

Columbia State 11: Flawed Intentions

By: IndigoRho

It was well into the night, and the hookah club Horizons was practically empty. Not too surprising, considering weekday nights were very rarely crowded, especially while college was in session. The few patrons actually there were bored nite owls, retail store workers enjoying their “weekend”, and students who had little intention of attending their morning classes to begin with. Beside one of the few active hookahs was an irritated stoat complaining to his deer companion.

“I’ve never been so humiliated in my life!” Travis, the stoat, growled. “Whenever I thought it couldn’t get worse, fate flipped me the bird and found a way.”

The deer was preoccupied with the hookah, content to enjoy a few puffs and listen to the stoat’s rant.

“First, that asshole boss of mine forces me to feed myself to that idiot otter Zeke. Then he decides Zeke somehow isn’t fat enough already, and has him eat every damn thing that makes its way back into the kitchen, pelting me with mushy crap!” Travis was waving a hookah mouthpiece in one paw for emphasis, though not actually using it. “It didn’t fucking stop, I was almost buried alive in the stuff!”

“Eh, doesn’t really sound any worse than, I don’t know, still being conscious when the digestion kicks in,” the deer smirked. “I’ve heard the sounds prey make when that happens, kind of off-putting.”

“Real funny, Aaron, real funny,” Travis grumbled. “So I manage to survive almost five hours of that hell, and my boss doesn’t even try to get me out afterward, just tells Zeke to hoof it to a clinic and hope for the best! When he finally did reach the damn place my skin was burning and itching all over, and the nurses took their sweet ass time getting me out. Sure, I’m digesting alive, just keep arguing over ref calls from a game that happened days ago!”

Aaron went back to quietly listening, amused.

“They finally get me out, wash me down, find me a robe to wear, and I’m pissed,” Travis continued. “First thing I do is try to find Zeke, cause if I’m swallowed, and survive, I’m sure as hell gonna return the favor. He was still stuffed full of leftovers, wouldn’t have stood a chance, but one of the nurses ran interference and trapped me in a closet until Zeke was long gone. Then they had the gall to kick me out for attempted predation!”

“Quite the injustice,” Aaron said.

Travis glared back. “Whatever, all they did was give him a few more days of freedom. I know where he works, and what days he works. I’ll grab him tomorrow before he reaches the restaurant, see how he enjoys stewing in *my* belly.” He laughed to himself.

Aaron rolled his eyes, unnoticed in the club’s dim lighting. “That’s the most pitiful revenge plan I’ve ever heard.”

“It’s a matter of pride, you ass!” Travis replied angrily. “Besides, I was going to eat Zeke eventually, even before the incident at work. Ugh, and I’m still craving bird! Maybe I’ll get lucky and Zeke will have some company tomorrow.”

“Well Travis, the last hour has been absolutely wonderful, but I’m bored as fuck.” Aaron stood up, stretching. “I’m heading home. If my roommate’s still awake we might plan our next hunt for a bit.”

“Wait a minute,” Travis said, ignoring Aaron’s insults. “When am I finally gonna meet Liam? Hunting with him sounds awesome!”

Aaron laughed. “Travis, you’re best off never meeting Liam. He’s a lot less patient than I am, you’d just end up in his stomach.”

Travis mumbled under his breath as Aaron walked off, finally deciding to give some attention to the hookah.

Only a few feet away, a raven was leaning back against the club’s check-in counter, vaguely participating in a conversation with the ram manning the desk.

"Dude, Adam, your shift ended like half an hour ago, why are you still loitering around?" the ram asked, focused more on his computer than his coworker.

"Well, I still have time till the next bus arrives, Reid, no point standing out in the cold when I can just wait in here," Adam replied. "A lot safer, too."

Reid shrugged in acknowledgment, not bothering to look up. "Yeah, I guess so. I thought hunters were less active outdoors when it got this cold, though. Hell, even with all my wool I still wouldn't want to walk around out there with a large, uncovered gut."

"Predators will endure a lot to ruin someone's life," Adam said, bitterly. "Reid, have you ever lost someone to vore, someone real close?"

Reid had a feeling he wasn't about to enjoy the conversation. "Yeah, a few years back at a family reunion my brother ate a couple of our cousins after getting shit-faced drunk. Honestly haven't talked to him much since cause of that. And about a year ago one of my best friends got himself eaten by his girlfriend when she found out he was cheating on her, *again*." Reid sighed, but didn't really linger on the memories much. "Honestly, though, practically everyone's got a friend or relative who's taken a one way trip to a stomach. That's just life."

"It shouldn't be," Adam whispered under his breath, unheard by Reid.

"Did...did you lose someone recently," Reid asked with some hesitation, wondering if he could somehow cheer the raven up.

"No, not since college. My best friend, Lucas, who'd stood by me when my parents essentially disowned me...he was eaten because I let myself get distracted by a friendly smile." Adam stroked a silver feather charm bracelet on his wrist. "Maybe I'd have been better off never learning who ate him."

Reid remained silent, carefully considering how to respond. "Yeah, that's rough. I know if my cousins had been eaten by anyone *besides* my brother, I'd be thinking about revenge."

"Glad we're on the same page," Adam said. "Oh, Reid. Have you ever eaten anyone before?"

"Uh, no, never," Reid was caught off-guard by the question.

"Good." Adam's tone unnerved Reid a surprising amount.

Before Reid could shift the conversation in a far less distressing direction, Adam began walking away towards the exit. Reid gave a confused "bye" that went unreciprocated, and gladly returned to surfing the internet. Transitioning from the heated club to the frigid sidewalk was jarring. Adam shivered instinctively as the cold air blew gently underneath his unzipped jacket, but did his best to ignore the feeling, looking up and down the street before moving on. The night was quiet, only rarely disturbed by a passing car or someone's far-too-loud television. There were also, thankfully, very few other pedestrians, aside from a fur walking further ahead of Adam. He was hoping for no unexpected surprises.

The unknown fur ahead began to slow down, halting at a poorly lit bus stop. The same stop Adam used to get home. Only six months earlier one of Adam's coworkers, Jamie, had been attacked by a predator and eaten there. The spot had made Adam uncomfortable ever since, not that he had any alternatives to his commute. Inevitably Adam reached the stop himself, taking a long breath before settling in, hoping to go relatively unnoticed by the nearby stranger. Unfortunately, the other fur, a stoat, seemed very interested in Adam.

Travis made little effort to disguise his obvious ogling, looking over Adam as best he could in the darkness. The raven was about the same size as him, and wasn't wearing any bulky clothing or carrying awkward bags. He seemed to be aggressively ignoring Travis. Probably a timid weakling who assumed every unfamiliar face was out to devour him. Travis decided that maybe, at least this time, the raven's assumptions should be given merit. Eating him wouldn't be very difficult at all.

Travis was about to make his move when an unexpected clattering noise drew his attention to the pavement; a cell phone had fallen, bouncing on the sidewalk. He looked back up just in time to see the raven suddenly inches away, beak wide open. Adam shoved Travis hard into the back wall of the bus stop, winding him, talons already wrapped around his wrists. Travis was still trying to regain his

breath when his head was swallowed. He didn't have any room to back out, and when he attempted to raise his arms to fight, Adam responded by digging into his flesh with his talons. Travis cried out in pain, his yells echoing down his captor's throat, eyes watering. Adam began to swallow. There was no point in taking his time, the prey needed to get into his stomach as quickly as possible. He stretched his beak around Travis' shoulders and worked down his chest with frightening speed. Travis' fur tasted of cheap cologne and his coat of smoke, forcing Adam to grimace as he swallowed. Good. To Adam, the experience of eating another fur needed to be as unenjoyable as possible, regardless of how justified it was. Otherwise he was just another heartless predator.

Adam gulped down Travis' barely existing belly with no issue, lifting the stoat into the air to speed up the process. Consuming him was almost too easy. Travis was soon sliding into Adam's stomach, causing the raven's belly to balloon outwards, pushing aside his already open jacket and raising his shirt. Adam grabbed a hold of his meal's legs and pulled, sending the stoat to his fate even faster. In only a matter of seconds, Adam was tearing off a pair of sneakers and closing his beak around Travis' paws, taking one last, deep gulp to finish him. Travis immediately began thrashing around in his soft prison. This wasn't possible! He was supposed to be the hunter, not the hunted! The stomach rumbled abruptly, and then shrunk a bit. Adam was beginning to belch out what little fresh air was left. Travis desperately felt around for the entrance to the esophagus, convinced he could escape, when none of his own victims ever had. The belching continued, and Travis rapidly ran out of space to move.

Leaning against the back of the bus stop, belly shaking violently, Adam was exhausted. Travis was his third meal and, just like the first two, was wholly deserving of his judgment. He had overheard the stoat discussing his imminent hunting plans. At least one innocent fur had been saved by eating Travis tonight, and that was justice enough for Adam. The only disappointment was his size. Travis wasn't any bigger than his previous meal had been, didn't test his eating abilities at all. If he ever wanted to take down the predator who ate Lucas, he would need practice swallowing much bigger furs. The struggles within his stomach were subsiding. Soon, Travis would fall unconscious, and never wake up. Digesting another living being always gave him a tinge of regret, but he quickly reminded himself of the necessity. The predators he digested had never cared who they ate, never showed *their* meals any mercy. He made their final moments swift and painless, and in his mind, that was far more than they deserved.

With some effort, Adam waddled forwards and picked up his discarded phone, which, thanks to its heavy-duty case, remained unscathed. Such a simple distraction, but so effective. Adam checked his bus-tracker app, smiling when it showed the next one only five minutes out. Everything had worked out so well that night. His target had put up practically no resistance, leaving Adam free of black eyes or bruised knuckles for once, and by sheer coincidence had ended up at the very bus stop he needed. All he had to do now was head home, take something to ease his stomach, and begin the long work of digesting his meal.

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Adam struggled with his keys, forced to lean in at an odd angle to reach the door knob, full belly pushing up against the door uncomfortably. When he finally gained entry to the apartment, he realized with despair the living room light was on. Victor must still be awake. Standing near the couch was his lizard roommate, staring at him quietly in horror.

"Adam, what happened!" Victor rushed over to the raven, obviously looking for any sign of injury.

"Nothing. Don't worry about it," Adam tried to brush his roommate aside and waddle to his room, but Victor moved to block him.

"You've given me that answer the last two times, I'm not accepting it anymore," Victor said with a mix of concern and irritation. "Why have you started hunting?"

Adam tried to slide past, but was too encumbered to outmaneuver even the overweight lizard. "Why do you care?"

"Because I don't want to wake up one morning and discover you never made it home! I don't want to lose you!" Victor seemed surprised he'd made the admission out loud.

Adam was overwhelmed by guilt, couldn't bring himself to look Victor in the eyes.

"You're not a predator, Adam, it's not who you are," Victor insisted. "Whatever your reasons for it, they can't be worth going against everything you believe in."

"Almost every day I see someone walking around, stomach squirming in desperation, just going about their business," Adam's eyes were watering. "No one tries to stop them or treats them like a pariah, everyone pretends it's perfectly fine and normal to treat another person like food."

"Adam it *is* normal," Victor said with some doubt. "I know it can be horrible, but vore's always been around, we all have to live with it."

"I can't accept that anymore!" Adam shouted a little too angrily. "Victor, you're one of the nicest guys I've ever known. You worry about everyone around you, you're always so kind and gentle. You...you remind me of Lucas. I don't see how you were able to eat people."

Victor stared at the floor, remorsefully. "I...I had to lie to myself, a lot. Came up with excuses as to why my meals deserved to be digested, why I was somehow entitled to decide their fate. I quit when I finally saw firsthand the anguish a casual meal could cause."

He gently grasped one of Adam's talons, briefly stroking the feather charm bracelet, then embraced the raven in a warm hug. Adam didn't know how to respond at first. For one horrible moment he thought of his plan, and the shame was unbearable. He accepted his roommate's embrace, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Please Adam, please stop hunting," Victor begged, head buried in the raven's shoulder. "I can help, I can be there for you. I want you to finally stop suffering."

For the first time in months, Adam was genuinely beginning to doubt his grand scheme. The years of endless mourning and lust for vengeance had been destroying him, had made it impossible to move on with his life and actually be happy again. Perhaps it was a sign that, in the end, it was Victor of all people who made him realize this. Victor, who had gained his adoration so long ago. Adam's heart began racing. He had come so close to making a horrendous mistake, and the thought was enough to make him tighten his hold. For Victor, he would rethink his plan, would stop risking his life hunting predators. There was still one more fur he had to deal with, though, one last meal to finally end his suffering and avenge Lucas. All he needed to do was eat Niall...