

It was good to get out of the house. Classes had been extremely busy the past two weeks for Mark. It felt as if his professors all coordinated their essays to be scheduled back-to-back. Now that he was completely caught up, he could finally relax. A brisk walk through town was exactly what he needed to clear his mind. And what a day to choose to come out. It was the perfect weather to go out. The sky was clear and calm, and the sun was pleasantly warm. There was hardly anyone outside. Being a workweek meant almost everyone was indoors leaving the town streets quiet and peaceful. It was incredibly refreshing. The stroll had revitalized Mark's energy, and he was ready to bust out some art. Just as he was about ready to head back home, something caught his eye. He stopped dead in his tracks. At first, he thought it was a massive intricate mural. A colorful banner welcomed the reader to "Toon Town". From the buildings to the city streets, everything had such bright and cheerful colors. Mark had to rub his eyes and make ensure he wasn't just seeing things. There was such a rough and abrupt divide from the familiar marketplace and this cartoon town. Mark was very familiar with this area, or, so he had thought. He'd walked down this street plenty of times before. He would have most certainly remembered this. It was a very surreal experience. Hesitantly he walked up to the edge of the strange place. He slowly reached out his hand, expecting it to come across a wall. There was no barrier. His hand felt the same as it did on the other side. He waved his hand about, double-checking to make sure it was safe. Once he decided it was safe enough, he stepped across into Toon Town.

It was exhilarating being in such a strange place such as this. It really felt like stepping straight into a cartoon. The roads were paved in a golden color. Buildings appeared warped with how they leaned and bowed out. Everything was so vibrantly colorful and cheerful. Mark had only walked a couple of feet through the entrance and already felt overwhelmed by everything here. It was a whole new world to explore. Mark looked over the area, wanting to start with a familiar setting in this place. A

coffee shop stood out. It had a big blinking neon sign pointing down to its entrance. Perfect! Mark's throat had gotten a bit parched from his walk.

A small bell jingled as Mark stepped inside the store. The coffee shop was surprisingly normal looking. Mark wasn't sure what he had expected but was surprised at how mundane a place in toon town was. At first, he thought he stepped back into the real world again. With one look at the barista, it was very clear he was still in Toon Town. A lanky cartoon fox was leaning on the counter, leisurely perusing a magazine. Their long snoot practically buried in the pages. It seemed they were taking a break during the slow part of the day. Though the moment they noticed the human they startled upright, their cap nearly slipping off from the sudden movement. They quickly dusted off the vest and adjusted their bow tie trying to look their best for their customer.

"Welcome customer! What can I get yah today?" They gave a big welcoming smile. Mark was surprised the toon didn't seem to have any reaction to having a human for a customer. His astonishment almost made him forget to pay attention. He stood with a clueless expression before the realization of what the toon said caught up. Mark glanced up at the menu, quickly getting a puzzled expression. The signs seemed to be all written with nothing but squiggly lines. He squinted hard, trying to make out any word or letter. Not a thing was legible. Perhaps the chicken scratch was only legible to toons. Mark stared back at the cordial toon. His tail swished about as he stood attentively.

"Well, what do you recommend err... Faux " Mark paused and looked at their name badge before inquiring. The name tag practically glittered when he read the name "Faux E."

"Pronounced 'Fox' actually!" Faux flashed a wily grin across his muzzle while correcting the customer. Perhaps it had simply been his imagination. The fox took a moment, scratching his chin in thought. He seemed to be eyeing Mark closely.

"Hmm, for a recommendation for youse, we got a special on our Tropical Blast. Though gots to warn yah, it has a bit of a punch to it!" They suggested. Mark had second opinions on that. He was never one for the fruity drinks. He was hoping for something more focused on the coffee flavor. Against his better judgment, he caved into Faux's suggestion. It wasn't like they had any other options given to them.

"I'll order the tropical blast then."

"One tropical blast comin' right up!" Faux flicked their hat's brim and was ready to get to work. Mark's attention immediately went to his phone. He had to tell his friends about this place! Though that plan was immediately dashed by a complete lack of signal. Of course, the moment he wanted to use his phone the most, there was absolutely no cell service. Just as the fox turned around to prepare the drink he stopped in mid tracks. You could almost hear the faint sound of a tire screeching to a halt. He quickly pivoted to face towards Mark again.

"Oh hey, mind if I put on a little music? I works best when I gots something ta groove to!"

"Yeah sure, no worries!" Mark said, looking up from his phone. With a flourish of his hand, Faux turned on their radio. The radio swayed back and forth as it began playing a song. Mark immediately recognized the tune. It was that one Trashman hit, "Surfin Bird". It was an odd choice for a coffee shop, but whatever. The music faded into mere background noise as he messed with his phone.

Mark kept trying to connect to the Internet or some sort of signal, but nothing seemed to work. Whatever, he'd figure it out later. The moment he looked up he saw Faux jaunty wiggling to the groove as they worked. Musical notes floated along a colorful staff that spiraled around the radio. It was good seeing someone so happy while working. Mark couldn't help but smile at the merry fox. While Mark was distracted, the colorful staff moved in the air like a snake, closing in on the human. He remained oblivious to the encroaching notes. The song slithered and spiraled above Mark. It slowly loomed

towards Mark's head. He noticed the music was getting louder. It was then that he realized it had been going on for a while. A cyan feather peeked out of his beanie. A second one popped out, then a third. Vibrantly light blue feathers began replacing his hair strand by strand. Mark listened closely, paying close attention to what was being played. It was as if it were repeating the first verse on a loop. He waited for the dip in the music, but it never came. It just kept replaying the first verse. It had such a perfect and seamless loop. Unless you knew the full song, you wouldn't have realized something was wrong. No wonder why it took him a bit to catch on. The moment the realization hit him, he noticed that musical staff and notes were swirling around his head. Mark could feel the tune attempting to worm into his ear. He quickly waved his hand, swatting the music away from him. The notes and chords swirled against his arm before being scattered like smoke. The volume turned down allowing Mark to hear his thoughts again. They were now once again able to relax.

Mark was starting to get impatient. Waiting for his drink was no problem at all. No, the real issue was the music. It kept repeating, looping, and replaying the first verse over and over again. It was aggravating to listen to. He was really regretting not bringing his headphones to shut out this noise. Mark repeatedly flipped through his phone, trying to find anything to distract himself. It was hard for him to find any way to distract himself without any cell service available.

"Order up!" Faux tapped on a bell and whistled out. Now that was music to his ears! The colorful coffee drink was sitting on the counter, ready to be picked up. It was practically radiating a golden aura. Mark was excited to grab his drink and leave. He hastily stood up and rushed to the counter. Musical notes whorled about in the air, like a serpent awaiting prey. There was no way he was going to let that earworm of a song get stuck in his head. He was eager to leave this shop. Mark reached his hand out but immediately stopped in his tracks. A strange jolting sensation coursed through his mouth and nose. It felt as if something that wasn't supposed to move did so. He was moments away from grabbing his drink, his fingers were inches touching the cup; but before Mark was able to reach up and inspect it, a

large beak erupted into his view. It felt as if his face had suddenly lurched forward a couple of feet in one movement. It almost toppled him over with the sudden force. He felt the heavy weight of it tilting his head forward. His eyes crossed as they braced the beak up with their hands. They felt the smooth and hard texture as they ran their fingers across the bill. It was hard to believe this was real, but the weight of this new formation was a constant reminder. The toucan bill was decorated with yellow, black and cyan being extremely eye-catching. His mouth was agape in shock this was happening. How would he go anywhere with something this unwieldy on his face!?

In his awestruck state, he had completely forgotten about the music. It had coiled around him. It whorled up his arms note by note. The volume was rising as it once again became the forefront of his attention. The song! This was what was doing this to him! Forget the drink, he was leaving. Now! Mark broke free from the troublesome tune and booked it out of the shop. His hands covered his ears, trying to shut out the sound. It was incredibly awkward to sprint with such a large cumbersome beak. He only stopped running when he felt his hands trembling against his ears. Mark's shoes skid to a halt on the pavement. He slowly pried his hands away from his ears, staring down at them in apprehension. His arms were covered in goosebumps and his fingers were shaking. Then, in a blink of the eye, both his thumbs popped into cartoon feathers. Before Mark could comprehend the changes, his other fingers began rapidly changing. It was like watching popcorn kernels go off in a microwave. Fingers instantly popped into red cartoony feathers. The strangest sensation is they still felt very dexterous. He was able to move these new finger feathers as if they hadn't changed at all. Just when Mark thought the changes were coming to a halt, his arms were caught in an explosion of black and red feathers.

"Wings!?! I have wings!?" Mark shouted, flapping his new feathery arms in fright. This was insane! He wasn't a bird! He shouldn't have wings and some massive bill! Thinking this was all some lucid dream, Mark pinched one of the feathers on his arm and plucked it. He winced, it felt akin to plucking a hair out. These were certainly attached, and he certainly was not dreaming.

At the forefront of Mark's mind was how absolutely ridiculous he appeared. Rationalizing this scenario was all he could do. They paced along the streets of Toon Town in a mental frenzy. He'd somehow grown a beak and his arms were now wings. He was certain it was THAT song that caused it too. Nothing else seemed to be changing now that they'd gotten away from it. Maybe this was temporary. Perhaps everything would turn back to normal shortly. Let everything run its course, and he'd be back to normal in no time flat. Mark continued to walk in circles. Thoughts of changing back were rehearsed again and again. Though, the changes weren't receding. Instead, a very faint tune began playing alongside his thoughts. The music steadily grew in volume. Mark unconsciously started humming it. The more Mark hummed, the further the song overpowered his thoughts. It was hard not getting caught up in the music. He could feel his body wanting to move to the beat. It was drowning out all his other thoughts and concerns.

"Bird. Bird. Bird! B-birds the-" the loud sound of shoe leather tearing startled Mark out of singing. He looked down to see his sneakers bulging out like a balloon. The toes of the shoes were slowly peeling upwards. The leather expanding out, struggling in vain to withhold whatever was happening to his feet. Then, like a tiring blowing out, his sneakers ruptured. Mark stood in shock, seeing scraps of leather laces covering up a brand-new pair of cartoon sneakers. They were bright red, large, and bulky. Mark wasn't sure what the biggest surprise was; How his shoe size instantly doubled or the scaly cyan-colored bird legs that came with it. Mark knelt and tugged at his laces. He wasn't going to go around with these embarrassing giant things! Though, try as he might, the knots refused to budge. Next, Mark tried the direct approach of slipping off the shoes. They remained fixed in place, not moving an inch. It was as if they had been glued in. Nothing he tried appeared to work. These new shoes could not be taken off. What's worse is he felt the song creeping back into his mind, like an earworm refusing to leave.

Mark needed to find anything to distract himself from that tune. The urge to hum was starting to return. He looked around the colorful streets, trying to find some shop that might be able to help him. This was a town of toons after all! Surely there was something here. It was hard to get your bearings here. Alleyways seemed to repeat infinitely. Signs pointed in every direction making this one disorienting mess. Mark stumbled with his new sneakers. It was awkward getting used to wearing such large clunky shoes. Mark was starting to develop a rather goofy cartoonish gait as he walked. Mark searched, desperate to find anything that would help. He had already gotten used to the weight of his beak, despite it being a big focal point in his view. Maybe being a bird wouldn't be too bad. Birds were great! It sounded so good in his mind.

"Bird. Bird. Bird." Mark softly repeated out loud. That was quite the word indeed! Just as Mark's mind was beginning to sink into a comfortable haze, he snapped himself out of it. What was he thinking!?! A prickling sensation tickled his chest. Quills begin spouting up his torso. The plumage poked at his shirt, making it tight and stuffy to wear.

"Focus!" Mark clapped his feathery hands against his bill to recompose himself. Mark's movements were becoming exaggerated as he scanned the area. His wing acted like a visor. The whole town was densely populated buildings tightly packed together. Different varieties of businesses. An exclamation point appeared above Mark's head the moment he spotted one shop in particular. His sight practically zoomed on the music store. This was perfect! He could drive off that demon of a song with some different tunes!

Mark swung open the shop's doors with his wings. Shelves upon shelves displayed records, tapes, and CDs. A sigh of relief escaped from him. There were plenty of listening stations to try out. He'd take anything to get THAT out of his head. Mark shuffled their bulky shoes over to a pair of headphones, putting it on. It only took half a second before they practically ripped it off their head after the noise

they heard. Perhaps it was simply bad luck. Maybe another pair was playing something different. He held up another pair to his ears to test it before immediately yanking it away. It was playing the same thing too! A throat cleared behind them, startling him. Mark quickly turned around to see a smug fox leaning against their counter.

“Can I help yah find Anythin’?” They said with a mischievous smile. Mark rubbed eyes, he had to be seeing things. They looked exactly like Faux, right down to the very clothes they wore. But they couldn’t be the same. No one could be at two places at once. It had to be two different toons. A simple glimpse at their name tag made it quite definite who they were. ‘Faux E.’ It was indeed the same toon as before.

“Looking for a certain song in particulars? Well, you’ve come to the right place!” they smirked. Faux twirled a remote before pointing it at a huge sound system. Mark flapped his wings, waving them to stop. With a simple click of a button, the store got incredibly loud. Several colorful staffs snaked out from the speakers, quickly swarming Mark. Waving his wings about did nothing to stop them. He felt one slipping into his ear hole and out the other. Thoughts started becoming fuzzy, getting harder to think with all the notes bouncing around his head. His eyes startled to spiral as they sunk into a trance. Warm happy thoughts filled his brain. He started tapping his feet on the floor. It felt wonderful to move to beat. The song had such a catchy rhythm and put a spring in his step. The birdbrain started wiggling and dancing around. Plumes of tail feathers burst from his khaki pants as he wiggled his rear to the beat. His pants had a massive gaping hole where the feathers had ruptured out from. Each of the long feathers fanned out as they jauntily grooved to the rhythm. An overwhelming surge of hyperactivity coursed through him. His body shook with an energy akin to an earthquake as if it sought some way to escape. Mark let out a loud playful squawk as he flapped his wings. His body jetted upward and twirled about in the air. Mark let out a loud off-key squawk as he hovered in midair by flapping the tips of his wings. A strange sensation billowed through their body, rapidly changing his proportions. A sizable

amount of weight dropped down to their lower half all at once. It looked like he has swallowed a huge beach ball and it was shaping out his hips and rear. Giggling to himself, the bird floated back down. It felt good to get that out of his system! The toucan wiggled his tail feathers, admiring over his new cartoony proportions. Worries melted away into playfulness. All that distress earlier rolled off his back. He felt so light, free, and jubilant. Actually, what had he been worried about again? It seemed so distant and hazy trying to recall such a far-off memory. The only thing he could recall was a single name.

“Mark.” It had an air of familiarity to it, He thought long and hard over it. They stroked their beak as they mulled it over. He couldn’t quite recall anyone by that name. Blast shrugged. It would probably come to him later. The Tooncan tapped his shoes in a beat while walking out of the music store. He couldn’t help humming to himself.

“Surfing bird.” Man, now that song was incredibly catchy. He’d be singing this all day! Faux grinned while watching the blissful bird go on their way.

“I never was one to make good coffee or drinks, though always strive to make my customers happy with whatever it takes!” They chuckled as they watched the toucan merrily saunter away.