

Washing Down the Thieves

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After plenty of meticulous filing, the last bar blocking a window of the storeroom was removed. Small paws gently nudged the window open without making a sound, before two figures slipped in, one after the other. Their drop to the floor below was just as silent as their entrance. Eyes darted all over, only stopping once they were certain no one else was in the room.

Zak and Kaz looked like twins, but the truth behind the mice was a bit more complicated. There had been—at first—only Zak, a self-proclaimed master thief who'd been stealing since the moment he was big enough to run off with a wheel of cheese. Then he'd run afoul of a cheese monger who actually knew magic.

In a flash one tall mouse had become two short mice, neither a hair over three-and-a-half feet tall. It'd been a powerful curse, separating Zak into identically puny beings. A questionable game of cards had determined which mouse kept the name Zak, while the loser spitefully went with Kaz.

The distress over their embarrassing fate vanished the instant both realized their smaller stature only enhanced their ability to sneak into places they weren't supposed to be. Eventually their personalities had diverged enough for the duo to be content never merging again. After all, why would either want to be burdened by the lesser thief?

On that night their target was a storeroom at the Rainwood Mage College. Valuable reagents or trinkets were bound to be within, enough for Zak and Kaz to enjoy a vacation somewhere relaxing. Somewhere loaded with wealthy merchants and nobles just begging to be robbed blind when they least expected it.

With silent nods the pair snuck off in opposite directions, investigating every crate, chest, and shelf they came across. Enchanted goggles let them see through the dark room as if it were day. Innate talent let them sniff out magic. Though there was so much magic in the room it was hard to pinpoint anything specific.

Both mice grumbled as they stepped in unexpected pools of water that seemed to plague the storeroom. The fact the College had neglected the room in such a manner meant security was likely non-existent—but also that they deemed nothing there valuable enough to safeguard.

Luck was on their side, though, as Kaz unearthed a small chest that smelled overwhelmingly of magic. A few deft prods with his lock pick opened it up quick. A pile of enchanted rings was inside, like a miniature dragon's hoard. Zak was by his side within seconds.

"Now *this* will make us comfortable for a good while," Zak said, picking up and admiring one of the rings.

"Doesn't even matter what they actually do, the magic alone will make them profitable."

"Either the rats have gotten bigger or the thieves shorter."

Both mice turned in unison, shocked to see a towering, hefty giraffe smirking at them. Holding a metal staff and wearing a loose blue robe, the stranger was clearly a mage of some sort. Probably one of the students—or maybe a professor. Neither option was good for the thieves.

"I thought being punished with night watch duty was gonna be boring *and* pointless, but I guess the College was right to be paranoid," the giraffe continued. "Good thing I bothered scattering those puddles around to detect intruders."

"Great job!" Zak and Kaz accused each other simultaneously, which only made their scowls wider. Of course there was water on the boots of both.

The two mice bolted, each hoping the other would draw the giraffe's attention. Outrunning their large pursuer would be a breeze, especially as they zipped in between lines of crates taller than them.

However, the giraffe appeared unfazed.

The metal staff was banged on the floor like a gavel, the sound echoing sharply throughout the

storeroom. The giraffe lifted the staff upward and horizontal. Water abruptly began to gush from both ends like a geyser, swirling into a pair of large spheres. Once formed he directed them after the mice, whose presence he could still sense thanks to the puddles they'd stepped in earlier.

Zak had winced at the sound of the staff slamming down, but didn't let it distract him from sprinting towards the window and salvation. Unfortunately his speed proved his undoing. As he darted around a corner he ran straight into an orb of water.

The mouse tried to cry out in surprise but gulped down a mouthful of water for his trouble instead. He frantically tried to swim out, but the surface of the orb bulged no matter where he pushed, as if it were solid. Gradually the orb condensed, until Zak was almost curled up inside, trapped.

Kaz had had a small head start on his spitting image, but not nearly enough. With the window in sight the mouse leapt forwards, preemptively smiling at his assumed success. He didn't see the sphere of water rising from below until he was already halfway in it. Just like Zak he quickly discovered that swimming out of the sphere was impossible. He felt like he was in a fishbowl.

The two spheres of water and their captive mice lazily floated back towards the giraffe, who hadn't moved from his spot at all. Bubbles of air drifted into the orbs to provide the mice with fresh air.

"I'm Alec, by the way," the giraffe said, though he doubted either of the mice could hear him through all the water. "You know, I forgot to bring a snack, and I've been starving. It takes a lot of food to fuel someone my size! Lucky me mice are one of my favorite foods~"

Any confusion Zak and Kaz had vanished the moment Alec opened his mouth wide and motioned over the first sphere. Zak's flailing renewed as he realized he was getting closer and closer to the dark tunnel of Alec's maw. He only managed to tire himself out.

The sphere pressed against Alec's lips and the water poured into his mouth. Zak felt himself getting sucked in, powerless against the current. Thanks to his size and the water, Zak's descent was swift. He felt the soft sides of Alec's throat on the way down like a fleshy slide.

Alec's belly swelled as it filled with water, a muffled splash and a bounce announcing Zak's arrival as well. Once the sphere had been swallowed completely—mouse and all—Alec burped and gave his large gut a slap. It was wobbling some, but so round it was hard for Kaz to tell Zak was even in there. Only the faintest, briefest bulges marked Zak's presence.

Kaz knew he was next, but there was little he could do to stop the inevitable. Just like Zak he floated towards and then into the waiting maw, gulped down with ease just like the water he was trapped in. Alec's belly swelled even more, becoming a wrecking ball. He could feel the mice swimming and squirming within him, stuck in the cozy heated pool that his stomach had become.

It was a delightful feeling.

Alec lifted his heavy belly and let it drop, laughing as it sloshed and swayed. He carefully lowered himself onto a crate he hoped was sturdy enough, smiling as it creaked beneath him. Despite its protests it held.

If I'd known guard duty had the potential to be so filling I'd have—*buh-urrrrrp*—volunteered for it ages ago," Alec mused, rubbing and squeezing his belly. Course I'd probably have to start hiring thieves just to keep the meals frequent."

The giraffe burst into laughter, his whole belly bouncing as he did. Within, Zak and Kaz were left blaming each other for the catastrophic failure of their heist—at least until digestion kicked in...