



Glasses

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The Bad Comic, Episode 2

By Sara Lufrano

Write a stupid joke. Be funny. Say something clever. At least make fun of someone for fuck's sake. No? Why the hell not? Just make fun of that girl's leggings. They are ugly. Say something like "I hope she didn't pay for those." I know it isn't funny. Jesus Christ. But it's something. Get over yourself and say something.

I hadn't had a contract come through for weeks. I was doing busy work. Organizing files, looking at new document management software, standardizing clauses, or wasting the Wi-Fi by watching Netflix and YouTube.

I hadn't been to a comedy club in months. After I got some laughs with the few okay jokes I wrote, I ran dry. I watched every comedy special I could but hated most of them.

I think I'm over comedy. I don't think I like it anymore.

Colleen carried two clear drinks back to the table we were sitting at.

"Happy hour is over in 30 minutes," she said.

"Shit," I got up once she put her drinks down. "I'll get two more."

"This one is for you." She was confused.

“Ah,” I brushed away her words, “Just in case it gets slammed and we don’t make it back to the bar before it’s over.”

It was hard hanging out with people. They wanted to talk about what they were doing and then ask how I was doing. I didn’t want to tell them.

Two drinks. Drink these two drinks and you can leave. Go home, sit in front of your stupid notebook and write nothing. Nice, productive night. Alone.

I got my drinks and sat back with Colleen.

“Have you heard from Rhett?” she asked.

I hung my head. “God damn, Colleen. How about, how was my weekend?”

“Oh, how was your weekend?” She took a sip from her drink and smiled at me.

“Shitty and boring.”

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. What did you do?”

“It’s impossible to do nothing. When I was a kid my Uncle would call and when I would answer he would ask ‘What are you doing?’ I would say ‘Nothing’ and he would tell me, ‘You can’t do nothing.’ So I always tell him, and anyone else, what I’m doing.”

She looked at me waiting for me to tell her what I did over the weekend.

“Jerked off and drank,” I said.

“See, that’s not nothing.”

I smiled reluctantly. “What did you do this weekend?” I asked again.

“I went out with that guy I had been messaging.”

“Oh, yeah. Was he everything his charming messages suggested?”

She pursed her lips and looked past me. “He was one of the biggest jerks I have met in this city.”

Her eyes glassed over with tears. I figured as much, though.

“Hey, hey.” I reached over and patted her on the shoulder. “There are millions of people here. There will be another.” I looked around. “Like that guy!”

She looked at the chubby, balding guy with a neck beard that I was pointing to. She looked back to me with a blank look on her face.

“You really aren’t funny,” she told me.

Are jokes about not being funny, funny? Are jokes about not being able to make something funny, funny? Are jokes about trying to be funny but not being funny, funny?

No and they never will be.

Self-deprecation could be funny. I suck, I’m bad at this. I haven’t written a joke in months. I barely even have a handful of good jokes. And that’s my set, good night everyone. Thanks for coming. Tip your bartender. Who doesn’t tip the bartender, anyway? I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone stiff a bartender.

Why the fuck do people say that?

That’s a stupid joke. Fuck the guy that got away with saying that and having some stupid asshole chuckle.

I sat at my desk clicking around on Netflix when an email from Rhett came in. I didn’t open it right away. I didn’t want to seem like I had nothing better to do than read any email I got right away, no matter who it was from.

I picked a British crime drama and went to the email. I was only cc’d on it. It was just an FYI about something that could happen, just in case it needed a contract. Waste of my damn time.

“Steph!” Colleen leaned into my office.

“Hey.”

“I have a date tonight.”

“See, there’s a million people to date here.”

“I know,” she smiled and twisted her torso back and forth. “You were right.”

“Where are you guys going?”

“Were getting drinks at Pier 99 and then dinner somewhere if it all goes well.”

I sarcastically smiled for her. “Very cool.”

“Thanks.” She stayed in my office looking at my whiteboard. There was only a list of music to listen to on it. “I’m going to keep asking you about him. You should just tell me what happened with Rhett.”

“Bye, Colleen. Have fun on your date. I hope you two have beautiful kids.” I put my ear buds in and clicked my mouse loudly and banged on my keyboard.

She smiled and waved as she left. I shook my head, rolled my eyes, and sighed. The trifecta.

The thing that upsets me when people ask me about Rhett is that I know for certain he’s not anything like what I made him out to be. He wasn’t even the type of person everyone else thought he was.

We worked it out that he would come visit for a weekend. We went out, had fun, came back to my place, had sex, drank coffee in the morning, and then he left early.

I messaged him too many times and got no response to most of them until he stopped all together. The last message he sent me was, “Don’t tell anyone about us. It was a one time thing.”

It feels like I'm mad at him, furious that that's all he ended up being, but I know I'm mad at myself. I didn't need to make him what he wasn't, the perfect man and the only person on the planet that could make me happy.

And when I think about being funny I think about that night and how hopeful and happy I was and I don't want to be funny anymore.

That's what happened with Rhett.

Colleen and I were out after work. She was talking about the guy she was dating now, how great he was and how she hoped he's the one.

"How can you hope someone is the one?" I asked.

"I just want him to be the one, then."

"He either will be or he won't be. You can't make people be the one."

"But we can grow into it."

"Isn't that something you both are supposed to feel right off the bat?"

She smiled, "Maybe we did and we just aren't telling each other yet."

"You better tell him soon." I finished my drink and looked for the waiter.

"I'm not worried about it, for once."

Her optimism was tiring.

"Let's talk about something different," I said.

"Okay. Did you hear the diss track Tanya la Tigre put out yesterday?"

I smiled hoping this would be a good distraction. "No, sounds like a fake name, and tell me everything about it."

I know I'll get over Rhett. But I don't know if I'll ever be funny.

Night of the Cat

by Marshall Bowles

Ned parked his 2005 Pontiac Grand Am in a tight space in front of the apartment complex. It wasn't a sweet ride, but it was the best he could afford with his paycheck. Bartending was supposed to pay well, but the only job Ned could land was at the shittiest country-western dive in town. The only good thing about the place was that he got to stare at Carmen's sweet ass all day.

Ned bent over and checked himself out in the side mirror of the car. One strand of hair poked up higher than the others. He licked his thumb and used it to put his hair back in place. He sported a thin, scraggly goatee on his chin. His facial hair wouldn't grow out as thick as he would like, but it helped cover up his acne scars. Ned smiled and gave his reflection a thumbs up.

Carmen's apartment was on the second floor of the complex. Ned bounded up the stairs and found her door. He paused to take a quick sniff of his armpits. Yep, all good. He knocked and waited.

The light blue door swung open. Ned felt a tingling in his groin, just like he did every time he saw Carmen. Her long blonde hair glowed in the light of the late afternoon sun. Her tits formed perfect mounds under her t-shirt, and her tight red shorts showed off her amazing legs.

"Ned!" she said, smiling. "Thank you so much for doing this. You're a life saver."

Ned smiled back, but not too wide. He didn't want to come across as desperate and scare her off. "Not a problem. I'm glad to be of service."

"Yay," Carmen said. She took a step back and waved him in with her hand. "Come in. I'll give you the quick tour, and then I have to run."

Ned followed her inside, and Carmen closed the door behind him. While she had her back turned, Ned checked her out. Her shorts squeezed against her perfect ass. Her long smooth legs were lean from running 5k every day. Carmen turned around and caught Ned looking. He didn't care.

Carmen cleared her throat, and Ned looked back at her face. "So this is my place," she said. Ned looked around. The front door opened into her living room. An off-white couch faced the TV, a 55-inch LED that was much nicer than the crappy second-hand plasma that Ned had at his place. A large book titled "Kittens" sat on the glass coffee table, the front cover a basket full of white furry kittens.

"Nice," Ned said. "You should be an interior decorator."

"Uh huh," Carmen said. "I'll have a fallback career if finance doesn't work out."

"Nah, a classy chick like you? You'd make a killing working on the homes of rich idiots." Decorating was good work for a woman.

"So," Carmen said, "let me show you where everything is." She led Ned down the short hallway at the other end of the living room. Carmen pointed to the small kitchen on the left. A pair of light blue dishes sat on the floor against the wall, one filled with water and the other with cat food. "Fluffy only eats dry food. The bag is in the last cabinet on the bottom. No people food—it upsets his stomach."

"What about cake on his birthday?" Ned said. Hah, that was pretty clever.

Carmen looked at him without even a hint of a smile. "No people food."

"Got it," Ned said. His smile faded.

"There's the bathroom," Carmen said. Ned leaned his head around the doorframe to peek inside. The pink bathmat matched the curtains that covered the one tiny window in the room. "The litter box is in there. Just clean it out

every day when you come over to feed him." Ugh. That was going to be the most disgusting part of this. The things Ned did for a piece of ass.

The bedroom was across the hall from the bathroom. Carmen walked in, and Ned followed. The room was tidy like the rest of the apartment, and just as girly. A vase full of dried flowers sat on the bedside table, and the walls were decorated with mass-produced artwork. A large dresser stood against the wall and on top sat a framed picture of Carmen and Fluffy.

Sitting in the middle of the queen-sized bed was a long-haired black cat. A large section of his torso was covered in white bandages, squashing the fur underneath. The cat looked at Ned with his yellow eyes and meowed. Ned hated cats.

"And here's my little man," Carmen said in a stupid baby-talk voice. She leaned over the bed and stroked Fluffy's head. The cat didn't even look at her. His eyes were locked on Ned. "Isn't he just the cutest thing you've ever seen?"

"Oh, yeah," Ned said. "He's really cute." The cat's eyes bore into Ned, like he knew Ned's intentions with Carmen and didn't approve. "Did you ever find out what happened to him?"

"No," Carmen said. "The vet thinks it might have been a raccoon or a fox. But I'm sure Fluffy hurt it more than it hurt him. Isn't that right, sweetie?" Carmen rubbed her nose on the cat's face. Gross.

"Meow," Fluffy said. Ned let his gaze drift around the room. He lingered on the small top drawer of the dresser. She probably kept her panties in there. Ned made a mental note to check later.

Carmen let go of Fluffy and looked at Ned. "Keep a really close eye on him when you open the door. He likes to sneak out. I was trying to carry in my groceries when he got past me the last time."

"Yep, got it." Ned said. "You're leaving Fluffy in great hands."

"And call me if he does anything... weird." Carmen glanced sideways at Fluffy.

"Weird like what?" Ned said. "He isn't going to hump my leg, is he?"

"No. He's just been different since he got hurt." She let out a breath and laughed. "Don't worry about it, I'm sure he'll be fine."

"Sure." If Fluffy humped his leg, Ned was going to kick the shit out of him.

"Ok, I have to leave soon for my flight," Carmen said. She led Ned back to the front door. "Thank you again for doing this. My regular cat sitter bailed on me, and Fluffy is too weak to be in a kennel around other cats. I really owe you."

"Nah," Ned said. He could think of several things she could do to pay him back. "I'm happy to help out. Fluffy and I are going to have a good old time together."

"Oh! I almost forgot." Carmen fished a key out of her pocket and handed it to Ned. The bright pink metal key had a cartoon cat logo printed on the head. This bitch would be a crazy cat lady if she wasn't so hot. "Just stop by whenever it's most convenient for you."

"Great," Ned said. Now was as good a time as any to make his move. He could give her a quick ride before she headed out of town. He leaned in for a kiss.

Carmen stepped back. She grabbed the front door and opened it. "So, yeah. I have to finish packing up and go," she said. She gestured at the open doorway.

"Yeah, sure," Ned said. It looked like he would have to wait until she came back. At least taking care of her fleabag cat should loosen her up. He stepped out onto the porch. "Enjoy your cousin's wedding."

"Thanks," Carmen said. She shut the door.

The sun was low on the horizon when Ned returned a few hours later. He checked to make sure Carmen's car was gone before he parked. He didn't want

her to catch him coming back so soon and risk freaking her out. No one was home.

Ned opened the apartment door and flipped on the lights. "Meow," Fluffy said. The fuzz-ball sat on the floor just inside the apartment, staring up at Ned.

"Hey asshole," Ned said, closing the door behind him. Something about the way the cat stared at him made Ned uncomfortable. He shooed Fluffy away with his foot.

"Meow," Fluffy said, a hint of anger in his voice.

Ned went to the kitchen and opened the fridge. Fluffy followed him and sat on the kitchen floor. Ned dug through the fridge, trying to find something good to eat. Carrots, spinach, cottage cheese. Yuck. Carmen didn't keep any real food around.

Ned settled on the milk. He grabbed it and drank out of the carton.

"Meow," Fluffy said.

Ned looked down. He took another swig of milk while making eye contact with Fluffy. "Yeah, that's right," Ned said. "I'm the man of the house now. Got that?" Fluffy didn't move. Ned laughed at himself. What was he doing? Proving his manhood to a cat? He stuffed the milk jug back in the fridge and closed the door. When he looked back down at the floor, Fluffy was gone.

"Meow," Fluffy said, inches from Ned's ear. Ned fell back against the kitchen sink and looked up. Fluffy sat on top of the fridge, glaring down at Ned.

"How did you get up there so fast?" Ned said. Fluffy stared at him with unwavering eyes.

Screw it. Ned wasn't going to let this cat ruin his good time. He walked down the hall and turned on the lights in the bedroom. He smiled. What would it be like to have sex with Carmen on this bed? The thought made his groin ache.

Ned went to the dresser and pulled open the top drawer. Jackpot. It was full of Carmen's underwear. He picked up a pink lacy thong and ran his fingers over it. Carmen had worn this, right up against her pussy. Ned felt warmth

spreading from his stomach into his whole body. He stuffed the panties in his pocket, saving them for later.

"Meow," Fluffy said, his voice loud and insistent. Ned looked back over his shoulder. Fluffy stood on the bed, watching Ned. The cat's tail flicked back and forth, as if trying to tell Ned that he shouldn't be in the room.

"Buzz off, cat," Ned said. He turned back to the dresser and tried to ignore Fluffy. He picked through the drawer, but the fur-ball's constant screeching grated on him. Fluffy was killing the mood.

"Shut up!" Ned yelled. He turned and swung at Fluffy, hard enough to backhand the cat across the room. Ned's aim was perfect, but right before he made contact, Fluffy leapt into the air. Ned missed. Fluffy back flipped twice and landed with the grace of a gymnast on the far side of the mattress. Fluffy hissed.

"How the hell did you dodge that?" Ned looked at the bandages around Fluffy's torso and narrowed his eyes. "I thought you were supposed to be hurt."

"Grrrrr," Fluffy said.

"Whatever," Ned said, but something about Fluffy unnerved him.

Ned went to the living room and plopped down on the couch. Dealing with this damn critter was more work than he expected. He grabbed the remote and kicked his feet up, resting his dirty tennis shoes on top of the "Kittens" picture book. He turned on the TV. Carmen better have the premium channels.

Fluffy hopped up on the coffee table. He stood with his back arched slightly, staring at Ned. A deep, threatening growl rose out of Fluffy's throat. Ned tried to ignore him and focus on the TV, but it was impossible. Fluffy's stare cut into Ned like a knife.

Enough of this. Ned put his feet down on the floor and leaned forward. Fluffy didn't shy away, and Ned reached out and grabbed him. "Time for solitary confinement, you little shit."

Ned stood up. He held Fluffy on the bandaged part of his torso with both hands. Ned gave Fluffy a squeeze against his wounds, just to hurt him a little. Fluffy needed to learn that Ned was a human and that made him the boss.

Fluffy squirmed. The cat was harder to hold onto than Ned expected. Ned gripped down tighter, but he couldn't stop Fluffy from twisting in his hands. Fluffy turned to the side and bit into the meaty area between the thumb and index finger of Ned's right hand. The pain was sharp and sudden.

"Ah, fuck!" Ned said. He tried to pull Fluffy away, but Fluffy reached out and sunk the claws of both of his front paws into Ned's right forearm. "Aargh!" Ned ran down the hall to the bathroom and stopped at the door. He grabbed Fluffy by the scruff of the neck with his left hand and yanked as hard as he could. Fluffy's teeth ripped a small chunk out of Ned's right hand, and his claws sliced long gouges along Ned's forearm. He screamed in pain.

Ned flung Fluffy as hard as he could at the bathroom wall. Fluffy twisted in midair, landed feet first against the wall, pushed off, and jumped like a ninja. Fluffy landed on top of the shower curtain rod and perched. The hair on his back stood up, and he looked down at Ned and growled. Ned's jaw dropped.

"What the hell is going on?" Ned slammed the door and hurried into the kitchen, cradling his bleeding arm. That damn cat was insane. Ned should call animal control and have it put down. He would be doing Carmen a favor.

Ned turned on the faucet in the kitchen sink and ran his wounds under the water. It stung. He grabbed a handful of paper towels and wrapped himself up. His blood immediately soaked into the towels and turned them red.

Ned pulled out his phone and started writing a text. "What the fuck Carmen—," he typed. What should he say? That he came over to her apartment to check on Fluffy only hours after she left? That would raise questions that he didn't want to deal with. He deleted the message.

Ned felt dizzy. He went to the living room and plopped down on the couch. The local news was on. "And tonight's full moon will be extra bright, if

you can catch it between the intermittent clouds," the weatherman said. "I for one am heading out to get a moon tan." He laughed like a jackass and joked with the news anchors. Ned stopped paying attention.

The last fading rays of sun shone through the living room window. Ned was really tired. He closed his eyes and leaned back into the soft couch. Just a quick nap. His thoughts would be clearer when he woke up, and then he would figure out what to do.

Ned's eyes popped open. A noise had startled him awake. It was dark outside, and a poorly written crime drama was playing on TV. He muted the volume and listened. A loud thud came from the bathroom. What the hell was Fluffy doing in there?

Ned stood up on shaky feet and checked out his wounded arm. The hair on the back of his right hand seemed thicker and darker than normal. That was weird. The thudding came again, followed by a crash of breaking glass.

"Hey stupid animal," Ned said, walking down the hall. He stopped at the closed door. The noises from the other side stopped. "I'm going to come in there now, okay. Just don't be an asshole and I won't kick you."

Ned opened the door. The bathroom was dark, the light from the hallway not strong enough to illuminate the room. What he could see was a disaster. Strips of toilet paper littered the floor and the bathmat was shredded. Two small points of light stared at Ned from the darkness—Fluffy's eyes reflecting the weak light.

"I'm not cleaning this up," Ned said.

At that moment, the moon came out. The pink curtains covering the bathroom window lit up with pale white light. Ned felt a deep, aching pain in

the wounds on his right arm, and Fluffy started shaking uncontrollably and screeching. Ned flicked on the bathroom light.

He screamed.

Fluffy was twice as big as he should be, and he was growing larger. The bandages on his torso ripped apart and fell to the floor. His body elongated and swelled with thick muscles. His paws expanded and grew opposable thumbs. When the transformation stopped, Fluffy stood on his hind legs, a three-foot tall monster. He lifted his head at the ceiling and howled, "Meeooowwwww!"

What the ever-loving fuck? Did Ned just watch Fluffy turn into a... werecat? That was insane. Fluffy looked at Ned. That little fucker looked hungry. Fluffy crouched, getting ready to pounce. His tail flicked back and forth in the air, and he growled like a tiger.

Fluffy was ready for dinner and Ned was on the menu. Ned grabbed the bathroom door and slammed it shut. Maybe werecats were like house cats and were too stupid to open doors. Fluffy rammed the door from the other side. A large crack split open down the center of the door. Balls.

Fluffy hit the door again and it exploded, and Ned was pelted with splintered wood. He shielded his face and fell back against the wall, trying to stay on his feet. Fluffy strode through the door on his hind legs, his front paws balled into tiny fists.

Ned looked over his shoulder. The front door seemed so far away, and he didn't think he could outrun Fluffy. He had to fight. Ned squared off against the creature. The cat was only three feet tall, and Ned was a full-grown man. He could do this. "I'm going to kick your ass."

Ned leaned over and swung downward, punching at Fluffy's head as hard as he could. Fluffy just stepped to the side. The werecat punched upward, his furry fist smashing like a rock into Ned's jaw. Ned saw stars. Fluffy swiped with the claws on his other hand, and they sliced through Ned's shirt and into his skin.

Ned stumbled backwards into the living room, trying to regain his balance. He should have run. Fluffy jumped, and while in midair, he backhanded Ned. Ned twisted and fell face-first into the glass-topped coffee table, shattering it. He tumbled onto the floor in a pile of glass shards.

"Oh, God," Ned groaned. Not like this. Don't go down like a bitch. The "Kittens" picture book was lying on the ground near his face. Ned grabbed it. Summoning all his strength, he rolled onto his back and held the book out between him and the werecat. "Hey Fluffy, look at these nice kitties. Don't you want to be nice like them?"

Fluffy swiped the book out of Ned's hands. It crashed into the TV and cracked the glass. Well damn. He was going to be eaten alive by a fucking house cat. Fluffy hopped onto Ned's chest. The werecat's sharp claws dug into his stomach. Ned shielded his face with his bandaged right arm.

Goodbye cruel world.

Fluffy froze. He leaned forward and sniffed the bloody paper towels covering Ned's arm. Ned opened one eye and peeked at Fluffy. The werecat's pupils shrank, and he locked eyes with Ned. Then, of all things, Fluffy purred.

Fluffy tilted his head up into the air and howled. "Meeooowwwww!" With that, Fluffy leapt off of Ned and crashed through the living room window. Glass rained down on the walkway outside, and cold air blew into the room. Ned heard Fluffy's howl fading as the werecat ran off into the darkness.

Ned clung to the steering wheel with sweaty hands. He leaned forward and squinted at the dark road ahead. The clouds covered the moon, and his headlights weren't penetrating the darkness. Why was he having so much trouble focusing? He had been feeling progressively worse on the drive home. A wave of nausea hit him, and Ned swallowed hard so he wouldn't puke.

A werecat bit him. What happened to people in the stories? They turned into to whatever were-fucking-animal bit them. No, that couldn't happen to Ned. Fluffy bit him while in normal cat form, so Ned wouldn't be infected. Right?

A bead of sweat dripped in his eye and he blinked it away. Ned was close to his place. He would get home, take some aspirin, and sleep it off. Tomorrow morning, this would all be a bad dream. Everything was fine. He wished he never volunteered to watch Carmen's damn cat. She was hot, but getting pussy wasn't worth this mess.

He knocked over the trashcans on the curb when he pulled into the parking lot at his apartment complex. It didn't matter. Ned just needed to get inside. Get in the shower. Run cold water on his burning skin. His entire body was on fire.

Ned leaned against the car door and fumbled with the handle. He pushed it open, lost his balance, and tumbled onto the concrete. Every bone in his body ached, and the inside of his skin itched. He lay there on the ground, panting, and trying to muster the strength to stand. That's when the clouds parted and moonlight poured over him.

Ned shrieked. The pain was unreal. The pale light burned like boiling water. This can't be happening! Ned got his knees under him and tried to stand, but his legs were spasming out of control. He grabbed the car door for balance, and that's when he caught his reflection in the side view mirror.

Black fur exploded out of his skin. Sharp fangs sprouted from his mouth. His pupils narrowed to cat-like slits. Please, anything but this. Ned fucking hated cats.

"Meeooowwwww!" Ned's werecat howl echoed in the night air.