

The Kobold Thieves: Chapter 02

By: Indigo Rho

Buckle had woken that morning feeling restless, and he hadn't the faintest idea why. He'd slept well, as far as he was aware. Dinner the night before hadn't disagreed with him and neither did breakfast that morning. He wasn't coughing or feverish or sore. And yet he felt an absence, faint at first, but gradually growing as the day went on.

He had no one to discuss it with. Virk was off selling the tomes they'd stolen the previous day, not that he was ever open to any talk that didn't involve work. Krix only excelled at *pretending* to listen to others. He could be pleasant at times, but tended to redirect all conversation to himself. Cleave didn't much like him. He didn't much like anyone. Liquor made him tolerable, to an extent. It quieted his threats into grumbles.

With the tavern closed for another day, Buckle couldn't even talk with the cooks or servers. They were all kobolds as well, though few were privy to the gang's illicit activities. They knew their bosses were doing something questionable, and had the common sense to not pry. The rest of the gang ignored them, but Buckle enjoyed their company.

The day passed quickly, despite the peculiarity in Buckle. When Virk returned, he gathered everyone up with the same great fervor he always had when about to gloat.

"Gentlemen, we just turned a few old books into a mountain of gold," Virk said. He tossed each member of the gang a heavy pouch of coins. "Yet again I prove to you the value of careful planning. There's a reason we've never had to worry about bounties on our heads or guards breaking down our door. As long as you continue to stick to my plans and work as a team, you'll never have to worry about money."

Buckle had heard the speech often before. Virk offered far more warnings than praise, while the gang impatiently waited for him to stop talking. Success kept the gang together, not love or loyalty. None of them were bothered by that.

"The tavern will stay closed until tomorrow, so enjoy yourselves until then," Virk ordered. "I've got business to attend to."

"What kind of business?" Krix quipped.

“The private kind,” Virk snapped. He entertained no further questions and left the tavern.

Cleave snorted. “He never knows when to shut up.”

“He savors the attention,” Krix said. “Which is why he’s going back to that silly little lounge again, the one where he can pay pretty men to dance around him while sipping on wine.”

They all snickered.

“I’ve never had to bribe anyone to dance with me,” Cleave said with loathing.

Krix turned to Cleave, mischief in his eyes. “How hard is it to dance with someone while holding a knife to their belly? Dancing under duress must be awkward.”

Cleave smacked his muscular tail against the floor. “They dance with me *willingly*, ass. Hearts flutter whenever I knock someone down a peg. I’ve had tavern brawls start over me.”

“And you get the loser?”

“Fuck you!” Cleave rose so fast his chair fell over. “Keep pretending you’re some sort of big shot, I’m getting action.” He stormed away, swatting aside his fallen chair with his tail as he passed.

“Should you really be riling him up?” Buckle asked. He’d never quite understood why the others were so adversarial. A nice meal as a group would do them all some good. Especially Krix. The kobold needed to put meat on his bones.

Krix smiled and shrugged. “It’s not my fault he can’t take a joke. And he throws as much mockery my way as I do his, perhaps even more. I just don’t make a fuss about it.”

Buckle had seen Krix pout and sulk plenty, but he decided to keep the observation to himself. “Are you going out tonight as well?”

“As a matter of fact, I am. An acting troupe called Fletch’s Company is performing tonight, and I hear their new play is the most anticipated of the year.” Krix stood, pacing as he talked. “Events like this attract the city’s wealth like moths to a flame. I’ll get to see a show *and* return home with a nice stash of jewelry and coins.”

“But Virk wants us to stay low.”

“Virk’s only in charge during heists. Besides, I can’t perfect my craft if

I'm sitting around the tavern all day. Just consider this to be training." Krix winked.

Buckle saw the wisdom in Krix's claim, but he also recognized it was an excuse first and foremost. "Have fun, then."

"I always do," Krix said. He headed upstairs to prepare himself for his night.

Buckle looked around at the empty tavern as Krix vanished upstairs. Alone again. He didn't plan on going out like the others. Trying out his pastry hydra at the library had put him in the mood to experiment in the kitchen.

He walked behind the bar and down a worn set of wooden steps. They groaned quietly, more from age than his weight, though the rest of the gang preferred to claim otherwise. Long ago, such comments would've gotten to him. As he'd steadily grown tubbier, though, he'd come to accept the extra pounds. So what if he jiggled a little when he moved or his shirt revealed a strip of his belly when he stretched? He could still move around the kitchen with ease and wasn't about to fight anyone with his fists.

Light poured through the cloudy windows of the basement kitchen. The tavern straddled a hill, with the basement beside a narrow alleyway. A dumbwaiter carried drinks and dishes up to the main floor of the tavern, along with the occasional clumsy kobold. Heavy kegs were stacked against the back wall, filled with whatever ale, cider, and wine Buckle could acquire. Pantries held bulk ingredients and spices, all rather basic. Virk only funded the tavern enough to survive, not thrive. Buckle knew how to push simple ingredients to their limits, and had earned numerous drunken compliments from customers.

Buckle started a fire in the hearth and started cooking. He'd always had a passion for it. He'd worked in kitchens all his life, learning first from his mother, and then from anyone willing to put up with his many questions. Along the way, he'd discovered he had a knack for culinary magic. Animating food was his specialty. He could enchant a loaf of bread to float around or transform ingredients into delectable creatures, like the hydra.

Unfortunately, he rarely received credit or praise for his culinary creations. The ones he made for heists were always eaten before they could truly be admired, and his role in making them had to remain anonymous so that he could avoid a cell. Buckle could add a flourish or two to the meals he

made for customers, but the menu needed to be affordable, preventing him from going all out.

One day he'd run his own restaurant, with fewer limits to his budget and creativity. Customers would be awed by food that flew from the kitchen to their table, and pay good coin to order a ball of dough that would turn into a herd of sheep pastries. They'd eat until their bellies bulged out and would struggle to get up after. Regulars would grow fat, their doughy middles the greatest sign of their love for his cooking.

The thought caught Buckle off guard and made him blush. He'd never really imagined others getting fat before, but now it seemed almost pleasant. Perhaps the students from the library were still on his mind. They'd digested the hydra by now, and all three must have grown rounder in the process. Flat middles replaced by paunches soft to the touch. New curves all over replacing features once sharp. He smiled, without quite knowing why.

The chef's mind wandered, but his claws dutifully put together a sizable meal for four. He looked upon the fruits of his labor with pride, then confusion. "Huh, that's a bit more than I intended. I'm not sure the others will be back in time to enjoy it, either." It could be warmed up later, but a great deal of its taste would be lost. He resolved to eat as much as he could in one sitting so his work wouldn't go to waste.

Buckle started on the first plate. He devoured a juicy hunk of meat, sauteed vegetables, and fluffy bread. Cider washed it all down. He nodded after every bite, congratulating himself but also considering what could be improved. His recipes were permanent works in progress, always open for potential enhancement.

The portions were larger than usual—no doubt a consequence of letting his mind drift—yet he managed to finish the first plate with surprising haste. It should've been enough to sate him; it always had before. He did have an appetite to match his belly, but it mostly prompted him to snack between meals, not glut. His eyes wandered to the remaining food. He felt like he could pack away another portion, and found along with it a great desire to. The more he ate, the less that went to waste.

So he zealously struck at the second plate. He finished it off even faster than the first. The meal left him stuffed. His belly bulged faintly and

his breathing was heavy. He couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten past his fill. The pressure in his stomach pleased him like never before. He slid a claw under his tunic and rubbed his taut middle. He wondered what it'd feel like to be even fuller, and blushed again.

Two more plates remained on the counter, full of food that deserved to be eaten while fresh. He swore he'd find the room for it, and he did.

"*Uworrmp.*" Buckle covered his mouth too late to hold back the belch. He leaned against the counter, his bloated belly wobbling as he panted. It'd pushed out from under his tunic.

Buckle looked between the four plates he'd emptied and the belly he'd stuffed. A wide grin spread across his face and he giggled. He hadn't merely indulged, he'd pigged out, and that made him giddy. Eating had always been a thing of pleasure for him, but now he'd experienced the joy of gorging. It'd been so easy, taking bite after bite, even as the pressure built and his stomach told him it'd had more than enough. It was excess, pure excess.

But despite clearing a four-course meal by himself, he knew he wasn't anywhere near capacity. The students at the library had eaten so much they'd been buried beneath their towering bellies and fallen into a stupor. He envied them. He desperately wanted to know what it'd feel like to have a gut so big he couldn't stand up.

The chef suddenly laughed until he burped, embarrassed by such a ridiculous thought. He had no reason to be envious, not when he had the ability to stuff himself just like he had the students. *His* stuffing would be more drawn out, though. He wanted to savor it, to bask in the steady changes he'd bestow upon himself.

Buckle arranged a medley of enchanted ingredients on the counter. He plopped down a trail of dough balls and splashed them with flour. They swelled and stretched, transforming into a slithering pile of freshly baked snakes. Swirling designs of cracked frosting coated the snakes, which were plump with cream filling.

Buckle held a claw out, and one of the snakes gladly coiled around it. It slid up his arm and then into his awaiting mouth. He slurped the living pastry up like a noodle and groaned as it puffed his belly out another inch more. He grabbed the two closest snakes and shoved them into his maw one after the

other. The rest gathered before him, all willing and eager to dive down his throat.

Each snake swelled Buckle's belly nearly as much as the plates of food he'd prepared earlier, and at a much swifter rate. When he looked down, he could actually see his middle round out with every gulp. The sight got his heart racing. He hungered to test his capacity more than ever. Daydreams of wrangling a gut like a giant dough ball flooded his head and reddened his face.

As he finished gobbling up the last of the pastry snakes, he began to make more. The pastries of the second batch were bigger in every way, covered in more intricate frosting designs and filled to the brim with creamy filling. He gave some wings so they could fly up to his maw. The winged serpents struggled to get airborne, their little bulging bellies swaying beneath them. He cupped them in his claws and opened wide, letting them roll into his mouth and down his gullet. They landed in his stomach with a bounce.

Before long, Buckle's belly grew to be an inconvenience. It stuck straight out, like he'd swallowed a large balloon. He felt its heavy weight sway whenever he reached for a filling treat. When he turned, his belly pulled the rest of his body along with it, almost toppling him over at times. The cumbersome size of his gut and the steadily increasing pressure within were rapturous to Buckle. He craved the struggle, for the harder his middle was to handle, the more stuffed it was.

Buckle couldn't understand why he'd never allowed himself the pleasure of gorging before. He'd had the means since the moment he'd learned to nurture his first animated pastry, yet it'd never crossed his mind. Even stuffing people during heists hadn't inspired him until that day. Maybe it'd been the size of the students or their number. He'd rarely gotten a chance to see the results up close, too. He wished he'd seen the light much sooner, but relished the fact he finally had.

After one particularly thick pastry, his knees nearly buckled. He quickly slid his claws under his heavy belly to hold it up. The weight of it made him moan. He gazed upon the immense curve of his engorged middle and smiled, as if it were his greatest creation. And in the moment, it may as well have been. He doubted he'd be able to lug it up the stairs. Even if he could,

he imagined himself having to shove the mass through the doorway, too stuffed to go from one room to another. He could still waddle through the door leading to the back alley, and felt the intense and sudden urge to correct that.

He reached for his ingredients with magic and gave them life. Balls of dough floated through small clouds of flour, then ballooned into delicious creatures. Snakes, dragons, wolves, foxes, and tigers, whatever he fancied at the moment. They danced in the air around him, showing off how plump and filling they were.

Buckle ambled to a spot by the wall where sacks of grain stood. He steadily lowered himself into a sitting position and leaned against the sacks. His belly covered his lap and rose to his chin. Having secured room to safely grow, he opened his maw and beckoned the herd of pastries he'd created. His gut wobbled as he devoured each one. The green globe swelled outward. With his claws free to roam, he blissfully rubbed as much of his middle as he could reach. Every inch it gained left him both elated and craving more.

By the time he ran out of pastries to eat, his enormous belly blocked his view. He hadn't ballooned as big as the students had, but he adored the results nonetheless. He gripped the sides of his gut and wobbled it. He felt like he was pinned beneath a boulder. The kobold placed his palms on the floor and pushed up with all his might. He barely budged. He'd done it. He was too full to move.

A cackle of success escaped Buckle's lips, followed by a bellowing belch. He'd eaten like a king, stuffing himself with reckless abandon not because he was hungry, but because he wanted to. If all the eating and spellcasting hadn't tired him out, he'd have gorged even more. Next time he would, he promised himself that.

Glrrgle. The sound echoed from deep within his belly. All he'd eaten was beginning to digest. "Oh, I'm gonna gain a lot of weight from this, aren't I?" He asked aloud. He braced himself for a wave of regret that never came. Instead, the prospect excited him. Being stuffed was incredible, so being huge *all* the time should be just as good, maybe even better. Everyone already teased him about how much fatter they swore he'd get. Why not exceed their mocking expectations and leave them at a loss for words?

Buckle's fantasy of himself strutting around with a bulging belly shifted until the rest of him was big and blubbery. He wanted his gut to jiggle whenever he laughed and for his apron to struggle to cover him. A fat chef carried the weight of rigorous taste-testing around their middle. Customers would take one look at his waistline and know they wouldn't be disappointed. And if they became regulars, they might plump up as well, and understand why he was so jolly.

The impromptu stuffing session had been a revelation for Buckle. For years, he'd treated his weight first with frustration and then indifference. Now he wholeheartedly wished to embrace it. New doors had opened to him. Though for all he knew, his unwieldy belly might soon close quite a few. Or at least get stuck in them.

Buckle grinned and embraced his gut, ignoring the discomfort from the added pressure. He couldn't wait to see how much weight he'd gain from the night's binging. If he could tweak his culinary creations to be more fattening, the gains might even seem humble compared to those in the future. A euphoric chill ran up his spine. He knew his life had abruptly changed, undeniably for the better. The rest of the gang was in for a delightful surprise in the morning.