

A Hero's Feast

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Arrell flailed his wings as he was carried above the heads of a river of gracious villagers all cheering his name. His green cloak flapped wildly and his gray feathers were ruffled, but the harpy eagle was too busy basking in the attention to care. He'd stumbled upon the village while traveling through the forest, and had given in to the locals' pleas for assistance. A beast was terrorizing them, they'd claimed, and surely a mighty ranger could slay it. Praise and the promise of a reward had convinced him to accept the quest. The beast had turned out to simply be an oversized boar, no challenge to Arrell. From the townsfolk's reaction one would think he slew a dragon.

The procession eventually dropped Arrell off in the town square, where the mayor was waiting to greet him. A tall, plump snake, Istlehiiss seemed happier than all the others combined.

"Our hero has returned!" Istlehiiss declared. More cheering ensued. "You have saved our humble village from a vile threat, valiant Arrell. We are forever in your debt!"

Arrell was flustered at first, but a cocky grin soon appeared on his face, the eagle puffing up his chest some. "Well I couldn't let such a creature continue to prey on your village! Fortunately my arrow flew true and killed it in an instant."

"Incredible! A dozen of our best hunters couldn't even touch the foul beast, you've been a blessing from the gods!"

The praise was much appreciated by Arrell, who felt less and less humble by the second. "I get that a lot."

"Now, Arrell the Great, in anticipation of your triumph we prepared an unparalleled feast!"

Istlehiiss stepped aside, and only then did Arrell notice the four massive tables that took up the square. Each was covered in plate after plate of food, more than the ranger had ever seen in one place. Plenty of wine, beer, and cider existed as well. There was only a single, incredibly wide chair, but the sheer bounty before him proved distracting. Arrell was left speechless.

"Though our village is small, we pride ourselves in having the best cooks on the continent!" Istlehiiss said. "We've made everything we know, and it's all for you, hero."

"T-That's wonderful—it really is—but I couldn't possibly eat this all by myself!" The eagle's stomach growled, as if to disagree.

"Then simply sample whatever catches your eye!" Istlehiiss wrapped an arm around Arrell and guided him towards the feast. "And I've heard heroes can have appetites that can put even a full-grown dragon to shame, so don't count yourself out quite yet."

By then the alluring aromas of the food had reached Arrell, whose stomach growled louder. At the very least he could have his fill and pack some leftovers into his bag before continuing on his way. No one could turn down free food, after all.

Trying to carefully choose what to eat would have taken all day, so instead Arrell stopped at the first appetizing plate he saw—which was also coincidentally the first plate on the table. It appeared to be duck—a whole one—and he greedily tore at a drumstick. The taste was beyond compare. In seconds he was picking at a bone, and soon after the entire duck was devoured.

Arrell was surprised by his gluttony—and how he didn't feel the least bit full. If anything he was somehow hungrier. Dealing with the boar must have drained his energy more than he'd thought.

A large mug of mead was passed to the eagle by Istlehiiss. "No need to be modest, hero. Indulge, eat and drink to your heart's content. You deserve it all."

Arrell smiled back and took a swig of the mead. He *did* deserve it.

The next plate was overflowing with pasta, and Arrell dove into it without hesitation. Steaks, pork, rice, shepherd's pies—everything tasted incredible, and Arrell couldn't help but consume it all. A line of empty plates was left in his wake, not a single crumb uneaten. He always had something to wash the food down with, never having to wait for refills even when he chugged the contents. No matter how

much he ate he didn't feel full.

As Arrell gorged his middle inevitably swelled. A small pot belly strained his tunic and belt, the strap of his quiver digging in ever-so-slightly. It grew with every cleared plate, until it finally peeked out from under his tight tunic. He was sporting a round ball gut by the time he noticed.

The eagle looked down at his middle sheepishly, giving it a curious prod while still gulping down a fantastic egg dish. “O-Oh. I didn't realize I'd eaten so much...”

“And nothing wrong with that!” Istlehiss insisted, slyly replacing Arrell's empty plate with a full one and grinning as the eagle started eating again. “We're honored you're enjoying our food. Besides, you're probably just rebuilding your strength after your adventure, of course you'd need to eat a lot.”

Istlehiss' words shooed away the lingering concerns in Arrell's mind, and he happily directed his full attention back on the feast.

The swelling renewed in earnest. Arrell's slow walk along the table gradually turned into a waddle, his gray gut bouncing with every step. It wasn't long before the eagle could rest his belly on the table itself, giving himself a break from lugging his increasing heft around as he gluttoned on all the food in reach.

Any time Arrell showed signs of worry about his gluttony Istlehiss would reassure him everything was fine, and after a while the ranger stopped caring. Indulging a little wouldn't hurt him, and it wouldn't be very heroic to let the villagers' hard work go to waste. It'd be disrespectful to *stop* eating!

Half-way down the table Arrell was forced to cradle his massive gut in both wings just to ensure he didn't topple over. The bulk was a hassle but he still wasn't full, and the food had only gotten tastier. Istlehiss seemed to sense his conundrum, and led the guest of honor up to the lone chair. Arrell groaned a little as he lowered himself into it, pinned down by the weight of his gut. He would've required assistance to stand back up, but the eagle didn't think too much about it.

“Relax hero,” Istlehiss said, giving Arrell's belly a gentle pat. “We'll bring the food to you. Just enjoy your hard-fought feast!”

Already lines of villagers had formed behind the snake, each holding a plate. That's when the *real* eating began.

In an instant Arrell was surrounded by food. His gaze darted from one dish to another, the ranger whittling away at everything at once. Empty plates were replaced by full ones the second his eyes left them. Arrell was always chewing or swallowing or gulping down something, Istlehiss sneaking food into his open beak at every opportunity.

Rounder and rounder the eagle's belly grew, spilling out over his lap and pressing against and then over the arms of the chair. It creaked faintly beneath his immense weight. Arrell's middle was quickly resembling a soft, feathered boulder. Still, his hunger persisted. He desperately wanted more food and drink, and didn't care how immobile he got in the process.

When the chair inevitably splintered and collapsed, Arrell hit the ground with a belch and a jiggle. There was a fleeting moment of surprise, followed by more eating.

The eagle was rolled onto his eternally-growing gut, stuffing his face the whole while. The blubbery mass of feathers swelled outwards in all directions, enveloping the town square inch-by-inch. Arrell spread over tables and emptied plates, fallen mugs and discarded bowls. He was so enraptured by eating he didn't realize the food was simply floating right into his open beak, Istlehiss guiding dishes with his magic. Of course Arrell didn't notice when he slipped into a deep food coma, either.

With a jolt Arrell snapped back to reality. He could vaguely remember eating—a lot—but his memory was hazy. He couldn't tell if he was laying down or standing, moving in general proving to be practically impossible. Arrell *did* have the strangest sensation he was being held down by something, though. Confused, the eagle tried looking around, only to feel his beak press right into a doughy cheek.

“Ah, Arrell the Great, you're finally awake!” Istlehiss' voice came from somewhere...somewhere below.

With considerable effort Arrell managed to look a bit downward, beak sinking into his chins. His eyes widened in surprise as he recognized the curve of his mountainous belly stretching before him, and Istlehiss standing down on an uncovered portion of the town square.

“W-What...what happened!” Arrell asked, his whole body jiggling as he struggled.

“You ate the entire feast prepared for you, Arrell the Gluttonous!” Istlehiss replied with a snicker. “Sure there was some coaxing involved, but your ability to stuff yourself into oblivion is beyond compare. Most of my victims require a funnel or tube to reach your girth.”

Arrell was suddenly very, very worried. “I’m massive! Why didn’t you try to stop me!”

“Now why would I stop my meal from making itself even more delectable, Arrell the Blob?” Istlehiss said. “I’ve got an appetite that exceeds even yours, jumbo, but mere steaks won’t sate it. I need something with a bit of a kick—and a wiggle and a yelp and a squirm!”

“B-But I saved your village, why are you doing this!” Arrell’s attempts to escape only wobbled the butterball, much to Istlehiss’ amusement.

“The boar, yes. A puppet controlled by my magic, just like all the ‘villagers’ here.” Istlehiss licked his lips and slapped his belly. “Grazed on them a couple weeks back while setting up this trap—they were a nice little appetizer for the main course that you became. Now I’m sure you’ll want to know why I bothered to set a trap for someone like you, Arrell the Mouthwatering. Heroes have a bad tendency of trying to interfere with my fun, but thankfully I’ve collected more than enough magical trinkets over the years that reveal potential future threats. Eventually you would’ve been an annoying thorn in my side, Arrell the Fattening, but now you’ll just be a memorable meal.”

Arrell’s jiggling intensified, especially once he saw Istlehiss slowly make his way around the eagle’s massive form, out of sight. He wanted to believe he was too fat for anyone to possibly eat, but it wasn’t long before he felt claws gripping him, and jaws stretching against him...

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The thunderous belch echoed throughout the abandoned village and surrounding forest, powerful enough to rattle homes. A handful of gray feathers fluttered to the round, landing before a black, scaled mass. A look of pure delight was upon the face of Istlehiss, who now filled the entire town square, his enormous bulging middle shaking slightly.

“Been a while since I treated myself this well,” Istlehiss sighed contently, feeling Arrell wiggling futilely deep within his gut. “Not like I can’t handle a little immobility, though!”

He laughed and burped up a few more feathers.

“I might end up as fat as I was after eating that whole mage college a while back,” Istlehiss mused, remembering the feast with a mix of joy and frustration. “Hopefully I don’t have to deal with any obnoxious heroes any time soon—or at least fattening ones. They’ll have a hard time matching you, though, Arrell the Future Snake Fat!”

The snake’s cackling cut through the air once more...