

It couldn't be right. Gabriel felt like the class was so easy up until this point. Sure, he was treating his education a little liberally, but who doesn't in their first year? Riverpaw was an enormous state college, and it was common for dormitories and Greek houses to spend weekends and occasional week days throwing spur of the moment events. One of the reasons he came here was to open up, especially since the general air of the culture on campus was incredibly welcoming. A nerdy little goat like him still was able to meet the occasional like-minded person at these parties, and it only encouraged him to try them more often.

The midterm assessments were only a few days ago, and unlike the rest of the quizzes and exams for this semester, he'd actually studied for at least a few hours! In high school he was able to absorb information so easily, but the caprine was slowly learning that it wasn't the case for this school. He felt like he prepared well enough for the Friday exam, so he ended up having a few drinks with his roommates to celebrate. How difficult could an exam for a class called 'Russia: The Historical Experience 1613-1991,' be?

Gabriel was frozen in his seat as he pulled his pamphlet from the pile of exams the following Monday, flipping back and forth between the writing questions and doing his best to comprehend Professor Tarvashbek's comments. He felt bitter and betrayed, the goat remembering a connection with the enormous crocodile at the beginning of the semester.

His mind went back to the first day of class, the noon period finishing up as the lecture hall emptied out. Gabriel was the last to leave, nervously gathering his notebook and pen, heading for the open door as the trunk of the professor's tail swished along tile floor to block his way, a long snout turning towards the student, "Gabriel...yes?"

Petrified at the organic weapon beneath him, he craned his head to the side, "Y-Yes...Professor Tarvashbek?" He paused to double check the 'dile's name on the front of his notebook.

"A little nervous on your first day I see. I spend a little time reading up on my students. I don't think you have anything to worry about here, judging by your past results..." The corners of his jaws curled in a smile, "I think you'll fit in just fine."

"It's just a lot to take in, I guess. I-I'll get more comfortable here, I'm sure of it!" A fake smile from Gabriel as the golden cuffs of fur on his wrists tightly gripped his belongings to his chest.

"Remember little one, my door is always open if you have any concerns. It takes a lot to anger this old crocodile." The tail swished to the other side of the desk, the scholar going back to whatever he was writing about before, letting the boy go on his way.

Gabriel nodded meekly, scurrying out of the echoing, empty hall to continue on to the rest of the lectures he had on his first busy day of the semester. He could hear the deep, thrumming chuckle of the burly croc as he left, clearly amused by the new students on campus, despite how friendly he seemed.

He left that hall feeling a little more welcomed than before. Despite the intimidating demeanor that an enormous carnivore like the professor exuded, his actions showed the opposite. The crocodile seemed thrilled to call on his students and hear them add on to his thoughts or provide thoughtful commentary. The man wanted each and every one of his pupils to leave his class with a new repertoire of information in their mind. He cared, and he didn't hold back speaking his mind on the few students that already seemed uninterested with his course.

To the professor's luck, the bad eggs of the group seemed to drop the course throughout the first half of the semester, lightening his load of frustrating pupils.

Gabriel never ended up going to him for help, the caprine confident that he had control of his education. Those thoughts diminished week after week, showing up to class less, pleading with the reptile after lecture hours to accept late assignments. He was lucky they were taken, even with the point deductions, but his grades weren't sufficient to keep him passing. He was too proud to admit defeat, at least that's what he told himself. The truth was he was afraid to show signs of weakness, especially to the handsome Nile Crocodile that loved to take a personal interest in his students.

Gabriel had spoken with one of his classmates before about how to turn around a failing grade in Tarvashbek's history classes. It was a friend he'd spoken with before the first exam, a primate named Logan. The monkey's striped tail had poked his side at the end of the lecture to ask for some help on a paper. He had a stoner vibe to him, wearing tight jeans and a black tank top for one too many days in a row, a beanie covering his wispy hairdo, his demeanor much too laid back for the grades he was earning.

They studied together for that first exam, but both of them grew apart, the two managing to develop a horrible lack of self-discipline. It was a month in however, when Gabriel noticed a jump in the ape's grades as the tests were passed back out, confronting him for an explanation. Logan was excited to share, "It was a little scary to own up to my own shit with him. He gave me a few easier books to read on top of the dense reading we already have to get through. I banged out a few papers on topics he personally selected. On top of few private tutoring sessions...I'm back in business."

"I can't possibly let him know I'm failing, he had faith in me...c-could you help me?" Gabriel begged his friend for aid, but the monkey just didn't understand.

Logan shrugged, leaving the goat with a final note before he ran off to another class, "He helped me, so he'll help you. I already have a ton of work to do for him, man, I'm not out of the fire yet." With a pat on the shoulder, the simian ran off, "Just don't do anything stupid."

The goat couldn't explain to him how his family would react, or how the school might drop his scholarship! It was all so overwhelming, and it wasn't supposed to be anyone's burden but his own. He was already taking so many classes though, and some of them were much more important to his major than electives relating to Russian History. So he dragged his feet, doing his best to keep his college life enjoyable.

One would think he'd be miserable, blaming himself on his own mistakes throughout his first few months at the university. No. He started to enrage, the goat being the only one left in the lecture hall, even the professor gone as he crumpled the paper in his hands and roughly stuffed it into his bag. How could the professor let one of his students fail like this? Should he not have reached out and talked with the goat if he was clearly struggling this much? After all, he was able to see at the beginning of the semester that he was having difficulties. Why not now?

Storming out of the lecture hall, the nerdy caprine stomping his way through the campus, he headed towards the faculty building. He had something dastardly in mind for revenge. The boy was blinded by his own mistakes, and he truly had no idea what mistake he was about to make.

Through the sliding doors, he flashed his school ID to the security guard. He knew exactly where to go: elevators to the third floor, a left down the hall and a right towards the office at the end. Professor Tarvashbek had an isolated office, most likely earned for how many years he's been at the institution, and it in Gabriel's mind, it made it the perfect place to break in and make some well-needed adjustments to his own standing in this class.

Soft steps across the old carpet, he'd creep up to the old door at the end of the hall, passed the decrepit looking bathrooms and empty offices, carefully peeking his head through the glass window with the enameled **Tarvashbek** on the window, a handwritten note in Cyrillic underneath, which he assumed was the 'dile's name in Russian. Tension released from his body as he saw the wide room unoccupied. He reached for the knob, another fear thwarted, relieved as it turned, granting him entry.

To the common eye, most would say the room was old, but to those who understood the crocodile's cultural interests, antique was more appropriate. The back wall of the room was lined in bookcases from floor to ceiling, history books between the ages of a few years to possibly a century decorating the shelves, most of which seemed to be organized by relevant time period. The walls on the sides of the room were decorated even more extravagantly, the goat able to pick out a few relevant culture pieces like a preserved Russian balalaika hanging above a table, or the number of Chinese porcelain plates gridded on sections of the wall. One piece that caught his eye was a tea set covering part of the enormous desk at the center of the room, blacks and whites patterned along the material, lined with gold trimming, steam rising from the tea in one of the cups.

That was only the start of the detail to the room, the caprine moving slowly towards the back as he dragged fingers along the spines of the books, reading off a few of the countries in his head. Russia, China, Georgia, Uzbekistan, the list went on and on. He must've been an expert on centuries of culture, conflict, and development in dozens of nations across the world, especially considering that there was a whole section of self-published textbooks..

He couldn't focus on this though, despite the inviting and comfortable warmth of the office. Gabriel took a deep breath, and he turned his attention to the stacks of papers of notebooks. He noticed a number of file cabinets along the sides of the room, praying to himself that he only needed to look at the desk in front of him. Thick planners were stacked on the desks, all labeled with what he assumed to be the many different classes that the professor was teaching on campus. Just like the shelves, classes on many different time periods and cultures were being taught, and one of the bottom booklets seemed more than familiar. It was his class.

Pulling the planner from the bottom of the stack, a few of the other booklets and papers drifted to the ground. He'd clean it up after, he thought. It shouldn't take long to adjust some of the numbers in the grade book. He flipped the pages until he found his name in its own row, much like the other students. Numbers went across of the scores he's received in the class so far, all of them below average.

He adjusted the round frames on his face, reaching down to sift through the crocodile's drawers in search of a pen. There was a drawer dedicated to teas, a drawer of papers with plenty of red pen decorating the normal writing, a strange deeper drawer filled with skulls of various shapes and sizes. Eventually Gabriel found a pen, starting to alter the scores as subtly as he could.

The first *thoom* went unheard, but eventually the decrepit paneling of the building's floor creaked and bent under the professor's heavy steps, the reptile leaving the tight bathroom some feet away from his office. Gabriel gasped, thankful that the beast was wiping water from his tie instead of looking through the glass window to see a snooping caprine. He had to act quick, attempting to order the papers he messed on the desk and shutting the book before dipping underneath the large desk and pressing himself underneath it, hoping he was safe for at least a little while.

The crocodile lumbered through the door, humming to himself until he saw the mess on the floor, "Hm..." Something was amiss, but Tarvashbek continued on, slumping down in the long-suffering office chair that bent and squished down to accommodate for the enormous rear plopped in it. He slipped his feet from the sandals he wore, pushing them underneath the desk and sealing Gabriel in the shadows of his thick legs. He turned his head to the side, taking the smallest breaths possible to avoid detection.

The crocodile went for a sip of tea, grabbing the top booklet of his pile, noticing that this class was at the end of his workload. Why was this on top? He had about six other classes to review before this one. He also noticed the out of place pen, and started to piece together a suspected crime. Papers on the ground, the office out of order from how he left it. Someone was in here. His eyes narrowed, the terrifying guttural growl of a crocodile erupting from his loose throat as it vibrated the room around him, "I suspect a rat..."

Gabriel shivered in his hiding place, the horns on the top of his head tapping the wood of the desk underneath as the crocodile's rumble ceased, one of his thick soles lifting and searching for a hiding culprit. The warm base of the crocodile's foot pressed up and against the side of the goat's head as the professor spoke, "Hello, little one. I don't remember having an appointment with a student today. But who is this..."

"Ah-" He started to speak, the arch of the meaty foot roughly mashing his muzzle into the desk to silence him.

"Shh...I'd rather guess. After all you aren't supposed to be in here, hm? Now let's see..." His other foot lifted, each of those thick soles equal in size to Gabriel's face, maybe more. It was hard to tell considering the dark environment he was cramped into. The crocodile's toes dragged and traced the curves of his caprine features, keeping him pressed tightly against the wood as he whimpered. Tarvashbek let out a chuckle, clearly playing dumb, "I see you have some glasses, no need for those now though." The gaps between his digits gripped the wire frames and tossed them to the side as he continued to explore, "There are some lips. Ah, a little extra fur on your chin, that eliminates a few of my students and any female students. I've never felt your face before either, so that eliminates a couple more..."

He dragged it out, the professor using the contours and protruding parts of the goat's features to soothe and massage his own feet. He rubbed the arches and heels roughly into the goat's muzzle, subjecting him to the hot body heat exuding from the surprisingly soft soles. Most of the crocodile's body was armored in scales, but there must've been particular sections meant for cushion and support.

The greenish toes crept up the goat's face, forcing the goat to breathe in against the professor's arch as they found a key feature, tapping against his horns, "Ah, I know exactly who this is, and why you are here. I'm disappointed in you, Gabriel..." He brought his feet away and

reached down to grab the goat by his collar, roughly pulling him from the dank darkness and sitting him on the desk, the looming carnivore hovering over the student, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

Bewildered and lost, Gabriel shook his head to leave the trance he was put in from being a doormat for the minutes before. He looked up from the fat gut mashing into his legs to meet with the long snout pointing towards his own, "I-I'm sorry, I promise I didn't do anyth-"

"Then what are these convenient changes in my book?" He lifted the class booklet he adjusted before, already turned to the page with a thick thumb pointing towards the numbers he had risen.

"That wasn't me I prom-" He was cut off again.

"Do you think you can lie to me at this point, Gabriel?" He spat fire, fury in his words despite the relaxing moments before. "You've taken steps to avoid help from me already. I know you've spoken with Logan on his grades. Why didn't you come to me?"

He didn't have an answer, the goat merely looking down in shame. The worst part was he realized that he wasn't guilty for doing this in the first place, but merely because he was caught, and the goat could sense his professor thinking the same.

The two sat in silence, Gabriel surmising ways he could escape from the office as he looked from side to side for an opportunity. The professor hung his head in frustration over the failing student feet below him. His thick foot tapped on the ground, suddenly feeling the need to scare the poor boy a little more, as if that would help set him straight, "There's a lot in this world you should be afraid of, Gabriel. If you aren't taking this opportunity to better yourself, then what are you doing?"

He started to pace around the desk, heavy footfalls shaking the loosely hung ornaments on the wall, "You know, I'd imagine you could enjoy whatever topics interest you. No need to have a focus." As he reached the front of the desk, his jaws moved to hang over the goat's shoulder. His large palms moved up and gripped the boy's arms to his side as he started, "You know I'm not only an expert on history. I've spent years on many subjects in the past, one of them being anatomy."

The caprine gulped, closing his eyes as the threatening knowledge was spilled from the wide maw against his cheek, "Crocodylus Niloticus, otherwise known as the Nile Crocodile. It's jaws can administer a bite force of over twenty thousand newtons. That is moreso for the average specimen. At my size, it is much more than that. Don't worry though..." The crocodile's jaws snapped shut, eliciting a fearful yelp at the loud display, "Studies have shown your bones will crumple at a tenth of that."

The crocodile's arms slipped over the front of the goat's torso, nestling him against the warm, soft chest that the professor sported underneath his button-up. Gabriel shook with fear, feeling the rumbling breaths pour into the reptile's lungs and drain after, feeling the *thump-thump* of the creature's enormous heart behind his head. Tarvashbek continued, "We are at the top of the food chain as well. Opportunistic apex predators. Do you know what that means, little one?"

A pause, nothing answered as expected. The crocodile let out a chuckle, "I figured you didn't...it means we don't hunt. We wait. And wait. And wait for the right moment. We wait until our prey naively creeps too close to the surface of the water to quench their thirst. We wait for

them to enter our domain, and risk their lives for something so...trivial. That's when we strike." He loosened his grip, standing taller and pressing the tip of his snout in between the goat's black horns, "Tell me Gabriel, were you naive enough to wander into a crocodile's domain?"

The professor's tone had changed grimly. What used to be a charming, intelligent scholar from a university now reminded him of a monster from horror movies. He didn't speak to Gabriel, rather through him. He could feel thick drool dribbling into his hair, and he suddenly realized he wasn't safe anymore. Whether or not the professor was intimidating him or planning to deal with him permanently, he didn't care. He wanted to leave. Now.

The crocodile loosened his grip, sliding his hands up the caprine's chest to grip his shoulders. This was his chance, Gabriel roughly pulled himself from the vice, attempting to vault over the side of the desk and hopefully dodge the thick tail coiled along the ground, but he wasn't as nimble as his mind led him to be. He tumbled to the ground, his leg kicking ornaments on the desk down to the carpet with him. The tea set tumbled off the surface, shattering on the carpet and drenching him in a hot liquid, making him smell of chai.

Time stood still as he looked up to his professor, the once empathetic gaze glazing over in a white rage-induced glare. The same vicious growl from before vibrated in the reptile's neck. Gabriel tried to apologize but his throat was dry from fear. He didn't act, simply waiting for the first word spoken. They were less than satisfying to hear.

"I'm sorry, Gabriel." The crocodile spoke after what felt like minutes of fuming. "I think your time at this university has come to a close." The crocodile thundered forward, the tall behemoth stomping closer and closer until he was within reach, picking the student up and sliding his writhing head into the depths of his drooling maw.

The goat's arms were tightly bound to his sides, legs kicking violently in the air as his face dragged across the wide, undulating tongue. The winking gullet at the back beckoned him deeper, Gabriel protesting, "W-Wait, Professor I'm sorry I'll just g-" Silenced for the final time, his visage stuffed into the tight passage as the echoing gulps sounded throughout the office.

Lodged in murky darkness, he could smell the awful stench of boiled meat from below as the crocodile's throat claimed him, inches with every swallow. His shoulders pushed inside, the powerful muscles surrounding him, toying with the goat relentlessly. Tarvashbek's throat clearly had the room to make the boy disappear in one swift gulp, but he was angry, he needed to let out his emotions, and what better way to do that than to swallow and catch the misbehaving student with flexing clenches over his form?

His torso had disappeared, clothing and fur drenched with the thick saliva and mucous lining the reptile's esophagus. He whined and pleaded in vain, the air squished from his chest with every squeeze to his body as he felt the maw imprisoning him turn towards the ceiling. His bushy tail wiggled against the ribbed roof of the crocodile's mouth, legs kicking as his fate was sealed. Tarvashbek relaxed his muscles, his eyes gently closing as the boy vanished from view with a wet *glurk*, bulging out from the professor's gut, making the clothing keeping him decent taut against his scales.

The terrifying jaws snapped shut just as they did moments before, a tongue swiping over the fangs at the edges. He groaned in delight, alone once again as his hands drifted down to feel just how the goat was settling in. A finger loosened his tie, the other hand undoing the buttons on his shirt. Bulges of hands and feet, even the occasional horrified face pressed out

against the crocodile's flesh from underneath, an errant kick from within bursting the rest of the buttons on the professor's shirt as he angrily sighed again, "Hm...you've been a pain to me, Gabriel. I look forward to you joining my drawer."

He kept his composure. The reptile liked to be in control. Rowdy and unruly students were nothing but a pain, and if they weren't working to improve, they were destined to annoy him until the day he retired. And thus...they became a lovely layer of crocodile fat. Tarvashbek didn't mind, always one to appreciate his rounded belly on top of his muscled form. The students he dealt with only made him bigger, hoping that one day they wouldn't cross him all together. After all, he's one of the most imposing figures on campus. They'd never asked what truly happened to the students that disappear from his class.

For now, little Gabriel would settle into his new home as the crocodile slumped back into his chair, thick claws poking and prodding the wriggling smelter for hours until he settled down for good. The soothing sound of a sizzling simmer accompanied his every breath as his belly started to digest and roll over the meat inside. He sat in a widened stance, feet slipping underneath the desk as he reveled in the crunching sound of a wire-framed pair of glasses underneath his sole. He chuckled at how foreboding that truly was to the doomed caprine.

He leaned forward once the bulges had smoothed out, flipping open the booklet from before and drawing a thick line through Gabriel's scores, making a note in the margin depicting his current status: "Dropped the class. Couldn't take the heat." A horrible joke, but nothing was more true.