

Darius shielded his eyes, squinting against the oppressive whitespace that seemed to stretch forever. With ethereal fog obscuring infinity, the average-looking wolf had to wonder if he died and was stuck in limbo.

What was worse was that he was missing his clothes.

And just in time for a visitor as well. In the fog was a herculean figure. What looked like a wolf with obscene muscle stood in the swirling haze. He had tan fur and a thick golden beard with equally lush locks. The lupine stood nearly as tall as he was wide, a single toga looped over his chest to provide modesty below.

Radiance seeped from the figure, giving him an otherworldly look as he stepped forward. Outstretched in a meaty hand was a necklace. The length of it looped over dense digits, the amber-hued amulet swaying subtly as he seemed to offer it forward.

Take it.

Darius startled at the sheer depth of the voice, even more with the fact that it rattled the inside of his mind instead of the world around him.

Embrace who you are.

The diminutive wolf stared at his mammoth counterpart, noting that he was nearly twice as tall. He crept forward, scrutinizingly staring at the fog-obscured figure.

This man was everything Darius had admired—and more. He often watched bodybuilding channels when he was young, envying and even lusting after the walls of rippling muscle on the screen. He coveted the size yet lamented that the gym never yielded those results for him—no matter how hard he tried.

And now, this... This muscle *god* was standing before him, a radiant halo lazily rotating behind him and everything, the edges peeking past his mountainous traps and wing-like lats. It might have seemed cliché to Darius if he wasn't awed by the sheer heft of rippling muscle filling the divine being's body.

He stared at Darius impassively, watching with pupilless eyes. They seemed like fonts of raw power, twin glowing orbs sitting below a masculine shelf of golden brows. His indiscernible gaze seemed to gesture to the offered amulet, meaty arm extending further, bringing it only a few feet from the other wolf's muzzle.

Tentatively, Darius reached out. Fingertips brushed the edge of the gold setting. It was engraved, images of men transforming into hulking wolves expertly carved into the polished-smooth surface. In the middle of it all was a god-like lupine, the image buried deep in the amber-colored gemstone.

A central figure.

No. *The* central figure. The nexus of it all...

Darius tried to piece together why it seemed so familiar. It was like a word on the tip of his tongue, a thought stuck in the back of his mind.

The amulet lifted, the cord sliding from the god-like being's thick fingers. Darius stared into the gemstone, trying to find a spark of familiarity—anything to abate the itch in his brain.

I'll see you soon.

Darius looked up, opening his mouth to question his gift.

But the figure was gone.

Darius groaned as he blinked, cracking his eyes open. As the world slowly came into focus, so did the realization that he had fallen asleep. The memories of his little dream were already fast-fading, the wolf struggling to hold onto the details.

A big bronzed god? An amulet? Something about embracing his identity?

He sighed, details slipping from his fingers.

The incessant march of clattering keys asserted itself, pulling Darius back into his daily life. He squinted as he leaned back in his chair, the buzzing fluorescent lights threatening to blind him. The wolf keenly felt the weight of his headset around his right pointed ear. It felt heavy, far more than it should have—like a shackle.

The symbolism was on point. Muted conversations rolled and rumbled, several same-faced employees filling a myriad maze of cubicles. Everything seemed washed out, colors diminished by the harsh blue-white glare from above.

Every day was the same, bleeding together in a formless mass that stretched months—even years for Darius, much to his chagrin. The only reason he stayed was for the semi-decent pay. Unlike other call centers, this one actually provided a livable wage. It seemed one simple trick was enough to keep cubicles full. Amazing that other employers couldn't figure that out.

Still, it didn't stop it from being a soulless monotony. Between checking remote servers to see if they were collecting valuable data, to calling those locations to see if the private employees were *actually* keeping the damn things running, it was a tedious job.

His pointed ear perked, picking up on the halting cadence of an escalating call. A red squirrel's bushy tail twitched and lashed in the cubicle across from him, the puffy appendage nearly as large as its owner.

Donnell, or Donnelly, as he preferred to be called by his friends, wore a consternated expression. The squirrel tilted back in his chair, scratching uncomfortably at the front of his pink button-up shirt.

“No, sir—” his usually pleasant tenor sighed. “If you would just—*No*, I’m simply asking you to restart the machine.” He rocked back in his chair, front wheels lifting subtly. “Yes, I *know* you’ll lose progress on your game of solitaire, and I’m very sorry,” the squirrel with slicked-back hair said, his sky-blue eyes nearly crossed. “But you need to restart the machine so it can reconnect to the network.”

Darius tried to suppress a little smirk, both ears angled into the budding squabble. Everyone on this floor had gone through this familiar song and dance. At least the new guy was handling it well.

“Yes—*no*—our conversation is on your *phone* line. It doesn’t use your data connection or the PC, so that’s how I’m able to talk—” He abruptly cut himself off, expression screwing up, buck front teeth showing.

“There’s no need to be rude, Sir,” he said in exasperation, the stress on the formal title nearly coming out as a hiss. He opened his mouth to continue, but his eyes flew open wide.

“He hung up on me!” Donnelly shook his head, pinching the fur between his brows. He peeked open an eye, swiveling it in the direction of the intently staring Darius.

“You handled that well,” the gray wolf offered, flashing the newbie a friendly smile.

“I haven’t heard language that colorful since my grandpa was alive,” he muttered, lacing fingers over his stomach, thumbs twirling. Donnelly seemed visibly deflated by the encounter, his tall ears drooping.

Darius felt a pang of sympathy for the young squirrel. He remembered what it was like, the stress before it bled into bland tedium. “You want to go out for a drink later?” the wolf found himself asking. A surprising thing, considering his extended dry streak.

Donnelly blinked in surprise, those ears lifting. “Really?” he asked, genuinely surprised, head tilting. “I mean...” He scratched his cheek bashfully. “I guess I’m not really doing anything? A few guys wanted to do some extreme trials, but...”

“Final Fantasy?” Darius asked with a low chuckle. That drew out a look of surprise from Donnelly, the squirrel perking up as he turned to face the wolf.

“Oh? You play?” he asked, eyes adorably lighting up.

Darius shook his head as he did the same, spinning around in his chair. “Nah, I’m on hiatus at the moment.” The wolf tilted his head slightly, flashing a reassuring look at the squirrel. “You don’t have to go, you know? Not like I’m gonna drag you away from your friends.”

Donnelly snorted sharply, arms crossing over his pink button-up defensively. Darius couldn’t help but note the wiry muscle flexing, taut and trained as it stood over the squirrel’s forearms. “I wouldn’t call them that. Just some FC members...” There was a hesitation in his voice that made Darius’ brow lift.

"Not having fun with them?"

"Eh, I usually heal for them. They're not...great? They tend to blame me when they bite it," he said, chair squeaking as he subtly rocked in it. True to his species, there was a small amount of unrestrained energy in Donnelly, subtly surfacing as a tapping foot or a pen twiddling between fingers.

With a charitable chuckle, Darius said, "Sounds like you need a new group."

"Woof, you ladies did flirtin' yet?" rumbled a bassy voice from a cubical away. Around the corner, a kodiak bear craned his neck, regarding the pair with a toothy, teasing smirk.

The ursine knew that Donnelly was gay, leveling a grunted gaze with him. The squirrel never made any attempt to hide the fact. If anything, between his pink shirts and rainbow bracelets, it was painfully evident.

"This doesn't concern you, Bently," Darius responded flippantly, rolling his eyes. A phrase that often followed the bear was "get *bently*," on account of the ursine poking his big, padded nose into business it didn't belong. He was something of a busybody. A *big* busybody. He took up most of the space in his cubicle, broad shoulders, and rounded, solid gut perched partly over his desk.

"It does when you're talkin' loud enough for half the floor to hear," The bulky bear snickered. "But what was that I heard about goin' out?"

"You weren't invited," Darius quickly clarified, leaning to catch the brown bear's honey-colored gaze.

"Aw, squirrels only? I see how it is," the bear said, feigning hurt, even though he couldn't keep the smirk from the corners of his blocky muzzle. "I guess you got a type, huh? Ignorin' me for years, and then this pretty thing comes swingin' by, and suddenly, you wanna buy 'em a drink."

Donnelly's face instantly lit up, the shade of pink working its way into the insides of his ears.

"Aw, look," Bently continued, waving a massive paw the squirrel's way. "You're embarrassin' him!"

"Got any good movies showing?" Darius asked, a leveled brow lifting.

Bently cocked his head, blinking several times. "Eh?"

"Because you're projecting pretty hard there."

The bear's nonplussed expression quickly melted, the bear letting out a booming one-note laugh. "**Hahah!** That's a good one, Dari!"

The wolf's ears fell back, a brief tick of annoyance passing through him. He hated that nickname, but suffering the riposte was worth it.

“For what it’s worth,” Donnelly chimed in, pushing past the embarrassment as he brushed his headfur back. “I’d like that. It’s been a while since I’ve gone out.” The smile he wore was cute, and Darius found himself mirroring it.

Bently exhaled dismissively, floppy lower lip fluttering as he spun back into his cubicle. “Well, guess I’ll meet you guys after work then.”

“Not invited,” Darius reiterated, rolling his eyes as he returned to his work.

“Who said anything about being invited? Might just be a coincidence we end up at the same place,” the ursine said with a rumbling snicker, his fat fingers clattering heavily on his keyboard.

Donnelly gave him a helpless shrug as Darius massaged at a dull aching temple. Looks like he had no choice in the matter. This third wheel was coming along whether he liked it or not.

He just prayed that it wouldn’t make his headache any worse.

Booming laughter echoed through the busy bar. Pulsating beams of light pierced the nightclub’s dark, the din only interrupted by the thrum of EDM.

To Darius’ right was Donnelly; the squirrel was still wearing his pink button-up, albeit with a few of those buttons undone. His creamy white chest fur spilled out of the opening, revealing the curvature of taut pecs. The squirrel’s cheeks were warm, a light shade of pink from the alcohol swirling through his system.

Behind him was Bently, the bear having lived up to his promise. The ursine’s sizable girth found his ass spilling over the edges of the seat. He was the kind of guy who wasn’t exactly portly, but he wasn’t a professional bodybuilder either. Off-season, one might call it; fat-wrapped muscle filling out his clothes to the brim and making him unmistakable in a crowd.

He was on his third beer, the foam sloshing over the edge of the dark amber liquid that refracted the pulsing, varicolored lights shining through the glass mug. “Y’know,” he started unsteadily, laughing, one guy tucked up under his free arm, “This kinda place ain’t so bad!”

The hyena the bear was paired with giggled, clad in black with a cut-off shirt showing off his taut, spotted stomach. He seemed preoccupied with the bicep that swelled with a curled arm, nosing before giving it a shameless little lick. His right ear had seven loops, all color-coordinated for a rainbow. The same could be said about his multitude of armbands that hung loosely around his forearms as well.

“I thought you said you were straight,” Darius said, his deadpan unfortunately stolen by the teeth-rattling thrum of the bassline.

The bear guffawed, spilling just a tad of his foam over his chest. The spatter seeped into the white fabric, staining it as it spread over a cresting pectoral mound. “Yeah, well... That was until I got a few beers in me. Besides!” He gestured to his companion, shaking the diminutive—in

comparison—hyena in his grip. “This guy knows how to treat someone good! Ain’t many girls who appreciate my kinda gains.”

“You mean besides the ones from Five Bears and Fries?” Donnelly surprisingly sassed before taking a slow, appreciative sip of his fruity cocktail. Crystalized sugar lined the rim, watermelon, or the squirrel had asserted.

“Hey.” Bently pointed a thick finger in the squirrel’s direction. “I need my carbs, alright? Ain’t easy keepin’ this bod tanked up!” He followed the statement with a slap at his stomach, thickly padded palm cracking over it like flesh-wrapped stone.

“Uh-huh, sure,” Bently said dismissively, voice barely heard above the musical din even with Darius’ superior hearing. The wolf could tell not all of that was entirely angled at the ursine. Whatever energy they had going was slowly starting to fizzle out.

Darius wasn’t sure what he was doing wrong. The squirrel kept making subtle side glances as if expecting someone else to show up. As for who, Darius couldn’t begin to imagine.

While this wasn’t supposed to be a date, Darius hoped the lively atmosphere would have kept things running with a positive spin. Maybe he was still thinking about his game? After all, Darius knew that feeling—the awkward tug of conscience when skipping out of your gamer group.

“Hey,” Darius said as he stood from the bar stool. “I’m going to run to the bathroom.”

Donnelly seemed to snap out of his stupor. “Oh, I’m... I’m sorry,” he stammered, fidgeting in his seat, bushy tail curling around his legs.

“For what?” Darius asked with a bemused chuckle. “I just need to go.”

“Oh.” The squirrel’s ears folded back as he scratched bashfully at his cheek, flashing a buck-toothed smile. “I thought I was boring you. I haven’t...*mm*...” His hand dipped to his neck, awkwardly rubbing around it. “I haven’t been myself lately. Just feeling...distracted, I guess.”

Darius exhaled before offering him an empathetic smile. “It’s fine. I was hoping some time out might distract you from work.”

The squirrel sipped his colorful drink, tipping it back a little before licking his lips. “I really appreciate it.” He smiled gently, twirling the paper parasol around the glass’ edge. “You were among the few to reach out when I first started.”

Warmth bloomed in Darius’ chest as he smiled a little wider. “We all start somewhere. Glad I managed to give you the leg up I didn’t have.”

“Have a good bathroom!” Donnelly’s smile faltered after a half-second, realizing what he said. His big ears fell back, turning pink as he coughed in his throat. “I mean... Uh... H-Hurry back?”

“*Ppfff*, what are you, *boyfriends*? All this talk about sneakin’ off to the bathroom,” the burly bear in the next seat said with a snicker.

Like a flick of a switch, the embarrassment vanished from Donnelly's face as he wheeled to face the oversized ursine. "*Excuse me?* Who has a guy parked in his lap and stroking his biceps?"

Darius snickered quietly as he stepped away from the brewing argument, content with letting the two of them squabble. The crowd was thick, the wolf pulling his jacket over his shoulders as he avoided accidentally brushing elbows. Unfortunately for him, the bathrooms were tucked away in the back, far from the bar and closer to the dance floor.

He noted more than a few guys being intimate, hips straddling over plush sofas as lips met. The heat rose in his collar, averting his gaze just as the two exchanged tongues, shuffling quickly from the surrounding sofa-filled gutters of the dance floor. The bathroom entrance was in sight, a dark-bricked entryway with a single bright light above, practically beckoning him.

And then he collided with someone else.

The air nearly knocked out of him from the force of the impact, getting t-boned as he crossed through the intersection. He stumbled, a strong hand grabbing at his side, stopping him from crashing over seatbacks and onto the laps of distracted lovers.

"Sorry about that."

Darius' eyes widened as he glanced at the man who crashed into him. He smiled apologetically, the sandy-furred wolf with golden hair and beard adjusting his dark glasses before blending back into the crowd.

It took a moment for Darius' brain to reboot from the shock. That was the man from his dreams! Or, at least, he looked *just* like him, albeit mortal. But, that was impossible, right?

"H-Hey, wait!" Darius called out, pushing through writhing shoulders to chase after him. He felt pulled by invisible strings, unfamiliar anxiety welling in his chest as he caught desperate glimpses of the man heading to the exit.

The cold night air washed out of him as he banged through the back door to the place. He stumbled up stone steps, looking desperately around to track the mystery man.

But he was gone. Vanished.

Darius stood there, leaning against a paint-chipped railing as he caught his breath. His ears swiveled like radar dishes as chill wind flitted through his fur, but he couldn't pick up on any sounds. No signs that anyone had traveled down the sidewalks or out-of-sight alleys.

He suddenly felt very foolish, ears falling back as their insides burned. So much for chasing his dreams. Turns out his quarry was just as imaginary.

Disgruntled, Darius went back to the bar with a crestfallen sigh.

The door to Darius' apartment clapped shut as the lock clicked. Mildly inebriated, his night hadn't gotten much better. A rain cloud seemed to dim the optimistic Donnelly, and Bently was far too distracted with his latest "not-gay" fling.

The wolf kicked off his shoes as he wandered past his living room and into the bedroom. His apartment was small, just a downtown one-bedroom suite. The furniture was just about as non-descript as he was, a modern black and white the prevailing theme.

With a muted thud, Darius threw his jacket onto the bed. He stripped the rest of his clothes off, tossing them into the nearby hamper before groaning. It was tempting to just fall straight into bed after the night he had. It was late, and he was still a little tipsy. The wolf paused, a glint catching his eye.

"What the..." He turned, moving to the edge of the bed. Sticking out of his jacket pocket was a golden chain, the jostle from being thrown dislodging enough of it to finally be noticed. Curiously, Darius looped a finger around it, reeling the chain out from its confines. Out popped a pendant, or, rather, an *amulet*. It swung from side to side, twirling to give him a brief view of the embedded gemstone.

It was just like the one he had been offered his recurring dreams. His fingers brushed burnished gold, tracing the intricately carved outlines of hulking lycans.

But how did it get in his pocket?

It didn't take long for Darius to drift back to the stranger who had crashed into him. It was the only link that made sense.

Darius' ears swiveled, a sense of satisfaction at being absolved of madness. It turned out that his instinct was correct after all.

Everything about the amulet was as his hazy recollection remembered it, albeit...smaller. More *Darius-sized* than he recalled. What also struck him was the fact that the amulet was warm. It held heat, as if freshly handled, even though it had been packed away in the chill of his jacket pocket until now.

What would it do to him if he put it on? He thought about the unadulterated size of the wolf in his dream, all of those rippling muscles that would have seemed morbidly unnecessary to anyone else. The picture held in his mind's eye, a sense of validation flowing through him—almost as if the gripped amulet was hinting as much.

"Could that be me?" he asked himself as much as the inanimate object, his gaze drifting from his prize to a nearby corner mirror. It showed his reflection—and he didn't like it.

It was a boring wolf. Average in looks and average in body weight. There was nothing that stuck out to him in the slightest.

That angered and insulted him on a deep, subconscious level—one that he had never felt before. It was like it was connected to...something else. *Someone* else. Some deep reservoir of dominant personality that seeped into his subconscious.

Was it the amulet?

Darius scoffed, breaking his gaze from his reflection to regard the trinket in his grip. He had seen plenty of scenarios like this in stories. You find the shiny McGuffin, and you grow, right? Maybe the object is cursed, and you have to fight darker influences.

Yet, for all the stories and fanfics he'd read on the internet, there was a sense of surreality at experiencing it firsthand. A rational part of his brain wanted to scream, to throw the amulet away—or contact some government agency.

Or, hell, try to find the original owner. This was probably just some prop or a weird heirloom. It had to be.

...Right?

He squeezed it as if trying to demand an answer out of it.

The only response he got was a sudden, almost violent bulge in his forearm.

Darius' eyes widened as power trickled from the amulet, a golden glow traveling up his fingers and enveloping growing muscles. He gasped and panted, fingers practically fused to the object as his left limb trembled.

"A-Ah...!" He gasped as he gripped his wrist, propping up a rapidly swelling forearm. Veins surfaced, coaxed by engorging sinew. Even his fur was changing color. Dull gray yielded to vivid sky blue. A white undercoat spiraled from his hands, unfurling and patterning like flames over his thickening lower limb.

The amulet flashed in the light as his arm lifted. Just in time, too. His bicep expanded, ballooning as twin heads bloomed to life. Twin marbles quickly expanded into battling baseballs. Fur changed color as veins branched up his arm, pulsing in time with his hammering heartbeat.

Horror, fascination, and more than a little carnal gratification flooded through him. Darius watched the growing transformation, eyes wide. A small, fearful part of him yelled to throw away the amulet, but it was quickly being submerged by that new voice—a louder, *powerful* one that resonated through his mind like the rumble of thunder.

More.

He breathed heavily as he watched the color bleed into his chest. It ballooned in kind, every intake of air causing it to inflate, sinew feathering and expanding. Assaulted physically and mentally, Dairus reeled. He dropped to a knee even as muscle pushed around his neck, thickening traps and engorging his neck, his voice lowering to match the increased mass.

Like fire, the changes spread over him, rapidly consuming his old body, subsuming it, and transforming a blank canvas into something new. Something *better*. He gasped and moaned as the changes crawled up his neck and into his face. His jawline popped as it subtly thickened. A once-thin chin filled out into a proper block, the ghostly outline of a dimple sinking in.

“*Hhughh... Nnghff...*” Darius twitched, his fingers subtly thickening, growing broader as their grip engulfed the amulet tighter to a dense, meaty palm. He was forced to kick his legs out as they enlarged, taking on the fiery pattern of his forearms and his calves engorged.

Quads thickened, feathering as sinew stood on end. Abs popped into existence, taut, trimmed things that were flanked by subtly carved obliques. Even his back wasn’t spared, muscle rippling across a once flat surface, giving it definition and purpose.

The amulet finally popped from his grip, steam rising as it tumbled from his fingers. It hit the floorboards with a heavy thump, rolling several times past the foot of his bed before falling onto its side.

Darius heaved, panting heavily, pecs bobbing up and down, spread eagle over his back. The room around him spun, his heart hammered in his ears as the last changes finally settled in, musculature still twitching and squirming under his colorshifted pelt.

When his ears finally stopped ringing, he slowly sat up. Nausea abated, leaving Darius feeling...

Good? Great, even.

He felt energized, awake—*aware*. More than he’s felt in the last decade.

Darius got to his feet but nearly stumbled back onto his ass. Everything was a few inches lower. His equilibrium was thrown off-balance in what should have been familiar surroundings. He took a few steps towards his mirror, looking down into it.

The wolf didn’t recognize his reflection as brilliant aquamarine eyes stared back at him. The rest of him was just as eye-catching. He was junior bodybuilder-sized, with years of heavy weight training and diet manifested in only a minute of writhing pleasure. Experimentally, he touched his chest, feeling over the curves of heavy pectorals as thumbs brushed dark, quarter-sized nipples.

“Holy shit,” Darius muttered. His ears perked, jumping to attention from the manly baritone rumbling from his throat. A hand left his chest, reaching up to feel over his throat. He noted how much more prominent his Adam’s apple was now, his neck decently thick with muscle. It led up to a blocky jawline, the wolf tracing past scratchy stubble.

The astonished expression he wore quickly shifted into a smug grin. The wolf brought up his arms, hitting a pose he had seen hundreds of times in the past. His biceps swelled to life, jumping up as his forearms rippled. The wolf rolled his fingers, squeezing them tighter in his fist just to make those rippling pillars dance.

The little voice in the back of his head—the one that had warned him not to trust the amulet—had gone completely silent.

Darius checked over his body, twirling in place as he glanced at his glutes. What he had assumed at first was white, was actually an icy-blue hue of fur. The edges of the patterns curled like flame, faint blue wrapping up his calves and forearms like socks and gloves.

He had gone from a mistakable nobody to an eye-catching jaw-dropper in just one squeeze of that enchanted amulet. His body rippled with shrink-wrapped muscle, any trace of midlife fat having evaporated from his skin-taut frame. His mind raced, wondering what more was in store if he kept using it...

The floor shook subtly from the weight as he dropped to a knee, reaching just under the bed where the amulet had rolled. He brought it to his face, staring deep into that amber-like gemstone. His heart raced with possibility, the warmth seeping into his fingers once more.

But one thought snagged in his mind. A crucial piece to his puzzle that he was missing.

What good was his new mass if someone didn't admire it? A budding yearning to test out his new strength seeped into his consciousness, making the corners of his muzzle curl higher.

Nah, patience and prudence. That would be the strategy. Darius could have his cake and eat it, too; he just needed to take it one step at a time.

Staring at the amulet, he felt he understood its purpose better—having both experienced its power and given a small dollop of understanding from the new, dominant personality integrating with his own. He probably should have been terrified that he was being possessed. Cursed amulet, after all, right?

But there wasn't any fear—not anymore.

Darius chuckled to himself, a low rumble as he put the amulet in the top drawer of his dresser.

It's the gods that should be afraid.

Donnelly stared, the squirrel's eyes threatening to pop out of his head. Darius leaned back in his chair, the seat creaking quietly, his broad back enough to test the limits of the flimsy office furniture. The wolf's clothes looked painted on, slacks pulled tight over meaty thighs, seams threatening to split down the middle. His shirt was in a similar predicament; the first several buttons were left open—unable to be closed. Icy blue fur spilled out, revealing the cleavage between proud pectorals.

"Um..." Donnelly finally said, staring at the wolf across from him. "...D-Darius? That, uh...you?"

Darius smiled, showing off a charismatic grin that made the heat rise in the squirrel's ears.

"Yeah," he responded smoothly, giving his blank computer screen a cursory glance. It just didn't

seem important anymore. Things that the old Darius would have been pulling his fur over felt so far away now.

Beneath him.

“What’s got you tied up in a knot? You two go home and fu—” The ursine that looped his head around the corner dropped his jaw. Bently’s wide eyes flicked up and down the muscular lupine in Darius’ office, broad shoulder threatening to brush against the inner wall.

“You, err...” Bently gulped, nearly at a loss for words. “You, um, go to a fur stylist, dude? You’re looking a little...”

“Very meaty?” Donnelly finished, the squirrel looping a finger into his collar, giving it a tiny tug.

“I was gonna say *blue*, but.” Bently scratched at his brow, wheeling his chair a little further out to better face the entourage. “Is that, uh...really you? You don’t even sound right...”

“I guess you could say I had the night of my life,” the wolf said with a toothy smile. “It was *transformative*.”

“I’m not going to even ask what experimental treatment you went through,” Donnelly said, the less apprehensive out of the two as he eyed Darius’ newfound bulk appreciatively.

“I might have been given a little trinket,” Darius hinted. He wouldn’t have shared the details with anyone else, but with two of the closest people in his life he could call friends, well...

“Like...?” Donnelly asked, egging him to go on.

“It’s absurd, but I was given an amulet. I touched it, and I grew,” he said matter-of-factly, shrugging dense shoulders, the seams of his shirt popping dangerously. It wasn’t just his clothes struggling, either. The piston in his chair was slowly losing the battle, the height of the wolf’s seat gradually lowering.

“That’s...” Bently’s brows furrowed into uncharacteristic worry. “You sure that’s a good idea, man? I don’t really get the idea of spirits and magic, but like...” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “You sure you should be meddlin’ in shit like that?”

“I don’t necessarily think it’s a *bad* idea,” Donnelly interjected, flinching as he caught a stern glance from Bently. “But, you’ve *really* changed, and...” He paused, furtively looking at the ground as his fingers laced together. “Maybe you should take it slow? I don’t know what’s going on, but you don’t seem... perturbed?”

“I’m fuckin’ ‘perturbed,’” Bently shot back incredulously. “Dude goes from string bean to gym rat overnight?” He patted his solid midsection for emphasis as he said, “I put a lot of work into my gains! And you’re telling me he picked up his by touching a magic amulet?”

The ursine scoffed, crossing burly arms over his chest, puffing up to prove that he was still bigger than Darius. “I don’t trust it. I don’t think he should use whatever voodoo again. Throw

out the damn thing. You got a good build goin', so why not cultivate it at the gym or something safe?"

"The gym..." Donnelly's eyes sparkled, tall ears springing straight up along with his tail.

Bently blinked. "Eh?"

"I'm going after work! Maybe you can come with me?" Donnelly asked, flicking his gaze back and forth between the other men. Darius seemed intrigued with the idea, a fang-filled grin spreading across his blocky muzzle.

Bently rolled his eyes before saying, "*Psh*, you don't get enough of me at work, huh? You jealous of Damian or somethin'?"

"The hyena who was clinging to you?" Donnelly asked, his turn to be incredulous. "*Please*. If he enjoys going down on a closet case, all the power to him."

Bently's face went through different shades of red. The giant grizzly sputtered vainly, much to Donnelly's snickering delight.

"Sounds like a good idea," Darius finally responded, resonant voice cutting through the squabble. "I've been wanting to test this out." He followed his words with a little dance of his pectorals, another button popping off and shooting across the room.

The presence lurking in the back of his mind itched to test it out. It languished having to wait, but it also sensed that a *sizable* payoff would be coming.

So patience was the game Darius would play.

Darius thumbed the amulet in his bag. While the power wasn't outright infectious, he could feel the pressure contained within. It was practically bursting to unleash its might. And, not just for a singular person, he had learned.

With power came knowledge. The longer he lingered in contact with the otherworldly object, the more he gleaned its purpose, the object imparting fragments of memories of some other life. It was hard to process, but Darius was starting to piece together the frayed edges of a picture.

It was designed for a different purpose. Like the art inscribed across the bezel, it was originally fashioned to empower mere men into *werewolves*, transforming them into demigod-like beings. Darius had received his due blessing, or so the amulet had imparted to him.

But it was like taking a mere sip from a pitcher. So much untapped power still remained.

And he planned on making it his. There would be no other way.

The brief thought of sharing the power flitted through his mind, but it was quickly dashed—and not by his own ego. The amulet was only for wolves—fundamentally incompatible with other

species. It almost had an opposing aura to it, seeming to reel from Donnelly as he brushed next to Darius.

"I'm glad I had a few pairs of stretchy workout clothes," the squirrel said with a light laugh, flashing that buck-toothed smile. "I don't think your work clothes would have survived much longer."

"Probably not," a confident Darius rumbled back, returning a fangy grin. "Bet you wouldn't mind if it didn't, though."

Donnelly coughed in his throat, scratching at his cheek shyly. "*Hah*, well... I am kind of a sucker for a good gym bod."

Darius leaned back, pecs hiking up into the air as it stretched the sleeveless shirt around it, fabric sealing around those meaty globes. "*Mm*. You and me both," he purred, eyeing his own chest with unrestrained reverence. "Though, I don't think it's going to be 'gym sized' for long."

Donnelly flashed him a look, an ear flicking. "You think you're going to...grow more?" He paused mid-sentence as if reconsidering the absurdity of it all. But he couldn't deny the evidence in front of him. This was Darius, muscle mass, blue fur, and all. The cocky attitude was new, but the wolf underneath was too familiar to deny.

"It's inevitable," he replied matter-of-factly, thumb brushing over the smoothly cut gemstone of his amulet. That subconscious part of him reveled in the flustered look Donnelly gave him, the slight tint to his cheeks. It was the kind of adoration he craved, the pang of pleasure confirming that he made the right choice.

The doors to the gym hissed open as the pair stepped in. It was a short affair to get Darius checked in, Donnelly talking to the front attendant for a visitor's pass. The rest of the gym goers were more aligned with the squirrel's build, younger guys focusing more on cardio than heavy weights.

Well, that just left more for Darius. How convenient.

Stowing his bag into lockers, the wolf couldn't help but pull out the amulet, giving it a once-over. The cord wrapped around his neck nicely, the gemstone nestled against his pecs, tucked just under the hem of his shirt. To anyone else, he looked like he was wearing a golden chain and not something straight out of a fantasy novel.

Darius took the time to appreciate Donnelly's form as the squirrel stripped down. He hardly had any body fat under his red-and-white pelt. Wiry muscle rippled as he shifted, slipping on shorts and a snug tank top. It was difficult to tell he spent most of his time in an office cubicle.

They didn't have a plan. Not that Darius needed one. Imbued with preternatural instinct, he knew exactly where to go and how to lift—despite having only been inside a gym a handful of times in his life. Dumbbells slipped into his hands like gloves, palms wrapping around knurled metal.

Each curl gave him a hit of dopamine, his biceps swelling and tightening as blood pumped through them. He had to bite back a moan, trying to keep the pleasure to himself as his arms swung. Dissatisfied with the weight, he swapped out for heavier dumbbells. He growled in pleasure as it gave him the resistance he was looking for, his amulet bouncing over his chest as he worked up a sweat.

Nearby, Donnelly watched, captivated by the almost ferocious display. He took a sip of his water, tipping the bottle up to try to cover his obvious ogling.

“*More*,” Darius growled under his breath. His biceps bulged as he flipped the weights up over his head, pressing them skyward. “I need...*more!*”

The amulet against his chest resisted the call, pushing back against Darius’ incessant pull. Still, he managed to sup the edges of that font, pulling threads of power into his body. The wolf’s pecs swelled, pulling the fabric of his shirt taut around them. He moaned in ecstasy as power flowed through him, pumping his muscles. Traps rose higher, neck thickening as a few errant veins slithered under his taut pelt.

Donnelly was speechless, losing track of his set as he watched the subtle swell of Darius’ body. The wolf had dropped his weights into the rack, chest heaving as the seams popped along his shirt, starting to fail around his shoulders and biceps. His back had become a maze of rolling muscle, twitching and writhing with the subtlest movement.

Even his shorts were filled to the brink with glutes starting to spill out the back, the taut pull of his underwear sinking into the crack between banded mounds. Lats slowly dropped, pulling the fabric of his shirt until it could no longer contain those spreading wings. They threatened to graze those bulbous mounds below, only an inch of space between them as serrated spinal erectors proudly filled the gap between.

Hamstrings thrummed like piano wire as they tore through the back of the lupine’s shorts, revealing more of his icy blue fur. Calves pumped, splitting into twin diamonds as they jutted shelf-like underneath the shade of his turgid thighs. Everything but his shoes seemed to be on the brink, threads hanging on for dear life as fabric turned translucent.

He was a good hundred pounds heavier. Even as he subtly shifted, Darius could feel the weight, swollen pecs rising with every deep breath.

“You weren’t kidding,” Donnelly said breathlessly, having approached the bulging bodybuilder. Tentatively, he reached out, stroking over a bulbous delt, tracing down it reverently as his finger crested the serrated curves of his tricep. “How is it possible?”

That was a question that even Darius wondered. He was given no concrete answers, just vague feelings and memories—all of which grew stronger as he tapped into the amulet’s power. It wasn’t so much that he was gaining power, but reclaiming it—in some sense. It felt *right*. Like slipping on a worn-in pair of shoes.

“Just my natural magnetism,” he said without thinking, the words slipping out of him. On some level, he knew it was right, a sense of déjà vu washing over him. It felt like he had done this before—several times, in fact. To the point where the scenario almost felt a little...

Cliche?

At least the feeling of Donnelly stroking over his muscle-burdened body was nice. *That* registered as new. He was attentive for sure, his fingers gliding over the bulging curves of Darius’ herculean torso. The wolf made his pecs dance, enjoying the attention to the banded muscle as it rolled and twitched.

The fact that they were being watched by at least a dozen other guys seemed inconsequential to Darius. He continued to flex for his worshipper, enjoying the attention lavished upon him as those hands traced around his midsection. A shiver went up his spine as fingers dove between his glutes, the lupine making sure to give them a slight clench just before Donnelly’s hand wrist vanished.

The wolf rolled his shoulders, rippling torso destroying the last of the shirt that desperately clung to him. A spread of his legs and a clench of his quads shredded the rest of his shorts, leaving him in a pair of white tennis shoes and over-stretched underwear.

“That’s better,” Darius said with a low chuckle, side-eying himself in a wall-length mirror. He was an absolute hulk, traps flanking either side of his head, threatening to push higher than his skull. He swept his arms forward, hitting a most muscular pose. His delts shredded along with his pecs as he hunched forward, showing off the vascularity of those massive arms. Bloated biceps forced his arms away, proud mounds refusing to compromise on size just for the sake of a pose.

He ran through a series of stances, remembering those images from his youth of bodybuilders in magazines and VHS tapes. Arms folded behind his head as he grunted under his breath. Abs sucked in, rippling bricks beveling inwards to reveal the new size of his powerful ribcage. Vascularity trailed down them, coalescing just above the wolf’s crotch.

The lupine’s lats flared wide, threatening to brush his glutes, the amulet perched between his pecs flashing as Darius dipped into its reservoir of power once more. He groaned, rolling his head back as his body bulged in all directions, muscle mass swelling as it fed on otherworldly power.

Donnelly moaned softly as that expanding muscle forced his hands apart. Feathering sinew pulsed and engorged under a tightening, creaking pelt. Out of curiosity, he reached out, fingers slipping between those pectorals to touch the glowing gemstone.

The squirrel gasped as the amulet shocked him, a little warning that crackled across the setting. Darius broke his fixation from his overblown body to flash his counterpart a sympathetic look. “Seems one size doesn’t fit all,” he said with a quiet chuckle, barely able to get his fingers into the growing void between banded pectorals. He fished it out with a fair bit of effort, giving the amulet a once-over between thick digits.

The wolf breathed heavily, mammoth chest bobbing as he anticipated what he could become. Of what he *knew* he *would* become.

Donnelly seemed to read the wolf's mind, easily seeing through his expression. "Going to go all the way?" he asked, a gulp catching in his throat. He seemed to understand the implications as well. Yet, he didn't shy away, the squirrel's hands still caressing the generous curvature of turgid sinew.

"I don't see why not," he said, a greedy growl in his voice. He licked over his lips as he reached into the amulet once more. Not with a request, but a *demand*. It resisted, reminding him that its original enchantment was to empower a multitude of other wolves. But Darius knew better. That was just the outer trappings of such a powerful artifact. A test against one's willpower.

And he powered through it using that new line of confidence that had supplanted his once-meek nature. *More*, he snarled in his mind, directing the mental message to the trinket that defied him.

MORE!

His chest surged almost violently, pushing forward, growing weighty to the point of nearly unbalancing the ice-blue wolf. Nipples plumped, dangling underneath as he cupped the swollen shelf. Darius panted heavily, tongue lolling out of his muzzle, draping over a plump, obsidian lower lip. It, too, fattened, thickening up as his masculine mug was swept up in changes. The glow of the amber amulet traveled up over his face, coaxing his jawline wider, packing rounded muscle over it as it serrated, giving him a bite force that could sheer through metal and shatter diamonds.

"*Uuurggh...! MNGGH-!*" Darius' brows furrowed as they grew dense, shading over his eyes. Just below, his cheekbones chiseled, growing prominent as his face flooded with testosterone. Rivulets of drool trailed from the corners of his maw as he grit his jaw, causing all of that muscle to bulge obscenely. Forming a split cleft, his chin dropped, crashing into ballooned pectorals, the grind between those mounds nearly causing Darius to lose his focus from ecstasy.

"That's so hot..." Donnelly muttered breathlessly, swirling to the front of the expanding titan. His hands dutifully worked over those pecs, thumbs brushing over the sensitive flesh of his turgid nips. They moved higher, caressing a slowly vanishing neck in the trifecta of his jawline, traps, and chest.

Darius panted as he leaned forward, thighs flexing to keep himself from tumbling completely forward. They expanded, hamstrings strumming as steel cables fattened. He found himself nose-to-nose with the squirrel, smaller hands caressing his jawline, reveling in the scrape of rough stubble that coated it. Part of Darius was surprised to see the fitness model so enamored with his brute-like proportions. He didn't take him for a size chaser.

Another wave of power shot through Darius, the wolf mentally grabbing onto it. He yanked with everything he had, a growl in his throat as his lips pressed to Donnelly's. They exchanged tongues as Darius' back ballooned. Muscles writhed, hills and valleys rising as the divide

between halves deepened. Lats finally crashed into glutes as they thickened, balancing out the planetoids hanging from the front.

*More...! More! **MORE!!***

He was beyond the need for humility or restraint. The new voice, the old voice, the *true* voice of Darius boomed within. This was no longer about desire but about claiming birthright—or the closest thing to it.

The overstretched underwear finally snapped, shooting across the room like a broken rubber band. The last of his shoes finally gave up as he stepped out of snapping laces, leaving behind crushed soles.

Darius leaned forward, pressing his prize against the nearby wall, scooping the squirrel up by the rear. It rested nicely in his palm, keeping the rodent aloft as they exchanged saliva. He had to admit, the little guy had passion, Donnelly biting down on his dense lower lip, tongue slathering over it as hands greedily took in his oversized facial features.

He stomped, foot crashing down like a hydraulic press. The floor shattered, a shockwave skittering across cement as cracks spidered from the impact crater. Darius growled possessively as he locked muzzles with the source of his adoration. He appreciated, even loved that his hands never stayed put. He had a hunger of his own, unsatisfied with just a few meager caresses.

Darius was wider than tall, bordering on nearly twice as much; impressive, considering his height had ratcheted up to almost 7 feet. Bones popped, stretching to support the new muscle mass piling onto it.

Sweat beaded over the wolf's body as it burned like a furnace, internalizing the amulet's power as it pulled from this seemingly bottomless cup. The shadow around him grew, back, chest, and shoulders obscuring the fluorescent lights that flickered and spasmed above. The sheer weight of the muscular titan caused the ground to rattle as he moved, the behemoth strolling to the weights.

Even with a squirrel clamped between his pecs, he scooped dumbbells into his palms. They squealed and crunched as they combined into glowing wads between his absurdly strong digits. The weight didn't even begin to tap into his new potential. Even after gathering all the weights into a twisted sphere, it still barely challenged him. Muscle stood on end, pecs bulging and traps humping up around the wolf's head as he brought the metal mass above his head.

All the while, Donnelly moaned, squeezed by those flexing pectorals as banded boulders rolled around him. He was a beanpole in comparison, like a hotdog trapped between beefy buns as Darius held him like a prize.

A guttural grunt boomed with every push, cerulean eyes burning with power as he spread his stance. The ball crashed through the rafters, metal screeching as it gave way. Inconsequential to Darius, his thoughts solely focused on testing his freshly forged muscle.

It wasn't just cultivating mass, either. This was a prelude—a warmup. It was Darius stretching his mind to fill the corners of his herculean body, to take full possession of it.

To *own* it.

And it was working. He felt every serrated thread of sinew through his body. Fine control came to him as subconscious mastery finally clicked into place, guided by some unseen hand. Darius could make any part of him jump and flex with just an errant thought.

Throwing the ball aside—and ignoring the delicious destruction it caused as it rolled through a wall and into a street—Darius turned to the wall-length mirror. He put his hands on his hips, straining to get them there with the unadulterated width he was working with. From bottom to top, his body rippled, muscle rising in waves all the way to and through his bloated, brutish jawline.

Darius exhaled in exaltation, a power-drunk smirk breaking across his manly muzzle as he sent the sinewy wave back down to his toes. He was the epitome of masculinity, testosterone surging through his body nearly as thick as his blood, pumping through veins that pulsed subtly just below the surface of his audibly groaning pelt.

And then there was Donnelly, still squeezed between his pecs. His face flushed pink, ears folded back as he kissed at those stubbly mounds, nuzzling his face between them every so often.

The adoration gave Darius the spark he needed to hit the next level.

Pulling on every last cord of muscle, he willed himself *bigger*. They followed his command, utterly subservient to Darius' ironclad willpower. There was a question if he even needed the amulet anymore as he widened, body rumbling in an ominously self-contained earthquake.

The floor cracked again, cratering under the immense weight it was forced to bear. The rest of the gym goers had the good sense to skedaddle, scampering to a safer vantage point as ceiling tiles startled to tumble.

Darius growled, a libidinous, self-indulgent sound as drool continued to dribble from the corners of his maw. He leaned back, chest hefting upward, squeezing the squirrel deeper in. The size difference had grown to the point where Donnelly almost completely fit between his pecs alone, the last of his legs poking out of the bottom, grazing against the curve of blocky abdominals.

Somewhere underneath the overwhelming pleasure, Darius knew that would be the safest place for the squirrel to be.

The wolf moaned as he surged again in size, body rippling in a wave as the amulet's chain pulled tight around his neck like a choker. The gemstone gleamed, catching errant sunlight in a dazzle of citrine shades. Darius' stride crushed the floor, grinding up cement as he put one stomp in front of the other. The building shuddered, footfalls shaking it apart as lights swung and sparked.

The wall gave way as Darius stepped through it, foot-thick brick crashing against his chest as it crumbled. The cement dust washed over him but didn't stick, repelled by an unseen force as a pristine wolf stepped onto—*through*—the street. The sidewalk cracked under his step, cratering and shattering when he put his weight down; it churned as he stepped through it, crumbled cement parting around him like the wake from a boat.

Darius took a deep breath, filling powerful lungs as he leaned back. He basked in the sun's warmth, enjoying the feeling of it spreading over his considerable surface area. So many boxes being ticked, all of them a survey on "Just how *large* are you?" Donnelly seemed to enjoy the results, the squirrel still jammed into Darius' pecs, the little guy moaning and blushing hard.

Smirking, Darius gave his pecs a little flex, letting those mounds dance around his admirer. His attention lapsed as he observed his surroundings, peeking past monstrous pecs to spot rows of nearby parked cars. A thought drifted, unbidden but not unwelcome, as the ground-shaking titan strolled to a nearby delivery van.

He contemplated it for a moment, amused with the fact that he was just as wide as it was long. There was no way he could fit in anything short of an industrial dump truck. Even then, the shocks wouldn't last long...

The metal squealed, the frame shuddering as the vehicle lifted from the ground. Darius gripped both ends, crushing metal for a better grip as steel warped and conformed to his fingers. "Watch this," he said to his little admirer, a throaty growl bubbling up as he leaned back. The van went up, the frame bending ever-so-slightly as it squealed. Enough for any insurer to instantly label it totaled, however.

The back end popped open, the warping frame causing the doors to break loose. Packages went tumbling out in a brown boxed cascade, clattering over the hood of the nearby car, one or two cracking the windshield.

"*Whoops*," Darius said with an unapologetic chuckle. Like the ball of twisted weights, he pressed the car over his head, peeking up at the dirty underside of the van. Up and down it went, bobbing in ways that it was *never* designed to handle. Donnelly watched with wide eyes, momentarily pausing his ministrations to watch the unadulterated display of strength.

"Holy *shit*..."

The wolf's attention swiveled, momentarily forgetting about (what should have been) crushing weight in his arms. On the sidewalk, geared up in workout attire, was Bently. The bear stared at him, eyes threatening to bug out of his head. His bag had slid from his shoulder, comically slipping off of it like butter before dropping to the sidewalk with a muted thud.

And then his attention swiveled to the package-swamped sedan.

"My *car!*" he wailed, gripping his headfur, his latest observation pushing everything else aside. He stopped, fingers pulling from his hair as he swiveled his gaze back to the overwhelming wolf. "Your chest!" he squawked, pointing a finger, expression screwing up.

“Hi,” Donnelly said with a bashful laugh, partly dislodging himself from those monstrous mounds.

Bently squinted at the glistening bauble attached to Darius’ bull neck. “You used it again, didn’t you?” He took a step back, sweat beading over his forehead as the van started to quiver. The bend in its frame increased as the lupine added pressure on either end.

It broke in half, metal screeching and squealing. Before it had the chance to crumble into a pile, Darius pulled it into his embrace. Donnelly had the foresight to duck down, pressing himself underneath the lupine’s bulbous jawline as the herculean hulk flexed. Metal compressed as glass shattered in a glistening, light-catching explosion.

The van dropped to the ground with an earth-shaking thud. It was unrecognizable, just a twisted meatball of metal and rubber. Darius might have felt bad if it belonged to the local post office. But it didn’t, and he held little respect for private corporations.

“So, decided to come watch the show after all?” Darius asked, his voice like the rumble of an engine as he addressed the gobsmacked bear.

He slowly got ahold of himself, shaking his head. “I was *going* to swing by to see if you were making another bad decision. But I guess I’m a little late for that.”

“What? Too busy making out with your latest boy toy?” Donnelly asked with a snicker, perched over Darius’ pec, leaning an elbow on it with a chin in his palm.

The burly bear scoffed, hands on his hips. “You kiddin’ me? Saying that when you’re half wedged in his man-tits?” Despite his standoffish tone, Darius couldn’t help but notice that Bently couldn’t take his gaze off of him, the ursine watching out of the corners of his eyes as he tried to look elsewhere.

The effects of his natural magnetism. Or, so experience told him.

... *experience*?

Darius almost laughed at the absurdity. It was the first time he had ever done this, and yet it felt so...*familiar*. Like the lyrics to your favorite childhood song. He might not have remembered the exact words, but as he heard them played, they rang with nostalgic familiarity.

“Like I was saying,” Bently said, interrupting Darius’ train of thought. “I was tryin’ to get here before our favorite coworker made a bad decision, but I guess I’m too late for that.”

The lupine’s muscular jawline rippled as he smirked. “Why would any of this be a bad thing?” he asked, his suave purr rumbling through his herculean body. To emphasize his point, he made his pecs dance. The banded mounds rippled and slapped together without so much as a twitch from the rest of the monstrous man, individual fibers jumping to the titan’s mental commands.

Donnelly, of course, moaned as his body was massaged by the rolling muscle. It was just enough pressure to squeeze the air out of him, expert control being the only thing between pleasure and becoming a pancake.

Bently's expression scrunched as he gestured towards his busted windshield, thrusting his palms towards it. As if for emphasis, one of the tires popped, dropping the vehicle down to one side as its alarm went off.

"Can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs," Darius said with another low chuckle.

"One hell of an omelet. You've got enough protein to feed a village," Bently grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest. What would have been a usually intimidating gesture paled in comparison to the looming hulk that outsized him by several factors.

"Jealous?" Donnelly teasingly asked, leaning over that pec again. His fluffy tail stuck out, swishing back and forth, tracing the turgid curve, eliciting a pleased rumble from his gracious host.

The bear snorted loudly but didn't offer a retort. Darius noted that he couldn't keep his eyes off of him. Indeed, the ursine was sneaking looks, tracing the contours of the wolf's wing-like lats and curved obliques. "So...what now? You gonna keep getting bigger?" he asked, his contentious tone abating.

"That's the plan," Darius fired back, smiling even wider, showing off dense fangs behind that thickened lower lip.

"And then what?"

The question would have caught Darius off guard before. But that was the old Darius, the wolf that didn't know what he wanted out of life. Now, more than ever, he knew *exactly* what he wanted.

"More," he said in a low, venerated growl. "It doesn't need anything else, because it *is* everything." His body was already starting to rumble forebodingly, veins racing underneath the surface of his straining pelt.

Bently took an unsettled step back, unable to outpace the growing shadow that draped over him.

Getting people out of the city was far easier than Darius would have imagined. Just some local chaos and destruction was enough to get people to eagerly evacuate.

A police shootout was the perfect thing to catch the attention of the news. Bullets bounced off Darius' body like marbles flicked at a brick wall. He had to admit, it did tickle a little. He loved the way it made his pelt subtly ripple, like droplets into still water. One of the officers tried to ram into him, but Darius was more than ready. He scooped the front seamlessly, lifting the siren-wailing thing into the air, muscles bulging as he effortlessly kept it aloft. The only thing that kept the offers tumbling through the windshield were their seatbelts.

He made a point to gently set them down before busting the doors off with a flick of his wrist, escorting them from the battered vehicle with a sympathetic chuckle. It was their job after all, so he couldn't blame them for their antics.

Still, it was a guilty pleasure when he threw that empty cruiser into the 10th floor of a nearby building. The exploding glass that rained down on them was quite a sight. Like a rainbow as it caught the sunlight.

Camera crews had also converged, several vans and cameramen hunkered at the ends of streets. Darius had fun confiscating their equipment, flashing a charismatic smile before asking, "You using this? No? I guess you won't mind if I borrow it." He strategically placed rolling cameras, perching them on the ledges of buildings and onto street corners. At one point, he precariously perched an entire camera van on top of a nearby fountain. A surprise that it held, but one that Darius didn't regret, especially when he saw the glint of the camera's dark lens.

He escorted Donnelly and Bently out of the city—or at least to a far enough distance where he assumed they could skedaddle on their own. It wouldn't be safe within the concrete jungle, not with a growing titan smashing about.

With every step, Darius engorged, his footprints expanding as he strolled down the streets. He grunted, twitching his head left and right as his jawline popped and cracked. It swelled thicker as fangs poked out. His lower lip stretched around those dense pillars, points stopping just short of his darkly padded nose.

The chain around his neck strained, links visibly stretching and warping as they tried to contain the titan. The wolf's neck had all but disappeared, vanishing under the sizable trifecta of pecs, jaw, and traps. The gemstone nestled into the deep cleft of his chin, nearly hidden from view.

Darius drew in breath, groaning and growling as he grew bigger, willing his corporeal form into something *more*. The ground shook, fractures spidering across the city block with every step. The sheer weight of his enormous bulk was enough to churn the street like butter. Gravel washed against the foundations of nearby buildings, busting out picture windows as cars went surfing into empty lobbies.

Every footfall shuddered the city, toes curling, churning through solid rock. It was pure ecstasy for Darius when his widening shoulders finally met opposing buildings, shearing through metal, stone, and glass. His triceps took out an entire floor on their own, ice-blue muscle blasting into now-former office space.

Come to think of it, the building on his left was probably his old office. It was hard to tell anymore. His old life seemed so small and dull in comparison to now. As if someone else had lived it. A boring, *small*, uninteresting someone.

But that was okay. It was like criticizing a baby or a caterpillar for not living up to what it would become. There wasn't any shame in humble beginnings.

Another euphoric surge found Darius rivaling the buildings surrounding him. Now standing several stories tall, every step shook the earth. Deep fractures formed as they crackled and spread through entire city blocks. Alarm-blaring cars bounced, some slipping into the widening fissures before disappearing without a trace.

Darius heaved, chest bobbing as sweat steamed off his body, hazing around him, partially obscuring the sunlight. In an almost ironic twist, god rays haloed around his head, emphasizing the brutish, power-lusting smirk. Those fangs poked out further, twin pillars, the cherry on top of the sundae that was his testosterone-infused face.

The chain around the wolf's neck creaked loudly, some links splitting as they hung on by only an inch or two. Curiously, Darius stopped his rampage, pausing just in time for the chain to bust. The amulet fell between his pecs, the gemstone fracturing between the squeeze of those massive mounds. It exploded, turning to dust as the resulting metals were compacted into a twisted plate smaller than one of his nails.

He blinked in surprise, even a little shock. His link to unlimited power had been severed. Or...rather, it had given out? His head spun with questions, but they quickly faded as he focused on his rippling body that spread out before him.

There wasn't any loss of control. He could still feel *everything*. The sense of potential still in reach even without the mystical bauble guiding his way.

All he had to do was reach out...

And take it.

"Nnnnggghh!" Darius bellowed, jaw clenching as veins rose around his absurdly dense neck. His body doubled in size, shoulders blasting into buildings like hydraulic presses.

His pecs surged before the rest of his body caught up. Muscle crashed into muscle, lats colliding with his glutes as his abs bulged, pushing up against his overblown chest. Even his thighs fought for space, forcing him to widen his stance, temporarily locking up his casual stroll. Even his calves brushed together, having grown fat in excess size.

Through the carnal haze, it finally became clear to Darius. The amulet was just training wheels. Something to assure him that any of this was even possible. He didn't need it anymore, the bauble he had outstripped and outgrown, shredded and fallen away like the clothes, and even buildings that once restrained him.

Darius breathed like a beast, massive pectorals bobbing. Their sheer size obscured his vision as looming traps threatened to touch those banded mounds. It only gave him a sliver of horizon to work with as his body continued to swell, muscle piling on faster than his frame could adjust for.

It almost felt like he was drowning in his bulk—but it was only for a moment. He reasserted control, harnessing wanton lust for his own body as he reined it in. Proportions normalized as his height shot up, head lifting above the overwhelming swell of turgid planetoids. His body

broadened to look proportional with mountainous musculature rather than a twitching, rippling meatball.

Testing out his restored flexibility, the wolf leaned down. Even then, it was a struggle to grip around the base of one of the glassy, spear-like towers that littered the crumbling city. He tore it from the roots, the foundation breaking away as concrete and stone hung from the bottom in a jagged point.

Surprisingly, the structure held up despite being manhandled by a god-like figure. He twisted and turned the structure, looking it over as his biceps swelled to absurd degrees.

And then he shoved it into his chest. The skyscraper was now scraping against the insides of his pectorals, banded muscle clenching around the entirety of the building. Darius growled and huffed, tongue lolling out of his mouth as his deeply shaded eyes threatened to roll back in his head.

The building cracked, glass shattering before it finally collapsed. It imploded like a submarine under the pressure, crunching between those mammoth mounds. It was the final source of intoxicating self-induced pleasure that triggered another explosive round of growth.

He expanded, fibers of muscle visibly splitting and feathering under his creaking, groaning pelt. Darius' soles spread over the streets, rolling over buildings as everything toppled underneath his growing shadow. The ground fractured, just a subtle twist and grind of his heel tearing through the earth.

The wolf's weight had grown so absurd, his body so dense, that he was collapsing the planet's surface, sinking subtly into it. Strangely, the bubbling of the Earth's lifeblood didn't bother him as it washed over his toes and ankles. He knew that he was teetering over the border of immortality, a sense that contrivances for sustaining life no longer applied to him.

Knee-deep into crushed earth and bubbling magma, Darius slowly squatted down. His glutes crashed into earth, cratering and destroying the hillsides surrounding the city that his bulk had utterly subsumed. His thighs swelled, teardrop-shaped quads bulging obscenely as his hamstrings thrummed like steel coils.

With one powerful leap, he left the ground, throwing magma and ash into the air like a supervolcano eruption. Clouds parted, the atmosphere temporarily blasting away to reveal sparkling stars even before he exited the Earth's embrace. The tenuous hold that gravity had on his ever-increasing weight had broken, the wolf sailing lazily into the space just beyond.

It all felt so familiar as he brushed the moon with his hands, bringing the pockmarked ball closer to him. He reveled that he couldn't get his arms around it, biceps slamming into either side. Fingers dug into the silt, dense digits carving into the rock as he flexed around it.

Even the celestial satellite couldn't withstand Darius' strength. It broke apart, collapsing as the wolf's arms swung inward. The glowing core at its center lost cohesion as it splashed over the lupine's chest.

Darius reveled in the warm caress, a throaty growl bubbling up his neck. The shards of rock sailed away, the dirt repelled from his pelt like cement dust. His body refused to be sullied by the weak-willed universe around him.

And so, with all the space he could desire, he grew.

And grew.

...And *grew*.

His weight pulled at the very fabric of reality. Darius couldn't tell if he was expanding or the universe was collapsing onto him. Maybe it was a little bit of both.

Planets collided with his body, shattering against him. Even stars didn't stand a chance as luminescent spheres washed over him, adding their power to his own. His eyes flared, burning white as lightning arced from those spheres, only adding to the power-mad smile that split his monstrous mug.

"*More...*" He boomed through the cosmic reaches of supposedly endless space. "**More!!**" His voice trembled the foundations of his universe, a booming brutish bass that made his entire body quiver.

The euphoria was indescribable. The feeling of space crashing down around you, combined with the unstoppable swell of your own body, was nearly beyond even Darius' god-like comprehension. Black holes dissipated between his pecs as, eventually, entire swirling galaxies engulfed him, dotted lights haloing around the wolf's subtly glowing body.

He reached out, hands pressing against a translucent film. The edges of the universe stretched around his fingers like plastic wrap, inky black bubbling around them in a feeble attempt to contain the monstrosity within its borders.

The poke of his nail brought light to the void, a glowing rip in what should have been an endless expanse. Leaning in, he peeked through the crack even as the rest of his universe shrink-wrapped around him.

He could see a mirrored, fractal space beyond. Colors and images far beyond what he could imagine. In each angle was a glimpse into another universe, another life. Focusing in, Darius realized that he could see himself—his old self. So many wolves whiling away their lives, unaware of the potential within...

And then it dawned on him why this felt so familiar. While that golden-furred god might have kicked things off, it was far beyond his hands now.

That's why it would always *be* so familiar. They just needed to be shown their potential.

Darius smiled wide, tusky fangs pushing past his lower lip as he reached out of his universe and into the infinite metaspace beyond.

All they needed were some training wheels.

