

Academic Growth, Part 1
By Renard De Fleureaux III

The thing to understand is, I didn't choose this. I mean, in a way, I did, but I was tricked. Well, maybe not tricked, but manipulated. This guy, he's very charismatic.

Allow me to explain.

I'm just another college student trying to get through four years and graduate. I'm a good student; I make Dean's List most semesters, and I'm a double major in History and English. I'd like to become an Archeologist. I'm an RA, too; I got a job in the school's fitness center, I'm active in a few clubs. I keep busy. I'd like to just go about my business, but certain developments have kind of utterly destroyed that possibility. Most notably, about three hundred and fifty pounds of muscle. That three hundred and fifty pounds of muscle belonging to me. I'm huge.

Ah ha, that got your attention.

See, I wasn't born this way. Dad's a lion, Mom's a wolf. I call myself a lolf, as a result. Despite a pretty good pedigree, I've never been particularly muscular. I've never been weak or anything, just moderately fit, tall, and devilishly handsome. (Still the latter, in case you were wondering) It's a bit like Bruce Banner becoming the Hulk- but if he just stayed as the Hulk. And wasn't green. And still spoke properly. And not so much gamma radiation as a multi-colored trickster cat who can manipulate reality on a whim.

Don't look at me like that. I'm freakishly huge, not crazy.

Look, let me just start at the beginning.

Maybe it was my fault, because I actually did want to bulk up. I have for a while. But more Adonis, less Hercules' roided-up cousin. I was in the gym, doing my thing. As I said, I'm a pretty busy student, so I don't get to the gym as often as I like. A good friend of mine used to be my workout partner, but as he lives one thousand miles north of me, getting to the same gym and committing to a regular schedule can be a bit difficult.

I tend to go it alone, though. A lot of the gym regulars are not the type I associate with anyways. Lots of jocks, lots of meatheads. Some of them are like cows, really docile, but dumb as a post. Others are just douches. None of them make a problem for me, mind. Usually, anyways. They're all really loud and leave a huge mess, though. I tend to avoid the gym when they're around.

Thankfully, the night this all started was one of those golden moments where I was the only one in the gym. It was chest day for me, one of my favorites. I had the run of the weight room, until I saw him.

Theodosius Sebastian Augustus Renatus. I thought I had it with my name being Renard De Fleureaux III. He was tall, very well built, and wearing a suit of all things. Not just any suit, no- if I had to wager, I'd say Regency Era military jacket, this shade of really bright green. He had a blue vest on underneath, with a diamond-studded cravat, and old fashioned, polished black boots. It matched his fur, too. It was this rich, sea green, with blue stripes. I've seen some wild dye jobs, but he really took the cake.

"Mr. De Fleureaux?" he said in way of greeting, bowing.

"Uh, yes?" I asked. I always err on the side of caution when I can; I may be an adult, but mom's warnings about strangers were still valid in my mind.

"I believe you and I may be able to do some business. I am Theodosius, but you may call me Theo, Mr. De Fleureaux." He produced out a business card from... somewhere. It just seemed to appear in his hand. "You're looking to, as they say, 'bulk up', is that right?"

"Well, yeah, I suppose so. How did you know?" I stepped around the weight bench, putting it between me and him, pocketing his card.

"You have heavier weights on the barbell and were doing fewer reps; the standard strategy for increasing muscle size."

"Oh. Well... if you're offering to work out, I guess I could use a partner."

Theo chuckled. "Mr. De Fleureaux, I'm hardly in suitable attire. I actually have a product for you to try- you do use some form of protein powder, yes? Of course you do."

"Look, I appreciate the offer, but you can't solicit any items here. It's against the rules." I work at the Fitness Center- so sue me, I'm a bit of a stickler for the rules.

"Oh, it's quite alright. I asked the attendant at the desk, and they're allowing it." Theo grinned wide at me.

"I find that hard to believe." I waved my hand at him and turned the corner to tell the student assistant covering that shift, but there was Theo, sitting at the desk. He was even wearing the light blue polo all employees had to wear, though it seemed taut around his broad shoulders and muscular chest.

I swerved around to look back, no Theo in the weight room. "How did you do that?"

"Do what, Mr. De Fleureaux? Are you feeling alright? You look like you've seen a ghost." The damn cat stroked his goatee once before leaning back, kicking his feet up on the desk.

"Hey! Feet off the desk, I mean it. Get out of there. Where's the actual employee?"

“Oh, but sir, I *am* an employee. See?” Theo grabbed the nametag pinned to his polo- it was twice as long as the standard nametags, to make room for his full name.

I was liking this less and less. “Alright. Look, what do you want?”

“Why, to help you, Mr. De Fleureaux. You want to be big, don’t you?” Theo’s wide grin grew wider. It was beginning to get unsettling.

“Well. Define big.” I asked, beginning to inch towards the door.

“Buff. A slab of beefcake. Muscular. Strong. ‘Swole’, I believe, also suffices in the current parlance.” Theo listed off the words, producing a small crystal bottle with some suspect liquid inside. “I can help you get there.”

“As good as that sounds, I’m not exactly in the practice of buying things from random strangers that walk up to me in the gym.”

“Oh! Mr. De Fleureaux, you misunderstand me. I’m giving it to you for free.”

Now, my old workout partner and I, we both tend to be pretty cheap. He was in a habit of entering contests online for free protein powder or workout supplements, and he usually let me know. We won a few, but nothing to really keep us well-supplied. As a result, free samples were always welcome.

“What’s the catch?” I asked.

“Nothing at all. An entirely free sample that I guarantee will increase muscle size exponentially. Why not use it now, now that you’re done with your workout?” Theo grinned, holding out the crystal bottle.

“I don’t usually see workout supplements in something I’d expect to find in my Grandmother’s China cabinet.” I said, taking the bottle.

“I like to work with a certain air of class- something I think you can relate to, Mr. De Fleureaux.” Theo’s grin *really* shouldn’t be capable of getting wider.

“Well, that would explain why you were dressed for Queen Victoria’s coronation.” I muttered.

“King George IV, actually, seventeen years prior. But a lot of people make that mistake.”

I was looking over the bottle, which only had a tag that read “Drink Me” I frowned, “Look, Theo, I don’t know what to think about-” Gone. He was just gone.

I looked out the glass doors leading outside, back over my shoulder, nothing.

The actual student assistant, a fawn with long blonde hair, came out of the bathrooms, approaching the desk.

“Hi! I’m sorry, I was cleaning up a mess in the bathroom. Is there something you needed?” she asked, sitting back behind the desk.

“Uh... did you happen to see a large cat? ...In a suit?”

She thought for a moment, “You mean Dean Hall?”

“Mm. No, sorry, never mind.” I looked down at the bottle again, and took my leave.

As I said, I’m an RA, and I was blessed with a pretty quiet hall with decent people. One of the actual perks to being an RA was that I get a room all to myself for free. Not to brag, but I’ve managed to keep it clean for the whole year- just the way I like it. I set the bottle on my desk, still mulling it over.

I want to clarify, I was by no means sickly or weak. I’d seen some progress- my chest was somewhat developed, my shoulders and back had grown wider- but only by a bit. There was still a lot more I wanted. And sometimes, progress is made by trying new stuff. What did I have to lose, right?

I’m not entirely sure how I look back on that fateful night, if I can coin a phrase. Don’t get me wrong, I’m telling this story because of all the issues being huge has caused, but it’s not without its benefits. But enough stalling- this is why you’re here, isn’t it?

It tasted like strawberry- coincidentally, my favorite. Though, knowing Theo, it probably wasn’t coincidence. I drank the whole thing in one go, and took a breath, sitting down in my desk chair- it’s a general rule of thumb to be distrustful of so-called health or protein shakes that taste good, so I was already gearing up for disappointment.

And then the pain hit.

It’s been one of the few times I’ve jumped up out of shock- it felt like someone shoved a sword in each of my thighs. I’m not too proud to admit I screamed my head off- doesn’t help that the dorm walls are like paper and I probably startled half of my residents. But then I saw what was happening- my pants were splitting at the seams. A sharp pain in my lower stomach drew my attention to my belt, which I quickly threw off. From there... I guess I just kind of exploded.

The growth- and the pain- spread quickly from my legs up into my torso. It was here that I began to catch on and stop yelling. The slightest movement caused the new mass on my legs to bulge and flex- it was muscle! Lots and lots of muscle. Hoo boy.

Those who work out a lot will be familiar with feeling “pumped”- that satisfied feeling after you know you’ve made progress towards your work out goals and feel like you really

succeeded- you feel harder, better, faster, stronger, and a few other things I didn't steal from Daft Punk. Imagine that, but in a concentrated shot. Now mix it with about a good cup's worth of excruciating, aching pain, like someone had just turned your spine into a corkscrew, finish it and add a dash of adrenaline rush for flavoring, and that confused cocktail is roughly what I was going through just then.

I let out the last yell when the painful growth hit my shoulders and chest- I arched my increasingly large back as a tearing sound let me know my polo was effectively ruined. It was my favorite, because of course it was. A neat split in the middle of my shirt showed a glimpse of huge, slab like pecs, and increasingly boulder like boulder shoulders, matched with increasingly round and bulging biceps were shredding the sleeves of my polo.

"Ah! Do I hear the dulcet tones of another satisfied patron?" Theo's voice drawled. *Right behind me.*

I don't like being surprised from behind- and as can be seen, I was a little stressed out. So I swung at him, which was much like hitting a baseball with an ocean liner piston for a bat. I'm more than a little proud that I sent him sailing across the room. I'm a little upset that he broke my chair when he crashed, though.

"*What are you doing in my room?*" I yelled, taking advantage of my new size to loom over the cat. "No, scratch that- WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?"

"Now, now, Mr. De Fleureaux," Theo stood up and dusted himself off. I had him in sheer mass, but he had a good four inches on me. Jerk. "There's no need to get excited."

"No, to hell with that! There's EVERY reason to get excited! Look at me!" I grabbed Theo by his cravat, "I look like I ate 1970's Arnold Schwarzenegger and half the steroids in major league baseball!"

Theo's grin grew the widest I'd ever seen. "Isn't that what you wanted, Mr. De Fleureaux?"

"What? No!"

"So you weren't looking to 'bulk up'? You didn't want to be 'buff'?"

"Well, yes! But this is... this is too much!" I protested, flexing an arm for emphasis, my new, still sore bicep swelling in size. "My bicep shouldn't be bigger than my head!"

"You never specified a limit, Mr. De Fleureaux." Theo moved his hand over- I didn't see it because, admittedly, I was still looking at my enlarged arm, my bicep having grown to such a large, bulging size that it was beginning to brush up against my clenched fist.

It was a new experience, alright? It's not like I was used to it. You'd stare too.

Don't judge me.

"And if I didn't know any better..." Theo reached down, clawed fingers gently scratching at my arm, "I'd say you're rather enthralled with the prospect."

I let go of him, shuddering a bit. "Don't do that."

"Of course, Mr. De Fleureaux." Theo even talked with a grin. Jesus.

"So, look, what do I have to do to go back?"

"Go back?" Theo's large tail coiled, and he actually sat on it like a chair.

"Reverse all... this!" I gestured with my arms a bit too wildly, causing my shirt to tear further.

Theo chuckled. It was more unnerving than the grin. "Oh, Mr. De Fleureaux, there IS no going back. You expect me to have something that can just suddenly remove hundreds of pounds of flesh, short of amputation? Don't be absurd, my good sir."

I rested up against the wall, sliding down to the floor. "So... I'm stuck."

"Only if you try to go into very tight places, Mr. De Fleureaux."

"I just..." I trailed off, still feeling the new weight of my arms. Maybe another experimental flex. Again, experimental. No judging, thank you. "What am I supposed to do?"

"The better question is, what can't you do? My dear man, I've given you the strength of Gods! You could be an Olympian athlete, a professional bodybuilder- a superhero!" Theo's grin grew excited, as I caught a strange glimmer in what appeared to be multi-colored eyes.

"What? No! I... I wanted to be an Archeologist! A writer- a scholar." I said, raising my chin, causing the tendons of what I could safely call my bullneck to tense.

"Well, perhaps you need to expand your horizons. It would be rude of me, Mr. De Fleureaux, to not guide you into what could be some very entertaining prospects."

My ears twitched. "I'm sorry. Entertaining? Is THAT why you did this?"

"Why, of course! What do you expect a Cheshire cat to do otherwise for fun?" Theo stood up, offering me his hand. I didn't take it.

"Harass little girls that get lost in the Truffle Woods?" I was losing my patience.

"You know, everyone uses that joke." Theo said conversationally. "But my dear Mr. De Fleureaux, I think you have bigger, more immediate issues at hand."

“Like what?”

Theo, it turns out, could be very handsy. The cat appeared behind me, one hand squeezing on my shoulder, squeezing at the rock hard muscle, while another one reached for my stomach. I could feel his fingers go over each row of newly formed, tightly packed abs. I could feel his tail wrapping around my leg, squeezing at the calf muscles. “You’ve taken on some considerable weight... maintaining it all can leave a man *very* hungry.”

As if on cue, a sharp, groaning pain came from my stomach. I was *starving*.

“Shit.” I easily rolled Theo’s hands off of me. “I can’t go out like this! None of my clothes fit. Theo?” I turned around. No Theo.

“I shall take my leave, then, Mr. De Fleureaux. It’s not proper to disturb a man when he’s preparing for his evening meal.” Theo’s voice came from behind me, now. I felt a pinch on my, er. Rump, shall we say. “Don’t worry, my good sir. We’ll be in touch soon- *very* soon.”

“Theo! Theo, come back here!” Nope. Gone.

“Perfect.”

My stomach was still aching- I needed to eat, *now*. The little mini-fridge I had in my room was all but empty. I had to think fast. I spotted one of a few brochures on my desk- Chinese delivery it was, then.

“Yeah, hi- I need two orders of your shrimp with broccoli dinner specials, a large eggdrop soup, an order of fried dumplings... and half a dozen spring rolls. Also, listen- I’m in the dorms at the University, on the second floor. I broke my leg... can you send your guy up to my door? I really don’t want to go down the stairs and hurt myself further. Yea, thanks.”

It still didn’t solve my immediate problem, like how was I supposed to go out for classes the next day when I couldn’t fit any of my pants on one arm alone, far less my legs, but at least I’d get fed, and hopefully keep this under wraps a bit longer.

I had to peel off the remains of my clothes- what stayed on was staying on for dear life. It was also suffocating, so it had to go, save for the boxers. I couldn’t see all of me as I stood in front of my mirror, just a big, huge lump of brown and tan fur with really great hair, but I got a good enough look- my legs were as thick as tree trunks, thighs bulging with mass and calves actually pretty well proportioned. At least the *thing* Theo gave me remembered leg day. My torso was pretty thick, but beefy, nice, full set of abs, no discernable fat or love handles, a back with lats so huge they didn’t make a V so much as just a solid wall, a chest that could probably break rocks... that, admittedly, was pretty nice. I could barely see my feet past my chest, though. Coordinating outfits with the proper shoes was going to be a nightmare. And that’s if I could find nice shirts with sleeves that could fit over a normal person’s waist.

Soon enough, there was a knock at the door.

Alright. Time to put four years of High school acting to good use.

“Wok-n-Roll delivery- are you Mr. uh, Deaf-lure-ox?”

“De Fleureaux, yea.” I opened the door a crack. “I’m, uh, really sorry... I just got out of the shower, and with my broken leg, it’d take a while for me to get decent, so...” I grabbed my wallet, and frowned, “You got change for a twenty?”

“’fraid not.”

“Of course.” I shoved the bill into an outstretched hand. “Food, if you please.”

I’m usually a very neat person. But, again, I was *starving*. I took the food and gingerly sat on my bed. The metal bedframe groaned ominously, but held firm- thank God for little miracles, then. There I was. Suddenly several hundred pounds of muscle, in my boxers, wolfing down Chinese with my hands.

That’s everyone’s vision of college, isn’t it?

My hands were pretty messy by the end of it- I stepped off into my bathroom, and found a package lying on my bed when I came back. Like I even need to tell you who it was from.

“Short notice, but I think you’ll find them comfortable to wear.

-Theodosius Sebastian Augustus Renatus, Esq.”

I smirked when I opened up the package. It was my favorite polo, dark blue with a small crest showing my family’s coat of arms, only five times as large, with an equally proportioned pair of pants.

Maybe he wasn’t so bad after all.

Maybe.