

Columbia State 2: Eat and Greet:

By: IndigoRho

Much of the sky was a clear blue and the temperature just warm enough to be uncomfortable, yet the rain fell anyway. Pedestrians hurried along the sidewalks, shielding exposed belongings as best they could from the unexpected shower. A fox and a goat were amongst them, weaving between store awnings and bus stop overhangs, attempting to stay somewhat dry. The relatively thin fox, Eli, occasionally glanced over his shoulder to see if the much larger goat was keeping up with him.

"Were gonna be late, Niall," Eli said. "Did you really have to waste so much time chatting with that girl at the bus stop?"

Despite his size, Niall kept pace with Eli quite easily. "Hey, her name is Cameron, and getting her number was worth the wait."

"Does Cameron know about your favorite hobby?"

"I think I made it clear."

Eli laughed. "Sure ya did. I seem to remember you telling her you enjoyed large meals and lots of protein to fuel your workouts. Totally the same as saying you eat people when you're bored."

"Stop exaggerating!" Niall grumbled. "Besides, most chics who've accepted my waistline have also accepted the fact that I eat a cocky pred every once in a while."

"Yep, every member of a predatory species is an active hunter. You know me, scarfing down rabbits and mice all time," Eli replied with as much annoyed sarcasm as he could muster.

Niall groaned. "Ugh, not this again, I'm sorry. Your vacation made you grumpy."

"It did *not*! It's just that between vacation and catching up at work I haven't been able to hang out with anyone in weeks, and we're supposed to be meeting Riley's new boyfriend."

"Well, we're getting close to the restaurant, right?"

They were, in fact, within site of Amber Hill Cafe, regarded as one of the better breakfast spots in the city. The cafe also had a reputation for abnormally large serving sizes. Pushing through the entrance's double doors, Eli welcomed the rush of cooler air and lack of rain. Most of the tables were empty—it was before noon in the middle of the week, after all—and Eli quickly spotted his friend Riley already seated at a booth in the back, alongside a zebra he didn't recognize.

A cheery cardinal walking past with a fresh pot of coffee stopped to greet the new arrivals. "Morning, and welcome to Amber Hill! Would you like to be at a table or a booth today?"

"Oh, we're actually with that puma over there," Eli answered, pointing in Riley's direction.

"Sounds good, I'll be with you all in just a minute to get you started on drinks." She quickly continued on her way towards a table with a trio of hyenas.

Eli and Niall headed to their booth, brushing off water drops from their fur and clothing. Riley finally noticed them and waved, the zebra besides him simply smiling politely. Eli easily slid onto the bench opposite the pair, while Niall squeezed himself in afterward with a bit of effort, managing to prod his large belly entirely underneath the table. As Niall got himself situated, Eli took a better look at the stranger. The zebra was chubby, but a lot thinner than Eli had expected. Though he hated admitting it openly, Riley was horrible at hiding his preference for heavyset guys. Eli thought it a little silly, but understood how practical it was considering his friend's odd urges, and refused to judge him for it. However, he couldn't help but notice Riley himself looked a good deal fatter than usual. Niall still dwarfed him, of course, but Riley's weight only changed dramatically when...accidents happened. Eli decided not to linger on the thought much longer.

"Hey man, sorry we're late. We got delayed at the bus stop unexpectedly." Eli said, glaring at Niall.

"No worries, we already ordered to save time, though." Riley replied. "Ooh, and everyone, I'd like you to meet Marcus."

Marcus gave a little wave. "Nice to finally meet you two."

"The fox in front of you is my old friend Eli, and the goat is Niall, whom you may remember seeing from a nice safe distance a while back."

The waitress interrupted the introductions momentarily to grab drink requests from the new pair. Familiar with the Cafe, Niall was already able to provide his food order, too, choosing a single waffle and asking for extra syrup. Eli quickly scanned the menu, settling for scrambling eggs.

With the waitress gone, Eli revived the conversation. "So, how did you two meet?"

Riley responded. "We met at that party Lindsey had about a month ago. Neither of us really knew anyone else there, so we spent most of the night chatting together."

"I thought Niall went with you?" Eli asked.

"Well he did, but he left early after, uh, eating."

"That answers the obvious," Eli said, glancing quickly at Niall's gut. He'd sworn it looked bigger, though the cause was never in doubt.

Riley laughed. "Yeah. Anyways, I screwed up and overindulged on some edibles, and Marcus was sweet enough to watch over me." He smiled towards Marcus, causing the zebra to blush a little. "Then some drunk jerk tried to eat him, but I interfered and ate the drunk instead. To be honest, I was pretty out of it, so it's, uh, not as heroic as it sounds."

"Well, I'm still alive and not an anonymous layer of fat, so I'm not eager to complain about your intent." Marcus replied.

And that answers the question about Riley's weight, Eli thought to himself.

Niall had barely paid any attention to the conversation, instead staring at the few other occupied tables from time to time. "I think I remember seeing you at the party," he abruptly told Marcus.

"Yeah, fortunately you, uh, decided against saying hi," Marcus replied nervously.

"Ha! I did skip a couple meals that day, was willing to try something new." Niall let out a boisterous laugh. "Course, Lindsey would've kicked my ass if I had."

The loud buzzing of Riley's phone ended the awkward discussion. Riley looked down to see who was calling, then quickly scooted off the bench. "It's my mom, I'll be right back," he explained, before leaving to answer.

With Riley gone, Eli felt bold enough to ask Marcus a more personal question. "So Marcus, being with Riley must be, well, rough, considering his whole sleep eating issue."

"It...it does complicate things," Marcus sighed a little, though his smile quickly returned. "But he's always been honest about it, and we're really careful."

"Can't be all that bad if we're meeting him," Niall butted in again. "Half the time I don't even know he's been dating until it's all over."

Eli was thankful Riley hadn't been there to hear that one. "Yeah, Riley tends to be fairly nervous about relationships, doesn't want us getting too attached to someone if things don't work out. Also so Niall doesn't go ex hunting."

Niall rolled his eyes. "That happened once! And for completely unrelated reasons, by the way!"

Marcus laughed. "Well that's good to hear. I must have won him over when I agreed to put on safety weight."

"Ah, I was wondering about that," Eli said. "Riley's mentioned wanting a guy who's harder to swallow before."

"Gaining weight on purpose is definitely a different experience, but I kind of like being able to just eat everything I want." Marcus patted his stomach. "We've only been dating a month, but I've already put on about twenty pounds"

Riley returned then, still cheerful. "So, what did I miss?"

"Marcus was showing us the side-effects of your cooking," Niall replied, causing Marcus to blush.

The timely arrival of their food thankfully halted the conversation. Marcus accepted a plate overflowing with a breakfast sandwich and sides of bacon and sausage. He was then passed Riley's

plate, too, a massive omelet. The feast seemed to overwhelm him at first, though he quickly forced himself to dig in enthusiastically. Riley occasionally stole a bite, but for the most part left the eating to the zebra.

"With Marcus around I've been able to experiment with my cooking more in the last month than I have in two years." Riley took a moment to admire his boyfriend's efforts. "Well, while he's busy with that, why don't you two talk a bit about yourselves. Niall?"

"Sure," Niall said. "Grew up in a tiny little place up north called Needle Falls, seriously doubt you've heard of it. Escaped thanks to a wrestling scholarship. Met Riley and Eli in college cause we were in the same dorm. Oh, and I've got a passion for vore."

"A passion he wants us all very much to indulge in," Riley added.

"Hey, with the right motivation vore's amazing," Niall countered, a little more sternly than expected. "Myself, I mainly hunt predatory species. Helps remind them that a goat can be just as dangerous as a wolf or a bear."

Eli couldn't resist chiming in. "I'm sure they learn a lot while on your waistline."

"Oh shut it," Niall responded. "Besides, vore comes in handy when you work campus security."

"Yep, protecting the students from so many loiterers and drunk frat boys," Eli refused to back down. "The holding cell's a bit hazardous, though; bit on the acidic side."

Niall was used to Eli's sarcasm, but still let it get to him every now and then. "I let *most* of them go," he insisted. "Their stay's only permanent if my patrol is delayed or they're a known problem. Creates a lot of annoying paperwork, otherwise."

Hoping he'd talked enough to satisfy Riley, Niall doused his waffle in syrup and began eating. Eli was next.

"Alright, I've lived in the city all my life. I've known Riley pretty much since elementary, and Niall since college, as he already mentioned. And regardless of Niall's obnoxious preconceptions, I have zero interest in eating anyone, ever." Eli hated that the last statement was so often necessary considering his circle of friends.

"One day," Niall managed in between bites. "It's like your family's one tradition."

"Screw tradition!" Eli snapped back. "I'm not like my parents or brothers."

With Marcus' mouth too full of food to ask, Riley decided to offer an explanation. "The rest of Eli's family generally feel the same way about vore as Niall. His younger twin brothers are a bit, uh, jerky about Eli's view."

"I'm sure if they experienced what it's like to be trapped in someone else's stomach they'd see my point," Eli grumbled.

The comment interested Marcus enough to take a brief break from eating. "Have you been swallowed before?" He asked.

Riley stared down at the table, and Eli quickly spoke up before the puma could. "In high school Riley accidentally ate me during one of his sleep eating bouts. He woke up, though, and pretty aggressively threw me up before any harm was done." While the memory wasn't a great one for Eli, he knew Riley felt worse about it.

"And," Niall said.

Eli sighed. "And my wonderful buddy Niall here ate me the very first time we met, while I was heading back to my dorm room. Fortunately for me, he was on his way to hang out with Riley, who forced him to throw me up once he recognized my screams for help."

"And," Niall, again.

Eli crossed his arms, remaining silent.

"And!" Niall insisted.

"Alright, alright," Eli relented. "Noah, one of my younger brothers, swallowed me once as hunting practice. Dad wanted that to be a regular occurrence, but Mom actually disagreed with him for once and banned the twins from eating me, even temporarily. Satisfied?"

Niall nodded.

"Great. Now that you've heard the least important details of my life, let's move on." Eli cleared his throat. "I work at the student clinic on campus, got the job in college and staid on after I graduated. I mostly do reception stuff, but on busy nights they have me assist with some of the, uh, less technical procedures."

"He means dealing with patients suffering post-vore problems," Riley clarified.

Eli begrudgingly accepted the interruption. "Yep. Usually just send them home with indigestion medicine. Sometimes we get them soon enough after vore to actually rescue the meal, though, which is nice. Rare, but nice."

Niall and Eli had managed to finish their plates despite conversation. Miraculously, Marcus had cleared everything from his first plate. His belly was noticeably rounder, and he had begun to spend more time chewing than swallowing. Most of an omelet still loomed before him.

"You're doing awesome!" Riley said, gleefully. "We can save the leftovers for later. They'd make a great post-nap snack to hold you over till dinner."

After looking over his shoulder for a moment, Niall abruptly chugged the extra container of maple syrup he'd been left. Riley and Eli looked on in confusion, not sure how to respond to their friend's unusual display.

"OK," Riley finally managed. "Well, I'm gonna hit the bathroom real quick."

Niall finished his container, and wiped the syrup from his mouth. "Same."

With care and effort the duo left their seats and headed towards the bathroom. Marcus finally put down his utensils and leaned back, gently rubbing his stuffed belly before remembering Eli was still there. "So, uh...watch anything good recently?"

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Niall stood in front of the sink, lazily running his hands through the flowing water, all the while keeping a close eye on the stalls behind him via the mirror. Riley was at one of the urinals further down, out of sight.

"You really shouldn't bug Eli so much about his family issues, you know how he feels about that." Riley said.

"Hey, he starts shit too. *He* knows I've got reasons for my hobby," Niall's unusual discreteness regarding vore was strange, but Riley didn't dwell on it. "Anyways, you seem to be having a great time with Marcus." The single occupied stall finally opened, and a pudgy hyena stepped out. Niall grinned.

"Honestly Niall, the last month with Eli has been amazing," Riley gushed.

Niall remained at the sinks, patiently waiting for the hyena to finish cleaning, carefully positioning himself while avoiding suspicion. Riley's conversation would provide a decent, if unwitting, distraction.

"He's just been so understanding of my condition, and really supportive of my cooking."

When the hyena finally turned to find the hand dryer, he instead found a massive goat. Niall grabbed the hyena's wrists and swiftly leaned forwards, engulfing most of his prey's head in one go. The events had occurred so swiftly the hyena never had a chance to cry out. His muzzle was clenched shut, he couldn't see anything in the dim cavern of his attacker's mouth, and a strong maple scent was everywhere.

"And I know it's not really your thing, but he's wonderful at the piano. Sometimes when we're at his place he'll play while I cook."

Niall preferred to savor his meals when possible, but today he was in a hurry. With skills honed from a decade of active predation, Niall began swallowing. The hyena frantically tried to escape, but the goat was far larger and stronger, holding him in place with little effort. As he rapidly traveled down the predator's throat, the smell of maple grew stronger. Niall allowed himself to linger on his meal's

belly, savoring its softness and licking a small strip of fur and flesh that had been exposed during the ordeal.

"It'll be nice when we can finally spend a full night together, though. He's been making great progress, and I've been looking into a stronger muzzle."

The hyena finally began to enter Niall's stomach, sliding face-first into a pool of maple syrup and mashed waffle. The unexpected sensation renewed his struggles, though not enough to reverse his fate. Niall turned to face the mirror, admiring his work. His already enormous belly was expanding with each gulp and shaking back and forth as its meal tried to fight back. The large, stretchy shirt he wore was containing his gut expertly; with luck it'd hold out till the end. Niall began swallowing faster and faster, eager to finish his meal before anyone else wandered into the bathroom. The hyena's bubble butt disappeared, then his tail, his knees, his ankles. Niall roughly pulled off the prey's shoes before another strong, and final, swallow. He quickly gave his belly a hard shake, tossing the hyena around and soaking him in syrup. Escaping a predator's stomach was incredibly difficult to begin with. Escaping while covered in a sticky substance and with your sense of smell overwhelmed was close to impossible.

"Ooh, we should take him to Horizon's to meet Victor. He said a bit of inflation now and then can expand stomach capacity, or something. Or maybe that was one of his weird jokes..."

Niall dumped the shoes into the garbage, setting his sights on the hand dryer. He could feel his meal saying something, but his numerous layers of fat muffled the sound completely. Leaving as is would probably create a scene, even with the Cafe this empty. Worse, it could lead to a lot of annoying conversations about etiquette. Fortunately, he had an oft-reliable solution. Covering the hand dryer's nozzle with his mouth, Niall turned it on. The blast of hot air stung, but he endured, feeling the warmth travel down his throat and into his stomach. The hyena jostled from the new sensation, confused. Once again Niall's belly began to expand, the distortions of its contents gradually fading as it filled with more and more air and smoothed out. With the nozzle heated to an uncomfortable level, Niall finally released his mouth from it. He resisted the urge to jump when he realized Riley was behind him, staring.

"What the heck are you doing that for?" Riley asked.

"Just like Victor said," Niall gave his barely covered belly a hard slap, relieved to feel stretched fat rather than hyena. "Little bit of inflation now and then helps stomach capacity. Good exercise for predators."

Riley knew Niall had done something while he wasn't looking, but wasn't in the mood to push the issue. Instead, he quietly washed his hands, ignored the new pair of shoes sitting in the garbage, and left the bathroom. Niall followed, albeit with a bit of a waddle. Approaching the table, Riley was pleased to see Marcus and Eli chatting together.

"It's one of the best adaptations I've ever seen, probably my favorite series of the season," he overheard Marcus say.

"I'll definitely check it out, thanks for the suggestion."

"You two having fun?" Riley asked, bemused.

Before either could answer, Niall came into view. His sudden increase in girth was obvious, and while Marcus stared in confusion, Eli was fairly certain he knew the cause.

"Yeah, while you two were cleaning up," Eli glared at Niall's swollen belly. "Marcus was recommending some shows. Checks are here, too."

"I handled yours, don't worry," Marcus told Riley. "Only seems right considering you spend so much on food for me as it is."

Niall took a quick glance at his, before digging out his wallet and dropping some bills on the table. "Well, I've got something to go finish up real quick so I need to bail." Eli simply shook his head. "Marcus, it was great to finally meet you, and I'm sure we'll see each other a lot more often. See ya guys!"

Not waiting for responses, Niall hurried towards to the Cafe's exit as swiftly as he could

manage. While inflating made it harder to notice his predation, it also gave his meal more room to maneuver, and tended to delay the digestion process. Currently the hyena was busy wasting what little energy he had left thumping on the walls of his prison, desperate to be seen. Niall's belly merely shook a bit. Eventually he walked by a table with two other hyenas, both patiently waiting, their checks obviously paid for.

“What's taking him so long?” One asked.

The other shrugged and stood. “I'll go check on him. I've got to piss now, anyways.”

Niall increased his pace.