

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 and padded into the kitchen.

The sound of paws against tile alerted my presence to no one. Flynn was still asleep. Grumbling, I stepped on the pedal to open the fridge. I grumbled again as the fridge door swung open. The crisper was devoid of sandwiches³. My stomach growled. Were I a dog, I would 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 birds. 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 it 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.

"It's 8:15."

"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 your magician's orders⁴."

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

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

⁴ Right, Flynn's a magician. Like, a real magician, not some cheap slight-of-hand guy. Unfortunately, none of that helps him make sandwiches.

“Go to bed, Coby.” Flynn repeated. He lay back down, “I open late today so let me sleep in⁵. 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!”

“Yea, yea. But I’m not doing this agai—oh,” Flynn paused when he opened the fridge, “well that’s not good.”

I yipped curiously. Flynn stood aside. There was only a box of juice, half a stick of butter, and the untouchable mystery tin left on the shelves. “I seem to have neglected the groceries. We’re out of eggs. And everything else.”

My ears drooped. “We’re...out of food?”

“Basically, yea.” Flynn shrugged. “There’s probably some nuts left in the storeroom.”

“Eww⁶. Why don’t you go shopping?”

Flynn yawned again. “I just woke up. Can’t you wait a bit?”

“No.”

He looked at me, struggling for an argument or compromise. “Eh, some battles aren’t worth it. Go downstairs and wait for me. I need to get changed.”

“Yay!”

I bounded downstairs. The bar was an easy place to wait. An absence of customers meant I didn’t need to put up with all their annoying smells⁷. The clean seat cushions and polished wood were enjoyable, soft scents that helped me survive the otherwise excruciating wait.

“I think I have funds for three days of groceries.” Flynn said as he came downstairs. He was looking through his wallet. “That should be enough until we either get more customers or another case.”

⁵ Flynn runs a bar on the main floor of the building. The second floor is a bunch of spare rooms and the third is where we live.

⁶ I have standards!

⁷ Seriously, how can you humans stand yourselves? Stingy car exhaust, stale offices, not to mention all those acidic stresses you people run around with. Those are just the minor annoyances too; don’t even get me started on the lack of regular bathing. Weak noses are no excuse!

“Starve in three days. Got it. But can we get food *now*?”

Flynn rolled his eyes and opened the door. “Yes, we can go now. Honestly, Coby, a bit of patience would do you a world of—”

A figure burst through the door and collided with Flynn.

“You’re open! Finally! I’ve been waiting, yes, waiting! Couldn’t rest, couldn’t risk! I didn’t realize it, you have to know that. I didn’t mean to! But you can help, yes?”

The man grabbed desperately for Flynn.

“There are rumours—unspoken things—about this place. That you help people. They’re true, right? You help people? That’s what you do?”

“Sir if you could calm down and let go of me I’d gladly—”

“I can’t be calm! I have to be ready! Vigilant! It comes when I sleep. It comes!”

The air contorted and the man crumpled into Flynn’s arms⁸. He glanced at the door and it swung shut. The man’s snores drifted through the bar.

“We’re not getting groceries now, are we?”

⁸ Most magic doesn’t come with flashy gestures or deep incantations. The simpler the spell, the less physical action is required.