

After hours.

That spell that was cast when the doors closed. The smiling faces of the stars, plastered on posters, vending machines and wallpaper alike, were now the ones keeping watch in lieu of their walking, talking counterparts. Only the most otherwise unnoticeable sounds were now able to rule the roost—echoes of the wheels of an errant worker, the humming of an arcade machine—all adding to the antic ambience. An eeriness lent to the once hustling halls and rooms, kept alive now only in neon.

It was much the same as it was any other time. Familiar events could hold a more unsettling vibe when the hustle of everyday activity wasn't there to drown it out. Easy enough to assign something macabre to the sight at one door (the sticky-looking talon-prints leading away from it, and the robot frantically following the trail with a mop, to be precise). This establishment couldn't shake off some shadows, no matter how hard it tried.

Past the pizza-scented scene that rang no alarm bells in the place, and the lazy (sounding) affirmations that could be heard faintly behind the wolf's door, possibly the most innocuous of the sounds could be heard behind door number 3. Quite the oddly enhanced expanse was left of Freddy Fazbear's Mega Pizzaplex. The band never seemed to be able to stay out of intriguing situations—they were made to perform even when eyes weren't on them. Here lay an example. That of lazy clanking and whirring.

It could be chalked up to the mere everyday motions of the stars of this establishment...if the closed door and lack of rhythm to the vibrations didn't throw a figurative wrench into things. There was no pinning a cleaner bot as the source. The cleaners would be blessed to possess such a presence. Footsteps that shook the ground and jolted the breath from any observer's lungs. In the case of this room's occupant, they were often even louder.

But these muted metallic noises, at the moment, could be found owed to a more mellowed out mechanism. A hulking green gator idly surveyed his self-ransacked surroundings, his own smug mug smiling back at him from the mirror opposite. His thick tail thumped the wall behind him in quite the canid manner. Flashes of purple and teal showed now and again behind his jaws, as another animatronic—closer in size to an action figure at present—was engaged in a losing battle with a tongue larger than his body.

Evidence enough lay in his movements, those being twitchy things that both had yet to develop into anything resembling noticeable and paled in comparison to those of the tongue driving over them. No outside eye could guess at how long the dominant display had gone on for, however—were the valiant warrior's efforts reduced to this after hours of struggle against the monstrous muscle, or were they of this calibre the second he'd passed those enormous fangs?

The tongue led him a dance, bucking and twisting as if excited at his flavour—while an almost filmy fluid sluiced across it, spat up from the vent resting under his tongue like a gland. Steam blasted over his body, in the likeness of musing, measured breaths.

“Can't stay outta me, can ya?” could be made out from the muffled depths of the gator's maw, distorted around the mouthful of moggy that bulged said grinning jaws. Steeled fangs

ground along shining hide in a manner, although likely agonising to those of real flesh and skin, amounted only to a teasing tickle to these animatronic animals. Monty knew well and good that his object of interest could bounce back from far greater blows. Many of which he came to, merely by his own playful escapades.

For he was, in fact, familiar with the shrunken figure that his tongue was toying with. It was the same one he'd noticed peering back at him from the vents, likely thinking itself shrouded from view. On more than one occasion, to boot. The same one he'd found in a supply closet on a past hunt for his lost guitar, at the end of the trail laid by its off-tune notes.

While tonight's crossing of these two livewires had begun with a clattering in the vents. Far from a rare occurrence. But next to the name of *Montgomery Gator*, which—like its walking, talking namesake, would demand more caution even when on standby? He'd glared up at the opening, fully ready for one of those little cymbal-banging bastards that kept monkeying around up there...both ready to receive it and to relieve it from duty. Permanently.

Instead, what his sensors had been treated to was something much...sweeter.

Monty didn't always offer the smaller animatronic much thought. The gator bassist found his mind more often on sharpening his (already out-there) rockin' skills, when it wasn't full of that other feeling that boiled up inside of him so frequently. The slightest catalyst set off that vicious cascade of chemicals, and out it would burst in a heated fit over whatever was nearby and destructible—which, in his case, was most things.

Not that anyone tried to question him about it anymore, as that often set him off even further. Maybe he LIKED his sign looking wonky. Maybe it was part of the aesthetic. Why didn't they make these dumb dressers and stuff sturdier, if they didn't want them broken? Damn mirror was lucky not to be in pieces, the way it was looking at him.

No-one was asking about the little kitty, yet, however—and his predator was going to take full advantage of the time they had together. Every way he could manipulate him, wear and...not so much tear, for he was still a sturdy little thing. But that only allowed for rougher stuff. The way he wriggled when the tongue rivalling him for size shoved him about. When the array of fangs around his current dwelling joined in on the fun, seeing what twitching motions and noises they could bring out with a gentle bite or chew or two. Or three. Or another three.

...He didn't offer the cat *much* thought, past the role of prey he was fit to play. Obviously. Totally. Now wasn't the time to think about it. When Monty saw an issue, there was a simple fix at the best of times. And now was as much one of said times as any others. *Many* others.

A harsh gust of steam shot from the dark depths of the gator's gullet, flattening the dark fibres on the struggling cat's body and forcing a mewl from him. The tongue below gave a jolt, before starting to tilt its rider. Back, just a little, then a little more—and, with a kind of destined finality, shoving his squirming self into the space that barely stretched to accept him. Monty let out a grunt. It would've been a little rough, if he'd needed to breathe.

But the boundaries of flesh weren't a problem to him. A simple mechanism at the junction of body and jaw, to dislodge any foreign objects that could have gotten wedged

inside—garbage, the hands of particularly adventurous patrons, the works. And it was simple enough to reverse: go figure, where some areas had witnessed a whole world of advancement, others were still so basic to test. Monty's jaw worked convulsively as he performed a little 'bypass'.

The door to downstairs for his little visitor existed in the form of rugged, rippling coils. Their undulations were especially rhythmic, with less give to their grooves than in living muscle. Striking force had been bearing down on the trapped cat in every powerful grind. A slight slickness could be seen to the whipping blur of his tail, and the odd strand of neon glinted at the shuddering archway behind him.

A resonant rumble rose up through the faux-throat, gator-grade growls rattling the cat down to the core. Monty felt that even the lengthy exploration of his prey wasn't enough time for him. Those teeny-tiny, tinny noises that managed to squeak their way out past his heaving jaws. The slightly ticklish fibres against his tongue that made him bite (figuratively) down on the odd laugh. And...that was the taste of sugar, brought to the sensors within range of the prey's flailing limbs.

Or a sensation close enough to taste. They were still far from flesh and bone. So, it wasn't *quite* a throat that the shaking cat found himself funnelled down afterwards, either, despite the eerie manner it gave way to more organic-looking insides. The establishment prided themselves on realism, to an uncanny extent in some cases, and it was the one area they didn't seem to pinch pennies—through a jostling, rugged tunnel he was forced, too fast and too slowly and yet breathtaking all at once. Mechanical rumbles assaulted his ears, when they weren't being blocked up by the oily lubricant that eased his travel down the chute.

Which led to the chamber below. It wasn't *quite* a stomach that accepted him into its shuddering confines, exchanging one shadowy, suffocating environment for another. Letting his head through first, with the briefest window of opportunity to judge his new lodgings before the sphincter shoved the rest of him inside. A final crushing squeeze to his tail left the last untouched fibres of it thoroughly drenched.

It still tried its level best to be one, and did the job just fine to its diminutive occupant. It squished and it gurgled and it growled, a chamber in constant and unbroken motion that tossed him to and fro. The smell of it was chemical enough, if not in a territory that made him nauseous. He could very much make out the dark, undulating curves and ridges that rubbed over him with every surge of mock-muscle.

And he could very much hear the deep, smug voice that continued to thrum up around him, through his curled up form and right down to his deepest circuits and crannies, his every hair unsure whether to flatten in submission or stand on end in hysteria. His ears flattened, both from what was being said to him and from the sheer overwhelming presence of the bigger animatronic, towering and overpowering. More owed to the former than one would think, given the voice box that now hung over him, its conveyed words cascading down like a bassy waterfall.

"Have fun with the rapids, did ya...uh..." The words thrummed in the thick air. "Little...guy. What was it, snack?" He would have made a 'tip of my tongue' jibe, if not for him knowing his

prey's name already. The annoyed tone of that chick—the one human they hadn't managed to swap for a bot, not the dumpster diver he called a bandmate, despite both bearing just as frequent witness to the cat's shenanigans—flashed in his memory. "Skittles?"

The little figure may have tried to speak up—but even disregarding the whirring and pumping of the mechanisms around him, as well as the quieter register his conditions had forcibly entered into, it wasn't to be allowed to progress further than a mew.

"Alright, then, snack, since ya practically fell in there, better get comfy!"

Monty's organic orchestra held the cat enraptured. Built to make music, to entertain. Every bassy groan held a tone that was melodic to his ears. It was as if he was cut off from the outside world, —and with his only potential ticket out in hands that would obliterate it with their brand of punch, that being their intention or not.

Said hands roved over the well-fortified prison that was his own body. Light scratches from his claws sang a little stronger in the silence of the room—he wondered idly if his puny prisoner could hear them. If it was actually Skittles, then...that name was alright, and all, sounded pretty sweet, but *snack* worked out better in *his* eyes. It just did.

Speaking of working out better. Monty's nostrils gave vent to lazy steam. He couldn't think of a time where he'd been able to just sit like this, without an annoying voice getting in the way, be it from outside his head or not. The urge to destroy, to around him in helpless pursuit of that slight feeling of satisfaction--it was very much smothered.

As the gator was very much satisfied, in something *e/else* being smothered. The weight he held over his fellow animatronics coming to this kind of head, this distinct depth. Watching things shatter apart under his fists faded in his mind: the familiar, superficial sights and sounds retreating, in lieu of poking and prodding at the slight bulge in his midsection, painting the cat's reactions with senses attuned to destruction. The innards of his latest aggressive 'art piece' staring back in that same predictable way, fading in favour of tinny, terrified meows and paws pushing back feebly against him...

Monty blinked, thrown off for a moment. Was it always so warm in here?

They were thoughts he wasn't used to addressing, and he didn't want to start any time soon—so, quite suddenly, he gave a hearty slap to his midsection, and the feeling and sound of the yelps and wriggles stirred up from within brought a pleasant, distracting tingle. The impact of metal on metal jolted him where he leaned against the wall. He could only imagine how it sounded from the inside, and at such a size as to be truly deep inside.

It was a classic, Monty-brand way of spicing things up. Just one heavy slam. He took it as a point of pride, that he could withstand the same force that could snap a last-gen animatronic in two. And he did it when he was bored. By way of amusing himself. One slam. A slam of the door, open onto something new and surprising, or clapping shut on a scene that had served its purpose in amusing him and held no further sway.

The same way he'd caught the cat against a wall, slamming a clawed hand not an inch from those rapidly flickering eyes and fanatically flicking ears, in a sharp and cradled memory. The way he could bring down the tension and silence so swiftly, like the ever-blaring music and vibrations through the floor meant nothing. Scarlet searing into purple and teal; synthetic scales on faux fur. And the topic of what, exactly, was cooking in this part of the Pizzaplex—

A sharp, vivid memory. One he'd mulled over between repeat sessions of...the same event. It didn't mean anything, the fact that he was so familiar with that softness under his claws. That cat just knew well enough how things worked. Like everyone should. Their natural place, cowed and cowering under the easy eye of an apex predator: they slotted into it simple enough, even when he wasn't looking to take half their face with him. Why would anyone make something out of it? Someone *better* not make anything out of it.

He did it to *anyone*. Except his bandmates. Which counted out Freddy, of course. And Chica. Roxanne would have been in the market for alligator-hide boots in an instant, so she was off the table. (As funny as it would be to watch her get so snarly and defensive). And no way was he doing it to that circus performer they put in charge of the daycare. Those S.T.A.F.F. Bots wouldn't have stood for it (literally, given his strength). Or any of those Endos. Or the DJ. He'd be lucky to pin down one of that guy's legs alone.

Other than that, he did it to anyone.

His stomach turned. Owed completely, of course, to the gator shifting about where he leaned, gentle movements heightened to great, bullying jolts of inner walls that threw his prey from one side of the sac to the other. His little limbs pushed back in a way that made Monty feel...something.

"Y'ever heard a'...Springlock suits?"

He received no response, but the press of robotic paws into his stomach lining gave enough insight into the cat's confusion.

The reptile carried on, set stolid upon this road of discussion. "Springlocks. Back when they didn't have just the one human here? They were puttin' on a show themselves. Fancy that. And they were *real* tricky things, those suits. Like teeth hangin' over ya. All the time. This big...hungry cage. One wrong move? Dead meat."

He felt a fuzzy tail lashing against his inner walls.

"Imagine that, would ya? Scrap metal. And nothin' those money grubber's'll bring ya back from."

As if punctuating the statement, a low growl emanated from the gator's midsection.

"Nothin' beyond me, neither. The whole trash-compactor schtick, I mean. Could do it here 'n' now." He held off, letting his gaze wander up to the ceiling, claws drumming over his midsection and over the pregnant pause. "But I ain't gonna."

'Tick-tock' went the croc...

"H-huh—"

"And why's that, d'ya think?" Monty snapped, a little hurriedly, snout pointed accusingly at the source of one veritable squeak amongst however many synthetic stomach sloshes. "Well, repairs are rough! Y'seen what the chicken goes through, yeah? Or what goes through 'er, rather? Parts and Service hurts enough the first dozen-odd times...but I'm made of stronger stuff, see, so it'll just be annoyin'!" He set his teeth. Then wanted to clash them so hard he spat sparks. Both his own irrational anger and the just-as-irritational target of said anger being the catalyst. "Not that, neither. T' be honest."

Silence, but for his own inner workings.

And he was doing it. He was going all in. "Yeah, I ain't...I ain't gonna. 'Cause, look, yer alright, see? And it ain't just 'cause o' the gut lovin'," he added, a little more quietly, because the 'gut lovin' was still pleasant, plain put.

It was hard to discern, between the burbling of his stomach sac and the hum of circuitry, but it sounded somewhat like "I...um, can't hear—"

"Ain't sayin' it twice, fuzzball!" He shot a glare at the door, waiting, expecting, just *daring* any approaching footsteps or accusing eyes to run roughshod right over what he'd laid bare.

Any feet to step on. Eyes to rip out. There was something on the rise, and he didn't know how long it would take before it needed an outlet. Quite possibly a different one than what he'd been enjoying for the past few moments, considering how things were starting to linger in his mind. The anger was familiar enough. This *other* feeling, welling up under his chest and seeping through the cracks he couldn't close was not. And it wasn't like he was SCARED of it, not at all.

He just...didn't want to deal with it right now. Or later.

Or for a...fairly long time.

The gator planted his feet before straightening out, idly stretching his arms; the renewed wriggling within him sent another hot rush through his system. This cat was giving him a lot of the same. Not that it was an issue. There wasn't a great deal else to expect from that kind of animatronic, one whose stage smarts weren't worth much past a footnote in a pamphlet. How could he not see what was being held in the air, forced to the darkest corners, and left only in the most tangential implications imaginable?

Clawed toes cut into the carpet. He was being so *blatant*. Skittles needed a lesson in Monty mannerisms.

A reptilian tongue arched, as if recalling the puny body that it had subdued. Just the right angle and time from that vent, it had been, and scarcely a struggle before he'd been locked in for the ride. As if that incident was even an accident. The cat would have happily plunged

into that maw if it were wide open and waiting for him, and put up camp in the belly of the beast like he was set for a weekend at dark, stormy sea.

It would say something to let his innards grind the little guy into scrap. The most recent models in this establishment were more than capable—even if they weren't exactly, you know, built for garbage disposal. He'd seen the kind of mangled trash they pulled out of the chicken's gizzard. And he could crunch *her* up like no big deal.

So what if he just let it happen? Let that protocol take over. Bore on down like a living...well, closer-to-living hydraulic press. Same old frenzied, unpredictable reptile. Proof that you couldn't take the words of ol' Monty at face value.

The gator considered it.

Then he lurched forward, his jaws ratcheting open, claws clapping over his knees. Aiming for the one empty space among the (self-caused) clutter, the reptile dropped to all fours, his tail hiking up high as a deep, mechanical groan erupted from inside him. Growing in volume, a rattling sound followed it, worming up through his chest, then past his shaking jaws—

And forecast a little dark ball, hued with teal and purple, to roll free over a carpet more royal purple than red. He came to a stop next to a towering guitar that reflected his fuzzy figure back at him, strings strong enough to support him should he try making a ladder of them. A short role, in playing a shorter roll. By the giant indicator of a gator's standards? It could have been far more forceful.

It was a second or so before it uncurled partway into a bite-sized cat. There he lay, in as tidy a position as anything else in the pile of timeworn, time-trialed and time-tested belongings Monty called his room. Motionless as he was, the feline almost blended in with the fibres around him.

The room's owner had kept an eye open for any extra weight un-jettisoned—he was half-expecting Skittles to have filched something else from him, and he'd rather have made a more conscious decision to have damaged said item, should it still exist inside of him. But there wasn't much time to waste on looking—he had to slip back into his cool self, to 'get with the program' he'd installed in himself, and so forth. He regarded the faux-furball with a look of practised aloofness.

"Hardy little guy, aren't ya? Sure ain't lookin' like an endoskeleton I just brought up!"

The curled-up figure didn't respond, save for a twitch of his tail. Crouching, the gator was disconcerted...at the feeling of being disconcerted at what he was seeing, so he hurried to fill in the silence.

"Take a few return trips to put a dent in ya, I'd imagine." Monty jerked his head at the vent. "So, why were ya in there, anyhow? Hankerin' for the inside scoop on ol' Monty again? Well..." He slapped his own midsection again, a metallic *clang* resounding out. "There's one way o' goin' about it!"

Star-patterned limbs twitched. Then made no further movement.

“Hey, it was somethin’ sudden for sure, but nothin’ you ain’t seen from me before! Expected, I mean!”

The little kitty let out a near-inaudible noise. A neon stalk bending before him gave more of an indication that he’d done anything at all. The aftereffects of his sudden ‘expulsion’ left a lasting impression on him, Monty’s scaly thumbprint casting a shadow that Skittles’ own actions couldn’t breach. Slight groans and creaks from where tiny limbs had been buffeted about by massive inner muscles, an amplified squishing of fluids through dark fibres as they went through measured, almost testing motions.

His ears flared, but didn’t rise all the way. His legs, followed by his arms, gained enough ground over their constant shaking to bring his body into a kneeling position. Purple and teal eyes lingered, for a moment, on the name that hung loose on the wall. And then, in that same stop-and-start manner, made his gradual way up past the looming planes and shining surfaces to...just about manage to look his hulking overseer in the face.

“You didn’t...” He trailed off, his tail swishing as he glanced around the room. Taking in familiar sights with notably wide eyes and jaws. As if he didn’t expect to see them again.

Experience had dumped plenty of knowledge on the cat. Despite animatronics not (yet) being built to digest even organic matter (proof enough of that being the stench of pizza that accompanied that chicken so often), there was a degree of threat to what Skittles had been through that couldn’t be denied. And with *Monty*?

He was lucky, and he knew it.

The gator in question mused on the answer.

“Felt like it,” he stated gruffly. His eyes lidded.

It detracted nothing from their intensity to the smaller party.

He’d put it plain. No games. No way to misconstrue it. With a door between them, and all. No unwelcome outside influence waiting to pounce from around a brightly lit corner. It was different when his bandmates were around to test him, tease him, or...worst of all...*pity* him.

Not because he was scared. It was them who should be scared. Trying to throw a wrench in his carefully prepared speeches. How dare they? He side-eyed the door. They’d better not dare.

It was hard to read what any animatronic was thinking at a brief glance, and Monty appreciated it. He was glad Fazbear Entertainment hadn’t put *too* much investment into that area. If his face started matching his thoughts, it would be harder to keep up a tougher appearance, wouldn’t it?

“So, if you’re done feastin’ on *me* with those little eyes, y’feel up to speakin’ up?”



“What...” Said eyes darted about. “What do you mean—”

“What I just asked ya! Did I knock somethin’ loose, or are ya always this faulty?”

The gator was one to point claws, given how he was quite clearly just as caught up in Skittles’ idiosyncrasies as the cat was in his. So to speak. It had been a while since he’d looked at another animatronic and not pictured them in sparking pieces. But for whatever reason Monty would inevitably shove deep down, gussy up and pretend never existed (like maker, like machine, it seemed), Skittles hadn’t stoked *that* kind of flame.

“That’s a no, uh? Figured.”

No squeaky little attempts at words tried to barge in on Monty’s claim, and that brief second said plenty for the bassist...in particular, in his purple-tinted lenses, overlooking the scene and fitting it into his own view.

Judging from the look in Skittles’ eyes, if he’d wanted to speak up before, he didn’t dare to now. For fear of offending the room’s ruler...and for whatever other reasons he had for staying on his good side. Still wrapped up in a fat layer of fear, most likely.

Monty regarded the little cat. At his lofty height (which could still be classified as such on a day-to-day basis between the two), it was easier for him to guess at his feelings based on body language. That oh-so-delicious sight of another animatronic averting their own...was purely a happy fancy for him in this case, and so he indulged more in other areas. The curled tail, folded ears...the paws that shuffled in a way that he recalled pushing into his faux-mucosae, making his fingers twitch over his stomach...

It hadn’t been the first time they’d come back different, to say the least. It would be a quick fix, if waiting on a way to justify it.

“Wanna...hold off on the remodelin’?”

“Um.” Then a “Huh?” Followed by a glance aside, then back, then away again, faster, before a “I...why?” squeaked its way out of him.

“Y’ look better that way, see.”

Then his words seemed to catch up with him. “*Tastier*. Since you’re so caught up in my *inner workin’s* ‘n’ all. No time’s a wastin’, and all that.”

Those were Monty-brand mannerisms for you.

His feline friend blinked. They were far from foreign to him. Some weren’t worth arguing. Or trying to argue. Which manifested itself in many a form, right down to looking ‘wrong’ or holding oneself ‘wrong’ or merely seeming ‘wrong’ at the ‘wrong’ moment. He glanced aside for the umpteenth time, unwilling to test the gator further with his silly, sensible questions.

"I'll...be going," he managed, with the beginning of a calm departure that didn't progress past fantasy, and a stumbling realisation of such in a stop-and-start manner towards the exit within eyeshot.

A shadow fell over him. A hot *whirr* washed over him like a breath.

"We're doing this again, cat." It wasn't a question.

So Skittles neither took it as such or allowed himself to even start *considering* it as such, and with a half-nod, half-jerk of his head that rivalled in its lack of ease to read, he scampered over to the door. Which was slightly, helpfully ajar—not a single S.T.A.F.F. Bot would risk the half-second it would take to close, lest Monty not tolerate the second it would take to open it again.

These were the tiny things that stood between the big guy and a lot of potential destruction.

A deep, crocodilian grunt split the silence—the thrumming tone a bass expected of the bassist. Monty's eyes were locked on the gap, even after the tiny tail had whisked past the door.

The...door. He hadn't considered the vent again.

*And why are YOU considerin' it? Ain't your problem.* Monty tried to make his fists unclench. *Outta sight*, he insisted, *and outta mind. Got better things to do than kitty-sit*, he told himself, as he stayed staring at the door.

The door that held itself together quite well, for once. Being Monty's door. The door belonging to Montgomery Signs-Are-A-Suggestion Gator. Too many after hours inspections had been spent poring over craters in that damned door, and management twisting themselves into veritable meat pretzels to try and pin the blame elsewhere. While this one? The exact turnout that had been avoided by...well, the intervention of a tiny thing.

Monty grunted, and turned his head. His thoughts weren't his own, and that was enough of a motive to flatten them down and forget about them. Some attempt to stir him to action, given how he was practically on standby this whole weird time in his room. Little furball may as well have a second to himself without someone tripping over him.

But what if he even made it back to his room? What with the practical marathon he had to run there? Cats may be nimble, but the neon-hued shadow had turned all too often into a magnet for trouble, with the belongings and mental fortitude of staff paying the price for it. Braving the Pizzaplex at that size? A recipe for disaster, even without a certain feline ingredient.

Not even getting into the other animatronics. Some of them could mess him up real bad without even thinking about it. Who, exactly...he couldn't remember at the moment. The gator likely held sway over those grounds—and was happy to—but his brain found itself clutching at threads to justify. What Freddy may have seen as a friendly slap on the shoulder would be amplified in a destructive way (not that *anything* any animatronic did could become

such, to be frank). But they could. For sure. He was better off rooming somewhere...*relatively* safe.

His eyes were still locked on the door, even before his head shifted back to join suit. He was doing everyone a favour. The cat most of all. Not that Monty regarded his outlook as any more important than the others, of course, or as anything other than the fulcrum for his fun—to test or to total. Nothing meaningful in that centrality to his involvement in this, either.

And what business did that fuzzball have walking out on him like that? Tail tucked against the baleful heights of the looming rooms, with all their dark corners and lights-turned-spotlights, every place in itself a stage for a surprise performance...? Like he'd *allowed* him to? Which he had, but...

The door swayed slightly.

In tandem came a low, mechanical groan—its origin traceable enough, but hard to pin on the gator's voice box or his pining belly, specifically. A sharper sigh sliced through the silence.

That familiar red haze was overtaking Monty's vision again. His tail lashed as he straightened up. It was like a damned second skin he couldn't shed. Not being *that* kind of reptile, but enough of that tangent. The solution wasn't a new or surprising one, and deep down this may have, ironically, surprised him. All those times he'd taken the easiest way out and had solved so little. The feeling was rising in him again...and nothing around him, breakable or eventually-breakable, held the likelihood of quelling it.

He already knew what would.

And clang after clang soon rang across the complex as his paws took him on that trail, ready to hunt down his prey and snap them back up for the crime of not stopping to face the music a little longer. Gator-grade behaviour, for all to see and to question at their skeletons' risk. When Monty wanted something, he got it. He'd said they'd do it again, after all.

And so what if 'again' came with 'right now' in corollary? Who was going to argue with him?

The cat?

Not likely...