

*FWUMP.* “Alright Mrs. Sanders, your total is three silver pieces and two half coppers.” Callum tallied the final cost as he set down a large cloth bag of baked goods for the elderly mouse.

Rustling through her purse for the proper amount of change, she suddenly cocked her head and said, “That isn’t right. Usually it would be five silver pieces.”

Callum grinned and shook his pudgy head depreciatively, “According to Aaron, loyal customers are entitled to a couple of free loaves of rye bread every once in a while.” The dragon was indeed repeating the serpent’s reasoning, which had been aptly stated only that morning.

“Well isn’t that a wonderful surprise,” Mrs. Sanders said as a smile slowly parted with her whiskers. “You boys are always so considerate.”

Callum humbly waved off the compliment, “We simply appreciate your business and..” the dragon leaned forward conspiratorially, feeling the counter’s wooden edge push into his plush stomach, “I heard a nice gentleman has taken fancy to a certain mouse.”

The elderly mouse’s blush tinged her entire face, from ear to ear as she affirmed the rumor to be true in an embarrassed mumble. “Well perhaps..it might be tr-true...” Suddenly her eyes met the dragon’s humorous gaze, and she gently swatted the tip of his snout, “Not that it’s any of your business,” she laughed good-naturedly, before gathering up her purchases and said, “There’s something different about you as well. Have you grown?” The elderly mouse tilted her head slightly, as if to acquire a better angle.

Callum shook his head with a grin, feeling his cheeks sway slightly with the movement. The dragon was still propped against the counter, when the elderly mouse noted his stomach creasing against its edge.

“Aaah, you’ve finally put on some weight.” She concluded. “That’s lovely dear, you carry it well.” And without another word, the frail mouse turned and walked out the doors.

Callum was left spluttering with indignation, “Yo-you come back here. Was it that obvious?” His words only trailed after the mouse who was already long gone.

“Off course it’s obvious,” a voice high over Callum’s shoulder said, before a purple tail slithered into view and gently pinched the drake’s side.

Squeaking in surprise, Callum whirled around to face his boss. “Don’t do that!” He panted, still slightly shocked from the mouse’s frankness.

“Do what?” Aaron inquired mischievously, adopting a look of innocence on his face. “I’m simply making an observation.”

Callum crossed his arms over his soft chest, “Not that. I’m referring to your ability appear out of nowhere and scare the living daylights out of me.”

“Oh, I would never do that,” the serpent smiled as he grabbed a couple of rags and began wiping down the counter, “I simply move from room to room, but I’m never intentionally silent.” A glint of humor in his pink eyes revealed that this was exactly Aaron’s intent.

“Uh-huh,” Callum huffed, “Well I’m not sure how many more ‘movements’ my poor heart can take.”

Chuckling, the serpent decided to steer their conversation in a more relevant direction. “You’ve made progress in your padding, I see.” He gestured to the dragon’s prominent paunch, and smiled encouragingly at the drake.

“Yeah,” Callum sighed, used his powerful claws to gently knead and shift his stomach. “The eating is nice, but the process is slow going,” the dragon mused. He’d been sticking to Aaron’s custom diet of consuming an average of a dozen or so pastries a night. It had been a week since he started, and despite the initial success of his first binge, his body seemed to be expanding a slower pace. Not the the drake minded, as the steady increase in weight allowed for him to become accustomed to the unfamiliar sense of being softer.

“I have definitely become warmer though,” Callum said, drawing a claw absentmindedly over the outline of his soft belly, which sagged slightly over his waistline. Callum had noticed the increased layer of softness was present over the entire expanse of his body. Fortifying his arms and legs with an extra layer of padding, widening out his rear and tail considerably, and forming the foundations of a second chin under his pudgy face.

“My additional ingredient is designed to disperse the adipose evenly without causing too dramatic of a change,” Aaron said, tilting his head thoughtfully as he continued to clear bread crumbs and pastry debris from the counters. “The process is usually pretty steady, but most seem to find it enjoyable.”

The serpent’s words clicked in Callum’s mind a second later. “*Wait*, others?” The dragon said, turning towards his boss with a look of intent curiosity.

“Why yes,” Aaron smiled, “You aren’t the only anthro I’ve worked with over the years. I’ve had the pleasure of enjoying numerous fursons’ company for quite some time.” The serpent suddenly had a distant look in his eye as he reminisced about all the different colleagues and friends he’d made. Though none of them had been a dragon, Aaron was familiar with an incredible spectrum of individuals who had each left their own unique imprint in the serpent’s mind.

“Quite a few of my fellow workers were convinced by certain sources,” Callum raised an eyebrow at this, “Erm, namely myself, to expand their horizons a little. Sometimes I would suggest it, and other times they would seek it out themselves.” Aaron had turned a deep shade of indigo, which Callum took as an indication of the serpent’s slight embarrassment from admitting his involvement in the unique process.

Callum smiled knowingly when he realized that this light-hearted confession was a perfect representation of Aaron’s persona: He loved to aid others in what ways he could, encouraging and providing them with support, while simultaneously incorporating his own generally humorous nature into the process.

Chuckling at the sentiment, Callum shook his head and then asked, “So if you are guilty of ‘helping’ so many acquaintances, then how old are you to have known such a number of them?”

Aaron paused slightly before answering, as he didn’t want to outright shock to the dragon with his answer. “Well ah, I’m quite old..and will live for a very long time,” the serpent nervously adjusted his hat before looking at the dragon again.

Callum thought for a moment, "Well I got that part," he quipped, "But how are you able to sustain such a long lifetime? Are you blessed with long life span, is it a characteristic of your species?" The dragon made to continue with his inquiry, but the serpent held up a hand.

"It is none of those things," the serpent said. "I am..well...a spirit of sorts. From the old world, long before civilization and anthros truly began interacting with one another." He looked down apprehensively at the dragon, as very few others were privy to the knowledge.

The grey drake's face contorted slightly in surprise, but then changed to one of affirmation as he realized that the notion of Aaron being an immortal spirit, despite being initially shocking, didn't detract from his friendly demeanor.

Smiling, the dragon embraced the serpent, and said, "I thought you seemed a little other worldly."

Caught off guard by the dragon's sudden hug, the serpent slowly smiled when he realized that Callum wasn't wary of the serpent's unique state, but accepting of it. The snake returned the embrace with his coils, and, after a long moment, began to register the dragon's musculature once more.

The action was so natural for Aaron, that he didn't realize he what he was doing until he opened his eyes to see a sternly glaring Callum looking back with his arms folded over his ample chest.

"You just couldn't resist," the drake smirked, as the serpent's deep violet blush returned once more.

A guilty smile adorned Aaron's visage as he was called out, but the spirit still used his sensory muscles to determine a read on the dragon's supple body. "You've increased your weight quite impressively," the serpent noted, "And your musculature seems to have slightly increased as well." The dragon cocked an eyebrow at this, and Aaron further explained. "The nutrient boost doesn't transform everything into fat, it will increase other areas of your body too." Aaron assured him, "Although adipose is the main target."

Grinning at the serpent's explanation, he contemplated how this might aid the dragon's movement in the future. Increasing his initial weight would

certainly ward off the cold, but the dragon had admittedly been slightly worried about how the increased baggage would affect his ability to move.

Apparently a spirit was quite capable of numerous miracles, as Callum felt much more at ease with the prospect of gaining weight than he had a moment ago.

Seeing the dragon's shifts in facial expressions, Aaron felt slightly worried that his explanation would deter the drake from continuing his course for expansion. The serpent was greatly relieved when Callum gave him a small smile, and said, "That sounds more like it," before launching into an overly dramatic spiel in hopes of embarrassing the serpent. "You're an all-powerful spirit with the waistlines of us puny mortals at your finger tips. But you are a kind, benevolent being with a magic powder that nurtures us, comforts us. Oh great Aaron," the dragon stooped to his knees, giggling at the exasperated and confused expression on the serpent's face, "Please impart more of your unlimited wisdom."

Aaron sighed and rolled his five eyes. It was his turn to groan from the dragon's awful performance, and he sighed and turned away from the drake to go back into the kitchen.

"But master," Callum called after him, his belly jiggling from constant laughter as he still remained kneeled forward, "What are your final words of wisdom?"

"Tend to the young gentleman who just came through our door!" A muffled response came from the serpent, followed by a subdued laugh.

Callum gasped and exploded to his feet, causing his belly to rock from the motion, before calming himself to address the anthro in front of him.

A well-built tiger stood in front of the dragon, standing almost as tall as Callum, and dressed in a formal uniform commonly worn by the city's guards.

"Ah, hello." Callum stammered. "W-welcome to Aaron's Exceptional Confections. How can I be of service." He slowly turned bright red as he realized the tiger was a regular and wouldn't require such a formal greeting.

Shaking his head, the tiger said, "Well good sir, I thought that perhaps I could try a couple of your cinnamon rolls. I've heard they're quite good."

Callum sighed and shook his head. "Sorry for the confusing greeting Albert, I was temporarily thrown off by a CERTAIN CRAZY SERPENT." He raised his voice loudly in hopes of spiting Aaron who responded from the kitchen.

"Yeah, yeah. Don't listen to him Albert, he's just sore that I bake much better cinnamon rolls." The serpent laughed at his own jab which initiated chuckles from the dragon and the tiger.

"Seems like you two are fine," the uniformed feline noted with a good natured grin. "It's always been the same with you guys. The only difference I can see now is..." he trailed off, and winked knowingly at the dragon before gesturing to Callum's protruding middle.

The drake turned a deep scarlet hue, before absentmindedly rubbing a clawed hand over the gentle curve of his belly. "Yes, well it was getting colder and Aaron can be pretty convincing." The drake mumbled, slightly embarrassed.

Albert laughed heartily, "Don't worry. You carry it well, and," he leaned forward slightly, "In my honest opinion, I think your career is aided by your physique." He gestured at the well-lit area around him, "I mean you work in a bakery for crying out loud, and who should stop you from enjoying yourself?"

Callum found himself completely agreeing with the tiger, despite an initial apprehension of increasing his weight. Realizing that the tiger's words made sense only strengthened the drake's internal decision to forge on with the process.

Smiling widely from the tiger's kind words and from his own small revelation, Callum brought their discussion back to the professional subject of how many and what kind of cinnamon rolls the tiger wished to purchase.

Feeling increasingly generous, the drake included an extra roll for the tiger's trouble before the two exchanged small talk over any events within the city's walls that might prove interesting.

“Nothing too exceptional is taking place,” Albert confided, “But I will be sure to keep on the look out for any folks who might be coming in with some of those spices you guys love.”

Callum thanked the feline for his words of encouragement, and bid the soldier farewell before leaning back to contemplate Albert’s words. As he leaned he noticed that his increased fluff also cushioned his backside and made it thoroughly more comfortable to sit.

The drake and serpent worked throughout the rest of the day with nothing exceptional transpiring. After a couple hours, Callum registered the fading light diffusing in the wide-windows.

He went back into the kitchen and asked Aaron if they should begin to close for the night. Thinking for a moment, the serpent nodded and affirmed that it was close enough to dark for them to put everything up.

Once the two finished shutting the shop down, Aaron proffered the usual bag of confections to Callum who took them expectantly. As he took the bag, he grunted when he realized that it weighed almost twice what he was accustomed to.

Looking inside, Callum found a considerably larger number of pastries than usual. Looking questioningly at the serpent, Aaron explained. “You’re going to need more if you want to increase your weight in time for winter. This will aid in enlarging your appetite as well as your stomach.”

Callum nodded and the two said their farewells before departing to their respective homes. The dragon trudged at a slightly awkward angle due to the bag of confections he was carrying.

Once he arrived at his apartment, the dragon plopped the sack of confections on the table before grabbing a drink of water from the rain barrel outside his door.

Callum then took the bag back into the cove and sat down in his increasingly favored spot for another food-filled night.

Grabbing a book from his small shelf, the dragon laid down and propped the novel against his belly before placing the confections at his side. Soon

Callum slipped into a familiar routine of reading, eating, and expanding.

As the minutes and bites passed, Callum's belly slowly lifted the book upwards and forwards as it became tighter and smoother. The already present layer of fat reflected the expansion as it too became thinner and more firm with the swelling nature of the drake's stomach.

Periodically, Callum adjusted his book and reached for another confection. Time passed in seamless increments that were only punctuated by a shift in Callum's weight to get comfortable. The movement would cause love handles to appear as the drake compressed his gut slightly to readjust himself.

After two hours of steady feeding, the literature bound dragon's claws grappled for another confection and found nothing but air. Looking down, the drake realized he had finished another large meal, and his taught dome of a gut proved this sentiment. Extending a foot and a half upwards, Callum's stomach bulged proudly from the volume of food crammed inside it, and his ventral plates groaned from the incredible pressure. Each plate separated slightly to reveal tender, silver flesh beneath it; which Callum gently scratched in order to calm his bulbous stomach.

Breathing steadily, Callum was slowly hit by the a sense of fullness that rendered him almost unable to move. Thinking about the different individuals who'd confided in the dragon's figure throughout the day, a grin split the dragons plush muzzle as he fondly fell into a deep sleep dreaming about the quirky Mrs. Sanderson, Albert's kind words of encouragement, and, most of all, Aaron's decision to entrust him with his spiritous secret and expansive intentions