

"-yet, despite the crushing, indescribable weight of the mountain he shouldered on his back, his bones and synapses snapping like twigs beneath the mighty foot of God himself, Nicholas continued to step forward, inch by painful inch. He was well aware how much easier things would be if he simply collapsed on the spot, yet he dared not submit even an ounce of his determination. Instead he continued to shoulder the exhausting pain, even if every step he took sent cracks forming throughout the ground, knowing that each of those strenuous steps sent him closer to the one he cared for the most. The one he swore to protect, or die trying."

Hahdrim's eyes were simply glued to the book. He couldn't put it down even if he wanted to! The picture in his head was so vivid of this powerful, gallant warrior who would rather crush himself into a pulp than let his loved one perish that he himself felt as though he were in this world himself, shouldering that mountain and trudging through the seemingly endless valley.

Of course, his actual circumstance was quite different; the dragon's sinewy tail tip raised towards his muzzle seemingly on its own, wrapped tightly around the handle of a tea cup.

He wasn't even aware of the tea he'd just sipped, although sipped it all the same he did as he turned the page, eyes darting from word to word. Nor was he properly aware of the plates of snacks he'd nibbled on throughout the course of his reading adventure, consumed in a similar method as the tea so as to prevent crumbs from falling onto the pages. Hell, even the usual chitter chatter he'd hear sitting at a table by the city streets had all but fallen away into a distant murmur, a secondary sound compared to whatever noises the book he read was describing.

But unfortunately, there was one such noise that pierced through all else, erasing his immersion completely.

"Hahdrim! Hahdrim!"

Hahdrim groaned, gripping his book ever so slightly tighter upon hearing the cries of his name pierce his imaginary bubble. Not now, please. He was *this* close to finding out if Nicholas managed to reunite with his lover or succumbed to his wounds! He brought his snout closer towards the book, filling his vision with its pages in the vain hope that it would hide his face.

Alas, it did not. It would take more than a few pieces of paper to hide an entire dragon, after all.

Hahdrim blinked as he heard a noisy thump land atop the table, clinking the various plates and cups strewn about. With a sigh, he finally lowered the book onto the table, looking up at the grinning kobold standing within a foot of him. "Whatever this is, Kip, can it wait another five minutes?"

"Of course not! If I waited any longer, someone else would have snatched up these missions. Seriously, these are a *steal!*" Kip smirked proudly, waving around three papers in front of the dragon's face, the tops torn off.

Hahdrim groaned. "You know better than to tear these off the adventuring board, Kip! We can't accept three quests at once, especially with only two of us."

"Sure we can. We just do them one at a time, no problem."

"That's not..." The dragon sighed loudly, pinching his brow. Seriously, where did Kip get this kind of energy? At first glance, anyone would have doubted the kobold could run and zip around as quickly as they did, the kobold sporting a rather plump, round build, their loin cloth squeezing fairly tightly against their white belly and red hips. If Hahdrim had to guess, he would assume they had just a few too many sweets.

Alas, not like the larger dragon had much room to speak, either. His little table for one was quite full, not just with a big red kobold, but also several crumb-strewn platters as well. His chair would also quite full as well if he could sit in it, his back as broad as the backrest, if not wider. Granted, he was an ice dragon, a fair bit taller than the common folk around here even on all four legs, but he was also a fair bit wider than, well, more than just the common folk. Those snacks and pastries he'd just eaten were not helping one bit, but at least he was using the sugar energy to be more productive... reading was productive, right?

Bringing his tail around to take another sip of his tea, Hahdrim finally relented. "If I take a minute to read the requests, will you promise me another five minutes to finish my story?"

"Sure, sure!" Kip was literally bouncing on their heels, almost like a small ball in perpetual motion. "Heck, I'll even read them for you."

"I'm fully capable of reading on my own, thank you very much." Hahdrim's eyes narrowed. "In fact, I'd much rather be reading right now."

But Kip ignored him fully, pulling out the first sheet to read. "Alrighty, first off. We've got a small slime problem to clear out in a nearby salt mine. No problem for the two of us, right? Just scare them off, set up some wards, and we'll be back in time for supper."

"The other one," Kip pulled out the second sheet. "A single farmer is a little concerned that their crops are growing *too* fast. Pfft, yeah, okay. I don't see how that's a problem, but they're apparently really anxious about it being some weird, weird magic involved, and wants someone strong around to stay close, in case it ends up being cursed, or whatever. Hey, we get paid *and* there's free food. You know my vote." Kip grinned, patting their chubby white belly.

"And last but not least, we have a request for a diplomat. They just want someone with scales to attend a... a..." Kip's brow furrowed, a similar expression Hahdrim has seen them make before when trying to read one of his more complicated books.

With a shrug, Kip rolled it back up. "Well, whatever. They want scaly folk to sit in on some meetings and they're willing to pay big money for it. Easy peasy."

"I doubt it's that simple." Hahdrim sighed, leaning his head against his hand. Still, he had to admit, those were all relatively simple missions. Slimes could be dealt with easily as long as they're prepared and bring the right equipment, and it wouldn't be the first time they'd dealt with paranoid farmers. The third request Hahdrim would have to read closer to see if there was any more to it than what Kip was saying, but even then, it sounded like someone simply wanted a bodyguard. And while Hahdrim was annoyed at Kip's timing, he knew they were starting to run low on funds, their combined sweet tooths chomping into their wallet as much as their own collection of purchased cakes.

Finally, the chubby drake spoke up. "Alright, Kip, here's what we're gonna do."

- A) "We'll go deal with the slimes. It shouldn't take us longer than an afternoon, which means we can get back in time for more reading and tea."
- B) "**We'll check in on the farm, make sure it really is just paranoia and not anything suspicious. Who knows, we might get to take home some of their crops as a bonus.**"
- C) "I don't know why they specifically requested 'scaly folk,' but let me look at the request. If it pays as well as you say it does, I think this will be our best job."
- D) "You're going to put those forms back on the wall properly. I'm still tired after our last job, and I'd rather do something locally instead."

Kip's grin widened. "Hah! I knew it! You like free food just as much as I do, Had!"

"I-it's not just that!" A rosy blush appeared on Hahdrim's icy cheeks. "Farmers supply everyone with food, so it'd be a very serious issue if there was a possible contamination. We're doing this for the good of the village, not just for free food."

"Yeah, yeah." Kip muttered dismissively, hopping off the table. "C'mon, fatty. The sooner we get there the sooner we can be real big heroes."

Yet again, Hahdrim let out an icy sigh as he closed his book and shifted back onto all fours, taking one last sip of his tea before setting it onto the table. Honestly, it wasn't even just the free food that appealed to him. Hahdrim was just relieved there was an option that didn't involve fighting. With slimes, anything can happen even with plenty of preparation, and being a bodyguard meant he may have to be intimidating, something that was a bit difficult with his plus-sized body.

"Make sure you put back the other two requests!" Hahdrim growled after his chubby kobold companion. Maybe if this went well, they could tackle the other missions. If they were still available afterwards, that is.

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The dragon was 100% correct: Kip's energy did come from sugar.

To the little kobold's credit, they managed to retain that enthusiasm while the pair packed their gear. Well, while Hahdrim packed his, Kip couldn't exactly carry much in their loin cloth, and instead simply bounced around and nudged at the dragon's legs telling him to hurry up. Even after they had left their humble abode, Kip quite eagerly bounced around the street, orbiting the larger ice dragon like a miniature satellite.

However, as soon as they left the town's front gate, that energy quickly tapered off.

Kip was no longer bouncing around and exploring the area. Rather, they began lethargically following beside the taller dragon, arms slumped forward and head held back. "Are we theeeeeere yet?"

Hahdrim rolled his eyes. "I can literally see the town gate behind us. We've barely left."

The kobold groaned. "Yeah, but it's easier for you. You've got long legs."

"True." The dragon conceded. Of course there was the obvious point of Kip literally running circles around him earlier, but he really didn't want to argue right now. It's not like he was in much better shape himself.

Alas, Kip pressed on. "And you've got a big, strong back, too! Strong dragon backs are practically meant for carrying kobolds, ya know."

"They're meant for carrying other things too." Hahdrim rubbed the back of his neck, looking around for a distraction.

The chubby kobold brushed hips against his leg. "C'moooon. You care about me dearly, right?"

"Yes."

"Then carry me!"

"No."

"Why not?!"

"Because we're here."

Hahdrim let loose a sigh of relief as they slowly crested the hill, the aforementioned farmland coming into view. Finally, an end to that discussion, as well as to their hike. Short as it was, it was also a reminder that he really should cut back on the sweets.

While Hahdrim felt all the more tired, Kip appeared to have found their second wind as they perked up and dashed forward, stubby tail wagging at the sight. The dragon trudged slowly behind, giving a brief inspection of the land.

- A) Something was definitely wrong. He didn't even need Detect Magic to see that.
- B) Nothing out of the ordinary yet. He'll need to look closer to see if anything was wrong.**
- C) Livestock shouldn't normally be this... plump, right?

"Hey, Had?" Kip paused to look back at the dragon. "This *is* the right farm, right?"

"It should be." Hahdrim nodded, swiveling his long neck around as they stepped into the land. Honestly, a part of him expected 'oversized' to be something absolutely enormous, such as pumpkins large enough to be houses, or strawberries bigger than his fist. Yet, this area looked practically indistinguishable from any other farm the dragon had seen. The rows upon rows of crops looked fertile and healthy, but not impossibly so, and none of the grazing cattle didn't appear sick or unhealthy.

Of course, this was all at a passing glance. To truly discover what was wrong, it was better to hear everything from the horse's mouth. Or, well, whoever it was that lived here's mouth.

"Kip, please don't play in the cornfield." Hahdrim frowned, seeing the kobold vanish briefly into the massive stalks. "I really don't want to have to file my own request paper just to find you in there."

"You're no fun." The kobold pouted as they trudged back out, scoffing. "They looked really ripe and yummy, too."

"I'm sure we'll get a chance to test it for ourselves later." The dragon rubbed his forehead. To think he still had to teach this little imp that taking without permission was wrong.

With his tail coiled gently around Kip's waist to prevent them from wandering off again, the dragon strode up to the house overlooking the plot of land... And froze. Damn nerves. He'd been on plenty of excursions before, none of which seemed to help his inherent shyness towards meeting new people.

Nor had they stopped Kip from wanting to meet new people, as the kobold knocked on the front door for Hahdrim, looking up at the dragon with a smug "you're welcome" expression.

"I could have done it," Hahdrim whispered harshly at the kobold, but quickly stood straight and rigid as the front door opened.

A: An elderly vulpine with a grandmotherly smile, standing at roughly the halfway point between Hahdrim and Kip's height.

B: A rather imposing looking wolf, nearly as tall as Hahdrim, and roughly just as large with brutish muscles.

**C: A laid back german shepherd with a casual grin, whose stomach pushed heavily against his overalls.**

"Well well! I should have known the prospect of inspectin' oversized food would attract a certain demographic!" The large canine laughed, his hefty gut bouncing against his clothes.

Hahdrim couldn't help but look away in embarrassment at that, shyly scratching behind his horns. It felt weird being called fat in front of someone whose stomach clearly surpassed his own. "H-heh, yeah. I, erh, suppose you could say it spoke to us."

"Yeah, it did." Kip spoke up, arms crossed. "It did speak to us, and right now it's asking us why someone who's got a barrel for a gut is afraid of food being too big."

"Kip!" Hahdrim hissed, baring his teeth. How dare that little jerk say exactly what was running through the dragon's mind!

Thankfully, the pudgy pooch hardly seemed to mind that comment; if anything he laughed all the harder from it. "Ho ho oh! Aye, I s'pose it is a bit ironic, big guy like me afraid of too much food. Erh, perhaps it'd be easier if I showed ya what it is that's botherin' me. The names' Clyde, by the way."

"H-hahdrim," the dragon shyly took the dog's hand in his, hardly giving it a squeeze. Meanwhile-

"Kip!" The small kobold shook Clyde's arm enough to jiggle the poor limb. Again, Hahdrim glared at his partner for their overactive tendencies, and again Clyde simply chuckled it off.

"Ho hoh! That energy will come in handy real soon!"

The adventuring duo followed behind the ample german shepherd, Hahdrim doing his best to politely avert his eyes from Clyde's bouncing rump, while Kip stared at it in a wide-eyed trance. Thankfully, the dog remained oblivious as he spoke. "Well, I may not look it, but I am startin' to get long in years. Managing the entire farm all by my lonesome is hard work, after all. Now, normally I don't mind it one bit, see. The pay's great, and knowing I can fill the belly of those townsfolk nearby is just as great of a reward. However, I do like to call upon any strong

young men or women from the adventuring guild from time to time, have them come by for a spell to help remove weeds, till the land, et cetera."

By this point they had reached the corn field Kip had wandered into just earlier. With his tongue sticking out of his muzzle, Clyde leaned forward and stuck his arm inside, fishing around as though reaching into a basket. Soon, he plucked free a rather large cob of corn. Hahdrim now fully understood the farmer's worries; it was very large indeed, one end of which completely filled the dog's fat paw. The kernels of corn were incredibly plump and round as well, as though ready to burst right off of the cob at a moment's notice.

"Now, my last group of strong adventurers taught me a lil magic, see. Something to help grow my crops on my own, make sure I don't have to bend over quite as much, spare my poor old back the ache." Clyde bit into the cob of corn, the juicy crunch almost deafening as the juice erupted against the canine's chubby muzzle. "Mmmf, delicious. Anyways, I may or may not have been using those fun lil spells to save myself some trouble. Problem is, I wasn't expectin' the fruits and veggies to grow so fast... or, well, big."

Hahdrim, nodding and listening along, shyly raised his arm.

"Oh hohoh!" Clyde let loose another hefty belly laugh. "Hahdrim, buddy, this ain't school. You're allowed to speak up whenever somethin's on your mind!"

"S-sorry." The dragon lowered his arm shyly. "It's just, well... this seems like an open and shut case, if you don't mind me saying. Your magic's making your produce bigger, right?"

Clyde smiled, but shook his head softly. "Ya see, I thought the same thing. But I tried contacting the gents who kindly taught me the spell, only they never responded. Dunno if they're simply too busy, or running away. I talked with everyone I knew about this little dilemma and they say I'm full of it! If there was a spell that made growing ripe and fertile crops that easy, and it was simple enough to be taught to an old fart like myself, then every farmer would know it by now, right?"

"That's a fair point." Hahdrim rubbed his muzzle. He knew of several spells to help avoid physical labor, such as Shape Water or Mage Hand, but something to straight up grow and enhance crops just like that? Moreso, a spell that could be taught to a commoner at that? There was something suspicious happening here indeed.

Clyde nodded along. "I can see yer getting it now, son. I can't sell this stuff to town without someone's word that it's safe to eat, ya know? It's why I was hoping you and your excitable pal here could do a clean sweep of my farm, look for anything that seems malicious, ya know?"

Kip's eyes widened. "You want us to check the *entire* farmland?" Indeed, their energy was purely dependant on whatever it was they were doing at the moment.

Thankfully, the farmer hardly minded the brash response, slapping the side of his hefty paunch as he laughed. "Oho! Getting cold feet, young lad or lass? Well, the size of yer stomach tells me you value a good meal, aye? If'n you two finish by sundown, I'll have large feast ready for ye, warm and fresh."

That did the trick. Kip practically snatched Hahdrim's arm and tugged with enough force to make the dragon think they were trying to tear it off his socket. "What are we waiting for, Had? The poor fat dog's farm is at stake!"

"W-we'll do what we can!" Hahdrim cried out to the laughing dog as he was dragged away, pulled along by someone far smaller, yet far more enthusiastic than he was. The latter, however, remained true for only but a moment; the dragon's stomach let out a small growl. A home cooked meal sounded wonderful right now.

With Kip by his side, the dragon began pacing the perimeter of the nearest patch of fertile ground, inspecting the produce. Carrots, from the looks of it, although judging from the tops alone they were nearly the size of squash. Hahdrim hated taking something that wasn't his without permission, but for the sake of their request he figured it was ok to remove this one specimen to better scrutinize it. Once more using his prehensile tail, he grabbed onto the leafy end of the vegetable and tugged, slowly unearthing the mighty plant. Hahdrim then concentrated his energy into the carrot in his tail, searching for any traces of magic.

**A: Obviously there was magic in this carrot, but it was faint enough to hardly get picked up on. In any case, it's clearly safe to eat.**

B: Hahdrim nearly dropped the carrot out of fright. Something *dark* was surrounding this vegetable.

Hahdrim frowned, rotating the carrot this way and that. The presence of magic in the vegetable in of itself was alarming, but the fact that it was hardly any more than a buzz made him all the more suspicious. Yet, the more he probed, the less he found, the dragon testing his patience as much as he tested the vegetable. It wasn't like magic was dangerous to eat by itself; plenty of healing potions had magic in them, even other spells produced small berries that could heal minor wounds and fill a man's belly for a day. Well, a normal man's belly; Kip and Hahdrim were experienced with that spell and found themselves craving more within the hour.

The ice dragon shook his head. Damn, he was getting distracted.

Clearly it wasn't this specific carrot. Setting it aside for now, Hahdrim took a closer look at-

**CRUNCH!**

The dragon nearly yelped in fight as he heard Kip snack down on the orange veggie, looking at his puffy-cheeked friend. "Wha?" They muttered before swallowing. "You looked like you were done with it."

"Well, you still shouldn't eat hard evidence like that! We don't know what it does to you!" Hahdrim growled, looking back at the soil. Truthfully, he was just frustrated that Kip got to snack on something before he did.

Pressing his palms into the damp Earth, Hahdrim once again channeled his magic and concentration. Sure enough, the soil was far richer with magic than the vegetables were, but he couldn't find anything malicious or nefarious. No signs of poisoning or rot, or underhanded curses some wicked wizard may have placed. If anything, the magic he sensed felt warm and glowing, like the morning sun. It was surprisingly calming.

"So?" Kip asked, taking yet another greedy bite of the carrot. "Am I cursed?"

"You asked that far too casually." Hahdrim grunted as he leaned back up, rubbing his palms clean on the nearby grass. "Clyde was right to be suspicious. There is plenty of magic in his soil, although I don't know if he could have done it himself or if the previous adventurers he mentioned did something. Eitherway, I'm assuming his crops absorbed some of this magic, hence why they're so large."

"And delicious!" Kip shoved the rest of the carrot into their mouth, pulling the end out by the leaf before licking their fingers. "No wonder that dog's so fat. I would be too if I got to eat like this."

"I really wished you'd washed that first before eating it. I literally just pulled it from the ground." Hahdrim sighed. Not like Kip wasn't already fairly pudgy themself. However, the kobold brought up an excellent point. Clyde ate a cob of corn right in front of them, and even without his powers, Hahdrim could tell there was just as much magic in it as there was in the carrot Kip just ate. Clearly, the canine wasn't suffering from any curse or dangerous side effect, but it couldn't hurt to ask.

"Does anything feel weird or funny to you, Kip?" Clyde asked, looking closely at his kobold companion.

The little lizard shrugged. "I feel fine, I guess. Maybe a little bored, or hungry."

"Okay, so your default state of being." The dragon nodded, rubbing his chin. It's sounding more and more like Clyde was worried for nothing. Either the adventurers from earlier magically altered the fat dog's land without telling him, or said fat dog had an incredible magic reserve and accidentally flooded his own crops with mana.

Eiherway, Hahdrim wanted to know for certain before concluding this mission. The chubby dragon strode down the vegetable patch, much to the chagrin of Kip. "What are you doing? Clyde's house is the other way!"

"He asked us to inspect his entire farm, Kip. We're not calling it there after just one carrot."

"But I'm tiiiiired!"

Hahdrim rolled his eyes.

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Admittedly, he wished he had turned in early. There really was nothing else to see!

Every plot of soil Hahdrim felt, every vegetable or fruit Hahdrim plucked, felt exactly the same way. A slight tingle of magic in the crops themselves, while the vines or soil were practically abuzz with it. Truthfully, the dragon hoped that at least one plant would feel somewhat nefarious, just so he could justify the extra precaution, yet that never happened. The farm was as tame as could be, for a farm that grew magically enhanced plants.

It wasn't all chores and boredom. At least the pair got to snack on whatever plants they plucked, right?

"Any *bwuurp* more to look at?" Kip asked, their face extra red from tomato juice.

Hahdrim sighed and lifted a large brown pear to his mouth, its shape reminding him of the german shepherd waiting for them inside. "I think that's everything."

"And nothing's suspicious?" The kobold asked, hopeful.

The drake nodded, biting into the fruit. "I guess you could say it's suspicious that nothing's suspicious... but I guess things like this happen. The plants, animals, even the planks of wood on the fence and scarecrow. Everything feels the same."

Kip raised a thick arm in glee. "Sweet! We can head back and eat now!"

"We've been eating nearly this whole time." Hahdrim scoffed. Honestly, the crops were quite filling on their own.

"Yeah, but it's all been raw fruits and veggies. Clyde promised us a warm meal."

"That he did..." The dragon rubbed a claw along his hanging potbelly. Really he should be thinking of dieting, but to be fair they had been eating healthy fruit and veggies all day, save

for the pastries from earlier, right? Besides, they'd been walking around nearly this entire time, and that alone burnt quite a few calories! The sun was starting to set, too, and both chubby reptiles knew it was impossible to end the day without one last hearty meal.

With tails wagging and maws glistening, the two adventuring friends headed back towards the barn, surprised to find the front door open. Apparently farmer Clyde enjoyed the brisk evening air in his house. However, no sooner did they notice the door open did they smell what was cooking inside.

And they both let out a collective groan of anticipation.

"O-oh, man. I've *got* to have what's in there!" Kip licked their lips before dashing forward.

This time, Hahdrim did nothing to stop his eager companion. If anything, he began jogging right behind, licking his lips the whole time.

Both kobold and dragon barely stopped in time to prevent themselves from flying into the front door of Clyde's home, the pair of reptiles leaping inside and making a hard turn towards the kitchen, guided by their noses as though they knew the interior inside out and out.

And who should greet them but Clyde, wearing an apron that clung tightly to his ample midsection. "Evening, fellas! I take it you've finished making yer rounds?"

"Y-yes, sir." Hahdrim nodded eagerly. He noticed Kip crawl into a seat by the kitchen table, gripping a fork and knife as though they were weapons and they were preparing for battle. Honestly, Hahdrim didn't have the restraint to tell them to knock it off.

The canine's grin widened, gesturing to the table. "Excellent work! I promised ya a meal, and a meal is what you get. Pull up a chair and dig in, now!"

**A: With gusto!**

B: Are you sure? There's still more to discuss

Ooooh, the dragon didn't need to be told twice! Muttering a quick thank you to the kind dog, Hahdrim plopped down right before the table, licking his muzzle as he looked over the spread. Chef salad, shepherd's pie, chicken pot pie, ham and potato casserole, french dip sandwiches, and so, so much more! Any thoughts of diet and healthy eating were thrown out the open front door for Hahdrim, who couldn't decide what he wanted to start on.

But what did it matter, when he intended on trying everything anyways?

The dragon forked up large portions of everything he could until his plate couldn't fit anymore, which admittedly was more polite than Kip forgoing their plate to shovel food directly into their mouth. Not wanting to be outdone, Hahdrim quickly scooped up a bite of shepherd's

pie, then chicken pot pie, then the casserole, his eyes squeezing shut. Mmmmf, it was so good! Was it due to the extra ripe produce they'd been inspecting all day, or was this dog just that masterful of a chef?!

Speaking of, Clyde put his paws on his ample hips, grinning at the pair. "I take it everything's to your liking?"

"Oh yes!" Kip and Hahdrim chirped up simultaneously, the dragon in particular forgoing his meek and shy attitude completely as though the food had temporarily cured him. Hell, he was tempted to grab a second fork in his other hand, maybe even a third with his tail. It would feed him much faster, after all.

"Hooh! I'm glad to hear it!" The big dog stepped beside the dragon, placing his soft paws on Hahdrim's shoulders. "Judging by your two's ravenous eating, I take it I don't have anything to worry about with my farm?"

"Mm-mmh!" Hahdrim shook his head, cheeks round with food before letting out a heavy gulp. "Nothing *\*munch munch gulp\** dangerous that we could find. We think *\*Ommf nommf\** your last group either *\*horrmf omf\** enhanced your soil with magic, or *\*Omf monch munch\** you're using more magic than you expect."

"Hmmmm." The large dog rubbed his round chubby chins, thinking out loud. "Now that you mention it, I believe one such fellow in that party was a druid. I know them folk care a lot about nature. Wouldn't be surprised if she felt my ground needed a lil extra kick. Well, I prefer to think the latter. I like the thought of me being some all-powerful magical being, Oh ho hoh!"

With that, Clyde leaned over the table, taking a large forkful of casserole. At first Hahdrim's heart plummeted; as selfish as it was, he hated the idea of losing out on more food. However, his heart soon went soaring as the dog placed that forkful on his plate, doing the same with Kip. "There you fellas are. Can't have ya reaching past yer own guts just to reach for more. Don't worry about me, I already ate before ya got here. You just worry about sating your own hungry bellies."

Hahdrim wanted to marry this dog.

It was the coziest, tastiest meal either of them had ever experienced. Each bite seemingly refueled the energy spent walking through the vast farmland, not to mention somehow fueling their own appetites further. Hahdrim was quite gluttonous, admittedly, but never to this extent. He literally couldn't keep the fork down for a second, no matter how full his muzzle already was. It didn't help that Clyde was eager to constantly keep refilling his plate with more and more, never letting his poor stomach rest for a second.

And with the time for talking over, Hahdrim and Kip were free to just eat, eat, eat away. The mystery of the farm's produce seemingly vanished from either reptile's mind as they cleared

out dish after dish, platters emptying right before their very eyes. Even with how rich and filling each meal was, Hahdrim and Kip continued devouring with reckless abandon, only looking towards the next bite.

Only when there was none left did they realize just how full they were.

“Bwuuuuuwrrp!!” Hahdrim huffed and grunted, his fork dropping onto the empty plate before him. Immediately, his fullness hit him like a truck, the bloated dragon slumping back away from the table, both hands finding their way towards his stomach. Sheesh, and what a stomach it was. The orb of icy-blue scales must have doubled in size since the beginning of his feast, a sphere of densely packed food, scales, and chub nearly two feet wide. Damn, this would definitely impact his waistline once it all digested, yet even with that knowledge, the dragon allowed himself a sly, lazy grin as he rubbed his exposed scaly midriff. He felt bright and warm, much like the magic he sensed earlier. Much like the morning sun.

He peaked past the empty platters towards Kip, snickering at the sight. The kobold looked even rounder than usual, their loin cloth digging painfully against that packed gut. How the little lizard managed to scarf down so much in one go was a mystery to even Hahdrim, who'd seen his partner's gluttonous antics in action many times. Moreso than that was how that loincloth managed to remain secure around that wide round middle, and even more than that, how Kip somehow didn't notice the incredible pressure as they lifted their plate to lick the crumbs away.

Greedy little bugger.

Still, Hahdrim had no room to talk himself. He was not looking forward to the walk back home by any means. It was dark out now, after all, dark and cold. And he'd much rather stay here where it was warm and bright. Alas, their mission had been completed, and there was nothing more for them to do. Maybe they could pay Clyde a visit in the future, but now-

“Anyone have room for dessert?”

Hahdrim's eyes widened as the fat dog placed not one, but two large pies on the table, right before the two stuffed reptiles. Oof, he was distracted with his own food and fullness, the dragon didn't even notice Clyde had been preparing even more for them! Shoot, their last meal was already quite heavy in carbs and fat as well, he didn't need to add all that sugar into his stomach as well.

A: Politely decline. They won't make it home at this rate!

**B: They shouldn't eat, but it's right there, and it smells so good...**

C: Ask Clyde why he's being so generous with food, despite how bloated they clearly look.

Hahdrim couldn't take his eyes off the pie. It just drew his attention to it like some gravitational well. He knew he should cut himself off now, thank the kind dog for his hospitality and leave. Or at least take the pie home for later.

But Clyde scooped up a slice and placed it on his plate. Right there. Right in front of Hahdrim's nose. He could smell the sweet berries, the delicious frosting, the flakey crust...

Ignoring his stomach's protests, the big dragon wielded his fork once again and took a large bite, grumbling in delight. Again, that warmth, glowing feeling washed over his body. To think that he, an ice dragon, would actually relish such a feeling. It was worth eating even more just to continue that warmth, shoving the last of the slice of pie down his throat. Maybe one more couldn't hurt...

And one more slice appeared on his plate. Hahdrim didn't remember reaching for it, but it didn't matter; he was ready to eat. Bite after bite, his stomach grew increasingly full, increasingly discontent, increasingly round. He felt himself ready to burst, his stomach several inches broader now and gurgling quite loudly in anger, but he just couldn't bring himself to listen to it. Just one more slice... just one more slice... just one more-

*Ping!*

Hahdrim perked up slightly, looking past his own plate for once just to see what that noise was. Apparently, Kip had finally burst free of its loin cloth, that creamy white belly on full display. "D-dammit... I liked that one, too..." The belly with a kobold attached murmured, weakly clawing at their drum-taut stomach.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. I have a spare belt you can use." Clyde responded matter of factly, hardly reacting to how round the little reptile managed to grow. In fact, he apparently wholeheartedly endorsed it, as the fat canine grabbed a forkful of pie and held it out for the kobold to eat. "You just keep enjoying yourselves now. Go on, open wide."

Hahdrim had never seen someone feed Kip as though the kobold were a small child before; mainly due to having to keep said kobold away from other people's food. Yet here they were, so stuffed and bloated they could barely keep their eyes open, slowly but surely working through their own slice. It was quite the humorous sight.

But the dragon had no room to judge. He himself wasn't sure how he was even going to roll himself upright, let alone walk home. He just couldn't stop himself from stuffing himself further and further, his vision growing increasingly blurry with every bite... every slice...

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"SNRRRRRK!"

Hahdrim shot awake, huffing and puffing. He had the most vivid nightmare! He was adrift amidst an endless void, surrounded by fruits and veggies as large as himself, all rolling towards him in an effort to flatten him. He ran and ran, but there was just no avoiding the avalanche of produce. In fact, his running only made it worse, as he found himself heading headlong into an enormous yellow ball of gas and heat, one that burned up his icy self in a horrible-

Wait, this wasn't his room.

Rubbing the side of his head, the ice dragon took a slow look around. Apparently, he was in an attic of sorts, a single window illuminating the room, the morning sun shining right in. Looking outside jogged his memories, as he recalled roaming the fields in search of any dastardly magic trap.

Along with the food. Oof, so much food...

Hahdrim patted his stomach, feeling it gurgle. He still felt somewhat stuffed from last night's feast. Man, he really needed to control himself better, eating all that food *and* an entire pie on top of that. Thankfully he'd digested most of it as his stomach had shrunk a fair deal, although there was just a bit more jiggle to it than he would have liked.

Stretching all five limbs out, the dragon let out a loud yawn before rolling off the bed and onto his feet. Apparently he must have passed out at the dinner table. Clyde must have incredible strength if he managed to haul him up towards a spare bed. Well, that or he used a levitation spell of sorts; still, there was a lot of him to levitate! He wasn't exactly thin even before eating so much. Now he just felt like Kip...

Oh man, Kip!

The kobold was still sound asleep in a smaller cot, stuck on their back with their stomach on full display. Sheesh, there was no fitting back into their old loincloth now. Fortunately, Hahdrim recalled Clyde mentioning a spare somewhere, although that just caused Hahdrim to thump his (slightly softer) tail on the ground in disapproval. Look at this glutton, so heavy they need to wear a belt meant for someone not kobold sized!

How Clyde tolerated this kind of behavior was beyond him.

Oh man, Clyde!

Hahdrim bit his fingers. Late last night was a little blurry, but he recalled the dog acting just a little *too* incessant about feeding them. No, there was something odd with the fat dog's behavior. Why would he make a feast with presumably his own produce, before even confirming with them if the food was safe to eat? Sure, Clyde seemed pretty laid back, but there was clearly something more to this than meets the eye...

Oof, were those eggs being cooked downstairs? Just the sound was enough to cause the dragon to wipe his maw of drool.

The sound and smell must have been enough to break Kip out of their slumber, as the little reptile paused their snoring to let out a loud yawn, slowly rolling into a seating position. “Mmmf, breakfast time already? Well, if I must.”

“Kip, wait!” Hahdrim grabbed the kobold’s shoulders, making sure they were looking him in the eyes first before continuing.

- A: “This is a trap. Let’s look for a way to escape while we can!”
- B: “Make sure you properly thank Clyde before digging into breakfast, alright?”**
- C: “We’ve eaten enough, I think. Let’s just wrap up the request and call it a day.”

The kobold rolled their eyes. “I was going to! You make it sound like I’m some ungrateful, spoiled child.”

Hahdrim raised a brow. “I don’t remember you thanking him when we came in yesterday.”

“I did! I thanked him *during* dinner. You probably couldn’t hear because you’re too busy scarfing away, tubby.”

The dragon turned red at that. Honestly, that might be true. He may be a bit loud when he eats. Alas, even with his attempts to act formal and dignified, he was still a four-legged, and four-leggeds were used to eating with their mouths and not the assistance of silverware. “L-let’s just go down.” He scoffed, turning to head down the stairs.

On the way down, Hahdrim couldn’t help but feel a tad self conscious about how... large he felt. Not just the fact that he was nearly the size of a horse walking through a narrow stairway meant for anthros, but also by how his belly tended to sway just a tad more than it should have. Ok, this was it. It was diet time.

But as he stepped into the kitchen and saw the delicious meal prepared, the drake thought better. Maybe his diet could start tomorrow?

“There you fellas are!” Clyde stood in the kitchen with that apron still tied around his ample middle, giving the dragon a strong case of deja vu. “Yer just in time for breakfast! Come, come, take a seat!”

The table was yet again filled with a variety of delicious meals, this one breakfast themed. French toast, pancakes, waffles covered in fresh fruit and butter, not to mention whole milk to wash it all down. The dragon felt a breeze on his left as Kip rushed right past him, leaping onto their previous seat with fork and knife in hand. “Kip!”

"O-oh, right." The kobold cleared their throat. "Thank you so much for the food, Clyde. We really appreciate it bunches!"

"Yer quite welcome, son!" The big dog laughed, before looking towards Hahdrim. "Ya better sit and eat too, before your lil pal here leaves you with crumbs."

"Y-yeah, of course." The dragon nodded, sitting back on his haunches to eat. He didn't need to take a bite of any of the starchy, carb-laden breakfast foods to know they would all be delicious, but clearly that didn't stop him from greedily forking up as much as he could, munching away. It didn't matter how much he ate just the previous night, the drake found himself an empty void yet again, desperate to fill it with the warm, shining food before him.

Despite his hopeless addiction, however, Hahdrim managed to restrain himself when he noticed Clyde walking towards the pair, yet again offering to cut up and serve portions to their plates. "Erh, Clyde, sir—"

"Oh no no, don't worry about me!" The big dog laughed. "I already ate plenty. This here's all for you."

"T-that's not what I wanted to ask," Hahdrim muttered, although he was relieved he didn't have to share the meal with another mouth. Kip was already a bottomless pit! "I was just wondering... well, we've completed the request, but there wasn't anything on it that said you'd pay us in food, or lodging. I don't want us to intrude."

"O-oh, that!" Clyde nervously chuckled, his eyes shifting. "Erh, would you fellas mind if I'm being honest for a bit?"

Hahdrim nodded, taking another large bite of waffle. If Clyde was going to speak, then he'll use this opportunity to eat.

"Well, y'see lads, I've been meaning to bring it up with ya last night, but erh, heh, you were a lil too tuckered out. I get it, it's fine! But, the thing is, I'm not doing too hot in terms of money. I haven't been able to sell my stock, after all, so funds are a smidge low. I-I can still pay ya in gold, as was negotiated, but given I have such a surplus in food, I was hopin' I could treat you twos to a couple nice meals instead."

Hahdrim blinked. "That's it?" Suddenly, Clyde's insistence on them eating more made a lot more sense!

The dog nodded. "Yessir! Actually, I was hoping to convince you two to stay for a while! I know you gave it the clean sweep yesterday, but I wanna make sure things stay fine, ya know? So, how about it? You check the farm every day, and I cook as much as your stomachs can hold!"

**A: Absolutely!**

B: I dunno...

Hahdrim blinked as Kip's head nodded vigorously, practically a blur even. "I wouldn't turn this stuff down for a hundred bags of gold! You got yourself a deal, Clyde!"

"Wonderful!" Clyde laughed, giving the chubby kobold a friendly pat on the end. "It warms my heart hearing such kind words, son."

Hahdrim sighed. Not like he was gonna say otherwise. The food really was just that delicious, and with Clyde's explanation, he found himself far more at ease to let himself pig out. "Sure, what the heck." The dragon smiled. "We've been enjoying ourselves so far. No reason to let it end early, right?"

"Ohoho! That's what I like to hear!" Clyde walked to give the drake a hearty pat on the back, grabbing the platter of pancakes and setting it on the dragon's empty plate. "In that case, you better eat up! There's a lot of walking to do, and you'll need plenty of energy for it."

Both reptiles happily obliged.

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Hahdrim enjoyed the thrill of adventuring and exploring, but there was something cozy about holding a stable source of income.

The farm was quaint yet comfortable, enough so for the dragon to feel right at home even on his second day. He found himself smiling as he inspected the crops, the roots, the soil, his slender tail swishing happily behind him as he crouched over to investigate. The morning sun felt great on his hide, but even more so on his heavy stomach; a bit strange, given that said stomach hung below him and not within direct constant, but it wasn't like that mattered too much, right?

He forced himself to set his suspicions aside regarding... well, practically everything. Clyde treated him like family practically, and soon the timid dragon found himself comfortable to be himself around the big dog as well. He liked his role of checking the magic within the ground, as all he had to worry about were any changes. And so far, there wasn't any! Another easy day, of simply striding around the farm, ready to end on yet another delicious feast.

Oof, the next one tasted even better than the last! Hahdrim barely managed to let out a thank you before plunging into a delicious buttery meal, scarfing down as though his life depended on it. He released any inhibitions he had about his weight and simply enjoyed himself in the moment, letting Clyde encourage the pair by offering more onto their plates. Even when

they were stuffed to the limit, they found themselves unable to say no to another generous helping of dessert, this one being apple crumble.

Suffice to say, they didn't make it to their beds yet again.

It amazed Hahdrim how casual Clyde acted towards their gluttony, even encouraging it, in fact. The big dog gave them the go ahead to snack on any produce they pulled during their inspection. "Waste not want not, right? Besides, I got plenty! You two help yourselves." And boy, did they. It wasn't uncommon for Hahdrim to "accidentally" uproot more than he meant to, giving the pair even more to snack on. It wasn't long before Kip and Hahdrim spent just as much time snacking on fruit and vegetables as they did checking the magic, yet no matter how much they ate, they gladly ran back to the house when they had finished, feasting themselves into submission as they had the night before.

It was a wonderful cycle they found themselves in, lasting a full

- A) Week
- B) 2 weeks
- C) Month**

Suffice to say, as the weeks went on, the two reptiles didn't just crave the food as they obsessed over it. Their thoughts always strayed to what they would eat next, their idle chit chat became discussing their favorite meals or produce to snack on. By week three, Kip and Hahdrim barely spent any time checking on the magic so much as plop their ever widening rumps down by a healthy plant and munch through its load. Clyde hardly seemed to mind their increasingly lazy attitude, as he would simply pop out to offer them a quick snack or three, as well as plenty of refreshing beverages hand squeezed from the local fruit. Honestly, Clyde was associated with food at this point. Everytime they saw him, he had food ready. Everytime Hahdrim asked when they should go, he had food ready.

Everything was food, food, food!

"Fooooood... urgh..."

Hahdrim groaned as the sun hit his eyes, slowly stirring out from yet another food-induced coma. Yet another dream of him being chased by oversized fruits and veggies, although lately those dreams had started to change. Now it was the dragon running after the produce, chomping them down into submission before eating the sun next!

Mmmmf, he couldn't wait to eat.

An enormous gurgle erupted from his stomach as he thought about breakfast, causing the drake to sigh. Yeah yeah, he was working on feeding it. Gosh, it felt as though he really was

insatiable as of late. Not that he minded much, it just meant he got to eat even more! With a weak stretch and yawn, the dragon rolled onto his side to stand up.

Or at least, he attempted to.

“Errf?” Hahdrim tried again, but no dice. Each time he did, he was meant with resistance, rolling right onto his back yet again. Even stranger, he heard loud creaking and groaning beneath him, even the sound of wood splintering. Lifting up his weary head, the dragon slowly realized what had happened.

He’d broken his bed in his sleep.

“Uh oh...”

Uh oh indeed. Equal parts terror and shame ran through the breached dragon’s mind as he laid in the wreckage, slowly assessing his situation. How did this happen? Well, obviously *he* had done this to himself, recalling the weeks of seemingly nonstop gorging. Yes, he was aware he’d been getting a little... plumper, as of late, but he’d told himself not to worry and just let loose for once.

Clearly, he was a little *too* loose, as he could still feel himself jiggling.

Forced into an uncomfortable state of self-reflection, Hahdrim looked down at himself with a frown, feeling his thick chins bunch up. Goodness, he was large. Even with his large neck raised as high as it could go, he still couldn’t quite see the other side of his rotund middle, a gelatinous dome of silvery-blue scales that, despite the plating, wobbled and squished far too easily against his touch. Oof, his scales. The plate-like objects had popped off his stomach from time to time after heavy meals, having regrown larger and larger to better cover his sensitive middle. He didn’t dare look at his small collection he’d harbored, knowing that each one was bigger than the last, a glimpse at just how much larger he’d grown.

He lifted his forearms and hind legs, wincing to see they too have grown over encumbered with lard. His hind legs, especially, used to contain some firm muscle to them. Now, said muscle was buried beneath several layers of blubber. Anyone could easily doubt the large drake was ever the adventuring type, and not some spoiled rotten house pet.

The house pet to an overeager german shepherd.

Hahdrim thumped his tail against the ground in frustration, grunting as he couldn’t even lift it without feeling it collide with the edge of his hanging stomach. Of course his tail would be the fattest of any of his limbs, once sinewy and strong now bloated and squishy, with folds forming with the slightest bend. No wonder it was getting harder to hold silverware and cups in the tip now. At this rate, he’d be too tubby to grab his own utensils, forced to rely on the kindness of their canine host to just shovel the food into his fat open mouth directly.

### *Gurrrrwrrugle*

Hahdrim blinked as his stomach let loose a deep and powerful gurgle. Of course, he should be down there eating by now. He wanted to eat too, his mouth growing moist at the sheer thought of stuffing himself. In fact, that alone was motivating him more than anything else to shake himself out from underneath... well, himself.

With a hefty grunt, the pudgy dragon shuffled himself back and forth, hearing his flab slosh and glorp about. Beneath him, the wooden planks snapped even further, enough so for Hahdrim to feel a bit of give to his side. One more rock, and he managed to shake himself onto his side, pausing a moment to catch his breath...

Gods, was he seriously out of breath?

Grumbling, Hahdrim shuffled onto his stomach, feeling his bulk spread across the cool wooden ground. Bringing in his legs as close as he could against his fat middle, the dragon pushed off and stood up. Oh yeah, he was definitely heavier. Even without seeing himself in a mirror, Hahdrim could tell his back arched higher than before, thick hotdog-looking rolls forming along the back of his neck, while his stomach hung low between his legs, a round sphere.

Well, at least he was up. Looking at the small crater he made in the bed did cause the dragon's heart to sink a bit.

"I know what you're thinking."

Hahdrim slowly turned towards Kip, who was sitting upright in their cot. "You're thinking 'it's diet time' because that's what you always think when you break something, right?"

Hahdrim didn't respond, too busy gawking at the kobold as though seeing them for the first time. Good lord, they were fat! A beach ball with legs was a more accurate descriptor than a kobold at this point, given how their round, chubby head rested atop a spherical, squishy body. How they managed to roll themselves out of the cot and stand with only a minor grunt was beyond the dragon, although standing didn't do Kip much good in terms of looking thinner. If anything, it showed they were clearly wider than they were tall, sporting a real hefty paunch that sagged over their waist a solid foot and a half out, impressive for a three foot kobold. The loin cloth wasn't even needed at this point, yet Hahdrim could still make out what looked like twine buried beneath those generous love handles and folds. How long would that last, he wondered.

Well, given Kip had been bursting out of loin cloths on a weekly schedule, the dragon had a safe wager of one to two more large meals.

Kip raised a brow. "Nothing? Well, in that case, it's breakfast time! Have fun with your diet, tubby!"

"Wait!" Hahdrim called out, but the kobold ignored him. He was forced to watch his obese companion saunter off with the most exaggerated waddle-shuffle the dragon had ever seen, swinging one chunky thigh around the other and bouncing that overripe belly with every step.

Sighing, Hahdrim slowly followed suit. The extra weight wasn't too burdainsome yet, but it was incredibly obvious how every step jiggle, shook, and even swayed his pendulum-like stomach, while his tail lazily hung behind him. Hell, he swore he felt the floorboards bend beneath his feet as well. Maybe he should ask Clyde if he could sleep downstairs from now on, so as to not fall through the entire house.

Hahdrim perked up. What was he thinking?! He couldn't stay another night! Any more food and he won't fit through the door!

Actually, the stairway was proving to be an issue as well. Hahdrim didn't have much room to maneuver down the stairs, as he constantly found himself brushing or bunching against one of the sides. Even worse, bending his legs to trot down meant his belly slid across the corner of every step. Oh, to be able to walk properly on two legs...

At last, he was down, and the dragon felt his spirits lifting immediately as he smelled breakfast. Yes, he was still quite concerned with his weight, but any intelligent being knows that you can't think on an empty stomach, right? He padded into the kitchen in time to see Clyde helping Kip into his seat, the kobold either too fat, lazy, or both to attempt to get in on their own.

"Oh, there you are! Was worried I'd have to come up and getcha!" Clyde chuckled at the fat drake. "Well, take your seat and get yer grub on!"

Hahdrim looked at his spot.

- A) A series of chairs for him to lay on. Reinforced too, hopefully...
- B) A beanbag chair for him to flop on. Finally, something soft to lay on that wasn't his own gut.**
- C) A single pillow on the ground, specifically for his head. Laying on his back made it easy for Clyde to feed him, after all.

Hahdrim hadn't been up for too long, even so he couldn't help but sigh in relief as he climbed aboard the linen bag full of soft straw. Leaning all the way, the dragon was fully off of his legs, as well as being in arm's reach of his plate.

The plate that was already full of omelets and pastries.

"Hoho, gotta say, son. It's fun watching you slide onto that thing." The big dog chuckled, patting Hahdrim's fat back. "You look so natural laying on it."

Natural? The dragon blushed, his chubby cheeks (full of pastries and omeletes) now rosy red. Was it really natural for him to be like this? To lay in a manner of having all four paws suspended in the air by something large, heavy, and soft? Dammit, it wasn't! Yet here he was, greedily stuffing his face and moaning with every bite. With great will power, Hahdrim put down the fork and craned his neck towards the farmer. "Hey, Clyde? There's, erh, something I want to talk about."

"That so?" The farmer asked, scooting Kip's place closer. The obese kobold was having quite a lot of trouble reaching past all that tummy. "Well, talk away!"

"W-well." Hahdrim didn't know how to phrase this. In the time it took him to think of a proper response, the dragon shoveled two omelets and four muffins into his mouth, letting out a hearty burp. "Kip and I, we really appreciate all you've done for us. The food is... it's bloody good, for lack of a better word. We could eat it all day."

"Well, nothing's stopping ya!" Clyde laughed, giving Kip's side a playful pinch. "You love to eat, I love to cook. Win-win, right?"

"N-not exactly." Hahdrim looked away shyly. "We're getting... well, a little fat."

He expected a stronger reaction out of Clyde, but the dog just let out another loud laugh, his own belly bouncing. "Son, have you seen me? None of us here are exactly as fit as a knight, here. There's nothing long with having some meat on yer bones, right?"

"But we're a little *too* meaty, wouldn't you say?" Hahdrim whimpered, drooling as it'd been too long since he had something in his mouth, aka 5 seconds. "Kip can't tie on their loin cloth anymore, and I... sheesh, I've been breaking furniture for the past week! The bed, the chairs, everything!" He could still see the broken chairs pushed off to the corner of the room right now, even.

Yet again, Clyde seemed far too dismissive at his broken furniture, waving a casual paw. "Dawww, that stuff was getting too rickety anyways. I needed new ones, anyhow. Hey, tell ya what. Why don't we set your new bed down here, right in the kitchen? That way you two don't gotta get out to eat!"

Kip practically went stiff in their chair. "That sounds *amazing!*"

It sounded completely different to Hahdrim. In fact, this just proved his growing suspicions of the past month. While naturally quite timid and shy, the blubbery dragon couldn't help but blurt out the one thought on his mind. "Why do you want us so fat?"

Finally, a different reaction. Clyde raised a brow, staying silent for a few seconds. The smile on his face remained, although his eyes appeared a bit more distant, unreadable. Finally, he let loose a sigh, shaking his head. "I suppose it's only fair that I spill the beans."

He turned fully towards Hahdrim, hands crossing.

- A) "I'm growing quite sick of my usual meals. Now, dragon and kobold stew, on the other hand!"
- B) "**I made a deal with some shady folk. They promised fertile lands for the rest of my days as long as I present them with some plump offerings...**"
- C) "I've been living on my own here for the past 5 years. Occasional visits aren't cutting it for me anymore, I miss having someone around."
- D) "I've known for a while these lands are cursed. *Someone* has to keep eating from them or else something terrible will happen."

Silence. Hahdrim's irises were surrounded by white as he gaped at the dog, for once forgetting about the food on his plate. Even Kip stopped eating long enough to stare wide-eyed at the tubby dog, arm frozen as it reached for another butter roll. Hahdrim couldn't believe what he just heard. He knew he had every right to be suspicious, but *this*?! "H-how?" He managed to shakily get out.

Clyde sighed, looking downcast for the first time since they'd met him. "Remember when I mentioned the kind adventurers who helped me out a ways back? They were... an interesting sort of folk, for sure. All wearing the same color robes, all with tattoos and piercings on the same parts of their bodies."

"Cultists?" Hahdrim shivered.

"Perhaps." Clyde nodded. "I was gonna ask them to leave right away. They looked like no good, after all. But they insisted I at least hear them out, and well, like a fool, I did. And like a fool, I sat back and watched as my dying garden sprouted to life in a matter of hours, and began producing the best-tasting crops I've ever had in a matter of days. I was over the moon, I was. I went to thank them, but alas they said that it was only temporary, and that everything would die once again once they leave. I begged them to help me find a solution, and..."

"You made a pact?" Hahdrim's stomach turned.

Clyde rubbed his brow. "Afraid so. 'If you wish to keep harvesting the fat of the land, then you will need to produce a fat bounty of your own. In two moons, we shall return for our prize: the largest, ripest, juiciest specimen you own. Once we've taken our offering, you are free to a land of endless bounty.' That's what they said. Heh, I felt so terrible, I actually considered offering myself up as well." He chuckled sadly, patting his own pudgy stomach. "I'm a coward."

Hahdrim's heart began racing. "In two moons? Th-then how long-"

"About a week, until they come for you." Clyde's expression grew darker, worryingly so. "And you should know I can't simply let you two go after hearing all that. If I were you, I'd stop worrying about it now and go back to eating. I promise to make your next week as pleasant as I can."

Uh oh.

- A) **"Clyde, please, we can talk this through! In fact, I think I have an idea that can benefit us all!"**
- B) "Let's make a break for it, Kip!"
- C) Hahdrim tries to speak, but the food smells too good. Maybe he should just finish breakfast first...

The dog raised a brow at that, then sighed and shook his head. "I wish that were true. These cultist folk are bad news, and powerful too, if they can do what they did to my yard. Best let them have their way."

"No, really!" The dragon tried sitting up further to appear more serious and dignified. Alas, a bit hard to look like any of those at his level of chub, as well as laying atop of a beanbag the way he was. Honestly, he was glad he didn't just try bolting out the door. It would have taken him a solid minute of solid jiggling and fussing just to get off this damn thing.

Hahdrim cleared his throat.

- A) **"Tell us where their base is, or at least where they left. I can use magic to find their tracks and confront them."**
- B) "It sounded like the cultists want the fattest person, right? One of us could be bait, while the other stealthily follow them."
- C) "We lay a magic trap for them when they come for us. The second they step in, *boom!* We'll drag them to his royal highness himself to get them to leave you alone."
- D) ...and then he cleared his throat again. And again. Buying time was not working out at all...

Clyde looked surprised at that suggestion, not like Hahdrim could blame him. Honestly, even the dragon was shocked by his own suggestion. Taking on an entire magically powerful cult, just the two of them? A brash and roly-poly kobold and a bookworm dragon who'd rather pick up a donut than a weapon? That was outrageous!

"Hell yeah! I'm on board!" Kip raised their fork in the air as though it were some powerful weapon, their fat arm jiggling. "We save the farm, we get free food for life! What's not to love?"

"Kip!" Hahdrim hissed.

But Clyde just chuckled. "Heh, I dunno if my crops will last too long after those fiends are dealt with, but if they do, then by all means, you're both free to come back for as much food as you want, whenever you want."

"Then it's settled!" The kobold stood up on their chair, dimples forming in their chubby cheeks. "We charge in, whoop some cultist ass, and make it back in time for supper."

Hahdrim sighed and pinched his brow. Honestly, he was grateful for Kip's boisterous attitude. Hearing how their spirits hadn't been buried beneath the several inches of fat made the dragon feel a twinge more confident as well. "We're not taking them head on, Kip. We're going to investigate, first."

"And then?"

"I'm still making it up." Hahdrim muttered. The town they were staying at didn't have much of a militia, not that the dragon wanted to involve normal people in a magic fight. And it would definitely take longer than a week to send a request for reinforcements further away. But anything was better than sitting on their asses. Their ever growing, fattening asses.

Hahdrim was brought out of his stupor by a firm pat on his back, looking over to see the dog's face smiling genuinely. "You know, it's the least I can do for you folk after lying to you and doing... *that* to your bodies." He gestured towards the dragon's broad spreading flanks. "If there's anything I can do, please let me know."

This time, it was Hahdrim's turn to chuckle softly. Dammit, there was no going back now, huh? Well, if Clyde was placing his life in their hands, they may as well do what they can to protect him. "I, erh, could use some help getting off the cushion, actually." The dragon wiggled a tad from atop his perch.

"And if you could bag up the rest of this food for us to take on our journey, that'd be great too."

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