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Get fit. Obtain abs. Have your Ryan Gosling moment.

So it was written, by the hand of Clyde Warner. A rough translation of the words of his mentor who probably doesn't even remember his real name, Lexy Chapel.

At the time of her saying it, it was more along the lines of, "I'm not trying to be mean, but Penguin has the body of a 12-year old. Remember that scene in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* where Ryan Gosling takes his shirt off and Emma Stone gets all flustered? Yeah, Penguin has the opposite effect of that."

Paraphrasing made the words hurt less.

"Fuckin' pump it," Clyde Warner softly growled to himself as he struggled to do a tenth consecutive pull up. He found himself in a random gym in a city he couldn't even recall. All he had time to think about was bettering himself and his partner. "Pump it, little *bitch*."

"*Ooh, mamacita! Daddy likey,*" Douglas Casey howled out at a young Indian woman passing by him while he sat on a bench press browsing his phone with his big, stupid bear paws.

Predictably, his catcall didn't get a response beyond a scoff and a typical eye roll from the woman. She didn't break her stride as Doug scoffed right back. "Ugly skank."

"RRRRRAAHHHH!" came the valiant cry of Clyde as he - against all odds - did a tenth pull up. His feet dropped to the floor and he got up with his chest puffed out, standing tall as the conqueror of the pull up bar. "LET'S GO!"

"Are we finally leaving?" asked Doug, standing up from the press. "About damn time, let's get some grub."

"I have to do two more sets."

"What?"

"I've only done one set of my routine, I have to do two more."

Doug stared at Clyde blankly, which was typical since Doug never took his giant bear head off, what with its dead eyes and even deader smile.

"You're telling me that we've already been here for an *hour* and you need to do your thing *two more times*?"

"We've been here for maybe fifteen minutes."

"Do they got a cafeteria here?" wondered Doug, looking around the building desperately.

"Maybe you could benefit from some cardio," Clyde carefully suggested.

The truth was, his friend was a fat ass. There was no denying it. One could sense it through the absurdly large bear suit. It was the way he walked, talked, and just generally existed. He oozed the aura of a fat ass.

In the spirit of friendship, Clyde refused to be honest with his friend and instead just slung passive-aggressive suggestions Doug's way every now and again in hopes of convincing his friend to maybe exercise once.

Clyde shrugged and went on, "We might as well use this time off to help our conditioning."

It wasn't an arranged leave of absence, but the Farmstead animals were grateful to have time to recover after the horrific events that transpired at the last Breakdown before Under Attack.

They had won the match against lich house, but at what cost? Dancing Bear was literally shot three times, which Doug considered a "hate crime" since he was a *black* bear and Ravyn Taylor was a *white* woman.

While Clyde let Doug handle the political aspect of the assault, he focused on the fact that his big break as a professional wrestler wasn't really feeling like a big break at all. While Happy Farmstead Friends had remained undefeated at 1-0-1, they had yet to actually finish a match. It was Clyde's dream to pin someone in the middle of the ring on SCW television. Instead, he'd spent his two matches getting his ass kicked and even having to watch his friend get shot until the bell rang, leading to him getting his ass kicked even more.

He wanted to be better. He wanted the *team* to be better.

"Nah, I'm good," Doug retorted flatly. Suddenly, he broke out into an angry fit, shouting, "We're undefeated, but for some reason, everyone thinks we're a big joke! I know better! I'm better than that, damn it! I've proved it once and I'll prove it again!"

"Maybe doing ten minutes on the treadmill will prove everyone wrong?"

"A treadmill can't help me with *this*," Doug said confidently before flossing with the grace of a fat baby. Ever the expert at multitasking, he continued while flossing. "This is something I was born with. Sure, I can hone it, and I will. But there's a natural talent at my base level that cannot be taught inside of a gym."

"What about outside of a gym?" Clyde suggested, pointing towards the exit. "We could go for a run."

"Yeah, let's get lunch," Doug said while mercifully finishing his flossing. "I saw a killer taco truck a few blocks down that looked cheap as fuck."

"No, I mean—look, just let me finish these sets and we'll get some food," Clyde conceded, meeting his friend halfway.

He turned and picked up his notebook, opening it up and scanning the second page that had the workout that was going to turn him into Ryan Gosling all written out.

Before he could even remind himself of what to do next, Doug reached over and grabbed the notebook with his bear hands, yanking it out of Clyde's hands.

"Hey!"

"What's this, your diary? Ha! That's so gay," Doug teased as he opened the notebook to the first page. He tilted his head while he read. "Hold on, is this Lexy's diary? It has all of her wisdom written down."

"No, that's—"

"Dude, Lexy's handwriting looks like a dude's. Like, I forgive her, but still, gross."

"It's not Lexy's!" Clyde yelped before yanking the notebook back and opening it on the page, which had a long-running list in two separate columns. "I just jot down stuff she says in this notebook so I can look back at it and remember it so I can be as successful as her, Ace, and Autumn one day."

"What d'ya got in there?"

"Well, I think some of it has gotten lost in translation because she talks so damn fast, but...let's see," Clyde began, running his finger along the page and reading the list aloud. "'Always carry baby oil, abs, don't trust Katsumi-chan, look like Ryan Gosling, make sure your bedroom door is locked, abs, remember the branding, let everyone know of the conspiracy, abs, something about children being money machines...'"

Doug nodded. "She's so smart."

"She also keeps mentioning this 'Nigel' person and - if I'm being honest - I'm starting to believe he's a figment of her imagination," Clyde admitted, closing the notebook and trying to

emote his concern through the mask before giving up almost instantly. "Anyway, that's why I'm doing these reps. I need to look the part. I don't right now."

"Is that why you started wearing a shirt?" Doug asked, pointing out the shirt that Clyde was indeed wearing, a rare sight ever since he had become The Hairless Penguin.

"Right. After months of not wearing one, I got kind of used to it, now all my shirts make my sensitive nipples chafe," Clyde revealed rather nonchalantly. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I gotta get my crunch on."

"Oh, so we're going to the taco truck now then?"

"No," said Clyde as he dropped to the floor and started doing crunches. To his surprise, they came easier than the first set. *The program is really working*, he thought. Mid-exercise, he looked up at Doug. "Just lift some weights, it'll make time go by faster."

Doug shrugged and went to grab a dumbbell while Clyde continued his crunches. Out of the corner of his eye, Clyde could see Doug struggling to lift one dumbbell - not because of the weight, but because of his ridiculous paws. After some effort, he managed to double fist a single dumbbell. He pulled it up before stumbling back, his leg catching Clyde's bag and sending him falling to the floor.

"Help!" cried Doug, flailing his legs about while the dumbbell rested on his chest. "Black bear down!"

"Oh, God, Bear," Clyde muttered worriedly.

He rushed to his feet and used both arms to fling the dumbbell off of his friend before pulling him up. From behind, laughter came. Clyde turned to see a group of extremely fit gym bros cackling at the misfortune of this oaf in a bear suit.

"Yo, look at this fat ass!" the alpha of the pack bellowed, pointing at Doug and continuing to laugh.

Doug looked around excitedly. "Where?! Where's a fat ass?! Let's fuckin' roast him!"

Their laughter died out. "You," the alpha clarified. "It's you."

"Hey, he's not fat," Clyde lied. "There's just...a lot of padding in the suit."

"All right, get out of the suit then."

Doug suddenly got into a defensive stance, throwing his fists up. "NEVER!"

"Listen," Clyde began, stepping in front of Doug, "we don't want trouble, we're just here to workout. We don't wanna fight."

The alpha chuckled, prompting his friends to do the same. "Yeah, I bet you don't, soft boy."

"Soft boy? I'm not—I'm a man! I'm a soft—I mean, I'm a *hard* man!"

"You masked freaks get each other real hard, huh?"

"That's not what I meant! It's not! I meant—no! That's not—no!"

One of Clyde's childhood traumas was bubbling to the surface. The pointing. The laughing. The ridiculing. *Humiliation*.

As the runt of his parents' litter, high school was not easy. While most kids were sprouting into adults, Clyde was a late bloomer. He was often mistaken as a "little buddy" from the elementary school next door when hanging with his very limited friend circle. While all of his classmates got girlfriends and started to experiment with sex, he was left wondering when he was going to finally see some growth in the only department that mattered for such things. His parents got him a Gillette razor for his 18th birthday, which only felt like they were mocking him for his pathetic wispy hairs on his neck and upper lip.

Worst of it all, his "late bloom" was hardly a bloom at all. Here he stood: five feet, four inches, and 140 pounds of 'soft,' up against a group of people who could defeat him just by standing their ground with a palm placed against his head as he swung helplessly, arms too short to hit.

Always too short. Story of his life.

Clyde took a deep breath and took Doug by the paw. "Come on, Bear," he started.

"Bear?" one of the gym bros echoed through a cackle.

"We'll find a different corner to work out in."

"Hold on, HP, we're about to go make fun of some fat ass," Doug replied, still looking around.

"Don't worry about it," the alpha said, dismissively waving at Clyde. "Me and the boys are about to hit the showers. Let's go, boys."

"Fuck yeah," one of the boys hollered before they all started to high five each other while heading for the showers.

Doug watched quietly as they left, all laughing amongst themselves. Finally, he turned to Clyde, who was on the verge of a panic attack. "Dude," Doug began, "I think those guys are really gay."

"They'll regret making fun of us," Clyde muttered angrily, clenching his shaking fists at his side. "I'll *make* them regret it."

"Yeah, they were really harsh about your body," Doug sighed. "I guess the shirt didn't hide your physique. That's all right, man, you'll get there. Wanna go get lunch?"

Clyde responded in the only way he could. He fell to the ground, went flat on his back, pulled his knees up, and resumed his crunches.

With what he had planned, he'd need them.

200.

200 crunches is what Clyde was able to fit in before he saw the alpha and his pack leave the showers, all stopping to harass a poor woman trying to workout.

Clyde quickly got up - as fast as he could, anyway, given he'd just done 200 crunches after having done maybe 20 total over the last decade or two. On his feet, he felt pain in his core. Good pain. The pain of growth. The pain of abs. The pain of Gosling.

"Taco time?" Doug asked, heaving the dumbbell that he was pretending to lift well across the gym.

"Yeah, hey, go get the car ready and I'll be there in a sec," Clyde said, keeping an eye on the pack of gym wolves.

"Fuck sake, I just want to fuckin' *eat*! What is it this time?!"

"I think the pre-workout powder I took has given me massive diarrhea," Clyde half-lied. It probably did, but that wasn't why he was hanging back. A statement had to be made and it wasn't going to be made inside of a gym toilet.

"Oh," Doug mumbled awkwardly before picking up their bags. "All right, go make that shitter your bitch. Hey, the tacos oughta help with your bowels too. Judging by the quality of the truck, I'll assume that their food is a colon cleanser. Perfect for after a workout, get all those toxins out!"

"I won't be long," Clyde said with a soft pat on the back of Doug's bear head, sending him on his way.

Once Doug was out of sight, Clyde inhaled deeply and tightened his core. He could feel the burn. He knew that underneath that shirt, there were newly-formed abs waiting to be unleashed on the world. 200 crunches saw to that.

Make Lexy Proud, he thought while exhaling...slowly. *Have your Ryan Gosling moment.*

With the confidence of the emperor penguin, Clyde made his way toward the gym bros while they all continued to try and score one girl at once.

"Hey," he hissed, coming to a stop just in front of the group and the girl. "Leave her alone."

"Oh, look, it's gay Michael Myers," one of them chirped while pointing out Clyde.

"What'd you say, bud?" the leader asked. He couldn't help but smile at the little man's posture. "Can't really hear you through that mask."

"I *said*...leave her alone."

"Or what?"

"Or," Clyde began rather dramatically as he very slowly lifted up his shirt to reveal his doughy tummy, "you deal with *these*."

There it was. His Gosling moment. The girl had to be impressed, but more importantly, the men had to be *jealous*. Not just jealous, *intimidated*! Because if it was to be a true Gosling moment, it wasn't just about nailing the girl, it was also about making every other man in the room feeling insecure.

"Are those bed sores?"

"What? No. I just have a little rash from shaving my body hair to be more aerodynamic," Clyde uttered sheepishly. "I'm talking about my abs! You'll have to deal with my abs!"

There was a brief moment of awkward silence before the group once again burst into laughter. The girl quickly got up from her machine and grabbed her bag before going up to Clyde and whispering in his ear, "Thanks, kid, but you should go back to your mom or dad now, because these assholes will have no problem hitting a child."

"Huh? I'm not—"

Quickly, she scampered off.

"Okay, okay," the alpha said as he prevented himself from hyperventilating. "If you really wanna go, we can go. Let's go."

Clyde cleared his throat. "I must warn you...I'm a professional athlete."

"Ooh, don't hold *back*," the gym leader shot back sarcastically.

"I wasn't warning *you*," Clyde clarified before gesturing to the rest of the pack. "I was warning *them*. They're going to have to take you to the hospital after I'm done with you."

"Christ, kid, let's just get this over—"

Clyde lunged forward and flung his leg up, catching the alpha between the legs. With the slightest of squeaks, he slowly fell forward and to the ground while holding his junk.

"Hey, no cheap shots," one of the friends said, looking down at his gym buddy writhing on the sweat soaked floor.

Before he could even look up, Clyde ripped his shirt off and threw it in his face.

"Penguins don't wear shirts or give a shit about your balls, bitch!"

The wolves leaped forward, ready to dismantle their penguin prey. However, Clyde's small stature made it easy for him to pull off the expert maneuver of crawling through a man's legs to escape through the other side. Almost running in place like a cartoon, he scrambled towards the exit.

Bursting through, his destination was clear: the sketchy black van with tinted windows that served as the Farmsteadmobile. It was a full on sprint to the running vehicle, the sound of trainers hitting pavement and basketball shorts flowing in the wind behind him. The tones of angry gym members that just got outsmarted by a little weasel - in this case, 'outsmarted' meaning kicked in the dick.

"Go, God damn it, go!" Clyde yelled as he ripped open the back doors of the van and crawled in, not even bothering to close the doors behind him. "Drive, Bear!"

"It's your turn," Doug yawned from the passenger's seat. "I'm all tuckered out anyway. Hard day. Don't feel like navigating the wheel with my big, manly paws."

"It's not my turn, it's—damn it!"

Worried about the threat of imminent death, Clyde opted not to argue and instead scattered into the driver's seat, immediately turning the key with his foot already on the pedal. The van weakly roared to life and the sounds and smells of burning rubber quickly filled the parking lot as the van shot forward.

Doug looked back to see the back doors flying open as Clyde zoomed through the parking lot. "Hey, you left the back doors open! Why'd you come in that way?!"

"Close 'em!"

Thanks to not bothering to wear a seatbelt, Doug was able to quickly get out of his seat and crawl to the back. Before he closed the doors, he noticed the group of muscle-bound hunks on their tail, but losing distance.

"Hey, those gay guys that roasted you are chasing us," Doug said, turning back to look at Clyde in the rearview. "They must've bullied you because they had a big crush on you!"

"Yeah, yeah, sure," Clyde muttered quickly. "Are we losing them?!"

Doug sighed and turned back to the open doors, trying his best to get a hold of the handles despite his stupid suit. "We're not interested!" he yelled out to the gym bros before managing to successfully close the doors. He crawled back up to the passenger's seat and sat down, still no seatbelt even while Clyde drove like a nutcase out of the gym parking lot. "I told 'em we're not gay."

"Right, I'm married, you like Lexy," Clyde said, exhaling a shaky breath. Adrenaline continued to pump through his entire body. After today, he knew he was ready to be the protector that LexyCorp needed. "It just wouldn't work out, would it?"

"Why are you driving so fast? I'm hungry, but I'm not trying to die for a 50 cent taco."

As if spurred on by Doug's resistance, Clyde pressed down harder on the pedal as they made it out onto the main road. The van struggled to keep up with Clyde's wishes, but it was good enough.

"You ever seen that movie Drive?" asked Clyde, white knuckling the wheel.

"Is that the one where that autistic dude drives really fast while listening to 80s music? I think so," Doug pondered before shrugging. "What of it?"

Clyde turned on the radio, hoping to get some 80s music to make a point. Instead, some modern pop came through the speakers, polluting the car with its putrid sounds. The scene played more like a parody of Drive rather than the actual film. Regardless...Clyde pressed on.

"Let's just say I feel like Ryan fuckin' Gosling."