

Rising Above Petty Crime

By: Dragonien

Soft grunts of effort were the only sounds filtering through the otherwise silent alleyway off of the main market street. The little orange-furred fox struggled to lift himself up over the edge of the one-story roof across from his goal. When he finally got his arms over the edge, rather than pull himself up all the way, he braced his feet against the top of the wall and launched himself off of it. As he sailed the four feet across the width of the alley he twisted in midair, arms outstretched, and just barely got the tips of his fingers on the ledge of the second story window. From there it only took a bit more effort to haul his minuscule weight up and through the unlocked window into the shop he intended to burgle.

Tyson hated stealing. Or, more accurately, he hated the problems that arose from stealing. If he was being honest with himself, he kind of liked sneaking past guards and passers-by, slipping through the shadows to snatch up the valuables out of someone's home or business. He liked the thrill of bumping into someone and snatching their coin-purse with them none the wiser. He could even enjoy the dangerous thrill of running from guards or an angry mark that had caught him mid-theft and using his agility and wiles to lose them in the confusing streets and back alleys of the slums. No, he didn't hate the thrilling, dangerous life of being a thief. What he hated was doing it for others. He hated having a quota beyond his own needs, of being forced to pull jobs that he normally wouldn't risk. If he was going to get caught and punished for his thievery, he wanted it to be on him, not because someone else was pushing him beyond his comfort and skill level. He enjoyed stealing, but only on his terms.

Which is why he absolutely hated being a member of the Wolf Moon bandits.

They had all but raised him since he was a boy. He had no idea where or who his father was, most likely some drifter that had passed through town and spent a night with his mother then left with no intention of returning. She, in turn, had wound up as one of the Wolf Moon's camp servants until she died of a fever when he was young. By then the Wolf Moon members had already accepted him as one of their own, if not very high up in their hierarchy. At first, he had just continued where his mother had left off, helping to cook and clean up after the others. As he grew older, though sadly not much larger, some of the other members of the camp had decided to start using him for more 'adventurous' jobs. They'd started with using him as bait, letting people traveling the roads think he was an abandoned orphan only to be raided at sword point when they stopped to help him. More than once when they would risk burgling in the nearby merchant town they would take advantage of his diminutive size by lifting him up to small windows no one else could fit through so he could crawl down and unlock doors for him. Years went by and they taught him the basics of pick pocketing and would periodically send him into the city for days or weeks to see what he could scrounge up. Of course, he never got to keep most of what he brought back. Clan tax, they called it, to pay them back for raising him all of these years.

Even now after he had finally come of age he was still treated as little more than a child by the others in the clan. Not that he could entirely blame him. Despite finally having reached maturity he was

still barely larger than a child. He was a scrawny little five-foot-tall stick of a fox, all lanky limbs and wiry frame. The only real benefit to his tiny frame is that no one really took him seriously as any kind of threat, so while he got little respect among the Wolf Moon clan, he still could bring in quite a haul through petty theft and pick-pocketing. Unfortunately, today he had been given a specific task by their leader to case a new shop that had just opened up. Whenever new shops opened, he was always the one to scope it out and see what kinds of valuables they carried that could be easily fenced, that way they knew whether or not it was worth keeping an eye on.

Tyson wished he hadn't come in the moment he made it through the window. The air was filled with an offensive smell that bordered on toxic, burning his sensitive vulpine nostrils every time he inhaled too deeply. The smell was some mixture of crushed plants and herbs, way too much burning incense, and a half dozen other things his sense of smell was too overwhelmed to sort out from the collective odor. As he started to walk around what looked to him like a small office, he saw dozens of strange symbols and unrecognizable letters scrawled across pieces of parchment scattered across a massive oaken desk. Tyson had no idea what any of it said but he did know what it meant. The owner of the shop was a magic user. Those symbols and pictures must have been some kind of spell formula, not that the fox had any knowledge of magic at all beyond being able to recognize something as magical when he saw it.

"That's about as good of a reason as any to get out of here. Last thing I need is some pissed off wizard turning me into a toad or setting me on fire."

Tyson paused halfway through climbing up over the edge of the windowsill he had entered from. He had very little desire to get on the bad side of a wizard but he had about as much desire to get on the bad side of the Wolf Moon's leader Orion and the rest of the clan. He had spent most of the day gathering information about Merchant Caravans rather than pickpocketing passerby's and if he went back to camp without any tangible goods, they probably wouldn't give his share of dinner. A quick glance around the small office didn't show him any immediate valuables in sight, at least none that he could easily recognize the value of. All of it was either notebooks, cheap looking jewelry they gave off an unsettling aura that made him not want to touch it, a few vials of unknown liquid scattered around shelves seemingly at random and other unimportant knick-knacks. Just as he was about to give up he noticed on the second from the highest Shelf on one of the corner bookshelves was a small Leather Pouch that looked very much like a coin purse.

"Bingo." The little fox whispered aloud.

Unfortunately, with his diminutive height and the bookshelf going nearly to the ceiling the Shelf was about 2 feet beyond his reach even on the tips of his toes. Doing his best to move silently, he planted one foot on the first Shelf, then started climbing his way up the first three levels of the Shelf until his face was at the same height as the coin purse. With a satisfied grin he snatched the purse up, excitedly hefting the full-to-bursting pouch of coins. If this was all gold like the peek through the drawstring led him to believe this one bag held as much money as he was usually able to lift from people on the streets in a week! Before he could enjoy his newfound glee much, his excitement faltered at the sudden sound of footsteps coming up the stairs.

He had let himself get distracted by thoughts of praise by the others that he hadn't been paying attention to the sounds of movement from downstairs. In his panicked rush to climb down the shelf and escape before he was caught his foot slipped on the second shelf and he toppled backwards, reflexively grabbing on to the upper shelves and bringing the entire bookshelf down with him. The chorus of wood smashing against wood, the sound of books being sent flying and the shattering of glass filled the air and gave pause to the footsteps down the hall. Thankfully the shelf had caught on the edge of the desk and was now resting at an angle instead of having smashed directly on top of Tyson, though that hasn't stopped the contents of the shelves from piling on top of him. This included several of those bottles of mystery liquid, one of which having hit the edge of the desk to smash open and shower Tyson in a spray of sweet-scented purple liquid that made his skin tingle wherever it soaked through the fur.

With no more reason for stealth the little fox desperately scrambled his way towards the window without a care for things falling down or being knocked over. Just as he had reached the edge of the window sill he heard the door burst open behind him. A brief glance over his shoulder saw the shocked face of a gray-haired rat in the standard brown robes of a wizard. He didn't stick around to look any harder than that and instead jumped down from the second-story window, painfully rolling as he hit the alleyway below to minimize the damage from his fall. The moment he had gotten his feet back under him he had ran, not stopping to look back at the window to see if the wizard was giving chase. He didn't stop when he made it out onto the main market street, nor even when a familiar guard that often caught him in the act of pickpocketing saw him run past and yelled for him to stop. He didn't stop running until he had made it through the small hole in the city wall he used to sneak in and out and had stumbled his way deep into the surrounding forest to finally collapse out of sheer exhaustion.

He had been running for all he was worth but running was one of the things he was good at which left him surprised at how tired he found himself. Sprawled out in a small grassy clearing it was all he could do to keep his eyes open as his chest heaved and body burned from a combination of overexertion and the bruises from his fall. He didn't even notice that his fur, while slick from sweat, showed no signs of sticky residue left over from that potion that had spilled on him nor did he feel any remnants of that lingering tingle he had originally felt. In fact, all he did notice was how unusually tired he was and all he could do is make note of the unusual exhaustion before the weight of his eyelids became too heavy. Finally surrendering to the inevitable, his eyes closed and his consciousness slipped away the moment they did.

Hours passed before Tyson finally awoke. His eyes drifted slowly open, a faint smile still lingering on his muzzle. He couldn't quite remember what it was but he had been having a pretty nice dream. He felt so relaxed and well-rested he was sorely tempted to just go back to sleep. Then he remembered what had happened before he had passed out and sat bolt upright, suddenly wide awake and fully alert. Frantically, he looked his surroundings over as if expecting to see a ring of guards or wild animals or any combination thereof ready to arrest or attack him. Thankfully he was just as alone in the clearing as he had been when he had passed out. Checking his pockets and belt he found all of his belongings were still on him including the hefty purse of gold he had snatched from that magicians' shop. No guards, no wild animals, and no robbers stealing his things while he slept; It was almost too good to be true.

Thinking that it was well past time for him to get home he strained to push himself up to his feet. Or at least, he thought he would strain. He expected his body, especially his legs, to be sore and unresponsive from the previous overexertion but surprisingly he found himself hopping upright with no effort whatsoever. There was no burn or ache of overused muscles and no soreness from his body recovering. He felt great, better than great actually! He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so spry and energetic. The little fox started to walk back and forth experimentally, wondering if maybe he had lost the feeling in his body and that's what was masking the negative sensations that should be drowning in. Then, he tripped on a tree branch and fell face-first into the grass. No, that had hurts. He could still feel just fine. Tyson felt good, and that sensation was uncommon enough that he didn't really feel much obligation to dig too deep into the reason why and decided to just enjoy it instead. Besides, he had other things to worry about besides an unusually recuperative nap.

Like the fact that he couldn't remember the last time he had been so hungry, his stomach growling loud enough that for the first second or so he thought a wild animal had been sneaking up on him. He had gone hungry before, nearly starved to death once or twice so he was no stranger to hunger. What was surprising was how close he felt to the same amount of hunger he felt when he was starving. It wasn't quite as uncomfortable or painful as he hadn't been going through it for days or weeks as his body hadn't started to cannibalize itself just yet, but if the empty void that his stomach currently felt like was the only indication he had to go by he would have never have guessed that he ate breakfast just that morning. With his mind firmly set on sating the ravenous hunger that was overtaking him and returning to a more secure environment, Tyson set off towards the Wolf Moon camp deeper inside the forest.

It took a couple of hours for him to make it near the Wolf Moon camp deep in the forest. By the time he was nearing the simplistic log gate the sun was setting and what little light filtered through the dense canopy of the forest was starting to wane. The energized feeling had started to wear off a little bit but he had still made excellent time through the dense forest without breaking even a sweat. Hunger was still gnawing at his belly like a ravenous wolf and he had started to feel a little bit of that weariness that came with starvation by the time he had made it to the gate, otherwise he expected he wouldn't have even had been able to tell that he had just hiked through dense foliage for hours. A voice had begun to yell out a demand he identify himself the moment he had come into view beyond the thick brush, but Tyson cut them off before they got more than a word in.

"It's Tyson, Jevin, just let me in dammit! Don't give me that password shit, you know they probably gave me the wrong one on purpose again anyway."

A moment of silence passed before one of the two wrapped log gate doors swung inwards with a loud creak. Standing in the newly revealed opening was a burly looking male tiger with three-pronged claw-shaped scar going down one side of his face. The Tiger's muscular arms were crossed over his broad chest as he stared down the scrawny fox that, were the two of them standing side-by-side, wouldn't even be as tall as the tiger's chest.

"Who the hell are you and where is Tyson? That little runt doesn't have the balls to talk to me like that" came to tiger's deep growl of a voice.

“I’ve had too long of a day and I’m too hungry to put up with bullshit today you overgrown house cat.”

Tyson reach down to his belt and pulled the bulging coin stack he had taken from the wizard off of it, tossing it to the looming tiger in front of him. One of the tiger’s arms uncurled and caught it from midair with ease, hefting the bag curiously and then eyes going a bit wide when his thumb pulled back to draw string enough for him to peek inside. The tiger’s muzzle twisted into a grin and, as the fox walked by, he bumped the back of his fist against Tyson’s own fist which had pre-emptively raised in expectation of the show of approval.

“Damn kid, you finally work up the balls to try purse snatching in the noble district?”

“No. I was casing a new shop that’s opening up and found this perfectly good bag of money sitting around unattended.”

“Ah, that makes more sense. For a second there I was worried you might have actually done some real work.”

“Asshole.”

“Runt.”

Despite the aggressive and insulting way they were talking to one another both were wearing smiles by this point. Jevin was probably the one that Tyson considered most as a friend out of the clan. Both of them were a bit of oddball outcasts, him a runt of a fox while Jevin was the only feline in an otherwise all canine gang of bandits. Not that Jevin put up with nearly as much shit as Tyson did, having earned his spot as the clan’s second-in-command by not hesitating to beat anyone they gave him shit into unconsciousness. As Tyson started to walk past the tiger, Jevin moved up to follow after him. As they walked towards the mess area of their little camp Tyson started to rattle off what little tidbits of information, he had been able to gain about upcoming caravan routes and what little he had seen of the magician’s shop. He succinctly left out the fact that he had nearly been caught as the last thing he wanted to hear was them giving him shit about that.

That night Tyson easily ate four times as much as he usually did. Granted he was a small Fox so his normal meal size was about half of what the others ate but that still meant he was eating twice as much as anyone else. More than a few people, Jevin included, gave him several odd looks as they watched the little fox greedily devour as much food as he could get his hands on. Tyson, for his part was just glad to finally fill the void his stomach had become over the course of the afternoon. When his appetite was finally sated his stomach was actually visibly bulging out words ever so slightly from the sheer volume of food he had ingested. He had to put up with a few jokes from some of the others teasing him that getting fat wouldn’t make him any less of a runt. Normally Tyson would be throwing insults right back at them, trying to assert himself through sheer willpower in place of physical brute force but he was too contented with his meal and just ignored them. Despite the fact that he had taken a long nap only a few hours ago the sheer volume

of food in his stomach and the effort of beginning to process it had his body demanding more sleep. With no good reason coming to mind to deny its demands, he excused himself back to his little tent in the corner of their camp and was asleep the moment his head touched his bedroll.

The sharp crashing sound of metal hitting metal boomed around Tyson like a gong and jerked him from his sleep as violently as anything could have. He jerked upright so quickly that his head smacked against the support pole of his little one-person tent and sent the whole thing collapsing down on top of him in a pile of wooden poles and canvas.

“Rise and shine, squirt! It’s time for sword training! If you’re not at the training yard in 5 minutes I’m coming back to set your tent on fire again!”

Jevin’s words were almost as loud as the sound of him banging two metal shields together outside of Tyson’s tent. If it wasn’t for the fact that the fox new full well that the tiger wouldn’t hesitate to make good on his threat, as he had actually done a year or so ago, he would have laid back down to sleep again out of sheer obstinate spite. He had forgotten it was saturday, the day that the tiger forced him into weapons training with him. Part of Tyson knew that Jevin was just trying to help him learn to defend himself and maybe even put on a bit of muscle in the process, but the lion’s share of him couldn’t get over the fact that every one of these training sessions always ended with him embarrassing himself in front of the others. All of their swords and shields were too heavy for him and he got tired of everyone laughing at him for having to lug around one of their longswords like it were a claymore.

After much cussing under his breath and almost a full minute of flailing around beneath the heavy canvas of his tent, Tyson finally freed himself from underneath it. Idly he noted that his stomach was audibly growling again despite having gorged himself last night to near immobility. Unfortunately, he didn’t have time to get breakfast unless he wanted his tent to be burned to ashes so, sullenly, he scrambled to pull on his breeches and tunic. He barely had time to register how tight they were on him and he made a note to himself that he needed to finally get some new ones since these were more patchwork than they were the original material at this point.

With the extra minute or so it took him to get dressed he barely made it to the large circle of flattened earth they used as a training ground in time. The muscular tiger had already been in the process of lighting one of the torches they used around the camp at night when he saw the little fox approached.

“Ah there you are. Damn, and here I thought I was going to get to burn someone’s tent again.” Jevin teased with just a hint of genuine disappointment in his voice.

“Let’s just get this over with, I’m starving.”

Clearly disappointed that Tyson wasn’t rising to his provocation, the tiger took his place on the opposite side of the training ring. Tyson grabbed for one of the large, blunted longswords hanging on a rack nearby. As he jerked on the handle the little fox found himself stumbling backwards as he hefted the sword up off the ground much more easily than he had expected. It was still heavy, mind you, but to his

surprise he could actually lift the thing without using both hands. That didn't mean he could properly wield it one handed, but usually he struggled to even get the tip of it off the ground until he had both hands on it and his legs braced. For a brief moment he started to think about the unusual sense of well-being that he had been in since yesterday but was given little time to ponder it before the sharp clang of steel hitting steel rung out in the air.

Purely out of reflex, Tyson had jerked the sword up to block a casual overhead strike from the tiger. Both he and Jevin were surprised to find he had actually successfully blocked the strike. Granted he had been driven down on to one knee even with one hand on the hilt and the other bracing the flat of the blade on the far end, but any other day that strike would have knocked Tyson onto the ground and sent his sword skittering away. Both of them simply stared for a moment at each other in surprise until Tyson's muzzle twisted into a grin and, in a surge of uncharacteristic confidence, he angled his sword to one side to deflect Jevin's blade off of his own and charged forward to ram his shoulder into the tiger's gut. A second later, Tyson was on the ground clutching a rapidly forming bruise on his shoulder, his groan of pain drowned out by the booming laughter of Jevin.

"Sun and Moon, kid. You actually had me worried for a second there!" Jevin guffawed. "I think that's the first time you ever blocked one of my sword strikes without being sent sprawling! Still think you're a bit too scrawny to be trying to use the rest of your body as a weapon though."

He was right, of course. It didn't matter how good of shape he was in he still was barely a hundred pounds, soaking wet, of fox and that wasn't going to do much to the wall of muscle that was Jevin even if he full on tackled the tiger at a dead run. Despite that, he still felt a renewed sense of confidence and pushed himself back to his feet with his sword at the ready. Tyson had no idea why he felt so good recently but if it meant he had a chance to actually put on a not-embarrassing showing during training then who was he to question it.

An hour later the little fox was laying on his back, chest heaving in exhausted panting. Jevin was still standing over him with naught but a few strands of hair out of place on his head and his massive broadsword hefted over his shoulders. The tiger had still made near-effortless work of Tyson, which was no surprise. But despite that, both of them knew it was clearly the best showing Tyson had ever put on. Being able to actually hold the sword properly upright and not be sent flying with the momentum of it every time he swung it had made it a lot easier to actually block and deflect Jevin's blows. Jevin, for his part, commented on Tyson's improvement with the typical sarcasm that made it hard to tell if he was serious or not. Tyson didn't care, though. He was simply happy that he hadn't been flung around like a ragdoll.

When he had finally regained his breath and gotten back to his feet Jevin had already wandered off as he usually did during Tyson's after-training recovery periods. Usually at this point Tyson would have passed out from the beating he had taken and would be asleep well into the early afternoon but, despite still being knocked around liberally by Jevin, he felt good. It was that muscle soreness like after an intense workout that made you feel accomplished rather than miserable. Now that he wasn't being assaulted by someone four times his mass and had time to take stock, though, his hunger came screaming full force to the front of his mind.

Just like yesterday he felt like his stomach was all but caving in on itself, ready to devour his internal organs if it wasn't fed immediately. With his stomach absolutely refusing to be denied any longer, he made his way over towards the mess area. Again, like last night, he devoured well beyond what was his normal amount of food. Thankfully that morning most of the camp had left for a week or so of camping out and raiding the caravan roads he had gotten them the information for on his last trip in to town. That meant there was almost no one still left in camp and more than enough food left from what the camp cook had made that morning. After gorging himself for the second time in as many days on enough food to feed two fully grown men his body once more began demanding more sleep. With most of the others in the camp gone he had little to do around camp nor was there much reason to go back into town so there was little hesitation in going back to his little corner of the camp and curling up for an early morning nap.

It was when he awoke hours later that he started to notice something wasn't right. The primary indicator being that as he started to awaken and stretch his arms and legs out several sharp ripping sounds filled his little one-person tent as shirt and pants burst several of their seams simultaneously. The unexpected sound helped kick his brain into full consciousness and he rapidly started to notice how tight all of his clothing felt, even after much of it had ripped open to alleviate the pressure. Throwing the thick fur of his bedroll off of himself the little fox looked down at his now partially destroyed clothes and was met with a startling realization. This little fox didn't look quite so little anymore.

The sight was almost comical with how tight and ill-fitting his clothing was on him now. It looked like an adult had tried to put on one of their kids clothing. His pants no longer reached all the way towards his ankles, having drawn up just underneath his calf. His shirt similarly didn't even reach down past his belly button anymore and the sleeves would have ridden up well past his biceps if they hadn't been ripped open. Ripped open by, what Tyson was amazed to realize were, actual biceps. Not just the designated place those muscle groups were supposed to be on someone's arm, but a visible rounded bulge of muscle distorting the shape of what had previously been a smooth and lanky arm with no definition to it. Now that he had noticed that he realized he wasn't just taller but the rest of him had beefed up noticeably as well. He wasn't going to be wrestling Jevin into submission anytime soon but his stomach now had a tiny bit of definition to it, the faintly visible lines of a budding 4-pack of abs showing around his belly button. His shoulders must have broadened a little bit to make room for new pectoral muscles that gave his chest a firmer, flat appearance in place of the thin slightly rounded shape they had before. Most of the damage to his pants had been done by the new girth of his thighs which looked to have gotten the lion's Share of this enhancement as his pants had ripped open on either side of his thighs and down his backside from the new thickness of his glutes and hips. He was still small by nearly any standard, but he certainly didn't look like the runt he had been only yesterday.

And that's when the realization hit him that this had just happened. He had always wanted to be bigger but he just didn't seem to have the disposition for it. Years of living the semi-rough life of a bandit, or at least a bandit-adjacent position, including constant runs through the forest and weekly training sessions with the camp's second-in-command since he had come of age had done almost nothing to put on so much as a single visible pound of muscle on him. It had kept him from getting fat but that was about it. And yet here he was, in the span of 12 hours it looked almost like he had gone through an entire session of

puberty. These weren't just things that happened out of nowhere, and for all of his physical failings Tyson had never been stupid. The only possible explanation came to him almost immediately.

That potion.

Back when he had been casing that wizard's shop and had fallen off the shelf there had been a potion that had spilled all over him. Now that he thought about it, he never remembered actually washing any of it off of him yet by the time he had gotten out of the city he was bone dry without even residual stickiness in his fur to signify anything had been spilled on him. He had no idea what had been in it but could only assume it must have been absorbed through his skin, and he sure as hell had absolutely no reason to complain about the potion's effects. Hell, he was sorely tempted to run back to town right now and try to find more of that stuff. Unfortunately, those thoughts were derailed by a much more pressing desire that made itself known with a loud growl coming from his stomach. He was hungry again.

It was quite a shock for the aging wolf matron and the young rabbit girl who managed the camp's domestic needs to see the now noticeably larger and inadequately clothed fox approaching their little cooking pavilion with single-minded determination. They hadn't quite started on dinner yet since they didn't have nearly as many people to feed but that didn't stop Tyson from greedily digging into everything that was left over from breakfast, nor from starting to dig into some of the preserved foods. Now that he was actually paying attention, he swore he could actually feel his body digesting the food almost as quickly as he was eating it. It made sense to him, this much growth couldn't come out of nowhere. His hair trigger, seemingly endless appetite seemed to be his body's way of demanding fuel to power the transformation going on inside of him and he was all too happy to give it whatever it wanted. By the time he had finally polished off everything that was left of the morning stew and two entire loaves of bread he swore he must have gained another inch and height and at least a couple of pounds more muscle mass from the way his clothes felt even tighter and had developed a few new rips in them.

Having heard the commotion about halfway through when their camp matron had been loudly protesting of the fox digging into their food stores Jevin had come to investigate, arriving just as Tyson was finishing his meal. To say the tiger was shocked would have been a drastic understatement. Initially he had reached for his sword, not recognizing Tyson for a few seconds and thinking some intruder that had snuck in and was stealing food from them. When he noticed the familiar markings a Tyson's fur his hand dropped away from his sword and instead combed through his hair as his shock and outrage turned to bewilderment.

"Holy hells, Tyson, is that you?"

Jevin's voice broke Tyson from the food coma he had been slipping into. A wide grin spread across the fox's face as he pushed himself up to his feet. Both Jevin's shock and Tyson's glee grew when Tyson stood and found himself now eye level with the top of the Tigers chest, just below his collarbone. He definitely had to have gained at least 6 inches in height since just this morning.

"Oh, hey there Jevin." Tyson greeted him casually, words spoken as if nothing was out of the ordinary yet also dripping with a smug self-satisfaction.

“What the hell happened to you kid?”

“Remember that magic shop I told you about yesterday? When I was crawling out of the window I accidentally spilled something from one of the shelves on myself. Apparently, whatever it was has had some very desirable side effects, as you can see.”

The tiger, for his part, still seem to be struggling to understand what exactly was going on. On one hand he was happy for the kid to have finally filled out a little bit, even if it had happened through rather unnatural circumstances. On the other hand, he also felt a budding sense of worry both for Tyson’s well-being as he knew nothing about magic and had no idea if there would be other side effects to whatever was going on. And somewhere deep in the back of his mind there was a little spark of wariness as the Tiger’s instincts upgraded the fox’s existence from a dismissible adopted charge to an, if minor, potential threat. Before the size and skill difference had been so enormous between the two of them that the tiger could have effortlessly subdued Tyson with a single hand without any effort expended whatsoever. But now, even though he was absolutely confident that he could handle the fox with ease it wasn’t so visibly apparent anymore. What made it worse was that the fox was giving Jevin a very disconcerting, eager grin.

“Hey, Jevin. How about some afternoon sparring practice?”

It shouldn’t have bothered the tiger nearly as much as it did. There was still no way the fox would be a real challenge as he was simply far too outmatched in both size and skill even with his new enhancement. But none of that made that strange feeling of concern welling up in his chest go away. It also did nothing to stifle the sound of the tiger swallowing nervously, a sound that only made the fox grin that much wider.

As expected, Jevin wiped the floor with Tyson just as he had every other time they had sparred together. However, neither of them failed to notice how much more effort Jevin had to actually put into the fight. With his new strength Tyson was able to actually wield his sword properly without it pulling him along with it every time he swung it. Add to that the extra reach he had gained with his new larger body and longer limbs and the fight ended with Jevin actually having to block several counter-attacks that Tyson had never been able to manage in previous fights. Even as Jevin walked off, leaving Tyson in an exhausted heap on the ground just as he did every other time, he couldn’t suppress the sense of foreboding that sent shivers down his spine. It wasn’t until he was on the other side of the camp that the tiger finally started to recognize what the feeling was. It was that feeling that a teacher gets when they feel like they’ve been training their student a bit too well and now there’s a real genuine fear that the student might outdo them.

Tyson, for his part, had never been happier. Sure, he’s still gotten his ass thoroughly kicked, he had plenty of bruises to show where Jevin clearly had not been taking it as easy on him as he usually did. But that only made him that much happier, knowing that the tiger finally had to take him at least a little bit seriously. And he had no intention of stopping here. It was hard to put into words but he could still feel that whatever that potion had done to him was still happening. That burning ache in his muscles that signal he had push them to their limit already felt like it was starting to fade ever so slightly. At the same time, he

could feel his stomach gurgling loudly in protest, demanding more food despite the fact that he had eaten not two hours ago. It was like his body had become hyper reactive to exertion so the more he strained himself the more his body tried to compensate for the strain and the more food it demanded the fuel the necessary changes.

By now several of the other clan members that have been left behind from the raiding party had either heard about or seen the fight between the new and improved Tyson and their second-in-command, Jevin. When he made it over to the mess tent for lunch he was relegated to the back of the line as usual. This time, however, those normal looks of amusement that everyone gave him when they saw him as the helpless runt had transformed into either looks of mild concern or wary challenge. It was more than just the tiger that had started to see Tyson in a new light, as a potential challenger, even if he was still the smallest clan member. This time when Tyson took more than his share instead of finding it an amusing joke about the runt eating too much one of the wolves decided to confront him about it.

“Taking a bit too much for yourself aren’t you, runt?” a lanky but athletic brown wolf growled testily.

Tyson may have been overlooked due to his miniscule size from most challenges of dominance since he had been part of the clan but he had still seen more than enough of them to recognize one. Again, he was many things, but stupid wasn’t one of them. Rather than indulging the growing concern that he was biting off more than he could chew and getting ahead of himself, Tyson suppressed those thoughts. Then, standing to face the wolf who still had a good six inches of height on him, responded in the way any other equal in the clan would have.

With a sucker punch.

He slammed his fist into the wolf’s gut with every ounce of force he could muster. Admittedly he was almost as shocked as the wolf was when the wolf’s breath exploded from his muzzle in a forced exhalation from the impact of the punch. Even more so when the force of the punch made the wolf stumble backwards several steps. Tyson stepped forward to follow the stumbling wolf, slamming one of his feet down on the wolf’s boot to unbalance him further mid-stumble. His fingers interlocked over the Wolves hunched head and jerked it downwards in sync with his other leg lifting up to slam his knee cap into the wolf’s jaw. With the impact to his jaw sending him reeling, Tyson lifted his foot up off of the wolf’s boot and let him, breathless, dizzy, and stunned from pain, fall back onto his ass.

The other three wolves that had been watching from various places in the mess tent, along with the matron and her rabbit assistant all stared in shocked silence. Tyson, for his part, simply stood there looming over the wheezing form of the wolf that had challenged him. He had never been much of one for violence but he had grown up in this clan and he knew the moment that he had gone from a useful joke to a potential threat to the others he only had one chance to establish his place in the pecking order before he became the clan’s whipping boy.

Despite his improved size and the multiple low blows, Tyson still wasn’t all that strong compared to the others so his attack hadn’t actually done all that much real damage. What it had done is incapacitated

the wolf, leaving him helpless for several seconds. Both of them knew that if this had been a real fight that would have been all the time that Tyson had needed to draw a knife and stick it in any number of places in the wolf to finish him off. So, when the wolf finally pushed himself up to his feet there was a split-second of renewed defiance in him. When he locked eyes with the fox, Tyson could almost hear the gears in the wolf's head grinding before that realization finally hit him. The moment it did, the wolf abruptly averted his gaze as his ears flattened against the top of his head in a sign of submission.

"S... sorry..." The wolf murmured so quietly that even Tyson, standing right next to him, barely heard it.

The wolf then took that opportunity to scurry off towards the farthest side of the mess tent to eat his food in silence, glancing up once to look back over at the fox only to avert his eyes again when Tyson's following gaze almost locked eyes with him once more. Then Tyson turn his attention to the other wolves that had been watching the commotion. For a split-second each of them stared him down the same way that the first had done then each of them in turn averted their gazes as well. They may not have been quite as cowed as their companion was but they clearly had no intention of issuing him another challenge right then and there after having watched one of their own be so thoroughly put in his place.

With that done, Tyson happily set back down and greedily dug into his food as if nothing had happened. When he was done with both portions he actually had room for a little more but decided against going back for thirds for fear of starting another incident. As he stood to leave he heard a now familiar ripping sound as yet another seam in his undersized clothing ripped open and he realized, to his embarrassment, that he wasn't much better off than being naked with how tight his clothes were and how many holes they had ripped in them. Not that many people around the camp were shy, himself included, but that didn't mean he wanted to go parading around in his birthday suit.

When he walked over towards the aging wolf matron by the cooking fire he couldn't help but notice the petite little rabbit girl watching him out of the corner of her eyes. If he didn't know better, he would have sworn she was blushing. At the matrons direction, not without a significant portion of chastising him for parading around all but naked with seemingly no interest in why he was literally bursting out of his clothes, he made his way to the clan store house to dig through some of the second-hand clothes they kept there either from clan members that had outgrown them or from victims they had robbed when one of the bandits had been feeling cheeky and literally stole the clothes off of their backs. A few minutes later a much-relieved Tyson was exiting the storehouse in a far less constricting pair of loose-fitting cotton pants and matching shirt.

It was about this time than now familiar sense of post-meal exhaustion was finally starting to hit him. Any other day he would have rebelled against the idea of taking so many naps in such a short period of time, not wanting to waste his days away sleeping. However, considering the last two times he had gone to sleep he had woken up bigger than he had been before it was a miracle he didn't just lay down and go to sleep right where he was standing in his eagerness for a repeat performance of the effect. By the time he finally made it back to his bed roll his eyes felt like they had lead weights attached to them and it took all of his self-control to wait until he had his head on his bedroll before he fell asleep. His last lingering

thought before unconsciousness took him was a silent prayer to whatever gods were listening that this wasn't just some dream and that he wouldn't wake up as his old scrawny self once more.

Tyson was ecstatic to find in the morning that the gods had not disappointed, it had not been a dream after all. The formerly loose-fitting clothing that he had gone to sleep in now fit comfortably across his further enlarged frame. Just guessing from how much closer his feet were to the end of his bedroll he estimated he must have gained at least another three or four inch of height and with the added tightness around his legs, arms, and chest he definitely must have gained a little more muscle mass as well. As he lay there, stretching to get some of the kinks of laying still for so long out of his joints he swore he could actually feel his clothing getting just a little bit tighter. Like he could feel the sleeves pulling more snugly around his biceps, his shirt tightening across his chest and his breeches straining around his thighs. Then again that could just have been his imagination and him breathing in a little too deeply. Even if it was his imagination by this point he knew exactly what he needed to do to make that fantasy a reality.

This kicked off a new routine for the fox over the next several days. He would wake up and gorge himself on as much food as he could get his hands on, the amount of which increasing with every meal. Then he would track down Jevin and demand another sparring session. The tiger, for his part, had a little problem at first accepting the challenges if for no other reason than to constantly reassure himself that he was still top dog, metaphorically speaking. However, as their sessions went on and Tyson's progress grew by leaps and bounds the tiger started to get increasingly worried. By the end of the first day Tyson was already able to land a couple of solid blows on Jevin. By the end of the second he was able to actually hold his own and it was only through Jevin's superior stamina and combat experience that he was able to keep winning.

The other wolves for their part didn't seem very interested in how it was that the fox was growing so unnaturally fast, they were more worried about the literally growing threat to their superiority. There were three more challenges that Tyson had to deal with over the course of the first two days. The first he won like he had the day before with a sucker punch thanks to the wolves still not really taking him seriously. The second and third challenges, however, were much more serious. The second challenge came near the end of the first day and had effectively ended in a draw between the two of them with both of them having bite and claw marks all over each other as their fight had devolved into little more than a feral brawl on the ground. To the wolves shock the next time they saw Tyson Not only was he even bigger but all of his injuries had healed during his last nap. Apparently, whatever was making him bigger was speeding up his ability to regenerate as well.

When they challenged him for the third time on the second day since all of this began Tyson was already as big as any of them. That alone was intimidating to the wolves to the point where they felt the need for a pair of them to jump him. It was only thanks to the shaggy brown wolf that Tyson had put in his place that first day, much to the fox's surprise, coming to his aid but he had subdued the two of them. When Tyson asked the brown wolf why he had helped the wolf had just fidgeted nervously in place struggling to answer while actively avoiding eye contact has everything from his body language to the nervous stammer in his voice oozed submissiveness.

“I just wanted... wanted to help... sir.”

That was the last time any of the wolves challenged him, both due to the fact that he had won every challenge so far, and due to the fact that the next time the rest of the wolves saw him was after another sparring session and nap and he was now bigger than anyone left in the camp save for Jevin himself. In fact, by this point he was probably bigger than anyone including those that were out raiding except for their clan leader. And yet even that didn't seem to be enough for Tyson. If anything, the rest of the clan member's increasing subservience only encouraged him to grow that much faster. The next day they were all sitting at the same table in the mess tent with him, offering the lion's share of their food to what they seem to have adopted as their new alpha. They even started exercising with him since Jevin wasn't around to spar with him the third day as he had gone to one of the local farms to trade. Whether because they simply wanted to help or they were trying to catch up, Tyson had no idea. All he knew was that he was taking immense satisfaction in watching himself pass physically surpass the wolves that used to tease and joke about his minuscule size and physical strength as they struggled to keep up with him.

All of this became quite a shock to Jevin and when he finally came back on the fourth day, two days before the rest of the clan returned from their raiding. He found all of them in the mess tent, the wolves picking at sparse half meals while Tyson sat at the head of the table greedily devouring what clearly had been most of their food along with his own. He had started to ask what was going on but his words died in his throat when Tyson stood up at seeing the tiger enter, and walked over to him with the widest grin on the fox's face that Jevin had ever seen. The reason for the smile became apparent the moment the two were standing directly in front of one another.

Jevin now had to look up to meet Tyson's eyes.

And it wasn't just an inch or two either. Clearly the fox's growth has been accelerating while he was gone as the tiger now found himself eye-level with the top of the fox's chest. The little fox that had once been barely more than waist-high to him was now over head and shoulders taller than the burley tiger. And it wasn't just that. Tyson was bare-chested, wearing a pair of pants that must have belonged to Jevin and had been taken from his tent yet looked like they were ready to rip off at any moment due to their inadequate size. Tyson's body was rippling with thick, powerful muscle with not a single visible pound of fat to hide any of the cut definition of his body. He wasn't just taller than the Tiger, clearly he had grown more physically built than him as well.

Five minutes later the two of them were facing each other on the training field at Tyson's insistence. Unlike the last time Tyson had fought Jevin, however, he did not have one of their standard long swords in hand anymore. Instead he held a monstrous buster sword that they had stolen years ago from some traveling blacksmith who had made it more as an advertisement of his skill rather than as a weapon that was ever intended to be used. The thing was nearly the size of a fully grown adult and hardly anyone in the Clan could even lift the thing much less properly wield it and was little more than a massive steel slab with a iron-cored handle attached to it. There have been a joke going around ever since they had found it that the day someone was able to swing that thing around like a proper sword was the day they'd have a new leader in the clan. And now Tyson stood in front of the tiger, smug grin plastered across his face, hefting the enormous blade over his shoulders as casually as Jevin usually did with his bastard sword.

Even considering Tyson's impossible increase in size he still wasn't that much bigger than Jevin was, and he shouldn't have been able to swing that sword around like a proper weapon. Apparently there was more going on with the fox than simply an unnatural growth spurts as the only explanation seemed to be his physical strength was increasing disproportionate to how fast his body was growing.

The fight was brutal but quick. Jevin still had years and years of experience over Tyson, but almost none of that experience was with fighting people bigger than him. He was used to being the larger one most of the time, able to use his superior reach and strength to overwhelm and outdistance anyone. But now he was the smaller one, the weaker one. He was able to dodge the first broad swing by ducking underneath it. The second one, an overhead vertical chop, he deflected to the side with his own blade. Taking the opportunity to rush forward, Jevin slammed his shoulder into Tyson's torso with enough force that it would have sent anyone flying clean off their feet. Anyone, except for Tyson.

There was a sharp pop that came from the Tiger shoulder as the impact against what felt like a solid stone wall dislocated his shoulder from its joint. As he stumbled back he barely had time to get his sword up to block the horizontal swing Tyson aimed at his midsection. He successfully blocked the attack but the sheer force of it combined with the weight and momentum of the enormous suster sword literally bent Jevin's sword and lifted clean off his feet to be sent flying to the side. That fight officially ended Jevin's tenure as second-in-command as far as everyone else that had been left behind in camp was concerned. Tyson was in charge now.

For the last couple of days before the rest of the clan returned Tyson gorged himself as much as possible. He was getting too big for the normal meals and their current food stocks to be enough for him so he sent out the others to do some hunting in the area, bringing back deer, boars, and other small game that he greedily devoured the moment the exhausted matron finished cooking them. The more he ate the more fuel his body had to power whatever that potion had done to him and the bigger he got.

To say that it had been a shock to the rest of the clan when they finally arrived back from their raiding trip would have been like saying a forest fire was a little warm. When they had rolled up to the gate with several wagons in tow, they had called for the gate to open only to hear a heavy thud of something landing on the top of the log wall surrounding the camp. Looking up, they found themselves looking up at the enormous muzzle of Tyson grinning down at all of them, arm casually resting on the top of the wall like it were a chest-high fence. The 10-foot wall that he was now head and shoulders taller than.

Orion, their leader, was outraged to see what had happened to his camp while he was gone. His personal tent had been co-opted for the fox, seeing as it was now the only one big enough for him to fit inside of. The wolves he had left behind, all of them hardened men that had each seemed dozens of battles, cowed in the presence of the monstrous fox and seemed to wait on him hand and foot; bringing him food and tending to his petty needs. He was even more outraged to see his second-in-command had been removed from his position in charge of those he had left behind and instead been sent out hunting to feed the over-sized vulpine. When he confronted Tyson about all of this the fox simply smirked at the silver-furred wolf, purposefully standing as straight as possible to emphasize the massive size advantage he had over Orion.

“If you haven’t noticed, there’s been a little bit of a change in leadership. But don’t worry. I still plan to keep you around so you can deal with all the little things I don’t feel like bothering with. Just don’t forget who’s in charge now.” The fox smugly rumbled down at the wolf who is a little more than half his size. It was clear that the fox is ego had grown even faster than the rest of him.

That had been the last straw for the wolf. Orion drew his sword and lept at the fox with an angry snarl pouring from his lips! Tyson, of course, had been expecting and planning for this reaction. Smug and egotistical he may have become, but that didn’t mean he had gone stupid. Orion found his sword blocked by the massive buster sword that had been collecting dust in their store house for years. The fact that Tyson was able to wield the thing was intimidating enough, but when Orion realized how small it looked compared to the fox holding it, the entire over-sized, two-handed grip being held in one hand and the blade being brandished as little more than a longsword, he faltered. A split second later a foot impacted with his chest hard enough to force the air from his lungs and knock him onto his back. Grinning even wider at how effortlessly he had overpowered their leader, Tyson casually rested his massive bare foot on top of the wolf, covering his entire torso and then some with the massive appendage. As his gaze left Orion and swept across the rest of the clan, all of which were watching in silent fear, he pressed down on the wolf’s chest just enough to force Orion to release a yelp of pain as if the drive home how easily he could just crush their former leader if he wished. When no one dared to speak up he finally lifted his foot up off of the defeated, now cowering silver wolf and calmly set himself back down on the hilltop in the back of camp, the hilltop where the clan leader made his home. From his new proverbial throne Tyson gave his first order to the clan that he had once been at the bottom of.

“I’m hungry. Bring me something to eat.”

Jevin, for his part, had been struggling to come to terms with the new power dynamic. He had been in a subordinate position before with the clan under Orion and he was used to that, but this was different. With Orion, it had been a matter of skill and experience. Between the two of them Jevin was larger, stronger and even the quicker than Orion. But he had always been the second best, not because of any failing on his part, but simply because Orion had been the better swordsman. Tyson was no swordsman. Sure he had learned enough to be competent with a weapon from the training he had done with Jevin, but the difference between Jevin and Tyson wasn’t one of superior skill or practice. Instead, it was a difference of raw, insurmountable power. A skilled enough warrior could always outmaneuver a wild animal or another person, but no amount of skill would ever allow a warrior to stop a boulder rolling down a hill towards them. To Jevin, Tyson was that boulder, that unstoppable force that all of his skill, experience and training was useless against.

"Hey, Jevin. Stop daydreaming and join us over here!"

Tyson's loud rumble of a voice broke the tiger from his thoughts and drew his attention back towards the village square. The front of the tavern had been literally ripped off of the building’s frame, exposing the innards of the building to the cool afternoon air. Kegs had been rolled out from the bar and into the street where all of the clan members were merrily laughing, roughhousing, and drinking

themselves silly. Tyson himself was sprawled out with his back resting up against the front of one of the nearby cottages. Even sitting down the massive fox was now taller than Jevin was. It was just yet another constant reminder of the overwhelming differences between the tiger and the once-diminutive fox. For his part Tyson was happily drinking along with the others though the key difference being while the wolves were all drinking from pilfered mugs Tyson was palming an entire rain barrel sized keg like a slightly over-sized mug and drinking straight from that. With a faint sigh of resignation Jevin decided that hanging around, brooding, wasn't going to change anything. So he instead jogged his way over towards the others, yelling as he did.

"Alright you whelps, let me show you how a real man drinks!"

An hour later the majority of them, Tyson included, were hammered to the point they could barely stand. Tyson, for his part, was currently stumbling his way towards the looted bar to try to find something else to drink. The massive fox missed a step and had to catch himself on the roof of a nearby house, the roof of which audibly groaned in protest and nearly buckled under his sudden weight pressing against it. Jevin seemed to be the only one that still had most of his faculties about him, though he was still quite tipsy himself and Orion had long since drank himself unconscious in a clear attempt to try to distract himself from thoughts of how his leadership had been usurped so effortlessly. When the massive fox had finally sat himself back down, with only a mild amount of damage to the surrounding buildings, the tiger settled himself down beside Tyson.

"So, uh" Jevin paused for a moment as he mulled over what to call the fox. When the answer came, almost unbidden, to his lips he felt some invisible modicum of control and self-assurance he still held inside of him slip a bit. "Uh... Sir. What's your plan now? What are we going to do next?"

Tyson's huge head rolled over to look down at the tiger, lips curling into a lazy grin. Before Jevin could react a hand nearly as big as his entire torso plopped down on his head with enough weight and power that his body was forcibly hunched down for a moment. The massive hand rubbed over Jevin's head in a way reminiscent of someone petting a loyal hound or a well behaving child which should have sent the tiger into an indignant rage. Yet, it didn't. Instead that grip inside himself slipped a bit further when he felt a tiny spark of... pride? At the sign of acknowledgement from their new leader.

"Hah... Jevin... Jevvy Jev Jev. You kept pushing me even though I was hopeless." Tyson slurred, several words coming out in labored syllables as his tongue struggled to function beyond the haze of alcohol. "But now look at me! I rose above it all!" That little joke sent him into nearly a full minute of giggles before he recovered and continued. "Now? We're gonna take what we want, when we want. That's what I want. You all taught me might makes right... well, now? I'm the mightiest. And getting mightier every day. You just wait, I'm gonna keep getting bigger and bigger until I'm the biggest thing there is!"

As his drunken words came forth, Jevin found himself reflexively thinking back on having all but raised Tyson like the fox were his little brother. And now that 'little' brother was not just the leader of their clan but the biggest living person he had ever seen or even heard of. And what's more, apparently that wasn't the end of it for the fox. At the last bit of his drunken speech Jevin couldn't help but imagine the fox even bigger. Tyson looming over two story cottages that didn't even come up to his waist. Seeing the

fox towering over entire military garrisons, laughing smugly as their arrows and ballista bolts peppered his fur without even making it through to break harmlessly against his skin. Or, in the most extreme image that came to the tiger's mind, the fox grown into some monstrous living god who was crouching down over an entire mountain. Fingers the size of castles smashing into the edges of the entire mountain as untold millions of pounds of muscle flared and flexed from the effort of the fox-turned-god uprooting the whole mountain as his latest prize.

It was then that it finally clicked in Jevin's head, and that last vestige of his reluctance and self-control withered away. Not that he would be conscious of it in the days to come, but it was at that moment with that realization that Jevin never called Tyson by his name anymore. From then on, he only referred to the fox as 'sir'. He couldn't see the fox as just another member of the clan anymore, he had quite literally grown above all of them. He wasn't just some thief or bandit that had gotten a bit too big. Tyson was more than that, and was becoming even more with each passing day. And Jevin wanted to be there to see it all. He didn't just want to see it, he wanted it to happen. He wanted to find if there was some way he could help, some way to help Tyson grow faster. Some way he could help Tyson become the god he was growing in to.

"Yea..." Jevin whispered, more to himself than to the fox. "You will, won't you?"

Some days Darren really hated being captain of the city guard. On the good days all he had to do was sit back in his office and occasionally sign a requisition form, spending the rest of the day drinking from the bottle he hid in his desk or napping. On the bad days he would be out in the yard training with the recruits or having to deal with some petty, stuck-up Merchant throwing a tantrum because he wasn't smart enough to keep an eye on his coin purse. And then there were days like today, the weird days.

He spent all morning reading reports about the whereabouts of the local bandit crew and their latest series of raids. It was pretty standard at this point, they hit some of the wealthier merchant caravans but had left alone the ones smart enough to hire trained and skilled guards, or the ones that had paid their baksheesh to the right people to be left alone. But it was the sightings after their raiding that started to get weird. It had started with a filing from some local farmer out in the country throwing a fit that apparently his entire herd of cattle had been stolen by the Wolf Moon Clan. He had no idea why a bunch of bandits would want an entire farm's worth of livestock so he had dismissed it as the farmer just trying to make excuses for losing his animals in hopes of getting out of taxes. However that had been followed by a report of one of the local hamlet's being occupied by the Wolf Moon Clan. What was most interesting about that report was that apparently that old retired knight Orion that had been running the Wolf Moon Clan for years no longer seemed to be calling the shots. Unfortunately that's also where the reports started getting weird.

They had begun spinning wild fantasies of some Mountain Giant having taken over the bandits and now had them waiting on him hand and foot. And it wasn't just the one town that reported this either. As he followed through the reports he started to notice a pattern, tracing across the countryside as if they were moving from place to place. Every report mentioned the bandits rolling into town and demanding a massive feast to the point that just about every scrap of food would be gone by morning. Then they would

move on to the next location. Every report also mentioned that giant that he was able to piece together apparently looked like a fox, but every new report seemed it to describe the fox as being even larger than the previous. Darren wanted to just dismiss it as people's imagination going wild and following rumors, but there was this tiny little nagging worry in the back of his head that made him not immediately dismissed the idea. He didn't know where people were getting these ideas of a giant fox from but he was able to recognize the pattern in all of these sightings. From the path they were taking around the local settlements and the time between each sighting that would mean the next time they were going to show up would most likely be today, and their target would be...

Darren's thought process was interrupted by a loud crashing sound coming from outside. Reflexively he reached for the sword on his hip even as he jumped to his feet and ran for the door. Before even getting outside he could already hear shouts and the loud ringing of the alarm bell. Once outside the guard house he saw that the massive wooden gate near the guard house had been smashed inwards as if by some enormous battering-ram. Rather than a battering ram coming through the gate he instead saw almost two dozen wolves rushing through the ruin of the gates, using the confusion to their advantage to incapacitate the guards still inside. But none of that was what left Darren standing there, Frozen, in a state of shock. Instead, it had been what he saw when he had looked up.

Two enormous hands, each one big enough to palm an entire pull cart were resting on top of the city wall to either side of the gate house. Towering over the wall, the 20-foot tall wall that surrounded the city, was the enormous visage of a gigantic, bare-chested fox. To the fox the comparatively puny wall barely came up to his upper thighs and from the way Darren saw the fox was leaning his weight on the partially crumbling wall he could guess the fox must have simply cocked a leg back and kicked the gate in.

"Sorry for bothering you," the fox spoke, his voice booming loud enough that seemed it to resonate through the streets of the city. "I tried to knock but your flimsy little door fell off its hinges. I hope you don't mind us stopping by, me and my friends here wanted to come by and sample some of the city's goods."

And with that, the smugly grinning giant simply started to step over the wall. All the guard captain could do is stand there in dazed fear as he watched the fox crawl over the top of the wall as easily as he might do so over a livestock fence. He was finally able to snap out of his trance thanks to the loud crashing sound of a pull cart being smashed into splinters underneath one of the fox's gigantic feet. It was a good thing too, as if he had waited any longer to jump to the side he would have been the next thing disappearing under the next one of those footsteps. Instead he simply found himself being swatted away by the fluffy mass of the fox's tail as it flipped behind him with enough force to send him tumbling a half dozen paces away.

Tyson for his part was loving every second of this. The feeling of power, of being unstoppable had long since gone to his head. He had found when he was only 20 feet tall that he was immune to arrows, several of the hunters in the first village they had gone to had tried to shoot him with their hunting bows and the arrows couldn't even pierce his skin. He had reveled in sitting on one of the cottages in town only to feel it crumble to debris underneath his immense weight, laughing all the while as he made the ruined remains of the village chief's home his new temporary chair. But what had really spurred him on to both

this feeling of euphoric power, and his desire to return to the city was when they had visited one of the larger villages, one that had a local spell monger.

The sorcerer had been nothing to write home about, otherwise he would have been set up in a much more prestigious location. But even a mediocre sorcerer is still powerful to the mundane, magic-less masses. The villagers had rallied around him to demand that Tyson and his crew leave but Tyson had simply dared be sorcerer to do his worst. He had been expecting his body to be similarly resistant to whatever magical attack the sorcerer could throw at him. What he hadn't expected was for the bolt of lightning that the sorcerer threw at him to slam into his chest only to be absorbed by his body. All this time so far whatever that potion had done to him had been using the food he was eating as fuel to power his growth. But apparently his body wasn't picky about what energy and fuel it could get as it absorbed the magical energy of the attack itself and sparked a sudden and rather abrupt growth spurt in him! It was hard to tell whether it was the sorcerer or Tyson himself that had been more surprised when that lightning bolt seemed to simply dissipate across his torso and then he abruptly swelled him from 30 feet tall to 40 feet in a matter of seconds.

And now here he was back in the city that had started everything. He hadn't told any of the others in the clan what he had intended, instead simply telling them that he planned to use his newfound size to take over the city proper and promising them as much loot and plunder as they could carry. But while they were busy looting he had other business to attend to. Business involving a familiar little magic shop that had recently opened on the market square.

The elderly rodent wizard barely had time to even register the rhythmic shaking of the ground before a massive black fur covered hand was smashing through the side of his shop and trapping him in a fist large enough to palm him like a child's toy. A sudden rush of vertigo from being abruptly raised several dozen feet into the air nearly made the aging rat pass out. When he had finally regained his bearings he found himself trapped from the shoulders down in the grasp of fingers thicker than his legs, staring down a vulpine face the size of a small shed.

"Greetings, oh great and powerful wizard!" Tyson's voice boomed with a mocking flare to his words. "I have come for your assistance and wares!"

Unable to suppress his amused snickering, the fox then shifted his fist to turn and open, leaving the comparatively tiny wizard splayed across his palm. Then, he started to casually bob his hand up and down, bouncing the rat on top of his palm like you might lightly heft a toy ball up and down in one hand. From there his 'play' with the wizard escalated to him tossing the wizard between both hands, tossing him up in the air only to catch him at the last second, and finally dangling the rat upside down by his legs in front of his toothy grin. With the wizard too dizzy, disoriented, and confused to form words Tyson simply continued his own mocking speech.

"Your magic is mighty as I can see. But I have need of one of your potions. A purple one, that was broken when an intruder broke in to your shop a couple of weeks ago."

With that, the fox roughly dropped the poor rodent down onto the street in front of his shop. Before he even had time to get back to his feet, Tyson slammed a foot down right next to him hard enough to send him tumbling away from the impact. He knew how these bookish types would think, he'd spent enough time in the city following them around waiting for opportunities to snatch their coin purse to understand the types of devious calculating minds merchants could have. He also knew the best way to deal with them was to keep them in a constant state of panic so they never had a chance to order their thoughts, though Tyson had to admit it was a lot easier and more fun to instill that Panic now.

"You have 30 seconds to find me more of that potion"

That was all of the warning that the rat got before the fox's foot smacked into his back hard enough to send him sprawling through the gaping hole that had once been the front door of his shop. As he struggled to regain his bearings he heard a loud groan of protest coming from the support beams of the building. From the way that he could see through the hole in the wall that the fox's feet had turned around in the opposite direction, it wasn't hard to connect the dots and realize that the fox was now sitting on top of his shop like it were some kind of stool. Unfortunately, a building like this was not meant to support multiple tons of oversized fox and it was rapidly beginning to crumble under the weight. It was only due to Tyson's conscious effort to keep his weight from resting entirely on the rooftop that kept it from caving in. The very loud count down from 30 that Tyson's basso rumble of a voice was announcing from outside told the frantic wizard that such a courtesy was not going to last long, however. So just as the fox had planned for, the wizard's panic-riddled mind could only focus on the most immediate solution: giving him what he wanted.

Tyson had gotten down to seven before the rat has stumbled out of the building holding three bottles of a familiar-looking liquid. Before he even had a chance to turn around and face the fox that was destroying his shop, the rat found himself being scooped up in a massive hand once more. Fingers thicker than his legs gripped his ankles and dangled him upside down, laughably exposing his undergarments as his robe hung down to obscure his torso and partially his face. Just as the fox was raising the rat over his massive, fang lined jaw, he desperately threw all of the potions into Tyson's waiting mouth. He desperately hoping that would be enough to keep the fox from eating him. His gamble paid off when the fox mercifully, if not gently, dropped him back down to the ground.

For a second Tyson had wondered how he was going to actually get the bottles considering, to him, each one was barely the size of a bead. He deciding trying to fish them out of his mouth was too much work so instead he rolled his tongue around a little bit until he felt the three little specks of glass catch between his teeth. It barely took any pressure at all from his clenching jaw for all three of them to shatter and spill their contents into his mouth along with mini shards of glass which, thankfully either due to their miniscule size or whatever unnatural physical augmentation the original potion had done to Tyson, harmlessly slid down his throat as he swallowed.

He had expected there to be some jolt of energy, some explosion of power that would elevate him beyond the already impressive monster he had become. But there was nothing. Honestly he shouldn't have been surprised, it's not like the first potion had a sudden effect either. It had just been wishful thinking that he wouldn't have to keep going through this process of his body being pushed to near starvation only to

process every scrap of food it could get to enlarge him. Sulking, he was about to stand up from the damaged building he had been sitting on only to be reminded that he was not alone.

The blast of fire exploded against Tyson's chest with the force of a cannonball, nearly knocking him backwards off of his impromptu chair and into the streets behind the wizard's shop. The rat, for his part, was absolutely livid now that he had a chance to regain his composure and eagerly expressed such outrage with an explosive ball of flame that could have leveled a small building. That indignant outrage began to transform into confusion, then concern when he saw the fox sit right back up with hardly a singe on his chest. It had been more the surprise of the oncoming burst of fire than the actual impact itself that had made him reel backwards, but now they're both Tyson and the rat were paying attention they can clearly see the vestiges of the magical flames being sucked into Tyson like a water being pulled into the eye of a whirlpool. Then, to the rat's horror and to Tyson's glee, the fox started to grow.

Tyson had no idea if it was because he now has so much more of that potion in his system or if the wizard was simply that much more powerful than the country spell-monger he had encountered in one of the surrounding villages. What he did know was that he could feel the energy surging through him like an electric charge and feel his body responding in kind by burgeoning outwards in every direction as if it were trying to make more of himself just to contain all of that energy. Within less than two seconds of the initial impact Tyson had already grown just as much as he had from the entire bolt of lightning from the previous sorcerer, and there was still plenty of the residual magical energy being pulled in to him. But that wasn't the most concerning thing for the rat. The added weight of those extra dozen or so feet of height became too much for the building Tyson was sitting on and the entire thing simply collapsed underneath him. The rezoning thud of impact from the fox's gigantic ass smashing through the second floor and landing on the first caused the rat to stumble in place. He cried out in anguish at the sight of his new home being crushed like an inadequate chair that couldn't handle the weight of its occupant. All of his money, his possessions, the magical artifacts he had collected over decades were now crushed rubble under an oversized vulpine bandit! When that last thought fully processed through the rat's mind and the implications hit, his eyes went wide.

Streams of technicolor light started to flutter up from the ground beneath Tyson, intermingling with the residual ribbons of red and orange that were the leftovers of the fire spell the rat had cast. All of them began to circle their way into the fox like kind of void greedily engulfing every ounce of energy to feed itself. All of those artifacts that had been inside of the shop must have been destroyed and now every single scrap of magical energy that had been stored within them and released up on their destruction was going straight into the fox, forcing him to do what every other source of energy had done to him so far since all of this began.

It made him grow.

The fox grit his teeth as he felt every muscle in his body clench and strain like there was simply too much of him occupying the space he was in. His body didn't just expand, it literally exploded in size. The makeshift loincloth he had been wearing simply snapped apart as his thighs and hips bulldozed every building nearby into rubble with their sudden surge of size. His entire form rapidly expanding until his thighs were thicker than the two and three-story buildings around him were tall! His tail stretched out into

the streets behind him, even that malleable mass of fur and sinew smashing through several homes to claim the space they had occupied as its own. The rat disappeared beneath one of Tyson's growing legs, smothered into the ground along with dozens of other people and their homes. Within seconds he was towering over every building in sight even while sitting down. Guards and bandits alike stopping their scuffles in the streets as they all looked up to watch Tyson's growing form rise up over the rooftops. Many of them didn't think to run until it was far too late.

Pound after pound of mass, foot after foot of size all compounded on to the fox that only two weeks ago had been small enough to frequently be mistaken as a child. And now his body literally flowed across a city like a tidal wave of flesh and fur as he surpassed a hundred feet, two hundred, five hundred with no signs of stopping in sight. It was only when the growth finally started to slow a couple of minutes later and Tyson realized that he was, quite literally, sitting on the entire city or at least the ass shaped imprint in the ground that had once been a city. He had to be at least a couple of miles tall, and even though he could feel all of that residual energy from whatever had been in the wizard's shop along with whatever other miscellaneous magical items had been in the city had finally been depleted, he still felt energy flowing into him. He still felt himself growing. If he focused hard enough he could actually see tiny little wisps of ephemeral blue energy trickling into him from every direction. Somehow on an almost instinctual level he seemed to understand what was happening. The wizard's magic attack had been the catalyst to activate the additional potions he had drank and now his body wasn't just accepting energy, it was actively devouring it from his surroundings. Ambient magic all around him was being pulled in to him, not just fueling additional growth but even powering his body's natural functions in place of food and oxygen.

It was like he could feel new paths opening in his mind as the energy flowed into him. New understanding of how to shape and manipulate the energy both inside and outside of him. Not only that, but he could feel other sources of power, feel their pull as if they called him for him to come and devour them. It was then that he realized that while his stomach no longer demanded food, he now had a new hunger to sate. And after all, he was a thief. It was in his nature to take what he wanted from others.

Future generations would know the events that followed as the Great Harvest. As the titanic fox, changed by whatever alchemical and magical mixtures he had been exposed to, made his way across the land magic would simply vanish in his wake. Every scrap of ethereal, arcane energy was greeley absorbed by his constantly expanding form. Cities became nothing more than play things to the ever-growing titan. Briefly he used a mountain as a throne when he sat down to rest while amusing himself at the thought of the enormous natural structure cracking and crumbling beneath his monstrous weight. All the while the greatest heroes and sorcerers the world had to offer stood to challenge him. Yet none of them had any hope of even garnering his attention.

Entire armies of highly-trained knights and archers would disappear beneath a single one of his titanic footsteps while he wouldn't not even realize there had been an army attacking him. Dragon riders would swoop around his head while he was still small enough that they could reach a high enough altitude to do so, only to be swatted away like flies by a careless wave of the massive fox's hand. Even the sorcerers and wizards, masters of the arcane and secrets of magic could do nothing but fuel his growth as every spell they cast in his direction simply dispersed and was drawn in to him with everything else.

Before long those very wizards noticed their magic weakening as the fox's presence sapped the magic from the land to the point there wasn't enough to go around anymore. Magic wasn't dying, it was being stolen.

And yet Tyson, for his part, simply continued his trek across the land. He would no longer pickpocket petty coinage from nobles, would no longer steal documents or valuable artifacts. He had grown beyond such minor things. Now the currency that he traded in, that he stole, was power itself. Not conceptual power like economic or political influence, nor even the overwhelming raw physical power that his monstrous size provided him. That was just an aftereffect, a byproduct of devouring the power of magic itself from the world.

By year's end the purely magical creatures had all died off or fallen into deep slumbers without ambient magic to sustain them. The spell casters of the world found themselves impotent and useless as the arcane secrets they had spent untold centuries unlocking and refining no longer held any meaning, like a master baker with no flame in his oven to bake his breads. The world had become one devoid entirely of magic, a world forced to remake itself as one of the fundamental forces of nature was ripped away from the land. And most notably, a world held dangling like a piece of jewelry from the ear of their world's new keeper, owner, and God. An entire planet inhabited by millions upon millions of people relegated to nothing more than a trinket that lay as a reminder to Tyson of where he came from, even as he waded through the vast expanse of space itself, looking for his next mark.

Why would he stop now? He was a thief, after all. There was always more to take if one knew where to look.