

Growing Attention

It was too early in the morning to be dealing with boisterous customers — only a quarter past 11, according to Shin's phone. In other jobs, his slightly-above-average size usually made people think twice before being too mean; but in a gym, the wanna-beefs took it as a challenge in toughness. No amount of politeness and tact would calm down a musclehead offended at the request of putting equipment back on the racks.

At least, the scrawny guy in a white & blue hoodie looked mostly harmless. Shin didn't remember him ever coming in, which made sense given how loosely the fabric hung from his thin frame. The hood obscured almost his entire head, save for a puff of fluffy white hair without which Shin could have believed the figure to be a living pile of discarded clothes.

But not *entirely* harmless. Even though the gym declined all responsibility for injuries that customers got from overexertion, half of Shin's job was to hammer some reason into whatever was left of their brain so that their ride home wouldn't be an ambulance. Regulars quickly learned this, but newcomers needed to be watched attentively. And sure enough, this one was picking up a barbell heavy enough to snap his back like a twig, and he was doing this alone.

Shin crossed the room with quiet intent and appeared beside the bench just as the figure laid on it. He slightly bent over, making sure that his badge — outdated gym logo, handwritten first name, and the words "Your safety is our priority" — was fully visible.

"Excuse me, sir, would you like me to help you find a spotter? It is recommended to work out in pairs if you wish to use th... this much—"

One push upward of the barbell was enough to disturb Rei's hood off his head, revealing his handsome face to his friend. The grin that spread across it meant that Shin had made a grave mistake.

"Aw, big bro, have I been out of your sight so long that you don't recognise me? We ought to spend more time together, then! I'm not sure I need a spotter, but you could be a [spot] on my chest instead~"

The entire gym was silent. All eyes turned to where the gym employee used to be just a moment ago, and, finding nothing, landed on the man who kept pumping iron as though it were helium.

Shin knew better than to protest, as pointing out Rei's trickery never lead to a better outcome: in this world, the gavel of Justice only served to massage Rei's soles; by the time he could have opened his mouth, he was already too small to be heard anyway. All he could do was take in the magnificent view of Rei's bulging pecs towering before him,

actual mountains that reached up to the cotton sky. Each lift of the barbell would make the fabric shift and let some light flood through, revealing how much Rei's body had buffed up in that single movement before plunging into darkness again. It was only through trickery that Rei could have hidden his toned musculature under his hoodie; and with this exposed, the hoodie was strained to its limits, struggling to keep in the reality of Rei's brawn.

Finally, the sky tore apart.

The other gymgoers witnessed buttons dramatically popping from Rei's buttonless hoodie; Shin didn't, blinded by the harsh neon light. It took him a moment to adjust to the (much less interesting) real world, and another moment to realize that Rei had not only been getting buffed, but also bigger: Rei finally allowed the bench to give out with a long, tragic creak, then sat up. The barbell was now a mere dumbbell in his hand, and the ceiling of the gym was a long-gone memory. If Rei's head weren't poking out of the building, he would have seen on the TV screen mounted on the other wall that the commotion he had created was already getting him a *lot* of attention. And more attention meant more...

He held that thought for a second. Before growing into the next scene, he just needed to give his good friend Shin some reassurance.

"Don't worry, big bro, I promise I'll put it back on the racks~"

Rei peeked his head above the buildings and looked around.

The rat-sized people in the maze-like streets had stopped scurrying around, and those in their cages stood at the windows and balconies despite the biting cold of mid-February. The city was silent with complete awe, only disturbed by the crunch and crash of houses overstressed by Rei's still-growing body.

All eyes were on him.

Good.

...

Not enough.

It was his birthday, the most special day of the year for the entirety of reality. He wanted *more*. He *deserved* more. "Everything and beyond" was merely an amuse-bouche.

That thought made him hungry, so hungry that no words were needed: the rumble of his empty stomach was enough to rewrite the flow of reality.

A swarm of helicopters carefully lowered the building-sized multi-tiered birthday cake on top of the town hall. With a dramatic lick of his lips, Rei held his shiny cutlery in each hand, one mountain of sweetness ready to devour another.

Which meant both his hands were full.

Which meant he couldn't hold his phone to stream himself to the entire world.

Which bothered him.

In this situation, any normal person with god-like powers would use the reasonable option of making their phone levitate, or bending the rules of reality so that such a contradiction wasn't a contradiction.

Rei didn't have god-like powers. He had god-*crushing* powers. And also friends whose buttons he loved to push.

Jake had guessed that the hand was coming for him, yet he was startled by the deafening sound of the rooftop being ripped off and thrown away like a candy wrapper. He was perfectly ready and happy to climb aboard by himself, but Rei took charge and softly pinched him between two fingers.

Jake knew to hold his breath and close his eyes while his gigantic friend moved him a street-length in a moment to bring him close to his face.

"Good boi Jake! Would you do me a favour, pretty please?~"

Jake blushed characteristically. "Y—"

"Great! You have your phone on you, right?"

Jake blushed harder. "N—"

"I said, {you have your phone on you}, right?"

Jake could feel his phone in his pocket, and was absolutely certain that it had always been there. He took it out without a word and showed it to Rei.

"Good boi~ Start streaming, then, and make sure my pretty face is always in the frame!"

Jake's body hit the frosting and instinctively got back on his feet before he could process Rei's order. He was not worried about dropping his phone: if Rei wanted him to hold it, there was no force in the universe that could make it leave his hand.

"Hey everybody! You know what day it is today, right? Of course you do. It's my birthday! And birthdays are for sharing, so I'm sharing this wonderful birthday cake with you, by which I mean I'm eating it and you're watching me eat it. Aaaaaaaaand... I've got a special guest! Someone close to my heart, both in emotion and in digestion: you've heard of Elf on the Shelf, get ready for..."

"Jake on the Cake!"

Jake turned the phone so that Rei and he were both in frame. Even though the giant's head was far off in the distance, it kept dwarfing his figure no matter the perspective.

“Now, I know I'm all the entertainment you need, and I'm very happy to grace you with my perfect presence~ but we can raise the stakes.” Rei held his fork up in the air. “Jakey boy, I've got a challenge for you: make that views counter go as high up as you can before I getcha... It's a race against the fork!”

Rei plunged his golden fork into the cake and took out a greedily-sized chunk, which instantly disappeared in his mouth. “hree, 'wo, one...” The fork was already tearing off another unreasonable chunk of cake. “Run!”

Even though Rei didn't toy long with Jake, the chase felt endless to the tiny man. The frosting was too slick for him to keep a sure footing, and the sticky layers of cake prevented him from running. He was putting all his energy into narrowly dodging the fork and faceplanting in the cake: he knew he wouldn't be able to escape forever — and, obviously, deep down, he was waiting to lose — but the added drama helped rake in the views, and that was all that mattered. More eyes on Rei. So many eyes on Rei. The chat was scrolling at lightspeed with comments from infatuated followers, some bragging how they would fare so much better than Jake, others being more upfront about their yearning to be on the cake.

But in this moment, Jake was the lucky one. He was lucky to find himself scooped up in a bite of cake the size of a house. He was lucky to find himself right in front of Rei's handsome face, the sky-blue eye staring at him with glee. He was lucky to have the *real* view of the perfect maw opening to welcome him in, the depths of which no screen could convey. He was lucky to get welcomed by the love-hungry tongue, lucky to get held in its embrace then released down into the eager throat, lucky to find a warm home at the end of his trip.

Rei finished the last bite of his birthday cake, thumped his chest and sighed with pleasure.

“Damn, that was a good one... I ought to play this game more often with Jake, see if he can set a new personal best~”

After such a hearty meal, Rei just wanted to lie down and doze off for a bit. The park uptown sounded like a nice place to have a rest... and it was just big enough to accommodate his current size. He reached it in a couple of district-shattering steps, bent down and blew away the minuscule structures. He toed off his shoes and his socks, and lay down on the soft, welcoming grass.

His feet towered high above the buildings, his soft, perfect soles on display for the entire city like a giant billboard. With all eyes turned on them, an idea formed in his mind... Should he get someone to write a message on them? And if so, what exactly?

He remembered that he had a bone to pick with somedirt.

Kwa was running as fast as he could, shoving away anyone who was in his path. Fortunately for him, all traffic had stopped, although he did have to jump over a few cars in order not to lose some precious seconds.

The beacon had been lit, and he had to answer the call. (The beacon is his penis.)

After an excruciating few minutes, he finally reached Rei's heel. And just as he was about to touch it...

"It looks like somedirt wants a taste of heaven. Do you think you deserve that, bug boy?"

Kwa was frozen into place. "—S—Sir—"

"After what happened the other day, do you think you have the right to lick my feet? To address me? To even live? Do you think you deserve **special treatment**?"

Kwa was livid. "—S—Sir—"

"You have a pretty big wrong to right. Do you think you can make up for it?"

Kwa was on the verge of tears. "—S—Sir—"

The order boomed over the city. "Get to work."

Kwa wasted no time and climbed Rei's right sole until he reached the ball of the foot. His weak hands struggled to find a grip in the doughy skin, his noodle arms could barely hoist his body one millimetre at a time; but through stubbornness, his frailties did not matter, a *gaule* had made him stronger today.

He started licking. He crawled along, with no idea where his body was taking him, his mind entirely focused on pleasure. It *did* taste of heaven, and he couldn't get enough of it. Soon, he was completely lost, in body and mind...

Rei savoured every drop of humiliation that Kwa was bringing on himself. The speck of dirt didn't know — although, that was entirely his fault for being in such mindless admiration instead of trying to perceive the thoughts running in his brain — that his path was not erratic. The trail of saliva that he left behind glistened in the sunlight, reading:

*"Special treatment because baby gotta go squish soon <3
baby got an early eternal sleep, oh yis, oh yis baby"*

Nothing was significant enough to make a sound or leave a stain when Rei woke up and rose back on his feet. He stretched and yawned, wiggled his toes, and finally noticed that there was no more city. All gone under a single step. Well, that wasn't his fault; the only reason he had grown to such heights was because people kept staring at him and being obsessed with him. They should have just looked away if they didn't want this to happen; there was nothing that prevented them from doing so, except maybe the fundamental rules of the Rei-centric universe but one of them was "Rei is not responsible for anything" so he was absolutely blameless.

Anyway, he had other things to do. He was feeling [fashionable], and once the aura of magic had done its work and left his body, he was sporting shiny dress shoes, tailored trousers, and a white waiscoat over a azure silk shirt. He was only missing one thing before he could start his fashion parade: a couple Alexories.

Alex was feeling... odd. He could feel his head... heads? spinning, but not... in the usual direction? And this headache... *headsache*... like his brain — brains? no, still the one — was being flossed.

He didn't groan in pain.

...He tried again.

He still didn't groan in pain. No air.

He didn't reach for his throat.

...*No. No, no, no.*

He *did* panic.

Who was it this time? The usual suspects were few, but any clue, any piece of information might help him get somewhat out of trouble. ...Who was he kidding, he was no match against his godly friends, and any inching towards freedom would be met with harder consequences. If he were smart and level-headed, he would learn to just go with the flow.

But another fundamental rule of the universe was that the weaklings had to put up a fight.

It didn't take Alex much longer to understand what was happening. From their fixed points around the string, his heads compiled an extensive field of view — except for the ones that had turned upside-down and had their face pressed into Rei's ankle. He could see miles and miles away, cities spotted around like stains on a carpet — sometimes, in their place, a slight shoeprint crater; the clouds were hanging barely over his level until Rei's legs cut through them and whooshed them away to reveal his stratospheric grandeur.

Rei stopped on a tall plateau that barely elevated him a relative inch.

“Good afternoon, everyone! Welcome to **Rei’s Fashion Walk**, where I’ll show off the latest godly *bijouterie* for your eyes only — that’s right, those are unique pieces that you could never afford, or even wear at your puny size, so thank me for being so generous as to grace your eyes with them~”

He raised his left heel, putting more pressure on the front of his foot, and slowly twirled his ankle.

“First, we have this ankle bracelet. You might think it’s only a few head-shaped gold beads on a string, but as with all godly jewellery, the real value is what’s trapped inside. This right here is none other than the god of stories. How did I catch him? Easy: he’s not gonna be able to do much if he’s not able to write or to speak.”

Alex had a realization.

He was in a story.

Which meant...

He focused as hard as he could, despite the dizziness from being swirled around. If he could tap into the flow of the story and try to rewrite it, even just one word...

But Alex couldn’t speak.

But Alex could...n’t speak.

But Alex could.....n’t speak.

But Alex could.....n’t speak.

Almost there.

But Alex could squeak.

...This would have to do.

“R-Rei, what are you doing? I-I’m not some jewel for you to wear! F-Free me right now!”

Rei sneered down at the insubordinate trinket. “Hm. You are right.”

Alex sighed with relief. “Th-Thank—”

“You’re just a gold bead, not a jewel.”

Alex paled.

“Yet.”

Alex despaired.

“I will say, I am disappointed that you would blow your one chance with such a silly mistake. But I guess that’s why I am the God of Words, and you’re just the guide of the library. Now, tell me, bookworm, what’s the Dewey code for toerings? I do wanna see what you look like as a [jewel].”

At least now the darkness helped with his headache. No — *headache*. Alex felt odd at this sudden change.

He didn’t groan in pain.

Rei bent down, undid his shoelaces, and toed off his shoe, which he lightly kicked into a nearby mountain. On his middle toe, an ornate silver ring was adorned by a light citrine with blue sparkles.

The fashion show was over, now that the tongue-bound Earth was plunged in the darkness of Rei’s mouth. Earthlings would just have to hope that the piercing would hold together.

Rei made sure that Lartse got a good view of it when he was talking.

“But if you’re... *we’re* here...” — Lartse gestured around at the restaurant — “how am I... here?” — ze pointed at Rei’s tongue piercing.

Rei reached over the table and ruffled his friend’s hair. “Aww, aren’t you so cute when my powers confuse you! I’m afraid I can’t tell you, the raw knowledge itself would be too much for your microbic brain, and it’s not time *yet* to break it~”

A waiter approached their table. Clones, that was easy enough for Lartse’s brain, but ze still couldn’t shake off that slight odd feeling. Ze hoped that the Reis wouldn’t team up...

“Nah, don’t worry, not this time. I want you all to **myself**.”

Lartse was taken aback. “How... Did you—”

“You’re an open book,” both Reis unisonned. “There’s no need to read your mind when you’re writing it out loud~”

That made sense. But Lartse was still confused about Rei saying “myself”. Weren’t all clones... himself?

“Microbic brain. You wouldn’t be able to even articulate it yourself.” “Now, what would you like to order as a starter?” “Oh, easy. Eel sushi.” “What about you, Lartse?”

“Uhhh... I guess like y— like Rei, eel sushi?”

“Very well, then. I shan’t keep you waiting.” Waiter-Rei produced two plates and set them before each diner.

Rei blew a kiss to his friend Eel, picked up the sushi, and sent him straight down the gullet.

Lartse picked up zis regular eel sushi and savoured it in a normal manner. “I should have seen that one coming. Although, didn’t I say I was ordering like you? Not that I wanna eat Eel, I’m just getting confused about what’s happening.”

Rei sighed. “I ordered Eel sushi. You ordered eel sushi.”

“Those sound the same.”

“But they don’t *read* the same. You know that. You **wrote** that. Stop playing dumb.”

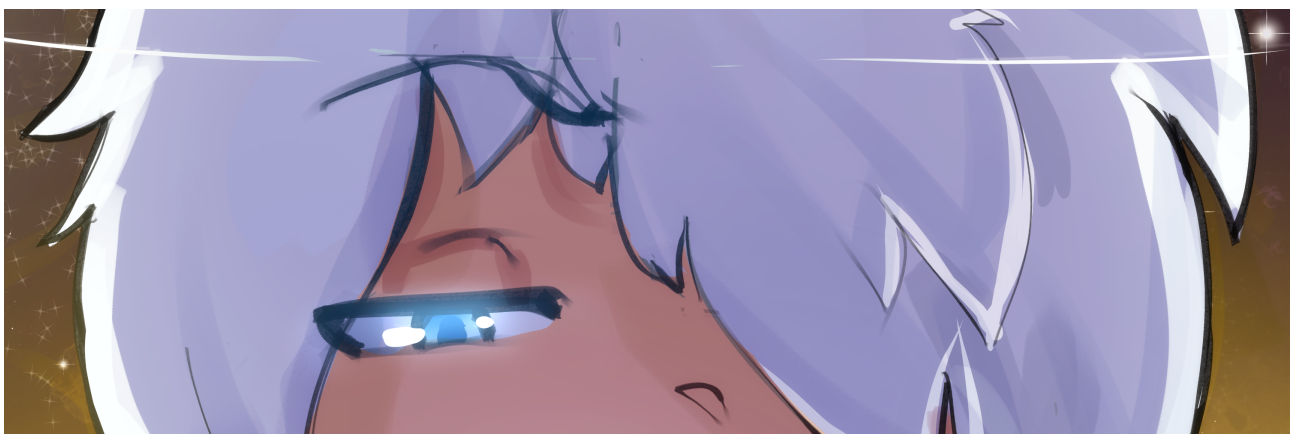
What do you mean? ...Hey, where are the—

“I’m not talking to you, Lartse. I’m talking to **you, Lartse**. Sure, it’s fun to get everyone’s attention in a story, but what about the real deal? What about the attention you’ve been giving me by writing all these words? I want that. I want more of that.”

I blush and shrink in my chair. No, not that kind of shrinking, I should choose another word or he’s gonna—

“Lartse. Look me in the eye.”

There’s only words to look at.



“Look me in the eye.”

There’s nowhere else to look at. There’s... only you... only you. If I close my word processor, your pretty face is still there as my desktop wallpaper. Two entire screens of Rei grinning, arms crossed, towering over a puny planet.

“Good. I like to hear that~”

I don’t feel a presence behind me.

I still won’t turn, just in case. That’s how it’s got to end, right? You’ll want to reach beyond the screen and snatch *me*. Now that I’ve written this far, now that I’ve suggested it, I can’t go back on my words. I’ve written myself into a corner.

“Come on. Just turn your head and see for yourself. Don’t you want to hear my deep voice? Don’t you want to hear me say **what a good little boi you are~**?”

I inventory my messy desk. Some paperwork that still needs done. Half a bottle of water and no snacks. And I’m already hungry.

But... if he just wanted to snatch me, wouldn’t he have torn the roof off and picked me up himself?

“I want you to give yourself to me. I don’t need powers for that. I don’t need to make myself [irresistible], because I already am. It’s cute when you resist... it makes my heart flutter with anticipation for the inevitable moment you’ll break~”

I can hear your grin.

“Do you want to see it?”



That’s unfair. Kwa draws *excellent* grins.

“And now that you’ve written him dead at my feet, you can’t even scurry back to him for protection.”

...And I know my Master would throw me under the bus without you even needing to ask.

Should I drag this out, or should I give up?

“Just think of how much fun I’m gonna have with you...”

I need to focus... I’m almost there... Just one more line to scroll...

“...What do you mean, one more line?”

“My baby
boy is
craving
attention?
Oh, I’ll
give you
so, *so*
much~”

The voice boomed across the universe, instantly growing Rei to indescribable heights from the interest that it carried, and shattering the end of the story.