

The Prosperity Heist

By: Indi

It wasn't a particularly warm day, but it was a bright one. The scattered clouds in the sky all shone blinding white, so much that Sloan had to squint his eyes to get a real look at them. But the cougar's attention was on everything below, not above.

Traffic was steady. Wagons and horses going either direction, kicking up dust in small puffs that never reached him. He had his back against a wall, far away enough from any door or window to avoid getting shooed away for loitering. His stern frown and holstered pistol certainly helped as well.

Sloan pulled out his worn pocket watch and checked the time. It'd been an hour. A long, boring, wasteful hour spent staring at the entrance to the Feedbag Saloon across the street. He'd hoped the three lawmen who'd entered were just there for a drink or a bribe, but the hour wait had proved him wrong. As long as they were there the job was in danger of going to shit. Hell, the job had been shit from the get-go.

You can't casually rob the biggest damn saloon in town, Sloan thought. Not without planning. *Real* planning; not just casing the place once and trusting questionable insider info. If he'd been in charge of the job, he'd have looked into who was involved with the saloon. What kind of bribes they were passing out, what kind of sway the owner had, what were the busiest hours. But Ward was in charge, and the horse hadn't met a long-shot opportunity he didn't barrel right into. Didn't help that he excelled at charming the rest of the gang into thinking shit was gold. Every. Single. Damn. Time.

Sloan's frustration wrecked what little patience he had left. He was tired of standing around and his stomach was starting to rumble. If he didn't do something soon he was bound to grab the next passerby and scarf them down, and lugging around a bulging belly didn't exactly make robbery any easier. Personal experience had taught that lesson to him long ago.

Sloan pushed away from the wall and started walking as if he'd never stopped. A minute later he took a left at the first intersection, then dipped into an alley between a furniture store and a harness shop.

The five men crammed into the alley all turned as he arrived, a couple of paws moving away from holsters as he was recognized.

"See Derek? Told ya he wasn't off eating someone," a coyote—Irvin—said, grinning at a chubby gryphon.

"Shame on me for thinking he had a good reason for leaving us here." Derek threw a silver coin fast and hard at Irvin's face. The coyote flinched and held up his paws to block the coin, which bounced off them and down to the dirt. He dove after it, prompting curses as he squeezed past the others. "Guess he did fall asleep," the gryphon said.

A black-and-white donkey tossed a coin of his own to the otter beside him.

Sloan growled. "I wasn't sleeping, either!" The coin was quickly returned. "I told Oats there were lawmen in the saloon so we had to wait, and that's what we did." He glared at the donkey, suspecting he hadn't bothered passing along the message.

“Yeah, but that was an hour ago,” the otter next to Oats said.

“Well, Stout, they’re still there!” Making the otter wince didn’t do enough to improve Sloan’s mood.

“So are we ditching the job?” Irvin asked.

If someone with a bit more respect in the gang had said it, like Derek or Mute, then Sloan could’ve fueled the doubt and convinced the others how terrible the job was. Irvin might’ve been the closest thing to a friend Sloan had in the gang, but he was also a cocky little shit who didn’t quite know when to shut up. No one was going to support him, and Sloan could already see some of the others preparing insults.

“Caution’s smart, but we’ve still got numbers on our side,” Sloan said, mustering as much false enthusiasm as he could. “If we can pull off a proper distraction we can still sneak upstairs to where the office is and get away with the cash. But it needs to be a big one—big enough to get the attention of the lawmen and everyone else there.” Sloan didn’t think anything short of a fight could work, and of course the odds of getting dragged off to jail after were high. At least it’d only be for a night at worst. “Oats. Stout. You two are in charge of it. I don’t care what you do, as long as it works.” And if it didn’t work, both were expendable enough that leaving them behind wouldn’t be much of a loss. If only Ward were good at charming competent outlaws into the gang, rather than just anyone barely capable of aiming a gun or gulping down a witness.

“Oh, I know the perfect thing!” Oats said. The short donkey was smiling even wider than usual, like he’d cleaned house in poker. Sloan hadn’t expected enthusiasm. “Just give me twenty minutes...no, wait, make it thirty! Yeah, that’ll be enough.”

Waiting was the last thing Sloan wanted to do, but his only alternative was to have Mute start throwing fists and tables and hope the burly elk could take on half a saloon by himself. Which he could, with the right motivation, but at that moment he was being his usual quiet self and waiting for actual orders. Sloan remembered why he liked him.

“Alright, you’ve got thirty minutes,” Sloan said. “Just make sure there’s an open path from the entrance to the stairs so we can actually take advantage of whatever the Hell it is you’re gonna do.”

“If the way to the stairs is blocked in thirty minutes then I’m living the dream. Or in one...” Oats pinched his arm, then frowned.

“What does...” Sloan thought better of it. He couldn’t waste any more time listening to the donkey’s scheme or figuring out how terrible it was. He just wanted to focus on his own role in the job. The only time he’d ever failed himself was when he put too much faith in others. “Just get going.”

Oats passed on by, with Stout hurrying to catch up with him. “Okay Stout, when we get in there you’re gonna have to nervously whimper about how my Father would never approve of us being there, got it?”

“I what?”

The donkey and otter turned the corner, out of sight and earshot. Sloan took a deep breath. “If by some miracle they pull this off, we’ll need to get upstairs fast. Don’t storm up there, but don’t bother trying to stroll up either. Act like you’re going to a meeting, not

sneaking around.” He tried not to linger on Irvin, but his choices were either him or Derek, and Derek was far more likely to start something if singled out. “From there we’ll head straight to the main office. Might have to deal with a guard or two, but that’s all.”

“So we’ll have snacks?” Derek asked. Everyone in the gang was voracious to some degree, but the gryphon tended to revel in the act. The only thing preventing him from being a blob was the fact he was smart enough to target lean prey more often than not and kept himself active.

“Only if you can scarf them down on the go. We can’t afford to get slowed down because you’re having to lug your damn gut around under fire.” Again his eyes went to Irvin. He was the smallest of the four, and the only one Sloan doubted could jog with prey in their belly. “Now once we’re in we’ll be going after cash bags. According to Ward’s info, there should be a bunch in there—profits from the saloon and a casino they run next door. We grab what we can and leave out the office window. There’s a short shed along the side of the building we can climb onto, and the drop from that shouldn’t be bad. Then we run back around to the front, where Eli and Otis will pick us up in a stagecoach. Our best-case scenario is we leave without anyone even realizing the place has been robbed.”

“And the worst case is seeing who can swallow the most bystanders?” Irvin said with a snicker, while Derek grinned in approval.

The gang thinking with their stomachs right before a robbery wasn’t a good omen. Reckless gluttony could lead to a cell and the gallows—or, more likely, the gut of an engorged sheriff. “We’re here for the money, not the food,” Sloan said. “So don’t go eating people just because you *think* you can.” He got nods from them all, but only trusted Mute’s to be genuine. The muscular elk barely indulged, despite being more than capable of forcing whoever he wanted down his throat. If the others were more like him, then Sloan wouldn’t expect every job to be a disaster waiting to happen.

Sloan was walking the second thirty minutes had passed. He didn’t spot any commotion outside the Feedbag, no one running in or out, and wondered if Oat’s plan had been a failure. Not that he even knew what the donkey was up to. A raucous could be heard from within as they neared, which turned out to be a mix of laughter and cheers. A good sign, he hoped.

The first thing Sloan saw when he pushed open the doors was the crowd. Over half the saloon had gathered around a table near a wall opposite the stairs, people leaning over shoulders and on their toes to get a look at something. The few who hadn’t wandered over were staring, and a poker game had slowed to a crawl as the players shot more glances towards the distant table than their hands.

Sloan didn’t see Oats or Stout amongst the crowd, but he did see the lawmen, none of whom looked ready to break anything up.

“*Berrrrrrrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaap!*” The belch rattled a few empty glasses nearby. “Keep it coming, I’ve only just begun!” Oat’s voice rang out.

Sloan smiled and strolled towards the crowd. Against the odds, Oats was proving

useful. As long as he kept up whatever he was doing, the rest of the saloon would inevitably become distracted, and the robbery could commence. A pair of servers hurried from the back, each carrying plates loaded with food. They went straight towards the table Oats was at and squeezed through. *What the Hell's he need with so much food?*

Plates and pitchers covered the table. Sloan saw a bounty of meat, potatoes, eggs, cheese, and toast, all cooked in bulk. It was a damn feast, more food in one place than Sloan had ever seen before. And Oats was stuffing his face with it like he was starving.

The donkey's belly was bulging, his shirt pushed up atop the crest of the slowly swelling mound. He'd shovel the contents of a plate into his mouth, then wash it down with a torrent of beer or water, whichever was closest. He only stopped to burp or demand more food. Otherwise, he was constantly eating and drinking and eating some more. Beside him was a confused Stout, whose gaze was darting between the table and Oats' belly.

Sloan had to bite his tongue and resist cursing the ravenous donkey out then and there. He was supposed to be doing a job; instead, he was pigging out. Why couldn't the fool have taken things seriously for once?

"Damn, he really does know how to be the center of attention," Irvin said. The coyote had slid in next to Sloan. "We good to go?"

The fury of seeing Oats' ridiculous plan in action had made Sloan forget what was actually important: that it was working. It was dumb, incredibly dumb, but it was working. "No, not yet." He kept his voice down. "Soon though."

Oats had never been prouder of his guile. To be fair, he also owed a lot of thanks to accidentally skipping breakfast and daydreaming about food as he waited in the alley for Sloan to return. He'd been craving flavor, thinking about how wonderful it'd be to gorge on everything the saloon had to offer and end up so stuffed he couldn't move. An old fantasy of his, from the days when food was scarce and being fat meant he wasn't worried about where the next meal would come from.

So when Sloan had asked for a distraction, his mind had still been lingering on indulging. Gluttony would get people's attention—especially if Oats made a scene in the process. Stout hadn't been keen on the plan, but the otter also wasn't offering any of his own. It'd taken the entire walk over to convince him to go along with it.

Oats couldn't help but crack a grin as he looked around at everyone mesmerized by his gorging. He'd never considered how fun it could be having an audience watch him eat. Of course usually when he was stuffing himself the food was a tasty stranger and any potential onlooker was doing their best to avoid becoming a second course. A valid concern, considering the donkey was fond of glutting.

The donkey shifted in his seat, his round belly jiggling sluggishly. He could feel the weight of it on his lap. Every plate he wiped out made it bigger and more unwieldy. Sure, he could get the same sensation by eating someone, but mundane food made it seem so much more...*indulgent*. The first couple of plates had made him full, and now each dish was pure,

unnecessary excess. He had to will himself to eat extra, ignoring all the messages from his body telling him to stop. Glutting was a challenge—one Oats accepted without hesitation.

The pressure was tightening around his waist, and Oats felt his belt straining to contain the lower curve of his growing gut. It was both uncomfortable and wonderful. Oats vowed to keep eating until he burst it right off.

The feast before him wasn't fancy or elegant, but it was still better than what he was used to. And free, too, if everything went smoothly.

When Oats spotted Sloan in the crowd he didn't slow down, plowing through eggs and bacon as he watched the cougar go through a range of foul expressions. He swore the man knew how to scowl in a dozen different ways, and frown in a hundred. But—eventually—he settled on a resting look of acceptance. Or at least what Oats decided was acceptance.

A few more plates were wiped out. Oats' middle nudged him further from the table, a testament to the sheer amount of food he'd packed away. His ability to overeat was beginning to surprise even himself.

Though it felt as if the whole saloon was watching his feast, Sloan hadn't slipped away. Oats needed to find a way to turn the distraction into a real rousing spectacle. Well if eating was a crowd-pleaser...

Oats thumped his belly. "*Uorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrp!!*" The belch shook his belly and rattled the plates, earning him laughter and hoots--mainly from the owl amongst the lawmen.

Stout grimaced and leaned in, whispering. "Sloan don't look happy, maybe we should try something different?"

"Way ahead of ya—just play along." Oats grabbed Stout by the collar and pulled the otter out of his chair. "If you're so worried about how much I'm spending on food, then why don't you help fill me up for free!"

"What do you—no, wait!" Stout tried to pull away, but Oats' grip was strong and his maw wide open. The otter managed a single, terrified squeak before his whole head was swallowed.

Oats hadn't expected Stout to accept getting eaten, but at least his frantic struggles made the act seem real and not staged. He was lucky the saloon allowed vore.

A strong gulp pulled in Stout's shoulders and sent the otter's head into the back of his throat. Fabric and fur paled in comparison to bacon or a well-made stew, but Oats didn't have the luxury of being able to dip Stout in sauce, and the mere thought of how big he'd look afterward was enough to get him gulping eagerly.

Stout was flailing, his paws smacking against the table and Oats' gut but never gaining a solid grip on anything. He fell out of his chair, sending it skidding back into the crowd. His efforts did little to slow Oats down. Soon his arms were pinned to his sides, reducing his struggles to awkward wiggling that only looked comical. Oats knew he'd won, then.

With half an otter down his throat, Oats' belly was ballooning in short bursts. It shoved the table, causing the plates to clatter. His chair was groaning, not from the extra weight but from all the movement. They could handle a relaxing pred, but not a fidgety one.

Oats grabbed Stout by the pant leg and hefted him up, the otter's kicking feet lifting off the floor for a few seconds before falling back down. A second attempt to lift him was more

and Mute pushed the busted door closed as well as he could.

“Guess our luck’s holding up,” Sloan said as he strolled forwards, guns still trained on the horse. They didn’t seem the type eager to go out in a blaze of glory, but he wasn’t about to take chances. Derek had pulled out his pistol as well, though his distended middle was doing all the heavy lifting with the intimidation. “Open the safe. Now.” It hadn’t been their original target, but Sloan wasn’t going to let an opportunity pass.

The horse jolted up out of his seat, legs shaking. He looked doughier up close. His suit clung to his paunch, buttons strained. His collar looked tight as well. All signs he’d eaten someone in the last day or two. It was easy to forget how fattening a person could be—until you woke up the next day and nothing fit anymore.

The safe was tall and narrow. The horse fumbled his first attempt to open it. “I can...I can make you gentlemen comfortably rich if you leave me be. Or perhaps you’d like your pick of the servers downstairs. I assure you they’re at least as filling as Jameson was.”

“We’ll be finding out how filling *you* are in a moment if you don’t open that safe.” Sloan nudged the horse in the back with a pistol.

The second attempt at the lock succeeded, and the door opened. The shelves were sparse. There were a few stacks of bills and a handful of silver coins, but it looked like it’d already been cleared out.

“Yeah, really rolling in dough there,” Irvin said.

“Our weekly bank run was today. It was full this morning, I swear!”

Sloan exhaled deeply. The safe being empty didn’t bode well for the rest of their venture. “Well, what else you got?” The cougar bared his teeth, and the horse nearly fainted.

“W-Well there’s...um...there’s.” The horse was quivering. “The unsorted cash bags, from last night! They’re in the cabinet behind the desk.”

Sloan looked towards Mute and nodded his head towards the cabinet. The elk walked over and kicked the cabinet door in. He pulled a small bag out and opened it, staring for only a moment before holding it towards Sloan. It was filled with bills.

“Thank God. How many bags we got in there?” A half dozen of those and they’d be off to a decent start.

Mute put the bag on the floor, then pulled out two more. After that, he stopped.

“Damn it don’t tell me that’s all they got?” Sloan said.

“That’s it,” Mute said.

“So much for being the richest—*uorrrp*—saloon in town,” Derek said. His gut was acting up. No doubt the mouse was coming to, and not excited about his new surroundings.

“We are!” the horse insisted, before cowering again once he remembered his predicament. “It’s all in the bank, as I said!”

“Well we ain’t at the bank, we’re here.” Sloan struggled to hold in his fury. He meant it for Ward, but the horse in front of him was a good enough target. “So you’d better have diamonds hidden in your pockets or I’ll need to find other ways to make this worth my while.”

The horse took a step back, right into the wall. His eyes were darting all over, never meeting Sloan’s for more than a second. “I...I...if we go to the bank I can—”

Sloan holstered his pistols and jammed an elbow hard into the horse’s chest. They

gaped and slumped a little, their glasses falling off, while Sloan slid one paw under their armpit and the other behind their head. He lunged, seeing the horse's eyes widen in terror right before shoving half their muzzle in his mouth. The struggles began immediately, but there wasn't much the horse could do while pinned between wall and feline. A kick from Sloan weakened them further.

The cougar didn't bother savoring his meal. He wanted a horse stewing in his stomach, and the saloon owner was all he had available. As Sloan wrangled the helpless horse deeper into his gullet, he imagined his prey being a bit taller and less pudgy. And gray instead light brown. He knew it was petty imagining them as someone else, but in the heat of the moment it improved his mood from horrendous to mediocre.

Buttons bounced off the wall as Sloan's vest shot open to make room for his swelling middle. He didn't get the same level of joy out of being massive like others in the gang, but his stomach was grateful for the sizable meal emptying into it. By the end, Sloan was cramming the horse's wiggling legs down his throat, his cheeks swelling as he closed his jaws shut and swallowed.

"Alright boys, grab whatever you can that's small and looks worth a damn," Sloan ordered, his face twisting as the horse threw a kick down below. "Can't let this job be a total bust."

They went to work, throwing open drawers and clearing off shelves. Derek lumbered over to the door to stand watch, as his gut got in the way of searching. Sloan emptied the safe, putting what little money he found into a sack far too large for the pittance it was holding. The horse was wiggling around wildly and pleading to be let out, promising Sloan everything from cash to a job to a lifetime supply of beer at the saloon. God, he hated when food whined. He squeezed his belly from opposite sides, pressing hard until a rumbling belch was forced out. His stomach tightened around the horse. Another belch forced the rest of the air out, and Sloan went back to work. The horse's struggles intensified shortly after, before dwindling to nothing.

Even after turning the whole office over, not much else was found; a couple of watches, some rings, a stash of bills under a drawer. Sloan didn't have time to count it all, but he knew it wasn't even close to the score Ward had promised them. It was barely better than robbing a stagecoach, which they could've done with three people and a lot less hassle.

"We didn't really get much, did we?" Irvin stated the obvious.

"Nope!" Sloan growled. "So let's get the Hell out of here before things get worse."

Sloan waddled to a window and opened it. It'd be a tight squeeze getting through, but he could do it. He cursed when he looked out, though. There *was* a shed below the window, but the roof had caved in and a wall had fallen over. A pile of splintered boards and metal scrap awaited anyone stupid enough to jump down.

"I'd like to remind y'all that I said this was a stupid, risky job that only idiots would take!" He punched the wall, his belly bouncing in response. The others glanced out the window to see what Sloan was talking about. None disagreed. "Better pray everyone downstairs is still enamored by Oats stuffing his face."

Sloan had Mute lead the way and Irvin cover the rear, sticking himself and Derek in the

middle so their full bellies wouldn't be the first thing rounding every corner. Keeping a brisk pace with a horse hanging from his waist was a pain, and Sloan almost regretted indulging. The meal was turning into a hassle rather than a treat. Of course any time he glanced behind him he saw Derek groping his middle and looking plenty satisfied.

To the relief of the outlaws, Oats hadn't stopped eating. The donkey's gut was massive and round, and from above Sloan couldn't even tell he'd eaten someone. If Stout was still holding out in there, he was buried in food, plain and simple. Bystanders were taking turns prodding the glutton's middle, some eagerly passing fresh plates to Oats whenever he finished one off.

Descending the stairs felt like an eternity for Sloan, waddling down one step at a time, each one creaking beneath his weight. He wasn't a predator on the top of the food chain then, but a stuffed prey with nowhere to run. If anyone in the saloon happened to cast a suspicious glance his way he was screwed. All because he let his temper and hunger get the better of him.

But no one did. Sloan breathed a deep sigh of relief as he reached the bottom, and collected himself. The robbery wasn't over yet.

Sloan tapped Mute on the shoulder and leaned in, his belly bumping up against the elk. "Go blend in with the crowd and find a way to drag Oats out of here. I doubt he's got enough on him to pay for that damn feast he's gobbled up, and there'll be donkey on the menu if the staff find out."

Mute nodded, then made his way over to the crowd. Sloan knew he was smart enough to come up with a plan on the fly, even if it merely involved a fair mix of intimidation or brute force.

Ten feet short of the exit, one of the lawmen turned around. The owl's eyes narrowed at Sloan and Derek, looking between their bellies and the bags they carried. Gears were turning in his head, Sloan could see it. He didn't wait for the owl to go for his gun, charging towards the doors and hoping Derek and Irvin followed.

Small splinters flew out of the wall ahead as a bullet went through it, and Sloan returned fire. He missed, but forced the owl to find cover rather than keep firing. The other two lawmen—a bull and a tabby cat—turned in confusion, going for their guns as they spotted the three outlaws fleeing. The gunfire caused the crowd around the table to panic and disperse in complete chaos, enveloping the lawmen.

"So fucking close!" Sloan howled as he stomped through the exit, his gut swaying heavily and awkwardly. The shots and shouts had echoed outside, and nervous onlookers backed off, no one eager to get caught in the middle of a gunfight. The stagecoach was ready outside, Eli working to calm the horses while Otis readied his rifle towards the saloon. "Once Derek, Irvin, and I are in get going!" Sloan yelled at them.

"What about Oats and the rest?" Otis asked, the hare's gaze shifting between Sloan and the saloon.

"They're fine!" Sloan avoided telling Otis his friend was busy being an immobile distraction. The idiot was too likely to run on in, either to help him or cheer him on. Irvin made it to the stagecoach first, swinging the door open and leaping in. He at least had

the decency to take position at a window to provide cover fire. Sloan's chest was thumping hard as he jogged around the back of the coach. The coach shook and groaned as Derek squeezed in. A few patrons flew out of the saloon and scattered, followed by the lawmen, guns blazing. Shots from Sloan, Irvin, and Otis forced them into cover, but not before the bull was grazed.

Sloan took a few more shots and hurried around the back, grunting as he got onto the stagecoach. It tipped from his weight, and his belly pressed against the sides of the door, requiring him to push himself through. Derek was on his left, the gryphon half-laying across the bench, his wobbling belly spilling into the aisle, firing both revolvers out a window. Sloan lugged himself onto the bench opposite him, clamping his mouth closed with a paw as the movements provoked a belch.

"Go, go, go!" Sloan yelled. He heard the reins snap, and the coach lurched into motion. A bullet came in through one side of the coach and out the other, luckily too high to hit anyone.

"One of 'em's following!" Irvin yelled, leaning half-way out the window and taking a shot. "Fuck that cat's fast!" He slid back in, emptying the casings from his revolver.

Something rocked the stagecoach. An orange-furred paw reached through the window and grabbed a hold of Irvin, pulling him hard. His pistol fell to the floor, and the coyote yelped as he was dragged from his seat, feet kicking, his free paw frantically reaching for something to grip. Sloan barely had time to grab Irvin's pant leg. A hard yank tried to pull Irvin the rest of the way out the window, but the engorged Sloan was a fearsome anchor.

"Fuck fuck fuck!" Irvin screamed, stuck in a tug-of-war between Sloan and the lawman.

Sloan managed to grab onto Irvin with his other paw, while Derek grabbed the coyote's shirt. Together they began to pull Irvin back in. The tabby cat wasn't letting go, though, stubbornly fighting the odds.

A sudden yank at the right moment not only dragged Irvin in completely but also pulled the lawman in partially. As the cat scrambled to regain his footing on the side of the stagecoach, Irvin recovered, twisting back around and grabbing them by the shoulders.

Sloan heard the gulp that muffled the lawman's curse. Irvin worked fast—thankfully—scooting back as he swallowed more and more of his prey. It was a mess of a meal to watch, with Irvin sprawled against the seat and the lawman likely inches away from getting pulled under the wheel of the speeding coach. He fought to the bitter end, even though getting thrown up during the whole ordeal would've been as likely to do him in as getting ate.

Panting and groaning, Irvin rolled over, his gut now bulging as much as everyone else's in the coach. The three outlaws had almost filled it, their bellies pressing against each other, bouncing from the rough road and squirms of prey alike. Shuffling around gave them a bit more room, but it couldn't fix the fact they were trying to cram six into a coach meant for four.

Irvin's face twisted, the coyote's gut shaking violently. He looked about to hurl, both paws covering his mouth, his eyes clenched shut. A few seconds later he slumped back in his seat and let out a small burp. "Ugh, I like it when a meal squirms but this cat's making me nauseous."

"If you can't handle him I'll gladly take him off your waistline." Derek leaned forwards

and poked Irvin's belly with a pistol, making the coyote groan.

"I can handle 'em! He's being a pain, that's all. Heh. Never ate a deputy before." No amount of smirking could hide how exhausted Irvin sounded. He gave his middle a gentle, hesitant pat. "Makes the whole thing worth it."

Sloan scoffed. "Don't forget how close you came to getting snagged. I doubt they'd have even bothered taking you in for questioning; you'd just be cat fat."

"I'm not a damn snack, I'd have gotten away even if he pulled me out!" Irvin insisted.

"Anyone can be a snack if they're stupid," Sloan hissed. "The deputy you're about to digest is proof enough of that." He ignored the annoyed look the coyote gave him. "And this whole fiasco wasn't the least bit worth it. Damn near went south a dozen times over—we got *lucky*. The score's pitiful. Once it's divided up we're bound to make more selling whatever we belch up from our meals!"

"Oh it wasn't—*bworrrp*—that bad," Derek said.

"It sure as Hell wasn't good!" Sloan leaned forwards as best he could, but found himself pushing against Derek's gut. "Ward promised us the biggest payday of our careers—how am I the only one pissed we ended up with pocket change and a few extra pounds?"

Irvin had a burping fit and punched his rowdy middle. "There'll be plenty more heists," the coyote said. Sloan kept expecting him to upchuck the deputy at any moment.

"Not if we all end up as a pile of partially-digested bones in the ground," Sloan said. He'd thought Irvin of all people would agree with him, but getting a meal had won him over. No doubt Derek was happy for the same reason. The others back at the hideout might be less forgiving when they saw how little their cut would be.

There needed to be change. Sloan wasn't going to let himself get done in by Ward's idiocy. He placed a paw on his belly, massaging the lumpy mound. Maybe horse would be on the menu again for him soon.

There was nothing dignified about getting dragged on his ass out of the saloon and into the dirty street, but Oats didn't care. The stuffed donkey was far too busy admiring how huge his belly had become. He'd eaten more than his weight in food, and that wasn't even counting Stout, who was a slight bit chubbier than him. At long last, he knew what it felt like to eat like a king.

"Oats—you're fat," Mute said as he continued pulling the massive donkey along. Once the shooting had started it'd been easy to swoop in and grab him, since no one particularly cared about the glutton anymore.

"Thank you! I'm thinking it might be a fun new look to try out." Oats wasn't quite sure if he was joking or not. Gorging had been wonderful—even if he did feel like he could pass out for a whole week—but it was also guaranteed to be fattening. No amount of exercise could prevent him from ballooning in size if he decided to indulge like that regularly. And maybe he didn't mind getting huge for good? It was a lot for the donkey to think about—or fantasize about.

Mute dragged Oats into the first alley he came across, a wide one with a water trough and a few unused posts for securing horses. He propped Oats against the trough and looked him over. "Is Stout still alive in there? Or is he about to become donkey fat?"

Oats had forgotten about Stout. "I don't know, might be too late for him. Oh well, I'd say he was digested for a good cause." Even more pounds to get him plumping up well.

Suddenly the donkey's belly wobbled, with the faintest bulge appearing at the top. "Let me out, fat ass!" The otter's voice was faint but fierce.

"Guess I can't win them all," Oats said with a shrug. He wasn't even sure if he was joking or not. The desire to get big was hitting him hard.

"You could always ignore him," Mute said. The elk was keeping an eye on the alley entrance. Things hadn't quite calmed down out there, and people were gossiping about the gunfight.

"I mean, *yeah*, but then we'd need to replace him, and Ward might give me an earful about it. Besides, he's one of the few people worse than me at poker." Oats gave his gut a teasing pat and felt it wobble again. "Hey Mute, mind rolling me over? This'll be easier to do on my belly."

The elk nodded and crouched, rolling Oats over with ease. Oats belched as the contents of his stomach shifted, and he worried the act might've buried Stout in food. There were weak thumps against his stomach, which slowly moved upwards to his sphincter.

Oats rested his elbows on the water trough and dry heaved. He felt his stomach clench tight but didn't hurl. The thumps continued. Another dry heave made him cough hard, but nothing came up. He'd never had trouble throwing people up before—not that he did it very often—but he'd also never tried it while stuffed. It was beginning to feel like Stout was doomed to be digested anyway.

Giving up was tempting. He was still idly imagining how much weight he'd gain by actually eating Stout. Nothing was as fattening as a whole person, and Oats remembered how soft the otter had been looking recently. The thumps in his stomach were getting faster, Stout's struggles more frantic. Must've been feeling the first few tingles of digestion. One more try, so he could claim he'd done his best.

The next dry heave wasn't as strong as the first few, but a paw found Oats' sphincter in the process. More heaves followed, a rapid chain that strained his gut and made Oats feel like he was about to burst. His cheeks puffed up, and a pair of twitching paws lurched out of his mouth. With another lurch half of Stout was out, the otter having time for a single gasp of air before being dunked into water. One last heave freed the rest of him and left Oats exhausted and panting.

Stout splashed about in the trough, paws flailing as he attempted to gain a grip on the side of the trough. "Why'd you eat me you ass!"

"Had to keep everyone distracted. It worked." Oats let out a hoarse chuckle. With Stout free, he felt so much...smaller. He found himself missing his rounder belly already.

"It did," Mute said.

"You could've eaten someone in the crowd! Or at least stopped stuffing yourself after! I had to fight to keep my head above that gunk. It was like being in quicksand—or a stew." Stout

shuddered.

“I couldn’t reach anyone else,” Oats insisted. “And I knew no one would try and stop me from eating you. Just be lucky you weren’t plumper.”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean!” Stout demanded. The otter was washing himself off.

“It means you should cut back on the pies,” Mute said. “Now that Oats is mobile enough, let’s get going.”

Oats accepted Mute’s hoof and lugged himself up. His bloated belly jiggled and swayed, and he grinned in euphoria as he felt how heavy it was. He had to cradle the taut dome in his hooves to keep it under control and squeezed it frequently. Still amazing, even without the otter swimming inside.

Stout finished washing away all that he could, before stumbling out of the trough soaking wet. He looked miserable.

Mute and Stout took point, with Oats huffing and puffing as he waddled behind them, struggling to keep up. The journey back to their horses was going to be a tiring one.