

No Shortcuts

By Victor Waite

A wolf desperate to shed his winter weight seeks out a fast solution and finds his way to Endra's shop. She has what he needs, but instead of granting him an easy out, provides him with a tool to help him achieve the feat on his own. He instead uses it to cheat on his diet, and the consequences of doing rapidly get out of hand.

Content Warning: This story is intended for Mature readers and contains a Male Wolf, a Female Kitsune, Magical Weight Loss, Unchecked Gluttony, Enchanted Clothing, Wardrobe Malfunctions, Rapid Weight Gain, Immobility

The soft breeze of an overworked air conditioner flowed through the cramped shop, staving off the unbearable heat just beyond its window. Low light filled the spaces between towering shelves, which were stacked with every variety of mundane and magical curiosity. The curios gave way to ancient tomes and crumbling scrolls deeper into the space, which in turn were displaced by aromatic plants and glowing mushrooms. There wasn't a field of study unrepresented, though none of the strange and wondrous items seemed to matter to the business's latest customer. A single bell tone announced the tubby wolf's interest, though his huffing and puffing made his presence more than obvious. The grey-furred canine took a moment to bask in the wall of cool air that washed over him, though he didn't linger on the door step long. Mixed curiosity and nervousness seeped into his posture as he glanced about, clearly unsure of what he'd gotten himself into. To his credit, he swallowed his apprehension and stepped forward with purpose, then took another and another, until he disappeared between the towering shelves. An open space greeted him on the other side, where the shop keeper and her counter awaited him. A slight smile spread across the blond kitsune's muzzle as she marked her place in her book, then looked up to greet her overweight customer.

"Hey there, what can I do for you?" Her eyes sparkled with interest and her five tails swayed with mischief while she sized the lupine up.

"I uhh... have a little problem, and a buddy of mine said you might be able to help." He scratched the back of his neck and looked to the ground until his blush faded. "Do you sell any kind of... weight fixers?"

Endra stood up and folded her arms over the counter. "More than you can imagine. Are you looking to gain or to lose?"

The wolf looked puzzled. "Umm, lose? If you have anything in stock. Preferably something fast acting."

The voluptuous vulpine lost a sliver of her mirth. "I do, but I'm afraid I can't sell it to first time customers. Safety concerns and all that," she gestured. "But I have something that can help you from putting on any more weight while you work on it, if you're interested."

Despite the less than ideal solution, the lupine beamed. "That would be fantastic! What do you have?"

"I'll show you~ Just give me a moment to fetch it."

The kitsune turned around and scanned the wall opposite of her counter, which seemed to contain most of her stock. A single, massive, multi-level shelf dominated its surface from floor to ceiling. Trunks and chests sat packed together on every level, labeled in scrips arcane and indecipherable to the canine. Endra found her target with ease and summoned a ladder from the wall's far end, which dutifully rolled to her open palm and easily bore her weight as she climbed. The wolf couldn't help but stare at her generous rear as she rose

above and beyond the obscuring counter, kindling a blush in his muzzle that drove his gaze back to the floor. By the time he recovered the nerve to look up, she retrieved her merchandise and returned to her favorite spot behind the counter. The wolf jumped and earned a playful giggle from the vixen.

"This is it," Endra held the girdle and showed it off. It was a strange garment, covered in ornate designs and dominated by shades of purple, and it thrummed with an energy that enraptured the wolf. It was clearly no ordinary piece of clothing, but the lupine failed place what inspired that conclusion. "Like I said, it won't do much for the weight you've got now, but it'll stop you from losing ground at least."

The kitsune went on to explain the finer details of its enchantment and its limits, but her arcane explanations went in one ear and out the other. It wasn't that her instructions were incomprehensible, far from it, but the wolf found himself distracted with the potentials such a tool unleashed. It was a free pass, a key to as many cheat days he wanted, and a release from the diet he'd oppressively shackled himself to. His inner visions only faded when he realized Endra had stopped talking, and his shamed blush returned.

Endra laughed to herself as he returned to the conversation. "Need me to run you through that again, big guy~?"

The wolf averted his gaze. "No, I think I got it," he mumbled. "How much do you want for it?"

"I think the girdle itself is a higher grade than the magic on it, so how does 30 sound?"

"Deal!"

The pair made their exchange, and the wolf squished his salvation into his rolls. "I've got a changing room in the back if you'd like to..."

Before she finished her suggestion, the wolf tugged his shirt over his head and undressed right in front of the counter.

"Or you could change right here," she chuckled.

Again, Endra's comments fell on deaf ears. The wolf devoted his full attention to squeezing himself into the enchanted garment, hoping against hope that it worked as advertised. Doubts rose in the back of his mind when he wrapped it around his pudgy middle, and his heart sank when its clasps came up short. He tugged at its edges to stretch it just a little more, and his efforts paid off as the loops gradually came together. A worrying pressure built in his belly and stole his breath as he fastened the first notch, and his fur bristled as a bizarre tingling suffused his form. Confusion played across his as he looked down, only to be replaced with relief as his doughy rolls diminished. His breathing eased as the pressure declined, and he whined with delight as he slipped into the profile of his

dreams. Hundreds of pounds of flab melted from his middle and thighs, easing the load on his legs and retuning his balance. The canine wiggled his comparatively wide hips and shook it out through his tail, basking in his bottom-heavy silhouette until Endra broke his daydreaming with a short cough. The small sound spurred him to jump once more, and his muzzle blazed with embarrassment.

"I'm glad I can add you to my list of satisfied customers," Endra chuckled. "Just remember what I said. Take it easy on the food, and you'll still need to exercise to make that shape stick."

The wolf vigorously nodded and threw his shirt back on, which hung from his shoulders like a curtain. "You bet! I'll be back again if I ever need anything else!" He stumbled when he turned, but he quickly recovered and dashed off into the forest of her shelves. A small ring announced that he found his way to the door and back into the world beyond.

"Oh~ You'll be back again," Endra sung under her breath. Her tails swayed with purpose as she stood up and turned to her back wall, where she browsed her selection of chests and recalled their contents. "Was it viper fang or vipergrass I need for that weight loss potion," she muttered to herself.

The wolf bounded down the sidewalk on his way to the gym, still adjusting to the absence of nearly a hundred pounds. His baggy shirt billowed in the slightest wind and hugged his figure, showcasing his "progress" to anyone who cared to look. A perpetual smile sat plastered on his muzzle as he met the eyes of everyone checking him out, their reactions ranging from bashfulness to astonishment, depending on how well they knew him. The fleeting interactions strengthened his resolve to make his figure permanent, and excitement welled in his chest as he neared his destination. He imaged the reactions and comments of his friends, and he was fully prepared to disclose his secret should they need a morale boost of their own. His grinned widened while he imagined exactly that scenario playing out, and from there, he envisioned himself walking to his favorite piece of equipment. The wolf's pride ballooned as he loaded up weight after weight, itching to test the limits of the body he'd spent weeks training and sculpting. His gaze turned to the ceiling when he laid on the soft bench before him, and anticipation gathered in his arms as he grabbed the ephemeral bar and lifted. A crowd gathered around him as he cycled through rep after rep, earning more of their awe and admiration with each pump. His stamina never flagged, and he only ended his workout when he decided he'd hogged the bench for too long. The canine set the bar in its slot and sat up to find a fast food meal in his lap.

The wolf stopped in his tracks and his fantasy dissolved.

Curiosity crossed his brow as he sniffed and searched for the source of the illusionary intrusion, and he pinpointed it almost instantly. The scent of his favorite fast food stop danced on the wind and traveled several blocks to caress his nose, spurring his deprived

appetite to shake its chains. His stomach growled and demanded the decadent familiarity, drawing a sigh of frustration from the conflicted canine. The lupine pressed on and mentally scrambled to repair the resolve that fueled him just a few short moments before. His willpower felt boundless in the absence of distractions, yet he found his discipline weakening at his first temptation. The wolf struggled to restore the strength of his fantasies, but his baser desires crept into and corrupted them in new and gluttonous ways. The weights he loaded onto his bar morphed into greasy burger patties, the bar itself molded into a single, massive french fry, and the bench he reclined upon distorted to a fluffy bun. The tug of his hunger intensified with each attempt to drive it back, until it finally wore him down. The wolf let out a defeated sigh and allowed himself a single cheat meal, if only to placate his demanding stomach and test his new garment. With his destination altered, he found his stride and only stopped when he stood at the doorstep of his most loved and hated restaurant.

A wave of cool, refreshing air greeted him as he pushed through the double doors, eroding just a small fragment of his detour-based regret. The wolf looked up to the menu and browsed its graphic selection, each image more greasy and fattening than the last, until he found the one that sang the most irresistible tune. Drool pooled on his tongue as he approached the counter and placed his order, a double large triple patty burger, a supreme fry, and an ultimate thirst slayer. The cashier paid little mind to the canine's self-consciousness and sent the request to the kitchen, then handed him his drink and gave him an order number. Relief and giddiness welled in the lupine's chest as he filled his cup to the brim with his favorite soda, to the point he couldn't resist sipping the foam from its surface and topping it off again. The added taboo of violating his diet only enhanced the drink's flavor, and he took several more swigs on his way to his seat. He claimed his table and sat down with an unceremonious plop, and he noted with delight his seat stayed silent under his reduced weight. The wolf passed the time on his phone and stole sips of his sugary drink in the gaps of his news feed, and he sunk into his own little world until the call of his number drew him back to reality.

The canine marveled at the size of his meal, which required both of his hands to lift and deliver to his seat. The table squeaked and tilted under the burger's considerable weight, spurring him to grab its opposite end and hold it steady. For the first time in fast-food history, the product looked more appetizing than its menu portrait, and it took every ounce of his willpower to resist cramming it into his muzzle instantly. The wolf took a steadying and refocusing breath, however, then sat and took a modest bite. Grease poured from the decadent patties and spilled across his deprived taste buds, spiking him with a wondrous flavor he'd nearly forgotten. It called into question his need to diet and lose weight in the first place, but after a moment's consideration, he remembered his promise and restored his self discipline. He forced himself to enjoy the burger as a treat, not the new norm. The second bite tested his willpower once more, but by the third and fourth, he found the key to his resolve and conquered his unruly gluttony. Maintaining such focus came with a price, however, and by the time he felt he could truly savor the meaty snack, there was nothing left to enjoy. The wolf hid his disappointment and moved onto his fries, which he also depleted woefully quickly.

He pushed his empty tray away and leaned back in his seat, then licked the residual flavors from his chops. The lingering essence was hardly a substitute for the real thing, and instead of appeasing his appetite, rekindled it. He looked down to his stomach with a critical eye and poked into his midriff, burying his finger to the first knuckle. Despite his generous meal, he looked and felt like he hadn't eaten anything. The wolf recalled his conversation with Endra and searched for details that may explain his situation, but he found nothing in the fantasy-interrupted fragments. He turned to his experience for an explanation instead and cobbled together a hypothesis. The canine stroked his chin while he mashed together bits of reason, eventually concluding that the girdle prevented his food from ever reaching his belly. The lupine's observations rallied behind his theory, bolstering it until it could be nothing other than truth. The new information unleashed dozens of loopholes and possibilities, nearly all of which involved returning to the counter and ordering more food. His tail wagged with lightning speed while he mulled over the menu, until he decided the best course of action would be to try everything on it while he could.

So he walked to the counter, flagged the cashier down, and ordered the menu.

Instead of bringing his meal out once it was finished in full, the kitchen crew brought out each course as they finished. They explained it was because they couldn't simultaneously prepare everything, but the wolf didn't seem to care either way. Confident his dietary lapse wouldn't influence his figure, he fell back into his old ways in full force and gorged himself. The staff watched with mixed awe and disgust as he shed his manners and feasted at a breakneck pace, sustaining his gluttonous momentum through multiple trays. Mini-burgers vanished into his ravenous jaws in single bites, sliding down his gullet and vanishing behind his slender chest. The mass of his meals seemed to vaporize at the top of his throat, leaving his middle just as flat as it was when he invaded. Not chicken nuggets, nor breakfast burritos, nor tacos nor fries could swell his figure, and that detail didn't escape his audience. Some sensed the presence of strange magic and left before it went awry, while others asked about his secret. The wolf freely offered his solution between mouthfuls, pointing them to Endra's quaint shop. A procession of burgers marched to his table and met his slavering jaws while they took note of the kitsune's address, and faint sparks tickled the canine's fur as he stuffed himself well beyond his former limits. The sinking feeling of something amiss crept into the back of his mind as the final course arrived, a copy of his original, massive meal.

The wolf's ears perked when the sound of a snapping thread snuck into his ear, followed by the pop and crackle of many more. His slim sides wobbled and quaked as the garment and its enchantment frayed, finally conquered by his rampant gluttony. A severe fullness rushed into his middle as everything the girdle absorbed returned, including the meals of its former wearers. He let out a pitiful whine as he gradually refilled his baggy shirt, then surpassed its bounds and pulled it tight across his rolls. A second wave of rending fabric filed his corner of the restaurant when ill-fitting top finally gave way, revealing the glowing tatters of the ruined girdle. Its fibers crumbled into a shower of glowing motes and danced across his pelt as the last of its magic dissipated, fueling a final

surge of growth that dwarfed everything before it. The wolf gathered his knee-length apron of a belly in his arms and squeezed in a vain attempt to stem its growth, but only managed to massage lose his limbs in his valleys. His rump and thighs spilled over the edges of his chair until nothing but its legs were visible, but the curtain of flab did little to muffle its groans of protest. The noises drew the attention of everyone not already watching, and his cheeks blazed with embarrassment as he tried to will himself invisible. Despite his best efforts, he remained opaque and wobbling until his growth eventually ended.

When he thought things couldn't get worse, his chair unleashed a pained groan and collapsed under his girth.

A loud slap filled the room and his impact shook the building to its foundation, and a shocked silence filled the air in its wake. It softly echoed for minutes while the wolf and the other customers grappled with the strange reality that unfolded before them, and it only shattered when the canine's belly grumbled and burbled with contentment. The heat in his muzzle rekindled and he pressed his stomach in to silence it, but the damage was already done. A few of his fellow patrons laughed, and a smaller number of them watched with envy, but the majority shrugged it off and returned to their lunch. The lack of reaction stunned the lupine almost as much as his ordeal, and he swallowed what remained of his pride and thanked the stars for extinguishing his limelight. He took a steadying breath, which sent a calming, wobbling wave across his figure. The wolf's expression soured as he pushed the details of his bulk from his thoughts, then got his feet under him and resolved to revisit the kitsune. She caused his problem, which meant she could probably resolve it. The wolf planted his feet on the ground and attempted to roll himself upright, only to discover he lacked the strength to stand.

A pitiful whine resonated in his flabby chest as each attempt to stand only sent more ripples across his rolls, which grew in volume with his desperation. He slumped into his flab once he depleted his stamina, though a familiar laugh drew his attention before he sank too deeply into his dread.

"I had a feeling something like this would happen," Endra teased. "You really should pay more attention when someone's explaining an artifact to you."

"I'm sorry," the wolf stammered. "Do you have anything that can fix this?"

"I do, but it's not cheap~"

"I'll do anything! I'll scrub floors in your shop for the rest of my life if I have to!"

That gave Endra pause. "You really hate your body, don't you?"

The wolf whined and nodded.

"Let me ask you this. Do *you* hate your body, or do you hate what you think others think of

it?"

The wolf opened his muzzle, but introspection stalled his reply.

"Well, you'll have time to think about it while we work out a payment plan for this." Endra produced a glowing blue potion from her tails and swished it about. "For now, open up and drink. You can't work anything off if you can't move."

He accepted the bottle, but didn't imbibe it right away. The thought of throwing himself in to such a deep debt, with a witch no less, sent a chill down his spine and raised his hackles. A moment of consideration revealed no other options, however, so he shoved his concerns aside and chugged the potion before he lost his nerve.

"It's going to take a few hours for that to reach its full effect. For now, come with me back to my shop, and we'll negotiate the terms of your debt~"

The wolf began to ask her how she expected him to follow, until a soft glow enveloped his form and lifted him a few inches from the ground.

"I hope you don't mind showing off too much~ It's a bit of a walk back."

The wolf blanched and withdrew into his rolls and prayed they wouldn't pass anyone he knew on the streets.