

Dwindling Talent

By Dragonien

Francine had yet to even officially debut, her trainer still in the process of waiting for callbacks from some of his contacts to try to find a good opportunity to get her name out to the masses. This had been why it had been so surprising to find herself invited to perform a private demonstrative performance. Normally she would have immediately said no, either from lack of confidence, suspicion of anterior motives, or some combination thereof. When she'd gotten to the bottom of the letter and saw the name written on the signature line, though, she'd instantly changed her mind. The check that fell from the bottom fold of the letter certainly didn't hurt her decision either. Would her bank even let her cash a check with that many zeros?

The whole world knew the name Rufus Livingstone. Similarly, the whole world also knew that no one turned down Rufus Livingstone. He wasn't technically the richest man in the world however even among the powers that be there were few that would dare argue he wasn't the most influential. He was an entrepreneur who freely admitted he had no true genius of his own. Sure, he educated himself enough to be dangerous but he was no engineer, scientist, botanist, biologist or any other ologist that you could think of. Yet He had the uncanny knack of being able to tell the level of talent someone possessed seemingly with but a glance. That's how his company, Whetstone Industries, had managed to be responsible for over half of the major scientific and industrial breakthroughs for the entire world over the last two decades. Not content with industrial conquest, he had even branched out into the entertainment industry. His interest in the fine arts was well known and a frequent topic of discussion whenever anyone mentioned Whetstone TV. That's why When Rufus Livingstone invited you for an interview, whether you were a leading biologist or a small-time ventriloquist, no one would ever dream of turning it down. It was as much of a compliment as it was a dream business opportunity.

And he had invited HER to his private auditorium on his estate to perform for him. Even if he didn't hire her for any actual parts the check he had sent by itself would have allowed her to live a moderately comfortable life without ever having to work again. The only condition was that she had to be halfway across the country by tomorrow evening. Considering what her bank account was going to look like once she had time to take this check to the bank, the idea of an expensive last-minute flight booking made her smirk mockingly. Forget coach, she was busting out the credit card and getting herself a first-class ticket. After booking her flight, she began haphazardly throwing various objects together into an overnight bag. All the while, she happily mumbled a song under her breath, her glee unable to stay contained inside her.

"I've got a golden ticket. I've got a golden chance to make my way..."

Sweat poured down her face, her chest heaving as she struggled to catch her breath. She'd been given no direction to what she was to perform, instead simply led straight from the gate to the changing room of the private auditorium on the four-square-mile estate that Rufus Livingstone lived upon. So, not knowing what else to perform she had simply reverted back to some of her favorite sequences she used to warm up or impress friends at parties. A few excerpts from Cinderella, The Nutcracker, and La Bayadere were hopefully enough to impress. Now that she was finished though, holding her final pose and trying not to let the physical exhaustion show she struggled to catch any glimpse of either approval or contempt from her audience of one.

Unfortunately, she couldn't even see him in the dim auditorium. The bright spotlights glaring down at her ruined her low light vision and made the shadowy audience seating all but pitch-black to her. Yet she knew he was there. Somehow, she could feel his gaze upon her like an oppressive, judgmental weight. She hadn't felt this nervously terrified since right before she'd worked up the courage to read the local newspaper's review of her first public performance, despite it having been little more than a glorified community event to feign municipal interest in the fine arts and had an attendance of less than a hundred. Just when the silence was beginning to get awkward and she felt her legs starting to shake from the strain of holding her pose she finally heard his response.

Clap. Clap. Clap. Clap.

The applause of one would have probably sounded sarcastic and insulting in most other circumstances yet somehow Francine could tell that it was truly enthusiastic and genuine. A breath she hadn't realized she was holding exploded from her chest in a gasp and she released her pose. Instead, she took a half step backwards and gave her best stage bow to the unseen audience. she had to make a conscious effort to keep her jumping up and down joyfully and giving away just how happy she felt right now though she was unable to do anything about the quiet squeal of glee that rolled its way from her throat. She was pretty sure that the acoustics here weren't good enough he could hear it but if she was being entirely honest she didn't entirely care if he did. She was still trying to squint her eyes enough to get a look at her audience of one when she noticed a faint glow coming from the auditorium. The green light briefly illuminated a shadowy figure she assumed was Rufus a split second before the green light flashed and momentarily blinded her.

Her eyes squinted closed in reflex at the bright light and she was glad they had. She abruptly found herself overtaken by an extreme case of dizziness and vertigo. Before she even realized it she had fallen down onto her hands and knees as she struggled to make the world stop spinning around her. She dared not open her eyes lest her inevitably wobbling movements

only make her disorientation worse. Then, just as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. Confused, she opened her eyes and looked around. For a moment she thought she was still disoriented as nothing looked coherent or familiar anymore. When she took stock of herself, though, she no longer felt like the world was spinning around her. What was confusing her though was that the stage was no longer in view. Instead there was a pile of pale pink cloth draped all around her like someone had dropped the curtains off their rod and buried her beneath them. It was then that she felt the shaking.

It wasn't a constant rumble either. It was a rhythmic impact that caused the floor to vibrate, then stop, then vibrate again in a pattern. poor Francine had no idea what was going on and panic started to overwhelm her. Then, light suddenly flooded into the strange cloth-lined cavern and she saw two enormous, black-fur covered objects fumbling around for her. Within moments they had grabbed a hold of her leg and she found herself being unceremoniously hoisted up into the air, upside down, like the prize of some kind of claw machine game. No matter how much she struggled or squirmed she was unable to free herself from the iron grip of the two objects. Each one was roughly as thick around as a telephone pole and from the force it was exerting holding her leg it probably could have just crushed it if it squeezed even the slightest bit harder. Francine wasn't an idiot though. The moment her panic abated slightly she realized she was now dangling several stories in the air and quickly stopped her struggling. It wasn't a hard decision to choose between being picked up by some unknown entity and falling 30+ feet down to the unforgiving hard ground below. With that moment of clarity came a re-examination of her surroundings, though. And with that came the realization, as impossible as it was, of her situation. By the time she found herself face to face with Rufus she realized what had happened even as his now billboard-sized face filled her view.

Somehow, she had shrunk.

Instantly a different kind of fear filled her, a far more primal terror of being at the mercy of a larger predator. Her fear of falling was still strong enough to keep her from squirming, thankfully lest he still drop her. Before she had time to let herself start to think over the absurdity of her situation the now gigantic lupine entrepreneur began to speak.

"Truly was a marvelous performance, dear. It's utterly criminal that no one had bothered to scout you before. So many of these sub-par talents get put in the limelight simply because they 'know a guy' and the real talent gets squandered in back-alley theaters and basements."

As he monologued the wolf began to casually stroll across the stage, dismissively stepping over the pile of clothing that she had been wearing only moments ago. The rumbling thuds of his footsteps were now familiar to her and she realized those quakes hadn't been earthquakes at all but rather his footsteps. Rufus was a big wolf in many metrics. She knew from his bio that he was well over 6-foot-tall though she couldn't place the exact number. He also had a rather hefty build: Well into the heavy side with a thick gut that jostled beneath her with each step he took but still enough muscle mass his chest was well defined and both his

arms and legs filled out the sleeves of his shirt and pants respectively with enough of an impression that you'd hesitate to just call him fat. Then, the sudden realization that she had shrunk right out of her clothes and was now naked derailed her train of thought and she was left blushing uncontrollably and quickly reaching up to cover herself with her arms. Rufus either didn't seem to notice, or simply didn't care; his words never missing a beat as he walked.

"That's why I make it my business to find these poor, downtrodden souls such as yourself and give them a place. I give them, and now you, purpose and an audience that can truly appreciate your talents unlike the philistines that would rather let nepotism and lazy effort rule the world of entertainment and art." He spoke with derision of the others; a harsh growl of distaste that made the poor shrunk human shudder in fear at what, to her, was a bestial roll of thunder comparable to the revving of a diesel engine. "That's why I collect you all. To ensure you have someone that is deserving of your talents admiring you, to ensure that you have an audience with the proper reverence for your talents that you deserve as well."

When he pushed his way through another door, the environment rushing by so fast poor Francine couldn't even keep track of where they were going, he paused for a moment to raise her back up in front of his muzzle again. His lips twisted in a lupine grin that both made Francine shudder in fear again as she found herself staring down a mouth full of teeth each larger than her arms, and yet at the same time somehow made her blush slightly with the strange handsome cut of his jaw and sincerity of his amused expression. She should have simply been scared out of her mind, but sometimes even the fear of death or the unknown can't entirely quell the unstoppable might of a girlish crush on a man she'd only ever seen and admired through television screens and magazines. When he spoke again though, both the fear and the misplaced attraction were both washed away with an urge to groan in displeasure so intense that it was a miracle she suppressed it.

"You could say I'm all of yours biggest fan."

As she tried to make sense of her situation, there was a wry part of her mind that silently wished that if he was going to subject her to more of that kind of humor, she wish he'd just end her now.

She hadn't been sure what to expect from the situation. She was still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that she was probably less than 6 inches tall at this point. Any number of bad scenarios tore through her mind, mostly fueled by monster movies and books she'd read or heard of. Ideas of being swallowed whole by Rufus's gaping jaws or crushed underfoot and ground into the floor with a dismissive twist of his foot. Terrible fantasies of being manhandled until she simply broke or, worse still, being shrunk any smaller. What she hadn't expected

was to be set atop a small marble vanity set with various adjustable light sconces and a 3-sided mirror all in a configuration that seemed tailor made to someone specifically of her stature.

She was still naked, a situation that her meek requests to rectify had been summarily ignored. You'd think she'd first have been more concerned about why he had actually shrunk her, or how he'd done so in the first place. But, when you're in your birthday suit in front of other people you don't know well it's hard not to reflexively look for any kind of coverage. It didn't help that the illumination from the lights was bright and intense enough that it was starting to heat up her skin and make her uncomfortably warm. Instead, all she'd gotten were hums and grunts from the wolf as he looked her over. It was embarrassing enough that she was standing naked in front of the now-giant wolf being looked over like he was, but when he started to manhandle her it had gone from embarrassing to humiliating. He'd begun to grab at various parts of her. Fingers thicker than her legs would grab either side of one of her arms and lift it up as if examining its length then what lay beneath. More than once she was poked and prodded to turn around this way or that and even simply picked up and flipped around a couple of times as the giant wolf scanned every exposed inch of her. She'd never been more humiliated in her life.

"Hmm... Still a bit on the thin side. Probably not eating quite enough. We can fix that. Also, legs are a bit longer in proportion, perfect for dancers but might have to re-tailor some of the clothes..."

The wolf spoke aloud, clearly for his own benefit rather than her own. He was dressing her down and analyzing her like she wasn't even there, like someone would talk about some model or figurine they had just got. The fact that she was the size of one of those figurines now didn't help reassure the poor human at all. What came as even more of a surprise though was when Rufus reached over to the walls to either side of the mirror and pressed in on them. With a soft click of a re-pressing magnet clasp little storage doors opened in the walls. To the right of the mirrors he grasped a small metal rod and pulled it out a good 2 feet, stretching it halfway across the length of the counter-top behind her. Hanging from the rod were dozens upon dozens of carefully sewn and crafted doll clothes. Everything from tuxedos to dresses, ballet tutus and marching band outfits lined the racks of clothes. She even saw a few less... encouraging outfits such as a rather revealing cheerleaders' outfit and more than a few sets of swimwear and bikinis. Out of the other compartment came a small makeup kit. It wasn't a minimal one, mind you, but rather literally small. The applicator brush was more like a soft-tipped watercolor brush instead and the lipsticks were smaller than toothpaste tube openings. It was like one of those comically over-designed barbie doll playsets.

Over the next few minutes she found herself once more being manhandled without a care for her own wishes. He wasn't necessarily rough with her. If anything, he actually seemed to be taking particular care not to hurt her or bend her the wrong way. She had no doubt if he did, it would take about as much effort on his part to snap one of her arms like a toothpick if he accidentally bent it backwards. Yet despite his care not to harm her he also seemed to take no

care whatsoever to her protests. Any time she'd shove against one of his fingers, kick at his palm or yell up at him she was utterly ignored or simply overpowered. It wasn't exactly like she could resist even one of his fingers at this size even with her entire body's strength behind it. Each time she'd brace herself and push back against the finger with both arms it would just push forward and knock her back on her ass, shoving her arms out of the way to continue its work. Said work being, of all things, cleaning her up. A couple of moist towelettes from a nearby dispenser were used to wipe her down, cleaning the seat built up from her performance off of her with meticulous care. Though he showed no perverse intention, Rufus was merciless in his cleaning and had no hesitation in pushing his way into all of her most intimate and private areas. Towelette-wrapped finger forcing her legs apart to clean off her inner thighs then lightly shoving the arm wrapped around her chest for modesty aside to do the same to her torso and bosom all with neither care for her yelps nor a lingering touch for his own satisfaction. It was a level of humiliation she never even imagined before now.

When all was said and done, Francine had been thoroughly cleaned and wiped down with a dry cloth. Now smelling of a faintly fruity soap and dressed in an admittedly pretty sundress that he had carefully pulled on to her, she had once more been scooped up without ceremony. She'd lost most of her energy and will to struggle. Instead, she focused her attention on observing her surroundings. Francine was a lot of things, but stupid wasn't one of them. She had calmed down enough to rationalize her situation, at least as much as was possible when one suddenly only found themselves six inches tall, and was now actively looking for chances to escape. What she would do once she got away from the wolf she had no idea, but she felt that was an important first step and anything else could come afterwards. Her plans quickly fell apart though as she watched where the wolf was taking her.

The first chance she'd had to look around the room the little doll dressing room had been in she had thought it was a closet of some kind, Just one of those obnoxiously large ones all rich people seem to have as if solely for the bragging rights of saying their closet is bigger than most people's bedrooms. What had thrown her off though, was the heavy steel door at the end that she only now just realized was what they had come through to enter the room. Thinking back, she'd heard an audible hiss of releasing air come from the door both when it had opened and closed. As she was carried from that room past an absolutely monstrous bathroom, similarly gigantic bedroom and towards an open common area at the end of the double-wide hallway something finally clicked in her head. there were no windows. Before she had time to dwell on the implications of this Rufus made it to the common area at the end of the hall and Francine completely forgot her previous train of thought at the sight before her.

It was like a small city. Literally a small city. Dozens of slightly mismatching homes lined streets paved not with concrete but with those interconnecting, impact-absorbing foam squares that one uses to reduce foot and leg strain when walking upon. the houses were all pristine replicas of antique Victorian-style doll homes and more than a few looked like the genuine article that had been masterfully restored. They even had working light fixtures inside most rooms from what she could see of lights coming from some of the windows. It wasn't the

houses, or even the strangely designed open-air auditorium with a large cell phone resting sideways in it like a movie screen that made her gasp in surprise. It was that the city was populated! Dozens of people, both anthromorphs and humans alike, lined the streets, occupied the homes, or sat in that outdoor theater watching something on the screen she couldn't see from this distance. It really was a small, fully populated city!

She also couldn't help but notice the wall that surrounded the entire city. A black-painted concrete divider rose up in a circle surrounding the city a bit over two feet tall. To the people inside the wall it would be just a bit over two stories tall, more than tall enough that casual attempts to climb it and escape would be easily foiled. There was still a wide walkway space around the city that gave Rufus plenty of space to move, and even a sitting area on the far side almost like a throne overlooking the city itself. Despite everything Francine suddenly found herself blushing slightly at the thought of standing in the middle of that town, looking off in the distance at the looming visage of the bulky wolf sitting high upon his throne like some kind of over-watching deity.

In her distraction she had missed where Rufus must have stepped over the wall to the little city. When she looked down, she saw him casually walking his way through the streets in between buildings. It dawned on her then that there were no cars in the streets; fake, shrunken, toy or otherwise. The streets were, however, slightly wider than they should have been to stay in proportion with the buildings around them. It wasn't hard to put two and two together to realize they weren't meant for cars but, rather, for Rufus himself to walk through considering they were the perfect width for his wide stride. She also noticed how each of his steps made an audible THUMP akin to how they had sounded on the stage she had initially been shrunken on. Looking back from where she was held at waist height, she could see the carpeting that had been mostly muffling his footsteps impact. But now, in the hardwood that had been painted to imitate suburban streets it was pretty obvious they were purpose-made to make his footsteps loud, noticeable, and imposing. Francine had to admit if she were able to shrink people like this, she might like to indulge in feeling huge and powerful a little bit as well.

The reaction to the presence of the massive wolf seemed rather mixed. Some blatantly ran into their homes and slammed the doors, nothing but the occasional face peeking out of a window visible of them. Others seemed to be gathering in the large open space in the middle of town where a functional water fountain was happily spewing water in admirable patterns and designs without spilling any. A minority even seemed to simply outright ignore the wolf, continuing to walk down the street talking with one another as the massive footsteps came and went past them. When he'd reached the center square, he crouched down enough to drop his captive down in front of the gathered crowd of people before standing back up with a minor grunt of effort that seemed to echo through the city.

Looming over them all, Rufus was still quite an intimidating distraction but Francine still made an effort to look around at the others. The crowd was a rainbow of both species and genders. She was surrounded by everything from a muscular wolf girl in a sports bra and gym

shorts and a curvaceous dragoness in a regal-looking silk dress to a timid-looking dark-skinned human man with a violin case strapped to his back and a bookish male rabbit who seemed perfectly happy to try and hide behind some of the others. What surprised her the most was that she thought she actually recognized a few of the faces here; vague memories of faces seen in magazines or news articles she couldn't quite put names too but had interested her enough she'd skimmed them. Before she had a chance to say anything to them Rufus began to speak in an authoritative, elevated tone that seemed to echo through the enclosure at a volume that the sheer size of him left at just south of painfully loud.

"Alright, little ones. Today we have a new arrival. Francine here is a ballet dancer of no small skill. Sarah, you're in charge of orientation. I expect you to have things well in hand when I return for dinner."

Rufus never seemed to actually look at anyone as he spoke. At first, his head simply swiveled around to survey the town. Even when he turned his attention down to the crowd below his gaze just glazed past everyone as if they were just part of the scenery. The only time he ever actually seemed to look at anyone was when he spoke to the person named Sarah. She turned out to be the wolfess in the workout gear. The moment he had said her name Francine watched the wolfess' ears immediately flatten to her head and her tail tuck between her legs as she took a half step forward towards the much, much larger wolf before her and nodded her assent to his demand. His gaze seemed to bore into her to the point that Francine swore for a second that, from the way the wolfess was hunching in on herself, she was shrinking smaller than she already was just from the sheer force of his attention. It was a little surreal despite the absurdity of their situation. Francine had always been a bit intimidated by the anthromorphs. Who wouldn't be? even the small prey species were objectively faster and stronger than a human in almost every circumstance. They had better senses, natural weapons like their teeth and claws and were still in tune with the survival instincts most humans had long since suppressed entirely. Sarah would have been intimidating as a human thanks to her impressive physique, but as a wolf she would have been downright scary at even the tiniest show of aggression. Yet here was this powerhouse of a predator, all but trembling in the presence of another. Then again that 'other' could have swallowed Sarah whole so maybe Francine shouldn't judge her too harshly.

Satisfied in her show of obedience, Rufus scanned the crowd once more. Then, crouching down as he had before to set Francine down, he began to reach one of his meaty paws down towards the group. For a second Francine had been afraid he was going to snatch her up again but, thankfully, those massive digits swept right past her. Instead, they wrapped their way around the now very nervous-looking man with the violin slung across his back. Without another word, Rufus picked them up and simply deposited the man into the front pocket of his suit with no more ceremony than you might slip your phone into your pocket before leaving for work. With his new acquisition stowed, the massive wolf turned on his heel and left the crowd of people watching his plump backside lightly straining the seat of his pants as his rumbling footsteps led him out of the tiny town and through the door at the end of the hall. For the first

time since the wolf had somehow shrunk her, Francine was left to her own devices. Without his overbearing presence and manhandling she was free to let what she now realized seemed to have been a near-constant adrenaline surge slowly fade away. She was left standing there, shaking in the wake of the fading hormones, as panic at the reality of her situation began to build. Just as her thoughts were ready to build into a maddened scream of disbelief and fear a hand slapped against her back hard enough to send her stumbling a half step forward; the momentary pain snapping her out of the building meltdown before it could reach critical mass.

"Hey. I'm Sarah. Though you probably could have guessed. Used to be a personal trainer."

The voice was oddly soothing to Francine. The fear of her situation was still there but hearing another voice, one that didn't sound like a roll of thunder, gave her a small sense of familiarity to latch onto. Looking to the side, she found herself face to face with the lupine woman that Rufus had she had apparently been 'assigned' to. She was taller than Francine by a couple of inches, though some part of the human girl's mind wanted to laugh aloud at the thought that really it was probably a couple of millimeters instead considering both of their actual sizes. She found that she was glad at the rough greeting Sarah had given her. If it hadn't been for that distraction, she'd probably be curled up in a ball sobbing or running around trying to find things to break right now. Despite this, though, it still took her a few moments to collect herself before she could return the introduction.

"Uh. Francine. I'm a. or I... Um. Ballet dancer?"

She was a bit confused at the job introduction and reflexively responded in kind. That made Sarah smile at her, unintentionally showing off her teeth. For a moment, Francine just stared. She'd never exactly been scared of anthromorphs, they were just people like anyone else after all. But that didn't mean she wasn't still intimidated by them. Sarah seemed pretty friendly at face value though so Francine tried to push those feelings down.

"What uh... What's exactly going on. I guess it's safe to say I'm not dreaming?" She asked.

Sarah gave her a sad smile.

"No. Not dream, I'm afraid. Here. let's go get something to drink and I'll fill you in on your new life here."

Doing her best not to dwell on how ominous that last statement was, Francine nodded and let the wolf lead her away from the square. The others had already mostly dispersed, though Francine could see more than a few of them lingering and looking her over. She'd been looked at like that more than enough times to know she was being evaluated. What worried her was what she was being evaluated for.

Sarah had been surprisingly calming to talk to for Francine. Maybe it was just the sight of someone else again the same size as her that helped to put her at ease but for the few minutes they spent walking down the sidewalk she was almost able to forget that she was now only a few inches tall. Sadly, it all came rushing back it the front of her mind when Sarah started to explain how things worked in their new 'home'. First and foremost, she had been fervently warned not to try to escape. Even if she were able to climb over the wall the room that they were in was hermetically sealed. Apparently, it had been some bomb shelter that Rufus had built under his home that he'd converted into their new 'home'. Both of the girls made a rather obvious attempt to refrain from calling it a prison, though the thought hung in the air. If even air couldn't get in or out without coming through a dozen different filters then they had no hope of leaving under their own power. The same warning was given if she was taken out of the room by Rufus, or Mr. Livingstone as Sarah called him with slightly strained reverence in her voice. The wolfess expertly avoided any specifics of what might happen to her if she tried to escape outside of the room, but her evasion and the nervous look on the anthromorph's face was enough to get at least a general idea that it probably wouldn't be pleasant. From the way that Sarah described it, beyond the fact that they were essentially kidnapping victims the size of toys, it honestly wasn't too bad living here. Francine couldn't quite tell how much of that was genuine and how much was just Stockholm syndrome but she really hoped she wasn't here long enough to find out.

Most of the time the inhabitants of what they'd started calling 'Tiny Town' lived fairly normal lives. Most of the homes had rather cleverly designed indoor plumbing and lighting sized for the buildings and each of the homes was either a custom-built dollhouse or a masterfully refurbished one. They had movies to watch at the theater on the smartphone that was left there for them, though Sarah warned her not to bother trying to use it to call for help. It had the parental locks on so the only apps they were able to access were movie-watching ones. The only thing really expected of them was too perform for Rufus.

They were his collection, Sarah had explained. Some rich people collected rare artworks or unique cars and objects. Rufus took it a step further and chose to collect the creators themselves. When Francine finally worked up the courage to ask how he was even able to do this she explained that Rufus had some kind of a device that was able to change the size of living things like plants and people but not inanimate objects like materials, clothing or electronics. Apparently the scientist that had invented it actually was here in Tiny Town with the rest of them. Before Francine got any hopes of questioning him for help in returning to normal size, though, Sarah ruthlessly squashed those ideas.

"Don't even think of asking him to help you to get back to normal size. First off, in his more lucid moments he's explained several times there's no way to reverse the effects without another similar device. The only way to make one is with an incredibly rare space-borne material that came planet-side via meteor and apparently Mr. Livingstone's company owns the

entirety of the supply; all two pounds of it. The bigger problem is that he's in Mr. Livingstone's pocket. None of us know exactly what Mr. Livingstone did to him but he's... let's just say he..." Sarah trailed off for a moment trying to think of how to put it into words. "He sees Mr. Livingstone as a god." She finally said, bluntly. "He'll tattletale on you in a heartbeat if he even gets wind of a thought of someone trying to escape if he doesn't just attack you and try to stop you himself. He's literally a fanatic and takes it upon himself to police Tiny Town when he thinks there's something amiss. He's also the only one Mr. Livingstone really seems to trust out of all of us. That's why he lets the doctor be bigger."

Francine blinked in confusion, causing Sarah to smile ruefully.

"Bigger?" Francine asked.

"Yea. He's about double any of our sizes. So if you did cross him... well. It won't be a fair fight, so don't. Thankfully he mostly stays on the far side of town unless Mr. Livingstone specifically calls for him or he's up to something."

Trying to take all of this in was giving Francine a headache. She wanted nothing more than to just curl up in a bed somewhere and try to pretend none of this was happening. Then again most likely any bed she found that she could curl up in would be made of plastic and have felt sheets so even that would be a constant reminder of how tiny and helpless she was now. When Sarah elaborated on the expected performances they were supposed to give for Rufus, Francine couldn't suppress her scoff of indignation.

"So, we're just supposed to dance and sing for him whenever he wants like a living music box or wind up-toy?" Francine huffed, causing the wolfess to wince unconsciously at the insolent tone directed at Rufus.

"That's what he expects of us. Otherwise he leaves us to our own devices down here. Just... You just have to accept it, ok?"

Sarah tried to impress the importance of compliance on the newcomer. Even the tough wolf girl couldn't help but shudder whenever she thought of her own defiant behavior when she had first arrived. Her own behavior, and what Rufus had done to calmly yet ruthlessly crush it out of her that is. Unfortunately, as if on cue a dull rumble in the air like a mixture of thunder and a sonic boom shook the walls of the toy-diner they were sitting at. Francine was confused at first until she followed the gaze of the wolfess and realized it had been the sound of the bunker door decompressing and opening. Rufus was back. With a sense of determination fueled by the indignation of her situation, Francine began to march her way towards the park area she assumed was a standard meeting place for the wolf.

She planned to give the wolf a piece of her mind, shrunken or not.

"You can't do this to me. To us!" She yelled up angrily at him. "You can't treat people this way. Its ethically wrong, pretty sure It's illegal and frankly it makes you kind of a creep!"

Francine had been going on her tirade for a solid minute now. It was only through sheer indignant rage that she wasn't being cowed into silence by the objectively intimidating sight of the enormous wolf having to lean forward to see over his ample gut to the tiny little human girl yelling up at him. She should have been utterly terrified. There were dozens of ways he could simply end her at any moment if he desired to do so. Hell, all he'd have to do is take one half-step forward and he could just crush her underneath one of his polished dress shoes like nothing more than a mouthy cockroach. Rather than simply end her, though, he simply stood there and silently listened to her speak. Only when she finally seemed to have run out of breath and transitioned to simply staring up at him defiantly did he respond. He didn't yell, snarl, or even speak to her whatsoever. Instead of some similarly angry response at her insolence he knelt down, carefully placing the large picnic basket he had brought with him down in one of the side streets, then began unlacing his shoe.

Francine's confusion was evident on her face but the others that were crowded around her seemed to know exactly what was going on. If the defiant little human hadn't been so intent on staring down the wolf she might have noticed that the other shrinking victims had all begun to back away from her. They all knew what was coming. Rufus was going to have to 'train' her. The last thing they all saw as the look of angry defiance turn to fear on her face when a massive black-furred hand scooped her up and dumped her into the polished dress shoe right before he slipped it back on.

Her 'training' went on for days. She was kept around the wolf on an almost twenty-four-hour basis, though never in any place that anyone would want to be. When she wasn't trapped in his shoe being nearly suffocated by the weight of his foot like some kind of living insole then she was riding along in his back pocket, ready to be smothered into the seat cushion of any chair that he sat on without remorse. She'd had her clothes taken from her, stripped down to her birthday suit just as she had been when he first shrunk her. In some ways that was the worst part. It wasn't even that he was sexualizing her in her nudity. Like when he had cleaned and dressed her in those first few minutes after shrinking her, he seemed to simply glance right past her femininity and treated her as an object instead. It left her feeling helpless and exposed. It got worse that first night.

Instead of being allowed to sleep in the home that had been prepared for her she had been forced to sleep, still naked, in a bird cage hanging over Tiny Town. She was left there with a dim night-light glowing on the wall behind her, still naked, for everyone in town to see. She was clearly being made an example of to everyone down below, as well as herself. Since her rant against him he had yet to speak a single word to her, even when she was in the presence of others he was speaking to. When he gathered his evening entertainment in their transport basket, he'd set it down on the dining room table to give them time to set up while he went to retrieve his meal. It was one of the few times other than when she was left asleep in the

birdcage that he left her alone. When she approached the others though every single one of them would avert their gazes, refusing to talk too or even acknowledge her. Every last one of the other shrinking victims would avert their gaze or simply pretend she wasn't there, even Sarah. Even that ostracization paled in comparison to the humiliation of night he had fallen asleep on the couch with her.

She had spent most of the day stuffed in the tight confines of one of his front pockets. Of course, they were those tailor suit pockets, the kind that rich people have that are more for show than actually keeping anything. After all, when you're rich you don't need pockets. You can just hire people to carry things for you. So the enclosure had been tight enough that she'd essentially been pinned between a wall of fabric behind her and the cloth-covered mass of his thigh in front of her. Each time he'd taken a step she could feel the fabric strain and stretch across his prodigious mass, shifting her back and forth as if rubbing her across his outer thigh muscle. That hadn't been what had made it so awful, though. Apparently the day had taken quite the toll on him from the way he haphazardly had draped himself across the couch in his sitting room. Rufus had always given off a prim and proper air; the textbook definition of rich high-class society. It seemed only the inhabitants of Tiny Town ever really got to see him unwind a bit, and only in rare circumstances where he was either too tired or too fed up with whatever the day had brought to feel the need to keep up the facade. After all, why would he feel the need to put on a fake persona for his property?

When he'd done so he'd nearly crushed poor Francine in the process. First by flopping down and landing almost directly on where she had been trapped. Even with the protective padding of the couch cushions and the layer of soft fat surrounding his muscular thigh the entirety of the, to her, titanic wolf would have squashed her like a grape. Thankfully he'd just barely missed and landed square on his ass rather than at an angle on his thigh. The position had done little to improve her situation otherwise, though. With the fabric of his pants caught underneath him it had pulled skin tight around her, nearly suffocating the poor woman as the pressure constricted her rib cage and made it a strain to inflate her lungs properly. through sheer panic-driven desperation Francine had squirmed and struggled her way upwards until she had been able to grab the edge of his pocket and pull herself free. A gasp of relief burst from her lips, followed immediately after by several heavy pants as she struggled to regain her breath. Thankfully her breathing didn't seem to have disturbed Rufus, she didn't want to know if he was going to be mad or not that she'd crawled out of his pocket of her own accord. Then again her other option had been to suffocate so she didn't know how much worse it could have gotten.

When she dropped herself down from the pocket she'd found herself in a narrow, cloth-lined valley between the back of the couch and Rufus's side. There was hardly any space to move, even for her tiny form. There wasn't even enough space for her to have extended her arms to either side of her! Francine took a moment to examine her surroundings before finally glancing up at the wall that was Rufus' side. When she looked, though, she felt her cheeks immediately flushing with an involuntary blush. From the way that the cloth was bunched up and jutting out almost like the overhang of a cliff-face, she was pretty sure he must have

unbuttoned his shirt before flopping down, leaving his torso and belly exposed up above. She didn't know why she found this so embarrassing to her, the guy had been such a jerk to her... god, she couldn't even remember thanks to the way her 'punishments' had made the days start to blend together. She hated that, despite him having shrunk, kidnapped, then humiliated her over and over again she found herself developing an inexplicable attraction to him. Well, more of one beyond the visual attraction she shamefully admitted to herself she'd had the first time she'd seen him.

Her train of thought derailed when she saw the 'wall' that was the wolf's side beginning to shift. Concern flooded the little ballerina as she realized how easy it would be to end up crushed if he rolled over in this position. her concern morphed into resolve as she stared up at the flap of his shirt-hem hanging down nearby. After a deep breath to steel herself Francine backed up a few steps, then took a running leap to grab onto the hem of the shirt! She had been dancing for years, which meant she was in pretty good shape. Unfortunately, most of her bodily strength was in her legs, not her arms. Within seconds of holding on to the corner of the wolf's shirt her arms were already burning from the strain. It took every ounce of willpower and strength she could muster to pull herself bodily upwards until her feet could find purchase on the small lip of cloth where the shirt's hem had been folded over and sewn in. After a few seconds to catch her breath she returned her attention to the shirt and began climbing once more. She had to climb at an angle, as going straight up would have left her nothing to grab on to other than fistfuls of the thick fabric. climbing to the side, however, let her use the small holes that the shirt's buttons fit into as hand and footholds, making it hardly more difficult than climbing a ladder. Only a few minutes after pulling herself free from Rufus' pocket, Francine was letting out a contented laugh of victory as she flopped backwards off of the edge of the shirt and onto a hill of black fur and flesh. Then she immediately snapped up straight, realizing where she was. When you're climbing for your life, hoping you don't get crushed in the process, you don't have a lot of mental energy to think ahead. Now that she was 'safe', though, it abruptly hit her where she had climbed up too. Standing up and looking around she felt that heat return to her cheeks as she surveyed the landscape that was Rufus.

It was hard to forget that Rufus was bigger than her, bigger than all of the people of Tiny Town. Having spent a good portion of the last god-knew how long stuffed in pockets or shoes or any other number of places she had already pretty thoroughly internalized the drastic size difference between the two of them. It still didn't really help her actually visualize the true size disparity. Not like the view she had now did. She found herself standing atop the hill of Rufus' gut, feeling the thick ball of muscle and fat slowly rising and falling beneath her feet each time the wolf took a breath. with her the size of a barbie doll more or less, it really was like a hill. If she sprawled out on her front she could lay on top of his belly button, which to her was the size of a large bowl, and her fingers couldn't reach the top nor could her toes reach the bottom of his gut. She also got a much better look at just how built the wolf was. She'd always known he was fairly in shape despite his prodigious middle. None of them failed to notice how impressively his arms filled out the sleeves of his suits and shirts when he was around them. But now, she had an unobstructed view of his muscular pectorals. There was little softness too them, almost

entirely hard muscle that moved as a unit each time he inhaled or exhaled. someone may have mistaken him for just being fat when he walked by before, but anyone that saw him shirtless would have called him a tank long before they thought of him as a fat-ass. Not that his ass wasn't fat, mind you. Francine had spent an entire evening trapped beneath the prodigious backside, feeling its squeezable heft smothering her into the soft cushioning of the chair without crushing her. It was hard not to see how easily his size could go to someone's head, how he must feel so powerful when he was around all of them from Tiny Town. Power was pretty attractive, after all...

Francine abruptly shook her head and reached up to slap her hands against her cheeks. the little human cursed herself under her breath over and over for several moments as she tried to clear those thoughts from her mind. She couldn't be attracted to the wolf; he had kidnapped her! Kidnapped all of them! He didn't even treat them like pets, much less people. They were, SHE was just property to him! Yet even as those angry thoughts rolled through her head trying to wash the attraction away, a little voice rolled through her mind and whispered a thought she'd not dared to let form in her head before.

'He does care about us, though.'

Despite her disobedience he had never once yelled at any of them or even shown any anger. Regardless of how much she fought him and protested, he was never rough with her. Unforgiving, maybe, in the way he was disciplining her but never harsh or violent. If anything, as she thought back on it, he had taken great pains to ensure that she never actually got hurt whenever he stuffed her somewhere. She thought back to the extra time he spent putting on his shoe when she was in it, realizing he had been ensuring she was positioned so his entire weight would never come down on her and crush her. how he had only sat on her when sitting on one of his particularly soft chairs, and always with her sticking out far enough that the lion's share of his weight was on the cushion, not her. The harder she thought, the more she realized that he had never actually hurt her a single time since shrinking her. And he could have so easily. She'd felt the power in his grip, felt the weight of his body. he could crush her like a grape just by squeezing his fist around her. he could crush her rib cage like a graham cracker under one of his toes or could have just swallowed her whole if he'd wanted. But he didn't. He punished her, disciplined her... but never hurt her.

Glancing around once more at the landscape of wolf sprawled out on the couch as if to ensure no one else was around, Francine slowly lowered herself down onto the wolf's belly. Her arms and legs splayed spread-eagle across his gut, testing just how much of it she could cover with her body. Spoiler: it wasn't much. As she did, she buried her face into the thick black fur covering his body and struggled to suppress a faint giggle. She'd never really thought about it before but his fur was so luscious and soft. It felt amazing against her bare skin. Better still, it was warm. It was like laying on top of one of those thick, fuzzy blankets right after you pulled it out of the dryer. So lost was she in her guilty indulgence of her massive captor, that she didn't even seem to notice him starting to shift position until it was far, far too late.

The massive wolf began to roll over. The couch groaned slightly under the shifting weight and Francine took that as a cue to grab on. She should have probably been trying to scramble to her feet and running, but when the ground starts to move underneath you then your first response is to grab on to it. As he rolled, the little human's eyes went wide. At first, she thought he was going to roll off of the couch, which would have ended up with him landing face down right on top of her. She doubted she could survive the full weight of Rufus falling on her even if she had his belly to soften the blow. Thankfully, he was rolling in the opposite direction. Her thankfulness lasted all of a second before she realized what her fate was going to be instead of simply being crushed. Her loud curse came as a muffled grunt as she found herself plastered face-down into the wolf's belly. With him having rolled the opposite direction she hadn't been crushed beneath him, but rather simply pinned between his gut and the back cushions of the couch. no matter how much she squirmed or struggled she couldn't move an inch even despite the, thankfully, malleable girth of the wolf's belly. There was enough give for her to be able to angle her head to the side and wedge her head into a small wrinkle of the couch cushion that gave her an avenue to breath. other than that, though, she was trapped.

Francine had no idea how long she lay trapped there, trapped within the admittedly soothing warmth of Rufus's stomach. She could feel it rhythmically pressing in and squeezing against her, only to relax and retreat slightly with each of the massive wolf's breaths. More than once she drifted off only to be woken when he'd shift position slightly and momentarily squash her tighter into the couch cushion. When he finally stirred and rolled onto his back once more she didn't even notice for the first few moments. By the time she had regained her senses the wolf had already regained his own and was smirking down the landscape that was his body at the frazzled, naked little human sprawled out atop his gut. Poor Francine was soaked in sweat, her hair ruffled and frizzing in every direction and her cheeks were flushed beet red both from the heat of Rufus' body and from her own embarrassment at how much she actually had kind of enjoyed herself. When she finally looked up at the looming billboard-sized visage of the wolf's muzzle her breath caught in her throat. He was staring down at her with a clearly expectant look on his face, as if waiting for her to say something. He clearly realized where she had been and what she had been through for the last god-knew how long, though she couldn't tell if he actually had been awake at the time and had rolled over on purpose or if it had been a happy accident. What she did know was what he wanted to hear. Despite her pride and indignation still burning inside of her, she felt a different emotion welling up and overriding it. Maybe it was a sense of defeat, attraction, inevitability, or simply some more primal aspect of her finally accepting submission before an obviously superior being. Regardless of the reasoning, she found herself giving a nervous little curtsy despite her haggard and exhausted appearance.

"G-Good morning... Sir."

Her voice came out hoarse and ragged, only then realizing how dry her throat was. Oddly that wasn't what confused her about her own speech. Rather, she had simply meant to say good morning... the sir had seemed to come out almost as a reflex. That thought sent her blushing all over again at the realization of her unconscious deference to him. It was hard to keep fires of

indignation running on someone so much more powerful than her, who had been so gentle with her when he had absolutely no reason to be. It was that mix of benevolence and overwhelming power that had compelled her to address him with an honorific she felt he deserved.

Either that or she'd finally succumbed to Stockholm syndrome.

The words seemed to have the intended effect, however, and the Wolf's smile nearly doubled in size. Any other time she would have been concerned about seeing so many teeth, smile or no, even if they weren't all the size of swords. Now, though, there was a sense of calm that came over her when she saw his muzzle, teeth or not. She knew he wouldn't hurt her. All she had to do was behave and she'd be treated as good as all of his other treasures.

"There. That wasn't so hard now, was it?" His voice rumbled through the air even as a quiet murmur. "It's admirable to have fire and passion, but its Intelligent to know your place."

His words sent a tingle up and down her spine. She was embarrassed to think about how much him speaking directly to her made her happy. It had been days since he, or anyone else for that matter, had spoken to her or even acknowledged her existence. That acknowledgment coming from him before everyone else only further solidified that admiration for him. When she behaved and showed respect, she was treated nicely after all. What more could someone ask for than the attention and adoration of someone so much greater than them?

This time when his massive paw reached down to scoop her up she didn't shy away or flinch. Maybe it was her newfound confidence that he had no intention of hurting her, or maybe it was just that she was getting used to being manhandled. either way, she didn't make so much as a sound when the tree-trunk like fingers wrapped around her and lifted her up off of his bare torso. When he raised her up to dangle over his face he began to inspect her with an appraising eye. Suddenly she felt incredibly self-conscious of her appearance, trying to use the arm that wasn't pinned to her side by his fingers to straighten her hopelessly messy hair. She was in no condition to be looked over by Mr. Livingstone. When he gave a huff of obvious disapproval that showed he agreed, she felt a sense of loss at disappointing him.

"We'll need to get you cleaned up, though. Poor little thing's gotten all messy and frazzled. Don't worry, though."

When Rufus smiled at her this time there was the tiniest hint of a playful edge to his expression. When he spoke again, Francine felt her heart leap up into her throat and she swore that her head was going to catch on fire with how hard she was blushing. It was all she could manage to croak out a "Yes, sir" to him before he began to roll himself off of the couch and lumber his half-dressed self down the halls. She knew he'd get her cleaned up. Then she could rejoin the others in Tiny Town, now with a better understanding of their deference towards the wolf. He was good to them, after all. He provided for them and went through all of this effort to keep them comfortable when he could treat them like disposable nothings or food. She started

imagining herself prancing through the streets in that flowing, green sundress he had put her in the first night just ahead of his footsteps. Darting this way and that in the steps of a new dance she was already choreographing in her head that kept her just barely avoiding each of his ground-shaking footsteps. She wanted to show off for the others, and to show her appreciation for Rufus. Maybe she'd call the performance 'The King and I'. She was pretty sure something else already had that title, but she felt that Rufus deserved it a lot more than they did. But before she got to prance her way back among the others she had to get cleaned up.

Her mind wandered to ideas of a massive, clear-water lake stretching on for what seemed like a mile. Hills of thick soapy suds rising up from the water's surface like islands of soap. A massive landmass protruding from the middle of the lake that she gleefully swam towards. Approaching and clamoring up the curved surface until she flopped happily, soaking wet, right on top of it. Only when she had caught her breath from her frantic swim did she think of herself smiling up at the sky overhead, where a black-furred, lupine muzzle would be grinning back down at the little human sprawled out atop his naked gut. Everyone in Tiny Town would get to see her little performance soon. But first...

She got to share a bath with Rufus.