

Chapter 4

“Hey, there he is! C’mon, have a seat with us.”

James found himself frozen in the doorway, staring awkwardly at the mess hall. He knew he shouldn’t feel so nervous to meet everyone, especially having spent the past 10 minutes hyping himself up in his room. He thought he knew what to expect: a big group of butlers sitting around a table.

It was just...he didn’t expect them all to be so *fat*!

Yes, this was the Weight Staff, where everyone was obviously fat, yet it was still a big shock to James, who had grown up always being the fat kid. Yet sitting at the table before him were a dozen dudes over a hundred pounds heavier than him, each of whom were large enough to turn anyone’s head in public.

Yet it wasn’t necessarily their size that stunned James, but rather their presentation. The hyena wasn’t sure if it was mandatory or not, but everyone’s uniform was completely open down the front, allowing for their stomachs to rest freely on their laps and press into, or in some cases rest on top of, the table. Their lower half was similarly exposed, the fat butlers’ slacks barely covering their spherical rumps, the top of which were on full display. The hyena could never see himself being bold enough to sit so closely to other fat, half-undressed men.

But, well, apparently the job called for it.

Thankfully, nobody quite noticed the awkward hyena standing in the doorway, at least not right away. True to their fat nature, the other butlers were busy shoving food down their throats as though they hadn’t eaten in days, which was quite obviously not the case, given most of them spilled around their bolted-down seats. The only one who really minded the hyena’s presence was Cin, who eagerly waved him over with one hoof while tapping the empty space next to him with the other. “C’mon! There won’t be any left for ya if ya keep standin’ there!”

Well, he was already plenty embarrassed, but he may as well deal with it. Taking a deep breath, James slowly sauntered over, grateful to find there was plenty of space for him to sit. As he silently plopped down on the seat, he noticed some of the other butlers glance up from their plates towards him.

The first to say anything was his neighbor: A moss-green wolf with a cloud-like belly, both in color and softness from the look of it. “Hiya! It’s nice to meet you...James, right?” With

a dimpled smile, the wolf quickly wiped his paw on a napkin before offering it. “My name’s Aaron, but everyone calls me Snek, on account of my tail being so long and all.”

James leaned back to check. Sure enough, resting along the upper curve of Aaron’s rump was an impossibly long tail for any wolf. The rope-like appendage was easily long enough to wrap around the wolf’s waistline twice; a remarkable feat, given just how large that waistline was!

“Wow,” James muttered. Then, realizing just saying “wow” might come off rude, the hyena put on a smile and shook Aaron’s paw. “It’s nice to meet you, Snake!”

“It’s Snek.” Aaron chuckled. “It’s like saying Snake, but with half the effort.”

“Heh, right.” Well, Cin wasn’t the only one with a strange name here, it seemed. Still, Aaron’s calmer, gentler demeanor felt like a whiplash compared to Cin’s more boisterous, energetic one. Now that he looked more closely, James noticed the “snek” was the only one present with clothes that actually properly covered his torso and rear. Was that from personal preference, or did Aaron get special privileges?

Before he could ask, James felt a strong, flabby arm wrap around his shoulders, squeezing him tight. “Oh, good! Yer gettin’ along with Snek!” Cin’s familiar guttural voice chimed in. “He’s our dietician. Helped all of us here get nice and flabby, our special Guru of Gaining! Listen to him, and you’ll be busting yer buttons in no time!”

“You say that like you needed any help getting to your size, Piggy.” Aaron tittered, reaching across James to prod the boar’s belly. “If anything, maybe I need to teach you how to slow down a bit. I’m noticing the number in the living room has been creeping up a bit, lately.”

Ah, Aaron must be referring to the whiteboard with everyone’s weight on it. He must have been, considering Cin oinked quite loudly in response, sputtering on about how it’s just water weight or a seasonal thing.

James didn’t pay too much attention, however, as he noticed the bat from earlier sitting at a 3 O’clock position from him, offering his winged paw for a handshake. “Howdy, James. Sorry for shouting earlier, didn’t know you were there. Thought it was just Cin making a ruckus, like usual. I’m Benny, by the way.”

“Oh, it’s alright.” The hyena pressed against the table in order to reach the bat’s hand.

Apparently, that must have been a secret code to get noticed, for soon James found himself swarmed on all sides by pudgy, food-stained paws, all wanting to be shaken.

“Heeeey, good to meet ya, my man!” an especially plump fox who’s cheeks spilled over his jacket’s collar exclaimed. “Call me Rex. Heh, I haven’t seen someone who was as thin as you in a while, besides Archie at least. Reminds me of myself about 10 years back. Ah, they never did make highschool desks big enough.”

“Howdy...James, right?” A rather rotund racoon excitedly shook James’ hand, with enough force to jiggle both their arms. “The name’s Bleu, cuz my mom really loved cheese, apparently. I mean, I didn’t get this big *not* loving food, but you don’t see me naming my kid Donut, right? Anyways, yeah, nice to meetcha.”

James kept a smile on as he found himself shaking paws with everyone around him, in some cases having to stand up in order to reach. Outwardly he may look happy, but deep down he was fretting. There was no way he was gonna remember everyone’s names! Normally it was easy to keep track of who’s who based on body shape, but that was significantly harder when *everyone* was obese! Besides, there were *three* foxes; already he was forgetting which was which!

Thankfully, the introductions didn’t last too much longer, as after shaking hands with a fat ferret, James was finally allowed to sit back down. By the end of it, the only names he could remember were Cin, Aaron, Pot and Pan. His sigh of relief was short lived as Cin let out a rather pleased oink. “It’s so nice seein’ everyone together again. Someone’s workin’ nightshift or Benny’s snorin’ away or somethin!”

“I’d still be sleeping, if you hadn’t come back screaming about meeting the newbie.” The bat, Benny, grunted between a mouthful of the faux pork roast.

“Well, ya didn’t exactly roll over back to sleep now, didya?”

Benny grunted. “Course not. After the third or fourth time of being woken up, it’s a bit hard to fall back asleep. Especially with your heavy-ass footsteps shaking the whole damn house.” Then, the bat turned to smile at James. “Still, nice to meet you, James. I can tell from your expression this is all a bit much for your first day, huh?”

“Just a bit,” the hyena agreed shyly.

“Well, the fact that you’re even here speaks volumes. I was this close to quitting on my first week here!” The fat bat held his fingers closely together, to the point where James thought

they were touching. “Only reason I didn’t was because Archie let me work at night instead. Still gotta deal with this noisy lot during the day, though.”

“Oh yeah?” James nodded along, suddenly tilting his head. “What sort of schedule will I have?”

“Same as mine, kiddo!” Cin gave a dusky grin. “We’re getting up at seven A.M sharp. Any later and it gets too warm to work outside.”

“Seven?!” The chubby hyena went wide eyed. He didn’t remember the last time he woke up before ten, even during college.

“Don’t fret, we get plenty of time for naps. You’ll get used to it, and that’s a piggy promise. But don’t worry about that now, not when there’s food to eat!”

Oh, James was definitely still worrying about it. The possibility of being a complete zombie on his first day of work did not make the hyena want to eat anymore, a knot forming in his stomach. He could barely remember the layout of the house he was staying in and he was very much alert, and the hyena knew just how dysfunctional he was when he didn’t get a good night’s sleep. As if he needed any more reasons to be stressed.

But as soon as a plate of faux pork roast slid before him, he found himself immediately easing up.

Was it even *possible* for food to smell this good? James’ stomach had been growling just from breathing in the aroma from the hallway, and were it not from his anxieties distracting him, his mouth would have most certainly drooled when he sat at the table. Now, having his very own plate before him, the hyena found himself salivating once more. For a mainly vegetarian dish, it smelled so meaty! What did Pot say this was again? Potatoes and mushrooms covered in turkey bacon?

“Heh, the kid looks like he’s having an out of body experience! I remember my first time trying Pot and Pan’s cooking.” James heard someone talking about him in the distance, but at the moment he wasn’t paying attention. Wasting no time, he forked up a large chunk of food, stuck it into his mouth, and swallowed it.

Good lord, was food this tasty even *legal*? The chubby hyena was so used to his mom’s bland, “healthy” cooking that this...this divine dish truly tasted otherworldly! The crispness of the bacon matched perfectly with the soft, squishy texture of the saturated potatoes it covered. Rich and heavy, but not too greasy that it becomes overwhelming. The bite went down very easy,

hardly needing any chewing or swallowing, yet the hyena felt the impact it made in his hollow stomach. God, even the mushroomy aftertaste was amazing!

“Good, huh?” Aaron’s voice actually sounded far away.

“Oh yeah,” James couldn’t have agreed more.

The lardy lupine chuckled. “It’s very good for you, too! Plenty of carbs, which means plenty of energy for the night shift workers, and plenty of fat for our fledgling employee.”

“Mmm.” The hyena simply mumbled in response, mainly because his mouth was full of food.

It really was great. The good food, the raucous atmosphere, the friendly fatties surrounding him. James did feel himself easing up over the course of dinner, his shoulders lowering, his tail unfurling from beneath him. To think he had always been mildly subconscious about his tubby frame, yet here were a dozen other guys who actually made him feel skinny, and were actively encouraging him to put on weight. It really was a bizarre set of circumstances he found himself in, but they were all fortunate, right? James should consider himself extremely lucky to be in the company of good friends, good food, and an even greater paycheck.

Yet, he just couldn’t keep up the good mood forever.

As the evening sun lowered as the only light came from the chandelier above, James found himself closing off from everyone. He found it difficult to enjoy himself when there was a part of his brain actively telling him he shouldn’t be. A part that told him he didn’t deserve this. It was all a fluke, a very chance coincidence that landed him this spot here at the table. He didn’t deserve the smiling faces, the delicious food, the great paycheck.

He didn’t deserve to be happy.

“Oi!” Cin’s voice cut through to him like a knife through butter, the hyena looking up to see the boar tapping on his plate with a knife. “Don’t tell me yer gettin’ full already!”

“O-oh,” James blinked, his chubby cheeks blushing when he realized the table had actually gone quiet, with many fat faces turned to him. “N-no, that’s not it.”

“Then what is it, then?” Cin grunted, crossing his arms over his ample chest. “Yer not gonna get nice n’ plump if ya can’t even finish a single plate.”

“It’s, well...” James wasn’t really sure how to word it. He didn’t want to voice his concerns and bother others with his problems, so being put in the spotlight was a little unnerving. The chubby hyena looked down at himself, gently tapping his claws on the plate. “I’m not sure I really...should be here, I guess?”

The boar tilted his head, bunching out a neck fold. “Where do you wanna go, then?”

“No, no, I *want* to be here!” James’s ears wilted. “I just...don’t think I *deserve* to be here. I’m not...really smart, like you guys, and-”

The entire table exploded with laughter, causing James to flinch. He wasn’t sure where the joke was. Or were they just laughing at him?

Benny wiped a tear from his eye. “Us? Smart? Kid, do you know who we are?”

“Uh...” Was that a rhetorical question? Because James still didn’t know everyone’s names.

One of the foxes, Felix perhaps, smirked at the hyena. “We’re the Weight Staff, James. A bunch of losers and dropouts who get shit done and look good doing it. Ask any of us, we all have stories about how we sucked ass at school, or were kicked out of one thing or another. Hell, both Pot and Pan flunked out of culinary school, and you’ve seen how delicious their cooking is!”

“Seriously?!” James found that *very* hard to believe.

Felix nodded. “Yup! I think Aaron’s the only one of us who actually finished college, hence why he’s our dietician and not a butler.”

“Hey now, a college degree doesn’t make me smarter than anyone!” Aaron spoke out, before sticking his tongue out and adopting a rather childish voice. “I iz still a siwwy siwwy snek.”

“No, but it means you have more than one brain cell dinging around in there.” Felix snickered, gesturing towards Cin with a thumb. “That’s one more than this pile of pork. Hey, James. Wanna hear what Cin did last Summer?”

“Nuuuuh!” The pig’s eyes went wide. “Don’t tell him!” Cin’s protests sounded real and terrified, which made James want to hear it all the more.

Thankfully, The fat fox continued. “Alright, so it’s the middle of the day after it had rained all night. The entire yard is all wet, and the big pig’s rolling around in the mud, cuz that’s his way of cooling off without hogging the showers, I guess. Like, he’s covering himself head to toe in it, he looks like the abominable snowman, but brown instead of white.”

“Dooooon’t tell him!” Cin pleads again.

Felix ignores him. “It’s time to come in, cuz it’s almost supper, and Cin tries walking in through the front door, still dripping in mud, mind you! Benny and I were lazing on the couch when we saw this big brown blob standing in the doorway, completely ruining the mat with his muddy self. We’re immediately like ‘Cin, you moron! Hose yourself off with the backdoor hose before coming in!’ And Cin-”

“Dooooon’t tell him!”

“-And Cin’s like ‘fiiiiine’ and then walks *through* the living room towards the back door! He doesn’t go out and walk *around* the house, no the fatass is walking *through* it, still dripping mud! Benny and I are screaming at him, and he’s just like ‘I’m going, I’m going’ before realizing what he’s doing.”

“Doooooooooon’t tell hiiiiiiim!”

“Cin almost makes it to the back door, looks back and sees all the mud he’s dragging in, screams ‘aw, hickory!’ and then runs *back* the way he came! His fat body’s jiggling and wobbling and sending mud all over the damn place! I think Benny got hit in the eye by a mud splotch cuz he screamed and covered his eyes; either that or he saw Cin wasn’t wearing any clothes beneath all that mud and the sight of such a fatass running away blinded the poor bat!”

“It was a bit of both, actually.” Benny shook his head. “It took *weeks* to clean the living room after that!”

Yet again, the entire table erupted into raucous laughter, and James found himself joining in, partly because he knew he wasn’t the butt of the joke this time. Glancing over, he saw the poor pig covering his face in embarrassment, yet beneath the hoof he could see a wide grin covering the boar’s fat face, chuckling along with everyone else. It was safe to assume this wasn’t the first time Cin was the butt of a joke, but while that story was pretty funny, it made the hyena feel a bit more reassured. Don’t shake his fat, muddy body in the middle of the living room, and he won’t be made fun of. Probably.

“There, see?” The fat fox’s dimpled face beamed at the hyena. “It’ll be hard to top that, so don’t worry.”

“Yeah,” James nodded. “I’ll, uh, try not to get muddy.”

“You can get muddy! Just don’t jiggle it everywhere. Now, less talking and more eating! You’re not leaving the table until you’ve cleared your plate three more times.”

“You got it.” The hyena forked up another great mouthful of the faux pork roast, eagerly munching away at it. He couldn’t wait to gain that extra hundred pounds.

Or, maybe he should wait to gain it.

James struggled to breathe just lying on his back, the overstuffed hyena staring up at the bedroom ceiling. All he could manage were short, shallow breaths, that round lump beneath the blankets rising up and down. Never, in all of his life, had he ever felt this full before. He had never eaten this much before, especially in a single sitting.

But then again, he’d never been encouraged to glut like this before.

After Felix had told that story, James became the center of attention at the table once again, the others all offering inspiring words to help the hyena pack away as much food as possible. At first, James didn’t need any; the food was just that good, and he kept eating even after he felt comfortably full. However, once he went from full to stuffed, he seriously started slowing down.

Gradually, members of the Weight Staff left the table to do their own thing, either starting night shifts or turning in for the night. Some still stayed behind to help the hyena eat: Passing him more food, offering an encouraging word, or even giving his bloated belly a gentle rub.

What a belly that was turning into, too. When Felix suggested he unbutton his tight jacket, James wasted no time in doing so; the damn thing was already fairly tight to begin with, so having his stomach freed up felt incredibly relieving. Besides, he felt prideful in having his round, spotted belly on full display; it was like he really was a member of the Weight Staff. Even if he was much skinnier than everyone. He really wanted to just keep eating, especially with the bat, boar, fox, and wolf nearby to encourage him further, always saying “just one more bite, James. Just one more bite.”

Alas, as he went from bloated to near-bursting, even one more bite became too much before the hyena had to call it quits.

He didn't even remember the walk to his bedroom, the poor fledgling butler stuck in some weird conscious-unconscious limbo. He was aware of his bloated belly gurgling and growling as it attempted to digest a meal meant for a family, although even that was drowned out by the constant snoring around him. After all, he was Cin's roommate, and the big boar snorted as much as he expected an obese pig to in their sleep. James would have tried covering his head with his pillow if he weren't pinned down beneath his own stomach.

Immobile as he was, he spent the night staring upwards, thinking about his future here. He thought about how he'd gain the hundred pounds, how he'd look as an even fatter hyena. Would he be top heavy like Edwin, bottom heavy like Cin, or somewhere around the middle, like the other butlers? Would he ever return home once he made enough to live comfortably off of? Would he ever attempt to work off the weight, or could he manage life morbidly obese? It's not like he did much physical activity in his spare time. Sitting around and playing videogames were his favorite hobbies; he'd just have to buy a bigger headset to fit around his chubbier cheeks. Yeah, he could see himself staying fat, especially if there were people like Archie who found him attractive that way...

"Pssst! Wakey wakey, James. Rise n' shine, time to dine!"

"Hmmm!" James rolled over, hugging his pillow. He didn't remember falling asleep, but he certainly craved more of it. "Five more minutes..."

"I wish, buddy, but we gotta get goin'! Lots to do today, not just eatin' and walkin' I'm afraid."

James felt a familiar hoof gently push at his side, and the hyena knew there was no avoiding today, as much as he wished he could relive last night again and again. Seriously, how did people function waking up at seven in the morning? Just sitting up in bed gave him a headache, the poor yeen feeling especially heavy and sluggish, although he hoped that was partially due to last night's meal.

"Theeere we go, that's the spirit!" Cin proudly grinned, making James wonder if the pig was actually properly looking at the bedraggled, exhausted hyena. "You'll feel better once you get some food in ya. Go ahead and brush up, I'll meetcha in the mess hall."

“Mhm.” James nodded, resisting the urge to fall back over and close his eyes.

Once he finally hauled himself onto his feet, he found himself waking up a bit more. Looking out the window to see the beautiful mansion garden did help energize the fat hyena. He wasn't at home anymore, in his windowless basement room at his mother's. He was at work, about to go start his “internship” and make himself useful.

It was a shame he didn't bring many more clothes with him. He only had the one suit, and it had a stain on the collar where a piece of bacon landed. The rest of his clothes were far more plain and generic: Boring T-shirts and basketball shorts that didn't match what everyone else wore. James wasn't sure he had enough in his savings to pull out to buy any more suits either; hopefully Archie didn't mind if one of his butlers looked like a broke college kid.

For now, he wore a plain red T-shirt and black shorts, the former he noted showed off his developing gut quite a bit while the latter dug a bit around his waist. A quick trip to the bathroom to freshen up, and James felt at least awake enough to function as he stumbled into the mess hall.

There, he found the boar waving to him from the table just like last night, only there weren't quite as many butlers present. A fox whom James only recognized was not Felix was leaning against the table, sipping on a drink balanced between his two moobs while reading a piece of paper in his chubby paws were the only other occupants.

“There he is!” Cin oinked a greeting as the hyena sat beside him, pastry crumbs strewn about the boar's muzzle. “Was just about to check in on you. Ya missed Felix and Jasper just now, they wanted to wish you good luck on your first day.”

“Oh, uh, thank you. Erh, thank them, I guess.” James mumbled, flicking his ears. Jasper was one of the names he didn't remember from last night; was he that big black bear who belched after downing a whole quart of milk last night? James woulda thought he'd remember the name of whoever could drink that much in a single sitting.

Well, it was obvious he still hadn't properly woken up yet, and this food looked rich enough in carbs to help fix that. It was clear that “pastry” was the theme of breakfast today. Cinnamon rolls, turnovers, bear claws, fritters, donuts, nearly every combination of breading, frosting, and jam possible lay along the mess hall table, along with large pitchers of milk and orange juice. The whole room smelled like a breakfast bakery, it made James wonder if Pot and Pan made everything from scratch or if it was outsourced. Either way, it looked and smelled delicious; it took all of James' willpower not to dive right in!

Instead, he looked back up at Cin. "I'm allowed to have some, right?" He didn't know if there were any prerequisites to eating.

"Of course! I'd be offended if you only stopped at 'some!' Eat up!" Cin chuckled, eating half of a jelly-filled donut in a single bite. "Got lots of work today for us, so fill up that tank of yours."

Ah, that wasn't reassuring. James was hoping they'd go easy and start slow for his first day here. Alas, it seemed as though the food was the only thing he had to look forward to today. At least the pastries were as good as they looked, the hyena quickly finding himself reaching for more, even if he still felt a bit bloated from last night. Who knows, maybe if he ate slow enough, he could delay getting out there long enough to properly wake up.

Apparently, he wasn't the only one who thought that.

The hyena's ears perked up as he heard a beeping sound, looking up to see the fox check his watch. "Ugh, was hoping I could waste a couple more minutes. I've got bathrooms today." The vulpine groaned, sitting further upright to wipe the crumbs from his muzzle. "What about you, Cin? Still working outdoors?"

"Mhm! Can't keep a good pig from the mud!"

"Right." The fat fox turned to James. "How about you, newbie? What's your schedule today?"

"U-uh, well," James stammered, flustered. Was he supposed to have picked up his schedule by now? Shoot, was this something Cin went over with him yesterday that he was too overwhelmed to remember? Flashing back, he vaguely recalled the boar bringing up something about being faxed instructions every morning, but now matter how hard he tried, the hyena couldn't remember where he was supposed to pick those up.

Thankfully, Cin came to the rescue, the boar waving around his clipboard. "Naw, he don't got a schedule just yet. Right now he's just followin' me around, get the lay of the land and all."

"Yeah." James nodded, pretending he knew that from the beginning.

"Ah." The fox nodded, before hauling himself up. "Well, best of luck to ya, newbie. The first day is always the hardest."

“Ooh, ain’t that the truth!” Cin snickered, patting the yeen’s back. “We should get goin’ too. Sun’s coming up real quick, and we don’t want it getting any warmer now. C’mon, up and at ‘em!”

“Alright,” James grumbled. Sometimes, Cin’s exuberant personality was a bit *too* much. How the pig can stand being so incredibly tubby while also wielding that much energy was a mystery to the hyena, who felt like he could fall back asleep just resting his head on the table.

Shaking (and jiggling) himself awake, he stood up from the table, grabbing his dirty plate and walking towards the kitchen sill. Standing there, James realized he wasn’t quite sure where to put his dirty plate. Still too tired to think, the hyena simply stood there dumbly, plate in paw, staring at the sill as if expecting a sign to appear showing him where to set the plate.

Who knew how long he would have stood there, were it not for Pot waddling over from the other side of the sill, the pudgy mongoose frowning. “Was there not enough food on the table? Did you eat *everything*?” He asked, staring at James’ gut in disbelief.

“Huh?” James mumbled, shaking his head. “No no, I’m uh...just returning this, that’s all.”

Pot tilted his head. “Why?”

“Uhhh...Because it’s dirty?” James had the sinking feeling he was doing something *very* wrong. Looking back, he noticed everyone else left their dirty plates on the table. “Should I...not have?”

“Oh, you are just the *sweetest*!” Pan’s voice cut through the awkwardness like a hot knife through butter, the flamboyant rat bumping their way into view to take the plate straight out of James’ voice. “Thank you thank you! Everyone here’s so lazy, they just leave their crap back at the table. It’s so nice to have someone actually bring their plate here for once!”

“Seriously?” Now James was very confused. Were these butlers really that bad at picking up after themselves?

“Seriously!” Pan beamed. “Thank you for being a dear! It’s nice to see someone here who was actually raised with manners.”

“Heh, thanks.” James chuckled awkwardly. If only they knew what kind of person raised him.

James was surprised to find out there were several sheds in the manor's yard, simply for the sake of making it easier on the Weight Staff. None of the fatties had to walk too far to pull out an item they needed, whether it be sheers, mowers, pickers, or any variety of tools. Each shed was neatly positioned as well; out of the way enough to ensure it didn't mess up the natural beauty of the yard, while close enough to make it convenient for the Weight Staff.

Alas, James was quick to learn this was the only convenient part of working outdoors.

Their first task was to mow the yard; a seemingly simple chore turned into an absolute nightmare considering the sheer size of the mansion's property. Even with two mowers, James couldn't possibly fathom just how much grass they'd have to mow and haul away. Why couldn't Archie spring for one of those riding mowers? Why did they have to use the same brand of push mowers his mom had?!

Cin was actually quick to answer that while the pair pushed their respective mowers to the end of the yard. "Now, when we're workin,' Archie wants us to show off the goods, ya know? That's where the 'Weight' in 'Weight Staff' comes in, after all." With that, the pudgy boar lifted his considerable overhang in both arms, standing on tip toes to drop all that tonnage along the mower. The entire handle was completely buried in a sea of brown, hairy lard. "Like so. Now you try!"

James frowned, lifting his shirt up over his own gut. He mirrored the boar by setting his own belly on the handle; while it didn't fully cover the handle, it still felt incredibly awkward, how close he had to stand to the mower to do it. Perhaps this was the one job that would become easier the fatter he grew. "Like this?"

"Perfect! Feels a bit weird, I know, but you'll get used to it!" Cin beamed.

James wasn't too sure. The vibration of the mower felt incredibly strange against his exposed gut, working up a series of hiccups from the fat hyena, whose stomach was still trying to settle after breakfast. How anyone could find this sexy was far beyond him; Archie really was a weirdo. But he was also a rich weirdo, and if it meant escaping his mother and living a comfortable life, then James figured it was worth doing.

By the time they finished, the sun had risen a fair bit, the heat definitely contributing to the hyena's sticky shirt. Fortunately, they were allowed a quick water and snack break back at their lounge before moving on to trimming the rose bushes. How Cin could use those clippers with those pudgy hooves of his was beyond James, who struggled to reach even half the boar's

speed. Perhaps it had to do with experience, yet experience alone wouldn't explain how Cin managed to lift up heavy containers full of clippings to the compost with ease, while James stumbled along with his own, wheezing and panting the whole time.

Another food and water break, and then off to another chore. This time, they were clipping the pecan tree, as well as gathering up whatever nuts fell along the ground. James thought his arms were sore enough from operating the heavy clippers, but having to bend over to scoop up all those tiny nuts was absolute hell on his legs! This was all just to show off their rear for Archie, whom the hyena was resenting more and more for having such an inconvenient kink for fatties. James' forehead felt warm and feverish, he barely had the energy to continue, yet Cin somehow couldn't stop chatting the entire time they worked.

"I know this ain't the most fun, but trust me, it's aaaaall worth it. Pot and Pan make the meanest pecan pie you'll *ever* have! Just one bite, and you'll be runnin' back out here to pick up more, just for them!"

James had no reason to doubt the boar, but he doubted he'd ever voluntarily pick nuts off the ground without a picker. Ever.

Only three tasks in, yet James nearly collapsed when they returned for yet another snack and water break. His arm nearly shook just bringing the cup to his maw, drinking so quickly that water spilled onto his shirt. Not like it mattered much, how drenched with sweat he already was.

Yet Cin only appeared slightly winded. The boar shoveled in several slices of pie, washed them down with an entire bottle of water, and immediately patted the hyena's shoulder. "Up and at 'em, we're gettin' apples from the apple tree next!"

"H-how..." James panted, staring up at Cin in awe. "How...do you do this?"

"Well, for the real high ones, we get a picker to-"

"No. How do you...do this job? All of it? It's so much!" The hyena had never felt more sore in his life! The thought of having to get up to do even more chores alone was exhausting, and it was barely even noon! His arms and legs felt like the very pudding he was snacking on earlier today.

Cin snorted. "Well, if it helps, we're makin' great time."

"It doesn't."

The boar chuckled. “Fair ‘nuff! Here’s a secret, James: just cuz we’re fat, doesn’t mean we don’t gotta be strong.” Cin raised his arm to flex, and to the hyena’s surprise, the flabby lump of flesh actually shifted up, forming a small bump beneath the lard!

“Ya see? Gotta be strong to be fat!”

“Oh.” James’ ears folded. He was the thinnest one here, yet he was also clearly the most out of shape, which made him feel even fatter, somehow. The hyena gained all his weight through being lazy and eating junk foods, while everyone at the Weight Staff earned it just from having a large appetite. These guys were only fat skin deep; clearly there was plenty of muscle beneath there, whereas James was a true fatass through and through. Which didn’t help his self esteem.

The boar offered a reassuring smile. “Hey, dun worry about it! You’ll get there eventually, I’m sure of it! Tell ya what; Archie’s got a big ol’ gym in that big ol’ mansion of his. Now, ya gotta be an official Weight Staff member to use his facilities, but I’m sure if we ask nicely, say it’s to help train ya, I’m sure he’ll let you use it during your free time.”

“That’s...good to know.” James muttered, looking down. He did *not* want to work out in his free time, not when this job alone was incredibly strenuous on his body.

“Well, I’m gonna go grab the apples.” Cin hoisted himself off the table, smiling. “You can have a breather for this one. Not like grabbin’ fruit’s all that hard, right? I’ll getcha when it’s time to work on the next chore!”

“Thanks.” James didn’t mean to sound blunt, but at the same time, he didn’t enjoy being pitied like that. It only exemplified the feelings of worthlessness that flowed through the hyena’s mind. Of being weak, flabby, useless. Yet at the same time, he wasn’t sure he could keep going; he needed this break, whether he liked it or not.

Pan came in to offer the hyena some lemonade and attempted to chat with the down hyena, but when it was clear he was not in the mood, the rat thankfully left him alone. His attitude didn’t improve too much when Cin returned to bring James back for more chores; this time weeding the garden. Thankfully, it was a job they could do on their hands and knees, although now James could add back pain to his growing list of reasons why he should have never taken this job.

“I can’t do this.”

That phrase rebounded in the hyena's mind again and again, growing in intensity everytime he was reminded of just how achingly sore he was becoming. Everything hurt: his arms, his legs, especially his pride. Not even his strict mother would have demanded this much labor from him; she just wanted the hyena to get a job in general. Why couldn't he have just finished college? Why did he have to be such a loser and drop out? By now, he could have been in a cozy, air-conditioned cubicle, not slaving away outside in the hot sun. This job was already beyond overwhelming, and he hadn't even been inside of the mansion yet! This was too much. He couldn't do this!

Just as the afternoon was starting to transition into evening, James and Cin were finishing up their final chore: sweeping the cobblestone pathway. Despite making "great time" earlier, they were starting to fall behind schedule as James slowed down, although thankfully Cin didn't say anything on the matter. In fact, the boar started speaking much less ever since James failed to laugh when he balanced a broomstick on his tusks, perhaps sensing the dark cloud of negativity surrounding the smaller hyena. Thankfully, sweeping wasn't necessarily a strenuous job, yet James found himself leaning against the broomstick, to the point where it actually started splintering beneath his weight. It was slow going, but James was determined to finish today off strong, even if he was absolutely miserable. Just one more sweep, he would keep telling himself. Just one more stupid, awful sweep from the stupid, awful, failure of a hyena...

Cin's booming voice suddenly brought James out from his own negativity. "Ahoy, Archie!"

James paused, turned around, and immediately jerked himself upright.

He had forgotten his boss had most likely been watching from within the manor. More importantly, he had forgotten how Archie had looked, the stoat looking striking even from a distance! The slender, broad-shoulder mustelid's grin shone as he walked towards the pudgy pair, those bright teeth shining in the afternoon sun as he clapped both paws against either side of the boar's exposed gut, sinking his paws deep into the flesh. "Hello, Big Pig. Still eating well, I see."

"Aye! A bane of buffets, that I am." Cin snickered, not at all phased by the constant groping of his stomach. "I dunno if I can say the same for you, Archie. I think yer startin' to lose weight. Yer as thin as this broom!"

The stoat snickered. "Nah, you're just getting bigger, clearly. Not that there's anything wrong with that. What are you at these days?" Archie asked, his paws roaming fervently across the boar's belly, ruffling the hair.

"653! It'd be higher if Pan would stop whapping me whenever I go for thirds."

“Well I oughta have a word with them! I’d never allow someone as hard working and big as yourself even a second without a good treat nearby.” Archie grunted as he attempted to haul all that belly in his arms, that gut alone probably outweighing the stoat.

James knew he probably should continue sweeping, yet he found himself standing there watching the exchange. It was...odd, seeing someone appreciate fat people as much as Archie was, the stoat groping the boar’s body as though he were some giant, overstuffed teddy bear. It was very weird, yet the thought of getting as large as Cin, with Archie doing the same actions to him: rubbing him, squeezing him, leaning on him...

The hyena didn’t realize he was blushing until Archie suddenly turned to him, smiling. “And how’s our newest recruit doing?”

“He’s doin’ great! Takin’ to this job like a fish to water!” Cin spoke for James, much to the hyena’s relief; there was no way he could talk coherently at the moment.

“Excellent.” Archie’s voice lowered as he stepped closer to James.

Suddenly, it got hard to breathe. James found himself locking eyes with his boss, the strong, confident stoat that flustered him so easily at the interview. Archie’s smile was soft and genuine, yet those deep blue eyes were strong and piercing, staring right into the hyena’s soul. This wasn’t an interview in some random building anymore; they were on *his* territory now. With just a look alone, Archie made it clear he practically *owned* him.

“How are you, James?” Archie asked, his soft voice slightly above a whisper. “Are you enjoying the job so far?”

“Y-yeah,” the hyena mumbled, briefly forgetting all of his aches and pains. Crap, should he say something else? “T-the, erh...food’s great.”

Archie chuckled warmly, his face lighting up. “I’m glad to hear. Hopefully it sticks to you.” The stoat’s eyes shifted down, looking towards the hyena’s belly. “I look forward to seeing more of you, James.”

“H-heh, right. Cuz, fat.” James blurted out, trying way too hard to please Archie.

Thankfully, the stoat laughed at that outburst. “Exactly. ‘Cuz fat.’ I’m glad to hear you’re catching on quickly.”

James' breath got stuck in his throat as he suddenly felt a quick, yet firm squeeze on his overhang, looking up to see Archie's smug face leaning in closer. "Keep up the good work, James."

Just as quickly as he appeared, Archie left, his slender tail flicking behind him with every step, like a snake. James was left panting, the feeling of the stoat's grip on his underbelly imprinted firmly in his mind. That was...something. Archie knew exactly which part of his belly was the most sensitive and attacked it perfectly, yet despite being so sensitive, that grope was far from unpleasant. Even if it did give the yeen goosebumps, the fur on his body standing on end.

The firm clap on his back startled the daydreaming yeen, looking up to see Cin's round face beaming at him. "Well, look at that! Archie's never been that friendly to someone as thin as you! Hell, he wouldn't even hug me till I was 450 or somethin' like that! Now, it could just be me, but I think Archie really likes you!"