

The Pirate and the Thief

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The noise of crowded taverns encroached on the docks. The water of the sheltered bay lapped against the hulls of ships, mixed with the occasional creaking of wood. Starlight and a few scattered lanterns weren't enough to fend off the shadows.

Ombi darted from cover to cover, taking advantage of his diminutive size and the darkness. The vulpera dressed in black from head to toe to hide his bright orange fur. If things went south, he wouldn't make it easy for any guards to spot him.

Though the night kept Ombi hidden, it also made finding his target more difficult. He'd yet to memorize the layout of the port, and the large ships all looked alike in the dark. After backtracking for some time, he finally arrived at what he assumed was his target. A contact had informed him of a newly arrived ship with valuables in its hold, the sort that were easy for a thief to snatch and get away with. If all went well, he'd be able to pay off some debts and still have enough left over to treat himself.

Ombi concentrated, and the vulpera shimmered as he became invisible. He darted up the ship's gangplank, nimble paws not making any noise. Upon reaching the deck, he stopped and looked for threats. Two sailors stood at the bow of the ship. Both were worgen, their glowing eyes piercing the night like candle flames. At least he was downwind of them, so they weren't picking up his scent.

He crept across the deck and snuck into the hold, taking every step gently to avoid making noise. Getting inside was the easy part. Now he had to track down the valuables. Nondescript crates and barrels filled the cargo hold. They were marked with letters and abbreviations, none of which gave away their contents to a thief like Ombi. He'd have to rely on experience and luck to find treasure.

Still invisible, Ombi moved from crate to crate, barrel to barrel, searching for his payday. Treasure was plentiful—luxurious bolts of silk, tanned hides of exotic creatures, dried herbs he vaguely recognized, and potions that may have been of high quality. But they weren't the sort of things he could stash in his pack and bolt off with. He'd expected jewels or

trinkets or something ripe with magic.

Another crate, another stack of unknown potions. Ombi picked up a bottle and swirled the contents within. Maybe the potions were the real prize. He'd heard mages would pay good gold for particularly potent brews. He put the bottle back. If only he had a way to appraise them before he stole them.

A white, furry arm suddenly wrapped around Ombi's neck from behind, and he was lifted off the ground. His invisibility faded as he flailed in the stranger's grip. He yanked on the arm with all his might, but it wouldn't budge. He reached for his daggers too late. His paws found empty sheaths, and a clattering told him the daggers were now far out of reach. He spotted the scarred muzzle of a worgen in the corner of his eyes. Glowing orange eyes stared at him.

The worgen chuckled as he felt the small vulpera wiggle in his grasp. His catch was a lively one but lacked the strength to break free. "I thought I smelled something curious when I was heading to the galley. I didn't expect to find a whole vulpera scurrying around my hold like an overgrown rat."

Ombi grew still, then began wiggling fiercely. He swayed, but not enough to escape. "Let me go!"

"Maybe after you've answered a few questions for me, vulpera. My name's Mileos, and I'm the captain of this ship. You wouldn't happen to be a spy, would you?" He asked, growling in Ombi's ear.

"N-No!" Ombi gasped. Nothing he did seemed to loosen Mileos' grip.

"So you're just a common thief who thought he could steal a ship's cargo?"

"I got lost."

Mileos broke into thunderous laughter. "You're either a poor liar or a decent jester. And based on your clothes, I've got a hunch about which one." He tightened his grip and watched as the vulpera squirmed. "I saw you show an interest in my mana potions. I made them myself, using a concentrated formula I've spent years perfecting. They're popular, and deceptively valuable for their size. But surely you knew that, since you came here to steal them."

Ombi silently cursed himself. So the potions *had* been worth taking. "I swear I didn't know. If you let me go, I'll leave and never come back! You

have my word!”

“Don’t worry, little vulpera. You’ll be gone soon enough,” Mileos chuckled. “But first, why don’t you sample some of the potions you were admiring?”

Mileos grabbed one of the potions and popped the cork off. He forced the end into Ombi’s maw and tilted the vulpera’s head back, making him chug the entire bottle. Ombi kicked and thrashed as his stomach filled with the cool elixir. It tasted fruity, almost like cider. An odd chill ran through his body.

“No need to be afraid. The excess mana won’t harm you. Though you may experience a bit of bloating.”

Ombi felt a growing pressure in his belly and burped. He glanced down and saw his flat middle puff out.

“See, nothing to worry about. So why don’t you enjoy some more?” Mileos picked up another bottle and forced Ombi to drink it.

The vulpera’s belly swelled like a balloon. His belt dug into his middle, and his tunic clung to him tightly.

“I’m feeling generous tonight. You can have all the potions you can handle. I know mages who’d make a fel pact for this kind of deal!” Mileos gleefully forced his captive to chug potion after potion.

Ombi’s belt creaked in protest before snapping off. The force of the belt breaking wobbled the vulpera’s gut and freed it from his tunic. He looked like he’d swallowed a pumpkin. Squirming became difficult as his bloating belly bounced and swayed, weighing him down. He began to fear Mileos would make him chug potions until he popped.

Mileos put down an empty bottle and grabbed Ombi’s gut. He squeezed the taut ball, forcing a small belch out of the sloshing vulpera. “You’re practically a potion bottle now. I could drop you in front of a mage, and they’d pay me a whole pile of gold for a mana-infused vulpera. But I’ve got other plans in mind for you, little one,” he snickered.

Mileos turned Ombi around to face him. The vulpera’s belly swayed and sloshed. He showed a toothy grin. “It’s been a while since I got to indulge on vulpera. And you’re the most filling one I’ve ever seen.”

Ombi’s jaw dropped as Mileos opened his maw wide. “W-Wait, let’s talk this over!” he begged before being plunged into darkness.

A single gulp took in Ombi's head and shoulders. A second took in his chest. Mileos' jaws stretched greedily over the curve of Ombi's belly. He'd had his fill of countless people over the years, from beefy tauren to hulking naga, but vulpera always felt like a delicacy to him. They were a small treat that settled well and didn't leave him beached or begging for sleep. And it didn't take much to stuff one into something more appetizing if the mood hit.

Mileos angled Ombi upward and let the weight of the vulpera's gut send him gliding down the gullet. Mileos felt the bulge of his meal travel down his throat and into his belly. His tunic rode up, letting his fluffy white gut swell out into the open. With one last gulp, Ombi was gone, and Mileos' gut bounced to celebrate the arrival of his latest meal.

Mileos smacked his belly and sighed. He felt Ombi shifting within him, searching for a comfortable position and a way out. The thief wouldn't find either. Mileos ogled his swollen gut, watching its surface bulge from Ombi's struggles. He ran a paw over it, and his tail wagged. "Few things beat a good meal." He thumped his middle, then looked at the empty potion bottles in the crate beside him. "You were an expensive meal, for sure, but I deserved a treat for all my hard work lately."

He covered the crate back up and waddled out of the hold, swaying his belly from side to side for his own amusement. He stopped in the hall outside the galley and looked down at his belly. "Hmm, it would've been frustrating if I hadn't caught you myself. A lax night watch is bad for business. Perhaps I should have a talk with the two who were supposed to be looking out for thieves like you." He poked a finger hard into his middle. "For their sake, they'd better hope you were enough to sate my appetite tonight. Though I've always got room for more."

With his thoughts drifting to fantasies about a second course, Mileos waddled towards the deck, tail wagging and stomach rumbling.