

Gluttony Pie

By Lupine

The shop door jingled with quite unnecessary picturesqueness as it swung open, making the dragon pushing on it start with surprise. A bell? Oh, a string of bells. How... retro. It was his first visit to this establishment, and already he was visibly losing confidence.

“Umm... hello?” he called out hesitantly from the doorway. His eyes tracked from corner to corner of the modest retail unit- a rather twee, gingerbread-style street-side shop recently refurbished as a trendy ‘artisanal’ bakery. Y’know, the kind of place where the owner will- in cold blood- use, say, a set of vintage bronze horse-bells, still on their original leather strap, as their door alarm, for the sake of ‘authenticity’. *That* kind of place. But apart from the bells, there didn’t seem to be a soul about.

“Uh, *hello?*” the dragon said again, a little more loudly. No response. A little uncertainly, the prospective purchaser took a step further into the room, and then another. The door, finally having enough clearance, swung slowly closed again with another cheerful- if flat sounding- little carillon of clonks and dings. They jangled quite loudly in the near-silent space, whilst the potential profit-opportunity took a closer, slightly furtive look at his new surroundings.

The room was a little wider than it was deep, big enough for the dragon to take two more steps before bumping into the counter, and perhaps seven paces from one side to the other before running up against the walls. In fairness, the room was somewhat larger than this might suggest, because this particular dragon- his horntips brushing the doorframe at 6’6”- was distinctly rounder than your average reptile. By about 300lbs of superfluous subcutaneous corpulence. His was the kind of fulsome figure produced by years of sustained, unthinking excess, or possibly- the unkind comparison had been made- a balloon, a skilled clown and quite a lot of air. When this fellow stood in the doorway, it would have been more accurate to describe him as filling it. Similarly, the door itself had actually opened two feet ahead of him, thanks to that quite prodigious scale-ball of a stomach arriving first. Passers-by observing him would have been completely unsurprised to see him entering a bakery- in fact they might have taken more note if he’d shown some willpower and walked steadfastly past the establishment without giving in to his obviously self-indulgent nature.

The dragon's friends might have been *very* surprised- and extremely amused- to see him sneaking in here like this.

Despite the lack of people, the bakery was otherwise extremely crowded, stuffed to the gunnels with almost every kind of baked good that the increasingly-round-eyed reptile could recognise, and quite a few others besides. The counter, stretching wall-to-wall, was almost entirely invisible beneath this jumbled bounty of foodstuffs. Racks on the walls groaned with it. A couple of tables that might have sat customers had instead been pressed into service as extra storage space. It was a wonder there was still room for the door to open against it all. With a kind of slow, orbital grace, the dragon pivoted in a quarter-circle, his stomach rippling heavily, then another, inadvertently giving anyone behind the counter, had there been someone there, a good look at the impressive reptilian rump he possessed. It filled out a pair of XXL shorts (super-stretch waistband) to almost beyond their maximum capacity so that, despite his best efforts, two slivers of grey moon were rising above the waistband in broad daylight. There was just enough room for his doughy tail to swing behind him sluggishly without knocking anything over.

As he turned, he looked around him with something approaching disbelief. All this choice! His nostrils flared slightly, sucking in thickly-mingled sweet and savoury scents that already threatened to overwhelm his tastebuds, not to mention his willpower.

“Oh! Hello!”

The dragon jumped as if electrocuted when a voice came unexpectedly from behind him. The jolt sent a gelatinous ripple up his carbon-grey scaled back, the lovehandles to either side caught up in the swell as it passed. The could-be customer spun back around to face the counter guiltily, as fast as his considerable bulk would allow, to face the animal now standing there.

“Woah-h-h-h, sorry!” they said with a big smile and a little chuckle in their voice. “I didn’t mean to startle you, big guy. I was out back, mixing things up. How can I help you?”

For a moment the dragon just stared at the speaker, and when he finally opened his mouth all that came out was a little gulp. Standing behind the counter, a professionally-friendly countenance on his muzzle, was the most enormously muscular horse that he could ever recall seeing. There were still a good couple of feet between the dragon's horns and the wooden ceiling, but the stallion's ears only had inches of headroom. His shoulders seemed only marginally less broad than he was tall, across which you could probably erect an entire sideboard. Arms like tree-trunks swelled out from the sleeves of the plain black T-shirt he wore. He shrank quite considerably down to the waist (which stood above counter level, a view that also provided a glimpse of thighs that looked like they could crack coconuts), but was still thick enough at this, his narrowest point, to have successfully tethered a modest-sized cruise-liner. His T-shirted torso was wrapped in a blue-and-white striped apron, providing some token of the culinary trade, but the draconic client couldn't help noticing the way the tightly-tied garment had vacuum-formed itself to the horse's midriff, revealing an equine- one, two, three.... count them- *eight* pack. The narrow top of the apron was dwarfed against the cliff-face of his upper body, nestling between a pair of shirt-straining pecs that resembled the fanciful, impossible-to-achieve embellishments found on armoured breast-plates of Days of Yore. The apron was looped around a surprisingly short, sturdy neck, so thickened with muscle that it looked shorter still. Even his species-characteristic long snout was blunt and blocky. What could be seen of this horse's natural coat was pure, glossy black- his long, hygienically-ponytailed mane included, in an even darker tint- except for a backwards pointing triangle of white fur just behind his nose, and an irregular white star on his forehead. His wide-spaced eyes were almost as dark, deep-brown and brimming with honesty, sincerity and enthusiasm.

"Ehe..." the horse's tail flicked once behind him, and with another gulp the dithering dragon realised he'd been gaping at this apparition for almost a full minute. "I know, I know- I don't *look* much like a baker, do I?" No, he looked like he should be found down the gym, putting every other bodybuilder to shame just by his very presence in the neighbourhood. "Never trust a skinny chef, and all that, huh?" Still smiling, the supremely-sculpted stallion made a self-deprecating gesture at his monumental physique, then patted his rock-hard abdomen. "But I *am* a real baker, I swear! I'm fully qualified, and everything." He shrugged- an impressive sight in and of itself. "I just... have this 'metabolism' thing. Seems hauling flour-sacks around and kneading dough is all the workout I need to keep me looking like... well, this." He flexed one arm almost apologetically, raising a bicep that threatened to split

his T-shirt's sleeve. The dragon gulped again. Was it hot in here, or was that just him? But then the horse let his burly arm drop and shook his head briskly. "But enough about me- my name's Atlas, by the way-" his smiled abruptly amped back to full wattage "-and welcome to Wider Horizons Bakery! Where you can always find something new to try!"

The dragon leaned back slightly in the face of this cheery onslaught. The self-professed Atlas winced, his voice dropping to something more conversational.

"Sorry, is that line a bit *too* corny, d'you think? I'm still just starting out in this business. And speaking of new," he smiled and leaned one musclebound elbow on the counter, "I don't think I've seen you in here before, sir?" Did he just wink? "I feel sure I would have remembered."

"Uh..." The somewhat overwhelmed-looking dragon finally recovered the power of intelligible speech. Well, on the second try. "Uh... no, no, I've never actually been *in* before." He smiled a little awkwardly. "But I've walked past a couple of times, and today I thought-"

"Say no more, sir!" Atlas declared jovially. "Just couldn't resist, eh? I can tell you're someone who really *appreciates* great food."

The dragon blinked and before he could consciously stop himself his hands moved towards his bloated, bare sides where they swelled out from underneath the T-shirt he was wearing- the biggest one left in his wardrobe. It was stretched between his prominent moobs as they wobbled inside it with each breath he took. Between its hem and the buried waistband of his shorts, the outsized yoga-ball that was his belly hung free, the sapphire-blue stripes of separated belly-plates only accentuating his girth, mercury-coloured under-scales glinting brightly between them. It looked a little like a large, lustrous globe with lines of latitude picked out in blue. He felt a blush build on his cheeks, purpling their normal silvery appearance, but Atlas didn't seem to notice- he just carried right on talking.

"Well, you've come to absolutely the right place, sir!" The horse's hands collided together with a loud, enthusiastic smack, raising a small cloud of flour-dust as he interlaced his thick fingers in front of him. "What's your poison?" He paused, and then gave a whinnying belly-laugh, "Oh, that just a figure of speech, obviously! I haven't had a customer die in, ohhh, *ages*." He definitely winked, this time. "Heh, gotcha- I'm just joshing you."

The dragon smiled back, somewhat uncertainly.

“Oh, well. I... I really can’t decide.” He made a show of looking around again at the heaped produce “It all looks so...” he fumbled for the right word, “unusual.”

“Yep,” the horse said proudly. “You’ll find flavour combinations in here I *guarantee* you won’t find anywhere else. All-natural ingredients, and all my own recipes, too. ‘Twist It, Taste It, Treat Yourself’, that’s my motto.” He paused and scratched his chin thoughtfully, a lock of black hair falling over one eye. “Or was it ‘Go Big Flavours, Or Go Home’? One of those, anyway.” He shrugged, flicked his hair back with a practiced toss of his head and gave the dragon another big, hopeful smile. “Perhaps I could help you to choose something?”

“Oh, well, I...” the dragon took a small step back, his courage apparently deserting him.

“Umm, maybe just a croissant...?”

“A puritan! Tsk...” Grinning, the horse wagged an admonishing finger at the surprised serpent. “We’ll soon change *that*! But I may have the very thing for you...”

Abruptly he hinged up a section of the counter and stepped into the shop proper. The difference in height between Baker and Customer- not to mention in physique- was suddenly quite intimidating. He wore a pair of chef’s checked pants that did nothing to hide the rippling musculature of his thighs and calves, and the gaping dragon caught sight of a flick of shaggy white fur between pants leg and hoof. Before he could get his mouth to close, in two quick strides Atlas clopped confidently over to one overstuffed baskets amongst many lining the walls- the rainbow of goods they contained practically spilling out in their over-abundance- produced a pair of tongs, extracted something deftly and returned to present it to the dragon with a little bow. The dragon blinked at the paper plate suddenly resting on the horse’s outstretched hand.

“Baked brie, honey and tangerine marmalade- a classic in the making, I think. I start every day with one of these babies.” The croissant had been sliced lengthways, its filling inserted and then sandwiched back together, although there was so much filling it was a wonder it hadn’t just exploded. The croissant itself was about one and a half times the standard size, and bright red. Melted, savoury-smelling cheese just starting to ooze from its edges.

“Oh, wow,” the dragon said, his eyes widening as they took in the substantial ‘snack’. “H-how did you make it red like that? Food dye?” A muscle in the corner of the horse’s smile twitched slightly.

“Heh, oh, I don’t hold with *food dyes*, sir. All-natural, that’s me. As to how I do it... well, that’s what we in the trade call a ‘professional secret’.” He winked.

“Oh. Heh... sorry I asked,” the dragon said.

“Come on, then,” the horse said. He looked on the verge of prancing from hoof to hoof with eagerness, like an over-enthusiastic puppy. “Tuck in, and tell me what you think!”

“Oh... well, o-ok,” the dragon still looked a little less-than-convinced. “How much, though?”

“Pshaw!” the horse said jovially, flapping his empty hand in dismissal. “This is on the house, sir.”

“Really?” The prospective customer contrived to look both astonished and disbelieving at the same time.

“Sure,” Atlas replied with an easy smile. “Since I’m just starting up around here, I need to build up my client base.” ...Did the horse’s eyes just run over his figure? No, the derg chided himself, it must just be his imagination being over-sensitive. “And I figure the best way to get folks ‘hooked’ was to start giving out free samples.”

“Ehe... that’s... pretty smart,” the dragon admitted.

“Well, since I’m being so generous and all, why not actually have a *taste* of it?” the horse joked. “I mean, it’s pretty, for sure, but it’s there to be eaten.”

His new customer smiled and fumbled with the overloaded pastry, having to resort to holding it in both hands to stop it falling apart before he could take a tentative bite off the end. As he chewed his eyes widened. It *was* good! The creamy brie provided a satisfying, savoury heft to the snack, its soft and sticky texture balancing the crisp, buttery flakiness of the croissant. And the honey wasn’t the sickly-sweet syrup he’d been expecting, but something aromatic and almost pine-y that warmed his sinuses. In contrast, the tangy sweetness of the marmalade seemed to surf on top of this like the crest of a tastebud tsunami. The dragon swallowed with a gulp, the mouthful disappearing down his throat like a wiped-out surfer. Still a little stunned, his tongue then registered a lingering aftertaste, from the croissant itself. “Sun-dried tomato?” he blurted out.

“Woah-h-h-h,” the horse said admiringly, “I’m *impressed*! You sure know your flavours.”

The dragon apparently didn’t hear him. He blinked, for a moment staring into the middle distance, and then immediately took another, bigger bite. Then another. Then another...

“...Pretty good, huh?” the horse enquired a few moments later, watching his client with amusement.

“Mmsh,” was the somewhat indistinct reply he received, then the dragon’s eyes widened self-consciously. He swallowed the last of the snack and resisted the temptation to suck his flaky fingers clean in full view like this. “Ehe...” he could feel the blush starting again. “Very good,” he admitted.

“Excellent!” Atlas beamed. “I love it when I can satisfy a customer!”

“Sorry,” the dragon felt the need to add, “I don’t normally eat quite so... ehe... greedily as that.” He self-consciously wiped a hand down his heavy grey chin, a number of escaped pastry flakes showering down like an encrustation of rubies.

“Oh, you’re fine, I see it as a compliment,” the horse said, grinning, “There’s nothing I enjoy more than seeing someone enjoying the food I’ve made. Besides,” his grin widened a little, “a baker *wants* customers with... healthy appetites.”

“Ehe,” the dragon responded again, abashedly scratching the gunmetal scales on the back of his chubby neck, where one doughy roll met another, “I... I guess so.”

“Here,” Atlas said suddenly, clattering into another enthusiastic whirl of activity, “another breakfast option, but this one’s a *leeetle* more adventurous.”

Another paper plate appeared in front of the dragon. The bun on it looked as light as a feather until the plate was pressed determinedly into his fingers.

“My ‘grumpy mule’ crispy bacon, cherry and jalepeno-treacle brioche. It gives you that extra ‘get up and go’ kick in the mornings!”

“Oh,” his customer said, a little taken-aback. “Well, I... maybe...” he could feel that over-laden croissant still settling heavily into his stomach.

“Oh come now,” the horse said with a winning smile, “not just to taste? The more you taste-teste now, the more precisely I’ll understand your unique preferred-flavour profile.” He gestured expansively to a chart pinned on the wall. It was so complicated and multi-coloured it might as well have been trying to explain quantum physics, and was just as impenetrable.

“The more you try, the better you’ll buy!”

“Oh... ok then, why not?” The dragon smiled, shrugged and took a small bite. This time his eyes bulged as hot, smoky flavours filled his mouth, which started to water from the salty savouriness of the bacon insulated in the brioche-bread, followed by a starburst of sweetness

as a whole cherry popped juicily between his slowly-closing teeth. He swallowed, the lump sliding visibly down his throat until disappeared into his tubby torso. “Wow,” he coughed, “I’ve... never tasted anything quite like *that*.” Despite his eyes following his mouth’s lead and starting to water, he found himself taking another bite. It was a bit like he might imagine how a volcano tasted, though with less ash and more fruit.

“Now that’s absolutely music to my ears, sir,” the horse said with a big smile. Eyeing the coughing dragon as he finished up the morsel, he added confidently, “but possibly a bit *too* far-out-there for everyday consumption?”

“Oh, umm...” the dragon hesitated, then smiled. “Maybe I can try something a little sweeter, the next time I’m...?”

“Oho, I *thought* you might lean more to the sugary side of life,” Atlas grinned, snapping his fingers and pointing them at the dragon, an action that came dangerously close to being a poke in the plus-sized saurian’s stomach. “Well sir, people *do* say that desserts are my strong suit. And I pride myself on being able to cater to *any* sweet tooth. Challenge accepted!”

“But...!”

The astonished dragon’s protest fell on deaf ears as the horse practically blurred, galloping into action again. And before this plump prospective-patron managed to wrap his lips around the phrase ‘I didn’t mean *now*!’ the unstoppably enthusiastic baker was back, looming over him with multiple foodstuffs lined up on a larger plate.

“Let’s start with something more traditional. My *personal* favourite, a toffee-apple doughnut...”

Before he could get another word in edgeways, the dragon was taken through not only the doughnut- with crisp, tangy apple pieces floating a truly luscious salted caramel sauce at its centre- but a blood-orange and sherbet millefeuille, a rhubarb and rosewater macaron and...

“Mphh... is this... pistachio *baumkuchen*?”

“Woah, I take it back- I’m *very* impressed. You seriously know your stuff, sir. But if you like *that*, I think I have something here that will really hit your sweet-spot.” As Atlas turned away momentarily, tail flicking- and giving the dragon an inadvertent eyeful of the horse’s mountainously muscular, T-shirt-stretching back- our chubby customer’s sense of self-restraint finally struck out for sanity.

“Woah, h-hang on. Th-this is all *really* good, but if I keep eating like this I’m going to wind up even *bigger* than I am already.” The dragon joked sheepishly, using both hands to indicate his porky physique. “I’m supposed to be watching my wei-mphh.”

“Oh, tush,” the returning horse said with a reassuring smile, actually reaching over and putting a thick finger to the dragon’s lips. “You’re absolutely *fine*- since setting up shop I’ve seen fellows *much* bigger than you out and about this town.” The surprised dragon’s eyes widened further as Atlas’ large hand patted the side of his doughy stomach once, although it seemed to be an entirely unselfconscious, friendly gesture. It was over so quickly the dragon’s abdominal muscles didn’t know how to react, already tensing to suck his stomach in, but then bouncing back again in surprise as his startle-reflex was cancelled, setting a sluggish wobble through his tummy’s tonnage instead.

“Besides,” the horse standing next to him said with a big, friendly smile, “from *my* perspective, the bigger you are, the better. After all,” he carried on, oblivious to the sudden choking noises his client was making, “to me a Big customer is more likely to be, well... a big customer.” He grinned again, and absent-mindedly put one girder-thick arm across the dragon’s shoulders.

“Oh,” the dragon smiled, the sudden purple blush only just fading from his cheeks, “Oh. Heh, I... I see what you mean.”

“So come on, open up,” the horse said at his side, a teasing note entering his voice. “Trust me, you’ll *really* like this one- call it a gut feeling.”

The dragon blinked and made to turn his hefty head to look more sharply at the horse, but the pointed tip of a slice of tart was suddenly hanging just in front of his snout- so close that focussing on it nearly made him go cross-eyed. It was surprisingly plain and subdued in appearance compared to some of those previous, elaborate confections. Not even any cream dolloped on top.

“This is one of my best recipes,” the stallion said proudly. “I call it ‘Gluttony Pie’, because everyone who tries it *always* winds up coming back for more. You sure seem to know your flavours- can you guess what’s in it?” The tip of the slice was pressed temptingly closer, like a parent with a reluctant toddler. With a mental shrug, the doughy dragon opened obligingly, and bit the end off.

“Mphh... it’s like... pecan pie?” Chewing, the dragon rolled the piece around inside his mouth.

“A little like it,” the horse agreed amiably, still holding the rest of the slice ready at the dragon’s lips. He took another thoughtful bite. It was pretty good if you liked that sort of thing, but he wouldn’t say it was the *best* thing he’d ever tried. He could taste nuts- pecans, walnuts, pistachios bound together in a sugary-sweet toffee, and there seemed to be some kind of fruit in there too. But, as the mouthful warmed up, a rich, spicy aroma seemed to evaporate off of it, suddenly filling his snout from cheek to cheek.

“Woah...”

“Heh, have the spices just hit?”

“Uh-huh. There’s... cinnamon?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Cloves?”

“Yup.”

“And... is that cardamom?”

“Woah, you’re *good*! Practically a professional.”

“And there’s... something...” the dragon smacked his lips and sucked his teeth. It was something in the background, something that tap-danced teasingly on the edge of tongue. Despite several more bites, he just couldn’t pin it down. Whenever he thought about the flavour it seemed to slip away. Something... almost like an exotic perfume. And then it was gone again. “What *is* that?”

“Heh, well now, I’m afraid *that’s* the magic ingredient,” the horse said with a smile.

“Another professional secret- wish I could tell you, buddy, but if I did you could go and make it yourself. Then there’d be no need for you to keep coming back here for *more*, would there?”

“Ehe, I guess not,” the dragon agreed. He blinked at the horse’s thick palm in front of him, discovering that he had eaten the entire slice without realising it.

“You see? I told you you’d enjoy it. But if you liked *that*...”

* * *

“Oof...”

It was a good hour later before the dragon squeezed- yes, squeezed- back out of the bakery's front door and down the steps. His belly- noticeably bigger than before he'd gone inside- bounced sluggishly against his thighs.

"Please, do come back soon." Beaming, Atlas poked his head around the door after his stuffed-to-capacity customer as they made it to street-level. "It's so nice to find a customer who really *knows* his baked goods."

"Oogh... uh, yeah, you... you bet I will..." With some difficulty, the dragon looked back over his shoulder, smiled and waved.

"We can even talk about getting you a bulk discount."

"Uh... sounds good. B-but I've really gotta go now. Catch you later!" Then the dragon turned and lumbered away down the grassy street and around the corner.

Once he was safely out of sight, Callum puffed out his cheeks and let out a long, slow breath.

Whew! For a moment back there he thought he'd blown it when he'd grabbed 'baumkuchen' off the bat without thinking, but he seemed to have gotten away with it. With one hand on his distended stomach, the dragon set off down the street at more comfortable pace, wheezing a little under his current load. *Ooof*... He hadn't felt this full in a while- he was definitely going to wind up a few pounds heavier after this. That newbie- Atlas?- had managed to persuade him to try almost one of everything in the shop. He was a good talker, for sure. If Callum had actually had to *pay* for any of it that horse would have made a real profit...

Callum still had pangs of guilt about gulling a fellow baker like that, sneaking in there for an incognito taste-test. But, seeing as his bakery was nearby, this new business that had sprung up and his customers kept talking about *was* a potential rival. And hey, all's fair in love and commerce, right? And besides, Atlas couldn't have properly scoped out his competition, otherwise he'd definitely have recognised him- fat, silver-blue doughball dragons sure weren't *that* common around here. Callum was modest enough to admit that donning some of his old clothes and play-acting the reluctant, 'having-to-watch-my-weight' customer probably wouldn't have been enough to get away with it on its own. *Oof*...

A small, unexpected burp took him by surprise, drawing censorious looks from a couple of passers-by. The warm smell of spices filled his nostrils again momentarily. Blushing and

making an apologetic gesture, he set off again, sparing a fond pat for his bloated belly as it jiggled heavily in front of him. He was *stuffed*. He had to hand it to that horse, he was a pretty good baker, if a bit too fancy-pants. And not, he thought, good *enough* that Callum had to worry about his regular customers- for the most part they were nicely ‘hooked’ on Callum’s own ‘secret recipes’. You needed a solid bottom to your baking to make a success of it- fancy-pants on its own wasn’t enough to cut it. He might take some of the passing trade, though, and maybe the easily-impressed. Some of those flavour combinations had been pretty eye-catching. Oh well, Callum would just have to try to up his game a little there. After that exhaustive taste-testing (*urp!* Oof...) he was confident that, if needed to, he could replicate most of the tricks in his rival’s arsenal, except for that pie... But- the questionable morality of his actions aside- he was a little concerned for his new ‘friend’s business model: from the amount of stuff the horse was trying to sell, it looked like he was expecting to feed an army...

By the time Callum made it back home the exceptional, overstuffed heaviness in his gut had worn off. In fact- when he was peeling off his T-shirt, its folds clinging to him and pulling on his chest as he dragged it up over his arms- he was actually on the verge of feeling kind of peckish. Heh, that massively-muscled horse wasn’t the only guy with a ‘metabolism’. Dragons digested *fast*. The long-unused T-shirt streetched up under his chins, and then Callum’s plump snout finally popped back out from the neck-hole, setting his entire upper body jiggling. He squirmed out of the old, undersized shorts too, ripping only a single stitch in the process, and wriggled back into his much-preferred jeans, although they proved to be barely any less tight. Topless, he turned side-on and gave himself an approving look in his full-length mirror. Yup, *definitely* a bit heftier around the belly and butt this afternoon. Even his chest, where for the most part his blue scale-plates still interlocked as nature intended, rippled and swayed above his gut, seeming to plump bigger and more prominent now it was free of that constraining top. Pah, *his* motto was- ‘If you’ve got it, flaunt it’!

Callum proudly patted the lower curve of his stomach, setting it wobbling, and thrummed softly to himself in pleasure. Oof, getting BIG again, derg! Might have to watch that just a little... but hey, there was still room for ‘improvement’, right? Grinning at his reflection, the doughy dragon stretched out the waistband of his jeans with one thick finger as far as it would go- not far, it turned out- before letting it *snap* back, setting the bulging curves of his rear wobbling.

Another spicy little belch gave him momentary pause- something in that horse's cooking was definitely repeating on him. It must be karma, or something. At that moment his hugely indulged belly chose to let out a little growl, despite its recent 'snack'. Chuckling, Callum patted it again, and rumbled back at it.

"Patience, my pet. I still have to do *some* work around here, y'know, if I'm going to stay as top baker hereabouts. Get to it, handsome!" With a final slap to both sides of his stomach, the rotund reptile gave himself a confident grin in a mirror, facetiously blew his reflection a kiss and then lumbered back downstairs to where an afternoon's profitable baking awaited him.

* * *

"Whew..."

Sweating slightly, Callum gripped the long handle of his batch-board and slid two dozen perfectly-baked finger-buns out of his oven. They'd be ready for icing in a few, once they'd cooled down a little. Grinning to himself, Callum swung his hefty frame around and expertly slid the entire set onto his low, central, wood-block prep table. His stomach- which had been nagging him with increasing vehemence for the best part of two hours, gave a particularly loud grumble from beneath the white apron that bulged out in front of him like a ship's sail. Heh, well, a little taste-testing of his own wares couldn't hurt, right? Maybe that horse had some things right after all. He nipped off one of the buns- they'd be separated up later, anyway- and gobbled it down, huffing at the heat it still held. Mmmm... Why did baked goods taste so much better warm? And, mmph, those tasted even better than usual! He took that as a good omen.

His baking now done for the usual afternoon/evening rush in business, Callum set to work with the less-fun tasks of cleaning and tidying his kitchen back up. Around him the fruits of his labour were stacked and arrayed, still cooling and making his kitchen smell delicious. He must really have been inspired today- it *all* smelled so good!

Pretty soon came the fun part of finger buns- the icing! Callum grabbed the two bowls standing ready and, one in each plump hand, began drizzling the sticky-sweet ooze across the still-warm rolls with gusto (hmm, perhaps he should have waited to start cleaning up *after* he'd done this- he always got a little carried away doing this. Oh well...). Today, perhaps because of his earlier expedition, he'd gone for the two-tone look, silvery grey and bright blue- look a little like anyone you know? Just a little bit of additional advertising to remind his customers where they could buy the best snacks from.

Mission accomplished, Callum expertly caught a gooey drip of blue icing on his finger just before broke free of the bowl's rim. He sucked the finger clean. Mmmm, *sweeeet*...

Callum's gut suddenly gave another, deeper rumble, in spite of the placatory offering earlier. Boy, he *was* getting hungry! And it wasn't even as though he'd skipped lunch! The sugary taste of the icing still sat on his tongue, and seemed to make it tingle. Smacking his lips, Callum's eye fell upon his freshly-iced buns. His fingers hovered uncertainly. He probably *should* just taste-test one with the icing on, to be on the safe side, shouldn't he?

Of course he should. Besides, it would neaten up the numbers.

Callum's thick fingers closed and pulled at the outermost bun, the icing stretching as it tore free. He lifted it to his lips, and his teeth closed around the end third. He let out an involuntary little moan as he chewed. These really DID taste better than usual. Soooo good! Almost before he realised it, the bun was gone, and he was industriously licking every last particle of icing from the insides of his pudgy fingers. Those were going to sell like (ha ha) hot-cakes! But the thought nagged at him- what had he done different this time? Nothing, as far as he could remember... hadn't he?

Smacking his lips, Callum looked thoughtfully down past his apron at the remaining buns where they sat, looking innocent. Well... there was only one way to test, right?

Grinning to himself, Callum helped himself to another bun, chewing analytically, his eyes pointing at the ceiling. What was it about them today that was so... tasty? They didn't exactly taste *different*, as such, just... *more so* than usual, somehow. He could register the richness of the butter, and the lactose-sweetness of the milk, even under the coating of sugar-

saturated icing. Was it just because they were warm? No, he always had them warm- chef's perks.

As the doughy dragon masticated, his stomach gave another, even deeper *grrrowl*. With a grunt, Callum's speed of consumption accelerated noticeably- in moments the bun had vanished just like the first. To Callum it felt like it had just evaporated, making no impact on his appetite but leaving a delectable tingling on his tongue. His eyes then fell on the remaining buns. Well, if a *baker* wasn't occasionally allowed to snack on his own wares, who in the world was? Grinning to himself a little self-consciously, the dragon pulled off another bun, and this time stuffed it into his mouth, not analysing, just revelling in the pleasure of eating something. It vanished with a gulp. So goooood...

...Oh, a *fourth*, huh? Heh, now who's just getting plain greedy, huh Derger? But... sometimes life is for living, and you're entitled to spoil yourself a *little*....

...Heh, ok now, Callum, this is what, your sixth bun? Seriously, there's living the good life, and then there's Eating the Profits. You really ought to stop after this one. B-but... no point in putting *this* one back now, right...?

...Seriously Derg, this has got to be your last one. It's what, number 10? You've got the second batch, sure, but... ok, maybe there's no point in just leaving these last two here, all sad and lonely...

...Seriously. Callum, stop. No, DON'T start on the second batch. P-put that bun back. Put it back, RIGHT NOW, you hear me...?

...Stop. Stop. STOP...

...I... *CAN'T*... stop!

Callum's eyes widened, his chubby cheeks bulging against the sides of his snout, mouth stuffed full of sweet bread and icing as he found himself just shovelling them in, one after another after another after another. Two entire batches of finger buns- 26 in all- disappeared in a matter of minutes! By the end he was holding one in each hand, the second waiting in

readiness as he stuffed the first in to minimise the time between mouthfuls. Wh-what was *wrong* with him all of a sudden?!!! He'd been under enough Spells of Naughtiness in the past to know when someone else was making his body do something against his will, and it was definitely *him* controlling his arms right now. Look, he could stop, even put these two down! B-but... it was... so... *hard*! The last three buns lay scattered on the cooling rack, glowing up at him like looted jewels. His eyes seemed to be magnetised to them, his mouth almost drooling. Every few seconds he felt his hands and arms twitching to grab them up again, bring them back to his mouth. He had to keep consciously exerting willpower to stop, telling himself 'No... No... NO...!'.

But within moments of his mouth being empty, his stomach let out a deep, unnatural *gurrngling* roar. It actually *hurt*. With a ravenous moan Callum leaned down and snatched at all three buns at once, fists squashing them into a gooey mass in his haste. When he crammed them in, the relief was almost blissful. He felt like he'd been on a starvation diet for three months, and had finally found something to eat!

Panting, snout still full, Callum managed to straighten up and stumble back from the work-block. He gulped his mouthful, a tight, hard ball of compacted bread that felt like a cannonball as it sank down his throat. His scales were covered with a fine sheen of sweat, and he found himself shaking slightly. And... and he was STILL hungry!? He could feel that mass of buns sitting in his belly, bulking it out, he *knew* he should be full, but that didn't seem to make a jot of difference to the craving he was suddenly experiencing. Food... He... he *needed* more food!

The dragon's eyes, roving hungrily around the kitchen, fell upon a fresh batch of cinnamon buns- one of his signature bakes. His nostrils flared, and his legs took one, two, three lumbering steps towards them before he managed to control himself. He halted, looming over them like Godzilla above a particularly tempting, defenceless, wonderfully-flavoured, mouth-watering metropolis- *No!* He... he mustn't! He had to *sell* those this afternoon, for Pete's sake! But...

Indecisively, he licked his scaly lips, and his suddenly super-sensitive tongue caught a tantalising hint of cinnamon dust in the air. Callum's belly *rrrumbled* again. Just one, then. Just. One...

Moving with the nervous care of a bomb disposal expert, the sweating dragon reached out with a plump arm, gripped one bun- just ONE!- on the tray in the tips of his blue claws, pulled it away from the pack and brought it to his snout. It bent and flexed, still warm and soft, exuding pure deliciousness into the air around it. His arm shook as he tried to control himself, fighting the sudden desire- the need- to guzzle the thing whole. Remember, derg, this is the. Very. Last. One!

He opened wide and, slowly, deliberately, took a careful bite. Sweet, cinnamon-spiced splendour exploded in his mouth, and he let out a little moan. Nothing had ever, ever tasted THIS good! He swallowed with a *glop*, and before he could stop himself, the rest of that swirly little taste of pastry paradise followed in two big, greedy bites. And then another, and then *another*...!

It was the Texas Cinnamon-bun Massacre. By the time Callum regained any semblance of self-control, all that was left were crumbs- mostly splattered across his face and apron. Twenty-six cinnamon buns in one sitting! Groaning, he staggered back from the table, his stomach now visibly swollen, apron strings digging into his sides. Beneath it, his belly-plates were feeling taut, stretched against his gut's growing curvature. His rear bumped against the counter behind him- and he encountered unexpected amounts of padding there, as well. He stumbled and leaned back on one arm for support. Panting, a bestial BURRRRRP welled up unexpectedly from deep in his stomach and up out of his snout, catching him completely off-guard. Mortified, he clapped a pudgy hand over his mouth, even as the air around him filled with the second-hand smell of cinnamon and other spices. What was *happening* to him? Time-out, derg! Relax! Just t-take a deep breath...

Wiping his free hand down his sweating face and snout, with a groan he sank back further, letting the counter take his full weight. As his hand swung back, it bumped unexpectedly into something- something soft. Surprised, he instinctively grabbed at whatever it was, then brought his hand up to his face curiously.

He found himself clutching one of his vanilla-caramel frosted cupcakes. Callum's eyes widened, and he let out a little whimper. The irregular swirls of the toffee sauce seemed to spin hypnotically, the muffin drawing itself closer, and closer, and closer... It collided with

his tongue seemingly of its own volition, frosting smearing itself out along that blue runway in a long, slow-motion skid-mark, a luscious, stain of sweetness that seemed to sing in his senses. With a deep groan the dragon's eyes half-closed, and the cupcake pushed itself into his mouth whole, aided unconsciously by his dimpled digit on its underside. It broke up on impact, a landslide of rich, spongy pieces rolling and crumbling around inside his cheeks. He gulped, and a new, slightly feral light seemed to come on behind his eyes. He turned around like a sleep-walker, to reveal a whole group of cupcakes cowering in his shadow.

Less than two minutes later, and the tribe of Cupcake was no more. At the same time, the last vestiges of Callum's willpower were consumed by an overwhelming, primal urge to eat. Not just to eat until he wasn't hungry any more- he wanted to STUFF himself, to fill himself to bursting, to binge and chow down and pig out; eat, eat, eat, and keep eating just because it all tasted so *GOOD*! Callum immediately moved to the ginger cake he'd prepared earlier and began tearing into it like an industrial excavator, not even bothering to slice it. A tiny piece of his psyche deep inside his skull was yelling and hammering on the door of his cockpit, but the door was locked and it seemed nobody inside was paying him any attention. After the ginger cake (enough for 20 servings, \$2.10 a slice) he moved onto the dinky little fruit pies. So many fruit pies...

The dragon just couldn't help himself as he ate, and ate, and ate, and ATE. It was like he was the captive audience at a movie, a first-person viewpoint of somebody else on a rampage through his kitchen. The only consolation was that he'd been provided with plenty of popcorn. Callum moved from baked good to baked good, scaly stomach already stuffed but stretching bigger to accommodate each new intake, feeling like a balloon that was being over-pumped. He was starting to ache he was getting so full, but he just had to have more... more... MORE!

Then, still stuffing his snout, he felt his draconic digestion kick in with an ominous gurgle. The swelling ache in his middle subsided, but now, as he scarfed food down with wild, uncontrollable abandon, he could still feel himself getting bigger. His belly swelled like a ripening fruit as blubber padding his trash-can of a gut billowed in an ever-thickening layer beneath his scaly hide. Moving to the next treat- oh, yes chocolate brownies!- his apron *creeeaked* and rode up as he filled out even further. His torso swelled like a soufflé in the oven, overflowing the confines of his jeans, burgeoning lovehandles accumulating dough by

the bite and spilling out over its constraining strings. At the same time he could feel his backside swinging more and more heavily behind him as he thundered from stop to stop, the waistband of his denims riding down as the sheer volume they tried to contain now besieged them instead. But still they clung on, squeezing tighter and tighter and, nggh... tighter...!

...*Stop*.

Callum lumbered on like a gourmand juggernaut, stitches starting to pop in the seat of his jeans, belly hanging to his knees. He tore off a huge hunk of banana-bread (there's ALWAYS room for banana-bread!), and as he raised it to his snout he watched his arm wobble with flour-sack heaviness, already twice the thickness it had been. As his tongue licked the base of a metal pie dish he caught a glimpse of his reflection in its polished-clean surface, his face puffed up like a basketball around an increasingly dinky-looking snout. Then he spied a shred of tarte Tatin clinging on in a neglected corner of the tin. *There* you are, you little dickens...!

And still he ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and *ate*...

...*S-STOP!*

Moaning and panting, Callum spied the ultimate prize across the kitchen- cakes! Delicious, freshly-frosted cakes. Wiping his food-stained snout futilely on the back of his food-stained hand, he lumbered towards them like an iceberg, his belly bouncing, wobbling and swaying before him. He was easily double the bodyweight he'd been, what, only half an hour ago? Part of him was mortified at himself, part was perversely delighted, part... just wanted MORE. With a *pop* one of his apron's overstressed straps tore free and, pressure released, his stomach visibly inflated, bulging out and down. Its lowermost edge smacked against the cold tiles, rose, and thereafter kissed them with each laden, lardy step he took, skidding along. Callum blinked, but even this stark, tactile demonstration of his out-of-control obesity wasn't enough to break the compulsion consuming him. He just... *had* to keep eating!

Behind him, the seat of his pants split asunder with a noisy *rrrrrip!*, finally overwhelmed by the ballooning cheek-girth they were being asked to restrain- Levi and Goliath. Popped seams gaped around his swollen thighs as he moved onwards, reduced to a waddle, the legs

of his jeans as tight as a second snakeskin that badly needed to be shed. The only thing that slowed him down was his tail, dragging reluctantly across the floor behind him like an anchor, his clawed feet occasionally skidding on the smooth tiles as they tried to haul his bulk closer and closer to his reward.

...STOOOOOP...!

Callum's belly hit the counter, and- as he ploughed forwards, arms outstretched- began to push back. The dazed dragon grabbed for the cakes, but for some reason his arms couldn't reach! Growling and panting, he shoved and pressed closer, squeezing his stomach up against the worktop's edge in an attempt to reach past this unfair, baffling buffer. Reaching forwards as far as he could, his fat, flailing hands finally caught the edge of one platter. Eyes gleaming behind his bloated cheeks, Callum dragged it triumphantly towards him...

* * *

"Hello?!"

The distant voice called out, echoing around the silent bakery. A discreet little 'ting' announced the shop door swinging shut.

"Hell-loooo!" the voice called again cheerfully, unrecognised but... strangely familiar.

"Anybody home?!"

No answer was the stuffed reply.

Muffled steps in the bakery, getting closer, and then the click of the back room's door being unlatched, a *creeeek* as it swung open under its own weight.

"Oh. Oh-ho..."

Callum was standing- more or less- with his back to the door, his eyes magnetised to one last surviving slice of cake left on the counter-top in front of him. It had slid off the final platter as he'd grabbed it, and now no matter what he did he just... couldn't... *reach*!

Except for that, the kitchen was bare. Empty. Ransacked. But at least it was easy to see where all the food had *gone*.

The front edge of the counter was buried in Callum's scaly stomach, forming a crease in a belly now roughly the size of a two-seater couch. Behind him, his butt was wide enough to *fill* a two-seater couch. The remains of his underwear were hanging on by threads, shallow breathing and the tail-flap holding them sandwiched against his cheeks, bulging out of the boxer shorts' reinforced tail-hole like runaway brioche. His feet were planted wide in a sumo-esque stance, partly to keep his balance and partly just to make room for the gut shoving between them and the barrel-like bulk of his bloated thighs. He was leaning forwards against the counter, flabby arms fighting to reach over the colossal cushion of his stomach and chest, each moob of which put industrial flour-sacks to shame. His blue chest-plates had separated as those keratin-cracking knorks had fought for ever more growing room. Even his face was fatter than ever, big chubby cheeks wobbling as he shoved forwards, tongue stuck out to its fullest, futile extent. The counter was protesting under this unwarranted load, saved from collapse only by Callum's stomach itself, the majority of which sagged below the counter-top. Resting on the tiles, his scaly underbelly was partly supporting his weight, as though he were sprawling on a behemoth bean-bag. One he was handily carrying around with him. In short- he was *huge*. A sluggish ripple passed through Callum's bulk as he shifted his weight slightly, his half-bare butt quivering like two gigantic jello-moulds as he doggedly tried yet another new position to reach that irresistible-smelling slice of Victoria sandwich...

The visitor's feet echoed loudly on the tiled floor as they approached, slowly, until they stopped right behind him. Then there was a long, whinnying chuckle.

"Weh-*hell*, now..." Another three hoofsteps and Atlas suddenly appeared to Callum's right, resting his rock-hard rear-end against the already-overburdened counter, arms folded casually across his chest. He'd doffed his apron and instead wore a plaid, unbuttoned short-sleeved shirt over his shoulders. He still wore a cheerful little smile, but under this kitchen's lighting it definitely seemed more of a smirk. Wordlessly, the horse slowly and deliberately ran his eyes over every inch of the panting scale-ball of a dragon, seemingly drinking in the outrageous obesity on show. His smile widened at one corner, lips parting to show off

pearly-white teeth. His gaze flicked around the devastated room, then down to the counter. With another low, whickering chuckle he picked up the errant slice between thumb and forefinger. “Looking for *this*, hmmm, Tubby?”

“Muhh...” As before in the shire-horse’s stupendous presence, Callum struggled to form coherent speech, but this time his mouth was hindered by his doughy cheeks weighing against it, and his tongue was just plain disobeying him, still straining stubbornly to reach that cake.

“Gooooood...” Atlas crooned, to the bewildered dragon’s further bafflement. His smile stretching into a big, broad, toothy grin, the stallion slowly brought the errant confectionary towards the reptile’s snout, which started to water in anticipation. But then he stopped, and the slice hung hypnotically, still just tantalisingly out of range. The horse’s spare hand slapped once against the dragon’s swollen, scaly side and let it rest there, sending a liquidic, lardy ripple sloshing through him. “Can’t let a big boy like you go hungry now, can we, *Callum*?”

The dragon’s fattened-up features blushed bright purple. The shock finally allowed him to regain some control over his truant tongue.

“What... wh-what...?” he managed, sweating with the effort, before Atlas abruptly pressed the slab of sponge home, stuffing it between Callum’s open lips until they met the heel of his hand with a sticky squelch. “Mphhh!”

“Was that going to be ‘What are *you* doing here?’?” the horse said cheerfully, absently wiping his hand on the front of his shirt, “Or was it ‘What have you *done* to me?’?” Grunting, Callum could only keep chewing through his mouthful, cheeks swollen like a draconic chipmunk’s. “Well, either way,” Atlas said glibly, “the answer is ‘it was a Piece of Cake.’”

In control of his own body or not, there was no power on Earth that could stop Callum rolling his eyes at that lame gag. Seeing this, the beaming, musclebound mustang let out another low chuckle, then lifted his backside from the counter and stepped away, disappearing from Callum’s restricted view. The dragon tried to turn his head, but it was too firmly anchored by the rolls of flab that had inflated around his neck like crash airbags. But he could still follow

Atlas' progress by the sound of his heavy hoofsteps on the tiled floor, now walking slowly around behind him.

"Hoo-*whee!*" the horse's deep voice exclaimed. Unannounced, a hand suddenly clapped against the lower curve of Callum's left buttock, and briskly joggled it. The dragon yelped, letting out a wordless exclamation of surprise that was more like a seal's bark. That hand on his butt felt astonishingly small given the horse's size, until the dragon's food-befuddled brain worked out the humiliating explanation for that. "Maybe that li'l old slice of Gluttony Pie I fed you worked a tiny bit *too* well," Atlas' voice chuckled up close, the horse's breath hot in his ear.

The dragon's eyes widened, and he swallowed the remains of the cake with a 'gulp'.

"Oh, tush," the stallion said, with what sounded for all the world like fond amusement. The hand was removed from Callum's rump, and then slid up to his side. At the same time, the horse's other hand brushed against Callum's far-side love-handle. "You can't tell me you didn't just enjoy *every minute* of stuffing your face like that, you big, greedy derg doughball." Despite his best efforts, the dragon felt his cheeks going purple again in response to this complete and downright accuracy. "You cleaned out your *whole* stock, Fatso!" The horse's hands squeezed briefly, and Callum let out another seal-like *harmp!*, his blush deepening. "And it's not like you weren't asking for it- sneaking into my bakery like that! Tsk." Atlas snorted right by Callum's ear, but it sounded like he was still smiling. "Giving you a little feed-back seemed only fair." He gave another little snort, a suppressed laugh. "It was a good job I was all ready and waiting for you, huh?"

Callum blinked, and then his eyes bulged along with his cheeks. A deep, brief BELCH took him by surprise. But it was as though that burp flushed something out of his system because, as a shiver ran through his lard-overloaded frame, he was suddenly back in full control of his faculties. At the same moment, though, the sheer sense of his own weight pressed down on him.

"Woah-h-h-h-h, there!" the horse neighed cheerfully as Callum abruptly stumbled backwards, beginning to topple. Powerful arms adroitly caught the dirigible-sized dragon under his

ample armpits, and held him upright as he scrambled to find his feet- almost literally. “It’s going to take you a little while to get used to being this size, big guy! Take it easy.”

“Take... take it *easy*?!” Callum wheezed in disbelief, doing his best to growl angrily.

“What... what did you *do* to me?” Ok, it wasn’t an original line, but he still wanted answers!

“*How* did you do this to me? And what did you mean, ‘ready and waiting’?”

“Oh, I’d been *hoping* you’d run across me eventually, Cal- I can call you ‘Cal’, can’t I buddy?” The horse gave Callum an intimate squeeze on both swollen sides- the derg had lost enough of his shock that he managed not to yelp again, but he couldn’t stop his body from making a treacherous little rumble of pleasure- then let go and stepped away, reappearing to park himself against the counter again. Left standing unsteadily on his own two feet, Callum was too preoccupied trying to keep his new massive mass balanced to even glare, let alone recriminate. In the meantime, Atlas settled back comfortably.

“Y’see, I do enjoy baking, but that mostly just feeds into my *real* hobby- finding big fellas around the place and... improving them.” A devilish grin flashed across his muzzle as fast as lightning, and he winked. “And I’ve been finding *plenty* of good starting material around these here parts. You should see the gym I’m ‘working out’ at downtown. Now those’re some boys that are learning the *true* meaning of ‘bulking up’. But you?” The horse chuckled again and poked Callum lightly in the hugely oversized glob that was his belly, sturdy digit sinking right into the stretched, super-sensitive silvery scales between two of his blue belly-plates. Callum gulped, and tried to suppress a little squirm of pleasure that was trying to writhe up and down his spine. “Well, *you* were just too good a target to pass up, Mr. Big-Boy Baker.” Leaning forward slightly, the buffed-up farm-beast reached down and, with no apparent effort, slowly lifted Callum’s furniture-sized stomach in both arms. That swollen, sensitive blob of blubber jiggled and changed shape as it tried unsuccessfully to slither back through his grasp. The dragon had to clamp his snout shut on a little whimpering moan. Beaming beatifically, Atlas juggled the dragon’s huge, scaly suet pudding of a paunch up and down, which only made matters worse. “And I was so right- you’re looking *good* with a little extra dough on you.” Callum blinked, and had to suppress another eye-rolling *snrk*.

“And as to *how*, well...” Atlas leaned forward, smiling sweetly at Callum, his dark eyes wide. The dragon blinked again and jerked his neck back as what looked very much like lightning flickered in their depths. His bulk teetered, and he had to windmill his arms briefly

to stay upright. His legs were starting to *ache*. Atlas sat back. “Let’s just say I’m not *quite* the Ordinary Ed you might think. Picked up some tricks from a few like-minded ‘enthusiasts’ here and there, too. What with my own natural talents on top of those- *and* some seriously good short-crust pastry- seems I can Unleash the Greed-Beast in pretty much *anyone*. Sometimes it takes some effort,” he let out another amused snort, and gave the doughball dragon’s gut another joggle, “but sheesh, I didn’t even have to raise a sweat with *you*. Haven’t you ever *heard* of ‘beware horses bearing gifts’? One piece of barely-magical pie and you’re ready to devour an entire bakery, you great greedy dra-hog-on!” The beefy beast whickered again, finally letting the derg’s supersized stomach sliiiiide through his fingers, until it hit the floor with a blubbery slap. This drew a shuddering gasp out of the enormous dim-sum of a dragon, followed by a low groan. The horse watched as Callum’s middle carried on rippling, whistled admiringly and then grinned at the derg. “Boy, I was right- you’ve got serious *potential*.”

Callum blinked.

“Oh god,” he gulped, “you’re another *Theo*.”

Atlas’ ears perked, then he cocked his head, a knowing little smile twisted the corner of his blunt snout.

“Ohhhh... Heh, oh, I should have *guessed* you weren’t new to this kinda thing, the way I’ve seen your waistline yoyo.” Callum felt his cheeks colouring up again. In the silence, the slightly-psychotic stallion chuckled and clapped his hands together once, making a noise like a gunshot. “Well, that just makes things all *kinds* of easier, doesn’t it?” Still smiling, the hulked-up horse sat up straighter and spread his hands. “Because I actually came here to make you a bargain, big fella.” The dragon blinked, and felt himself break into a nervous sweat. What *now*? “Want to join my bakery as my taste-tester?”

Callum blinked again, and then burst out laughing.

“Wow,” he choked out when he’d finally got his giggles mostly under control, “I take it back! You’re... you’re even *more* nuts than Theo!”

“Hey, don’t slap me down just like that, partner, I’m offering you a good deal!” the horse protested, still with a smile on his lips. “All the food you can eat, and no need to sweat for a living whist you’re working for me. And trust me, I take *real* good care of my ‘big buds’.” He winked once more. “Satiation absolutely guaranteed!”

“Uh-huh,” Callum said, making an attempt to fold his arms sceptically across his capaciously chubby chest. Years of arguing with his size-crazed, clouded leopard ‘friend’ were finally paying off. “And I’d give up running my own bakery for *that*, because...?”

“Oh, I’d say it was pretty fair Just Desserts for you being such an underhanded, unscrupulous and downright *sneaky* derg today, wouldn’t you, customer-o-mine?” Atlas grinned again- a little more worryingly, this time. “Anyone with the chutzpah to try to steal *my* recipes is *definitely* deserving of my... fullest attention.”

“Ehe...” Callum tried to match the horse’s jovial tone, but it was hard going. A joke was a joke, but this... He wiped the back of his neck with one hand. “Well... thanks, but I’m going to have to pass on that offer.”

“Oh, that’s ok, buddy...” Atlas said easily, slowly unfolding himself from his seated posture. As he did so he casually pulled a little greaseproof paper packet from his pocket, and peeled back its wrapping. The dragon’s sense of smell recognised the contents before his sight did. Eyes widening, Callum hurriedly tried to scurry backwards, but after barely two steps the newly-overblown baker overbalanced and went down hard on his resplendent rump. The *BOOM* his backside made hitting the floor caused everything in the bakery not nailed down to jump. On the plus side, it was an incredibly soft landing. But before he could struggle to his feet the psycho-stallion was suddenly on top of him, pinning him easily to the floor (and Callum was no weakling, thanks to his constant ‘weight training’), one hand holding the derg’s wrists down above his head. The doughy dragon squirmed desperately, but the horse’s strong fingers prized his jaws apart with the expert touch of a vet, and a square of sweet, sticky, nutty foodstuff was pushed in. As the overpowering smell of spices started to fill his nostrils, Atlas’ fingers clamped Callum’s lips together like a vice.

“...another li’l taste of Gluttony Pie,” he continued brightly, “and I figure you’ll soon be begging me to take you on.”

Callum grunted and spluttered as his snout was held shut, eyes wide and cheeks bulging, but the glob of tart was breaking up succulently inside his mouth and slithering insidiously to the back of his throat, despite his best efforts. Mmmph... The heady mix of spices was starting to make his mind swim. Eventually his aching jaw muscles twitched and down it went. Callum gulped.

“Put it there, *partner!*” Atlas declared cheerfully, his ‘shucks-me?’ façade instantly back in place. He slipped his hands under Callum’s armpits once again and- making unnecessarily theatrical straining noises, in his opinion- hauled the defeated dragon to his feet. Standing behind him, the horse reached around and playfully drummed both hands on Callum’s overhanging belly. The dragon couldn’t help the shivery little moan that welled up out of him in response. “We’d better get you back to Wider Horizons pronto, big boy, before you work up too much of an *appetite.*”

The dragon groaned dizzily, taking a couple of unsteady steps with the horse’s arm clamped around his shoulders. His wide underbelly slid along the tiles as he waddled laboriously, more duck-like than dragon-esque. It felt like he was wearing one of those old deep-sea diver’s suits, only with the water in the *inside*. His whole body sloshed unsteadily from side to side as momentum built up, and he was getting out of breath already. His feet slipped out from under him and down his rump went again, with another flabby *THUD*. At the same time, a high-pitched *ping* announced the fact that the remains his underwear had just resigned, effective immediately. With a sluggish wobble, the dragon’s backside spread just that little wider.

“C’mon bud, you’re gonna have to pull your weight better than that in this business,” Atlas said irrepressibly. From the floor, Callum just groaned. Would *nothing* stop this horse’s dreadful puns? “It isn’t *that* far to walk, and there’s pie waiting for you at the other end!”

Callum’s belly- already working for the enemy, it seemed- grrrowled hungrily at the mere thought. *Piiie...*

“Too... too big,” he panted, resorting to his last-ditch defence- be too heavy to move. He flopped onto his back like a beached whale, arms and legs spread wide. “Too... too fat... to walk that far!” At this kind of size- and he *had* been this big on a few memorable occasions- Callum normally wouldn’t leave the house, let alone tramp across the neighbourhood. Even the stairs were a no-no. Besides, there was no way he was squeezing out of the bakery’s front door at *this* size. Not even after it had specially widened for his ‘larger-than-life’ customers. Hah! Th-this *smug*, supernatural huckster of a horse hadn’t thought of *everything...*

“I was kind of hoping you’d say that,” Atlas said to the recumbent reptile. He interlocked his fingers and stretched out his arms, knuckles cracking. Callum blinked, then yelped in astonishment as the stallion slid his firm fingers under the dragon’s swollen side at floor level. The horse’s fingers waggled against his fattened flesh, and the dragon’s protest somehow turned into a wordless, limp murr of pleasure. Oh... actually, that felt *gooooood*... Then those hands suddenly *heaved* upwards! Ack! Wh-what the...?!! The near-spherical saurian’s bulk was bodily lifted, rocking him up onto one side, his belly flopping over to collide against the cold tiles with a fleshy slap. He wobbled there for a moment like a gargantuan blancmange, then a shove from the stupidly-strong shire horse’s shoulder against his back sent him slowly rolling all the way over onto his stomach!

“You’re... you’re going to *roll* me all the way there?!! In *public*?!”

“Yup,” Atlas said with indecent cheeriness. “Trust me, it’s the easiest way,” he added, ignoring Callum’s spluttered, disbelieving protests. With a grunt the horse gave the dragon’s marshmallow-boulder of a body another heft, turning him sluggishly through a second revolution. Callum’s blubbery back slapped into the tiles again, making the whole room shake. Almost as wide as he was tall, the dragon’s bloated equator reached up to Atlas’ chest. The horse grinned down at him. “We’ll have to use your delivery entrance to get you out, big guy.”

“Mmphhh!”

Callum whimpered as the garage-door rose, and, sweating and puffing already, the enormous equine rolled him out into public view. Bystanders- some of whom he recognised as the view cartwheeled slowly past- stopped and gaped. Then the first titters of laughter began in their wake. Then there was the flash of camera-phones...

“This... isn’t... *funny*!” Callum complained during one of the mad mustang’s breathers. The dragon’s face had been bright purple every step of the way, over half an hour now. It had become a kind of town procession (‘Come see Callum, the baker’s blimp!’), Atlas touting their ‘new business partnership’ at every opportunity (“See folks? Our food’s so darned tasty, my good buddy Cal here just couldn’t help but keep eating!” Cue laughter. “But you guys don’t have to go quite *that* far...”). The horse had even obligingly stopped *en route* to let people pose with Callum for *selfies*!

“Aw, c’mon Big Guy, the crowd *loves* you,” the huffing horse grunted, lightly slapping a hand against Callum’s side. His shirt was now tied around his waist in a kind of chic lumberjack style, whilst sweat stuck his black T-shirt to him like a second skin, making the physical contrast between the two- one mightily muscular and the other wobblingly whale-like- even more humorously stark. Callum shivered and groaned weakly at the contact- the uneven ground rubbing over his sensitive belly-scales had been driving him crazy, his entire body rippling and distorting like a water-balloon full of pudding with each revolution. He was so *big*! Another grunt, another roll. The rock-solid stallion was actually steaming with exertion.

“You’re... *enjoying* this...!”

“Yup,” Atlas whispered with a surreptitious wink, even as he turned around and pushed against Callum’s boulder-like bulk with his back. “You didn’t think I really stayed in shape just toting *flour-sacks*, did you? Heaving Big Boys like you around the place gives me the kind of workout you just can’t *get* in a gym.” Callum’s fat face grew even more red.

“Besides, think about all the *great* publicity you’re getting us, partner! We’re even trending on Witter right now- Hashtag Doughball_Derg!” Callum just moaned, his cheeks practically glowing. His blimp of a belly let out another volcanic hunger-pang that refused to be quashed, even as he was rolled up onto his stomach. It was getting hard to think, he was so hungry!

“T-there’d *better* be pie at the end of this, that’s all...”

“Oh trust me,” the horse grinned widely, “there will be...”

* * *

There was pie. *Lots* of pie. And there kept being lots for a long, long time- Atlas made sure of that. As for Callum, there wasn’t much he could do about his situation except sit around and eat, hostage to the horse’s highfalutin foodstuffs. Mphh... Not to say that that wasn’t quite... *enjoyable*, sometimes...

Callum was made to experience excess that almost exceeded his wildest dreams- and some of his scariest nightmares, too. The scheming stallion had kept him on a regular diet of Gluttony Pie for the first few days, and had then maliciously and cruelly given the delirious derg as

much rich, tasty, irresistible food to eat as he could guzzle down, until poor calorie-soaked Callum's stomach had stretched so much he was almost constantly hungry of his own accord. After that, whatever his stomach wanted, his stomach got- in spades! Callum had rapidly grown too fat to attempt escape- well not on foot, certainly- then too fat to even squeeze out of this bakery's industrial-sized double-doored delivery entrance. And since then, his every, increasingly-gluttonous wish had been his captor's command. Wh-who *wouldn't* go a little hog-wild in that situation? Now, a month into his 'employment'- 30 days of near-solid eating- he existed in such a pampered state of jaw-dropping doughiness that sometimes he wasn't even sure if he *wanted* to escape any more. He felt like his body had become a living blubber-balloon, and he was floating inside himself as he was pumped up bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger, but growing ever more comfortable as he filled out. And, he had to admit, Atlas was scrupulous about his 'works benefit scheme'- behemoth belly-rubs, massive back-massages and titanic tummy teasing included.

If he'd thought he'd been huge before, Callum was sorely mistaken- *now* he was huge. The bakery/workshop area out the back of Wider Horizons was easily twice the size of the shop itself, and Callum nearly filled it. He was easily three times wider than he was tall- and he was sure he'd even blimped in height along with everything else. Most of that bulk was belly, a mountain of silver scaly flab decorated with narrow, far-apart bars of blue striping across it. His legs stuck out at nearly 180 degrees from each other, he could feel that bounce-house sized ball of blubber extending beyond his feet. Not that his lard-laden legs could have helped him much anyway, even without the consequences of his aggressively-indulged appetites weighing down upon them- they were so fat he was starting to struggle to even wiggle his toes. But, oof, doing that that *did* feel nice against his super-sized, super-stuffed, super-sensitive underbelly...

All Callum could actually see of himself first-hand was essentially his chest, rising in front of him to form a double-curved horizon that rippled and wobbled glacially in time with his breathing. It was a good job he didn't get sea-sick. Only the top two of his blue scale-plates even remotely interlocked- after that there was an exponential expansion of distance between them as they seemed to stretch away into infinity. He definitely couldn't even have reached the front of his massive moobs, although his arms were so 'ample' with adipose themselves now it was an effort to lift them at all, and he needed that energy for eating. They otherwise sat resting on his sides, lifted by the pressure of their own swelling tyres of tub around his

upper and lower arms, elbows sandwiched in the creases in between. Even his neck had swollen enormously, the rolls on the back of it so bloated it looked like his head was being propped up by flour-sacks. His second-chin had swollen into another grain-bag, at least providing some support for his snout as it was weighed down more and more by his ever-chubbing cheeks. Sometimes, after a long day, he had to get Atlas to help open his mouth for him so that he could eat his post-work snack.

Beyond this visible horizon, the more distant parts of his body he kept track of only through regular ‘publicity photos’ that Atlas took. From these he had watched his butt spread like scaly butter-lanche, and it was now bigger than his old delivery van. His tail not much better, so swollen with rolls it looked like a blue-and-grey croissant. Little hot-spots of sensitivity across his entire body also attested to points where the sheer pressure of his unrelenting growth had caused scales to pop- patches that his equine employer exploited ruthlessly in his efforts to persuade Callum into eating just a liiiittle bit more than the day before. He was almost always successful- that darned, diabolical horse could talk anyone into *anything*. And his hapless helper often had to watch him do it...

“...So that’s five Peanut-Collider Cupcakes, three Very-Berry Baklava, *four* Cream Horns of Plenty and an Apple Tart of the Hesperides . You sure that’s all, buddy? I can’t tempt you to a special treat, something just for you?”

“Oof,” Callum’s close friend Knox replied, with a big grin, “I... I *really* shouldn’t, Atlas. I spend enough in here as it is.” Blushing slightly, the bulging Belgian Brabant stallion patted his belly self-consciously with both hands. “I swear I put on weight from just walking by your window, now!”

“Aww, you’re *fine*, big guy.” Callum rolled his eyes as Atlas put a ruthlessly-practised companionable, confiding arm around his customer’s shoulders, giving him a 100% saccharine smile. “There’s plenty of guys I see out there WAY bigger than you. Besides, us draftys look so much better with a little beer in our barrels! I just wish I could manage to put on some pounds, look a little more like *you*!”

“Aha, aha, heehee!” Knox laughed, his charcoal-coloured cheeks blushing a dark, cherry pink. “D-do you flirt this shamelessly with *all* your customers?”

“Only with the most handsome hosses, big guy.” The silver-tongued stallion winked. “Here, have a brownie on the house. You’ll need to build up your strength to carry the rest of that home.”

“Oh... I... I just can't say 'no' to you!” And Knox's daily buttering-up was complete.

“Mshh... shanks! Hey, can I shay 'i 'oo Tallum hehore I cho?”

“Sure thing!”

Cheeks still bulging from his treat, Knox poked his head around the door of the back room, oblivious to his stardom on the bakery's very own Candid-camera and the plasma-screen on the wall above him. Callum was there, 'hard at work'. He was dressed in a marquis-sized black T-shirt that covered his chest and slightly more than half of his stomach, but it was shrinking every day. Where Atlas had got such a massive garment from was a mystery- all he'd say was it 'got left laying around by a buddy of mine- don't worry, he doesn't need it back- too small for him now'. A tiny name-badge was pinned against one of Callum's moobs, too small to be legible at any distance. Originally it had read 'Taster Tester', then- as he had been repeatedly 'promoted'- 'Food Disposal Unit', 'Bottomless Pit' and now simply 'Dough-zilla'.

“See ya round, derg-ball!” Knox called out with his mouth still half-full, waving cheerfully.

“Don't work too hard, huh? Or you'll be busting this place apart!”

Help, Callum wanted to say. Run- whilst you still can! Save yourself. Don't trust that evil equine! But his mouth was full, and just couldn't keep it empty for long enough to speak. Atlas seemed to have a supernatural sense as to when Callum's friends would drop by- that or his pals were just painfully predictable in their habits- and made sure his very own Hinden-Derg was well-dosed with Gluttony Pie in advance of their visits.

Knox's full face vanished back round the door, and on the screen the dumpster-dragon watched him approach Atlas with suddenly-serious face:

“Callum's... maybe not getting a little *too* big working here, don't you think? I mean, I know he loves his job-” ha ha! “-but... man. He's bigger every time I stop by!”

“Well...”

“I can't believe I'm suggesting this but... maybe you should put him on a diet, or something?”

...A *diet*?!!!!

“Hmm...” Atlas made a great show of concerned pondering, stroking his chin. Then he patted Knox reassuringly on the shoulder, giving him his well-practiced ‘sincere’ look. Those big dark eyes took people in every time. “Maybe you’re right. I’ll have a talk with him at the end of the shift, see if he wants to cut back some.” His prey’s worry thus deflected, he then perked back up distractingly. “See you tomorrow, handsome?” “Ehe,” Knox blushed again. His stomach answered for him with a *grrrowl*. “I just can’t seem to stay away...” “That’s what I like to hear...”

Still grinning, the oblivious Brabant lumbered out of the shop. Callum found the self-control to *snrk*. ‘Too big’? Like Knox could talk! Lord knows he hadn’t been lean horsemeat to start with, but since falling into Atlas’ clutches the once-burly silver-and-charcoal stallion was fattening up almost faster than he was! As Knox waddled heavily down the street, already snacking on his purchases, the equine’s belly- a huge grey sphere like a furry wrecking ball- wobbled and jugged ponderously in front of him, its bottom edge hanging level with his hocks. His physique was putting sumo-wrestlers to shame, his arms now hanging out at 45 degrees to accommodate his love-handle and the side-roll of his chest. Behind him bounced and bumped a behind that was getting so big that it would be a menace to any cart he tried to pull along. His wardrobe wasn’t keeping pace with his runaway weight-gain, so the berry-red hoodie he was sporting barely covered the top third of his gut, along with the huge double durian-fruit of his chest. It was even straining around his rapidly-thickening neck, causing Knox to absent-mindedly tug at it every few paces. His cargo shorts weren’t faring much better- seriously overloaded with cargo as they now were. The hapless horse was getting so big and heavy, his hooves were starting to leave imprints in the pavement outside. People stopped to stare at this ballooning beast as he ambled amply past, his snout stuck shamelessly into yet another bag of calorie-packed pastries. What a horsey hog!

Atlas stepped into the back room, dusting his hands down. As he did so, his service-attitude smile morphed into his congenital smirk.

“Whoof... long day.” He yaaaaawned, arching his back with a faint *crck* of gristle, then raising his arms high above his head, fingers intertwined. As he stretched luxuriantly, his

eyes closed, his entire body quivered, chest looking larger than ever as it pushed forwards. Then he opened one eye, and gave Callum a smile that said he knew *exactly* what effect this performance was having on the poor derg.

“So, partner,” he said, running a hand along the exposed curvature of Callum’s continental gut as he walked slowly from one side of it to the other, leaving a ripple in his wake, “think I should stick you on a diet, like your little buddy says?”

Callum didn’t trust himself enough to answer *that* loaded question. Who knew where this insane equine would take it, anyhow?

“I’m really starting to like Knox,” Atlas said in such an innocent tone of voice that it set Callum’s alarm-bells ringing. “Think you could do with an assistant taste-tester? Business is booming, after all.” It was- Atlas had half the town eating out of his hands, almost literally. The stallion then burst out laughing. “Oh, don’t look so worried, Cal! You’ll always be my Chief Taste Tester. I don’t think I could get even Knox to overtake your size, Dough-zilla, not with *your* head-start. Though it might be fun to *try*...”

Grinning, the horse grabbed hold of two handfuls of the dragon’s doughy bulk, then began to ascend, expertly mountaineering up to base-camp on Callum’s chest, even as the mountain he climbed rippled and wobbled with ticklish laughter. Crumbs rained down over his dark shoulders like snow.

“But y’know, I don’t think there’d be room for the two of you in here, buddy,” he said as he brushed himself down, “not if Knoxy-boy lives up to the promise he’s showing.” Callum blinked, his snout still stuffed full with food. Laying on his front atop Callum’s couch-sized chest, chin propped on his hands, the smirking stallion nodded slowly. As he did so, his elbows dug against the sensitive silver scales between Callum’s separated chest plates, making him shiver. “Mmhmm, that’s right- I’m thinking you’ve probably learned your lesson by now, you big dumb derg. So you see? I’ll be letting you go, no harm done.” Callum blinked again. It couldn’t be *that* easy... “Once I’ve seen you *fill* this room, that is.” The screw-loose stallion winked as Callum’s eyes went round behind the silver pillows his cheeks had ballooned into. “How’s *that* for a performance incentive?”

Free, at last? Part of Callum rejoiced at the prospect. But, disturbingly, he realised that a surprisingly large part of him was thinking ‘but who’s going to look after me *then?*’ Talk about Stock-Cupboard Syndrome! And how was he supposed to *work* at this kind of size?

“Oh, you’ll manage,” Atlas said, as if Callum had spoken aloud. “I might even be able to shrink you down a *little* before I return you to the wild, except that’s not really my style.” He clapped his hands together. “But before we think *too* much about training up your successor, you’ve got a *performance target* to reach, derg-ball.”

The horse’s smile became just a little devilish, and as he opened his thick hands into a cupped bowl, in between them there materialised-

“A bit more Gluttony Pie should soon take care of *that...*”

Fin