

MONKEY BUSINESS
By pwatson1974 and Ms Tiger to You

The door to apartment 1313 gives out a soft click and swings open. A shaft of light illuminates the silhouette kneeling in the doorway, pulling a spare pick from between her teeth and back into its proper home in her pocket. She gives a quick glance down both sides of the hallway before picking up a small cardboard box that accompanies the delivery uniform that got her past security and slipping inside. She pulls the door to, careful to make sure it doesn't lock behind her, just in case. She looks around the apartment hallway, focusing on the glint of something in the light. "*Shiny.*" her lips curl up as she pads across the wonderfully silent carpet to the bureau, lifting up the polished piece of amber from its stand. She weighs it in her hand, turning it in the faint light around the doorframe, some unfortunate insect outlined in the smooth stone. "*Nice. Cute. Not worth the space.*" she puts it carefully back on its stand. She eases the first door along the wall open, peering inside in the half-light. "*Nah.*" She opens the door opposite to much the same reaction before opening the next door along... "*Ooooh.*"

She slips into the room, dustsheets blanketing the contents in white cloth, "*Worth protecting. Probably won't notice it's gone immediately. This has possibilities.*" She pulls up the corner of one sheet, covering something tall, a bureau, most likely. The object underneath, what little she can see, anyway, is fire-engine red. Which is odd. Which automatically makes it more interesting. She pulls a bit more of the cloth away. Her nose twitches as the layers of dust stir up. She drops the sheet, fighting the inevitable. Sadly, the inevitable is, well, inevitable. "*Hahhh-choooooo!*" "*Crap! I hope no one heard that!*" she pauses, listening for any sign that someone did. Nothing happens for several too loud heartbeats.

She turns back to the room. With a very loud twang, followed by an even louder and nearer thunk, the cloth in front of her sprouts a small quarrel, fletching still quivering. She jumps, almost screams, and turns. Standing in the door way, calmly reloading its tiny crossbow with a second quarrel, is a monkey. Its tail twitches, black eyes regarding her as its dexterous paws wind back on the crossbow's windlass. "What the flying..."

The monkey finishes loading the crossbow, raising it menacingly in her direction. She glances back at the quarrel embedded in the whatever it is beneath the cloth and thinks better of plan A (Run). She also reconsiders Plans B (No, really, run!) and C (I mean it! Why are you still standing there?). She slowly raises her hands, hoping it's a universal simian signal of surrender. The monkey chitters at her in response, but, as it doesn't fire, it seems to be working.

Light floods in from the hallways, followed by shuffling, and finally a faded bathrobe draped over a scarecrow-thin figure, face hidden behind a thick white Santa Claus beard and cobweb of wrinkles. He fumbles around the door as the monkey chitters, finally hitting the lightswitch.

"*Sooooo not good.*"

"Yes, yes, I heard you. Now, what do we have here?"

The monkey chitters.

"Well, obviously a burglar, I'm not senile yet."

The monkey chitters again.

"I heard that."

The monkey grins broadly, baring its teeth.

"However, back to the issue at hand..." he looks towards her, "that would be you, my dear."

The monkey chitters, gesturing with the crossbow.

"No, I won't just phone the police. I haven't had an appreciative audience for a long time."

She looks down at the monkey, and up at the old man, and back again, "Are you...talking to your monkey?"

"Of course. How else would I get any conversation?"

"Right. Ok. I'll just be going now..."

The monkey chitters, waving the crossbow in her direction threateningly.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that. She will shoot you if you give her an excuse. She can be rather violent, you

see.”

The monkey chitters in disgust.

“You are pointing a loaded crossbow at our potential audience. I just thought I'd point that out.”

The monkey sulks.

She edges a step towards the door. The crossbow twangs and the cloth behind her sprouts another quarrel, considerably closer to her side. The monkey chitters angrily, shaking its fist at her as it pulls another quarrel into the bow.

“I think you might have used up her last warning shot, my dear.”

She stops moving immediately. The monkey chitters.

“Yes, thank, you, I will 'get on with it'.”

The monkey rolls its eyes, but doesn't lower the crossbow an iota.

She swallows, looking nervously down at the crossbow, “Get on with what?”

“Oh, of course, I didn't explain myself very well, my dear. Now, bear with me, it has been a while since I did this with someone new.”

The monkey chitters, rolling its eyes again.

“The peanut-eating gallery can withhold its nasty comments, please.”

The monkey chitters.

“Simianist isn't even a real word.” He steps forward into the room, the monkey scurrying to one side, keeping the crossbow trained on her. “Now, as you see, I have nothing up my sleeves.” he rolls up the thick cloth sleeves to prove the point. “Which is why this is so impressive.” He cups his hands together blowing onto them. He opens his hands, revealing...a six-inch long dragonfly, its iridescent wings buzzing as it takes to the air. “Oh, bother, that was supposed to be a dove.”

The monkey shakes its head in embarrassment.

“I must be a little rusty.”

The monkey nods vigorously. He cups his hands again, blowing on them and this time, opening his hands on...an eight-inch long dragonfly that takes off after its smaller relative.

“Bother.”

The monkey nods again.

“Uhm, this is really interesting, but I really should...”

The monkey shakes its head very firmly and chitters, waving the crossbow at one of the shrouded shapes.”

“Oh, yes, thank you, that might be a better idea. Could you be a dear, my dear, and free that contraption?”

“Me?!”

“You. You might want to hurry it up, she isn't known for her patience when she's in this kind of mood.”

She looks down at the glowering monkey. The monkey waves its crossbow at the shape emphatically. “Right, right. So I do what you say or your monkey shoots me?”

“That's more or less accurate, yes.”

She turns to the indicated sheet, pulling it away, sneezing as another layer of dust leaps into the air. A sarcophagus stands revealed, the figures on its lacquered surface faded. “What...is that?!”

The monkey grins.

“That, my dear, is a marvel of my own devising, but, of course, hacks like Houdini get all the attention.”

“Houdini? The escape guy?”

“Exactly.”

“So, uhm, what does it do?” she looks at the monkey's widening grin, “And to who?”

“To whom, my dear. And in this case, that would be you.”

“Me?!”

The monkey nods slowly, still grinning.

“I am not getting in...”

The monkey slowly nods again, raising the crossbow towards her.

“Well, if you prefer a nice visit to the emergency ward, with the attendant police and everything, my dear...”

“That's blackmail.”

“Yes, isn't it?”

She glowers at him, but he smiles blandly in response. As does the monkey.

“Fine! What do I have to do?”

“I knew you'd see reason. Just open the door and back yourself in. It might be a tight squeeze.”

She backs into the sarcophagus, struggling to squeeze into it. “If you cross your arms, it may help.”

She tries harder to squeeze in, before finally relenting and crossing her arms over her chest.

“Excellent, my dear. You really are good at this.”

She smiles thinly. As does the monkey.

“So what do I do now?”

“You don't, my dear. I do.” The door slams shut, plunging her into darkness.

“Hey! What did you dummp...!”

The door opens, revealing her wrapped head to toe in off-white bandages, her glaring eyes the only things uncovered. The monkey smiles, chittering, lowering the crossbow.

“Yes, you're right, it does suit her.”

“Mmmmmfff!!”

He smiles. The door slams shut once more. A muffled scream emerges from the sarcophagus. The monkey chitters.

“Well, they might be hungry. It has been awhile.”

The door opens and the bandages fall to the floor, black scarabs scuttling through the wrappings.

The monkey's paw reaches out to pop one into its mouth, cracking the shell between its teeth as the swarm scurries under the sheets.

“That wasn't very nice.”

The monkey chitters, flipping its paw at him.

A muffled banging, accompanied by screams and curses, comes from under another sheet.

“Ah, now, where did we put the other half again?”

The monkey chitters, tapping the side of its head, and scampers over to one of the sheets. He follows as the monkey points at the sheet covering the increasingly frantic sounds.

“Ah, yes, here we are.” he flings the sheet away from the battered black safe. “But what was the...”

The monkey sighs, reaching up to twist the combination lock. With a loud click, the door bursts open and the burglar runs shrieking into the hall, frantically brushing scarabs from her hair.

“Well, that was fun, wasn't it?”

The monkey looks at him disapprovingly. “Don't think I didn't see the way you were eyeing her up, you daft old fossil. Just because you made a monkey out of me, does not mean you can make a monkey out of me. I am still your wife!”

“Yes, dear.”