

Of course they were sleeping.

Declan expected as much. Really, he wasn't sure if there was a place this guy *wouldn't* sleep. Noe slept at home, Noe slept at The Rabbit Hole, Noe slept at the Imporium... and yet, somehow, somewhere between all of the naps they'd taken there, they'd injected Hutch's teachings into their brain well enough to be the proud owner of not one, not two, *not three*, but *four* healthy and happy imps. The evidence was right in front of him, where Noe lay sleeping in their cuddle-pile of pets.

If they could do it, how hard could being an imp-owner be?

Still, Declan sighed as he leaned down to shake Noe's shoulder. "Hey," he announced his presence only to be responded to with a rude groan. As if he wasn't punctual. "Noe," he tried again. "If you don't get up I'm takin' Mister Bearly home with me."

"His name is BearBear..." Came a reply just as lazy as the peachy bun's horns would suggest. Declan rolled his eyes.

"It's a bearly either way... look, I don't got all day. Unlike you, I've got things to do, and I'd like to make sure that imp hasn't wrecked my house before I go to work tonight."

Slowly, life seemed to flash behind Noe's eyes once more, and they yawned with a long stretch of their arms. The imps surrounding follow suit, standing to regain the feeling in their legs after sleeping for... who knows how long.

"Right..." Noe began as some form of coherency returned to them. "You better not name that poor loafki like you tried to name my poor BearBear."

"BearBear ain't much better," Declan muttered, stepping out of the way for Noe to sit up.

"You were lucky to find a loafki," Noe continued, ignoring Declan's comment. Which was fine by him. "I don't have to show you too much about caring for them, because they're really mild..." They trail off as they pet the long-horned loafki by their side.

"This the guy you gonna be showin' me then?" Declan reaches out to the loafki, who retracts its head into its large scarf of neck fur at the motion.

"No, no!" Noe sits up suddenly, gently grabbing onto Declan's arm and guiding it back to his body. "Muffin doesn't do well with strangers... a lot like you said your new loafki is. That's just how they are."

"Okay..." Declan returns his hand to the pocket of his hoodie, raising an eyebrow. "Which one gonna be showin' me the ropes, then?"

“It would be a lot better if we started with... wait...” Noe looks around himself, sleepy eyes squinting. “Where is...?”

As if on-cue, an eager black phloof emerges from the wild mound of fluff sitting atop Noe’s head and bounces right toward Declan. The thing’s lucky Declan’s got such fast reflexes, because he catches the imp mid-jump. And it thanks him by bounding onto his shoulder, rubbing its soft cheek against his.

“Oh, you found them!”

“It found me, really...” Declan poked the imp’s fur, blinking when he began to wonder if its tufts are never ending. “Is this our little test runner?”

“Mhm! That’s Bean, and they love visitors!” Noe scooped BearBear into their arms, already scurrying off to a separate room of their apartment. “C’mon, I’ll show you all the essentials!”

“Wait—” A sad attempt to stop Noe as they left, and Declan sighed, glancing to the phloof attempting to burrow itself into the hair draping over his shoulders. “You’re supposed to be *their* pet, hope you know that,” he tells them, following after Noe to begin learning about the basics of pet care.

For as lazy as Noe was, if there was one thing they were good at, it was ensuring theirimps were properly cared for. Declan learned about ensuring his loafki would be properly hydrated, providing all the missing nutrients that standard imp food didn’t cover, how to read an imp’s body language to know what scares them versus what makes them happy, what the best toy options were imps of different sizes and temperaments...

“I thought I was *avoiding* a lecture from Hutch by droppin’ by here...” Declan complained, shaking a toy with strings attached for Noe’s phloof to bounce after.

“Imp care is no joke!” Noe huffed. “I’m giving you every little detail because I *know* how stingy you get with your carats, you can’t just half-ass things with this—”

“*Relax*,” Declan cut them off, exasperated. “I’ve got the carats to spare, I’ll get the dry food and the wet food and the fuckin’... toothpaste or whatever you said...” Letting out a huff of his own, he ran his fingers into his bangs. “Look, I took that thing in ‘cus it looked so... *scared* where it was before. Trash everywhere, the thing needed a bath, ‘n’ I know those bastards are fluffy but when I picked it up, it felt so goddamn skinny...” He stopped as phloof bounded up to him, rubbing against his ankle. As cute as it was, he simply stared, consumed by the thought of that loafki sitting in his home alone. “... ‘M not a pets kinda guy. But I ain’t heartless neither. ‘N’ it already got attached to me, so I ain’t sendin’ it to any kinda pound, or even makin’ it start over with Hutch. Imma take care of it.”

A thoughtful hum resounded next to him, and when Declan looked over, Noe was smiling, their cheek smushed against their all-too-content bearly. "What are you naming it?"

Declan shrugged. "Dunno. I've just been callin' him 'lil guy' and stuff."

"Well!" Noe stands suddenly, practically skipping into their kitchen. "This might help you come up with something!" Declan remained where he was, all too aware of the possibility of stepping on Bean at his feet, and Noe returned soon enough with a container of clearly half-eaten dangos. "Here!"

"... I ain't really a sweets kinda guy—"

"No, dumbass!" Noe shoved the container further into Declan's face. "It isn't for *you*, it's for your loafki! I'm sure he'll love them!"

"Is that safe?" Declan asked, taking the container and skimming over the ingredients label.

"Yup!" Noe nodded. "My babies love dango and mochi, and they've all got favorites! There's a couple colours in there, so you can see which one your loafki likes best!"

"Hm," Declan hummed, a bit thoughtful, before scooping up Bean and setting them down on an imp tower. "Thanks, I guess... I'll take these home 'n' see if he takes to any of 'em, then."

Noe grinned, presumably at the quick acceptance of the gift, and took BearBear's arm to force the poor imp to wave to Declan. "If you need anything else, we'll be here!"

"Sleeping, I'm sure," Declan retorted, making his way to the door.

"As if that's really any different from you—!" But Declan didn't get to hear the rest over slamming the door behind him, and making his way back home. It'd been a long day already, being around Noe always exhausted him, and yet he'd still decided to pick up a shift tonight. He sighed, wondering if he should simply call off...

Noe's lessons from today replayed in his mind. There was a lot he needed to buy, and if he wanted to keep some extra stashes of carats around, he'd have to adjust his budget. At the forefront of his mind sat frustration. He hated unexpected expenses digging into his wallet, and, for a split second, considered taking the fluffball to Hutch after all.

But when he thought about that night, staring at the poor thing cornering itself in some recently-abandoned apartment, reeking of beer and garbage, he knew something like that wouldn't be an easy adjustment for it. Not when it'd already begun sleeping curled up on his chest, or mewling at him for the scraps he was surprisingly willing to hand over from his plate...

Yeah. It was an adjustment his budget could get used to.