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SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-0-545-65505-7

I0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 I8 I9 20 21 22

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, October 2018

Book design and illustrations by Abby Denning



Rock. Nut.

Snub looks between the two, thinking.
This tree keeps its nuts high in its branches—
a fallen one is a lucky treat.

She imagines rolling the inside nugget in her mouth,
biting its oily flesh.

Tongue between her teeth, brow scrunched,
she raps the rock on top of the nut.
It does not crack.

She licks the rock.
The rock tastes like rock.
She licks the nut.
The nut tastes like dirt.

Snub twists the woody halves.
They will not part.

Opening nuts is Mother's job,
but Mother let Snub go off alone.

mrrgh.

Fresh fury surges.
Snub hurls the nut, aiming
at a pair of magpies.

It goes wide and disappears into the foliage.
Worthless nut.

Snub looks to see if anyone has
been impressed by her rage.
But this only reminds her:

Her family is not here.



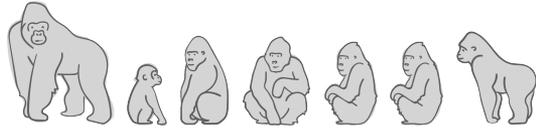
The magpies don't fly away.
The magpies watch and mock.
The magpies are not afraid of Snub.

Snub grunts and charges.

The birds flutter up,
chopping white and black
into the open blue sky.

As she watches them flee,
Snub feels better.
When she leaves the clearing,
she struts.

Maybe when she returns to her family,
they will be impressed by her.



When Snub finds her family,
not a single one of them looks up.

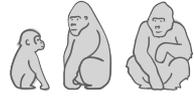
Brother is feasting on the buds of a thicket.
Wrinkled and Teased, the squabbling older females,
are back-to-back in a patch of clover,
searching out the lightest greens.

Mother hasn't stirred.
Her night nest has become a day nest.
This is not like Mother.

Mother
is no longer
like Mother.

Snub knows what is to blame.
It is that thing.
It is pink
and it wriggles.
It is pink
like a large worm.
Mother should crush it
under her foot.
Ooze under her toes!

But instead
Mother is caring for it.



It used to be
that Snub only had
to worry about
foraging food and
being close to Mother.

It used to be
that Snub and Mother
groomed each other,
climbed trees with linked arms,
passed a fruit rind
until together they had stripped it
of every glossy golden morsel.

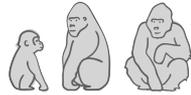
It used to be
that when all this was done
they would sprawl in the sun-fragrant grass,
content.

boo.

Then the worm arrived.

Now Mother doesn't allow Snub to come near.
Now Snub hasn't been touched all day.
Now Snub's legs crumple right where she stands.
Now Snub lands heavily at the edge of the family's clearing.
Now Snub is outside everything that used to be
inside

and she doesn't understand why.



Snub knows what will happen next,
knows she will be unhappy after,
but she cannot stop herself.

She gets to all fours,
feet furrowing rich black soil,
and cheats her way to Mother.
She leans so the hairs on her back mingle with Mother's,
extends an arm,
as
slowly
as
she
can,
until it grazes Mother's knee.

Mother tightens her grip on the pink worm.
As she pivots, Mother's eyes look at Snub
but don't see Snub.

Snub still doesn't understand why.
She has done nothing wrong,
not once this day has she
kicked Brother
teased Wrinkled
pelted Mother
yanked Silverback.

Snub stares out at everything that is not Mother:
one puff of cloud in the sky,
moss on the trees, thick as wet green hair,
bright edges of a puddle,
fly-milled soil, so richly black that it foams.

Snub can't bring herself to say

boo,

because Mother is ignoring her
and might not

boo

back.

Snub stands.

Snub sits.

Snub tries
one more time
to lean against Mother.

Snub's breath catches.
Mother has let her stay beside her!

Snub risks lowering her shoulders
so she is curled around Mother's body.

Mother allows that, too!

The worm isn't just pink.
Fine black hairs drape along it.
Its eyelids don't quite close over the slick slivers of its eyes.

It is a weak and fragile and useless and disgusting thing,
even if Snub sees now that it's a small version of a gorilla.

Surprise:

She wants

to hold this tiny gorilla that came out of her mother,
to cradle its tiny shoulders in her rough palm,
to pry its eyes open and see them look into hers,
to say

acha,

to share in Mother's

acha.

Mother sneezes.

Afraid that she is about to be alone again,
Snub holds very still.

Startled by Mother,
the worm raises its too-heavy head,
then feeds some more.

Feeding makes Snub think of food.
She selects a handful of sweet grass
and sprinkles it on the baby's face.

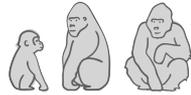
The baby is too useless to eat this grass.
The pink-gorilla-baby-worm doesn't *do* anything
except take away Mother.
If Mother doesn't start foraging soon
she won't eat anything before the day goes dark
and her day nest will turn into a night nest.
This fragile little thing,
which demands

acha

and gives none back,
will keep Mother in this one spot for the whole day.
It makes Snub growl out loud—

mrgb

but softly, so Mother cannot hear.



Snub rolls away from Mother
and knucklewalks through the clearing,
blowing contempt through her nostrils.

The day ages.

Already heavy with humming insects,
the jungle thickens until it is murky with their sound.
The sun lowers beneath the tops of the trees,
its light disappearing as quick as a thought.
Snub hasn't eaten enough today,
and she knows she'll wake before light with a hollow ache,
her belly plump and sharp.

Alone again,
no longer a daughter but nothing else either.

Is there more out there than this family?