

The City of Feren was a prosperous, bustling center where daily business was conducted with efficiency and patience. The majority of its inhabitants were simple beings of various trades whom often interacted with one another on a friendly, light-hearted level. Shopkeepers, tailors, blacksmiths, bankers, market workers, chefs, entertainers for the young ones, and foreigners eager to sell exotic goods from all corners of the globe comprised only a fragment of the wide spectrum of individuals residing within its borders.

Most of the citizens were mild tempered, good-natured, and hard working anthros who were the main cause for Feren's exquisite reputation. The city's economic and political workings reflected the disposition of its inhabitants, functioning smoothly and without any serious issues.

As the various anthros traveled their separate ways to begin another day, they could not help but take some time to enjoy the crisp, autumn air that sent a breeze through the Middle Century City. Trees adorned every street and illuminated the surrounding buildings with a swirl of red, yellow, and orange hues. Almost everyone welcomed the refreshing breeze, though there were those who found it to be lacking in this regard.

Callum Reiner, a 22 year-old dragon, was bitterly cursing the cold as he attempted to wrap himself tighter in his wool jacket. The dragon was tall and thin, but wiry; with a leanly toned physique reminiscent of a message runner or sprinter. His cursing was sourced from the fact that he was unable to increase his core temperature to the appropriate level of warmth to ward off the crisp breeze breathing down his neck. The dragon shook his carbon grey head, which possessed two sharp, angular horns and a pair of intelligent blue eyes. The movement initiated a shiver that traveled down Callum's midriff, which held a series of luminescent blue ventral plates across his chest and grey scales on his back. A line of pale blue crests were spaced along the dragon's spine and they tapered off at the tip of his tail. The dragon's powerful legs were also a similar grey coloration, with only a hint of blue on the back of his shins. His clawed feet were similar to those of many others in his species, but were currently sealed in simple leather boots.

The dragon was, as were many other individuals, currently making his way to his place of employment: A large, well-known bakery shop formally known as *Aaron's Exceptional Confections*, but was affectionately shortened to *Aaron's* by the locals. The name was derived from the owner

who was a well-known figure of the culinary world and widely regarded throughout the city. Perhaps his reputation stemmed from the fact that Aaron had a penchant for baked goods, but it might have something to do with the anthro's peculiar appearance.

The owner was thirty feet long for starters, and colored a bright, radiant purple that could appear pink in certain lights. He also possessed five eyes rather than the standard two one would expect. Aaron was a serpent who, despite numerous rumors about the reptilian species, was about the most outgoing and friendly being in the city. Atop his imposing layers of coils, the serpent had two arms, just like any other anthro, and a mischievous grin that was enough to unsettle the mind of any reasonable furson.

Callum was grateful to work under the serpent, even if he had been slightly apprehensive about the notion at first. He had apprenticed with the bakery when he was 16 in order to support himself and his parents who lived on a small, homely farm a couple leagues south of the city. Callum was by no means homeless, but his finances were tightly handled in order for the dragon to live in reasonable conditions

Over the past six years, Callum had grown to enjoy a mutual friendship with the serpent, as he couldn't help but appreciate the serpent's extroverted and enthusiastic nature.

Callum entered a side door into the large bakery, and looked around the kitchen in hopes of spotting his boss, but he had no luck. As he looked around, he took in the setup in front of him.

On the far wall were three large wood-burning stoves set into the building's foundations. Next to them, in the far corner, was a preparation/cooling table where baked products were prepped to be taken into the front room. On the right wall, a large set of swinging doors lead into a separate pantry where ingredients were stored at cooler temperatures. Next to the pantry, stood a large rack of utensils necessary to form, mold, and prepare the bread. To the dragon's immediate right stood a small washbasin and coat hook for aprons and washing up. On the left wall, a wide entrance led out into the service/display area of the bakery. To the right of the door stood the main preparation table for their floury products. With cutting boards, rolling pins, spatulas, numerous measurement instruments, and toppings for special orders, the main table was easily the largest utility in the room.

A sudden purple wisp interrupted the dragon, as his keen eyes registered the meaning of it a moment later. Before the dragon realized his mistake, he was swept up in a large, violet coil and squeezed gently. This was commonly Aaron's way of greeting familiars, in an overtly friendly, almost breathtaking manner.

"Good morning," the serpent said, as he gently lifted the unsuspecting dragon slightly closer to his face. A wide smile adorned the mischievous snake's visage and his eyes glinted with good-natured humor.

"Urf-uhn...Good morning," Callum said in response. Shifting his limbs around underneath Aaron's grip. "Do we really have to go through this every time I come in?" The dragon quipped in a sarcastic, but well-versed tone.

"Why of course!" Aaron exclaimed, feigning indignation. "How else could I express my delight in seeing a good friend?"

"Well for starters," Callum grunted, "A 'Hello' might suffice."

"Aah, but where's the fun in that?" The brightly hued snake replied. "I would much rather express myself as directly as possible, especially when it means catching you off guard." He began shifting around the room, and then stopped when the numerous sensory muscles under his scales took a read on Callum's musculature.

Aaron sighed dramatically, and set the dragon down. 'Wait for it,' the drake thought, mentally prepping himself for the inevitable.

"You know," Aaron began, "If you were to acquire a little more padding, you would be much more comfortable. Especially with the impending weather." He gestured to the dragon's coat and then to the doors leading outside. "I'll bet you were shivering when you came in here, and it's only going to get colder."

Callum sighed, "Yes, I was cold this morning, "But it's only because I forgot to wear my other jacket." Even to him, the excuse sounded weak. He *did* own another, slightly thicker, jacket but it made only the most minimal difference. Callum was used to fending off the cold in the 6 years he'd worked there, but a small synapse at the back of his mind remained open to the serpent's suggestion.

“Alright, I concede,” Aaron said, throwing up his luminescent arms, “But promise me you’ll at least consider it,” the snake adopted a pleading look in his eyes, widening them to their fullest extent to convey a manipulative expression of concern.

Callum chuckled and agreed to think about his bosses’ plea. Satisfied, the serpent released the dragon, and suddenly kicked into business mode. Although Aaron would still joke around with the dragon, he was more oriented on the task at hand and mentally mapped out their daily work schedule. The bakery usually opened an hour after dawn and closed with the setting of the sun. Their flexible times ensured that customers could feel more reliant on their service, and consequentially resulted in additional business.

As the pair fell into a familiar, working pace, they began readying the dough, prepping special orders, and rhythmically alternating between the kitchen and the service counter out front.

The front room held an ornate display case that featured renditions of the bakery’s common products and some of its fancier confections. Everything from simple buns and loaves to intricate cakes and pastries were proffered at the bakery, and a steady stream of regulars was expected to choose from these throughout the day. Customers could decide between simply making a quick trip in-and-out of the shop’s dual glass doors, or sitting at one of the comfortable, wooden tables residing in front of the counter. There they could enjoy one another’s company in the natural light provided by the wide windows at the front of the store.

As Callum periodically performed his tasks throughout the day, he kept turning over the offer of “adding some padding” as Aaron affectionately referred to it. Looking out the shop’s windows, Callum noted the increasing caliber of wind blowing through the cobbled pathway. Anthros were beginning to hunker down more as they made their way through the streets, and this sight alone was enough to send a shiver through the drake’s aquatic-colored crests.

‘Perhaps I could afford to add a little more weight to my frame,’ the dragon reasoned. ‘I could always lose it again, and I don’t have any other physically taxing activities to attend to.’ Looking over his shoulder, Callum caught a glimpse of Aaron humming happily as he kneaded another wedge

of dough into a loaf. 'And it would make Aaron happy.' Despite the dragon's seemingly exasperated attitude toward his boss, he knew that he would rarely meet a more caring or friendly being.

Weighing these possibilities, Callum decided to go ahead with his decision, and at the end of the day he informed Aaron that he would like to give the serpent's idea a try.

Aaron was quite excited by the dragon's decision, seeing it as a victory for himself by managing to convince the stubborn drake of such an involved process, and an appealing process as Aaron quite loved softer versions of anthros.

Keeping the last sentiment to himself, Aaron was unable to stop himself from once again encompassing the dragon in a coil and embracing him.

"So," Callum said sheepishly, once he was released. "How do we begin the process?"

Aaron grinned and quickly winded around the kitchen to fetch a couple dozen left over pastries and breads. "I don't expect you to consume all of them," the serpent assured, but eating as many as you can will increase your capacity and immediately result in a layer of "padding". I also added a little extra ingredient to the mix, to help you with it." Callum looked at the big snake quizzically, and the serpent explained further, "It's a nutrient-boosting powder that aids with digestion and dispersion of the carbohydrates in the breads. Don't worry, it's harmless and tasteless. The only impact it will have is increasing the amount of padding you acquire." The serpent assured him.

Callum nodded, showing that he understood the need for such an ingredient. He felt slightly apprehensive, but was more curious than anything. "Well I suppose I should be heading home," the dragon said, noting the dying light as it faded slowly.

"Of course," Aaron agreed. He helped Callum gather the confections into a cloth sack for easier transportation, and then guided the tiring drake to the side door. "I am very pleased that you decided to at least try my suggestion, it shows that you are actually capable of keeping an open mind!" The snake couldn't avoid a final jab at the dragon who cast withering glance up at the snake, before a small grin parted his muzzle.

"I appreciate the help," Callum said, "Seems like you're infallible wisdom is only exceeded by your exceptional persistence."

It was Aaron's turn to feign offense. He narrowed his eyes playfully and gave the dragon a gentle shove out the door. "Be gone with you!" He joked in a dramatic tone.

Once the dragon was outside, he shook his head and began the cold, but brief walk back to his small apartment.

Callum occupied a comfortable, simply furnished apartment with all the essentials of a young, male anthro. A small rustic kitchen with a dining table and pantry connected to a little hallway that lead off to his bedroom were the primary features of the meager dwelling. Another small corridor held a bathroom before dead-ending into a little cove with a couch and bookshelf.

Callum opted to take his food to the cove, where he placed the sack of food down and grabbed a book he'd been reading. As he lay out the literature on his lap, the dragon was already hungrily reaching for the first confection. Finding a rather large cinnamon bun, he chowed down eagerly to initiate his "extra-padding" decision.

Engrossed in his book, the dragon steadily marched through a dozen of the breads in under an hour. His attention was only interrupted when he felt a distinct tightness emanate from his stomach. Snapping his focus away from the novel, he looked down and was surprised to find his stomach bulging 6 inches out into his lap and creasing slightly from leaning forward.

Callum groaned quietly from the sight, but he didn't feel uncomfortable or full yet. Running his scaled hands over the smooth curve of his ventral plates, he found that his belly was slightly tightened but still yielding. Looking back into the bag, Callum noted that there were about 20 pastries left. 'Aaron must have slipped a couple more in when he handed me the bag,' Callum thought. Realizing this, the dragon only shrugged and decided the serpent was simply acting out of concern for the drake's physique.

He decided to forge on with the rest of the confections, and went back to his book. An hour and a half later, Callum began to get tunnel vision from

the words on the page when the book suddenly slipped out of his lap. As his hazy, bleary vision slowly refocused, the drake was able to pinpoint the cause. His belly had bulged outwards to the extent of pushing the book off his lap in order to create room for itself. Now a 12-inch globe, Callum could feel the tightness residing in his midriff as he contemplated his consumption of 32 confections. The dragon slowly rubbed his claws over the sensitive surface and shivered from the tightness. The rubbing motion felt heavenly though, and Callum slowly drifted to sleep.

The next morning, Callum woke in a dreary stupor. Not immediately recalling why he had awoken on his couch, or why his body felt weighed down. Then the dragon looked down and yelped in surprise. A mild potbelly had formed overnight, quivering softly from the dragon's sudden movement. As he raised an arm to prod his belly, he noticed that his scales rippled with the movement. Poking a finger into his arm he realized he had added an inch of adipose onto his figure in its entirety. Laughing nervously from the revelation, Callum slowly got up and went to get changed. As he donned his clothes, he noticed they constricted around his round middle slightly, and gently hugged his legs.

The plush dragon realized that he actually enjoyed the feeling, and slowly grinned as he decided that he had made the right choice. 'I wonder what Aaron will think,' Callum thought to himself, as he headed out the door. On his way to work, the drake noticed something else: he wasn't nearly as cold as before.

Aaron seemed to be even more excited about the dragon's development, than Callum was himself. The serpent hugged him gently in a coil and let loose a torrent of words that functioned as a combination of approval and observation. "You look incredible! How does it feel? Hmmm, your body seems to carry the weight well. Have you had any problems? Trouble breathing? And your tail, much softer than before." Callum could barely register the speed or force of the serpent's enthusiastic burst.

Laughing, Callum said, "Alright, alright. Lemme talk." Once Aaron was slightly subdued, the dragon said, "I love it, I'm fine, no health troubles, I'm much warmer than before, you were right." He counted each reply off to ensure he had covered everything before allowing the serpent to respond.

"That's incredible," Aaron smiled warmly and folded his arms smugly. "So tell me, who was right after all these years?"

Callum let loose a loud groan and turned on his heel to get ready for work.

“Come on,” Aaron said, “You know the answer.”

The two kept up the game as they began preparing for another day for working in *Aaron’s Exceptional Confections*.