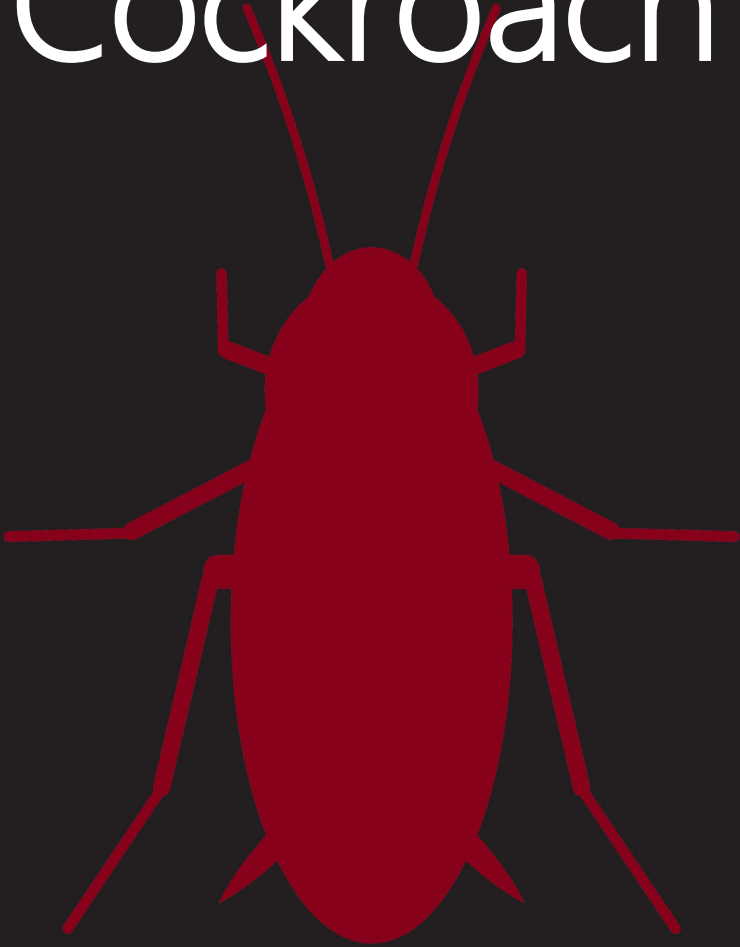


# Glen the Cockroach





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# **Glen the Cockroach**

## **A Complete Fairytale**



## Glen the Cockroach

Train carriages sway with a rhythmic limp; they jar and twist in spasmodic tremors; they shake in the bones and chatter the teeth; they grow and fall, throwing passengers around with a vicious glee.

A certain passenger, with a certain scowl imprinted from his crown to his navel, hunched into the back of his seat. He tapped his left foot in time with the vibrato of the shuddering engine.

A wire fence followed the tracks, fresh rye grass, grew tall in the fertile soil. The grass plucked at the fence with its seeded fingers; shaping small shivers down the wires.

The certain passenger tapped at the top pocket of his frayed, khaki jacket with meaty fingers. It was the perfect sized pocket for a small packet of cigarettes and fortunate, as a small packet was all he had ever been able to afford. He fiddled and grunted but his pocket turned out empty.

A spark of afternoon sun peaked through the low dark cloud warming his face, with a sniff and a sigh he slipped back into a recline. The train wound through back paddocks, heaving across erosion scarred hillsides. Failed vineyards and rotting ghost gums dotted the landscape.

An unfortunate passenger who had been searching for the toilet stepped out in time with the jerk of the carriage as it rumbled down the rusted line. He fell with a thump into the scowling lap of the khaki-clad man. A burst of stale tobacco filled the air, as Glen slowly heaved the weighty traveller off with an impatient frown and a dismissive grunt.

Bobbing across from Glen, chuckling at the unfortunate passenger was Itch. He had a greasy smile, a loose fitting basketball shirt and a large pink fungal growth that bloomed from the top of his left ear down to the bottom of his emaciated jaw. Itch scratched at the fungus voraciously.

“No’ long now Glen, might wanna get some sleep ‘fore we get there. Gunna be comin’ in late.”

Glen nodded his approval.

The warm interior of the carriage was welcoming. Light flashed across the ceiling, framing a group of celebratory advertisements that were stuck to the low ceiling.

## Glen the Cockroach

“Reckon if ya gotta tell people there’s a reason fa celebratin’, there might not be a reason ta celebrate yeh?”

Glen nodded in casual agreement. Itch continued, “People care ‘bout somethin’ they gunna celebrate how they wan’ I reckon.”

Itch went back to scratching, Glen stared at the shiny posters. Some had frayed at the corners revealing the remains of older, less appropriate adverts. Glen craned his head and spotted one with a packet of cigarettes. Plastered over the top, smiling children pushed each other off swing sets, clumsy fathers dropped burnt sausages and single women in their late fifties laughed wildly while gulping down large glasses of white wine.

The train turned sharply, scudding off a bent rail before righting itself with a metallic sigh.

Glen’s eyes bounced around the interior, jade bag racks and exit signs merged into each other in a wobbly haze of short sightedness, Glen closed his lids for a moment to adjust. Behind his eyelids things began to turn the same shade of green as the neon exit sign, he popped his lids open.

The expectant face of a conductor peered back.

The conductor bore a face of issue, not a specific issue, but a collection of issues that over time had built up and resulted in his face twisting in upon itself. Every line, every wrinkle of a fifty year life, was pulled down on an acute angle that formed at the centre of his mouth. So sharp was the angle that, had it not been for the tuft of facial hair adorning his lower lip, it could easily have been mistaken for his creviced chin.

The whole business reminded Glen of water going down a drain; it reminded the Itch that he hadn’t bought tickets.

“Tickets sir?”

The question was laboured and knowing. The conductor had, in his twenty-five years of service, learned to distinguish between the legitimate commuters and the bums that jumped on any train going in the right direction. How? He had no idea. Why? He didn’t care. The answer to his question was all that was important, the answer would give him the power he needed, the answer was key.

## Glen the Cockroach

The coat rack searched his pockets in idle desperation, trying to buy some time. Glen sat squinting at his companion ignorantly.

“Carrrrrm on Itch. Tha gentleman is waitin.”

The conductor began to tap restlessly on his notepad, intermittent flashes of gum trees passed the cabin. They looked blissful, but withered in their old age. The conductor had been on this route for years, every day of the week. He knew every corner, every thicket. He remembered how he had seen the trees as saplings grow their first shoots, poor and fragile. He remembered how amazed he was with this budding life, born freshly from the earth. It was his first day and they had grown with him.

“Fuck I hate gum trees.” He thought.

“Fark I ‘ate gum trees.” The cabin surprisingly echoed.

“Shut up Itch.”

Itch moved on to fumbling through the worn seats, while Glen ogled the conductor menacingly. The conductor’s eyes remained on Itch.

“Why don’t ya check m’ bag Itch, reckon I might a popped ‘em in there so they di’n get lost.”

Itch smiled a grateful smile.

“Make shore y’empty et out though, probly at tha bottom o’ tha lot.”

Itch reached for the green canvas sack on the rack above their heads. It was a simple affair with a hole at one end for filling, a cord around the hole to make sure things didn’t fall out and a single strap sewed haphazardly into the fabric. Itch felt at the cord, wriggling the whole thing slowly and heavily from its spot.

Glen returned to staring at the insufferable smiling faces above his head.

The conductor tapped.

The bag fell.



## Glen the Cockroach

A shower of filth sprayed from the sack, fluttering down the aisles like moths caught on the breeze. Two empty soda bottles thumped onto the floor and took off, passengers pulled yellowed newspaper out their hair and a ball of underwear rolled towards the toilets at the rear. The conductor pulled a used handkerchief off his sleeve.

Itch gave a nervous smile, "Find et n' bring et to ya?"

The conductor grimaced, pulled the offending cloth from his sleeve, tightened his top button and stalked off down the aisle.

"Well I reckon that was good timin' aye Glen?" Itch was holding Glen's empty sack and scratching his neck, "Spouse we'll need ta get everythin' back in 'ere."

Glen looked at Itch scornfully, "Yep, reckon ya gunna 'ave ta get right on ta that Itch."

Itch grimaced as he searched around the muck strewn cabin, the other passengers were not impressed. Itch looked back at his companion pleadingly, Glen was too busy trying to make his right eye twitch. One of the women had started to quiver. Itch stumbled off.

"Oh n' find tha tickets Itch!"

The train wound on, holding to the hillside, rolling past patches of open ground soggy and grey with bog. Herds of cattle had churned large craters into the fields. Trees grew with little pot bellies, engorged on the light from the sun and the moisture from the earth. Glen's eyes grew hazy as small memories trickled through his mind.

He remembered a young friend with a serpent smile had taken him around the back roads to go yabbing. Dams popped open on the roadside like wounds in the landscape. They caught a few yabbies that year but didn't check to see if they were females. There were no yabbies the next year.

Glen noticed a collection of wind turbines on a distant ridge, their propellers spun proudly in the face of a frigid southern breeze. A collection of small, grey clouds gathered behind them.

Itch scrambled back to his seat with a pile of paper and rags.

## Glen the Cockroach

“All I could find.” He said with a smile. One of the other passengers objected, waving a musty cloth at Itch. Glen shot a dark glance towards the dissenter, casual murmuring went silent, the objector sat down and Glen sat back in his warm chair.

“Thanks mate,” squeaked Itch as he nervously gouged at the rash above his right ear.

Glen gave a nod.

Flakes of skin fell over Itch’s hands, seat and floor.

Glen decided to close his eyes for a while.

.....

Glen woke to a clatter of banners wafting in the breeze. They hung over a deserted station, colours and creatures stitched precisely into the soft fabric had melted into a solid block of dreary block in the storm darkened sky. The train was silent, light trickled in from the station roof. Itch was snoozing with his fingers resting firmly on a fungus that had bloomed below his elbow; it was turning a vicious shade of violet.

Glen stood up to stretch his legs and found himself staring directly into the tightly squeezed mouth of the train conductor. The neck buttons on the conductor’s uniform flashed, his lips slowly stretched out into a loose, knowing smile.

“Tickets. Sir.”

The conductor held out a firm, expectant hand. Glen looked down at Itch, snoozing peacefully, then back into the conductor’s impatient eyes.

Glen leaned back and with a heavy shudder, forced out a violent, guttural cough. A hefty wad of dark brown mucus detached itself from his trachea and smacked hard against the conductor’s face.

The conductor recoiled in horror, swiping at his face with one hand, while digging in his left pant pocket for a cloth with the other. Glen shook Itch violently, pulled his rucksack off the storage rack and set off down the car with a bustling limp.

## Glen the Cockroach

Itch slowly dragged his eyes open in a contented daze. Out the window, beneath the station's dim lights, he could see Glen stomping off towards the bus stop. Above Itch loomed the scowling face of the conductor, handkerchief stuck to his cheek. A heavy droplet of saliva slid down his nose and splashed onto Itch's shoulder.

"I believe I was promised tickets young man!"

The conductor's growl rung in Itch's ears. Itch nodded and slowly he reached for his pocket. He inched a small piece of paper to the top of his pocket and flicked it into the conductor's face. Then, with a brisk slide, Itch dodged beneath the conductor's restraining arm and bounded after Glen, screaming every profanity he could think of at the top of his lungs.

The conductor, surprised by the nimbleness of the young, dirty vagrant fell with a resigned thud, repeating only one of the profanities Itch had been screaming in a long deliberate bellow.

"Shit Glen, move et!" Itch screamed at the lumbering hulk as he sprinted past. He ran away from the bus stop towards an ancient red dent with wheels.

"Fugget 'bout that mate, jump in tha car!" Itch blurted as he swung himself into the front passenger door of the tiny hatchback.

"Oi, come back ya filthy bastards!"

Glen turned, two conductors were screaming at him through the station fence, for a moment he tensed, he could feel the muscles on the back of his neck ripple.

"C'mon Glen."

The car hobbled to and the back door flew open. Glen hesitated, searching for a reason to stay, there was none, with a shrug he threw himself into the back seat, his bundle still tied firmly onto his back. A painful sound of gears crunching, followed a high-pitched squeal; the car lurched forward throwing Glen back against torn seats.

Itch sat in the front passenger side grinning through his gums. Glen slowly righted himself with a strained huff. In the rear vision mirror he could see the two conductors slow to a walk.

## Glen the Cockroach

Glen shifted on a collection of fast food wrappers, ten cent coins and what he assumed was a hair brush. Considering the lack of any discernible bristles he couldn't be sure.

"F'anythings in ya way Glen jus' move et yeh." A sharp twanging voice with a hint of masculinity on top of its feminine base jangled from the driver's seat.

Glen peered into the rear vision mirror, his gaze was met by a younger woman with more make-up than her face should have allowed and less clothing than the weather demanded. She nodded at Glen through mirror, Glen nodded back.

"Sorry bout that mate, must a fugotten to get tha tickets." Itch chimed. Glen glared out the window huffing with what he hoped sounded like disappointment. It was closer to asthmatic, the warm air from his lungs hung against the cold window.

"Yeh." Was all he could muster.

"Well we got outta et mate that's all that matters."

"Yeh."

"Ya met Ray right?"

Glen looked at the intense face of the woman in the front seat; her eyes were set straight ahead, focused on keeping the wayward vehicle on the road. Ray was wearing a white tank top and what Glen assumed was a pair of Itch's tracksuit pants. She looked slightly older than Itch with a small collection of wrinkles around her right eye, her hair had been flattened, bleached and cropped short to make it look like it could just pop off. He remembered her.

"Yeh, howsit goin' Rayure?"

The woman shot a dark glance back at Glen, "it's just Ray, thanks Glen."

Glen nodded.

Itch buzzed in the front passenger seat with enthusiasm,

"So mate when are we gunna head out 'n see some old places, yeh?"

## Glen the Cockroach

Glen looked out the window, trying to ignore the question.

“Few people wanna see ya man an’ we can go see ‘em soon cos most of ‘em don’ ave much on.”

Glen gave a sniff. Grey banners; the same that hung from the station swayed beneath every light post, every large building, the entire city was in the midst of a celebration. Each banner hung like a guillotine blade waiting for the drop.

“See ‘ow we go Itch, yeh?”

“Alright mate but I reckon you’ll need ta see some folk soon.” Itch turned and looked out the window. “We droppin’ ya off at ya old place mate?”

Glen bobbed in the cabin, he pensively watched the groaning trees whiz past, they stood erect against the biting breeze, their leaves shivering in complex clumps as the car shuddered past.

“Yeh.”

.....

Glen looked back at the car as it slid awkwardly on the wide boulevard. The street was empty now, but would fill with people in the morning, desperate to get to work on time, unsure of why they were so desperate. A cough that had been stirring in Glen’s chest forced itself into the cold night air with a hoarse rattle. He stopped for a moment and looked over his old apartment block, remembering cracks and angles. He ran his hand along blanched bricks, painted with vile scrawl. The glass in the entranceway was still shattered, a trail of emerald and orange ooze seeped through the open wound.

As he opened the screen door to his apartment it gave a high pitched squeal, it was cold to touch, sticky and still smelled like it had been covered in fish oil. Glen fumbled for the key and slid it into ...

... a hole where the lock used to be.

.....

## **Glen the Cockroach**

It was obvious something had died, but Glen couldn't figure out where it was hiding. He wondered if it could be in the thin blue mattress that had been stapled to the wall, or perhaps in one of the bulging garbage bags that hung, with chemical stalactites, from the light fitting in the lounge room.

He was sure that it wasn't in the bathroom, the only stupid thing the squatters had done there was leave a shopping trolley upside down in the bath.

Glen grabbed some of the loose paper scattered around the floor and built himself a bonfire in the tub.

.....

**It has been said that when Glen the Cockroach drew his first short sharp breath, the land to which he was born and to which his presence was blessed, had changed in a moment of madness by the removal of its master on swift tides. A heart poisoned by the passage of time, dragged the new leader to the oceans depth. It was hours before the alarm was sounded, long enough for the body to be dragged into one of the underwater caves that littered the coastline, where it would stay breaking apart and hurling itself back onto the beach in years to come. Drawn into the mouths of happy children squealing with the joy of diving head first into the Indian Oceans swirling foam.**

**It was, at the time, another tragedy in an era of doubt. A time where young men fought the coming of the red by the cover of night, despite their judgement and will. The weight of sin was said to lift, the consequence did not and as Pharaoh's armies poured back across the Red Sea in search of their lost slaves, young men showered in blood born of the Congo. Hearts grew and pupils retracted, men in white coats decided how much poison the body could take before it broke down, the insane didn't have a choice.**

**Memories were made in a flash as were humans: some by the law of the land, many by the right to exist with another, some were even born in the traditional manner. In years to come, those in power would view this as an aberration and think up new ways to stop it.**

## Glen the Cockroach

It has been said that this is how Glen came to be; born in the traditional manner. Arms and legs akimbo like a swamped cat loose from a drowning bag, feet flailing soundlessly until they settled firmly on the face of the physician who had removed him from his warm home. One little foot slid into the surprised doctor's mouth while the other came down sharply on the point of his nose.

Years passed, the moon was conquered then forgotten, the legacy of conquest bit back against its feeding arm. Blood turned against itself, men of Empires died in gutters while the bodies of their assailants ate themselves from the inside out, slowly. Men of peace died quicker.

Legacies became long forgotten, or bent into a shape that became unbelievable or unbearable. 'How much did you learn' turned into 'how much did you gain', shame rises if the child comes home from school with only one pair of legs.

It was said that at this time Glen grew longer, then it was said he grew rounder. It was said that the reason for the second occurrence was the departure of Glen's father in a war; it was not said the departure was caused by bad blood.

If it was said, Glen's mother would say many words in reply, most of them Glen had not heard before.

Another leader perished, this time it was at the hands of a drunken lawyer, a squatter and a monarch; although the monarch played little part. Faces had colour and grew hair but had little depth, everyone walked around in two dimensions. It was said that this confused Glen. Faith was reborn at the pointed end of a bayonet or in the flickering tones of the voice.

It was said that Glen began to grow long again, that teeth began to fall out of his jaws, that teeth began to fall out the jaws of those around him, often as a result of blunt impact trauma. It was said that Glen had trouble dealing with the loss of his father. It was said and then it was said again, only louder and directed at Glen's mother, whose face had disappeared behind a screen door that never opened. Glen began to smile, others did not.

It was said that Glen and his mother moved.

Hawks squealed at each other across oceans, but the bravest acts were committed by doves armed with aprons and shovels. White suits crashed in waves against the funnels that blotted the sky, trying to fill the gap as the marvels of man crumbled, their blood turned to water and seeped from their bodies.

The boil worn onto Belgian hearts finally burst into open eyes, sin froze, hate grew from suspicion, wars grew colder as slaughter mechanised, a dragon rose in the East and began to smother a sleeping bear.

It was said that in his new home Glen smiled, his teeth clenched like his fists, the light spark in the corner of his eyes turned to dust and crumbled out one morning. He woke with his fists clenched, the next day he woke in a cement block cell.

As the sunlight crept up the whitewashed walls it was said that Glen lay, happy and content, feeling the warm light of summer wash through the small barred gap at the top of the room, it was said that he lay in a pool of blood and that the young man who had been placed in the tank with him the night before was barely breathing. The room smelled of lavender, Glen said it was an accident. The Judge agreed.

They did a lot of agreeing at the time and humanity not only jerked forwards it moved from side to side in a fitful tantrum. A wall fell down from misuse and the land it had encased was flooded with rats, the people trying to climb over the rubble to see the world outside were quickly swamped by a rising wave of filth.

A smiling man was set loose while a woman was imprisoned, the world watched through a lidless eye as anger turned to love, love turned back to anger, anger turned to riots, in some places there was genocide but with the much nicer name 'ethnic cleansing'. The wind changed, wrapping itself around the bare toes of the young as they lay rotting in the fields far from their homes, catching the words spoken over them.

Glen's friends went to war, or at least Glen's enemies went to war, it was said that the only friends Glen had were concrete walls and cockroaches.



## Glen the Cockroach

It was said by his mother, Glen smiled in agreement, it was not said that the smile was false. Not said.

It was said that Glen's favourite song was 'Back in black' because he started wearing black after what was said to be the fashion of the time, it was not said that his favourite song was actually 'Year of the cat'. It was said that he took a three hundred dollar leather jacket that he wore off the back of a young man that had changed the music in the jukebox without him approving, it was said that when Glen had finished with him he wouldn't have been able to pull the jacket over his arms.

It was said that when Glen started losing hair. He shaved his head and that the bartender in his favourite dive commented on the change. It was said that Glen did not go back to that pub, it was also said Glen was not allowed back into that pub. It was also said that the owner of the pub shot Glen twice before he dropped the bartender.

Judges continued to judge despite everyone asking them to stop, there was no sin, blood was cheap. It could be bought from one of the larger continents, along with livers, spleens and kidneys, the price, destruction. It bore fruit and spread across the globe. Escape became the key, as jackhammers pound the ground down to build new windows.

It was said that Glen grew a liking for auctions, house auctions, second-hand auctions. It was said that he loved the process, the excitement, the bugging off after pushing the price too high for others to afford.

It was said that at this time in an effort to relieve his boredom he joined the army, it was said that he assaulted an officer within a week and was asked to leave. It was said the officer was shot a month later in the desert by a young boy with an AK-47. It was said that the young boy's town was carpet bombed in retaliation, it was said that all that was left afterwards were black marks and empty rifle shells. The desert sky rained fire.

There was a man with a shotgun, then there were a hundred thousand men with shotguns, they all put them into their mouths and pulled the triggers. It was said that no one knew why, but that was not widely believed. Buildings went up, reality became virtual. Faces appeared with colour and were beaten on the side of the road; more riots.

It was said that Glen, amidst the turmoil and occasional bowel trouble that had begun to plague his increasingly leathery stomach, had found a partner. Who, it was said, was British, blonde and a marine biologist. It was also said that it was bullshit.

It was said that Glen did actually start spending time with a woman, a woman with blonde hair, who spoke in a British accent. It was said that far from being a marine biologist she was actually a dancer of sorts. It was said that there was more of that work around. It was said that Glen smiled a lot, but that no-one got hurt.

It was said that more money could be made without dancing, or dancing without dancing. Glen smiled. People got hurt. It was said the blonde British woman didn't dance after that or do much of anything. Much was said in between broad sheets, judges kept judging, Glen walked.

Two buildings fell. It was said that at this time everyone lost patience. A little man with glasses introduced laws that guaranteed safety for all, or at least for little men with glasses and some rounder men that dug holes in the ground. A boat arrived, then another, then another. Then one day, one marked with an 'X' sunk like a stone and the boats stopped for a while. The little man took the credit.

It was said that Glen wasn't even at the scene that day. It was said that the time had arrived that he would be taken, it was said that the police force needed to boost arrest numbers. A lot was said, as it was always said; on the flickering whispers of breeze that rose to a crescendo from the mouths of those that knew what was said but never said what was known. It was said that this more than anything else was the reason that Glen's bald flashing head was found face down in a gutter with an officers boot rested firmly upon the pronounced crown.

A collection of teeth was scattered down the street amidst thick lines of coagulated blood, the smell of rust, cold and piss filled the air. Cameras flashed diligently at the almost lifeless body as it was dragged away. It was proved that the officer had a history of violent arrests, or so it was said, but that was forgotten, he would later win a medal. It was said that Glen would later laugh at the irony of being caught by someone

who was similar to himself, except for the uniform. It was said but it wasn't true. No-one finds irony amusing in a coma.

The world marched on to a powerful new tune. Freeing itself of such miscreants had made the streets safer; the new war was in the cloud, where all the information hung suspended and waiting for someone to use it, but only the right people. Who the right people were, would be decided by the right people.

Suspended in a cell, white walls threatening to collapse in on themselves, the aging gristle that hung from broad ceiling shackles, Glen smiled, or so it was said, like a parachutist, limbs spread wide. The hair on his face dripping slowly down like a waterfall marking the slow passage of time, the room smelled of lavender, black flashes appeared against the white walls.

Sin rose in the cloud much to the disgust of the new tune. Sin rose in the cloud much to the pleasure of the new tune. Time was marked by the coming of disaster as the planet rejected the medicine forced into its veins; bloodletting sent the crust into spastic convulsions.

It was said that the ground beneath the swinging Glen began to furrow, aromatic tinges of lavender stained the air. It was said the small ray of sunshine that shot through the square window in the wide domed cell warmed the crumbling cement. Bodies shifted around the room in a black haze, all except Glen's.

Then with a word he dropped. A moment later he was awake outside of a hedged garden with a high iron gate; a friend was looking on, poking him with a stick.

All of this was said.

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An old man sees himself in the shallow reflection of darting eyes, words are muttered, dragging occurs, in the distance he can hear the sound of a train issuing the call to board. Beneath awkward feet he hears the loose sound of crunching gravel.

**Glen the Cockroach**

**The sky is a grey dome covered in the dark mist of early morning dew.  
Memories of warmth replace screaming cold; moments are caught and  
thrust to the side in the haze.**

**There is someone behind that rock...**

.....