

Vem slammed the door directly onto Zass' snooty, conceited face, successfully shutting him up and his shrill, high-pitched laughter for long enough that he could get out of earshot. He was getting tired of having to deal with that idiot every single day while guarding the hoard; it had been bad enough *before* he started to experiment with size-altering spells, what with Zass fancying himself as the "bestest guards everest", whatever that was supposed to mean, *now* Vem had to contend with him boasting about how big he was too! The bastard kept going on about how he totally had dragon blood in him (or at least more than most kobolds did) and how that was the secret to his "second puberty", despite the fact that every kobold at their workplace knew exactly why he had suddenly gained a foot in height and an adequate boost to... other things. Vem didn't like to admit it, but it was more than a little distracting whenever he saw that particular coworker walk right past him, wearing a loincloth that left perhaps a *bit* too little to the imagination; it awoke a few things in him that he hated having to feel for someone as vapid and lacking in substance as Zass was, not to mention it being slightly confusing to someone who had never given much thought to *those things* in the first place.

It just got worse though. The larger kobold continued to dip into the one spell he successfully learned, constantly adding a bit more here and there, until he was so much larger than the rest of his troupe that their resident dragon had to ask him if he was feeling alright and needed some form of herbal remedy for his allergies. It was enough to get a good laugh out of everyone, quickly turning into a groan once Zass decided to start posturing towards a draconic monster that could easily flatten him into a 'bold pancake with a single finger; even *they* eventually gave up altogether, shrugging and flying off without a word, leaving the rest of his kobold servants to deal with the aftermath.

"See? Even the boss can tell I'm the best around," Zass said back then, much to everyone's rising annoyance, "ain't gonna be much longer 'till I'm as big as he is!"

These words in particular resonated with Vem, who saw any attempt at surpassing their lord and master as, to put it lightly, beyond ridiculous. What hope could any of them have to compete with a dragon, pound for pound, when even the grandest of all 'bold heroes of legend barely even made it past chest height compared to a regular human? Even Zass, with his judicious use of a growth spell, barely scraped four feet total, and *that* was with him ignoring the safety limits on that kind of magic; and yet, he still felt like he had the right to stand there and talk about how much of a piece of hot shit he was, something that drove Vem up the wall... particularly since Zass had a penchant for picking on him out of all the other members of their group.

He didn't know why. Maybe it was because he was the only one that bothered responding to Zass' nonsense, or maybe it was the fact that he did an objectively better job at guarding the hoard than anyone else (by simply politely informing adventurers of what the kill count for that month was); perhaps it was jealousy, with their simple mind unable to process it properly and

thus having it turn into outward mockery, or maybe they were just a cunt. Who knew, really? What mattered was that Vem, despite having done nothing to belittle or mistreat Zass, was constantly, *constantly* on the receiving end of their jabs and pokes and awful quips about how tiny he was “for a kobold”, and how much he should strive to be like them, “a true kobold”; this despite all the indications that he was probably half-lizard, of all things, to add fuel onto the fire of ridiculousness.

But up until then, Vem had done a good job of holding back on his feelings, mostly because he felt like Zass just wasn't worth the trouble; why bother going to *any* lengths at all when the result would just be an emotional mess that he'd have to clean up afterwards? Better to suck it up and deal with the aftermath than try and “fix” the problem only to make it worse, or at least that's how he chose to see it... initially. As the days wore on and the nagging only got worse, it became progressively harder for Vem to justify sitting there without a response of some kind, to the point where other kobolds in their hoard job began to ask him why he took the abuse without reporting it to internal affairs, or heck, even their boss himself. And as much as the admittedly-diminutive 'bold wanted to tell them that it was fine, it *wasn't* fine; in fact, it was anything *but* fine.

The sheer dissonance between Zass' behaviour and how much his body sparked some non-insignificant lust within Vem's mind left the latter in a state of near-perpetual confusion, unable to make up his mind on whether he wanted to jump the other kobold's bones or throw him off a cliff with a bag of rocks attached to his back. Some days it veered more towards one end, others Zass walked around with an extra-small loincloth and Vem found it exceptionally difficult to get anything done. It was hard to make up his mind, at least until *that* day happened.

Everything had begun just as it usually did, with the kobold troupe walking out of their sleeping holes and doing whatever it was the staff rotation told them they should do. That day, Vem had been assigned bureaucratic work, specifically one of the most boring tasks: performing inventory for the loot “gained” from adventurers who failed to heed the warnings and tried to steal part of the hoard anyway. It was mind-numbing work, especially considering they had to account for all the charred bits of metal, but it was something to do; better than standing outside in the cold waiting for a group to come by so he could be ignored. Early autumn always brought with it groups of adventurers from far-off lands, wanting to reap the riches of the regional tournaments, and with them came the occasional daredevils who *really* didn't understand how outmatched they were; the pile of scrap labelled “Discarded Weapons” was proof positive of that.

However, rather than having a nice few hours where he catalogued various bits of slag and mostly guessed at what they used to be beforehand, he had to deal with *him*. Zass had been unfortunately assigned to the same task thanks to a bureaucratic mess-up, and rather than go back

and find something better to do with his time, resolved to “help” his “little friend” in order to finish the job faster so they could both clock out earlier; not how it worked, but at least his heart was in the right place... probably. Unfortunately, his attitude wasn't, because Zass' idea of “helping” consisted of walking around asking what various bits of equipment were, more often than not right in the middle of Vem counting other things; it was like he was a sorcerer, and knew exactly when to speak up to interrupt his line of thinking... that is, of course, when he wasn't deliberately being a nuisance by imposing himself upon his smaller colleague's personal space, just to remind them of how much bigger he was.

Vem genuinely believed he was able to hold back doing something he'd regret later, but as the hours wore on, or at least he assumed they did, the less he was able to withstand it. When he took an opportunity to go to the bathroom and checked what time it was, then realized he was barely even *two hours* into that day's shift, that was as close as he ever got to throwing *himself* off a cliff just to get away from Zass. It didn't help that when he got back, the other 'bold was readjusting his loincloth, letting Vem catch a glimpse of the sizable package he had hidden away there, only adding to the frustrations he was feeling.

“Like what you see?” Zass asked him, not even bothering to pretend to be civil, “I can make it bigger if you want me to!”

“I don't want you to be bigger, Zass” - he did. That was a damnable lie.

“Why, 'cuz then you'll be *jealous*, Vem?” the other 'bold mused, poking at insecurities he *knew* his coworker had.

“No, I'm *not* going to be jealous of you” - yet another fib, though at least this time Vem had the common courtesy of going back to work... or at least trying to - “I just need and want you to focus on the task at hand, so we can wrap it up, file the report, and then we won't need to talk to one another any more than we have to.”

“Aww, you don't like me anymore?” - Zass' tone of voice was so grating whenever he sounded genuinely upset - “Whatever did I do to you to make you not like me?”

“I don't know Zass!” Vem yelled, “Maybe it's the fact you're smushing your dick against my back right now!”

Indeed, the larger kobold had once again displayed a frankly stunning lack of self-awareness by moving so close to his smaller companion that his shaft was very obviously poking at Vem's back. What he did afterwards would decide the fate of their relationship, or lack thereof, and of course, Zass being Zass, what came was a dumb, provocative comment at Vem's expense:

“You’re just jealous yours isn’t this big!”

That was enough. Throwing his hands into the air, Vem pushed Zass aside and turned around, storming out of the room with the other kobold right behind him, nailing the door right in their smug face and causing everyone in the adjacent room to look up and wonder what had just happened. Left without explanations (or at least without any good ones), Vem simply said “Zass” and walked out, mumbling something about having to get some fresh air.

The outside world was less than pleasant, with fall also bringing a sharp drop in temperature that always affected their species quite badly. The kobold stationed at the front of the cave, waiting for the next group to arrive so they could get in line for a resurrection spell, was wrapped in so many layers of clothing that the only part of them that was visible was their head, most of it covered by an oversized woolen hat. They looked towards Vem and signalled at their complete lack of protective equipment, something that didn’t worry the tiny ‘bold nearly as much as what was going through his head.

He had to be bigger than Zass. The idea had been swimming around inside of him for some time, but it never crystallized in a solid enough form until the moment he shoved that door onto the other ‘bold’s face; he knew, at that moment, that there was nothing he could do that could solve this problem that didn’t involve growth in some regard, enough growth that he could not only look to Zass at eye-level, but *bear down* on him as well. It was ridiculous; the easiest way out would be to just talk with his dragon master and make up a convincing enough lie that Zass ended up getting rolled down the mountain. Wouldn’t be the first time that happened to someone, nor would it be the last. But after being on the receiving end of such foul indignities for so long, Vem no longer wanted an annoyance removed from his life; he wanted *justice*. He wanted the satisfaction of knowing that *he won*.

And that meant growth.

But how? *That* was the most important question of all, given that the only reason that Zass was so big already was because he “borrowed” an item from the discarded equipment pile that just happened to fall through the paperwork cracks; no one really paid much heed to it, given that their dragon master wasn’t one for spell catalysts to begin with, but it’s not like Vem had a wealth of options to pick from. As much as it pained him, and as much as he knew it would eventually come back to bite him in the ass, he turned back around and made his way to the same place his now-rival had found his magical spell, making sure to wait until the kobold on duty went away for a bathroom break of their own before delving in and perusing through the wares.

Typically, the process of picking the good stuff from amidst the assorted junk that was left after the slag heap was categorized was less of a bother than what Vem was supposed to be doing at that exact moment, but it was still a painstaking, laborious process, especially given how picky their boss was. It wasn't at all surprising that something like a growth spell just got lost in the middle of the bureaucratic process, much less that someone as unscrupulous as Zass got his hands on it and decided to flaunt its use in front of everyone. Luckily for the smaller 'bold, such magic had a tendency to pop up relatively frequently, and given what part of his enemy's body he felt more attracted to, he now understood *fully* why adventurers liked to keep a couple of those things in reserve. His cheeks were bright red as he sifted through the pile of staves, amulets and talismans, hoping to find something, *anything* that would allow him to get the upper hand, a task that took so long that he was eventually surprised by a fellow coworker clearing her throat behind him.

"Mex! I, uh..." Vem yelped, not even bothering with an excuse, "Was... Just... Going through... The pile... Yes?"

Pathetic. If not for the fact that he was so utterly lost and had his eyes silently begging for mercy, he might've gotten a chuckle for how bad that excuse was; instead, the other 'bold simply sighed and walked past him, pointing at a list that had been pinned to the wall next to the work table.

"If you're here for the same reason that Zass was, take your pick," she said, in a dry, monotone voice, "the rest of us are sick to death of that prick anyway, so if you want to show him up, be my guest. Items C-70 and R-9 are especially powerful, but I'd stick with A-1 through A-5 if I were you, at least until you're used to the effects."

What he had heard was so far outside of what he expected that Vem took a bit before his mind processed exactly what it was that Mex had just told him, and even longer before he accepted that not only was she helping him get away with theft, but was doing so to help him get back at Zass for the same reasons he was thinking of. He couldn't thank her enough; literally, seeing as she refused to accept it, telling him to focus on "dethroning that asshole" instead, as quickly as he possibly could. Smiling like an idiot, Vem grabbed a couple of things off the table, some engraved gemstones with an odd glint and glitter to them, then ran back to his assigned workstation for the day. There, he found Zass waiting for him, having completed absolutely none of the tasks that he was supposed to be working on, and instead focusing on admiring his body on one of the mirrors hanging on the wall. Vem recognized this as a Covetous Reflector, a curious piece of magic that showed the user the idealized version of their bodies, but only to themselves; anyone else would see... a regular reflection, something for which Vem was *immensely* thankful for; the last thing he wanted was to confront himself with whatever the larger kobold imagined to be the better him.

In a monumental and yet entirely appropriate display of his complete lack of self-awareness, Zass offhandedly asked him if Vem had “gotten over himself”, a comment that would’ve led to a shouting match in literally any other day, but instead had the smaller kobold just nod politely and inform his soon-to-be-smaller rival that yes, everything was fine, and now they could get back to work. As usual, the useless ‘bold let him know he’d start helping once he was “done” preening, and once again, Vem took it in stride; why should he bother himself when he held the key to his own superiority right there in his hands? As soon as he got to his den that day, *then* there would be changes, and the moment he arrived at work the day after, Zass would be so jealous that he wouldn’t even be able to make dumb jokes!

This thought warmed Vem for the rest of the shift, fueling him like a raging furnace to the point where even Zass’ continued annoyances seemed to bounce off of him harmlessly. Every quip, every joke, every prodding comment, everything added up to one beautiful truth: he would soon get his comeuppance. In fact, seeing as the rest of the kobold troupe looked at him with rather knowing expressions, Vem figured that his colleague Mex had informed all of them about what his plan was, and judging from the thumbs-up and solemn nods, he had the full support of his friends and coworkers. For a moment, he wondered if it *wouldn’t* just be easier to tell his boss some white lie about Zass stealing from the hoard; it’d certainly be simpler than sparking a growth competition. But after having the other ‘bold muscle his way out past him, Vem *knew* that he had to do this the hard way. It was the only way to be sure.

Once safely in his den, Vem put down the gemstones on his bed and kneeled next to it, staring intently at his precious growth talismans. This was it. This was the thing that he had set his mind to and decided to do, the one thing that would let him *finally* shut Zass up for good. It would put all of his worries behind him and allow him to, at long last, focus on his job without having to worry about that idiot breathing down his neck with his moronic comments... and he had no idea how to use them. In retrospect, probably would’ve been a good idea to ask Mex how those were supposed to work, but he was so caught up in having been, well, *caught* that it just slipped his mind. Slightly panicking, Vem grabbed one of the gemstones and moved it around between both hands, rolling it in his palm and trying to find some semblance of a lever, switch or instructions on how to make use of it, only to come up short.

Short. Hell’s blazes...

“Come on, work!” he pleaded with the damned thing, “The office is already closed, I can’t go back until tomorrow, and I’m *not* going to go through a whole day of that asshole bullying me again! Work, darn you!”

With that, Vem slammed the gem against his chest, hard enough to knock some air out of his lungs and... activate the talisman? It suddenly grew red hot, too much for him to keep holding onto, but even after he let go of it, the object refused to let go of *him*; the gemstone itself was firmly attached to his scales, and trying to tug on it would inevitably lead to either burnt fingers or something that he didn't want to think of, assuming his scaly covering could even come off. It was painful, yes, but he *had* to let it happen; he trusted Mex not to have duped him, not when she had so many better ways of punishing him for transgressing on her workstation... and his faith, as it seemed, wasn't misplaced.

The warmth never went away, but it did stop hurting; whether it be because of its magical effects or the nerve endings on his chest being burned off, Vem didn't know, but it *felt* a hell of a lot less painful. It felt... good, in fact, so good that he could actually get used to it the more he thought about it. It filled his body with the sort of warm glow he imagined a good cooked meal would give him, rather than the scraps he had to turn into a sandwich every night, the sort of energy that a rejuvenation spell might provide. It was wonderful, absolutely wondrous, so much so that he was too distracted by how glorious it felt to notice how his body was finally doing what he had wanted it to do.

Now, Vem was still a kobold, and this came with a certain set of limitations, chief among them being that he was *very* small, and thus any spells that modified his size were bound to have equally limited effects. However, what with his body running on such a low amount of energy compared to other, larger races, as well as the hints of draconic blood in their distant heritage, it also meant that any effects that *did* take hold lasted for quite a while longer than they did on anyone else. Thus, if a human used that gemstone, they might be able to grow themselves to be as tall as a house, but only for a few short hours; Vem, meanwhile, would only get a foot and a half of extra height at most, but could probably count on it staying that way for weeks, if not longer!

His smile, which had vanished once he realized he didn't know how to operate those talismans, had returned in full force, leaving him looking rather goofy for someone who looked the way he did; the wonderful side effects of having his body grow like that included a package that grew along with it, and far more than it should in proportion, given the sorts of people that usually wielded that sort of magic. By the time the gemstone was fully drained, Vem stood at the proud height of barely four-foot five, but carried a male apparatus of such respectable size he was sure that, if ever he had enough luck to get together with anyone, they'd have... a lot of issues with internal damage, if he were ever to use that monster. Still, it *looked* good, and that's what mattered; the whole point of that exercise was to show Zass up and make him stand down, so it wasn't out of the realm of possibility for Vem to shrink his body back to its regular size after he accomplished his goal... though it was getting harder to accept that as an option the longer he kept looking at himself.

He looked *good. Really* good. So good that he began to understand why Zass was so insufferable all the time; even for someone like him, who much preferred to keep his mouth shut even when he had a legitimate reason to brag, it was difficult to hold back how much his own form aroused him. If he saw someone looking like that, he *might* actually have done something stupid, like look at them twice or allow his mind to think about how good they must be to the touch. He was definitely bigger than Zass though, and that was the biggest accomplishment yet; all that was required of him now was to make it through the night and show up to the office come morning, and everything else would sort itself out.

Plenty of time to explore his new body in the hours left until sleeping time, though...

The next day arrived, and with it the promise of sweet, sweet revenge as soon as he set foot inside his workplace, which conveniently was just a few yards away from his den. Getting out from inside proved to be slightly more difficult than usual, and suddenly he had a whole new appreciation for Zass, albeit a rather begrudging one; couldn't be easy to move around in tunnels and hallways built for kobolds of regular size, so much so that Vem wondered whether he'd even be able to keep up a size competition if it turned out his new rival wanted to engage in one. Even at his relatively small size (for a humanoid) he was already having to bend over just to avoid bumping his head onto the ceiling every other step, and as much as this served as a constant reminder of the sort of body he had crafted for himself, it was still a genuine annoyance.

At the very least, his coworkers' reactions to seeing him were well worth the trouble, from the stunned silence to the dropped jaws, to the occasional rising loincloths, they were all there. A few even went so far as to openly rub their eyes, presumably to confirm that it was indeed Vem striding into view, only to mutter something incomprehensible after confirming that their once-tiny colleague was now towering over them... or at least towering as much as a kobold could. He was confident that his plan was about to bear fruit, and he'd walk right into wherever he was meant to be and immediately stumble onto the other bastard, as was the universe's wont; surely, things hadn't progressed the way they had only for things *not* to take a turn for the scripted, so Zass picked a door at random, opened it, squeezed his way in, and was immediately floored by what he saw.

It was definitely Zass, just not the Zass he remembered seeing the day before. *This* version was significantly taller, tall enough that they were about as big as a regular human, and only spared from having to bend over by virtue of the archives' ceiling being dug higher up into the rock. He was positively massive when compared to the fragile-looking shelves and brittle boxes that held their records, and sure enough was having a hard time picking anything up without causing severe damage to its contents. It was hard to tell whether it was intentional, and the 'bold was just waiting for someone to come in so he could pretend to be oh-so clumsy, or if their size



had effectively reached a point where it began to interfere with their functionality. Whatever the case may be, there were shreds of parchment all over the ground, boxes torn into bits strewn about everywhere, and what looked to be an expression of sincere embarrassment on Zass' face... at least until he looked up and saw Vem, at which point he lit up and suddenly had a reason to smile again that day.

“Oh, you've grown too?” he asked, seemingly genuine, “Yeah, I took the opportunity and blasted myself with the spell last night too. I noticed you were getting jealous, so I thought about giving you something to think about. If I'd known you were gonna do it too I would've gone for another round!”

Three sentences. Three sentences and already Vem's day was completely ruined. It was honestly impressive how easily Zass could completely destroy a mood, though to be “fair” to him he did have plenty of practice being a thickheaded prick with a superiority complex... then again, Vem had to admit that he had fallen in much the same hole, excusing himself by pointing out *he* was entirely justified; but if that was the case, then why was he bothering with this at all? Why do it, if not to assert his superiority? Goodness, was this how Zass felt every day?! No wonder he was so insufferable all the time!

“Yeah, so, I dunno what you're on today, but,” Zass carried on as if nothing had happened, “I've been trying to move these papers for the last few minutes and I can't get anything done when my claws are so big, so if you could give me a hand...”

“Why don't you just shrink?” Vem spat back, knowing full well that he had lost the right to pose that question the moment he took the gems from the stockpile, “It would make life a lot easier for you, you know?”

“What, and miss out? Nah, I think I'll just go find something else better for me to do. Like move boxes in the storage room!” - the way that the other 'bold delivered that sentence, he might as well have had a religious epiphany - “I'm sure they wouldn't mind having something big, hunky and sexy to look at while they're working; be seein' ya, Vemmy~!”

He hated being called that, mostly because only Zass did it and it sounded so detestable when uttered by his tongue. It was even worse given that, just like last time, it would appear that a certain few *parts* of that idiot had grown out even more than the rest of him; the loincloth he wore, though much larger than the one before, was still not enough to hide the tip of what had to be a foot-long cock, hanging down and swinging in front of a set of ponderous orbs that Vem could *clearly* hear sloshing about with each step. Just how big *was* he underneath that piece of fabric? Could he himself ever hope to compete with such a thing? It felt like a waste of energy and resources, like he had lost the war before he even started, and for the first time in quite a

long while, Vem felt... hopeless. Like a dream had just been forcefully removed from within him and then crushed into dust in front of his eyes, without care nor concern for what he might think about it.

But there, alone in the room as he was, he felt more than just the crushing, existential despair that came with knowing that one's goals were obliterated. He felt something different, something far more powerful, something that would take him from where he was and propel him to a whole new level, an emotion that he hadn't felt before in his life and still wasn't sure whether or not he actually liked feeling: jealousy. Jealousy for Zass, jealousy for his size, jealousy for him being *bigger* than him, confirming just about everything that bastard had said about him. Just this realization alone was enough to bring him close to tears, but he had something to hold onto now, as petty and minute as it was; he was going to beat his rival at his own game, even if it was the last thing he did and he had to drag the whole workplace with him kicking and screaming.

He was so determined, in fact, that he decided to do something that he really shouldn't do at all: grow during work hours. He tried to convince himself that it was a bad idea, that he should wait until everything was done and his emotions weren't running so high so he could make an informed decision, but things just didn't work that way anymore. His critical thinking had been hijacked and replaced with an endless growthlust fueled by a desire to beat the conceited little git at his own game, and no longer concerned itself with such simple matters as whether or not he could do his job properly or even knew what he was supposed to do. All he *could* do at that point was grow, grow until Zass was no longer the biggest 'bold in the office, regardless of what negative consequences that might have.

To that end, he sprinted back to his den as quickly as his new size allowed, finding the second talisman somehow stuffed away in his undone bed. Without a moment's hesitation, he slammed that thing against his chest, muzzle breaking into a wide smile when he felt the heat rise up again; there it was, the growth, stretching him out and forcing him to take up more and more room inside of his living space, giving him a very good reason to try and find the biggest loincloth he had just so he could remain halfway-decent... not that any would really fit. With some embarrassment, Vem had to resort to tying up his bedsheets around his waist and hoping it would be enough, even if the last few inches of his new rod were clearly visible regardless; at least he was bigger than Zass, which was a great consolation, though getting *out* of the den without breaking anything had become a slight issue.

So he didn't. Instead, Vem placed all of his new upper body strength onto the wall, collapsing it outwards and opening a brand new path into the hallway outside, seriously frightening a few other kobolds headed his way, then had to get on all fours in order to crawl to the office space; try as he might, there was just no comfortable way to get on his feet until the ceiling rose higher, and even then he'd probably be bumping his head against it for the rest of the

day. Still, seeing everyone's faces when he showed up bigger than before for the second time that shift was *absolutely* worth it, doubly so when Zass walked into the main room and dropped a box he was carrying at about the same speed as his jaw did. This was it, *this* was the reaction he was hoping and looking for, this... flabbergasted expression denoting a complete lack of understanding. Now Zass was the smaller one, Zass was the one who was jealous, and Vem was the one who could walk up, approach his rival, and then proceed to completely ignore a perfect opportunity to be cordial and sportsmanlike; instead, he bent down slightly and booped his opponent straight on the snoot, letting them know *exactly* what he thought of them. And that tiny moment of anger, that single second of time where Zass allowed his base emotions to take over his seemingly perpetual self of self-assuredness? That *instant* where his facade broke and the true Zass shone through?

That was why Vem had gone to the lengths he had. He'd done it, he'd *actually* beaten Zass at his own game... for now at least. There was no doubt in his mind that the other 'bold wasn't going to take this insult to him lying down, even if he huffed, looked away and pretended not to care; it was patently evident to everyone looking at him that Zass was absolutely fuming at the mere notion that someone might try and outgrow him, and it wouldn't be surprising if he came around the next day being even bigger. But for now, Vem held the upper hand; not only was he taller, but he was bulkier, wider, and certainly heavier in a few very specific spots... it made focusing on anything but his own body be more complicated than he thought it would be, given the sudden rush of hormones that came with modifying himself so much. He felt like he could take on anything in the world and come out the other side a victor, a *dangerous* thought to have for what amounted to a draconic slave, but he couldn't help it; every time he looked down and appreciated the fine curvature of his new form, all he could think of was just how *good* he looked, how *strong* his body was, and how much he wanted to... make it even better?

Yes. Yes, this wasn't enough, not nearly enough; he had to keep going, had to find new limits, had to keep ahead of Zass, and to that end, he had to remember to swing by the stockpile to check if there were any more artifacts he could "borrow", not even bothering with an excuse that time around. After all, everyone could see him or, failing that, *hear* where he was going, so trying to hide it would be frankly ridiculous as far as he cared; besides, didn't he do this precisely so that everyone could see where he was going? Didn't he do this precisely so that his body would be the center of attention regardless of where he ended up being? Because if he didn't, then that was seriously concerning, because that's *exactly* why he thought he did, even if there was still a tiny voice in the back of his head trying its level best to tell him otherwise.

The rest of the shift went by as best as it could, which was a highly relative measure given that Vem could barely get anywhere to get anything done; the staff for the day had to find something simple for him to busy himself with, as it was becoming clear that the 'bold's sharp mind was starting to go dull against that brick wall of self-aggrandizement he was starting to

slam into. It was grating, to be honest, and now everyone there silently lamented the existence of a *second* Zass, when all they wanted was for the first one to shut up and stop talking about how great their body was for five minutes. In a stunning display of lack of self-awareness, Vem went as far as to suggest that the only reason his colleagues were talking about that was because they were jealous of his own body, something that left everyone feeling so immensely downtrodden at their apparent fate that they gave up trying to do anything about it... everyone but one person: Mex.

The same kobold that had been responsible for turning him into what he was now was *not* about to take any of his shit, and promptly marched up to him, climbed onto a table, and slapped him twice with all of her might, stunning everyone present and sending Vem flying backwards onto a stack of document-laden boxes, much to the consternation of several secretaries; he couldn't begin to believe that anyone would have the gall to do something like this, but... there he had it. Mex was standing there, looming over *him*, looking as disinterested in his plight as she did when first giving him the amulets; and yet, there was something different about the way she carried herself, something off about how hard she was breathing and how solid those legs looked. She was tensing up, all of her muscles ready to activate if she had to fight for her life, and though her words were firm when she spoke, her tone was certainly not; that 'bold was riding on a high of empty bravery and she knew it.

"I didn't help you just so you could turn around and make Zass look like the employee of the month, jackass," she spat at him, "so you're going to pick up your fat rear, march all the way back to your den, splash some water on your face, fix your door, have a sleep, and think about what you've done, because I swear to the goddess, if I have to deal with *two* of you from now on, I'm calling the boss and I'm having *both* of you roasted in a pit and then thrown over the side of the mountain! Don't test me!"

She was half a second away from collapsing out of sheer stress, and *still* she persisted, holding her high ground and staring Vem down with such intensity that it somehow managed to pierce through the thick veil of self-superiority that had grown over the engorged kobold's ego. Goodness gracious, what *was* he doing? He had gone out of his way to turn himself into an inconvenience, but he hadn't done it for Zass, he'd done it for himself! The one thing, the *one* thing he promised to himself that he wouldn't do, and it took him less than a day to break said promise like it was the most natural thing in the world; it was enough to move him to tears.

"Oh, for fuck's sa-alright, alright, come here," Mex sighed, jumping off from the table and offering her friend a hug, which was gladly accepted, "no tears, you big idiot. We'll find someone to take over your shift, just go back to your den and relax, ok? We need you at your best, not your biggest. Remember that."

“... thank you,” Vem finally managed to mutter, “thank you...”

The rest of the office was silent, but it was clear from their expressions that they both approved of and echoed Mex’s message, merely lacking in the sort of insane, mindless, potentially-suicidal bravery that the tiny kobold apparently had in droves. A few offered words of support for Vem, who did his best to avoid stepping on anything when he walked out, hunching over so he’d fit into the hallway outside. It was here that the damage done to his den came back to haunt him, because there was no way he was going to be able to fix it in any appreciable amount of time; the rock itself had been torn off, the wooden door turned to splinters, so unless he had a mason on call, there was no chance in all the seven hells he could put all of that crushed stone back where it used to be. Fragile as he was, when Vem sat down inside of his tiny room, barely able to fit and looking out at the hallway outside, he felt just about ready to break down completely... that is, until a sudden outpour of support from his fellow ‘bolds materialized from thin air.

He couldn’t believe it himself, but in between the first one stopping to ask what was going on and a steady stream of them making their way to and from the storage warehouse with construction supplies were just a few short minutes, quick enough that the enlarged kobold didn’t even have time to process what was going on. If anything, it just made him feel worse; he’d been treating everyone with the same level of respect Zass had and yet they *still* took time out of their day (and materials out of the stockpiles) to help him out. Tears flowed freely past a certain point, and Vem didn’t bother to hide them at all that time around; every time he tried to help he got told to sit back and let the rest of the team work their magic, giving him plenty of time to fail at keeping his composure. Once they were done, about an hour or so later, his den was back the way it had been before, with a stone wall that looked so perfectly like the old one that, were it not for it being conspicuously clean compared to the smudge-covered bits around it, one could be forgiven for thinking it *was* the old one!

Really, all that was left was for everyone to get together into a great big group hug so they could fall asleep on a ‘bold pile, but Vem was too shy to even think about that seriously (even if the experience would be neat with him at that size); rather, he did his best to try and calm down, splashed some water on his face from the sink, then... laid back on the ground, as his bed had become too tiny for him. It was incredibly uncomfortable and succeeded in sucking the joy out of the whole process, but at least he had a room now, rather than a particularly open section of corridor; not only that, but he was *bigger* than Zass now, and *so* big that there was no way the other kobold would try to surpass him, lest he find himself stuck inside of his den. That alone was enough to get him to ignore (or at least tolerate) the cold, hard floor, and with a smile on his face, Vem fell asleep.

He awoke several hours later to the sound of distant shouting, not the best of noises to hear first thing in the morning. There was no alarm going off, so it wasn't a fire, nor did the voices sound guttural, so it *probably* wasn't an orcish or goblinoid invasion hoping to get their hands on the hoard; those always ended up in so many casualties that sifting through the wreckage to identify what wasn't burned to a crisp *alone* took upwards of two weeks of their time. No, those were kobolds shouting, though why exactly he couldn't tell; it was hard to discern what the topic of conversation was about, and even the tones seemed to shift all over the place, from infuriated to elated to downright lurid, though how he knew this was unknown even to him. Vem couldn't even begin to imagine what might be causing such a commotion, but he had a bigger problem: leaving his den again.

He didn't want to knock his wall down, not after everyone went to so much trouble to get it back up, but he didn't really see much of a choice; the door was still the same size and it's not like he had a shrinking spell on hand... though he could probably work on that if he wanted to. Sighing, Vem opened the way to the hallway and stuck his head outside, *expecting* to find a packed corridor full of people that could help him. What he saw instead left him utterly floored, and seriously put everything he had done so far into extreme perspective: it was Zass, but not a Zass that he remembered seeing.

The shouting suddenly made a whole lot more sense once Vem saw that the hallway leading further down the row of dens was blocked at one end by something big, scaly and dull-green, twisted and smushed so it just barely fit the contours of the stone-hewn passageway. A large crowd had gathered next to his head, with the dumb 'bold smiling like the idiot he was and telling everyone that things were perfectly fine and they didn't have to worry about anything. It was doubtful that even he knew just how badly he screwed up, but one thing *was* for certain: he was bigger than Vem. And try as he might, the latter just couldn't get it out of his head that this meant he had failed somehow, regardless of the revelations of the previous day.

Seeing as everyone's attention was stuck on the other 'bold, Vem had to wait for far longer than he should've before anyone looked his way, and longer still before he got enough of their attention to beg for some help in getting out of his den, *immediately* denying any sort of shrinking charm, anything but that! His 'bold coworker looked at him with the kind of expression that betrayed just how much this made them feel uncomfortable, but ran off to the storage rooms anyway, returning with a weird-looking birch wand that, when cast, made the whole front wall of Vem's den turn intangible, allowing him to just barely squeeze his way out. Even at his size, the 'bold couldn't move without rubbing against the rock so much it became uncomfortable; he could only imagine what it would be like for Zass... and yet he seemed perfectly fine, though apparently entirely immobile. Vem attempted to listen to whatever he was saying through the shouting of the crowd, and it appeared that he was trying to dissuade everyone from shrinking him down, with false reassurances that he'd "totally" be able to get

himself out of the bind he was in and that everyone around him was “just exaggerating” about how unwieldy his new size was. Vem would’ve said something about a lack of self-awareness, but alas, he now possessed enough of it to know how hypocritical that would be.

He didn’t even *try* to understand why anything had happened, nor did he commit the cardinal sin of feeling like this was his fault somehow; Zass had been given every reason to *stop*, and if he chose not to, then he held just as much blame for his fate as Vem did when *they* had their incident the day before. Honestly, it was starting to feel like this entire competition was bound to end in disaster sooner rather than later; seeing as his main rival was now too big to even fit through the corridors they were meant to use to move between their dens and the workplace, not only had Zass made a complete fool of himself, but he was also preventing other, more reason-abiding ‘bolds from getting to work... and if they didn’t get to work, then said work would become late, and if they were to allow *any* part of their schedule to slip away, it was only a matter of time before the butterfly effect grew powerful enough for their draconic master to notice, and then who knew what might happen? Their continued existence as a clan was predicated entirely on the good graces of the dragon who owned the hoard they tended to; it would be far easier for its owner to find replacement maintenance staff than it would be for said staff to find employ elsewhere, if they were even allowed to resign at all rather than being thrown down the mountain after being burnt to a crisp!

Suddenly, the thought of a growth competition for the sake of proving a point felt a lot more dangerous than it had before, though to Vem’s credit, he hadn’t ever expected things to get *this* bad; never in his wildest dreams could he have predicted that Zass would actually go so far as to become stuck, rather than simply pouting and rationalizing away their defeat as something else entirely. Now though, it had suddenly become a lot harder to justify having gone down that route; a lot harder to reason away the inherent peril associated with such a turn of events. Vem suddenly felt a lot worse than he had even the day before after his unfortunate epiphany, doubly so when he remembered that he, too, was so big that he couldn’t move properly without collapsing a wall or two, and the few ‘bolds that looked in his direction did so with the same expression of disdain they presented to Zass. The time for their pissing competition was past, and everyone else was clearly tired of it; the only question now was how they were supposed to end it all.

To the smaller of the two giant kobolds, the solution was obvious, but that was mostly because he knew very little of magical amulets or how they interacted with their semi-draconic nature; he tried to approach the crowd, only ending up blocking the way *to* them when his ass got stuck around a particularly tight section of the ceiling, then told them he’d be fine with being “shrunk down” as soon as possible, and no longer cared about whatever it was that had led to him going down that path to begin with. Much to his horror, the few kobolds present that actually *knew* how those spells worked were quick to inform him that it wasn’t so simple; not

only had he injected raw magical power into his body via a talisman calibrated for a different species entirely, but he'd also done it several times over. Thus, it wasn't a simple matter of "getting it out", and even if it was, they lacked the magic items required to make it happen; their only way out, much to everyone's collective chagrin, was to siphon one of their bodies into another, and then hope that their dragon master would take sufficient pity on the resulting giant 'bold and *not* instantly incinerate them on the spot. The only question was, who got whose size?

A question that was answered purely by its own existence, considering that absolutely no one present even so much as *considered* the possibility that Zass *might* be the one to receive the boost; as far as anyone knew, he might do something completely insane, like turn around and tell their boss that his body was better than theirs, or that the dragon was "just jealous" of the kind of curves he sported, or any other such nonsense. For once, the bigger kobold was quick to deny this, his voice rising as the panic set in; if there was something that could still instill the fear of death into that airheaded idiot, it was the idea of having to give up his acquired size, doubly so when he'd have to do that against his own will. Despite this, no one bothered to give him the time of day, which left... Vem.

Now, Vem inspired very little confidence as well, but it was either that or an even worse option. The smaller of the two growing competitors had no other option but to stay there, stuck on all fours, as he was lectured to about the importance of keeping his wits about him, and how *vital* it was for him not to let the growth spurt get to him. It would be good, it would be pleasurable, it would hit every single button he had and even more, but he *had* to keep it together; after all, this wasn't just his life that was on the line, but everyone else's, and if their dragon master saw fit to get rid of them all, even Vem's increased size wouldn't be nearly enough to contend with the raw, unfettered power of the lord of the hoard. Vem himself nodded along and reassured his fellows that he wouldn't do anything as stupid as... well, what he had just done the day before, and as much as that didn't convince anyone, they were all out of options; wiggling to the side, he allowed one of the more knowledgeable 'bolds to squeeze by his side and run to the repository, only to return barely a minute later carrying a deep blue gem in one hand and a wooden wand in the other. He threw the former at Vem and ordered him to hold onto it, then unceremoniously poked Zass with the latter.

The results were as strong as they were immediate; while the 'bold hit by the wand's power yelped and demanded to know what was going on, their main rival felt the blue gem in their hands grow increasingly hot, a familiar sensation when coupled with the fact that he couldn't throw it away or drop it on the ground. The walls around him became tighter and tighter, his body expanding in every direction as Zass' shrunk in equal measure. Vem heard the entire den system crumble around him, for his eyes were closed and he lacked the willpower to open them; the transformation already felt so good that he feared that being able to see it take place would inevitably result in the complete loss of his mind, something that wasn't at all helped by the fact



that every other 'bold around him began screaming in terror once the tunnels' ceiling was brought down and their one salvation completely ruined their living quarters. To Vem though, this hardly mattered at all; the only thing he cared about was feeling all that delicious mass pour into him, filling him like he was an empty mould. His cup was running over and he loved every second of it, even when he knew he had crossed a line he couldn't come back from.

Normally, kobold lives were lived under the cover of either darkness or oil lamps; the great outdoors weren't exactly the type of environment they enjoyed living in, with large clans such as his much preferring intricate tunnel systems dug into large hills or, in their case, mountains. Besides, seeing as they served a dragon, where exactly would they go? There was a small ledge outside the cave with a very narrow path leading down to the base of the mountain itself, some three miles down, and... that was it. Not a lot of tourist-y hotspots for them to visit, plus they had plenty of work to do to keep their minds occupied; even those who were stationed at the entrance to the hoard *hated* the job, and not just because of the elements, as the light of the sun bordered on downright painful when they were exposed to enough of it.

Which made it quite surprising when Vem burst out from their living quarters and into the wide world outside, felt the touch of frost, the cold bite of the wind and the insufficient warmth provided by a winter's sun... and didn't immediately complain about it. It'd be disingenuous to claim he enjoyed it in any degree, but it didn't hurt as much as he'd thought it would, nor was it as unwelcome as he *knew* it was going to be; rather, it was a stark reminder of what it was like to be something more than a mere kobold, to transcend the boundaries imposed by their short stature and lack of power, and become something *greater*. It was intoxicating, in its own weird way, and despite having made a dozen different promises that he wouldn't lose control over his urges, it was getting difficult to live up to them. In fact, Vem *might* have to break a few of them. Or five. Or maybe all of them, because *gods*, this felt *amazing*; he was so massive now that towered over everyone's den, able to cover the hole left behind by his ascension by just bending down and bringing his hands around his head. He smiled, though he doubted that his fellows would be in as good a mood as him... in fact, he was quite certain of it, given the generalized screaming coming from every direction. Why *were* they screaming, though? They already knew what was going to happen, so surely it wasn't *that* much of a surprise to let chaos reign; it felt odd that they would react this way...

... at least until he heard the flapping of wings.

Well, his life was done... or was it? Wasn't he supposed to beseech their lord and master for some sort of mercy? Vem distinctly recalled something like that being the reason why he was so big, so surely things weren't going to be *so* bad that the mere presence of their draconic overlord would be enough to lead to certain destruction. He looked up, trying to locate him, only to nearly be thrown off the mountain when a massive shadow collided with the side of it, claws sinking

into stone and creating a large cascade of broken shards that nearly hit Vem on the head. Up above him, clinging to the mountain with as much ease as one would stand up on a regular surface, was his boss: a big stonkin' dragon with so many swords plunged into their back that he could probably make a killing by melting them all and reselling the resulting steel to the very same adventurers that kept adding more to the collection. His eyes were wide open, though his expression betrayed more curiosity than anything else; if he had eyebrows, they'd probably be lifted.

“Explain,” he said, short and booming nonetheless.

It was supposed to be intimidating... though, for whatever reason, it really didn't come off that way to Vem. Maybe it was the sense of self-importance, maybe it was the fact that he was so big he didn't fit in the kobold tunnels, but it wasn't nearly as bad he thought it'd be. If anything, from that new perspective, his dragon master didn't look *nearly* as scary as he did back when Vem was still a tiny little nameless 'bold. Honestly, he couldn't even remember *why* he was ever scared of that guy.

He could totally take him on.