

Why So Glum?

An Inkwell Story

Kood99

Ritz D. Wolf, The Inkwell, and Pinnacle Peak created by @SqueakyCanine. Licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial CC BY-NC.

I

“It’s five.” Glen says to himself. He approaches his dresser to grab some clean clothes: Dull grey socks and underwear. Then to his closet: A pair of khakis and a dull grey t-shirt. He travels through his sparsely decorated, drab living room to finally arrive at his front door to slip on a pair of dull grey tennis shoes. He walks to his dull grey car and starts the engine. He pulls out of his driveway and begins to travel.

His first stop is the house of a lanky friend who hops into the back seat of Glen’s car. “Alright, Rheese, let’s pick up the birthday boy.” Glen says to the friend named Rheese.

“Which bar are we going to again? Shepard’s or Larry’s?” Asks Rheese.

“Larry’s; You know that’s his favorite!” They continue their travel and arrive at another house. A wide man stands out on the front porch. Seeing the arrival of Glen’s car, the man practically jogs to the car with a huge smile on his face. “Woo!” He shouts into the ether. “Let’s go!” The wide man energetically seats himself in the front seat next to Glen.

“You seem pretty excited, Drew.” Glen observes.

“Damn right I am!” Exclaims Drew.

Rheese interjects from behind, “Try not to knock yourself out like last year.”

“No Promises!” Drew chimes.

Larry’s is quite the drive out of town and into the neighboring city. No longer than half an hour, but--to Drew today--that might as well be half a century. Larry’s is less a bar and more of an activity center with the target demographic of adults with their happy hour specials and a sign at the front door telling patrons that no minors under the age of 18 years are allowed inside. Also below that is a sign that reads “HUMANS ONLY.” Drew says with exasperation, “Ugh! We’re finally here!” as he speed walks to the entrance of the complex.

“Drew! Slow down!” Rheese calls out as he and Glen try to catch up with the hulking speed walker. They now enter Larry’s. A gust of cool wind greets their faces when the doors open. Lights and sounds from arcade machines of various types bathe their eyes and ears. A well lit bar is the trio’s guiding light through the chaos of merriment happening around them. Towards it they walk. Rheese lags ever so slightly as he eyes up a marble pusher machine nearby their path to the bar.

“What can I get you boys this evenin’?” asks the bartender.

“The birthday special.” answers Glen, “It’s this guy’s birthday today!”

“That time of the year again, huh? Alright, Drew, one birthday special coming up! Do either you two boys want anything?”

Rheese answers. “A rum and cola.”

“Just water for me.” Glen requests. The two friends boo him, but he just rolls his eyes. “I have to drive, guys.” Only a measly “yeah, yeah” is given for his concerns.

The bartender takes out three napkins and places them on the bar. First, a rum glass. Rum is poured into a shaker. Then some cola is poured in. After a few rigorous shakes, the mixture is poured into the glass. The glass is transferred to the napkin in front of Rheese. Next, a restaurant glass. Cool, refreshing water is poured from a chilled pitcher into the glass. The glass is tentatively placed on the napkin in front of Glen. Finally, a large margarita glass. The rim is salted. Ingredients are poured into a shaker--some you don't normally find in a margarita--and then vigorously shaken together before being poured onto the ice left inside of the margarita glass, and a birthday cake-themed cocktail umbrella is placed inside. The cocktail is then reverently placed on the napkin in front of Drew. A bell behind the bar is rung. The other bartenders gather as well as some patrons. Everyone gathered begins to sing to Drew the traditional birthday song everyone in the U.S. knows by heart ever since childhood. Then with a shout, everyone drinks a toast to Drew before going back to their business.

Drew hangs out at an air hockey table and takes on anyone willing to challenge the birthday boy. Rheese sits at the mable pusher machine he was eyeing up earlier when they arrived. Glen, however, just sits at the bar sipping his water. “You're just gonna hang out here the whole night?” the bartender questions, “Why don't you go on and play some games and have fun with your friends out there?”

“Oh, no, that's fine. I'm fine. Not really interested at the moment.” Glen gives an awkward chuckle.

“What? You afraid of tooning out?” jokes the bartender.

“W-what? No! Of course not! That's, uh, that's silly. I'm just not interested. That's all.”

The bartender chuckles himself. “No need for the panic attack, man. Just ribbing ya.” He chuckles again. “Like, you know that's not how that works, right? Nothing wrong with having a bit of fun.”

“No, I'm fine. Please.”

The bartender shrugs before stepping away. Glen takes another sip of his water.

“Hey, Glen! Come over here!” shouts Drew trying to get Glen's attention. Glen cringes at the idea of having to leave his spot, but he does so anyway.

Having made it to the air hockey table Drew is occupying, Glen asks, “Yeah?”

“I ain't having you slouch at the bar again this year on my birthday. Play me a game!”

Glen sighs. “Fine, I'll play you.”

Just as Glen reaches for his mallet, Drew interrupts him. “Hold on! Before we begin, I'd like to propose a rule.”

“What's the rule?”

“Whenever your opponent scores on you, you take a shot.”

“I’m not doing that.”

“Why not?”

“I need to drive the car, Drew. I’m the designated driver.”

“Oh, psh! I can guarantee that your car will be safe in the parking lot in the morning. We can take a cab home. I’ll even drive you over here personally to retrieve it!”

Giving in to the soft spot for his friend, Glen relents, “Okay! Okay! I’ll do it.”

“Ey! There we go!” Drew takes a trip over to the bar for a few quick moments before returning with a tray of shot glasses and a bottle of tequila. He sets the tray onto a foldout support he also brought over. “Ready?”

Glen sighs again. “Yeah, I guess.” Drew inserts his Larry’s Cash Card into the card reader and starts the game of air hockey. After a quick game of rock-paper-scissors, it is decided that Glen will start with the puck. Drew tosses it onto the table, and the thick disc of plastic gently glides over to Glen’s side of the tiny rink. With a hit of his mallet, the game begins. The puck flies across the table with speed and caroms off of the walls with loud clacks. *Pa-chunk!* The puck finds its destination in Glen’s goal. Knowing the rules, Glen pours himself a shot of tequila and drinks.

The liquid embers tingle on his tongue before igniting and burning a fire down his throat. He shakes off a shiver the alcohol gives before returning to the game. All the while, Drew was chanting in victory. *Pa-chunk!* Another into Glen’s goal. Another shot. Another cheer from Drew. *Pa-chunk!* It went into Drew’s goal this time. *Pa-chunk!* The score is now 3 to 1. Eleven minutes on the clock. The ritual is made. *Pa-chunk!* 1 to 4. *Pa-chunk!* 2 to 4. Glen has to shake his head to focus from the alcohol beginning to take effect. *Pa-chunk!* 2 to 5. 2 to 6. 3 to 6. 4 to 6. 4 to 7. 5 to 7. **BRRRRRRNT!** The buzzer sounds as the game comes to a close.

Drew gives greater cheers from winning the game. “Gah! I was so close!” laments Glen.

“We can go again.” suggests Drew.

“You’re on!” A new game begins. Drew goes first this time around. *Pa-chunk* goes the puck as it flies into Drew’s goal. 0 to 1. The game plays out between the two for another fifteen minutes. **BRRRRRRNT!** The second game ends with a score of 5 to 6. “Ha hah!” Glen celebrates.

“Best two out of three!” announces Drew. A third match. Glen makes the first point again. Drew takes a shot. Drew makes the second point. Glen takes a shot.

II

The air is cold. The ground is hard. It's also wet. And the air smells like garbage. *Why the fuck does the air smell like garbage?* thinks Glen. Glen sits up off of the ground. The light is so bright. *Oh, right. I've got a hangover. Should probably be careful.* Glen nurses his headache with his soft hand. He then rubs. *Strange... Why is my hand so soft?* Glen puts his hand in front of his face and is greeted with a hand encased in a white glove. *What the?* Not only is it gloved, but it also only has four fingers instead of the normal five. Looking to his arm, it is an inky black. His heart begins to race. He looks to the rest of his body. His torso is uncovered and also an inky black. His legs are adorned with a pair of stark white shorts with no real defining features. That is all the clothing apparent on his body that he can see.

Glen yells at the top of his lungs, "AAAAAAHHH!" He briefly hovers in the air as he does so. When his feet paws land on the ground, he looks side-to-side to get a bearing on his surroundings. He's in an alleyway. On one side are the normal looking buildings of the city he and his friends were in the other night. The other side leads to a street lined with cartoonish buildings that very much do not belong in reality. "Oh no... Toontown..." he says quietly as if someone was listening in on him and he didn't want them to hear. He exits the alley on the reality side. He enters the first building he sees that he knows could possibly help him. Above it is a sign that reads "The Inkwell" and is in the shape of the titular object, and it glows an ethereal, pale blue.

Inside, he is greeted with a modest bar. Being the morning, it's rather empty at the moment. Only two are present in the bar not including Glen. A black and white toon wolf wearing a white dress shirt and dress pants with a pair of suspenders attached stands behind the bar. He was cleaning out glasses with a dish rag before Glen stepped inside. "Oh, it's da fresh ink from last night. I thought you'd be long gone by now. And human."

Sitting at the bar is a blue canary toon who was humming to himself and writing down stuff in a notebook while enjoying a glass of sugar water before the wolf toon made Glen's presence known. They are now looking at Glen. They give a friendly wave. Glen hurriedly moves to the bar. As he approaches, the bar seems to get taller than expected. When reaches it, his chin is just barely above the bartop. Either the bar is unusually tall, or Glen is unusually short. Brushing that aside, he takes a seat at the bar as far from the canary toon as possible. "Sir," Glen says with urgency, "I have no idea where I am or why I'm like this. I am freaking out quite a bit right now." He begins to grip the edge of the bartop very tightly as his stress continues to rise.

"Whoa! Whoa! Slow down 'dere!" Says the wolf trying to calm Glen down. "I sees you're quite stressed, but you gotta slow down a bit. Start from da beginning."

Glen takes a few deep breaths before trying again. "Okay, so, it was my friend's birthday last night. We went to Larry's. He roped me into a drinking game, and that's the last thing I remember."

"Uh huh. Last I saw you, yous left wit' yer friend after tooning out. You seemed pretty bummed about somethin' when yous got here."

“Why the hell did he take me *here* of all places?!”

“Don’t ask me! Just calm down and ground yerself. You’ll de-toon soon enough.”

Glen takes more deep breaths to try and calm down as per the wolf’s instructions. Many minutes are spent just sitting there. He listens to the clinking of the glasses as the wolf sets them down after cleaning them. He listens to the melodious humming from the canary. “How long is this gonna take?”

“As long as it needs to. You busy or somethin’?”

“I would like to go home very much right now, yes.”

“Well, I could help relieve ya of that form faster if ya want.” The wolf toon pulls out a cane that looks like a fountain pen.

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!” pipes up the canary. “Not this time, Ritz!” The canary takes its notebook, gets out of their seat, and then grabs Glen’s arm despite Glen backing away from the canary as far as he could while sitting in a stool. “I’m not gonna let you steal another poor sod’s ink right in front of my eyes. C’mon, fresh ink! You’re coming with me.” The canary begins to drag Glen to the toon side of the bar.

“Oh, please, no! Don’t take me there!” Glen protests as he tries to dig his heels into the ground. The canary now has to make an effort to drag Glen out.

“Quit your whining! You’ll love where I’m about to take you. It’ll calm you down better than just sitting in some dingy bar in silence.” They reach the doorway on the toon side of the bar. The canary opens the door and it leads into the toontown. Glen grabs a hold of the door frame in another attempt to wrench himself free of the canary’s grip. The canary has to use even more effort to pull Glen out. Glen’s arms begin to stretch longer and longer. “Just... let... go!”

Eventually, Glen’s grip falters and he lets go of the door frame. The potential energy stored up from being stretched unleashes itself upon the canary by having Glen fly into the canary’s chest at high speed. The force causes the canary to also fly in the same direction at high speed. They zoom past driving cars with a loud *whoosh!* as they fly across the street. Their flight is interrupted by a telephone pole with a *splat!* Glen falls to the ground to reveal the canary squished into the wood.

The two toons pull themselves together. Glen manages to pull his attention away from the horrifying reality that he is currently in a toontown to get another look at the canary toon that pulled him out of The Inkwell. Their body is covered in luxurious blue feathers with a white feathered underbelly. His arms are wings and can act like hands somehow. *Fucking toons*, Glen thinks. Those arm wings have black feathers to accent the blue ones and make a layered pattern. His torso is garbed in a mauve colored vest with black buttons.

“Well, then,” begins the canary, “I believe introductions are in order. Hi! My name is Ken!” Ken extends a wing to Glen.

“Um, uh, Glen.” He grasps Ken’s wing with hesitation.

“Nice ta meet’cha, Glen! Welcome to Pinnacle Peak! This is the toontown I call home.” Ken gestures to their surroundings. To the buildings with cartoonish proportions. To the streets that seem to go on into an endless expanse of pavement. To the toons of all shapes, sizes, and

colors that inhabit the space. To Glen who seems very, very uncomfortable right now. “Uh, you okay?”

“I shouldn’t be here.”

“Why? Everyone’s welcome here!”

“No, no, this is a place meant for toons. I’m *not* a toon! I shouldn’t be here!” Glen grabs onto Ken’s shoulders.

“Look, pal, so long as you’re in that form, you’re a toon. Judging by the backs of your hands, not a permanent one, but still.”

“You need to take me home **now!**”

“Dude! Chill! Just take a little tour with me and you’ll be calmed down in no time! You won’t be able to ground yourself in reality while you’re all hysterical like that.”

“Grrr! Fine!” Glen flails his hands into the air. “Take me wherever I guess. I don’t care anymore.”

“Great! Just follow me!” Ken takes Glen to all of his favorite spots in Pinnacle Peak. From Fleischer Café--famous for its large selection of coffee beans--to Tex Boardwalk--a great place to watch the tide ebb and flow along the beach. They take a short walk through Bosko Park on their way to Ken’s last stop. “And finally, here is my most favorite spot of all: Termite Terrace Theater! Today is Tuesday, so they’re having their amateur showcase today,” Ken then practically sings, “and I’ve got a spot in it!”

All Glen can answer with is a pathetic “Unh.” as he gazes at the large building made of bricks of a dusty red color. The marquee above the front door says in moderately sized letters: “AMATEUR SHOWCASE TODAY! ALL LIVE SHOWS!”

Ken gives a huff at Glen’s dour reaction. “That’s all you’ve said this entire tour!”

“To be fair, you’re the one dragging me along this tour against my will.”

“I’m trying to help you!”

“I’d prefer going home, thank you very much.”

Ken huffs again. “Oh, c’mon you sadsack! I’m sure this’ll cheer you up!” Ken brings Glen to the box office. He slaps some coins onto the counter and asks the ticketmaster, “One ticket to the showcase, please!”

“You don’t want two?” drones on the ticketmaster.

“I’m a performer, so I don’t need one.”

“Uh huh.” The ticketmaster takes the money and gives the canary one ticket. “The showcase is at stage twenty-one as per usual.”

“Thank you!” Ken takes the ticket and pushes it into Glen’s gloved hand. “Alright, get your butt into a seat. I gotta go in a different way. See you soon!” With that, Ken heads on around the corner out of Glen’s sight. With a dejected sigh, Glen walks into the building.

The house of stage 21 isn’t very packed. There’s some clusters of toons and humans alike. Glen goes and finds a cozy corner in the back of the house. While waiting for the show to start, he gets a good look at the décor. Red and gold seems to be the main theme here. The

curtains are a brilliant red that match the seat cushions of the house. All of the trimming is of a gold color, and the walls appear to be marble. Though, upon closer inspection, that's just what the wall paper wants you to think. The aisles between the blocks of seats are of red carpet. The actual flooring beneath the seats is smooth concrete painted black. The acoustics of the room are so good that Glen can hear the whisperings of the people far across the room.

Soon enough, the house lights begin to dim. "Ladies and gentlemen," announces a voice from the speakers, "welcome to this week's amateur showcase! Today, we have three acts for you to enjoy. First up is the comedic stylings of Felitas Fallone!" The small audience cheers a little as the curtains open to a cat toon sitting on a stool with a microphone. The cat performs a stand-up comedy routine that was okay at best. The audience gives a few chuckles here and there, but it's nothing too groundbreaking. After that performance is a live toon act of a fox and rabbit duo. The audience loved this one. The duo gave a great performance that would've brought the house down if they had a full audience instead of this small crowd of enthusiasts. The only one not cheering them on and laughing their asses off--figuratively and literally--is Glen. The voices of his parents echo in his mind: *"Their shows of utter chaos are not healthy!" "Stop that laughter right now, mister! You'll become a toon before you even know it!" "Ma'am, I will no longer allow your son to corrupt my son with all that cartoon nonsense no longer!"*

"What a great show, you two! You'll be marquees in no time with performances like that! Now on to our third and final act of this afternoon. Give it up for this musical performance performed by Ken Canary!" The audience applauds once again and the curtains open. Ken stands at a microphone. Music begins to play. Eventually Ken begins to sing. It doesn't sound familiar to Glen, and it doesn't sound old. An original composition perhaps? Either way, Ken signs his heart out in this little jaunty tune of his. As Glen listens, he seems to find himself relaxing his shoulders a bit and actually enjoying the performance. For just a few minutes he forgets that he's currently trapped in a toon body and not knowing if he'll ever be human again.

Once the performance is done, the audience gives generous applause for Ken who bows to the audience before the curtain closes on him. "What a lovely song that was! Great singing, Ken! And that concludes this week's amateur showcase. Be sure to exit..." Glen tunes out the rest of what the announcer says as it's just reminders about leaving in an orderly fashion, and to not litter, and yada, yada, yada as the lights to the house brighten back up.

Ken meets up with Glen outside of the theater. "So? What d'ya think? Did you have fun?" Ken tippy taps his feet in anticipation of Glen's answer.

"Uh, a little I guess. Your--"

"Yay! I knew you'd like it! Hopefully you've calmed down a bit. It'll hopefully be easier to concentrate on grounding yourself in reality again."

"Here is to hoping..."

"C'mon, I'll take you back to the border. It's starting to get a bit late anyways." And as promised, Ken takes Glen back to the border of reality and this toontown--Pinnacle Peak.

The smiling sun begins to touch the tops of the taller buildings in the distance, and the sky is beginning to dim. "I guess this is where we part ways for now." Ken says when they reach their destination. "Take my business card! Hit me up if you wanna hang out again."

"Uh, sure." Glen takes the offered piece of cardboard. "See ya."

"Goodbye!" Ken waves to Glen. Glen gives a flick of two fingers in return as he makes his way past the border. Once he turns the corner out of Ken's sight, he makes a dash away from the border in order to get away from it as quickly as possible. Didn't want to seem rude. But, before he could even start running, he runs into someone with an "Oof!"

"Hey! Watch it!" Glen looks up to the human's face. It was Rheese!

"Rheese! Boy, am I glad to see you!"

"Who are you? How do you know my name?"

"It's me! Glen!"

"Glen? No, Glen is a human. Who the hell are you, man?"

"I'm Glen! You guys took me to The Inkwell last night!"

"Never heard of it."

"It was Drew's birthday last night. We went to Larry's. Last thing I remember was taking a shot during our game."

Rheese pauses for a moment. He then dons a face of realization. "Oh shit... What the fuck happened to you? I thought you didn't like toons. And why are you so short?"

"I don't know what happened! I took a shot, and then I woke up in an alleyway looking like... this!" Glen gestures to his body.

"Uh, well, during your guy's third game, you lost and seemed rather sad about losing. Turns out you're an emotional drunk." Rheese snickers. "Anyway, uh, Drew was adamant about ending the party early. He wanted to take you somewhere he thought would cheer you up."

"And he took me to The Inkwell of places?!"

"I guess. Again, I've never heard of it, and Drew didn't want to tell me where he was taking you. Said to trust him that you were gonna love it. I went home. Drew wouldn't let me join you guys for some reason." Rheese shrugs.

"Okay... Okay... I'm starting to piece things together. There's still a bit unexplained, but... I guess that'll sate me for now." There's a small moment of silence between the two before Glen speaks up. "Can you take me home?"

Rheese is broken from the heavy stupor the moment has brought. "Oh, uh, yeah! Of course!" The human and toon pair walk to Rheese's car and then get inside. The drive is long and awkward. Especially for Glen. He was still very clearly not comfortable in his toon skin, and it was hard to articulate any words to penetrate the awkwardness Glen was feeling in these moments. Glen fiddles with the business card Ken gave him to distract his fingers, and he does his best to avoid looking into any mirrors. He doesn't want to see what the transformation has done to his face. The rectangle of cardboard stands out from the rest of the surroundings. It looks like something that was drawn onto a photograph by a cartoonist no matter where you position the card.

Rheese pulls into Glen's driveway. His car is there. It seems either Drew or Rheese drove it back to Glen's home. "Thanks for the drive, man."

"No problem! Do you, uh, think you'll be alright?"

Glen opens the passenger door. The cool evening air hits Glen like the gust of wind from opening the doors to Larry's the previous night. "I'm sure I'll be fine. Good night, dude."

"Alright, if you say so. Good night!" Glen slams the car door shut and walks into his dull grey house.

Glen tosses the business card onto the small table next to his front door. A table that now reaches up to the top of his ink-black belly instead of his waist. On the wall hangs a mirror. He now looks at his face for the first time today. He seems to be a fox toon. Er, well, no, more like a cat toon? Maybe? Possibly? The laws of comedy probably couldn't decide on a species. More likely is that it thought the ambiguous combo was more funny than one or the other. The lack of tail only makes it harder to discern. A head of white fur lies between his two, tall, pointed ears. Black fur frames his white furred face. A blunted nose reminiscent of the two animals aforementioned sits in the center of his very, very slightly muzzled face. Two tufts of white fur stick out from either cheek.

With a sigh, he heads into his living room and plops himself onto the dull grey couch and stares at the wall in contemplation. *What happened to me last night? Why did Drew take me to The Inkwell? Doesn't he know I don't like toons? Was he trying to make me toon out?! ... No... No, he wouldn't do that on purpose. He's like that.* His skin begins to become lighter. *Well, at least I'm home now.* His face slowly contorts back to his normal, human face. *It's nearly dinner time I think.* The gloves start to disappear with the arrival of his missing fingers. *I think I'll just order something to be delivered.* His clothes begin to return to normal; his shorts become his khakis, his feet paws grow his tennis shoes, and his t-shirt grows from his torso.

I think I'll order pizza. But where's my phone? Glen swivels his head to look for his phone knowing that there are no pockets to his shorts. At least no obvious ones anyway. Thinking about checking his shorts anyway, he looks down to his legs to find that they are encased in a pair of khakis. He jumped from his seat--and didn't hover in the air this time!--and examined himself. He then hugs himself in relief and sits back down. "Fucking finally!" He grabs his modest flip phone from the usual pocket and calls for pizza to celebrate.

III

Nothing says “good morning” like your phone ringing to wake you up on an off-work day because your parents want to tell you they want to visit you for dinner that very same day. “Oh! And I just realized this visit would be a good opportunity to make this a part of your monthly check-up!” says the doting, motherly voice on the other side of the line. She didn’t just now realize it. It was planned from the start. “See you tonight, son!”

“See you later!” The chipper tune Glen gives doesn’t at all reflect the stressed expression on his face. “Oh, fuck.” He expresses aloud after hanging up the call. *I gotta get this place clean before dinner.* Still in his pajamas, he rushes out to the kitchen to prepare every piece of cleaning supplies he owns. He pulls out the mop, the broom, the vacuum, various rags, all-purpose cleaner, floor cleaner, carpet deodorizer, etc.

He begins by dusting the higher up stuff with a clean rag and watches as little to no dust falls to the ground. He dusts the top of the refrigerator; the one shelf containing a single, grey cube as a decoration (he dusts the cube, too); the top of the cabinets; and the blades of the ceiling fan. After that, he grabs the broom and dustpan and sweeps the negligent amount of dust that fell from the furniture.

With the dusting done, he moves on to scrubbing the spotless and shiny countertops and tables with the all-purpose cleaner. Just a spritz of cleaner and then a good rubbing from the rag. *Fuck, why do they have to come today of all days? I really wish they didn’t come to check up on me every month. Like, I don’t watch TV or use the internet. Not a single bit of toon stuff enters this damn house. Like, what the hell is their problem?*

Scrub, scrub, scru-- Glen pauses when he looks at the back of his scrubbing hand. *What the fuck is that?* Two black, seemingly drawn on lines have appeared. He looks to his other hand. Same thing: two lines. He pokes them a bit and, yes, they move with his skin. Those lines are definitely on his hands. Ken’s voice comes to him in his mind, “*Judging by the backs of your hands, not a permanent one, but still.*” “Oh no...” *Okay! Okay! Just calm down! Ground yourself in reality. Uh, okay, what was I doing? Scrubbing! Right, right... okay.* Glen goes back to scrubbing the already clean kitchen counter. *Okay, after the counter, I need to scrub the dining table. Afterwards, I need to scrub the coffee table in the living room. Then I need to scrub the small table by the front door...* Glen continues on with thoughts like these in an attempt to ground himself in reality. It seems to work as the lines begin to fade. He pays no mind however and just focuses on cleaning.

He continues to think to himself while finishing up the table by the front door, *I think it worked. That was close. Hopefully Mom thinks this is good enough. ... Oh shit!* The lines are back. With a vengeance, too. His pinky begins shrinking right in front of his eyes. *No, no, no, no, no! Stop!* He tries to pull his pinky finger back into existence with no success. *Uh, uh... Okay, I need to mop the kitchen. Let’s do that, yeah.* He grabs a bucket, the mop, and the floor cleaner and creates a sanitizer solution with the floor cleaner and some water from the kitchen sink to mop the floor with. He does his best to solely focus on cleaning. This also seems to work as his pinkies reappear. The lines don’t seem to go away though to Glen’s chagrin.

He decides to just ignore it and focus on cleaning 100%. No distractions. No wandering thoughts. Just cleaning. He finishes mopping, so he moves on to vacuuming. By the time he finishes that task, he notices the time. It's about six o'clock. His parents will be at his home soon. He puts away all of the cleaning supplies and then goes to his bedroom to put on some clean clothes. It's the same outfit as yesterday. The only outfit he has besides his pajamas.

Glen checks the backs of his hands. They're still there. "Fuck..." He goes to the bathroom sink to try and wash it off. Rubbing them off doesn't seem to do anything. Adding soap doesn't either! He's even rubbing very vigorously. No matter how red he rubs the skin, the lines won't go away. *DING DONG!* goes the doorbell. Glen hurriedly shuts off the faucet, dries his hands, and heads to the front door. Right when he gets there, he notices Ken's business card that he left on the table near the front door. He quickly snatches it up and puts it into a pocket. Finally, he reaches for the door with his left hand and hides his right hand behind his back and opens the door.

As he expected, his smiling parents are waiting for him. "Hey, guys!" he says with a fake smile on his face.

"Hello, dear!" Exclaims his mother. His father stays quiet.

"C'mon in!" Glen steps aside and accidentally puts out his right hand to gesture to the foyer. Realizing his mistake, he puts it back behind his back hoping that came off as a natural movement.

"Wow! It's so clean in here! Good job!" The mother gives Glen a thumbs up.

"What's for dinner?" His dad asks.

"Oh, uh," *FUCK! I forgot to make something!* "S-sandwiches!"

His mom answers, "Oh, lovely! You make the best sandwiches." Glen lets out an exhale of relief. Once they have fully stepped inside, he closes the door and hides both hands behind his back. "Remember! I don't like onions!"

"Don't worry! I haven't forgotten!" Glen's parents walk to the living room while Glen heads to the kitchen to start making the sandwiches. He pulls out the bread; the deli meat; a tomato; an onion; a concoction from the grocery store called "sandwich spread;" and pre-sliced, sharp cheddar cheese. As he makes the sandwiches, he tries to ground himself once again to try and get rid of the lines. For some reason, it's just not working. Frustrated, he gives up and goes to serve the sandwiches. To avoid having his parents see the lines, he places the plates on the dining table before sitting down at a chair. He calls for his parents for dinner and hides his hands in his lap.

Glen's parents file into the dining area of the kitchen and sit down at the table. His mother drones on about some gossip while his father listens. His father doesn't say much and mostly focuses on his sandwich, but he does vocalize every once in a while to confirm he's listening. Meanwhile Glen is stuck staring at his sandwich. If he moves his hands out from under the table, his parents will see the lines, but if he doesn't eat, his parents will get suspicious. After a minute or two, Glen gets the idea to actually listen to the inane gossip his mother is spouting to try and get the lines to go away.

She goes on and on about some co-workers who did something ever so slightly incorrect. About a story one of her H.A.T.E. (Humans Against Toon Encouragement) friends told her about their child. About dumb people in traffic. On and on she goes. On instinct, he reaches for his sandwich and begins eating. Then his heart jumps into his throat realizing what he did. Carefully he moves one of his hands in such a way he can look at the back. He finds that his skin is now clear of the lines. With that seemingly solved, he enjoys the rest of his sandwich.

Dinner concludes and his mother gives a positive report on his house seeming pleased that nothing toon-y is going on in it. With their goodbyes, the front door closes behind them. Glen lets out a big breath of air as if he was holding his breath the entire time, but that large exhale--from his perspective--left him shorter. Glen takes a look down at his body and sees the toon body. **“FUCK!!!”**

The next morning has Glen looking at himself in the mirror. He's still a toon. The sleep didn't make it go away. He squishes and stretches his face to test out the skin to see what its limits are. Almost as if he's trying to see if he could pull it off to try and get back to his human body like it was underneath. Alas, that is not the reality of his situation. *I need to find that wolf guy. What was his name again? Ritz? I think that was it.* With that, he heads out to his car. Having learned about the infinite space that is in the pockets of his toon shorts this morning from his earlier messing around, he pulls out his keys and starts the engine and heads to the city where this all started.

“Okay,” Glen says to himself, “it should be on the street around this corner here, and... Uh... Where is it?” In the spot The Inkwell was is now a vacant building that looks nothing like the building The Inkwell was. “Wha-- where the hell is it?” Glen finds a parking spot next to the curb and gets out to investigate. He walks up to the vacant building. A bog standard “FOR SALE” sign is stuck onto the window. His face scrunches up in painful confusion. He checks the alleyway. Nothing. He goes back to the building's front. He scans the building's every detail that he can. He notices that the door handles don't match the door. The door is normal, but the handles look toon-y and contrast against the door. Curiosity gets the better of him and he attempts to open the door.

The door opens to a toon office building. Seeing this as a step in the right direction, he steps inside. Toons sit at their desks working on huge mountains of paperwork that are piled at their desks. “Uh, excuse me!” calls out one of the toons. “What're you doing here?”

“I was looking for The Inkwell, but this doesn't look like the right place.”

“What made you think that a building marked ‘Ornstein & Smough Law Company’ was going to be a bar?”

“Huh? The building was vacant and marked as for sale.”

“I don't know what you're on, buddy, but the question still stands.”

“Argh! Whatever!” Seeing this going nowhere, he steps back outside only to find himself in Pinnacle Peak. “Oh, great. Back here again. Ugh...” Not knowing where to go now, he decides to wander down the sidewalk.

After quite a bit of walking for some time and trying not to look at any of the other toons around him, he hears a familiar voice call out his name. “Glen!” It says in the distance. “Glen! Hey!” The voice is getting closer. Glen stops and looks for the source of the voice. Lo and behold its that blue canary toon: Ken. Glen groans but waves to him anyways. “Oh my gosh! I didn’t think I’d see you around here! Did you come here yourself, or were you forced again.” Ken jokes.

“I’m looking for The Inkwell. I want to see how Ritz can cure me of this.”

“No, no you don’t.”

“Yes, yes I do. I think I know my own wants and needs.”

“Dude, look, you don’t want Ritz to poke you with that cane of his. He’s bad news. He’ll steal your Ink, and you won’t ever be the same again! My advice is to learn to deal with it.”

“But I don’t want to deal with this, I want to be human. Nothing but human. This,” he gestures to his body, “is not natural. This is not okay.”

“What do you mean? Ink is a part of nature as much as any ol’ tree!”

“No, humans are meant to be humans. Toons are meant to be toons. This warping of that fact is completely unnatural!”

“Hey! Hey! Quiet down! You’re causing a scene. But you’re wrong, what happened to you happens all the time to humans. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Glen makes a frustrated sigh. “Whatever... Let’s just... change the subject. What’ve you been up to?” Glen goes back to walking along the sidewalk to an unknown destination. Ken follows.

“Oh, I’ve been doing performances and the like. Ever since the amateur showcase, I’ve been starting to get gigs all over the place!”

“Already? Wasn’t that, like, two days ago?”

“Yeah! Isn’t it great? If my creator was still around, he’d be so proud of me!”

“Wow...”

“Maybe you should try your hand at performing.” Ken says matter-of-factly.

“I’d rather be caught dead.”

“What?! That’s ridiculous! Toons were born to perform! I think you’d be pretty good at it.”

“No.” This “no” was a rather firm one compared to the mood of the conversation.

“Yeah, you could be the sadsack straight man to a happy-go-lucky toon!”

“I. Said. No.”

“Jeez! Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed?”

“No!” Glen says very harshly. It was almost like it was meant as a strike at the bird boy. “I’m not just going to throw my life away for some performance nonsense when I could be spending my time doing something productive like... like... I dunno! Reading a book? Like, just

a few days ago, everything was normal. Everything was fine. Everything was perfect. Now? It's all out of whack and now I have to hide this from my mother on top of being her son in the first place!" The stress of his situation has finally caught up to him and tears begin to roll down his cheeks. The weight of it all pushes him down to his knees. "How do I hide this, Ken? How?! It keeps creeping back up on me when I just want it to go away!" Now his emotions overwhelm him. No words any more. Just sobbing.

Ken gets down onto his knees, too, and he places a wing onto Glen's back. "Sssssh-sh-sh-sh-sh! It's okay. Your emotions are heightened when you're like this. Just let them go through you. Don't fight the sadness. That'll only make you more sad than you already are. Here, I'll help you back to reality so you can go home, alright?" Glen nods unable to vocalize his agreement.

IV

“Go! Go! Go! Yes!” shout Glen and Rheese as they watch a player from their favorite football team score a winning touchdown in the last quarter of the game.

“Woo! Good running, Falcone!” Says Rheese giving the player a few claps.

“Oh, looks like they’re actually going for the kick this time instead of trying for a two point conversion and then throwing the ball to the opposition.” Glen jokes.

Rheese looks to Glen with a bewildered face. *Glen doesn’t make jokes.* He thinks. “Yeah, and they also won’t try to rely on Mr. Butterfingers to catch the ball even though there was ample space to run the ball in.” Rheese jokes back. They continue to joke with each other and laugh for a good few moments. And then Rheese looks to Glen after looking away from him the whole time. He jumps as if jumpscared. “Oh, shit, man! You scared me!”

“Why? What’s wrong?” Glen now takes a look at himself and sees that he has tooned out again. “Damn it! I was getting so good at holding this back, too!”

“Hey, man, it’s alright! I don’t mind.”

“This is, uh, kind of awkward. Uh... I’m-- I’m just gonna go home.”

“You want me to drive you?”

“Uh...” Glen mulls it over a little, “sure.”

The car ride home is dark. The car is cozy. The tension is thick enough to cut with a pair of scissors. Glen sits in the passenger seat up against the door watching the road lines speed by. Rheese watches the endless expanse of dark pavement ahead. Neither says a word to the other. That is until a voice cuts through the silence. “You doing alright?” Rheese’s voice suddenly rings out.

“What do you think?” says Glen glumly.

“I think I see a tooned out human.”

“Oh, is that what you think?”

“Mhm.”

Glen sighs, “No, I’m not doing alright. I thought this problem finally went away. Two weeks without tooning out. Two weeks of normalcy.”

“There’s nothing wrong with changing up what’s normal every now and then.”

“You don’t understand. If my parents see me like this or find out I’ve been hanging around toons, they’re gonna kill me.”

“It can’t be that bad!”

“No, I’m being serious. They’d probably disown me.”

“I see.” A moment of pause hangs in the air. The red traffic light shines through the dim. The light turns green and the car moves forward again. “I’m pretty sure it’s inevitable that they’ll find out.”

“Yeah, I know, but, like, it’s easier if they didn’t know, you know?”

“Not really. Are they, like, paying your rent or something?”

“No, it’s just that my mom will be insufferable if she finds out. I can’t take that. Yeah, they’ll probably disown me, but my mom is the kind of woman who lets you know that she doesn’t like you when given the chance. Any time we meet, she’ll constantly mention the thing she doesn’t like about you in the conversation. She’ll talk shit about you behind your back--a lot of it are rumors she made up through assumption. And, like, she’s a member of H.A.T.E! I know you know that. Don’t tell me you didn’t.”

“Yeah, I know she is.”

“Then you know that this conversation is pointless as you already know what they’ll do if they find out about this.”

“Won’t don’t you just, like, move somewhere else so they don’t know where you are?” Glen gives Rheese a look that looks as if Rheese insulted him. “Yeah, I know it sounds harsh, but it doesn’t seem like you like them very much anyhow. Not to mention that your mom in particular seems rather psychologically abusive.” Glen doesn’t know what to say. It’s his mom. The woman who cared for him for all of his childhood.

“I’d love to be able to do what you’re suggesting, but I don’t think I could stand to hurt her like that.”

“And why’s that?”

There is yet another pause as Glen searches for the right words. “I don’t know. Because she’s my mom I guess. I feel guilty just thinking about moving out of my current home out of nowhere.”

“Well, time on this planet may be short, but that’s only in comparison to the age of history. Eighty years is a lot of time to let the consequences of decisions play out. The consequence of cutting your parents from your life is probably negligible compared to that as harsh as it may sound.”

Another pause. A very, very long pause this time. Neither said a word. Then, once again, Rheese breaks the silence with a question. “You know, I think all this toon stuff is rubbing off on ya.” Rheese chuckles. “Never heard you make a single joke ever.” Glen curls up against the car door a little bit more. “It was the first time we’ve ever exchanged jokes, too.” Rheese laughs a little. Glen curls up more. Rheese steals some glances at Glen and notices his curling. “You cold?” No answer. “I’ll take that as a ye--”

“I liked it.” Glen interrupts.

“H-huh?”

“The laughing and the joking. I liked it.”

“I mean, that’s kind of the point of doing that.” Rheese laughs again but awkwardly this time.

“I never made jokes because I thought It’d make me toon out if I did. That’s what I was told.”

“Um, o-okay.”

“The feeling that all gave me... It was great. I liked it. I wanted to do it more.” Glen curls up even further. “I liked seeing you smile because of my joke. I liked hearing you laugh at my

joke. I didn't even mean to make the joke in the first place! It just kind of came out. Then we kept making more jokes. It was... euphoric."

"Well, toons *are* born to entertain!"

"I'm not a toon!!!" Rheese falls silent after Glen's outburst. The loud noise is absorbed by the car's interior to instantly silence the moment.

Rheese finally speaks up, "Are you sure?" Glen doesn't answer. Rheese pulls into Glen's driveway. Glen's dormant car sits there. "We're here. See ya later, man!"

"Yeah... See ya."

The soft sheets feel like a comforting embrace against the back of the toon laying on them. Contemplation is the name of the game. Something that he's been doing a lot lately. Tonight he's contemplating the conversation he had with Rheese in the car. Should he move out? Where? Can he take the guilt he'd put onto himself from doing so? Does it matter? Would he truly be happy in this condition? Ken's voice rings through his head once again, "*Maybe you should try your hand at performing.*" "*I think you'd be pretty good at it.*" Glen grabs his cellphone and Ken's business card. He taps away at the keypad.

8:50 "*Hey, this is Glen. Can we meet up somewhere? I'd like to talk about getting a gig.*"

8:54 "*Of course!!! When are you next available?*"

V

The curtains rise to a scene of a fox-cat-thing(?) sitting in a big and comfy armchair with a TV remote in his hand. A side table sits stage-left next to the chair. The low murmur of the television can be heard. On the other side of a wall--and presumed to be a window--a blue canary wearing a mauve-colored vest hovers and lands onto a tree branch. They clear their throat before beginning to sing a chipper little tune. The toon in the chair puts on an annoyed face and throws a can at the window. Startled, the canary is interrupted from its singing.

After a few moments, the canary begins to sing again. Of course, this aggravates the toon inside the room. He gets up out of his chair, opens the window and yells, "HEY!" This startles the canary again to the point of flying up into the air from a fight-or-flight response. Feeling satisfied, the other toon goes back to sitting in his chair.

Not a moment later and the canary toon floats back down onto the branch and continues their song. The other toon shoots back out of their chair and grabs the canary by the neck. "Shut it!" he commands.

"But, sir," the canary chokes out, "you seemed so sad. I thought a lovely song would cheer you up!"

"You're making a racket while I'm trying to watch TV!" The canary is then thrown out the window. The window is then shut while the canary comes in from stage left and stands on the side table. The other toon turns around to see the canary standing there despite being thrown out of the window. He stops in his tracks.

"A good song is way better at lifting your spirits than any ol' TV show! I'll show you!" The canary says before starting up their song again.

"Gah!" exclaims the other toon, "I don't want to listen to your song! I wanna watch TV in peace!" They grab the canary by the throat again to stifle the singing. They open the window and throw the canary out again. The canary moved so fast they seemingly teleported on top of the other toon's head. The canary starts to sing again. "Grr! You dang bird!" The other toon starts swatting at the canary to try and grab them. The canary just floats up above the other toon which makes the other toon fall out the window and down a trap door in the stage floor to signify falling a great distance out of the window.

Still hovering in the air, the canary says in a chipper tune, "I knew he'd fall for my song eventually!" The audience lets out their final big laugh and gives the duo's performance much applause as the curtain falls.

There's a show at The Inkwell tonight. Next to the front door outside is a poster on an easel that advertises:

TONIGHT ONLY! THE BEETLES! OPENING PERFORMANCE BY KEN & GLUM!

Inside, Glen in his toon form sits on a stool at the bar with a shot of alcohol sitting on the counter next to him. He's playing with a coin and holding his head. His movements are sluggish as

though he's already drunk. The wolf toon tending the bar--Ritz--speaks up, "Seems you two made a good performance. The crowd was... loud." There's a slight bitterness to that statement on the last word.

"Mhm." Is all Glen responds with as he plays with the coin.

"A couple months being a toon and it seems ya already got da hang of it."

"Ya know, Ritz, being like this ain't so bad." Glen slurs. "But I gotta ask: what the hell even am I?"

"Hm..." Ritz squints at the fox-cat-thing sitting at his bar. "Judging by yer pointy ears and cheek tufts, I'd assume some kind of fox or somethin'."

Ken appears and takes a seat next to Glen. "Nah, I think he's more like some kind of lynx."

Ritz counters, "But he ain't got dem ear tufts at the points."

"I heard him purring once!" Ken says in a sing-song voice.

"Hey!" Glen interrupts, "I thought you wouldn't tell anyone!"

"Oops!" Ken tweets with no remorse.

"Ey! There's my favorite toon!" Drew's voice sounds off from across the room. Rheese is with him as well. "What a great show, Glum! You too, Ken!" Drew gives Ken a smile.

Rheese comments, "You two are a pretty good up-and-coming act. I wonder when I'll start seeing your names on theater marquees."

"Possibly soon!" an unfamiliar voice says. "Hello, I'm Deren Turtain." The voice comes from a weasel toon that has decided to approach the group. He hands Ken his business card. Indeed his name is Deren Turtain. The card also says that he is a talent scout for the Termite Terrace Theater. "I wanted to approach you with an offer to perform at the amateur showcase next week. Would you at all be interested in such an opportunity? I already know Ken here has had a performance there once before, and my bosses were quite happy with him. I'm sure I'd be able to get a spot no problem."

"Oh my gosh! Gle-- er, Glum!" says Ken excitedly, "We're doing it! One step closer to the big time!" Ken practically shoves the business card into Glen's face.

Glen takes the card and stares at it with his bleary eyes. "Huh."

"We should take the offer! It'll be our most important performance yet!"

"Huh." Glen grunts again. "Yeah, sure, that sounds like fun." He lazily hands the card back to Ken. Although his exterior exudes nonchalance and not very much care, on the inside his heart is racing and there's a fuzzy feeling of joy in his chest."

The weasel stands back up seeing the deal is finished. "It seems we have a deal! I'll contact you soon with more details. See you around, you two."