

The summer sun showed no mercy, assailing the populace with searing rays. Asphalt turned to volcanic basalt, sending every barefooted fur bounding for shade. Those with footwear were no safer, having to hurry at a pace brisker than usual lest their rubber soles stick to the blazing tarmac. Not one day into June, and already even the city's hardiest, most heat-tolerant individuals were awaiting autumn with bated breath.

Datch, spackled all over with salt-and-pepper shag, was in no better spirits. An undone blazer showed off their brazen tummy, with its sweat-soaked tie wrapped around their crown as a temporary bandana. Below were matching grey trousers, rolled up at the knee and transformed into a pair of shorts that constantly unravelled and necessitated repairs. On any other day, such a look would turn heads. But compared to the borderline nude pedestrians streaming past, Datch looked borderline dignified.

Folks of all shapes and sizes were doing their best to brave the elements. A brass bull, standing at a towering eight feet (horns not included) limped towards his destination, leaving a trail of sweat on the sidewalk behind him as if a particularly localized rainstorm passed through. His yellow vest must have been a t-shirt at one point, torn clean in half to ensure survival in the boiling atmosphere. Just ahead of the canid, a flush hippo wearing nothing but a decency-ensuring layer of fat waddled past looking like death warmed over. Three dew-covered cans of lemonade were crammed in his lovehandles, a fourth in the process of being drained into his no doubt dry mouth. Being as hulking as either mammal couldn't have been helpful under the impudent star. For once, Datch felt thankful for their small stature; less body mass meant less body heat. Less body heat meant a lower chance of heatstroke.

So Datch thought, until - as they peered over their shoulder at that mysteriously still-mobile hippopotamus as he passed - they caught sight of a figure, decked out in an all-black ensemble. Now *that* was a look to turn heads! They scuffed along, unfazed by the record-breaking heat. Being a full block back, Datch couldn't get a good look at the nonchalant nutcase; if the streets weren't so empty, they would never have noticed them

in the first place. Just as the squinting canine managed to make out the faintest silhouette of a briefcase by their side, the stranger froze. Their brim-covered head whipped left, then right, then left once more as they ducked into an alleyway. Weird, but Datch knew it wasn't their right to judge. Buried under such an insulating uniform, the heat would drive anybody a little mad. Hopefully, wherever they were off to had some air conditioning, or some ice cold drinks to chug.

When Datch got home, their first order of business would involve diving into the freezer, fetching a quart of peanut butter ice cream and flopping onto the TV-lit couch, basking before the polar air conditioner. The mere thought sent pleasurable shivers up Datch's spine, almost distracting them from the sun-struck aches and pains. A step onto a flattened, discarded lemonade can, conductive to the extreme, thrust the greyscale dog back into reality with a frustrated yelp and a one-footed dance. Close inspection revealed the burn's harmless superficiality, but it still hurt like no tomorrow.

Every tentative post-singe step brought with it a pang of discomfort. Not debilitating by any means, but walking with the injury, no matter how mild its implications, would only sour Datch's mood further. No, the only option was to take a break and let their paw cool off. One look around the roadway showed every business as packed, windows fogged wintrily over by the interior air conditioning. Even with their short stature, squeezing into one of the overcrowded bars or grocers wouldn't help much. Getting jostled and smooshed didn't sound like a very fun time. Instead, Datch was drawn to a shaded sidestreet; a bench, one of the few not covered in a mosaic of chewing gum, almost too inviting underneath a resplendent Norway maple. The detour did take them a bit out of the way, but the chance to catch their breath and rest their taxed feet couldn't be passed up.

Wheezy Datch leapt close, bounding as a beachgoer over burning glass sands. Only, instead of a blissful crystal sea, all that awaited the pup was a warm, slightly sticky city bench. Beggars are not wont to be choosers; Datch knew this and, after belly-flopping onto the comparatively comfortable seating, breathed a weary sigh of

relief. Filtered sunlight trickled down around them, so impeded by the crown-growth of foliage as to be borderline pleasant. At least, to look at. The oven-air still baked the city itself, lacquered chair included. But safe from the sunbeam deluge, the ambient weather became at least bearable. Datch, splayed out on the bench, dug their phone out from a cavernous pocket. After wiping the screen clean of moisture, they gazed at the clock.

It was only twelve thirty. Home was still a half hour away. Datch huffed and stashed their cellphone once more, turning their attention to the green ceiling. The leaves were dead still. For all they knew, the tree itself had already died. That any plant remained verdant in this heatwave was nothing short of miraculous. Motionless they were, the branches still cast a calming sheen of lime on their surroundings. The warm hue remained as the puppy closed their heterochromatic eyes, warmth and fatigue taking their toll. Whether they liked it or not, Datch's imminent future involved a puppy nap. Snoozing in public seemed acceptable, if only just this once... not like anybody was looking, anyhow. With a stretch and a wipe of sweat from their brow, sleepy Datch embraced their fate. With any luck, the day would be cooler by the time they woke up.

When they did, there were a few things of note. One, the day had grown hotter. Two, the sun barely moved at all. And three, a rudely waking clamour sounded off right beside the wide-eyed dog, who bolted upright into a ninety degree angle with a high-pitched bark. Sleep still crept around the corners of their vision, but that didn't make finding the cause of their rude awakening any tougher. A frazzled businessman, prone on the sidewalk, clutched a sundered suitcase in one hand and the back of his head in the other. At least a dozen of these same containers were busy meandering down the inclined street, clanking and clanging all the while.

Datch yipped, giving the groaning man an inquisitive poke. Part of them wanted to chase after the runaway - or, rather, rollaway cans, but not before making sure the unfortunate individual could move. The canid's worries dissipated as the grimacing fox got up onto his footpaws, rubbing his uninjured noggin. Even though he remained

conscious, it still must have been a nasty fall, so nasty it made Datch all but forget about their own paw problems.

"You alright?" Datch asked with a characteristic city cadence, still not entirely convinced.

"Ah, I'm fine... though my product seems to be a little worse for wear..." Shoulders slouched, the fox watched the purplish tins making their great, sluggish escape with a blank expression and a half-hearted grunt of dismay. Dressed as sharp as one could be in a hundred and ten degree weather, he wiped some dirt from his waistcoat and dug a pewter pocketwatch out from his pinstripe trousers. He didn't seem too surprised by the initials on its reverse side, "B.W.", but the warped and smashed face left him in mental anguish. "Of course, just my luck!"

"Aw, it's broken... is that what you sell, then? Watches?" An honest question; considering the vulpine's discordant reactions, anybody could be forgiven for believing it.

"What?" Hurrying to find a way to change the subject, the eccentric creature threw the shattered timepiece to the ground, wincing at the resultant crack of glass. "No, no - I sell drinks! Sodas, colas, fizzy pops - no matter what you call them, I've got them! ...well, *usually* I've got them. But now the street has them! And they're no good for resale. No doubt the carbonation ratio has been fuddled." Tutting, he lifted up his open suitcase, suddenly marvelling at its contents. "But, my stars, look what we have here!"

Datch craned their neck to get a look inside, instead being shoved away by the fox's grandiose gesturing. In his paw he held an intact can, polished and labelled unlike the others. Also unlike the others, it was tiny! Not even a little hummingbird's thirst could be quenched by such a minuscule gulp. "By some miracle, one of my free samples has survived!"

"Well, that's good, at least! So, you sell soda, that's it, Mister...?"

"Conrad! Conrad Fairfax! And you, my very astute friend, are very astutely correct! Though with all of my stock now worthless, I won't be doing much selling today, I'm afraid... and on such a hot day, too! I might have finally made it big!" The fox, now with an arm wrapped congenially around Datch's shoulder, chuckled to himself. "But, say, *you* could still make it big - with a taste of TecTonic!"

"I've never heard about... what, TecTonic?"

"Ah, yes!" For some reason, Conrad began sweating with a bit more intensity. "I'm with a start-up, and we're testing out the refreshing effects on fortunate passers-by in hopes we might one day hit the big market! It seems you're in need of some refreshment; with our recently rarified stock, I'll have to budge the price up just a small amount... to the tune of fifty dollars!!"

"FIFTY --" Datch snapped, collecting themselves. "Erm, sorry, but that's a bit steep, don't you think? I mean, for such a little can... wait, you said it was a free sample to begin with!"

"Ah, you drive a hard bargain!" Just like that, Conrad up and dropped the less than pint-sized drink into Datch's outstretched paw, giving it a pat for good measure. "Then, there you go! With how marvellous it tastes, I feel I'll be getting my money sooner or later, when you order more! And when you tell your friends all about it, too!"

Datch wriggled free, now apprehensive to sip the shot of soda. Everything about Conrad just seemed... fishy. But, it had been hours since their last drink, and the can seemed professional enough. Just one taste couldn't hurt!

Holding the vessel between squishy digits, Datch gulped preemptively. The next time they gulped, a half mouthful of faintly grape-flavoured cola flowed down their gullet. Despite its brand name, the mixture tasted flat, like it had been left open on the counter overnight. Perhaps the sun was to blame... but that failed to explain the ethereal

coldness which chased the mellow fruitiness. In their paws, the can felt no different than the surrounding humid air.

No matter the source, the crisp aftertaste left the pup reinvigorated, more than ready to make the trip home! The coolness just might last them all the way! Appreciative, Datch shook a vivacious nod at the beaming fox. "Good stuff! Where can I get more of it?"

"Well, let's see..." Conrad placed a finger to his chin, tip-tapping it as his smile grew wicked. He focused mostly on Datch's height, eyes roving up and down before settling on the phone-shaped outline in their pocket. "No, I think just the sample should be plenty for you..."

"Whatcha mean? That was great! Are you sure I can't have any more?"

"Perhaps sometime later! But for now, we'll just have to see how you handle this little batch. Until then - thank you for your custom, and for being such an eager assistant!"

Dumbfounded, Datch watched as Conrad dashed over to a postbox. There, he yanked a wadded-up black overcoat from its open hatch, wrapping it halfway around himself before disappearing behind a building's corner. He didn't even bother to pick up the cans he dropped which, upon closer inspection, turned out to be dummies, little more than spray painted tin cans. Just what kind of business was Conrad *really* running?

No sense worrying about it too much; as far as the canine was concerned, they just scored a free energy drink! After such a crummy nap, Datch greatly appreciated the boost. Already, walking felt easier, done with a longer and faster stride which Datch chalked up to the sugar. Amidst far too many foreign chemical names not even a proper scientist could pronounce, the can's nutrition facts showed a whopping quarter pound of sugars in just that one sip... along with two percent of one's daily requirements of vitamin B. Yippee.

Some moments after resuming their walk back on the main road, Datch's shirt began to feel... tight. With the front undone, it became apparent that this wasn't because of any sort of bloating or weight gain. Rather, the suit jacket's sleeves were riding up on their arms, constricting the dog's triceps. Curious, they stopped at a fire hydrant to rest against it and take a little break. Maybe that nap did more harm than good - it felt entirely possible, at least in the pup's mind, that they had simply slept on an uncomfortable slab of wood in an uncomfortable position; aches and weird feelings were thus inevitable.

As the hydrant started to creak, a wholly different sort of weird took over. Datch hopped away, watching with mouth agape as the solid lump of metal cried, then fell with a deafening crash. Not to be outdone, the earth itself rumbled, quaking as a great geyser sprang from the very earth. White water spewed fifty feet up, casting extensive shade on the street in spite of the apogean height of the sun. Surrounding pedestrians marvelled at the spectacle, many dropping their bagged groceries and once-iced coffees in order to embrace the gushing spout, shrouding themselves in the dainty mist surrounding the roaring pillar of water. Even a few motorists on the adjoining highway pulled over, emptying their cars of passengers and thrusting themselves into the splendid fountain.

Datch did not join them, paralyzed by the heft of dozens of emotions all squabbling for control of the pup's actions. Surprise was most prominent, naturally. Never before had Datch seen such a sight, nor had they ever witnessed so many people gathering in one spot. They had more than enough water to go around!

Amidst all the other sensations - guilt, excitement, maybe a little bit of pride for having toppled such a sturdy structure - worry started to take hold. With their muscles still pained, bordering on numbness, there existed even less rationalization to explain how they, being such an unassuming puppy, could have even chipped the fixture, let alone tear it in half. For a fleeting breath, Datch chalked it up to shoddy infrastructure. This idea fizzled as the uncertain dog took a step forwards... and sunk a half-inch into

the sidewalk. As the concrete dust settled, they lifted their sensationless paw to find a matching imprint now roughly carved into the stone. Another step, and another crack, this time even punching through a bit of rebar. There was no explaining *that* away; that drink must have had some sort of stimulant in it!

Not wanting to break anything else with their newfound strength, Datch chose to remain statue-still. With any luck, the drink's effects would wear off sooner rather than later. The only change in feeling came from within; that same inner coolness steadily progressed toward frigidity. Desperate to warm up in the hundred-degree heat, Datch tenderly pinched either half of their slate blazer and, with the tiniest inkling of effort, brought the twin sides together. Slow progress was inevitably halted - not when the jacket tore, but when it grew obvious the article had suddenly become one size too small. The buttons failed to meet their designated holes when they experienced no trouble doing the same but an hour ago. Frustrated, habit drove Datch to suck their chest in and tug, which succeeded... only in transforming their fetching top into an overly expensive tank top.

Datch threw the sleeve scraps onto the shattered earth, noting how the very floor looked farther away than usual. Not only were they growing wider, but taller, too? A resounding *rrr-r-i-p* from their cuffed trousers served as further evidence; their makeshift shorts had grown shorter, *much* shorter. In their place were a pair of foot-thick fluffy legs, perfect to-scale replicas of their former selves, only now harbouring upwards of a thousand pounds of force.

By this point, a few cityfolk had taken note of Datch's predicament. They stepped from the dazzling fog, some towards the eight foot pup, thrusting their chins at him to get a better look - in the not-too-distant past, people needed to crouch in order to address the pup properly! Far more people opted instead to step back, eyeing the unfolding events from a safer distance. Feeling dozens of eyes on themselves, Datch waved away the attempted assistance with a trembling face-sized paw, wanting nothing more than some time to themselves to process the unmissable but mercifully painless

changes. The public's impudent, probing curiosity never faltered; if anything, it developed at a rate to rival Datch's own physical growth.

Not sensing an end to the attention or the effects soon, Datch stammered a falsified excuse and, mutt-mitts covering their pinkish cheeks, tromped through the tight opening in the flanking throng of people. In their wake, a discarded cellphone and tattered scraps of textile fluttered to the dented ground, soon vanishing as crisp, refreshing water surged to fill in the tidepool-like craters. Too overheated to even consider giving chase, all those left behind returned to their watery muster, gawking at Datch's bounding silhouette as it thundered away, making a boisterous beeline for a nearby alleyway. The retreating pup didn't even stop to check the damage when they felt their log-sized tail snag against a lamppost, severing the thing in a great display of sparks.

Datch came to a wobbly rest against an office building, wiping the second floor windows with their ears. They tried their best not to let the creaking from behind psyche them out any more... though with the sounds intensifying every second, this proved a difficult endeavour. When a few bricks fell from above and bounced off of their tense shoulders, Datch thought better of their casual pose and lurched away from the complex, sighing when the entire construction rocked on its foundation. Ignoring the Datch-shaped outline now impressed into the masonry, the mini kaiju took the opportunity to gaze at their reflection in a chipped windowpane.

They were bigger. Much bigger, having to crouch in order to inspect the first story window. At a glance, however, nothing else changed. By all accounts, Datch was still *Datch*. Closer inspection unveiled some subtler differences; atop each toe, their puppy claws had grown wolfish, hooked and steely. A testing tap against glass stood testament to their sharpness, razor edge rivalled only by the prismatic scraps of glass that fell from the pane as Datch clacked against it.

Making sure to mind their talons, Datch gave the rest of their body an unsure inspection. Their tail seemed a tad less soft, but still plenty long. One thing looked off,

however... a strip of electrical wiring had gotten tied up in its plush fur, wrapped almost in a bow. Datch made quick work of the straggler cable, casting it aside like a crackling strip of licorice and paying no mind to the chaotic discordance as it smashed against a joining edifice.

Next and last on Datch's agenda were their teeth; they felt especially different. On their tippy toes, a quick look into the reflective third story window showed a set of pearly fangs, enough to make any dentist weep in delight. For all the sugar in that drink, at least it didn't damage their canines any! All told, Datch was looking cooler than ever. If only they could show off their new, still-changing body without knocking everything over in the process!

With fingers in each corner of their mouth, tugging and squashing at their lips, Datch figured they must have looked awfully silly, impeccable dental be damned. A tap from the other side of the glass confirmed this; a timber wolf sporting janitorial coveralls had one paw on a mop, and the other on her hips. A playful scowl dwelled below her nose; this gave way to a ribbing request to Datch, audible through the window: "Whatever you're doing, ain't my business... just don't smudge the glass, alright?"

Datch dropped their arms to their side and nodded, hoping she wouldn't come across the sorry state of the lower windows any time soon. As she wheeled her bin away, another voice came from beside the pup. Or, rather, from somewhere by their shins. When this voice failed to be heard, it echoed its original greeting with doubled strength and its owner's hands cupped to their mouth. Surprised Datch yapped as the noise reached them, rattling the nearby windows in the process.

After doubly surprised Datch located the source of the call, they let out another bark, then wincing as the already-damaged glass nearby crumpled into glistening cascades. At Datch's footpaws, Conrad first covered his ears and then his head as silicate splinters rained down, harmless to all but his unfortunate vest, bedazzling the

article with flecks of quartz. As the downpour ceased, Conrad peeked up at the more than grown-up canid.

With a man-sized mitt scritchng the back of their head, Datch swept some of the larger shards aside with a swish of their tail. "Gee, sorry, Conrad..." they whispered, a wry smile curling on their lips. "But, you really shouldn't sneak up on people like that, you know?"

"Well," the grumbly vulpine retorted, "I wouldn't have approached in the first place if *somebody* hadn't toppled my stash!" Conrad gestured a clenched paw toward a nearby garbage can, newly dented, horizontal and spilling out container after container of canned seltzer. Unlike the fakes from earlier, these cans were very much full; unlike the dismally tiny sample from earlier, the contents of the crumpled cargo could have quenched a monstrous thirst... if their payload weren't busy hydrating the dandelions growing from the concrete cracks.

Hanging from a buckled fire escape was the same ductile cord Datch cast away, dangling precariously over a conglomerate mound of displaced bricks and soda cans. As the towering dog refocused on the fox, having to tilt their head a few degrees steeper to do so, they noticed his face had taken on an even more intense shade of scarlet visible even through the sprawling shadow cast on him.

"So *pardon* me if I'm 'intruding'!" Having dropped all pretenses of civility, Conrad shook a fuming fist at the giant. If starting a fight with a thirty-five foot giant weren't so stupid an idea, the vulpine may have started a scuffle right then and there! "If you had any idea just how much damage you've caused me, how much money you've cost me... why, I should have never approached you in the first place! I knew that hippo would have been a better pick!"

Datch crossed their tree trunk arms, staring the petite charlatan down. A thought crossed their mind, seeing pint-sized Conrad attempt to be intimidating... Datch didn't have to take this! Deft as their usual self, they bent down in a flash and smooshed

Conrad mid-rant, muffling his protests with the squish of their mattress-like paw pads. Futile struggling proved fruitless, the fox's wriggling only underscoring just how in-control Datch was. Having such invigorating power... up until now, Datch didn't see much benefit in being so massive. What a wake-up call!

Just as Conrad's fluff-encased fidgeting began to slow, Datch loosened up their grip, letting a trickle of life-giving air reach their new prisoner. Ungrateful, the vulpid whined and yakked. "Snip my whiskers, is it hot in here!" N Whatever you're gonna do, it better take place outside of these grubby mitts - wouldja let me out already?!"

"Doesn't look like you're in much of a position to negotiate... little fox! Heh, I like the sound of that!" Datch blew a raspberry into their paws, further ruining Conrad's vestments. "You're not going anywhere 'til I get some answers!"

"Really?" In Datch's clutches, the fox writhed as best he could to clean himself of puppy spittle. "You got *the* Dante -- erm, *the* Conrad Fairfax in your clutches! You could do anything; you could claim his bounty, or chuck him over to the next city... but instead, you just wanna chat? I've got to say - *hck*, too tight! - I'm a bit insulted, really!"

"Saying stuff like that just makes me want to know more!" With their tongue jutting out, Datch squeezed a teeny bit tighter, sealing the fox under their authority. "What's this bounty all about, first of all?"

"Why, you lookin' to make bank, pup? I might tell you... but if I pass out from heatstroke, well, I won't be able to tell you anything! Set me down somewhere, so I can - *hrff* - catch my breath. I won't run off, you got my word on that. Doubt I'd get real far, anyhow..."

"Fair enough. If you *do* try anything, though, then -- "

"Yeah, yeah. You'll probably squash me or fold me into a pretzel or something. I get it."

Datch almost corrected Conrad but, after some more thought, began bobbing their head in meek agreement, a modest gesture for the mind-boggling epiphany developing beneath their hybrid eyes. The two examples the fox gave were basic, but poignant all the same. Squashing, folding, stomping, throwing... all things the pup struggled with only an hour ago, back when the world towered above them. Now, these destructive acts were all second nature. It felt alien, the sheer potential Datch had access to. A distressing desire to properly put this strength to the test spawned within their soda-addled mind - whether this resulted solely from the drink's chemicals or Datch's own subconscious remained to be seen.

"Geez, pal," Conrad moaned, chin resting on the rusted railing crossbar. "I thought you wanted to talk, but here we are, listening to the pigeons."

"Sorry, it's just -- " Datch slapped their forehead with bombastic force, an awkward move in the constricting alley. " -- no, I'm not sorry! It's just that I've got a lot to think about, after what you've done. I've half a mind to squish you and be done with it!"

Conrad's jaw would have dropped, had the iron beam not been in the way. "Y-You really ain't gonna pancake me, though! ...right?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because," Fairfax yapped, flashing his teeth, "you'll never find the antidote otherwise!"

"I bet I could do both! All I gotta do is take a seat right on top of you - I won't move 'til you -- uh-oh..." Datch's confident streak faltered as they detected an outside force acting upon their head, and their hindquarters. Throughout the confrontation, their growth continued at a steady pace. Forehead pressed against the far building and fluffy thighs sandwiched on the rear, Datch was well and truly stuck in their bent-over

position. Any movement risked toppling either tower, but inaction meant the demise of both when the dog's mass reached a literal tipping point.

Datch did their best to remain cool and collected, an act made impossible by the fox's knowing snickers. Levelheadedness was even harder to come by as, with every inch gained, their surroundings creaked more and more. The foundations squealed, giving way and allowing their beared buildings to tip over dangerously. From the anterior window-holes, Datch swore they heard that janitor from earlier yelp a curse, followed by a crescendo of smashing office equipment. In just a few moments more, it would be the entire four stories crashing to the pavement!

Almost whimpering, Datch knew they needed an out, and *fast*. With reluctantly pleading eyes, they gazed down at the mirthful fox swimming in schadenfreude. "Conrad, hey, how about that antidote, huh?"

Teasing laughter gave way to spiteful hilarity; Conrad's legs refused to stay still, kicking out from between the rail bars and bouncing off of the hunched-over goliath's flat, fuzzy tummy. In between raucous gasps and tear-wipes, he maneuvered himself down the metal staircase, stammering a confirmation in a mocking falsetto. "Yeah, yeah - for you, bud, anything!"

Upon reaching the final landing, Conrad opted to vault the fence rather than attempt to traverse the wire-damaged flooring. He dropped safely onto Datch's blanket-soft paw, to be expected since it almost covered the entire width of the passageway. From there, he took a leisurely stroll over to the sideways trash can, sifting through bruised and battered cans before pulling out the sole survivor, perceptibly indistinguishable from its brothers.

"Alright, you big puppy, I got your antidote right here... open up!" The big puppy yawned accordingly, maw stretched far enough to accomodate a car even with their three-feet teeth lining both gums. Despite its lofty height, the target proved an easy hit as Conrad chucked the aluminum cylinder with all his might. Datch snapped their jaws

shut to secure the catch. The only thing left to do? Get at the contents. But the vast size difference between tooth and can made chomping impossible. The sole option involved no more than gulping the whole thing down.

Eating metal turned out to not be as repulsive a thought as it might have been earlier; even though it was no bigger than a grain of rice, proportionally, it was almost gratifying - almost like something Datch should have been doing more of. Thus, gulping the metallic morsel took no effort. When it completed the long trip down to their belly, an icy numbness soon took up residence in the very same spot. Regardless of the lack of real sensation, Datch still felt their stomach drop. They'd been duped!

Conrad, meanwhile, dropped to all fours and took off. Datch's blood surged as they watched, enfuried heartbeat pounding in their ears. After thirty seconds of painful waiting, primal rage took hold of their mind. That scoundrel wasn't about to get away if they had anything to say about it! Nothing would stop them from giving chase and throwing that weasel of a fox into orbit; to this end, they shoved the building in front of them with a mighty roar. While the flanking mid-rise sighed in relief, a cloud of powdered debris shot up from its neighbour, masking its abrupt destruction.

No time to dwell on the implications of this instant demolition, or the peculiar satisfaction that came with it. Datch took one massive step, fanning the billowing dust behind them with one titanic swipe of their tail and clipping another building in the process. Despite the chaos behind them, Datch set their sights on the six-lane highway adjoining the now-spacious alley, the same road Conrad ran off to. With his half minute headstart, that cheat could have been in any number of buildings or cars.

A glint of light caught the ponderous pup's eye; peering down, they saw a sizable congregation of pedestrians beside a firetruck and a lake-wide puddle of water. First responders and citizens alike all stared up at the behemoth of a puppy, frozen in fear. One individual, however, chanced a little wave at the kaiju, a microscopic gesture that almost went undetected. Lucky for them, Datch took note and bent way, way over, wagging tail finishing the job that it started and cleaving the damaged structure in

twain. They shot a glance backwards, blushing before refocusing on the pink speck that greeted them.

Datch pressed a digit, big as a bus, onto the concrete; the stranger clung onto its claw as the dog brought it back up to their head. Up close, this bubblegum creature looked like some sort of alpaca, his black lips smirking around a lollipop stick. He didn't seem all that fazed, dangling from a kaiju claw almost a hundred feet from the ground. Not even the heat looked to be getting to them.

The currently gentle giant curled their paw inward, setting the curious critter on their palm and smiling. It was nice to know there were still some people out there who weren't afraid of their new size! "Hey," they whispered, not wanting to hurt the ungulate's big ears. "Uh, I'm looking for a fox - he wears a funny suit, smells a bit like grapes... have you seen him?"

The black-and-pink critter pointed a blue hoof down at a curbside taxi cab, fumes spewing out of its exhaust. Just as Datch spotted it, it started to take off, making a beeline for the skyscrapers downtown! "That's probably him!" shouted Datch, forgetting to mind their voice, though their helper didn't show any signs of discomfort. "Thanks!"

After setting the llama-like fur back down among the O-faced throng, Datch set off in pursuit of the yellow-orange car, minding their feet so as not to smoosh anybody. Other structures were less fortunate, however; Datch spent so much time looking at their paws, their tail was able to run wild, swiping at power lines, parked cars and roadside businesses on either side of the highway. Even at their careful pace, Datch was making good progress.

When the car stopped beside a metro station, somebody bolted from the driver's side. Datch let them go, far more interested in whoever would be in the passenger seat. The kaiju stooped and retrieved the vehicle, having to wipe condensation off of its windscreen as their cool breath met the blazing car. Peering inside, they saw nothing

but a set of fuzzy dice! Datch whipped their head around, back to the train station, where they saw a sliver of orange trailing a figure robed in all black.

Datch roared, crumpling the car in their paw before wedging an immense finger in the staircase tunnel leading to the subway. With minimal effort they wrenched a gigantic slab of stone loose, revealing the station's innards and with it the sprinting form of a panicking fox leaping onto a passing blue-accented train and clinging on for dear life. The locomotive screamed, en route to the heart of the city. Datch, a lifelong local, knew just where the blue line would take the fox - that was where they would make their ambush.

After tossing the crumpled car into their maw and making quick work of it, Datch set off for the high-risers. Taking the most direct route meant wading through apartments, grocery stores and city parks, most of which became new layers of pavement underfoot, squashed two or three at a time. Those that weren't flattened were punted, landing thousands of feet away and causing further mayhem. There were no remnants in their wake, any surviving buildings swiftly toppled by the pup's street-sweeper tail, now showing some budding spikes around its tip.

Sirens wailed all around, but the greatest distraction were the mosquito-like helicopters, some military and some news, eager to film the unfolding chaos. Datch swatted at them all, to little effect - they were just too far away. Any sort of interference might make him miss the train ferrying the swindling sneak; the pup needed the birds gone!

A new complication soon arose; Datch's chest began to tighten, and actually felt hot for once. These were no mere growing pains, this felt like heartburn of untold intensity. It drove them to stop in their tracks, catching their breath for a moment. A forceful slap to their belly sent a bubble of gas up from Datch's abdomen, tickling their throat before manifesting as a loud, shockwave-inducing exhalation. Thick and swirling

purplish gas fumed from their mouth and trickled from either nostril, catching even the kaiju off guard!

One tawny chinook was caught in the obscuring cloud. When next it came into view, its propellers had all but disappeared, and its body was littered with pockmarks exposing wiring and red-hot inner workings. The pilots bailed just in time, leaping outside and deploying olive parachutes before the chopper's fuel tank reached a breaking point, turning the high-grade equipment into a \$40,000,000 fireball.

The other choppers peeled off, eager to avoid a similar fate. With their discomfort gone, Datch continued with the rampage, puffing little bursts of atomic breath here and there as practice for their new ability. It seemed this development hailed the end of the drink's effects; Datch's growth slowed, capping around the midpoint of the approaching skyscrapers. The kaiju pooch admired their mirrored visage as they got close, harbouring a strange pride as they took in the sheer destruction they caused along the way.

A close-by subway overpass proved a little more enticing than their fearsome reflection. Datch exposed their fangs to the city air as they turned back to the skyscraper, creativity flowing through their neurons. With a guttural laugh, they spun clockwise, smacking their studded tail clean through the side of the structure closest to the rails. Datch gave the top half a feather-light push, causing it to loom just above the tracks. With its center of gravity altered, a cataclysmic crash was inevitable; six hundred feet of glass and metal came tumbling down, severing the railroad bridge and pulverizing six city blocks. A few transformers exploded, casting sparks high into the air and setting sections of salvage aflame.

Dopily, Datch flopped onto their rear, turning the financial district to a concrete flapjack and muffling some of the incessant sirens. From this surprisingly comfortable seat, Datch waited, enthralled by the section where bridge met tunnel.

Steel screeching made the colossus' heart skip a beat. Beneath the thin blanket of smoke covering everything, two faint headlights on the bridge did their best to pierce the fog. By the time they revealed the twisted mass of metal blocking the route, it was too late; the driver dove for cover as the blue line car slammed into the barricade. The passengers slammed against each other, so dazed that few paid any mind to the seated kaiju wearing a vengeful smirk.

Datch yanked the caboose off of its affixments, giggling as they inspected the interior. Between a gaunt businesswoman and a sleeping commuter, Conrad's puny eyes peeked out from over a newspaper. An attempt to cover them back up did nothing; Datch shook the car, tipping its contents into a continental paw. They began to sift through the passengers like jellybeans, restrainedly placing all but the orange vulpine back onto the bridge.

"F-Fancy meetin' you here!" choked Conrad from behind his quivering newspaper. "Say, have you read the - the Gazette lately? Wouldn't you know it, the mayor *just* made eating foxes illegal! Well, more illegal than it used to be --"

Datch entombed the fox in the very same paw, giving a little wave to the train riders before standing up and looking over their apocalyptic footsteps. Their tail fanned the bonfires as they spun and walked alongside their trail, smashing a hundred buildings more. Every so often, Datch came across a particularly fancy structure and went out of their way to push it over, making sure to give Conrad a first-class view of the damage.

"This is all your fault, you know," Datch sang, dancing across evacuated homes and shaking the earth itself, bounding along back to the path's beginning. "Must be at least a billion in damage, by this point, don'tcha think?" Conrad didn't nod, even though he agreed. "Gonna take the city a looong while to clean up *your* mess..."

As Datch reached the highway, they gave a little spin for good measure, clearing out a ginormous circle with their fully spiked tail. Across the way was the alley where

Conrad administered Datch's second dose. Atop the damaged office building was an exasperated timber wolf, grey coveralls turned black from soot. Datch plopped the rogue fox next to her, and instructed the cleaner to slide her mop and bucket over to Conrad, a command to which she readily agreed.

As Conrad gripped the objects with a dumb look, Datch waved over an apprehensive news chopper as it made rounds documenting the damage. "Whoever's watching," Datch chuckled, "get me a truck full of peanut butter ice cream. I'm gonna need it!"

Plonking themselves down on their kaiju-sized clearing, Datch laid their legs out over the road, pressing their paws up against the office, blocking the exits and knocking down the fire escape in the process. "You're not going anywhere 'til this city is *spotless*, little fox!"