Taking a break at the table, Arro glowered at the lean, muscular dragon lifting weights at the far side of the gym. He thought he was so tough, huh? So, why did Kraz need those stupid protein shakes?

Arro eyed the one that Kraz at set on the table. He was tempted to swipe it off onto the floor with his chubby paw. He was pretty sure they were expensive. He glanced up at Kraz, still on the other side of the room, but the gray dragon wasn’t paying him any mind. It would be way more fun if Arro could dump it on the floor while staring him dead in the eyes, or something.

Arro looked back at the cup. Tilted his head at it. Do those things actually, really work? Something that dense in nutrients packing the muscle on the other dragon after every workout seemed like cheating, somehow. Arro hoped it tasted awful, at least. He hoped Kraz choked. He…

He stared at the cup. If it was Kraz’s first day trying it, did the other dragon even know what it was supposed to taste like?

Discreetly, Arro materialized the sugar packets he’d stolen from the break room earlier as he started to get an idea.

He glanced back up at the fit, muscular dragon, but now he was hoping that Kraz wasn’t looking at him. He tore open a few packets. He hesitated. Kraz would make their shifts even worse… Well, only if he found out, of course. If Arro was careful, he wouldn’t. Arro tipped the sugar packets into the drink. Shit. That was a lot.

Kraz fucking deserved it, though. The stupid look on his face when he realized he’d been messed with… The drink tasting nowhere near as sweet tomorrow would have him forever wondering what had been done to it. Hopefully, it would drive him mad. Good. Fuck him.

Arro actually found himself tearing open a few more of the sugar packets. Then a lot more. Fuck him. He could go fuck himself. Arro was going to absolutely ruin this drink.

When he was done, the drink was probably more sugar than any other ingredient. It occurred to him that at this point, Kraz would have to notice that his drink had been tampered with. It was impossible to think a drink could be this sweet. Arro gulped. Kraz was still absorbed in his workout, and Arro decided that the best thing he could do right now was leave before Kraz took a sip. They’d have their little fallout over it later, if he suspected Arro was the culprit. For now, the much fatter dragon wasn’t sticking around.

It was two weeks later when Rangavar noticed Kraz shimmying to get into his pants in the locker room. He’d been looking a bit bloated lately.

Kraz caught Rangavar’s eyes on him. “Ugh. I think these shrank the last time they were washed. My companion did the laundry this time. He’s a bit hopeless at household chores, huh?”

“Heh. Yeah.” Rangavar pulled up his own pants easily. Out the corner of his eye, he noticed Kraz have to haul tightly on his belt buckle to get it clamped on the usual hole.

“I’ve just been really busy at the gym, you know? He’s been helping out a lot, and don’t get me wrong, I’m really grateful. I’ve been working out constantly ever since getting that stronger protein shake formula. I always feel like I could just keep going forever after chugging one down.”

“Don’t wear yourself out,” Rangavar warned. “Maybe it makes you feel stronger or something, but you still don’t want to overdo it.”

“I won’t. I’m actually expecting to get tired of them, but it hasn’t happened yet, and I want to make sure I get in as much working out as possible before needing to take a bit of a break.” Kraz buttoned his jacket. The jacket went on far more easily than his pants. “They actually taste way better than I expected, so I think that’s part of what’s kept me going.”

Rangavar closed his locker. He wondered if the pants weren’t fitting because of Kraz’s thickening muscle? That made sense. Probably. “Well, I’m glad it’s working out for you.”

Kraz brightened. “Thanks. Me too. I’m just, so excited to get bigger, you know?”

Rangavar eyed him up and down. “I’m really not sure how you possibly could. You do realize you’re already SUPER muscular, right?”

Kraz grinned. “Are you saying there’s not room for more?”

“I’m saying I can’t specifically picture you with any more,” Rangavar retorted. “Not sure it’s possible.”

Kraz snorted. “Guess we’ll see.”

He seemed so happy and self-confident. Rangavar was still a bit worried he’d overexert himself, though, if he kept going at it this hard.

When he got home later that afternoon, he noticed Arro was out again. He’d been going to the gym so much lately. Since it always seemed to be around the same hours as Kraz, Rangavar really had no one to hang out with. It was okay, though. It gave him the chance to keep leveling up on the videogame he and   
Arro liked. Arro couldn’t beat him at that forever.

Arro had been at it over a month. He spent time working out himself, of course, but when Kraz came in with his stupid protein shake and put it on the table, Arro always ‘took a break’ to sit at the table and rest for a bit.

Kraz seemed completely unaware; well, almost. He seemed to be working out more intensely, lately. Arro really suspected it was from all the sugar, giving him boundless energy, but there was no way to know for sure. What he did know was that as the other dragon’s workouts became more energetic, he’d started to drink two shakes throughout his workout, much to Arro’s excitement. Two drinks packed with sugar. Kraz would work out some, drink his shake, work out more, drink the next shake, and then go back until he finally worked himself tired enough to leave.

Watching him drink the ruined shakes wasn’t the fun part for Arro, of course, although it had started out being funny. No. The truly fun part, by now, was the new body that Arro was cultivating, which he didn’t feel bad about one bit.

Kraz’s extremely muscled form was quickly being eaten up by fat packing onto his body. It had been very slight at first, the buff dragon looking just a bit softer. Now, every defined bulge of muscle beneath his scales was disappearing; not to say that it wasn’t still there, beneath the surface, which kept Kraz going. Maybe that was why he thought nothing was wrong; he was working out as strongly as ever.

Still, to Arro’s delight, he’d begun to develop an actual, tiny curve of a potbelly. The firm lines of his abs were slowly disappearing into it, but if Kraz noticed, he didn’t give any clues. Maybe it was harder to notice when it was on his own body every day, and too gradual when it didn’t impact his fitness routine. If he didn’t spend a lot of time looking in the mirror, it would be very easy to miss.

Arro noticed. The only reason he thought Kraz didn’t was because he’d slapped Arro’s belly in the hallway that morning while calling him tubs again. Because he was an asshole. But wouldn’t he be a little less bold if he noticed his own weight problem developing?

For now, the much fatter dragon could sit and be satisfied with his work. He knew it wasn’t the end, though. It was going too well. No. This was really the beginning.

Rangavar watched out the corner of his eye as Kraz yanked on his work uniform, huffing and puffing to pull it over the defined paunch that had developed over his middle. He’d managed to wriggle them up over his thickening thighs, but trying to button them over the swell of pudge at the top was day by day becoming a lost cause.

The smaller dragon wondered if he should say something. The only thing he could think of was that the growth aligned with the new protein shakes he’d started drinking a month ago, so maybe he should let the other dragon know that the formula wasn’t right for him. He had no way of knowing what was going on at home, though, so he wasn’t sure he should just assume. Still, either way he wondered if he should point out the layer of fat slowly developing over his frame; Kraz didn’t seem to have noticed somehow. Rangavar was sure if he had, he’d be devastated, with all the hard work he’d been putting into the gym lately. Maybe it was better to leave the topic alone until Kraz realized for himself, thinking that maybe no one else had noticed either. But if he eventually noticed when it was unmistakable, would he be raging mad that none of his friends had mentioned it to him?

“Are you, uh, ready?” Rangavar finally asked. He’d had his own uniform on for a few minutes, pretending to dick around in his locker while waiting for Kraz to finish dressing.

Kraz had been unsuccessful today, however. He sighed. “I don’t know what happened to these. I put them through the wash myself this time and didn’t do anything differently.”

Yeah. The wash. “Think it might be… Think it might be the protein shakes?” Rangavar asked hesitantly.

Kraz scowled at nothing in particular, facing his open locker. “Do I really look like I’ve gained any muscle? I’ve been trying to keep track of how well I’m doing by increasing the intensity of my workout routine, but I’ve stagnated for like a week straight now.”

“There’s gotta be a limit to how much muscle someone can gain,” said Rangavar carefully, slightly changing the subject. Maybe pointing out Kraz’s growing belly wasn’t a good time right now. He could tell the dragon was feeling a bit… sensitive, as he hauled at his clothes. Maybe not quite aware of the problem yet, but getting the inkling that something was wrong. He just didn’t seem to have realized what.

Arro watched with glee as Kraz downed his third protein shake with a troubled look on his face. He’d seemed quieter, lately. Maybe even more frantic as he pushed himself harder and harder at the gym. He didn’t really give any hints as to whether or not he’d noticed the weight gain, yet, but it was more than obvious to everyone else.

It had been over three months by this point. Despite all of the working out, Kraz had downed larger quantities of the shakes as he increased his workouts, seemingly aware deep down in his subconsciousness that something was wrong, causing him to push himself harder. Maybe it had buried what he secretly noticed, his brain trying to protect him from the truth, but the truth was very evident to everyone else.

Kraz had gotten fat.

With the increasing influx of shakes tampered by obscene amounts of sugar, his body had ballooned, more noticeable due to his previously lean frame. His chest had become coated with a hearty layer of pudge, expanding down his front to become a definite spare tire that hugged him all around to his chubby lovehandles. His thick thighs jiggled with every step, and Arro smirked at the sight of Kraz’s belly jiggling and shaking with his workouts. He wasn’t massive by any means, but no one meeting him for the first time would ever think he’d been within a mile of a gym.

Was he really that deep in denial? How could he have avoided noticing that something was off?

Arro made his way ponderously down the hall. When he noticed Kraz coming the opposite way, he groaned internally. Kraz also had two of his buddies with him. It had been a while since he and Arro had crossed paths at work, though, and Arro suppressed a smirk at the way Kraz’s belly bounced with his steps under his work jacket. He was still nowhere near as fat as a dragon like Arro, obviously, but the gut was unmistakable beneath the straining buttons.

Kraz grinned maliciously as they got close. “Hey, here comes the big guy,” he said to his friends, in the kind of whisper that was meant to be heard.

Arro frowned at him as they came upon each other. Kraz was still grinning. “Looking big today, I see,” he said in a fake conversational tone.

Arro just couldn’t take this anymore. He clenched his fists at his sides. “Speak for yourself.”

Kraz paused, his lip slightly curling in a snarl. “Excuse me?”

Arro bared his teeth. “Every day you call me fat, but maybe you should speak for yourself,” he growled more loudly. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think you were copying me.”

Kraz was glaring with his mouth half-open, like he wanted to say something but was at a loss for words. His friends looked awkward and uncomfortable behind him, looking anywhere else, definitely staying out of this. They’d obviously noticed the steady gain as well, but nobody really ever wanted to upset Kraz. Nobody would ever dare suggest to him that he’d put on weight. That he was… fat.

“Take a long, hard look in the mirror, Kraz. Now get your own fat ass out of my way.” Arro surged forward and shoulder-checked the slightly shorter dragon, sending him stumbling back towards the wall. Arro stormed away quickly enough that he hoped Kraz wouldn’t realize the sweat on his forehead or how hard he was shaking. He’d done it, though. He’d stood up for himself for a change. He’d turned the tables.

And Kraz didn’t show up to the gym that night.

Kraz was incredibly quiet in the locker room. Incredibly uncharacteristic. Rangavar cast him a few worried glances until he finally cleared his throat. “Wonder if we’ll be partnered today. It’s been a while.” He kept his voice light and unconcerned.

Kraz looked down while eyeing his uniform. “Maybe,” was all he said.

Rangavar shrugged, unfolding his own uniform to put it on quickly. “It would be fun.” He was quiet a moment. “You just seem kind of… down, today.”

The dragon finally sighed and straightened. “Rangavar, do I…” he paused, his face looking a bit unsure of whatever next might come out of his mouth. His face hardened as he seemingly came to a decision. “I… I think I’m starting to gain weight.”

Rangavar stared blankly. Starting to?

The other dragon’s voice wavered. “I don’t understand, I’ve been working out nonstop, I just…” He reached a tentative paw down to his increasingly ponderous belly. His fingers stank into it, and he looked simultaneously confused and horrified.

Rangavar looked away uneasily. “I mean… I think you look fine.”

The other dragon glanced up sharply, hopefully. “I don’t look like I’ve gained weight?”

“That’s, uh, not exactly what I said.”

Kraz frowned and looked away awkwardly. “I just… I don’t get it. I’ve been keeping up at the gym. I feel like I’m doing better than ever, actually. And yet…” he clutched his stomach again. “Vaugh dammit Rangavar, I’ve put on weight and don’t know what’s going wrong.”

Rangavar carefully chose his next words. “Do you think it has to do with the protein shakes? That’s the only thing that’s changed in your workout routine.”

Kraz snorted. “I switched to that type months ago, though, so gaining weight doesn’t exactly coincide.”

Rangavar didn’t mean to hesitate an extra moment. He really didn’t.

Kraz froze with an expression of horror. “Have—Have I been—?”

Rangavar didn’t quite know what to say.

With a whining groan, Kraz stomped over to one of the benches and sat, crumpling the jacket clutched in his paws against his lap. Well, the part of his lap that wasn’t immediately buried by his belly. “Do you think it really started that long ago?”

“I… maybe.” Rangavar looked away.

Kraz scowled. “Why didn’t you say anything? Was it obvious to everyone? Why didn’t ANYONE say anything???”

Somehow, Rangavar was pretty sure that ‘It would hurt your feelings,’ wasn’t an adequate answer.

“Do you really think I started to gain weight back then?”

“I, I don’t know,” Rangavar stammered. “Looking back, it would sort of make sense. Telling me your clothes shrank and stuff.”

That seemed to ring a bell. Kraz closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall behind him. “Fuck.”

“I mean, just… stop with the protein shakes,” Rangavar suggested. “They’re obviously not working for you. You’ll get back on track, and just… things will straighten out.” That sounded right. It wasn’t as if Kraz had stopped working out or something.

The plump dragon groaned. “Do you think everyone notices?”

Rangavar wasn’t really sure how to answer that one, either.

At Rangavar’s silence, Kraz gave him a look. “What the fuck, Rangavar. You SHOULD have said something. I thought we were friends.”

“Hey, there’s nothing wrong with it. Just change the formula, like I suggested a few months ago.”

Kraz stared blankly ahead. “I guess you did mention it then, huh. Sorry for snapping. I still just…”

“It’s not the end of the world,” Rangavar assured the other distraught dragon. “Like I said, things will work themselves out.”

“Ugh. It feels like the end of the world,” Kraz sighed. “Someone made fun of me yesterday. I don’t know why I hadn’t really noticed. Kept lying to myself, I guess...”

Rangavar frowned. Someone made fun of Kraz for being fat? He suddenly recalled Arro mentioning that someone constantly made fun of him for being fat, too. Rangavar would have to find this guy eventually. He sounded mean.

“I guess I’ll just switch the shake formula like you said. Thanks for the tip. Although I feel kind of dumb I didn’t notice on my own.” Kraz rose slowly, still looking a bit upset, but also a bit calmer. He shook out the wrinkled jacket. Rangavar waited for him so that they could leave the locker room together.

Kraz was still buttoning his jacket as they walked out the door. He’d gotten a new one recently—for ‘some reason’—but even this one was straining now, the buttons finding it harder to reach the holes. He’d almost gotten the last one through after sucking in hard, when he prematurely let out his breath.

One of the buttons popped, pinging off into the hallway. The rest quickly followed, like a cascading waterfall that couldn’t be stopped until the floor of the hallway around their feet was littered with the tiny things.

Kraz let out a wordless growl. “Vaugh dammit.”

Arro watched from his usual seat at the table as the fat gray dragon worked out on the other side of the room. His new brand of protein shake sat welcomingly on the table for when he came back over after his workout. Apparently, Arro’s comments the other day had snapped him back to reality. The other dragon would have a lot of work to do to get rid of that gut.

Arro eyed the protein shake. Apparently, Kraz may have also taken a guess at the source of his problem. This one was a new formula again. Arro looked over at the fat dragon lifting weights. Then he looked back at the shake. He looked at the dragon. Then, the shake.

Leaning an elbow casually against the table while Kraz was occupied, Arro smirked as he ripped open a sugar packet.