

Chapter: The Final Temptation of Olly - Part 1

By Kwakwa

On such a beautiful, shiny morning, Everett could usually be found with his best friend Olly, or perhaps on a date with his beloved Jordan. But today, the white-haired man found himself unable to enjoy the outdoors. Unable to leave his apartment at all, really.

It had started like any other day. Olly had come to his door like he often did, and the two of them hanged out around town. The charming Mrs. Gilden even offered them freshly baked cinnamon rolls, making for an exceptional breakfast, then the kids around town had a blast climbing a 15-foot-tall Everett.

It's after noon, when Ev had come home alone to cook some lunch, that he felt the first cramps, which quickly devolved into intense stomach pain. His power activated and he found himself shrinking to just a couple inches in size, despite not ever trying to shrink himself.

But the worst of it is when he realized he could not grow back.

The pain subsided after a few minutes, but an increasingly terrified Everett realized that he could not change his size anymore. Not to grow back, not even to shrink himself further. The part of his brain that fired off that unique size-changing feeling was just not responding anymore.

And, as the shrunken man was starting to hyperventilate in worry, a knock rang out through the room. Everett stared at the door.

"Is it... Olly or Jordan?" He wondered. Jordan would definitely be reliable. Olly... Olly wanted to own Everett as a pet, and although Ev teased and played with the idea without truly meaning it, he didn't know whether his best friend was serious.

"Naaah, surely Olly will know to help when it's really important," Everett told himself. "He'd help when it's really important... right?"

Keys clanked in the lock and the door opened wide, showing Olly's diminutive form. "Yo, I need you to shrink Eric's new outfit real quick, you available?" He asked while inviting

himself in. Not getting a response, Olly started looking around. “Ev? Everett, you here?”

Olly dropped what he was carrying—it was a bundled-up maid costume topped with a cat ear headband—and walked in confidently, making Everett stagger back at the sheer size of the boy. The massive purple sneakers of his giant friend were thumping across the floor directly towards him.

“Oh, there you are!” Olly said, to Everett’s dismay. The tiny man had hoped he’d remain unseen until the more reliable Jordan came home. And to worsen Everett’s anxiety, Olly’s instinctive reaction to seeing a shrunken Ev was to tug at the heel of his right shoe with the toes of the left, swiftly pulling his socked foot free.

The tiny tried to speak up and explain he needed help, but Olly’s much-louder voice overshadowed the squeaks. “Whatcha doing there, all tiny?” Olly took another step, bringing him so close that Ev had to hurt his neck looking up. The giant had a twinkle in his eye, the same he had while looking at his shrunken pets. “Waiting for me, are you?”

“It’s not what you think-” Ev said, but his breath caught in his throat. Olly was shamelessly peeling his sock off his foot, a growing grin on his face, his eyelids half-closing.

Ev started to run, aiming for the nearest furniture, hoping to escape underneath, but his run was cut short by metric tonnes of Olly’s sole collapsing on top of him. His giant friend casually stepped on what, to him, looked like a scurrying bug, but to Everett, it was a mountain falling on him and pinning him down. And while it was not enough to hurt him, it expelled all air out of his lungs and cracked his back in three different spots that had been bothering him for weeks.

“That’s your last chance, bud. Grow back now, or forever hold your peace!” Olly said with a laugh, though his voice was muffled to Everett’s ear, encased as he was in Olly’s sole. “... For real, you’re not growing back? You really want this, right?”

Everett was desperately trying to wiggle, move, fight, anything, but he was far too small to even budge the sole trampling him.

“Hmm, so you fi-na-lly learned that your place is at my feet, uh~? Took ya long enough! I’m glad you came around dude, you were the last piece to make my collection shine!” A long belly laugh, and suddenly the sole shifted over Everett, dragging him along slightly until the toes were just above him. “Ah, not quite the last~ I still need to collar your boyfriend, lil’

Jordan. Love the guy but he needs some training, to make him come yapping and licking on command.”

While Olly monologued, his voice dripping with increasing greed and desires, he shifted his toes, turning Everett front up so he could see the sheer, absolute self-satisfaction on Olly's face.

“Please, listen!” Everett yelled as soon as he could breathe through the crack of his giant friend's toes. “Please Olly!”

That finally got his attention, and the black-skinned boy finally quieted down. “Uh? Trying to talk, pipsqueak?” And Olly bent down and snatched Everett from between his toes, bringing him to his quizzical face. “What's up?”

Everett needed a few seconds to breathe deeply and recover, grateful that the gargantuan fingertips that grabbed him were only applying a rather light pressure on his tired torso. “I can't grow back. It's-it's my powers, they're not working anymore... You need to help me...”

First, Olly's face showed surprise, but it quickly turned into a wide, ear-to-ear grin. “That's WICKED! So you're mine now uh? Done deal, no takebacksies!”

“OLLY!” Everett cried out, upset. “Stop messing around, this is serious! I want your help, I do NOT want to be your pet!”

Olly's smile did not shrink one bit. Instead, the giant shrugged uncaringly. “Eric said the same thing at first, you'll change your mind.”

“What?! NO! Olly you can't-!” Everett tried to protest, but Olly had already dismissed anything he might say. Everett was brought to the open maw of Olly's loose sock, and without warning, Olly tossed him inside.

“Oomph-” He landed on fabric, far down the tube of Olly's sock. The 'ground' here was thick and soft... musky and slightly damp, too, which involuntarily made Everett blush.

“Don't daydream mate, get on your back and spread your limbs!”

Everett was surprised by the voice that came from near him, and he turned his head to see

Eric, the same size as him, laying down on the fabric.

“Fucking do it, you dolt!”

“Wha-?”

Everett stuttered, and Eric sprang into action. Everett’s collar got grabbed with incredible strength, and all of his body was slammed down on the fabric. Eric brought his face very close, clearly angry.

“Olly’s feet, that’s *my* turf. You come on my territory, you fucking obey me.” And Eric rushed to lay back down, arms and legs spread; Everett imitated his pose without further protest. As he understood a second later, Eric was right.

Olly’s toes were sneaking into the sock, and any other position would run the risk of injury when... evidently... Olly walked all over the two of them. Everett winced and braced himself.

The warm skin was almost welcoming, and Everett had to steel his resolve. When Olly put his foot on the floor, the two tinies winced in unison, but Olly’s weight was not enough to cause more than an overbearing discomfort—thanks to the black man’s short height, no doubt. Thud, thud, thud—Olly’s steps were fast and enthusiastic, earning grunts from his two pets with each footfall.

It took much less time than the tinies expected for Olly to come to a stop—and they heard the giant’s voice order an ice cream, muffled by layers of fabric, earning a groan from Eric. The giant settled, clearly licking away at his treat, while the feet gently rocked back and forth to fidget with its tiny toys.

“How come you’re here, anyway? Grow back and go back home, if you’re not wanting this,” Eric suddenly said.

Everett was caught by surprise but he painfully shifted himself to look at his companion directly despite the metric tonnes of Olly compressing them. “My powers are not... they’re not working at the moment, I’m afraid.”

“Oy, you’re fucking with me right?” Eric reacted more strongly than Ev expected—but he remembered after a second. Eric’s only way of ever growing back was Everett’s abilities.

Without them...

“I’m sorry... it’s...” He didn’t finish his sentence.

Eric groaned in a way that felt like releasing anger and... horniness, perhaps? Eric’s face went red suddenly upon hearing his fate was robbed from his hands again, that he would be trapped at this size if Everett’s powers didn’t return; and he promptly buried his face in Olly’s supple skin.

“... don’t look at me...” Eric mumbled through the sole. “Please.”

Everett dragged his cheek along the skin again to look strictly away from his friend, understanding that there was embarrassment in being seen in that position. But Ev could not unhear the ragged breathing and borderline moans that Eric made afterwards. They were thankfully muted when Olly finished his ice cream and went on his merry way, crushing his pets underfoot again. Silence and pain felt almost like a miracle this time.

Everett felt like hours had gone by when Olly finally slowed down, and relief flooded him as Olly suddenly sat down, greatly diminishing the pressure on his insoles.

“We’re home,” Eric said, and the foot slid out of the shoe like on cue, flooding the inside of the sock with light.

“Issaaaaaak!” Olly screamed from above. And only then did the giant tug on the sock, freeing both his foot and his pets; Eric and Everett collapsed on the floor of Olly’s apartment, between his feet.

“Olly, you need to-” Everett started, but a deafening yawn silenced him. It was not a natural one either, Olly just mocked him to his face.

“You’re one of my pets now—” Everett tried to protest, so Olly’s voice rose one octave. “—so you have to show me what you got, little guy! You three, run three laps around the coffee table and then climb on top. Go!”

Everett barely had time to get on his feet when Issak sprinted past him and around the table leg. Even Eric, who had been wiped out by the ordeal inside Olly’s shoe, suddenly leaped on his feet to obey the order. Ev did not move at first, instead trying to walk towards Olly to beg for his help, but a powerful hand grabbed his arm suddenly.

Issak, moving faster than Everett considered possible, grabbed his forearm as he completed his first lap and engulfed Everett in his mad dash—although the white-haired man suspected Issak slowed down considerably to allow him to keep up. Everett was pretty athletic himself, even if he liked food a tad too much; but even he was gasping for air before completing even one lap at Issak's pace.

“Can we- can we... slow down?” Ev asked, and Issak finally did, giving him a contrite look. “Why are we... even obeying him?” Issak did not give an answer, but he smiled in the way only he knew how, and Ev understood in a way. Obeying Olly is how Issak lives his life.

Everett breathed in deeply and picked up the pace, and Issak happily followed—and in a minute, they were done with the running portion. Now, climbing... Everett rushed not towards the table, but towards the couch—easier to scale, his climber instinct told him. And so it was; in a few moments, Everett's strong arms pulled him up to the seat and, from there, he jumped across what felt like a dozen feet to the tabletop. The landing was harsh, but Everett felt proud of himself.

... That is, until he saw Eric and Issak. Neither used the couch as a stepping stone. Eric pounced after a running start and reached the edge of the table in one go, awing Ev. Issak climbed the leg of the table as if it were the trunk of a tree and, ignoring how difficult it would be to climb such an overhang, he kicked back and grabbed the edge of the table and pulled himself up with one arm, seemingly effortlessly.

Everett had to take a second to breath and stand up straight beneath the watchful eye of his titanic best friend.

“I did your thing, now you need to-”

“I don't need to do anything. I own you.” Olly said matter-of-factly. And before Everett could protest, he added. “Your performance was shit anyway.”

“Wha-? No need to be rude!” Ev said, feeling genuinely kind of offended.

“It's true though. You're all sweaty and out of breath, and look at your belly.”

Everett blushed a bit, feelings self-conscious. “Hey, what's wrong with my belly? ... HEY!” Olly grabbed him unceremoniously and started peeling his clothes off of him, starting with

his coat, then his sweater and shirt... Olly put Everett down like a kid done playing with his doll when the tiny was barechested, to Everett's horror.

"I thought you were supposed to be a mountain rescuer? I'd say you've had it too easy since you can grow bigger than the mountains, if I'm judging by that~" Olly prodded Everett's belly with a fingertip, making it jiggle a bit. The tiny man blushed with embarrassment—and he couldn't help but feel a tinge of anger towards Olly. His friend was just acting like a complete jackass!

"Guys, show him what my pets should look like," Olly said. On cue, Eric and Issak started removing their clothes.

"H-hey, you don't need to do what he says," Everett stammered.

"Yes they do," Olly's voice boomed from the heavens, shushing the white-haired tiny.

The other two didn't make a peep—Eric dutifully removed his jacket and pulled up his shirt sleeves, and Issak shrugged off his much more scant clothing, showing off his bare chest. Both of them were in olympic shape.

Everett tried to express his discomfort, but Olly's palm bumped into him as the giant grasped him and the other two tinies in a fist. They were scattered on the ground in front of Olly, where they could see his full size. The runt didn't look so small anymore.

"And this is the standard you will be held to, as a member of the family," Olly continued, looking eager, as he flexed and showed off his own body. He uselessly pulled up his t-shirt's already-short sleeve to emphasize his flexed biceps.

"Olly PLEASE! You have to help me," Everett was starting to fear the worst... Olly looked and sounded downright intimidating when Everett was stripped of his size-changing ability. Normally, Everett would be quick to grow back and grab Olly by the scruff of the neck if he started to act too frisky. But now, with no escape route in sight... he could see the glimmer in Olly's eyes that was reserved to his pets.

It did not help that Olly had positioned himself just between the light and Everett, casting his shadow over all three tinies. Everett knew—he just knew—that Olly had done it on purpose. With his flexed muscles, confident pose and puffed out chest, and with a golden halo illuminating his head from behind, Olly looked like a god—not a benevolent one.

“I’m helping you! You don’t know how nice my pets have it. Every week I buy a pint of ice cream and they can literally swim in it. Don’t you want that? And then I’ll give you a healthy, nutritious diet and plenty of exercise, and you will be able to enjoy every treat to the maximum! The health of my pets is very important!” Olly said while wagging his finger like an enthusiastic lecturer.

“Olly, I said no.” Everett was starting to feel a deep, creeping fear. He knew *exactly* how stubborn Olly could be.

“Whyyyy,” Olly groaned, looking suddenly much less happy.

“I don’t have to justify myself to you. No means no.” Everett’s eyes were almost unconsciously mapping the room around him, looking for hiding places.

“You just say no because you don’t understand,” Olly said, obviously annoyed. He crossed his arms, sighed and let himself fall on his butt, his bare feet propped up with the soles presented to the group of shrunken men. “But don’t worry, I will make you love it so much that you will be begging me to keep you forever.”

On cue, Everett just bolted. He knew that line of thought, and there was no way to snap Olly out of it. Him and Olly were too good friends, they knew exactly what was going on in each other’s mind. That’s why Olly was not surprised when his best friend tried to run away from him. He lazily called: “Eric.” The tiny, who was near Everett’s escape path, suddenly leaped, tackling him to the ground.

“Issak. Make him apologize.” Olly sounded giddy.

Issak obeyed like a well-oiled machine, rushing to Eric’s side and grabbing Everett’s arm with an iron grip. Everett was pulled rudely towards Olly’s seating form—Issak ignored all of Everett’s whispered pleas to let him go—until he was standing just between the walls of his exposed soles, which reached as tall as houses.

“You should bow down,” Eric helpfully said under his breath. Everett felt very awkward, but Issak, in the corner of his eyes, approved with a nod. So, the man took a knee to the ground, then two. His face was burning red with frustration and embarrassment as he prostrated himself in front of his best friend, stuttering “I-I’m sorry Olly.”

“Ah, it’s alright,” the giant said. “You’re my friend, I forgive you. Well, I will forgive you IF you kiss my foot. Eric will show you how,” garnering an shocked “what?” from Eric, then a resigned grunt.

Eric left Everett’s side with a sigh and positioned himself in front of one of the titanic feet. His forehead barely reached the third toe. Everett observed with dread as Eric got on his tippy toes so his lips reached the spherical, smooth underside of the toe. Eric, who looked angry a minute earlier, had nothing but a beatifically entranced look on his face as he repeatedly kissed his master’s creamy skin. Olly had asked for just a kiss, but Eric offered five, ten, twenty kisses, each more intense than the last. After a few seconds, the man was openly making out with it, and Everett caught a glimpse of his tongue sneakily lapping at Olly’s chocolate skin. The tiny man started wrapping his arm around the toe, trying to haul himself up closer to it, when Olly’s voice boomed from above.

“That’s enough. Everett, your turn.”

The whole display lasted a couple minutes. When Eric peeled himself away from the foot, he gave Everett a guilty look, mouthed a quiet “sorry” and wiped the drool off his chin. Issak, one hand clenched around Everett’s shoulder, led the white-haired man to Olly’s other foot, not allowing him a single chance to run away again.

“Issak... please,” Everett whispered.

“I am on your side.” Issak spoke in a barely discernible voice, ensuring that Olly’s ears couldn’t pick up the conversation of his pets. “There will be time to bargain for your freedom later. I will help. But now, the master gave an order, and we must follow it. If you perform well, Lord Olly will be appeased and more likely to hear your request. Give it your all, please!”

Issak’s hand moved incomprehensibly fast, grabbing the back of Everett’s head and shoving his face in the gap between two toes. Everett could barely manage a startled shriek before his mouth was filled with the taste of his best friend’s feet. Issak kept his head pinned down, so Everett, resigned, started kissing.

There was a black crevice of anxiety in Everett’s chest, but he couldn’t deny that the act of kissing a giant’s toes was itself a pleasure for him. So, for a moment, he allowed himself to let this desire loose; he kissed and affectionately bit his friend’s skin until Olly decided to end it.

“Hahaha, alright, alright! Good boy!”

Immediately, Issak spoke up as he yanked Everett’s head out from the fold of the giant’s skin.

“Master, sir! I believe that Everett would like to talk.”

“Hmm? Well, let him speak,” Olly shrugged.

The stage was his, and Everett shook his head to dispel the memories of how Olly treated him. He just wanted to remember who Olly really was.

“Do you remember when you fell off your bike? I think it was after school, and you were so bruised you couldn’t walk?”

The giant seemed confused. “Yeah, and?”

“I carried you home on my back.” Olly frowned slightly, he didn’t like to be reminded of that detail, but Everett continued. “What could a pet have done for you that day? You needed a friend to be there for you. You still do! Please be reasonable and help me get my powers back. You need to bring me to the top of the Giant’s Step. If you get me to the peak, I’m sure everything will fix itself—it’s just a day trip.”

“No.” Olly’s answer cut like a blade and left Everett stunned.

“Olly... You’re my best friend, and-” Everett started, but Olly cut him off. “You’re my best friend too! That’s why I can’t let you go. Friends fade away. Pets are forever.”

Olly let a heavy silence fall before grinning and suddenly sounding cheery. “I want you to be with me forever, dude. You’re really, really special! You should be happy! I’ll treat ya well~”

Everett felt the cold bite of fear. If Olly really refused to budge, there was nothing to do. Even though Olly was just a short, unimpressive man, he was an unstoppable force to the shrunken people in his home. Everett usually wielded that power with exceeding care and prudence, but Olly reveled in it, he craved it. Olly was a glutton for power. If changing his mind wouldn’t work, Everett knew of one way to get a reaction out of him: prickling his ego.

“How about a competition, then? If I win, you help me grow back.”

“What? I have everything I want, why would I bet it away?” Olly questioned, genuinely confused.

“Oh? Are you... *scared*?” Despite the vast size difference, Everett immediately knew he’d hooked his giant friend. When a challenge presented itself, Olly couldn’t let it go unmet.

“Tell ya what—if...” Olly caught himself, hesitated, then smiled, “If you beat me at Smash, I’ll help you grow back.” Olly’s smile grew into a grin, a joyous expression that felt threatening to the tiny Everett. “But if I win, you will call me Master from now until the end of time~” Olly was utterly confident he would win, despite Everett being the better Smash player, usually.

“How can I play? Do you have, like, a tiny controller for me?”

Olly didn’t grace him with an answer; he snatched Everett and dropped him atop the coffee table next to a normal-sized controller. The tiny circled it a few times—even laid flat on its back, the controller was as tall as Everett and three times as long.

“I can’t play with this,” Everett sighed. With his size-changing power, he could have easily made a tiny controller for himself, but now...

“Nonsense. I told you to play, so you will,” Olly said. He brought two fingers to his mouth and let out a shrill whistle. On cue, both Eric and Issak rushed to climb the table, needing only seconds to perform what seemed a challenging act of athleticism for Everett. The two men scaled furniture in leaps and bounds in a well-practiced act, and neither was winded when they reached the tabletop.

“Don’t worry, we can do this. Olly makes us play video games with him all the time,” Eric helpfully said. His scowl was less pronounced than usual, which was as close to a smile as he’d show Everett. Issak provided a bright smile before turning around to face Olly.

“Am I allowed to play seriously, or should I sabotage Everett?” He asked. The question sounded so earnest that it unsettled even Olly, who fidgeted in response.

“Yeah, try to win, it’s not like I need help beating yo ass,” Olly grunted, visibly irritated.

Everett could imagine that his giant friend had hoped Issak would keep quiet and secretly work against the tinies' team. But now, put on the spot, he had to instruct Issak to play fair.

Issak perked up and enthusiastically rushed to Eric, who lazily raised one hand in the air for Issak to high five it. "There's three of us this time, I think we can win!"

"Yeah, we're gonna crush Olly, don't worry," Eric smirked.

"Don't forget I can ACTUALLY crush you, so watch your mouth!" Olly piped up with a snarl.

"Don't threaten me with a good time," Eric said, earning himself a "tch" from Olly, who got up to turn on the game.

On the table, the three tinies gathered around the controller. Imitating Issak, Everett looked to Eric for instructions on how to proceed.

"I'll take the joystick, that's usually my position," the blonde said. "Issak, you're taking the face buttons. Everett... the right bumper and trigger." Eric whispered, conspiratorial: "We usually get pretty close to beating him when we have nobody to man the shields. With you, it's a guaranteed victory." Everett nodded, still anxious but now hopeful in the face of Eric's confidence.

The TV flickered on in the distance. Olly threw himself on his couch, controller in hand, and the tiny band got in position; Eric was standing, slightly hunched over, holding the joystick like a captain at the helm of his ship, while Issak sat straddling the handle to access the front buttons. Everett put his left shoulder against the bumper, ready to shove with all his might against something designed for a human finger to press.

"Ganondorf!" The TV screamed as Olly selected his fighter. "Ken!" Eric had picked his fighter too.

"Final Destination, ten lives, no items," Olly said, and to Everett's surprise, the giant's bare foot rose into the air before slamming its heel on the tabletop, just inches from the tinies' controller. The creamy sole towered far above the three pets... and Eric seemed transfixed by it, not even looking at the TV as the match started.

"ERIC!" Everett cried out, and the man broke out of the trance just in time to see his character fly out of the screen after Olly's merciless attack.

The fight that ensued was possibly the most stressful video game experience of Everett's life. Olly did not let down for even an instant; Ganondorf pummeled Ken out of the stage three more times before the tinies managed to kill him once. Everett's shoulder was sore from the force needed to push that bumper, and even his best efforts were not always enough, so some of Ganondorf's hits landed due to a lack of shield.

"PAUSE! Time out!" Eric called out as Ken lost its fifth life. Olly did pause the game, and Eric turned to his shrunken teammates. "Close your eyes, look away, seriously. I have to take care of something, you better not fucking watch."

Everett complied without a peep, and he plugged his ears for good measure. A couple minutes later, he heard the muffled instruction that he could look again—he caught a glimpse of Eric, face a deep shade of red, wiping his mouth with his arm before they all returned to their gaming positions. There was a glistening wet spot on Olly's heel, just around face-level for a tiny.

It was like night and day. A Shoryuken landed and Ganondorf flew across the screen. Eric's eyes were laser-focused on the game, now, and his verbal instructions to Everett and Issak had become more precise and efficient. Olly lost a third and fourth lives without killing his pets' avatar once, and his annoyance was starting to show. Each life taken emboldened the tinies, to the point that they equalized scores when only three lives were left in both camps.

Everett caught movement from the corner of his eye, and he was horrified to see Olly's sole, which was towering above them, quickly descending. The toes went directly for Eric; Everett loudly protested, but Olly didn't care. Eric tried to hold on to the joystick, but Olly's toes snatched him up and pulled him off the table entirely. Everett rushed to try to help, but Eric had disappeared between Olly's scrunched toes, and—as Olly put his foot flat on the floor—beneath them.

"OLLY! You-you can't DO THAT!" Everett let out some genuine anger.

Olly's eyes came over Everett, but the giant seemed unbothered by the outburst. He smiled slightly. "You should be using that controller, I think." The sound of death resounded through the living room, and Everett turned to see that Ganondorf had just killed Ken again.

“You’re cheating!” Ken died again. Even Issak, despite still manning his position on the controller, was not even attempting to stop the inevitable.

“Looks like I won~” Olly was giddy as his character threw the enemy to his final death. “It’s settled, you’re mine now!”

Olly’s lack of care for his blatant cheating shattered Everett’s confidence that he could ever convince Olly to let him go. Olly would just cheat and then act as if he did not. Who could enforce any rule in a world where Olly is the supreme authority?

Everett’s shoulders slumped, and he let out a long, exhausted sigh.

“Aww c’mon, you’re gonna love it,” Olly said enthusiastically. He bent forward and poked Everett playfully. “There’s some parts of me that you’re gonna become very intimate with~ What should I start with, hm~?”

Olly moved his face to meet Everett’s eyes, but the white-haired tiny purposefully avoided him. Everett had never been quite so disappointed in his friend’s... stretchy morals. “You lied, you cheated. I won’t like any of what comes next.”

That seemed to agitate Olly. “What? Hey! I was nice to even let you play a round, I could have just taken you and-”

Everett turned his back to Olly and took a couple steps away before Olly’s fingers snatched him up. “Hey! Look at me when I talk!”

He was brought to Olly’s face, and Everett saw only stubborn anger on it.

“You don’t even see your actions as reprehensible,” Everett said with a hint of sadness.

Olly clicked his tongue. “I’m doing this for your own good, why are you being so difficult?!”

“Right... I’m the one being difficult.”

Olly grunted, clearly feeling called out. “You’ve been my pet before just for fun, you like this! Why are you denying it now? We could be having a fun time!”

“Consent is what matters most,” Everett replied with a disapproving glare. “You have this

whole BDSM thing with Eric”—Olly opened his mouth to deny the term, but Everett continued—”but it’s fine because Eric wants it. He can leave whenever he wants. That’s the key.”

“... You want to leave me?” Olly noted, looking hurt.

“Not like that! Please Olly, don’t take it the wrong way!” Everett called out, genuinely distressed. “Please buddy, what can I do for you to let me go?”

Olly’s face contorted, clearly thinking and getting an idea.

“Just be my pet. I’m good to my boys, I’ll help you get your powers back—as my pet,” Olly offered, letting out a repressed smile. Everett knew that expression all too well; he just knew that Olly wanted to grin and give that smug, self-satisfied expression he knew so well.

Everett sighed and slumped against Olly’s massive fingers. “Alright. I’m your pet, temporarily. Happy to serve you master, blah blah blah. Can we go to the mountain now? If we get to see the aurora borealis tonight-”

“Oh no no no, I’m not gallivanting around a mountain so late in the evening. You’re my pet now, there’s no rush!”

“Olly! Olly please, I really need you to-”

“We can talk about it tomorrow, buddy,” Olly yawned, cutting off Everett’s protests. He got up and walked towards the bedroom.

“It’s late, go to bed,” and he deposited Everett in the terrarium prepared to serve as his bedroom... or as his prison. Before walking away, Olly replaced the top of the terrarium closed, in such a way Everett didn’t think he could open from the inside.

Inside of the terrarium, there was decoration reminiscent of an icy landscape with, ironically, an aurora borealis, and an igloo that Everett knew was filled with cotton balls to serve as a bed. Everett had hoped Olly would be reasonable in the end, but it really seemed like Olly was acting purely on his immediate, bratty needs and not even considering the bigger picture.

Everett banged on the glass for a moment, observing at the same time Olly go about his evening ritual, brush his teeth and change into his pajamas. After the boy turned off the light in the bedroom, his three pets safely tucked away in their own containers and a warm blanket covering him, Everett lost hope. He would not gain freedom that night, he feared. Perhaps he would gain it ever again...

So, dejected, he entered the igloo and settled on the hamster bed that his so-called owner prepared for him...

... A voice woke him up. It was human-sized, so it was particularly loud to his tiny ears, but it did not belong to Olly. Everett knew that voice well, but it sounded just kind of off.

It was his own voice.

“You did well. Keep it up!” The other Everett’s voice was saying. Tiny Everett got up and hurried out of the igloo. To his horror, he saw himself, human-sized, sitting on Olly’s bed. Olly was sitting up too, staring wordlessly at this Everett. “I like protesting for the heck of it, but you know I love it all, right? If you could make it more forceful, more painful, I’d”—he whispered uncannily—“loooooove that~” Olly nodded.

Everett started punching the glass. “Hey! This is not me! Don’t listen! Don’t listen to him!” But Olly did not acknowledge him at all.

But the other Everett... his head turned, and his eyes locked directly on his tiny counterpart. His eyes, unlike Everett’s sky blue eyes, were red. Blood red.

“Maybe you should punish me tomorrow. Make it hurt~” The thing practically purred in Olly’s ears. Everett’s fists pounded on the glass, his screams unheard.

“Olly! Olly do something please!... Olly...!”

“OLLY!” Everett screamed, violently sitting up with a gasp as he woke up from that nightmare.

“You saw it too?” Everett jumped a little in surprise, as he expected to be alone in the igloo, but Eric was there too, sitting an arm’s length away from him.

“Red eyes you, you saw it too, no?” Eric asked again.

Everett regained his bearing and nodded. "How do you know?"

"Dreams around Olly can be weird. We tend to dream about the same things, Olly, me and Issak. I think anyone who spends the night here partakes in the shared dreams."

Everett wow'd at it, he had no idea that such a thing was occurring or even possible. Though, he thought about his own abilities, and he couldn't really be surprised that Olly had something off with him too. Olly had been there that day, with the aurora.

"Tonight this bastard showed up again. Not the first time, but I think he's bad news. Really bad news." He paused. "I think... I think that maybe... Olly's behavior has gotten worse because of it. Since it appeared, Olly has been playing rougher, being more uncaring of our pain or feelings. It's not like I dislike it, mind you, but..."

"He's been more... Olly-ish, these days?" Everett supplied, uncertain. He continued. "I would have sworn Olly would have helped me, usually, if I needed his help. I could always trust him when it mattered."

Eric grunted in assent. "That's what I thought too. But keeping you as a pet, like he did with me? That's another line in the sand crossed."

Everett scoffed with some humor. "You don't value your own life or freedom very much, do you? He did kidnap you, torture you, and suddenly you were happy to call him master and bow down before him. Honestly, I... well, at first I thought that Olly was forcing your hand. Threatening you or something so you would pretend you're here willingly."

"It's not that..." Eric said, a bit embarrassed.

"What then?"

"There is... something in his soul that resonates with something in me," Eric admitted, a bit shamefully.

"Oh boy, I guess you really like Olly's feet that much, uh?" Everett reacted with a nonjudgmental smile that meant 'I can relate.'

"Not the soles of his feet you moron! His-HIS SOUL! Inside there!" Eric gesticulated towards the general area of his own chest.

Everett let out a belly laugh. "Are you in love with Olly, then?"

"In love? No. I don't think I'm gay. I'm just..." Eric scratched the back of his head, irritated, "... Ollysexual, I guess. Some crap like that."

"Would you kiss Olly if he asked you?"

"SHUT UP!" Eric snapped, suddenly much redder and angrier. "I came here to help you fuckin' escape, so if you don't want my help-

"I do!" Everett interrupted, raising his hands in appeasement. "Sorry, sorry, I really need your help."

Eric clicked his tongue and turned around, beckoning Everett to follow him out of the igloo. Outside, Everett was greeted by the sight of Issak, a spool of thread in his arms. The thread he carried was unrolled and linking the inside of the cage to freedom.

"Ready for a daring escape, brothers?" The ebony man asked, and he handed Eric the thread. To demonstrate, Eric skillfully climbed the glass wall and hopped out. "After you," Issak said.

Everett's ascent was not as graceful as Eric's; and Issak, who escaped last, completed what felt like climbing a cliff in one impressive jump. Everett felt the urge to ask his fellow pets to join the mountain rescue team, but he repressed it as Eric put a finger in front of his lips in the universal "shush" motion. Everett nodded, and the three continued. The thread extended to the floor, and the way down was much farther than escaping a cage. One by one, they started repelling down.

A loud rumble spooked Everett halfway down. Olly's snoring, however light, was a constant reminder that his best friend was always there... massive... terrifying... stubborn and unwilling to let him go. It was the feeling of betrayal that bothered Ev the most. He always knew Olly's flaws, but he also assumed that push come to shove, Olly would do the right thing. He'd have bet his life on it!

Now that his life was truly dependent on it, Everett was afraid that maybe Olly's obsessions were stronger than the kindness he knew Olly possessed...

“Fuck!” Eric hissed in a whisper. “Go! Faster!”

Everett complied, although he didn’t understand at first. But a moment later, it was obvious that Eric could recognize something in Olly that Ev couldn’t; Olly stirred and swung his feet over the edge of the bed and onto the floor, to Everett’s horror. He had another dozen feet relative to his size left to climb down. Eric let himself drop and, shocking Ev, so did Issak, who was easily 20 feet off the ground. Issak landed on his feet and gestured at Everett to jump too. After a second of hesitation, the white-haired man obeyed and let go of the thread—and to his surprise, Issak’s arms caught him effortlessly, sparing him a painful meeting with the ground.

Olly had been rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, and the tinies were keeping a wary eye on his monumental form in the distance. The vast plains of Olly’s bedroom could be crossed in a few steps by the giant, but for the shrunken friends, it was like observing a distant beast. Olly rose to his feet and took his first step; the tinies squeezed themselves against the wall in a hurry.

“Stay close to the wall, run but don’t be obvious, crouch, quiet,” Eric instructed them in a barely audible whisper as the trio did exactly as he said.

Everett’s heart was beating in his ears. But, unlike what he feared, Olly was not walking towards them; the titan walked right past them, he opened the bedroom door and walked into the living room, triggering a sigh of relief in all three tinies.

“I thought we were done for,” Issak chuckled.

“I meant to ask... Why are you including yourself in this?” Everett whispered to Issak. “Eric I can understand, but... you worship Olly, don’t you? Isn’t he the god of your religion? Going against him, isn’t that... heresy?”

Issak smiled and invited them to keep running alongside the wall as they talked.

“Lord Olly’s wrath is an acceptable price for helping you. I intend to confess my sins and endure punishment as soon as you’re free, brother!” Everett blushed in response and gave Issak a thankful smile.

“You need to stop with that whole ‘brother’ thing,” Eric piped up, earning an interrogative “uh?” from Ev. “Issak thinks just because we’re both Olly’s pets, it makes us siblings. I

guess you count as an honorary brother as Olly's current pet," he explained.

"Honestly, I think it's cute. Brother~" Everett said, and Eric sighed, irritated.

Suddenly, Issak sprung into action and covered Everett's mouth with his palm, as Olly walked back into view, a glass of water in hand. They were just past the now-open door to the living room, but with Olly in the way, if he just looked at the floor...

Thump. Thump. **THUMP. THUMP.** THUMP. Thump. Thump. Thump.

The footsteps came and went. Olly walked past them, unaware, and all three tinies let out a breath of relief when Olly closed the bedroom door behind him, leaving his pets free to roam the living room.

They started rushing towards freedom when, unexpectedly, the door flew open again. Olly appeared in the opening, looking irate.

"I know you're here! Where are you?" He started walking, not yet spotting the three pets just a couple strides away from him. "Olly olly oxen free~"

In the dark of night, Olly was less of a big old goof and more of a massive shape in the shadows, his face barely visible in the moonlight filtering through the windows. Only the shadows that engulfed them all were giving the escapees a chance at concealing themselves.

The three shrunken men were squeezing themselves tightly against the wall, their hearts beating like jackhammers. Olly's feet slowly walked nearby, deliberately rolling from heel to toes like a predator on the prowl.

Olly walked past them in his search, and Eric indicated with hand signals that they should cross the corridor just on Olly's heels. They did so, as quietly as their tiny legs could carry them. The wind outside the window, Olly's breath, the soft crunch of carpet under the giant's feet all covered the murmur of the tinies' steps.

"Where are you?" Olly roared suddenly, cutting through the ambiance. "What the hell? Eric! Issak! Bring me Everett, it's an order!"

Ev tensed up, but his companions did not react to their master's order, and he relaxed after a second.

Olly grunted and puffed in anger as he paced the living room. He got on all four to look under the couch, giving the escapees a window of opportunity—they dashed across the open carpet while the titan was distracted.

A rogue twinkle of moonlight shone on the three tinies just as Everett looked over his shoulder at Olly. That's how he saw them, freezing his blood in his veins. Cutting through the dark, the giant's eyes were directly on them, staring. Enraged.

“Run! RUN!” Everett bellowed, and his fear jolted him to outperform his tiny peers for once. He dashed forward with reckless abandon, immediately followed by Issak, and Eric last of all after he let out an angry “Fuck me sideways.”

THUMP.

Olly's foot crashed straight on top of Eric, and an instant later Everett's whole body was engulfed in a fist and pulled off the floor.

“Have you got any excuses, pet? Or should I start dishing out punishment?” Olly practically growled. From Everett's view, mostly obscured by the trunk-sized fingers squeezing his body, Olly did not much feel like his best friend. So, he opened his mouth with no intention of talking.

He bit. Hard, with decisiveness, he took a bite of Olly's fingertip, earning a yelp of pain. Suddenly, the light flooded the scene, as Olly slammed his other hand on the light switch and electrical light illuminated the room.

Olly had slightly opened his hand, letting Everett breathe and see the small bloody mark left by his teeth. The giant's face was deformed by a grimace not of pain but of outrage, or perhaps betrayal.

“What the HELL dude?!” Olly yelled. “You bit me! Why?!”

“Why? You're asking WHY?” Everett yelled right back. “You bullied me, hurt me, humiliated me! You stole my freedom and ignored all of my wishes! Your actions are so... sooo... CONTEMPTIBLE! You've been a complete dickwad!”

Hearing Everett swear made Olly straighten up slightly. He was not used to being dressed down by shrunken people either; he usually had god-like control under the tinies under his *quote-unquote* care. For once, Olly had the reflex to look down with a modicum of shame.

“You’re gonna learn to-”

“No, I won’t! I will never, ever just accept it.” Everett’s voice had a low volume, but for once Olly shut up to let the tiny man be heard. “If you do not help me now, our friendship is over.” That, more than anything, hit the giant like a punch, and Olly reeled.

“I... alright. Fine.” Olly grumbled, but he moved nonetheless—he rushed to his bedroom, leaving the tinies alone. Finally, the three of them could take a long breath of relief.

“I thought we were toast,” Eric commented as soon as Olly freed him from underneath his sole. The punk had a trickle of blood on his chin, but he wiped it off as if it were nothing.

“I sure am glad that Lord Olly is being reasonable,” Issak added, and the three of them nodded in agreement.

Rustling in Olly’s room indicated he was done changing clothes, and a moment later he was standing in the living room in full winter gear with harness and climbing gear, staring down at Everett with a vaguely contrite expression.

“If I help you now... we’ll remain best friends forever, right?” He asked, almost like a kid caught doing a naughty thing and hoping against all odds for forgiveness.

Everett could recognize his best friend, again. He smiled gently. “Yes. Forever, bud.”

Ev climbed upon Olly’s palm and into his coat’s breast pocket, and after tearful goodbyes, the two were on their way.

For Everett, the trip was quite comfortable, as Olly could make life easy for a tiny if he so wished. The pocket he was in was spacious, and given it was stuffed with cotton balls and a shrunken pillow, one could tell that Olly had the habit of letting his pets rest there. And, while the giant walked across the lit streets of town and engulfed himself in the forest and up the slopes of the peak, Everett felt some guilt that he was warm and laying down.

“You’re doing amazing, Olly! And, thanks,” Ev said as he poked his head through the opening of the pocket. “You’re the coolest.”

“I sure am!” Olly boasted, and his stride accelerated a bit.

There was a scattered smatter of snow falling upon the two friends, but each other’s comforting presence kept them both warm through climbing. It was a familiar path, so Olly was moving fast despite the vast distance to cross.

Roughly halfway up, when the city down the valley was just a gathering of yellow and orange lights speckling the horizon, Everett convinced a still-determined Olly to take a break.

“Ugh, don’t baby me,” the giant replied with annoyance, not slowing down a bit.

“What if I say pretty please~?” Ev teased from his vantage point inside the pocket, lulled by his friend’s deafening heartbeats. “I can literally hear you getting tired.”

“Request denied.”

Ev hummed, then added, “Hmm, and if you stop, after I get my powers back, I’ll be your pet for a day.” One could almost hear Olly’s heels digging in the ground like a ferrari drifting to a stop, and he settled on a nearby rock.

“Are you fuckin with me?” Olly asked. He pulled Everett out and stared at his tiny friend in his upturned palm. “I’ll know if you lie.”

If Olly was being guided down the wrong path, maybe he just needed a light shining in the right direction. Staring up at the boyish face of his childhood friend, seeing the details of his features deformed by a grimace of mistrust, Everett giggled. “I’m glad we are friends.”

“Uh?! Wha-?”

“Shush, don’t worry about it,” Ev said, and Olly averted his eyes, blushing slightly, his chin hidden in his scarf in an expression Ev knew very well. That was the Olly he remembered.

Their break was cut short, however. Blinding lights, suddenly, pierced through the canopy of pines. In lieu of the night sky, the summit was suddenly bathed in the aurora, arriving unexpectedly and more welcome than ever.

“Did you summon this one?” Olly whispered, shocked. Everett replied, “No, I think it’s my ticket out.” They rushed the rest of the way with renewed energy.

The summit was bright as midday, but the colors dancing in the light reflected the whole rainbow. Although no shapes could be discerned clearly, Everett had the feeling there were beings in there, minds at work, minds who wanted to help him.

“Take me out!” He instructed Olly.

From Olly’s palm, staring up at a sky full of moving lights, Everett felt something familiar course through him. He did not hesitate; he jumped off the palm, and he was human sized before his feet hit the ground. He lightly jogged towards the cliff edge, gaining size with each step. First he peaked above the treeline, then his head met the aurora, and it bent around his forehead in a natural flow. And then, he jumped off the edge...

... only to emerge, larger than he had been in a while, a hundred feet tall at least. The aurora borealis was at eye level; he could pull and weave the northern lights across the sky with one fingertip, earning laughs from the minuscule Olly below.

“Are you ready to go home?” He asked after a few minutes of loitering and enjoying the return to normalcy. Olly hopped upon his palm, and they turned back towards town.

The walk back was much shorter than the other way ‘round.

Interlude: A little dream

“Noooo... noooo...nooooo...”

Elias had been repeating the same sounds over and over, crying in despair for a chance to survive, that even “no” had lost all meaning. Nooooo. No. Noo.

Semantic satiation. It was the term for the loss of meaning incurred by repeating a word over and over. Elias had known that, once upon a time. Right now, all he knew was the burning, the heat, the scalding heat of the pastry and the overpowering scent of cinnamon. Elias was practically choking on it, the sugar filled the air and his lungs, and when he cried his tears felt sweet.

He had been so close, so close to getting her, but he had lost, and now he was going to die. He knew it, because he saw the face of his executioner.

The boy was famous; after seeing his round freckled face on posters and advertisements and mugs, it felt like recognizing an old friend. An old friend who was miles tall and whose face practically filled the sky. Mostly his mouth, really. His wide, open mouth that was sending waves of warmth and fear into Elias’ fragile tiny body.

Elias remembered his lover, and he cried.

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If he could live off cinnamon rolls and nothing else, Everett would. They were the thing counterbalancing hours of efforts outdoors; the calories were worth it!

Walking down the street on his way home, Ev was saluting passersby as he chewed happily on the sugary treat. He swallowed after only a couple chews, because he was a bit too greedy when it came to his sweet tooth, to his own chagrin...

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* *

Elias cursed that giant monster of not at least ending it there and then, like a guillotine. He struggled and cried, half of a hand chewed away but the rest of him sadly intact in the center of the giant's tongue, trapped in a mound of cinnamon-flavored hell.

GULP.

A torrent of drool sent the small man careening towards his grave. Everett moaned in appreciation; that one mouthful had something even more delicious than the rest!

Everett gasped and looked around him. The inside of the igloo...

He sighed and went back to sleep.

Chapter: The Final Temptation of Olly - Part 2

By ShinseiKyouto

“Olly... please... don't do this...”

Everett's words were weak, pleading, Olly's powerful brown fingers wrapped tightly around his frail body. Olly couldn't help but smirk, tightening his grip, enjoying the feeling of how Everett's body began to creak, enjoying the sound of Everett's whimpering gasps, tears streaming down his face. “You kept me down for long enough, Ev. It's about time I stretched my legs and let this world really know what's up!”

“I-If I've been unfair to you... if you're unhappy... we can talk it out! I'll do better! I-I'm... I'm sorry!” Everett said, a loud SNAP punctuating his apology as his arm broke. He gasped, slumping in Olly's grip, unable to summon enough strength to struggle at this point. “Please Olly... I'm your friend...”

“You're an obstacle.” Olly said coldly, tightening his grip further, his fist erupting in a cacophony of snaps and liquid squelches, Everett's body slowly turning to mush, blood seeping between the giant man's fingers.

Everett let out a gurgling gasp, blood seeping out the corners of his mouth before he let out a tremendous cough, blood splattering out in front of him. Behind Olly, another Olly was watching, horror across his face. He ran forward, arms pumping, legs flying, desperately trying to reach his doppelganger, to stop this madness, to save his friend; but no matter how hard he ran he never got closer, the light slowly leaving Everett's eyes. “No... no... NOOOOOO!”

Olly sprang up in bed, the word shrieking out loud, waking Issak and Eric, both men leaping from their beds and running up to the glass of their terrariums, watching as Olly thrashed and screamed, his eyes opening wide with a long gasp as he finally freed himself from the confines of his nightmare, chest heaving, sweat standing out in glistening beads all over his nearly naked body. “What the fuck Olly! Are you okay?”

Olly sat up, shakily running his arm over his forehead. He felt hot and cold all at once, the vivid details of his nightmare lingering in his mind. “I'm... I'm fine. Yeah... it was just... a nightmare.”

“Are you sure, Lord Olly?” Issak asked, looking ready to scale the glass walls and pop out of his

terrarium if necessary to console his master.

“Course I'm sure!” Olly snapped, turning away from his pets, legs dangling off the side of the bed, feet not quite touching the floor. “I'm not some dumb little kid that thinks nightmares are real!”

“Could have fooled me.” A hollow voice spoke softly in the back of Olly's mind.

Olly's head jerked up, eyes widening as he saw something staring at him from the corner of his room. It was still early morning, the sickly white light of a rising sun barely infiltrating the shadows, two silver dots fixed on him from deep inside. Olly felt a chill run up his spine as he whispered, “What did you say?”

“I said, could have fooled me!” Eric said again, more loudly this time, smirking as he crossed his arms and leaned against the glass. “You look like you're ready to piss your pants!”

Olly blinked and the dots were gone... or had they really been there to begin with? He shook his head, a sound like fingers delicately brushing sandpaper slithering through his mind. He closed his eyes tight, trying to drive it away, the sound almost sounding like words. He balled his hand into a fist and knocked it against his forehead, grimacing. “Shut up... leave me alone...”

“Lord Olly, are you absolutely sure you're okay? You can talk to us if something is troubling you.” Issak said, Eric's smirk twitching slightly as Olly didn't respond like he usually did to his prickly words.

“I said I'M FINE!” Olly bellowed, jumping to his feet and punching the wall in front of him. “Just SHUT UP about it!”

His fist connected with a resounding CRACK, leaving a large hole behind as he stalked off. His two pets watched as he gathered up some clothes and left the bedroom, slamming the door behind him. Eric looked over at Issak and said, “Yeah... he's perfectly fine alright. My ass.”

“What do you think he was dreaming about?” Issak asked, settling down into a crossed leg position, hands on his knees, facing Eric.

“How the hell should I know?” Eric scoffed.

“Ah, so the events of the previous day, then. You think that too.” Issak said, reading the subtleties of Eric's expression.

“Tch! What do you know, Sasquatch?” Eric mumbled, turning his back to Issak. “...How should we handle this?”

“I would like to try and comfort him... but Lord Olly might prefer that things just return to normal. So I advise that we take him at his word and act as though nothing is wrong.”

“Fine. Not like I got any brilliant ideas.”

Olly stalked down the hall to the bathroom, slamming that door closed as well, dropping his clean clothes on the floor and immediately walking over to the sink, eye twitching as he realized he couldn't properly look into the bathroom mirror like he wanted to; all that was visible were the wild spikes of his red hair. He sighed, gripping both edges of the sink tightly, trying to banish the images from his mind but he just couldn't. “I didn't do that... I would NEVER do that...” He said to himself over and over again.

“But you thought about doing it.”

Olly let go of the sink and immediately walked to the shower, turning it on and stripping off his underwear before stepping inside, not even checking the temperature first, the hot water pelting his body as the soothing rush of water filled his ears. He focused on the heat and the flow, his hair slowly falling out of his signature spikes and flopping down around his ears and eyes, lying flat. “Everyone thinks about stuff like that sometimes... it was just a second... nobody's perfect...”

“Everett is perfect. He never has thoughts like that. It's why he has the power and you have nothing.”

Olly's hands tightened into fists as he grabbed his shampoo, furiously scrubbing his hair, eyes tightly closed, the pleading look on Everett's face floating into his mind once again. “He doesn't blame me for what happened... I got carried away! Nobody got hurt! It's not a crime! I was just... I just wanted... to have some fun... to feel... to not feel useless...”

“He's seen what you're capable of. He's seen what you would do if you were gifted with what he has. He will never let you have a taste of that power again. The only way you can get it now... **is to take it.**”

The hollow voice that had been whispering in the back of his mind suddenly moved to his ear, Olly's eyes springing open as he saw two shadowy hands on either side of his face, fingers splayed. He could sense someone... something... standing behind him, pressed against his naked back, leaning over him. Slowly, he looked up and locked eyes with those two pale dots.

The door to the bedroom banged open, Eric and Issak jumping as Olly reappeared, fully dressed, fully styled, and smirking, looking more like his old self than ever. Both of his pets felt a sense of relief as things seemed to be more normal for Olly now; whatever had been bothering him seemed to have passed. Eric's little smile of relief was quickly replaced with his typical glower as he rolled his eyes and loudly said, "So, finally over your little dream baby boy?"

"Hah! Like some stupid nightmare would ever keep me down!" Olly said, punching his fist into his open palm.

"I'm so happy you've recovered Lord Olly!" Issak said, joy evident on his face.

"I'm more than recovered." Olly said, hands moving to his hips as he puffed out his chest. "I'm improved!"

"Eeeeeeh? What the hell are you babbling on about now?" Eric asked, wondering if this was some sort of weird new game he was playing.

"Just watch shrimp!" Olly said, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath... before growing! Eric and Issak's eyes widened and their mouths dropped open as they watched their master expand upwards, inch by inch, until he was Eric's height... and then surpassed that to Everett's height... and then surpassed *that* to Issak's height... and he kept going, only stopping when his head pressed tightly up against the ceiling, the structure groaning slightly as he proudly refused to bend his head even slightly, creating a slight dent that was slowly radiating cracks. "So? What do you little runts think?"

Olly felt a surge of pride as his pets couldn't speak, too dumbfounded by what they had just witnessed to make a sound. He snickered and crouched down, his hands dangling between his legs as he stared from one to the other. "Come on, I'm not *that* scary am I? I thought you two were tougher than this!"

"Lord Olly... how is this possible?" Issak said, first to break the silence. "I thought that only--"

“That only Everett could do this!” Olly loudly interrupted, his boisterous voice drowning out Issak's calm one easily. “Well you're wrong! We both were there on that mountain that night ya know! Whatever he got... I got too! I always knew it... ever since that night something inside of me was telling me that I was special too, that something was different about me... it wasn't until this morning that I finally listened to it and now... now I won't need to rely on Everett for anything anymore!”

Olly beamed, his dark eyes flitting between Eric and Issak, waiting for the praise, the acclamations... but only a strained silence greeted him. His smile flickered, an eyebrow raising. “Well?”

“Well what?” Eric spat back, glaring at Olly. “This ain't right! After what happened to Everett before... and now this... something fucked up is going on! You need to talk to Everett about this! NOW!”

“Are you... trying to order me around?” Olly asked, his voice taking on a deathly low tone. Eric actually flinched, taking a step back. The words, the tone, the dark look in those normally lively, warm eyes... it felt like someone other than Olly was looking at him.

“Don't... don't be stupid! I'm not ordering. This isn't a game! This is serious! You just... you just need to talk to him, alright? He knows more about this stuff than you do!”

“Calling me stupid now, huh, you little bug?” Olly said, reaching out and snatching Eric's terrarium, easily engulfing it in his much larger hand. It was about the size of a Christmas ornament to Olly now, whereas before it had been about the size of a cannonball. He brought it up to his face and just stared at Eric, the tiny man defiantly standing his ground, arms raised, legs spread in a fighting stance. “I was going to have some fun with you today but if you're going to be defiant and nasty... I'll just have to reeducate you later.”

Before Eric could respond, Olly violently shook the little glass orb. Issak gasped as he watched Eric's miniscule form bounce against the glass walls, yelping as his back collided with the ceiling, his body landing on the floor of the terrarium with a sickening sounding SMACK. “ERIC!” Issak called, looking wildly around his own terrarium, debating whether it would be safe to leave in an effort to reach Eric while Olly was there. Olly carelessly shoved Eric's terrarium back on the shelf before Issak could make a move, rising to his normal height as he shrank back down. He turned his back on his pets and walked off, stopping in the doorway. “Things are going to be different around here now. I only shrank down this one time because I want to surprise Everett. Once I grow again, I'm never going back down to this pathetic height. The old Olly is dead... so you two better get used to it.”

Without another word, he slammed the door, Issak feeling a pained tightness in his chest as he heard Olly's footsteps recede into the distance and disappear after another door slammed. He closed his eyes, feeling a hot wetness spring to them.

“Hey, Sasquatch! Don't go even softer on me now.” Eric's voice sharply cut through Issak's rising despair, the taller man's eyes flying open.

“Eric! Are you alright?” Issak asked. “I can climb up and out of my abode to come to you if--”

“Ugh, cut the crap, I'm fine!” Eric grouched, rising to his feet, holding one arm. “Some bumps, some bruises, some fractures, it doesn't matter! I'm Olly's pet, goddammit, not some fragile little princess! If I couldn't take a beating what use would I be?”

Issak smiled ruefully. “Your uses to Lord Olly are many and varied, Eric. You don't... actually have any fractures or broken bones, do you?”

“Nah, that was... what's the fuckin' word... hyperbully. Or whatever.” Eric shrugged.

“That's a relief. But still... I can't believe that Lord Olly would--”

“Don't get it twisted, big guy.” Eric cut him off. “Whatever that... thing was... it wasn't Olly. I hate to say it... but right now I think only Everett can help him... RRRRGAAAHH!” Eric suddenly bellowed with rage and grabbed one of his barbells, chucking it at the terrarium wall, the glass remaining intact as the metal equipment bounced off of it. “I feel so... FUCKING USELESS!”

“Take heart, Eric.” Issak said, sitting in the center of his terrarium and closing his eyes. “We shouldn't distress ourselves with that which we cannot control. When Lord Olly returns... when he's himself again... he will need us.”

A soft tinkle sounded from the depths of the general store as Everett and Jordan walked inside. It was dimly lit as always, the yellowish light soft after the bright glare of the outside. Jordan looked around, seeing the counter was unmanned, and called out, “Hellooooooo? Anyone here?”

“Yes, dearie, just one moment!” A kindly old voice quavered back.

Everett's already bright smile became even brighter as he heard Mrs. Gilden's voice call back. It was a rare treat to see her working at her age. She slowly emerged from the backroom, cane in one hand, tapping her way closer to the counter, a smile bright enough to match Everett's on her wrinkled face. "Aaaaah, Everett, my child, how lovely to see you again."

"Hiya Mrs. Gilden!" Everett said, approaching the counter. "How are things?"

"Oh you know how it is. Same as always." Mrs. Gilden chuckled. "But today is a very special day nonetheless."

"Really? Why?" Jordan asked, peeking around his larger boyfriend's back.

"Why, today is my last day manning the general store." Mrs. Gilden said with a small sigh. "I've been running this place for a long, long time but I just can't devote the time to it that I want to. Even a few times a week is too much for me these days."

"Oh no!" Everett said, one hand going up to his mouth. "That's terrible!"

"Don't fret young man, it's not all doom and gloom. I'll still be around; I'm not dying just yet!" She chuckled, pounding one fist against her chest. "So, what can I do for you boys?"

"Well... we were working at the rescue center today and... I was craving something sweet and since you're here and all... do you have any of those cinnamon buns left?" Everett asked, poking his index fingers together, blushing slightly. "If not, no big deal! I just thought I'd ask!"

Mrs. Gilden chuckled and reached under the counter, pulling one of her famous cinnamon buns out and placing it on the counter. It was from yesterday, wrapped in plastic, but still looked just as soft and delicious as the day she baked it. "Of course, dearie, of course. It's not quite as special as yesterday but I pride myself on longevity."

"Yay!" Everett cheered, snatching the bun and holding it above his head. "Victory!"

Jordan patted Everett on the back before smiling at Mrs. Gilden. "Thanks Mrs. G! He's been going on about those things all morning."

Everett blushed and rubbed the back of his head. "Oh come on... it wasn't *that* bad... was it?"

"It's cute, is what it was." Jordan said, squeezing his boyfriend around the middle, making the taller man blush even harder. "Come on big guy, we have to get back to the center. Break's almost over."

"Okay! Bye Mrs. Gilden! Have a good day!"

"You as well, young man. You as well."

The moment Everett was outside the general store he unwrapped the bun and shoved half of it into his mouth, chewing it happily and swallowing within seconds. He let out a happy little giggle as he shoved the next half into his mouth, eyes closed in ecstasy as he patted his round belly.

"Mmmmmmm, nothing beats Mrs. Gilden's cinnamon buns!" He chirped, humming as he walked along the road back towards the rescue center.

"Do you think she'd give me the recipe if I asked?" Jordan said, walking alongside Everett, his pace a little faster to keep up with his taller boyfriend.

"Maybe! Mrs. Gilden keeps her baking secrets veeeeeeeeery secret but now that she's really retiring she might want to pass down her legacy to someone!"

"Doesn't she have kids?"

"Yeah, but nobody interested in baking. She always said that she'd rather take the secrets with her unless she found someone really worthy of passing them along to. If you say it's for me maybe she'll let you have it." Everett said, eyes shining brightly at the thought.

"I'm still learning but hopefully enthusiasm counts for something." Jordan chuckled, stuffing his hands in his pockets.

"You're learning and I get to eat all the tasty treats I want!" Everett said with a happy sigh. "Talk about a perfect arrangement."

“Yeah, yeah, maybe you should be cutting back on those sweets of yours.” Jordan teased, reaching around Everett's waist and gripping both sides of his stomach.

“H-Hey! It's not that bad!” Everett said, batting at Jordan, pushing him away, his face bright red.

“Hehehehehe, don't worry, I'm not complaining about a softer pillow.” Jordan said.

“Hey lovebirds!” A new voice shouted, interrupting the playful banter between the two boyfriends.

Everett and Jordan turned and saw Olly standing in their path, hands on his hips and grinning. Everett grinned back and waved. “Olly! Hey! What's up?”

“Yo Olly, nice to see you again.” Jordan said, a bit more subdued, not smiling. Everett was a deeply forgiving person, sometimes to his detriment, but Jordan wasn't about to let Olly off the hook for everything he had done the previous day.

“What's up?” Olly repeated, eyes focused fully on Everett, paying no attention whatsoever to Jordan. “Perfect question! The most important thing in the world is up! ME!”

Everett and Jordan's confused expressions lasted only a second, shifting to ones of pure shock as Olly sprouted swiftly up in front of them, doubling Everett's height in seconds, his width taking up more of the narrow road than before, effectively blocking their path forward. Olly snickered at the looks on their faces, smirking down at them from above, leaning forward to really drive the point home how much bigger he was. “So? What do you think?”

Everett frowned, looking Olly up and down, while Jordan looked a little intimidated. It was one thing when Everett was in control, able to keep Olly on a leash, but this? This was something else altogether. Everett shifted his stance from crossed arms to hands on hips, a posture Olly knew only too well. He straightened up and adopted the posture as well, but more exaggerated, both men saying at the same time, “This isn't normal, Olly! After everything that happened yesterday you shouldn't be messing around with stuff like this! We need to go back to the mountain!”

Everett's cheeks flushed as he realized Olly had matched him word for word, only more pompously. Jordan gritted his teeth and took a step forward. “Hey! He just cares about you and doesn't want you to get hurt! Maybe learn a lesson or two from him, huh?”

“Pipe down, pipsqueak.” Olly said dismissively. “The big boys are talking.”

“Just because you're a little bigger than me--”

“I'm a little bigger than you *now*.” Olly interrupted, his louder, deeper voice rolling over Jordan's. “But I could be so much bigger and you could be so much smaller, so unless you want to disappear inside one of my pores *shut up and step back*.”

Everett quickly held his arm out and said, “It's okay Jordan... I can handle this.” He lowered his voice to a whisper, passing Jordan a pair of small keys. “Go to Olly's place and check on Issak and Eric; something weird is going on with Olly.”

“Fine...” Jordan mumbled, taking the keys and running down the road.

Everett turned his full attention on Olly. “Are you going to shrink back down now so we can actually talk?”

“Nah, I don't think so.” Olly said, crossing his arms, that insufferable smirk plastered all over his face. “I like this height a lot more. I think I'll stay up here.”

“Fine, if that's how you want to be...” Everett said, growing to match Olly in height... only for Olly to grow larger again, doubling Everett's already doubled height, his feet now fully encompassing the road and spilling out the sides, his form now visible from anywhere in town, getting the attention of the other residents who began to gather. “Olly!”

“What? Got a problem?” Olly noticed the gathering crowd, drinking in the attention, his voice even louder, projecting out over the whole town. “If you want to talk, lets talk!”

“After what happened yesterday and now this... something is going on! You're not dumb, you have to see it, right?”

“All I see is me getting exactly what I've wanted all my life!” Olly said, a hint of anger peppering his words. “Every damn day with getting my hair ruffled, people calling me names, trying to push me around, making me feel like I'm less of a person... is that why all of you are so twisted up about me having this power? Because you're afraid? Afraid of the way you treated me coming back to bite you in the ass?”

Murmurs broke out among the crowd. It was true, pretty much every single one of them had made some passing comment about Olly's height, never thinking twice about it. In their minds it had been lighthearted ribbing but to Olly... it had been something much bigger, something much more hurtful. Olly could hear the whispers, sense the fear, that sand papery sound filling the back of his head. Yes, they're afraid. They should be afraid. He shifted his left foot, lifting it off the ground, raising it over the crowd, bits of snow and debris falling over them. The mood instantly shifted, palpable fear silencing the whispers, everyone too afraid to so much as move. Olly grinned maliciously as he brought his foot down, hard, on empty space, quaking the ground so ferociously that half the people fell, the other half dispersing wildly in every direction, doors slamming as they locked themselves inside, watching this confrontation from relative safety. "New order, everyone! Get used to looking UP at me and watching MY step because I'm not about to make sure all you whiny little nobodies are staying out of my way!"

Everett glared up at his friend. He had spent so much time carefully crafting his image, making sure people weren't afraid of him or his size, and Olly was destroying that work effortlessly with his petty grievances. "Olly, if you don't shrink yourself back down *right now*, I'm going to get angry."

"Pfff! What does it mean when a marshmallow is angry? You're going to lecture me? Tell me I should be better? Tell me I'm too immature for this power? Well you know what I hear whenever your stupid goody two shoes bullshit spills out of your mouth? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah! Get ready to step aside because I'm going to show you what you can *really* do with this power!"

Olly's caustic words stung Everett but he brushed it aside, holding both arms out, his soft features hardened with determination. "I won't let you use this power for even a second longer if that's how you really feel."

"Yeah? Why don't you just try and stop me then, you soft, fat little loser?"

Everett saw red, launching himself forward, wrapping both arms around Olly's leg, shrinking as fast as he could push himself to, the two giants seeming to disappear as Everett reduced Olly down to his normal height, pushing off his leg at the same time. Before Olly could even think of regaining his lost size, Everett grew rapidly, slamming his head into Olly's tight stomach, the taller man gasping harshly as all the air flew from his mouth along with a few strings of spittle. Olly flew up and off his feet, landing, hard, on his back, sliding a few feet in the snow and ice before coming to a stop. Everett didn't slow down, swiftly growing until his boot could easily cover Olly, fire in his eyes as he raised his boot up and over his friend, stomping down with full force. Olly managed to grow a bit before Everett's boot made contact, softening the impact slightly, the powerful treads still managing to slam into his body and pin him to the ground. "I've had my powers for a lot longer than you have, Olly, and I actually know how to use them. This is already over. I'm going to shrink you and keep you tied to my body so you can't grow without growing me... and then we're going back

to the mountain to get you fixed.”

Olly felt a surge of panic at those words. It had all happened so fast... was it really all about to be over before anything started? How foolish. How simply he had been caught. Maybe he wasn't worthy of this power after all. It would probably be better if he just let Everett do what he liked. He *is* perfect after all, unlike--

“Like... **HEEEEEEEEEELL!**” Olly screamed, a strength that wasn't his own filling his limbs, his arms pushing back against Everett's boot and making him stumble back. Everett yelped, almost losing his balance as Olly rose to his feet, rocketing up in height, stopping as Everett grabbed him in a bear hug. “I'm not letting you or anyone take this away from me! Not now... NOT EVER!”

Everett began to sweat and strain, his arms shaking as he tried to hold his friend back. Olly was strong but this was something else, something more intense. Up this close, Everett noticed something disturbing: Olly's teeth appeared to be getting sharper, the feral look in his eyes complemented with the whites slowly tinging black. Something was happening to Olly; something unnatural and the realization of it made Everett's blood run cold. “Who... what are you?” Everett asked, looking deep into Olly's eyes, talking beyond his friend. He caught a brief glimpse of a pair of silver dots in the distance before Olly broke free, shoving Everett back, punching him as hard as he could in the gut. Unlike Olly, Everett's middle wasn't nearly as cut and defined, his roundish belly a perfect target. Pain erupted through Everett's whole body as the fist connected, sending him flying backwards. Everett gasped, doubled over, clutching his stomach, tears springing to his eyes. He looked around, blearily, realizing he had almost crashed into someone's house. “Have to... get away...” He thought to himself, standing up, forcing his aching body into movement, stumbling away from the town, into the forest.

“Oh no you don't! I'm not letting you get away! Not after all that!” Olly growled, venom dripping from his words as he stalked after his friend, nails sharpening, coloring black like his eyes.

Everett managed to make it a fair distance from town by the time Olly's fingers gripped him around the neck, lifting him up into the air, his other hand punching ferociously over Everett's entire body. Both men grunted, one from effort and one from pain, as Olly treated Everett like a punching bag, years of pent up aggression unleashing all at once. His tall friend, his cordial friend, his admired friend, his perfect FUCKING FRIEND. After a few minutes of this abuse, Olly tossed Everett to the snow covered ground, panting, glaring hatefully down at the bruised and battered body at his feet. Everett looked up at his friend through half closed eyes, tears shining within. He closed them tightly and curled up, holding his legs, slowly shrinking down. “Okay Olly... if this is what it will take to make you calm down... to make you happy... then go ahead.”

Olly stared down at his friend, feeling conflicted. The power... this was more power than he had ever had before in his life and finally on his own terms. He wasn't connected to anyone, he didn't

have to beg, everything was in his hands. It was everything he knew he wanted... so why did it feel so... hollow? He had thought of so many scenarios throughout the years, things he would do if he was big, things he wanted to do with other people being small... was *this* any of those ideas? Ever since the first trip to the mountain Olly had felt so... spiteful, so out of sorts with the whole situation. It was a dream come true in so many ways... why did it feel like it was worse than before? He grimaced as he stepped forward, hands clenched into fists. It's because of Everett. It always comes back to Everett. If Everett wasn't here then...

Olly raised his boot over Everett, his friend now back down to his normal size, Olly towering over him. The boot's shadow easily engulfed Everett and a few trees surrounding him as well. He began to lower the boot, the heel hitting the ground first with a light rumble. Everett didn't so much as twitch. Olly continued, his foot slowly, slowly, slowly lowering, covering Everett more and more, his sky filled with the rubber treads and nothing else. He closed his eyes, sighing, accepting whatever was coming... but nothing did. He opened one eye and smiled slightly. "Heh... knew you wouldn't do something like this... Olly..."

Olly gritted his teeth, trying to force himself to step while also resisting that urge with every fiber of his being. His head was filled with that horrible scratching, that slithery sound that wormed its way into his brain but he pushed against it, the sound coalescing into words that screamed in his mind DO IT DO IT DO IT DO IT DO IT DO IT!

"In the words... of my favorite pet... FUUUUUUUUUUCK OOOOOOOOOOOOOFF!" Olly roared, forcing himself back, falling onto his butt with a ground quaking BOOM that echoed for miles around. Panting, Olly clutched his head, growling, fighting against the urges inside him. Everett moved as fast as he could, struggling to his feet, reaching out to him... when strange black tattoos snaked across his friend's body, stilling his movements, his eyes going blank.

"Olly... what... what's happening now?" Everett asked, hesitating, not sure what to do or how to help.

"Don't fret now, Everett. This is exactly how things were always supposed to happen." A soft voice spoke, rising on air currents to reach Everett's ears. His head whipped around, looking down, the crunch of snow under boots audible as someone approached. "Or... as exactly as I could make them. You boys have made things more difficult for me than they should have been."

Everett's mouth dropped open as a stooped figure appeared from the trees, cane in hand, a small smile on her wrinkled face. "Mrs... Mrs. Gilden?"

"Yes, child, it's me." Mrs. Gilden chuckled. "Surprised? After that little treat I gave you yesterday I was sure you would have found me out... but I suppose that brain of yours is as soft as everything

else, isn't it?"

Her words were cold, despite the smile, her eyes staring up at Everett unblinkingly. He shook his head, looking between Olly and her. "No... no that's not right... you didn't... you couldn't..."

"I know it's difficult to have your entire world view upended, dear, but trust me... I could. I did! I am still." She held her left hand up, dark sparks darting from her fingers and turning into swirling flames, the tattoos on Olly's body shining a bright, poisonous green. "I thought this would be so easy... the Spirits of the Mountain were finally ready to claim hosts and you two were the perfect vessels. Everett, pure as the driven snow, always doing the right thing... and Olly, fiery, passionate, and with a grudge deeper than the blackest ocean. But while you played your part perfectly Everett, Olly proved to be a disappointment... but really, he's been that his entire life so perhaps I was the foolish one."

"He's not a disappointment! He's... he's amazing! And he's kind and sweet and sure he can be a little mean sometimes but he would never hurt anyone, no matter how bad he felt!" Everett insisted, towering over Mrs. Gilden's stooped form, his brain slowly trying to process what was going on.

"You can see why I'm frustrated, yes?" Mrs. Gilden said with a sigh, twisting her fingers around, Olly growling loudly, falling to his knees, obviously in pain. "This perfect vessel... had hidden depths. The world just sees a bratty, whiny upstart with delusions of grandeur, wanting power and nothing more... and all this time he was actually *good*, a person who would never actually harm anyone else. I feel as though I was sold a faulty bill of goods, you understand? So please, when you see what I'm about to make him do... know it's not personal; I'm just very, very annoyed."

She clenched her fist, Olly screaming as he was forced to his feet, his body turning and slowly stomping towards town. Everett tried to grow to go after him but Mrs. Gilden held her cane up, Everett feeling something deep inside get locked. "Ah, ah, ah, dearie! You haven't fully passed my little spell through your body so I still have at least some control over your powers. You won't be stopping me anytime soon."

"But... why Mrs. Gilden? Why are you doing this?" Everett asked desperately, watching as Olly lumbered away against his will.

"I've lived on this mountain my entire life." Mrs. Gilden said softly. "For decades I've waited for the Aurora... the Spirit that granted you your power is far too powerful for even a witch like me to control... but every light has a shadow and my powers are more than adequate to bind such a greedy and simplistic spirit to a vessel which I can control. You ask why I'm doing this? Because I am owed it. Much like little Olly the world has treated me unfairly and it is the world that shall pay for it. Olly should be happy; all those close minded fools will be splattered against his soles!"

“I'm sorry Mrs. Gilden... but I can't let you get away with this! I'll stop you!” Everett said, approaching the old woman, fists raised, trembling slightly from what he had to do.

“Please, dear... you couldn't bring yourself to stop me even if you tried.” Mrs. Gilden replied, raising her cane with a shockingly fast swipe of her arm, a dark ball of energy erupting from it and slamming into Everett's chest. “You entered this world of spirits and magic because I opened the door for you! Do you really think you can stand against someone who has dedicated her entire life to these arts?”

Everett felt like his chest was burning as he was knocked to the ground, Mrs. Gilden slamming her cane down onto his stomach. “Now that the dark spirit is under my control I have no more use for you. Today will mark the rise of Agatha Gilden and the Demon King Olympe!”

She cackled, her face twisted into a mask of gleeful malice, an expression Everett had never thought he'd ever see on her kindly face. He groaned as fire felt like it was shooting through his veins, dark purple lines appearing all over his body. As Everett struggled, Olly fought as well, the magical bonds forcing him to move against his will, closer and closer to town. He felt those cold hands clutching his face again, like this morning in the shower, his body feeling heavy as he realized that horrible shadowy *thing* was clinging to his back, had always been clinging to his back, ever since that night on the mountain. He felt disgusted, like something oily and rotten had been inside him for weeks without his knowledge. He knew he couldn't blame all his mistakes on this twisted creature but he finally knew that these dark feelings, the things he had done to Everett, the things he had said today... they were *not* him!

A bright white light surrounded Everett, forcing Mrs. Gilden back with a shriek, her frail body falling into the cold snow as her cane was sent flying. She gasped as Everett rose to his feet, glowing as he did so, outlined in flaming white. He looked down at Mrs. Gilden with deep pity, turning his back on her. “No... no! Not now! Not like this! I will... I will have my power!” Mrs. Gilden said, her voice quavering and distant, lacking the power it had held until now. She raised her hands, the dark flames appearing once again, only for the white light to shoot from Everett's body and engulf Mrs. Gilden's, her shrieks fading into the distance as Everett approached his friend. Once he was close enough, he wrapped his arms around Olly's body, holding him close, the white light suffusing Olly's body. Unlike with Mrs. Gilden, however, who had felt the light sear her like fire, Olly felt a comforting warmth. A voice from a vast distance carried its way to his ears on the wind, blowing away the voice in the back of his head, the tattoos disappearing as Olly's features returned to normal. He couldn't understand what the new voice was saying but when it was gone, something more precious was in its place: silence. It wasn't until this moment of pure silence that Olly realized he had been dealing with that voice in his head, in some form, for so long. He sighed, closing his eyes, and falling fully into Everett's arms, his body exhausted. Everett smiled and shrank back down to normal size, carrying his friend back into town.

The next morning held a subdued atmosphere. Everett and Olly hadn't realized it in the moment but their actions had caused some minor damage to the town; older buildings had partially collapsed, the road was churned up and impassable to vehicles, and the forest had several felled trees that need to be cut apart and hauled away. Everett and Olly had both volunteered to help but nobody really wanted them nearby at the moment, especially using their powers. It stung them both to realize that but it was understandable. Everett and Olly were staying inside, Olly not wanting to go home after how he acted yesterday, a deep pit of shame sitting in his stomach. Everett patted him on the back and smiled slightly. "Come on Olly... that wasn't you. You know it wasn't you. They will know it wasn't you, too."

"It WAS me though. At least part of me." Olly said, growling in frustration. "It's so annoying... I always say not to treat me like a kid and there I was acting like one for so long... that stupid spirit and Mrs. Gilden both saw it... everyone probably sees it..."

"Anyone who actually gets to know you sees the real you." Everett said, staring out the window, watching the town go about the business of cleaning up. "How are you feeling? Physically I mean."

"Better than I have in weeks." Olly said, groaning slightly as he stretched, moving his head left and right to crack his neck. "That thing was sitting on me for so long I forgot what it felt like to move freely."

"So it's... fully gone, then?" Everett asked tentatively.

"Yup. That white light burned it all out of me." Olly said quietly. "What was that?"

"The Spirit of the Mountain." Everett said, shrugging. "It was working through me, I didn't do anything."

"Yeah you did." Olly said suddenly, sitting up and looking at Everett with a serious expression. "You saved me. Fighting is one thing but just seeing you laying there, helpless, trusting me to do the right thing... that's why I was able to fight that thing off."

Everett blushed and rubbed the back of his head. "Well...I'm not sure I could beat you in a fight anyway, Olly, so I didn't really have much choice."

He chuckled and Olly smiled, the first smile he'd had since the incident. "You may be soft but you're strong in ways that I couldn't be. I'm happy you're my friend, Ev."

“I'll always be your friend, Olly. No matter what happens! We're in this together, okay?”

“Hell yeah! We're not going to let some dumb spirit or whatever come between us ever again!”

“Great! Now that you're so fired up... let's go see Issak and Eric so you can apologize.”

Olly groaned but rose to his feet, knowing his friend was right. The healing process needed to start somewhere and that was the best place. Outside of town, Darren was taking a stroll through the woods, surveying the damage that had been wrought by Olly and Everett. Beneath the shark toothed grin of his face mask he was scowling, the expression not reaching his eyes which looked cool and impassive. Once again he was forced to witness those two morons squander the power that had come to them, bumbling around like idiots and making a mess of things. His eyes fell on the outline of a body that was left in the snow. Mrs. Gilden had gone missing since the incident yesterday and no evidence of her or her body had been found in the wilderness, nobody quite sure if they believed Everett's fantastical tale about spirits and dark magic but Darren knew Everett wasn't lying; an expert could always tell, after all. He knelt down in the snow, running his fingers through the ash, wondering if Mrs. Gilden had been burned to cinders... or if she was still out there. It didn't matter much either way but he couldn't help but feel like a door had been closed to him, one he had never known was open. He rose to his feet and looked over his shoulder, the back of his neck prickling, as though someone was watching him. He saw a tall, thin figure in the shadows of the trees, silver dots sunk deep into that blackness, staring. Darren lowered his mask and smirked, feeling like another door was about to open. “You got something to say to me?”

The figure lurched forward like a stop motion creature on fast forward, looming over Darren within seconds, peering into his eyes. Darren stared back, watching as the figure dissipated, feeling something stirring within. He winced as his teeth suddenly sharpened, a fiery pain splitting his tongue neatly in half, forking it, his eyes glowing briefly with a dark power. That slithery voice snaked across his brain, whispering the same promises it had to Olly, Darren sighing and raising one finger, bringing it to his lips. “Shhhhh... I know what you are. You were with Olly yesterday, weren't you? You're looking for someone on the same wavelength as you. Here, look at me... I'm not going to live the rest of my life listening to your little whispers and feeling you looking over my shoulder... so just understand what I want... and let me have it.”

The dark spirit hesitated, peering into Darren's mind, sharing his body, understanding who he was... and chuckled. Darren could feel the presence fade deep inside him, the spirit all but gone... while his power remained. Darren smirked as he grew a few inches taller, then a few inches shorter, as though flexing a new muscle. His mood instantly improved, he continued his walk through the woods, pulling his mask up, the expression under it finally matching the one on it.

Things were finally starting to look up.

The End