



SHINY THINGS

BRETT P.S.

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Chapter I

Shiny

Fango's whiskers dashed about as he caught the scene of something fresh in the midnight air. The sun had already set, and he could see starlight from beneath the sewage drain above. A car that skidded too close splashed over a puddle of water that drenched Fango from head to tail. It had rained not too long ago. Good for keeping clean. Not so good for tracking scents.

Fango scurried up a lead pipe he'd bitten a hole through months ago and began the trip he'd made every night around this time for the past year. His home was dank and putrid, but oh what riches lay above!

After crawling out of the drainage ditch, he hopped up onto the sidewalk and ran into the alley, keeping close to the shadows. He looked up to see that an ape was dumping something foul from a tin can. He watched as nearly all of it went right into a large metal dumpster ... except for a few drops that started pouring down the side. Yes, he thought. Tonight would be a good night.

After the ape went back inside his home, Fango went over to where he thought the oozy liquid might end up dripping. As it wiggled this way and that, he hustled back and forth to match with his mouth gaping wide open. As it got closer, he could sense something ... off about it, though he couldn't quite place the thought exactly. It was ... different, to say the least. Yes, something smelled different about this particular dish.

Fango didn't care. His tongue perked and his fangs itched as the morsel dripped into his mouth. He lapped it up and readied for the second drip, but then his mouth began to tingle. Then, it itched. In moments, the itching turned to a burning as if fire had erupted inside of him. It sent a shocking numbness throughout his whole throat that made his beady eyes well up in tears.

Fango's first thought was water. Water always douses fire! He looked and saw water everywhere, so he started licking the pavement. He lapped up dirt and rocky stones along with what little moisture came with them.

His mouth was caked with what might as well have been gravel, but with one last mouthful, he licked a circle shaped stone and then vomited it all out. He lay

still, resting as his gaze became fixated on something smooth and ... shiny.

Chapter II

Thief

Fango had never seen anything like it before. He inspected the round shiny object for a moment before attempting to bite it. It felt like the pipes. No, maybe a bit softer, like hard clay. It had raised surfaces in a shape he couldn't quite make out, but it was round! The sheer perfectly proportioned roundness and the glare it cast from rich moonlight ... Fango's eyes lit up with excitement, and his tail nearly stood straight on end.

Fango picked up his new possession in his mouth and carried it back down through the pipe. He took special care not to dent it. His teeth were sharp, but with an easing of pressure, he was sure to keep it intact.

He carried it down through sewer tunnels far removed from starlight above in the over world. He ventured into depths he'd not since used in weeks, to find a suitable spot for his new treasure. He glanced around a small chamber, seeing there was only one entrance. Perfect, he thought. This would do. He placed the shiny thing in a corner and quickly scurried out to find some bedding ... but on second thought ... yes, maybe one more check would do. Fango ran back a few steps to see it one more time. Moments passed before he darted out again.

Fango was not alone in these sewers. At the least, he knew that, but it was more than spiders and other crawlies. There were those of his own kind who, upon knowing of this new thing, would try to take it from him. If it captivated any of them even half as much ... he'd have to hurry at any rate.

Fango knew where to find some quick brush. He had a den he used for nuts he would find during his trips to the over world, and it wasn't too far away. A left, then a right, then two more lefts, and there it was. A thick patch of sewage soaked weeds covered his nuts. He knew that taking it might put his own food stores in danger, but Fango had no time to look for anything new. He promised himself he would look for more ... later, when he could afford it. He snatched the weeds up with his jaws and made his way back.

So many thoughts were dancing through Fango's head. Was he too late?

What would happen if he were? Fango had never had to fight one of his own kind, but a pulsing urge to do so welled up inside of him, as if it came from a dormant faculty. The shiny thing was the most beautiful object he'd ever laid eyes on.

As he came around the bend, Fango saw his worst fears realized. One of his own glared at him, a large beast of a thing with teeth clenched around Fango's treasure. No. No, he would not have it.

Chapter III

King

Something came over him. It was like a surge of primal energy that drove his teeth out and his mouth open as he lunged at his foe. Fango jumped and bit the first thing he could reach. His enemy screamed in pain as red rubies dripped off its tail and down into Fango's throat. The taste was more putrid than anything he'd sampled before. It was utterly disgusting and made his stomach churn, but he didn't stop. He bit down harder and harder until his incisors cleaved completely through the thing's tail.

It dropped the shiny thing and fled. Fango could hear it huffing and wheezing down the corridors as it hobbled away. That one wouldn't try again ... if he knew what was good for him, Fango thought. At the least, he'd now solidified his ownership to any of the other vermin watching and the scent of his kin's blood should stave off many more.

He crawled over to the patch of weeds he'd been carrying and dragged it over the treasure. He adjusted the flaps of leaves and twigs until he was certain nobody would mistake it for anything more than a pile of mucky debris.

Then, one last look inside. Fango crept up underneath the foliage for one more glimpse of it. There wasn't much light coming down from the over world. This chamber was packed away so much he had to rely on the depths of his own vision and smell to navigate, but he could see it enough. His eyes were looking back at him, a reflection in the surface of something that was like water. Fango ... wanted more. Yes, as many treasures as he could find ... he wanted more.

Chapter IV

Starvation

Fango wanted to leave ... but he ... he couldn't. There were too many eyes, things glowing through the dark of his chamber. They were looking at him. They were gazing, waiting to snatch it up. He hadn't eaten in at least a day, and his stomach was screaming with aches and pains from lack of food. Fango began to wonder what smells might be outside, but his thoughts stopped there. He couldn't smell anything and the last scent he could recall wasn't pleasant. The odor permeated every nook of his nose. The filth of his fallen kin had not gone away, though the stench was becoming slightly more bearable now. He almost couldn't smell it at all ... almost, that was.

Fango waited hours upon hours, desperately seeking the courage to leave his little hole for a while. Just a few minutes and he could scavenge up some food. He was sure of it. He had to do something, but the thought someone could spirit it away left his heart and mind at a stalemate. Fango knew what would become of him before much longer. He could feel it in his aching bones and his weary muscles.

He glanced down at the patch of weeds he was lying on. It was like a soft bed and, if he looked hard enough, he could see his reflection on the shiny thing underneath. It was the only one in the world he ever saw. It was an immensely beautiful splendor and ... it was his. Compared to that, nothing else mattered. What had driven him to this madness, Fango thought to himself? He relished every moment, but it was as if the trinket itself had taken him over, cast a spell on him.

Fango didn't care. He sat for hours more. Eventually, he lost track of time in his tiny hole in the ground. When did the moon last hang high in the air? Fango hadn't a clue. His legs were too weak to carry him. His breathing labored as he continued to lie atop his treasure.

They were watching. He was sure of it. Yes, all of the crawlies and the rest of his kin ... they were around the corner, waiting grab hold of it. He would not have it. He would not.

Chapter V

Shiny Things

Fango's light was fading, but he feared it wasn't actually getting any darker. No matter how wide he opened his eyes, more illumination seemed to slip away. It faded from oozy, stone walls until they looked the same as the cracks and grooves. He watched until his chamber became slates of dark fog that pressed into him, crushing his own heart. Why had it come to this. How could something so magnificent bring about his demise? It was ... it was so ...

A beam of sunlight peeked through an emerging crack near the top of his chamber. A circular shape cut from it, and then Fango felt warm sunlight beat down on his ragged hide and wet fur. His eyes squinted in order to adjust to the change in brightness. It took quite a while and even then, he still felt sick.

"Look at that," he heard ... sounds he didn't understand. "Must be sick or something."

An ape's leathery hand reached down and picked him up. Although he wanted, Fango didn't have the strength to bite him. All that came out was a weak nibble that didn't even pierce its thick skin. He watched as his treasure drifted further away ... as the ape carried him over to some kind of place he couldn't see. Fango had watched a few of his kind get too close to an ape. He never saw them again, and he assumed this encounter carried a similar fate.

"What are you going to do with it?" he heard elsewhere.

"Might as well throw it in the back."

"Gross, man! There's a dumpster over there!"

The ape carried Fango over to the dumpster that he'd visited on many occasions. He never once got to see the top; he always imagined what was lying inside. As the ape held him over, he noticed that a thick black material covered it.

"Looks locked," it said.

"I'm not riding in the back then."

"Whatever," the ape replied. "You know, I heard these little guys like shiny

things."

Swiftly through the morning air, it carried Fango to a large thing. He'd seen them before. Giant moving things. This one had a large open area in back and what he saw was ... it was unbelievable. The ape threw Fango down and he landed in a patch of a hundred ... no, a thousand shiny things, each as precious as the last. His eyes lit up with a fervor that kept his heart still beating even though he could no longer feel his ribs.

As he was carried away, Fango saw the glimmer of a setting sun that reminded him of his precious possession, somewhere in the sea of a thousand things like it.