

Few things can beat a good sleep in. A cool blanket wrapped around me, a cushy pillow below me, and a sunbeam-warmed tail nestled under my head¹. Curled up in my basket, I was a very snug little fox². Unfortunately, even the most comfortable arrangements must give way to the obligations of life. My stomach growled. I didn't want it to growl. I wanted to stay in my comfy bed. It still growled. With great reluctance I crawled out of my basket.

The workshop, also known as Flynn's entire first floor, was a mess like always. Only my little corner was clear of loose cogs, springs, wiring, and the like. I nosed through the clutter looking for my snackbox. A handy little device Flynn had made once I started waking up earlier than him, the box was meant to work like a personal fridge. Unfortunately he had given it wheels and didn't balance the frame properly. It tended to wander as a result.

I found the snackbox wedged between a chair leg and half of what was supposed to be an airship core. After some finagling³ I freed it and spun the snackbox around to face me. The ice glyph on the lid was still lit up; durability was one of the few things Flynn got consistently right. I pressed the button to open the lid. My ears fell. The snackbox was devoid of sandwiches⁴.

I nosed around inside the box but wasn't expecting to find any loose crumbs. Were I a dog, I'd be consigned to wait around until Flynn woke up and then gaze piteously until he fed me. Were I a cat, I'd be reduced to scrounging for mice or slipping out and hunting birds⁵. Fortunately, I was a fox; a creature of intellect and cunning. My plan was far more dignified and elegant in execution.

"Flyyyyynnn! Wake uuuuuup!" I called out from beside his bed. The mass of sheets shifted slightly. I hopped onto the bed and climbed to the ruffled section. A head emerged which I eagerly greeted.

"GAH!" Flynn exclaimed when he found my muzzle millimetres from his face. "Coby! You know I hate when you do that!"

"Feed me."

"What time is it?"

"Breakfast time."

One hand rubbed sleep from his eyes while another groped to find the clock.

¹ Yes, I have a tail. What, did you think I was human? How species-centric is *that*?

² A red fox, by the way. Don't confuse me with those blotchy crosses or drama queen grays. I have *class*.

³ Finagling is important when you don't have thumbs.

⁴ And they were nice sandwiches too! Flynn always cuts the crust off!

⁵ This is gross and demeaning on exactly three levels.

"It's 7:15."

"That changes nothing."

"Go back to bed, Coby."

"I can't sleep when I'm hungry."

Flynn scowled. "Part of being a familiar involves obeying orders."

I flicked my tail. "Part of *having* a familiar involves taking care of it. Like by providing food."

"Go to bed, Coby." Flynn repeated. He lay back down, "I'll make you something at an appropriate hour."

Flynn then found himself with a fox sitting on his head.

"You're getting eggs and toast." Flynn yawned as he flicked on the kitchen light. "I'm not making you anything fancy."

"Thanks a bunch!"

Flynn grumbled but got out the bread, butter, and his multitool's knife anyway. A minute into his buttering my nose twitched at an odd scent.

"Flynn, what kind of bread are you using?"

"The loaf I bought yesterday, why?"

"But that has seeds in it⁶!" I growled exasperatedly, "You should use the good bread!"

"It expired."

"But there was half a loaf left!"

Flynn was pressing the knife into the bread harder than he needed. "Then you should've eaten more of it."

"Can you take the seeds out?"

"That would take far too long."

"I can wait."

My ears shot up as Flynn yelped in pain. His multitool and the piece of bread fell to the floor. The knife blade was streaked with fresh blood and there was a hole punched through the bread.

⁶ I have standards!

Flynn cursed and grabbed a towel from the sink and wrapped it around his left wrist to staunch the injury. Blood was running down his arm. I sniffed at the fallen piece of bread but couldn't bring myself to take a bite.

After a minute he lifted the cloth and checked the wound before quickly replacing the towel. "Blast that's deep. I need to see Rem or it's not going to stop."

My ears fell. "What about breakfast?"

"Really, Coby? I think I hit an artery."

"So tie it off. You can make eggs with one hand⁷."

Flynn didn't respond. He grabbed his multitool from the floor and headed for the door. I followed after and fell in line beside Flynn as he walked quickly through the streets. It was still early so there weren't many people about. Those that were only gave Flynn a passing glance before returning to their own business⁸.

The *Torchlight* pub was located two blocks from our house. It was a moderate-sized establishment that had been in business for twelve years despite ample competition from a combination of fancier and cheaper alternatives nearby. Rem, the owner and bartender, was Flynn's go-to man for local news, supply tips, and medical services.

"Did it explode, fall over, or try to attack you?" Rem asked without looking up when Flynn entered the pub.

Flynn smiled weakly as he sat down at the bar. I hopped onto a stool beside him. "Neither, actually. Buttering accident."

That made Rem look up. "Oh, that's a new one. Congratulations, I was starting to get bored." His glasses glinted as he smirked. "Let's have a look then."

Flynn held his arm out and lifted the towel. Rem whistled. "Definitely nicked an artery. Looks a little that the gouge you got from the astrolabe incident, actually. Of course that one was bigger and on your—"

"I remember⁹."

My stomach growled. Rem turned and gave me a scratch behind the ear. "Heya, Coby. How's it foxing?"

⁷ It's not a complicated procedure.

⁸ To be clear, these are mostly good people. There's just only so many times you can see Flynn running injured through the streets before it stops being important.

⁹ I don't, unfortunately, since I slept through the whole thing. He still won't say where it was.

I wagged my tail¹⁰. “Hungrily. Flynn was making my breakfast.”

A sympathetic nod. “I’ll get something whipped up for you. Eggs and toast ok?”

I yipped an affirmative. “That’s what Flynn was making! But he was using the bread with seeds in it!”

“Eww.”

“I know!”

Flynn cleared his throat. “I’d hate to interrupt but—”

“What? Oh, yes, right. Bleeding to death. One moment.”

Rem’s magicite¹¹ bracelet emitted a low hum while he touched Flynn’s wrist. My whiskers twitched at the presence of magic in the air while sparks began floating around the wound like snowflakes. They coalesced into the wound and the skin began to pull itself shut. A minute later the magic faded and his arm was stab wound free.

“I’d suggest you learn some healing magic of your own, but then I’d lose one of my best customers¹².” Rem said, repeating the same joke he told every time Flynn visited.

Flynn rubbed his wrist. “How much is it this time?”

“On the house. Consider it a gift for your patronage. Just be sure to use a butter knife next time.”

“But I didn’t say—”

“I’ve learned to recognize your multitool’s work.” Rem smiled. “Come, get that blood washed off in the back.”

“What about me?” I asked.

“I’ll send out your food when it’s ready. Just make yourself comfortable.”

Rem escorted Flynn into the back kitchens, leaving me alone at the bar. Immediately I moved into the table section and curled up in the closest booth. Rem had a good taste in cushions and

¹⁰ Yes I know wild foxes don’t wag their tails. I do. I’m a tail-wagging fox.

¹¹ Magicite is a highly malleable metal known for its ability to conduct magic. As refining processes improved, magicite items like jewellery became the preferred receptacle for a magician’s power instead of familiars. Though why someone would want a boring ol’ necklace when they could have someone fun and fluffy like me is a mystery.

¹² For the record, Flynn can’t use healing magic. His style is less... direct than what healing requires.

Torchlight was the only place I knew that used fabric for its seats instead of leather. A waitress came out a few minutes later and placed a plate of sizzling eggs and warm toast on the table.