

## Magazine fiction

# Empathy

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Illustration: Mark Evans

One night, Jules is confronted by unpleasant strangers with guns. She doesn't like them at all.

The people come when I watch TV in my bedroom. I like Benny Hinn on the TV. Benny Hinn talks about love and Jesus and shepherds. Next comes I Love Lucy and I like it even better even though it has no colour.

Two people come in here while Benny Hinn sings a nice song about an old rock. I do not know the people. One woman and one man. They have white skin.

The man has red hair and the woman has black hair. They make noise. They smell scared. They do not look like the other people here. They wear cloth over their faces. I do not know them.

They speak so fast I cannot understand. They grab me. They hurt my arm. I say nothing. I go where they want. Scared animals are dangerous. They take me to the Big Door. I don't want to go with them any more. I don't want to go through the Big Door even if they do hurt me. Only people with bald faces go through the Big Door. I stop and squirm. They smell more angry.

The man shouts at the woman, not at me like I expect. He grabs me hard and the woman wraps me tight in a blanket until I cannot move my arms. Now I am scarest. I scream.

The man picks me up. I cannot stop him. The woman opens the Big Door and we all go through. I should not go through the Big Door. It is only for baldface people. We go anyway. I scream all the way.

They take me out into the dark. The moon shines. I see the moon from inside and on TV, but not like this. It scares me more.

They put me in a white van. Raoul is already in the back. Raoul is tied up. Raoul has a bruise on his eye and a cut lip. He sits up. It is not easy for him. He is tied up and he groans when he moves. He is hurt bad, but I see him and it makes me calm. I stop my screams.

He says to me, "All OK, Jules. All OK." He says the calming words and he makes the calming sound. "Shush-shush-shush-shush." Usually he strokes my head when he says the calming sound, but he is all tied up and he cannot do that.

The white man puts his head in the doors and shouts at Raoul. "Shut up!" he says.

He takes out a gun. I see guns on TV. I know what they do. I get scared again and scream.

The white man shakes the gun at Raoul. He shouts at Raoul some more. "Look what you done!" He thinks I am scared of Raoul, but Raoul gives me food and talks to me. I am scared of the new man, not Raoul.

The white woman pushes the white man away. She gets in the back of the van with us.

She pulls down the cloth over her face so I can see her smile.

She is nice. She gives me an apple. My arms are stuck so she puts it in my mouth for me. I bite and chew. The apple makes me feel better even though I am not hungry. The woman makes funny shapes with her hands. I don't know why. She makes more funny shapes. I want to make funny shapes back to her, but my arms are stuck in the cloth.

The man goes to the front and starts the engine. He is dangerous. The woman is nice. The white man scares the woman too, I think. Maybe she helps me if I talk nice to her.

So I say to her, "Hello." She stares at me.

I say "Hello" again.

Her mouth drops. She shouts to the man. "He talks!" she says.

The man doesn't know what she means. Then she uses the baldface language. I know bits of baldface language. Some of the words I hear, but there are lots of extra little words, lots of esses, and she talks very fast. She says something like, "Not sign language. He speaks with his mouth." I do not understand what is sign language. It is not baldface language or bonobo creole. It must be something different. Of course I speak with my mouth. How else? The man looks angry at the woman. He is very scary.

"Don't be ridiculous! He is a chimp!" he shouts.

I say, "Not he! She! Not chimp! Bonobo!" The white man and the white woman stare at me.

"Special bonobo," I say. "Fox-p bonobo. Very special. My name is Jules." They still do not speak. I tell them my name, but they say nothing. They are rude. They should tell me their names. I try again very polite.

"My name is Jules." The woman says, "My God." I do not know what that means, but I hear baldface people say it sometimes on Benny Hinn's show.

The man also speaks. He says some other words baldfaces say when they think I cannot hear them.

The white man shouts at Raoul. Why? Raoul is not rude. The white man says words like "bastard" which I hear before on TV, and "mengeler" and "vivisessionist," which I do not. He says we come to Costa Rica so Raoul can do "essperiments" that are not allowed in "america." But he is wrong. I always live in Costa Rica my whole life. I see weather reports on my TV and they always show the weather for Costa Rica as long as I remember.

The man gets out and comes to the back of the van.

He hits Raoul. This scares me first, then makes me angry.

Raoul is nice. Why hit Raoul? I want to help Raoul. The cloth holds my arms tight, but not my legs.

I shout angry and jump onto the white man's back.

He falls forward. I jump up and down on his head. I know I hurt him, but he is strong and the woman helps him.

They throw me back.

The man holds his gun and points it right in my face.

He has blood coming out his nose. He looks very angry. I think he will kill his gun at me, but the woman says, "Do not shoot the chimp! He does not know we help him!" I tell them already. Bonobo, not chimp! She, not he! They are stupid as well as rude.

The man lowers the gun. I see what to do. He can not expect this. When I meet new people, I surprise them by my fun trick, but this time is not for fun. I reach out and take the gun from him with my foot. I surprise him so much he lets the gun go easy.

Now he is not scary. I point the gun at him, right in his face.

See how he likes it. He does not like it. He jumps at me. I pull the trigger with my foot. The gun makes a big noise, much louder than on TV. I think I kill the white man, but he gets up and runs away. Not like TV again. He should lie down and say something nice and close his eyes instead of run away. The white woman runs away, too.

Poor Raoul. He is hurt. Both his eyes are red and puffy and his nose bends in the middle. I put the gun down. I go to Raoul and untie him with my feet. Then Raoul unwraps my arms.

We are in the back of the white van of the white man and the white woman. We get out of the van with the engine still on. The sky is still dark, but the sky is bright blue in one direction. I never see the sun come up before. I see the sun over the walls of inside, but never see it come over the edge of the world. From inside, I cannot see the edge of the world.

I say, "We call police?" Raoul says, "We do not call police." Nothing is like TV today.

I love Raoul. He is not like the white people. He feeds me. He talks to me. He has hair on his chin and dark skin, not as dark as bonobo skin, but not white either. I give Raoul a big hug.

Raoul says, "Thank you, Jules. You save my life." The sun comes up like fire.

It looks so big! It is not the same sun! I am scared again. I think about Benny Hinn. I think this is maybe the bad place called hell. I am scared. Benny Hinn says only one person called Jesus ever comes back from the bad place and he was a baldface.

I do not know if bonobos can come back out of the bad place, even special fox-p bonobos.

"We go back inside the Big Door?" I say. Shivers shake me all over.

"OK, Jules. Don't scare. All is OK. We go back," he says.

I say, "I love you, Raoul." Raoul strokes my head then he takes my hand and we walk back.

I am happy so I sing inside. I sing the song about the old rock, even though I do not know what cleft means.

"See, Jules. All is OK. We are home," says Raoul.

When we go inside the Big Door I say, "I love you, brother."

***Author's note:** The idea is based on research by Shu W, Cho JY, Jiang Y, et al. "Altered ultrasonic vocalisation in mice with a disruption in the Foxp2 gene", **Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences**, 5 July 2005.*

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