

The Thanksgiving Binge

Gage kept his claws in the warm pockets of his letterman jacket as the breeze picked up. The fat anaconda shuddered. His bulk wasn't enough to shelter him from the cold Thanksgiving Day. He wanted to be inside, where the warmth and food were, but he had to wait on Ford. He was the lion's guest, after all.

"Dude, thank you so much for coming along," Ford said. The plump lion wore less than Gage, relying on his fur for warmth. "Thanksgiving with the family sucks every year."

"Anything for a free meal," Gage replied with a laugh. He only half-joked. His family didn't really do Thanksgiving, and celebrating with fast food at the frat house didn't appeal to him anymore.

"Seriously, you're a lifesaver," Ford insisted. "I don't get along with anyone in my family."

"Why bother going, then?" Gage asked.

"They're worse if I skip shit like this. And I have to be careful about who I bring over because they're all voracious."

Gage laughed. "Do you know anyone who isn't?"

"No, but there's a difference between someone who eats a person every couple of months, and someone like you."

"And what kind of person am I?"

"Someone who'll eat two people for breakfast, two people for lunch, and then find room for a couple more at dinner," Ford said.

"That was a fun birthday."

"It wasn't even yours."

"That didn't make the birthday boy any less delicious." Gage tapped his belly with his claws still snugly in his pockets.

"You could've told me you were going to eat him *before* I bought him a present." Ford shook his head.

Gage shrugged. "Didn't know I was going to eat him until a few seconds before I coiled him up." But he'd been thinking about it that entire day.

"Whatever you say, dude. What's important is that my dumb family won't immediately try to start shit with you."

As long as Gage got a good meal, he didn't care how many cocky preds he had to deal with. "How big is this get-together, anyway?"

"A lot of the extended family either has work or obligations, so it's gonna be a small one this year. Seven people other than us, I think? There's my dad and my brothers, Keith and Owen. Then there's Uncle Al and three of my cousins; Joe, Jake, and Evan." Ford took a moment to count them in his head. "Yeah, seven."

"I'll try to remember their names."

"No need to bother. Though you might want to watch out for my dad and uncle. They've both got the largest appetites of the bunch," Ford warned.

"Maybe they should watch out for mine. But I'll try not to eat your family," Gage joked.

"If they act stupid, that's on them. And maybe it'll make the holidays more manageable."

Giving Gage a free pass to eat whoever he wished was a risk. The anaconda's appetite could feel bottomless at times.

Ford led Gage up the driveway and to the front door of his childhood home. He'd rung the doorbell three times before the door opened. A chubby lion with fur much lighter than Ford's stood on the other side. "Yo," he said, before stepping aside for them.

"Hey Evan," Ford replied in kind. "Why'd you get stuck answering the door?"

"No one else was getting off their ass," Evan answered with a grunt. "Keith's in his fucking gamer hole, my brothers are making a mess of the kitchen, and everyone else is watching football."

"Figures. This is my friend Gage." Ford pointed back at Gage.

"Cool." Evan's attention had shifted to his phone. "I'm probably bailing before dinner to hang out with my girlfriend and her family, so see ya later. Maybe. Oh, and Jake's been craving snakes lately." The distracted lion wandered away.

"He seems nice," Gage snorted.

"He tends to be a grouch, so that's actually pretty polite for a first encounter. He must be high again. I wonder if Jake's really in the mood for snakes or if Evan's just being an ass."

“If he’s dumb enough to want a snake for Thanksgiving, I’ll simply put a lion on the menu. Does he look delicious?” Gage flicked his tongue out.

“You think everyone looks delicious.”

“I’ll take that as a mouthwatering yes. So, you gonna introduce me to the rest of the menu?” The anaconda asked, half-serious. He scratched his belly. It’d been a few months since he’d last had a lion, and Ford knew better than to be in arm’s reach when he grew hungry. He hoped someone would give him an excuse to indulge.

“I should say hi to Dad, at least.” Ford headed down a hallway, and Gage followed. An argument about cooking times echoed from the cracked-open door to the kitchen. The dining room waited beyond it, along with the living room.

A big screen TV served as the room’s focal point, blaring a college football game. A fat lion lay on the couch, shoveling chips into his mouth as he watched the game. Gage guessed he was only a few years older than Ford, so likely a brother, though he’d already forgotten his name.

Two recliners sat on either side of the room, each filled by a doughy lion with a ball gut. One had Ford’s golden fur, along with a few streaks of gray in his mane. He wore a red polo from Columbia State University, the college Ford and Gage went to. The other lion matched Evan’s fur, also with touches of gray. Gage couldn’t see the logo on his shirt, but the purple color made him assume it was from the University of Columbia, CSU’s main rival. The two older lions gestured and shouted at the TV.

“What kind of call is that?!”

“The right one!”

“Like hell it is! The ref’s have been calling like shit this game!”

“Or the team’s playing sloppy!”

Gage sized the trio of lions up. The older men had at least a couple dozen pounds on him, while he was even with the younger one. He bet he could take any of them one-on-one, though the older lions might have the experience to offer a challenge. He’d keep an eye on them.

“Hey, Dad, I’m here. I brought my friend Gage with me.” Ford had to shout to be heard above the TV and the shit talk.

None of the lions bothered looking away from the TV. “Glad to have ya!” Ford’s dad replied, waving a paw either in greeting or to shoo them

away. The other two lions didn't even offer that much, with Ford's older brother focused on snacks and his uncle focused on riling up his dad.

Ford rolled his eyes. "Now that we've got that out of the way, why don't we check out the basement? I can show you my old room, and the den's got a TV we can use. Unless you want to see how angry my family can get about football?"

"I see that enough at the frat. It's only fun when people start eating each other." Plenty of Gage's frat brothers had met their ends arguing over sports. They'd gone down cursing their teams as much as the person swallowing them whole.

"They save the eating for when they're actually at a game. Dad and Owen pigged out so much at the last Homecoming game that stadium staff had to help get them out of their seats. And only *after* they'd spent another hour churning the fans they'd gorged on." Ford groaned.

"I've never heard you complain about anyone eating well."

"I'm usually not stuck in the rain waiting for gluttons to regain their mobility. Plus the cheap seats at the stadium are uncomfortable. And I was starving because Owen ate the prey I'd been eying all game." Ford glared at his brother on the couch, who continued not noticing anything other than the TV.

They left the living room behind and headed down into the basement. It was bigger than Gage had expected. The main space was split between a mini-kitchen and the den itself. Closed doors led to various bedrooms.

The basement would've been more impressive if it weren't trashed. Empty soda cans and beer bottles littered the kitchen counter. Fast food bags overflowed the garbage can. Cobwebs cluttered the corners. Clothing was strewn about the room, draped over furniture and bunched up in piles. Swim trunks and tank tops that might have been lying there for weeks, if not months, were mixed with hoodies and sweatpants.

A row of skulls on a shelf caught Gage's attention. All were battered and incomplete. Predation trophies.

"It's somehow gotten worse," Ford grumbled. "It used to be a cool place to hang out, before my brother Keith claimed it for himself. He didn't bother with college. He just crashes here and plays games all day."

The lion in question sat on a worn couch, eyes glued to the TV as he

hammered on a game controller. He wore a hoodie that clung to his soft middle and basketball shorts that squeezed his thighs. A faded beanie failed to contain his messy mane. “Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!” he cursed at the top of his lungs. He was playing a shooter—poorly, in Gage’s estimation. The round ended, and Keith spiked his controller on the floor while spewing curses.

In the middle of his rage, Keith spotted Ford and Gage. He narrowed his eyes and scowled at them. “Hey bro.”

“Keith, this is Gage. Gage, this is Keith.” Ford didn’t bother pretending to be pleasant with his younger brother.

“You his boyfriend?” Keith asked.

“No, just a friend,” Ford answered.

“You couldn’t bring over someone thinner? As if the house isn’t already filled with fatasses who’ll be hogging all the food at dinner.” Keith bent down to pick up his abused controller. His hoodie rode up, giving Gage a clear view of his doughy love handles. Plumper than Ford, Gage guessed. The hoodie made him look thicker.

Ford looked back at the fast food bags in the garbage can and the soda cans. “Hate to break it to ya, bro, but you’re one of the fatasses.”

“You’re fatter than me!” Keith insisted.

“I was last year, before I lost a bunch of weight and you ballooned. Keep stuffing yourself with junk food, and you’ll catch up with Dad in no time.”

Keith tugged down on his hoodie. “Yeah, well at least I won’t be belly fat like you! I’m surprised you’ve even made it to your senior year.”

“This coming from the guy who was too chickenshit to even visit campus,” Ford shot back. “Probably for the best. No way you would’ve survived your first week of college.”

“I can hunt!” Keith snarled, pointing at the row of skulls on the shelf.

“Dad says you only snag passed-out drunks at the bar.”

“As if you aren’t doing the same at frat parties!”

“My prey actually squirm.”

“And you will, too, once some rando scarfs you down! I bet the snake’s the one who’ll do it. He’s just waiting for you to get fat off Thanksgiving dinner.”

Ford winced at that, and Gage smiled as his friend avoided eye contact with him. The younger lion's attempt at an insult wasn't too far off. Gage had a reputation for eating his friends—and not just when he was high or drunk. Familiar meals were more meaningful to him than strangers. His friends knew that, begrudgingly accepted it, and often imitated him. Ford had eaten one of their mutual friends a month ago during a Halloween bet. Gage had made casual attempts to eat Ford twice that year alone.

But Gage wasn't in the mood to add Ford to his waistline that day. A more obnoxious meal had revealed himself.

Keith had made a terrible first impression with Gage. The lion was loud and whiny. He also looked juicy. Being juicy around Gage was dangerous. He didn't think Ford would mind him eating his brother. They clearly didn't get along. He might get in trouble if anyone else in the family were particularly attached to Keith, but he could worry about that later. When the urge to consume someone struck Gage, he rarely backed down.

Gage stepped into Keith's blind spot undetected. For all of Keith's claims of being a successful hunter, he had the awareness of a half-asleep drunk. There were so many ways Gage could proceed. He could simply grab and swallow him, relying on surprise and his size advantage. He could knock him upside the head and take his time removing the bland clothing that'd only hide his taste. If he had the time, he could force him to chug beer until he had the biggest belly in the house, then gulp him down after.

In the end, Gage settled on speed. He swung his thick tail, coiling it around the distracted lion with ease. Keith yelped in fear. His next shout came out as a gasp, the air squeezed out of his lungs. He twitched in Gage's grasp, eyes bulging, confidence evaporated. The shock on his face was wonderful.

Though the possibility of getting eaten was considered a natural part of everyday life, few faced the maw of a hungry predator with acceptance. Most believed they were the exception to the rule, a pred above all others on the food chain. Even Gage didn't entertain such a delusion, and the sound of his stomach growling could send people fleeing. Anyone could have bad luck. Tonight, it would be Keith.

Gage lunged, wrapping his jaws around Keith's head. He didn't care for the beanie and mane, so he swallowed swiftly, engulfing the rest of the

lion's head and then shoulders. His coils steadily shifted his helpless prey into his maw and down his throat. The bulge Keith made in his neck forced open the topmost snap button of his varsity jacket. Gage had given up on regular buttons the minute he'd gained a passion for eating others.

The buttons snapped open one by one at first. Then his belly swelled out, blowing open the rest as it bounced up and down.

Gage loosened his coils, revealing Keith's kicking legs. A tilt of his head and a deep gulp pulled Keith in up to his thighs. The next gulp brought him in up to his knees. Gage let gravity finish his meal by opening his mouth as wide as he could. He closed his jaws shut, swallowed, and the last of Keith's bulge traveled down his throat and into his gut.

The anaconda's bloated belly shook from Keith's struggles. He kicked and punched in every direction as he settled into a sitting position. Gage considered his fight to be mediocre at best. He didn't even force Gage to widen his stance to keep his balance. "Hmm. He didn't taste half-bad."

"Let me out, you fat fuck! Let me out! Let me out!" Keith's shouts vibrated Gage's stomach and made him shudder.

Ford had watched Gage eat his brother in stunned silence. He stared at the writhing bulge his brother had become, mouth opening and closing but no words coming out. Then he let out a short laugh. "Well, shit."

"It's okay if I eat him, right?" Gage patted his gut.

"It's a bit too late to ask that now."

"It's not okay! It's not fucking okay!" Keith had begun throwing himself against the walls of Gage's stomach. His efforts did little more than sway the anaconda's belly.

Ford jabbed a bulge with his finger. "All that talk about being a hunter, and you get eaten in your own house. How have you survived this long?"

"Make him throw me up, bro!"

Gage searched Ford's face for any hint of sympathy or regret. He found none.

"Not gonna happen. Gage doesn't give up prey."

"Never have, never will." Gage proudly slapped his gut. "And I hear throwing people up feels bad."

"You can't let him eat me!"

"You didn't seem to give a shit when you were so damn sure he'd eat

me earlier. Why should I give a shit about you becoming snake chow?" Ford crossed his arms and smiled.

"It was a joke! Dad'll kill you when he finds out!"

Gage looked at Ford. "Even if I belch out all his air to quiet him, it's gonna be hard to explain the belly bulge." Keith could've been short and stick thin, and he still would've left a conspicuous bulge.

Ford tapped his foot, his gaze never leaving Gage's gut. "We don't have to explain it. Dad and the others didn't look away from the game when we greeted them. They don't know what species you are, let alone how stuffed you may or may not have been when you came over. Just pretend you scarfed someone down before you arrived."

"What about your cousin? The one who let us in. I doubt he's forgotten I walked in without a lion-shaped gut." Gage silently chastised himself for indulging in a risky meal. As funny as it would be to eat Ford's brother and immediately bail, he'd promised to make his friend's Thanksgiving a little less dreary. And despite his willingness to eat his friends, he still put great value in supporting them.

"He said he's leaving early to be with his girlfriend. He'll be gone before you waddle back upstairs, and no one will be the wiser."

"And no one will miss your brother?"

Ford smiled. "I've heard Dad and Owen complain about how much Keith hides down here in the basement. They'll make a fuss about it but won't bother checking in on him. Dad might not even notice he's missing for a couple days. And even then, I don't think he'll really care. I think Dad calls him freeloader more than son."

"No he doesn't!"

Ford snorted. "Gage, I've gotta use the bathroom." He leaned over and tapped his friend's belly. "Not sure you'll still be around by the time I return, bro, so it was nice knowing ya." He walked away, ignoring the furious, toothless threats being shouted by his doomed brother.

"You won't get away with this! Let me out!" Keith roared in vain.

Gage belched, and his stomach tightened around his prey. "Dude, the more you whine, the happier I am I ate you. You sound like some of the jocks I've eaten. Bitching and moaning about how they're too good to eat or how they'll kick my ass when they get out. You gonna beg like they do, too?"

He chuckled as his gut shook in fury. He'd let Keith linger until his brother got back, then he'd get him settled in for good.

Gage caught movement out of the corner of his eye, but not in the direction Ford had headed. Evan raced down the staircase, staring at his phone. He walked over to a stool in front of the kitchen counter and snatched a jacket off it, before finally looking up. His eyes honed in on Gage's massive, squirming middle.

"Did you finally realize how annoying Ford is?" Evan asked with a smug grin.

"Uh..." Gage wondered if he should lie and let Evan believe his assumption was true. He didn't have a clue how Evan felt about Keith, after all.

"Help! The fucking snake ate me! Help me!" Keith bellowed, throwing a wrench into Gage's plans.

Evan raised a brow. "Keith?" He snorted. "Even better." He strolled up to Gage and leaned in towards his gut, smiling. "What'd the prick do this time?"

Gage relaxed slightly. He'd never been happier to be around such a dysfunctional family. "He was being a loudmouth, and I was hungry. Too bad my belly fat isn't thick enough to silence him." He smacked his gut, enjoying the faint ripples.

"Your stomach acid's bound to shut him up eventually." Evan turned his attention back on his trapped cousin. He reveled in the situation more than Ford had. "First course of Thanksgiving dinner. What a dumb fucking way to go out. Can't wait to tell Dad I won our bet. He swore up and down Ford would bite it before you did, what with him being a frat boy and all. But I always knew you were the dumber one."

"Why isn't anyone helping me?! He's going to digest me!" Keith beat rhythmically against his prison, provoking another belch.

"Because you're a brat. Everyone upstairs will probably toast to you getting churned. Dad's gonna roast Uncle Rob about it, I just know he will. Those two are always arguing over who has the kids with the best survival instincts. Maybe I'll stick around to see Rob's reaction." Evan giggled.

Gage and Ford's plan to keep Keith's consumption a secret was falling apart. Keith might not be missed in the long run, but his dad might not take

kindly to the immediate shame. Could Gage take on the hefty lion if things got heated? He gave himself decent odds, even while stuffed, but there were too many variables he didn't know. Uncle Al might prefer to keep his brother around to mock him. Ford's older brother might not like a stranger eating both his brother and his dad in one sitting. He'd end up beached for sure, and that would put him at the mercy of a household of voracious lions.

As Gage ran through the different possibilities in his head, his attention drifted to Evan's body. He had the start of a paunch, thinner than either Ford or Keith, but already showing early hints of a plush middle and bubble butt. Not surprising that the family would gain weight in mostly the same areas. Taste might run in the family as well.

Evan was smaller than Gage. He was high, and too busy teasing his cousin to consider the giant anaconda might not be full. And Gage wasn't full. One plump lion couldn't sate his appetite, especially not on Thanksgiving. Any thought of waiting for Ford to return and think of something else faded as the need to feed filled Gage.

"I'd hate to seem like I'm favoring one side of the family over the other," Gage said. His voice startled Evan, who had apparently forgotten the writhing gut before him belonged to someone. "I'll just have to even things out."

Evan gasped in surprise when Gage grabbed his arms tight. But he could only stare in disbelief when he saw the anaconda's jaws stretch open. He didn't think to shout until his face pushed against the back of Gage's throat, and his words only echoed down to his cousin trapped below.

Eating Keith had loosened up Gage's body, so Evan practically glided down his gullet. The lion struggled harder than Keith had, but no amount of twisting or squirming could stop his descent. The first hurdle came when Evan slammed into Keith. The pair's reunion in the dark was heated, and Keith made an effort to push Evan back. Gage's swallows proved stronger, though. Inch by inch, he consumed Evan, inevitably sealing away his second lion of the night.

Gage's gut had swollen to the size of a boulder, requiring him to work to remain standing. His thick tail helped him stay balanced, but desperate squirms within him rocked him from side to side. He lumbered to the couch and carefully lowered himself onto it, wary of crushing it with his bulk. The

couch groaned in protest, and something within it cracked, but it held together.

“I’d forgotten how delicious lions are,” Gage moaned. His belly sat between his legs, nearly reaching the floor. Keith and Evan didn’t feel like they were having a good time squeezed together in his steaming stomach. Gage, meanwhile, felt pleasantly full.

The anaconda hadn’t intended to become good at eating people. It’d sort of happened over the course of his freshman year of college. The natural heft he’d lived with all his life had given him an advantage over the other aspiring preds in his dorm, and every meal had improved his skill. Gaining a gluttonous reputation had helped almost as much as the weight. Some prey gave up the second he lunged, their heads filled with memories of seeing him consume others.

But being a stranger could help as well. Keith and Evan hadn’t known to be wary of him, and they’d paid the price.

A door opened in the distance. Gage leaned his head over the back of the couch and saw Ford heading his way. “Sorry for the delay. I hope Keith hasn’t been giving you indigestion or anything.”

“My gut’s too tough for that,” Gage replied, belching.

Ford stopped in front of the couch, eyeing Gage’s middle. “You’re bigger,” he said, stating the obvious.

“Oh, yeah.” Gage shrugged off the comment. He hadn’t planned on hiding his second meal from Ford. Would his friend have a problem with him eating two of his family members in one night? He’d insisted he didn’t get along with them, but that didn’t necessarily mean he wanted to see them all digested.

“Who’d you eat?”

“Evan?” Gage was pretty sure that was the name of the cousin in his belly. “The one who let us in.”

“Yeah, that’d be Evan,” Ford nodded. The lion in question shouted for help.

“He came downstairs and started talking about telling everyone else I ate your brother so your uncle could gloat, and I thought it’d be best to keep him quiet.” Gage wouldn’t tell Ford about his craving for lions. Friends always got skittish when they knew he was thinking about them.

Ford nodded again, then sat on the couch next to Gage. "Smart move. Dad and Uncle Al can get competitive about who raised the best kids. Sometimes they'll take turns mocking how my siblings or cousins have gone out. Like how my oldest brother was caught on camera being eaten at a football game. Dinner would've been weird."

"And I'd hate to ruin Thanksgiving," Gage smirked and let out another moan.

"Because causing an argument is so much worse than eating two of the guests." Ford relaxed. "It's not the first time I've seen you stuffed, but it's kind of wild knowing Keith and Evan are both in there." He reached over and briefly rubbed Gage's gut.

"Not for long. I give them another minute or two at most before they pass out, and then they'll discover how aggressively my stomach breaks down snacks." Gage's belly shook as his prey grew more desperate.

Ford frowned. "It's gonna take a while for them to digest, though. One prey bulge is easy to explain away. Two might be suspicious. We should probably hide down here until dinner's ready so you can get rid of the evidence." He poked a lump in the anaconda's massive middle and thought he heard Evan curse in response.

"Fine with me. No offense, but from what I've seen, your family's kind of a pain to be around. They taste good, though." Gage thumped his gut and burped, purging more of the precious air from his stomach.

"At least they're good for something," Ford snorted. "I should've started inviting you to holidays sooner."

"You'd run out of family if you did," Gage teased. He ran a claw over the writhing curve of his gut.

"True. Not like that's a bad thing."

"Fuck you!" The shout could've been from either doomed lion, it was too muffled for Ford to tell.

"It's so cute when food gets grouchy." Gage squeezed his belly, chuckling at the flurry of barely coherent curses that echoed from within. "Let's watch something. I'm pretty sure a *Pirates of the Insatiable Sea* marathon is going on."

"Dude, those movies are lame," Ford insisted. He looked around and spotted the remote on the ground, half under Gage's fat tail. He freed it.

“I’ve still got plenty of room for you in my gut,” Gage warned.

“Fine,” Ford relented, knowing better than to test his friend’s patience. Sure enough, the first movie in the series was playing on TV, and a quick check of the guide promised plenty more after. “Who plays a pirate movie marathon on Thanksgiving?”

“A station with good taste. Half as good as lions who don’t know when to quit whining,” Gage added, talking to both the pair in his belly and the one in arm’s reach.

Keith and Evan weren’t saying much anymore. The kicking and punching had dwindled to weak gropes as they lost consciousness. Gage didn’t notice the exact moment his food stopped squirming. He was too engrossed with the movie he’d seen a dozen times before, and would gladly watch a dozen times more.

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Credits rolled on screen, accompanied by dramatic orchestral music.

“I still don’t understand how a skeleton eats someone,” Ford said.

“Magic, duh,” Gage answered.

“But there’s a scene where one of the skeletons tosses back a mug of ale and it all pours onto the floor. Then like ten minutes later, half of them are strutting around with weird ghost stomachs full of prey. It’s inconsistent.”

“Again, magic. Just accept it, dude.” Gage elbowed Ford.

Ford shook his head and looked at Gage’s middle. He whistled. “Damn, you’re making short work of those two.”

Gage stretched. His belly had shrunk considerably during the movie, becoming a smooth, sloshy globe. He still looked like he’d swallowed a rather large beach ball, and his shirt didn’t come close to covering his middle up, but at least there was a degree of ambiguity surrounding what he’d eaten. The stew in his stomach certainly wasn’t lion shaped, and would only be gurgling, not shouting for help. He’d be able to pass it off as the remnants of one very fat prey, not two missing family members.

“Well, it’s got plenty of practice breaking people down. I doubt there’ll be anything left of them by the end of the night.”

“Fuck, dude. I’m always stuck lugging my prey around for hours. I wish I could go through them that fast.” Ford nudged Gage’s gut, gently wobbling it. His brother and cousin were well on their way to becoming snake fat. He could barely believe he’d never have to put up with them again.

“Eat more people and you’ll churn prey like a pro.” He slapped his belly hard so that Ford could hear the heavy sloshes from within.

“With how fat I’d get, I’m not sure I’d last long enough to enjoy the results,” Ford snorted.

“Probably.” Gage didn’t bother lying to his friend. “I can think of like, three decent preds in the frat who love to eat fat cats. And you know I hate seeing friends end up in any belly other than mine, so I’d have to be a bit more proactive in hunting you at parties. That weight would make you a lot easier to catch.”

Ford inched away from Gage on the couch. “Don’t forget, we’ve got fatter friends for you to eat first.”

“For now.” Gage smiled and toyed with his gut. “I think your cousin was high.”

“He does smoke a lot of weed. Or he did.” Ford raised a brow. “Are *you* high?”

“A little, maybe. Enough to feel hungrier than usual, that’s all.”

“Figures Evan would end up as a giant edible.”

“Dinner’s ready!” The shout rang through the room from the top of the stairs.

“Perfect timing.” Ford leaped to his feet. “If anyone asks about Keith or Evan, I’ll handle it. I’ll let you explain why you came to Thanksgiving Dinner already stuffed. Just don’t tell the truth.”

“Don’t worry, I didn’t get *that* high off your cousin.” Gage pushed himself off the couch. His gut bounced and swayed, refusing to be ignored. He slid a claw under the curve of the taut ball and rubbed it. Finishing off his gluttonous night with a more mundane Thanksgiving feast would be nice.

Ford and Gage weren’t the first to reach the dinner table. Ford’s dad, his uncle Al, and his older brother Owen were already there. His dad sat at the head of the table, with Al to his left and Owen to his right. Large dishes and platters of food filled the center of the table, enough to feed twice as many people as were in the house, even before Gage had secretly reduced

their number by two.

Ford's dad and Uncle Al had been arguing over a football play when the pair entered. Eyes fell upon Gage's gut, and the conversation died down.

"Ford, did you tell your friend we'd be having dinner tonight?" Ford's dad asked with a toothy grin. Uncle Al chuckled at that.

"Had a disagreement with a frat brother over CSU's odds in the bowl game tonight, and I got carried away." Gage told the lie without a hint of regret, assuming Ford's dad would appreciate the idea of him casually eating someone over football. "I promise I've got room for whatever you put in front of me."

"That's the spirit!" Ford's dad roared in approval. He turned to his brother. "See, Al, that's why the Trojans are gonna crush the Spartans tonight! Trojans hold their ground, on the field and off."

"Yeah, Rob, they hold their ground while Spartans zip right past them to the end zone." Uncle Al gestured with a paw, mimicking a player weaving down the field.

Ford's dad waved his brother off and turned back to Ford. "Where's Keith?"

"Playing some game in his room, I think. He didn't leave the whole time we were down there, and ignored me when I passed along that dinner was ready." Ford spoke confidently, having practiced his excuse for his brother's absence while watching the movie.

"He was making a fuss about there not being enough food earlier. Little shit needs to make up his mind," Ford's dad growled.

"He probably filled up on fast food again," Owen suggested while tearing away at a bread roll.

"I *did* smell greasy burgers down there." Ford eagerly used his brother's comment to bolster his lie.

"I've got half a mind to drag him upstairs and *make* him enjoy a meal with the family for once," Ford's dad threatened. He made no move to stand, though. "The lazy idiot's gonna get eaten if he doesn't get his act together. Either his boss or a customer will get him, I swear."

Uncle Al grinned as if he could already gloat about another nephew's embarrassing demise. He'd be able to sooner than he realized. "Leave him down there. Just means more food for the rest of us. You'll be thanking his

lazy ass once you've had the feast my boys made!"

With their lies accepted, Ford took a seat beside his older brother, and Gage followed beside him. To the large anaconda's relief, the chairs were wide and sturdy, obviously built with preds in mind.

The door to the kitchen swung open, and two lions entered, balancing additional dishes. Their fur matched Uncle Al and Evan, so Gage had no trouble guessing they were the twin cousins he'd yet to meet. One was lean, while the other was very plump, to the point of almost being doughy. But while their weights differed dramatically, their faces and manes looked mostly the same. They were like before and after pictures of a pred after a fattening meal.

Ford leaned closer to Gage. "The thin one is Joe and the fat one is Jake," he whispered.

"Easy to tell apart." Gage had expected to mix them up all night.

"Wait until Joe's had a chance to eat. He eats like someone three times his size. He might end up rounder than you by the end of dinner."

Gage knew of a frat brother or two with similar appetites. Somehow, emptying a fridge in one sitting felt more indulgent than swallowing a person whole to Gage.

Joe sat next to his dad, and Jake sat across from Gage. Two empty seats remained at the table. It thrilled Gage to know that the intended occupants were stewing in his belly, and that only Ford knew aside from him. Deception was a fun break from his usual, unabashed gluttony.

As soon as the twins sat down, people began filling their plates. There weren't any prayers or thanks, just a scramble for the choicest bits and the begrudging passing of dishes around the table. Gage joined the fray without reservations, piling his plate as high as everyone else's, despite the fact he was still digesting two whole lions. He blamed the faint traces of the munchies that'd been needling him since eating Evan. A plate or two of food would go a long way towards sating him.

Eating didn't quiet anyone down. Ford's dad and Uncle Al argued and ribbed each other whenever possible. They'd sneak in snarky comments between bites or let their scowls and smirks do the talking for them. There were heated moments, but the two brothers appeared to revel in their borderline-hostile relationship.

Their conversations drifted from football to baseball to camping to fishing. Inevitably, they focused on their families. Uncle Al's wife had been eaten at a business meeting a few years back—but only after securing a deal that earned her an incredible posthumous bonus, which Uncle Al spoke of with pride. Ford's parents were unofficially separated, but his dad sounded convinced he could patch things up by next Thanksgiving.

"This is good," Ford's dad said as he finished off some ham, "but I still miss those meat pies Emma used to make." He shook his head, but then aimed a wicked grin at Uncle Al. "Shame she got herself gobbled up by a professor less than a month short of graduating."

Uncle Al scoffed. He nibbled at a turkey leg while he figured out his counter. "It's hard to dodge professors as ravenous as UC's. I nearly ended up in the stomach of one more than once myself." He leaned back in his chair and let out a quick laugh. "Sorry, was just remembering how your Ben went. Five years at the company, big bright future ahead of him, and then he goes and gets himself eaten by some college intern he swore loved him."

Ford's dad exhaled in frustration. "I took one look at her picture and knew she had hungry intentions. One look! And I told Ben that, told him every damn day. Didn't I, Owen?"

"Yep." Owen smiled. Gage suspected the older lions had passed down their combative relationship to their children. Nobody showed grief towards their consumed siblings or relatives. Even Ford got a few laughs at the expense of long-gone family members. Gage felt better about his somewhat apathetic relationship with his own family. At least he missed a few of them now and then.

"Damn boy was paying too much attention to her rack, when he should've been paying attention to her gut. Don't end up like him, Owen. You too, Ford!" Ford's dad shouted across the table.

"I'm gay, Dad."

"Doesn't mean you can't be eaten by any guy who makes your heart flutter or whatever. Your cousin Kyle was gay, and he got eaten by his damn fiance!"

Ford rolled his eyes as his dad went on a tirade about office romances always ending in a gurgling gut.

The rowdiness at the table reminded Gage of dinner at the frat house

on a bad night. Relentless mockery, rampant belching, and endless boasting. But there wasn't a house director or frat president to keep egos in check and make sure no one went too far. He couldn't imagine growing up in a family that was like that all the time, and understood why Ford wanted little to do with them.

Gage kept to himself and let Ford's family argue amongst themselves, only speaking up when asked questions, which were few. He watched and listened, trying to get a feel for the obnoxious pride of lions around him.

Joe pigged out as much as Ford had promised. He practically shoveled food into his mouth, going through servings twice as fast as anyone else. His flat middle steadily rounded out, escaping his shirt. The more he gluttoned, the more he began to resemble his twin brother.

Jake, meanwhile, appeared distracted. He looked across at Gage too often for comfort. Experience had taught Gage how to tell the difference between a flirty ogle and a hungry ogle, and Jake clearly aimed the latter at him. The lion had the confident smirk of a predator convinced they were at the top of the food chain looking down. An impressive delusion, considering Gage outweighed him considerably. The beer Jake had been guzzling all dinner certainly hadn't helped with his decision-making skills.

Whenever someone on campus dared to eye Gage up as a meal, he tended to eat them on the spot. He enjoyed crushing their misplaced confidence and learning if they were the sort to whine or to beg when the worst came to pass. But he didn't want to cause a scene at Thanksgiving dinner, so he overlooked Jake's transgression.

Jake lacked the common sense to realize his luck and back down. "You go to CSU, right?" he asked, already knowing the answer thanks to Gage's red varsity jacket.

"Yep," Gage replied.

"Heh. I went to UC. Bet they'll trounce CSU at the bowl game tonight, like they do every year." Jake rested his elbows on the table and leaned in with a toothy grin.

Gage might have gotten riled up by the provocation if he'd had more than a passing interest in college football. He shrugged, pretending to care more about his food. "Maybe. But I hear CSU's been pretty decent this year."

“Just means they haven’t been losing as badly as usual. Wanna make a bet on it?”

“I didn’t bring any cash.” Gage held back a laugh. He knew what kind of scheme Jake was trying to pull, and it only worked on drunks and freshmen with short tempers.

“I was thinking higher stakes. Winner eats loser.”

“We’re not here to eat each other, Jake,” Ford hissed.

“I wasn’t talking to you, I was talking to him,” Jake snapped back.

“I don’t really do bets. And I’ve already eaten well today.” Gage patted his belly and allowed a slight smile. He wished he could tell Jake one of his brothers had contributed to the sloshy green globe.

“Typical CSU, scared shitless of taking risks. That’s why their football team sucks balls.” Jake threw out petty insults left and right, but they went right through Gage.

“My boy’s got a point,” Uncle Al added.

“Bullshit,” Ford’s dad said, charging into an argument with his brother about a football season from two decades before.

Jake remained intent on provoking Gage. “It’s been a while since I visited CSU’s campus. Maybe I’ll take a little hunting trip to celebrate UC’s win and pack away a few Trojans. At least then they’ll be on a winning waistline. And who knows, we might even run into each other then.” He flashed his fangs at Gage.

Gage had gradually accepted Jake wasn’t going to back down. While the drunk lion ran his mouth off, Gage stealthily maneuvered his tail under the table, positioning the tip beneath Jake’s chair. Everyone at the table had heard Jake’s boasts. There was no doubt as to who had started talking shit. And there’d be no doubt as to who would end it.

“Go ahead,” Gage said, leaning in as well. “I’ll gulp you down any time, anywhere.”

Jake scoffed. “Prove it.”

Gage couldn’t have hoped for a better response. He tipped Jake’s chair with his tail and sent the lion sprawling atop the table. With his meal now in reach, Gage simply grabbed hold of him and dragged him forward into his open maw.

“W-Wait, I didn’t—” Jake was quickly silenced. He flopped about on

the table and kicked his chair away as he squirmed.

“Watch it, bro!” Joe shouted, scooting away from his twin while still chowing down. He could’ve yanked Jake free, but made no move to save him. Uncle Al scowled as his son’s shoulders passed into Gage’s mouth, but didn’t move either. Ford’s dad and older brother seemed amused. Only Ford looked surprised.

Gage had hoped Ford’s family weren’t the sentimental sort, and he was relieved to be proven right. Jake had made the meal all about the rivalry between CSU and UC, reducing his support to his immediate family. And by starting the whole thing, he’d ensured no one would bother saving his ass if things went south.

Luck and a few choice words had given Gage his third live meal of the night. All he had to do was finish scooping him down his gullet.

Gage remained seated as he gorged on Jake, treating the lion as nothing more than another Thanksgiving dish. Jake’s struggles rattled the dishes on the table, forcing people to hold their drinks to avoid spills. Every swallow slowed him down a little more. By the time his plump rump was sliding past Gage’s jaws, the disruption was nearly over.

Gage’s belly ballooned as it accepted the fresh lion, steadily pushing him away from the table. He spread his legs and let his gut swell towards the floor and out of sight. Jake wiggled fiercely to the bitter end. Inevitably, all that remained of the reckless lion was a pair of twitching paws, which Gage happily pushed down his throat with a claw.

The anaconda’s stomach was more inhospitable than ever. Jake was dunked in a thick, tingling soup. He couldn’t punch or kick like the others had, only push pitifully against the stomach walls. His protests were muffled gibberish.

Gage clamped a claw over his mouth to stifle a belch. “That might be the best dish of the night.”

Ford’s dad laughed boisterously. “Eaten right at the damn table like any other course!” He laughed so hard he coughed. “Your boy practically served himself on a silver platter to him, Al!”

Uncle Al’s face twisted from one side to the other in frustration. “He *should* have ambushed him after dinner. And gotten his brother to help him.”

“As if I’d help him stuff himself. So much for being the better pred, Jake!” Joe cackled at his twin’s expense.

“I’m glad one of them has a good head on their shoulders,” Uncle Al grumbled.

Jake rocked back and forth within Gage’s swollen belly, oblivious to the mockery aimed at his impending demise.

Uncle Al dove into a topic unrelated to his doomed son, drawing in Ford’s dad. Joe returned to gorging. Jake couldn’t be ignored, but everyone at the table did their best to pretend he’d never been there at all. They already accepted his end in their own way, even as he struggled out of sight.

Dinner ended as unceremoniously as it had begun. Ford’s dad pushed aside his plate, belched, and stood up. “Game’s about to start,” he said, and headed to his recliner in the living room. Uncle Al and Owen rushed to finish up their plates and followed.

Joe rose a minute later. His belly had ballooned into a furry ball that jutted out from his lean frame. He’d grown wider around than his twin brother, at least temporarily. He consolidated the leftovers onto a couple of platters and waddled around the table.

“Have fun, bro,” Joe said as he retreated into the kitchen.

The volume of the football game rose. Ford looked at Gage’s wobbling gut and let out a nervous laugh. “I was worried for a second there.”

“What? Thought your cousin might do me in?” Gage smiled.

“No,” Ford insisted. “I just didn’t think you’d eat him at the table. I didn’t think you’d eat anyone else, honestly.”

“I didn’t plan on it, but he didn’t really give me a choice.” Gage groaned as Jake pushed in two directions at once. “Your family’s been making some piss poor decisions tonight, but they’ve been filling me up well.”

“Well, no one’s gonna make the same mistake Jake did, not after you manhandled him at the table like that.” Jake placed a paw on Gage’s belly. Gage noticed his friend always sought the bulges first.

“Damn, and here I was hoping I’d get to eat your whole family.” Gage joked, but the thought stirred arousal in him. Had he ever eaten siblings before? Or cousins? Not intentionally, or at least not in the same sitting. How would Ford’s extended family react when they learned three of their

members had been consumed in one day? What about five? Or seven?

The anaconda blushed. It was a fun fantasy, but even he couldn't overpower that many prey without help. When he'd consumed six people in one day, it'd been over the course of hours, and most of his prey had been on their own. He'd managed four prey in one night before, but always at parties surrounded by people who didn't care who got eaten. Eating three members of the same family at their own Thanksgiving gathering was enough of a feat for him. He'd cherish the memories, if not the pounds.

"If only," Ford said, unaware of his friend's daydream. The sound of a vibrating phone came from his pocket, and he pulled it out. He sighed. "Mom's calling, I need to take this. Stay out of trouble until I get back." He stood and patted Gage on the back.

"I'll try," Gage said. Ford was already hurrying back towards the basement as he answered his phone.

Boredom quickly struck Gage. He didn't care about the football game, or getting caught up in the CSU versus UC feud Ford's family reveled in. He was too stuffed to tackle the stairs to the basement, so he didn't follow after Ford. Remaining at the table after everyone had left felt awkward. With few options, he decided to go to the kitchen for a drink.

Sitting up involved a lot of scooting and huffing, but Gage managed it. He plodded to the door he assumed led to the kitchen, and let his gut lead the way for him.

Joe was leaning into the open fridge. His tail flicked behind him, and his round belly gently bobbed up and down as he scarfed down more food. He held an open container of cupcakes in one paw, which he'd nearly wiped out. He washed it down with eggnog chugged straight from the carton.

The lion's ears twitched at the sound of the door opening, and he looked over his shoulder. "Oh, it's just you," he said, and continued raiding the fridge.

"Uh, got anything to drink?" Gage asked. Though utterly unashamed of eating Jake, he felt odd casually talking with his twin brother right after. He'd never been one to rub in the fact he'd eaten someone. A bit of civility went a long way to fending off vengeful ambushes.

"Booze is on the counter." Joe pointed in three different directions before he finally bothered to look. A dozen bottles of liquor crowded the

end of a counter. He pulled himself away from the fridge and strutted over to Gage.

Try as he might, Gage couldn't avoid ogling Joe's wobbling gut. The gluttonous lion had eaten as much as everyone else combined and wasn't full. If anyone had needed to gorge on a prey or two, it'd been him. Gage wondered how he stayed so thin. He'd seen freshmen with half his appetite balloon in a matter of weeks.

"Is the idiot still kicking in there?" Joe asked, finishing off the last cupcake. He tossed the empty container onto a counter.

"Sort of." Was Joe having second thoughts about letting his brother get digested? Or contemplating the meal of a lifetime?

"Churn louder, Jake!" Joe told Gage's belly. Then he turned around and pulled a bag of chips from a nearby cabinet. "It's gonna be so nice not getting mistaken for him anymore. Or having relatives try to give us joint presents or matching clothes. Or having him take credit for meals I cooked. I've always been the better chef, but everyone rushes to treat us like a team. Jake can't spice anything right!"

Gage cared little for Joe's grievances. His eyes followed the light swaying of Joe's middle. Even from behind, he could see the curves of each side bulging out. The lion was more stuffed than the turkey. Gage licked his lips. He'd never eaten a pair of twins before. He suddenly needed Joe in his belly. The rest of the family was distracted by the game. There was plenty of time to pack the engorged lion away. But first, Gage had to make sure his next course couldn't flee.

Gage grabbed a large bottle of whiskey from the counter and removed the cap. He slowly snuck up on Joe. He swung his tail around and pinned Joe against his massive belly. Before the lion could cry out in surprise, Gage shoved the whiskey bottle into Joe's mouth and tipped it up.

Joe flailed in the anaconda's grasp as whiskey poured down his throat. He shuddered as the warmth hit his belly and radiated outward. His eyes watered from the burn, but he couldn't budge the thick tail an inch. He stared in horror as the large bottle steadily drained into him.

After emptying every last drop of whiskey into Joe, Gage kept the bottle up to muffle his shouts for help. "You're gonna be wasted once this all kicks in. But hey, if you're gonna get digested, you might as well be

shitfaced.”

Joe’s squirms slowly died down as his head spun, reduced to ineffective wiggles. Gage didn’t let him go until he slumped over, barely conscious. He lugged the drunk lion over to the kitchen island and hefted him atop it. Joe belched and mumbled nonsense, but made no attempt to flee.

The temptation to stuff Joe further plucked at Gage. He imagined his belly jutting out another foot or two, full of everything left in the pantry and fridge. A nice dream, but a dangerous one. He would be delicious enough as-is.

Gage rolled Joe onto his bloated belly, snickering at how he burped and moaned. The more incoherent a prey became, the easier it was to see them as nothing other than food.

Gage started with Joe’s feet. He wrangled them and the lion’s legs into his mouth, slurping them up like noodles. He snatched Joe’s tail along the way and threaded it past his jaws as he worked towards his ass. The true prize was Joe’s swollen middle. His heart raced as he stretched his jaws over the curve of the belly. Wider and wider, until he reached his navel. At that point, he slid his claws under Joe and lifted him off the island.

Joe sunk down Gage’s gullet with a lurch. His legs were submerged in the thick soup, brushing against the weak struggles of his twin. He was unaware of where he was, or where he was heading, his eyes half-lidded and drifting wildly. His chest vanished, and then his neck. He slipped away, with his chin resting on Gage’s tongue. A single gulp pulled him out of sight, and Gage’s jaws clicked shut.

The weight of Gage’s stuffed meal sent him sliding to the ground, with his back against the kitchen island and his immense belly spread out before him. He ran his claws over the warped surface, elated. He’d eaten half the people in the house. “I’m a—*bworrrp*—horrible guest,” he laughed. “Or maybe they’re just incredible hosts.”

Gage breathed heavily, struggling to keep his eyes open. He yawned. “Maybe...maybe I overdid it.” The huge anaconda passed out.

* * *

Gage woke to hard smacks against his shoulder. "I'm up, I'm up," he mumbled, opening his eyes. His stomach gurgled like a boiling cauldron.

"Dude, seriously?" Ford stood above him, constantly looking over his shoulder towards the door.

Gage didn't try to hide the obvious. Only another prey could've swelled his belly so much. "I *really* wanted to eat a set of twins. And he stuffed himself like crazy."

"Yeah, he does that every holiday," Ford relented. "Guess it finally bit him in the ass."

"I only gave it a nibble," Gage smirked. "Have I told you how delicious your family is?"

"It was sort of implied, since you gorged on four of them. Christ, dude, you're fucking huge." Ford nudged Gage's gut.

"Well, lions are filling."

"Hopefully that means you won't be craving more lions any time soon. It'll be nice not having to watch out for an anaconda when I hunt at the next party."

"Oh, don't worry, I never grow tired of food." Gage flicked his tongue out at Ford. "If anything, this is making me hunger for lions even more."

Ford groaned. "Guess I'll have to start inviting other lions to parties to serve as bait."

With Gage grounded, the pair hunkered down in the kitchen. Ford busied himself tidying up and thinking of ways to explain Joe's disappearance. They still had a couple of hours until the game ended and his family noticed someone was missing. They could bail once Gage regained his mobility, or maybe send a text from Joe's phone implying he'd gone out for food. Uncle Al wouldn't be happy about losing three sons in one night, but he wouldn't seek vengeance if he didn't think they'd all been gobbled up by the same pred.

None of the plans sounded solid to Gage, and Ford didn't sound impressed by them either. The thought of fleeing embarrassed him, but he preferred it to lingering and ending up as Uncle Al's main course. No one was too fat to eat.

The door swung open, startling them both. Owen hurried towards the fridge. "We're ahead, bro. Uncle Al's cursing up a storm and Dad's laying

into him, it's wonderful! He gloated. "Shit, where's the beer?"

"Dad keeps it in the garage fridge," Ford said, not looking anywhere near Gage's direction.

"Still?" Owen rolled his eyes. "I bet it's because Keith's been stealing it. Fucker chugs it by the keg." He slammed the fridge door shut. He was halfway to the kitchen door when he spotted Gage on the floor. Gage's belly had shrunk some, but not enough. "Dude, are you bigger?" There was only a bit of doubt in his voice.

Ford rushed over. "Of course he's bigger, he ate Jake during dinner!" A quick lie, but not a good one.

"Jake wasn't *that* big." Owen's gaze didn't leave Gage. "Where's Joe?"

"I think he went to grab take-out. You know how much he pigs out."

"Everything's closed for Thanksgiving," Owen shot back.

"Maybe he was too hungry to think straight." Ford stumbled over his lies.

"Or maybe he ate him, too." Owen pointed at Gage. "Losing Jake and Joe *and* the game is gonna make Uncle Al go ballistic! I can't wait to see the look on his face when I tell him."

Ford's shove surprised Gage nearly as much as it did Owen. Owen flailed his arms as he fell onto the anaconda's enormous middle. The force of the impact made Gage belch out a skull, which ricocheted off Owen's head and dazed him.

Gage looked up at Ford and then at the fat lion sprawled over his belly, and knew it was time to eat again. Just as he'd said, his desire to consume lions hadn't waned. He grabbed Owen's arms and shoved them into his mouth. Ravenous swallows pulled Owen in closer, right as he began to realize what was happening.

"What the hell?! Let me go!" Owen tugged uselessly, already face to face with Gage. His eyes widened in terror, and he thrashed as he made the same plunge his brother and cousins had made throughout the evening.

Ford swooped in to help push his older brother down Gage's throat. He kept the frantic lion's legs from kicking Gage's taut middle and guided him into the maw.

Gage's gut slowly ballooned further as yet another lion was crammed into it. His stomach—still busy churning four prey—resisted the fresh

course. Every gulp took considerable effort. If not for Ford's assistance, consuming Owen would've taken three times as long and left Gage exhausted. It still turned into a tiring ordeal. Yet Gage managed a half-smile when he swallowed the last of Ford's fat brother.

"Weren't you—*oof*—grumbling about me overeating earlier?" Gage laughed.

"Yeah, but Owen was going to bust us, so he had to go." Ford crossed his arms and ogled the shifting mass of his friend's gut. "It couldn't be helped."

"A-huh. Sure there isn't any other reason you fed me your annoying brother?" Gage raised a brow.

Ford exhaled. "I mean, it's kind of nice having him gone along with Keith. No more gloating about how much better his grades were or how he would always make more than me. No more talking shit about me behind my back with Dad."

"Dude, solving your family issues is going to make me fat." Nothing in Gage's closet would fit him tomorrow. He'd be lucky if anything still fit by the time he waddled home. His pants and sleeves already felt tighter from his initial gains, and he still had three whole lions to process. He saw a steady workout routine in his future to get his weight back under control. Not that he minded the heft.

"The fatter you are, the harder it is for you to catch me. Stuffing you with my family is the only sensible thing to do, honestly," Ford said.

"Then why don't we go all the way and gobble up your dad and uncle? It'd be a shame to separate the family." Gage rubbed his belly. Owen was already weakening.

"You think you can fit them?"

Gage grinned. He hadn't been sure his friend would go along with the plan, but now he knew there was hope. Ford's eagerness to get rid of the worst members of his family matched Gage's eagerness to consume them all. "I'll need to continue breaking down these three until I'm mobile again. I think I'll be ready by the time the game's over. Then I'll see what I can do."

"I'll owe you one," Ford said.

"You're feeding me a seven-course meal on Thanksgiving. I'm the one who owes *you* one, dude!" His mouth already watered at the thought of

swallowing the pair of older, fatter lions. He'd gradually evened the odds since arriving and now considered the two as prey, where he'd once viewed them as equals, even threats. He patted his gut. It was going to be a Thanksgiving to remember.

* * *

Gage lumbered out of the kitchen feeling like he'd swallowed a boulder. His sloshing gut hung low, swaying heavily with every step. The surface was completely smooth, with no trace of the five lions he was still in the process of digesting. Well, no trace aside from his immense girth.

Tears had formed up and down the seams of his pants. His shirt wrapped tightly around his chest, torn in places from the strain. His tail dragged behind him, doughier than ever.

The last thing Gage needed was to eat another person, let alone two more. But he craved nothing more than finishing off the rest of Ford's family that'd gathered for Thanksgiving. He'd stopped eating to sate genuine hunger four prey ago, and even then, he hadn't been hungry enough to eat someone. Now he ate for the spectacle of it. He ate for the responses he'd get when he retold the story of his voracious Thanksgiving feast. The shock, the jealousy, the fear.

He'd never been humble about his skills at eating others.

Ford's dad and Uncle Al sat in their respective chairs. Empty beer cans littered the end tables beside them. A bowl of chips lay on the sofa where Owen had been sitting. If either lion had noticed Owen's extended absence, they hadn't bothered to look into it. Missing a second of the game was unacceptable.

Gage properly sized the two up as prey for the first time that night. Both were portly, with thick bellies that jiggled as they argued. They were old enough to be graying, but had decades of predation experience apiece. They'd been eating people since before he was born. They might still be active preds. If either learned he'd been feasting on their sons, they could become hellbent on turning him into belly fat. Fury could be a strong motivator—or distraction.

Gage would have to think smart if he wanted to finish his fantasy feast

that night.

The seconds were ticking down on the football game. UC led CSU, and the odds of a reversal were slim. Ford's dad threw his paws up when CSU screwed up a game-winning play.

Uncle Al pumped his fist. "What did I say?! CSU's offense couldn't get through our defense if their life depended on it! And it might, if their coach is pissed enough. Maybe eating a Freshman will motivate the rest to stop embarrassing themselves."

"It was a *close* game!" Ford's dad growled. "If we'd gotten that first down in the third quarter, we'd have won it."

"'What if' doesn't win games. Hey Owen, how's it feel to be let down again? I told ya you should've gone to UC." Uncle Al turned to face the couch, but saw only the abandoned chip bowl. "Rob, your boy was so ashamed he ran off. And here's a couple more Trojans to mourn their loss. Good thing you didn't take that bet with Jake, kid."

Gage snorted at being called a kid. Even his parents didn't call him that anymore. He sensed an opportunity. Uncle Al's drunken gloating had left Ford's dad looking sour. Any brotherly love between them would be at an all-time low.

"No reason to take chances when I can just eat someone on the spot. And if I hadn't gobbled him up, I probably wouldn't have snatched Joe up shortly after. It's been a while since I had a nice, stuffed meal." Gage smacked his belly with both claws, making it wobble.

Uncle Al's grin flattened out. "Joe! Joe, get your ass in here!" he shouted towards the kitchen. He got no reply. The four people in the living room were the only ones left in the whole house.

Gage continued. "Then again, I doubt I would've eaten either of them if I hadn't gotten a craving for lions after eating their other brother. Evan, right? Less filling, but still delicious. Good thing you didn't consider making sure he'd actually left to be with his girlfriend. Not that there was anything left of him to save by the time we had dinner."

Uncle Al jumped out of his chair and snarled at Gage. "There's no way you ate three of my boys! Damn it, Joe, where the hell are you!"

"Right here, old man," Gage squeezed his gut. "Personally, I think he and his brothers are gonna make great honorary Trojans." The comment got

a snicker out of Ford's dad, who'd been watching in stunned silence.

"Shut it, Rob!" Uncle Al yelled at his brother. "Jake humiliating himself at the table was one thing, but I'm not about to let a stranger shame my family on Thanksgiving! You're gonna regret fattening yourself up for me, kid."

"I felt the same way towards Joe before I crammed him down my throat."

Uncle Al stormed over to Gage, rage in his eyes. Fury clouded his judgment. He didn't notice Gage's tail slithering forwards, and yelped when it tripped him with a heavy flick. Full of food and beer, the older lion failed to regain his balance as he toppled forwards into Gage's grasp. He pushed back, but not far enough to avoid the lunging jaws.

Gage took another gulp, then nearly gagged as Uncle Al pulled half his head back out. He tightened his grip on the lion and swallowed again.

Uncle Al fought harder than any of his sons or nephews had, landing solid kicks against Gage and reversing some of Gage's efforts now and then. But despite everything, he was losing the fight. For every inch of freedom he gained, Gage took six. Struggling gradually weakened him. Old injuries ached. Gage had spent the entire night eating and had sharpened his predation skills on five others. He wrangled Uncle Al into his maw like a pro, enduring his struggles.

The two of them shuffled around, Gage matching every one of Uncle Al's attempts to turn the tide and escape. As Gage worked his jaws around Uncle Al's gut, he grabbed the lion by the pants and tried to lift him. Uncle Al writhed the second his feet left the floor, forcing Gage to put him back down. Gage tried again, getting a little further before meeting with failure. His third try succeeded, putting Uncle Al at the mercy of gravity.

The frantic lion descended into oblivion in jolting gulps. He squirmed to the point of exhaustion, continuing to fight even when he no longer had a chance of escaping. Gage had expected nothing less.

Gage's gut hung nearly to the floor once he sealed away Uncle Al. It swayed from his dwindling squirms. His thick tail kept him from toppling over right away, but his legs buckled from the weight he carried. He carefully lowered himself to the ground, propping himself up against his belly. "Your sons didn't fight half as hard as you did. Maybe if they had, you

wouldn't be joining them."

Ford's dad began to laugh. A low cackle turned into a bellowing howl. "I never thought I'd see the day! Al's always acted like such a damn hotshot, and he gets done in by a kid not even half his age!" He didn't stop laughing. "Ford, how often has your uncle boasted about being at the top of the food chain?"

"Too often to count," Ford replied with a grin.

"Exactly!" Ford's dad smacked his leg and got up, beer in paw. He took a swig as he strolled over to Gage, and gave the anaconda's belly a teasing slap. "Having fun in there, Al?"

"Fuck off!" Uncle Al's voice cracked, barely breaching his prison.

"You, Evan, Jake, and Joe all scarfed down on the same night by the same damn snake. It's like Christmas came early! And you bet your ass I'll make sure the rest of the family knows all about it, too. Nothing's gonna top this humiliation; they'll be talking about it for generations. The Great Thanksgiving Churn." Ford's dad smiled wide as he tormented his brother.

Gage watched Ford slowly make his way behind his dad. He readied himself for the meal to come.

Ford's dad remained oblivious, too obsessed with bragging about something he hadn't been involved with. "We should have you over more often," he told Gage. "You can prune a few annoying branches of the family tree, and maybe teach Keith and Owen a thing or two about hunting. God knows Keith needs it. Or I can tell him you'll eat him if he doesn't get his damn act together."

"I'm way ahead of you on that," Gage said, flicking out his tongue. "And all I could teach Owen was how to gurgle."

Realization slowly dawned on Ford's dad. He didn't get a chance to even glare at Gage, though. The shove from behind sent him falling into Gage's open maw. He was less prepared to fight than his brother had been, and was being pulled down the anaconda's gullet before he started to squirm.

Gage swallowed Ford's dad with the same eagerness he had everyone else that night. One more. One more prey, and he'd have consumed the whole household. And on Thanksgiving, no less. Desire gave him the energy to finish off Ford's dad, even as his jaws grew sore from excessive use.

It didn't take long to reunite the two brothers within his stomach. They snapped at each other and threatened Gage in every way imaginable. They promised to do a thousand horrible things to him and Ford for their betrayal. As if they could make good on any once they were digested, joining their sons as thick layers of anaconda pudge.

"Holy shit," Gage moaned. "I think I may have overdone it."

"I never thought I'd hear those words from you," Ford laughed. "I never thought I'd be free of the dumbest members of my family, either. This is the best Thanksgiving I've had in years." He fell back onto Gage's mountainous gut, using it like a pillow.

"See, sometimes my appetite can bring joy."

"Usually it just makes people scatter."

"Never—*urrrrp*—fast enough."

"I'll never have to go through another shitty Thanksgiving ever again. No more getting insulted over a sports rivalry I don't give a shit about. No more nagging about getting the right career. No more bets on whether I'll be the next to get eaten." Ford sighed and crossed his paws behind his head. "I can't believe you actually ate everyone in the house."

Gage stared at his friend. Temptation flared within him. His tongue flicked out, tasting the air. Tasting lion. "Not everyone. At least not yet."

It was so easy for Gage to reach over and grab Ford. Ford looked back in horror, but didn't fight back right away. He might have escaped if he had. Instead, jaws wrapped around his head, muffling his protests of Gage's betrayal.

Gage had considered eating Ford countless times, but the lion had been one of his most persistently cautious friends. Ford had dodged his tail, casual grabs, and once even shoved a mutual acquaintance into his path as a delicious sacrifice. Watching Gage happily consume so much of the family in one night had given Ford the mistaken assumption that they'd formed a closer bond. They would, in a way, once Ford was digested.

Ford kicked and pounded on Gage's belly as more and more of him was swallowed. Gage didn't regret turning on his friend. While Ford would've been a useful witness to spread the story of his voracious feat, he'd make an even better finale to the entire night of overindulgence. The meal didn't feel complete without Ford. Two fathers, along with three of

their adult sons each. Eight prey spread across one evening. A whole house emptied of people on a whim.

Gage shuddered and finished off his friend. His stomach wobbled back and forth as his three most recent prey tried in vain to find comfort or salvation. "You were right, Ford. This really is the best Thanksgiving ever." His friend was saying something, but he couldn't make it out over the furious shouts of the older pair, who stubbornly held on. The gurgling grew louder. "I can't wait to see the look on everyone's faces when they get a load of how much I've ballooned overnight. Or when I tell them I did it by eating a pride of lions.

Gage chuckled as his gurgling stomach overwhelmed his last three prey of the night. He had a long night of digestion and fattening to do. Not quite different from any other Thanksgiving.