Zag couldn’t help but sigh on his way back to the office. He’d made it all the way out of the building before he noticed he’d forgotten some rather sensitive paperwork out on his desk. Forgotten! Just like that! Fortunately, everyone else had left for the day, so as long as he went in and put it away, no one would be the wiser.

The pudgy gray dragon pulled out his keycard to get back into the building, but frowned when the pad on the side of the door lit up red. He looked at the time: 6:10pm. He groaned and slapped his forehead, realizing he’d missed the building’s lockdown by only ten minutes. *That’s what I get for staying late all the time.* It was likely the reason he’d forgotten, if he were honest with himself; long, overworked days left him frequently tired.

Still, Zag looked around, wondering if there was a way to force the door. As far as he knew, the lab had high security, but the office wasn’t directly *in* the lab. He could ignore the lab. He just needed the papers *on* his desk to be *in* his desk. Preferably before his boss noticed. Zag was sure they would have be perfectly safe anyway, but it was protocol to lock up files at the end of the day, and he wasn’t confident in his ability to beat his boss to the office tomorrow morning before he could see Zag had been negligent.

Zag started around the perimeter, wondering if a fire door might have easier access. It would be a safety hazard to lock those down, right? Regardless of the time of day.

Surprised, but pleased, Zag’s attention landed instead on an open window around the side of the building. Surely, whoever left that open was about to get fired, too. Well, Zag figured he could do the guy a favor and close it on his way out, as a thank-you to the idiot who had unwittingly just saved his ass. He put his paws on the sill, mentally prepping himself to push his way inside. It was a bit small, and he was well aware that he was a bit wide. His pot belly folded into plush rolls on his sides that he was a little worried about as he gauged the sides of the window. He didn’t have much of a choice, though. Not if he wanted to still have his job in the morning.

With a small grunt, Zag hoisted himself over the edge. As expected, he felt the edges of the window brush his body as he slid his way inside. They tightened around his middle. Giving himself a little wiggle, he pushed again, and managed to slide farther. The extra chub on his arms jiggled as he maneuvered himself, trying to twist in a way that he wouldn’t just fall on his face. He could feel himself instinctively kicking and flailing on the other side of the window as his feet-paws met open air, but then he fell through and landed flat on his back. “Oof!” *Well, that was annoying*. Still, it could have been worse. “I wouldn’t even be doing this if I hadn’t left out those documents,” he grumbled out loud as he sat up and winced. He could acknowledge that this was sort of his own fault.

Brushing away his thoughts, he started up the nearest stairs. It was true he was a little unfit, quickly leaving him winded, but at least his office was just the second floor. His lard-laden frame jiggled with each step, reminding him of his constant battle against binge eating. Speaking of eating, he wondered what he should get for dinner… then vehemently shook his head. Was he really thinking about food at a time like this?! He pushed those thoughts away too as he made it to the next floor. His desk was at the other side of the large office space, meaning he’d have to creep past the lab, but at least he didn’t need to try getting in there. *That* would probably have the most extreme security. So, he would avoid it for sure. It was separated from the office by a wall with a large window, which Zag passed quickly to get to his desk. He was relieved to see that the documents were undisturbed, not that anyone else was here. Even the cleaning people had left by now, always sure to be out by the end of the day. Zag was the only dumbass to ever stay late.

It took him a moment to notice the red blinking lights around edges of the ceiling, like emergency lights, but smaller. Zag felt himself visibly pale. Cameras? But he worked here every day, and had never seen any cameras. Thinking back on it, he was actually pretty sure that edges of the ceiling had a solid black border. The blinking lights must mean something, though. Maybe he tripped a sensor on his way past the lab. *Shit*. He looked around. *Well, if there’s no cameras, at least they won’t know it’s me*.

He quickly finished locking up the files and moved away from his desk. In addition to the red lights, there was now a small, almost imperceptible hissing noise coming from the vents around the room. The room must be locking itself down or something. Zag quickly retraced his steps back through the office, although he paused before passing the door to the lab. Maybe walking by it in such close proximity had been enough to trigger security protocol. Nothing had happened until after he walked by the first time, so it was the only thing that made sense. He gave the door a wide berth this time, slowly creeping in a different route between the desks that would keep him farther away. No need tripping the sensors again, letting whoever read them know that the culprit had been in and out.

Despite his urgency, he began to experience a strange feeling. He realized he could smell something odd, although he couldn’t quite identify *what*; just that it wasn’t an unpleasant smell. But then, the air almost seemed to take on an odd quality, as if the density had changed somehow. *Is this a panic attack?* Though, in spite of everything, Zag didn’t think he felt “panicked” per se, just a bit frantic. Then he realized he could still hear that damn hissing sound. He had the startling realization that the security system might be pushing some sort of airborne chemical out of the vents. *Maybe a sedative?* Zag thought to himself as he resumed moving through the room. Something to make an intruder sleepy before they took anything important? He couldn’t imagine it being anything else, since the company wouldn’t go so far as to just start poisoning people. Probably.

Moving between some desks close together, the other side of the large office space was in sight. He stumbled suddenly, catching himself with a paw and leaning on one of the desks while he panted. He actually didn’t feel affected, other than regular physical exertion. When he went to move forward again, though, he felt the edge of the desk push into the side of his belly, and was startled to notice it sink in much farther than expected, even accounting for his usual rotund girth.

He looked downward to see that he was bloated somewhat, although he hadn’t eaten anything in a while, so that didn’t make sense. But the evidence was there; his usually modest pudge had a definite, firm bulge. Then he noticed that even his sides seemed wider, which made even less sense. Furthermore, he didn’t even feel full. “Of course not, I’ve eaten nothing but air for hours,” he scoffed quietly. Then, a thought occurred: The air!

He pricked his ears in alarm at the continued sound of the vents. Was the chemical able to make intruders bloated and slow-moving? As Zag looked back down at himself, it seemed like the most logical explanation; he’d somehow swelled even more. He was suddenly struck by how quickly it was happening now that the room had been filling for several minutes already. *Shit shit shit.* He stepped forward again, although the side of the desk bumped into him even harder. He’d deal with the bruise later, right now he had to get out of here before the air did any more damage. He’d go home, hopefully the chemical would pass from his system, and the room would probably have cleared out by morning. No one had to know.

As he rushed forward, though, his pudgy hips were brushing past desks on either side, which made him feel absurdly wide and clumsy. He didn’t specifically feel ‘heavier’, but it was definitely getting harder to move, as he felt the pressure in his body swelling outward to get in its own way. His legs were increasingly impeded by the overhang of his belly on his thighs, and his arms were pushed higher and higher up as his middle rounded out. He felt like a large balloon, a growing ball of air in a tight sphere that was miraculously growing along with it. He fortunately wasn’t in any discomfort, other than the awkward bumbling around. It became harder to squeeze between the desks, though, until he eventually decided to double back and pass through the main aisle of the office like he should have done in the first place. The sensors had already been tripped, so it didn’t really matter. He’d spend later on being annoyed at himself for wasting extra time in the rapidly-filling room. At the moment, he was just increasingly alarmed at the decreasing amount of space around him. How much was the chemical supposed to affect someone, anyway? His growth hadn’t slowed, although his torso was approaching a spherical size. His legs pressed wide apart as he waddled down the center of the room. Even though he’d specifically made his way toward the wider space that passed the lab door, he had expanded enough by now to still be close to touching it. He was almost close enough to loop past his desk again before he finally tripped forward and rocked onto his belly, the airy mass cushioning him. *No no no no!* He thrashed his limbs and flicked his tail, trying to rock himself back to his feet. Instead, his body remained on its front while bouncing with every twitch and jerk. It took a minute for him to exhaust himself, lying there like a beached whale in the middle of the floor.

He hung his head in defeat. *I just have to wait for the security system to turn off, and hopefully I’ll deflate in time to leave.* He didn’t feel hopeful, though. It wouldn’t be a very good security system if it allowed burglars to leave before getting caught.

Fortunately, the flow of air from the vents did eventually cease. Made sense, considering employees would be showing up in the morning who wouldn’t want to be blimp-ified. As the air began to clear, Zag waited to see if he’d start feeling normal. The smell was still in the air, although much fainter, and finally faded after an indeterminate amount of time. Zag couldn’t tell because he didn’t exactly have access to a clock in this state. He didn’t have access to anything. Even the cleaning people couldn’t come save him, since they left before six. When they were supposed to. Ugh.

Zag was thoroughly stuck for the night.

The plump gray dragon opened his eyes to see sunlight coming through the windows. He didn’t remember falling asleep, but at least it had passed the night more quickly. He felt relieved, until he was struck by the realization that his boss could come in at any minute. Trying to gauge whether or not he’d shrunk at all, he wriggled frantically, but couldn’t get a good view of himself. He was still swollen like a blimp, on his belly in the middle of the floor. It didn’t seem promising.

Finally, he heard the door to the office click. In came his boss, quiet and confident, clearly not expecting to find one of his employees laid out on the floor like a blimp made of dragon scales with his head and limbs held in place by his own girth.

“…Zag?”

Zag flattened his ears shyly at the orange, much larger dragon. Well, usually-larger; right now, Zag was obviously the bigger of the two. “Hi,” he said sheepishly. What else could he say?

His boss looked around the office, as if struggling to process what he was seeing. A look of ‘it’s too early for this shit’ flashed across his face, but then his eyes fell over Zag’s desk. “Oh, you decided to work late again, didn’t you?”

Zag had a moment of panic, but remembered locking up the files, so his desk was clear. He couldn’t get in trouble for that part, at least. “…Yes..?”

“Ah. Must have tripped the alarm. This place goes into lockdown at night, you know.”

“Yes,” Zag already knew, something he would never take flippantly again.

His boss rubbed at one of his temples as he looked over the beached dragon. “Unfortunately for you, the security system must have activated automatically when it still detected a presence in here.”

Zag tried not to look too hopeful as he realized his boss might misread the situation. He seemed to think that Zag had never left at all. Perfect. “Yes.”

The other dragon snorted. “Can you say anything other than yes?”

“Yeah,” Zag stammered. Wait. Shit.

Fortunately, his boss just laughed. “We’ll have to do something about you overworking yourself. Especially so stuff like this,” he waved a paw vaguely at Zag’s predicament, “doesn’t happen again.” Then he paused. “You know what? I think we have a position open with better hours.”

Zag pricked his ears, one of the only parts of him that could move freely, apart from his fingers and toes. “Er, what do you mean?”

“I mean, I think it’s time you were recognized for your hard work. I’m giving you a promotion,” the dragon declared. He put up a finger. “But, the new position is in the morning. Which means you *can’t* stay late anymore. Deal?”

Zag’s head was a mix of emotions. He’d quickly gone from assuming he was fired, to being rewarded for hard work. *Well, maybe I do deserve it, after everything I went through last night just to uphold company policy.* He finally mustered up a word. “Deal.”

His boss moved to pat him encouragingly on the shoulder, although it was lost a bit in the bulbous mass of Zag’s bloated form. “And this, uh, should wear off after a while.”

“How long is ‘a while’?” the balloon of a dragon asked meekly. “I’m guessing not before my coworkers get here, huh.” He could already feel his cheeks changing color at the thought of all the eyes on him, helplessly stuck for everyone to gawk at.

“Probably not,” the orange dragon admitted. “Although I’m sure it’ll eventually be a fun story to tell about how you got your promotion!”

Zag sure hoped so. “Thanks. I really appreciate it,” he added more earnestly. He twitched his limbs, trapped in his folds. He would have shaken his boss’ paw if he could. He was pretty sure his boss could tell anyway.

Left to his own devices, Zag wriggled a bit, feeling his body continue bouncing unapologetically even after he stopped. It was like floating on a cloud. Except, he was the cloud. And he wasn’t really floating. At least for now, though, he was comfortable. And since he was trapped, he wouldn’t get to start work right away, which seemed most ironic of all. Ah, well.

As Zag settled into, well, himself, he prepared to catch up on some rest and finally take a break from his work. He’d earned it.