

Barnaby in exile

Mike Resnick

Barnaby sits in his cage, waiting for Sally to come into the lab.

She will give him the puzzle, the same one he worked on yesterday. But today he will not disappoint her. He has been thinking about the puzzle all night. Thinking is fun. Today he will do it right, and she will laugh and tell him how smart he is. He will lay on his back and she will tickle his stomach, and say, "Oh, what a bright young fellow you are, Barnaby!" Then Barnaby will make a funny face and turn a somersault.

Barnaby is me.

#

It gets lonely after Sally leaves. Bud comes when it is black and cleans my cage, but he never talks. Sometimes he forgets and leaves the light on. Then I try to talk to Roger and his family, but they are just rabbits and cannot make the signs. I don't think they are very smart, anyway.

Every night when Bud comes in I sit up and smile at him. I always make the sign for "Hello", but he doesn't answer.

Sometimes I think Bud isn't any smarter than Roger. He just pats

me on the head. Sometimes he leaves the pictures on after he leaves.

My favorite pictures are Fred and Barney. Everything is so bright and fast. Many times I ask Sally to bring Dino to the lab so that I can play with him, but she never does. I like Barney, because he is not as big or loud as Fred, and I am not big or loud either. Also, my name is Barnaby and that is like Barney. Sometimes, when it is black and I am all alone, I imagine that I am Barney, and that I don't sleep in a cage at all.

#

This day it was white out, and Sally even had white on her when she came to the lab, but it all turned to water.

Today we had a new toy. It looks like the thing on Doctor's desk, with lots of little things that look like flat grapes. Sally told me that she would show me something and then I should touch the grape that had the same picture on it. She showed me a shoe, and a ball, and an egg, and a star, and a square.

I did the egg and the ball wrong, but tomorrow I will do them right. I think more every day. Like Sally says I am a very bright young fellow.

#

We have spent many days with the new toy, and now I can speak to Sally with it, just by touching the right grapes.

She will come into the lab and say, "How are you this morning, Barnaby?", and I will touch the grapes that say, "Barnaby is fine" or "Barnaby is hungry".

What I really want to say is "Barnaby is lonely" but there is no grape for "lonely".

#

Today I touch the grapes that say "Barnaby wants out".

"Out of your cage?" she asks.

"Out there," I sign. "Out in the white."

"You would not like it."

"I do not like the black when I am alone," I sign. "I will like the white."

"It is very cold," she says, "and you are not used to it."

"The white is very pretty," I say. "Barnaby wants out."

"The last time I let you out you hurt Roger," she reminds me.

"I just wanted to touch him," I say.

"You do not know your own strength," she says. "Roger is just a rabbit, and you hurt him."

"I will be gentle this time," I say.

"I thought you didn't like Roger," she says.

"I don't like Roger," I say. "I like touching."

She reaches into the cage and tickles my belly and scratches my back and I feel better, but then she stops.

"It is time for your lesson," she says.

"If I do it right, can you bring me something to touch?" I ask.

"What kind of thing?" she says.

I think for a moment. "Another Barnaby," I say.

She looks sad, and doesn't answer.

#

One day Sally brings me a book filled with pictures. I smell it and taste it. Finally I figure out that she wants me to look at it.

There are all kinds of animals in it. I see one that looks like Roger, but it is brown and Roger is white. And there is a kitten, like I see through the window. And a dog, like Doctor sometimes brings to the lab. But there is no Dino.

Then I see a picture of a boy. His hair is shorter than Sally's, and not as gray as Doctor's, or as yellow as Bud's. But he is smiling, and I know he must have many things to touch.

#

When Sally comes back the next morning, I have lots of questions about the pictures. But before I can ask her, she asks me.

"What is this?" she says, holding up a picture.

"Roger," I say.

"No," she says. "Roger is a name. What is this animal called?"

I try to remember. "Rabbit," I say at last.

"Very good, Barnaby," she says. "And what is this?"

"Kitten," I say.

We got through the whole book.

"Where is Barnaby?" I ask.

"Barnaby is an ape," she says. "There is no picture of an ape

inthe book."

I wonder if there are any other Barnabys in the world, and if theyare lonely too.

#

Later I ask, "Do I have a father and a mother?"

"Of course you do," says Sally. "Everything has a father and amother."

"Where are they?" I ask.

"Your father is dead," says Sally. "Your mother is in a zoo faraway from here."

"Barnaby wants to see his mother," I say.

"I'm afraid not, Barnaby."

"Why?"

"She wouldn't know you. She has forgotten you, just as you haveforgotten her."

"If I could see her, I would say 'I'm Barnaby', and then shewould know me."

Sally shakes her head. "She wouldn't understand. You are very special; she is not. She can't sign, and she can't use a computer."

"Does she have any other Barnabys ?" I ask.

"I don't know," says Sally. "I suppose so."

"How does she speak to them?"

"She doesn't."

I think about this for a long time.

Finally I say, "But she touches them."

"Yes, she touches them," says Sally.

"They must be very happy," I say.

#

Today I will find out more about being Barnaby.

"Good morning," says Sally when she comes into the lab. "How are you today, Barnaby?"

"What is a zoo?" I ask.

"A zoo is a place where animals live," says Sally.

"Can I see a zoo through the window?"

"No. It is very far away."

I think about my next question for a long time. "Are Barnaby's animals?"

"Yes."

"Are Sally's animals?"

"In a way, yes."

"Does Sally's mother live in a zoo?"

Sally laughs. "No," she says.

"Does she live in a cage?"

"No," says Sally.

I think for awhile.

"Sally's mother is dead," I say.

"No, she is alive."

I get very upset, because I do not know how to ask why Sally's mother is different from Barnaby's mother, and the harder I try the worse I do it, and Sally cannot understand me. Finally I

start hitting the floor with my fist. Roger and his family all jump, and Doctor opens the door. Sally gives me a little toy that squeeks when I hit it, and very soon I forget to be mad and start playing with the toy. Sally says something to Doctor, and he smiles and leaves.

"Do you want to ask anything else before we begin our lesson?" asks Sally.

"Why?" I ask.

"Why what?"

"Why is Barnaby an ape and Sally a man?"

"Because that is the way God made us," she says.

I start getting very excited, because I think I am very close to learning more about Barnaby's .

"Who is God?" I ask.

She tries to answer, but I do not understand again.

#

When it gets black and I am all alone except for Roger and his family, and Bud has already cleaned my cage, I sit and think about God. Thinking can be very interesting.

If he made Sally and he made me, why didn't he make me as smart as Sally? Why can she talk, and do things with her hands that I can't do?

It is very confusing. I decide that I must meet God and ask him why he does these things, and why he forgot that even Barnaby likes to be touched.

#

As soon as Sally comes into the lab, I ask her, "Where does God live?"

"In heaven."

"Is heaven far away?"

"Yes."

"Farther than a zoo?" I ask.

"Much farther."

"Does God ever come to the lab?"

She laughs. "No. Why?"

"I have many questions to ask him."

"Perhaps I can answer some of them," she says.

"Why am I alone?"

"Because you are very special," says Sally.

"If I was not special, would I be with other Barnabys?"

"Yes."

"I have never hurt God," I say. "Why has God made me special?"

* * *

The next morning I ask her to tell me about the other Barnabys.

"Barnaby is just a name," explains Sally. "There are other apes, but I don't know if any of them are named Barnaby."

"What is a name?"

"A name is what makes you different from everything else."

"If my name was Fred or Dino, could I be like everyone else?"

I ask.

"No," she says. "You are special. You are Barnaby the Bonobo .

You are very famous."

"What is famous?"

"Many people know who you are."

"What are People?" I ask.

"Men and women."

"Are there more than you and Doctor and Bud?"

"Yes."

Then it is time for my lessons, but I do them very badly, because I am still thinking about a world that has more People in it than Sally and Doctor and Bud. I am so busy wondering who lets them out of their cages when the dark goes away, that I forget all about God and don't think about him any more for many days.

#

I hear Sally talking to Doctor, but I do not understand what they are saying.

Doctor keeps repeating that we don't have any more fun, and Sally keeps saying that Barnaby is special, and then they both say a lot of things I can't understand.

When they are through, and Doctor leaves, I ask Sally why we can't have fun any more.

"Fun?" she repeats. "What do you mean?"

"Doctor says there will be no more fun."

She stares at me for a long time. "You understood what he

said?"

"Why can't we have any fun?" I repeat.

"Fund," she says. "The word was fund. It means something different."

"Then Barnaby and Sally can still have fun?" I ask.

"Of course we can."

I lay on my back and sign to her. "Tickle me."

She reaches into the cage and tickles me, but I see water in hereyes. Human People make water in their eyes when they are unhappy. I pretend to bite her hand and then race around my cage likeI did when I was a baby, but this time it doesn't make her laugh.

#

I hear voices coming from behind the door. It is Sally and Doctor again.

"Well, we can't put him in a zoo," says Doctor. "If he starts signingto the spectators, they'd have a million people demanding hisfreedom by the end of the month, and then what would happen? What would become of him? Can you picture the poor bastard in a circus?"

"We can't destroy him just because he's too bright," says Sally.

"Who will take him? You?" says Doctor. "He's only eight now. What happens when he becomes sexually mature, when he is a surlyadult male? It's not that far away. He could rip you apart inseconds."

"He won't -- not Barnaby."

"Will your landlord let you keep him? Are you willing to sacrifice the next twenty years of your life caring for him?"

"We might get renewed funding as early as this fall," says Sally.

"Be realistic," says Doctor. "It'll be years, if ever. This program is being duplicated at half a dozen labs around the country, and some of them are much farther along. Barnaby's not the only ape that has learned to use articles and adjectives, you know. There's a 25-year-old gorilla, and three other Bonobo chimps that are well into their teens. There's no reason to believe that anyone will restore our funding."

"But he's different," says Sally. "He asks abstract questions."

"I know, I know...once he asked you who God was. But I studied the tape, and you mentioned God first. If you mention Michael Jordan and he asks who that is, it doesn't mean that he's developed an abiding interest in basketball."

"Can I at least talk to the committee? Show them videotapes of him?"

"They know what a chimpanzee looks like," says Doctor.

"But they don't know what one thinks like," says Sally.

"Perhaps this will help to convince them..."

"It's not a matter of convincing them," says Doctor. "The funds have dried up. Every program is hurting these days."

"Please..."

"All right," says Doctor. "I'll set up a meeting. But it won't do any good."

I hear it all, but I do not understand any of it. Before it got white today I dreamed of a place filled with Barnabys, and I am sitting in a corner, my eyes shut, trying to remember it before it all drifts away.

#

We keep doing the lessons each day, but I can tell that Sally is unhappy, and I wonder what I have done to upset her.

#

This morning Sally opens my cage door and just hugs me for a long time.

"I have to talk to you, Barnaby," she says, and I see her eyes are making water again.

I touch the grapes that say, "Barnaby likes to talk."

"This is important," she says. "Tomorrow you will leave the lab."

"Will I go outside?" I ask.

"You will go very far away."

"To a zoo?"

"Farther."

Suddenly I remember God.

"Will I go to heaven?" I ask.

She smiles even as her eyes make more water. "Not quite that far," she says. "You are going to a place where there are no labs

and no cages. You will be free, Barnaby."

"Are there other Barnabys there?"

"Yes," she says. "There are other Barnabys there."

"Doctor was wrong," I say. "There will be more fun for Sally and Barnaby."

"I cannot go with you," she says.

"Why?"

"I have to stay here. This is my home."

"If you are good, maybe God will let you out of your cage," I say.

She makes a funny sound and hugs me again.

#

They put me in a smaller cage, one with no light in it. For two days I smell bad things. Most of my water spills, and there are loud noises that hurt my ears. Sometimes people talk, and once a man who is not Bud or Doctor gives me food and more water. He does it through a little hole in the top of the cage.

I touch his hand to show him that I am not angry. He screams and pulls his hand away.

I keep signing, "Barnaby is lonely," but it is dark and there is no one to see.

I do not like my new world.

#

On the third morning they move my crate, and then they move it again. Finally they lift it up and carry it, and when they set

itdown I can smell many things I have never smelled before.

They open the door, and I step out onto the grass. The sun is verybright, and I squint and look at People who are not Sally or Doctor or Bud.

"You're home, boy," says one of them.

I look around. The world is a much bigger place than the lab, andI am frightened.

"Go on, fella ," says another. "Sniff around. Get used to the place."

I sniff around. I do not get used to the place.

#

I spend many days in the world. I get to know all the trees andbushes, and the big fence around it. They feed me fruits and leavesand bark. I am not used to them, and for a while I am sick, butthen I get better.

I hear many noises from beyond the world -- screams and growlsand shrieks. I smell many strange animals. But I do not hearor smell any Barnabys .

#

Then one day the People put me back in my crate, and I am alonefor a long time, and then they open the crate, and I am no longerin the world, but in a place with so many trees that I almostcannot see the sky.

"Okay, fella ," says a Person. "Off into the forest with you now."

He makes a motion with his hands, but it is a sign I do not

recognize.

I sign back: "Barnaby is afraid."

The Person pets me on the head. It is the first time anyone
has touched me since I left the lab.

"Have a good life," he says, "and make lots of little
Barnabys."

Then he climbs into his cage, and it rolls away from me. I
try to follow it, but it is much too fast, and soon I can no
longer see it.

I look back at the forest and hear strange sounds, and a
breeze brings me the sweet smell of fruit.

There is no one around to see me, but I sign "Barnaby is
free" anyway.

Barnaby is free.

Barnaby is lonely.

Barnaby is frightened.

#

I learn to find water, and to climb trees. I see little
Barnabys with tails that chatter at me, but they cannot sign, and
I see big kittens with spots, and they make terrible noises and I
hide from them.

I wish I could hide in my cage, where I was always safe.

#

Today when the black goes away I wake up and go to the water,
and I find another Barnaby.

"Hello," I sign. "I am a Barnaby too."

The other Barnaby growls at me.

"Do you live in a lab?" I ask. "Where is your cage?"

The other Barnaby runs at me and starts biting me. I shriek and roll on the ground.

"What have I done?" I ask.

The other Barnaby runs at me again, and I screech and climb to the top of a tree. He sits at the bottom and stares at me all day until the black returns. It gets very cold, and then wet, and I shiver all night and wish Sally was here.

#

In the morning the Barnaby is gone, and I climb down to the ground. I smell where he has been, and I follow his scent, because I do not know what else to do. Finally I come to a place with more Barnabys than I ever imagined there could be. Then I remember that Sally taught me counting, and I count. There are twenty-three of them.

One of them sees me and screams, and before I can make any sign all of them charge at me and I run away. They chase me for a long time, but finally they stop, and I am alone again.

#

I am alone for many days. I do not go back to the Barnabys, because they would hurt me if they could. I do not know what I have done to make them mad, so I do not know how to stop doing it.

I have learned to smell the big kittens when they are still far away, and to climb the trees so they cannot catch me, and I

have learned to hide from the dogs that laugh like Sally does when I make somersaults, but I am so lonely, and I miss talking, and I am already forgetting some of the signs Sally taught me.

Last night I dreamed about Fred and Wilma and Barney and Dino, and when I woke up my own eyes were making water.

#

I hear sounds in the morning. Not sounds like the big kittens or the dogs make, but strange, clumsy sounds. I go to see what is making them.

In a little clearing I see four People -- two men and two women-- and they have brought little brown cages. The cages are not as nice as my old cage, because you cannot see in or out of them.

One of the men has made a fire, and they are sitting on chairs around it. I want to approach them, but I have learned my lesson with the Barnabys, and so I wait until one of the men sees me.

When he doesn't yell or chase me, I sign to him.

"I am Barnaby."

"What has it got in its hands?" asks one of the women.

"Nothing," says a man.

"Barnaby wants to be friends," I sign.

A woman puts something up in front of her face, and suddenly there is a big _pop!_ It is so bright that I can't see. I rub my eyes and walk forward.

"Don't let him get too close," says the other man. "No telling what kind of diseases he's carrying."

"Will you play with Barnaby?" I ask.

The first man picks up a rock and throws it at me.

"Shoo!" he yells. "Go away!"

He throws another rock, and I run back into the forest.

#

When it is black out, and they sit around the fire, I sneak as close as I can get, and lay down and listen to the sounds of their voices, and pretend I am back in the lab.

In the morning they throw rocks at me until I go away.

#

And then one day, after they throw the rocks at me and I go for water, I come back and find that they are gone. They were not very good friends, but they were the only ones I had.

What will I do now?

#

Finally, after many days, I find a single Barnaby, and it is a female. She has terrible scars on her from other Barnabys, and when she sees me she bares her teeth and growls. I sit still and hope that she will not go away.

After a long time she comes closer to me. I am afraid to move, because I do not want to frighten her or make her mad. I ignore her and stare off into the trees.

Finally she reaches out and picks an insect off my shoulder and puts it into her mouth, and soon she is sitting beside me,

eating the flowers and leaves that have fallen to the ground.

Finally, when I am sure she will not run away, I sign to her,
"I am Barnaby."

She grabs at my hands as if I was playing with a fruit or an insect, then shows her teeth when she sees that I am not holding anything.

She is really not any smarter than Roger, but at least she does not run away from me.

I will call her Sally.

#

Sally is afraid of the other Barnabys, so we live at the edge of the forest, where they hardly ever come. She touches me, and that is very nice, but I find that I miss talking and thinking even more.

Every day I try to teach her to sign, but she cannot learn. We have three baby Barnabys, one after each rainy season, but they are not smarter than Sally, and besides I have forgotten most of the signs.

#

More and more people come to the forest in their brown cages. My family is afraid of them, but I love talking and listening and thinking more than anything. I always visit their camps at night, and listen to their voices in the darkness, and try to understand the words. I pretend I am back in the lab, though it is harder and harder to remember what the lab is like.

Each time there are new People I show myself and say "I am Barnaby", but none of them ever answers. When one finally does, I will know that he is God.

There were many things I wanted to ask him once, but I cannot remember most of them. I will tell him to be nice to Sally and the other two People at the lab -- I forget their names -- because what has happened to me is not their fault.

I will not ask him why he hated me so much that he made me special, or why People and Barnaby always chase me away. I will just say, "Please talk to Barnaby," and then I will ask if we can do a lesson.

Once, when I was a very bright fellow, there were many things I wanted to discuss with him. But now that I have left the world, that will be enough.