

The Kobold Thieves: Chapter 010

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Virk gazed out the window of his room. The thick smell of the sea wafted in, along with the screeching of gulls. Across the narrow street, the broken sign of the tanner shop rotated in the breeze, smacking against a wooden beam. A passing wagon whipped up dust. It was an ugly view. He only liked it when the fog rolled in and blurred his surroundings so he could imagine them as something better.

The kobold let out a long, disappointed sigh. He'd anticipated waiting a couple of days to hear back from his contact. It'd been a week. A frustrating, fattening week.

He tugged on his vest out of habit. The new one didn't ride up his middle as often as the old one had, but he couldn't shake the feeling something was exposed. Even a professional fit couldn't hide how round he'd become. The weight had settled low, giving him a bottom-heavy pear shape. His lithe tail had thickened until it resembled a lizard's. Plump. He was *plump*.

Knowing about his cursed touch had limited his gains, not halted them. Using utensils and cups dulled the effects, but still made modest meals fattening. So he resorted to wearing gloves and drinking through straws. The more degrees of separation between him and meals, the better. He accepted that such inconvenient tactics were the sole reason he hadn't gained twice as much.

Eating and drinking no longer held any joy for him. There were consequences to every gulp. When he lifted his fork, he thought only of where the pounds might end up, not the taste.

Losing a little pleasure in life had left Virk bitter. Perhaps that was why he'd decided to put his curse to good use.

"Bruarrrrrp!"

Virk looked down. A pair of bloated mice had stumbled out of the tavern. They groaned and laughed as they waddled down the street. Their bellies bounced up, down, and against one another.

The Cracked Coin had been packed after reopening. Buckle had been generous with portions, and customers had taken advantage of that by

buying more than usual, oblivious to the fattening nature of the ingredients. The heavy meals had kept them at the tavern longer, so they'd ordered more liquor. Regulars returned the next day softer and hungrier than ever.

There'd been confusion and grumbling about how they'd gained so much weight so fast, but they weren't the brightest lot in the city. Most continued coming to the tavern so it continued fattening them up.

Virk alone had realized the benefit of having a gluttonous customer base. Gorging left them too sluggish to start fights, leading to less trouble and less costly destruction of property. Increased appetites and Buckle's compulsion to see others get fat led to them spending more. For every one customer who stopped coming because they suspected the tavern to be unhealthy for their waistline, three new ones arrived because they heard the food was cheap and plentiful.

Virk closed his window. He prepared to cast an illusion to slim himself down, but decided not to bother. He didn't care if the drunks saw him fat.

Belches echoed from below as often as loud chatter. Virk took his time descending the stairs to avoid jiggling any more than he needed to. He'd found that to be his least favorite aspect of the gains. His gut didn't quite get in his way yet and he paced himself so he didn't get winded, but he felt *every* little wobble. If not for that, he could've distanced the ordeal from his thoughts.

The customers were too busy eating to pay attention to Virk as he walked straight to the kitchen. Some were already stuffed, like the mice he'd seen leave. He imagined their bellies as pouches filled with coins. At least he'd profit off of their lack of control.

He took note of how wide each server on duty was. They'd gained weight from eating scraps and sipping on the water Virk had cursed. None looked clumsy yet. The moment their gains started interfering with their work, he'd be forced to let them go. He couldn't have them bumping things over with their bellies or struggling to squeeze through the gaps between tables.

Grit bumbled past. He was squeezed into a skintight shirt and pants, his rubbery belly as taut as a drum. To the server's credit, he'd acclimated well to the weight Virk had forced upon him. That he'd continued rapidly growing didn't bode well for his continued employment, though.

Warm air poured over Virk when he slipped through the door leading to the kitchen. He crept down the stairs, going just far enough to see the work. The cooks waddled from the pantries to their stations, busy keeping up with the onslaught of orders. Working in close quarters with Buckle had caused them to all plump up. Their aprons clung snug to their doughy middles. None were leaner than Virk.

My whole world's growing fatter around me, Virk mused to himself. The widening impact of the spell unsettled him. From four thieves to dozens of bystanders. He wondered if the caster had foreseen the potential consequences of their spell.

"Excellent, excellent!" Buckle's voice rang out. "The customers can't get enough of our food. We'll leave them so stuffed they have to be rolled out!" The chef spoke with unparalleled joy.

Buckle plodded around the kitchen, wobbling with every step. His delusional desire to pile on the pounds hadn't waned in the least. He'd swelled beyond being doughy or portly, and was on the verge of being as wide as he was tall. He was all curves and rolls, fat in ways Virk had never seen a kobold grow before.

Virk had held out hope the chef would snap out of their trance after surpassing a certain size and see reason, but Buckle's beliefs only intensified the fatter he got.

Buckle had moved his belongings into the kitchen so he didn't have to bother scaling the stairs. The move made it easier for Virk to avoid him; he'd run out of polite ways to turn down a stuffing. He also no longer had to listen to the hourly revelations Buckle had about their weight goals. He feared they'd never be content, and privately considered them a lost cause. Even if they broke the enchantment that very moment, Buckle wouldn't be in any condition to take part in a heist. They'd be a liability.

Virk snuck back up the stairs in disgust. At least Buckle still had value as a chef. The green ball of dough could earn his keep getting their customers addicted to food. He vowed their replacement would be capable of restraint.

Frustration brought Virk back to the second floor of the tavern, away from the gorging and the swollen middles. He dreamed of returning to his favorite lounge to take his mind off the curse, but knew it'd do him no good.

His touch would spoil any decadent meal and illusions would only trick the eye, not the touch. He remembered how much wine he'd allowed his last companions there to drink, and the desserts he'd treated them to. He assumed his lithe beauties were looking a fair bit softer nowadays.

The stairs thudded behind Virk. Fearing an intruder, he cast an illusion and blended in with the wall. He didn't have any weapons on him, but the element of surprise would be in his favor. A bobbing orange sphere ascended the steps, followed by the kobold it belonged to. Krix leaped to the landing and smacked his hefty tail down flat to prevent momentum and his middle from toppling him. After a quick peek over his shoulder, he let out a sigh of relief and leaned against the wall, panting.

"I'll have to move the tables further away from the staircase. Otherwise, the drunks might actually get me," he mumbled, catching his breath.

"Or, you could stop stuffing yourself like a fool." Virk dispersed the illusion.

Krix jolted at the sudden appearance of the other kobold, causing his gut to wobble up and down. He covered his surprise with a grin. "Trying to hide from your gains, as usual?"

"I'm keeping them in check, unlike you." Even when not engorged, Krix's girth matched that of the nobles he so loved to lurk around. The weight had predominantly settled in his belly, making him look permanently stuffed.

"This is nothing." Krix placed a claw on his bloated middle and massaged it. "I'll lose it all, in time."

"Or you'll keep telling yourself that until you're fatter than Buckle and wheezing whenever you waddle down the street," Virk hissed. He couldn't believe he'd once had an ounce of respect for the moronic thief. "You're stuck with the easiest curse to avoid, and yet you come home night after night looking like you volunteered to be one of Buckle's taste-testers!"

"I'll have you know, a small fortune in seafood is tucked away in my stomach right now. Lobster, crab, and shrimp, their flavors personally enhanced by culinary mages to last longer. My belly's worth twice its weight in gold right now at the very least." Krix slid two fingers beneath the curve of his gut and jiggled it.

“Those riches you gluttoned on will be churned away into worthless fat.” Virk dug his finger into Krix’s middle. The stuffed kobold winced and stepped back. A long *glrrrrgle* echoed from his belly and he burped.

“But the wealth of memories will stay with me forever,” Krix insisted. “I’ve indulged in lavish dishes I never thought I’d ever glimpse, let alone eat. I’m eating like a king!”

“And blimping up like one, too. But unlike those gilded butterballs, you won’t have the luxury of lazing around all day once you’re too fat to do anything useful!” Virk begged for Krix to get a hold of himself. It wasn’t too late for the gluttonous thief to undo the damage wreaked upon his waistline.

The other kobold’s expression didn’t change in the least. “Words are my greatest asset, not my dexterity. The wealthy are used to seeing pudgy folk in their circles. I may have to shift my approach somewhat, but I’ll still be able to steal their coin while fat.” He smirked. “You’re just jealous I’ve twisted this curse to my advantage.”

Virk snarled and exposed his fangs at Krix’s stupidity. He resisted flying into another rant, admitting Krix was as far gone as Buckle. They simply didn’t know it yet. “Sure. While letting every chef in the city cram food down your throat, you haven’t happened to run into Cleave, have you?”

Cleave had avoided the tavern, skulking by at odd hours of the morning when no one was eating.

“As a matter of fact, he cursed me out the other day. I complimented him on how his gut is probably large enough to break down doors now and he nearly wobbled himself apart howling and snipping at me.” Krix scratched his double chin as he fondly remembered the incident.

“Then he’s still mobile?” Virk had expected him to be a blob.

“Yes, but not fast. I didn’t have trouble dodging his sluggish punches and he fell flat on his face after a few. It sounds like he’s found someplace far from contagious appetites to hide. I’m betting he’ll have a phobia of taverns even after this silly curse fades.”

“None of us would have to worry about such a fate if we worked together.” Convincing any of the gang to act rationally had become an effort in futility, but Virk couldn’t help but try. “We could’ve been scouring the city for leads instead of getting fattened left and right.”

“And we’d have nothing to show for it but emptier pockets,” Krix brushed him off. “Any mage consultant we go to will happily take our coin to look at us, and then demand twice as much to actually *do* anything. At best, we’d be shaving a few days off our ordeal. At worst, the spell could be warped into something far more volatile. Relax, Virk. Good things come to those who wait.” Krix waddled by Virk, nudging them aside with his round gut. Virk considered tripping him.

Virk watched Krix push his bedroom door open with his belly and disappear inside, no doubt eager to sleep off his ridiculously fattening meal. All he did now was eat and sleep, no better than Buckle. No, he was worse than Buckle. Buckle openly admitted his intent to become more belly than kobold. Krix boasted of having control over his appetite while heading towards the same, colossal fate.

The muffled sounds of customers penetrated his indignation. Demands for more amidst boisterous jokes about how fat someone was getting. Even the thought of profiting off making others fat couldn’t improve his mood. He was losing control over his gang, plain and simple. They were all ballooning out of control and making no rational effort to fend off the pounds. Every day they were becoming less and less useful, while he struggled alone to prevent their doom.

He should’ve been asking around for leads on their next heist by now, or getting the gang small jobs to reinforce their coffers and keep them out of trouble. Soon, they’d be too fat to cause trouble. Or steal. Or run. Or maybe even walk.

Virk’s whole world was collapsing around him, even as it swelled. He’d had enough weight gain for one afternoon. He needed a break. He drifted back to his room, his spirits low. With luck, the next day would be better.