

“Are you okay, man?”

There were a hundred ways to respond to the question—ninety-nine of them being a variation of ‘no’. In a place like this, the subtlety that was part of every carnivore’s demeanor wasn’t needed. Even then, he couldn’t bring himself to truly air out his thoughts. Such taboo words weren’t meant to be *spoken* with other animals. They were to be expressed by action alone—actions that didn’t necessitate explanations.

Licking the last scrap of meat off his fingers, Riz exhaled in satisfaction. Honey served to soothe his mind, but meat was *far* more potent. The sugary paste he used to drink daily simply weakened the harrowing headaches from the medicine—meat didn’t just neutralize them completely, but his problems just *melted* away like butter on a sizzling pan.

“May I get another skewer?” His voice still remained as a facade, yet he spoke with unadulterated freedom. His claws tapped against the counter and he showed off his saliva-covered fangs in pure joy. “Your food is delicious. It’s the best I’ve ever had.”

He could even recite the types of meat used in the meal; thirty percent chicken—twenty percent beef—fifty percent pork.

Most cuts were just the same delicious protein-filled slop—but Riz was different. Every single inch of meat belonged to a *person*—people he was now connected to. Even better, they weren’t by his hand, so no risk involved. At first, he was beginning to contemplate connecting with his classmates, but enough cuts of meat in his stomach were more than enough to calm his mind and settle for something safer.

Peace of mind didn’t come without a cost, however. Nothing did, really—but indulging like this *especially* so.

“W-well, I was asking before—and like don’t take it as an insult or anything! It’s just that a-a-aum well, like”—he was erratically shaking his hands in front of his face, his words interrupted by volatile laughter—“I know that young carnivores can get a little too into it! Like it’s tasty! Super tasty—don’t stop coming, actually! It’s just that—”

Standing up was all that it took for the quivering salesman to quiet. “I’d like another one. Please.”

Before becoming one with Tem, he was already a towering mass of muscle. Now? He was a colossal monolith of muscle and fat. His limbs remained thick, chiseled mounds of meat. The rest of his body wasn’t as lucky as to be spared of changer, however; his formerly flat chest—adorned with a six-pack that all of his roommates were envious of—was now a giant round dome of a belly. His thighs and behind thickened to the extent of rendering his previous pants utterly useless. Even now with an XXL large carnivore-sized pair, his trousers wrapped around his meaty legs suffocatingly—not leaving much to the imagination when stared at. Both in the back and *in the front*.

With such a giant in his way, the small ferret couldn't do anything but nod and scurry off to the kitchen.

"Mmmhm..."

Riz sat down in peace. As long as he got enough meat to satisfy his urges, the world could go to hell for all he cared. Unlike carnivores and herbivores—not just in the drama club but in the entire world—Riz was connected to everything else through the life flowing through his massive stomach.

It would be... *selfish* to not share that connection with carnivores that needed, now that he thought about it. There were many pathetic excuses for carnivores crawling around the club—all of them very *tantalizing* targets.

Well, he'd have to think about it later. His stomach called for the seventh meat skewer of the evening.

"A meat skewer for table five!" The ferret screamed.

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Suspension was *one* of the fates that Riz expected if anyone found out about his union with Tem. There was a reason that he kept it a secret in spite of how beautiful of an act it was—seeing Tao break down at the threat of it just drove the reminder even deeper into his brain.

That day—knelt down beside Tao under the dormitory building's stairway and comforting him through his breakdown—Riz had... more than *one* motive when digging into the panther's business. After being confronted by Legosi and Pina, he needed a way to destress; trying to tempt someone into his addiction was just the first thing he thought of. Just like him a few months ago, Tao was adrift in a world that simply didn't see the true him. Choosing the right was as easy as looking inward into his blood-soaked soul.

*They just didn't know your strength. Considering that you're probably going to get your permanent record ruined, don't you think it's time to try and do... something new with your life?*

And so, the domino that would lead to Tao dropping out fell into place. It was an inevitability considering the damage to Kibi's arm. The fact anteater's parents weren't demanding his head presented to them in a pike was a miracle in it itself.

Unwilling to face the disappointment of not just his parents but everyone, Tao moved to an apartment with his uncle in the hidden condo... conveniently close to the back alley market.

Riz would've been *crazy* for not taking the chance. How could anyone blame him? Tao was calling to him as a fellow carnivore—it was just natural to reach out in response. He knew that the panther would take to his embrace like fish to water; completely alone and isolated from his classmates, it was his only choice.

*Come with me to the Eclipse Taka Diner at 8:00 pm. I'll show you something that always cheers me up after a bad day.*

When Tao came through the door, he looked like absolute hell. The previously chipper drama student looked... *dilapidated*. He was slouching his way forward while wearing clothes too big for his small frame—attracting the judging gazes of all the other patrons inside.

Drinks—snacks—small talk; it was all stalling for the inevitable. Tao was apprehensive about the entire situation, but Riz knew all it took was some pushing to gaze into a man's heart—metaphorically in Tao's case and literally in Tem's.

"Hey, when was the last time you ate?"

"Around noon..." As he answered, he shrank into his seat—hands shoved into his pockets. "I ate a pack of instant noodles..."

"Oh, no wonder that you look so skinny!" His hand gripped Tao's shoulder and pulled him in closer. He could feel Tao frazzling against the pressure of his fuzzy, tight drum of a belly against his frail body. "I think that you're lacking in protein, Tao. I already ordered something. I had the feeling, y'know?"

"Y-you already did?"

"Of course! I'm always ready to help my *friends* out." Riz said in a deep, rumbling tone. "I always come here to destress after work. You just need to relax and let loose."

Tao's blood ran cold as soon as the server put the giant meat platter. The silverware jumped into the air and clattered loudly once it landed. Surrounded by pieces of ham, salami and pepperoni was a sizeable slab of beef dripping in barbeque sauce. The panther's mouth turned agape—a mouth-watering sight having eluded him for his entire life.

"I-is that..." He asked, his shaking hand pointing at the giant meal. "For us?"

"Of course!" Skewing slices of meat through a fork, he commandingly leaned in closer to Tao. His shadow covered the entirety of the black-furred feline; looking oh so smaller now that Riz was so close to him. "Although I think it would be more fitting to say that it's for *you*."

"H-huh? What do you m-mphh!"

Tao's cheeks swelled with meat as Riz pushed the fork deep into his mouth. He instinctively reached to push Riz's paw away, but he was no match for the meat-filled bear. The forbidden part of his brain that remained hidden was like a predator waiting to be freed from its cage, and as soon as the meat grazed his tongue, the beast was freed. He swallowed harshly—Adam's apple bobbing as it struggled to gulp down the large chunk of meat.

The meat was in his stomach—firing up every one of his senses like flares exploding and alerting his racing mind. He heaved, bent forward, and exhausted from the single morsel.

“W-what did you...” Drool dripped from his maw like a cascading waterfall. A sticky, disgusting puddle formed on the stool. while his claws dug deep into his jeans in a *desperate* struggle for self-control. “What is this...”

“Oh, did you stop eating meat after you ripped Kibi’s arm off?” Riz gripped Tao’s arm, pulling him in—the bear’s mouth mere millimeters away from his ear. “No wonder that you look so sad and tired. Look at me-hey. Look at me.”

The harsh snapping of Riz’s fingers forced his gaze upward. Wrapping his arms against his shivering frame, Tao looked at the giant carnivore above him. The shame of comparison was *unbearable*; he had his life together—a striking build—perfectly content with being a carnivore.

“Come on... It’s for your own good.”

He cupped Tao’s face between his clawed fingers. It was truly *impressive* how quickly he was breaking under the pressure. He had always known that Tao was more squeamish compared to his contemporaries—nowhere near strong as Bill and without the attitude to make up for it like Kai. He was average—the kind of animal that was susceptible to influence with no facet of himself to call his ‘true’ identity.

So, when Tao opened his salivating mouth again and accepted the second morsel of meat like a starving man, Riz knew that he had someone to walk the path paved to hell with.

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“Dude, are you *seeing* this shit?” Kai shoved the phone in Legosi and Pina’s faces. “I thought that he was just completely gone off the map, but then he just showed up on my feed!”

Legosi only retreated more into his book, pretending to ignore Kai while trying to suppress a whine from parting his mouth.

Pina—on the other hand—wouldn’t miss the chance for *schadenfreude* for the world. “Give it here!” He said while snatching the phone off Kai’s hands.

He never really cared for his clubmates’ social media beyond simple curiosity. Just like how animals watched insects crawl around in mazes designed for the sole purpose of testing them, Pina watched everyone’s lives heavily filtered through their wants and needs be spewed across his timeline.

What he *didn’t* expect was to see such a radical change in Tao. The man was the definition of boring, and that extended to his posting history; only recognizable thanks to simple familiarity with his face.

In contrast, what was staring back at him was *anything* but unremarkable. What was clearly once a plain white room was now a room clad in darkness with purple neon lights illuminating the room. In the middle—right next to a computer and CPU big enough to kill a man was a feline that *looked* like the Tao Pina knew, but different enough for the dissonance to be striking.

The slender young man was no more. Saying he was rotund would be an understatement, considering that the office chair in the picture was almost wholly filled out by his legs—said legs barely contained by sweatpants with an elastic waistband. In between them was a portly belly that forced them apart. Pina's eyes went wide with shock as he kept zooming into the image just to make sure that what he was seeing was *real*; it couldn't be, but it was at the end of the day.

And that was just his *legs*. His butt—which was as flat as the ground he walked on—had softened up to two round mounds of pure, jiggly fat. They stretched the sweatpants so thin that without him noticing, the slight lean he did to pose for the photo made them ride down and let the camera get a glimpse at his buttcrack.

Pina placed his hand over his mouth—not from shock, but to hide the machiavellian grin that appeared on his face.

But still, it wasn't as embarrassing as how his nerdy graphic tee utterly failed in hiding his chub. Most would have the decency to get an undershirt *and* a loose-fitting shirt on top to disguise the fact, but Tao didn't even seem to think about such luxuries. Instead, his love handles were free to overflow past his pants and spill past his waistband. The lardy, black-furred mounds of fat were visibly drenched in sweat.

Pina could swear that the *picture* alone reeked of a lack of deodorant and a grease-filled diet.

"What happened to him? He looks like the kind of guy not even *I* would spare a passing glance at." Pina stuck his tongue out and jerked his head away from the photo. His disgust seemed concerningly real—nothing like the faux passing after arduous rehearsals that ended with some sweating. "He used to be... a six, not a two..."

"I don't know. He never answered any of our messages. I thought that he had gone off to some spiritual retreat with how long he was gone." Kai explained—a smidge of guilt present in his voice. "But then... he just started posting about his streaming career? He had a channel that he streamed in sometimes, but it looks like he's going all in."

"Really?" Pina asked through clenched teeth.

Against his better judgment, he continued strolling down. It was like staring at a giant, crackling car crash with morbid fascination. For minutes straight, Pina felt his face scrunch up with each picture he saw; each one showing the panther living a life of sloth and hedonism; a room full of empty soda bottles and takeout boxes—the glimmer of grease on the keyboard captured by the camera's flash—crumbs around his lips present in almost every pic. Pina was about to shove the phone back into Kai's hands when his eye managed to catch something... *peculiar* in the last pic he posted.

It was a rather... *gaudy* picture of Tao on his gaming chair. The fur around his chin had become overgrown and the shirt that he was wearing seemed to be unwashed; *par* for the course, really.

What *really* interested Pina was the strange brown spot on the corner of the picture. It was unclear at first, but a squint revealed its true identity; a pair of bear ears.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me...”

No wonder Tao had grown so big...

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Being shirtless was a luxury that Riz seldom enjoyed. With his pills thrown in the trash, he couldn’t afford to expose his body to his friends. As fellow bears, they would know that something was wrong with him immediately. Instances like these—away from his dorm and the school that refused to understand his true self—were rare, so he made the most of them with gusto.

Tao’s bathroom was small, but he could still fit inside and look at himself in the full-body mirror. Maneuvering towards it required him to suck up his stomach and slouch, but it was worth it. To finally see how much he’s grown over the past few days—how many *people* he’s been connected to—made him feel like an enlightened god amongst beastmen.

Rubbing his stomach, he was glad to see that the perfectly round consistency it once had was now less defined—an amorphous blob resembling a pile of baking dough. The fat that brimmed through the flesh of the dead had done a marvelous job of helping with the transformation. He could even picture herbivore men—plump and clad in suits that barely fit them—being the ones that ended up bonding with him in the afterlife.

Gluttony behested gluttony. It was a simple fact of life—a fact that he had been enlightened to.

His arms had similarly lost definition. It wasn’t like he had become weaker—it just was hard to see it. A flex was usually enough to make his muscles visible—veins popping into view from the burst of strain.

“Riiiiiz!” Tao whined from outside the bathroom. “Are you coming? I’m gonna eat all the food if you don’t!”

“I’m coming, I’m coming.”

When Tao spoke, he did so with an aloofness that he never expressed back when he still was a student in Cherryton. It wasn’t without reason; day after day, Riz would personally deliver copious amounts of meat into his apartment and then watch him consume it *all*.

It had the same effect on his brain as pornography; the shameless satisfaction of base needs—no thoughts beyond the simple want to indulge oneself—the *greed* that permeated every second.

Starting out, Tao needed a little encouragement. The poor man was deathly shy, but Riz took care of that almost immediately. He could still perfectly remember how he pushed Tao against his bed and forced meat down his throat. The panther’s squirms felt *exquisite* against his body.

*Stay still and let me take control. You'll be happier once you just forget about everything you know and start living like me...*

Opening the door, Tao was splayed out on a beanbag that was sinking against his weight. Shirtless as well, his black-furred belly was taut and over-stretched. Scraps of meat littered his mouth, man boobs, and stomach.

"Mmhm, couldn't wait..." He moaned as he rubbed circles across his stomach. "Sorry..."

"You couldn't leave more than a fourth?"

"Nooooope." Tao proudly stated. "Guess you'll need to bring more meat. I gotta be energized for my stream, you know?"

"Mhm. Guess so." Riz said, trying to hide his smile. "What do you want me to bring? I got the cash to spare to treat my friend."

"MmghRiiiz! You're too kind." He mewled, tail lazily swaying side to side. "Now, let me think... It's gonna be a long list."