

Tavern Trouble

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The mood in the tavern had soured nearly the second the massive brown bear and his lean hare friend had entered. Desmond and Jerome were notorious in town as thugs and mercenaries, both more than eager to harass whomever they saw fit. On good days they were merely bullies, but on the worst...on the worst they were prone to eating whoever frustrated them even the slightest bit. Or just whoever looked tasty enough.

The voracious duo had never been considered enough of a problem for the town guard to get involved, essentially giving them free reign to terrorize folks as they pleased.

On that particularly night they were doing their best to ensure the barkeep acted like their personal servant, and few others in the tavern had managed to get any drink or food since their arrival. The regulars hid their irritation well, quite a few outright leaving for elsewhere lest they end up getting on Desmond or Jerome's bad side.

In a corner of the tavern a traveler quietly watched the impact of the newcomers' arrival with curiosity. The hefty gray lion—a mage named August—could only make assumptions as to what kind of people Desmond and Jerome were, but within minutes he wasn't very fond of them at all. They were terribly rude and no one appeared to like them. But worst of all, they had delayed August's order of food.

Fortunately solving both problems would be easy.

August stood from his table and casually headed towards the bar, his doughy belly wobbling a bit as he went. He slid right up next to the bear as if they were any other patron and politely got the attention of the equine barkeep.

"Sir, any chance I could get an update on that beef stew?" August asked cheerfully.

The barkeep's gaze darted from August to the mercenaries, but it was Desmond who spoke up first.

"He's got more important matters to deal with than your pitiful stew, like keeping us topped off on beer!" the bear sneered, leaning in towards August and doing his best to idly intimidate him.

"Well your mug certainly looks full to me, I'm sure he'd be able to check on the kitchen real quick," August countered.

Desmond glared at the lion, then drained his whole mug in one go, slamming it back down on the counter. "Looks empty to *me*. Now why don't you scurry off before I get a craving for lion stew-- I'm getting hungry and it takes quite a bit to fill this tank!" He slapped his gut ominously, and the barkeep cringed.

August didn't appear the least bit afraid, and made no move to comply with the bear's demand. "Oh if you need a filling then I'm perfectly glad to help."

From behind the lion appeared a swarm of blue, spectral paws. They charged the very confused Desmond, who had no chance to react before his arms and legs were restrained, his sword and a dagger torn and tossed away. The paws lifted the bear right over the bar as the barkeep stumbled away and Jerome looked on in fear.

"L-Let me go, let me go damn it!" Desmond thrashed about, but the paws refused to release their grip. "Once I'm free I'm gonna—*mmmpmrrrmph!*"

Massive wooden kegs lined the rear of the bar, and the paws had connected a hose to one and shoved it right into Desmond's mouth. The tap was flipped on. Desmond's eyes bulged as he felt a torrent of ale cascade down his throat and into his belly. Almost immediately his belly started to swell, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Jerome had been left speechless by how easily Desmond had been overpowered. The hare turned to August and unsheathed his sword, though his stance lacked confidence and he was shaking some. "No more tricks hairball, call back the paws or I'll start removing yours!"

The threat was shaky, and swiftly neutered as fresh spectral paws deftly disarmed Jerome and left him defenseless. He made to flee, but his ears were soon grabbed along with the rest of him as he was placed atop the bar, one paw covering his mouth to muffle the protests.

By then Desmond's belly had rounded out a good foot, pushing out from under his shirt and drum taut. The hose was removed and a paw gave his gut a slap, prompting a rumbling *uorrrrrrrrp* from the dazed bear.

Desmond wiggled some as he was lifted up once again, but he wasn't fighting nearly as much as before.

"While I would've loved to try out that stew, I've got no problem settling for stuffed hare instead."

Desmond was turned over and lugged above Jerome at an angle. The paws that had kept Jerome's mouth shut now forced it open. Without warning Desmond was pushed head-first right into the hare's maw, Jerome throwing a fit once he realized what was happening. As soon as Desmond's snout pressed against the back of Jerome's throat instincts kicked in and the hare couldn't help but start swallowing.

Inch-by-inch Desmond was force-fed to Jerome, spectral paws ensuring neither could wiggle free. Jerome struggled the most, especially once the lithe hare's flat middle began ballooning outward dramatically as Desmond pushed into it. The seams of his shirt ripped apart and his jaws stretched wider than ever before as he took in what was without a doubt his fattest meal. His thoughts jumped between the terror of being fed his friend and the fear of how much weight he'd gain if the bear were digested. At times he seemed to care more about the latter.

Gradually Jerome's struggles weakened as he was stuffed, replaced by muffled groans and drifting eyes. Desmond was simply too big a meal for him to handle, and even as he continued slurping up the bear's thick legs he felt on the verge of a food coma.

When the hare inevitably swallowed the last of his friend he let out a long sigh of relief, thankful the meal was over.

Faint creaks echoed from the bar that supported Jerome, though nothing had begun to crack yet. The spectral paws shifted to rubbing and massaging Jerome's bulging gut, which was much larger than the engorged hare himself. Groans turned into moans as Jerome blushed. Even with Desmond crammed into his gut the attention felt good, and distracted him from potential dangers.

August looked upon the stuffed hare and simply saw an irresistible meal. "Wonderful, now you're not just skin and bones! I haven't been able to indulge much on this journey, and I think you'll hit the spot nicely."

Jerome grunted as the paws lifted him off the bar and spun him around just like they had Desmond. He was left staring down at the open maw of the fat lion.

"W-wait—*braaap*—don't..."

The hare couldn't finish his strained plea, even before his whole world went dark and wet.

Once again a feeding played out, though this was bound to be the last. Jerome fidgeted weakly as he descended deeper and deeper into August, too stuffed to put up a real fight anymore.

On August's shirt buttons quaked as his belly expanded dramatically. All at once the buttons burst off, skidding across the wooden floor. The lion's swelling middle bounced about, released.

Bigger and bigger and bigger August's belly grew as he gorged on the bear-stuffed hare. When his knees threatened to buckle under the immense weight spectral paws swooped in to support him, holding up his gut and letting him focus on the taste alone. As August's girth became too unwieldy he was gently lowered onto his middle.

Despite the considerable size of the meal August showed no signs of being overwhelmed, and let out only a small burp after his jaws shut tight around Jerome's paws.

The whole tavern had watched in stunned silence as Desmond and Jerome had been summarily dealt with, turned into a voracious feast. There was a desire to feel relief that the tormentors were about

to be permanently dealt with, along with plenty of understandable concern that August might just snatch someone up at random to be dessert. Thankfully the lion's appetite appeared sated.

"Oh that really was delicious. Went down smooth and filled me up good," August chuckled, then belched. "Barkeep, would you mind getting me an ale to help wash the food down?"

A small pouch filled with coins was dropped on the counter by one of the lingering spectral paws. "I do believe the bear is paying for everything tonight, including all that ale he guzzled down earlier."

The barkeep nodded and scooped up the gold, more than eager to overlook the tavern's usual policy against eating customers. Not like Desmond or Jerome had ever followed it, either.

August settled in before the bar, multiple paws kneading his lumpy, wobbling gut. He hoped the local cuisine of the next town he visited was half as good as the current place...