

"Looks like it's just you and me, shorty." Gabby Davies, small-time comedian/actor, as well as full-time jokester/socialite, was in a situation he rarely experienced: Sitting at home, bored. The shorty in question was his girlfriend's pet mouse, Lewis, who he had agreed to watch for a week while Paula was out of town. He'd turned out to be even less interesting company than Gabby had expected.

Gabby had been in a holding pattern all day. After finishing his afternoon workout, the athletic coyote had gotten dressed to go out, complete with the favorite of his trademark Aloha shirts, then realized he didn't have a trace of motivation for going anywhere. Spending more time exercising had crossed his mind, but even taking care of his leading-man good looks felt like too much effort tonight. Wandering through his video game collection had burned a couple of hours, but nothing was holding his interest, and Gabby had finally found himself unable to focus on the screen.

As his PC shut down, he noticed his gaze was already drifting to the side, taking yet another look at the photo of his recent lover, who he hadn't seen in person for days. **I'd forgotten the bad side of having someone who sets me off that much: NOT having them.** Picking up the framed photo, he grinned at the thought of her. It was a full-body shot of the lovely, cream-furred rat wearing nothing but a maroon silk robe and a tempting expression. He sighed wistfully and set the picture back in its place. Their relationship had a few obstacles, the major one being that Gabby was six foot one, and the photo he'd been holding in his hand was life-size, but, you know, challenges just kept a relationship interesting.

The coyote slumped in his chair, idly watching Lewis running on his exercise wheel. **Well, there's a good metaphor for how I feel right now...** Tapping on the cage bars to get the mouse's attention, he stuck a fingertip through the gaps to give the rodent a scratch, as the little guy wandered over. "You don't have any ideas for how to kill some time, I suppose." The little black-and-white puffball stopped by Gabby's claw, sniffed, **eek**ed and ran to hide in his nest of shredded paper.

Gabby pulled his hand back, and tapped on the desk's top next to the cage, giving the mouse's hiding place an annoyed look. "What is your problem, shorty? Sometimes I think we'd get along better if you were deep-fried." He leaned back in his heavily used swivel chair, looking blankly at the ceiling. Normally, being this bored would be a signal that it was time to go out drinking, but for some reason, he wasn't feeling it.

Belatedly, he noticed noise from the hall. Flicking his ears toward his apartment door, he caught what sounded like conversation in the hallway right outside his place. Excited conversation. "Well, sounds like someone in this place isn't bored." Gabby pushed himself out of his seat, and smirked as he approached the front door. "In other words, a chance to butt in for my own amusement!"

As soon as Gabby's door swung open, he was brought up short by a familiar voice. "Heyo!

Been a while. I woulda knocked, but your neighbors just refuse to leave me alone!” Gabby’s eyebrows made a serious attempt to jump clean off his face when he saw the grinning visage of his old friend and occasional rival, Wayne Rourke. After sending a smirk Gabby’s way, Wayne turned his attention back to the notepad in his hand, which he was tearing signed pages out of as fast as he could scribble his name. The tall, lanky weasel was busy handing autographed pages to Gabby’s neighbors, who were crowding the walkways that covered the hallway walls, all hoping to get one, or two, or a stack, for themselves. Rourke being over a dozen times the height of all the residents aside from Gabby didn’t make his fans any less enthusiastic, despite the autographs being the size of posters to their recipients.

“Damn, Davies,” came a voice from the walkway at Gabby’s shoulder height. “You shoulda told us you knew some real celebrities!”

Gabby’s face went blank, and his tone matched. “I’ve said plenty of times that I know him. I keep telling you I took acting lessons with Wayne Rourke, didn’t I?”

“Well, yeah...” said the same neighbor, who Gabby fortunately couldn’t identify. “But I thought you were lying your ass off about that. I mean, who’s going to believe you ever had acting lessons?”

“Oh hey,” Wayne broke in, not even trying to hide how funny he was finding this, “Good to see you’re just as popular as ever!” The six-four, wiry weasel in his signature pure white suit was showing that signature pure white grin that could tempt a saint to punch him in the face. “But don’t worry, America’s favorite excessively tall Irishman is here to make your life interesting!”

Gabby leaned out of the door and gazed down the hall. “I don’t see Conan O’Brien anywhere.”

The weasel snickered and steepled his fingers. “Yes... I’ve made sure of that...” he said ominously. As Gabby snorted a laugh in response, Wayne returned to his autographs, saying offhandedly, “Unless you’ve got something better to do, then I’ll oh God, I couldn’t say that with a straight face, heh heh...”

“Cute, Wayne, cute-”

“Why, yes I am!”

“But you’re right,” Gabby paused, “Huh. Guess there is a first time for everything. Anyway, I’ve got no good way to waste the evening. You probably don’t, either, but at least you’ll have a memorable bad way.”

Wayne handed off the last autographed pages and stashed the notebook before he rubbed his hands together in exaggerated anticipation. “Mwahahaha... ‘interesting’ is one word for it, yeah...” He was interrupted by a shout from the fifth floor, or from his perspective, chest height.

A squirrel from a few doors down had just stepped out onto her balcony and spotted Wayne. From the squeal and incomprehensible stream of fangirl-ese she let out, she sounded to be a major fan of his films. And body.

Wayne showed her that leading-man smile and leaned down to speak to her personally. "Always glad to be appreciated, madam. Sorry to say, you missed when I was handing out autographs, but if you've got anything you want me to sign-" There was a faint ripping sound, and Wayne went momentarily wide-eyed, then grinned and leaned a little closer. "Sorry, I'm not about to sign your boobs, my handwriting's not nearly delicate enough." Pausing, he cocked his head silently before beaming at her and adding, "Besides, from what I see, that would be like putting graffiti on the Venus De Milo." The squirrel swooned, the fall broken by the cushioning of her own fluffy tail.

That got an amused smirk from Wayne. "If you were hoping I'd give you mouth-to-mouth, then next time, remember that when someone faints, they fall **forward.**" The fan opened one eye, and pouted up at him. "Sorry cutie, not fooled. Now, if you want me to sign what's left of your shirt, that I can-" The squirrel's ripped top was offered to Wayne before he could get the last word out. One pen scribble later, it was handed back, causing the eager fan to make a squealing noise that was outside the range of most people's hearing. "Glad you liked it," Wayne said with a smile, over the ringing in his ears. "But now, I have to get my good friend Gabby to the night of sickening debauchery I promised!"

"About time," Gabby said, expressionless. "If you made me roll my eyes any harder, they might've fallen out..." he mumbled, absently locking his apartment door and following the smiling weasel.

When they reached the parking lot, Gabby got a shock. "Oh. God, I do not believe it..." It was a familiar sight, but one that he expected to have been left behind after high school, and the 'glory' days of the Fanboy Legion. "You're still driving the FanVan!? The thing hasn't committed suicide out of shame yet?" Sure enough, a dark orange Dodge van was sitting in the parking space next to Gabby's treasured T-Bird. "Holy... it's got the same plates. It's the original... **why in hell** is a famous film actor driving the goddamn Dodge Tradesman he had in high school?"

"To mess with people's heads." Wayne grinned. "Also sentiment, and lastly, because no one's going to think a celebrity would be caught dead in that thing. But mostly the first reason!" Noticing the disbelieving squint Gabby was giving the van, Wayne smacked him on the arm to get his attention. "Don't worry, I've taken good care of it. The rancid nerd smell has been gone for years."

Gabby matched Wayne's grin for a moment. Being here with his old sidekick and transportation made it so easy to drop right back into those old days. "Been a while. What was it we would've done next back in those days?"

“Before or after I handed out the, uh, illicit pharmaceuticals? The good old days... too bad I couldn’t remember half of ‘em afterward.” There was a suspicious silence, which Wayne broke with, “Not that I do that sort of thing any longer. No point, thanks to my abilities. These days, I’m so resistant to drugs and booze that I if I snorted most of a kilo it wouldn’t even... Uhh... never mind. Anyway... The next thing we’d do is fail miserably at an attempt to make conquests of all the world’s ladies. Duh.”

Gabby nearly replied with another of their old gags, but a sudden thought made him pause. “This time I’d be leaving ‘em for you. I’m taken.”

There was a sharp laugh from Wayne, and a moment of total silence afterward. Seeing the look on Gabby’s face, Wayne cocked an eyebrow and asked, “Wait, you’re serious?” Another moment of silence, staring at Gabby in disbelief. “Who are you and what did you do with the real Gabby Davies?” Wayne looked his old friend up and down suspiciously, before grinning again and adding, “And is there anything I can do to keep the original from coming back? This one seems like way less of a fu-” Wayne’s commentary was interrupted by a whack in the side of the head. Wayne kept joking without breaking stride. “Or maybe not. I think I liked you better when you weren’t whipped.”

“I liked you better when you’d notice getting punched in the face.”

“I still **notice.** It gets me a good laugh when someone tries something like that. Best reaction I ever got was the time someone slapped me and I made my head fall clean off.” Wayne flashed a grin that barely fit on his face. Literally. “Heh heh... ever since my powers manifested, it’s been obvious for me why shapeshifter types in comics are such huge goofs.”

“Because it makes it easy to forget how horrifying they should be?” Gabby asked, deadpan.

“Ehhhh... That’s only half of the reason,” Wayne answered as he hopped into the FanVan’s driver’s seat. “Now, I wanna catch up with what’s happening in your life. Assuming you finally got one. Also, I’m freakin’ starving. Recommend a place ‘round here and point me to it.”

“I’ll tell you to stop at the first place that looks promising.”

“Good! When I’m around, you should be experiencing new places to go and people to do!”

“It’s good to know you’re still as eye roll-inducing as ever.”

“Could be worse. At least it’s not tomato throw-inducing, like your act.”

“Yeahhh... Open mic night at O’Bannion’s is memorable. At least the owner only provides one tomato per table these days, along with the recommendation not to use them all on the first act...” The conversation veered onto the subject of the ups and downs of fame. Gabby didn’t have many stories about the ups. As for the downs...

“The rumors about me are mostly a good laugh because they’re way too tame, but that’s the way it is,” Wayne said. “The public is so used to celebrities being complete freaks that you can make up any rumor about anyone famous and people will believe it.” Wayne paused, then added in a sinister voice, “Want to know the horrible truth about Mr Rogers and why he always wore long sleeves on the air?”

“To hide the track marks?”

“I’ll be stealing that one, but no, the rumor I invented is that it was to hide that his arms were completely covered with tattoos from his days as a Marine sniper.”

Without hesitating, Gabby dropped into his best children’s host impression. “Can you say, ‘One shot one kill?’ I knew you could!” Abruptly sitting up, he smacked Wayne on the shoulder and pointed out the Fanvan’s passenger window. “Hey, think we should give that place a shot?” Gabby motioned toward a small restaurant with a mural in the front window, depicting a guy in an expensive suit delicately dabbing his lips with a napkin... and big red NO sign stamped over him. Underneath was the name “Unpretentious Dining.”

“I have no idea who runs this place, but I like ‘em already. Let’s give it a go.” Wayne miraculously found a convenient parking spot down the street. Gabby got out of the FanVan, turned to say something else to Wayne, and stutter-stepped. In the time it had taken him to close the van door, the lanky weasel in the expensive suit had been reshaped into a scruffy badger who didn’t deserve a second look. He got one anyway as Gabby paused, speechless, before sighing. “Wayne, you know I’ll never get used to you doing things like that.”

“No one does. That’s a big part of the fun.” Despite the different face, Wayne’s fangy grin that threatened to split his head in half was exactly the same as always. “Better yet, being a shapeshifter lets me dodge the downside of being famous. Not having to deal with people recognizing me all the time means I might not end up hating all of humanity! Unlike most celebs!”

As the two chose a table, a waiter headed their way. Before he could get halfway through “May I take your orders” he was interrupted by an annoying voice.

“Excuse me,” the nearly spherical man at the next table broke in, “Why are you taking their order first? I’ve been waiting longer!”

“Relax, big guy,” Wayne said, in his most diplomatic voice. “The man just wanted to order while there was still some food left in the kitchen.”

The man’s face turned even redder than it was naturally. “I’ve never been so insulted-”

“Seriously?!” Wayne instantly replied, disbelievingly. He raised an eyebrow and gave the

flabby guy a once-over. "Is this your first time out in public, or something?"

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"Wow," Gabby said a minute later, "I've never been thrown out of any place that fast."

"Yep." A huge smile broke out on Wayne's temporary face. "I've still got it." Cheerfully heading back to the FanVan after getting booted from the restaurant, Wayne had hardly been able to keep himself from busting up laughing.

"Why the hell didn't you just show them who you really are and save us the trouble?"

Wayne's smile turned petulant. "That ruins all the fun. People start thinking, 'Hey, I can get insulted by Wayne Rourke!' and they start lining up to take abuse from me. It sucks. Sucks *ass.* I didn't spend a lifetime honing my ability to thrive on people's hate for that!" That was followed by a slight smirk. "The fame and piles of money make up for it, but it's the principle, yknow?" Gabby sighed slowly in response. "Aww, don't be like that, man. You should be glad that one person out of our old group is successful... besides the one who went to clown college! Not everyone hits the genetic jackpot and gets born rich like you, yknow."

Gabby glanced at Wayne, wondering if he was serious, despite that being a lost cause. "Yeah, yeah. You've got a point. Besides the one on top of your head."

"Yeah, see? I totally earned it when I hit the genetic jackpot and got my kewl powerz!" Wayne had flowed back into his usual shape in a moment Gabby hadn't been looking, making his old friend do a double-take.

"Like I said, I'll never get used to that."

"I know, it's fuckin' awesome, isn't it?" The banter stopped as Wayne unlocked the van, and gave Gabby a considering look as they took their seats. Gabby immediately got suspicious.

"You're thinking. Bad stuff always happens when you do that."

Amazingly, Wayne didn't react. After methodically strapping in, he waited for Gabby to slide into the passenger seat before saying, "All right, I've got a legit reason I'm visiting. There's a guy I want you to meet."

"I still don't swing that way."

"Haw. But no, seriously-" Wayne cocked his head. "It always feels unnatural when I say that. Anyway, what's been going on with you? No need to talk about myself- Damn, that sounds even weirder- since my life is on the big screen. Or TMZ if I can't dodge the bastards."

“Well...” Gabby rubbed at the scar hidden under the fur of his right forearm. “For one thing, I got shanked in a parking lot.”

“Wait, what?”

“Why do you think I didn’t recommend going to O’Bannion’s tonight? I get second thoughts about the place now. Not that I’m traumatized or anything, of course...”