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Cast of Characters

JOHN, a mature male gorilla

JANE, an older female gorilla, John's mate

SARAH, a young female gorilla

BIG JIM, a strong, large and very macho gorilla

GORILLA EXHIBIT KEEPER

ZOO PATRONS

VOICES (*gorilla handlers*)

3-5 GIBBONS (*optional*)

[A note about the Gibbons: these less evolved monkeys act as chorus and John's foils. Their presence in the play is optional. Scenes with Gibbons are indicated by brackets.]

Setting

The Gorilla Cage at a large metropolitan zoo. Dangling down is a large tire swing, strong enough to support an actor. There is a pile of bananas in a bucket for hygienic reasons. The number of bananas changes throughout the show. At curtain, there are two: a lovely yellow one, and a squooshy black one.

There is an entrance to the indoor cages; this will hereafter be called The Exit. This should be large enough to permit the passage of an actor moving on all fours.

[On one side of the stage, there is a riser with bars or a chicken-wire wall. This is the side of the cage that abuts the Gibbon cage. There should be room behind it for the Gibbons to enter, move and antagonize John.]

The gorillas should be simply dressed. You may wish to use small bits of fur—on the cheeks, on the eyebrows or on gloves—to suggest their identities. However, since the fact that they ARE gorillas is meant to be a surprise, they should not be wearing “gorilla suits” or any obvious costume pieces like snouts.

Acknowledgements

Monkey Do was first performed at the Anderson Workshop, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, in February, 1996 with the following cast:

JOHN Andrew Scuse
JANE Lorien Beale
SARAH Trish Patterson
BIG JIM Jim Wright

Miss you, you monkeys! —Doug

The author is grateful to Matt Carson, Darren Brunke, Sarah Caines, Michelle Carlson, Laura Hill, Renee Hendry, Ryan Hume, Amanda Lauchlan, Kerry O'Dowd and David Pope for their many ideas during workshopping. Without you, the play would be considerably less evolved!

Production Notes

The author grants permission for groups to omit swear words as required.

MONKEY DO

by Douglas Craven

(Lights up on:)

Day 1

(A figure in black bouncing up and down on his heels.)

JOHN. Monkey see. Monkey do. *(He repeats this until he is told to "Shut up!")*

(Enter JANE. she is dressed in black.)

JANE. John. John. John John John. Shut up!

JOHN. Okay.

JANE. Why do you always say that?

JOHN. Oh, for something to do.

JANE. I think you do it so you can ignore me.

JOHN. No, I just like the sound of it.

JANE. You're wrong anyway.

JOHN. What? How?

JANE. "Monkey see. Monkey do." You're wrong. Monkeys are individuals. Monkeys are unique. Monkeys are spontaneous.

JOHN. We ARE?! *(He drops into gorilla stance.)*

JANE. Yes.

JOHN. Okay. Pass me that banana, would you?

JANE. No, that's my banana.

JOHN. But it's the last one in the pile.

JANE. There's another one.

JOHN. It's squooshy.

JANE. It's not that squooshy.

JOHN. There are bugs on it.

JANE. John, you eat bugs.

JOHN. Jane, not with my bananas. Come on, give.

JANE. No, this is MINE.

JOHN. Give it!

JANE. John!

JOHN. Come on, give me the banana.

JANE. John! Go and play on the tire swing.

JOHN. Okay. (*Grudgingly moving towards the tire swing.*)

JANE. Have you noticed people eat these things wrong?

JOHN. Can't hear you. On my swing.

JANE. Now don't sulk. Listen, this is interesting.

JOHN. (*Muttering to himself:*) Go on the tire swing, John. Do me a favour and pick these ticks out of my fur, John. It's not mating season yet, John.

JANE. Are you listening?

JOHN. Yes.

JANE. I said, have you noticed people eat these wrong?

JOHN. No, I haven't.

JANE. I figured. Well, they do.

JOHN. Oh, really?

JANE. Yes. People open them from the stem end.

JOHN. Stem end.

JANE. But that mashes up the end, right. You know—

BOTH. "The best part of a banana."

JOHN. Yeah.

JANE. "Yeah." Only a handful of people have actually reasoned that it's preferable to open them from the dimple end.

JOHN. Dimple end.

JANE. Yes. (*Gesturing toward the Gibbon cage:*) I mean, even gibbons know that!

JOHN. Amazing.

JANE. Don't patronise me.

JOHN. I'm not.

JANE. You are indeed an imbecile.

JOHN. Nice way to talk to me. Your mate.

JANE. My mate? How many other choices do I have? After all, it's not like we can *leave*, is it?

JOHN. What are you implying, that I couldn't hold my own against another male? I can display with the best of them, lady. Watch.

(He beats his chest, bares his teeth and races around the stage in an authentic gorilla kind of way.)

JOHN. *(Finishing with:)* ...and like that.

JANE. Oh. Oh, you are definitely an alpha, John.

JOHN. Now who's patronising?

JANE. Beat your chest for me. Please.

JOHN. I'm going to play on the tire.

JANE. No, stop. Flare your nostrils just once more. It makes me feel...so warm.

JOHN. Screw you.

JANE. Not for a few months, Tarzan.

(Blackout.)

Day 2

(Morning, the next day. JOHN emerges from the exit. He stretches. He does not notice that UC is a sleeping gorilla who has been delivered during the night: SARAH. Several ZOO PATRONS stand in the audience.)

[(Gibbon scene: the GIBBONS appear behind their cage wall. They notice JOHN as he emerges from the exit, glumly awake. One of them starts to mimic JOHN while his back is turned. When he turns to look at them, they instantly go about their business. This happens several times. Finally, JOHN catches them making fun of him.

JOHN. You damn gibbons!

(He charges their cage. They swing away, laughing.)

JOHN. You wouldn't be so tough if you were in here with me, would you? No, I'd show you what a guy five steps up on the evolutionary ladder can do. I've got the strength, I've got the brain, I've got the longer attention span, I've...

(The ZOOKEEPER places the morning bananas on the stage. JOHN is instantly distracted.)

JOHN. Oh, bananas!]

(Note: If Gibbons are cut from the performance, JOHN simply emerges from the exit and says:)

JOHN. Criminy, she stinks it up in there. All that wet fur.

(He ambles over to the new banana pile.)

JOHN. Morning bananas. My favourite.

(He notices the ZOO PATRONS in the audience.)

JOHN. Yah, yah. Hello people out there. *(Sotto voce:)* Bastards! *(Loudly:)* Yeah, I'm a Great Ape Eating a Banana. Big deal.

(He peels the banana Jane's way, dimple end first.)

JOHN. *(Realising what he's done:)* She was right. *(To the people:)* Okay, I'm going to Eat The Banana. Enjoy.

ZOO PATRON 1. Look, he's eating his banana!

JOHN. Remarkable, eh?

ZOO PATRON 2. Look at the gut!

JOHN. Hey, let's not get personal. Besides, look at yours.

ZOO PATRON 3. Mom, he's scary.

JOHN. Damn straight I'm scary! *(Shouting into The Exit:)* I could be an alpha.

ZOO PATRON 2. Is that a male or a female?

JOHN. What do you mean?! Look at me! I've got a...CREST!

ZOO PATRON 1. No, that's got to be the male...

JOHN. Damn straight.

ZOO PATRON 1. ...because the one over there's got to be the female.

(SARAH wakes up. She rises, her back to the audience.)

JOHN. Yeah...what? *(He looks at the audience.)* How'd she get by me? I'da smelled her. *(He nudges SARAH.)* Hey, Jane. How'd you get by me?

SARAH. Hello there.

JOHN. Uh, hello. *(Take and double take:)* You...I...You not Jane.

SARAH. *(Amused:)* No... "Me not Jane. Me Sarah."

JOHN. Me John. I mean, I'm John.

SARAH. Well hello there, John.

JOHN. What are you...where did you...?

SARAH. They brought me in last night from the Metro Zoo. Mind if I get your scent?

JOHN. No, be my guest.

(She sniffs him. He can't help but do the same. To us, she would smell like used "j-cloths." To him, she's wearing the simian equivalent of "obsession." Of course, JANE enters during the following.)

SARAH. Oom. Nice scent. Very strong. Masculine. *(She sniffs.)* You're fifteen. That means you're mature. *(Sniff.)* You hate living in a cage. *(Sniff.)* I'm making you feel...nervous, I think. *(Sniff.)*

JOHN. Well...

SARAH. And you don't have a mate. *(Sniffs.)* Or maybe you do. *(Sniffs.)* Do you?

JOHN. Well actually. *(He pushes the swing.)* No...not really. Not a mate, really.

SARAH. Oh, good.

JOHN. Can I offer you a banana?

SARAH. You can offer me whatever you want.

JOHN. Okay.

JANE. Get me one too, John.

JOHN. Jane!

JANE. John.

SARAH. Jane?

JOHN. Jane.

JANE. Jane.

SARAH. Jane.

JANE. John?

JOHN. Jane...Sarah.

JANE. Sarah.

SARAH. Jane.

(Long pause.)

JOHN. *(Bouncing:)* Monkey see. Monkey do. *(3x)*

JANE. John, stop that.

JOHN. Okay.

SARAH. Actually, I thought it was cute.

JANE. Is that so?

(The ZOOKEEPER enters.)

ZOO PATRON 1. Excuse me, do you work here?

ZOOKEEPER. Yes sir. I'm the exhibit's keeper.

ZOO PATRON 1. We're wondering why there are three gorillas down there. The sign says you only have two.

ZOOKEEPER. The other one came in last night from Metro. She's a young female.

ZOO PATRON 1. Why?

ZOOKEEPER. Well, we want some Gorilla offspring, sir. We haven't had much luck with the older female, Jane. So we brought in Sarah. Now, John has a choice.

JANE. I'll say he does.

(Blackout.)

Day 5

[(Gibbon scene. Enter the GIBBONS. JOHN tries to ignore them, but they gesture for him to come over. He does! The GIBBONS then perform a short re-enactment of the previous scene, showing Sarah catching John's scent and their discovery by Jane. The GIBBONS make monkey noises instead of saying the lines, but their meaning is clear. JOHN improvises his reaction, howling with rage and threatening them. As he rants, JANE enters.)

JANE. John!

(He stops. His shoulders slump.)

JANE. Not again.

JOHN. They provoke me.

JANE. John, they're gibbons. You're a great ape. You supposed to be more evolved. Why don't you start acting like it?

JOHN. *(Really hurt:)* Why would you say something like that? *(Long pause.)* Why do you have to be so mean? Don't you remember what it was like when I first came here?

JANE. Yeah.

JOHN. We used to chase each other around...and climb the tire swing. And sometimes...when people came around we'd whip things at them. And we used to regurgitate together, all the time. Just sit there, enjoying each other's company, happy just to be regurgitating. What happened to us, Jane? You'd get me a banana, and I'd groom you then you'd groom me. And sometimes I'd get you a banana and you'd groom me. *(Pause.)* Then I'd groom you. *(Pause.)* And

sometimes I'd get both of us a banana and we'd take turns grooming. *(Long pause.)* Then we'd regurgitate some more...

JANE. *(She's had enough of this:)* John...I think I saw some bugs over there.

JOHN. *(Delighted and distracted:)* Bugs?!]

(Note: if Gibbon scene is cut, follow this direction:)

(JOHN sits by himself onstage. JANE enters. He offers her a banana, but she avoids him.)

(He sees a tick. He begins to follow it idly. His interest becomes more intense as he realizes he would like to eat it. Suddenly, the tick leaps onto his arm. He tries to catch it as it climbs up his shoulder and over his back, where he cannot reach.)

JOHN. Jane? Jane?

JANE. What is it now?

JOHN. I think...I think I've got a tick.

JANE. ANOTHER one?

JOHN. I saw it on the floor and...

JANE. You thought you'd like to eat it and it jumped up on you and...

JOHN and JANE. ...now I/you can't reach it.

JOHN. Yep. Sorry.

JANE. Hold still. *(Pause.)* John, you're infested.

(She begins to extract the ticks. Her operation is practical. If she were human, it would involve iodine.)

JOHN. Ow. Ow!

JANE. Stop squirming.

(Enter SARAH. She ambles over and watches, sensing perhaps an opportunity.)

JOHN. Quit it!

JANE. Fine! Sit there and itch.

(She moves off muttering, leaving JOHN in agony.)

(SARAH sidles up to JOHN.)

SARAH. Let me.

(She begins to pick the ticks from JOHN's fur. We see JOHN's reaction as he realizes that it feels very good.)

JOHN. *(Blissfully:)* Oh. Oh, yeah.

SARAH. Your fur is so soft.

JANE. Soft? It's like wet straw.

SARAH. I like straw. A lot.

(JANE stares as SARAH with naked hatred. SARAH smiles.)

(Blackout.)

Day 20

[*(The GIBBONS are having troubles of their own. GIBBON 1 and GIBBON 2 want to be groomed at the same time. GIBBON 3 is grooming GIBBON 1. GIBBON 2 nudges her out of the way, taking her place. GIBBON 1 nudges GIBBON 2 out of the way. They do this several times. Finally, they both scream. GIBBON 3 runs off in fear.)*]

(Lights up on SARAH holding a kitten doll. JANE is on the tire swing, watching. Occasionally, SARAH signs to the doll. If possible, use the same sign language used in actual Koko language experiments.)

JANE. Are you ever going to put that down? You've been holding it constantly for weeks.

SARAH. I like it.

(Enter JOHN.)

JANE. John, I'd like a banana.

JOHN. Get me one while you're there, will you?

(She does so, grudgingly.)

JOHN. You know, people open these the wrong way.

JANE. *(A command:)* Swing.

JOHN. *(Instantly:)* Okay. *(He ambles over to the swing.)*

SARAH. She's so rude to him, isn't she, Kitty?

(JOHN sits by SARAH.)

SARAH. I just love this thing they gave me. It makes me feel...maternal, somehow.

JANE. They didn't just give it to YOU, you know. It's for all of us.

SARAH. Jane, you're a bit old for dolls, aren't you?

JANE. *(Races to SARAH:)* Are you stepping into my territory?

SARAH. Wouldn't dream of it. You're older; you're alpha-female.

JANE. *Don't* forget it.

Day 25

(JANE and SARAH are DS. JOHN is in the tire swing. There is one banana DC. Enter the ZOOKEEPER with a group of ZOO PATRONS.)

ZOOKEEPER. The second female has been in there now for 25 days. Nothing seems to be happening yet, if you know what I mean, but at least they all seem to have accepted each other. *(His voice trails off as he exits:)* The Buffalo Zoo has let us know that if the mating is unsuccessful, they would be willing to accept...

(SARAH ambles over to take the banana. JANE also becomes interested in the banana. They both reach for the banana at the same moment.)

JANE. Oh, go ahead.

SARAH. No, after you.

JANE. Go on.

SARAH. No, you're alpha-female. You get first picks.

JANE. It really doesn't matter. It's only a banana.

SARAH. Please. You need your nourishment.

(Unseen by the females, JOHN has dropped down from the tire swing. He is just waking up and is oblivious to the argument.)

JANE. I insist.

SARAH. I couldn't.

JANE. Eat the banana.

SARAH. Well, if you're sure...I have to keep my strength up...
(Signing:) Don't...I...baby?

JANE. It's mine.

SARAH. I thought you didn't...

JANE. It's MINE, beta!

SARAH. Go ahead. I never wanted it anyway. Greasy old last banana with brown spots...

(They ad lib more politely murderous debate. JOHN wanders between the two females, picks up the banana, stuffs it in his mouth, and continues on his way. He settles down to eat. He realizes they are staring at him.)

JOHN. What?

(Blackout.)

Day 40

[*(The GIBBONS enter and bed down for the night.)*]

(It is night. The gorillas are all sleeping: SARAH by herself and JANE with JOHN. SARAH begins to make soft noises in her sleep.)

(JOHN gets up. He moves nonchalantly towards SARAH. He is about to lie down beside her. Without moving, JANE screeches at him in best gorilla fashion. JOHN tears back to JANE and lies down as before.)

Day 50

[*(The GIBBONS wake up and discover Sarah's doll near enough to their cage to nab. They all snatch it and consequently cannot get it through the bars. They tug. Finally, GIBBON 1 has the idea of giving the doll a quarter turn. They tug some more. When JANE enters, they drop the doll and scatter.)*]

(JANE enters by herself.)

(She sees the kitty doll, abandoned. She crosses to it. She picks it up and begins to play with it. She cradles the doll. Then she holds it out and begins to beat its head methodically into the ground.)

(Enter JOHN.)

JOHN. Jane? Jane? Jane?

JANE. *(Musically:)* Y-esss?

JOHN. What are you doing with Sarah's doll?

JANE. Sarah's doll?

JOHN. Yeah. You're smashing its head... *(Trails off, registering JANE's expression:)* I mean, the people are going to think you've gone...Monkey see, monkey do. Monkey see, monkey do. *(Repeats.)*

(JOHN continues his litany. Enter SARAH.)

SARAH. John. Let's not do that now, love.

JOHN. Okay.

SARAH. *(She stretches sensuously.)* I heard a noise. It sounded like a truck. You found my doll.

JANE. It belongs to all of us. Unless you'd like to try and take it...?

SARAH. You can have it. I've got all I want.

(She sidles up to JOHN and they begin to mumble to each other, giggling.)

SARAH. Mumble mumble until mumble mumble mumble.

JOHN. Maybe.

(They giggle.)

JANE. What?

SARAH. Nothing.

(JANE throws the doll. SARAH retrieves it during the following dialogue.)

JANE. John, I'd like to speak to you by the banana pile for a minute.

JOHN. Actually, I'm enjoying myself right here right now.

JANE. I'd like to talk with you NOW.

JOHN. Okay. *(He does.)*

SARAH. So mean.

JOHN. What?

JANE. "What?" How long are you going to let this go ON?

JOHN. Let what go on?

JANE. That. Her over there. And you.

JOHN. What do you care?

JANE. Every night you sleep a little closer, don't you? *(Beat.)* I'll tell you why I care. I'm your mate.

JOHN. Oh, so now we're mates? Look, Jane, I don't want to hurt you. Sarah...she acts like she likes me.

JANE. Treats you like you were the only ape ever to bang his chest, you mean.

JOHN. I *mean*, she never sends me to the swing. She thinks whatever I say is cute. And she doesn't tell me how to peel my banana.

JANE. John. Nobody *cares* about your banana!

JOHN. *(Losing his temper:)* Sometimes...sometimes you... *(He has a gorilla temper tantrum, beats his chest and exits.)*

JANE. Oh, very nice.

(SARAH begins signing to her cat.)

JANE. You come here...You come here and you...what are you *DO*-ing?

SARAH. It's People Talk.

JANE. People don't talk that way.

SARAH. No, but I can make some of their words with my hands. If you want, I'll teach you sometime.

JANE. Thanks ever so much.

SARAH. *(Signing:)* Hello *(Signing:)* Kitty. Did *(Signing:)* the truck *(Signing:)* wake *(Signing:)* Kitty? *(Signing:)* Did *(Signing:)* mean-Jane *(Signing:)* hear *(Signing:)* the truck *(Signing:)* too?

JANE. Leave me out of this.

SARAH. *(Signing:)* Sarah *(Signing:)* like *(Signing:)* Kitty.

JANE. *(Making some rudish signs:)* Jane like strangle Sarah.

SARAH. *(Signing:)* Sarah *(Signing:)* like *(Signing:)* ...baby. *(Signing:)* Sarah *(Signing:)* want *(Signing:)* have *(Signing:)* baby. *(Signing:)* Sarah *(Signing:)* young; *(Signing:)* can *(Signing:)* still *(Signing:)* have *(Signing:)* baby. *(Signing:)*

JANE. Stop it, beta-monkey.

(SARAH makes an obviously insulting sign to JANE.)

JANE. What was that?

SARAH. *(Musically:)* I'll teach you. Offer's open.

JANE. What did you say?

SARAH. Monkey see. Monkey do. Monkey see. Monkey do.

JANE. Damn you, monkey.

(They chase each other around the cage, swinging on the tire, swiping at each other.)

SARAH. Lion chowder.

JANE. Chimp. Babooooooooon.

SARAH. Bald old gibbon.

JANE. Cage-wrecker.

SARAH. I'll be glad when you're gone.

JANE. I'm not planning to go anywhere.

SARAH. Doesn't matter much, Jane. Seems like you'll be gone soon. Do you know that truck I asked about? I told a little fib. I knew it was parked outside. I heard the drivers talking to the keeper. I heard everything they were saying. There are three men and they're from the Buffalo Zoo and...

JANE. Will you shut up?

SARAH. ...A-nnnnn-d I heard the drivers talking about moving a gorilla.

JANE. So, it's me they're going to move, is it?

SARAH. Think about it. I'm here because you couldn't breed. And now, you're off to Buffalo.

JANE. They won't do that.

SARAH. I'm sure you're right. Never mind.

(SARAH signs to her kitty. JANE moves to the swing and pushes it idly.)

(Enter JOHN.)

SARAH. Hello.

JOHN. Hello, Sarah. Jane.

JANE. John, come and talk to me. *(He sits by SARAH.)* Please.

JOHN. Alright. What?

JANE. John, I'm afraid.

JOHN. Oh, come on.

JANE. No. Sarah...

JOHN. Now, don't be threatened by Sarah.

JANE. I know we haven't always got along, but I always thought we...I feel like I'm not important here now. It's like she's taking over. Her scent...God, it's everywhere. It's all over you.

JOHN. Well. Sorry.

JANE. Sorry?

JOHN. Well, you're still important to me. I guess. I mean, it's just, now Sarah's important to me too.

JANE. Important to you TOO?

JOHN. Yeah. Things weren't really working out between us and maybe it's best that—now Sarah's here too. It's better for all of us.

JANE. Don't tell me what's better for me, you bug-sucking macaque.

SARAH. John.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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