

The Fish Bowl

Iering knocked on the door and waited. "Hey Butch?" He called, "You in there? You said I could drop in after class and you'd give me a hand with those runes, remember?"

"One moment." There was a rattle of keys then the door swung open to reveal a blue furred lion. Butch was certainly not small. At a little over eight foot high he towered over most people he met but, next to Iering, he barely came up to the tiger shark's chest. "Hey fishy. Come on in." He stepped back and gestured for the shark to follow.

"Thanks." Stooping low, Iering squeezed through the narrow doorway. The university provided accommodation in a range of different sizes to suit the varying species that came to study magic but that did make visiting a member of a smaller species a little awkward. Of course, it was always possible to arrange a meeting at the larger creature's house but that was uncommon. Hunting law would protect you in your own home but offered no such security in someone else's. As such, meetings between students of significantly different size usually took place in public or in the smaller person's home.

Not that Iering would have considered eating the lion had such an opportunity occurred. While he knew that many predators considered anyone smaller than them to be fair game, Iering couldn't imagine wanting to eat one of his friends. Still, it would have looked bad if he had tried to persuade the lion to come to his house instead and, as Butch had not offered, he would just have to put up with it.

Iering followed the lion through into the meager student accommodation. Other than the roof being a little lower than was comfortable for the shark, Butch seemed to have a fairly good room. There wasn't an enormous amount of space but it was well used and mostly free from clutter. Butch waved towards the desk against one wall. "Dump your bag over there and I'll be through in a minute. You want a drink before we get started?" He offered as he headed through a door into what Iering assumed would be his kitchen.

"That'd be great." Iering called back. Ducking to avoid banging his head on the lights, he made his way to the desk, placed his bag underneath it, and pulled out a chair. Despite the caution with which he moved he still managed to displace a stack of laminated cards that had been piled on one corner of the desk. Hurriedly bending down, he started to gather the scattered cards off the floor.

'Allina Harrows - Mechanical Engineering - 2nd Year - Student Id: 1024633' read the top card, beside a photo of a smiling bunny girl. He gathered up the rest and leafed through them. They were all student id cards. There were several more rabbits, a few mice, a perky looking rat girl, a couple of stoats, and even a fox. "Hey, are these all past meals of yours?" he called out to the kitchen.

"The cards? Yeah." Came Butch's reply. "I like to keep a record of my catches. That's just this semester, of course."

Iering's belly let out an envious growl as he restacked the cards. When he had first arrived at the university he had spent quite a few nights out hunting, most predators did. The influx of prey, many of whom were new to the area, incautious, and often a little drunk, made a very tempting target for predators. Of course, the university knew this and deliberately over booked most courses, taking on additional members of the prey species in order to ensure that a reasonable number made it to graduation. The university liked to advertise its high ratio of prey to predators. It made the prey species feel safer as the chances of them personally getting caught were decreased and the reduced competition for food appealed to the predators as well.

However, despite his appearance, Iering was not the fearsome predator that most people expected from a shark. In fact, his reputation and large size tended to work against him. In the water, he was lightning fast but, on land, he was slower and clumsier than most terrestrial predators. He had quickly found that most potential meals spotted him first and quickly got out of his way. It had taken him weeks of hunting before he had finally managed to catch a single foolish rabbit and, even then, it had involved more luck than any skill on his part. She had clearly been partying and had been walking home alone when she had practically run into him.

Too drunk to escape, she should have made an easy meal. Iering had certainly had no trouble in catching hold of her and lifting her off her feet. What he hadn't been able to deal with was the tears. The poor bunny had begged him between sobs to let her go home. Told him about the friends and family that would miss her and sworn that she would never take such a foolish risk again if only he would let her live. In the end, he had not only let her go, but had walked her back to her apartment in order to keep her safe from any other predators. After that, he had pretty much given up hunting and stuck to the campus kitchen for food. Butch, however, evidently had no such problems acquiring prey.

"Seriously, this is a single semester? There's like two dozen here. No wonder the class sizes have been going down." He muttered admiringly.

"Yeah, but the campus kitchen is too expensive and going shopping all the time is too much effort. It's easier to just pick someone up on my way home." He returned from the kitchen and tossed one of two cans of soda to Iering.

The shark caught it and took a sip. He couldn't deny that buying food on campus was expensive, particularly for a creature of his stature. He eyed the cards again. Just a couple of free meals like that would go a long way in helping his student loans stretch to the end of the year. "Actually, once we're done with the revision, you couldn't give me some hunting tips as well, could you?" he asked.

"You mean like good ambush places?" The lion checked, "Or ways to trick them into coming home with you, or something?"

"Well ... more how to deal with them crying and stuff like that?" Iering admitted. "I kind of let the last person I caught go because I felt sorry for them." He decided to omit the fact that she was the first and only prey he had ever caught.

"Seriously?" Butch gave him a mocking look. "And I thought sharks were supposed to be voracious hunters. If you want to eat someone, find a way to get them alone and vulnerable, then just swallow them. It's as simple as that."

Iering nodded weakly. "I guess ... I just don't like hurting people though. Even prey."

"Some apex predator you are." Butch teased, swinging himself into the chair beside Iering and opening his own drink. "Well, I'd be happy to give you some hunting advice later but, for now, let's start with the coursework. Which parts did you want help with again?"

That was a difficult question for the shark to answer. Some days it felt like everything the lecturers told them went over his head. "I've been kind of struggling with runes the most ..." he hazarded, "but alchemy, energy manipulation, and enchanting have all been giving me trouble."

Butch grinned, then pulled a sheet of paper from one of his draws. "No problem. Runes are easy. I had a few examples I was planning on showing you anyway." He pulled out a pen, then scribbled a couple of symbols onto the paper.

"Energy," he said touching one of them, "and light." he poked the other. "It's pretty obvious what will happen if you join them together." He drew a line from one to the other and a glowing orb shimmered into life above the paper.

Iering nodded. This much at least he had managed to take in from the lectures.

"Yeah, not exactly the most interesting application, is it?" Butch prompted. "Still, it's a good place to build on." He drew a circle around the rune for light, then connected that to the rune for time. "For example, if you want to change the color of the light, that's as simple as adjusting the frequency of its wavelength. Of course, you have to connect it with a circle instead of a straight line as we are trying to modify the light rune using the time rune, instead of trying to feed light into the time rune. If you get that wrong the spell will fizzle out at best."

Iering nodded again. They were already moving into territory that he struggled with, but he did his best to follow as the feline scribbled several more runes around the time one, specifying exactly how he wanted the wavelength altering. As he connected the last one into the spell, the glowing orb changed from white to a rich shade of amber.

"See, if you wire them up right, the modification runes specify exactly how the light should be affected." Butch glanced at the shark and saw that he was still obviously struggling. "If you want, we can also control its location." He added. From the line connecting light and energy, Butch drew a side branch, then added the rune for distance. "Here." He handed the pen to Iering and leaned back. "See if you can make it float a little higher."

Under the lion's guidance, Iering not only managed to change the location of the light orb but, after some further explanation about the behavior of the time rune, managed to get the light to sway back and forth at regular intervals. Bit by bit, he felt he was slowly starting to grasp how each rune affected the others.

"Okay. That's probably about as interesting as you can make a simple light spell." Butch decided at last. "Now here is what I wanted to show you." He pulled a second sheet of paper from the draw and placed it in front of the shark.

Iering stared at the complex mass of squiggles in front of him. Whatever was written on the paper, it was far more complex than what they had been doing so far. After several minutes of staring, he gave up trying to decipher it. He was pretty sure that half the runes used hadn't even been covered in their lectures yet and every single one of them seemed to connect to or encircle a dozen others. "How did you begin constructing something like this?" He asked. "What is it even supposed to do?"

"I may have skimmed through a couple of the third year notes." Butch answered smugly. "As for its purpose, just connect that one up to that one and see for yourself." He tapped two adjacent but so far unjoined runes.

Iering inspected the page nervously. He couldn't begin to unravel the full workings of such a complex spell but he was fairly sure that one of the symbols Butch had specified was rune for self. Whatever the spell was supposed to do, in some way, it affected the person who completed it. "Seriously, what does it do?" He repeated.

"Just connect them and you'll see. And relax, I already tested it. It's safe."

Iering wavered. It was obviously some kind of prank, but he was kind of curious as to what would happen. "If this turns my stripes pink or something ..." he muttered before picking up the pen and connecting the two runes.

The moment the ink joined the two symbols together, the paper seemed to whisk itself away from him. A horrible weightless sensation formed in Iering's belly as the chair he was sitting on seemed to plunge downwards. Suddenly aware that he was falling, he grabbed desperately for the only thing still in his reach, the edge of the desk.

For a moment, his legs scrabbled in mid air, then he managed to pull himself up onto the wooden surface. Panting heavily and bent over on all fours, the shark

risked a glance over the edge. The carpet now seemed to be a very long way down. Backing away from the precipice, he glared up at the now gigantic figure of the lion who was almost bent double with laughter.

"That wasn't funny." He squealed. "Turn me back. Now!" In his reduced form, his voice came out high pitched and squeaky, completely ruining the menacing tone he had intended.

Butch's amusement only increased in response to the furious squeaking from his desk. "Seriously Iering, I can't believe you fell for that." He laughed.

"Turn me back!" the tiny shark yelled.

In response, the lion picked up Iering's rucksack and started to rummage through.

"H ... Hey! Put that down. I'm serious." Iering protested.

"Ah, here it is. I was worried you might not have brought it." Butch finished his search of the shark's bag by pulling out a small laminated card.

Iering stared up at his id card, then glanced at the pile of similar ones still stacked on the corner of the desk. A horrible feeling spread through him. "No! Come on, you can't be serious? This joke has gone on far enough. Butch?" Backing away, he tripped over the pen he had dropped.

The blue lion smiled wickedly and placed Iering's student card on top of the pile of others. "Well little fishy, are you up for one final lesson before we call it a night?" He sat down at the desk again and grinned at his tiny victim.

Iering scabbled back to his feet. "Butch, please? We're friends right? You don't really want to do this." Unfortunately, the feline's widening smile told a very different story. Giving up on diplomacy, the shark broke into a run towards the far end of the desk. If he could just find somewhere to hide he might be able to figure this out. Maybe the spell was only temporary and would wear off if he could only survive long enough. If it was permanent ... well, he didn't know what he would do but hopefully he would live long enough to think of something.

He had barely made it a few steps into his panic fueled sprint before a shadow fell over him. Glancing up, he saw the giant cat paw descending and narrowly managed to throw himself to one side before it landed with a crash.

Picking himself up, Iering made a second attempt to run towards the back of the desk but, almost immediately, had to dive aside as a second paw slammed down in front of him. Again, he got up and tried to run, and again, the lion swatted at him, forcing him to leap out of the way.

Butch was laughing too hard to aim properly as he watched the poor fish grow more and more desperate in its attempts to escape. Not that he was actually trying to hit Iering. Each swipe was aimed to give his prey just enough time to get away and, bit by bit, to slowly force him back towards Butch's end of the desk. Each time the little treat tried to run the wrong way, his hands would come down ahead of him, forcing the shark to jump back. If he veered too far to either side, Butch would intervene to correct his course.

Gradually, Iering was driven closer until he had almost reached the edge of the desk again. Slipping from the chair into a kneeling position, Butch put his chin against the side of the desk and cupped his hands together to block off all other paths the shark could take.

No longer having to constantly dodge the giant paws, Iering finally glanced around and realized how trapped he was. This was not the side of the desk he had been trying to reach. Behind him, the lion's paws were blocking his escape. To either side, Butch's arms formed an impassable, blue-furred, wall. And, in front of him, Butch's wide smile invited him closer. Even as he watched, the lion's lips parted, revealing the pink inner maw. Towards the back, he could even see the feline's uvula dangling above the dark passage of the throat, as if pointing him in the direction he would soon be going.

As he stared into the feline's maw, he heard movement behind him. Butch was slowly dragging his paws forwards, leaving the helpless shark with only one way to go. Iering screamed as he felt the pads of Butch's paws against his back, his webbed feet scrabbled backwards against the wooden surface of the desk but did nothing to slow his forward progress. His mind reeled in terror. This couldn't be happening. He was a tiger shark. He was one of the largest creatures in the entire university ... or, at least, he had been. He was certainly not prey.

With that came the realization that, if he didn't want to be prey, he should stop acting like one. Cowering and trying helplessly to push against the grip of someone far stronger was not going to save him. He would be swallowed, just like all the rest of Butch's many meals. Instead of pushing back on Butch's hands, he stepped forward, closing the remaining distance until he was teetering on the edge of the lion's lips.

Butch made a surprised noise at the apparent display of cooperation from his fishy snack and adjusted his position as he prepared to nudge the little treat inside. Then Iering broke into a run.

Returning to the lion's paws, he used his momentum to scramble up them. His webbed feet pushed off the feline's fingers as he scrabbled upwards, then jumped. A moment later, he found himself landing on all fours on the wood of the desk. He'd done it. He was away from the lion's open maw and outside the enclosure of Butch's arms. For a moment he could feel nothing but pure relief.

The next moment, a giant paw slammed down on him, flattening him painfully against the surface of the desk. Stunned, he offered no resistance as he was scooped up and tossed into the air. As much as he was capable of expecting anything in his dazed state, it was that he would come down into Butch's open jaws and be swallowed immediately. Instead, he was almost pleasantly surprised to find himself land on the lion's closed muzzle. Then he looked down, saw how high up his was and, with a terrified squeal, clung on to Butch's nose.

"Nice try." Butch complimented the tiny morsel hanging from his muzzle. "Not that you ever had the slightest chance of getting away but, still, good effort."

Iering whined pitifully. On an intellectual level, he knew that he wasn't all that high up. In fact, given that, until recently, Butch had been smaller than him, his head was actually lower than it had been when he had first come in. If he were to simply let go of the lion's face and drop, he might actually survive the fall. Particularly given that his smaller mass meant he would land with much less force.

Unfortunately, his species had not evolved instincts to deal with being shrunk to a few inches tall. All his body knew was that, as far as it could tell, the floor was now hundreds of feet below him and that the only thing preventing him from falling was his hold on Butch's muzzle. Besides, without a better understanding of how the spell he was under worked, Iering couldn't really guess what the fall would do to him. Whimpering to himself, the tiger shark pressed his body hard against the feline's lips.

Next moment. He felt those lips part slightly as the lion's long tongue slipped out. Iering squirmed about as the giant muscle wrapped itself around his legs then slithered up his back, coating everything it touched with viscous drool. An appreciative rumble came from the lion's belly as he tasted his prey, then the tongue retreated back between Butch's lips, dragging Iering's legs inside as it did.

On the bright side, he was now in much less danger of falling. Sitting on Butch's lower lip felt a lot less precarious than clinging to his muzzle. On the significantly less bright side, he could still see only two ways of getting down. One involved a fall that might or might not be fatal to him, the other, a slower and more controlled descent that would unfortunately come to an end in a pool of gastric juices.

Tears began to fill Iering's eyes. "Please! Please, Butch? Don't do this! I just want to go home." He sobbed. It was no use. Through the haze of tears, he could just make out the stack of laminated cards on Butch's desk. Every single one of them likely cried for mercy at some point and, without exception, they had all vanished down the predator's gullet and been digested. His own card was on the top of that pile and, no matter what how much he pleaded, he knew that he would soon meet the same fate.

He remembered the bunny he had caught on his third week at university. He remembered how pitifully she had cried and begged for her freedom. He wasn't sorry that he had eventually relented and given it to her. He finally understood just how she must have felt on that night.

Distracted by his own thoughts, Iering had barely noticed that Butch had carried him into his kitchen. He had dimly heard the sound of a tap being run, but had thought little of it until he saw the large glass of water being raised to the lion's lips.

"No!" he struggled frantically. One gulp of that would wash him down into Butch's stomach and that would be the end of his life. To his surprise, the glass stopped mere inches away and Butch's lips parted a little, releasing the hold on his legs.

A little prod from the feline's tongue was all it took to dislodge the shark and he tumbled from Butch's muzzle, letting out a terrified cry, before splashing into the water of the glass. Being underwater, Iering couldn't exactly gasp in relief but the liquid flowing over his gills had a similar effect. He was out of the cat's mouth and back in his natural habitat. The chlorine burned his gills as he sank but just being back in the water was immensely comforting.

It was, of course, a false comfort. He was still a prisoner and the glass walls around him made escape more impossible than ever. All he could do was watch helplessly as the glass was lifted once again and his captor took a sip. His view of the lion's mouth was distorted through the water, but he could still see the dark opening as a little of his water flowed inside and was swallowed. He quickly pressed himself against the bottom of the glass, trying to stay as far from that greedy maw as possible.

After swallowing the mouthful of water, Butch left the kitchen and returned to his desk, setting the glass down next to him, then tidying away the rune covered papers.

Iering swam a couple of frenzied circles around his new home. There was no way out. Glass walls surrounded him on every side. He looked upwards, trying to gauge whether it would be possible for him to climb out the top, but even that looked hopeless. The glass was quite tall, and it had only been half full before Butch had drunk some. There was no chance that he would be able to scramble up the sheer walls. Very reluctantly, Iering returned to the surface and switched back to his lungs for breathing. With no other options, it was time to give diplomacy another go.

"Well little fishy, How do you like your new home?" Butch smirked as he noticed Iering surface.

"Butch? Do you really have to do this?" Iering tried. "We're friends, right? And it's not like I'd make much of a meal for you like this. There's dozens of plump

little bunnies or rodents that you could go after instead and I know a skilled hunter like you would have no difficulty in catching someone else." He flattered.

Butch smiled, although more from amusement at the blatant attempt to manipulate him than the compliment itself. "Certainly could." He admitted. "But you're missing the point here. You're my food now. Why would I want to let you go?"

"But I'm not ..." Iering cut his sentence short and dived to the bottom of the glass as Butch lifted it to take another sip. "But I'm not prey." He argued as soon as it was safe for him to surface again. "I'm a predator like you."

Butch licked his lips. "You know, it's kind of subtle, but I can actually taste your flavor in the water." He mused. "Anyway, you may be a predator, but you are also just a fish. A very large fish, or at least you were, but I'm also a very large cat. How do you expect cats and fish to interact?" Iering was forced to dive again as Butch took another gulp of water. "Honestly, the fact that a big lump of fish meat like yourself could walk around, thinking that you were invincible just because you were too large to swallow, was infuriating. Your current size is much more suitable for someone of your place in the food chain."

Iering started to protest but was again forced to duck under the water as the feline drank. With each sip, the water level dropped lower and lower, and each time the lion had to tilt the glass a little further to drink. By now, only a third of the glass was full and, as Butch drank, Iering could feel the current pulling him towards that open mouth. Then the glass tipped back and Iering was washed to safety again. A loud gulp followed and Iering could only stare as the blue fur around the lion's neck rippled slightly from the swallow. He shuddered at the idea that he would soon be sliding down the inside of that neck himself.

"Please. If it's fish you want, I'm not the only aquatic here. There are others you could go after. Prey species like salmon or trout. They'd probably taste better than me anyway."

Butch shook his head. "You're still not getting it. I don't want to go after fish that already know they are prey. I'm doing this to you, in part, because you were so confident that you weren't. Besides, you'll be great for bragging about afterwards. Next time someone decides to go leafing through my collection of past meals, they'll see a great big tiger shark in the pile. How's that for impressive." He picked up the glass again.

"Please, no!" Iering squealed. There wasn't exactly much room for him to dive away any more. The glass was tilted almost horizontal and he had to thrash wildly to avoid being dragged into the feline's mouth by the current.

Butch swallowed and turned the glass the right way up again, smirking at the little fish still inside. There was barely enough water left for him to swim in. If he had wanted, the shark could easily have stood up at this point but instead he

chose to swim round and round in blind panic. Butch chuckled to himself and idly swished the water around in the glass. "The cup is getting a little empty." He noted. "Can you guess what happens when it runs out completely? How about I give you a clue?" Pressing his lips to the side of the container, Butch stretched open his jaws.

Iering squeezed against the farthest wall. He had no desire whatsoever to see any more of Butch's mouth than he already had but, at the same time, he found himself completely unable to look away. The way the drool hung down in glistening strands, the dull pink of the lion's tongue flattened down to provide him with as clear a view as possible, the sway of Butch's uvula as it dangled above that dark tunnel that had already claimed so many lives. The sight both terrified and fascinated him.

Then the lion's maw closed again and Butch looked down at the awestruck shark. "Heh, you liked that didn't you?" He teased. "Well, don't worry. Soon you'll be getting a much closer view."

The words were enough to snap Iering out of his state of horrified fascination. "Butch? If you want me to admit that I'm prey then I'll do it. Like you said, I'm just a fish while you are a cat." Iering tried. He would have said just about anything if he thought that it might postpone his journey into that mouth. "Of course I'm only fit to be your food, but all I'm asking is for a little more time. There's only a few more weeks until the exams start and I've been working so hard for this."

Butch grinned. "More time? Well, I guess that's not unreasonable." With his free hand he picked up his half drunk soda can then emptied it over Iering's head. "There," he smirked. "Now the glass is half full again. You can have as long as it takes me to finish my drink."

Iering gasped as the sticky fluid washed over him. This was far worse than chlorinated water. The liquid burned his eyes and gummed up his gills. He couldn't breathe in it at all and was forced to remain on the surface. Choking and spluttering he paddled helplessly on the surface.

"Please Butch?" He tried as soon as he was able to speak again. "In all the time we've known each other I'd never have dreamed of doing something like this to you."

"Yeah, of course you wouldn't." The feline chuckled. "Like you just admitted, you're prey. It wouldn't have occurred to you to hunt me for the same reason you decided to let your last catch go. You never were a predator. You just liked to pretend you were because you thought you were safe from being eaten."

Iering hung his head. As much as he would have liked to deny it, Butch's words had cut deeper than he would have expected. He really had been a pretty poor excuse for a predator. Still, just because he didn't want to eat people that

shouldn't automatically make him food for someone else. "I trusted you." He retaliated. "I agreed to complete that spell because I didn't think you'd actually want to hurt me. I really thought we were friends."

A flicker of a smile crossed the lion's face before being replaced by something that could almost have been mistaken for contrition. "Well ..." Butch made a brief show of wavering in his decision. "I guess I don't have to eat you."

Iering was not fooled. He hadn't missed the amusement in Butch's eyes, nor was he convinced by the cat's apparent display of regret. This was just another game to Butch. He was being offered a glimmer of hope only because it would amuse the feline to snatch it away at the last second. Falling for such a blatant trick would only cause him further humiliation before he was swallowed and reinforce Butch's belief that he was nothing but gullible prey, easily manipulated and deceived.

Unfortunately, even knowing that it would not save him, he could not resist taking the bait. What little scraps of his dignity he had left were barely worth saving and even false hope was a comfort at this point. Staring plaintively up at the lion he nodded weakly. "Really? Please, I'll do anything." It was just so tempting to let himself believe that Butch might be sincere in his offer.

"Well, I have been looking for a pet and you're kind of cute swimming in circles like that. Plus it would mean I could have shark flavored drinks whenever I wanted them."

Iering whimpered. The thought of spending the rest of his life in a drinking glass, swimming in whatever syrupy gunk his captor chose to give him while living in constant fear of being swallowed sounded almost as bad as being eaten immediately. Almost, but not quite. He would still be alive, after all. "Yes, I'll do it." he agreed. "I'll be your pet. I'll do anything you want, just please don't eat me." He knew it was just another game to Butch but he couldn't help himself. It was simply too tempting to let himself believe that Butch might be sincere in his offer.

"Then again ..." Butch pretended to think for a moment, drawing out the suspense for the terrified fish as long as possible. "Your current fish bowl is a little small, even for someone of your size. Perhaps it would be kinder if I transferred you to a somewhat larger tank."

Iering didn't get chance to consider the implications of that statement. The glass tipped up around him and, once again, the current dragged him towards the lion's open jaws. This time, however, resisting it was impossible. The sides of the glass were too steep and the smooth surface and rushing liquid prevented him from getting any purchase. He slipped down, through the lion's lips and into the waiting maw, then everything went dark as Butch's mouth closed around him.

Butch didn't swallow immediately though, there was still a little more amusement he could wring out of his prey. With a wicked smile he swished the mouthful from cheek to cheek.

Iering was a strong swimmer, even for an aquatic, but even the best swimmer in the world would have been thrown around by the constant turmoil in Butch's mouth. The mix of soda and saliva bowled over him, throwing him to one side and then the other. Every so often, he would collide with the cat's tongue or be slammed against his inner cheek.

The poor shark screamed, at least while his head was above the fluids, and flailed wildly hoping to find something to hold onto. For a second or so, he managed to get a grip on a nearby tooth and held tight against the swirling fluid. Unfortunately, Butch noticed pretty quick and, with a little flick of his tongue, dislodged the hapless fish again.

Finally the lion grew bored of this new torment and allowed the contents of his mouth to settle. Surfacing, Iering inhaled a relieved breath before he noticed the lion's head tilting backwards.

"Wait! Butch, Please? I'll do anything." A large gulp channeled most of the soda down Butch's throat, leaving Iering with only a few dregs to splash around in. Still he continued to beg for his life. It was the only option he had left.

"Hey, Iering?" Butch's tongue shifted beneath the poor shark as he spoke but Iering could make out the words with surprising clarity. "You remember asking me for advice on dealing with prey that won't stop crying? Do you still want some help with that?" the lion asked.

"No! I take it back. I don't want anything. Just please don't swallow me!" Iering knew that it was pointless to beg but he did so anyway. After all, he had let prey go because they had pleaded with him. Maybe, just maybe, the lion could be persuaded to do the same.

"It's easy really." Butch continued, apparently oblivious to Iering's protests. "You do it like this."

The moment he stopped speaking, Butch's tongue rose up behind Iering. The poor shark gave one final, pitiful, cry before slithering down into the cat's waiting esophagus.

Gulp! With one last swallow Butch finished his meal, eye's closing as he felt the little wriggling lump slide down his throat. Inside Butch's esophagus, Iering screamed and thrashed about but it made no difference whatsoever. The powerful peristaltic waves carried him mercilessly down towards the cat's stomach. He could hear it gurgling below him, already producing the digestive enzymes it would need to turn him into nutrients. Just as it had done with every other person unfortunate enough to catch the feline's eye.

With a contented sigh, Butch placed his now empty glass back on the desk and leaned back in his chair. His sharp ears catching the muffled splash as his fishy snack reached the end of its journey and landed in the waiting pool of diluted soda and digestive juices.

Iering squealed as he sank into the burning pool. The chlorinated water had been bad, and the sticky soda had been far worse, but this was absolute torture. As a shark his skin was pretty tough, but Butch's digestive juices were unrelenting. His body stung all over from contact with the deadly fluid and his gills and the corner of his eyes felt like they were on fire. Surfacing quickly, he threw himself at the lion's stomach walls, scrabbling against them in an attempt to climb out of the acidic pool and, when that failed, simply pounding on them with all of his, currently minuscule, strength.

Butch rested one paw over his belly. He could feel the tiny shark's desperate punches, but it was not as enjoyable as he had hoped. He was used to taking kicks from far larger and more energetic prey and, compared to his normal quarry, Iering's struggles were a bit of a disappointment. With a sigh, he pulled the rune covered sheet of paper towards him and started adjusting the values. Next time he used it he would make sure not to over-shrink his meal.

Once done, he stood up and headed towards the door. Iering had given up attacking his stomach walls and was now swimming in frantic circles round and round the enclosed area. Panic had overtaken his mind and, despite knowing that he could not simply swim to freedom, his brain insisted that he try. In the pitch black insides of the cat he had no way of seeing where he was going. He simply swam in blind desperation until his nose bumped against the stomach walls, then turned and thrashed helplessly in another direction. Entertaining as that was for Butch, he was still feeling quite hungry. The tiny fish was simply not enough for a predator of his size.

Still, there were plenty more prey out there. With a shrug, Butch left his apartment and headed out to find the shark some company.