

The One and Only Ivan



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KATHERINE APPLIGATE

As a young child, Katherine Applegate didn't like to read or write—it wasn't until she discovered E.B. White's [Charlotte's Web](#) that she realized reading wasn't boring. From that point on, she wrote prolifically into adulthood. She began her professional writing career as a ghostwriter for the *Sweet Valley Twins* series. Applegate often collaborates with her husband, author Michael Grant, on book series for children, such as the *Animorphs* and *Everworld* series. The couple has two daughters. Though *Animorphs* catapulted Applegate to fame, *The One and Only Ivan* is her most critically acclaimed novel. It won the Newbery Medal in 2013. In addition to writing middle-grade novels, Applegate has also written a number of picture books for younger readers. Applegate lives with her family—including a variety of pets—in Irvine, California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The One and Only Ivan is based on a true story. Ivan the gorilla was around two years old when he and a female infant gorilla were captured in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1964. The female died in transit to the United States or shortly after arriving in the country, but the owner of the B&I department store in Tacoma, Washington purchased Ivan. For three years, Ivan lived like a child in his owner's home—but when he became too large and rambunctious, he was moved to a 14x14-foot enclosure in the B&I strip mall. He spent the next 23 years of his life there. In the late 1980s, the animal welfare group PAWS began to agitate for Ivan to be moved to a more naturalistic environment. Facing financial troubles, Ivan's owners allowed Ivan to move to the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, which then sent Ivan to Zoo Atlanta in 1994 on permanent loan. Zoo Atlanta has one of the best programs for western lowland gorillas like Ivan and, by 1994, they'd already rehabilitated another gorilla, Willie B., who had grown up and spent most of his adult life in circumstances similar to Ivan's. Ivan lived out the rest of his life at Zoo Atlanta and died at age 50 in 2012. The protests to move Ivan stemmed from a growing movement to house captive wild animals in larger, more naturalistic settings—the kind of enclosures that, today, are common at zoos. With Ruby and Stella's addition to the story, Applegate also draws in the growing backlash against using wild animals in circuses. The largest and most famous circus in the United States, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus, retired its elephants from shows in 2015 and ended up shutting down altogether in 2017. Today, a patchwork of state and local laws exist in the United States

banning the use of wild animals in circuses.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Applegate followed up *The One and Only Ivan* with a sequel, *The One and Only Bob*, in 2020. In it, Ivan's dog friend Bob goes in search of his long-lost sister with Ivan and Ruby's help. On her website, Applegate lists E.B. White's novel [Charlotte's Web](#) as the book that sparked her love of reading and writing, and its focus on kindness and helping others also appears in *Ivan*. *Ivan* is one of many novels, particularly for young readers, that draws attention to animal abuse and features an animal narrator. The most famous (and one of the earliest) examples is perhaps Anna Sewall's 1877 novel *Black Beauty*, in which a horse narrates his life story and his experiences with various owners—some kind, some cruel. Eliot Schrefer's four young adult novels about humans and primates (*Endangered*, *Threatened*, *Rescued*, and *Orphaned*) looks at issues facing apes—such as poaching and the destruction of their habitats—from a human perspective. In addition, the memoirs of both Dian Fossey (*Gorillas in the Mist*) and Jane Goodall (*In the Shadow of Man* and *My Life With the Chimpanzees*) were major forces in ape and primate research that led to the push to move the real-life Ivan out of the mall and into a zoo. Gerald Durrell also contributed to this research and pushed more broadly for captive animals to be housed in more naturalistic settings. He wrote a trio of books—[My Family and Other Animals](#); *Birds, Beasts, and Relatives*; and *The Garden of the Gods*—to raise money for his own zoo in Jersey.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The One and Only Ivan
- **When Written:** 2011
- **Where Written:** Irvine, California
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Children's Novel
- **Setting:** A mall near a freeway and a zoo
- **Climax:** Ivan and Ruby get into their boxes to be transported to the zoo
- **Antagonist:** It's possible to argue that Mack is the antagonist, but more than that, the antagonists in the novel are the claw-stick, the cages, and financial troubles
- **Point of View:** First-Person

EXTRA CREDIT

An honor. The character Bob in the novel was inspired by

Applegate's small dog, Stan—while Julia is named after Applegate's daughter.

Ivan the Artist. It's true that the real-life Ivan, the gorilla whose story inspired the novel, was known for his paintings. He often signed his work with a thumbprint.



PLOT SUMMARY

Ivan introduces himself: he's a gorilla, and he's lived at the Big Top Mall and Video Arcade for the last 27 years—fortunately, like all gorillas, Ivan is patient. While the other animals at the mall (like Ivan's best friend, an elephant named Stella) perform in three shows per day every day of the year, Ivan doesn't have to. He just has to be himself. However, Ivan isn't totally sure who he is—the depiction of him on the **billboard** by the freeway shows Ivan as an angry, dangerous beast. In reality, Ivan is calm and peaceful. He lives in his “domain,” a cage made of glass and concrete so that people can look at him all the time.

Ivan spends his days eating and drawing pictures for the gift shop. In the evenings he listens to Julia, the custodian George's daughter, talk to him. She's an artist too, so they understand each other. Ivan also watches **TV** with Bob, a small stray dog who sleeps on Ivan's belly every night. Though they mostly watch Westerns, Ivan once saw a gorilla on a nature program—and that's the only reason he knows he's not the only gorilla on earth. Stella has also told Ivan that she believes he'll see a real gorilla again someday, and Ivan believes her because she's old and wise. She used to work in a circus and only came to the mall after sustaining an injury to her foot. Her foot often bothers her and gets reinfected.

The Big Top Mall is experiencing financial difficulties, since Ivan “isn't cute anymore.” He's not attracting as many visitors as he used to. So the owner, Mack, purchases a baby elephant to attract more people to the mall. Stella is incensed by this turn of events. She has to coax the tiny baby out of the truck when she arrives, and she hurts her foot in the process. The baby's name is Ruby, and Stella explains to Ivan that Ruby was born in the wild but just came to them from a circus. There, trainers chained all of Ruby's feet to the floor for 23 hours per day to break her spirit.

Ruby proves to be curious and blunt. She tells Ivan that humans killed her parents and is impressed with Ivan's drawing skills. As Ruby settles in, though, the infection in Stella's foot gets worse. One evening, Stella is clearly ill and Julia begs George to call Mack for help. Mack insists that if Stella isn't better in the morning, he'll call the vet. But that night, after asking Ivan to promise to help Ruby get somewhere where she'll be able to live a better life than she did, Stella dies. Ivan knows the promise will be impossible to keep.

Ivan does his best to comfort Ruby over the next few days.

Since she loves stories, he agrees to tell her his story of his youth. He was born in a rainforest and had a twin sister, Tag. His name was Mud because, even then, he was an artist who drew with mud. Life was perfect—until people came, captured Ivan and Tag, and killed their parents. Tag died in the crate as they got further away from home. Mack adopted Ivan and raised him like a human for several years. It wasn't until Mack's wife, Helen, left him that Mack finally brought Ivan to live at the mall. Ivan was thrilled to see his domain—there was nothing to break in it—but he didn't realize he'd be here for so long.

A few days after Stella dies, Mack decides it's time to train Ruby to do tricks. He takes her into the ring and walks her in endless circles for hours. Not long after George and Julia arrive for George's shift, Ruby, exhausted, sits and refuses to move. Mack loses his temper and threatens Ruby with a **claw-stick**—but Ruby hits Mack in the groin with her trunk. Julia and George return Ruby to her domain and, later, Julia gives Ivan some finger paints.

Ruby has bad dreams and, when she wakes in the night, she asks if she's going to die in this domain like Stella. Ivan decides to tell her another story. In this one, a baby elephant needs to go to a zoo, “where humans make amends.” The elephant will get there because a friend of hers made a promise. That night, as Ruby and Bob sleep, Ivan remembers the rest of his story—how poachers cut off his mother and father's hands, feet, and heads.

As Ivan looks at the billboard the next day, he realizes he knows how to help Ruby. He begins to paint every night with Julia's finger paints and hides his paintings under the pool in his domain. He experiences a setback when Mack finds one painting and takes it to sell in the gift shop, though he also struggles to know exactly what to paint. But then, as Ivan and Bob watch TV, Ivan watches a commercial for the zoo. This shows Ivan the imagery he needs for his giant painting: the zoo enclosures and the zoo's logo. He continues to paint every night and finally, one night, realizes the last thing his painting needs: the word “home.”

Finally, Ivan is ready to show Julia his work. He shoves his paintings out of the hole in his glass. At first, she doesn't understand. But when she tries to leave, Ivan beats his chest to get her attention, frightening her. Julia realizes that all of Ivan's small pieces of painted paper fit together to make one big picture of Ruby at the zoo. She convinces George to help her put Ivan's massive painting on the billboard.

Though Mack is enraged when he first sees the billboard, he soon is thrilled about the media attention. People come to see Ivan, even reporters. Finally, reporters with a big camera come and take videos of the dirty cages and the claw-stick. After the piece airs on the evening news, protesters begin to gather outside the mall every day, advocating for Ruby and Ivan to be moved to the zoo. After a man with a checklist comes to inspect the mall, Mack seems upset—and days later, a woman from the

zoo, Maya, arrives with a Ruby-sized box.

Not long after, more people arrive with more boxes, one of them Ivan-sized. The boxes sit overnight and that night when George arrives, he and Julia say goodbye—but Julia says this is a good thing. Ivan and Ruby get in their boxes the next day, and a drink puts Ivan to sleep.

When Ivan wakes up, he's in a clean glass cage. After a few days, Maya starts showing him videos on a TV of a gorilla family that doesn't have a silverback. A few days after that, she pulls aside a curtain on Ivan's cage—and on the other side is the gorilla family Ivan has been watching on TV. Soon, Ivan is able to leave his cage and join the other gorillas. After a while, Ivan starts to feel like a silverback—and he rediscovers his childhood love of painting with mud. Best of all, one day Maya shows him video of Ruby, happy with the other elephants.

One evening, Julia and George come to the zoo with Bob hidden in Julia's backpack. Bob now lives with their family to keep Julia's mom Sara company, and George is going to start a job at the zoo soon. Julia tells Ivan that Ivan did it—he saved Ruby.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ivan – The protagonist of the novel, Ivan is a silverback gorilla who's about 30 years old. For the last 27 years, he's lived in a glass and concrete cage (which he calls his "domain") in a shopping mall. Though the **billboard** advertising Ivan as a tourist attraction portrays Ivan as a fearsome creature, Ivan is actually anything but. Like most gorillas, Ivan is peaceful, kind, and protective of those he loves. Ivan's chosen family consists of an old elephant named Stella and a tiny dog named Bob, who sleeps on Ivan's belly. Ivan spends his days eating, drawing, and watching **TV**. In the evenings, the cleaner George's daughter, Julia, sits near Ivan's domain and they draw together—she's an artist too, so she and Ivan have a special bond. At first, Ivan insists that he doesn't remember anything before coming to live in the Big Top Mall. But this begins to change when the mall's owner, Mack, purchases a baby elephant, Ruby, to reinvigorate the mall and its thrice daily, circus style show. When Stella dies not long after, she asks Ivan to promise to help Ruby lead a better life. This causes two changes in Ivan: first, he begins to paint a billboard-sized painting of Ruby at the local zoo, which he hopes will convince humans to help Ruby. Second, Ivan begins to remember his past and tells Ruby about it. Ivan reveals that he grew up with his parents and his twin sister, Tag. His parents called him "Mud" because he loved to paint with mud. Life was idyllic until humans killed Ivan's mother and father and captured Ivan and Tag. Tag died, but Mack adopted Ivan and raised him in his home until Ivan became too big. Ivan has been in the mall since then. Ultimately,

Ivan's plan to rescue Ruby by painting a billboard of her is successful: both he and Ruby are transferred to the local zoo, where Ivan is introduced to the other gorillas there and even falls in love with a gorilla named Kinyani. At the zoo, Ivan finally feels like he's become what he's supposed to be: a silverback with a family to protect.

Ruby – Ruby is a baby elephant whom Mack purchases to try to reinvigorate the Big Top Mall's daily shows. Ruby is inquisitive—she asks questions constantly—and very stubborn. She loves telling and listening to stories, and she also loves jokes. Mack purchases Ruby from a bankrupt circus and, over the course of her time at the mall, she shares her story with Ivan and Stella. Like Ivan and Stella, she was born in the wild and was then captured. She explains that "bad humans" captured her and killed her family—but she also tells Ivan and Bob about a time when she fell into a deep pit, and good humans rescued her and then helped her find her family again. While she was at the circus, trainers kept Ruby chained to the floor for 23 hours per day, which Stella explains to Ivan was intended to break Ruby's spirit. When Stella dies, it devastates Ruby. Ivan does his best to comfort Ruby and try to entertain her—and he promises Stella right before her death that he'll do what he can to give Ruby a better life. It's not until Ivan sees Mack using a **claw-stick** to train Ruby that he grasps how essential it is that he follow through on his promise to Stella. To try to save her, Ivan paints a huge painting of Ruby at the local zoo with other elephants. Weeks after George and Julia put Ivan's painting on the **billboard**, a woman from the zoo named Maya comes to take Ruby and Ivan to the zoo. Ruby is initially hesitant to go, as she insists that the mall is her home and Ivan and Bob are her family. But Ivan assures Ruby that Stella would've wanted her to go to the zoo. Not long after Ivan and Ruby move to the zoo, Maya shows Ivan a video of Ruby playing with other baby elephants in her new domain. She looks happier than Ivan has ever seen her.

Stella – Stella is an old elephant who is one of Ivan's closest friends at the Big Top Mall. She lives in the domain next to Ivan's and performs in the mall's thrice-daily shows. Ivan describes her as very old, wise, and trustworthy. She's able to see that humans are capable of both good and evil, and she suggests that zoos are places where humans "make amends" for the horrible things they've done to animals. Before Mack purchased Stella, she was a part of a circus. There, she suffered an injury when she fell off a stool, and her foot never healed correctly after the accident. This is why the circus sold her to Mack. In the present, Stella's foot acts up and gets reinfected regularly, so Ivan suspects that she's often in pain and feels unwell. When Stella learns that Mack is purchasing a baby elephant named Ruby for the mall, she's distraught—though Stella tries not to let on that she's unhappy and in pain, she doesn't want to see another elephant have to suffer through what she has experienced. She cares for Ruby once Ruby

arrives, and the two become extremely close. However, not long after Ruby's arrival, Stella's foot infection flares up, she becomes extremely ill, and she ultimately dies. Before her death, Stella asks Ivan to promise her that he'll try to help Ruby live a better life. Ivan's love of and respect for Stella means that he agrees—and he's successful. When Ruby expresses fear or uncertainty about going to the zoo, Ivan reminds her that Stella would want her to go, as that's Ruby's only option to live somewhere where she won't suffer abuse.

Bob – Bob is a tiny stray dog who lives at the Big Top Mall. While Bob is proud that he's a stray and insists that he doesn't actually have a home, he does spend nearly all his time at the mall. He sleeps every night on Ivan's belly and regularly checks Ivan's beard for crumbs. Bob came to the mall after someone threw him and his siblings onto the highway when they were tiny puppies; Bob was the only one to survive. In part because of this experience, Bob takes a very dim view of humans. Humans, in his opinion, are cruel, selfish, and are beyond even trying to understand. It's shocking to him when Ruby or Stella suggest that humans are capable of kindness. However, it's hard to tell how much of this is a front and how much of this Bob truly believes, as Ivan sometimes notices Bob sitting with Julia and allowing her to pet him—clearly, Bob doesn't believe that all humans are horrible. In addition, Bob is honest to a fault; he isn't always willing to go along with Ivan's insistence that he lives in a domain rather than a cage, for instance. He also tells Ruby that Ivan is going to get her out of the mall—which is true, since Ivan promised Stella he would—but Ivan resents that Bob told Ruby this, since he sees success as unlikely. Ivan also notes that Bob is a “useful” friend, since he can sneak around the mall and gather information that Ivan, who can't leave his domain, cannot. Though Bob is supportive of Ivan's painting, he also resents that Ivan smells of paint and is spending his nights painting instead of allowing Bob to sleep on him. But not long after Ivan moves to the zoo, he learns that Bob allowed Julia's family to adopt him.

Mack – Mack owns the Big Top Mall and all the animals in it. It's clear throughout the novel that he is facing financial troubles with his business, hence his decision to purchase Ruby to draw more visitors to the mall. But this stress results in Mack turning to alcohol, as well as neglecting and sometimes abusing his animals—in his desperation to get Ruby to perform, for instance, he threatens her with a **claw-stick**, a device the novel portrays as abusive. And several of his animals, including his adult elephant, Stella, die because he's unwilling to get them veterinary care when they need it. But as Ivan tells Ruby about his past, he implies that Mack hasn't always been this way. When Mack first adopted Ivan decades ago, he treated Ivan kindly and raised him like one would raise a human child. He spoiled Ivan with sweets and gave him the run of his house. It wasn't until Mack's wife, Helen, left that Mack moved Ivan to the mall and began to neglect his animals. Though even after

Ivan moved to the mall, Mack still hired keepers to care for Ivan, an indicator that Mack was both better off financially and more interested in the welfare of his animals back then. And even in the present, Mack is occasionally kind and generous, as when he gives George money to purchase art supplies for Julia. When Mack first notices Ivan's mural on the **billboard**, he's enraged. He's briefly thrilled with the publicity, until people begin protesting for Ruby and Ivan to be moved to the zoo. Mack ultimately loses ownership of all his animals after it's implied that he fails an animal welfare inspection.

Julia – Julia is George's 10-year-old daughter. She accompanies him to the mall every night and either does homework or draws while he cleans. Her mother, Sara, is chronically ill. Julia has long dark hair and a big smile—and though Ivan isn't the biggest fan of human children, he and Julia have a special bond because they're both artists. Julia, in fact, was the one who got Ivan started with drawing by passing him a crayon one day. She always compliments his drawings and tries to figure out what he's drawn—and she's usually able to identify what it is that he's depicted. Ivan also admires Julia's artwork, since Julia draws and paints fantastical things out of her imagination, things that Ivan doesn't believe he's capable of drawing. A caring and kind person, Julia takes issue with Mack's occasional cruelty and neglect of his animals. Julia, for instance, begs George to ask Mack about calling a vet out to see Stella about her infected foot, and she's extremely disturbed when she witnesses Mack threaten Ruby with the **claw-stick**. Because of Julia's compassion and the fact that she's an artist, Ivan knows that Julia is the only person with even a chance of understanding the mural he paints to try to free Ruby. And indeed, Julia recognizes what Ivan has depicted—Ruby at the zoo and the word “home”—and realizes that Ivan wants his painting to go on the **billboard**. She's then able to convince George to help her put it up on the billboard. For the most part, Julia is happy with the media attention that Ivan's billboard receives. She believes that Ivan and Ruby will be happier and safer in a zoo, even if it means having to give up her close relationship with some of her best friends. However, at the very end of the novel, Julia and George visit the zoo—with Bob in tow—and reveal that George is going to start work at the zoo and that Bob now lives with Julia's family.

George – George is the man who cleans the Big Top Mall every night. He always brings his 10-year-old daughter, Julia, to work with him and leaves her to draw while he cleans. George is a hard worker who cares deeply for the animals at the mall and their wellbeing. However, he also desperately needs his job, as his wife, Sara, is struggling with a chronic illness and he's the family's only source of income. Thus, even when George admits that Mack is abusive or neglectful to his animals, he usually doesn't feel like he's able to push back and advocate for the animals. However, George does agree to call Mack when Stella's foot infection flares up—and after she dies as a result of

not receiving medical attention, George does speak angrily to Mack. Though George likes Ivan, he seems to agree with Mack that Ivan's drawings are just scribbles, not depictions of objects or scenes. Because of this, George is initially unwilling to humor Julia when Julia tries to piece together Ivan's mural. But eventually, George relents, helps Julia assemble the puzzle, and ultimately agrees to put Ivan's mural on the **billboard**. While George loses his job at the mall for his role in alerting the media to Ivan and Ruby's situation, he later gets a job cleaning at the zoo.

Maya/The Woman – Maya is a woman who works with gorillas at the zoo. Until he learns her name, Ivan calls her “the woman” or “the zoo lady.” She coordinates transferring all the animals at the Big Top Mall to the zoo—including Ivan, Ruby, and Thelma the macaw. She's a kind woman and uses the clicker training method with animals, which means that both Ivan and Ruby get lots of treats. Maya makes Ivan feel seen and understood when, not long after Ivan has integrated into the gorilla family at the zoo, she shows him video of Ruby playing with other elephants at the zoo—she seems to recognize that this is what Ivan wanted, and that he'd appreciate seeing that his hard work paid off.

Sara – Sara is George's wife and Julia's mother; she never appears in person in the novel. She's been sick for several years with a chronic illness and, according to George, doesn't seem to be getting much better. Before she got sick, she used to help George clean the mall at night. After Ivan, Ruby, and the other animals leave the Big Top Mall, Bob goes to live with Sara and George to keep Sara company.

Helen – Helen was Mack's wife; she only appears in the novel in Ivan's stories of his early life, as she left Mack about 27 years before the novel begins. Ivan describes her as kind, but quick to anger. Unwittingly, Helen was the human to remind Ivan that he wanted to be an artist when she brought home a still life painting of fruit in a bowl.

Snickers – Snickers is a poodle who performs in shows at the Big Top Mall. She stands and jumps on Stella's back and, once Stella dies and Ruby takes over her performances, she rides Ruby, too. Snickers never speaks for herself or expresses any personality over the course of the novel. Bob looks down on her because she's a poodle—to him, poodles are “parasites.”

Ivan's Father – Ivan recalls his father fondly at various points throughout the novel. Ivan's father was everything Ivan says a silverback should be: kind, generous, and protective. Ivan remembers his father putting up with infant Ivan and Tag's antics, such as bouncing on his belly and sleeping soundly as his babies tried to wake him up. As Ivan steps into a sort of fatherly role to Ruby, his perception of his father changes—he realizes that his father was probably only pretending to sleep as Tag and Ivan tried to wake him up, for instance. Poachers killed Ivan's father when Ivan and Tag were just babies; they chopped off his

hands and head after killing him.

Ivan's Mother – Ivan remembers his mother as “a patient soul.” She put up with Ivan painting on her back with mud and, as all gorilla mothers do, carried Ivan and his twin Tag everywhere. Poachers murdered her when they captured Ivan and Tag. The poachers chopped off her hands and head after killing her.

Tag – Tag was Ivan's twin sister. She died in the crate on the way to the United States, after poachers killed Ivan's mother and father. Tag got her name because, as an infant, she loved playing tag with Ivan. Ivan explains that she died because she couldn't let go of her old life in the jungle.

Kinyani – Kinyani is a female gorilla who lives at the zoo where Ivan eventually ends up. She and Ivan are interested in each other romantically. Ivan thinks she's beautiful—but she's also terrifying in that she knows how to act like a gorilla and wants to test to make sure Ivan can behave as a silverback should.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Thelma – Thelma is a macaw who lives at the Big Top Mall. The fact that she talks makes her an attraction—though her talking often annoys Mack.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



ANIMAL ABUSE AND HUMAN CRUELTY

The One and Only Ivan is the story of Ivan, a gorilla who has spent most of his life living in the Big Top Mall. There, Ivan lives with an elephant named Stella, a small stray dog named Bob, and a variety of other domestic and exotic animals who perform in three shows per day, every day of the year. Ivan can more or less ignore how unfulfilling and sad his life is in his tiny glass and cement “domain” (his word for his cage)—that is, until the owner of the Big Top Mall, Mack, purchases a baby elephant named Ruby to add more life to the show and try to improve the mall's financial situation. This marks the first time that Ivan has seen (rather than just heard about) the painful techniques handlers use to train elephants to perform. Through this training, Stella's death from neglect, and the other animals' memories of cruel and abusive humans, the novel suggests that humans' cruelty to animals stems from a belief that animals are fundamentally different from humans and don't feel pain, fear, or betrayal the same way that people do—something that the novel shows couldn't be further from the truth.

First, the novel makes clear that cruelty and neglect don't have one single definition or look one certain way—there are varying degrees of abuse. Both Ivan and Ruby tell stories about their babyhood, when they were both captured from the wild after poachers killed their parents and other family members. They describe these “bad humans” as killing adult gorillas and elephants without a second thought. This, the novel suggests, is true, inarguable evil and cruelty. On the other hand, the novel offers up Mack, the owner of the Big Top Mall and the animals in it, as the embodiment of casual cruelty and neglect. The novel implies that Mack's business is struggling financially, and as a result, some of his animal husbandry practices are neglectful. For instance, he allows Stella's infected foot to go without medical attention, keeps the animals in small cages, and cuts food rations and heating when money gets even tighter. But the novel also portrays Mack as a complex person who once cared for his animals to the best of his ability. Despite his good intentions, his financial desperation has pushed him to become neglectful and even abusive. Both Mack and the poachers severely mistreat animals, but the novel encourages readers to recognize that some evil behavior is a result of circumstance while other evil behavior is simply evil.

The novel also suggests that people are willing to treat animals cruelly and neglectfully in part because they don't see animals as experiencing pain or emotions in the same way that humans do. Stealing babies and killing adult family members, for instance, shows that the poachers who captured Ivan and Ruby don't believe that the animals' family units are at all important—they see the baby animals as quick money, and the adults as disposable. Later, Mack's choice to use the **claw-stick** (a long, sharp stick with a crescent-shaped hook capable of piercing elephants' skin) to train Ruby shows, at the very least, that Mack doesn't care if Ruby feels fear or pain. His desire to get her to perform is more important than what she's feeling. Animals, according to Mack's outlook, are merely creatures that exist to make him money by performing for others, and whatever it takes to get them to perform is acceptable.

But throughout the novel, the various animal characters show that they are indeed capable of feeling emotions and have spirits that can be broken. Mack says things about Ivan that are cruel and hurtful, not knowing that Ivan can hear and understand every word Mack says. Ivan dwells on Mack saying that Ivan has “lost his magic,” or that he isn't cute anymore. It also seems to hurt Ivan when Mack insists that Ivan's drawings are just “scribbles,” since Ivan tries his best to draw pictures of items in his domain, like banana peels or candy wrappers. Mack clearly doesn't realize that Ivan understands his casual insults—the possibility never even seems to occur to him. This shows that Mack thinks of Ivan as fundamentally different—and less intelligent—than him. Further, it's heartbreaking for Ivan when, after Stella's death, Mack begins training Ruby to perform in the thrice-daily shows. Mack's use

of the claw-stick frightens Ruby into submission, making her dull and hopeless, and causing her to fear that she's going to die in the Big Top Mall of neglect—just like Stella did. Indeed, the fact that Ivan—a gorilla—narrates the novel, offering his own thoughts and feelings on everything he sees and does, provides the novel's clearest indicator that animals have feelings and are deserving of respect and kindness. While the novel and its anthropomorphized animals are fictional (though the novel is loosely based on a true story), hearing the story from Ivan's point of view encourages readers to develop empathy for animals, whom the novel suggests aren't so different from the humans who, in many cases, dictate their quality of life.



KINDNESS

Though the animal characters in *The One and Only Ivan* describe the various cruelties they've experienced at human hands, they also highlight the times when humans have been surprisingly kind. The baby elephant Ruby, for instance, acknowledges that bad humans killed her family and captured her—but she also feels extremely grateful to the kind humans who rescued her from a hole filled with water before she was captured. And both Ivan (a gorilla) and Stella (an elephant) describe zoos as places “where humans make amends,” presumably for other humans' cruel, inhumane behavior. In addition, as Ivan embarks on his quest to get Ruby removed from the Big Top Mall and into a zoo, he realizes that one of the kindest things he can do for Ruby is to be honest with her about their circumstances—even if doing so is emotionally painful. Through this, *The One and Only Ivan* acknowledges that being kind isn't always easy—a cynical outlook is, in some cases, emotionally easier. Nevertheless, the novel suggests that it's still important to be kind and to trust and acknowledge kindness in others, as this is one of the only ways people (and animals) can improve their lives.

First, the novel makes it clear that a cynical outlook can sometimes be a way for beings to protect themselves from emotional pain. Ivan, for instance, is willing to promise Stella on her deathbed that he'll look out for Ruby and try to give her a better life. But later, as Bob (a stray dog) asks Ivan what he's going to do to make this happen, Ivan insists that saving Ruby is impossible. For Ivan, it seems easier to cope with the emotional pain of giving up without trying than to deal with the pain of trying and potentially failing to save her. This also means that Ivan isn't going to get Ruby's hopes up too much and disappoint her when he believes he'll ultimately fail, something that he frames as a kindness to her. Bob also engages in a similar thought process: he insists that humans are, on the whole, horrible beings who do terrible things to animals. This stems from the fact that Bob and his siblings were tossed onto the freeway when they were tiny puppies—in Bob's experience, humans aren't good or capable of kindness at all, and he avoids them whenever possible.

However, the novel also shows that humans can be “unpredictable,” as Stella says—their kindness can sometimes be surprising. Ruby, for her part, firmly believes that there are both good and bad humans in the world. Bad humans killed her family and captured her from the wild—but good humans saved her from a hole where she would’ve died without their help. When she tells the story of the humans rescuing her from the hole to Ivan and Bob, Bob is very surprised to hear that humans were willing to do anything nice for an animal. It’s this idea that human kindness is sometimes “unpredictable” that inspires Ivan to finally try to help Ruby. He decides to create a giant painting meant to be displayed on the highway **billboard**, depicting Ruby at the local zoo instead of at the mall. This is a major leap of faith for Ivan—he not only has to trust that the mall cleaner’s daughter and fellow artist Julia will be able to understand what he’s created and why, but he also has to trust that strangers will see the billboard, interpret it correctly, and work toward getting Ruby into a zoo.

The zoo itself is the biggest indication that many human beings do care about animal welfare. Prior to her death, Stella describes good zoos as places where “humans make amends.” With this, she implies that it’s more or less common knowledge that some humans do terrible things to animals—and that some humans see it as their responsibility to make up for what their fellows have done. It’s a symbol, in this sense, of humans’ ability to show animals kindness. But this doesn’t mean that this kindness is easy to accept—indeed, both Ruby and Ivan struggle greatly with the choice to get into the shipping crates that they know will take them to the zoo. Though they both know the boxes are their way out of the mall, Ivan’s twin sister, Tag, died in front of his eyes the last time he was in a crate. And Ruby doesn’t want to leave the mall, Ivan, and Bob, even if her life at the mall is confined and unhappy. So, accepting humans’ kindness, especially after experiencing so much abuse and neglect, is something the novel frames as being very difficult. But accepting this kindness, the novel shows, is the only way Ruby and Ivan will ever be able to improve their situation. Moving to the zoo allows Ruby to find a new family of fellow elephants, and it allows Ivan to take his place as a silverback in a gorilla family at the zoo. These happy outcomes, the novel suggests, wouldn’t have happened had Ivan and Ruby not been willing to accept the kindness that humans offered them. With this, the novel suggests that kindness is a two-way street. It’s not enough for one party to show kindness to another—in order for change to happen, it’s necessary to accept that kindness and trust that it’s genuine.



ART AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Both Ivan the gorilla and Julia, the mall cleaner’s 10-year-old daughter, are artists. Ivan used to use mud as a drawing medium when he was an infant still living in the wild, but in the present, he only makes crayon

drawings to sell in the mall’s gift shop. Julia, meanwhile, is a budding artist who encourages Ivan in his love of art. When the mall owner, Mack, purchases the baby elephant Ruby, Ivan realizes that his art doesn’t just have to be something that makes money for the mall—rather, he can use his art to help secure a better future for Ruby. Through Ivan’s changing relationship to his artwork, the novel positions art as something capable of connecting people (and animals) across all sorts of divides. Art, the novel suggests, can help beings communicate, heal from trauma, and create change.

Art, the novel shows, can help beings feel more secure in their identities. Ivan has always been an artist. Gorilla parents, he explains, don’t name their babies until they show their parents something about who they are. And baby Ivan loved drawing with mud as an infant, earning him the name “Mud” among his family members. This name, he tells readers, meant “everything” to him when he was a baby, as it told Ivan that he was an artist. While Ivan no longer goes by the name Mud when he’s at the mall, he still uses art to connect with his past. When he draws with crayons, markers, or finger paints, he explains that he “feels quiet inside.” Making art is a way for Ivan to cope with a difficult life—it reminds him of who he once was and who he might be able to be in the future. And importantly, Ivan is proud of his identity as an artist in a way that he’s not able to be proud of some of his other identity markers, such as being a silverback gorilla (which he insists he can’t really be without someone to protect, for instance).

Art can also help people (and animals) connect and communicate with one another. Ivan and Julia share a special bond because they’re both artists. They may have different ways of approaching their art—Julia draws things from her imagination, while Ivan draws objects in his domain—but they both appreciate the other’s art. Julia, for her part, is the only human for much of the novel who’s able (or, for that matter, willing) to figure out what Ivan has drawn on any given day. While Mack and even George (the mall cleaner) insist that Ivan only draws “scribbles,” Julia takes the time to study Ivan’s drawings and identify them as depictions of bananas or beetles. This makes Ivan feel understood in a way that nothing else does. This is why, when Ivan paints a giant mural intended to go on a **billboard**, he decides to show his work to Julia first. As a fellow artist, she’s the only one Ivan trusts to realize what he’s trying to do—and to help him carry out his vision of seeing his painting on a billboard.

Ivan’s billboard painting shows that art isn’t just something that helps beings bond with others or feel good about themselves—art can also help agitate for change. Ivan comes up with the idea for the billboard when he sees how the original billboard functions: it draws passersby in and shows them what to expect at the mall. Ivan realizes he can use a billboard to convey something entirely different: that Ruby belongs in a zoo, not at the mall. Some of the media attention that Ivan’s

billboard painting attracts has to do with the fact that Ivan, a gorilla, conceived of and executed such an involved idea. Ivan notes that plenty of humans don't believe gorillas are capable of such high-level thinking, so it's a shock for some that Ivan could plan and paint such a massive piece of work. But this in and of itself speaks to the power of art to humanize an artist—Ivan becomes a much more sympathetic figure to humans when they see what he can paint, and that his paintings aren't just scribbles. Furthermore, the success of Ivan's billboard plan portrays art as an agent of change. His billboard painting is what begins to raise awareness of his and Ruby's plight at the mall, eventually leading to protests, media attention, and ultimately animal welfare inspections that culminate in Ivan and Ruby being transferred to the zoo—Ivan's goal from the beginning.

Art, the novel shows, can be many different things to many different beings. It can bring individual artists peace and happiness, and it can also help those artists improve their situations. When the novel ends after Ivan paints a massive white wall at the zoo with fresh mud—just for the fun of it—it suggests finally that art can help a person return to their roots. Painting with mud helps Ivan get a little bit closer to the gorilla he was as an infant—and it suggests that, perhaps most importantly, art can help a person heal and reconnect with a past version of themselves.



MEMORY AND STORYTELLING

Ivan insists for much of the novel that he doesn't remember his past. He is “the opposite of an elephant” in that he remembers nothing, while his elephant friend Stella remembers everything. Though Stella suggests at various points that remembering is a useful tool, Ivan doesn't believe her until the baby elephant Ruby arrives at the Big Top Mall, and Stella dies not long after. Having made a promise to Stella to help Ruby live a safer and happier life than she'd be able to at the mall, Ivan finds that having this goal to work toward makes both remembering and sharing his story with Ruby seem easier. And after seeing the similarities between his and Ruby's pasts—and realizing that Ruby could end up living a life much like Ivan's—remembering suddenly seems necessary. With this, *The One and Only Ivan* suggests that the act of repressing memories may be a useful measure to protect oneself from a traumatic past. But the novel also shows that it's only by confronting that trauma and sharing one's story with others that a person (or an animal) can heal and move forward.

The One and Only Ivan shows how repressing memories can sometimes be a helpful coping tool. Ivan reveals later in the novel that he's experienced some traumatic experiences throughout his life—but rather than dwell on them, he instead does everything he can to forget them. Forgetting these past traumatic events allows Ivan to go through his days as happily

as is possible given his circumstances. Put another way, forgetting the past allows Ivan to be “the One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback” as advertised on the Big Top Mall's **billboard**—all he has to think about is being a compelling attraction. However, the novel provides clues early on that while Ivan may be repressing his memories as a protective measure, this perhaps isn't the best way to go about life. Stella, for instance, insists to Ivan that memories tell beings who they are and what they're supposed to be. So according to Stella, by not remembering his past, Ivan isn't able to connect with who he's supposed to be—even if his unwillingness to remember protects him emotionally.

The novel also suggests the specific language a person uses to talk about themselves and their experiences can reveal how they feel about their lives. In the beginning of the novel, Ivan is able to take some pride in how he lives by calling his cage his “domain.” Ivan's word choice illustrates just how important language is in shaping a person's reality: the word “domain” suggests that Ivan is in charge of his life and what happens to him, at least within the confines of his domain. Similarly, when Stella talks about her life in the circus, she refers to the heavy chains that the trainers put around her feet—which left obvious scars on her legs—as her “bracelets.” The choice for these characters to describe instances of abuse and neglect in a more positive light shows how one's language can create a sense of control over one's life. So it's significant when, after Stella's death, Ivan decides to tell Ruby that Ruby doesn't live in a domain—she lives in a cage. This shows that Ivan has begun to fundamentally rethink his relationship to his captivity, and to Ruby's. Living in domains made it seem like life wasn't so bad—but when faced with the prospect that Ruby might spend her entire life at the Big Top Mall and die of neglect like Stella, Ivan suddenly realizes how important it is to speak truthfully about their situation—Ivan and Ruby can only hope to change their circumstances if they first accept that they're being neglected.

Speaking truthfully and telling one's story, the novel shows, is one of the most effective ways to both connect with others and create change. It's only once Ivan confronts the likely possibility that Ruby will grow up to be like him (that is, living an unfulfilled life of neglect at the mall) that he understands how important it is to be honest about their situations. He sees important similarities between the story of his early life and Ruby's: both were born in the wild and lived idyllic lives with their families, and both of them were captured after their adult family members were killed. By telling Ruby the truth about his own past, Ivan shows her what might happen to her if nothing changes. But Ivan also tells Ruby another story that he “hopes is true”: a story about a smart young elephant who, with the help of a friend, makes it to a zoo, where she can live happily and healthily. And through the massive painting that Ivan makes of Ruby at the zoo—a picture that imagines a reality that

doesn't yet exist—Ivan is ultimately able to create a new reality. As a result of the media attention that the mall receives after Ivan's painting makes it onto the local news, enough people protest to get Ruby and Ivan moved to a zoo that ultimately, this happens. And once at the zoo, Ivan is able to connect with his new gorilla family in part by sharing his whole story with them. It's significant when, after Ivan finishes telling his new family his story, his love interest Kinyani moves to sit closer to him—an indicator that by being truthful, Ivan is allowing himself to form deeper relationships. Through this, the novel holds up telling hopeful stories and being truthful about one's memories as some of the most effective ways to create a better future for oneself. Lying and forgetting one's past can make the present more palatable—but honesty can bring about positive change and bring people (and animals) closer together.



FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, AND IDENTITY

Ivan has lived his life alone in a shopping mall, and he hasn't seen another gorilla in the 27 years since he arrived there. Having spent so many years living

with humans and other animals rather than gorillas, and being billed as a frightening roadside attraction for tourists, Ivan isn't sure of who or what he is—it's not always entirely clear to him whether he's supposed to be a person or a gorilla, or whether he's supposed to be peaceful or frightening. However, Ivan finds a purpose and begins to feel more like a gorilla when the baby elephant Ruby arrives, and Ivan throws himself into getting her transferred to a zoo. Through Ivan's chosen family of various animals and humans at the mall, and later, as he integrates into a gorilla family at the zoo, the novel positions family as something that shows people (and animals) who and what they are.

Throughout the novel, Ivan explains that he's supposed to be a silverback gorilla—but living in captivity has made him unable to embody silverback traits. Silverbacks, Ivan explains, are the mature male gorillas within wild gorilla families, identifiable by the silver patch of fur over their backs. A silverback's job is to be a teacher and a protector of his family, helping to raise any babies and defending his family members from any threats. Ivan also notes that gorillas in general are calm and peaceful creatures—but anger, he explains, is a tool that silverbacks use only in special circumstances to defend their families. And while Ivan notes that he's calm and peaceful, he also doesn't have anyone to defend or teach. So, although Ivan may look the part of a silverback with his silver patch of fur, he feels as though he isn't able to embody what it actually means to be a silverback. Further, Ivan also recognizes that Mack, the mall's owner, is trying to make Ivan seem like he's not peaceful. The **billboard** advertising Ivan as a tourist attraction features a painting of Ivan, and in that image, Ivan looks frightening and violent—a far cry from who Ivan really is. Ivan also notes that when people stop by his domain to look at him, many beat their chests in an

imitation of what they think gorillas are actually like (powerful and dangerous). Few humans see Ivan for who he actually is—and Ivan also believes that because he has no one to protect, he's not even who he's supposed to be.

However, accepting his responsibility as a parental figure to Ruby changes everything. Ivan is distraught when Mack purchases the baby elephant Ruby and when, not long after, Stella (another elephant at the mall) dies of neglect. Stella's death leaves Ruby all on her own—and on her deathbed, Stella asks Ivan to help Ruby lead a better life than she did. At first, Ivan doesn't think he has any way to help Ruby. He doesn't see himself as a real silverback; therefore, he believes that he's powerless to do anything to help Ruby and keep his promise to Stella. But a change comes over Ivan when he sees Mack threaten Ruby with a **claw-stick** and he realizes that if he does nothing to try to help her, Ruby is going to become like Ivan one day. This motivates Ivan to paint a mural intended to convince people to move Ruby to a zoo—and he's ultimately successful. With this, the novel suggests that Ivan is able to step into the role of a silverback once he realizes that he has someone to protect.

Finally, the novel suggests that it's not always necessary to feel totally comfortable with one's identity—forming one's identity, it suggests, is a process that's never fully over. This becomes clear to Ivan when he's finally transferred to the zoo and meets other gorillas for the first time. Maya, a gorilla handler at the zoo, attempts to integrate Ivan into a gorilla family that doesn't have a silverback—a situation that, on the surface, seems like it will give Ivan every opportunity to become the silverback he wants to be. However, Ivan realizes quickly that being a gorilla, and particularly a silverback, isn't as easy as looking the part—his behavior needs to match his outward appearance. At first, Ivan struggles with this. He finds the other gorillas intimidating and struggles to present himself as a powerful leader, let alone an actual gorilla. But soon, he realizes that he doesn't have to actually feel like a powerful silverback in order to make the other gorillas treat him like one—he may feel like an imposter on the inside, but outwardly, he can embody the qualities of a silverback. With this, once again, the novel shows that family—in this case, Ivan's new gorilla family—can be a major driving force in helping beings become who they want to be. It doesn't necessarily matter what a family looks like; families of all shapes and sizes are important support systems as people (and animals) form their identities and become who they truly are.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE CLAW-STICK

The claw-stick is a device used to train elephants, consisting of a stick with a crescent-shaped hook at the end—the hook is capable of piercing an elephant’s tough hide. It’s a painful tool that the novel portrays as abusive, and it represents the terrible power that humans have over animals and their tendency to use that power cruelly. For Ivan, the claw-stick is merely a rumor until after Stella’s death, when Mack begins training Ruby to perform Stella’s tricks. During his first training session with Ruby, Mack pushes Ruby until she’s too exhausted to work anymore—and then he angrily threatens (but doesn’t actually hit her) with the claw-stick. This forces Ivan to confront an uncomfortable truth about Mack: that even though Ivan and Mack have had a close relationship in the past, and even though Mack has done the best he could for Ivan over the years, Mack is still a human who’s willing to turn to violence and abuse to bend animals to his will. This motivates Ivan to decide to follow through on his promise to Stella that he’ll try to get Ruby into a zoo where she won’t have to face a claw-stick ever again.

Other humans in the novel see Mack’s claw-stick in much the same way that Ivan does. When reporters come to the Big Top Mall with video cameras, the cameraman focuses on the claw-stick lying in the performance ring—and it seems that this footage of the claw-stick is what incites protests to free Ruby the following day. So while the claw-stick itself might symbolize abuse and cruelty, it also gives some humans and animals the impetus to advocate for kinder, more human treatment for animals.



THE BILLBOARD

The billboard, which has an image of Ivan on it, symbolizes Ivan himself. Sitting next to the freeway, the billboard encourages passing cars to “COME TO THE EXIT 8 BIG TOP MALL AND VIDEO ARCADE, HOME OF THE ONE AND ONLY IVAN, MIGHTY SILVERBACK!” The text of the billboard makes it clear how lonely Ivan is—while describing him as “the one and only Ivan” seems to be intended to make Ivan seem like an unusual sight, it nevertheless is also true that, in Ivan’s experience, he’s “the one and only” gorilla in the world. Further, the billboard’s imagery also features a depiction of Ivan that Ivan insists is incorrect, as it portrays Ivan as angry and dangerous. So the text and the imagery on the billboard show how Mack sees Ivan, and how Mack wants others to see Ivan: as a lone silverback gorilla, one who’s dangerous and exciting to look at.

But for Ivan, accepting this vision of himself comes at a cost. In addition to being lonely without the company of other gorillas, Ivan also resents that the billboard depicts him as a dangerous, violent beast—a far cry from the peaceful and somewhat morose, if protective, being Ivan truly is. This disconnect

contributes to Ivan’s sadness, as it makes him feel as though no one sees him for who he actually is: an artist and a silverback.

When Ivan creates the paintings of Ruby at the zoo, which he intends to be displayed on the billboard, it is a major turning point in Ivan’s identity. His decision to create such a large piece of artwork with the goal of getting humans to help get Ruby into a zoo shows that finally, Ivan has decided to reject the identity that the original billboard wanted him to embody. Having created this painting, Ivan situates himself as an artist and as a silverback gorilla, with someone—Ruby—to protect and advocate for.



THE TV

Ivan’s TV symbolizes how small Ivan’s world is, and how powerless he is, when he lives at the Big Top Mall. The TV is Ivan’s only connection to the outside world. He spends most of his TV-watching time watching Westerns, which he enjoys, but they don’t reflect real life particularly accurately. At one point, for instance, Ivan wishes he could be like the sheriffs he’s seen in the Westerns and enforce the law at the mall—but instead, Ivan is powerless to make anyone, human or animal, do what he wants.

Nevertheless, the TV offers Ivan important insight into the rest of the world. It’s because of television that Ivan knows he’s not the only gorilla in the world, since a nature documentary shows Ivan another male gorilla. The TV is also responsible for showing Ivan what a zoo looks like so that Ivan can then paint a more accurate depiction of a zoo as he works to free Ruby. But while the TV may do good things for Ivan in these instances, it’s also important to note that Ivan doesn’t have any control over what he sees on TV, or if he even gets to watch TV at all. Any help or insight the TV might offer is useful, but Ivan can’t control when, how, or if he gets this information.

Finally, it’s impossible to note the resemblance between Ivan’s TV and Ivan’s life inside his cage. Just as Ivan is powerless to choose what he watches on TV or if the TV is on at all, he’s also powerless to stop being entertainment for visitors to the mall—in his cage with glass walls, Ivan is akin to a TV show that’s always playing.



QUOTES



Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *The One and Only Ivan* published in 2015.



hello—the littlest big top on earth Quotes

☛☛ People call me the Freeway Gorilla. The Ape at Exit 8. The One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback.

The names are mine, but they're not me. I am Ivan, just Ivan, only Ivan.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Mack, Mack

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

As Ivan introduces himself to readers, he shares that people use all sorts of names to refer to him—but from his own point of view, he's just Ivan. From the beginning, Ivan makes it clear that he wants to decide what his identity is; he insists on being only Ivan, not any of the other names.

Saying that the names *belong* to him but *aren't him* suggests that Ivan has to put up with humans trying to decide who and what he is. And as an animal who can't communicate verbally with the humans around him, he has no choice but to accept that these other names are his. It's only through communicating to the reader that Ivan is able to share who exactly he is.

Then, it's interesting that Ivan rejects these other names so vehemently. The first two names ("the Freeway Gorilla" and "[t]he Ape at Exit 8") tie Ivan's identity to the fact that he lives at the Big Top Mall, which is a strip mall off of the freeway. This suggests from the very beginning that Ivan isn't content with where he lives. Furthermore, not accepting "The One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback" implies that Ivan resents being the only gorilla at the mall. He makes it clear throughout the novel that it's difficult to spend his life all alone—though he also notes that it's gotten easier after years of practice. Rejecting that he's a "mighty silverback," though has even darker implications. This suggests that Ivan feels powerless and impotent, entirely cut off from his natural role as a male gorilla.

☛☛ The freeway billboard has a drawing of Mack in his clown clothes and Stella on her hind legs and an angry animal with fierce eyes and unkempt hair.

That animal is supposed to be me, but the artist made a mistake. I am never angry.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Stella, Mack, Stella, Mack

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan describes the images on the freeway billboard, which advertises the thrice-daily shows at the Big Top Mall and the animals that live there. The billboard, Ivan insists, shows a version of himself that isn't at all truthful. Throughout the novel, Ivan describes himself as a normal gorilla. He's peaceful, kind, and generous, which he says is typical of gorillas. And for the most part, he isn't angry. So, the billboard presents a version of Ivan that seems to exist simply to draw in visitors by showing them what they think gorillas are: angry and fierce.

With this, the novel suggests that humans tend to misunderstand gorillas and other wild animals. It's clear to readers—thanks to Ivan's first-person perspective—that Ivan is right, and that the picture of him on the billboard isn't him. It's what humans (particularly his keeper, Mack, since Mack is the one who benefits from this depiction of Ivan) *want* Ivan to look like. It doesn't matter to Mack that Ivan isn't angry and fierce; he still gets money when people visit the mall, so he's more interested in making Ivan appear sensational than in portraying him as he actually is. But for Ivan, this is disrespectful and a mark of how little Mack and the artist care about depicting him accurately.

☛☛ Anger is precious. A silverback uses anger to maintain order and warn his troop of danger. When my father beat his chest, it was to say, *Beware, listen, I am in charge. I am angry to protect you, because that is what I was born to do.*

Here in my domain, there is no one to protect.

Related Characters: Ivan (speaker), Ruby, Ivan's Father, Ruby

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

After describing the freeway billboard and its unflattering depiction of Ivan as an angry animal, Ivan describes how gorillas actually use anger. Through this, Ivan shows readers what it means to be a silverback gorilla. Throughout the novel, Ivan holds his father up as an exceptional example of a silverback—he was kind and generous, and when the occasion called for it, Ivan’s father beat his chest and defended his family. This is significant because Ivan is also a silverback; he has the characteristic silver and white patch of fur over his back that marks him as a mature male, capable of defending his family. And at this point in the novel, Ivan seems to define a gorilla’s family as being made up of only gorillas. This doesn’t leave room for chosen family, particularly any chosen family members who might be different species—like the humans and animals in the mall where Ivan lives.

However, Ivan essentially implies that he’s not a real silverback because, unlike his father, Ivan doesn’t have anyone to protect. It’s impossible, he suggests, to be a silverback in only some ways; being a silverback is all or nothing. This starts to establish Ivan as being lost in his identity. Though Ivan knows that he’s technically a silverback, he still doesn’t feel like one.



This, of course, all changes once Mack, the mall-owner, purchases the baby elephant Ruby. Suddenly, when Ivan has someone to protect, he’s able to step into his role of a silverback and advocate for Ruby to be moved to a zoo. Broadly speaking, this makes the case that a being’s identity is something inherent and natural rather than something that’s dictated by others or by their environment. In Ivan’s case, he is a silverback, whether he has a family of gorillas to defend or not—when someone he loves needs protection, his natural instinct to defend them kicks in.

gone—the beetle Quotes

☝☝ My life is flashing lights and pointing fingers and uninvited visitors. Inches away, humans flatten their little hands against the wall of glass that separates us.

The glass says you are this and we are that and that is how it will always be.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

In telling readers about his domain and how he lives, Ivan describes how publicly he lives his life—he can never get away from humans’ gazes. Ivan’s word choice here is important. He makes sure to note, for instance, that his visitors are “uninvited,” and describing “pointing fingers” and “flashing lights” makes it seem as though Ivan doesn’t at all enjoy being stared at all the time. Moreover, the flashing lights in particular suggest that people who come to look at Ivan aren’t doing so respectfully—it doesn’t seem to occur to them that the flashes on their cameras would bother him. This drives home one of the main points in this passage: that people don’t see Ivan (or animals in general as a being worthy of respect and compassion. The mall visitors treat him as a roadside attraction to gawk at, and as an animal who can’t verbally communicate, Ivan is powerless to demand better treatment from his visitors.



Ivan makes it clear that people see him as fundamentally different from them through the way that he describes the glass saying, “you are this and we are that and that is how it will always be.” But given that Ivan has already noted that humans and gorillas aren’t so different (as they’re both great apes), it’s possible to read a sad, resigned tone into this sentence. Humans, Ivan seems to imply, see difference and division where they don’t need to. The glass not only physically separates Ivan from his visitors; it also makes it clear to both of them that Ivan is an oddity and is perhaps unknowable.

☝☝ My visitors are often surprised when they see the TV Mack put in my domain. They seem to find it odd, the sight of a gorilla staring at tiny humans in a box.

Sometimes I wonder, though: Isn’t the way they stare at me, sitting in my tiny box, just as strange?

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Mack, Mack

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan explains to readers that Mack put a TV in Ivan’s “domain” (cage), something that some of his visitors are surprised by. Ivan makes the case that it shouldn’t surprise his visitors that he watches TV—part of being human, he seems to wryly suggest, means thinking it’s normal and okay

to stare at other beings in a box. He encourages readers to question whether common activities—like watching “tiny humans in a box” or watching Ivan in his cage—are actually so normal. Indeed, Ivan suggests it’s actually pretty odd that people like to capture beings like him in “boxes” and ogle at them.

This provides some clues as to why Ivan struggles so much with figuring out who and what he is throughout the novel. Though it’s perhaps unsurprising that Ivan would want to watch TV given how bored he is in his domain, he also ties watching TV (or watching beings in boxes) to being human, not being a gorilla. And later, he suggests that he exists somewhere between human and gorilla and is never quite certain of where he’s supposed to stand. TV might pass the time, in other words, but it’s also keeping Ivan from really connecting with who he is as a gorilla, and what kind of a being he’s supposed to be.

It’s also worth noting that though Ivan has, up until this point, referred to his cage as his “domain” (a term that suggests Ivan is in charge of his surroundings and his life), he also describes his domain here as “tiny.” This is one of many clues that Ivan drops in the first part of the novel that suggest he’s well aware of how terrible his living situation is—he’s just trying to ignore it, for the most part.

☝ “You could try remembering a good day,” Stella suggests. “That’s what I do when I can’t sleep.”

Stella remembers every moment since she was born: every scent, every sunset, every slight, every victory.

“You know I can’t remember much,” I say.

“There’s a difference,” Stella says gently, “between ‘can’t remember’ and ‘won’t remember.’”

“That’s true,” I admit. Not remembering can be difficult, but I’ve had a lot of time to work on it.

“Memories are precious,” Stella adds. “They help tell us who we are.”

Related Characters: Ivan, Stella (speaker), Tag

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

One night, when Ivan can’t sleep, the elephant Stella suggests that he think of happy memories—something that Ivan insists he’s both unwilling and unable to do.

Throughout this passage, Stella makes the case that

memories are good things and essential to a person’s identity. She suggests that they can provide comfort, such as when a person can’t sleep and needs something pleasant to think about. But then she also suggests that memories and the past make a person who they are, and this is why memories are important. A person’s identity, in other words, is made up of all their past experiences.

So, it’s interesting that Ivan admits in this passage that he purposefully tries to not remember his past. Though he attempts to pass it off as not being able to remember, saying that he’s “had a lot of time to work on” not remembering shows that Ivan is making a concerted effort to forget his past. At this early point in the novel, this begs the question of what, exactly, Ivan is so keen to forget. Later, he reveals that his early life was full of traumatic experiences, such as when humans murdered his parents and when his sister Tag died. Put another way, Ivan may simply be unwilling to remember the past right now because so many of his memories are extremely unhappy. It may be easier to forget his past and feel unmoored in his identity than it would be to accept his difficult past and know who he is.

change—worry Quotes

☝ “A good zoo,” Stella says, “is a large domain. A wild cage. A safe place to be. It has room to roam and humans who don’t hurt.” She pauses, considering her words. “A good zoo is how humans make amends.”

Related Characters: Stella (speaker), Maya/The Woman, Ruby, Mack, Bob, Ivan

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

As Stella tells Bob and Ivan a story one night, she explains to Bob what a zoo is (he’s never seen or heard of one). Stella’s description of what zoo enclosures are like makes it clear that in comparison, the way that she and Ivan live doesn’t come anywhere close. The domains at the zoo are large (while Ivan describes his and Stella’s domains at the mall as very small) and “wild,” which is a far cry from the glass, concrete, and metal that make up Ivan and Stella’s domains here.

Stella also defines the zoo as “safe,” with “humans who don’t

hurt.” Again, it’s possible to infer that by saying this, Stella is implying that neither of these things are the case here at the mall. Indeed, later in the novel, Mack hits the baby elephant Ruby with a claw-stick, something that denotes him as a cruel villain. Through all of this, Stella shows just how important zoos are for wild animals living in captivity.

Furthermore, Stella describes zoos as places where “humans make amends.” This suggests that it’s more or less common knowledge that some humans are cruel to animals, and that others feel compelled to make up for what their fellow humans have done. Zoos, in this case, show that humans are capable of being kind and compassionate to animals, at least under certain circumstances.

However, Stella also makes it clear that she’s talking about “good” zoos. This implies by extension that there are also bad zoos, where these positive things that Stella mentions don’t happen, and where animals presumably still suffer. Implying that there can be bad zoos helps explain why, later in the novel, Ivan and Ruby struggle to trust Maya (a zookeeper) when she tries to coax them into transport boxes to move them to a zoo. Ivan, at least, knows that not all zoos are happy, safe places—he just has to trust Maya that he’s attracted the attention of one of the good zoos.

helps explain why Mack chose to depict Ivan on the billboard as such a fearsome beast: that kind of a gorilla is, Stella suggests, what humans expect.

However, Ivan makes it clear that humans are misguided to see gorillas like this. Indeed, Ivan has described himself throughout the novel as peaceful and caring, not as violent. And the one time over the course of the novel that Ivan becomes angry and lashes out happens because Ivan is trying to care for Ruby and get her moved to a zoo—he’s not angry for no reason, and he suggests that all gorillas are like this. Besides, Ivan suggests, gorillas and humans aren’t so different from each other, even though humans would like to think they’re far superior to animals.



The fact that this story is true—Jambo was a real gorilla who watched over a little boy who fell into his enclosure—adds even more credence to Ivan’s insistence that people misunderstand and underestimate gorillas. Ivan may be fictional, but his story (and true stories like Jambo’s) nevertheless humanize gorillas for the readers. It’s of course impossible to trust that wild animals will always show humans kindness—but the novel suggests that those animals nevertheless deserve to be respected and treated humanely.


●● I’ve heard the Jambo story many times. Stella says that humans found it odd that the huge silverback didn’t kill the boy.

Why, I wonder, was that so surprising? The boy was young, scared, alone.

He was, after all, just another great ape.

Related Characters: Ivan (speaker), Mack, Bob, Stella

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Stella has just told Ivan and Bob the story of Jambo, a silverback gorilla in a zoo who kept watch over a little boy who fell into the gorillas’ enclosure until the boy regained consciousness. Jambo then led the troop away and humans rescued the boy. The fact that humans would expect Jambo to kill the boy illuminates how humans look at gorillas. They see them as dangerous, violent animals who are both capable and willing to kill humans if given the chance. This

●● “The circus trainers chained her to the floor, Ivan. All four feet. Twenty-three hours a day.”

I puzzle over why this would be a good idea. I always try to give humans the benefit of the doubt.

“Why would they do that?” I finally ask.

“To break her spirit,” Stella says. “So she could learn to balance on a pedestal. So she could stand on her hind legs. So a dog could jump on her back while she walked in mindless circles.”

I hear her tired voice and think of all the tricks Stella has learned.

Related Characters: Ivan, Stella (speaker), Mack, Snickers, Ruby

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

The baby elephant Ruby has recently arrived at the mall, and Ivan is asking another elephant, Stella, if Ruby is going to be okay. Rather than answer yes or no, though, Stella tells Ivan about what Ruby has already endured during her short

life.

Ivan does his best to not underestimate humans, even though they continuously underestimate and mistreat him. He acknowledges throughout the novel that humans sometimes have good ideas and can do things that seem magical to him—such as spinning cotton candy. But when it comes to the humans’ cruelty to animals, Ivan discovers that their actions are simply beyond his understanding. There’s no logical and reasonable reason, this passage suggests, to chain an elephant—let alone a baby elephant—to the floor for most of the day. Such a thing, Stella’s tone implies, is needlessly cruel.

But Stella also makes it clear that chaining Ruby up did have a purpose for the circus trainers—Ruby was supposed to learn all manner of tricks so that one day, she’d be able to perform in the shows. And learning these tricks, Stella seems to imply, is only possible once an elephant’s spirit has been broken. This also implies that Stella’s spirit has been broken—the tricks she describes Ruby learning are all the tricks that Stella performs regularly for Mack’s show in the mall. Learning tricks, she suggests, comes at a cost. It may make humans money, but being forced to learn tricks robs elephants of their dignity, their health, and their happiness.

“Why do you love [drawing]?” Ruby asks.

I pause. I’ve never talked to anyone about this before. “When I’m drawing a picture, I feel...quiet inside.”

Ruby frowns. “Quiet is boring.”

“Not always.”

Related Characters: Ivan, Ruby, Ivan, Ruby (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

On Ruby’s first morning at the mall, she and Ivan discuss art and why Ivan loves it so much. Generally speaking, as Ruby and Ivan have this conversation, they both learn that they can trust the other. Ivan shows Ruby that he’s going to answer her questions truthfully, and so Ruby learns that she can turn to Ivan for advice and support later on. With this, the two of them take the first step to becoming each other’s chosen family.

Then, it’s significant what Ivan says about how drawing makes him feel. Ruby, being a baby, seems to take Ivan’s

insistence that he feels “quiet” literally—she seems to think that this means no talking. But Ivan’s tone and delivery suggest that he defines “quiet” a bit differently. Drawing, for Ivan, puts him in contact with an old version of himself, who happily drew and painted with mud whenever he got the chance as an infant. As an adult living in captivity, Ivan doesn’t have quite the same opportunities to draw anymore—but drawing nevertheless connects him to his past, even if he’s not totally willing to articulate that yet.

“Bad humans killed my family, and bad humans sent me here. But that day in the hole, it was humans who saved me.” Ruby leans her head on Stella’s shoulder. “Those humans were good.”

“It doesn’t make any sense,” Bob says. “I just don’t understand them. I never will.”

“You’re not alone,” I say, and I turn my gaze back to the racing gray clouds.

Related Characters: Ivan, Bob, Ruby (speaker), Julia, Mack, Stella

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Ruby has just told a story about a time when she fell in a hole—and “good humans” saved Ruby from that hole. Bob and Ivan are having a hard time understanding that humans can be both good and bad. Bob, especially, has had such negative experiences with people (humans abandoned him and his siblings along a freeway when he was a puppy) that he doesn’t believe humans could also be compassionate.

Ruby, however, realizes that some humans are good and others are bad, despite the fact that she’s relatively young and immature. Not every human will be one thing or the other—there’s variation among people. And though Bob and Ivan seem to make a show here of not totally buying Ruby’s idea, they both nevertheless show through their actions that they believe her. Both of them adore Julia (the mall cleaner’s daughter), for instance, and Bob even allows Julia to scratch his ears sometimes—she is, to them, wholly good.

So, Ivan and Bob’s main problem is that it seems impossible to identify which humans are going to be kind, and which ones are going to mistreat animals. Ruby, for her part, had no way of knowing whether the humans who rescued her were going to rescue her, or whether they were going to

treat her cruelly. With this, the novel suggests that animals are vulnerable—they have to trust that humans are going to be kind to them, sometimes with no way to know whether they should or not.

“Mack says the vet’s coming in the morning if Stella’s not any better,” [George] tells Julia. “He says he’s not going to let her die on him, not after all the money he’s put into her.”

Related Characters: George, George (speaker), Mack, Stella, Julia, Mack

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Stella is unwell, so Julia begged George to call Mack and ask to have Stella seen by a vet. Mack is unwilling to call the vet until morning, a decision that ultimately results in Stella’s death.

Mack’s message to George shows how little he thinks of his animals. Stella is, to him, a way to make money—he’s put money into her by feeding her, housing her, and getting her veterinary care in the past, and so he feels that Stella has no choice but to stay alive and continue to allow him to make money by performing in his shows. Framing his unwillingness to let Stella die in terms of money shows where Mack’s priorities really lie. Mack doesn’t care about Stella’s health or well-being as a living, breathing animal with feelings of her own—a viewpoint that the novel implicitly condemns. It doesn’t seem to matter to Mack that Ivan describes Stella as being in obvious pain. The most important thing, for him, is making money. And as Stella’s death shows, it’s the animals that pay the price for his mindset.

the promise—a visit Quotes

“But many days I forget what I am supposed to be. Am I a human? Am I a gorilla?”

Humans have so many words, more than they truly need.

Still, they have no name for what I am.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Mack, Mack

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

After telling Ruby his life story, Ivan admits that the way that Mack has raised him has made knowing who and what he truly is difficult. This is because during Ivan’s early years after being captured from the wild, Mack raised Ivan like a human child. Ivan wore diapers and ate human foods, like soda and cake. This all came to an abrupt end, though, when Ivan was no longer a baby and Mack settled Ivan in his domain at the mall. Suddenly, Ivan didn’t have to act like a human anymore—he could be a gorilla, albeit one living an unusually solitary life.

So, Ivan essentially spent his younger years trying and failing to be human, and he sees the decades since then as time he’s spent trying and failing to be a gorilla in his “domain” (cage). It’s unclear to him, in his current situation, which identity he’s supposed to embrace. This, Ivan suggests, is partially an issue with human language. There’s simply no single word to describe a gorilla who was raised to be a human and who also hasn’t been allowed to really be a gorilla, either. In this way, Ivan sees himself as alone and impossible to understand.

a new beginning—another ivan Quotes

“Do you think,” she asks, “that I’ll die in this domain someday, like Aunt Stella?”

Once again I consider lying, but when I look at Ruby, the half-formed words die in my throat. “Not if I can help it,” I say instead.

I feel something tighten in my chest, something dark and hot. “And it’s not a domain,” I add.

I pause, and then I say it. “It’s a cage.”

Related Characters: Ivan, Ruby, Ivan, Ruby (speaker), Stella, Stella

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon, as Ruby and Ivan wait for the beginning of the final show, Ruby asks Ivan if she’s going to end up living and dying as Stella did. Ivan wants to protect Ruby, and at first, he thinks that the best way to protect her is by lying to her and insisting that there’s no way she’ll die like Stella did. But at this point, Ivan doesn’t fully believe he can keep the

promise he made to Stella to save Ruby, so telling Ruby that she's not going to die here with conviction seems cruel. Instead, Ivan decides to go for some version of the truth: that he's going to do what he can to get her out of here. He seems to decide that it's not worth it to get her hopes up if she's only going to be disappointed when he can't save her. So, it's better to acknowledge that he's going to try, while also carefully choosing his words to make it clear that it's a long shot that he'll be successful.

Then, it's especially significant that Ivan feels the need to correct Ruby's use of the word "domain." Throughout the novel, Ivan has also described his enclosure as a domain. The word suggests that Ivan and Ruby are powerful and in control when they're in their enclosures; it's a word that makes their captivity seem less awful and more like something they have a say in. Telling Ruby that she's actually living in a cage forces Ruby to confront that her captivity is making her miserable, and that there's no reason to sugarcoat it. Thus, in this passage, Ivan essentially shows how important it is to tell the truth. Doing so can be one of the best ways to care for a loved one, even if the truth is uncomfortable and difficult to accept.


☝ I stare at the One and Only Ivan, at the faded picture of Stella, and I remember George and Mack on their ladders, adding the picture of Ruby to bring new visitors to the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade.


I remember the story Ruby told, the one where the villagers came to her rescue.

I hear Stella's kind, wise voice: *Humans can surprise you sometimes.*

I look at my fingers, coated in red paint the color of blood, and I know how to keep my promise.

Related Characters: Ivan (speaker), George, Mack, Stella, Ruby

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan promised Stella right before she died that he'd get Ruby someplace safe, and here, he finally figures out how to do that. Staring at the billboard that advertises him and the other animals at the mall, Ivan starts to see that art doesn't have to just be drawing the bananas and candy wrappers in

his domain. Rather, art is something that can foster communication between beings and tell people important things. Ivan realizes that the billboard, for instance, communicates to passing cars that at the mall, they can expect to see Ivan, Stella, and Ruby. It shows passersby what's possible, and Ivan realizes he can use this to his advantage—he decides to paint a billboard-sized painting of Ruby in an effort to catch people's attention get Ruby moved to a zoo.

Then, Ivan also remembers that people aren't all bad, like Mack or like the poachers who killed Ivan and Ruby's families. Sometimes, as Ruby and Stella both acknowledged, people are capable of surprising kindness. With this, Ivan starts to see that he can't save Ruby on his own. Rather, he needs to use his art to try to communicate with humans, ones who will do whatever is necessary to get Ruby to safety. This requires trust on Ivan's part, as there's no guarantee that his billboard painting is actually going to reach the right people—but nevertheless, Ivan has to try. It's also significant that Ivan describes the red paint on his fingers as the color of blood. This makes it clear that the consequences of not helping Ruby will be dire—Ruby's blood will be on Ivan's hands if he doesn't at least try to help her.



days—finally Quotes

☝ Mack turns on my TV. It's a Western. There's a human with a big hat and a small gun. He has a shiny star pinned to his chest. That means he is the sheriff and he will be getting rid of all the bad guys.

"If this sells quick, I'm getting you some more of that paint, buddy," Mack says.

He walks away with my painting. Ruby's painting. For a moment, I imagine what it would feel like to be that sheriff.

Related Characters: Mack, Ivan, Mack, Ivan (speaker), Ruby, Ruby

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:    

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan has recently begun painting a mural depicting Ruby at the zoo. He's working on small pieces of paper that fit together to create a massive image, and he's been hiding the

pieces of paper under his plastic pool so that Mack doesn't sell them in the gift shop—but now, Mack has found one of Ivan's paintings.

In this moment, Ivan starts to feel anger, something he's previously associated with being a silverback gorilla. Ivan doesn't believe he's a real silverback because he's never angry, and he doesn't have anyone to protect. But his anger starts to bubble up at Mack largely because Ivan is trying to protect Ruby. He's trying to get her to a zoo, where she'll live a happier, healthier life than she will here at the mall.

Then, it's also significant that Ivan starts to think of Mack as a "bad guy[]" here. Although Ivan has previously taken issue with Mack's use of the claw-stick and has dropped clues that Mack is a neglectful owner, Ivan hasn't really made any value judgements about him. But here, as Ivan describes what a sheriff is and what a sheriff does, he starts to mentally step into the role of a sheriff—which in Ivan's understanding, makes him the good guy. And saying that he'd like to be like the sheriff (meaning he'd like to get rid of the bad guys) suggests that Ivan has finally identified Mack as his real enemy.

●● It's different now, when I paint.

I'm not painting what I see in front of me. A banana. An apple. I'm painting what I see in my head. Things that don't exist.

At least, not yet.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Mack, Julia, Ruby, Mack, Julia, Ruby

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

After Ivan sees a commercial for the local zoo, he learns the imagery he needs to convey that Ruby belongs at the zoo and not at the mall. So, the picture he's painting is imaginary—but he hopes it will come true someday soon. Prior to his choice to create this painting for Ruby, Ivan described his paintings and drawings as "pale" and "timid" next to Julia's imaginary ones. This is because Ivan stuck to drawing the objects he could see in his "domain" (cage), which only conveyed how bored Ivan was in his unstimulating domain. His drawings, in other words, symbolized his sadness about his captivity, even if he couldn't put that into words.

Now, though, Ivan has realized that he isn't limited to

painting what he sees in front of him. He can also turn to his imagination and create whole worlds that he's never seen before, such as this one where Ruby is living in a zoo with other animals. And shifting how he makes art doesn't just give Ivan a better sense of purpose—it releases his creativity and helps him become the artist he's always wanted to be. Ivan also realizes through doing this that he doesn't just need to make art for himself or for Mack. He can also make art with the intention of changing things about his world—hopefully, his painting will attract the attention of people who will then help get Ruby moved to a zoo. When that happens, Ivan's imaginary painting won't be imaginary anymore.

●● During the last show of the day, Ruby seems tired. When she stumbles, Mack reaches for the claw-stick.

I tense, waiting for her to strike back.

Ruby doesn't even flinch. She just keeps plodding along, and after a while, Snickers jumps onto her back.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Stella, Snickers, Mack, Ruby, Stella, Snickers, Mack, Ruby

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan has been working on his painting for Ruby for several weeks now, and it's becoming increasingly clear to him how necessary it is that he succeeds—Mack is becoming crueler to Ruby when she doesn't behave perfectly during the shows at the mall. The way Ivan describes Ruby suggests that after several weeks of training, Mack is starting to break her spirit. Ruby isn't just tired—she's no longer willing to fight back when Mack threatens to hurt her. This stands in sharp contrast to her first training session with Mack, when Ruby hit Mack in the groin after he threatened her with the claw-stick. Now, it seems like Mack is able to actually hit Ruby, and Ruby doesn't even acknowledge the hit.

Ivan realizes that Ruby is just a baby; walking around in circles is boring for her, and the novel frames forcing her to do so as cruel and inhumane. But Mack doesn't seem willing or able to grasp this about Ruby. To him, Ruby's job is to perform and bring in money. So, it's acceptable to do

whatever is necessary to get Ruby to perform, even if might be construed as cruel.

Ruby's behavior is especially sad given how, earlier in the novel, Stella explained to Ivan that circus trainers wanted to break Ruby's spirit so she could walk in circles while a dog jumped on her back. That's exactly what's happening here—and seeing this only deepens Ivan's resolve to advocate for a better life for Ruby.



●● I'm ready to show Julia what I've made.

It has to be Julia. She's an artist. Surely she'll look, truly look, at my painting. She won't notice the smudges and tears. She won't care if the pieces don't quite fit together. She'll see past all of that.

Surely Julia will see what I've imagined.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), George, Mack, Ruby, Julia, George, Mack, Ruby, Julia

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

After working on his painting for weeks, Ivan is at the point where he's ready to share it with Julia. He believes that since they're both artists, Julia is the only person with a chance of being able to understand what Ivan is trying to convey.

In this passage, Ivan makes the case that art allows people (and animals) to connect with one another in ways that they otherwise wouldn't be able to. Julia and Ivan can't speak or write to each other—Ivan can understand what Julia says to him, but he can't read and doesn't speak English. So, most of the time, Ivan has to resort to body language and facial expressions to communicate with her, if he's not going to use his art. Art, though, is something the novel situates as being more powerful and more successful as a form of communication between species. If a being is willing to truly look at another's artwork, it's possible to understand the other being's thoughts and feelings.

Ivan also feels this way because he and Julia's relationship is close and trusting. Julia simply sees Ivan as a fellow living being, not as an animal who's less intelligent than she is. This sets her apart from both Mack and George, for instance,

who don't believe that Ivan is capable of intelligent thought. So, Ivan knows that while Julia, as an artist, is the only person who will be able to figure out what he's painted, he also knows that Julia is the only person who will be willing to take the time and try. Since she believes that he's capable of communicating, she'll be able to look past Ivan's mistakes and see what he intended.

●● *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

I bounce off the walls. I screech and bellow. I beat and beat and beat my chest.

Bob hides under Not-Tag, his paws over his ears.

I'm angry, at last.

I have someone to protect.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), George, Julia, Ruby, George, Julia, Ruby

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan has just tried to show Julia his painting depicting Ruby at the zoo, but she and George are in a hurry to get home and don't understand what Ivan is trying to show them. This brings about a major change in Ivan. Up until this point, he hasn't felt like a real silverback gorilla. Silverbacks, he explains, are the leaders of their families, and their job is to protect others. They do this by tapping into their anger—but Ivan has previously described anger as being "precious" to a silverback, so getting angry isn't something they do often.

This makes it clear that Ivan's anger in this passage is something new and important, and something that connects him to his identity as a silverback for the first time in his life.

The fact that Ivan has this reaction and finally feels like he has someone to protect speaks to the power of family. The novel shows that no matter what a family looks like or whether it's chosen or biological, family members can help one another become who they're supposed to be. Prior to Ruby's arrival, Ivan didn't really feel like he had a family to rely on. But now that he's stepped into a parental role and is trying to get Ruby a better life, Ivan feels like the silverback that he suggests he's supposed to be.

the next morning—photo Quotes

☞☞ Mack turns on the TV.



We are on *The Early News at Five O'Clock*.

Bob says don't let it go to my head.

There we all are. Mack, Ruby, me. George and Julia. The billboard, the mall, the ring.

And the claw-stick.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Julia, George, Ruby, Mack, Bob, Julia, George, Ruby, Mack, Bob

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:      

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

The day that reporters come to interview Mack, George, and Julia about Ivan's billboard painting, the mall ends up on the evening news—and the piece prominently features a shot the claw-stick that Mack uses to hit Ruby when training her to do tricks. At first, both Ivan and Bob seem to believe that ending up on the news is just another aspect of Ivan's growing fame. Ivan has always been somewhat famous, simply for being a gorilla in captivity but also for being an artist. His fame has only grown since George and Julia put his painting up on the billboard for everyone to see. So, at first, it makes sense to Ivan that this is just a natural extension of his growing fame.

However, Ivan's note that the claw-stick features so prominently in this newscast suggests that this piece isn't just about Ivan and his art. Rather, the newscast is actually about Ivan's cry for help, and the reasons why Ivan is asking for help in the first place. This suggests that Ivan has been successful in conveying that Ruby belongs in a zoo through his billboard painting. But it also shows that Ivan has also inadvertently made it clear that he and Ruby don't live in good conditions. They're neglected and are sometimes subject to cruel training methods—such as the claw-stick. But put simply, this means that Ivan has successfully used his art to communicate with humans.

☞☞ She starts to leave, then runs back to my cage. "I almost forgot. This is for you, Ivan."

She slips a piece of paper into my cage. It's a drawing of Ruby and me.

We're eating yogurt raisins. Ruby is playing with another baby elephant, and I'm holding hands with a lovely gorilla.

She has red lips and a flower in her hair.

I look, as I always do in Julia's pictures, like an elegant fellow, but something is different about this drawing.

In this picture, I am smiling.

Related Characters: Ivan, Julia, Ivan, Julia (speaker), Kinyani, Ruby, Kinyani, Ruby

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 247-48

Explanation and Analysis

When Julia says goodbye to Ivan and Ruby (they're being moved to the zoo tomorrow), she offers Ivan a drawing as a parting gift. Just like Ivan's billboard painting, Julia's drawing comes from her imagination—and it expresses hope for the future. In the world of Julia's drawing, Ruby is happily playing with other baby elephants like her, and Ivan has found love with a beautiful female gorilla at the zoo. This drawing speaks again to the power of art to show people new versions of the future. While Julia's drawing doesn't bring about change as Ivan's billboard did, it nevertheless shows Ivan what's possible once he moves to the zoo: happiness, for both him and for Ruby.

Then, it's particularly compelling that Julia has, for seemingly the first time ever, depicted Ivan with a smile. In her earlier drawings of him, she's drawn him looking sad and down—something that reflected how unhappy Ivan was with his life at the mall (or perhaps more accurately, how sad Julia was about the kind of life Ivan lived at the mall). Showing him happy, though, suggests that Julia's work here is done. She's the person who has helped Ivan with his art over the years and connected with him through their shared love of art. She's been essentially showing him the tools he'd need to secure his own happiness—and now, with this drawing, Julia shows that Ivan has been successful.

“Do you think the other gorillas will like you?” Ruby asks. “I’m a silverback, Ruby. A leader.” I pull back my shoulders and hold my head high. “They don’t have to like me. They have to respect me.”

Even as I tell her this, I wonder if I can ever command their respect.

I haven’t had much practice being a real gorilla, much less a silverback.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ruby (speaker), Mack, Stella

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

In the days before Ivan and Ruby are moved to the zoo, they discuss what life will be like for them there. As Ivan explains that the other gorillas don’t have to like him, he gives more information about what it means to be a silverback—something that Ivan desperately wants the chance to be. Ruby’s question (and Ivan’s answer) also shows how different elephant culture is from gorilla culture. This suggests that integrating into a family of gorillas is going to be a big shift for Ivan. For the last several decades, he’s been living with a variety of other animals—but no gorillas.

For Ivan, it’s becoming clear that while his friendships with Stella and Ruby (and perhaps, for a time, Mack) have been meaningful and have gotten him through a difficult period of his life, they also haven’t really prepared him to be a silverback around other gorillas. Because Mack raised Ivan as a human and then locked him up in a cage all by himself, Ivan hasn’t had to interact with other gorillas since he was an infant—let alone lead and protect them. So, this move will be a learning experience for Ivan, just as it will be for Ruby.

leaving—mighty silverback Quotes

I move toward the young upstart, and he retreats. Almost as if he believes I’m the silverback I’m pretending to be.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Maya/The Woman, Maya/The Woman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after Maya, a zookeeper, introduces Ivan to the gorilla family at the zoo, Ivan decides to pretend to be a “mighty silverback.” What starts as just pretending, though, eventually starts to feel true for Ivan. With this, the novel makes it clear that a person (or an animal) doesn’t have to be fully comfortable in their identity at all times. It’s okay, as Ivan does here, to essentially “fake it until you make it.” By doing this, Ivan starts to step into the role of an actual silverback, the head of a gorilla family.

Before, Ivan didn’t have a gorilla family to protect and instead protected Ruby and Bob. And while the novel suggests that Ivan’s chosen family with Ruby and Bob is no less meaningful than a gorilla family, it also acknowledges that Ivan is having to learn new skills here as he figures out how to communicate with his new family members. Ivan may have practice being a protector, but he doesn’t necessarily have the practice being a protector to gorillas. But as Ivan continues to pretend to be a powerful silverback, the novel suggests that he’ll become more and more comfortable embodying this role.

They stand side by side, just the way Stella and Ruby used to. Their trunks entwine. I see something new in Ruby’s eyes, and I know what it is.

It’s joy.



I watch the whole thing, and then Maya plays it again for me, and again. At last she turns off the TV and carries it out of the cage.

I put my hand to the glass. Maya looks over.

Thank you, I try to say with my eyes. Thank you.

Related Characters: Ivan, Ivan (speaker), Ruby, Maya/The Woman, Ruby, Maya/The Woman

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

After Ivan has been at the zoo a few weeks, Maya shows him video footage of Ruby with the other elephants at the zoo—and Ruby is obviously very happy. This video shows Ivan that he was right to promise Stella to get Ruby to try to get Ruby a better life, and he was right to decide that that meant getting her to a zoo. Ivan realizes that advocating for Ruby the way he did is what ensured that she’s going to live

the rest of her life happy and well cared for, in a place where she'll never have to perform or be abused again.

Seeing this video on TV also represents a major departure from the way that Ivan has viewed TV for much of the novel. At the mall, TV showed Ivan a fantasy world where there were clear good guys and bad guys. It didn't have much to do with Ivan's lived experience as a gorilla living in a small cage; rather, it provided Ivan an escape. This video, though, shows Ivan what is true, and what he managed to do.

Ivan also recognizes that Maya knows how Ivan interacts

with the TV; she knows that he not only watches it but actually understands what he sees on it. In this way, Maya respects Ivan's intelligence and treats him like the fellow great ape that Ivan suggests he is—they're not so different from each other, though they can't speak the same language. This is one of the reasons that Ivan makes a point to try to thank Maya as best he can. He's thanking her for saving Ruby—but he's also thanking her for taking him seriously and not underestimating him.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

HELLO—THE LITTLEST BIG TOP ON EARTH

hello. Ivan introduces himself: his name is Ivan, and he's a gorilla. Being a gorilla isn't "as easy as it looks."

names. People call Ivan "the Freeway Gorilla," the "Ape at Exit 8," or "The One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback." The names belong to Ivan, but they don't really describe him. He's just Ivan. Humans, in Ivan's opinion, "waste words." They throw them on the ground like banana peels—and everyone knows the peels are the best part of the banana. Addressing the reader, Ivan suggests that they probably don't think gorillas can understand them—but they probably also think that gorillas can't walk upright. He suggests that they try "knuckle walking" for an hour, and then come back and tell him which is more fun.

patience. Over the years, Ivan has learned to understand human speech. But this isn't the same as being able to understand humans. Humans talk too much, like chimps. They talk even when there's nothing to say. Ivan was very patient as he learned to identify human words and phrases. It's useful to be patient, and gorillas are "as patient as stones." Humans aren't.

how I look. Ivan used to be wild, and he still looks like a wild gorilla. He has a "shy gaze" and a "sly smile." His back is snowy, which makes him a silverback. His shadow is majestic, like that of all of gorillas. Humans look at Ivan's size and see him as a challenge. They think he wants to fight, but Ivan is usually just thinking about how the sun reminds him of a nectarine.

Ivan is 400 pounds, bigger and more powerful than any human. His family tree is also huge, as he's a great ape, just like humans, chimps, orangutans, and bonobos. They're all "distant and distrustful cousins." He realizes that this is troubling and finds it difficult that he's linked to "a race of ill-mannered clowns." There's no excuse for chimps.

Insisting that being a gorilla isn't "as easy as it looks" indicates that Ivan believes human readers have preconceived notions about what it's like to be a gorilla—and they're probably wrong.



The association of Ivan with a highway exit and the descriptions of him as "The One and Only" and "Mighty Silverback" suggest that he's some kind of roadside attraction for a human audience. But Ivan doesn't seem to like these names, because he just wants to be himself—not the spectacle that humans make him out to be. Ivan also makes it clear here that even though he's an animal, he isn't inferior to humans. He has a rich inner life and can engage in higher-level thinking, just like people do.



Ivan suggests here that he's become human in that he can understand what humans say to him. But in important ways, Ivan is still a gorilla—he's patient, and he still believes that gorillas, who he insists are quieter and choose their words more carefully than humans do, have the right idea.



This passage again suggests that how people see and think of gorillas isn't necessarily correct. Ivan isn't an aggressive challenger just because he's a gorilla. Instead, he's "shy," "sly," majestic, and poetic. Indeed, he seems more interested in peacefully enjoying the sun than anything else.



By noting that he, as a gorilla, is distantly related to both humans and chimps, Ivan encourages readers to see that he's not so different from them. But describing them as "distrustful cousins" suggests that some connection has gotten lost in translation over the millennia; now, humans and the other great apes struggle to communicate and trust one another.



the exit 8 big top mall and video arcade. Ivan lives in the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, located off of I-95. There are shows at two, four, and seven, every day of the year. This is what Mack, the boss, says whenever he answers the telephone. Ivan works at the mall too; he's the gorilla. In addition to him, there's a carousel, monkeys, and parrots. In the very middle, there's a ring with benches for humans to sit on. Sawdust, which is made of dead trees, covers the floor.

Ivan's domain is at one end of the big ring. He lives in the domain because he's "too much gorilla and not enough human." The elephant Stella lives next to Ivan in her own domain, and along with a dog named Bob, she's Ivan's closest friend. He doesn't have any gorilla friends.

Ivan's domain is made of glass, rusty metal, and cement. Stella's is made of metal bars. Three of the walls in Ivan's domain are glass, though one is cracked with a hole in it. Ivan made the hole with a baseball bat that Mack gave him on his sixth birthday. Mack took the bat away but let Ivan keep the ball. On one wall of Ivan's domain is a painted jungle scene. Ivan didn't paint the scene, and it doesn't look much like a jungle, but he likes it anyway.

Ivan is lucky, in that his domain has three walls that are windows. Through them, he can see the mall and even some of the parking lot. Beyond that is a freeway where cars drive constantly. There's a giant **billboard** beside it, encouraging humans to stop and rest. Though the sign is faded, Ivan knows exactly what it says, since Mack read it out loud one day. It reads: "COME TO THE EXIT 8 BIG TOP MALL AND VIDEO ARCADE, HOME OF THE ONE AND ONLY IVAN, MIGHTY SILVERBACK!" Ivan can't read, but he wishes he could. Reading would be a great way to pass the time. He did once get to "enjoy" a book that a keeper left in his domain; it tasted like termites.

Ivan can parrot what Mack says on the phone presumably because he hears it all the time—an indicator that Ivan's day-to-day life doesn't have much variety. Noting that the sawdust is made of dead trees shows that Ivan sees the world differently than many humans do. To most people, sawdust is just sawdust—but to Ivan, sawdust represents a tree's death. This hints that he, as an animal, has a deeper connection to nature than most people do.



Ivan's word choice is important: he thinks of his habitat as a "domain," not a cage. The word "domain" suggests that this space belongs to him and that he has power over what happens here. But still, Ivan's domain reiterates that he's "too much gorilla and not enough human," meaning that he doesn't fit in with humans even though he lives in their world. In a way, being in captivity means that he doesn't fit in anywhere—he's separated from other gorillas in their natural habitat, but he's also separated from the humans around him.



Ivan doesn't describe his domain as being particularly homey; the glass, metal, and cement instead suggest that it's cold and bare. The fact that Mack still hasn't fixed the hole Ivan made with the baseball bat is a possible indicator that Mack doesn't care for his animals and their enclosures as he perhaps should.



Ivan might live in captivity, but fortunately for him, he still gets to see a fair bit of the world around him. However, Ivan's description implies that everything that happens to him, or that he sees, is routine: the cars pass "constantly," and it's clear that the billboard's message hasn't changed in some time, since it's so faded. Indeed, Ivan even implies here that he's bored, since he wishes he had more ways to pass the time. The novelty of getting to eat a keeper's book seems like it was a big deal for him, suggesting that he doesn't get to experience new things very often.



That **billboard** along the freeway features a drawing of Mack dressed as a clown, Stella on her hind legs, and an “angry animal with fierce eyes and unkempt hair.” The animal is supposed to be Ivan, but the artist got his likeness all wrong. Ivan is never angry. For gorillas, anger is precious; silverbacks use anger to keep order and warn their troops of danger. When Ivan’s father used to beat his chest, it always conveyed that he was in charge and angry because he was protecting his troop. In Ivan’s domain, there’s nobody to protect.

the littlest big top on earth. Ivan’s neighbors at the mall know lots of tricks, and they’re very educated. A chicken plays baseball, while a rabbit drives a fire truck. Ivan used to have a seal for a neighbor who could balance a ball on her nose for hours on end. Children used to wish on pennies and then toss the pennies into the seal’s plastic pool. One day, the seal was either hungry or bored and ate 100 pennies. Mack insisted that the seal would be fine, but he was wrong.

Mack calls the show “The Littlest Big Top on Earth.” Every day, during the three shows at two, four, and seven, humans applaud and drink sodas. Mack dresses as a clown and rides on a tiny bike, while a dog named Snickers rides on Stella’s back. Stella sits on a sturdy stool. Ivan doesn’t do tricks, since according to Mack, it’s enough for Ivan to be himself. Stella has told Ivan about circuses that move from town to town, with lions and humans that swing from ropes. Those circuses have whole lines of elephants who look into the distance, so that they don’t have to see the humans who want to look at them. This circus doesn’t move.

After every show, humans “forage” through the stores at the mall. A store, Ivan explains, is where humans buy the things they require to live. Some stores at the Big Top Mall sell new things, like balloons or T-shirts. Other stores sell old things. Ivan spends his days watching humans run through the stores, passing green paper back and forth. No matter how many bags of things the humans leave with, they always come back to the store for more. Humans are pretty clever—they can, for instance, spin edible “pink clouds.” But they’re awful hunters.

It’s telling that Ivan doesn’t even describe the “angry animal” on the billboard as a gorilla, let alone make it clear from the start that it specifically depicts him. This depiction, in Ivan’s opinion, is so far from the truth that it’s not even appropriate for him to identify with the drawing. In this way, Ivan—and perhaps all animals—are misunderstood by humans. Ivan also suggests that he’s lonely and unfulfilled here in his domain, since there’s nobody to protect.



Describing his neighbors as “educated” suggests that Ivan holds being able to do tricks in high regard. In this way, he links his and his fellow animals’ worth to their ability to obey and entertain humans. But living the way that Ivan and his neighbors do has a cost, as the implied death of Ivan’s former seal neighbor showed. Whether she ate the pennies out of hunger or out of boredom, both scenarios indicate that Mack is neglecting his animals. Ivan confirms this when he suggests the seal died because Mack didn’t get her the medical care she needed.



Mack seems to think of Ivan, a gorilla, as an attraction all on his own—it’s not necessary for Ivan to be trained to do anything, unlike the other animals at the mall. Stella, meanwhile, suggests that there’s a major toll to being forced to perform like this every day. Describing the circus elephants as not wanting to look at the people who have come to see them suggests that the circus environment makes them unhappy. All the animals are, perhaps, at the mercy of their human handlers and their human audiences.



Ivan’s understanding of shopping at stores is limited, given that he’s a gorilla and doesn’t totally understand how human society works. But he also suggests that although humans might feel superior to other animals, this might be somewhat misguided. Ivan implies that if he were a wild gorilla, his foraging would be far more effective than humans’ is.



GONE—THE BEETLE

gone. While some animals live private lives, Ivan does not. His life consists of flashing lights and lots of visitors. Humans put their small hands against the glass that keeps them apart. The glass says, “you are this and we are that and that is how it will always be.” The humans’ fingerprints get left behind until a tired man wipes them at the end of the day. Ivan sometimes puts his nose against the glass to make a nose print. When the man wipes the nose print away, Ivan is gone too.

artists. There isn’t much for Ivan to do in his domain. He can only throw so many me-balls (dried balls of dung) at humans before it gets boring. He always keeps some me-balls on hand, but visitors don’t seem to have any. In Ivan’s domain, there’s a tire swing, a baseball, a little pool with dirty water, and an old **TV**. Ivan also has a stuffed toy gorilla, which Julia, the cleaner’s daughter, gave him. The toy gorilla is floppy and looks empty, but Ivan sleeps with it every night. He calls it Not-Tag; Tag was his twin sister.

Julia is 10. She has black hair and a big smile, and she and Ivan have lots in common: they’re both great apes *and* artists. Julia gave Ivan his first crayon through the hole in his glass. Having watched Julia draw before, Ivan knew what to do with it. Julia draws lots of things that aren’t real, like smiling clouds and swimming cars. Ivan thinks that her pictures are “like pieces of a dream.” Ivan can’t draw pictures like hers, since he doesn’t remember his dreams. Sometimes he wakes up with his fists balled up and his heart pounding, though.

Next to Julia’s drawings, Ivan’s are “pale and timid.” Ivan focuses on drawing things in his cage, like apple cores and banana peels. He draws the same things many times, but he never gets bored when he’s making art. He can focus on the act of drawing with a crayon in his hand. Humans often don’t recognize what Ivan draws. When they look at his pictures of bananas, they sometimes think he’s drawn an airplane or a wingless duck. Ivan doesn’t mind, since he’s drawing for himself, not for them. After a while, Mack realized that people would buy Ivan’s drawings. Now, Ivan draws every day. In the gift shop, his drawings go for \$20—or \$25 with a frame. When Ivan gets tired of drawing, he eats his crayons.

Ivan is matter-of-fact about living a very public life, but it nevertheless seems to take a toll on him. Indeed, suggesting that he’s gone when the man wipes his nose prints off the glass suggests that Ivan feels like he’s being erased too—like he only exists when people are looking at him. So, even if Ivan said earlier that his identity as a roadside attraction isn’t really him, he nevertheless associates his worth with being an attraction.



Again, the way that Ivan describes his domain suggests that it’s very small, and that his life in it isn’t particularly happy or healthy (especially since he describes the water in his pool as “dirty”). Further, the way that Ivan introduces Not-Tag and Tag is important—Tag was Ivan’s twin sister. Using the past tense here suggests that Tag isn’t alive anymore, though it’s unclear what, exactly, happened to her. Regardless, this begins to imply that Ivan’s past before he came to live at the mall wasn’t particularly happy.



Ivan and Julia’s relationship shows what’s possible with animal-human relationships when both parties are willing to see each other more or less as equals. Ivan recognizes that as a member of the great ape family tree, Julia really isn’t so far removed from him. And as artists, they can connect with each other by sharing supplies and admiring each other’s work. Meanwhile, the aside that Ivan sometimes wakes up from what seems like bad dreams again suggests that his past was unhappy.



It’s possible to see that Ivan’s drawings are so “pale and timid” compared to Julia because, unlike her, Ivan lives in a very small domain. In his domain, there’s not a lot to draw besides garbage, and he doesn’t seem to have enough mental stimulation to draw things out of his imagination. His captivity, in this sense, is stifling his creativity. But this doesn’t mean that his drawings aren’t still valuable: they sell for up to \$25. But Ivan also implies that the drawings are valuable in part because many humans underestimate what Ivan is capable of, so a crayon drawing seems like a bigger deal than it really is.



shapes in clouds. Ivan thinks he's always been an artist. When he was a baby and still clung to his mother, he'd notice shapes in the clouds or sculptures in stones. He'd grab for colorful things, like birds or flowers. Ivan doesn't remember much of his early life, but he does remember using mud to draw on his mother's back. His mother was "a patient soul."

imagination. Ivan hopes that someday, he can draw like Julia; that is, he can draw worlds that don't yet exist. He's aware that most humans don't think gorillas have imaginations, or they think that gorillas can't remember the past or think about the future. Maybe they have a point. Ivan tries to think about what already is, not what might happen. He's learned that he shouldn't get his hopes up.

the loneliest gorilla in the world. At first, when the Big Top Mall was new, it smelled fresh and clean and humans visited all day long. Lately, though, there have been days when no one visits. Mack is worried and says that Ivan isn't cute anymore. He tells Ivan that Ivan has lost his magic, and Ivan agrees—people don't stick around to stare at him like they used to. Now, they say that Ivan looks lonely. Not too long ago, a little boy sobbed as he looked at Ivan and said that Ivan must be the loneliest gorilla in the world. Then, Ivan wished that humans could understand him. He wanted to tell the boy that it's not so bad—you can get used to pretty much anything with enough time.

tv. Ivan's visitors are usually surprised when they see the **TV** in his domain. They think it's odd that a gorilla would stare "at tiny humans in a box." But Ivan thinks that it's just as strange that humans stare at *Ivan*, sitting in his own tiny box. The TV is old, and sometimes, nobody remembers to turn it on. Ivan enjoys cartoons most of all, since they're brightly colored, and the people in them sometimes slip on banana peels.

Bob loves **TV** too, though he prefers watching bowling and commercials for cat food. Bob and Ivan also watch a lot of romance movies, with hugging and "face licking." Ivan hasn't seen a single romance starring a gorilla. They watch Westerns, too, which Ivan likes because it's easy to tell who's good and who's bad—and the good guys always win. According to Bob, Westerns aren't like real life.

Here, Ivan tells readers a little more about how he'd like others to see him: as an artist, and a lifelong one at that. Mack might be helping Ivan embody this identity by having him draw every day for the gift shop, but Ivan's earlier descriptions suggest that he doesn't find drawing for Mack quite so fulfilling.



Ivan confirms that his drawings are appealing to people because they don't expect a gorilla to be able to draw. But he implies that he's unwilling to use his imagination because he might get his hopes up and then be disappointed. He thinks that in order to protect himself, it's better to not think about the future or draw fantastical pictures, like Julia does.



At this point, it's unclear exactly how long Ivan has been in the mall, but charting how the mall has changed over time suggests that it's been a while. Further, the fact that no one is visiting implies that the mall might be struggling financially—the fact that there are no visitors means that nobody is spending money at the mall. Importantly, Ivan doesn't push back on the boy's insistence that he's the loneliest gorilla in the world—he just implies that he's used to being lonely. This in and of itself illuminates how sad and unfulfilling Ivan's life in captivity is.



Ivan seems to suggest that at least when one lives among humans, it's not odd to stare at beings "in a box." He realizes that both humans and gorillas need entertainment—and just because he's entertainment for the visitors doesn't mean that he doesn't need his own entertainment.



As Ivan talks about Western films, he implies that he wants to live in a world where it's easy to tell whether someone is good or evil. But to Bob, this just isn't how life works. This also suggests that Ivan might have a more black and white view of the world around him; he might not see things for how they really are.



the nature show. Ivan has been in his domain for 9,855 days, totally alone. When he was young and naïve, he thought he was the last gorilla on the planet. He tried to think of other things, but it's hard to stay positive if you believe you're the last of your kind. But then, one night, a new kind of show came on after a Western. Ivan watched a forest on the screen—and then, he saw a male gorilla. The gorilla vanished, and Ivan watched a polar bear and a manatee. He thought about the gorilla a lot after that and wondered where he lived. Would that gorilla ever come to visit, and are there female gorillas out there too? Or are there just two male gorillas in the world, trapped in boxes?

stella. Stella is certain that one day, Ivan will see another real gorilla. Ivan believes her because she's old and knows a lot. She's like a mountain; Ivan is just a rock next to her, while Bob is as tiny as a grain of sand. Ivan and Stella talk every night after the stores close. Even though they don't have a lot in common, they have enough to connect: they're both big, alone, and love yogurt raisins. Stella sometimes talks about her childhood in a jungle. She remembers everything about her past, unlike Ivan. She loves the moon, while Ivan loves the sun. And though they talk, they don't talk too much—both elephants and gorillas dislike “wasting” words.

Stella used to work for a big, famous circus. She still sometimes does the tricks she learned there for the show here. She stands on her hind legs while Snickers jumps on her head. This is a difficult trick when you're as big as Stella is. If a circus elephant does the trick right, they get treats. If they do it wrong, “the **claw-stick** comes swinging.” Though elephants' skin is very thick, a claw-stick can pierce it easily. One time, Stella watched a trainer hit a bull elephant with a claw-stick. The bull tossed the trainer with his trunk. Stella told Ivan that the man flew—but she never saw the bull elephant again after that.

stella's trunk. Ivan thinks of Stella's trunk as a miracle. With it, she can pick up single peanuts, tickle mice, and tap humans' shoulders. However, it can't open the door of her domain. Stella has scars on her legs from the chains she wore as a young elephant. She calls the chains her “bracelets.”

Earlier in the novel, Ivan took great pride in being a gorilla and in looking how a gorilla should look. But it's hard to take pride in being a perfect specimen, he suggests, when there's no one like him to admire him and see him for who he really is. So, the gorilla on the TV here is helpful—Ivan now knows for sure that he's not totally alone in the world—but it also shows Ivan what he's missing. He's not the only gorilla, but it doesn't seem likely that he'll ever get to meet another being like himself.



Ivan makes the case that making friends doesn't require having much in common—he might also share the things that he and Stella have in common with a number of other animals or humans. It's significant, though, that Ivan is so insistent that he doesn't remember his past, unlike Stella remembers hers—he says it like it's something he's proud of, or like it's something he's trying to convince himself is true.



The claw-stick emerges as a symbol of human cruelty. It's used to make animals who greatly outweigh humans comply and perform difficult maneuvers—which shows that it doesn't take much for humans to exert their power over animals, even large ones. Indeed, Stella implies that the bull elephant who tossed the trainer was probably euthanized or disposed of in some way, suggesting that the circus prizes obedience over all else.



In calling her chains “bracelets,” Stella is using language much like Ivan does when he talks about his “domain” rather than his cage. It makes it seem like Stella was in control and wanted to wear the chains—she's trying to make them seem desirable and beautiful.



Back then, Stella had to balance on a pedestal as part of a trick. One time, she fell off the pedestal and hurt her foot. She never recovered, so the circus sold her to Mack. Her foot still hasn't healed completely. Now Stella walks with a limp, and sometimes, her foot gets infected. Last winter, she got very sick for five days. Ivan isn't convinced that she's better now, but Stella never complains. Here, Stella doesn't have to wear a chain. She's tied to the floor with a rope. Stella believes that the humans think she's too old to get into trouble—but "old age is a powerful disguise."

a plan. Nobody has visited the mall in two days, so Mack is in a bad mood. He grouches that he's losing money and is going to sell every animal. Thelma, the macaw, screeches "Kiss me, big boy" for the third time, so Mack throws a can at her. She hops away just in time (she can't fly since her wings are clipped). Mack goes into his office and closes the door. Ivan wonders if the visitors are tired of him. Perhaps he should learn a trick. Fortunately, humans always seem to like watching Ivan eat, and Ivan is always hungry. Silverbacks have to eat 45 pounds of food every day to stay a silverback. Ivan vows that tomorrow, he'll try to eat 50 or even 55 pounds of food. That will make Mack happy.

bob. Ivan shares his plan with Bob, but Bob isn't convinced. He insists that Ivan's appetite isn't the issue, hops onto Ivan's chest, and inspects his chin for extra food. Bob is a stray; he's so fast and clever that the mall workers don't even try to catch him anymore. He eats hot dogs out of the trash and spilled ice cream cones. Ivan sometimes offers to share his food with Bob, but Bob declines.

Bob is very tiny. He's like a brown "barking squirrel," and his tail is always moving. His tail conveys all sorts of emotions and phrases, like human words. Ivan finds it confusing sometimes. Gorillas don't need tails because their feelings aren't complicated. Bob used to have brothers and sisters, but humans tossed all six puppies onto the freeway when they were little. Bob rolled into the ditch, but his siblings weren't so lucky.

The story of how Stella ended up living with Mack suggests that she's been neglected for some time. While it's unclear exactly what's going on with her foot, the fact that it's never been able to heal completely suggests that she likely hasn't received the proper medical care for the injury. The fact that Mack ties her up with a rope instead of a chain implies that he expects Stella to behave since she's a seasoned performer. But Stella's insistence that her age "is a powerful disguise" suggests that she still has some spark to her—she'd disobey Mack if the situation called for it.



Mack doesn't seem to realize that Ivan, at least, can understand every word he says. This means that he says hurtful things about his animals without knowing that he might be hurting their feelings or scaring them. Ivan shows that he cares for Mack by insisting that he's going to eat more food to improve the mall's situation, even though readers may infer that this will only make things worse for Mack—if Ivan eats more food, it'll cost Mack more money. So, Ivan's plan also shows how limited he is in his ability to understand the humans around him, just as their limited in their ability to understand him.



The way Ivan talks about Bob suggests that he approves of the way Bob lives, at least in some aspects. Bob reads as free and able to move and eat what he wants, while Ivan is stuck in his domain and has to make do with whatever Mack gives him. Bob also seems to have a better handle on what humans want from Ivan, perhaps because, as a stray dog, he has more experience in the outside world than animals in captivity do.



Ivan demonstrates that he's capable of learning all sorts of communication methods, since he seems to have a good grasp of what Bob's various tail movements mean. Bob's origin story shows how cruel humans can be to animals. He implies that his siblings died on the freeway, and that this is what the humans intended—Bob was simply lucky to have survived the ordeal.



That first night, Bob slept in the mud and was so cold that he could barely get up. The night after that, he snuggled into the dirty hay near the Big Top Mall's garbage bins. Then, the night after that, Bob climbed into Ivan's domain through the hole in the glass. When Ivan woke up, there was a puppy asleep on his belly. Ivan didn't know what to do; it had been so long since he'd touched another being. He stayed still all night so he wouldn't wake Bob up.

wild. Ivan asked Bob once why he doesn't want a home. Ivan knows that humans love dogs and, to be fair, puppies are easier to cuddle with than gorillas. Bob insisted that his home is everywhere and that he's a "wild beast." When Ivan suggested that Bob work like Snickers the poodle, Bob responded by snarling and pointing out that Snickers eats nasty meat from a can. And poodles, according to Bob, are "parasites."

picasso. Mack passes Ivan a fresh yellow crayon and 10 pieces of paper. He tells Ivan to earn his keep and calls him "Picasso." Ivan wonders if Picasso has a tire swing and eats his crayons. Since Ivan knows he "lost his magic," he tries hard to think of what to draw. He looks around his domain for something yellow and draws a banana. When he's done, he leans back, and Mack grabs the drawing. Mack sighs that it's "another scribble" and prompts Ivan to do the next nine drawings. Ivan draws nine more bananas.

three visitors. There are three visitors staring at Ivan: a woman, a boy, and a girl. Ivan performs for them, strutting, dangling from his swing, and eating banana peels. But the boy spits at the glass, and the girl throws some pebbles. Sometimes, Ivan is glad that there's glass to separate him from the humans.

my visitors return. Once the show is over, the rude children come back. Ivan bares his teeth for them, grunts, and eats some more. In response, the children "pound their pathetic chests" and throw more pebbles at Ivan. Ivan throws a me-ball toward them and calls them "slimy chimps," wishing that the glass wasn't there.

sorry. But Ivan is sorry he called the children "slimy chimps"—his mother would be ashamed.

The hole in Ivan's glass might read as an indicator that Mack doesn't care about upkeep on his animals' cages, but it also offers Ivan an important opportunity to connect with another being. Ivan's desire to comfort and take care of Bob shows how caring and loving he is—he isn't the terrifying beast portrayed on the billboard.



It's ironic that Bob—a domestic animal—describes himself as a "wild beast" when, by all metrics, Ivan is the wild animal in this scenario. This suggests that identity isn't necessarily dependent on what others think—people (or animals) can decide what their identity actually is.



Mack's insistence that Ivan has "lost his magic" seems to be having a major effect on Ivan, since Ivan feels compelled to try harder to draw to make up for his lost magic. Calling Ivan "Picasso" also seems intended as sarcasm, implying that Mack doesn't take Ivan's art seriously. But since Ivan doesn't know who Picasso is, this goes over his head for the most part.



These visitors don't seem to respect Ivan at all. To them, he's something to stare at and torment—not a fellow "great ape." In this situation, Ivan's glass protects him from abuse, even as it keeps him trapped.



Baring his teeth, grunting, and throwing dung at the kids suggests that Ivan is trying to counter their rudeness with aggression—and sometimes, he wishes that he could actually hurt the people who torment him. But again, the glass traps Ivan and keeps him from defending himself.



Ivan's mother was clearly a major guiding force in his life—he wants to make her proud, wherever she is.



julia. Julia is a child, like the other rude children, but it's not her fault she's a child. Her father, George, cleans the mall every night, and Julia sits by Ivan's domain. She could sit anywhere, but she chooses to sit with him. Ivan thinks that this is because they both love drawing. Julia's mother, Sara, used to help clean the mall, but she stopped coming when she got sick. Now, Julia offers to help George clean, but he tells her to do her homework instead. Ivan knows that homework means pencils, big books, and sighing. He likes chewing pencils, so he thinks he'd be great at homework.

Julia sometimes falls asleep or reads, but most of the time, she draws and talks to Ivan about her day. This isn't unusual; lots of people talk to Ivan. This might be because people don't realize that Ivan can understand them, or maybe it's because he can't respond. Julia tells Ivan about how she likes science and art, but she doesn't like the bullies at school. She wants to be a famous artist. Julia sometimes draws Ivan. In her pictures, Ivan looks elegant, never angry like he does on the **billboard**. But in Julia's pictures, Ivan always looks a little sad.

drawing bob. Ivan adores the pictures that Julia draws of Bob. She draws him in all sorts of poses: running, hiding, or sleeping on Ivan's belly. Sometimes she draws him with wings or a tortoise shell. In Ivan's opinion, the best thing Julia has done for Bob was to give him his name. Bob was nameless for a long time. But one afternoon, Ivan watched Julia draw Bob while he was sleeping. Julia looked at Bob "the way an artist looks at the world when she's trying to understand it." When she was done, there wasn't just a picture of Bob—she'd written the name "Bob" under it. George commented that he didn't realize the dog's name was Bob, and Julia responded that she had to draw him to figure out his name.

bob and julia. Bob doesn't let humans touch him, insisting that the smell of humans "upsets his digestion." Occasionally, though, Ivan spots him sitting at Julia's feet, letting her scratch his ears.

Because Ivan and Julia are good friends, Ivan doesn't lump Julia in with other rude kids—she's her own person. Julia's choice to sit close to She makes Ivan feel special, and his understanding of why she sits with him shows that the two connect over their shared love of art. Ivan's perspective on homework is humorous, as he doesn't fully understand what Julia is doing or why. As a gorilla, his perspective is limited.



Ivan implies that he hears all sorts of things from various people—but this is because they see him as a being they can talk to without any consequences, good or bad. Nevertheless, Ivan seems to enjoy when Julia talks to him because she levels with him and treats him like a thinking, feeling being. It's interesting, though, that Julia's pictures of Ivan depict him as being sad, as this implies that his sadness is more obvious than he's letting on to the reader.



Ivan suggests that art can help a person understand their world and the other beings in it. Julia doesn't just imagine all the fantastical things Bob could be if he had a shell or wings; she can also help him form his identity. That Ivan describes this as the best thing Julia has done for Bob suggests that a being's identity is a very important part of them—and Bob's identity wasn't fully formed until he had a name to go with it.



Bob has every reason to dislike or distrust humans, given that humans threw him onto the freeway when he was a puppy. But even Bob seems to acknowledge that not all humans are evil—some, like Julia, are extremely kind.



mack. Mack usually leaves the mall after the last show. Tonight, though, he's working in his office. After a while, he comes out and stares at Ivan while drinking out of a brown bottle. When George comes up to him, they talk about what they always do—the game, how business is slow, and the trash. Then, Mack asks Julia what she's drawing. Julia explains that it's a flying dog for Sara, since she likes airplanes and dogs. Mack makes a noncommittal noise and then asks George how Sara is. George says that not much has changed; Sara has good days and bad days. Mack turns to leave and then gives George a green piece of paper. He tells George to buy Julia more crayons and leaves before George can thank him.

not sleepy. After George and Julia go home, Ivan tells Stella that he can't sleep. She notes that he's "the king of sleepers," and Bob tells Ivan to be quiet—he's dreaming about chili fries. Ivan says he's tired, but he's not sleepy, so Stella asks what he's tired of. Ivan thinks for a bit. Gorillas don't complain much; they're more "dreamers" and "poets." Kicking his tire swing, Ivan says he might be tired of his domain. Tactlessly, Bob says that's because it's a cage, not a domain. Stella admits it's a small domain, and Bob adds that Ivan is quite large.

Ivan asks Stella if her leg is hurting, since he noticed her limping earlier. Stella admits it hurts a little. Everyone sighs, and Bob drools. Stella suggests that Ivan eat something, since that always makes him happy. Ivan eats a brown carrot, but it doesn't help. He doesn't admit that to Stella, though, since he knows she needs to sleep. Stella suggests that Ivan remember a happy day, which is what she does when she can't sleep. But Stella remembers everything—and Ivan reminds her that his memory isn't as good.

Gently, Stella notes that there's a difference between not being able to remember and refusing to remember. Ivan admits that this is true. Not remembering is difficult sometimes, but Ivan has been practicing for a long time. Stella adds that memories are important, since memories help remind them of who they are. She suggests that Ivan remember all his keepers, especially Karl. Ivan remembers Karl; he once gave Ivan a coconut.

This passage positions Mack as a complex character who's possibly struggling—it's implied that the dark bottle he's drinking out of is alcohol. He may be somewhat neglectful and casually cruel to his animals, as Ivan has noted previously—but at least when it comes to people, Mack can be surprisingly caring and kind.



Ivan has been in his domain for 9,855 (27 years), which explains why he's tired of it. And when Bob says "tactlessly" that this is because it's a cage, it suggests that Ivan is very purposefully calling his enclosure a domain to make himself feel better about his captivity. He's trying to put a positive spin on a sad, difficult situation—but it's hard to keep this up after doing it for so long.



Noting that the carrot is brown suggests that Ivan doesn't get food that's particularly fresh, another indicator (along with Stella's foot) that Mack is neglecting his animals. When Stella suggests that Ivan remember a happy day, she proposes that remembering can be a good thing—it can provide comfort during difficult times. Because Ivan can't remember, he isn't able to comfort himself in the same way Stella is.



Here, Stella implies that Ivan is purposefully repressing his memories—and Ivan confirms that she's correct. This, in turn, presents the question of why Ivan is trying so hard to forget his past, especially since Stella insists that memories are a major part of a person's identity. Without memories, Stella suggests that people (and animals) can't have a full understanding of who they are. This is an especially interesting idea given that Ivan doesn't feel like he's totally in charge of his identity; he might feel more in control if he were to remember his past.



Ivan thinks about his other keepers who cleaned his domain, sat with him, and fed him. Gerald was his favorite; he once brought Ivan a box of strawberries. Ivan hasn't had a keeper in a long time, since Mack doesn't want to pay for "an ape babysitter." George cleans Ivan's cage, while Mack feeds him. When it comes to people who have taken care of him, Ivan remembers Mack most of all. Mack bought Ivan and raised him—and now he says that Ivan isn't cute anymore. Silverbacks, though, *aren't* cute. As the moonlight hits the carousel and the popcorn stand, Ivan listens to Stella's breathing and waits to fall asleep.

the beetle. Mack gives Ivan a black crayon and a stack of paper. Ivan rolls the crayon in his hands—he loves new crayons more than anything—and looks for something black to draw. He's eaten all his old banana peels, and everything else in his domain is some other color. Then, something in the corner moves. It's a shiny beetle. Ivan greets the beetle, which freezes. The beetle is pretty and black, so Ivan decides to draw him. Ivan doesn't often get to draw new things, so it's difficult. But he tries his best and draws the beetle's body, antennae, and face.

Luckily, the beetle stays all day. Most bugs move on from Ivan's domain quickly, so Ivan wonders if the bug is okay. Bob offers to eat the beetle, but Ivan declines. As Ivan finishes his last picture, Mack, George, and Julia come over. Mack picks up a drawing and says that Ivan draws pictures of nothing. Julia asks to see the picture. She studies it, looks around, and says that Ivan drew the beetle in the corner. Mack grouses that he just sprayed for bugs and heads over to squish the beetle, but the beetle hurries away. Mack grudgingly accepts Julia's insistence that Ivan's drawing is of a beetle. Ivan thinks it's nice to have another artist around.

CHANGE—WORRY

change. Though Stella notices it first, before long, all the animals know that a new animal will be coming to the Big Top Mall. They know this because they listen, watch, and smell. Humans always smell different—like rotten meat—when things are about to change.

Referring to keepers as "ape babysitters" suggests that Mack sees Ivan as a young child in need of constant supervision—he doesn't see Ivan as he actually is, an adult gorilla with a rich inner life. Ivan's recollections of his former keepers suggests that they help him feel connected to other beings and more okay with living in captivity. The fact that Ivan isn't cute anymore—but that, according to Ivan, he's not supposed to be cute—suggests that he and Mack have differing ideas about who or what Ivan should be.



Though drawing is an activity that makes Ivan feel more confident and in-control, his search for something to draw nevertheless speaks to how mundane and sad his life really is. There's not enough for him to look at to find something black to draw—and it seems like it's only luck that this beetle happens to crawl through Ivan's domain at the right time.



Again, Ivan shows readers how caring he is when he expresses concern for the beetle's well-being. In contrast, Mack's choice to try to squish the beetle shows how little regard he has for other beings' lives. It's also hurtful for Ivan when Mack insists that Ivan hasn't drawn anything, since he worked hard on the drawing. But having Julia around makes Ivan feel like he's less alone. She's willing and able to see Ivan as an artist trying to make sense of the world around him.



The idea that humans smell like something bad—rotting meat—when things are going to change implies that for the animals, change isn't good. Indeed, a new animal arriving at the mall will mean that another animal will be subject to Mack's neglect.



guessing. Bob is afraid that they're going to get a huge, dangerous cat, but Stella insists that a baby elephant will arrive in a truck this afternoon. Ivan asks how she knows; all he can smell is caramel corn. Stella explains that she can hear the baby crying for her mother. Ivan can hear lots of things, but not an elephant. He tells Stella that she's just hoping, but Stella replies that she's definitely not hoping.

jambo. Since Ivan's **TV** is off, he asks Stella to tell a story while they wait for the new arrival. Stella is rubbing her swollen, angry foot against the wall, so Ivan suggests that she take a nap instead. But Stella says she's fine. Ivan asks her to tell the Jambo story—it's one of his favorites, but Bob hasn't heard it. Stella knows lots of stories, and Ivan knows he can't be picky. Stella begins her story: once, a human boy was at a zoo, visiting a gorilla family. Bob asks what a zoo is; he's smart, but he hasn't seen much of the world. Stella says that good zoos mean large domains and "wild cages." Zoos are safe, and humans aren't harmful there. She says that with good zoos, humans "make amends."

Continuing her story, Stella says that the boy fell into the cage. Ivan interrupts to say that if humans knuckle walked, they wouldn't fall over so much. But Stella goes on with her story. The boy lay in a heap, and the humans were terrified. The silverback, Jambo, checked out the boy and stroked him. He could smell that the boy was in pain, so he sat and watched. When the boy woke up, humans shouted for him to stay still—they believed that Jambo would crush the boy. But instead, Jambo led his troop away and men took the boy out of the domain. The boy was okay in the end. Bob asks if the story is true, and Stella says that she always tells the truth—she just "sometimes confuse[s] the facts."

lucky. Ivan has heard the Jambo story many times. According to Stella, the humans were surprised that Jambo didn't kill the boy. Ivan doesn't understand why. The boy was young and afraid—and besides, the boy was another great ape. Bob asks Ivan why he and Stella aren't in a zoo. Ivan and Stella look at each other, and then Stella smiles a little. She says that they're lucky.

To Ivan, it makes sense that Stella would hope for another elephant, and this will mean that she won't be alone anymore. But Stella's dark reply—that she's not hoping for another elephant—suggests that Stella is more willing to accept the reality of her situation than Ivan is. Having someone to keep her company may be a nice thought, but Stella wouldn't wish her current lifestyle on another elephant.



Storytelling is a way for Stella, Ivan, and Bob to pass the time when they have little else to do or are dreading someone (in this case, the arrival of the baby elephant). Describing Stella's foot as swollen and angry makes it clear that she's not doing well and is probably in pain, another sign of neglect. In contrast to this, though, Stella's description of zoos as places where humans "make amends" stands out. This suggests that zoos symbolize humans' willingness to help animals, and that zookeepers try to make up for the abuse or neglect that animals suffer at the hands of other humans.



Given how Ivan describes himself (and gorillas more generally) as peaceful and protective, Jambo's behavior around the little boy doesn't seem surprising. But on the other hand, the humans' fearful reactions illustrate how humans tend to think of gorillas as dangerous, powerful, and as Ivan noted earlier, a "challenge." Humans seem to expect something entirely different from gorillas than they should, which reflects how out of touch they are with these animals.



Ivan, being a silverback gorilla, knows that Jambo would have no real reason to harm a little boy, which makes it even clearer that he and other gorillas are misunderstood. Meanwhile, Stella previously implied that she and Ivan should be in zoos—she seems to believe they'd be cared for better there. So, saying that she and Ivan are lucky to be at the mall reads as an attempt to shield Bob from the uncomfortable truth that she and Ivan are being neglected.



arrival. After the four o'clock show, the baby elephant arrives. Bob runs to tell Ivan and Stella as the truck rumbles through the parking lot. Mack lifts the door near the food court, and a big white truck backs into the opening. Ivan can see the baby elephant's trunk poking out of the dark truck. Ivan is glad for Stella, but then he notices that Stella doesn't seem happy. From the truck, Mack shouts for everyone to stand back—this is Ruby, and she's "six hundred pounds of fun to save our sorry butts." Mack and two men climb into the truck. Ivan can hear scuffling, and Mack is using angry words. Ruby responds with a little trumpet.

As Mack tells Ruby to move, Stella paces as much as she can in her domain (two steps in either direction). Ivan asks if she heard Ruby, and Stella mutters her own angry words. Ivan tells her that it will be fine and that she should relax, but Stella says it will never be okay. Ivan stops talking.

stella helps. The men continue to yell, at each other and at Ruby. The truck shudders as scrambling and pounding noises come from inside. Bob whispers that he already likes Ruby as Mack says that he's going to get Stella to coax out "the stupid brat."

As soon as Mack unties Stella, Stella pushes past him and limps as fast as she can toward the truck. She winces when she catches her foot on the ramp, causing it to bleed. Stella slowly climbs up the ramp in a way that makes Ivan sure that she's in pain. At the top, she sticks her trunk into the truck, and soon, Ruby's tiny trunk reaches out to meet it.

The elephants rumble at each other and slowly, Stella leads Ruby out of the truck. Ruby is small enough to fit under Stella. Her skin is sagging, and she sways. Mack acknowledges that Ruby isn't "the greatest specimen," but she was cheap. The circus only had her for a month before they went bankrupt. But people love babies, no matter what.

Ivan cares about Stella's happiness and well-being, so he still sees Ruby's arrival as something that's going to improve Stella's quality of life. But Stella's agitated, angry reaction to Ruby's arrival suggests that Ivan's thinking is misguided. Indeed, the fact that there's already "scuffling" and "angry words" as Mack tries to get Ruby out of the truck suggests that Mack isn't going to treat Ruby any differently from his other animals—she, too, is already a victim of his casual cruelty.



Noting that Stella can only pace two steps in either direction emphasizes how small the animals' enclosures actually are—Stella doesn't even have room to turn around. Stella insisting that it will never be okay shows how painful this situation is for her emotionally—it implies that according to Stella, Ruby shouldn't have to endure this kind of treatment.



Bob sees Ruby's willingness to fight back as a good thing—she's still spirited and opinionated. Referring to Ruby as a "stupid brat" suggests that Mack sees her as a creature to dominate. He doesn't leave any room to consider that she might be scared; this is all new for her, after all.



Stella seems to realize that the best she can do in this situation is make this experience as painless as possible for Ruby—even if it causes Stella pain. It's telling, too, that Ivan is seemingly the only one to notice Stella's bleeding foot or her limp. Mack either doesn't notice or doesn't care.



Ruby's sagging skin and the fact that she sways suggests that she's unwell, something that Mack confirms when he acknowledges that she's not "the greatest specimen." But animals in poor condition, he suggests, are cheap—and since people love babies like Ruby, she'll still be able to draw in visitors, no matter how unwell she is.



Stella moves Ruby toward her domain, with Mack and the other men behind her. When Ruby hesitates at the door, Stella stops. Mack mutters and shoves Ruby, and then grabs for a broom to hit her. Stella steps between him and Ruby as Mack shouts for them both to get in the cage. Stella stares at Mack for a moment and then gives Ruby a nudge into the domain. Once Stella follows her in, Mack slams the door shut. Ivan can see Stella and Ruby's trunks intertwined and hear Stella whispering, and Bob welcomes Ruby to the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, Home of the One and Only Ivan.

old news. When Julia and George arrive that night, Julia settles in to watch Ruby and barely speaks to Ivan. Stella is also too busy comforting Ruby to talk to Ivan. Ivan will admit that Ruby is adorable—but he's "handsome and strong." Bob snuggles on Ivan's belly and tells him he's old news as Julia starts to draw Ruby. Annoyed, Ivan moves to pout in the corner of his domain, disrupting Bob. George reminds Julia to do her homework, and Julia finally seems to notice Ivan. She apologizes for ignoring him and then rolls him a pencil so he can draw Ruby, too. Ivan bites the pencil in half and then eats some paper.

tricks. Ivan tries to keep sulking after Julia and George leave, but gorillas aren't good at pouting. So, he asks Stella if she's noticed the full moon, which they can see through the food court skylight. Stella whispers that she saw it, and Ivan realizes that Ruby is asleep. He asks if Ruby is okay. Stella laments that Ruby is too thin and that she was born in the wild, just like Stella and Ivan were. When Ivan asks if Ruby will be okay, Stella doesn't answer. Instead, she says that the circus trainers kept all four of Ruby's feet chained to the floor for 23 hours per day.

Ivan likes to give humans the benefit of the doubt, so he wonders privately why this was a good idea and finally asks Stella. Stella explains that it would eventually break Ruby's spirit. Then, Ruby would've learned to balance on a pedestal and let a dog jump on her back. Ivan thinks of all the tricks Stella knows.

introductions. The next morning, when Ivan wakes up, he sees a tiny trunk poking out of Stella's domain. The small trunk introduces itself as Ruby, and Ivan introduces himself. Ruby asks if Ivan is a monkey, and Ivan says he isn't. Bob, asleep on Ivan's belly, says that Ivan is a gorilla, while he's a dog. When Ruby asks why Bob is on Ivan's belly, Bob murmurs that he's on it because "it was there." Ruby notes that Stella is still asleep, and she thinks that Stella's foot is hurting.

Mack's willingness to hit Ruby with a broom shows how desperate he is, and how willing he is to turn to violence to make his animals obey. Of course, Stella, as an adult elephant, greatly outweighs Mack. Putting herself between him and Ruby and giving him this stare reads as threatening—she knows that like the bull elephant she told Ivan about earlier, she could easily toss Mack aside.



Julia's reaction to Ruby shows that Mack was right—everyone loves babies. The fact that Ruby is now getting everyone's attention shows Ivan that while he is "the One and Only Ivan," he's no longer the famous attraction that he once was. And even if Ivan isn't totally happy with his life, it's still hard for him to cope with how his identity is changing. Eating the pencil and refusing to draw Ruby drives home just how unhappy Ivan is in this moment—he's even unwilling to step into his identity as an artist.



Ivan suggests here that he's not good at being someone he isn't—even if he resents Ruby's popularity on some level, it's still not in his nature to hold it against her. What Stella says about Ruby's past indicates that although Ruby is a baby, she's already been through a lot—she's presumably been captured from the wild and then suffered at the circus. It's unclear whether or not Ruby will be okay in the future, but the fact remains that her past hasn't been happy.



Stella doesn't say so outright, but it's implied that Stella knows that being chained would break Ruby's spirit because this is what happened to her. The tricks she describes are the ones that Stella knows how to do. This suggests that there's a steep emotional and physical cost to training elephants to perform.



Ruby shows how young and innocent she is when she asks if Ivan is a monkey—presumably, she's only ever seen monkeys and has never encountered a large ape like a gorilla. Like young human children, she wants to know the "why" behind everything. Bob's answer as to why he sleeps on Ivan's belly suggests that sometimes, there aren't satisfying answers to questions like this—things are, sometimes, just the way they are.



Ruby asks when breakfast is and where the other elephants are. When Ivan tells her that Ruby and Stella are the only elephants, Ivan feels like he's letting Ruby down. Ruby asks if Ivan has parents, and Ivan says that he used to. Bob chimes in that parents are "unavoidable." Ruby shares that before she was a part of the circus, she lived with lots of family members. But they're all dead. Ivan offers his condolences, and Ruby notes that humans killed her family. Bob mutters, "Who else?"

Ivan knows that elephants, like gorillas, live in family units, so he's saddened to realize that Ruby isn't going to live the kind of life that would make her happiest. Ruby's uncritical and unemotional delivery when she notes that her family is dead suggests that she may be numb to the trauma and abuse she's suffered. Bob's insistence that only humans could've done such a thing shows that Bob doesn't think highly of humans. It's not surprising, in other words, that they'd orphan Ruby without a second thought.



stella and ruby. Stella spends the morning stroking and patting Ruby. The two lean into each other, rumble happily, and twirl their trunks together. Ivan loves seeing Stella so happy.

Because Ivan loves Stella and cares so much about her, he's glad that she finally has a baby to love and comfort. This speaks to the importance of family—and perhaps to how alone Stella felt before Ruby's arrival.



home of the one and only ivan. Ivan watches George and Mack out by the highway. They're high up on ladders, adding a number of pieces of paper to the **billboard** telling cars to visit the One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback. When they're done, Ivan sees that they added a picture to the billboard. It's supposed to be Ruby, but it doesn't look like her—it barely even looks like an elephant. Ivan knows he could do better.

Depicting Ruby incorrectly (in Ivan's opinion) shows how misunderstood Ivan, Ruby, and the other animals at the mall are. Mack wants to make his animals look as interesting and entertaining as possible on the billboard—no matter what they're actually like on the inside.

art lesson. Ruby constantly asks questions. When she asks about the jungle on Ivan's wall, Ivan explains that it's art—that's why the flowers don't smell and why the waterfall doesn't have real water. Ruby asks if Ivan makes art, and Ivan proudly says he loves drawing—he's always been an artist. But Ivan has to think for a moment when Ruby asks why he loves drawing. Slowly, he says he feels "quiet inside" when he's drawing. Ruby isn't impressed; she insists that being quiet is boring.

That Ivan feels "quiet inside" when he's drawing implies that when he's not drawing, his thoughts are racing—perhaps because living in his "domain" is so boring and unfulfilling for him. Ruby, as a baby, doesn't have these same coping mechanisms.



Ruby continues to ask questions about what Ivan draws, what a frame is, and what a dollar is. Ivan closes his eyes and says he's sleepy. He doesn't answer any more of Ruby's questions and suddenly recalls his father, sleeping in the sunshine while baby Ivan tried to wake him up. Ivan realizes that his father probably wasn't actually sleeping soundly.

As Ivan starts to step into a more fatherly role with Ruby, he develops some empathy for his own father. It's also significant that spending time with Ruby seems to trigger this memory in Ivan, as it suggests Ruby is somehow going to help Ivan reconnect with his past.



treat. George approaches Stella’s domain and asks how her foot is. Stella puts her trunk out to search George’s pocket for the treat he always brings her. Stella is George’s favorite, but Ivan doesn’t mind—Stella is Ivan’s favorite, too. As Stella finds her carrot, Mack appears and reminds George that there’s a mess in the men’s restroom. George agrees to clean it up and then tells Mack that Stella’s foot is infected again. Mack sighs and says he’ll keep an eye on it, but he can’t afford to have the vet out all the time. George strokes Stella and apologizes to her as Mack disappears.

elephant jokes. Ruby wakes Ivan and Bob up early the next morning. She says she didn’t want to wake Stella up since her foot hurts, but she’s very bored. Bob notes that when he’s bored, he sleeps. Ruby says she’s used to getting up early. At the circus, the elephants would get up for breakfast when it was still dark, then walk in a circle, and then they’d chain Ruby’s feet up, which hurt. After a minute of silence, Ruby asks Ivan to tell her a joke about elephants. With a yawn, Ivan asks how you can tell if an elephant has been in the refrigerator. You can tell, he says, by the footprints in the butter.

Ruby is silent for a moment and then asks what a refrigerator is. When Ivan says that it’s a cold box that humans put food in, Ruby continues to ask questions. Ivan sits up, grabs a pencil, and then draws a refrigerator for Ruby. Ruby studies the drawing closely and then asks if this is art. Ivan says it is, and when Ruby asks, he draws a banana for her. Ruby is impressed and laughs. The sound reminds Ivan of a birdsong from long ago, something he’d forgotten about. He likes making Ruby laugh, so he continues to draw small pictures on his paper.

Stella finally wakes up and moans as she moves her hurting foot; she insists that she’s just feeling old. Ruby explains that Ivan is drawing pictures and telling jokes. Ruby says she likes Ivan, and Stella says she likes Ivan too. Then, Ruby asks to tell Ivan her favorite joke. She asks what elephants have that nothing else has. Ivan wants to answer “trunks,” but to humor Ruby, he asks for the answer. Ruby says that elephants have baby elephants. Ivan and Stella praise Ruby for the joke.

children. Ivan shares that once, he asked Stella if she’s had babies. She never did, but Ivan told her that she would’ve made a great mother. Stella was pleased, and she shared all the things an elephant mother has to teach her babies. Then, after thinking for a moment, Stella mused that the hardest part of being a parent would be keeping a baby safe. Ivan said that silverbacks also keep babies safe, and he told Stella that she would’ve been a good protector. Gazing at the bars of her domain, Stella said she’s not sure that’s true.

George demonstrates how caring he is. It’s important to him to keep Stella happy (with her daily treat) and healthy (by suggesting that Mack get a vet to check her foot). But by refusing to call a vet to check Stella’s foot, Mack shows both that he’s struggling financially and that he isn’t willing to do what it takes to ensure Stella’s well-being. Given that Ivan’s seal neighbor died after Mack refused to get her veterinary care, this situation could prove dangerous or even deadly for Stella.



Again, Ruby’s tone as she talks about her life at the circus is important. She doesn’t express any emotion or even offer any judgments on what her life was like, aside from the fact that being chained up hurt. With this, she shows that what she experienced there was normal for her. It doesn’t seem to have occurred to her that being constantly chained up was something she could take issue with.



Here, Ivan uses art to communicate with Ruby, earn her trust and admiration, and situate himself as a knowledgeable mentor. In this way, Ivan starts to step into his role as a silverback—he’s teaching Ruby here, even if he doesn’t seem to realize it in the moment. And again, as Ivan remembers the birdsong, it suggests that getting closer to Ruby is helping Ivan connect with his own past, particularly the happier moments.



Stella doesn’t talk openly about her pain most of the time, so her foot could be hurting much more than she’s letting on. But lying about her discomfort is also a way for Stella to protect Ruby and Ivan, by making sure that they don’t worry about her. In the short term, this will keep them happier.



Earlier, Ivan insisted that he’s not a real silverback because he doesn’t have anyone to protect—but here, he’s more than willing to praise Stella’s mothering abilities and her protectiveness. Put simply, Ivan seems willing to give others the benefit of the doubt and see them how they want to be seen—but he’s not willing to extend that kindness to himself.



the parking lot. As George cleans one of Ivan's windows, Mack frowns and says that there's something amiss in the parking lot. George asks what it is with a sigh. Grinning, Mack says that there are cars there—people must want to stop to see Ruby. Ivan knows Mack is right; there have been more visitors since they added Ruby to the sign. He's been watching people ooh and ahh at Ruby for days now. Gazing at the **billboard**, Ivan admits that the picture of Ruby is cute. He wonders if Mack could make Ivan's picture on the sign cuter. Maybe then people would stop at his domain to ooh and ahh at him.

ruby's story. After the two o'clock show, Ruby begs for Ivan to tell her another joke or a story. Too impatient to let Ivan think of a story (he's distracted by the clouds above the skylight), Ruby insists that she's going to tell the true story of the time she fell into a big hole. Humans dug the hole, she says. At this, Bob perks up—he loves stories about digging. Ruby explains that the hole was full of water and near a village. Her family was looking for food, but she wandered too far away and fell into the hole. She says that she was terrified and certain she was going to die, since the water in the hole came up to her neck.

Ivan shudders and asks what happened. In a dark tone, Bob says he knows what happened: the heartless humans caught Ruby and shipped her here in a box. Ruby interrupts that Bob is wrong: the villagers helped get her out of the hole and saved her. Bob is shocked. Ruby explains that the children fed her fruit, and then the humans led her back to her family. Ruby insists it's true, but Bob is skeptical. At this, Stella rouses herself and says that humans can sometimes be surprising. Unconvinced, Bob asks why Ruby is here if humans can be so great. Ruby looks ready to cry as she says that bad humans killed her family and sent her here, but good humans saved her. Bob insists that he'll never understand humans, and Ivan agrees.

a hit. During the two o'clock show, Stella's foot hurts too much for difficult tricks, so Mack makes her limp in a circle. Ruby sticks close to Stella and watches, wide-eyed, as Snickers leaps on Stella's back and head. Stella's foot hurts too much to enter the ring for the next show, so for the seven o'clock show, Stella stays in her domain. When she sees Mack coming for Ruby, Stella whispers into Ruby's ear. Ruby allows Mack to lead her to the ring and then blinks in the bright lights. She gives a tiny trumpet as the humans clap and coo. Ivan can tell Ruby is a hit, but he's not sure whether he should be happy or sad.

Mack's instincts prove to be correct here—people are more willing to come to the mall when they see an advertisement for a baby animal. But this also has some sinister connotations: Ruby won't be a baby forever, so what will happen to her when she grows up? If Ivan's sadness is any indicator, she will also one day mourn the fact that she's no longer cute. At this point, her worth—to Mack's business—is her cuteness, and that won't last forever.



Ruby's noting that she fell into a man-made hole at first suggests that this story isn't going to end well. Aside from George and Julia spending time with and advocating for Ivan and Stella, the novel hasn't shown humans treating animals well. The simple fact that Ruby falls into a man-made hole and was afraid of dying shows just how fraught the relationship between humans and animals can be: humans often still hurt or frighten their animal counterparts, even by accident.



Bob hasn't had many good experiences with people, so it's logical that he'd assume the worst of the humans in Ruby's story. But both Stella and Ruby offer some hope that Bob's outlook isn't the only correct one—humans can also be kind and helpful to animals. The problem, this suggests, is that it can be hard for the animals to trust which humans are going to be kind and which ones are going to be cruel or abusive.



Stella's health seems to be declining quickly—and it's clear that Mack knows this, as he allows Stella to stay in her domain for the final show. But he still doesn't do anything about it, a sign of his neglect. For Ivan, it's awful to see Ruby in the ring by herself. The humans love to look at her, but they don't seem aware that Ruby is only out there because Stella is too unwell to be in the ring.



worry. Julia arrives after the final show with books and art supplies. She passes Ivan some paper and two Magic Markers. Ivan likes the red and purple markers, but he's too worried about Stella to draw. He looks toward her domain, and Julia looks too. Stella is lying in some dirty hay, struggling to breathe. Julia calls for George, who says that Mack must know Stella isn't well. He notes that vets are expensive, but he agrees to call Mack when Julia begs.

Ivan watches George's lips form a line. When George gets off the phone, he tells Julia that the vet will come in the morning if Stella isn't better—Mack said that he's not going to let Stella "die on him" after spending so much money on her. George assures Julia that Stella will be okay, but Julia watches Stella closely until she goes home.

THE PROMISE—A VISIT

the promise. Ivan wakes in the middle of the night to Stella calling for him. He runs to the wall they share, and Stella asks Ivan to promise her something. She says that she's never asked anyone to promise anything, since promises are forever—and forever is even longer when one lives in a cage. Ivan reminds her that she's in her domain and says that he promises. Stella points out that Ivan doesn't even know what she's asking for yet, and then says that it's silly to ask for anything. Ivan surprises himself and says that Stella wants him to protect Ruby. Wincing, Stella nods. Stella says that she wants Ruby to grow up somewhere safe, not here. Ivan knows that it'd be easier to stop being a gorilla than to keep this promise, but he promises anyway.

knowing. Ivan knows before anyone else that Stella is dead. It's just a thing he feels. He recalls that once, Stella had teased him that elephants are better than gorillas because they feel more emotions. She'd said that gorilla hearts are made of ice. Now, Ivan would give anything, even yogurt raisins, for his heart to be made of ice.

five men. According to Bob, who heard it from a rat, it took five men and a forklift to get Stella's body into a garbage truck.

Julia follows Ivan's gaze when he looks toward Stella, which indicates how well they understand each other. They may have bonded as artists, but this shows that they also connect in other ways. Julia shows that she's compassionate when she begs George to call Mack and get Stella help—it's clear to her that Stella is very unwell.



George seems to privately agree with Julia that Stella needs medical attention, but he also wants to emotionally protect his daughter. This is why he insists Stella will be fine, even though Stella seems to be in rough shape. Again, Mack only seems to care about his animals insofar as they can make him money.



Stella is finally willing to admit that she lives in a cage and not a "domain." Using a more accurate word to describe her situation suggests that Stella has finally decided to accept how poorly Mack has cared for her at the mall. And this, it seems, is what motivates Stella to ask Ivan to try to get Ruby somewhere else, where she can live a better life than Stella did. It's a mark of how much Ivan cares for Stella that he promises, even though he doesn't believe he can keep the promise. Nevertheless, this might give Stella some needed comfort in this difficult time.



It's impossible to say whether gorillas or elephants feel more emotions, but the fact remains that Ivan is still grieving Stella's passing. He's not the dangerous, powerful beast that the billboard makes him out to be—he has friends he cares about deeply, and he grieves just like a human might.



Dumping Stella's body into a garbage truck with a forklift reads as callous and disrespectful. This is perhaps an indicator of how little Mack cares to honor Stella.



comfort. Ivan tries to comfort Ruby all day, but he's not sure what to say. It's not true that Stella had a happy life, or that she lived like she was supposed to. At least it's true that she died surrounded by those who loved her most.

crying. That evening, Julia cries while George cleans. Ivan watches George confront Mack and hears a few words, like "vet" and "should have." Mack says nothing and leaves. Ivan notices that George is crying when he cleans Ivan's glass.

the one and only ivan. When the humans have left the mall, Ivan sends Bob to check in on Ruby. Bob returns and says that Ruby was shivering, so he tried to put some hay on her. He also told Ruby that Ivan was going to save her. Ivan glares, but Bob says he just wanted to make Ruby feel better—and Ivan promised Stella. Ivan says he shouldn't have made the promise, since he can't save Ruby or himself, then he flops onto the cement and notices that it hurts. Leaping onto Ivan's belly, Bob notes that Ivan is the One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback. He tells Ivan to repeat the words. Bob licks Ivan's chin and nose until Ivan complies. Looking up, Ivan notices that the moon, which Stella loved, is covered by clouds.

once upon a time. Ruby spends the night moaning and crying. Ivan stays awake in case she needs something, even though Bob encourages him to get some rest. After a while, Ruby calls for Ivan. She sobs that she misses Stella, her mom, and her sisters. She asks Ivan if he knows any stories and asks for one about Ivan when he was little. Ivan says that Stella was the storyteller, and he doesn't remember. Bob adds that Ivan doesn't remember much, so he's the opposite of an elephant. Ruby snuffles and turns away. Ivan listens to her cry and then starts a story. He tries to remember.

the grunt. Ivan says he was born in a rainforest in a place that humans call central Africa. Gorillas, he explains, don't name newborns right away like humans do. His parents named his sister Tag after she started chasing Ivan around the forest. Ivan loved playing tag with Tag. They'd chase each other and then jump on their father until he grunted to tell them to stop. To Ivan and Tag, the game never got old.

mud. Soon, Ivan's parents named him too. He'd spend all day drawing with sap, fruit juice, and mud. They named him Mud—and to Ivan, his name was everything.

Ivan doesn't want to lie to Ruby about Stella's quality of life, even if it might make Ruby feel better in the moment. This also shows readers how they should look at Stella's life and death: she wasn't supposed to live in the mall, so she wasn't happy.



Mack doesn't seem to have any excuse for Stella's death, since he doesn't respond to George's confrontation. Seeing this interaction shows Ivan that George cares more for the animals than Mack does.



It's unclear here if Bob thinks he's telling Ruby the truth, or if he's just trying to reassure her. Ivan, though, implies that he can't keep his promise to Stella, suggesting that he only made the promise to ease Stella in her final hours. It's also telling that Ivan seems suddenly aware of how the cement hurts—having lost a good friend, his captivity is starting to wear on him and become more difficult to bear.



Ivan may feel like he can't do much in his current situation to help Ruby, but he nevertheless shows her that he cares by staying awake—and, at the end of the passage, he makes a concerted effort to remember his past. Telling Ruby his story will help the two connect and figure out what they have in common, aside from their current living situation.



Ivan implies here that naming a baby at birth means that they're going to grow into a certain identity, helped along by their name. But for gorillas, this isn't how it's done—rather, parents try to figure out who their babies are before naming them. Ivan suggests that this gives gorilla babies a better chance at being who they truly are.



This passage shows that Ivan has truly been an artist his entire life—his original name made it clear that his artistry is essential to his identity.



protector. Ivan says that his family was just like all the other gorilla families—it was a family of 10, and they were mostly happy. Ivan’s father was everything a silverback should be: he was a protector and a teacher. Nobody, according to Ivan, could “chest beat” like his father could.

a perfect life. Gorilla babies aren’t so different from other babies, except they ride on their mother’s back. As time goes on, baby gorillas learn adult skills, like how to build nests and be kind and loyal. Growing up as a gorilla is the same as growing up as anything else: you make mistakes and learn. For a while, Ivan says, life was perfect.

the end. One day, the humans arrived.

vine. The humans captured Ivan and Tag and put them in a crate “that smelled of urine and fear.” Ivan knew that to survive, he had to let his old life go. Tag couldn’t forget, though. One day, Tag looked at Ivan, and Ivan knew that she’d finally let go of her old life.

the temporary human. Eventually, Mack opened the crate, bought Ivan, and raised him like a human. Ivan did everything human babies do: he wore diapers, drank bottles, and broke things. Mack’s wife, Helen, got angry when Ivan broke things, including his crib, lamps, a couch, glassware, a blender, a TV, and his own toes. Mack and Helen took Ivan to a fast-food restaurant every weekend. They also went to movie theaters and the circus. Ivan thinks of his life as a human as being “glamorous,” though he knows that his parents wouldn’t have liked it.

hunger. Ivan says he was well cared for in his new life as a human. He had access to all sorts of foods, but it’s possible to be hungry for other things—like his family or another gorilla to groom him. He reminded himself to not think about the jungle so he wouldn’t end up like Tag, but he’d still lie awake at night and wish for another gorilla to lie with.

Ivan holds his father up as an example of what a silverback should be—and, by extension, Ivan suggests that he should be more like his father. But in Ivan’s current captive circumstances, he’s not able to be a silverback the same way his father was, as he doesn’t have a gorilla family to protect.



Ivan makes the case here that many aspects of growing up and becoming an adult are universal: young people and animals learn the skills they need to survive, and they learn how to treat others with kindness and compassion. Humans and animals, he suggests, aren’t so different.



The fact that this statement is its own section is ominous. It suggests that these humans weren’t good, and that their arrival was devastating for Ivan and his family.



Ivan shows here why he’s so unwilling to remember his past: he attributes Tag’s death to her unwillingness to forget. In other words, he seems to have learned from Tag that repressing memories is a way to protect himself.



It’s possible to see the way that Mack raised Ivan as positive and caring, especially compared to what happened to Tag. Indeed, Ivan notes that he lived a pretty luxurious life—and he again makes it clear that human babies and gorilla babies aren’t so different, as they all get into trouble sometimes. Living with Helen’s anger, though, seems to have taken a toll on Ivan, showing that Ivan hasn’t always lived peacefully with humans.



Again, through Ivan’s story, he makes it clear why he’s worked so hard to forget his past: he believes that dwelling in the past is going to kill him, as it killed Tag. But this belief doesn’t always get rid of the desire to be with another gorilla, showing that forgetting still has its limits.



still life. One day, Helen came home with a painting of fruit in a bowl. She called it a still life. Ivan thought it was beautiful and reached out to touch a grape. Helen slapped his hand away. As Helen and Mack hung the painting in the living room, Ivan found a frosted chocolate cake in the kitchen. Rather than eating it, Ivan touched the frosting. It was like mud. He painted the white refrigerator with handfuls of the frosting. Ivan didn't care that he'd get in trouble. He just wanted to be an artist.

punishment. After this event, Ivan wasn't allowed in the kitchen again.

babies. Ivan explains that the Big Top Mall was smaller back then. Things changed when Mack brought Ivan to the mall, dressed in a tuxedo. People came from all over to take pictures with him. Once, Ivan got to hold a human baby. Ivan and the baby made faces and grunted at each other. Ivan was afraid that he'd drop the baby, so he held her tightly—but the baby's mother snatched her back. Now, Ivan wonders if his own mother worried about dropping him and Tag. He thinks human babies are ugly, but human babies have the same eyes as gorilla babies: "too big for their faces, and for the world."

beds. Ivan says that after weeks of "loud talking," Helen packed her things and left the house. She didn't come back, and Ivan doesn't know why she left. But that first night, Ivan slept with Mack. Though the bed was flat and didn't have sticks or leaves, Mack still rumbled in his sleep like Ivan's father used to.

my place. Over time, Mack became sullen. On the other hand, Ivan became what he's supposed to be: "too big for human life." Though he tried to be calm, dignified, and dainty, it was hard to act like a human. So, Ivan was thrilled when he saw his domain. There wasn't furniture to break—and it had a tire swing. The domain was a relief, though Ivan didn't realize then that he'd be here so long. Now, Ivan says, he eats old apples and watches **TV**. But a lot of the time, he forgets what he's supposed to be. He's not sure if he's a human or a gorilla. Humans have more words than they need, but there's no word to describe what Ivan is.

Helen's still life is, perhaps, the inspiration behind Ivan's drawings of things in his domain. Just as the still life depicts real-life fruit, Ivan's drawings in the novel's present depict the actual things he in his space. This passage also shows how important Ivan's identity as an artist is to him—so important that he didn't care if painting with frosting would get him in trouble.



Keeping Ivan out of the kitchen might keep Helen's fridge clean, but it also keeps Ivan from being the artist he wants to be.



This section explains why Mack is so certain that a baby animal will save the mall—baby Ivan did once. Here, it becomes clear how easy it is for humans and animals to misunderstand one another. Readers know that Ivan isn't trying to hurt this baby by squeezing her. But to the baby's mother, it's hard to trust that Ivan has her baby's best interests at heart when they can't communicate.



There may be many differences between humans and gorillas, but Ivan shows here that they can nevertheless comfort each other. Having Ivan close to him presumably offered Mack some comfort after Helen left.



Ivan acknowledges that his life hasn't been all bad. He suggests that it's silly to expect that he would be able to actually live his life among humans, but he also makes it clear that his domain has fundamentally altered who he is and how he sees the world. And though Mack probably didn't mean to cause Ivan such an identity crisis by raising him as a human and then shutting him up in a cage, this is nevertheless what has happened. The novel frames this as cruel, if casually and unintentionally so.



nine thousand eight hundred and seventy-six days. Ivan watches Ruby and Bob sleep, but his mind is racing. He's remembering his past for the first time. He realizes his story is odd, with an "endless middle." Ivan notes that he's counted every day he's lived with humans—gorillas are good counters, though it's not an important skill in the wild. Even though Ivan has forgotten a lot of things, he never forgets how long he's been in his domain. Grabbing one of Julia's Magic Markers, Ivan makes an X on his wall for every day he's spent with humans. It takes all night to draw 9,876 of them.

a visit. Before dawn, Mack walks unsteadily to Ivan's domain. He smells odd and has red eyes. He mumbles and says that he and Ivan have been through a lot.

The simple fact that Ivan has kept a count of how many days he's been in his domain makes it very clear that living in captivity has been unpleasant, as much as Ivan tries to ignore that fact. The number of days he's been in his domain essentially represents how long Ivan has been trying to survive in a situation that keeps him from being who he really is: a silverback gorilla and an artist.



Mack might be responsible for Stella's death because he neglected her, but this doesn't mean that he doesn't feel guilty about it. His odd smell and red eyes suggest that he's trying to cope by turning to alcohol.



A NEW BEGINNING—ANOTHER IVAN

a new beginning. Mack stays away from the mall for two days and when he returns, he doesn't mention Stella. Instead, he says it's time to teach Ruby some tricks so she can attract more customers. Mack works with Ruby all afternoon, looping ropes around her feet and putting a heavy chain around her neck. He shows her the ball, pedestal, and stool that Stella used, and he introduces her to Snickers. Mack gives Ruby sugar or some apple when she does what she's supposed to do, and he yells when she doesn't.

Julia sits to watch Mack and Ruby when she and George arrive. Bob also keeps a close eye on the training session. Mack leads Ruby around the ring in circle after circle, occasionally slapping her. But suddenly, Ruby stops and refuses to move forward. Ivan says that Ruby is exhausted, while Mack calls Ruby an "idiot." Bob mutters that Mack is the "idiot." Ivan knows Ruby can't hear him, but he tells her to walk. Instead, Ruby sits in the sawdust. Julia suggests that Ruby might be tired, but Mack says they're all tired.

From a business standpoint, losing Stella means that Mack has lost one of the mall's main attractions—from Ivan's descriptions, it seems like Stella's tricks were the highlight of the daily shows. So, while putting Ruby in training makes sense in this way, Mack doesn't seem to care that Ruby is a baby who will feel emotional distress when he yells at her. To Mack, Ruby exists to make him money—it's not so important to ensure that she grows up happily or healthily.



Ivan makes it seem like Mack has been walking Ruby in circles for hours—something that would be mind-numbing for anyone, let alone a baby elephant who regularly complains of being bored. But Mack isn't willing or able to show Ruby any compassion. Instead, she's a creature to dominate—and he sees her unwillingness to move forward and play along as rudeness and impertinence, rather than exhaustion or boredom.



Mack nudges Ruby with his boot, but she doesn't move. George offers to close up if Mack wants to stop the training session—but Mack yanks on Ruby's chain again. When he pulls one more time, he falls. At this, he says he's done playing and goes to his office. He returns with a long stick with a shiny, moon-shaped hook on one end: a **claw-stick**. Mack touches Ruby with the point, just to show her it can hurt her. Ivan growls, but Ruby doesn't move. When Ruby huffs, Mack swings the claw-stick back. Julia screams, but Mack says he's not going to hurt her. As Bob snarls, Mack brings the hook down so that it passes right above Ruby's head. He shouts that Ruby doesn't want to test him and tells her to move.

Ruby flings her trunk at Mack and makes a noise that, to Ivan, is “the most beautiful mad” sound he's ever heard. She slaps Mack with her trunk. Ivan doesn't see which part of his body she hits, but Mack falls to the ground and curls into a ball.

poor mack. Mack stumbles to his office, and Ruby watches him go. George and Julia comfort Ruby and settle her back in her domain with fresh food and water. Ruby falls asleep quickly. Then, Julia asks George if Mack will hurt Ruby. George doesn't think so, but Julia suggests that they call someone. George doesn't know who to call—and he needs this job. He tells Julia to get back to her homework.

Julia pulls out a metal box and explains to George that she's going to paint Ruby for art class. As George turns to walk away, Julia asks if he saw Mack's face when Ruby hit him. In a serious tone, George says he did. He says, “poor Mack,” but Ivan hears George laughing as he turns away.

colors. When Julia opens her metal box, Ivan sees squares of color that almost glow. He watches her dip a brush into water and then tap the red square. When she puts the brush to the paper, flowers appear. The brush seems like magic and distracts Ivan from thinking of Ruby, Mack, Stella, and the **claw-stick**. He watches as Julia paints a picture of Ruby. After a bit, Julia steps back and scowls that the painting isn't right. Ivan tries to look encouraging as she starts to crumple her paper, but then she offers it to Ivan. Ivan picks it up gently. He's not going to eat any of it.

Both Julia and George want to make sure that Ruby isn't going to suffer, even if she does have to learn Stella's tricks. But pulling out the claw-stick when Ruby gets tired shows how willing Mack is to be cruel to get what he wants, as the novel associates the claw-stick with human violence. The novel has made it very clear that the claw-stick can cause a lot of pain and suffering, so threatening Ruby with it allows Mack to show Ruby just how powerful he is. She may be bigger than he is, but he has a tool that can make her life miserable.



Ivan implies that it's “beautiful” when animals push back against this kind of inhumane treatment, and that this sort of uprising is necessary. The novel implies that Mack deserved to get hit (presumably in the groin) for threatening Ruby.



George doesn't want Mack to hurt Ruby, but he also realizes that he can't jeopardize his job. In this way, he quietly supports Mack's cruelty and abuse through inaction because of his own financial circumstances. To Julia, though, it's easier to see this situation as black-and-white: Mack is doing something wrong, and it's her and George's responsibility to stand up for Ruby.



George doesn't want to teach Julia that it's okay to laugh or be happy when someone gets hurt—but he laughs, nevertheless. He agrees with Julia that Mack was treating Ruby horribly and deserved to get hurt, even if he'd like to teach his daughter better.



Again, Ivan shows here that art can be a distraction from one's troubles—these paints, presumably watercolors, are magical to Ivan. In Ivan's understanding, they're so magical because they seem to literally create something beautiful from nothing, an idea that's particularly precious given how dire Ivan and Ruby's situation seems to him now.



Then, Julia runs to her backpack and pulls out three jars, each of them a different color. She opens them and puts them inside Ivan's domain, and then passes him some paper. She says that they're finger paints. Ivan puts a finger in the red jar and tastes the paint. It doesn't taste bad. With a laugh, Julia shows him how to paint with the paints. Ivan copies her and makes a red handprint. Unlike the prints on his glass that get wiped away, this one is permanent.

a bad dream. Ivan and Bob are awake, peeling and licking paint off themselves. Ivan keeps an eye on the **claw-stick** in the ring, and suddenly, Ruby cries out. Ivan tells her that she's having a bad dream, but she's safe. Gulping, Ruby asks for Stella before she remembers. Ivan encourages her to go back to sleep, but Ruby says she can't. She was dreaming of a sharp stick that hurt her. Ivan and Bob glance at each other as Ruby asks if Mack is mad that she hurt him. Gorillas are bad liars, so Ivan admits that Mack is probably upset.

After a minute of silence, Ruby says she smells something odd. Ivan suggests it's the finger paints and explains that he makes pictures with them. He says that someday, he'll make a picture of Ruby. Then, he shows her Julia's painting of Ruby. Ruby wants to know why she only has two feet in the picture, and Bob says it's because of "artistic license." With a sigh, Ruby asks for another story. Ivan can't think of anything for a while, and Ruby asks if Ivan is going to save her. Ivan says he's working on it. When Ruby says she has another question, Ivan knows he won't want to hear it. Ruby asks if she's going to die in this domain like Stella. Ivan says she won't if he can help it—and Ruby isn't in a domain. She's in a cage.

the story. Ivan looks around at the ring, the skylight, and the moon. He says he's going to tell Ruby what he hopes is a true story. Once there was once a brave, smart baby elephant who needed to go to a zoo. A zoo, he explains, is "where humans make amends." In good zoos, humans take care of animals and the animals are safe. Ruby asks if the baby elephant got to the zoo. After a minute, Ivan says yes. The baby elephant had a friend who made a promise.

how. After a long time, Ruby falls back to sleep. With a yawn, Bob asks how Ivan is going to get Ruby to a zoo. Suddenly feeling exhausted, Ivan admits that he doesn't have a plan. Bob says that Ivan will figure something out and falls right to sleep. Ivan wonders what will happen if he doesn't as he watches Bob's feet twitch.

The finger paints are significant in that they resemble the mud Ivan painted with as a baby. In both cases, Ivan can use his hands—not a separate tool, like a crayon—to make art. This suggests that the finger paints will help Ivan connect with his past. And his note that the finger paint handprint doesn't disappear suggests that along with this, Ivan will also be able to make something that lasts. This gives him a small amount of control over his life.



Though Stella's death is still recent and was very traumatic for Ruby, it's significant that Ruby only has nightmares after Mack starts to train her. This suggests that Mack's training techniques—particularly the claw-stick—are making it impossible for Ruby to feel safe and secure. Fortunately, though, she has Ivan to turn to; he starts to step into a fatherly role here.



Ruby continues to show how young, naïve, and in need of guidance she is as Ivan gives her another art lesson. However, Ruby is also starting to grow up—she knows enough now to realize that chances are good that her life isn't going to improve, and she'll end up much like Stella. Ivan's response, though, is interesting. It seems like he finally realizes that he has someone to protect: Ruby. And noting that Ruby is in a cage rather than a domain shows that Ivan is no longer willing to sugarcoat the fact that they live in captivity.



By telling Ruby this story, Ivan continues to step into a more parental role with her. He essentially affirms that she's right—good people do exist—and he vows to figure out a way to get Ruby to the good people at a zoo, where she'll be safe and happy. This story is especially significant for Ivan, as it shows that he doesn't think he's powerless anymore. He doesn't provide details as to what he's going to do, but he's now committed to helping Ruby.



Ivan might not have a plan yet, but he still has his friends around him to encourage him and keep his spirits up. Previously, Ivan equated being a silverback with protecting one's family. Now that Ivan is dedicated to protecting Ruby, it follows that Ivan will also be better able to step into his identity as a silverback.



remembering. Bob and Ruby sleep, but Ivan doesn't. He thinks about his promise to Stella, his pictures for Ruby, and he remembers everything.

What they did. Ivan remembers that he and Tag were holding tightly to their mother when humans killed her and their father. The humans chopped off the dead gorillas' hands, feet, and heads.

Something else to buy. Ivan notes that there's a musty store near his cage. There, they sell an ashtray made from a gorilla's hand.

another ivan. In the morning, Ivan studies the highway **billboard**. He looks at the depiction of the One and Only Ivan, with his angry expression. That Ivan looks like Ivan's father did on the day the humans came. Ivan thinks he's pretty peaceful—but inside of him is an Ivan who could tear a man apart and take revenge. That Ivan is on the billboard. Ivan remembers George and Mack adding Ruby to the billboard, and he remembers Ruby telling him about the villagers saving her. He remembers Stella saying that sometimes, humans are surprising. Noting the red paint on his fingers, Ivan knows how he can keep his promise to Stella.

DAYS—FINALLY

days. Ivan waits during the day and paints at night. When Mack takes Ruby into the ring, Ivan worries. Though Mack carries the **claw-stick**, he doesn't have to use it since Ruby no longer fights back.

nights. At night, Ivan dips his fingers in paint and paints many pieces of paper. They form a giant puzzle. In the morning, Ivan hides the paintings under his pool so that Mack doesn't sell them in the gift shop. Every painting is for Ruby.

Now that Ivan can look forward to the future, he finds that it's easier to look backwards and remember. He has something to look forward to, so he doesn't want to repeat the past.



Killing the gorillas and cutting off their body parts was a brutally violent act, and it was certainly traumatizing for Ivan to witness this. By not sharing this with Ruby, Ivan protected her from sharing in this trauma.



Gorillas, Ivan suggests, are commodities and entertainment for humans—whether they're dead or alive.



Ivan makes the connection here that the version of him on the billboard doesn't accurately depict him now—but it could, if Ivan became more like his father. Silverbacks like Ivan's father use anger to defend their families, and now, Ivan now has something to be angry about: Mack's mistreatment of Ruby. This suggests that Ivan is starting to figure out how he can tap into his latent identity as a silverback (and as an artist, judging by the paint on his fingers) to protect Ruby.



Threatening Ruby with the claw-stick has dulled Ruby emotionally and made her willing to do whatever Mack asks of her. He's breaking her spirit through this training.



Now that Ivan is throwing himself into helping Ruby, his art becomes something different for him. It's no longer just something Ivan does for himself—he's doing it to help protect someone he loves.



project. One morning, while Ivan is trying to nap, Ruby asks why he's so sleepy these days. Ivan explains that he's been working on a painting for Ruby at night, but he can't show it to her yet. Ruby is pleased, but then she asks if she has to perform in the shows later. Ivan says that she does, but that he's sorry. Ruby sighs that it's okay; she already knew she had to.

Ivan is working on a project that will help Ruby, but he can't do much to improve her situation in the short-term. So, for now, all he can do is tell Ruby the truth (that she has to do the shows) and validate her emotions, making it clear that she doesn't have to be happy about it.



not right. The next night, Ivan looks at the dozens of pictures he's made. The colors and shapes are wrong. He's not successfully portraying what he wants to—but he doesn't know what, exactly, is wrong. Ivan looks across the parking lot to the **billboard** again. He knows it uses words to tell people to come see him. Ivan knows this would be much easier if he could only use human words—but he's stuck with paint and torn pages. With a sigh, he tries another painting.

Ivan is trying to use the existing billboard to inform his new painting. However, being a gorilla who doesn't know how to read human words, he's unable to tap into an important tool that the existing billboard uses to communicate with viewers. But as Ivan works through this hiccup, he also becomes even more dedicated to his artwork and grows into his identity as an artist.



going nowhere. Ivan watches Ruby circle the ring endlessly. There have been more visitors, but not as many as Mack expected. Mack is planning to cut the animals' food and turn off the heat at night. Ivan thinks that Ruby looks thinner and more wrinkled, so he asks Bob if Bob thinks that Ruby is getting enough to eat. Bob isn't sure, but he gripes that Ivan is painting more than enough—it stinks, and he keeps finding paint in his tail. During the nights, Bob sleeps on Not-Tag, the toy gorilla, supposedly because she doesn't snore or make him seasick since her belly stays still. He asks Ivan what his plan is and offers to help. Ivan says he can't explain it and the idea is "stupid" anyway. Bob says it's smelly, but not stupid.

Just as Ivan's painting doesn't seem to be going anywhere, Ruby also circles the ring endlessly. And things are starting to look even worse for the animals and their welfare if Mack is going to start rationing food and cutting the heat. Put another way, it's even more imperative that Ivan figure out what he needs to do to correct his painting, as it seems likely that Ruby's health may decline. Meanwhile, Bob shows again how important Ivan's friends and chosen family members are to him: Bob is the one who encourages Ivan to keep going, even though he finds Ivan's painting annoying.



bad guys. Ivan dozes until late afternoon, when Mack approaches and Bob hides under Not-Tag. Mack notices a painting sticking out from under Ivan's pool. Ivan tries to calmly eat an orange as Mack kicks at the pool and pulls out the painting. He doesn't notice the others under there. This painting is green stripes that are supposed to be grass. Mack studies it and says that he can sell this picture for more money than Ivan's other drawings. Then he turns Ivan's **TV** on to a Western; Ivan knows that the man on the screen is a sheriff because he has a star on his chest. Mack offers to buy Ivan more paint if the painting sells, and he walks away with it. Ivan imagines how it would feel to be the sheriff.

At the beginning of the novel, Ivan explained that anger is precious for gorillas and that it's something silverbacks use to protect their families. It's possible to read Ivan's desire to be like the sheriff on TV as the beginning stages of getting in touch with his anger—an emotion that Ivan hasn't experienced for some time now. Also important is that Ivan seems to equate Mack, his caregiver, with the "bad guys" in the Western. This shows that while Mack may have done the best he could with Ivan, Ivan no longer sees him as a positive influence in his life.



ad. Bob says this is great news: Ivan will get more paint. Ivan notes that he doesn't want to paint for Mack, but Bob says that Ivan can paint for Mack and for Ruby. He's an artist. Ivan wonders if he can stuff his paintings into Not-Tag when they're dry. The movie he's watching turns out to be a Western that's also a romance. When it's over, an ad comes on. Ivan generally doesn't understand ads; there are no bad guys or romance. He and Bob watch an ad for deodorant.

The next ad shows children and parents buying tickets and then looking at tigers. There's a drawing of a red giraffe and then, humans are staring at elephants. Ivan knows what this ad is for: a zoo. He can see the walls of the elephants' "wild cage." This place isn't perfect, but Ivan knows this is what he needs. He looks over at Ruby and tries to remember everything of the cage in the ad. Ivan needs to paint that picture.

imagining. Now, Ivan's paintings are different. He's painting things that he only sees in his head. They're things that don't exist yet.

not-tag. Ivan pulls Not-Tag's stuffing out and then hides his paintings inside of her. Bob complains when he tries to sleep on her, and then he says that he misses sleeping on Ivan's stomach. Later, when Julia arrives, she tells Ivan that he's a "serious artist" now that he's used up so many of his supplies.

one more thing. Ivan's finger painting sold for \$40, so Mack buys Ivan paper and buckets of paints. During the day, Ivan paints for Mack. He paints for Ruby at night and naps when he gets the chance. Despite this, Ivan isn't pleased with his painting for Ruby. It's huge, but it's missing something. Bob accuses Ivan of being "a temperamental artist," since he has the elephants and the zoo accounted for. But something is missing, and Ivan says that he'll just have to wait to figure out what it is.

the seven-o'clock show. Ruby is very tired during the last show of the day. She stumbles at one point, and Mack uses the **claw-stick**. Ivan waits for Ruby to hit him back, but she doesn't even acknowledge the hit. Instead, she keeps walking and, after a bit, Snickers leaps onto Ruby's back.

Ivan is afraid that Mack is going to foil his plans by making him paint for the gift shop. Again, Ivan has to rely on Bob to emotionally support him and remind him that he can come up with ways to solve this problem—he doesn't just have to sit back and let Mack win. And indeed, the fact that after some encouragement Ivan comes up with the idea to stuff the paintings into Not-Tag shows how important Bob's support is.



Zoos, Ivan acknowledges, aren't perfect places. Animals still live in cages at zoos. But as Stella shared earlier, humans who run zoos care more for the animals. Seeing what a zoo looks like helps Ivan figure out what, exactly, his painting should be—he needs to portray Ruby someplace happy and make it clear that she's in a zoo and not just back in the wild.



Ivan uses his paintings to tell himself and Ruby a new story: one that he hopes will become true.



It's no doubt validating for Ivan to hear Julia call him a "serious artist." The painting that Ivan is working on is extremely important to him, and so getting Julia's praise makes it easier for Ivan to believe that he's doing the right thing.



Bob might be dismissive, but Ivan knows he's playing a delicate game here. He has to be able to effectively convey that he wants Ruby to go to the zoo—and he has to be able to communicate with humans, who don't always realize that Ivan is capable of communicating something so specific. Ivan may be overthinking it, but it's impossible to ignore how high the stakes are.



Notably, Ivan sees here that Mack actually hits Ruby with the claw-stick, which marks the first time in the novel that Mack does so. When Ruby doesn't respond, it shows Ivan how essential it is that he finish his painting—Ruby's spirit is breaking, just like Stella said it would.



twelve. Bob lies on Ivan's stomach, and they both watch Julia do homework. Ivan can tell that she doesn't like her homework, since she is sighing a lot. He's still thinking about his painting as Julia asks George what the difference between "principal" and "principle" is. George explains that a principal is a leader, and a principle is a belief. Julia groans that she doesn't need to spell if she's going to be an artist. Ivan feels bad for her; gorillas have no use for spelling. Suddenly, Ivan leaps straight up. He knows exactly what he needs and studies the **billboard** across the street. He imagines Mack reading it to him: Come to the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, Home of the One and Only Ivan, Mighty Silverback!"

Ivan lays out 16 pieces of paper in a square. Bob, annoyed, is even more upset when Ivan says that this has to do with the **billboard**. Bob insists that the billboard is "a monstrosity," since he's not on it, but Ivan points out that Bob isn't in the show. Bob notes that he's homeless by choice as Ivan studies the billboard. Ivan makes several lines on his paper and asks Bob for his opinion. Bob says it looks like a ladder, but Ivan says it's a letter. He needs a few more so he can write the word "Home." Bob says that home isn't so important, but he says it quietly.

nervous. Ivan spends the day knuckle walking in circles. He's nervous because tonight, he's going to show Julia his painting. Ivan is certain that since Julia is an artist, she'll see past the tears and smudges and understand what Ivan is trying to convey. As Ivan watches Ruby perform in the four o'clock show, he wonders what will happen if Julia doesn't get it. He knows the answer: nothing will happen, and Ruby will be the main attraction of the mall for years to come.

showing julia. Everything is silent in the mall except for Thelma the macaw. As Julia finishes her homework, Ivan pulls his paintings out of Not-Tag. Then, he pounds on the glass to get Julia's attention and holds up a corner piece of his big painting. Julia smiles as Ivan shows her picture after picture. She looks confused for a minute, but then she says, "It doesn't matter. It's pretty just as it is." Ivan is distraught—this *does* matter.

more paintings. George calls for Julia to hurry up so they can go home. Julia doesn't understand what Ivan is trying to tell her, so Ivan digs through his paintings and tries to hold a couple up against the glass. Bob drags some paintings over to Ivan, and Ivan then passes them out through the crack in the window.

Though both Ivan and Julia believe that artists and gorillas don't need to be able to spell, earlier, Ivan lamented that his painting would be easier if he could use human words. Presumably, Ivan has figured out that he can use words on the billboard to help Ruby. It's also significant that Ivan has this thought as Julia and George discuss the difference between "principal" and "principle." For Ivan, it's a matter of principle that Ruby should be moved to a zoo.



Writing the word "home" suggests that Ivan wants people who see his paintings to infer that Ruby's home should be the zoo, not the mall. And even if Bob insists that he's homeless by choice, he has, for all intents and purposes, made the mall his home. He may insist that a physical home isn't important to him, but the mall is the place where Bob is surrounded by other beings who love and support him—another definition of home.



This isn't exactly a life-or-death situation, but Ivan still knows that the consequences will be grave for Ruby if Julia doesn't understand. Ruby will continue to live like Ivan and Stella, alone and neglected at the mall, if Ivan isn't successful. But Ivan also hopes that his art will do exactly what it's supposed to, and that it will connect him to Julia despite being different species.



Julia probably means what she says about Ivan's painting as a compliment. But because she and Ivan can't communicate using the same language (aside from the language of art), she has no way of knowing that her response is inadequate. Ivan will have to find some other way to communicate what he's trying to say.



Ivan is trying to show Julia that his individual pieces of paper fit together to make a much larger image. But because Julia is under pressure to get ready to go, she's not in a place to give Ivan her full attention or think more critically about his work.



Julia stacks the paintings neatly and suggests that Mack will want to sell them. Ivan continues to shove more paintings through the crack as George puts on his coat. He notes that the paintings are just blobs and suggests that Julia leave them by the office for Mack. George doesn't understand why people pay for the finger paintings. Julia gets up and waves goodbye. Ivan looks at Ruby. He knows that she'll be here forever—and he can't let that happen.

chest-beating. Visitors often pound their chests when they see Ivan. Their pounding is weak and silent, but when an angry gorilla beats their chest, it's not a pleasant sound. It can make everyone in the jungle run away in fear.

angry. Ivan beats his chest, causing George and Julia to spin around and drop what's in their hands. Ivan storms around his cage, bellowing and beating his chest. Bob hides, and Ivan thinks that he's finally angry. Now, he has someone to protect.

puzzle pieces. Ivan grows quiet after a while; he's out of shape. Julia looks at him with wide eyes and says that something is wrong with Ivan—and she can tell he's still upset. George sighs that he shouldn't have swept earlier, now that Ivan's paintings are all over. He suggests that Ivan just threw a tantrum, but he doesn't blame Ivan after being stuck in the cage for so long. Suddenly, Julia looks down and freezes. She calls George to come look and points out an H and an E. George is tired and says this is crazy, but Julia runs among the pictures and says that Ivan made something really big. She identifies a trunk and an eye and runs to Ivan. She asks what he made. Ivan crosses his arms. Sometimes, humans make chimps look intelligent.

finally. George and Julia take Ivan's pictures to the ring and spend an hour laying them out. When Ruby wakes up and asks if the picture is of her, Ivan says it is. She's at the zoo—and she hasn't met the other elephants in the picture yet. Julia suddenly realizes that Ivan wrote "Home," and George suggests that it's a coincidence. There's a saying about chimps being able to write novels if they have access to a typewriter long enough. Ivan grumbles, and Julia notes that regardless, Ruby is in a zoo. She points out that Ivan even depicted the zoo's logo.

To both Julia and George, Ivan's paintings are just something he does so that Mack can sell them. And even though George cares for the mall animals' welfare, he shows here that he doesn't think highly of Ivan's intelligence. He, like Mack, thinks that Ivan just paints blobs and scribbles, and he can't fathom that Ivan is capable of so much more.



In this moment, Ivan starts to step into the role of a silverback. Letting go of his placid demeanor will no doubt attract Julia and George's attention. This is one more way that Ivan can communicate.



Ivan confirms here that he's becoming a real silverback; he's angry in this moment because he needs to protect Ruby. He's showing her that he cares about her, and he's also showing George and Julia that he cares about something—they just have to figure out what.



Describing Ivan's behavior as a "tantrum" suggests that George sees Ivan as little more than a big toddler, even if he has good reasons for acting out. But this, of course, ignores the fact that Ivan is mature, intelligent, and is doing everything he can to communicate with Julia and George. And sure enough, Ivan seems like he made the right call to trust Julia, a fellow artist, with his painting. She's willing to listen to him and try to figure out what he made—something that also shows how compassionate and caring she is.



Again, George may care about animal welfare, but he routinely underestimates animals' intelligence. Julia, on the other hand, realizes exactly what Ivan is trying to say—that Ruby belongs in a zoo, rather than at the mall. She's willing to read into his painting to draw these connections. But because George is so set in his belief that animals aren't all that intelligent, to him, Ivan's painting is just a matter of luck—not something that Ivan took the time to plan.



George smiles helplessly and says he can't explain the painting. Julia studies Ivan and then the paintings. Then she smiles. She tells George she has an idea that's "**billboard** big." This painting, she says, is intended to be on a billboard; she knows because both she and Ivan are artists. She begs George to help her, but George refuses. Mack will fire him. Julia says that this will be great publicity, but George still refuses. Finally, Julia picks up the **claw-stick** and hands it to George. She says that Ruby is a baby, and that maybe other people will want to help if they see the billboard. It's a matter of principle. George isn't convinced until Julia asks if Ruby will end up like Stella. Then, he goes to get his ladder.

Julia presumably wants to put Ivan's massive painting up on the billboard, where it will be able to show passing cars that Ruby belongs in a zoo. This puts George in a difficult position. He needs his job, especially since Sara isn't able to work. But he also cares deeply for the animals' well-being. Remembering what happened to Stella, George finally sees the importance of standing up for what the novel suggests is right—even if it might put him at risk in the long run.



THE NEXT MORNING—PHOTO

the next morning. Ivan watches as Mack stops his car, gets out, and stares at the **billboard** for a long time.

Like George, Mack doesn't think highly of Ivan's paintings—it's probably a shock to see that Ivan is capable of depicting something so clearly.



mad human. Ivan acknowledges that mad gorillas are loud—but mad humans can also be very loud, particularly as they throw chairs and break machines.

Once again, Ivan suggests that humans and animals, particularly gorillas, aren't so different. They all show their anger in similar ways.



phone call. When the phone rings, Mack answers it and glares at Ivan. Mack is perplexed when he learns that Julia contacted whoever is on the line. Mack says that Ivan paints, and then says it was his idea. He begins to smile and says photos won't be a problem—and Ivan will keep adding to the **billboard**. An hour later, a man from the paper comes to take Ivan's picture. Mack suggests the photographer take a picture of him with Ruby.

The attention from the local paper shows Mack that this might not be a bad turn of events. It might be possible to ignore the message behind Ivan's painting and instead market the fact that Ivan is a skilled painter. In turn, Mack seems to believe that this will bring more visitors to the mall and alleviate his financial troubles.



a star again. Mack tapes the newspaper story about Ivan's **billboard** onto Ivan's window. More and more people come to visit and buy Ivan's paintings. He paints for the visitors and even paints Bob, so that Bob can be on the billboard. In the afternoons, Mack and George put up more of Ivan's pictures on the billboard. These days, Ivan's paintings cost \$65 in the gift shop.

It's a show of how much Ivan loves and respects Bob that he puts Bob on the billboard. This shows Bob that no matter his thoughts on home or homelessness, he still has friends who love him and will honor him in whatever ways they can.



the ape artist. Now, people call Ivan "the Ape Artist" and "the Primate Picasso." People visit him and Ruby all day long—but Ruby's days are the same. She still has to perform in three shows every day and has nightmares every night. One night, after telling Ruby a story to help her fall asleep, Ivan tells Bob that this isn't working. Bob suggests that Ivan be patient, but Ivan is tired of being patient.

Ivan just has to trust that the right person is, at some point, going to see the billboard and understand what he's trying to say. But it's difficult to trust that his plan is going to work, especially when he sees that Ruby is becoming more and more downtrodden and dull.



interview. One evening, a man and a woman come to interview Mack, Julia, and George. As Mack and the woman talk, the man walks around and films Ivan painting, Ruby tied to the floor, and the **claw-stick**.

the early news. When Mack turns on the **TV**, the mall is on *The Early News at Five O'Clock*. Ivan watches himself, Ruby, Julia, and the **billboard** on the TV. Then he sees the **claw-stick** on the screen.

signs on sticks. The next morning, there are a few people in the parking lot with “signs on sticks.” They have pictures and words on them. Ivan notices a drawing of a gorilla holding a baby elephant, and he wishes he could read the words.

protesters. More people come over the next few days. They want to free Ruby—and some want Mack to shut the mall down. One evening, Mack complains to George that the protestors have it wrong and thanks George for nothing. After Mack storms away, Julia tells George that she loved the sign that read “Elephants Are People Too.” George smiles and goes back to mopping.

check marks. One day, a man with a clipboard comes to inspect the mall. Ivan watches him make check marks as he looks at Ivan’s floor, Ruby’s hay, and the water bowls. Mack scowls as he watches, and Bob hides outside, unwilling to let the man see him.

free ruby. Every day, more protestors and cameras gather outside. One day, Ruby asks Ivan why the people are yelling at her. Ivan says they’re angry, but they’re not angry at Ruby. A week later, the man with the clipboard returns with a woman in a white coat. The woman watches Ivan and then Ruby, and then she talks to Mack. When the man gives Mack a piece of paper, Mack covers his face and then goes into his office.

It’s important that the man focuses on filming Ruby tied up and the claw-stick. These things suggest abuse in a more overt way than Ivan’s billboard, and they may catch the attention of whomever watches this footage.



It’s been somewhat unclear up to this point how open Mack is with visitors that he uses a claw-stick. But having it broadcast on the evening news means that nobody will be able to ignore the fact that he uses a training tool that the novel associates with cruelty and domination.



Sure enough, the news broadcast showing the claw-stick has made it clear to people that Mack doesn’t treat his animals well. The people in the parking lot are presumably protestors, though Ivan doesn’t seem totally aware of what this means.



To Julia, the protestors are great news—they’ll be able to agitate for change and take Ivan’s billboard message one step further. But to Mack, the protestors represent a loss of income and livelihood when he’s already struggling. The same goes for George—he wants the animals to be cared for better, but he also has his family to think about.



This man seems like he’s performing a welfare check on Mack’s animals. Through this, he’s going to be able to formally decide whether or not Mack is abusing or neglecting his animals.



To Ruby, all the fuss makes a hard situation even more difficult, since she doesn’t immediately grasp that she’s not in trouble. This drives home how young and naïve she is—she needs Ivan to protect her—which makes Mack’s ongoing cruelty toward her seem particularly harsh. Seeing Mack’s reaction to the piece of paper, it seems likely that he didn’t pass the inspection—validating that he hasn’t been treating his animals properly.



new box. The woman returns not long after with some other people, who put a big box in the middle of the ring. The box is about Ruby's size. Ivan knows the woman is here to take Ruby.

Though it's not yet clear where this woman wants to take Ruby, it seems likely that Ivan has succeeded: Ruby is going to be taken away from her sad life in the mall.



training. Later, the woman leads Ruby to the box, puts an apple inside, and tells Ruby she's a good girl. Then, as Ruby inspects the box, the woman makes a metal object click and gives Ruby treats when Ruby touches the box. In a disapproving tone, Bob explains to Ivan that this is clicker training—the woman wants Ruby to learn that when she hears the clicker, she gets a treat.

The clicker training method is a stark contrast to Mack's claw-stick to training. With clicker training, Ruby gets a treat whenever she does the right thing—something that's far more positive and less traumatic than being threatened with violence when she does the wrong thing.



After a lot of clicks and treats, the woman puts Ruby back in her cage. Ruby asks Ivan why the woman gave her carrots for touching the box, and Ivan says that Ruby is supposed to go inside. When Ruby points out that there's nothing in the box, Ivan explains that Ruby is going to get out of here in that box. He tells Ruby that the woman is from the zoo, and she will take Ruby there. Ruby isn't excited, like Ivan expects her to be. Ivan tells her that the box will take Ruby to other elephants, humans who care, and a bigger place to live. Ruby says that this is her home, and she wants to live with Ivan, Bob, and Julia. But Ivan says that this place is her prison, not her home.

It's significant that the woman seems like she's more than willing to let Ruby take her time deciding to get into the box. It's going to be Ruby's choice to go, at least to some degree. But for Ruby, this is a difficult choice even though she's been abused and neglected at the mall. She relies on Ivan and Bob to keep her happy and safe, and she doesn't yet feel comfortable trusting humans to take her to other elephants. Reminding her that the mall is her prison shows Ivan again using language to tell Ruby the truth, and to encourage her to make the right decision.



poking and prodding. The woman returns with an animal doctor. He has a bag that looks dangerous. The doctor spends an hour inspecting Ruby, and then he enters Ivan's cage. Since Ivan can't copy Bob and hide under Not-Tag, he beats his chest. The doctor leaves Ivan's cage and says, "We're going to need to put this one under." Ivan doesn't know what this means, but he still feels like he won.

It's important that Ivan uses the word "cage" here, rather than "domain." Now that he's going to escape his cage, he's willing to use a more truthful word to describe where he lives. It's also telling that Ivan beats his chest at the vet, as this suggests that Ivan is now more in touch with his identity as a silverback.



no painting. Now, nobody asks Ivan to paint or Ruby to perform the shows. The only visitors are protestors, and Mack spends his days in his office.

Though the novel implies that it's going to be better for Ruby and Ivan to move to the zoo, this doesn't mean that the transition is going to be easy. Ivan loves painting, so being in the zoo without access to art supplies means that he may be even more bored than he's been at the mall.



more boxes. When Ivan wakes up from his morning nap, Bob is on Ivan's belly watching four men with a big metal box—a box Ivan's size. Bob says the box is for Ivan and, judging by how many boxes there are out there, they're taking every animal—even Thelma. Ivan asks where they're being taken, and Bob says probably the zoo or a shelter. In a bright voice that's somehow sad, Bob says that good things always come to an end and that he's going to miss Ivan's belly. Ivan asks what's going to happen to Bob, but Bob pretends to sleep. Looking at the box, Ivan realizes how Ruby feels. He doesn't want to get in—the last time he was in a box, Tag died.

good-bye. George doesn't grab his mop when he and Julia arrive that night. Instead, as he gathers his things, Julia runs to Ivan's cage, puts her hands up to the glass, and tells him that Mack fired George. As she cries, she says that the zoo woman told George that they might have an opening at the zoo cleaning cages. Ivan approaches the glass and puts his hand up to Julia's. Though her hand is tiny, their hands are very similar. Julia sniffs that she's going to miss Ivan, Ruby, and Bob, but that Ivan deserves better than this. Ivan wishes he could respond.

Then, Julia goes to Ruby's cage and tells Ruby to have a good life. Ruby reaches out to touch Julia as Julia asks where Bob is. George hasn't seen him, and Julia wants to know what will happen to Bob—especially if Mack shuts the mall down. George says he's worried too, but Bob is a “survivor.” Julia suggests that Bob could come live with them and keep Sara company. She'd pay for him with her dog-walking money, but George says no. Julia nods and then runs to Ivan's cage. She slips him a drawing. The drawing depicts Ruby playing with a baby elephant and Ivan holding hands with a pretty female gorilla. They're all eating yogurt raisins—and in this picture, Ivan is smiling.

click. The door of Ivan's cage is open, and he can't stop staring. Now, the giant box is open and pushed up against Ivan's cage door. All he has to do is walk through the door and into the box. The woman from the zoo—Maya—is here, making the clicking sounds and giving Ivan yogurt raisins, marshmallows, and apple slices. They do this for hours. Ivan sees Ruby watching, waiting to see what he's going to do. Ivan touches the box and sniffs it—there's a mango inside. He knows he has to do this for Ruby. This is the way out. He steps into the box.

an idea. Ivan steps back out of the box and into the cage—and then he has a fantastic idea. He suggests that Bob sneak into the box and come live at the zoo. Bob, however, insists that he's an “untamed” “wild beast.” And besides, humans might not be the most intelligent, but they'd definitely notice.

Ivan has spent the last few weeks trying to get Ruby moved to a zoo, but it didn't occur to him that he'd be moved to the zoo as well. And again, the novel frames it as a good thing that all the animals are going to leave the mall—but it's still a major transition. For Ivan, the prospect of getting in the box will require him to face and perhaps relive the trauma of watching his twin sister die before his eyes. He feels more empathetic toward Ruby in this moment, too.



Though this is a difficult transition for George and Julia too, it's telling that Julia frames this as a positive, necessary change for Ruby and Ivan. She knows that they're going to experience more humane treatment at the zoo—and in her mind, it's more important to do what's right for them than to cling to her close relationship with them.



For Julia, it's important to ensure the welfare of all the mall's animals, including Bob. As a stray, anything could happen to Bob if she and George don't take him home and care for him. But George makes it clear that their family is going through a difficult time financially, so they can't take on an animal right now. Just as Ivan's billboard painting presented a happier future for Ruby, Julia's drawing shows a happier future for Ivan—one that she presumably hopes will come true.



Ivan doesn't want to get into the box after what happened to Tag. But he also understands that since he's a stand-in parent of sorts for Ruby, it's essential that he push his fears aside and show her that the box isn't so scary. Now, he has to trust that Maya isn't going to hurt them. He has to be willing to accept her kindness, or his painting won't have fulfilled its purpose.



Bob's response is humorous, given that zoos are where “wild” and “untamed” animals live if they're not in the wild. And as a domestic dog, Bob isn't wild. But he nevertheless encourages Ivan to not underestimate humans, as they've underestimated him so many times.



respect. Ruby asks Ivan if he thinks the other elephants will like her. He assures her that they'll love her, and then Ruby asks if the gorillas will like Ivan. Ivan reminds her that he's a silverback. This means that the other gorillas don't have to like him; they just have to respect him. But privately, Ivan wonders if the gorillas will respect him. He hasn't been able to practice being a gorilla or a silverback, really. But Ruby continues to ask if the other elephants will know jokes. Then, she says that she's going to get in the box tomorrow. Ivan says that's a good idea, and that Stella would be proud. Ruby is looking forward to playing tag with the other elephants, and Ivan thinks of Tag.

photo. Late that night, Mack opens Ivan's cage. He seems smaller for some reason. Bob races away to hide, but Mack tells him it's not worth it. Then, sitting on Ivan's tire swing, Mack tells Bob to enjoy his last night with Ivan; Ivan is leaving tomorrow. Ivan is distraught. He hasn't had enough time to think or say goodbye. Mack pulls a picture out of his shirt of him and young Ivan, sitting in Mack's convertible. Ivan thinks that he was a handsome youth, but he doesn't look like a gorilla. Mack chuckles and reminisces about all that he and Ivan did together. Then he stands, sighs, and tells Ivan that he's going to miss him. He leaves Ivan's cage and doesn't look back.

LEAVING—MIGHTY SILVERBACK

leaving. The next morning, Maya and a bunch of other humans arrive. All of them seem busy. Ruby is the first to get into her box. From inside, she calls to Ivan that she's scared and doesn't want to leave him. Ivan knows he can't tell Ruby that he feels the same way, so he suggests she think of all the stories she can share with her new elephant family. After a long pause, Ruby promises to tell her new family Ivan's elephant joke about the refrigerator. Ivan suggests that she also tell them about him, Bob, Julia, and Stella. Ruby agrees, and then the humans roll her box out to a truck.

Now it's Ivan's turn. The humans don't seem to notice Bob hiding in Ivan's cage, so while they're busy doing other things, Bob sneaks out to lick Ivan's chin. Ivan whispers that Bob is "the One and Only Bob," and he offers him Not-Tag to help him sleep. Bob is confused at first, but then he grabs Not-Tag and returns to his hiding spot.

Again, Ivan is able to show Ruby how much he cares for her by encouraging her to get in the box and by making it clear that she's going to be happy at the zoo. But importantly, Ivan doesn't know for sure that Ruby will be happy—he has to trust that everything is going to work out, and that Ruby will find the better life that Stella wanted for her. When Ivan thinks again of Tag during this conversation, it shows that Ruby is connecting Ivan to his past and helping him remember.



Mack isn't entirely evil or unfeeling. This photo in particular suggests that Mack loves Ivan, or at least did when Ivan was little, and tried to do the best he could for him. Though Ivan has spoken fondly about his time living like a person with Mack, it's significant that here, he notes that he doesn't look like a gorilla in the photo. Now, Ivan seems more connected to the fact that he's a gorilla, and he sees the way that Mack raised him as harmful and unintentionally cruel.



Ruby doesn't know yet that she can trust these people to do what's best for her. Instead, she turns to Ivan, who she now sees as a sort of father figure. In this parental role, Ivan has to be careful about how he talks about what's going to happen—he can't show Ruby that he's just as nervous as she is because then, it'll damage any confidence Ruby might have. Part of being a silverback or a parent, Ivan learns, is acting confident even when he isn't.



Calling Bob "The One and Only Bob" is a way for Ivan to show his friend how special he is. And giving Not-Tag to Bob represents several things: it first shows that Ivan wants to help Bob remember him. But it also suggests that Ivan is now okay letting this stand-in for Tag go, and that he can look forward to meeting his new gorilla family at the zoo.



good boy. Maya tells Ivan “Good boy” as Ivan gets into the box for marshmallows. Once he’s in the box, Maya gives him a drink that tastes like mango, but it’s also bitter. Quickly, Ivan becomes sleepy. He dreams he’s with Tag, swinging on vines while Stella watches.

Ivan’s dream is a total fiction, but it essentially shows all the chapters of Ivan’s life melding together. This indicates that he’s now willing to remember the past and therefore has a better understanding of who he is.



moving. Ivan’s eyes open briefly. He can feel the box moving “in the grumbling belly of some great beast” before he falls back to sleep.

Not knowing the particulars of the vehicle that’s transporting him only adds to the sense that Ivan is at the mercy of the people at the zoo. He has to trust that this “great beast” isn’t going to destroy him.



awakening. When Ivan finally wakes up, he’s in a new cage that’s little different from his old one. It’s just cleaner. Maya greets Ivan as Ivan looks around. There are three glass walls in his cage, and one wall of wooden slats. This doesn’t look like a zoo—there are no gorillas. Ivan is worried for Ruby. She might still be alone and cold in her own cage. Is there anyone with her to tell her stories and help her sleep?

Ivan questions if he made the right decision. He implies that it wouldn’t be so bad if it was just him, but the thought of Ruby being alone is too much for Ivan to bear. He’s worked too hard for her to end up right back where she started.



missing. Ivan misses his cage, his art, and Bob. His belly is cold now.

Everything that Ivan once used to define himself is gone. Now, he’ll have to rework his identity yet again.



food. At the zoo, the food is okay—but there’s no soda or cotton candy.

Even the food is different at the zoo, another thing that Ivan is going to have to get used to.



not famous. Here, Ivan doesn’t get any visitors aside from Maya and her human friends. Maybe Ivan isn’t famous anymore.

Even if Ivan disliked his life at the mall, he did enjoy the attention he got for being famous. It made him feel valuable and needed.



something in the air. After many days go by, Ivan feels something different in the air. He’s not certain what it is.

Notably, Ivan doesn’t say that this change brings with it the smell of rotting meat, as he did earlier when Ruby arrived at the mall. This offers hope that this change, whatever it is, will be good.



a new tv. One day, Maya brings Ivan a new, bigger **TV**. She turns it on with a smile. Ivan hopes it's going to show him a romance or a Western, but instead, it's a nature show. There aren't any human voices or ads; just gorillas playing, eating, and sleeping. Ivan wonders why Mack never showed him this channel.

Though this nature show isn't what Ivan wanted initially, it still shows him something compelling and entertaining. Wondering why Mack didn't show him this channel suggests that Ivan understands Mack had choices in how he treated his animals—and he accepts that Mack made poor, cruel decisions.



the family. Ivan watches the gorillas on **TV** every day. The family is small and strange: there are only three females and a young male. There's no silverback to protect them. The family looks content and happy.

It's interesting that Ivan notes that this gorilla family looks happy, even without a silverback. This offers more credence to the novel's suggestion that families don't have to look one certain way to be happy.



excited. This morning, Maya doesn't turn on Ivan's **TV**. Instead, she and her friends say, "Today's the day" and act excited. Ivan has never seen humans look so happy. He watches Maya go to the wall of wooden slats and pull a string.

The fact that Ivan hasn't seen humans look so excited speaks to how dull his life has been for the last 27 years—few humans, it seems, have been happy to make Ivan happy for that long.



what I see. This reveals gorillas—the gorilla family Ivan has been watching on his **TV**. But this time, they're on the other side of the glass, and they're watching Ivan just like he's watching them. Ivan sees himself.

At the mall, the glass separated humans from Ivan; now, the glass separates Ivan from others who look just like him. In a way, Ivan is finally seeing what humans see when they watch animals on TV or at zoos.



still there. Ivan covers his eyes and then looks out again. The gorilla family is still there.

Previously, Ivan was certain that he'd never see another gorilla. But in this moment, he learns that Stella was right—he is seeing another gorilla.



watching. Ivan spends his days watching the gorilla family through his window. It reminds him of how human visitors used to watch him. He watches the gorillas chase one another, groom one another, and play. They're graceful like Stella, and they stare at Ivan. Sometimes they point and hoot, and it makes Ivan wonder if they're as intrigued by him as he is by them.

Letting Ivan watch the gorillas from the other side of the glass gives Ivan the opportunity to learn about this family before actually getting to know them. And it seems like Ivan is having some difficulty communicating with them, if he can't tell yet whether or not they're interested in him.



she. There's one female that Ivan admires most: Kinyani. She's fast and smart, and she terrifies Ivan. She's also "beautiful, like a painting that moves."

Ivan's clear interest in Kinyani suggests that Julia's picture of Ivan with a pretty female gorilla might come true.



door. This morning, the humans lead Ivan to a door. The other gorillas, including Kinyani, are on the other side. Ivan's not ready to be a silverback—he's just Ivan. He decides to try socializing tomorrow.

wondering. All that night, Ivan thinks about Ruby. He wonders if she's already gone through a door like the one Ivan refused to go through today. Maybe she was scared, like Ivan. Ivan thinks of all the questions Ruby used to ask—and he knows that if she were here, she'd ask what's on the other side of the door. Ruby is so curious that she'd have already gone through the door.

ready. The next day, Maya asks Ivan if he wants to try again. Ivan thinks of Ruby and tells himself he can do it as the door opens.

outside at last. Outside, there's a sky, grass, sticks, dirt, flowers, and rain. It all belongs to Ivan.

oops. Ivan approaches the other gorillas and puffs himself up, but they're not welcoming. Kinyani even chases Ivan, throws a stick at him, and corners him. Ivan knows this is a test of whether he's a protective silverback, but he cowers anyway. After this, Maya lets Ivan go back into his cage.

what it was like. That night, Ivan lies awake and tries to remember how to be a gorilla. How did he move, and how did he know who was in charge? He tries to think about other things than the babies he held and the clothes he wore. Ivan tries to imagine what he might have been without all that.

pretending. When the juvenile male approaches and eyes Ivan's food, Ivan imagines himself as his father's son. He grumbles and beats his chest as Kinyani watches. When Ivan steps toward the juvenile, the youngster retreats. It seems like he believes Ivan is actually a silverback—even though Ivan is just pretending.

Ivan seems to imply here that he wasn't a real silverback when he protected and advocated for Ruby—it's totally different to be a silverback among other gorillas.



In this situation, Ivan is able to learn from Ruby in the same way that she learned from him. He realizes that Ruby's incessant curiosity may have been obnoxious at times, but it also allowed Ruby to experience new, positive things without fear or apprehension.



By remembering Ruby and making this choice to step outside, Ivan shows that he's not going to forget his past anymore—especially not Ruby.



Ivan hasn't been outside since he was an infant, about 30 years ago. This is all new for him, and it shows Ivan that he was right to trust Maya.



Since Ivan hasn't been around gorillas in decades, he's not entirely sure how to behave around them. It's not enough to have the silver patch of fur on his back; being a silverback means knowing how to communicate and behave with these other gorillas.



This passage indirectly condemns Mack for raising Ivan like a human, rather than like a gorilla. Ivan is having such a hard time integrating into this family because he's been raised like a person and doesn't know what to do.



Ivan doesn't have to feel like a mighty silverback in order to show others that he is one—at this point, he's essentially faking it until he makes it. Experiencing success in this interaction builds up Ivan's confidence that he'll be able to become a real silverback soon.



nest. Ivan makes a nest on the ground. His nest isn't a good one, and the others clearly disapprove—but as Ivan climbs into his nest, he feels like he's "floating on treetop mist."

For Ivan, it's enough to be sleeping in the leaves and twigs—something he hasn't been able to do for years now. This is a happy return to his past, even if his nest isn't great.



more tv. Ivan knows that Maya wants him to go back to his glass cage; she's left a trail of marshmallows leading inside. Ivan ignores her since he wants to enjoy the beautiful day, but he gives in when Maya adds some yogurt raisins. The **TV** is on in the cage, showing Ivan another nature show. But instead of gorillas, Ivan hears a "toy trumpet" and sees Ruby on the screen. Ruby rolls in mud with two other baby elephants, while a huge elephant strokes Ruby softly. Ivan sees joy in Ruby's eyes. Maya plays the video for Ivan several times and then takes the TV away. Ivan puts his hand on the glass and tries to tell Maya "thank you" with his eyes.

It's significant that Maya uses food to coax Ivan back into his cage, rather than forcing him. This highlights just how different Ivan's life is here than it was at the mall—Mack brought out the claw-stick for Ruby when she refused to do what he wanted. Seeing the footage of Ruby happily playing with other elephants shows Ivan that all the stress and hard work was worth it. He was able to keep his promise to Stella and reconnect with his love of art.



it. One day, Kinyani comes up to Ivan, taps him on the shoulder, and then runs away. Ivan doesn't know how to respond. But when Kinyani comes back, shoves Ivan, and then runs away again, Ivan realizes that they're playing tag.

This is another happy return to the past for Ivan, as he and Tag loved to play tag together. This also offers hope that Ivan and Kinyani's relationship might grow into something more as Ivan learns to communicate with her better.



romance. Romance looks easy on **TV**, but it's hard in real life. Ivan has to make eye contact, grunt, and throw sticks. He's not sure he'll ever be good at it.

All the Westerns and romances that Ivan watched on TV may have warped his understanding of how romance works. This is another way that the novel implicitly condemns Mack, as he's the one who prevented Ivan from learning how to relate to other gorillas.



more about romance. Ivan wishes that Bob were here to give him advice. He thinks about all the romance movies he and Bob watched. Ivan isn't good at romance, but he's having fun with it anyway.

Ivan seems to be settling into his new life with this gorilla family, though he doesn't want to forget the past anymore. He now knows that Bob's friendship will forever influence how he sees the world, for instance.



grooming. There's nothing better than another's touch—especially when she pulls dead bugs out of your fur.

Another gorilla's touch is what Ivan has been longing for since he was an infant living in Mack's house. He's finally happy now that he's able to live in a more natural habitat among other gorillas.



talk. Unlike humans, gorillas don't talk all the time. Sometimes they share stories though, and one day, Ivan tells his troop about his life. He tells them about his parents, Mack, Ruby, Bob, Stella, Julia, and George. They look away when he's done, but Kinyani moves closer and lets her shoulder brush Ivan's.

the top of the hill. The only place Ivan hasn't been in his domain is the top of a hill at one end, where humans have been repairing a wall. Ivan leaves his troop to explore, enjoying his walk in the sunshine. There's a tree at the top of the hill that Tag would've loved. The new wall is clean, white, and seems to go on forever. It's tall and wide—it's supposed to keep gorillas in, and humans out, since this is still a cage. It rained last night, so a pile of dirt nearby is soft and muddy. Ivan scoops up a handful and looks at the wall—which seems to wait for him like a blank **billboard**.

the wall. The wall is big, but that's okay. Ivan's dirt pile is big, and he's a big artist. Ivan makes handprints, nose prints, and spreads mud over the white wall. He's not sure of what he's making, but that's okay—he's an artist. When he's done, he steps back to look, but he has to climb the tree to get the best view. The climb is a struggle, but Ivan gets two limbs up and then settles himself. The troop is dozing down the hill, while Ivan's wall is full of movement. Ivan thinks it looks like something Julia could've painted. From the tree, Ivan can see other animals—including elephants.

safe. Ivan can see Ruby, playing in tall grass with other elephants. In a whisper, Ivan tells Stella that Ruby is here—he kept his promise. Ivan calls for Ruby, but he knows she can't hear him. He sees her pause for a second, though, and then continue through the tall grass.

silverback. One cloudy, wet evening, Ivan doesn't care about dinner. Though the troop always sleeps in the den, Ivan has no interest in going inside. There aren't many visitors at this point in the evening. When Ivan sees one of the keepers calling for him, he turns to go into the den. Then, he sees someone running out of the corner of his eye. It's Julia, shouting for him. Ivan races for the wall, dances, and hoots as Julia and George wave. Then, from Julia's backpack, Ivan hears Bob tell him to stop acting like a chimp. Bob pokes his head out of the backpack and compliments Ivan on the new domain. Ivan can't form words.

This passage offers the novel's clearest insistence that sharing one's story and remembering the past can bring people together. It's significant that after Ivan shares his story, Kinyani moves closer to him. Their relationship will deepen now that she knows more about who he really is.



This clean, white wall gives Ivan the opportunity to paint and be creative, without having to worry about tearing his paper or taking great care with his supplies. It may be a part of Ivan's new cage, but Ivan doesn't seem so bothered by the fact that he's living in captivity anymore. Making the wall into something beautiful makes it seem like Ivan is now able to frame his captivity in a different way for himself, one that's healthier and happier.



Ivan's painting here shows that he's finally melding his different identities into one. Painting with mud represents a return to his roots—as a baby, his parents called him Mud. The wild, abstract painting looks like something Julia might've done, which shows how far Ivan has come with his art. Furthermore, when he realizes that he can see the elephants at the same time as he can see his painting, it reminds him of what his art has already done: it got Ruby to the zoo.



Seeing Ruby playing with the other elephants firsthand gives Ivan peace of mind that he did the right thing. He was capable of communicating with humans that Ruby deserved better—and now she's safe.



George, Julia, and Bob's visit brings everything full circle for Ivan. He can see Ruby, and now he has proof that he doesn't have to worry about ever losing track of his human friends. Put another way, Ivan doesn't just have a new family of gorillas now that he's at the zoo—he also has the support of his old friends.



Bob explains that George starts his job at the zoo next month. In the meantime, Julia is walking extra dogs to pay for Bob's food—all of them poodles. Ivan notes that Bob didn't want a home, but Bob says Sara likes him. He figures he's doing Julia's family a favor. At this point, Julia shoves Bob back into her backpack and reminds him that he's not supposed to be at the zoo. George notes that Ivan looks strong and happy now, and Julia holds up a small picture. She says it's of Ruby—Ruby is safe with the other elephants, all because of Ivan. Ivan wants to tell Julia that he already knows, but instead, he and Julia just stare at each other.

Finally, George tells Julia it's time to go. Julia smiles at Ivan and tells him to say hi to his new family. Then she thanks George for everything. As they turn to leave, Bob sticks his head out of Julia's backpack and calls that Ivan is "the One and Only Ivan." Ivan nods, turns toward his new family, and whispers, "Mighty Silverback."

Given Bob's earlier insistence that home wasn't important, it's perhaps not surprising that he frames living with Julia's family as him doing them a favor. It allows Bob to feel like he's the one in control—even though, as an animal, he depends on his human family to feed and care for him. It's also significant that George makes a note of how good Ivan looks—this implies that Ivan was in rough shape when he lived at the mall. Exchanging this long look with Julia, meanwhile, suggests that they don't need language to communicate—they love each other and have bonded over being artists, and that's all they need.



Now that Ivan has reconnected with Bob, Julia, and George, he feels better about stepping into his new identity as the silverback of his new family. Now, it feels right that he refers to himself as "Mighty Silverback," which is what used to be on the billboard but didn't feel appropriate. Ivan is now the gorilla that he was always meant to be.





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