

GUS AND PEPPER

Written by

Finn Wagstaff

EXT. BORNEO JUNGLE - DAY

A lush rainforest nestled away in the island of Borneo. Sun drips down through the canopy, illuminating the patchwork of Mangrove trees that covers the swampy forest floor.

Condensation makes the trees seem to sparkle. The ripest, juiciest berries hang tantalizingly out of reach.

The forest sounds alive with a symphony of wild animal noises. It's paradise.

GUS (O.S.)  
Pepper. Pepper... Pepper!

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - MORNING

A pair of eyes flutter open. Looking back is GUS, a male proboscis monkey (read: big nose).

GUS  
Finally, you're awake. I had to say  
your name three times!

PEPPER, a female proboscis monkey with a petite nose, rubs the sleep out of her eyes and groans.

GUS and Pepper's habitat is a concrete cube. The walls are painted as if someone with a Whip-Its habit tried to draw a jungle from memory. A few lone "trees" (industrial tubing with spray-painted brown styrofoam) decorate the cage, as well as a few worn toys.

Florescent lights full of dead flies swing overhead and gives their cage a grim and unnatural glow.

PEPPER  
Gus, what have I said about letting  
me sleep?

GUS  
I'm sorry, I know not to wake you  
up. But it's just that I missed  
you, Pep.

Gus is so adorable that Pepper can't be mad at him for long. Pepper sighs and does a big stretch that reveals a mysterious scar running along the side of her belly.

PEPPER  
You're lucky you're so adorable.

GUS  
I know. So did you have any  
exciting dreams?

PEPPER  
Yeah. I dreamed about... that I...

Pepper trails off.

PEPPER (CONT'D)  
I can't remember.

GUS  
Sounds like it must have been a  
pretty boring dream.

PEPPER  
No, I don't think so--

GUS  
--Pepper, guess what?

PEPPER  
What?

GUS  
You have to guess.

PEPPER  
Gus, can you just give me a second  
to wake up--

A low creaking noise interrupts Pepper's train of thought.

GUS  
Did you hear that? Morning Creak!

PEPPER  
Of course I heard Morning Creak. We  
hear it every morning.

The creaking continues. Gus strains to be heard over the  
grinding, metallic noises.

GUS  
The people are coming!

EXT. EASTSIDE ZOO - SAME TIME

Eastside Zoo has seen better days. The once-chipper facade  
reminds the (few) guests that the zoo was respectable at one  
point in time.

The creaking noise reveals to be a rickety gate scraping across the pavement. Above the gate, a metal statue of a father with his little girl seems to watch the guests.

Large animatronics in various states of disarray whir to life to greet the guests. All of them have disturbingly human-like eyes and teeth.

PEPPER (V.O.)

What was the thing you were trying to make me guess?

GUS (V.O.)

Just that it's another perfect day.

A school bus screeches to a stop in front of the zoo and a gaggle of middle schoolers exit the bus.

EXT. EASTSIDE ZOO - BUS

Waiting for them is DR. VANESSA BIRDGRAVE (40s), the General Manager and Lead Zoologist at Eastside Zoo. She has a huge smile plastered on her face.

DR. BIRDGRAVE

Welcome to Eastside Zoo! I was talking with the animals earlier, and they are SO excited to see all of you!

SIXTH GRADER

Are Gus and Pepper here?!

DR. BIRDGRAVE

Oh, yes they are! And you can even buy exclusive Gus and Pepper selfies for your instagram. Now go! Enjoy the zoo!

The kids cheer and take off. Dr. Birdgrave relaxes her face and drops the smile.

One kid tugs on Dr. Birdgrave's lab coat.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (CONT'D)

No touching.

SIXTH GRADER 2

Dr. Birdgrave? What kind of animal is that?

She points at a hedgehog that's scampering in the bushes.

DR. BIRDGRAVE

Oh, that's just a boring hedgehog.  
Go see the real zoo animals.

After the kids race into the zoo, the Chaperone spikes her coffee with tequila.

CHAPERONE

And remember, no running!

She takes a sip of her coffee and winces.

SIXTH GRADE GIRL

What did you put in your coffee?

CHAPERONE

(flustered)

Nothing! Why aren't you with  
everyone else? Go enjoy the zoo.

The Chaperone escorts the girl to the gate and hands her a pamphlet with a wild proboscis monkey on the cover.

CHAPERONE (CONT'D)

Go, go, go.

As the girl leaves, the Chaperone goes back to her coffee.

EXT. EASTSIDE ZOO

We follow the field trippers as they walk past the outdoor exhibits.

Two giraffes moan and groan as they get up on their rickety legs. A lion with a scraggly mane sits on a rock. Can lions be depressed? Because this one is. Flamingos that are the dirtiest shade of pink. A peacock that's missing too many feathers. A rhino with a droopy horn. All the animals are listless.

Something catches the kids attention and all of their eyes simultaneously light up.

EXT. EASTSIDE ZOO - GIFT SHOP

The kids press their faces up to the glass. Tantalizing toys and mega-plush stuffed animals line the display case.

CHAPERONE (O.S.)

Nuh-uh. You guys didn't come here  
to ogle the gift shop. This is  
supposed to be educational.

A chorus of groans.

CHAPERONE (CONT'D)

How about we go see the...

She scans the zoo to find something to distract the kids. The giraffes are still struggling to get up. The lion is flopped on the rock.

But then, she spots MONKEY MANIA, a jungle-themed building. Large animatronic monkeys swing from frayed rope, painted green to look like vines.

CHAPERONE (CONT'D)

Monkeys! Let's go, we're seeing the monkeys. Don't you guys want to see the internet monkeys?

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - SAME

GUS

So what do you wanna do today  
Pepper? We could play rope...

He swings on a dilapidated piece of rope. It used to be a part of a swing but the seat has long since broken.

PEPPER

We did that yesterday.

GUS

Okay. What about Screaming game.

PEPPER

(gesturing at her neck)  
Screaming Game hurts my talky-box.

GUS

Are you angry? We could play anger  
ball.

He gestures to a worn-out and semi-deflated basketball.

PEPPER

The anger ball doesn't help.

GUS

Okay. What about tire?

He climbs onto an old tractor tire.

PEPPER

No. Tire isn't fun.

GUS  
Hide and seek?

PEPPER  
We know all the good spots.

GUS  
What do you want to do, Pepper??  
Huh? I'm coming up with all these  
great ideas and you keep shutting  
me down.

PEPPER  
I'm sorry, I don't know why I'm in  
such a funk today.

GUS  
(cher impression)  
Well *schnap* out of it!

PEPPER  
Who was that an impression of?

GUS  
I... don't know.

He flips imaginary hair in a Cher-kinda way.

GUS (CONT'D)  
And what was that?

SIXTH GRADER (O.S.)  
MONKEYS!

GUS and Pepper take a look through the viewing glass that  
separates them from the zoo-goers. The crowd of sixth graders  
has entered the monkey house.

GUS  
Oh perfect. Young ones.

PEPPER  
Can we just sit and watch them  
instead of throwing-

Pepper turns to see GUS grunting, pushing out a turd into his  
hand.

GUS  
So you don't even want to fling  
your shit at them? Pepper, you LOVE  
to throw your shit around.  
Especially at human children!  
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)

Is your stomach out of poop? You can have some of mine.

PEPPER

No, Gus.

GUS

I don't know who you are, but I want to know what you did with my friend Pepper.

PEPPER

Gus, don't you ever get the feeling there's more to life than tossing the same old shit every day?

GUS

First of all, the beauty of poop is that each one is unique. Like a snowflake.

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - HUMAN POV

The sixth graders watch as Gus and Pepper have a monkey-gibberish conversation. Gus is just holding his shit.

SIXTH GRADER

Is that monkey holding its poop?

CHAPERONE

Yes.

SIXTH GRADER 2

Is he going to throw it or what?

SIXTH GRADER

I thought they had clout?!

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - MONKEY POV

PEPPER

(frustrated)

Gus. You aren't listening to me.

GUS

Yes I am. How could I not be hearing you, we're standing right next to each other.



PEPPER

Gus. You know I love you but sometimes your view on things can be... simple.

GUS

Simple is good.

PEPPER

No it's not! I want to be challenged intellectually! I want to discover new things. There hasn't been anything new here since they gave us "anger ball".

Pepper kicks the anger ball and it weakly bounces across the floor.

PEPPER (CONT'D)

I wish I could be like you and be happy to toss around my shit every day and go to bed with a smile on my face. But I can't. I need more.

Gus goes quiet. A frown spreads across his face.

PEPPER (CONT'D)

You're really telling me you never get bored around here?

GUS

No. Because I have you, Pepper.

The two of them stand in silence. Pepper can tell she hurt Gus' feelings.

The tension is broken by the sound of sticky hands slamming against the glass. The sixth graders have grown restless and start banging.

SIXTH GRADER

(through the glass)

DO SOMETHING! GAY ASS MONKEYS.

CHAPERONE

Language.

Pepper grabs the shit out of Gus' hand.

PEPPER

CAN'T YOU SEE WE'RE HAVING A CONVERSATION! LEAVE US ALONE!

The sixth graders can only hear Pepper "angry hooting" and they start cheering. But this only makes Pepper angrier.

PEPPER (CONT'D)

FUCK OFF!

She picks up the "anger ball" and chucks it at the glass. Zoom in on the basketball has a tiny pebble lodged in the side. Upon impact, the glass completely shatters.

The sixth graders start shrieking and all-out chaos ensues.

The timid girl gets a piece of shit-glass caught in her sweater and in the mad rush to get it off her, drops the Zoo's promotional brochure, which lands in the inclosure.

GUS

Pepper...

PEPPER

(tense)

I'm sorry Gus. I just need to be alone for a little.

GUS

It's okay. I get it. The privacy corner is yours.

INT. PRIVACY CORNER - MOMENTS LATER

Pepper goes to sit down in the corner. As she sits down, she realizes that she's sitting on something. Pepper pulls the brochure out from under her.

The Brochure is titled "PROBOSCIS MONKEYS: THE ODDEST NOSES AROUND (featuring Gus and Pepper!)" She opens it up.

PEPPER

Oh my god.

GUS (O.S.)

Um, Pepper?

Pepper can't pull her eyes away from the leaflet. Her pupils dilate excitedly.

GUS (CONT'D)

I know the rules about the Privacy Corner but **she's** coming.

This gets Pepper's attention. She quickly tucks the brochure into her pocket (her pocket?).

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - HUMAN POV

Dr. Birdgrave has come to survey the wreckage. Following behind her is ZIGZAG (mid 30's), her beta-male lackey.

ZIGZAG

I closed off Monkey Maniaa.

ZigZag tries not to step on the poop-covered glass shards.

ZIGZAG (CONT'D)

Gus and Pepper were able to shatter the glass with just a basketball?

Dr. Birdgrave scoffs.

DR. BIRDGRAVE

You just made the biggest mistake in zoo-keeping.

ZIGZAG

I did?

DR. BIRDGRAVE

NEVER underestimate a wild animal. They're not like us. They don't understand good and bad like we do.

ZIGZAG

But-

DR. BIRDGRAVE

These are dangerous creatures we're dealing with. Now, we have that news crew coming tomorrow and their piece on Gus and Pepper. It is imperative this goes well so that people will forget the whole... *Socks* incident.

ZIGZAG

I'm with you, Dr. B, the last thing I want is another *Socks* debacle, it's just that-

DR. BIRDGRAVE

It's Dr. Birdgrave, I don't know where you get the idea that you're on a nickname level with me.

ZIGZAG

I'm sorry, but-

DR. BIRDGRAVE

Oh! That gives me a great idea, we should bring that gaggle of kids back tomorrow for set decoration!

Dr. Birdgrave leaves Zigzag to deal with this combination safety hazard / biohazard.

ZIGZAG

It's just that we're out of gloves.

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - MONKEY POV

Gus watches Zigzag try to delicately pick up pieces of glass. Pepper is in the privacy corner, back turned to Gus.

INT. PRIVACY CORNER

Pepper is enthralled by stock images of wild Proboscis Monkeys swinging from vines and sitting in trees.

INT. PRIVACY CORNER - MUCH LATER

A couple large sheets of saran wrap cover the now exposed window where the viewing glass used to be.

Pepper is still holding the brochure but now it's well worn from her reading through it over and over again.

GUS

Um, Pepper? It's been like two days, you sure you don't want to eat anything?

Pepper slowly turns around to face Gus. She hasn't slept and her eyes are bloodshot.

PEPPER

GUS!

She breaks out into a toothy grin.

In a flash, she runs up to Gus. He tries to scooch away but Pepper grabs his arm.

GUS

You're hurting me.

PEPPER

I figured it out. I can't believe it took me this long but I did it.

GUS

Did what? Pepper, please, you're really scaring me.

Pepper starts shaking Gus frantically, making him cry.

PEPPER

(normal)

Awww, Gussie, don't cry. Please don't cry, I have good news.

Gus looks at her, sniffing.

GUS

You do?

PEPPER

Yes. So, you know how I've kind of been going through it these past few days?

GUS

I knew it, you WERE going through something! Why didn't you tell me?

PEPPER

Because I'm better now.

GUS

Really? Pepper, that's awesome! I'm so happy for you.

PEPPER

Me too. I thought of a plan that will fix everything.

GUS

Woah! Everything?

PEPPER

Everything.

GUS

Am I allowed to know about it?

PEPPER

Of course. I'm definitely going to need your help.

GUS  
(feeling good)  
Yeah, makes sense. I'm so good at helping. Sure, I'll help!

PEPPER  
Great! That was easy.

Gus takes a second. His brows furrow in confusion.

GUS  
Wait. What exactly am I helping you with?

PEPPER  
I'm going to kill myself.

Pepper starts grooming herself nonchalantly. Gus nods, then processes what Pepper just said.

GUS  
WHAT?!

PEPPER  
What?

GUS  
You're killing yourself?!

PEPPER  
Yes. That's what I said.

GUS  
But- But... you can't just do that!

PEPPER  
Why not.

GUS  
Because! You- you just can't.

PEPPER  
Gus, just listen to me.

GUS  
Oh, and I take back what I said about helping you out. I am not gonna help you un-alive yourself.

PEPPER  
Come on, Gus! You just said that you would help.

GUS

Back when I thought you were talking about coming up with new rules for how to play rope!

PEPPER

Gus, if you wanted to kill yourself I would help you!

GUS

I don't WANT to kill myself! And neither should you!

PEPPER

Well, I do want to. I've made up my mind.

GUS

Wait, how are you even feeling suicidal right now? Can monkeys feel that? Are we allowed to?

PEPPER

I'll show you... but just warning you: it'll probably make you want to kill yourself too.

Pepper starts to take out the brochure and Gus gasps.

GUS

DON'T SHOW ME!

PEPPER

Gus, it's not actually going to kill you.

GUS

Oh. Okay, then. Show me.

Pepper pulls out the crumpled brochure.

GUS (CONT'D)

It's a piece of paper?

PEPPER

Look at the pictures.

Pepper gives Gus the brochure and he looks at the pictures of the wild Proboscis monkey.

GUS

He looks so cool. No wonder he got the cover spread.

PEPPER  
You're missing the point. Look  
again.

Gus stares, not getting what Pepper is trying to tell him.

PEPPER (CONT'D)  
Where is he?

GUS  
He's... I don't know.

PEPPER  
Neither do I. But it's not here.  
Don't you see how happy he is?

GUS  
I bet he's not as happy as me. How  
could he be?

PEPPER  
Gus, have you ever thought about  
where we come from?

GUS  
Like mommy's tummy? That sort of  
thing?

PEPPER  
No. Like, us. Monkeys.

GUS  
Yeah. Mommy's tummy.

PEPPER  
Gus, monkeys didn't just show up  
one day living at Eastside. They  
TOOK us. From where he is.

She gestures the to the brochure again. Gus picks it up and  
takes a closer look. A look of doubt flashes across Gus' face  
before he laughs it off.

GUS  
So? It's so much better here.

PEPPER  
You don't know that.

GUS  
Yes I do. This place is awesome. We  
get meals hand-delivered, the most  
awesome-est toys, AND we get to be  
together!



PEPPER

You leave me no choice. I'm sorry,  
Gus.

She starts banging her head against the concrete wall. Gus starts screaming, which makes Pepper bang her head even harder. Blood starts flying which makes Gus even more inconsolable.

GUS

PEPPER STOP! STOP IT!

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - HUMAN POV

Zigzag is cleaning up a patch of vomit when he notices Pepper and Gus struggling. He takes out his walkie talkie.

ZIGZAG

Zigzag to Birdgrave.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (O.S.)

You've got Birdgrave.

ZIGZAG

There's something going on with  
Pepper and GUS.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (O.S.)

Is it cute? Get a video of it so we  
can get it on the instagram.

ZIGZAG

Dr. Birdgrave, it's not very cute.  
Pepper looks like she's trying to  
kill herself.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (O.S.)

WHAT? Lead with that?

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - MONKEY POV

Gus tries to hold Pepper back but she's a stronger monkey than meets the eye. She breaks free of Gus' grip and keeps pounding her head against the wall. A chip of the jungle mural comes off the wall, revealing an unknown tableau underneath.

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - HUMAN POV

Dr. Birdgrave comes busting in. She steps through the sheets of plastic wrap and runs up to Pepper.

DR. BIRDGRAVE  
(to ZigZag)  
What did I tell you? Wild animals.

She administers an injection. A label on the side of the syringe lets us know that this is KETAMINE.

Pepper stops banging her head and slumps onto the floor.

GUS  
Pepper!

DR. BIRDGRAVE  
There. That should keep her nice  
and calm.

ZIGZAG  
For how long?

DR. BIRDGRAVE  
I don't know. I'm not a doctor!

Zigzag double takes.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (CONT'D)  
I mean, yes. Of course I am a  
doctor. This monkey will be back to  
normal in... three hours?

ZIGZAG  
You don't sound so sure.

DR. BIRDGRAVE  
You're projecting.

She turns to leave. Gus is prodding Pepper's limp body.

DR. BIRDGRAVE (CONT'D)  
And clean up all this blood. The  
camera crew will see NONE of this.

EXT. BORNEO JUNGLE - MAGIC HOUR

Pepper looks up and sees that she's back in the jungle. She smiles and exhales deeply. She's home.

But her moment of bliss is short-lived. Alerted by a crackling noise, Pepper realizes that the forest is on fire. Thick black smoke starts choking Pepper, she starts gasping for breath as she...

INT. MONKEY INCLOSURE - HOURS LATER

Pepper wakes up gasping for air. She immediately winces, noticing a bandage wrapped around her head. Pepper looks around and sees Gus sulking in the private corner.

PEPPER

How long have I been asleep for?

GUS

A long time. I would have woken you up but I guess you hate that now. Also, you slept through dinner so I ate yours.

PEPPER

That's okay. I'm not hungry.

GUS

HOW ARE YOU STILL NOT HUNGRY??

Gus starts pacing a tight track around the inclosure.

PEPPER

Gus?

He ignores her and continues to pace.

PEPPER (CONT'D)

Gus.

GUS

What?

He stops pacing.

PEPPER

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have tried to bash my head in right next to where you sleep. That was rude of me.

GUS

Yeah, it totally was.

PEPPER

Will you let me make it up to you?

This perks Gus up a little.

GUS

Explain.