

The Curse

Albert wiped the sweat from his brow. The athletic husky stretched his quads and jogged in place, waiting for the light to change on the busy street. As soon as he saw the walk signal, he bolted with the grace of a seasoned runner. His motion was graceful and efficient, crossing the road in a flash. His tank top and tight running shorts left little to the imagination, clinging tightly to his lean and sharply defined six pack, toned arms roped with muscle, and a powerfully fit backside and legs. All in all, he might as well have been the dictionary definition of fitness.

His sleek silhouette turned a few heads as he crossed the busy intersection. Since he made this trip nearly every morning, he had become something of a landmark to everyone on their morning commute. He felt flattered and just a bit prideful, but was too focused on his run to acknowledge them. Albert pressed onward to complete his daily ritual.

Suddenly, a corpulent wolf in an ill fitting t-shirt turned a corner and began waddling directly in Albert's path, occupying nearly the entire width of the sidewalk with his ponderous belly. "On your right!" the husky called out. The wolf turned his head to see him, but was unable to maneuver effectively out of the way. Albert was forced to make a complete stop, ruining his momentum. With the busy street on one side and a retaining wall on the other, the sidewalk now had its own little traffic jam.

Albert shimmied around the wolf's vast middle, arriving on the other side of him after an awkward pivot, nudging and elbowing his way through. He started to utter an insult at the wolf, but caught himself before the word fully formed. He glanced back at the portly canine with a look of disgust. Privately, he detested obese people, believing them to be weak willed individuals of poor character who deserve everything thrown at them. Extenuating circumstances or simply being fresh to the road to personal health didn't even enter the equation for him. Though he usually had the decency to keep these thoughts to himself, that didn't always stop him from patronizing people with backhanded advice.

“You should try the gym on 35th Street. It's great for losing weight.” said Albert.

“I, um, I'll think about it?” the wolf replied meekly, but Albert had already dashed off into the distance without waiting for the response.

After a few more minutes of hard running, Albert suddenly remembered he had an errand to run and took a slight detour. Shortly after, he approached the grocery store. A light sweat misted his body, but he didn't feel the slightest bit winded. The air conditioning running full blast inside the store still felt amazing though, and he stopped at the entrance to relish it for just a moment.

Remembering why he came here, he picked up a hand basket and started his way down the aisles. He headed straight for the produce section, of course. He stocked up on his usual assortment of vegetables, avocados, nuts and other healthy fare. Next up on the list was the tofu, located on the opposite end of the store. To get there, he had to pass

along multiple aisles full of calorie rich and hearty meals, sodas, pastas, and other anathema things. Albert rankled at the mere thought of them. He simply couldn't understand how anyone could want such things or be beholden to their stomach like that. He felt justified praising himself for his discipline, unlike those of weaker will who would eat any garbage put in front of their face.

In fact, he was so focused on his self righteous disdain, that he completely failed to notice another shopper turning a corner pushing a fully loaded cart. Albert slammed directly into it, toppling it and the shopper over, sending a wave of pizza components and cake mixes to the floor.

“Oh geeze, I'm sorry! Are you alright?” said Albert, offering a paw.

The portly weasel stood himself up, readjusting his red scarf and smacking Albert's paw away with bitterness.

“Here, let me help you clean that up.”

The husky attempted to pick up a few packages of mozzarella before the weasel suddenly snatched them away.

“Don't you dare!” The weasel looked Albert up and down, noting the husky's figure, his athletic wear clinging tightly to his muscular form, and his shopping basket full of bland, healthy things.

The rotund weasel glared directly into Albert's eyes, as if he were reading some deep insights from them.

“I know your type. You harbor a deep malice against those you look down upon.

You think they're weak and stupid.”

Albert was taken aback. “I didn't say anything.”

“You were thinking it.”

The weasel stepped forward and suddenly jabbed a pudgy finger right into the husky's belly and uttered a single word, a shade of malevolence washing over his eyes.

“Grow.”

Albert backed away in disgust.

“The hell, man? Whatever, I'm not sorry I ran into you. You can clean this mess up yourself, fatso.”

The husky turned away to resume his shopping, leaving the weasel there with the upturned cart. Oddly, the weasel no longer seemed frustrated, and instead bore a malicious grin.

Albert checked out and returned to his apartment, depositing his groceries in the fridge. In the living room, a powerfully built utahraptor did one armed pushups while a sci-fi show played on the computer monitor. Seeing Albert come in the utahraptor adeptly launched himself to a standing position with one arm and sauntered over. He was wearing nothing but a pair of gym shorts, which gave the husky a good view of his intense musculature. Where Albert was toned and sleek, Travis, as the raptor was known, was built like a brick wall. His thick muscles framed his body like a mountain and rippled with strength.

“Hey hon” said Travis, as he gave his boyfriend a quick smooch.

“Hey.” They hugged tightly. “I picked us up some more salad things. The other stuff was getting kinda old and gross.”

“Oh awesome, thanks!” Travis hugged the husky again, as one of his claws wandered downward to give Albert's pert, muscular rump a friendly squeeze. The husky whimpered happily and nuzzled into Travis's chest.

After an enjoyable but not especially interesting day of watching films and working out together, the husky and the utahraptor laid down to rest. As he nestled himself into position, Albert felt a strange warmth course through his middle. He grumbled softly, pulling one of his sheets away and tossing it to the floor. The warmth passed as quickly as it came, and he fell asleep. Little did he know that a dark magic was brewing within him.

Albert woke up the next morning and began his usual routine. He had his usual healthy breakfast, and went out for his usual run. The scale read its usual number of 168 pounds. Something seemed a little different this time, however. Getting through his usual route was just a bit more difficult than he remembered. Midway through the run, that strange warmth again rolled through his middle, but he paid it no mind. He only made it three quarters of the way through and he was already gasping for air. He paused at a traffic stop to catch his breath, wondering in vain at what would be making this so hard today. He eventually completed his run, though he felt a bit disappointed in himself for not giving the morning commuters their usual show of athleticism.

The husky returned home, drenched in sweat. He cleaned off in the shower,

feeling greatly refreshed by the warm water. As he exited, he took a look at himself in the mirror. Something seemed a little bit off. It may have been his eyes playing tricks on him, but he got the feeling that his abs had receded just a bit, like they weren't as sharply defined as they always were. He chalked it up to his imagination, which must have been running wild after that encounter with the rude weasel the day before. Without a second thought, the husky suited up for work and headed out to the office.

Albert parked his car in the lot and mentally prepared himself for the day. A massive sign emblazoned on the building read 'FleetFit,' a sportswear and accessories company headquarters. Albert's boss Sam, a thin leopard in an Italian suit, greeted him at the front gate.

“Heya. Ready to knock 'em dead today? I need you sharp if we're gonna make this deal work.”

“I've got it all in hand, don't worry.” said the husky with a confident grin.

Later that day, FleetFit met with representatives from a department store with Albert heading the discussion. Leveraging his athletic presence, he was able to subtly influence the store representative's feelings and ended up getting a very favorable deal. Sam was elated and Albert was filled with pride. As the meeting came to a close, another strange warmth passed over his middle. The husky assumed he must have been worked up by the tension in the meeting and paid it no mind.

When he returned home, he quickly changed out of his work attire. Oddly, he felt a bit of relief as he undid the button on his pants, a sensation he was unfamiliar with. He

shrugged and finished getting ready to enjoy the evening with Travis.

Waking up the next morning, Albert groggily shuffled into the bathroom for his shower. As he got undressed, something in the mirror caught his eye. His abs had vanished! He cautiously poked and prodded at himself, hoping to find the muscular ridges he was so proud of, only to find a smooth surface with a delicate layer of fat on top. He figured he must be a victim of the business lunches that Sam often treated him to. Deeply frustrated, he vowed to redouble his efforts to exercise and stay even healthier.

The husky decided to go for a run. His usual route had become a serious endeavor, but he managed to push himself through it. He was gasping for air by the time he reached the end, but he had succeeded. He decided to reward himself with a smaller than usual breakfast, being extra careful to count his calories. Albert was determined. He was no weak willed fatty and like hell he'd let that happen to him. A gentle warmth passed through him again. Calories being burned away, the husky assumed.

The following morning, he found it in himself to go running again, but oddly it seemed to be getting harder and harder to cover the same ground he always had. He upped his activity level and dropped his caloric intake in response. His skintight running gear still fit him, but he didn't cut quite the lean figure he once had. When he got home and showered and ready for work, he struggled with the button on his suit pants. He found that they were a bit tighter than he remembered. He chastised himself for washing them incorrectly, assuming they must have shrunk again.

A few days passed by in much the same way. Each day, his daily workouts getting more and more intense, and denying himself more and more food. And yet each day the pounds kept coming. One morning, he exited the shower like usual, but the sight in the mirror mortified him. Right there, hanging off his middle, rested a small convex pooch of fat, mocking him. It was barely noticeable, but in Albert's eyes it was like night and day. It was evidence that he had been slacking in his routine that he was forced to wear around his waist. To make matters worse, Travis picked this moment to head into the bathroom for his own shower.

He looked Albert up and down and chuckled, giving the husky a gentle poke in the stomach.

“Going soft on me, huh?”

“N...no.” Albert looked away sheepishly. “Just been trying a new macro combination. It's not working so well so I'm going back to my old one.”

The utahraptor looked intently for a moment and then shrugged his massive shoulders. “Alright. Lemme know if you wanna work out together and shed those L-Bs.”

“Nah, don't worry about it, I don't wanna slow down your routine. I can handle this anyway, it's okay.”

Travis patted him on the back. “Attaboy!” He gave him a quick kiss before stepping into the shower. The husky blushed and felt warmed over, reminded of why he loved him.

Another day of work passed by. Today was so hectic and exhausting that Albert

didn't feel like doing much anything when he finally got home. He kicked off his shoes and plopped right into bed. The intense warmth lulled him to sleep immediately. Hours later, something rudely awakened him. It wasn't his alarm, but a sharp pain in the front of his waist. As it started to get more and more unbearable, it suddenly abated with a popping noise. Something ricocheted off the far wall, snapping him awake.

Albert climbed out of bed to investigate and found something odd on the floor. A button. He hesitantly looked down at his pants with dread to confirm what he suspected. He was right, the button had snapped right off, giving his little starter belly the freedom to spill forward. He poked at it gingerly, playing with the unfamiliar softness. "What's happening to me?"

The next day's jog went horribly. His running shirt and shorts barely fit anymore, and did nothing to hide the silhouette of a slight belly protruding forward and jiggling slightly with each step. Albert only made it halfway before being too exhausted to continue. Ashamed, he turned around and walked back home. Later that evening, he decided to take up Travis's offer to work out together.

Travis was happy to help, and subjected the poor husky to an intense regimen of cardio and weight training under his direct supervision. He recorded his starting weight of 187 pounds. He even prepared the meals for him and kept a watchful eye while he ate. For days this continued, with the utahraptor watching Albert with pride as he worked his way through a routine that would've even given him a great deal of trouble.

Albert put on a brave face, but somehow this wasn't having any effect. When he

wore his shirts outside, he felt drafts flowing on the underside where the presence of his belly introduced a gap. His pants kept getting tighter and tending to slip down against the curvature of his gut. With each passing day, he seemed to put on a little more weight. He had taken his suits to the tailor to get it let out again and again, until there was no more material to stretch out. He looked in the mirror sadly everyday, watching his facial features soften in slow motion, and his belly and rump slowly but surely swelling outward and never ceasing to grow.

Grow.

He fixated on the word, wondering where he had heard it recently. He couldn't put his finger on it but it felt significant somehow.

The husky had taken to sucking in his gut around everyone. Even around Travis, who he did not want to disappoint after he went to so much trouble. Eventually, two weeks of his intense workouts had passed and the time had come for his weigh-in. Travis excitedly marched Albert into the bathroom. The husky looked like he was attending a wake.

When they reached the scale, Albert disrobed down to his underwear and gingerly stepped on the machine. The husky shut his eyes in resignation. The utahraptor's cheer transformed into shock as the display kicked in. 215 pounds.

“After all that, you... *gained* 28 pounds?”

Albert looked away sheepishly and said nothing.

Travis continued with a look on his face like he had been betrayed. “Have you

been sneaking pizzas or something when I'm not looking?"

"No!"

"Wait a minute, are you sucking in your gut right now?"

"...No."

"Yes you are. C'mon, stop hiding and let me see."

The husky pouted at him for a moment before resigning. He relaxed his middle. Like a dam bursting, the husky's belly rolled forth, overhanging the edge of his waistband by at least two inches. He had a genuine pot belly now, a definite addition to his frame. His rump fared no better, and had grown plump with fat, the muscles underneath no longer obvious as it became two large, smooth curves.

Travis blushed and blinked his eyes several times. "Holy shit!" He reached out and felt the husky's belly, cupping his claws around the curvature and caressing it and giving it some playful squeezes as if to check if it was real. He seemed oddly enamored with it until he suddenly remembered where he was and snapped back on topic.

"I, uh, we need to go into overdrive and you need to get serious if you want to lose this. We're going to try again, and harder this time, and weigh you in another two weeks. Alright?"

"...Alright."

"I know you can do this, hon'. You just gotta remember your discipline. Remember how you got that bod in the first place. Hard work and perseverance." He clapped the husky on the shoulder, sending his little belly wobbling before stepping out.

Albert stared at himself in the mirror and could only sigh. A now familiar warmth passed through his belly and the husky could almost swear he grew slightly, but it must have been his imagination.

The next few mornings saw renewed vigor in the husky. He put on his jogging shirt and shorts, not caring at all that his bulging belly peeked out the bottom or that his enlarged rump was squeezed tight like ripe fruit under shrinkwrap. He stopped at the same intersection he ran through weeks ago, wheezing but determined. When he got the walk signal he bolted as best he could, his belly bouncing in rhythm with his steps. He was resolute. He was going to beat this.

He was not going to beat this. He monitored everything he ate down to the calorie and documented it all. He was impossibly active in both his running and in Travis's workout sessions. And yet the weight kept piling on. His work suffered too. Being so out of shape did not lend credence to his company's product line and he could feel the judgmental stares of his coworkers on his ample backside.

None of his old clothing fit anymore, and Albert was forced to buy a whole new wardrobe to match his enhanced figure. His face had softened into slightly cherubic features and his arms and legs lost their definition and picked up some fat themselves. His rump had fattened up nicely into a thick, rounded shape. But what had really taken the brunt of his gains was his midsection. His belly now bulged out into a hemisphere, a significant addition to his silhouette. He was well and truly fat now, as nobody could deny.

One afternoon in the FleetFit conference room, the pudgy husky plied his trade, attempting to secure a deal supplying a major football team with their product line. However, things were not going his way. Albert couldn't stop being self conscious about the size of his gut. It was sapping his confidence with the sales pitch and the potential clients were picking up on it.

Suddenly, a wave of warmth washed over the husky's middle. Albert couldn't place the feeling or why it was significant, but he was overcome with a sense of dread. A loud gurgle emanated from his stomach and the fabric on his pants began to creak ominously. He looked down at his waist with wide eyes as the button burst open, allowing his belly to bulge outward in all its shameful roundness. A band of white belly fur was visibly peeking out from between his clothing. Sam gasped at the sight, the husky's boss looking at the exposed canine with disbelief.

After a very awkward silence, one of the clients cleared his throat. "Umm, we'll be in contact. Thank you for meeting with us." Paws were shaken as per decorum, but it was clear the deal was dead. Everyone shuffled out of the room except for Albert and Sam.

The lithe leopard glided over to him. "You okay, buddy?"

Albert's face glowed crimson with embarrassment. "...Fine. Just having some problems."

"I see. We need to have a talk."

Sam's face was stoic with an undercurrent of concern. The husky spoke first.

“I'm sorry. I don't know what happened, I thought I had it in the bag but-”

“It's alright, these things happen.” Sam gritted his teeth and sighed, like he was running on equal parts frustration and pity. “But I think I'm going to need you to take a break from sales.”

“What?”

“It's... well it's like this.” The leopard pats Albert on the midsection, sending a wave of jiggle through it. “We're an athletic equipment company. It doesn't reflect well on us if the vanguard of the company looks, uh...”

“...Nonathletic.”

“...Like I said, I want you to take some time off, get things sorted out, and we'll touch base later, alright?”

“...Alright.”

“Good. Call me in a while, alright?”

“...Alright.”

“Right. Have a good evening.”

Sam quietly left the room, leaving the crestfallen husky to ruminate.

Albert went to visit his doctor, but she was utterly mystified by his situation and couldn't offer any suggestions beyond what he'd already tried. All he received was patronizing advice about portion control and exercise, as if he needed a lecture on that. He left the appointment unsatisfied.

“Out of the way, fatso!” A grouchy patient shouted to him in the hallway. He

rudely shimmied around the husky and muttered an insult about his weight and his worth as a person. As soon as he was out of sight, tears welled up in the husky's eyes.

Two weeks had come and gone. A funeral dirge played in the husky's head as he and the utahraptor went to the bathroom together. Both of them seemed to already know what the scale would say. With trepidation, Albert stepped on the scale and read the number.

“...290.”

“You gained another *75 pounds*. I don't understand it, this shouldn't be possible.”

“Well it is. And it's here to stay, it looks like.” Albert wobbled his belly for emphasis. His beachball sized gut sloshed back and forth like a single mass, bulging heartily past the waistband of his underwear like a bulbous sphere. Love handles formed creases at his sides, accentuating his roundness.

Travis stared with a serious look on his face for a few moments, but then his features softened into a smile. “It's kinda hot though.”

“What?”

“...Yeah. I didn't realize it until just now, but yeah.” He cupped his massive claws around the husky's belly and rump, giving both of them a squeeze. “You're so... soft and warm now.” He steals a little glance at Albert's plump backside and grins. “I like it.”

“Really?”

He nods.

“I'd have figured you'd be against it, considering everything.”

“Well I'm against it if you're against it. I want you to be comfortable with yourself.”

The husky sighed. “I think I have to be comfortable with it, like it or not. Everything's gone wrong and this thing's just gonna keep growing.” He rested his paws on his round middle, deep in thought.

“Growing...” said the husky.

“Hmm?”

“Everything went wrong the day I went to the grocery store. I bumped into this weasel guy and he... he put a spell on me!”

“Huh?”

“That must be it! He's a wizard!”

Travis blinked in disbelief. “A weasel wizard in the grocery store cast a spell on you that made you fat?”

“Basically, yes.”

“And what do we do about it?”

“We hunt the guy down and pound him until he fixes it!” The husky punches his fist into his palm.

“Well... I can't think of any reason not to do that. Let's get started.”

Hunting down a person turned out to be more difficult than the movies suggested. The two of them tried staking out the grocery store, retracing Albert's steps, investigating social media, going to the police, and other avenues of search. None of

them bore fruit. All the while, the clock was ticking in the form of the husky's growing waistline.

Weeks passed in the search, and the poor husky continued to grow, just as the weasel commanded. His belly ballooned into the size of a small boulder, and his rump stretched out the seats of his pants, leaving little to the imagination. His gut had grown so large that even his gait had to change into a swaying waddle in order to walk effectively. In his daily life, he constantly received unsolicited advice about dieting and exercise, which only served to enrage him. Travis did his best to console him.

Finally in a stroke of luck, Albert spotted the weasel out of the corner of his eye darting into an alley. The husky husky gave the signal to pursue and the two of them bolted after the miscreant.

The weasel spotted their approach and with wide eyes leaps to his side, appearing to phase straight through a brick wall. Albert was undeterred, and charged right in after him, diving face first into the wall, passing through it into a new location.

He did a face plant on a marble floor. When he got his bearings, he took stock of things. He was in some kind of eclectic curio shop and a familiar weasel was standing over him.

“Who are you and what are you doing in my shop?!” the weasel demanded.

“You did this to me!” bellowed Albert as he stood up.

Travis appeared in the portal behind Albert. The weasel shot him a glare before returning his gaze to the husky.

“Hmm? Ohhh yes, now I remember. The sanctimonious athlete. You look like you've been prosperous.” He chortled as he pantomimed a much larger belly on himself.

“Change me back! Now!”

“No can do, I'm afraid.”

Travis stepped in and cracked his knuckles. “You'd better do as he asks.”

A bead of sweat trickled down the weasel's brow. “Mmm. What I mean is, it's not in my power to stop the curse. It's up to him.”

“What does that mean?” asked Albert.

“It means the curse is tied to some kind of moral lesson that only the victim can break with new wisdom. In your case, your complete and utter disdain for overweight people needs to be overcome.”

“I don't hate fat people!”

The weasel shook his paw dismissively. “Don't lie to me, I looked into your mind. I know what I saw.” He sighed with exasperation. “You will have to sincerely and truly change your ways to stop the curse.”

Albert growled lowly but then relented. “Ugh. Fine.” He shut his eyes and thought about all the overweight people he had looked down on. The people he smugly mocked with unwanted dieting advice. He thought about how he felt suddenly being on the receiving end of such treatment. He grumbled to himself, but then managed to set his pride aside and change his mind on the matter. He opened his eyes again, wondering what happens next. He looked down at his belly. It still bulged mightily out in front and

hung partway down his thighs.

“And it's done. The curse is broken.” the weasel said.

“I'm still fat.” the husky said, frustrated.

“You stopped growing, isn't that enough? 'You can clean this mess up yourself, fatso' I think was your phrasing.” the weasel smirked.

“You rotten-”

Albert moved in to punch his lights out and the weasel cringed, but Travis intervened. “People like that get what's coming to them eventually. Let's let it go.”

“...fine.”

Albert travels through the brick wall again and back into the alley.

“If I ever see you again we're going to have a “talk,” understand? Said the immense utahraptor flexing his claws.

The weasel gulped and nodded as Travis left. He felt that maybe he should learn something today too, for his own sake.