

Following Callum's first ever victory in his campaign to strike back at the serpent with a prank of his own, the pair began to clean up the kitchen to ready for the day ahead. While Aaron could have left the quaking drake to the process on his own, the serpent was humble enough to know when he'd been bested. Using his levitation skills, Aaron took care of his own appearance first to ensure he wasn't disreputable.

Callum took care of the mess on the floor, leaning forward to steadily soak up the edible shrapnel that had resulted from the convectional explosions. As he did so, he found his belly pressing stolidly against his legs and the floor. Sighing, the drake leaned back on his hind legs and considered the problem thoughtfully. He absentmindedly began massaging his soft gut in the process, enjoying the feeling of the pillowy flesh being knead between his fingers. Looking from his belly, down to the floor, and then to Aaron, the pondering drake suddenly felt an idea flower in his mind.

"Hey Aaron," he called to the serpent in a curious voice, "That levitation trick you do..is.." he hesitated as the serpent looked back at him, "Is it hard to learn? Can it even be learned?"

An encouraging smile spread across the snake's visage, "It's not difficult to learn," he said. "Though I can only speak from the perspective of an immortal spirit. I've never had the opportunity to teach it to another before."

The drake nodded sagely, "I was just thinking that it might be nice to learn some useful tricks that would help me in the kitchen..and, well.." he grabbed his bulging gut and hefted it in his claws before shaking it gently, "It would help me get around certain obstacles formed by this." He let go of the squashed mass, which surged downwards and came to a jiggling rest against the drake's thighs.

"I see," Aaron tapped his chin thoughtfully. "Well I can certainly assure that something as trivial as a levitation spell is quite easy to master for those with proper guidance."

The words made Callum smile widely as he realized that there was a possibility of being able to form the incantation. "Really? Wow, that's incredible. Does it take long? Does it hurt? Is it dangerous? When can we start? Can we-," A purple hand silenced the overeager drake.

“It doesn’t take long to teach,” Aaron assured the dragon, “But I will need time to gauge your potential and explain some of the finer points of performing magic.”

Callum nodded thoughtfully at the serpent’s words, his mind steadily calmed to a reasonable state. “I understand,” the drake said, “I just got excited from thinking about the possibilities.”

Aaron nodded with a comprehensive smile, “Don’t worry. Tonight, once we close, I’ll talk with you more on the subject and we can see if you are able.”

Having settled the magic inquiry, Aaron then spread his arms expansively. “Now I believe we should take care of a mess that a certain dragon created.”

Callum snorted, “Who said they would never be bettered in the game of wits?” He cocked a mischievous eyebrow at the serpent, “As far as I’m concerned this ordeal is as much your fault as it is mine.” A cleaning rag suddenly whacked the drake full on in the face, while Aaron made himself busy with restoring the kitchen to its former state. “Aaagh-gaf,” Callum grunted, “Right, now I know the first thing I’m going to do when I learn that levitation spell,” he grumbled to himself, before removing the rag’s death grip on his face and leaning forward over his bulbous belly to resume cleaning the floor.

In no time, the two had the kitchen clean and in working order once more. “Well,” Callum said, as he slowly got to his feet and stretched, “I guess it’s time to look forward to another wonderful day of business.”

“First things first,” Aaron said, wrapping the dragon in a coil and gently lifting him off the ground. “Time to measure the impact that cake had on you last night.”

Callum yelped from the sudden seizure of his hefty person. “You know, it’s quite easy to ask me if you want to pick me up,” he said as he crossed his arms over his ample chest and huffed in exasperation.

“Of course,” Aaron said, “But where’s the fun when you’re expecting it?” A mischievous smile glinted in the serpent’s violet eyes, before he adopted a more official tone and performed his routine observation of the drake’s

middle. "Seems that my ingredient certainly helped had some heft to the cake," the serpent smiled, before realizing what he'd said and looked down at the dragon.

Callum grimaced slightly before creasing his eyebrows in a stern glare, "Uh huh, and I suppose it wasn't there until after Reyna came back with it?" He continued his piercing gaze while Aaron smiled nervously.

"Well..ah, heh, I was hoping to encourage your expansion a bit," the serpent rubbed his hands nervously, before deciding to play his most effective card. "Well at least I didn't attempt a ruthless prank on a poor, unsuspecting..."

"All-powerful, immortal spirit like yourself?" Callum smirked as he cut off the snake's rambling with a supplement of his own.

"Well, I suppose," Aaron shifted nervously, before taking an exasperated breath. "I'm sorry for sneaking it in, I suppose." The serpent mumbled the last words, while the drake smiled and reveled in the fact that for one rare moment, he was the one in the victorious in an amusing situation.

"Heh, don't worry about it," Callum chuckled. "I'm fine with the cake and it's way more fun to see you squirm for once."

Aaron snapped his gaze back to the drake and adopted a pouting expression, "So you were having fun at my expense?"

The question only made Callum laugh harder, before he regained his composure and drew in a deep breathe, causing his belly to swell within the serpent's coils. "You're impossible to be angry at you know," he said in a warmer, sincere manner. "I think this entire ordeal has left us about even, so why don't we move on and get this measuring process out of the way?"

Aaron smiled at the notion. "I completely agree," he said before rippling his coils around the drake's middle, "Now I shall examine your progress." After a couple moments the serpent stated with an impressed glance that the drake had made considerable headway with his weight. "Your body is considerably thicker, and your belly," he gestured to the bulging mass, "Has once again taken the majority of the food. You've also grown another quarter inch, which brings your height to slightly over 6'1'."

Callum smiled and said, "As long as it allows me to move more easily, then I am completely fine with it."

The serpent nodded, "And your muscles have also increased slightly in volume, which is the natural reaction. All in all, you have increased your weight impressively and should effectively be protected from the cold." The serpent gently placed the drake on the ground and Callum smiled as he rested his hands on his belly.

"I'm certainly a lot warmer," the overweight drake smiled as he pushed his claws into the rounded mass. They disappeared up to his wrists, and caused the layer of flab to bulge out of shape. Callum revered the softness under his smooth plates and adored the pressure it created from hanging down against his thighs.

Aaron grinned, "I'm glad you enjoy the feeling," he said encouragingly.

The drake smiled and nodded his pudgy muzzle contentedly, before a ding in the front room caught both their attention.

"Well I suppose that's our cue to get back to work," Callum noted. Aaron nodded in agreement, and they began another day of business in the bakery.

Callum walked out into the front room to greet the first customer of the day, when he stopped up short upon seeing the anthro enter. A very familiar otter padded up to the counter, dressed in a simple light brown blouse and skirt.

"He-hey Reyna," the drake greeted her with a slight stutter. "How are you today? Are you feeling better?" Callum's expression turned to one of polite concern as he recalled the unfortunate news about the otter's brother.

Reyna smiled and said, "I'm fine, thank you for asking. And thank you for being supportive of my little dilemma yesterday. It helped."

Callum nodded and returned the warm expression, "Of course. I hate seeing others in distress. Especially when they're as kind and compassionate as..." he trailed off, realizing what he was about to say. Cheeks suddenly flushing with a scarlet hue, the drake grit his teeth and finished the sentence, "As you." He didn't want to be awkward, but Callum

figured the otter deserved the truth.

Reyna's deep brown eyes glinted with a shimmer of amusement, "Why thank you."

"So," the plush drake said, "I suppose I should be doing my job and offering to take your order." He chuckled nervously and rubbed his protruding stomach comfortingly.

"Of course," the otter murmured, though her gaze seemed to be transfixed on the drake's hefty belly. "I would love some of your wonderful Apple Crescents," she said in a distant voice.

Callum noticed the otter's gaze affixed to his round middle, and blushed even more, but the drake attempted to keep the conversation on point after his previous blunder. "Alright, let me take the order back and they should be ready in a couple minutes."

Once the drake disappeared, Reyna sighed and rubbed her forehead in annoyance. She'd grown fond of the pair over the years of being a customer, but in the past couple of weeks Callum's expanding figure had initiated a deeper allure in the otter's psyche. The cake she'd returned earlier had been a painful reminder of her brother's absence, but the otter found more solace than she would care to admit in knowing that it had been added to the drake's increasingly softened form. She had come in today, because she wanted to move forward, not dramatically, but steadily, in becoming more familiar with the dragon. Reyna wasn't sure if her emotional attachment was shallow due to the fact that it was stemmed from Callum's heft, but she didn't see any harm in simply becoming a better friend.

The sound of a door swooping shut brought the otter back to the present, and she swung her head in the direction of the source; her rounded ears swiveling instinctively.

Callum padded out the door, with a satisfied smile on his face as he informed Reyna that her order was underway and would be finished in a couple minutes. Leaning forward on the counter, the drake's belly bulged around the lip of the surface and caught the otter's gaze once more.

"I take it you enjoyed the cake," Reyna blurted out, her mind forming and

expelling the bold statement before any rationality could be applied. Mortified, the otter turned a deep crimson hue that tinged her fur and pricked her cheeks. Reyna's eyes widened and her paws were clamped over her mouth before any more blunders were made.

The otter's remark and consequential reaction only elicited a lighthearted chuckle from Callum's pudgy muzzle. He decided to keep Reyna's obvious embarrassment to a minimum and continued as smoothly as he could, "It was wonderful. I appreciate your interest," he said in a politely amused tone. Placing a hand on his large belly he added, "It was very filling, but I'm sure you've already noticed that."

Reyna laughed nervously, before glancing down at the drake's plush gut and nearly falling into the same subdued state she'd occupied earlier. Shaking her head, Reyna shifted her focus from the bulging mass to the drake's face which looked back at her concernedly. Cracking a smile, the otter decided to move the conversation forward, "I'm just glad you enjoyed it. I would have hated to think that no one could have appreciated it."

"Yeah well, I certainly did. I'm hoping to add a little padding for the winter," the drake explained. "We can't all enjoy the comfort of thick natural coat," he feigned an envious gaze at the otter's furs, which brought another laugh, more genuine this time, from Reyna's muzzle.

"I suppose that's true," she said, rubbing her arm self-consciously.

Callum smiled, before noting the amount of time that had passed, "Speaking of foods, I think your crescents are almost ready." He made to arch his neck over his shoulder, causing rolls of fat to bunch up under his chin and turned just in time for Aaron to depart from the kitchen with a faintly steaming bag of crescents in his hand.

"You're right, Callum," the serpent smiled, before handing them to the otter, "Right on time, I hope you enjoy lady Reyna." Aaron bowed in an overly formal manner, which elicited a small laugh from the flustered otter.

"Why thank you Aaron," she said, "I was just talking with Callum about how much we enjoy this type of food."

"Really?" The serpent said, a knowing smile creeping across his face. Callum gulped as he knew all too well what the expression meant; Aaron

was up to something, and there was no way the drake could stop it. “Well, I’m sure he enjoys other things in addition to his food,” the serpent chuckled as he saw a dark shadow of malice cross over the drake’s face.

‘What are you doing?’ Callum sent the thought his mental link with the serpent.

‘Simply assisting you as best I can,’ Aaron replied wordlessly, before a mischievous smirk widened his face, ‘And having a little fun with the individual responsible for lodging an inordinate amount of flour in my nose.’

Callum’s eyes widened, but he was unable to send a telepathic retort, because Reyna was suddenly addressing him. “And what other things might that be?” She asked in a amusedly curious manner.

The dragon blushed profusely at the question, his cheeks trembling as he stammered to come up with an answer, “Well..uh..er I enjoy..heh..talking to you.” He finished weakly. Callum was groaning internally, hoping the answer wasn’t representative of his fondness for the young otter.

“Oh well, thank you,” Reyna replied warmly. “It’s nice conversing with you too. Both of you,” she said as an afterthought, “This is a place with kind people. I look forward to coming back.”

Callum nodded vigorously at the idea, sending his cheeks and chin wobbling as he smiled at the idea, “I would certainly enjoy that.”

“Have a nice day,” she said before exiting the shop and disappearing.

“All right,” Callum huffed before adopting an angry expression towards the serpent. “I thought we put the entire pranking thing behind us.”

Aaron smiled and nodded, “We did, I just couldn’t stand by in letting a wonderful opportunity slip past.”

Callum raised an eyebrow, “And what, exactly, might that opportunity be?”

“It was pretty obvious that you two wanted to extend your sentiments to one another,” Aaron explained.

“So you thought you would be the one to connect them?” Callum finished

the serpent's intent.

Nodding once more, the snake's grinned widened, "I'm glad you understand!"

The hefty drake snorted, but slowly came to agree that there was no denying he had found the otter to be considered different to most of the customers he came across. "She seemed to be infatuated with my 'hefty stature'," the drake murmured, rubbing his gut self-consciously.

"That would certainly seem to be the case," Aaron agreed.

"Well I suppose I should get to know her a little better if I am feeling so positively," Callum said, smiling up at the serpent. An expression of mock anger settled on his face, "But I expect no more help from you, at least unless I request it."

"I'll try," the serpent said, though his visage gave the drake the inkling that this would be a short-lived assurance.

"Well," the drake sighed, "I guess we should get back to work."

Over the next couple of weeks, Callum began exchanging increasingly longer and deeper conversations with the otter who came in nearly everyday. The majority of their subjects revolved around work, both in the drake's workplace and Reyna's part-time job at the large college in the center of the city. They discussed the otter's brother who was on a long, scouting expedition that extended into foreign lands where treaties and trade routes were extended for the local province. Callum, who'd begun learning simple magic lessons from his mentor, kept the otter on a consistent update of his progress by levitating small items. The drake seemed to have a talent for movement with his mind, and would use the ability to useful and humorous effect. He could levitate small objects for a short period of time, but it would often burn a large amount of energy. Due this fact, the drake's waistline remained roughly the same over the course of their time. The drake's expansive middle was the other topic they conversed about, though apprehensively at first, Callum became increasingly aware of the otter's interest in his bulbous figure. She expressed a particular interest in his soft, protruding belly which the drake held almost no quarrel over. As her interest became more evident, Callum realized his desire to increase his weight was growing stronger as well.

As the period of friendliness between the drake and otter deepened, Aaron noted the relationship with a polite, reserved level of interest. He didn't intervene and only offered his advice where it was needed. The serpent found the position similar to the role of an older sibling or parent, offering sage advice when needed and being inconspicuous at other times. He and Callum worked on other things too, magic, the bakery, and prank attempts, but with the telepathic link, Aaron was prone to sensing when the drake was growing restless.

One day he broached the issue, simply asking Callum what was troubling him.

"I think I've hit a plateau in my expansion efforts," the drake sighed as he looked down at his large belly. It had barely grown in the past two weeks, and Aaron was almost certain of the cause.

"You've been burning energy from the incantations I taught you," the serpent explained, as the two leaned against the counter.

"I know," Callum sighed, "But with Reyna, I just wish I had more to show her." He grabbed his doughy gut and hefted it slightly, "I want this to get bigger. Do you have any ideas?" He asked, looking quizzically at the serpent.

"I.." a ding interrupted both of them as a large, familiar ursine suddenly entered. Smiling, Aaron suddenly saw the solution, "I think I can help you," he said.

He suddenly turned to the bulging bear in front of him, "Tay," the serpent exclaimed amicably. "It's wonderful to see you."

"Heh, it's nice to see you too," the obsidian blacksmith responded, "How're things with you two?"

"Wonderfully," Aaron grinned, "I suppose you'll be wanting your usual, then?"

Slapping his globular gut, the bear unleashed a hearty belly laugh, "Of course," the ursine boomed. "Your pastries are one of the few joys in life."

Aaron's grin widened, "Excellent, well then how would you like access to an unlimited supply?"

Eyes widening, the bulbous bear and equally surprised dragon looked at the serpent with identically shocked expressions.

"...And er, how might this be possible?" The bear said, shuffling his bulky legs, and ringing his paws in eager temptation.

"Yes," Callum repeated the sentiment, "How?"

Aaron smiled, "With a pastry eating contest." Both the bear and dragon's eyes threatened to pop from their sockets at the idea, before enthusiastic grins slowly plastered their faces. "It would be a great promotional event for the bakery, and you two would be able to stuff yourselves to the brim in a head-to-head competition that will commence in five days."

The pair of doughy anthros could only nod in unison when a ding interrupted their reverie. Looking over the counter, Aaron's face became increasingly animated when he realized the newcomer was Reyna. "And I'm sure this young lady would support your entry Callum," as he smiled knowingly at the bewildered otter.

Aaron quickly explained the idea to the otter, who, though not as shocked as the drake or bear, was still genuinely excited by the prospect. "I like it," she said, before sidling up to Callum. "What do you think?"

Swallowing down a part of his shock, the drake looked into Reyna's eyes which glittered with enthusiasm, and a hint of passion.

He nodded eagerly, "Let's do it."