Another late night.

Retsuko watched her feet as they trudged along the sidewalk. The red panda was an accountant, and a rather overworked one at that. Thanks to her boss Director Ton, his lackey Komiya, and her superior Tsubone, it was already late at night when she finally finished the extra work they’d dumped on her. Despite being sat down for most of her work day, the extra grind left her positively exhausted. She was only twenty-five, but at that moment, she felt closer to sixty.

*I won’t even get paid overtime,* she thought bitterly.

Dissatisfaction after a work day was nothing new to her, and normally she would belt out her frustrations at the local karaoke bar. Even though she looked and acted like a demure and approachable young woman, she had a killer death metal growl. Letting out a good roar into a microphone, or into the stale air of the storeroom at work, or into her pillow at home was her go-to way to destress.

But that night, for the first time in a long time, she just wasn’t feeling it. She was so exhausted that just *thinking* of walking all the way to the karaoke bar and spending whatever money she had on reserving a booth made a quiet groan escape her throat. She just wanted to reserve whatever energy she had left for going home and flopping face-down on the bed. Sleeping in her work suit would sure save some time the next morning.

And then she halted mid-step. A warm, rather greasy smell tickled her nostrils. Her ears pricked up. She’d never smelled that on her work/home route before. She looked up at the building she’d stopped in front of. With how she was always either rushing to work or tiredly dragging herself back home, she never really took in the sights of her regular commute. But the smell of a fast food restaurant was certainly new. They were common downtown, near her workplace, but she never smelled one this far out before.

“O’Ronalds,” she read the sign over the door. “Must be American.”

Her cheeks flushed pink as her stomach let out a loud grumble. She hadn’t eaten since lunch, and she had been kept back so long that she didn’t get the chance to have dinner yet. Haida once told her that American fast food was notoriously cheap, something that appealed to her struggling wallet. Maybe she could see just how cheap it was. A little slip inside just to see the menu wasn’t illegal, she was sure. She quickly scanned the windows in case anyone she’d recognise was inside, before slipping through the automatic door.

She took a quick look around inside. Tables and chairs on each side were occupied by animals, some in their own work suits, biting into burgers and fries. In front of the counter was a small line of animals waiting for their own orders, taking away trays or paper bags. Not being used to fast food, Retsuko wondered what the protocol was.

“Welcome to O’Ronald’s!” Retsuko jumped a little and turned to see a rabbit girl next to her. She was in a suit similar to her own, but her waistcoat and skirt were green with the O’Ronald’s logo on the former’s breast pocket. “Do you need any assistance?”

Retusko flushed even pinker. Needing assistance in a fast food place? Now she was even more grateful no one she knew was there. “Um, I’ve never been here before, so...”

“Oh, it’s easy,” the rabbit assured her, then gestured toward some tall screens. “Just use a terminal over there to make your order, nothing to it.”

“Oh, thank you.” Retsuko forced a smile and walked up to an unoccupied terminal. She pressed a finger on the button on the screen to start her order, as it instructed, and she was immediately met with quite the selection of foods. Burgers, fries, wraps, sandwiches and more.

“Goodness, look at all this,” she gasped quietly. “And it’s all so *cheap*!”

After a moment of scrolling, she settled on a standard burger. She didn’t want to start experimenting just yet–not before she knew if she *liked* the food or not. Though, the pictures *did* make her mouth water.

“I can make it a meal?” she muttered, reading the text on screen. Curious, she selected ‘yes’ to see what that entailed. A burger, a carton of fries and a drink of her choice, all for the price of…

“Wow, it’s not much more expensive than a couple of Cup Ramens!”

With a smile, she confirmed her order, scanned her card on the reader, and watched as a ticket emerged from the machine.

“Sixteen?” she read quizzically, then looked above the big number. “Keep this ticket and wait for your number?”

Shrugging, she walked away from the machine and mulled around, keeping the ticket held tight in her paw as she made sure to keep out of the way of customers and workers.

“Sixteen?” she eventually heard, and she saw one worker at the counter with a tray of food. “Number sixteen?”

“Oh! Sixteen!” she realised, and went over to lift the tray. “Thank you!”

She took the tray to a table further away from any windows and sat down. She opened the cardboard box to reveal quite a big burger, bigger than she was expecting. She was surprised to see her paw splayed out perfectly across the top bun. But how did it taste? It certainly *smelled* good. She lifted it to her mouth and took a small bite.

And her eyes shot wide open. The soft bun, the juicy synthetic meat, the savoury cheese, the tangy sauce. It all blended together into one of the best tastes Retsuko had ever had outside of the very *very* rare visit to a nice restaurant. She took bigger and bigger chomps, savouring each mouthful before swallowing. A small moan escaped her when she finished the burger and tried one of the fries. Its salty, crunchy texture won her over instantly, and in moments, she had finished the whole carton. And finally, she washed it all down with a cup of sugary soda, sipping big mouthfuls from the straw. When she was done, she wiped her paws clean on a napkin, discarded the trash into the bin and set the tray on a pile.

“Thanks for coming to O’Ronald’s!” the rabbit chirped as Retsuko exited. “See you again soon!”

Retsuko couldn’t help but wear a positively *glowing* smile on her face. She wasn’t thinking about work anymore. The way all that food sat inside her full stomach just felt so *good*. All her bad vibes had melted away, and she was looking forward to going home and heading to bed for a whole new reason.

A little, grease-smelling yawn escaped her. “Oh, you’ll see me soon alright. How’s tomorrow for soon?”

Retsuko left the elevator to the Accounting department. It was early morning and she was almost late again, but she still had a smile on her face. For the first time in a long time, she was going to work in a genuine good mood.

And it was thanks to the egg and sausage muffin in her stomach, and the burger and fries in the paper bag in her locker. Not the healthiest lunch, but she didn’t care. O’Ronalds made her happy, and that’s what mattered. She was going to enjoy it, no matter what her coworkers thought.

“Morning, Retsuko,” she heard once she exited the locker room. She looked at the tall, handsome hyena giving her that awkward smile of his.

“Oh, morning Haida,” she said. “What’s up?”

“Just wondering if you wanted to, well, grab some lunch together during break?” he offered, rubbing behind his head. “Y’know, just you and me?”

Retsuko’s pointed ears perked up. “I’d love to!”

“Oh, nice!” Haida smiled and, making sure their superiors weren’t looking, planted a quick kiss on the red panda’s forehead. “So, uh, meet you here at lunch?”

Retsuko hummed giddily from the peck, her ringed tail swaying. “Sounds like a plan.”

And as she watched him walk to his desk, her face dropped. In a moment of careless thinking, she’d forgotten the lunch she picked up from O’Ronalds sitting in her locker. She didn’t care if her coworkers saw her eating fast food, but as far as she knew, her *boyfriend* was a different story. But the plans were made, and she couldn’t just reject his kind offer to take her to lunch, especially not after she’d said yes.

And as she sat in her chair, it hit her. She’d simply rush for her locker as soon as it hit lunchtime, slip into the storeroom and stuff her meal into her before meeting Haida. It was only a burger and fries, nothing *that* filling.

Right?

Satisfied with her haphazard scheme, she settled into work for the day. Autonomous accounting work as usual. She could actually feel her brain shutting off now and then with how dull it was. Her thoughts sometimes drifted to the O’Ronalds waiting for her, but she tried not to distract herself.

“Never pegged you for *that* kind of junk food,” said a voice in a teasing tone. She turned to the fennec fox next to her. “Cheap ramen, maybe, but burgers?”

Retusko’s orange cheeks flushed red. “W-wha?! I dunno what you’re talking about, Fenneko!”

“I saw you stuffing a paper bag in the back of your locker,” Fenneko muttered. “I mean, I don’t care what you’re eating, but you better make sure Tsunoda doesn’t see it.”

The two looked toward the deer in question, who was sneaking glimpses of her phone while her superiors weren’t looking. Tsunoda was all about social media, and her phone’s camera caught even a blurry background shot of Retsuko biting into some fries, she’d never be left alone.

“Good advice,” said Retsuko after a shiver.

“Is it O’Ronalds?” asked Fenneko, to which her friend nodded. “Just so you know, too much of that isn’t exactly good for you.”

“Really?” Retsuko tilted her head quizzically. “It made me feel *great*.”

“I’ve done some research,” said Retsuko, gesturing to her own phone in her pocket, “and American food tends to make you kinda…” she trailed off, puffing out her cheeks.

Retsuko gulped. The idea of gaining weight didn’t appeal to her one bit; Director Ton already gave her plenty of grief. And what would Haida think if she got… *fat*? Would he judge her? Stop being seen with her in public? *Break up with her*?

*Calm down, girl,* said the more rational voice in her head. *You know Haida’s not so shallow. If you put on a few pounds, you can just slim back down again, right? Besides, that stuff makes you feel good–you can worry about any side effects later.*

“Thanks, Fenneko,” she said. “I’ll try to pace myself.”

“Just looking out for you, bud,” Fenneko said, facing her screen.

And just as Retsuko went to put fingers to keys, another voice called to her. A deep, booming one that she dreaded hearing every day.

“Hey, Calendar. Get in here.”

With a silent sigh and a “Try not to die” from Fenneko, Retsuko stood from her desk and walked into Director Ton’s office. The large, sweaty pig slumped down behind his desk, while she stood across from him.

“I got the extra files you did last night,” he said, reaching into his desk.

“Y-yes?” Retsuko said, biting her lip. Had she sorted them wrong? Or filled out the wrong boxes? All she knew was she was braced for yet another verbal lashing from her boss.

But what she received was the sight of a handful of yen being set on her side of the desk.

“Nice work,” he said, his voice uncharacteristically soft. “You actually *prevented* a few headaches for once.”

Retsuko blinked and looked down at the yen. Was this a test? “Oh, um, thank you…?”

“Go on, take it,” Ton said, nodding to the yen. “Good work gets paid back, right?”

“Huh? Oh!” She tried not to move too quickly as she put the yen in her pocket. “Um, thank you, sir!”

“I thought a little incentive would help,” said Ton, and the beginnings of a smirk formed beneath his snout. “Especially since I’ve got plans tonight, and a lot of work that needs done, if you catch my drift?”

And there was the catch. Retsuko tried not to let her face fall too much, though she knew it would bring Ton a good deal of amusement. She just didn’t want to give him the satisfaction.

“I’ll get right on it when I’ve finished my regular work,” she said, trying her best not to sigh the words out.

“You’re not as boneheaded as you look, Calendar,” chuckled Ton. “Gimme a repeat performance, and you’ll get another reward.”

With that, Retsuko returned to her desk, her face fully fallen into a scowl. What was that thing her mom said about inches and miles?

“What happened?” asked Fenneko quietly.

“Ton…” Retsuko murmured, the words in her head sounding absolutely foreign when put together. “Ton gave me a *bonus*.”

And as she glanced at her pocket, then her stomach, she knew exactly what she was going to spend it on.

The second her break started, Retsuko put her plan into action. Making certain her colleagues didn't see, she grabbed the paper bag from her locker and slipped off to the storeroom. For the longest time, the dark musty space was her hidey hole for venting her frustrations via death metal screaming. Today though, she had some evidence to get rid of.

"It's just a burger and fries," she muttered to herself, "surely it won't fill me too much and I can still enjoy lunch with Haida?"

What she had forgotten was she had gotten the large sized meal, which meant a *big* burger, a *lot* of fries and a *tall* soda.

"Crap…!"

For a second, she considered just dumping the stuff in the trash and being done with it. But like hell she was going to throw money away like that. Plus, her stomach was loudly arguing against the notion.

"Maybe Haida will treat us to something fancier?" she tried to reason with it. It answered with another irate grumble. "Ugh… fine, but we have to be quick."

She started cramming big bites of the burger in her mouth, taking seconds to savour the taste before gulping them down. After making quick work of it, she poured the fries into her mouth, crunching on the deep-fried sticks as quickly as possible. Finally, she used the soda to wash it all down, opting to remove the lid and straw and chug it down straight.

When she finished, she deposited the empty containers in the trash and licked the salt, grease and sauce off her lips, fingers and the front of her shirt. Once she was absolutely sure she was cleaned up, she exited the storeroom. As she walked to the elevator, her stomach carried a small ache from having so much food stuffed into it so quickly. Not only that, but it had swollen out a little, making her shirt buttons strain ever so slightly, but not enough for any to notice unless they looked specifically at her middle.

Which Haida didn't do when she approached, to her luck. "There you are! I was starting to think you'd already left."

"Oh, just had to use the restroom," she lied. "Freshen up and stuff, y'know?"

"Ah, gotcha," he said, then took a closer look. "Are you okay? You don't look so good."

"I'm fine," she insisted, forcing the sickly look off her face. "So, lunch! What were you thinking?"

"Oh, I thought you'd just want somewhere simple," he said. "There's this American place a few minutes away. O'Ronalds, I think it's called."

Retusko jolted upright, causing a burp to escape her.

"S-sounds great…!"

“Phew,” panted Retsuko one evening, “another day done.”

It had been three weeks since she first discovered O’Ronalds. Every day before, during, and after work, she stopped in for a bite to eat. She was enjoying the fast food too much to stop herself, not that she wanted to.

Though recently, she had begun encountering some peculiar struggles. Such as on that morning, when she strained to bring her shirt buttons together, especially at the bottom. She was certain the trek to the subway wasn’t so arduous before either. She was happy to have such a sedentary desk job, giving her feet plenty of time to rest. And with her friends not caring what she ate, she was openly eating burgers and fries in front of them, although she wisely disposed of the packaging before any of her superiors, or worse, Tsunoda got a glimpse of her eating fast food. And with how good that food was making her feel, she decided those little struggles were worth it.

She had just finished another late evening at work, and she naturally stopped at O’Ronalds to pick up dinner. She’d decided to try the chicken sandwich this time, as well as a chocolate shake to wash it down.

She removed her waistcoat and draped it on a seat. She couldn’t wait to crash on her bed and–

*Pop!*

She froze mid-sight of relief. Her ears twitched as something small clacked on the wooden floor. She felt a sudden, slight relief of pressure in her stomach area. Slowly, her eyes lowered. Where a button on her shirt once was, a patch of brown belly fur bulged through a gap.

“Oh no,” she breathed.

She rushed to the mirror and looked at herself. She hadn’t really noticed it before, but her cheeks had gotten rather chubby, and the makings of a second chin hid behind her jaw.

“No, no, *no*!” she gasped.

She tugged off her shirt and skirt, looking at her body in full. Her stomach was a round fluffy sack hanging over the front of her panties. Her breasts had gotten doughier, starting to bulge over her bra. She certainly had no more thigh gap with how thick both of them had gotten. A pair of large orange orbs made up her backside, her tail draped down between them.

The longer she stared, the more she felt it. A familiar frustration that she hadn’t felt in a while. Her scowl hardened and she clenched her fists. She could almost hear the riff of an electric guitar growling in her ears.

She took a deep breath.

And then she realised she should be careful not to wake her neighbours, so she quietly flopped down on her bed, her face in the pillow.

***I’M GETTING FAT!! I’M GETTING FAT!!***

***DOUBLE CHIN AND THUNDER THIGHS!!***

***GOTTA DIET AND EXERCISE!!***

***BEFORE I BURST OUT OF ALL MY CLOOOOOTHES!!***

She lay there a moment longer, before finally rolling over to stare at the wall. She hadn’t had a good roar in weeks; part of her was happy she still had it. But it was overshadowed by all the other parts crying about how blubbery she’d gotten.

“Fenneko’s gonna have a field day,” she groaned. She poked a finger on her stomach, watching it sink in. “The curse of American food…”

She sat up and frowned with determination. “Well, no more. Starting right now, I’m going on a diet. No more sweets, and no more O’Ronalds!”

Her nose twitched, and she turned to see the paper bag on the table, smelling invitingly of chicken and fried potato.

“Starting *tomorrow morning*, I’m going on a diet,” she corrected sheepishly, sitting down to dig into her greasy dinner.

At lunchtime the next day, Retsuko stared miserably at the plastic container before her. As she promised herself, her diet had begun that morning. Her commune to and from work was plenty of exercise, she figured, but it took a lot of willpower for her to pass by O’Ronalds, and the smells from inside tempted her badly. She had even halted for a moment, considering just getting something small, but she managed to fight it. She was going to start eating healthier, no ifs or buts.

Even if it meant eating drab-looking chicken salads from the convenience store.

*No pain, no gain*, she thought, and she dug in. With the practice she’d gotten stuffing her face at O’Ronalds, she had wolfed the salad down in record time. To anyone around her, it was a blur, like she hadn’t moved. It didn’t taste as bad as it looked, but it wasn’t the same. And moreover, she was still hungry.

“That’s the price to pay for losing weight,” she muttered to herself. She prodded her stomach. “You’ve gotta go, and this is how to do it.”

She put the container in the trash and went to return to her desk. Perhaps an early start at work would help take her mind off food?

“Hey, Retsuko,” she heard Haida’s voice, and she turned to see the hyena smiling at her. “Wanna get some lunch? I’m gonna try that bacon burger O’Ronalds is doing, and I can grab you one too if you want.”

“Bacon burger?” repeated Retsuko, her eyes widening eagerly. A cheeseburger with a slice of bacon inside? She’d been meaning to try that!

*Even if it’s the opposite of diet food?* the rational side of her brain asked flatly. Her ears drooped.

“Um, I’d love to,” she said, looking up at him, “but I, uh…”

“Not hungry?” asked Haida, and his ears pricked up at a low grumbling sound. He smirked as his girlfriend squeaked and covered her eyes. “Well, that answers that. So, wanna come?”

Retsuko knew she should politely decline. That such a greasy, fattening, *delicious* lunch would compromise her efforts to slim down. But at the same time, it was *Haida* offering to spot her. And O’Ronalds food was so *good*. Maybe she could slowly ween herself off it? She’d heard going cold turkey when fighting addictions was dangerous.

“I’d love to,” she said, licking her lips.

As she walked with Haida to the elevator, she could tell he was staring. Her peers weren’t acting like anything was different, but she knew he had noticed her weight gain. She tried not to look uncomfortable as the two chatted about this and that on their way down.

Although, she quickly realised she didn’t feel uncomfortable at all. It wasn’t a *judging* stare Haida was giving her…

“There we go,” Haida muttered. “You doing okay?”

“Y-yeah,” panted Retsuko. “Thank you, Haida…”

It had been a month since Retsuko began her diet. Well, her *attempt* at a diet, anyway. While she was keeping up her exercise and she was eating convenience store salads, Haida was inviting her to lunch more and more often. And a lot of the time, the choice was O’Ronalds. That one place she’d sworn off… she was sure. But she just couldn’t help herself. He was so kind to treat her to lunch, and sometimes even dinner if they both got out of work at the same time. And despite her best efforts to resist, that fast food had her wrapped around its middle finger.

And so there she was that evening, approaching her apartment with a real *waddle* to her step, thanks to her thighs growing wide enough to force her legs apart. Her backside really strained the seat of her skirt, and she feared the clasp would snap off if she wasn’t careful. Another button had popped off her shirt recently, thanks to her even larger belly, but her waistcoat was still able to hide it for the most part. Her double-chin, however, had no hope of being tucked away anywhere, with how it squashed against her shirt collar and made fastening her top button an uncomfortable challenge.

And as she led Haida to the door, he watched her yoga ball-sized buttocks shift with each lumbering step. His tail twitched as his cheeks flushed pink. While one hand helped Retsuko up the stairs, the other clutched onto a big paper bag with the O’Ronalds logo emblazoned on it.

“Here we are,” she huffed, leading him into her apartment. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t expecting you to come over so I didn’t clean.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” he assured her, looking around as he followed. “It’s a lot cleaner than my place.”

"Oh, I'm sure your place is in way better shape," she smiled and took off her shoes.

*I know* I'm *not,* she thought bitterly, looking down at her stomach. *When's the last time I saw my feet?*

Haida set the paper bag on the table and looked toward her. “You okay, Retsuko?”

The red panda bit her lip. If there was anyone she could trust with this subject, it was her boyfriend. Right?

“Haida,” she said, waddling to her bed and sitting on the edge. “Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything,” he said, sitting next to her. “What’s up?”

She took a deep breath. “Um… do you think I’m… uh… y’know…?”

“Um, no, I don’t know,” Haida said, blinking. “What’re you trying to s-”

“DoyouthinkI’mgettingtoobig?” she blurted out, her eyes scrunched shut.

For what felt like an eternity, all went silent. It was Haida’s turn to bite his lip, racking his brain for the right words.

“I… okay, I’m not gonna sugarcoat it,” he said, “I have noticed you’ve been getting kinda… *fluffy* lately.”

“You’re sugarcoating it,” Retsuko said flatly. “You can say it–I’m fat.”

“Uh, yeah,” he muttered. “I noticed you were eating salads at work too, but you didn’t… y’know, look *happy* with it.”

“I wasn’t,” she admitted, looking down at herself. “But I have to lose this weight.”

“Why?” he asked. “You can still get to work, right?”

“It’s not that,” she sighed. “It’s… well… what are people gonna think of you, dating a big fat whale like me?” She lifted and shook her belly for emphasis, groaning quietly as it jiggled in her paws.

She blinked when she realised something he’d said.

“Wait, you knew I was trying to diet and you *still* took me to that fast food place for lunch?”

Haida gulped and rubbed his arm. “Okay, when you put it like that, it sounds bad. But I noticed how *miserable* you were with those salads, and ever since you started eating at O’Ronalds, you’ve been looking a lot happier.”

Retsuko couldn’t deny that. That food, despite how fattening and unhealthy it was, made her feel really *good* inside. A real double-edged sword.

“But… *look* at me,” she whimpered, giving her gut a slap. “I’m a *pig*!”

“Hey, you could weigh a hundred pounds or a *thousand*,” Haida said, putting an arm around her. “It’s the girl *inside* that counts, right? You helped me realise that, y’know.”

Retsuko looked up at him. “S-so… you don’t mind…?”

“That food makes you happy, right?”

“Yeah…?”

“Then keep eating it,” he said, kissing her pillowy cheek. “If any problems crop up, we’ll handle them together.”

Her wide eyes shimmered as they teared up, and she threw her soft little arms around him. She didn’t know why she was so lucky to have a guy like him, but she was grateful.

*Grrrruuuuuuooorrrrllll…*

The moment was broken as a loud grumble sounded through the apartment. Haida looked down at Retsuko, whose cheeks flushed bright red.

“Seriously?” she muttered, looking at her stomach. “*Now*?”

Haida chuckled and helped Retsuko to the table, setting her on a cushion.

“Here,” he said, opening the paper bag. “Let me.”

Retsuko tilted her head, watching as he lifted the carton of fries out. He held a handful to her, and she caught on, happily opening her mouth.

“Mmf,” she mumbled, letting him insert them and happily chewing.

“You’re so *cute* when you eat,” Haida purred, feeding her another mouthful when she was ready.

The red panda giggled as she ate, taking every mouthful of fries until the carton was empty. After a soda break, he held out a large bacon burger to her lips. She grinned and happily took a hearty bite from it. Then another, and another.

“Attagirl,” he smiled, watching sauce and grease smear her face. When she was finished, she let Haida dab a napkin on her chubby cheeks, getting the splotches that her tongue couldn’t reach.

Soon, the two were laying in Retsuko’s bed. Haida’s arms were wrapped around her round body, his hands resting on her taut stomach. A purr escaped her as she felt his fingers gently caress it, her bushy tail gently batting him. He tried not to let the feeling of her doughy, fluffy back rolls and thighs excite him *too* much.

“That was new,” she said. “I’ve never had someone feed me quite like that before.”

“Did you like it?” asked Haida over her shoulder.

Her chubby cheeks flushed pink as she looked back at him. “Can we do it again sometime?”

“Whenever you want,” he promised, sounding just as eager.

Her cheeks dimpled as a wide smile crossed her face, and her eyes fluttered closed. Perhaps being fat wasn’t the end of the world after all.