

# **BIGGER** THAN HE BARGAINED FOR

by Shalion



# Bigger Than He Bargained For

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## Chapter Twenty-Two

"Eeesshh..." Terry whined, ears drooping as he fumbled with the buttons on the front of his shirt. He was standing in front of the mirror in his bedroom, looking at the gaps of white belly fur spreading between the five too-tight buttons that lay right over the big hump of his dome-shaped upper belly. The buttons were marginally tighter than the day before, just as they had been marginally tighter than the day before that. Terry had joked that his shirt buttons were about to pop the other day, but now he could barely get them closed and that was only when he exhaled all of the air out of his body. When he drew in a breath, the fabric of his shirt drew dangerously tight across the front of his wide torso. When he drew in a breath that he considered slightly deeper than normal, his sensitive fox-ears picked up a high-pitched *\*ting\** that he thought might have been a thread popping.

"I'm too fat," said Terry to the air in his bedroom. The teenager rolled his eyes to the ceiling.

"I said, I'm too fat, Beel!" Terry repeated himself a little more loudly.

"No such thing," replied the demon easily, buzzing the fox's fat shoulder as he produced the sound of his voice. Terry gestured wordlessly to the front of his shirt where either a button was going to fly off or he was about to pop a seam, and the demon spoke again, "Oh, that? Am I suddenly too much of a stud for this shirt to handle?"

"I'm the only one with a dick here," said the young fox, only a little smugly.

"Rub it in, why don't you?" the demon whined, then added, "Or rub one out. Hasn't it been a while since we last did that?"

"Beel, concentrate. We're talking about the shirt here that my bloated ass is about to rip right out of."

"Yeah, and you keep making a big deal outta these little things that don't matter and expectin' me to do somethin' about them."

"You can make this gut of mine a little bit smaller for starters," said the fox, pointing towards his surging middle once again.

"Terry, Terry, my boy," Beel schmoozed, "The problem isn't that I'm too big, it's that the shirt is too small," Beel slithered around Terry's innards like a winding serpent, barely rippling the surface of the fox's pudgy, "Look, as I've already told you countless times now, I can move around, but I gotta go *somewhere*. I can make us wider and the belly smaller, but that ain't gonna change how this shirt fits one iota. I'd make our ass bigger, but we're about to bust outta our 68's as it is."

Beel had a point. The jeans he was wearing would have had a "skinny jean" fit around his butt and thighs if that hadn't been an oxymoron. They were barely functional because his

suspenders were holding them up, and even then, the force trying to push them down off of his round body was so extreme that he kept popping the clasps on the suspenders when he bent over or reached over his head.

Terry sighed, trying to think of a solution. He tried on his own for a couple of minutes and then resorted to summoning Sloth. Right away, a solution came to mind while he was in the trance-like state conferred by the summoning, and he dragged the idea back with him as he felt his mind become once again undeniably slower and duller in the frame of mind he referred to as "Normal." Even though Terry found that he could only pull back one idea at a time with him every time he exited Sloth, he could recall that his mind would usually flood with dozens of ideas as his thoughts and mental acuity expanded outwards. These would fade and be forgotten if he didn't grasp hold of one concept tightly, and that was fine, but in this case, Terry had the vague notion that he had just thought of *something* of particular importance right now. However, that idea had not been pertinent to the current predicament, so he had needed to let it go, and it was forgotten entirely, leaving only a faint sense of unease behind.

Terry shook his head, his ears flopping around a little as he cleared his thoughts. He spoke as soon as he was able to get his jaw to cooperate with him, his entire body having entered a sort of fugue state while he had been in Sloth, "Beel, I don't need you to make my gut smaller, I need you to let it out, move some of the mass lower down across my thighs so I'm not as wide around in the middle."

"Hmm, yeah, I guess I'm not opposed to sagging a little lower..."

Terry waited, and then when nothing was apparently happening, opened his paws out plaintively. "Well?"

Beel grunted in lazy irritation, "Haven't I told ya before that I ain't no workhorse demon? It ain't my job to accommodate your fat ass, it's yours to accommodate mine, kapeesh?"

Terry growled in the back of his throat, "You owe me, Beel!"

"Look, nobody's sayin' you haven't been doin' a fine job loading this succulent ass up with fried food, carbs, and sugar..." Beel started in his wise-guy persona, but Terry wasn't having it.

"You owe me because you took more than I said you could last night," the fattened fox huffed.

"When?!" Beel asked, incredulous.

"When I asked you to negotiate with the other Gluttony demons for me last night so that I wouldn't have to space out in front of Zima for five minutes," Terry explained with a huff, "I asked you to just convert a *little bit* of my dinner."

"Yeah," said Beel petulantly, "And that's what I did." But Terry shook his head, looking right at his gut in the mirror.

"No, you converted a lot more than the minimum necessary for me to walk around comfortably. I was expecting to still feel full afterwards, not totally leveled out."

"Ugh!" Beel scoffed, rumbling around the fox's fat waist like a thundercloud inside of him, "Making such a big deal over such an insignificant few thousand calories!"

"Why're you fighting me so hard on this?" The fox gaped, "Do you get off on growing or something?"

"Growing is one of the few pleasures I have in this second life, yes," said Beel primly.

"Gross," said Terry flatly.

"Says you." replied the demon childishly.

Terry shook his head, having had enough of this nonsense. "You took more than I said you could have, and you fed yourself with it!" said Terry firmly, stomping his paw onto his concrete floor.

"Stop whining about little details like that when we still have a hundred more pounds to go, kid!"

*'Quite a bit less than that now, probably,'* Thought Terry, annoyed, but he said, "And this is just as much of a little thing, Beel. Please do this for me. I'm not asking for a lot."

"Fffine!" Beel grumbled, finally acceding to the teenager who was actually a little bit surprised that he'd won the argument against his demon, "But don't complain about the after-effects..."

Terry was still wondering about what Beel meant when he felt a pulling sensation on the skin of his lower belly. It was like someone was drawing his pelt tight but from the inside! "Ow, that hurts. What're you doing down there?" Terry asked, lifting up his shirt.

In the mirror, he could see his belly fat oozing downward over his thighs and he could feel it too, though the pinching, too tight sensation over his whole, lower belly area was overriding that sensation.

"Just stretching things out a little, kid," said the demon with what Terry imagined was a sneer, "Just like you asked for.

"Ouch..." Terry murmured a second time as the dull but noticeable pain registered across the skin of his lower belly. He thought that he could probably ignore it throughout the day, but he still didn't care for the sensation of his pelt being literally stretched, like it was a rope of saltwater taffy. Whining softly in his throat, Terry continued to examine himself in the mirror, pulling up on the shirt where at least the buttons were laying closed across his front now. "You're not going to rip anything, are you?" Terry asked before letting his shirt drop and standing straight. He noted that a small belly pooch of creamy fur poked out from below the hem of his shirt near the middle.

"I ain't gonna rip your pretty little pelt," Beel mocked, "I ain't built to be exposed to the outside world, but you're gonna have a fresh set o' stretch marks here if you're plannin' on walkin' around like this all day."

"Stretchmarks?" Terry asked. Come to think of it, he didn't recall seeing many of those around his body despite how rapidly he'd been growing in the past year.

"Yeah," Beel grumbled, stretchmarks on this part of you that I'm pulling out right now. But don't worry about it. You can show off your scars to Zima later."

"S-scars?!" Terry stammered, frowning unhappily as his neck wattle jiggled under his chin.

"Chicks dig battle scars. She'll go for it," said Beel with absolute assurance.

"Battle scars?" said Terry dubiously then scoffed with a roll of his eyes, "Battle of the Bulge, maybe."

"So, you did learn something from World History after all!" Beel laughed.

Terry joked, but he felt deeply uncomfortable with scarring the surface of his body just for a short-term convenience, even if he did have a lot more real estate there than most foxes. But it was either this or walk around with his shirt hanging open all day. He could deal with a bit of pain if it meant not looking like a slob in front of his parents or Zima.

A thought continued to nag at Terry about this whole stretching business, however. He was about to ask Beel why it hadn't hurt like this when the demon had formed whole appendages out of his lard at other times before but was interrupted in his train of thought when his phone chimed, letting him know that he'd gotten a new text message; Terry's chime was a custom tune from a ninja-themed anime that he liked.

Terry's ears perked up and his eyes widened when he saw his new message. It was from Zima:

"Thinking of u & waiting to be squished 💕😏"

Zima included a picture of herself along with the text. She was kneeling on her bed, one hand on her thigh, the other arm extending towards the camera. She was wearing some pink pajama bottoms, and she wore nothing at all above her waist as she smiled demurely towards the camera... towards Terry.

Terry felt like his heart had skipped a beat as he stared at Zima's naked chest for the first time. She had these small pink nipples that stood out against her white fur...

"Oh my god," Beel drawled, "I just wanna ooze all over that chest, that slender body and that tight little—"

"Beel!" Terry growled jealously.

"What? She's *our* girlfriend. I'm allowed to say things like that."

"She's *my* girlfriend, Beel. So, keep your slimy, degenerate pseudopods off of her."

"When did you learn the word, 'pseudopod?'" grumbled Beel, "Nevermind, don't answer that." Beel wobbled around Terry's hips and midsection, unavoidably jostling the fox's buried junk which was currently more sensitive than in its normal state, "But you heard the lady last night. She wants to be sat on."

"So?" said Terry, flicking one ear.

"Well, who's she got her hands all over most of the time? Who's the one who's going to be pressing that scrawny little tail of hers into the mattress later this week?" Terry's ears folded down because this sounded distressingly close to the truth. "From my perspective," the demon went on, "She's more my girlfriend than yours."

"She doesn't even know you exist, Beel," said Terry coldly.

"For now," said Beel coolly, "But I wonder if that will always be the case, especially if I can show her a little of what these pseudopods of mine are capable of..."

Terry was about to respond, but all that came out was a grunt and a cough. He felt something squeeze around his semi-erect member, not uncomfortably. Just the opposite, in fact.

"Shhh... Just let it happen," Beel crooned as Terry bent over, holding onto his desk for balance as he was stimulated quite beyond his ability to control. "It's been way too long since you last serviced yourself, kid. That ain't healthy for a nineteen-year-old fox. Just... lay back on your bed, look at your phone there, and think about what you're gonna be doing with that slim little stoat girl when she's crawling all over ya..."

"Urgh... Mhrmmph... Fuck..." Terry stammered, but he couldn't walk. He was already fully erect and way too distracted to maintain his balance or even a coherent train of thought. It had been a really long time, more than a week, maybe even two, since he'd last done it himself. It was getting so hard to reach, that the discomfort involved made the effort seem less

worthwhile. That and it seemed like he had been super busy lately. It could have been that his libido itself had just been really low lately. But it had all come flooding back with the nude Zima had just sent him. He did lift his phone to his face, staring at the image. Then he flopped bonelessly onto his mattress, groaning and shifting his hips against the inescapable pressure exerted around his cock by the fat which totally enveloped it. He gasped and relaxed utterly when it was all done.

"There, that wasn't so bad, now was it?" Beel said.

"Go to hell, Beel," Terry groaned, shoving his face into his pillow. He suddenly needed to take a shower and spend extra time rinsing out his most difficult-to-reach folds.

"Been there, done that," said the demon amiably, leaving the fox to clean himself up and get his day started.

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Terry worked the front of the Fried Dough Hut again that day. His father outright asked him to work the cash register first thing that morning, to his mother's chagrin. Honestly, though, she seemed to be looking for an excuse to put some distance between herself and Terry and Frank anyways. Terry was conflicted about making an obvious spectacle of his massively overweight self, but the benefits were undeniable. In the night, an astounding **ten** Bonums had come to him, nearly doubling his and Beel's savings overnight. Terry didn't know why he was being paid so highly for what amounted to increasing the food sales at the county fair a little, but knowing that these metaphysical coins he was collecting were key to forcing Charity to change her mind about releasing his grant money, he wasn't going to ask too many questions about it. And it wasn't just the Bonums either, considering the very noticeable bump in sales for the stand. His father kept going on about how busy they were the previous day, attributing the change entirely to Terry's presence.

"Fine, if you want to make yourself into a freakshow attraction, I don't care anymore," Veronica put in that morning as Terry started working. Her tone was subdued and her ears hung perpetually low, clearly miserable after whatever talking-to her husband had given her the previous day after Terry and Zima had left. Terry felt bad for her, but he preferred her passive-aggressive comment to her actually aggressive bullying of both himself and Zima. He didn't know what he was going to do as far as his long-term relationship went with his mother, but if she could at least avoid actively interfering with him and his life, he guessed that would have to be good enough for now.

As the fair got going for that day, Terry noticed that not quite as many people were standing around and "admiring" his fat form as the day before, however, the stall remained just as, if not more busy than yesterday. *'People be wanting their fried bread today...'* Thought Terry to himself as he slung out order after order at a sustained pace, still adding Gluttony demons to each from his internal, replenishing horde. The demand was sustained through the morning and became gratuitous at lunch, the line extending so far back that Terry wasn't sure where it started and the general milling crowd began. Terry felt Beel constricting around his legs and supporting his lower back, helping to support his own weight just like before. It was the only reason Terry was able to get past lunch without a break. Standing in one place was not a workout for him by

any means, but now that he was well past a hundred pounds over his new “normal” as set by Belphegor, spending five hours standing up left Terry’s paws aching and the quarter-ton teenager longing for a stool or something to sit down on.

“Dad, I’m going to take an hour off, is that alright?” said Terry wearily as the business at the front of the Fried Bread Hut finally slowed somewhat after the lunch rush.

“No problem, son,” said Frank as he scraped the bottom of one nearly empty bucket of batter and added it to the last of the buckets they had brought with them from the bakery, “I think we’re going to have to close early today anyways. We’re nearly sold out.” Frank’s tail was waving behind him, full of mirth at his commercial success.

Selling out was fairly uncommon in their business due to how cheap flour, salt, oil, and butter were in general, and Terry lifted an eyebrow at the fact that they had already nearly blown through their entire stock for the day. “Hell, if we make enough money from the fair, maybe you’ll be able to afford to buy me a new mattress, or a reinforced bed frame!” said the overweight fox offhandedly.

“What’s wrong with your mattress?” Frank asked, and Terry explained how his bed was basically collapsed now in the middle due to his weight. Frank touched his chin, “Well I would get you a new mattress; I don’t know about a steel bedframe though...” The older fox turned his paw over, gesturing to his son, “But you’re going back to Tufts now in a few weeks, right? I expect you’d want to move into the dorms.”

Terry shuffled uncomfortably. He hadn’t weighed himself that morning either, but he still *felt* heavy on his paws and knew that he was gaining rapidly due to him converting food directly to fat for three days in a row now. When he met Charity again in just a couple of weeks, he knew that he wouldn’t even be able to pretend like he’d simply failed to lose the weight as he said he would. He would be visibly fatter and it would be undeniable. His only hope was that Beel had some sort of demonic magic trick he could pull to change his looming fate.

“Yeah...” said Terry preoccupied, “I was planning on doing that.”

Frank reached forward, clapping Terry on the shoulder, “Well, I promise that I’m going to do everything in my power to make that happen. I should have told you already, but I wrote a letter to that commissioner lady you told me about. She’ll have to confront the fact that your parents aren’t united in what your mom said about your weight.”

Behind him, Terry’s bushy tail began to wave, “Is that right?”

Frank nodded, “I’m still trying to convince your mother to retract what she said, but she’s fighting me on it every step of the way...” Frank gave his son a pained look, and the teenager sighed. As much as he loved that his father was doing this much to support him, he didn’t want to be a wedge that drove his family to divorce either.

“I still don’t know why she’s so adamant,” said the younger fox.

Frank glanced back over his shoulder, his fangs showing in his thin-lipped mouth, “Ah, she has her reasons.”

Terry cocked his head curiously, “Like what?”

“S’not my place to tell you, son,” said Frank, shaking his head. He reached out his arms towards Terry, “No c’mere. I’m sure you’re ready for a rest and for *something to eat*.” He said the last part with a grin that was a little bit too knowing to be comfortable coming from his dad. Still, Terry padded forwards and hugged his father, the lean fox half disappearing into the much fatter fox’s bulk.



*'He knows why my mom is acting the way she is, but he won't tell me for some reason,'* Terry thought as he dropped heavily out of the back of the Fried Dough Hut. But that fact alone suggested that there was some concrete reason why his mother was hellbent against his own obesity rather than just a general prejudice against fat people or a disgust for the way he looked. She did keep telling him that the things she said and did to him came from a place of love, as misplaced as it might have been. He ought to ask his mother what it was that made her act this way...

Terry dismissed the idea of asking his mother immediately, of course. His mom was scary, and the things she said still hurt him deeply. He wasn't willing to go to her just for her to make him feel shitty about himself. Just thinking about it made him sad... at least until he caught a whiff of a stall nearby that was making fresh caramel apples.

Three funnel cakes, half a dozen fresh caramel apples, and a Monster Onion Rings later, Terry was leaning back on a bench seat. He was trying and failing to lift up a foot so that he could rub at his paws. Crossing his legs had been a challenge even when he had been at a much smaller size, but it used to be that he could at least rest the ankle of one foot on the opposite knee. He was discovering, however, that he couldn't even manage that. His fat thighs made Terry sit naturally with his knees spread wide apart, and even when he tried, he couldn't get his leg anywhere close enough to his other knee in order to prop his foot up. Additionally, his leg was increasingly less 'leg-shaped' and more like a tree trunk with piled rolls of fat on either side, especially his thighs. The extra mass and padding just made twisting his leg in certain ways impossible now, greatly restricting the range of motion he used to take for granted.

"Bleh..." Terry sighed, just splaying his paws out, resting them on his heels or the sides of his feet to avoid putting pressure on his aching toes that took his weight while standing. They throbbed even while suspended in the air. Terry curled and flexed his toes a little in a vain attempt to massage them a little that way.

Taking his mind off his aching feet, Terry thought back to what he and Beel were doing with their scheme to hand out Gluttony demons along with the fair food they were selling. He had finished eating and had just now only fully refueled his maximum complement of Gluttony demons. He had nearly run out of his demonic hitchhikers back at the stand after distributing them for five hours straight. The rate at which Terry replenished and attracted new Gluttony demons seemed to depend greatly on his local environment, and he was more than capable of depleting the ones available in an area around him, it seemed. It had not been until he had moved further away and to a different part of the food court that his body had once again begun rapidly filling up with new silvery demons.

Terry looked around, seeing that nobody, in particular, was paying attention to him, however, he noticed that he was still attracting the same sort of passive attention as was now familiar to him just because he was so overweight that it was interesting to look at him. The teenager reached down into the neck of his shirt and retrieved his cell phone from where he kept it stored securely under his left moob. It was a habit leftover from when he was walking around the bakery in just his fur because he had pockets now that he could have used. He just liked the vibrations when he received a call or a text message, and he didn't accidentally miss his calls anymore. Terry held his cell phone to his ear but didn't actually call anyone.

"Beel," said the fox conversationally.



"Sir, this is a Wendy's..." The demon chirped from a patch of plump skin near to where Terry was holding his phone, "...that's a joke kids say now, right?"

Terry groaned, "Ugh, stop trying to be cool, Beel. It's not working."

"I can be hip! I can be cool!" said the demon, a little too desperately, "Just because I was dead for who knows how long doesn't mean I can't get wit the times now!"

Terry rolled his eyes and then got back to the topic he was thinking about, "About these demons we keep dishing out..."

"Yeah?"

"You said that we were getting them right where they need to be, but what I don't get is why they can't just do that on their own," Terry waved his paw, "They're always flying around anyways, and they can fly right through things. Why can't they just fly directly into people's bellies if that's what they want?"

Terry expected the demon to tell him that he was overthinking things again and to just do what he was told, so it came as a surprise when the demon actually began to answer him. "Two things. The first is that the world up here looks really different to a dispossessed demon. No eyes to see, no ears to hear, not even a tongue to taste wit."

*'Might explain why they always seem to be drifting around at random,'* Terry thought, and said, "So, how do they get around?"

"They perceive what you're only just now learning to perceive for yerself, a psychic landscape based on thoughts and emotions people have at various locations. It's easy to tell where a lot o' folk are congregating, but picking out an individual is tricky for most demons. It's even more difficult to pick out a sweet spot like the stomach."

"Alright, and what's the other reason?"

"It's metaphor," said Beel.

The young fox's ears drooped slightly in confusion, "Say wha?"

"The whole bit about consuming the demon through the mouth, about enjoying food designed for pleasure instead of nourishment, about coming to the fair itself to consume, it's all metaphor, dig?" said the demon who wobbled on Terry's lap for emphasis, "And metaphor has a powerful effect in the spiritual world." Terry was still scratching his head, so Beel added, "What we're doing has a way more powerful effect than just pushing demons to a certain spot in people's bodies. It's more than the sum of its parts, see? Generates way more power an' influence."

It made a weird kind of intuitive sense. These were demons of Gluttony, after all, so it made sense if they'd want to be served up on a plate so that they could better do their jobs, even if they needed somebody like Terry who had an actual physical body in order to accommodate that. Other demons probably had other preferences and scams they liked to run, he imagined.

"Now, if yer done yammering, kid, how about we dispense wit these side dishes here and serve up some entrees!"

With Terry's fat once again fully saturated with Gluttony demons again, the fox found himself undeniably hungry and even the scents around him became enticing again despite being in the fair for days on end now. The fox's ears stuck out to the sides as he sat, conflicted, however, "Bluh... I've eaten almost everything they have to offer at the fair at least once now... I kinda just want a salad, I think I'm low on vitamins or something..."

"A salad he says!" Beel cried, shaking where he filled up Terry's lap.

"A *big* salad," Terry considered, giving in to his artificially enhanced hunger.

Where Terry's belly sat, it seemed to half flop, half jiggle in a certain direction, "Look, they sell vegetable tempura at that stall over there. I don't really care what you stuff into yer gizzard so long as yer eatin' rich enough for me to get mine." Which was just another way of telling the morbidly obese teen to make sure he ate enough to keep gaining weight.

Terry was about to move, keen on sating his surging hunger in spite of the food he'd already eaten, but he spoke again instead. "Also, I'm running a little low on cash. This fair food is expensive and I'm already digging into the cash I got from those Envy demons just to feed myself."

"Look, I don't care if you have to drive back to the bakery and fill yourself up on pancake batter and butter," the demon said sternly, "I've been bustin' my ass for you too if you haven't noticed the fact that you didn't collapse on your fat ass three hours into work today. You don't even know how many calories I have to burn to do that, and do I have to remind you that when I burn calories, I'm literally burnin' myself away!"

"We're getting paid pretty good in Bonums for serving out those demons, though," Terry pointed out.

"You mean *you're* getting paid 'cause we're gonna have to spend most o' those influencin' your councilor cunt," Beel made first one and then two swirling movements deep inside the fox's bulbous midsection, "So, you're gettin' paid, and your dad's clearly gettin' paid from hockin' all that fried crap. All I'm askin' is for what's due to me, and that's *bein' fed!*"

Terry's first instinct was to resist, but he was not wholly unsympathetic to his demon the more he learned about Beel and how he worked. He had this incredible power to move Terry's hundreds of pounds of collected fat around at will, yet doing so seemed to cause him pain if Terry understood him correctly. If Beel had to burn fat every time he moved even a little bit (and therefore himself), that would help explain why the demon was so reluctant to help Terry out with the minor, everyday difficulties he faced just being at his size, like putting on his socks and underwear in the morning.

Terry eased himself up, wincing because his paws were still sore, even if they were less sore now than when he had first sat down. "Well, fine, if you'll stop complaining, I'll make sure that you're 'fed,'" said Terry, making air quotes with his paws as he put his phone away finally.

Beel growled unintelligibly, the tone appreciative, but concise. The demon didn't care what he ate so long as he avoided running a calorie deficit. That shouldn't have been a problem given that Terry was capable of eating enough for six people without even breaking a sweat, but if Beel working caused him to burn a lot more calories than would normally be possible, then that meant that he might actually need more of his ridiculous eating capacity to meet Beel's needs. *'It also means that I could theoretically burn off fat way faster than a regular person,'* Terry thought to himself as he waited in line for vegetable tempura, *'But that would only work with Beel's help, and he'd never go for it.'* Terry sighed out of his nose. It was an interesting thought, if impractical. Still, he was learning more and more about how demons and the supernatural worked all the time, it seemed, and that was something he could feel good about.

Zima came to the fair late in the afternoon that day, well before sunset, wearing a large pair of sunglasses to protect her albino eyes from UV radiation. She didn't like going out before sundown, but the two of them were running out of things to do at the fair together besides pack large quantities of corn dogs and imitation cheese sauce down Terry's gullet. There were a few shows that day that Zima and Terry were mutually interested in, so Zima agreed on a schedule that would allow them to sit and watch them. When she first saw him, she reached down and tickled the visible portion of belly that was hanging out from beneath the bottom of the fox's shirt. The sensation sent a weird thrill up Terry's back and not only because of the reminder of how his exaggerated dimensions had changed as he had recklessly piled on weight over the past year. Mostly, he was just happy that she didn't comment on the fact that while his belly was hanging lower today, his buttons weren't even as tight as they had been yesterday.

The first they went to was an improvisational comedy troupe that Zima found to be hilarious while Terry thought it was mostly confusing. Zima poked him in the side at one point, encouraging him to go up and volunteer at a part of the show where they were asking for audience participation.

"Are you kidding?" Terry grimaced, "It'd be all fat jokes until the end of the show!"

"So?" Zima laughed, still pushing at Terry's bulk which sat unmoving. Someone else was selected and the stoat was left pouting. "Okay, next time you have a chance to go on stage, Terry, you need to take it!"

"But, why?" Terry whined, ears flopping

"Because everyone will have a good time if you do," said Zima emphatically, and then she reached over to brush the fox's fat forearm tenderly, "Especially me."

"Alright, fine," Terry frumped, "If there's another chance to go on stage, I'll go." Terry wasn't expecting there to be another chance, but as things turned out, the next show they went to go see was a stage hypnotist

It was the 7:00 pm show, and the sun had set about twenty minutes earlier so Zima was able to remove her sunglasses even though the sky was still a rosy shade of pink in the west. The small amphitheater had rows of bench seating for which Terry was grateful because the straw of haybales tended to poke into his ass when he sat on them. The bench seat was a bit narrow for the fattened fox's taste, but at least he had plenty of room to ooze out to either side of him. They arrived early since they left directly from the previous show in a different amphitheater, and the couple sat right in the front row, near the center aisle. Just a few months ago, Terry would have never been willing to sit so prominently within the seating area, but now he felt that being concerned about such a minor thing was silly after what he'd already done.

They talked about nothing for a while, Zima leaning against the fat at Terry's plump side. The stoat even had time to get up and fetch several corn dogs and a bucket of caramel corn to assuage the rapacious fox's appetite. As Terry munched away happily, he asked, "What is this show again?" All around and behind him, other people were now beginning to arrive in greater numbers and select prime seats

"It's a hypnotism show," said the white stoat, opening up her fair brochure to double-check. She pointed down with a claw towards a small portrait painted on the schedule, "Ashok Bhandari, Mystic, Sorcerer, and Spiritual Guru..." she said the last dubiously but

continued, "Witness the power and mysteries of Hypnosis live and in person! Family-friendly entertainment."

"The tone sort of clashes there at the end," Terry observed dryly before taking a huge bite from a footlong fried coney.

"Probably someone else wrote this bit for the pamphlet," said Zima mildly.

They waited a while longer as more and more people wandered into the seats. It looked like it was going to be a packed show. Zima scooted close to the fox's side, and Terry himself scooted towards the aisle until part of his ass was hanging off into space. Even so, he thought that he got some looks for how much space he was taking up. Looking beside him, he noticed that Zima was staring intently up at the stage with its midnight blue curtain covered with garish, bedazzled silver stars.

"So..." the young fox demurred, noticing Zima's intense expression and also a little bored now that he'd already eaten all of the food Zima had gotten him earlier, "You seem excited for this hypnotism show... thing." Terry had heard of hypnotism before, but only in the context of period dramas from the 19th Century and pseudo-scientific therapy or self-help courses. He had no idea of what to expect from a show like this.

Zima turned her head to look at him. "A girl can have interests beyond fabric and fattening foxes," she teased, pushing on the side of Terry's vast tummy, "I don't know if I've mentioned this before, but I've actually always had a bit of an interest in the occult and supernatural stuff like that." The stoat gestured towards the stage, "This isn't the same as that, but it still seems fun, I dunno."

Terry's ears pricked upward as Zima expressed at least a passing interest in the supernatural. He longed to tell her about the part of his life that he had kept secret from her the entire time he'd known her, but his whole thing with demons and the underworld was just so surreal, he didn't even know how to work his way into it. On the other paw, if Zima was already somewhat acquainted with the occult, maybe that would open some doors for him to at least worm his way nearer to his secrets. But not right this second.

"I guess it seems interesting," said Terry blandly, looking back onto the stage which was pretty barren aside from a line of cheap folding chairs that had already been set up on stage and the dark, starry curtain behind them.

"And the best part will be you getting up there and being part of the show!" Zima nearly squealed, pushing at the saggy dough of his upper arm.

Terry tensed, "W-wait a—" he started, but his voice was drowned out as the opening music for the show began blasting out of the speakers set around the amphitheater, an exotic tune reminiscent of what Terry understood as vaguely "Indian" music, but with a more elaborate and slower tune to it that came across as trying really hard to seem mystical and mysterious.

"Namaste and Good Evening to you all!" The prerecorded voice grooved in a sultry, masculine tone, "Please hold your applause for Ashok Bhandari, World-Renowned Hypnotist, Mind Reader, and Mystic!"

On cue, a person emerged from behind the curtain obscuring the back of the stage or slithered in this case seeing as the hypnotist in question was a cobra. Snakes were an unusual bunch as far as species of people went. Lacking arms or legs, the key distinguishing feature that set them apart from their critter counterparts in the wild was their sheer size which allowed them to stand eye to eye with most furs, including the taller ones like horses and rhinoceroses.

Though lacking hands, most snakes seemed to get by well enough with a prehensile tail that functioned in a similar way to a hand, and it was considered extremely impolite to suggest that a snake was in any way “disabled” due to their lack of limbs. Terry certainly wouldn’t have suggested anything of the sort of Ashok; he could see the three-inch-long, venomous fangs peeking out from the viper’s mouth as he shot the crowd a gleaming smile. Despite the dangerous look and reptilian features which were definitely out of the ordinary among the mostly fur-covered audience, Ashok received a fairly motivated applause for his appearance, including from Terry and Zima; the snake seemed to bask in the attention.

“Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen,” said the snake with only a slight lingering lisp on the idiosyncratic “S” for which snakes were known, “I feel that the stars are in alignment for a night of mystery and entertainment. I hope that I can bring a little bit of wonder and fun to you marvelous people of...” the snake paused only slightly, eyes drifting to somewhere over the heads of the audience before recovering, “this quaint little town of Densfield.”

At this point, Terry still wasn’t sure what to make of this person or the show to come. Mainly he was looking at the clothes the snake was wearing which consisted of a ruby velvet vest and complementary indigo turban mounted on top of the cobra’s head. The vest was gaudy and covered with shiny lines of gold that covered almost the entire thing in an intricate and indecipherable pattern. Given the snake’s lack of shoulders and the shape of his broad, flat head, the young fox wasn’t sure at all how either the vest or turban remained stationary on Ashok’s body. Beside him, however, Terry noticed that Zima was already fully pulled into the show, so Terry did his best to enjoy himself.

The introduction was brief, with Ashok saying very little, but using a lot of words to do it. He did successfully set a mood that Terry could almost sense in the air and an anticipation in the audience. So, when Ashok finally called on volunteers to walk up onto the stage to be hypnotized, there was no shortage of hands raised.

“Terry!” Zima trilled from beside the bloated fox, “Raise your paw!”

Terry grimaced. He hadn’t seen one of these shows before, but he was already getting the impression that the people going up there were basically going to be told to make fools of themselves for everyone else’s entertainment.

Sensing his hesitation, Zima tried again, “Oh come on, I’ll come up with you if you’re scared.” She wrapped his thick paw in hers and lifted her arm up while holding his. Terry resigned himself to lift his chunky arm up as well.

*‘What’s the worst that could happen?’* he thought to himself as almost immediately, Ashok’s piercing black eyes fell upon him and Zima. The fox thought he detected a slight grin at the corners of the cobra’s curving mouth.