

Academic Growth: Part III
By Renard De Fleureaux III

So, some may not know that I'm an RA. That generally means I run a Hall of a College Dorm, and keep everyone from setting the building on fire. My job as an RA has been made infinitely easier as of late, mainly because most college students would be justifiably terrified of an RA that can bench-press a car.

For the uninitiated, I'm just your everyday devastatingly handsome, half wolf, half lion hybrid college student, Renard. A while back, a shapeshifting, magical trickster of a cat changed me into a colossal waste of space, with roughly 350 pounds or so of muscle suddenly added on to my frame. Needless to say, it has changed my life dramatically, and my clothing bill has skyrocketed as a result.

Is everyone still with me? Yes? Excellent.

One of my more annoying duties as an RA is I have a bulletin board outside my door that I have to update every month. I'm not, nor have I ever been, what one would call "crafty," and I really despise having to cut things out in cute little shapes and put them up on a board only for the first jackass that passes through to tear it down. It was doubly hard now, as working on a flat wall meant my unreasonably large arms kept pressing up against it, my slightest movement making any number of muscles flex and swell in size. But as I rather like free housing, I do it anyways. Then he showed up.

Theodosius Augustus Sebastian Renatus was the one responsible for my little growth spurt. I still fought with myself every time he magically appeared if I should deck him and send him sailing into the next room or not. It'd wipe off his damn grin, at least. Though not as wide as he had made me, he was a couple inches taller, and impressively built himself, a light green and blue furred fellow with a flamboyant fashion sense right out of 1820.

"You know that the resident in 214 is going to tear that down as soon as you're done and he's drunk, yes?" Theo purred, his thick tail swishing.

"Then I'll have to put up another one, and he'll have to pick up all his teeth if I catch him, won't he?"

"Won't that get you fired, Mr. De Fleureaux?" his grin widened.

"Yes, but a lolf can dream, can't he? Besides, I know he tore my posters down last month. Bastard deserves a good swift punch in the smug face."

"Tut, tut, Mr. De Fleureaux. Such brash words are unbefitting of a gentleman."

“There are a lot of things unbecoming a gentleman, Theo- one of them being popping up out of nowhere uninvited.” I wasn’t even going to look at him. Just focus on gluing stars to the wall.

The cat purred, running his hands over my sides until he squeezed at my mountainous shoulders, tickling at the thick tendons of my bullneck. “Touché.”

I shuddered, causing any number of muscles to ripple as he shrugged his hands off, “Could you not?” I snapped.

“Is this really what you’re doing with your phenomenal gift, Mr. De Fleureaux? Playing with paper cut-out stars?” I did a double-take as I looked at him. He was upside down, standing on the ceiling. “Oh! I see what you were doing now.” Theo grins wider, looking at my bulletin board.

I grunted, grabbing him at the sides, wide chest swelling up against an already tight shirt as I yanked him down. “Stop. Now. If you have something to say, go ahead and say it. If not, I’m calling Campus Security.”

“Mr. De Fleureaux, don’t you think you ought to be putting your prodigious strength to better uses? Throw your weight around, as it were?” Theo purred, his claws pinching at my bulging bicep.

“No, I don’t.” I said, pushing my elbow against him until he let go.

“There’s a bank robbery going on right now Downtown.”

“Damn shame.” I wasn’t having it.

“The police could use some unique help.” Theo’s iridescent eyes flashed.

“I’m sure they could.”

“You could easily handle it... you could pick up each of the rogues involved like they were toddlers!” Theo grin grew ever wider, as he mimicked picking up something small.

“No, what I COULD do is finish my Bulletin Board and not get shot at.”

“Oh, like they could hurt you.”

I gave Theo a long look. “Are you suggesting that this,” I bounced my pecs, my chest bulging out dramatically and straining my shirt, “is bulletproof?”

Theo’s grin faltered. *That* was a first. “Well, I didn’t say that, exactly, Mr. De Fleureaux.”

“Good night, Theo.” I went back into my room, locking the door.

And before you ask, no, I don’t know why I thought it would work.

Theo manifested right beside me. “But Mr. De Fleureaux, you are wasting a talent... and one must never waste a talent.”

“Theo. I’m a writer, historian, and actor. My *talents* are relegated to the arts and the humanities. I was already trying to learn the talent of picking things up and putting them down when you did this to me, and the only thing that’s changed is that I can pick up excessively larger things and put them down.” I walked away from him and flopped on my iron-enforced bed. The Residential staff had been unusually cooperative in re-fitting my room to accommodate a fucking juggernaut.

“But Mr. De Fleureaux, I implore you, think of what good you can do-”

“Good? Theo, I *already* do good. I donate to charity. I help out at homeless shelters, churches, and Soup Kitchens. I’m studying to become someone that can influence positive change through writing. That’s going to serve people a lot better than some meat head running around in tights and punching criminals until they stop committing crimes.” I sat up, huffing and rolling my shoulders.

Theo sighed, “Very well, Mr. De Fleureaux. I’ll just have to convince you another time.”

“You will convince me *never!*” I shouted, throwing a pillow at him. Or empty space, as he had already vanished.

“I swear to Christ. One of these days he’s going to push me too far, and then... bam!” I grumbled, punching the air.

Despite what I originally feared, my professors were tremendously understanding about my sudden muscular development, and treated me the same as always.

My *professors*, anyways. My fellow students? Please.

While not everyone was so accepting, some of it was rather gratifying. A certain strata of women, and more than a couple men, who were into the big and strong type were quick to take notice. I had had more than a few requests for flexing my arm, making my pecs dance, that sort of thing. And what kind of person would I be if I didn’t fulfill a request from a lovely lady? Or fellow gentleman, if he’s good looking?

My friends’ reactions were more varied. Some, like my old work-out partner Rehgan, were accepting and supportive as always but worried about my health, others, like Nocturne, were encouraging me to embrace the change.

And then there was Tim.

Tim was my best friend on campus; and we were a very odd pair. I was, even after the change, well-dressed, slightly stuffy, and overtly polite. He was not. A rather lean and mean rat, he was always dressed in a leather trench coat with military boots, always quick to crack a racist or sexist joke and generally reveled in being as insulting and insensitive as possible. He also had a brilliant mind for history, and was a genuinely good guy to have at your back. At least, on occasion. And like any best friend, he cracked jokes at my expense.

“Oh, crap! Renard’s gone full Hulk! You no crush Tim. Tim friend.”

“Shut up.” I smirked, punching his shoulder, making him stumble.

“Hey, hey, no hitting. You know I don’t hit girls.”

“Mhm. You know, you could crack those jokes *before* this, but now?” I flexed, holding my arms up over my head, biceps brushing up against my cheeks as I gave my triceps a moment to shine, the two mounds of muscle strained and bulging. “I think it’s safe to say which one’s the man in this relationship.”

“Yeah? Your boobs say otherwise, Hercules.” He grabbed my chest, squeezing my pec, “What are these, D-cup?”

I flexed my chest until he lost his grip, the muscle pushing against his hand until he couldn’t hold on. “Cute. Never mind I could probably bench press ten of you.”

“Yeah, but you won’t, because I’ll still beat you in a fight.”

“Sure you will.” I sighed, “I had another visit from my friend.”

“Yeah? Your imaginary friend who talks to you, and only you can hear him? I thought that was Jesus.” Tim was an Atheist, and I’m Christian. We have fun.

“He wanted me to go stop a bank robbery.”

“So you ARE turning into the Hulk!” Tim shouted triumphantly.

“No! I’m not going to go running out like a damn idiot to get shot at.”

“So, what’s the problem?”

“Well... it wouldn’t be the worst thing, being all heroic.”

“But there’s still the getting shot at thing?”

“Yeah.”

Tim shrugged, “Hey man, you do what you want. Who’s going to stop you, right? I’m pretty sure you could go into Financial Aid and like, beat everyone up for their lunch money until they gave you free tuition.”

“It’s something I’ve considered...” I muttered.

“Hah. Anyways man, I gotta head out.”

“Alright, see ya.”

“Oh, hey, before I go, though... think you could...?”

I groaned, “*Again?*”

“My back is killing me, man. C’mom.”

I rolled my eyes, and wrapped my arms around him from behind, biceps tensing as they slammed against my friend. My pecs were bulging out, pushing up against the back of his head as I picked him up, letting go once I heard the familiar crack of vertebrae.

“Oh... oh yeah.” Tim muttered as I set him down. “That is the *shit*. You’re not allowed to slim down until I get, like. Ten more of those. See ya, man!”

I waved back, a bit lost in thought as I meandered around campus.

“Freak!” came the all-too-familiar catcall, coupled with the sensation of a small object hitting my barn-door back.

Here we go again.

I looked over my wide shoulder, seeing three students, with rocks in their hands. Two were dogs, mutts, by the look of it, and another was a gator.

“You know that’s like throwing a paper airplane, right guys? It doesn’t actually hurt me.” I called back, frustrated.

“Go fuck yourself, Freak! We don’t want your kind ‘round here.” Did I mention my school was in the South?

I threw up my arms in frustration, walking away.

“Yeah, yeah you go and run wuss! Get as big as you want, you’re still a little bitch!”

If it weren’t for the fact that the second I so much as lay a finger on another student, I get fired from my RA position, I would have thrown a punch and sent all three flying. I’d go find them right now, if I could. But I can’t, so I shan’t.

In the weeks after Theo's tampering with my body, this wasn't the first time that the heckling had happened. People knew I was huge, and strong, but they also knew I couldn't do a thing to them without getting screwed over by the Administration. It had quickly become a rite of passage for guys on campus to show how tough they were- not so much poke a sleeping dragon as poke a sleeping dragon after he's been chained up, muzzled, and had his fire-breathing appendix surgically removed. My Dad, who was a big guy in his own right and had been a varsity jock in his day, warned me it would happen.

I wandered off campus, soon. My school was literally right across the street from a busy residential area, and a stone's throw away from a big city, its sprawling downtown laying just across the river that ran by my school. My legs carried me a lot farther than they used to- I suppose it's bound to happen when you have tree trunk thighs. Some people honked at me as they drove by, some more catcalls, one or two booty calls, judging by how one girl called me "Big Daddy" as she drove by. I blushed.

While some of the attention was nice, right now, I'd kill to just be invisible again. I'd never sought the limelight in social settings, because I don't really care for it. I like my privacy, having control of how much I expose myself to others. I'm not shy, I just like being alone at times. But that had quickly been stolen from me the moment the whole school found out that I was, well...

Freak seemed like a pretty good word, after all.

I could feel my ears drooping at that thought. The attention that was meant well was a bit embarrassing, to be honest. While gratifying, it wasn't attention for me. It wasn't for anything I had done, specifically. When I flexed for the girls and guys, I was just... what, eye candy, to them? None so far seemed interested in talking or getting to know me, they just wanted a slice of beefcake, content to smirk and flex at request. Oh, sure, they wanted to date me- but I hadn't said yes to any of them yet. Why would I when I barely know any of these people?

The walk had me in a progressively worse mood. I'd give anything to keep a low profile again, just disappear. I soon came to one of the many bridges that passed over into downtown, and I had come to the biggest. It was a hundred feet above the water level, a huge, two tower suspension bridge, like the Brooklyn Bridge but not as nice. The walkway over the bridge was in between lanes of traffic, serving as the median. I stopped, realizing that perhaps this had been a bad idea. The cars roaring past me made me feel even more uncomfortable. I didn't need to be in a loud, noisy place, what I needed was somewhere quiet and secluded. I turned to go back the way I came, but then my eyes bugged out as I saw him.

I was going to kill Theo.

The damn cat was right out in the middle of traffic, juggling on the dividing line. What was he *thinking*?

“Theo!” I yelled over the roar, waving my arms. “THEO!”

The Cheshire saw me and waved, grinning wide as he juggled three balls up in the air with one hand.

“Get out of the road!” I roared. Cars were flying by at sixty miles an hour.

“On minute, Mr. De Fleureaux! I can’t hear you! Let me get closer!” Theo called, taking a step to the side.

“NO!”

Too late.

If the cars hadn’t seen him before, they saw *something*. One car came to a screeching halt, as another rear-ended it. They were the lucky ones. As Theo obliviously sauntered over into the next lane, one car tried swerving, and missed him- only to careen for the barrier of the bridge. The car’s front wheels went up, sending the car at a frightening angle, and sending it with a loud crunch back to perch over the side of the barrier. My heart froze.

Half the car was already over the edge, the rest slipping down, the metal chassis scraping against the concrete, sparks coming off it as it grinded against the stone. It wasn’t going to balance itself, the weight was already tipping it over.

The only thing I can say is, thank God for Fight or Flight syndrome.

I was there in two bounds, and just as the car began to tip over, I caught the bumper. Previously, Theo had given me access to a place where someone of my caliber could, in fact, get a decent workout. I had even bench-pressed a car, there. But a stripped down car, while still a solid ton or two, was miles away from a car filled with God-knows-what in the trunk and several hundred extra pounds of passenger. As soon as I grabbed it, I could already feel my grip slipping. I gritted my teeth and dug my fingers into the bumper, denting it as I threw all my strength in. My arms buckled, and my legs began to tremble as I tried pulling the car back from the abyss.

I would not let this car go. I could not let this car go.

I groaned under the strain, and felt my strength begin to fail. No. No. No one was going to go tumbling to their deaths if I could help it. I tried curling my arms towards me, my biceps beginning to feel like they would literally tear. I dug my heels in, throwing my back and legs into it. And soon, by the grace of God and over three hundred pounds of muscle, I felt the car begin to slide back to me. As soon as enough of the car tipped over back to the side of the road, it was much easier to drag the rest of it back from the edge. As I pulled it back, I gratefully let go, resting my hands on the hood, denting it, too, as my full leaned on it. I was panting heavily, drenched in sweat, as my massive chest heaved, straining my shirt.

The driver came trembling out, as Police made it on the scene at last. She made her way over to me, and threw herself at my side. She was a middle-aged vixen with three kids, as three kits were collected out of the car by the Police.

“Oh... oh, thank you, thank you so much, suh!” She sputtered out in a thick Southern accent. “I thought that was it for me and my boys. God bless you!” she sobbed against my chest, and I hesitantly patted her shoulder.

“Hey! Big man!” called one of the officers, a stout looking badger. He came up to my shoulders, and seemed to be sizing me up. “All these people said you pulled this car back from sailing over the bridge single-handed.”

“I, uh. Yeah.” I rolled my shoulders, the great titanic movement making my whole body rumble against the woman clinging to my side. “I’m pretty strong, so. Figured I could do something.”

“Well son, damn glad you did. You’re a hero today.” A whole crowd ringed the stretch of road. Smart phones were out, recording the whole thing. Behind the police cars, I could see News vans were beginning to pull up.

.....

Three hours. It took me three hours to fight my way past hordes of reporters to get back to my room. Once I was safely inside, I threw myself on the bed, making it creak ominously. Not ten minutes passed before I could hear the pounding on my door. I groaned. They’d have to go away eventually, right?

“Well...” drawled a familiar voice, “That went smashingly, don’t you think.”

Oh. I was done with games.

As Theo materialized, I pounced on him. I had my hands on his throat, lifted him up, and slammed him against my wall, breaking the coat of paint and leaving a definitive dent in it.

“YOU!” I roared. My chest was pressed up against him, massive slabs of pecs probably able to keep him in place on their own, “ARE YOU INSANE?! YOU COULD’VE GOTTEN PEOPLE KILLED! YOU NEARLY DID! AND FOR WHAT?!”

“Mr. De Fleureaux, Mr. De Fleureaux, please!” Theo said still smiling. He didn’t even seem at all distressed I had my hands around his throat. “Remain calm. I assure you, the woman and her children were never in any *real* danger.”

My grip almost loosened at that, “What are you talking about, you deranged lunatic?” I growled.

“Mr. De Fleureaux!” Theo began chidingly, “Do you honestly think I’m the type of person to toy with people’s lives?”

I took one glance down at shoulders so massive they actually could be mistaken for boulders, and pecs so thick with muscle they actually were holding an entire person up, and then looked back up at Theo, giving him a hard look.

He offered an apologetic grin, “Poor choice of words.” Theo disappeared from my hands, reappearing hovering mid-air. “Mr. De Fleureaux, I wanted to show you your full potential! Now everyone will think of you as a hero, and you have been shown what you’re capable of.”

“What about the woman and her kids?”

“Oh, please. I would never jeopardize lives like that. Had you hesitated, they would have anti-climactically tipped the other way, rolled off the barrier, and back on to the road.”

The pounding on the door was louder, more insistent. “Mr. De Fleureaux! Renard! This is Greg Smith, with The Tribune, a moment of your time?” “Mr. De Fleureaux! Jane Fletcher, Channel 9 News, our viewers want to meet the city’s new hero!”

“But it seems you have company. Ta-ta for now, Mr. De Fleureaux! Enjoy the adoration!”

“Theo! Don’t you dare disappear!” I shouted, as he disappeared.

“THEO!”

The pounding on my door continued. It looked like now, a low profile, much like my physique, was next to impossible to attain.