

The law of the sea lions was firm, but it wasn't absolute.

Fender never considered himself to be a mischievous California sea lion, only a curious one. He made sure to follow the rules set by his herd to the best of his ability, but as a young pup, he couldn't help but ask about certain rules. Why couldn't they stray too far from the bay they lived near when there were virtually no predators to fear, for example? Why could they only dine on sardines and anchovies when there were surely tastier alternatives just nearby?

And most importantly of all: Why couldn't he interact with the humans?

That last rule in particular bothered Fender. Whenever he would come onto the wooden pier to sleep with his herd, he would always find the humans watching close by, only a small body of water separating them, easily crossed by their long two legs. And yet, they would never step over, although they would fawn and coo and make adoring noises at the herd; Fender in particular received plenty of attention, being the youngest and smallest.

So, naturally he had to ask why he couldn't approach the humans.

"Because they're dangerous," responded Niles, the elder and leader of their sea lion herd. "Take it from me, Fender, humans are nothing but bad news."

It wasn't a very satisfying answer, but Fender simply shrugged and went with it. He was young and foolish, after all, maybe there was something he didn't know. And yet, as he lifted his neck to cast a glance towards the coast, he could only wonder just how much "danger" could lie behind those cheerful, happy smiles.

As he became older, Fender grew to understand the reasoning behind the other rules. While they had no natural predators near this area, straying too far from home could cause the oceanic tides to sweep him away and become lost at sea. And the reason they avoided the food the humans tossed into the sea, as tasty as it smelled, was because great old Hubert once ate a tin can and hasn't been able to poop the same ever since.

And yet, the adage about avoiding humans continued to perplex Fender. He had little to no experience dealing with the bipedal simians, nor knew of anyone who had; it was a constant mystery that plagued the young sea lion's mind.

So once enough time had passed, and Fender felt he was mature enough to understand, he asked once more. "Why can't we approach the humans?"

Immediately he received a reaction as most of the other sea lions lazing along the pier lifted their heads to look his way. It was common for young pups to ask such questions, but a full grown adult asking was quite head-turn worthy.

Well, apparently not for Niles, the grumpy old sea lion snorting. "Go back to sleep, Fender."

"First of all, I wasn't sleeping to begin with," Fender grunted, nudging his snout into the elder's back. "Second, I have the right to know. I'm not a kid anymore."

"And yet you complain like one." Growling from the constant prodding, Niles slowly rolled over, even if just so he could glare at the other bull. "They're dangerous. That's all you need to know."

Much like Niles rolled his big brown body, Fender rolled his tired yellow eyes. "Oh yeah, they're soooo scary! Gosh, those twiggy arms of theirs could just carry me right off, huh?" To emphasize his sarcastic point, the large sea lion shifted further onto his side, slapping his midriff with a flipper. At eight feet long and weighing roughly 900 pounds, Fender was quite large even by sea lion standards, his broad body still rippling from the patting. He was a very big guy, definitely eating his fair share of food wherever he may find it; naturally, much of his curiosity of humans came from their delicious-smelling food.

Speaking of humans, Fender's small ears raised ever so slightly when he heard a gentle "awww" sound, looking over to find the humans at the coast looking at him. Humans seem to like it when he slapped his belly like that. Interesting.

Inversely, Niles did *not* like Fender showing off to the humans. "Knock it off, we're not a zoo!"

"What's a zoo?"

"A place where you're gonna be shipped to if you keep acting chummy with the humans!" Niles hissed. "Obviously they can't lift you with their arms, but they have machines! Tools to do that sort of thing for them. You've seen their boats coming and going, haven't you?"

"I have." Fender nodded. "And I know they don't come near us with those boats. Hundreds of humans walk past us every day, yet not one of them try to use those giant boats to catch us."

"Yes, but-

"They COULD catch us with those boats if they wanted to, but they don't! You know what they catch instead? Fish! Literal mountains of fish, more than an entire herd of sea lions could eat at once, they catch that many fish in a day!"

Niles sighed. "I should have known it was all about the food."

"No!" Fender sounded incredulous. "No, no, no."

A moment passed. "A little bit."

Another moment passed. "Alright, so what if it is?"

"I figured." The elder sea lion grumbled. "Listen. While not physically imposing, those humans are capable of some dastardly things. They built those concrete monuments you see in the background, they built those boats they go fishing on; heck, they even built the pier we're laying on! We don't know what else they're capable of, and we're better off not knowing. Humans are *dangerous*, Fender!"

But Fender had stopped listening once he heard something rather interesting. "The humans built this pier, just for us to use? How can they be dangerous?!"

"Fender!" Niles snarled, but it was too late. Fender had heard enough, the large bull sliding back into the water. If these humans really were as dangerous as Niles claimed, Fender had to see for himself!

It was moments after dipping beneath the sea that Fender realized he had quite literally zero plan on how to approach the humans. He'd never done so before, and had no idea what to expect. Would they actually try to grab at him and yank him out of the water? Obviously they'd fail, but it would still be an uncomfortable experience. Doubts began brewing in the young sea lion's mind, but he didn't dare go back. This was a matter of pride, at this point; he didn't want to see Niles' smug face when he returned dejected, after all.

So, he was as surprised as the humans when he suddenly resurfaced at the dock, right before them.

"O-oh, goodness!" One human female gasped, nearly dropping her hotdog from shock. "Look! One of 'em just came up here!"

Fender felt his face heat up as a small crowd gathered around him, not quite sure what to say. Should he wave hello? Tap his tummy again? Bark? Nervously, he just awkwardly eyed the group around him; he was used to humans gawking at him from a distance, but up close it just felt weird. He also wasn't used to hearing their comments in person either.

"Aw, what a cutie he is!"

"Big heccin' chonker, that's what he is!"

"What pretty yellow eyes...oooh, and look at those big brown stripes on his back! Handsome lad!"

Fender did his best to face everyone who talked with him, if he could call that “talking.” Seriously, what the heck was a heccin’ chonker anyways? Were most humans this strange? Regardless, his interest in humans was quickly waning, and the sea lion was considering dipping back under and swimming back to his herd. He had set out to do what he’d accomplished anyways.

But then, his whiskers twitched. Before his eyes was that half-eaten hotdog the woman from earlier nearly dropped, who now held it right before his snout.

“You hungry, big guy?”

Instinctively, Fender opened his mouth to say yes, only to grunt as the lady practically tossed it in! The sea lion’s first instinct was one of panic; what if he ended up with bathroom problems now, just like great old Hubert?!

Oooh, but the second his mouth closed around the hotdog, his mind was *filled* with bliss! Lordy, this was delicious, far beyond anything Fender could even dream of! His eyes closed in enjoyment as he let out a low growl, savoring the sudden treat. So rich and meaty, while also tangy and salty; not unlike the salty sardines he preyed upon, yet somehow far richer and more satisfying at the same time. The breaching surrounding the hotdog felt a little strange in his mouth, but the more he chewed, the more he grew to enjoy it.

Gosh, how were these humans not fatter? Human food was delicious!

“I think he liked it!” A man called out, to which Fender grinned cheekily at him. Duh! He loved it so much, he hardly even flinched when the woman lowered her hand towards him. It smelled just like the hotdog, so he had no problems letting her palm stroke along his head and snout, although he admittedly had trouble resisting the urge to lick the remaining salt from it.

“Hey, I wanna pet him too!” Someone cried out from the crowd. Fender turned towards the source of that sound, his heart leaping in joy when he saw another fellow pull out a hotdog.

Coming to greet the humans was a *fantastic* idea!

“Oh yeah, those humans were *bwuuurp* sooooo scary!”

Fender couldn’t resist the urge to rub it in Niles’ grumpy face, his own face grinning smugly as he hauled himself back onto the pier. Once up, the young sea lion wasted no time in rolling onto his side, exposing his pleasantly stuffed middle to the elder. “Ooooh, so dangerous! They almost gave me a tummy ache, how many hotdogs they fed me! How awwwwful!”

“You’re an idiot,” Niles replied disdainfully, narrowing his eyes at the bloated belly. “It’s bad enough you had to get up close to those creatures, but did you have to eat their food too? It could be poisoned, for all you know!”

“Poison?” Fender reared back his head to bark/laugh at that. “Hah! They wouldn’t do that; they love me too much! They called me a ‘heccin’ chonker,’ after all!”

“What the hell’s a heccin chonker?”

“A term of endearment! Shows you know nothing about humans, huh?” Fender harrumphed, which quickly turned into another burp. Urf, he had just eaten before they’d come up to nap on the pier, too, yet he willingly chose to eat a dozen of those cooked wieners. He was certainly stuffed, almost uncomfortably so, yet he still smiled regardless. They loved watching him eat! They loved *him!*

Still smiling, he gently reached a flipper up to pad at the moonstone necklace now hanging from his neck. In the middle of the sea of hotdogs being offered to him, someone placed it atop his head, perhaps as a joke. In any case, Fender wore it with pride, a sign that he was important to the humans, and as a way to piss off Niles even further.

It was working, the older sea lion’s face was scrunched up in anger. “I know enough about humans to know you’re being *used*, Fender! Get it through that fat head of yours. You’re making a grave mistake!”

“The only mistake I’ve made was not *hic* trusting them sooner!” The younger mammal huffed haughtily. “Go ahead and be a stick in the mud all you want. Just means more food for me!” And with one last indignant snort, Fender rocked over to face the other side, ready to sleep off his rapidly approaching food coma.

Fender’s little spat with the elder had garnered quite a bit of attention from the other sea lions, all of whom were alert and facing the pair. It was quite the conundrum they faced; they all saw Fender approach the humans, and they all saw him enjoy himself quite a bit! However, Niles was quick to face them all with a stern expression. “Fender may look content, but that foolish idiot is playing with fire. Give it time, friends. He’ll learn the error of his ways soon enough.”

-----

“As if,” Fender thought to himself as he drifted off into sleep, his mind already made up.

Every day after their usual feeding, the greedy sea lion would swim right up to the humans again, interacting with them, barking with them, eating with them. The sea lion quickly learned to love the extra attention being poured onto him, even relishing the gentle pets and scratches he would receive. Not once did anyone try to claw at him or drag him out of the water,

the humans were content to just rub his silky smooth head or take pictures with the “heccin’ chonker.”

They were also content with feeding him plenty of stray food!

It soon became common for Fender to end his day with a rather stuffed stomach, having eaten what was essentially an extra meal compared to his fellow brethren. It was quite the noisy stomach as well, gurgling and churning all throughout the night; Niles claimed it was evident of the human’s tampering with the food, but Fender just figured his body just wasn’t used to human food quite yet.

He should eat more of it, to help himself adjust!

Honestly, it was hard *not* thinking about human food, it was just that tasty! Even when he was hunting for fish with the other sea lions, Fender would daydream about snacking on those greasy treats, so much so that he forced himself to gobble up more fish than usual just to help keep his appetite in check. Yet, that didn’t stop him from lingering on the surface with the humans for longer periods of time. What’s so bad about enjoying an extra hotdog or two? Or three?

Or six?

Fender didn’t notice anything wrong with his new lifestyle until nearly two months later, when he found himself out of breath just hauling himself onto the pier. Granted, he had eaten an exceptionally heavy meal, yet the huffing sea lion didn’t remember ever feeling so wiped just from exiting the water. Nor did he ever remember feeling the pier become so cramped. He had to wedge himself close to the nearest sea lion just to avoid falling off, and even then a hanging belly roll bulged around the edge of it. Were there more members of their herd?

Or was there some other reason?

Fender didn’t dare consider this a side effect of the human’s food. Niles wouldn’t let him hear the end of it! No, the pier was cramped because there were more sea lions in his herd that he didn’t know, of course. And he was just tired because of all the swimming he’d done, that’s it! He vowed to take it easier the next day.

“Taking it easier” meant swimming far less than usual, opting to simply float around (which was surprisingly far easier than before). He only really put effort into swimming when it came time to hunt with his herd, and even then the lazy sea lion opted to stop partway through, finding it a bit too tedious to search for such tiny fishes. Why bother when he could get his very important nutrition right at the shore from the other humans instead?

It was such a good plan, Fender enacted it again the next day, and the day after that. As time went on, Fender grew progressively lazier and lazier, spending less time swimming with his

herd and more time floating near the humans. He didn't need those bland, boring fishes anyways. The human food was far richer and tastier, even if it did leave him constantly craving more. So, why shouldn't he have more? It made the humans happy after all; they were starting to wait for him around the times he would resurface, many of whom already carried food with them. Who cared if he ended up eating until he had a belly ache from time to time? Who cared if his stomach guuuuurgled and growled noisily after every meal?

Fender didn't care, and he saw no reason to care...until one evening, when the great sea lion found himself unable to haul himself onto the pier.

He didn't even make an attempt; he simply knew there was no way he could climb on to sleep with the others. Too much sea lion gut would just spill right over the end of the pier; it'd take as much effort just staying up there as it would hauling himself up to begin with. With a frustrated grunt, he gently nosed the nearest sea lion's tail. "Can you scoot a bit to your right, please?"

Said sea lion turned to him with a rather embarrassed look on her face. "I, um...I don't think it'd help you very much, but I can try." With a grunt, the female mammal gently wiggled over, giving Fender enough room for a whole 'nother sea lion to flop onto.

But not Fender. "That wasn't very much."

"It's the best I can do."

He frowned. "Ok, what gives? How many new herd members are there?!"

"None, you fat idiot!"

The "fat idiot" scowled as he heard Niles spat out that insult. Great, this was probably all his doing, trying to prove every inconvenience of Fender's was due to the humans. With a frustrated flick of his tail, Fender slowly floated over to the otherside of the pier, staring up at the elder's face. "When will you let it go, you old fart?"

"And when will *you* realize what a bloated mess you're becoming?!" Niles retorted, slamming his tail firmly into the wooden boards. "That human food is poisoning you, if not your stomach then your mind. Look at you, the size of a bloody walrus and too ignorant to even realize it!"

"Oh, I realize it!" Fender lied, a subtle blush washing over his pudgy cheeks. Goodness, was he really that big? That couldn't be right! Sure, he might have put on a little weight from the excess snacking, but it wasn't *that* much. He'd always been one of the largest members of the pack, so some extra poundage would have easily gone unnoticed. Still, a walrus? Really?!

Fender shook his head, now noticing how his chubby cheeks jostled when he did so. “So what if I’ve put on some? At least I know how to actually feed myself. You all keep frantically swimming after fish, while I live in the lap of luxury.”

“Overflowing it, more like.” Niles’ whiskers twitched. “You’re too damn fat to even fit on the pier with us! You spend so much time eating from the humans like some sort of pet, you may as well live with them! Stop this madness, Fender, it’s not too late to work off the weight and return to a normal life.”

“I don’t *want* to!” The fat sea lion growled. The old coot was being absurd! If he wouldn’t be allowed on the pier, then he’d just find his own. A quick look around, and he found just that.

The pier right by where the humans docked their boats.

“Fender, don’t!” Niles cried out once he realized what the tubby underling was planning, but it was too late. Fender didn’t even realize he was practically swimming back to the same crowd of people who fed him nonstop for the past hour; he just wanted something to lay on!

Of course, once he swam up to it, he realized getting himself out of the water was still quite a challenge, even with all the extra space. With a final burst of speed, Fender was able to launch himself just partially out of the water, catching the wooden boards with his flippers. He was heavy! Right away, he was gasping and wheezing, his cheeks going red as he struuuuuggled to haul himself out of the water. More and more of him just kept inching out, water washing off of his great cylindrical body like a submarine resurfacing. His flippers strained just to keep himself above the water, struggling to even reach the ground past all his blubber.

He really was the size of a walrus!

“C’mon, heccin’ chonker, you got this!” Fender heard the crowd cheer out, the humans having followed him to that spot just to encourage him. Yet Fender hardly felt encouraged; if anything, he was annoyed! Dammit, why did they have to feed him so much just before; it was all that extra food in his belly that was holding him back so much! For once, he actually wished they would help pry him out from the water, even if they had no chance in hell of hauling a fraction of his tonnage out!

The floorboards creaked, and Fender found himself finally gaining enough leverage. Slowly he flopped forward, a thick meaty *thwack* resounding along the ground. Another good shove, and he was finally out of the water, his body undulating back and forth like water in a bathtub. The cheering of the crowd around him was lost on the breathless sea lion, who huffed and puffed as though he’d been holding his breath for hours.

There really was no denying it now; he had gotten *huge!*



Just craning his head to see himself was a hassle, as his thick neck rolls bunched up heavily against his pudgy face. Still, he was shocked to see just how much of *him* there was! Fendor's pudgy body spilled along the ground like a slippery smooth brown ooze, easily the width of three sea lions and then some. And yet, at his widest his back rose several feet into the air, past most human's waists! If you are what you want, Fendor was one big croissant, a thick series of blubbery rolls growing thicker along the middle before tapering off around the head and tail. Only the pendant of his moonstone necklace remained visible, the strand completely lost amidst those folds. Flapping his fins and thumping his tail, he could easily feel the extra weight hanging along his limbs now that he was out of the water. He was starting to wonder if heccin' chonker meant what he thought it might mean.

Maybe Niles was right, and he should try working off the weight while he still could?

Right as that thought entered his mind, a donut entered Fendor's vision, his mouth starting to drool. Already, the humans were piling up treats right before him, praising him for his job well done of escaping the sea, their hands rubbing along his blubbery back.

The sea lion's heart pounded. He shouldn't eat it. He was already stuffed from his last meal, his stomach still churning away. This food was the reason he was in this predicament in the first place! Yet it was right there, right in front of his snout, just waiting to be eaten. Surely a bite couldn't hurt...

Giving into his inner glutton, Fender gulped down the donut greedily, much to the joy of the humans surrounding him. He can start his diet tomorrow, right?

---

His "diet" the next day consisted of 14 bagels, 11 croissants, 3 buckets of freshly caught fish, a dozen donuts, and 18 hotdogs. All for breakfast.

As Fender slipped into yet another food coma, he realized he would be there for quite some time. Nobody forced him to eat, yet the gluttonous sea lion simply couldn't turn down any of the food being offered to him. Now fully out of the water and on the dock, there was nothing stopping the humans from surrounding him, from shoving their affection and food into him. There was a constant flow of humans, all of them different and unrecognizable from the other; it was like the entire city came to greet him at times! It wasn't like he asked for them to come and dump entire trash bags full of food in front of his head.

Fendor also never asked them to squeeze his belly, rub his head, or call him adoring nicknames, but boy did he love it when they did!

If there was one thing Fendor loved more than the constant stream of greasy food he received, it was the equally constant stream of affection. He never knew just how wonderful the soothing touch of a human hand could be, particularly when those hands would glide along his

bloated belly after a heavy meal, soothing his poor overworked stomach. They weren't exactly flippers, yet those hands also squeezed perfectly in between his building folds, rubbing and squeezing the parts of him he had long since given up ever being able to reach on his own. And as if the rubbing wasn't enough, there was always the praises, the kind words, the encouragement!

"Look at that heccin' chonker eat!"

"He gets cuter by the day, I swear!"

"C'mon, tubby, you gotta eat more! I waited in line for over an hour just to feed ya this tuna sandwich!"

Even if the general commotion around him made it difficult to pinpoint specific phrases, Fender could still read their faces and emotions from their tone alone. They wanted him to eat. They got happy when he ate from them, and his reward was more food. The humans wanted him to stuff himself stupid, even if he ate enough to resemble a big bloated balloon, enough to turn his normally-squishy belly into a firm ball.

They wanted him to eat more. They wanted *more* of him.

Well, who was he to deny them what they wanted?

If living in the lap of luxury meant growing to the size of a whale, then Fender was all too happy to take up that challenge! His mobility all but vanished as his increasing bulk slowly occupied more and more of the dock; not like it mattered. He had everything he could have ever wanted right there! He had plenty of human hands to brush his broad coat, giving him the attention that he wanted; no, that he *deserved*. He had plenty of gracious humans who would voluntarily dump buckets of cool sea water over his frame from time to time, ensuring his skin never became too dry.

And all he had to do was gulp down enough food every day to give even an entire herd of sea lions a stomach ache!

So he ate, moving as little as possible so as to turn every last calorie into pure fat. Soon, he didn't have a choice in the matter as he found himself unable to even reach the dock within a week, his big belly suspending him in the air. He also didn't have any choice but to eat once his neck grew too bloated to turn, the moonstone necklace completely vanishing in his puffy tire of neck fat. But why wouldn't he want to eat? For all he knew, he could eat even during his sleep! He could keep this up forever...and ever...and ever!

Which was why he was all the more confused when, one fateful morning, he awoke to a distinctive lack of humans.

With a noisy snort, Fender yawned loudly, his thick chins bunching up into his chest. Despite how hard it was to keep his mouth open, what with all the fat surrounding it, Fender continued to prolong his yawn, hoping someone would toss in a breakfast muffin.

Alas, that wouldn't be the case, as the only taste in the sea lion's mouth were of last night's burgers.

Frowning, the pudgy mammal's yellow eyes shifted around, trying to find where his usual crowd of people were. Alas, he couldn't properly look around due to his tire-sized neck, his vision mainly consisting of the dock he laid on, and his own billowing cream-colored chest. Without his vision, he was forced to rely on his hearing instead. For the first time in months, Fender heard the cries of gulls circling overhead, the gentle washing of waves lapping against the coast; even the humming of cars passing by in the city.

But no humans. No "Good job, chonker! Eat this donut!" Nothing.

A couple minutes passed, and soon Fender heard another sound he hadn't heard in months; his own stomach growling for hunger. Grumbling in frustration, he attempted to adjust himself, but alas that only served to slosh his massive self, as well as cause the pier to creak. He had surpassed immobility long ago, and yet he continued to fruitlessly jiggle and wiggle himself, no matter how ridiculous he looked. C'mon, surely someone has to see him, right? Would he need to cry out in order to grab the human's attention?

"Well, well, well. If it isn't the human's *pet*."

Fender sighed. Great, the last people he wanted to see; erh, hear.

"Hrrf... whaddya want, Niles?" The obese sea lion growled as he felt the elder's whiskers against his hanging folds; apparently he was in the process of outgrowing the pier, if a part of him was sagging around the edge.

The elder sea lion chuckled. "Obviously, to rub your face into your mistakes while offering no help."

"I knew it."

"I'm being sarcastic, you fat, jiggling oaf!" Fender felt the other sea lion firmly slap his hanging flab. "I'm here to save you!"

"Save me?" Fender snorted. "From what?"

Niles growled. "From yourself! Goodness, Fender, your gut alone weighs as much as an entire herd of sea lions! Fortunately for you, I've called in a favor from other herds to help haul your fat arse off. Now stay still; that shouldn't be a problem for you, now, should it?"

Fender still had no idea what he was talking about. He wasn't *that* big, was he? Certainly not big enough to hold an entire pod in his gut, at least, right? Yet before he could protest, he heard the waters around him splash as various sea lions emerged from the waves, their snouts pressing into his flank.

His *other* flank.

Fender's yellow eyes widened. Was he actually so large, that he was sagging over *both ends of the pier*?! That couldn't be right, he'd have to be the size of a truck for that to happen! He couldn't even begin to imagine just how massive, how *round* he must be, but the constant jiggling caused by the sea lions pressing into his bulk gave a great indication. He really was enormous, a literal whale of a sea lion, wasn't he? No wonder he couldn't turn his neck, or see much farther than his cheeks. He couldn't have gotten this big on accident. The humans must have been fattening him on purpose.

He growled. "Quit touching me! I don't wanna move!"

"Fender!" Niles snapped, sounding like a parent disciplining a child. "What are you saying?!"

"I'm saying leave me alone!" His very cries were enough to jiggle his entire frame. "I want to grow fatter!"

"*Why?!*" Oh, how Fender wished he could see the look on that old fool's face. "Do you have any idea how long it will take to undo all that damage to your waist? Months of withholding food for you and constant exercising until you'd even be fit enough to bend your torso again! Why on Earth would you want to become fatter?"

"Because it's what the humans want...and it means more food."

"*Damn* the humans, Fender, they've abandoned you! They've probably gone to fatten up some other poor foolish animal for their own amusement."

"No." Fender retorted, a slow grin spreading across his face. "They're coming back."

A positive to being breached so high upon his belly was that Fender could see a bit farther down the dock than normal. From his vantage point, a massive truck was slowly driving along the dock towards him, a crudely drawn picture of a pudgy sea lion painted along its side. Obviously, this truck was for Fender; not to take him away, of course, considering Fender outweighed the truck by a good ton or so.

No, that truck was here to feed him. To reward him for being such a good pet.

The pudgy ball of blubber could hear the other sea lions quickly dive under in fear of the approaching vehicle, which stopped no more than a few feet away from Fender. The door opened, and a man in bright yellow clothes stepped out, smiling at Fender. "Goodness, you're quite the chonker! You're taller than me just lying on your belly!"

Fender nodded, or at least tried to.

"I think I heard your stomach growling a mile away, chonker! You must be starving, huh?"

Fender tried even harder to nod, with limited success.

"Well, don't wanna keep a cute chonker like yourself from your food. I got something special here that'll get that big belly of yours nice and full for a *long*, long time."

Stepping towards the truck, the man in yellow clothes returned with a large plastic hose from the vehicle, big enough for a grapefruit to roll through. Fender, of course, was all too happy to see the return of something that would fill his growling gut, his yellow eyes lighting up. He practically snatched the hose from the man's hands!

The truck whirred, and the hose stiffened. The smell that followed was something Fender could only describe as mouthwatering. Plenty of fish were on their way to his maw, mixed in with dozens of other delectable scents. Butter, salt, lard, grease; a whole cauldron of filling flavors flying towards his gaping maw, all with the intent on turning him into the biggest, fattest whale possible!

Fender smiled as the sludge was dumped into his mouth, his eyes rolling back. Hopefully, they never remove the hose from his mouth; the fat sea lion wanted nothing more than to gorge on this concoction for all of eternity!

"Fender!"

Ah, right. Niles was still there, unfortunately. Fender wished his ears could grow too fat to work properly, so he wouldn't have to listen to elder sea lion screaming his head off. "You spit that out right this instant! Don't you *dare* harm your body any more than you already have, just to appease these damn humans! For goodness sake, you can't even get into the water anymore on your own, what will happen if-"

A thunderous crunching sound filled the air, and the obese sealion felt blissful, momentary weightlessness before slamming into the sea! It was quite the destructive event, with wooden pillars scattered across his flabby backside, but thankfully Fender was unharmed. Even more fortunate was that the hose remained secure in the sea lion's maw, allowing him to continuously guzzle down the fattening concoction.

However, the highlight of that accident wasn't any of those factors, nor the fact that he could now finally touch the water with his flippers, considering the majority of his body floated beneath the water like some legendary iceberg. It was the ability to look at Niles with the biggest "I told you so" face possible. "You can't even get into the water anymore on your own," pah! He got into the water on his own just fine!

In fact, he'll stay in the water for years and years to come.

---

Becoming an island was starting to take its toll on Fender.

Days were much shorter, for example. The sea lion's higher elevation and surrounding land mass (which was, obviously, his own) meant the sun rose and set much earlier for the mountainous mammal. Sure, the humans who used to climb atop him in the past would mention how they could see the sunset far longer than anyone at his base, something the tour guide said also happened at the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world; but Fender couldn't really stand *on* his own body to witness that.

No, the sea lion's head was buried within its own dozens, if not hundreds of rolls of neck fat.

He missed the tours, too. He liked the interactions he had with the humans, even if they were limited. The gentle cheek rubs felt warm and genuine, far more preferable to being walked and driven on. Sometimes, they'd even take out the tube from his mouth and let the tourists toss him a sardine or donut as a treat. Of course, they only had time to toss him a few treats before his stomach would gurgle beneath them, demanding the hose once again.

Still, Fender didn't mind those sudden pangs of hunger, especially since he knew the hose would top him off soon enough. Alas, it'd been quite some time since the last human tourist had ventured up to his head. Now, the only ones who came up were the maintenance crew to make sure their industrial-sized pipe remains secure. Not even the seagulls flew high enough to greet him anymore; he was simply too massive!

Between the shorter days and lack of any real activity, Fender found himself dozing off again and again. Back when he was far slimmer, only a mere city-sized Californian sea lion, he could at least watch the little humans crawl along his frame like ants. Now, at his current size, all he could see were the blue sky above and the yellow belly below. He didn't think it was possible, but it seemed as though he really was too big for company.

Which was why he was all the more startled to one day wake up and find Niles laying before him!

It was hard to believe that the old cot actually made the climb onto him, no less all the way onto his head. Before they stopped giving tours, the humans were warned about dealing with altitude sickness climbing towards the sea lion's head, yet here was Niles, who merely appeared winded. Was it an illusion? The weight felt real enough, at least.

"Hello, Fender."

Ah, the illusion spoke! Fender blinked slowly, expecting the other sea lion to fade away. But no, Niles remained.

He watched as the other mammal's head craned to the side, watching the tube that pressed itself into his rolls. "I'm surprised you can actually wrap your jaws around that thing. It's wider than me."

Fender snorted in response. Niles didn't sound particularly impressed, but his tone wasn't snarky or abrasive, either. It was actually hard to parse what his mood really was.

Niles continued. "'Thousands of gallons a second.' That's what great old Hubert says the sign at the bottom said about how much of that mixture you eat. And here I thought him learning how to read Human would have been a waste of time. I suppose I've been wrong about a lot of things lately."

Slowly, Niles squirmed his way closer to Fender's head, the older sea lion's both swaying as though he were swimming in the lard. Once close enough, he pointed down Fender's belly. "They're building a city on top of you, you know. Paving roads, constructing buildings, et cetera. They plan on being able to house a million people by the end of the month on top of your belly alone. Now, I thought building anything on such a flabby, jiggly mountain was a foolish idea, but if there's any group of people who can live on ground that constantly shakes, it's Californians."

Niles chuckled softly at his own joke, even further confusing Fender. The elder was having fun pointing out his size, for sure, but it wasn't in an angry or mocking way. More just trying to strike up a conversation, even if Fender couldn't respond, what with the giant tube in his mouth.

Finally, Niles cleared his throat, leaning up. "I...this is hard to admit, actually, but it seems humans aren't...all bad."

Oh? Now Fender was certain this was all an illusion, his tiny ears perking up to listen closer to Niles speak. "Part of their project to keep you as well fed as possible included a fundraiser. Every bit of money donated to feed you, was also donated to a California Sea Lion conservation project. They've constructed this massive artificial reef inside your navel, it fits hundreds of us. Gives us a place to rest, catch fish; the humans even occasionally check us for diseases. It's...not bad. And I suppose I have you to thank for it."

“So...you have my permission to keep growing fatter. A lot of us are depending on your size, now. A bigger Fender means more sea lion protection...I hear you’ve actually surpassed Japan in terms of sheer size recently. Just saying.”

This was a lot to take in. To think, that stubborn old fart actually climbed *all* the way up his mass, just to apologize. Fender actually felt a bit bad; if he hadn’t the hose in his mouth, he would have forgiven him. Or at least not say “I told you so.”

Instead, he started jerking his fat head to the side.

“Huh?” Niles blinked, watching the spectacle. “What is it? You want me to come closer, or show me something?”

Fender nodded, before continuing to tilt his head to the side.

Niles carefully slid closer. “Right here? Beneath your...cheek, is it?”

Fender nodded again.

The older sea lion wiggled his snout beneath the flabby fold, unearthing a hotdog in pristine condition. It was left there quite some time ago, but the heat in Fender’s folds helped keep it nice and fresh. The behemoth of blubber couldn’t help but grin when he saw the older sea lion’s eyes light up. He expected Niles to laugh at the offering, or suggest to give it to someone else.

But to his surprise, the older sea lion grinned right back. “I suppose one bite couldn’t hurt.”