the standing people passed by on, reaching his long arms out to them through the open window, much to their confusion and terror.

Sonny became used to this reaction, seeing it in the faces in passing cars as he hung his head out of the window and felt the cool air on his tongue. He watched above the rim of a glass of milk as drunken pub-goers rubbed their eyes and asked their friends if they could also see the chimp.

He missed Vikki these nights but found company in another creature the couple seemed to be hosting, a four-legged critter with even more hair than Sonny and a long, wagging tail. Though it frustrated and confused Sonny at times that this beast held things in its mouth instead of its hands, and often did not understand personal space, he was soft to touch and fun to play with.

Sometimes on weekends, the group would go out for walks around the neighborhood. Whatever pride Sonny had taken over the four-legged creature for having to be walked about on a leash was diminished by the firm grip the standing people kept on his hand as they strolled, though they would allow him one free hand to pick black berries when they passed a bush of the delicious treat.

He would stow a few away in his diaper and present them proudly to Vikki the next day, an act of guilt for having another home.

The guilt turned to desperation the night the standing people did not come.

He waited for hours, gripping the bars of his enclosure and watching the doors, waiting for them to come back for him, wondering how they could forget him.

That night he rocked and cried alongside Vikki, he'd been rejected, just like her.

The final rejection was the worst of them all.

It was mid-day, a few weeks later, in his new, outdoor enclosure, watched on by crowds of standing people on the other side of a mote. Vikki and himself shared the space in intervals with another pack of chimps, the looks of which terrified Sonny.

His fears were confronted one morning when a door was left open and a raging, adult male chimp came barreling towards Sunny. In a fit of terror, seeing the same anger and strength in this beast's eyes he'd seen in his fathers, Sunny dove into the moat.

Realizing too late, he didn't know how to swim.