



### OUTTAKES

*By Luisa Perez*

#### Chimp Attack

Have you ever had a conversation that starts out innocently and turns into a raging battle before you know it?

If you have a brother or sister, I'll bet you have. They push a couple of buttons and— wham!—you're screaming so loud the skin peels right off your tongue.

This happens between my sister and me all the time. I never understood the dynamic until today. My mom took this seminar about effective communication at work, and conveniently left the course material on the kitchen table.

Apparently, it all starts with something that resembles the chimpanzee aggression sequence. A chimp sees certain triggers and attacks, and once the sequence has begun, there's no stopping it until it has run its course.

Keeping in mind that humans share 98 per cent of our DNA with chimps, it's no big surprise that we might follow similar patterns in a fight. When we feel threatened, we get defensive and strike back. Fast. Speaking from experience, it feels impossible to stop the attack sequence, even if you sort of realize mid-brawl that you misread the cues.

Let me give you an example. My sister, Grace, has been dumping

her shifts at Dan's Diner on me since the first week I started working there. (That's probably why she got me the job.) I'd plan my whole week around *my* work schedule and then I'd get stuck with her shift, too, and it would throw everything off. I was forever canceling plans with friends or getting up early to do my homework because of Grace.

So now, if she says something like, "I've got plans for tomorrow. I need you to..." I don't even wait for her to finish the sentence, I explode!

**Lu:** "Forget it. I have a life too you know. You can't take always take advantage of me."

**Grace (gearing up for her own attack):** "You have it so good. No responsibilities. Always looking out for yourself."

**Lu:** "Are you kidding? I'm always covering your butt. Find another sucker to take your shift."

**G:** "My shift? What are you talking about? All I wanted was for you to lend me your blue sweater."

**Lu:** "Oh." (The chimp may see the miscue at this point but the adrenalin is pumping and there is no ABORT switch.) "Well, that's my favorite sweater, so the answer is still no."

**G:** "I need it for a meeting. I want to look boring and conservative like you."

**L:** "So you think you can insult me and borrow my clothes?"

**G:** "I think you should stop being so selfish for a change."

Cut to half an hour later when it finally sinks in that Grace is paying me a backhanded compliment. She was nervous about the meeting and wanted to look good, and with going to school and having a young kid, even with two part-time jobs, she doesn't have spare cash for nice clothes. Thanks to working so many of her shifts, I do.

In short, our conversation went so far off the rails that it's tragic. And it wasn't an isolated event. Grace and I fight like chimps every couple of weeks.

Hopefully not anymore. Thanks to mom's seminar material, I plan to have more constructive conversations with my sister.

In my next column, I'll share some tips on derailing the chimp sequence that will help you keep *your* discussions from going the way of the apes.