

"I woke up late in the afternoon the next day, every fiber of my being feeling the strain of the previous night. Rain could be heard pattering on the roof above me, and despite the wet weather and the fact that I was inside a building, the smell of smoke could be detected. I could go on explaining, but... well, you've seen the outcome...."

It was obvious that the memory still pained Bradley. I wanted to say something, some sort of condolence to show that I sympathized with him, but I wasn't eloquent, and nothing I could think of sounded sincere. So I simply sat there, waiting for an appropriate time to speak, if ever there would be one.

Bradley sighed, then looked up at the room's window. "Sounds as though the rain has stopped," he said. "I think it's best that we both return to our work."

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In truth, the rain hadn't completely left, but the occasional drizzle brought a welcomed cooling effect. There was at least one downside, however.

Said downside became gruelingly apparent when I went to gather more roofing materials. My feet slipped in the wet, muddy roads, and the cart would often sink its wheels into a freshly washed-out hole. These effects were only compounded when I got the cart loaded up, even though it wasn't nearly as full as the first time. On the bright side, that douche wasn't anywhere to be seen, and so he couldn't tease me for wearing the only clothes available to me.

As I trudged back to Bradley's place, I did what I could to avoid any dips that lay in my path. But despite my best efforts, I still ended up struggling to pull the cart free of a muddy pothole every so often. At one point, however, the cart's wheels sunk so deep that I found myself unable to get them out. I struggled in the middle of the muddy lane, feet slipping on wet soil as I tilted my body forwards in vain efforts to free the ensnared wagon. Giving a violent jerk at the handles, all I managed to do was pull my grip free of the slick wood, at which point I fell to the mud in a rather ungraceful manner.

Wiping the sticky brown substance from my muzzle, I lifted my gaze to see an extended paw. "Want some help there?" its owner asked.

"Yeah; yeah, thanks," I replied, taking the man's paw and allowing him to pull me to my feet.

We each grabbed one of the cart's poles and began rocking it back and forth to my helper's command. "...and forwards, and backwards; and forwards, and backwards; and forwards, and backwards; and *forwards*." With a final grunt, we managed to heave the wheels free of the trap and back to stable ground.

Panting slightly, I nodded to the fellow. "Thanks."

"Glad to help, mister...?"

It took me a moment to realize he was asking for my name. “Jason,” I said. “Just Jason; I don’t go by any ‘misters’ or anything.”

“Very well,” the man chuckled. He extended his paw once again, for a shake this time, one which I accepted. “Then you may call me Reling.”

I felt my face brighten up a bit at the mention of the familiar name. “Say, you wouldn’t happen to know Bradley, would you? The weaver?”

“I do indeed know him,” Reling confirmed, taking an axe out of the wagon; he must have placed there while I was down. “What about him?”

“Well, not much; just that mentioned you earlier.”

“Very well,” he said, his blue eyes looking me up and down. “Now, it may just be the mud, but I don’t recognize you; are you here with the relief groups?”

Suddenly self-conscious, I began brushing off my chest, which I had left shirtless, fortunately. “Not really; I mean, I’m fixing Bradley’s roof, but that’s more of a personal deal between the two of us.”

Reling nodded. “Ah, I see. Well, if you’re ever looking to make another deal, I could always use more woodcutters, especially during this time.”

I shrugged. “Ehh, maybe.” In truth, I really meant, “Yeah, I might keep that in mind, but I’d rather not take you up on that offer;” this was for the simple reason that I was no woodcutter, and I’d likely end up hurting myself if I tried swinging an axe.

Hefting his tool, Reling gave his final say. “Just come find me if ever you’re interested.” And with that, he walked away into the mist, leaving me alone to finish my work.

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I carried on working late into the afternoon, finally finishing as the horizon began to burn an orange hue. Checking over my work as best as I knew how to, I sat back and nodded, pleased with myself.

I climbed to the roof’s peak, where I rested as I looked out towards the sunset that was beginning to form. A small chuckle rose up in me.

“Did I seriously just spend all day fixing a roof?” I looked down at my hands—well, paws—and smiled wryly. “And in this form, nonetheless; what other little surprises does this place have for me?” I remained up there for a while, enjoying a moment of bodily relaxation and contemplative thought. “*What now?*” I wondered.

I didn’t get to answer this question, for I suddenly heard Bradley call me from below. “Oy, Jason! You finished up there?”

I snapped back to reality. “Yeah,” I shouted through the dried grasses.

“Well then, what are you waiting for? Come on down! I’ve got something for you.”

Standing up, I took one last look at the village from my raised vantage point, then grabbed my shirt and hopped down to the road.

Inside, Bradley stood by his sales counter, a satisfied look on his upturned face. "Seems as though you've completed it. It's not the best work I've seen, but it's certainly not bad either; I won't have to worry about rain intruding on my shop anymore, that's for sure." He unlocked a box sitting on the counter and withdrew some small disks of shiny brown metal, each about the size a U.S. nickel, though slightly thicker. "Ten copper bits, as promised," he said, holding the coins out to me.

"Thanks," I said, taking them. I looked at the circular currency, feeling their weight, then had a thought. "Um, how much is this worth, exactly?"

"Wa'd'ya mean, 'How much—'" Bradley started, then cut himself short. "Right, right—you're not from around here..."

"Two copper bits," he began, "will often buy you a loaf of bread, so figure that amount there will get you about three days' worth of food. And, to give you a bit more knowledge, there are also three other coins we use here: silver bits, which are worth fifteen copper bits, gold bits, which are worth twenty-five coppers, and iron mites, twenty-five of which will equate to a copper. Got it?"

"Yeah," I nodded, pocketing the coins. "Fifteen copper bits to a silver, which is enough for a loaf of bread, twenty-five gold bits to a copper, thirty-five... wait, what?"

Bradley tilted his head back and let loose a hearty laugh, which only hurt my feelings a tiny bit. "It took me a while to memorize as well; you'll get it in time, though." He restated the system to me a couple more times until I was able to repeat it back to him, then he led me to the door and saw me off.

"I suppose you're off to the inn now?" he asked me, leaning on the door frame.

I looked down the road thoughtfully and shrugged. "Unless there's anywhere better to go, yeah."

The weaver nodded. "Well, if there's ever anything I can help you with, you know where to find me." He raised his good paw in farewell, a gesture I returned, and then he closed the door.

Walking along the still-moist paths, coins jingling in my pocket, I gazed up at the reddening skies. For once that day, I felt as though I were able to relax both my body and mind, and it was a welcome feeling.