

Jeez, how long're they planning on keeping that party alive?
Surely they know SOME of us need to get some sleep by now...
Bah. Fun as this sounded, I'm not sure she was the best choice for the job.

...

These thoughts go on for a while as Gaylord Robinson goes about his days and nights as XO-Tan's party rages on, mostly in the background of his mind. The spotlight's nice and all, he's more than content with his place, but... something about this all is gnawing at him. Not a whole lot; puppets don't exactly have the best material to gnaw at to begin with – like, what kind of idiot chews on felt for fun?

He'd hate to consider himself a hermit, but he's *not* into this party business. Going out wasn't the most common back home, no thanks to Margaret's incessant bickering and ill temper... and with all due respect to his fellow assists, they're far from the people he'd put his best faith in. Between that pastel party girl getting plastered every night, and those two hotshots that were blazing through town not too long ago, and the... what was it again? A *streamer*? Anyone chasing a fad like that's doomed, he thinks, so it's no wonder they've mostly passed his radar altogether.

At the same time, though, it's not a party without everyone there. Even that bundle of oddities has shown their face plenty - heck, they even seemed like they wanted to be involved more than he did! Reluctantly, Gaylord drags himself out to the plaza, and then out to the greater parts of the town. He's not exactly sure where to go or what he'll do, but the 'party spirit' or whatever that seems to have totally overtaken AUT Town will probably guide him.

... He wonders if that sounds as stupid as it does when it stays in his thoughts.

The party spirit is a peculiar one, Gaylord finds. It brings him into the depths of AUT Town, in the middle of some sprawling park that overlooks Yogi's office. He likes to think it would remind Yogi of home, but... what would he know? This place has *been* their home for years, and - admittedly, he'd kind of get it. Every now and again he has the passing thought of missing Elmore – and while that thought is always stuffed hastily into a dark corner of his brain to hopefully never see the light of day again, it returns so often that he'd wager it's a sign of some sort.

A sign of what? Heck if he knows. He doesn't care. He sits himself on a park bench, and stares up into the sky. The permanent orange in the sky offers a sight reminiscent of sunsets he sort of, kind of remembers. Balloons rise up from the horizon, flying ever upwards into the stars, colored only vaguely like his associates. The pinks and blues make sense, those odd muted teals and grays... he's a bit more skeptical. But it's a pleasant enough sight, all things considered. He takes it in for a while, just him and the ambience of his home away from home. The peace lasts

for a while, until he's joined by someone else, who stands just a bit outside of the center of his vision.

BABY: *A puppet with no string.*

He nods a greeting, which Gaylord doesn't return.

GAYLORD: What the..? ...*Oh*. It's you. What do you want?

BABY: *Everyone loses their invites in the mail. What do you want?*

... Right. He forgot he's not much for original commentary. That's fine, he thinks. Gaylord can supplement, or whatever. It can't be any worse than his last attempt at witty banter.

GAYLORD: Some peace and quiet. I wanted to get out and get with this whole... 'party scene,' but there's no way I'm dragging myself to our associate's level for just one day. Not a chance. Why do you care?

BABY: *Some peace and quiet... alright. Few minutes in this world isn't much to give.*

He nods - more to himself than anything - and takes a seat next to Gaylord. Baby slips an iPod from out of his pocket and sifts through his expansive catalogue of music. The song he finds himself with is something far out of Gaylord's scope, but it's not offensive, or anything. It's fairly mellow, which didn't seem at all to reflect the taste Gaylord boldly assumed his newfound company had.

They sit in silence for a while, watching decorations come and go. Seconds pass, then minutes. There's some attempts at conversation from Gaylord that falls flat - he realizes Baby's not much a talker in the moment and that's perfectly fine.

... It might be better than fine, actually. He turns to Baby as another song fades out, before they lose focus in the music.

GAYLORD: ...Hey. Can I bend your ear about something? Just between us.

BABY: *Now I think the time is right.*

GAYLORD: Right. Okay. It's... about this. This whole party thing. Skeptical as I am about it being a good idea, I...

He trails off. Baby makes a motion for him to continue - not in the irritated "*just get on with it!*" kind of way, though.

GAYLORD: I hate to admit it, but I'm... having fun.

BABY: ...Hm?

GAYLORD: This whole event. At a musical level, it's something I genuinely enjoy, which... I haven't been able to do in Elmore for years. Even if it hasn't been up front and on my own until now, being able to pitch in and give *others* the hand they clearly needed, it's... it's just nice. I don't know.

BABY: *If I sing to the world, it will set me free.*

GAYLORD: Ex- yes! That's how I feel. Now, that said, that doesn't mean I'm the happiest here. I've had my fair share of headaches and back pain and leg pain, between the day-to-day toil and the *idiocy* some of the others seem to carry around with them like the plague –

BABY: *Like fish bait from a sling.*

GAYLORD: You get that, too, then. Maybe you're not so bad, kid.

Baby cracks a smile and nods, waiting for Gaylord to continue.

GAYLORD: But deep down, I... *I can't believe I'm admitting to it, but...* I do enjoy it here, genuinely. All this music, all this *passion*..! It almost makes me feel young again.

He reminisces fondly for a second, but his expression quickly twists into a scowl.

GAYLORD: *Almost.*

Said scowl quickly lightens up, however. Gaylord sighs, staring down at his hands. All this time, he's been such a grump about everything. Quick as he was to lend a hand to Fawful, *that* only ended in disaster for the Beanish weirdo, and since then he's been mostly on his own. Right up until XO-Tan snuck in and planned this big party, and...

Since then he's actually noticed some improvements. Maybe it's just because he had the spotlight all to himself for a song or two, or maybe it's because an infinitesimal part of him sincerely did want to enjoy himself with his associates, but he's felt... a very slight bit happier. Not a lot enough to matter in the long term, but the kind of mellow happiness that gets you to go "huh!" while in the middle of some mildly pleasant activity. It's enough for him.

GAYLORD: Oh, and... thanks. For hearing me out. I won't keep you for much longer, I know you said it'd be brief, but... this was nice.

BABY: ... No problem.

Baby collects his iPod - he realizes now that the music stopped altogether - and pockets it again, getting up from his seat. There's a series of nods: one after patting himself down to make sure he didn't miss anything, one to the sky as the balloons' ascents slow down for the here-and-now, and then one to Gaylord as he takes his leave. As he shuffles his music again, Baby notices Gaylord return the nod, and it gets him to smile right as he walks off.

After a bit, after Baby is well out of sight, never mind earshot... Gaylord smiles, too.

Maybe this place isn't as bad as he thought.