

I remember exactly how it was on stage that day. How excited I was to see one of my heroes in person.

She was a bunny who defied her family, rising above the limits of what people would place on her species.

Every carnivore had heard about the Howler case: the attempt to paint us as innate murderers that could snap at the drop of a hat. The fact that a herbivore vindicated us wasn't lost on me, not when I was at the front of the crowd and cheering her name.

I didn't expect the syringe to stick into her neck. Nor the explosive changes that followed.

While everyone screamed and ran, I watched.

I watched as she swelled with power. As she—*he*—became a mountain of muscle, testosterone, and virility. It was the day that transcending your limits had moved from something symbolic to something physical.

*Tangible.*

I was the last person to leave that day, and I was going to be the last person to forget what happened.

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I groaned as my eyes slowly fluttered open, everything a golden-hued haze from the rising sun. It illuminated the tent flaps, chasing away shadows. Weight pressed down on me, my arms pinned to my sides, my body compressed into piles of soft pillows and downy blankets.

"*Mm...*" The noise came from under my jawline, a gentle nestle into the crook.

It was still strange waking up like this. To someone clinging to me like I was worth something more than the potential pittance of a fortune I might inherit.

Azure scales practically glowed in the morning light, bare shoulders exposed, showing off the curving ridgelines of solid shoulder blades. They breathed slowly, rising and falling in a strangely comforting rhythm.

I quickly discovered that I couldn't move my legs. A little squirming told me they were bound tight, a thick tail having spiraled around under my thighs, lifting my knees and locking them into an angle.

"...Gary," I whispered softly.

"*Mmh...?*"

I had never known affection like this before. At first I found it unsettling, but... I was somehow growing used to it. The feeling of someone pressed against me in the morning, clinging to me.

Right now, the angle I was forced into was causing my lower spine to ache; my knees felt like they wanted to pop out of their sockets.

"Gary," I insisted, jostling and squirming in discomfort. Yellowed eyes flitted open, a second membrane sliding along with it in a way that would have made most mammals shiver. Pupils pulled into slits, his face bathed by streaming light. He rose with the fluid grace of a wave. It was almost unearthly as his long spine rolled him into a sitting position over my hips.

He smiled.

Twin fangs pushed past his scaled lips as he regarded me warmly, slender hands pressed over my otherwise fluffy, unremarkable chest. "Good morning," he said in his peculiarly stilted accent.

"Well, uh..." I droned with an awkward laugh lodged in the back of my throat. "It would be, if I could—y'know—" I drew in a hissing breath, "feel my legs."

"Ah," Gary whispered, becoming aware of his own tail as it uncoiled. It loosened enough for me to scoot back and retrieve my legs. I could barely feel them past the dazzling pinpricks that spread all the way down to my feet. "Sorry. Sometimes I forget," he said with an embarrassed chuckle.

"It's... it's fine," I said, rubbing my thighs, giving them a few slaps in an attempt to get the feeling back.

"You're just so warm," he says sheepishly, his eyes sliding away from me only to flit back again. "It gets cold at night in the desert."

"You, uh, don't need to justify sleeping with me," I mutter, feeling the heat rise to my cheeks. My tufted ears flip back as I rub the back of my neck.

"Oh!" He laughed softly, showing off more of those pointed, ivory icicles. "I enjoy that as well, yes." Lowering himself down, he slotted into place against my side, my arm automatically lifting for him. Unlike my stocky, squat proportions, everything about him was lanky—and that wasn't even counting the tail that was longer than he was tall. He was just that way when he slipped out of the shipping crate he was smuggled in.

We had been correspondents for over a year before he made his fateful trip. We had shared everything together—though, I'm not sure how it came to that. I was usually careful around people, keeping to myself. Maybe it was because, for the first time, someone was showing genuine interest in me.

Or, maybe, I just needed an outlet that would actually listen to me.

And here he is, staring up at me with those big, reptilian eyes. Like I was his world, or something.

I mean, I might have smuggled him into Zootopia, and, sure, my family might have absolutely ruined his—not that it needs explaining—but I still couldn't wrap my head around why he was so

fascinated with me. So clingy. Maybe it was because I was the only mammal he had ever known? Or talked to, I guess, for more than five seconds without screaming?

My train of thought completely derailed as a hand slid under my chin, nails scratching through the fur to hit the sweet spot that made my eyes roll back. "Ah..." I gasped, a weakness I would have otherwise kicked myself for. I could hear his giggling in my ear as he scooted closer. The flit of his forked tongue against sensitive inner hairs made me gasp again, louder this time as my spine arched.

"That isn't fair," I gasped as his arms circled around me, tucking under mine.

"No?" He smiled that annoyingly endearing smile at me. "Consider it revenge for tickling my sides."

He scratched deep into my cheek's fluff, fingers digging into more sensitive spots. "I..." I muttered between gasps of air, "I only did that because *you* wouldn't turn off the teaser! Seriously, I can't control myself when it's bobbing around like that."

My confession must have amused him. There was a hissing giggle next to my ear as he slid behind me, pressing his chest into my back, his limbs wrapping around me like I was his personal stuffed animal. We couldn't have been more different. His hands were thin with long fingers; mine were stubby and thick with sheathed claws at the end. They outclassed his, engulfing them as I scooped them from my chest and gave them a squeeze.

It was getting harder to remember a time when I woke up alone in this tent. It used to be a source of freedom for me, a separation from the *pleasurable* homelife I used to endure. Solitary confinement, but on my own terms—where I could be myself.

Gary leaned forward, nuzzling into the crook of my neck where it met my collarbone. I couldn't have imagined a snake could be so clingy. I always thought of reptiles as aloof. It didn't help that I grew up with family history coloring my perceptions. At first, I thought Gary might have been the exception, but he would always talk about how affectionate his family was.

"They would love you," he told me one day while playing with my sheathed claws. I asked him if they would love me if they knew I was a Lynxley. He didn't hesitate when he told me that it wouldn't matter. "The sins of the father are not the sins of the son," he told me in that strangely soothing accent. I wanted to correct the statement to "grandfather," but I didn't get the chance before he kissed me.

Even now, I could feel the ghost of his lips, the rough ruffle of his feathering scales where it crested around his...muzzle? Face?

Gary's voice broke me out of my idle musing. "You look pensive."

I arched my head back, catching a glance from the corner of my eyes. "Just remembering."

"Oh?" He leaned closer, looping his neck around so he could watch me better.

"How you popped out of a box and turned my life upside down." I chuckled sardonically.  
"Y'know, little things like that."

"Oh, yes," he giggled as he shuffled. His hips pressed against the small of my back, knees hiked up around my sides. "It was very stuffy. I'm lucky it was warm inside the ship's hold."

Our original plan was to ruin my family.

Okay, maybe not *Gary's* plan, but it was certainly mine. Apparently, the entire Lynxley fortune was founded on a stolen idea. All he wanted was justice for his framed grandmother. Kinda sad that all I care about is personal revenge.

Oh well. It just highlights the fact that we're cut from a different cloth. Most people wouldn't believe a snake to be capable of being so noble, but I know better.

"So..." he whispered, his voice lowering. "What should we do this morning, Pawbert?"

I was starting to get an idea, especially with something pressing up under the base of my tail. Man, nobody told me that every guy's external anatomy started as *internal* for reptiles. But that didn't stop us from fooling around.

Who would have imagined that we were both gay and compatible? Not me, that's for sure. Those fangs of his scared me half to death, but he would always whisper soothing words along with slow, deliberate movements that kept me still.

And, well, he had a disturbingly cheery snake-styled epipen ready to go just in case he somehow nicked me.

I'm probably certifiably insane for trusting him so much. A cold-blooded creature nestled between my thighs with fangs that could pierce from one side of my boner to the other—oh, and the poison that would paralyze and kill me within an hour. That's fun too.

Maybe he was using me? After all, that would be fair. That was the motivation for contacting him in the first place. The secrets to unraveling my family could only be sussed out by a pit viper. So, I needed him.

And he needed me to access our family's snow-slathered mansion.

But...our plans stalled out. Too preoccupied with each other and growing affections.

When I would ask about our plan, Gary would put it off. He would tell me that we have all the time in the world, and that his grandmother's secrets wouldn't be going anywhere. "They have been hidden for a hundred years. It will wait a little longer," he told me as he stroked my cheek.

Instead, he insisted that I show him my world.

Taking him around Zootopia had its...logistical challenges. I couldn't exactly flash around a bright-blue snake everywhere I went, right? Luckily, the spare helmet I had with my motorcycle hid his features. When he was tucked into his sweater, it was hard to tell his species when we

were on the move. From my passenger seat, he watched the world in fascination—the city that grew from his grandmother's lofty ideas.

Regret would settle in the pit of my stomach as I stole glances. Which is a funny way to describe it, considering the rest of the city regarded their climate-controlled comfort as a Lynxley creation.

"A-Ah..." I gasped as the warmth around my shaft nearly made my brain short out. He was quick and effective, swallowing me down to the base. Hands explored over my chest, finding nipples that were buried under the considerable fluff.

I had to hand it to him. He had become an expert in just a few months.

Heh. A sexpert.

Though the way he bobbed over me wasn't a laughing matter. The noises he coaxed out of me were uncontrolled and raw. One hand gripped the blankets, nails digging in. The other pressed onto his back, holding onto him as I struggled to keep from sticking him.

It was a dance of control for both of us.

The inside of his mouth was like velvet. It was hard to believe the comforting warmth wasn't his. The combination of the desert and my own body heat mingled around my shaft as he dutifully bobbed over it. I traced over the ridges of his head, stroking along the frilled scales as I sucked in a few rattling breaths.

"N-Not gonna last long, partner," I muttered, feeling the tell-tale pull deep between my thighs. I heard the sound of wet sliding down below, knowing what Gary was doing as he worked himself. Part of me was disappointed that I wouldn't be able to return the favor, but that all became a blank when I finally blew.

"Mph..." Gary grunted as he screwed his eyes shut. The snake shoved his nose to the base of my crotch, making me cry out as his throat constricted around my sensitive length. Seeing him take every last drop was incredibly hot. Through the lightheaded haze, I couldn't tear my eyes away from him.

He pulled off, his forked tongue slithering around the glistening head of my shaft. He gave it a teasing, fluttering flick before licking his lips. "Maybe a little more warning next time?"

"Sorry," I said with a bashful laugh. "I wasn't expecting you to go down like that."

He grinned as he scooted closer, wiping the mess away from his crotch and onto the spare towel we kept nearby. "I wanted it to be a surprise. You're always so cute when you gasp like that."

My cheeks immediately heated up, my ears swiveling back. It was crazy what a little bit of positive attention could do for me. I think Gary knew it too, his smile brightening as he watched me. "Yeah, well," I muttered, "Call it a weakness."

"Oh-hoh?" He wrapped his arms around my sides, slinking so he sat fully over my lap, our slowly deflating erections pressed together.

"Yeaahhh..." I said, with a drawn-out sigh. "Something about cute pit vipers. You know any of them?"

Gary tilted his head to one side, his smile turning lopsided. "I might know one or two back home. Perhaps I'll introduce you." We shared a mutual laugh, arms circling as we squeezed together. It had been a fun several months together. I gained not just a friend, but someone I could share a tender touch with. I didn't think it was possible; even now, as he tucks his head under my chin, it still feels surreal.

Not like I deserved any of this. It still feels like a dream.

I exhaled slowly, my padded fingers tracing the curve of his spine down to the base of his tail.

But all dreams have to come to an end sooner or later.

"Hey," I whispered softly against his ear. "I've got somewhere I gotta be. Are you gonna be okay by yourself for a while?"

That caught his attention; the snake coiled back to scrutinize me. "Going? Where?"

"I've got a little ace up my sleeve that I need to...*procure*...first. Y'know, before we confront my *evil*," I said with a little playful wave of my hands, "family." His frown wasn't what I expected, his ridged brows furrowing in thought.

"That...*is* what you want, right?" I egged. "You came here to clear your grandmother's name."

"Yes, but..." He sat back, separating himself from me. His arms crossed, the pattern of sapphire-like scales glittering as he moved. "I don't want you to do anything rash."

"Rash?" I laughed, even though I could hear how hollow it was in my own ears. "Why would I do anything like that? We just need to convince them to give us access to the journal."

"That's why we've been here. There is no easy way to access it..." he muttered, almost seeming dejected as his head dipped.

"Because we need my dad to open it for us, yeah." I stroked at my cheek fluff, tracing it down to the long, drooping tip. "I mean, I thought about using an ice-cream scoop. That'd probably work wonders to remove—"

"*Pawbert!*" Gary shot me a horrified look that instantly stole my humor.

"Sorry," I said with a clipped snicker. "I'll try to keep his eyes in his head. Though it's not my fault he decided to go all spy-tech with his locks."

"*Promise* me you won't do anything dangerous."

The pain in his eyes was gut-wrenching. I found myself momentarily derailed, my jawline working without words. "I..." I exhaled softly. "I can't promise you that," I mumbled. When he didn't immediately, I continued. "You know this would be dangerous, Gary. When you came over, when we first laid out our plans. We both knew this was going to end with a confrontation."

"I don't like it," Gary said, his fingers lacing over his lap, slender arms clamped to his sides. "But...I trust you."

Those words sent a shiver through me. The duality wasn't lost: the pleasure of someone trusting me so completely, and the likelihood that I was going to break his heart in one way or another.

After all, that's what I do. What I've always done to people.

"Tell you what," I said softly. "After I get my ace, you can come with me when I confront my parents."

He brightened a little, but it didn't completely clear the overcast that clouded his usually sunny disposition. "Okay."

I smiled, but it felt forced as I slowly got up. I tossed on my clothes, snuggling into my green sweater as I pulled on a pair of jeans. I could feel Gary's gaze on my back as emotions I wasn't familiar with churned in my stomach.

Letting someone get this close to me had made things...complicated.

And I'm not used to complicated. Good thing I'm about to simplify the equation.

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Meeting the man who had brought Gary to me was easy. His front as an innocent dock worker fooled everyone. The ZPD had no idea, not after their incident with losing their two up-and-coming officers. They were just walls of meat now, brought to some testing facility outside the city.

Speaking of walls of meat...

Antony was looking huge. Whatever cocktail he was on took his top-heavy nature and exaggerated it. Massive delts rolled under the sleeves of his crimson button-up, his clothes clinging like a second skin over the brawny anteater. Fur curled out from his pectoral like a hirsute carpet, swollen mounds bouncing with every heavy step as he walked.

Like before, he was decked out in gold, a necklace that was once loose over his chest, hugging around a thickened bull neck. His rings clung to dense, clawed digits, the originals no doubt replaced. He even had a few new additions, precious metal clinging around blunt, thick toes as wide soles clapped worn cement. Even with a broadened jawline, thick brows, and a cleft chin, he still wore that middle-part haircut.

Antony turned, spotting movement, his shelf-like brows furrowing. He opened his mouth, expression twisted—no doubt ready to throw me out as I approached. But a look of recognition replaced it. Instead, he smiled broadly, revealing a golden canine.

"Oh-hoh! I'm blessed by royalty once more," He said, his voice a thunderous rumble, yet no less slick than the last I had heard it. "Do tell me, what do I owe the pleasure? I hope you're not back for a refund on your snake, because I don't do that."

Part of me twitched at Gary being dismissed as a commodity like that, but I knew I had to keep up an amicable facade. So I did, my frazzled whiskers lifting along with my fluffed cheeks.

"Heeey, Been a bit, huh?" I clapped my hands together, rubbing sizable paws. "Nope. Actually, kinda the opposite!"

He cocked his head curiously to one side. I knew men like him, with that greedy glint in their eyes when they see an opportunity for profit. "Yeah? And what's that, kid?"

I gestured to his mammoth chest, the one that was barely contained by his shirt. Several of the top buttons were undone to let those swollen globes hang out; I honestly doubted he could even pull the fabric together. "I was wondering, well..." We both knew what I wanted, but I continued my theatrics regardless. "What's your secret? Mind sharing your workout routine? Maybe the brand of protein shake you choke down every morning?"

That stoked his ego, his expression turning smarmy as he arched back and puffed out his chest. He made those pectorals dance, muscled mounds rolling and jumping as they banded. I pretended it didn't have an effect on me, but it took everything to keep the poker face on my second head. "You like the changes, huh?" He chuckled to himself as he tucked his arms forward, biceps pushing forward to make those pecs really *pop*. "Can't say it don't look too bad on me. People don't 'xpect it, that's fer sure."

"Yeah, tell me about it," I said, lowering my voice to a false reverence as I moved closer. "Lynxes aren't the biggest cat. Pretty overlooked in a crowd with tigers or lions..." I flashed him a demure smile, pretending to tentatively reach out for those pectorals. The slight nod he gave me sealed his fate as I pressed my palms to his chest, massaging over the curve of swollen sinew.

The soft groan that bubbled out of him was music to my ears as I brushed my thumbs around the outline of his nipples, using the tips of my pointed nails to scrape the silky fabric. "Heh. Fortune ain't enough for you, is it, kid?" He asked confidently, yet I could hear the breathless tone to his words.

"Was it enough for you?" I asked, my voice dropping to a sultry purr as I leaned forward, my fingers digging in, squeezing into Antony's sensitive chest.

He let out a tortured sigh, and I could feel the shudder that traveled through his spine. "Touche, kid..."



"Why don't you give me some pointers? A good place to start, maybe?" My language was coded, but only thinly. We both knew exactly what I wanted.

"What's in it for me?" Antony asked, struggling to fight off my influence as I kneaded his bulging chest. He blinked in surprise as I stopped for only a moment. His eyes dropped as he sensed something slide between his pectorals. Nestled in the divide between hirsute mounds was a roll of cash, green and clipped.

His sneer widened even further.

"Oh, well, when ya put it that way..."

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Luckily, the location he had scrawled out wasn't that far from the harbor. Abandoned warehouses whizzed past as I drove, weaving through a few old loading vans that pattered by. I pulled up to a shoddy trailer that hugged the edge of one of those rusted-out storerooms before popping the kickstand.

"Well, guess this is it," I muttered, stepping carefully as I approached the steps. The last thing I wanted was to get rusted shavings stuck in my pads. I smacked the door with the back of my knuckles, cringing internally at the magnified boom that traveled through sheet metal. It didn't compare to the reverberations that followed. Footsteps shook the ground as I took an apprehensive step back. Several locks clicked before the door swung open.

He didn't even check through the peephole.

He didn't need to.

Towering above me was a sandy-furred castle of raw brawn. A ratty white tank top stretched over his enormous torso, straps stretching from traps to pecs with enough space to fit my entire arm in between. It cut off just below his chest, showing the majority of gut-beveled abdominals that jut like a cobbled boulder. The rest of his enormity couldn't be understated, not with arms jutted at wide angles from his sides and thighs that were thicker than several of me combined.

He peered over his swollen pectorals, whiskers frazzled with fur tousled as brow-shadowed eyes narrowed in on me. "You the kid I heard about?" His voice was booming, shaking through me like a force of nature as he sized up my pitiful existence.

"Uh," was the incredibly clipped, incredibly lame response that my brain came up with. My jaw was unhinged, hanging like a loose door. Luckily for me, the hulking weasel soaked it in like ambrosia, basking in my unabashed gawping.

"Lemmie guess," he said, with a rather noticeable Boston accent. "You're here cuz you wanna get *huge*." He emphasized the word with a simple flex of his pecs. I say simple, but there was nothing *simple* about the intricate dance those massive mounds did. Sinew swelled, muscle visibly banding under his short fur as veins rose like roots over those monstrous globes.

"Eheh... Something like that," I replied, fingers snapping to the back of my neck like nervous magnets. He waved me in, lifting his arm and forcing me to slide against his generously muscled side. I had to dip around a wing-like lat, fur brushing my nose to get past him. I could see the snide smirk he wore, a flash of it as I passed under his pecs. He was enjoying every second of it, thinking I was put off by the display.

Too bad I was enjoying it just as much.

The door clicked, his dense digits flicking longs back into place before turning to face me. "So, how big we talkin' kid?" He asked, eyeing me past his absurdly huge chest. "Gotta figure out what dose you're gonna need to get the...*desired*...results." I didn't miss the way he licked his lips as his eyes lidded. A few fingers brushed the front of his painted-on sweats, adjusting the enormous boulder-like bulge that proudly jutted between his thighs.

"Oh, just...big enough to really shake up my life, y'know?" I said with a disarming little laugh. The floor shook as the weasel stomped over to a nearby desk. The drawer popped open as he rifled through it, tossing a pamphlet in my direction.

"Luckily for you, I got *infographics*. Just pick one of the three sizes, and I'll get ya there. Price included in the total."

I gave it a cursory look, flicking the page open. Crude drawings of a typical canid going from typical to a massive wad of muscle. The depicted sizes were: bodybuilder, mountain, and *mega-mass*. The last one was exactly what I saw happen to Officer Hopps. The artist, whom I assume was the grinning gentleman looming over me, had drawn the nondescript canid to be entirely overwhelmed with muscle. A veritable meatball of muscle.

I chuckled quietly as those pectorals loomed just above me, brushing the tufted tips of my ears. He was trying to fluster me, to goad me into a quick decision. I let out a little whimsical sigh, pretending to fall for the pheromones radiating from his enormous body. There was a pleased little growl that bubbled from him as my fingertips "errantly" brushed the jutting curve of his crotch.

"Mmm... I think I'll go for the first dose as a starter," I said, letting my voice dip to a more sensual tone. "Oh, and... I'd like to keep my wits about me." I didn't wait for his surprised reaction as I continued. "It's in our best interests, isn't it? After all, a repeat customer is better than not."

"Smart kid," my new business partner mumbled as he slowly rocked his hips into my innocuous strokes. "It'll cost ya extra."

Again, I let my voice lilt low as I said, "I can pay."

"Heh. I'm sure you can. Name's Duke," He said, a hint of breathlessness to his voice. The front of his shorts stretched, revealing the base of a vivid pink crotch thicker than my thigh.

"Pawbert," I said, keeping my face placid even as I dipped my fingers into the gap between elastic and flesh. The groan that bubbled out of him was music to my ears. I stroked slowly,

getting him worked up to the point where he tugged his shorts down, fighting to get them free from those trunk-like thighs.

"Heh, funny name, considerin' the magic you're workin' with 'em," he muttered, moving to sit over the edge of his desk. Giant glutes shifted, rolling and dimpling deep as he adjusted himself with a low, pleased grunt. "Yeah... You're gonna look good with my kinda mass, kid. Won't be as huge, but you'll be a powerhouse."

I knew what I needed to do. I banished the guilty, slithering thoughts of Gary, using muscle memory to shut down my brain. Leaning forward, I nuzzled the glans that bobbed in front of me like a fleshy helmet. Part of me rolled with icy pride as I heard him moan, my tongue dipping into the slit, giving a little wiggle that made his oak desk crack under clenching fingers.

"Heh. Maybe we could work together..." he mused as I mouthed his twitching cock. "It'd be a schweet gig havin' a Lynxley helpin' me out. Can only imagine how far my goods'd go."

I let him have his delusions of grandeur as I worked around the tip, barely able to get more past my nearly unhinged jaw. He didn't seem to care, not when supple padding slipped down the sides of his achingly stiff shaft. He moaned, rolling his head back into rising traps, nearly crashing back completely onto his desk.

I was onto his thighs in a moment, straddling around them as I hugged that endowment to my chest. I slowly jerked both arms, making sure to press my padding down along those sensitive sides. It must have been a while since Duke had seen any action. He was moaning like a foghorn, shaking the room as his entire body shuddered, the desk below him struggling to keep up with the weight that was pressed over it.

Not that I care what happened beyond this point. Guys like him always put pleasure over business, and I knew that he would reward me handsomely for what I'm doing for him.

And the promise of what I might do again when I'm even bigger.

Those turgid balls jumped, slapping the side of the desk where they had rolled over and hung from the ledge. I wasn't about to get any of that weasel's spunk in my mouth as I pulled free. Leveraging it like a canon, I angled it away from me as Duke's orgasm crept up on him, egged on by the massage of my curled toes around his bloated bowling balls. With a smirk, I tilted back, watching him careen over the edge. The creamy deluge hit the wall behind him with a loud crack. Some of it splashed upward, smacking against ceiling tiles, dislodging and dropping a few of them to the dusty floor below.

As a little extra service, I leaned forward to cup his pecs. I could tell how immediately appreciative he was as deep, rolling moans escaped him. My grin turned toothy as I watched him underneath me, completely under my spell. Funny how easy these big guys come undone. You just have to give them the proper attention, and they unravel entirely.

Works for me. Just one step closer to what I want.

Duke cleaned himself up easily enough, though I had to disguise my disgust of him using a crusty towel behind a demure expression. He exhaled, licking over his lips as he sidled closer to me, wrapping an enormous arm around my stocky frame and pulling it closer to him.

"Heh. You've done me a real solid, kid. Broke a bit of a dry streak." He chuckled, the sound shaking in the back of his throat. "Tell you what, I'll waive the extra fee this time—if y'come back and give me a lil bit of that Lynxley magic."

"Give me what I want, and I'll do a little more than that," I fired back, my grin widening as the mountainous mustelid sized me up.

Duke's deeply set eyes glittered greedily. "You got yerself a deal, kid."

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It's a shame I couldn't convince Gary to stay in our tent. Amazingly, the concept of *my* tent had somehow shifted to *our* tent in my mind.

It would have been so much easier if he had. Instead, he insisted on waiting inside my bike's passenger seat, bundled up in blankets and paw warmers. At least I managed to convince him not to go in with me, telling him that it would be dangerous if he were spotted.

What an ironic lie, considering the most dangerous person in the house is me.

I glanced at the syringe I had been given, the stainless steel needle glinting. It was simple enough. Stab my neck and depress the plunger. Duke explained that the effects would be nearly instant, and that's exactly what I was counting on.

Familiar halls took on new meaning as I navigated our expansive mansion. I had never enjoyed the ridiculous level of wealth my family wallowed in. It was all self-serving and built on a lie.

I rolled the syringe around, letting the chill of the glass settle into my fingers. For such a light thing, it carried a lot of weight. No going back once I stick myself.

Exhaling, I took the servant's route behind the grand staircase and into the kitchen, where I would be afforded some privacy. Between lunch and dinner, it was dead quiet; the only sound was the circulating air. Steeling myself, I lifted the syringe, angling it toward my neck before jamming it in. The sharp pinch made me gasp, biting back a whine as I pushed the plunger. I could feel an immediate tingle spread down to my right shoulder. The spent syringe clattered across the floor as I threw it aside, breath picking up as my heart began to race.

Immense pressure under my pelt forced me to hunch forward as I grabbed the edge of the countertop to steady myself. I groaned, sweat beading over my forehead. I could feel the serum spreading through my body like a poison, burrowing through my veins as I grew feverish. An anxious part of my brain questioned if I had been tricked, if I had actually been served poison by the shifty weasel, but I stuffed the thought.

It's not good business to kill your clients, after all.

The pressure mounted as I clutched at my neck. I could feel the surreal sensation of my heartbeat pulsating through it. The first signs of the change came in the sound of popping seams. The strain mounted as my neck thickened, muscles rolling under the surface as nerves spasmodically fired. I could see the warped reflection of myself in a nearby pot, the stainless steel offering me a window into my rapid transformation.

My sweater tore fully open, right arm swelling with bulging muscle. Veins rose to the surface, carrying the serum, spreading it. I chanted a soft 'yes' under my breath as I clenched my hand, watching tendons bulge and thrum as my fingers grew thick and meaty.

"*Ngh!*" My head whipped to one side, forced by the wave of sinew that crashed around it. Traps evened out as the wave swept to the other side of my body; swelling boulders for shoulders and jutting triceps made short work of my straining sleeves. Marble cracked under my clenching fingers as I hunched forward, yowling as pressure flooded down my spine. From the reflection, I could see a mass of muscle tearing through the remains of my sweater, an expanse of coiled muscle rising, a deep ravine forming between turgid halves.

"So...so good," I muttered, eyes threatening to roll back in my head as my tongue freely lolled. It was like a full-body erection, every nerve on fire. Pain and pleasure blended together to new heights. The squeeze of my clothes was orgasmic, fabric clinging to me like a second skin before giving way. My jeans were next to go, the insides splitting open as my thighs engorged, forcing me to continuously widen my twitching stance.

If this was going to turn me into a slobbering idiot, at least I'd have this last burst of pleasure. Even with a simplistic mind, I knew what needed to be done after. It wouldn't take much nuance. Just a lot of...

"**Muscle**," I moaned, my body contorting as I gasped.

Bone popped, my spine stretching as it forcibly made room for more mass. The reflection revealed a caricature of myself, creeping in on being as wide as I was tall. Monstrous lats swung from my sides, hanging out like wings as they threatened to brush banded glutes. I couldn't help but reach back, my dense digits barely able to trace the edges of those massive mounds. They rolled as I subconsciously clenched, dimpling deep enough to suck in a softball.

Calves effortlessly peeled the denim from them as I felt the scraps tumbling to the floor, destroyed fabric raining around me. It was exquisite, like taking a deep breath of cool air as my body expanded unfettered. The countertop cracked as my fingers engorged, palms widening as I hunched forward. The serum seared through me, putting on the final touches as my feet widened, toes popping as my padded soles stretched across the floor.

And then it was over. What felt like an hour of exquisite, tortured pleasure had only been a short few minutes, the clock on the far wall telling me as much. My head spun as I finally stood up, vertigo seizing me as I realized that things were a good foot lower than they should have been. Despite the chilling cold of the kitchen, sweat dripped from my furnace-like body.

A grin cracked across my face as I cupped my own chest, admiring the curvature that blocked the rest of the view below. The makeshift reflection was the only thing I could use to reference my new self. Bringing my arms up, I hit a double bicep pose, enormous hands rolling into tight fists as split peaks pushed out. "*Mh...*" The spots of my pelt stretched, warping over mountains of muscle they were never meant to cover.

It was everything I had ever wanted. Raw *power*.

I felt as if I could crush a car in my arms, to tear down this entire mansion with my bare hands. The thoughts hazed through my mind in an intoxicating wave, throaty laughter rumbling. I could feel it shake through me, augmented by my widened, truncated bull neck. Everything felt so heavy, yet moving was effortless. A single stomp shattered tile, cracking the floor and leaving a kaleidoscoped copy of my sole.

The weasel must have given me an extra dose, putting me somewhere in between the first advertised sizes. "*Heh*," I chuckled to myself as I licked my lips. I'm sure he's looking for a round two, the slut.

I let myself go as I ravished my own body, bringing arms up over my head and allowing monstrous biceps to pin my skull in place. The pressure was exquisite—only made more euphoric by the fact that it was *me*. I gave those split peaks a slow lick, my scratchy tongue working over the creaking hide as I indulged in my own mass.

It wasn't until I heard the sound of movement that I finally broke out of my reverie. Chattering from familiar voices filled the hall as the doors to the kitchen opened. I watched in amusement, my arms slowly lowering, biceps catching against lats as my elbows were forced out from my sides.

Kitty and Cattrick—obivious as ever. They were arguing, big paws waving as they held phones glued to their ears. They didn't even see me lounging next to the stove, an explosion of green and blue scraps around me like the remains of a demented party cracker. They must have gotten back from a meeting, still wearing their Sunday best as they strutted in like they owned the place.

And I'm sure that's exactly how they felt. After all, Dad promised them everything.

Well, they're just going to have to settle for scraps.

"Hey, sibs!" I called out, raising my new booming voice. It had the intended effect; the pair startled out of their bickering, wide eyes turning to stare at me. It brought me more amusement than I could have imagined to see the emotional gymnastics play out over their stupefied faces.

The only scrap of cloth that clung to me was a pair of violet briefs. The poor thing had been stretched into a thong, vanishing completely into the crack of my ass. The front fared little better, my oversized endowment tucked in it like a too-small basket as it swayed between my swinging thighs.

"Aw, don't tell me you guys aren't happy to see me!" I said with a playful purr, looming over them before I could even fully close the distance. Their jaws dropped, ears flipping back as the impossible registered in their minds.

"Pawbert...?" Cattrick was the first to ask, the usual cold steel of his voice turned brittle.

"Aw, it hasn't been *that* long since we saw each other!" I chided playfully, giving the lightest punch to my brother's shoulder. It might as well have been a nudge from an elephant. He went stumbling, careening into the stove with enough force to dislodge the empty pot, sending it crashing across the floor.

I drank in their confusion, their *fear*. For once in their life, they couldn't keep a sneer plastered to their prettied-up faces.

"C'mere! C'mere," I repeated, a thinly veiled edge of malice in my voice as I circled my arm around Kitty before she could decide to bolt. "You know..." I paused deliberately, showing my teeth as I grinned, "... We've spent far too much time apart recently." I gave her a gentle jostle, messing up her perfectly ironed tuxedo. Cattrick wasn't shown the same restraint, however, as I grabbed him by the back of his jacket, yanking the dazed cat into the crook of my other arm.

"Aaaah, there we go! It's been such a long time since we've had a real heart-to-heart, you know?" I leaned in, soaking up their apprehension as they reflexively winced. "We were always so *tight*." I flexed, forcing unpleasant groans from my squirming siblings. "But, where did that all go? Chasing after a family legacy just so we can get a head-pat from dad?"

I moved forward, lifting them from the ground as if they were nothing better than my playthings. With a single hand, I wrenched open the heavy door to the walk-in freezer, inspecting the interior thoughtfully. "Well, I'll tell you guys what. I don't hold it against you." With a light shove, I sent them both careening into the back. Kitty smacked into a pile of crates, crumbling through the frost-bitten boxes while Cattrick tripped over his own feet and skidded on his ass across the cold floor.

"Pawbert..." Kitty coughed, brushing her ears back, as she rolled back onto her undignified pile of frozen peas. "What are you doing?"

"I'm glad you asked!" My absurdly broad shoulders blocked the entryway, making sure they couldn't bolt past me. "Remember my 10th birthday, Cattrick?" It was a moment of sick glee when I saw the recognition in his shrinking pupils.

"Y-You can't...!" He desperately moved forward, making a dive for the door. A flick of my wrist sent him back where he came, crashing through crates to join his stunned sister.

"I'll never forget that day. Spending an afternoon in frozen isolation really makes you think, y'know?" I chuckled, a malicious sound that rattled through the freezer's trembling walls.

"But...—" There was a flicker of understanding behind her eyes. "Is that why you were late to your party?" Kitty asked, her ears folded back, gaze snapping to her brother, who was still foundering in his mire of frozen food.

"Oh, but neither you nor Dad listened," I cooed. "One of the cooks found me inside just before dinner. Lucky, huh? I probably would have frozen to death if you guys went for takeout and forgot my existence." I rolled my shoulders casually, a chuckle bubbling up my throat. "It wouldn't have been far from the norm, huh?"

The fact that she couldn't spin the facts amused me. It probably had something to do with the reality that I could break her in half with just my fingers, but I digress...

"Oh, one thing I learned while I was locked here." Panic rose, both of them stumbling to their knees as I began to pull the door shut. "There's absolutely *no* cell service. Hope you guys got games on your phones."

The door slammed shut with resounding finality. "I could get used to this," I muttered to myself giddily.

Doors meant nothing to me now. I stepped through them as if they didn't exist. Hinges busted off, wood splintering as they were kicked aside by my unerring stride. My unhinged laughter filled the halls in a manic symphony, echoing down them as I spilled suits of armor and flipped portraits from their pegged posts. A helmet screeched as it went between my pecs, pushed deep, and condensed as I flexed my torso forward. The sound of it crumpling like a can was music to my ears. Pinching the end of it, I pulled out a flattened slab of iron, giving it a good once over before flinging it like a frisbee.

The hunk of metal delightfully flew, whizzing through the air with an ominous hum. "Oof," I said, cringing, yet unable to wipe the grin from my face. It lopped off the head of my grandfather's statue in the foyer, his mustachioed mug and synonymous tophat tumbling. The feeling was exhilarating, rising, pulsating veins matching my heart's excited hammering.

My tour of destruction continued through the west wing of the house, up several flights of stairs, and past our personal chambers to where I knew my father was hiding. I stopped just short of his double doors, my toes tearing through the red carpet that led up to the threshold. Taking a deep breath, I steeled myself, excitement and fear swirling so fast I felt lightheaded.

This is it. This is everything I ever wanted out of my life.

To be acknowledged.

To be feared.

To ruin the man who wouldn't even give me a second glance.

Rolling my curled index finger forward, I knocked with a single knuckle—and waited. Time ticked on, several seconds passing before I knocked again, impatience muscling past apprehension.

"What is it?!" came a muffled yell from a voice that could still make me reflexively flinch.



"Sorry," I said, trying my best to modulate my voice to a semblance of its former self. "Just needed to have a word with you, uh, Dad! Cattrick and Kitty sent me." That would get his attention. And it did, the lock clicking from the other side as I heard fading footsteps.

Sure, I could have pushed the doors down, but getting the man to unlock it himself was so, so much more satisfying. He barely had time to sit back into his velvet, high-backed chair before I strolled through. He seized halfway, his eyes bugging out as they caught a glimpse of me. It seemed he was having trouble reconciling his expectations.

Good. It's not going to be the first time today.

"Heeeey, Dad," I said with a toothy grin as I sauntered forward. My chest puffed, shoulders back as my arms swung at obscene angles. The floor shook as I put extra weight into my steps, his curios and knick-knacks tumbling from his desk and onto the floor. A snowglobe fell from the fireplace mantle, shattering on the rolling fire, nearly putting it out in a puff of smoke. It cast ominous shadows as light played across the rising curves of my bulging chest.

"Pah..." Was all he could stammer, eyes flicking over every exaggerated corner of my herculean body.

"You're kinda right! *Paw-bert*," I deliberately sounded out as I continued my slow march. "I'm sure you'll pick it up fast now that I've got your attention—for once." I rolled my head, giving him an entertained, side-long look. "Like, I know that mom picked out my name, but it's not *that* hard to remember."

I could see his gaze harden as he mentally pulled himself together. "What have you done to yourself?" he asked, a note of disgust proliferating his tone as he looked me up and down.

"Well..." I braced my huge hands on his desk, pushing papers aside, letting them spill to the floor. "I remember you always telling me that I need to be stronger. I guess I took that lesson to heart."

"I didn't tell you to become a *freak*!" he spat, moving back from me as if mere proximity made him sick. "Think of what the press is going to say when they see you! I've told you before that if you're not going to contribute to this family, then you need to stay out of the spotlight! Now look at what you've done!" He slammed his hands on the desk, but it was a vain display of impotent power. "They'll hound me for months! They'll want to institutionalize you as well, like they did all the other meatheads!"

I leaned harder, putting more of my weight on polished mahogany. It groaned, creaking ominously before the first fractures split the veneer. Milton watched, staring in disbelief as the century-old furniture started to crumble. "I think you've got more to worry about than some bad press, *Dad*."

His chair rolled back, bumping into the bookshelf behind him, rattling the contents. I knew most of those were just for show, blank pages that were fitting for an empty man.

"You know, I've recently had a pen pal—ex pen pal, actually—that I've gotten into contact with recently. And he told me..." I pressed a little harder, causing the burgeoning crack to splinter, deepening until the desk crashed to the floor, split cleanly in half. "That our family fortune isn't exactly...well, you know—*ours*."

It brought a smile to my face when I saw the haughty attitude bleed from him. "What are you talking about?" he asked, his voice suddenly breathless, gaze subtly flicking to the corner of the room. Proudly displayed was a secure container holding a brass-bound book. It was the source of our fortune, the patented blueprints for the weather walls that kept Zootopia functioning.

"Well, it turns out his story was *really* compelling. So..." He didn't even let me finish my sentence before he bolted, nearly tripping over his own feet as he rushed to the glass-encased tome.

"Who have you been talking to?" he asked, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial hiss. "It's a snake, isn't it!" he accused with a pointed claw. "Have you brought *more* shame upon our family?"

"Funny that you know his species," I said with a low chuckle, taking my time as I turned from the ruins of his desk. The ground shook with my footsteps, a fancy tea table and nearby sofa scooting and jostling across the hardwood floor.

"It's the only kind that would try to ruin us!" He hissed, aggressively grabbing the book-bound container from its wooden pedestal. "Before you, that is!" He hugged it defensively to his chest, fingers splayed over pristine glass even as its plinth toppled over.

"Us?" I laughed, my thunderous voice rattling the snow-caked windows. "Oh, that's neat. There's an 'us' now?" I slapped the sofa he was cowering aside, sending it hurtling across the room. Pages exploded like chicken feathers as it demolished the decorative bookshelf.

"*Pawbert!*" he hissed, clutching the container tighter. "Calm down this instant!" His voice strained, failing in the attempt to project authority. "You *will* listen to me!"

A step crushed the tea table, shattering it into splinters under my huge sole. A twist of my heel reduced scraps to sawdust. "Why should I?" I asked darkly as I loomed over him. "You never listen to *me*." Milton gulped, his eyes darting to the window and back to the open door. I would have loved to see him jump through glass, but he took the easy way out.

"Awww, *Dad!*~" I called out, letting my voice playfully lilt. "We were having such a good father-son moment!"

It was like chasing after a mouse. My strides kept me bounding forward, thighs coiling like springs as I shot forward. I made a display of tearing through the already tattered halls, my nails clawing through plaster as easily as tissue paper. Milton gave me a few terrified glances over his shoulder as he ran, nearly dipping onto all fours to try and scamper.

Not that he could. The weight of our family's biggest secret had become something a little more literal for him.

He tumbled down the back stairs, flipping head over heels until he crashed at the bottom. Maybe I would have felt a shred of guilt once, but the serum pumping through my veins erased any of that. I felt powerful, utterly in control of not just my body, but the world around me. It was intoxicating, and I found that I didn't feel much more than a spark of empathy for those getting in my way.

Especially when they didn't deserve it.

He made a terrified noise as he pushed through the doors, scampering into the snow with me hot on his heels. He ran to the sprawling hedge maze that filled the borders of our back property, as if it would somehow offer him sanctuary. I couldn't help but laugh at the idea, my voice rising to a hysterical tone.

"Aw, Dad!" I called out even as he vanished behind the verdant wall. "How did you know? I always wanted to play hide-and-seek with you!" Old growth snapped as I walked through it, breaking under the sheer power of my mammoth body. The cold was nothing to me; the natural heat generated from pumping blood and thrumming muscle kept me more than comfortable.

I could hear him running, his frantic footsteps crunching through the snow.

"C'mon, *Daaad*," I called once more. "Come out and play with me! Forever and ever...." A swing of my enormous forearm cleaved through the hedges as sure as a chainsaw. "*And ever!*" I snarled, spittle flying. Milton gasped, falling onto his ass, scrambling to keep hold of his precious book. He looked as if he was about to piss himself, pupils blown wide from fear. With the wet patch creeping up from his ass and between his thighs, maybe it wasn't just the melting snow.

I made a game out of it. Jumping through walls and making him scream. Slowly driving the sanity out of the man who once had iron-clad control over my life. It was fun, dissecting him piece by piece, crumbling his psyche to powder as he stumbled and tripped through the maze of his own making.

Our game carried on until he found his way back out of the maze again. He was drenched with sweat, reeking of terror as he sucked in gulps of frozen air. "Kitty...! Cattrick!" he bellowed, pitch spiraling into a cracking high.

"Sorry," I called out, my voice a low purr from behind as I stalked him. "But your playdate is with me today, *Daddy*."

"What did you do to them?" he asked, kicking over the stairs that led to the porch, sending puffs of fluffed snow at me. It didn't slow my approach as I loomed over him.

"Oh, nothing compared to what I'm going to do to you," I said, my voice a growl in the back of my throat. Automatically, my fingers circled around his neck, hoisting the man from the ground with a single arm. It exploded in sinew, veins rising as my pulse thundered in my ears. All the pent-up rage for this man coalesced into this single moment, staring at him as he gasped like a fish out of water.

"That's all you care about, huh? *Kitty and Cattrick*," I spat. "You don't care about me at all."

"*G/k-!*" Milton kicked at me, but it did nothing; his furred feet smacked against my chest. He might as well have been kicking a padded brick wall.

"I bet you didn't even love mom," I snarled, my voice taking on an emotional edge as my fingers clenched. I watched his face turn from red to purple between his fur, the color creeping up into those big ears. "When she died, you didn't mourn. Why would you care? She served her function and made kids for you—to continue your lineage."

He continued to thrash, the book dropping from his grip as he grabbed my forearm with both hands. Nails dug into my pelt, droplets of red blossoming. But I didn't care, ignoring the pricking pain.

"I bet you think I'm some kind of monster," I whispered, leaning in, putting his multi-hued face only inches from mine, letting the spittle fleck onto his whiskers. "And you're right." My chest heaved as I fought the urge to shake the shit out of him. "But you *made* me this way." His struggling grew to a fevered pitch, my thumb fully clamped down on his windpipe. My world shrunk to this single point—this singular moment—the edges of my vision darkening.

And then a desperate voice called out to me.

"*Pawbert!*"

Out in the snow, glittering sapphires were wrapped in knitted layers. He struggled through the embankment that hugged the shrubs, his body sluggish, and his steps uneven. It made me momentarily forget what I was doing—where I was—my fingers loosening enough to allow Milton a shrill gasp of air.

"*Please*," Gary begged as he tripped over the stairs, falling halfway into the powdered white. "Please, stop..."

My mind raced. How much had he seen?

Enough. I wasn't exactly subtle in my rampage, and now Gary knew.

So, why was he looking at me like that? His yellowed eyes shining with hurt and...worry?

It didn't make any sense. He should hate me for going behind his back. But he continued to crawl, only feet away from my ankle.

"*S-Snake...*" Milton gurgled from a tortured throat.

Gary had scooped up the container, brushing fingers over the glass dome as he stared into it reverently. Yet, it didn't hold its importance. He dropped it into the soft snow, his arms circling around my thigh.

"This isn't who you are," he said, his voice a low, lethargic cadence. If he were a mammal, his teeth probably would have been uncontrollably chattering.

"You don't know that," I replied, refusing to release my dangling father.

He didn't give up, his arms tightening around my leg, holding onto me. "This isn't what my family would want."

"What if it's what I want?" I asked, some of the emotion coming back to my voice. "What if you were just a means to an end for me?"

Gary looked hurt, falling back onto his ankles, yet refused to release me. "I..." He recomposed himself. "That isn't true..." He shook his head slowly, eyes screwing shut. "You're better than this."

*I'm really not.*

The words wouldn't come out. My mouth hung open, but I couldn't force the statement past my lips. Hadn't I come to terms with it? I'm a Lynxley. This kind of betrayal is in my blood. I'm just directing it to someone more deserving than an innocent snake.

Milton gasped as he landed square on his ass, clutching at his bruised throat as he violently coughed. My arm hadn't gotten the memo yet, still hanging out like a treebranch. Or...well, a tree trunk, now.

"We can still help my family," Gary said, his voice soft as fresh snow. "We can make things right for reptiles, to show everyone the truth." He took my hand, fingers tracing inquisitively around the rolling sinew of my engorged forearm.

"You don't mind that I'm just a big hunk of meat now?" I laughed, some of the tension starting to break. "And here I thought you would run screaming."

"I don't mind it," he replied brightly before giving my knuckles an affectionate kiss. "There's more of you for me to snuggle."

I exhaled, shaking my head. This snake. Again, proving that he's better than any mammal I've ever known. I brought him closer to me, letting him cling to my leg for warmth. Preoccupied with the outlandish, intimate sight of his son and a snake, Father flinched as my gaze turned upon him.

"Well, we still have to get that case open," I said even as Gary handed it to me. I had to give it to Pops; the construction was top-notch. I couldn't break it, even with my elephant-augmented strength. The plexiglass material merely reverberated, refusing to warp even when jammed between my pecs or my thighs.

Milton squeaked in terror as I snatched him by the front of the shirt, dragging him forward onto his knees, leaving twin ruts in the snow behind him. "Smile for the camera," I chimed, holding the ocular scanner at the bottom in front of his face. He was smart enough not to fight with me, keeping his eyes open just long enough for a satisfying beep. The bottom popped open with an air-tight hiss. The book spilled out, Gary's scaled hands waiting as he caught it. He stroked the binding solemnly, his nail tracing the edges.

"We're one step closer," he whispered before hugging it to his chest, flashing me an earnest smile that nearly melted my chilled heart.

"You won't get away with this!" It seemed that Dad had found his voice once more. Color rose in his cheeks, his voice raw and rattling from his abused windpipe. "The city answers to *me*!" He seethed, struggling to get onto his feet with wobbling legs.

"Oh, *right*." I sucked through my teeth as I shrugged languidly, palms going up. "Loose ends, huh? *Yeaah...*" He shrank back, ears pinning against his skull as I approached. "Gary?" I asked, tilting my head towards the pit viper clinging to my side. "You mind getting the door for us?"

He perked up, eyes sparkling. "Gladly!~"

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Milton sailed through the air like a sack of potatoes into the walk-in freezer. My siblings had taken my advice to heart, pausing whatever inane games they were playing. They watched in abject horror as their patriarch made intimate contact with a box full of frozen custard, the mess splattering over his mustachioed face.

"You know what they say," I said with a snicker, already moving to shut the door behind my flailing father. "Two's company, but three's a party. Hope you guys enjoy your lil frozen food bash."

Slamming the door shut, a hard twist snapped the handle completely off before I tossed it aside with a clatter. It was shockingly easy, like breaking a twig.

"You're absolutely ruthless," Gary said as he slithered up against my side, in better spirits now that his body wasn't shutting down. Still, the statement gave me an anxious pause. Almost as if he could sense it, his hand traced up to my chest, following the curvature of a bulging pectoral to soothingly stroke my chest.

"We'll come back for them later," he said, voice calming as he slid in front of me. Sensing his intentions, I leaned down, his arms looping around behind my neck as he nuzzled the end of my padded nose. He spared the door a thoughtful glance before saying, "Although, I think we should hurry."

I chuckled throatily as I leaned forward, pressing a kiss to his lips. "I don't see why we should." My huge hands traced down his back, pushing up under the hem of his heavy sweater to feel the lithe curves of his scaled body. "They'll be fine. We're built for the cold."

"*Mmmh...*" Gary shivered from my touch, leaning up to loop his head around mine.

"I...suppose..." he muttered, clinging tighter to me, his lengthy body nearly wedging between my pecs.

"Sorry," I whispered against his ear, nuzzling at the recessed hole. "About...keeping you in the dark."

There was a thoughtful silence as he clung to me. "It's...okay. I'm not happy with what you did, but you didn't do it to hurt me." He kissed my cheek, the ridges of his noseline rubbing along my jaw. "You were angry."

"That's an understatement," I said with a self-deprecating chortle.

"But, um..." If he were capable of blushing, I'm sure his cheeks would be on fire right now as he pulled back to look me over. "You're...very large now. Very, um...muscular."

I puffed my chest out, letting those curved mounds dance before clenching banded muscles together. "Yeah? I thought it might be easier to storm the castle if I were a little, *y'know*, stronger."

"A *little* stronger? I think that's the understatement," Gary said with a mirthful giggle.

"I could have gone bigger," I admitted, with a sly smirk.

"And you probably wouldn't fit in our tent." He glanced from shoulder to shoulder, sizing me up. "...Will you even be able to ride your bike?"

"That's..." My elbow went up, fingers diving across the back of my head. It was such a natural pose for me, and yet the increased mass that crashed together made it almost impossible.

"Yeah, that's a good question."

Gary exhaled, flashing me a playfully admonishing look as he shook his head. "What am I going to do with you?"

"I dunno," I joked, letting my arm drop to my side, "Tell me you love me anyway?"

He pushed his hands onto my chest, fingers denting into it. Suddenly, I knew why Antony and Duke melted at my touch. My knees nearly buckled, taken down by this slender snake.

"I love you anyway," Gary replied without hesitation, looking me square in the eyes with slitted pupils.

I sputtered, ears heating up to the point where I swore steam billowed from them. "I... *Ahah*... I was, uh... That was just...an expression?" I hated the way my voice cracked, the vulnerability from how flustered he, and only he, could make me.

"Oh? I'm unfamiliar with it." Gary's forked tongue flitted out, playfully tickling my nose. He hugged the book between his arms, adjusting it against his slender chest. "We should probably go somewhere more..." he paused, searching for the word, "secluded."

My excitement rose—both figuratively and literally. A side glance from Gary found his brows flattening. "I'm still angry with you, Pawbert." Before I could completely deflate like a punctured party balloon, he smiled. "But, you did the right thing in the end. I'm proud of you."

That simple phrase lit me up like a Christmas tree. I stood a little taller, the grin threatening to split my face. It was insane what a dollop of approval could do to me—when it came from someone I cared about.

"Come." He waved to me, beckoning. "Our goal awaits."

I took his waiting hand in mine, swallowing it entirely as he guided me. I wasn't sure if I was worthy of his absolution, but it was startlingly easy to believe it as he tangled fingers with me.

Who knows? Maybe there's room in someone's heart for a broken, overgrown misfit after all.