

"It's not like I want you to actually eat me."

Perry buried his head in his hands. He looked down at his boyfriend in the passenger seat and avoided the urge to strangle him. "Babe, what else am I supposed to assume when you ask me 'Hey, next time we're doing it, let me put my head in your mouth'."

"You're blowing this way out of proportion." Nate crossed his arms and let out an exasperated sigh. The possum was on the defensive again, baring some of his fangs as he spoke. "It was just a question. We don't have to do it."

"No, no-stop. Don't treat this like it's something fun and kinky to liven up our sex life." Perry hissed, trying to keep his eyes on the road. The light had turned green and the car jolted forward. "I don't play around with that junk."

"Well, if you're not into it then stop yelling at me about it."

"I'm trying not to! It's just really, really messed up okay." It was difficult to explain and it didn't help that he didn't want to explain. "I'm not mad at you if you like it. I just want you to be careful with it."

"Like I was with you?" Nate said, his tone dry.

As much as he wanted to dispute that point, it was what had kept them together for so long. Both their families seemed to have taken their respective coming-out-of-the-closet fairly well; but when an opossum said they were dating a huge monitor lizard it became a whole different matter entirely. Nate's family called too frequently and Perry's parents were giving him phone numbers to other, even bigger, carnivores.

"I'm just scared you'll get too far deep into it, babe." The rest of the ride was full of silence. Perry carried their groceries into their apartment, save for one. The little marsupial looked silly carrying a full bag of fruit that was practically half his size and weight, but he managed it somehow. It made Perry smile at how much effort the three foot opossum put into everything he did.

"Have you ever done it though?" Nate asked as he tucked his fruits in the fridge while the tall reptile stuffed frozen dinners in the freezer above.

"Done what? Eat somebody?"

"Yeah," Nate paused, raising an eyebrow in response to the glare he received. "Is our relationship not deep enough for me to be asking that?"

"That's kind of like asking someone if they're a murderer. Which I'm not."

"So that's a no?"

Perry ruffled Nate's head with one huge, scaly hand. "A big no. Not planning on starting either. Your name's on the lease. It'd be awkward thing to explain to the tenants."

"You don't have to eat somebody and then let them die, y'know. Some folks have system."

Perry narrowed his eyes as he tugged off his shirt. The cool air of

the apartment was necessary considering Nate had a delightfully soft coat of fur, but the summer rays were still blazing and the broad couch was lit up by sunlight. "You did some heavy research into this didn't you?"

"A fuck-ton. Some people do this kind of thing for a living." Nate clambered over the top of the couch and plopped down beside the heavy set lizard. He leaned onto the scaly gut, sinking his fingers into the soft middle and kneading it incessantly.

"What, eating people?" Perry said, closing his eyes and groaning softly at the sudden belly rub.

"Yeah, they're like porn stars. They got ones for being prey too, though. Equal representation and all that. Really professional."

"Okay, I'll bite. How do they get them out? Stick a finger down their throat?"

"Please, don't be so crude. You ever hear of The Down & Out bar downtown?"

Perry eyes slitted open, frowning deeply. The rubdown he usually received from Nate were usually some of the tenderest moments he had with the little possum, but now he thought back on them and wondered if this was what Nate had in mind the entire time. He felt scared suddenly. He didn't want that to be a reason his boyfriend liked him, especially if Perry didn't want anything to do with that kind of kink. "Is it a joint where people do this kind of thing? We have one of those places here?"

"Totally! There's a lot of preds in town that frequent there and it's all consensual. They make you drink this syrup if you eat--"

The lizard held up a claw to the possum's lips. "Wait, stop. Have you been to this place before?"

Nate's ears slightly drooped and his hands began to massage the lizard's belly more slowly. "Well, I went to check it out and see if it'd be something we'd want to go try out."

Perry again found his face buried deep into his hands as he sighed. His tongue flickered out in annoyance as he began to hiss and growl uncontrollably. "Why did you not tell me thisssss--"

"It's okay, it's okay! I didn't let anybody mess with me!"

"Noooo, you're missing the point! You're tiny, babe, you don't get a say if someone messes with you unless I'm around." He hissed more sharply as he felt those tiny hands lift up from his stomach. "Don't do that again, okay? That place is probably filled with freaks that don't care about consent or syrup or whatever! I don't care how civilized we look, you shouldn't give yourself away to a someone like that, ever."

He opened his eyes and saw the stunned expression on his boyfriend's face. He swallowed hard, chewing his lower lip as he mumbled something. "Mmnsiri."

"What?"

"I'm sorry." It came out choked and his small body started to tremble. "I'm a freak."

[i]Great, now look what I've done[/i], Perry thought. He wrapped one,

burly arm around Nate and pulled him against the warm scales. "You're not a freak."

"I seriously am." It came out muffled, but not as distraught as before. Perry knew how much the little guy liked snuggling like this, tucked so neatly against the lizards soft sides.

"Okay, you kind of are for thinking a big creep like me is adorable." He noted, ruffling Nate's round, pink ears.

"Guilty."

"But I don't love you any less just because you like the idea of being tasty." His large, clawed hands began to gently stroke over Nate's soft fur, petting his brow firmly until he felt the possum's tiny arms wrap around him as best he could.

"I want to cook you dinner."

"As long as you don't try to climb in the oven, I've got no objections." He leaned down and flicked his long, forked tongue across Nate's brow. He paused, flicking his tongue out again just over the possum's face. Nate did taste good.

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Three weeks later, Perry walked inside the Down & Out; alone. He lost track how many times he'd tried to call Nate's cell phone. No answer. His gut told him to check here first, ironically. His expectations were shattered from the get-go. It looked more like the run of the mill tavern than some kind of fetish club. Instead of flashing lights and loud music he was in a dimly lit room, catching the glances of several patrons. There seemed to be two kinds; the big, burly kind and the small and dainty kind.

Keeping a stern expression, Perry stalked straight towards the bar. A fat boar stood behind the counter, leaning forward as he chatted with another patron, a broad bellied crocodile that looked stunted but bore arms that looked like they could bench press Perry if they ever tried.

"You seen a possum around? Little guy named Nate?" He said, interrupting their conversation tersely.

"Why?" The crocodile shot a glare towards Perry, his under bite snapping with annoyance. "You his boyfriend or something?"

"Yeah, I am." Perry said, eyes narrowing. "I'm not here to play around. If he's here just tell me and we'll go."

The croc and the bartender shared a glance. "Well, what do you think a cute, lil' possum would be doing in a joint like this?" The croc said, rolling a beer bottle between his palms. Perry noticed it didn't have a label.

A quick scan of the room didn't help. It wasn't hard to pick out the 'prey' as they chatted with the large, imposing beasts that reclined back in their seats. He was almost grateful he didn't see his boyfriend flirting with another man. It was uncomfortable looking at the other large, burly men in the room. Their shirts were either open or had been chucked off at some point. Every bare gut that was out in the open had a pair of hands delicately stroking them. Perry began to see a predatory gaze on some of them, others licked their lips as they hugged their willing participants against them.

The boar began to chuckle, slowly piecing the puzzle together. "Aww, that's a shame. You don't even know what's going on here, do you?"

"I don't see him. You got a back room or a toilet or something-," Perry paused as he looked down at the crocodile seated on the stool. The hulking male only wore a leather vest, the buttons undone so his paunch could hang low and loose on his thighs. A wave of revulsion swept over Perry as he saw a bulge, something, push and stretch underneath the thick layer of fat. A loud, unmistakable gurgle from the reptile's stomach followed.

"What the fuck did you eat?" Perry asked, his nails biting into his palm as his fingers clenched together.

"Maybe you should have looked at the menu when you came in. Then you'd know."

The boar snapped his fingers sharply, silencing the crocodile before he could go any further. "Stop teasing, Darrel. The guy's just worried." He reached across the counter and grabbed a folded pamphlet from a stack and held it out towards Perry. "Name's Russel by the way. Ignore Darrel, he's an asshole."

The crocodile grunted and kept warming the bottle between his fingers as he glared at Perry. "I didn't eat your boy, jerk."

The bartender interjected again. "You probably know this place has a certain catch. It's called the Down & Out for a reason. People sign up on the menu that are going Down, within reason. They stay there for a bit, then they're Out." He thumbed through the menu, shrugging. "No Nate here on the menu tonight. Sad. Definitely saw a little guy with a pink tail hopping about."

Perry stared in disbelief. They had a menu for people. It seemed so surreal, but he brought his attention back to the crocodile's stomach. "How do you know who ate who though?"

Darrel suddenly burped. It was a heavy one and the crocodile blew it straight in Perry's face. "Smell that and see if you recognize it." He chuckled, giving his squirming bulge a hard pat.

At first, the lizard felt like he would tear the flabby gut open and see for himself, but his tongue merely flickered out. It was disgusting, but he picked up a taste and a scent that definitely wasn't Nate. It was a person though, to be sure. "Okay, it's not Nate." He said. The last thing he wanted to do was outright apologize.

"Yeah," Darrel swallowed, firmly stroking his mishapped belly. "You got to learn that there's rules here to help keep this place safe. Lot of people get off of the thought of stewing in big bad boys like me, but we've got standards to keep here. Everybody gets Out eventually. Even little Jake here." He held his wide belly in both hands and gave it a shake. Perry swore he heard something like a moan erupt in response under all that flab.

"Speaking of which, it's about time you let him out, right?" Russel said.

"Aww, let him stew for five more minutes. He's loving this..."

"Nate's name isn't here." Perry muttered, slightly relieved. "He came by though right?"

"Still here, I think." The boar jabbed a thumb towards a hallway at the far end of the bar. "Mitch is giving him a tour of the rooms and the Out tub."

The lizard raised an eye ridge. "Who's Mitch?"

"Big mutt with a leather jacket. Tell him to pay his tab while you're at it."

Perry nodded, but his eyes scanned the stained surface of the bar as he took in the whole situation. Then he shrugged and turned towards the hallway Russel pointed out. Perry began to walk, stepping to the furious beating in his chest. He glanced to see if the croc had noticed if he'd had his drink swiped, but the reptile was still toying with his squirming paunch. As he stepped into the dimly lit hall labeled 'Out' Perry flicked his tongue out over the rim of the bottle. He recoiled instantly. Whatever was in there smelled like a rancid egg. No way in hell this was beer. He guessed it was the brew the predators drank to force themselves to hurl up their prey like Nate had told him.

He didn't have to go too far. There were doors on the right side of the hall, closed and occupied considering the low grunts and heated moans he heard behind them. None of them sounded like Nate, so he kept walking until he got to the end of the hall. The door was open so Perry ducked inside.

The room was small and he immediately saw a dog sitting in a chair next to a large bath tub. Perry saw clothes strewn about the floor including a jacket with black leather. He also noticed a pair of small clothes. He also saw a bright red pair of briefs, ones that he knew that Nate favored. Another flick of his tongue told him that the possum had been in here. The mutt, Mitch presumably, looked up at the monitor lizard with a bemused grin that stretched his muzzle.

"Yo, new face! Big fella ain't ya?" His tone was friendly as was his posture, stretched back against the chair he was seated in. His sagging gut straddled his waist. The rest of him was fit and defined, the kind of body that had a calendar for which part of their body they were going to focus at the gym every day. Perry stared hard. It was hard to notice but he saw the flabby surface of the dog's paunch jerk and bobble gently. Someone was in there.

"See something you like?" Mitch said softly, trying to overplay the tantalizing tone. It might have worked on Nate, but Perry had to clench his fists tightly to suppress a hiss from escaping his throat.

Instead of tackling the canine, he stepped forward and boldly put a hand over that soft mound of fat and muscle, letting his scaly palm sink onto the surface. He turned his head, as if admiring the sight of the fat, wriggling belly. "Yeah, he looks good on you." Could Nate hear them? Would he even recognize Perry's voice?

Mitch laughed, giving his gut a soft pat that made the whole thing wobble. "He does, doesn't he? M'name's Mitch by the way. If you're looking for some cute snack to crawl down your throat, you're in the wrong room." He held out his hand and Perry shook it. He noticed how loose Mitch's grip was. The mutt eyes glazed over and the stench of liquor was overwhelming as Perry leaned in. The fucker was drunk.

"I'm Perry. I don't know if this sort of thing is for me yet."

"You got the size for it, believe you me. Not everyone is born with a stomach big enough to hold these prey-sluts. Some of them out there have to make do with the real tiny guys. I prefer them for different reasons." The dog stroked the sides of his belly, squeezing it along with the possum inside. "Just look at this little fella. You can barely see him. Got plenty of room to curl up and wiggle for me. Wiggle boy!" He said sharply and immediately the belly began to shake, shifting from side to side as the formless bulge pushed and stretched. It was difficult to accept that it was Nate under the layers of fat that separated him from Perry.

The reptile knelt down in front of Mitch, running both his hands over the dog's squirming belly, trying to comfort the trapped opossum; his Nate. He could taste and smell his scent all over the canine that had devoured him. "Shame that you have to let him out at all. Is that what this thing is for?" Perry asked, gesturing towards the tub, still trying to sound clueless.

"Sure, if you want to let a good thing end. Most of the time you only get half an hour for each boy on the menu. Got a few rooms for those that really want to savor their meals in peace if you catch my drift?" The mutt's eyes gazed down at his round midsection, cupping the bottom with both his hands and jostling it. Perry could hear the stomach sloshing its contents about and a lewd, muffled whine accompanied it. "Then you have sluts like this who don't give two shits about coming out."

Perry glanced up, his eyes so wide he feared they might pop out. "You're kidding right?"

"Hell no!" Mitch said, laughing as he gave his gut another firm shake. "If you get the fuckers consent you can let them stew until they're nothing but slop for the better man..." The mutt's tongue traced over his thick, drooling lips as he gave the gut another firm rubbing, chuckling as he stroked his stomach possessively. "You hear that kid? You get to be more pudge for big ole' me."

Perry heartbeat began to staccato in panic. He had to get Nate out of there. "What about the menu though? Won't they know if someone goes down but not out?"

"Sure, if you bother to get on the menu. Folks are too interested in getting their rocks off and their bellies full of beer or boy; they won't notice a few strays going missing. Ain't like it's unheard of these days, eh? It's why you're here, right?"

Laughing nervously, Perry took a seat on the rim of the bathtub. It was the only thing he could do to try to set both himself and the mutt at ease. "Hell, you can hardly see him under all that..." He said in mock awe of the canine's bloated mid-section.

"It's that easy." Mitch said, giving the mound of squirming flab a hard pat.

The lizard nodded, lifting the bottle in his hand up to his mouth. "To going Down." He pressed the tip against his tightly pursed lips and tilted it up, wincing at the slight burning he felt brush against his lips. None of it made it past the tight seal he made. He grinned widely, offering it to Mitch.

At first, he thought the mutt wouldn't take the offer, but he held back a sigh of relief when the bloated dog grabbed it and grunted, "To never coming Out." He downed the rest of the bottle in one fell swoop of his arm. He must have been used to the foul drink or he couldn't tell the

difference from the other beer he'd swallowed prior to Perry's little Nate.

It didn't take long. The mutt's expression went from cocky pride to a sour, disturbed expression. He tried to say something, but it came out muddled as he quietly began smack his lips incessantly until his whole body suddenly began to heave. A great, gurgling burp followed and the mutt practically fell forward, leaning in to the tub and gagging.

Perry winced as he heard Mitch cough and gasp. Finally, the dog heaved and spewed forth a foul smelling puddle. The monitor lizard hissed with anger when he saw nothing but vomit in the tub, but Mitch heaved again and his entire body lunged forward, nearly falling in the tub. His throat bulged as a wet, furry ball slid out from between his jaws. The instant it hit the floor of the bathtub, Perry knocked Mitch over and picked up the mass of drool, vomit and fur. Not wasting another moment, the lizard began to march out the room, down the hallway, and out into the main room. The din of the bar went quiet for a moment and Perry felt their stares as he stepped out of the Down & Out.

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The appointments were getting longer. It didn't bother Perry. The therapist's concern over Nate's well-being with a man like Perry was beginning to lessen the more he probed into Nate. They walked out to the parking lot, Nate's arms pulled tightly against his chest. His eyes looked red.

"Do you think he'll start letting me into the sessions?" Perry said as he opened the door, helping the opossum into the passenger seat.

"He wants me to go back to the bar."

Perry felt the outrage boiling in his guts then chose instead to hiss softly. "Why?"

"That's where we'll work out the urges, he says. If you're there, I won't try to--"

"Fuck a guy? Let him eat you?"

Nate stared at his feet, silent.

Perry sighed, walking around and collapsing into the drivers seat. "I'm sorry."

"That's why he won't let you into the sessions."

"I'm trying. I got really scared, Nate. I love you, you know?"

Nate nodded, still staring down. "I know."