

Chapter Twenty-Five

Snack Run

Winter that year had come with an unexpected advantage. Despite the fennec's natural fur coat, the arid sands from which his species originated had not accounted for the inevitable global expansion into much chillier climates. Now, garbed in sweatpants and a goose-feather coat, Hunter now at least did not have to worry too much about being discreet with his padding.

The fennec was standing in line at the local convenience store, his reusable shopping bag having been filled with an assortment of snacks he was sure his mother would have had a few words about. He'd work his way through them before the university cafeteria opened up, having decided that he might as well treat himself a little before the next semester started.

Malissa was still on a cruise with her family, and Jack would be back in town in the next two days.

Hunter eyed the shelves of arrayed salty and savory snacks, knowing full well that the moment Jack came over to his place the snacks would begin to disappear at an accelerated rate. Grabbing a few more bags and stuffing them into his bag, he took a step forward now waiting second in line. His mind must have been particularly distracted by the thoughts of his weasel friend eating him out of the house, his gut lurching as he felt something snag the waistband of his pants.

The fennec's eyes bulged, his jaw dropping open in shock as he felt the elastic band of his sweats snap, spilling his pants onto the floor of the drug store into a depressed heap around his ankles. The panther hieroglyph now on full display on the front of his diaper, his cheeks reddened as it took him a second to realize the sound of tearing fabric had been quite loud. He looked up sheepishly, figuring that he must have caught the attention of the shoppers around him.

Instead they stood, as they were, politely ignoring him as they waited for their turn in the queue. Hunter stared at one of them, a rather scrawny looking antelope teen who was holding a large Icee. Eventually, the antelope returned the look, raising an eyebrow but maintaining eye contact with the fennec. Realizing that he might have appeared rude, Hunter quickly turned around and faced forward once more. The bison in front of him had checked out, and Hunter took a crinkly stride forward to address the chipmunk behind the cash register.

“Cash or card?”

The chipmunk squeaked, not taking any notice of the fact that Hunter’s padded, and now slightly soaked, was in full view. Hunter glanced behind him for a moment, looking at his ruined sweatpants in utter confusion before he turned back to the clerk.

“Uh, debt.”

He mumbled, dumping out the contents of his bag and allowing the chipmunk to routinely scan them, the rodent’s buck teeth flashing momentarily as he stifled a yawn.

How is nobody reacting? It’s like I’m invisi-

Hunter looked down and stared pointedly at the panther covering his crotch. Of course, there was something different about the hieroglyph covered diapers, but this development was most unexpected. If there was one point of consistency when it came to the magical power of the brooch, it was that it seemed determined to shout to the entire world around him that he was a little kit. Now, for whatever reason, it appeared that the trinket’s influence had instead decided to spare him the inevitable humiliation he had come to expect.

Experimentally, Hunter swung his tail from side to side, eliciting a round of obnoxious, plastic crinkling from the seat of his diaper as he did so. He glanced behind him, having just given the customers behind him a full show of the state of his padding. Nothing, no reaction.

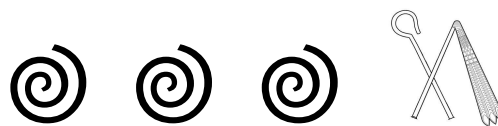
"That'll be thirty-eight seventy-six please."

The chipmunk chittered, after which Hunter hastily paid and stuffed his collection of snacks back into his grocery bag. The bell of the front door jingled behind him as he stepped back onto the street, a couple blocks from his apartment. As the wind blew between his spindly legs, which were now feeling particularly chilly save for a small part of his inner thighs insulated by his padding, he trudged forward towards his flat. None of the passersby paid him any mind, a fact for which he was feeling surprisingly grateful.

He was still cold, however, and was frantically rubbing his thighs as he walked up the stairwell and back into the welcome warmth of his apartment.



Hunter stood in front of the enchanted changing table, internally reminding himself not to hop up on its surface so as to not activate the helping hands that would no doubt be all too keen to change him. Stooping, he sorted through the hieroglyphic diapers and picked one from each type of symbol. There were several cougars, ones he hoped would be regularly magically restocked given their incredible potential to maintain his peace of mind. There appeared to be three other types of hieroglyphic diapers. One which looked like three water fowl sitting in a boat, another which appeared to be a baby bird, and the last appeared to be a crook and flail which he recognized from his previous research.



The word 'cygnet' bubbled up to the front of Hunter's mind as he looked over the baby bird symbol, wondering whether his guess as to what kind of spell this particular rune would cast was accurate.

Hunter eyed the other three diapers suspiciously, unsure of whether they would end up with favorable outcomes as the panther had done. Unless he abstained from the hieroglyphic diapers entirely, which might not necessarily be possible given the haunted nature of the changing table, he would likely find out their various enchantments soon enough.

Taking his phone out, he took a picture of each of the diapers and opened up Malissa's texts messages. Feeling a little sheepish sending his friend pictures of his diapers, he saw that she had replied to the original message regarding the panther.

Panther, yup. Meaning sneaky, stealthy, quiet, unseen.

Before sending the images, Hunter replied promptly.

I believe it, given the fact that the chip stand at the drug store decided to pants me and nobody noticed the giant Egyptian themed pillow on my butt.

Sending the photos off with a question prompting further translation, Hunter put his phone away and removed the diapers from the surface of the changing table. Behind him, he felt something grope the back of his soaked padding. Hunter squeaked, whirling around to see that one of the clawed ghost paws appeared spontaneously behind him. It vanished a second later, having apparently come to the conclusion that the fennec diaper could still withstand an accident or two.

Sighing in relief that he was not about to be accosted by several pairs of ghostly paws, he returned his attention to the shelves of diapers beneath the surface of the changing table and took out his favorite brand. The various pampered pups, kittens, and cubs grinned up cheekily at him, playing with their various infantile toys as they crawled over the surface of the plastic covering. Despite the knowledge of the curse's influence, Hunter harbored a particular fondness for this brand of padding. Hoping that this would influence the will of the ghost hands when bedtime came around, Hunter deposited the pamper meaningfully on the center of the changing table's surface.

As he headed into the living room, his phone buzzed. Opening it, he read through Malissa's response.

The first two will require some research as to their meaning, other than the obvious I guess. However, the last one is a pretty famous symbol: the Crook and Flail. Basically, they're weapons when crossed that represent royal authority and power.

Hunter waited as Malissa typed out another response, instinctively reaching down to squeeze the front of his diaper to check just how wet it was. He hoped he could hold off on a change until just before bed.

As in you managed to cover it up?

The fennec took a moment to type out a response.

No, like everyone could have seen it in plain sight but nobody appeared like they noticed. So either the brooch duped me or it duped everyone around me.

Three small dots appeared on Hunter's messenger app as Malissa wasted no time in typing up another response.

Snap a picture of it and send it to me.

Hunter grimaced, looking down at the front of his diaper where the hieroglyph had faded slightly from the amount that he had already peed into it. Sending a picture of his padded front to one of his close friends, despite one that was in the loop on what was happening to him, made him feel more than a little self-conscious. Hunter bit his lip, trying not to think too much about just how excited the prospect made him feel in addition to his initial shyness. Deciding that taking the initiative and simply sending her a picture would probably be the best way not to make a big deal out of the request, he did so.

He waited a minute, barely breathing as he wondered whether or not the trinket's magic would translate through a picture on his phone. A second later, Malissa's response came.

Uhh, you need to take your pants off first for me to see it.

Hunter reread the message several times in disbelief. The influence of the hieroglyphic diapers clearly covered all of their bases, which made the poor fennec all the more apprehensive to try out the other ones without knowing what they would do. He responded quickly.

Still not wearing any, whatever you're looking at isn't the picture I took if you see any pants on me.

The otter responded.

Okay, yikes. I guess good luck with the other ones?

Hunter typed.

Yeah...

Lastly, Malissa responded.

I'll look up the other ones tonight and let you know if there's anything sus about them.

Leaning back down on his couch, his stomach grumbling, he moved himself over on the cushion until he faced the kitchen where he could just see his plastic grocery bags sitting on the counter. In classic college fashion, he would probably not have a meal more substantial than box Mac N' Cheese until the campus cafeteria opened. He turned his head over to the wooden box on the mantelpiece, idly musing to himself.

If only this thing could conjure up three-course meals for me and maybe do my house-cleaning for me...

He griped silently to himself, eventually gathering the motivation to push himself off of his couch and rifle through the grocery bags. He was feeling lazy, and with about five days left of his winter break before the semester started he was not exactly in a hurry to maintain a productive mindset until he had to. Having checked his inbox on his phone finding no syllabi sent earlier, he flopped back down on the couch with a large bag of cheese curls.

He began browsing through the channels on his TV, consciously avoiding the children's channels as he tried to bring his mind off of the daunting prospects of the upcoming semester. Hunter had confidence that he would be able to pull off a similarly well put-together GPA this semester, same as last given the fact that he now knew what he was going up against.

Paying little attention to what was happening on the screen, the full weight of what he was going to have to deal with hit him. Hunter took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly as he tried to calm himself down.

This is going to be a lot for me to handle...

He mused to himself, reaching for a stuffed red panda plushie that had been reclining on the opposite end of the couch. Hugging it, the fennec suddenly felt very small. This was not the kind of small the brooch was intending either. College grades, a social life, and contending with the fact that reality altering 'magic' was real. The latter was something he had not even fully digested for fear of becoming overwhelmed with panic and existentialist dread.

Where do my physics and chemistry courses even fit into all this?

He stopped himself, knowing the cliff he was looking over. He sighed again, wondering whether or not he should have picked up something stronger from the drugstore to treat himself with.

Having been idly clicking through the channels, Hunter saw that Blue's Clues was playing on one of the channels. Deciding that it would be best not to dwell on the

possibility that this was somehow the trinket's doing, he selected the episode.

"Bah bow!"

Blue cheerfully exclaimed from the television speakers, and Hunter nestled himself down further onto his couch. He would let his mind drift for now. Tomorrow's problems would be tomorrow's, after all.