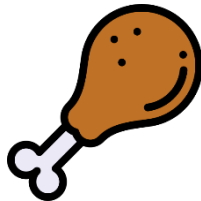


Season 2, Chapter 9 – Foodie Quest



I don't know what all that was about. I probably just played a game about a blue elephant unlocking achievements and saw that name, adding it in because I thought it was cool. Yuck!

Anyway, today Amber and FlamDawg were sitting on the couch in the living room doing whatever it is that they tend to do. There was a girly magazine opened to a specific page on the coffee table and FlamDawg was busy scrolling through top 7 articles on his phone. Which top 7 articles? Yes! Seeing as the magazine was out of her hands, you can probably guess that it was because Amber was busy talking up a storm.

“-and on page 9 it said they would hold some kind of hula hooping contest but then that guy tragically died in Manhattan so they canceled it. Now it's a dance competition and I'm totally going to enter because I'm the best dancer, like, EVER!”

She threw her arm into the air and did a little hand-swish. FlamDawg, having heard none of whatever she just said, slowly looked up from his phone with wide eyes.

“I... I...”

She leaned in close.

“You what? You love me?! Oh my God!”

“I... I have a craving...!”

She made a noise in disgust and rolled her eyes before throwing a bag of Cheetos at him which he immediately tore open and started eating by the pawful.

“So... what's this about a hula hooping convention?”

“Ugh, I said *competition!* And it's canceled because that guy died!”

He chewed for a moment before responding.

“But you’re a lady.”

“Oh, true! I probably wouldn’t die because I’m too cute. But anyway, check out my awesome dancing moves that I’m going to use in the competition!”

It was then that I entered the room, walking in just in time to see Amber awkwardly climbing onto the coffee table and nearly hitting her head on the ceiling fan above. My eyes grew wide and I quickly hurried over to her.

“Oh my God! What are you *DOING?! We are CIVILIZED people on occasion!*”

She ignored me and started doing some kind of karate stance.

“So, like... I’ll start off with this kung-fu pose, right? Oh, and I can do sound effects too!”

FlamDawg and I shook our heads.

“NO!”

“No no no, that’s quite alright.”

“SILENCE! I must heighten my focus!”

She spread her arms out while I stared at her.

“I think if you get any higher you might just get arrested.”

She turned and glared at me.

“HEY! You are *DISRUPTING* the psychological field of *MY AWESOMENESS!*”

I blinked a few times in confusion.

“...your what now?”

She then proceeded to wave her arms about slowly and carefully while making lightsaber sound effects.

“VWOOM... VWOOOM... VWOOM!”

Then, she thrust her arms out and threw her head back like she was unleashing some latent power, but nothing happened.

“YAAAAH! Okay, I’m done.”

She turned and jumped off the table, only to slip and take a hard spill on the floor before popping up like it didn’t happen. FlamDawg and I remained frozen in place with confused looks on her faces because she never actually did anything that could be classified as “dancing”.

“Yeah, okay, very good.”

After this little stunt, I turned to head upstairs but then she stomped her foot like she was suddenly angry about something.

“I’m hungry! I need food!”

I whipped around and pointed in the direction of the kitchen.

“That’s GREAT! There’s a fridge RIGHT OVER THERE!”

Her jaw dropped and she stared at me in disbelief, hardly able to believe I was giving her such unwarranted attitude in her very own home. Then, she made a noise in disgust and headed into the kitchen with a similar level of unwarranted attitude. As she stepped out of the room, FlamDawg suddenly started bawling and snatched like seven tissues from the box on the coffee table.

“I’m sorry...! This is a very emotional time for me...!”

I gave him a look that said I was not about to deal with *any* of that.

“I bet it is.”

Then there was a sneeze from BlueEye, who had apparently been standing in the corner this entire time without anyone noticing. I immediately whipped around and started screaming at him.

“THAT’S ABOUT ENOUGH!”

I was about to wrap my hands around his throat when I heard Amber’s voice again.

“Um... guys? Could you come in here?”

I sighed loudly, already done with everything, and then FlamDawg and I headed into the kitchen where Amber was standing in front of the open refrigerator.

“What, Amber? Do you need help making a sandwich again?”

“No, it’s just... well, there’s *supposed* to be food in here, right?”

“Of course there is!”

I shoved her aside and we all peered inside.

“I just went to the... WHUH?!”

Our jaws all dropped at the same time upon seeing that the fridge was completely empty, devoid of any food we could use to replenish our much-needed life forces! I gasped in shock while FlamDawg started sobbing hysterically.

“WHERE DID THE FOOD GO?!”

It was then that we heard a burp and all eyes slowly turned to JT who was sitting at the kitchen table with an absurdly large stomach. There were dozens of empty jars and containers and various other things that once had food in them strewn all over the table in front of him. He seemed to be quite satisfied with what he had done even though this meant the rest of us would quickly starve to death. I took a deep breath before marching over to him and wrapping my hands around his throat, but Amber stopped me before I could get very far.

“No, stop! It’s not worth it! You’re just using up the last of your energy!”

Suddenly, Zack came downstairs and saw what was going on. I had my hands around JT’s throat, Amber was trying to pull me away, and FlamDawg was on his knees, sobbing.

“Uh... what’s happening?”

I whipped around.

“JT ate all the food so now we’re gonna *starve*.”

There was a quick zoom-in of our fat, bloated bellies before it cut to Zack looking confused.

“Oh, he didn’t eat all the food; I took it.”

“What?!”

“Yeah, I was trying to figure out how to make it all poisonous but then I realized I didn’t have enough poison. When I went to put it back, it smelled funny. Did you know all that food in the refrigerator had to be kept cold or else it would go bad? I didn’t. So instead of throwing it away and stinking up the house I just gave it to JT who eats anything.”

He raised his paw in the air.

“That I do.”

I stared at Zack for a moment before taking a deep breath, marching over to him, and attempting to wrap my hands around his throat. Once again, Amber stopped me before I could do what I’ve been wanting to do for over a year now. Throttle! Throttle! Throttle!

“Enough! Strangling Zack is only going to solve a *few* of our problems. What we need right now is to go out and get more food.”

I spun around and thrust a finger into the air.

“You’re right! It’s time for us to embark on a new quest! Pack your bags, everyone! We’re setting off for the Valley of Food!”

FlamDawg picked himself off the floor while Amber and Zack stared at me.

“The valley of... what now?”

“The Valley of Food is a place far to the east of here that is rumored to consist entirely of fresh food. There’s your standard lettuce and carrots and grapes in the farm fields but then there are also chocolate rivers and burritos that grow on trees. And if none of that is true, then it’s probably just some place with a bunch of restaurants or maybe a quaint farmer's market.”

FlamDawg blinked a few times in confusion.

“Wait... can’t we just go to the store and buy more food?”

My eyes narrowed and I grabbed onto his black dog lips, pulling until they stretched out and then releasing them so they snapped back into his face and fell limp.

“Why would we just walk a few blocks to go to some dumb store when we can go on a *crazy, magical adventure* spanning five chapters instead?!”

Amber threw her head back and groaned loudly because she just *knew* this would involve walking. Without even giving anyone a chance to prepare themselves, I started heading over to the back door.

“Come on, let’s get going! Food and grand adventure await!”

I reached for the door handle, but suddenly turned back around.

“Hang on, wait wait wait.”

“What is it?”

I was quiet for a moment before continuing.

“...does everyone have their Thighmasters?”

Amber, FlamDawg, and Zack rolled their eyes before slowly holding up their revolutionary thigh-toning devices for me to see. I nodded in acknowledgment before all eyes once again turned to JT who just stood there looking rather confused.

“Um... what’s a Thighmaster?”

I pulled mine out for him to admire and possibly become jealous over.

“A Thighmaster is a revolutionary piece of workout equipment designed to be portable and efficient. You stick it between your legs and then squeeze them together for rapid toning anytime, anywhere! It’s my latest obsession and I will die on this hill, mark my words. None of you can stop me. Certainly not with those flabby thighs.”

He stared at me in confusion.

“Oh. Well, uh... I don’t have one of those.”

My eyes grew wide and it was clear this was *not* what I wanted to hear. Amber quickly leaned over and whispered in his ear.

“You should have gotten one from the prop department shortly after your contract was signed!”

“I didn’t! They just signed my contract and then went straight to lunch!”

Amber facepalmed while Zack pulled on his face in distress. What followed was a minute or two of uncomfortable silence as I stared at him rather intensely. Then, I smiled.

“You know what? That’s perfectly fine. You don’t need something as silly as a Thighmaster. You’re fine just the way you are.”

He seemed a bit surprised by this but smiled back.

“Oh! Uh, thanks!”

“No problem. Oh, and one more thing?”

We cut to a shot of us walking down the sidewalk, heading out on our big adventure. As we set off, we passed by a garbage can that now had JT’s legs sticking out of it. It was also on fire. The moral of the story here is probably something like “never forget your Thighmasters when setting off on big adventures”. I’m sure I read that in a book somewhere. Was it this one? Probably.

Sometime later, we all arrived at the bus stop and managed to climb onto the first bus that pulled up. The adventure was already proving difficult because Amber was dying of excess exercise and FlamDawg was once again proving that he was the most annoying person to spend an extended period of time with. Zack, meanwhile, was actually rather quiet and keeping his hands to himself. This was certainly a sign of bad things to come. JT was once again with us, albeit scarred for life, and had his brand new teal Thighmaster strapped to his thigh. I say “strapped” but it was more like “embedded” and probably won’t ever be removable.

We rode along without any trouble aside from Amber harassing some professional-looking business lady in the seat across from her. That girl needs to be on a leash, I swear. Eventually, I found myself glancing around because I couldn’t see where Zack was. He was definitely nearby when we had *boarded* the bus so he had to be *somewhere*.

“Hey, where’s Zack?”

FlamDawg was staring out the window with a bored look on his face.

“He’s driving the bus.”

I whipped around.

“HE’S WHAT?!”

He turned and looked at me.

“Yeah, he’s right up there.”

“And you didn’t stop him?!”

“Hey man, let people do how they do.”

I jumped out of my seat and marched up to the front where Zack was sitting in the driver’s seat, wildly whipping the wheel back and forth.

“ZACK! WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING?!”

He turned to me with a smile.

“I’m driving the bus!”

“Where is the real bus driver?!”

We cut to a shot of a garbage can on the side of the road that had some random man’s legs sticking out of it. It was also on fire. Returning to the bus, I threw my head back and groaned. This adventure was already going downhill! Then, Zack stopped whipping the wheel around and looked concerned.

“Oh. Oh no.”

“What? What is it?”

“I just remembered that I don’t know how to drive. I meant to learn how to do that.”

My jaw dropped before the bus suddenly started swerving out of control! We all went flopping and bouncing as Zack tumbled out of the driver’s seat and went flying somewhere in the back. The bus ran off the road and started tearing through a lush forest as the sounds of screaming and crying were heard inside. Eventually, we bounced until we all collided with the door at once, causing it to break and send all five of us flying outside where we immediately landed in the middle of a large lake. When we surfaced, we spat out water and gasped for air.

“WHAT... WHAT THE HECK JUST HAPPENED?!”

We turned and saw the bus spiraling out of control down a dirt forest path alongside the lake we had landed in. It then violently exploded, sending the professional business lady, apparently the only other passenger, flying into the air at mach speeds. We watched as she opened an umbrella and floated off safely to her important meeting at Corporation Incorporated and sighed in relief. Good for her! It was then that Amber surfaced and spat water in all of our faces.

“GAH! HECK! BLEH! Ehhh... hi.”

I took a deep breath before repeating myself.

“WHAT... THE HECK... JUST HAPPENED?!”

Zack smiled at me.

“Well, it seems we went down into the forest and landed in a nearby lake when we fell out of the bus!”

Amber’s eyes suddenly sparkled.

“Ooh! I know where we are! This is Daybreak Lake!”

“Daybreak... Lake?”

“Yeah! It’s one of the four secret lakes of GreenGrove and it’s, like, *THE* best makeout spot in the tri-county area.”

I stared at her while Zack crossed his arms with a smug look on his face.

“Well, you can thank me for taking you to a super-secret spot, then. Remember me when you fast-travel back here in the future, knowing that it was because of me that you even found the teleport waypoint at this lake.”

“I think she said it was a makeout spot.”

FlamDawg shrugged.

“Well... if we *have* to...”

He and Zack leaned in for a kiss while romantic music blasted and I started slapping them in their faces.

“NO! NO NO NO! I will NOT have a romance arc in this novel!”

They screeched and hissed while I turned back to Amber, noticing that she seemed to be staring down at the water with a smile on her face.

“Amber...? What are you doing?”

She quickly looked up.

“Uh, nothing!”

“Are you Thighmaster-ing right now?!”

“NO!”

Several bubbles surfaced in front of her and there was a loud squeaking sound when each one popped. I studied her for a moment before nodding my head.

“I’m proud of you, girl.”

With that, we all clambered out of the water and dried ourselves off. Zack pushed Amber back into the water four more times shortly after she climbed out, but that was only funny the first three times and then I felt bad for her.

“Okay... so what now?”

“Well, I’ve honestly forgotten what we’re doing at this point, but I see a large mountain over that way so let’s do that!”

We all turned to see a massive, imposing mountain stretching high into the sky above. Amber immediately gasped in shock.

“Oh. My. GOD. That’s not just any mountain... it’s Mayweather Mountain... and the top is Heartbreak Peak!”

“What now? Are you just making these things up?”

“NO! See, Daybreak Lake is where you come to get your smooch on, right? But Heartbreak Peak is where you go to dump your boyfriend in, like, the worst way possible. The top is, like, SUPER high up so just imagine hiking all the way up there only for some pretty girl like me to tell you it’s OVER. Most guys just jump off after because it’s *that* devastating.”

We all stared at her for a moment.

“It sounds like you’re speaking from experience.”

She smiled wide and flipped her hair.

“I mean, I’ve only dumped like eight guys up there so it’s not *that* impressive.”

“And yet she complained that she was tired when we were walking down the driveway.”

“Okay, I wasn’t following any of what you were saying, but it sounds like the peak would be a great vantage point to see where we should go next! Let’s head over!”

We started walking over to the base of the mountain while a peppy song played. Unfortunately, it was only a few steps to the right of our current location so it only played for about three seconds. No, we will not be releasing the full version! Once we arrived, Amber was out of breath and I glanced up at the mountain that seemed even taller than it was before.

“Okay, so we are *not* walking all the way up there. I see hills and valleys and steep edges and... yeah, no. I love toning my thighs but I’d like them to not explode.”

“So what do we do?”

Then, we heard an unfamiliar voice.

“I think I can help you!”

We all looked around in confusion before a nearby bush rustled and a magenta-colored Dawg emerged from it! She had a bow in her hair and was decidedly cute for a Dawg. Then again, we've yet to see a girl one so maybe she's just average in that regard.

"Hey, guys! If you need help getting to the top, I can get you where you need to be!"

"Um, okay. And who are you?"

She smiled and pointed to herself with confidence.

"Me? You can call me Cat!"

So then! It's our first grand adventure of the Season! Ooh, I wonder where we'll go this time? And who is this mysterious new girl Dawg? All these questions and more are sure to be answered in time!