

When the Pelipper Post Office delivered, Ruby made it a habit to greet them—at least, when she wasn't out adventuring in a dungeon. Given the recent moratorium against explorations, though, that had been a lot, recently. (Some big end-of-the-world dealio was going down and a ragtag group of kids in scarves were saving it. Again. Minor adventurers like Ruby herself were barred from entering dungeons until it all went down.)

“How's it going, Lyle?” the Zangoose asked. “Any news about that big thing up north?”

“You'd be the first to find out,” the Pelipper replied. Rather than dropping letters in her mailbox, he set down a big crate full of berries and treats. “Your order came in again. You've been getting a lot of these lately!”

Ruby shrugged, wearing a small smile. “Don't have much else to do but sit at home and wait for this all to blow over. Thanks, Lyle.”

As she bent over to pick up the crate, he squawked. “Wait, hold on! Got a letter, too.” He put it on top of the berries. “Enjoy yourself, Ruby!”

She waved him off, her purple claws glinting in the sunlight as the wind played with her fur. Tucking the letter inside the crate, she picked it up—and found herself suddenly huffing from the strain. Normally, she didn't have problems with this. She hadn't ordered any more berries or treats than usual... was she just out of shape?

Carrying the crate of snacks inside, she immediately dug out a berry pie and started scarfing it down. Ah... Madam Blissey was an excellent cook, and her snacks were worth every penny! Ruby tried to go slow and enjoy it, but before long she'd still devoured the whole thing. The crust was rich and buttery, a perfect complement to the tart sweetness of the mixed berries and the syrup. Digging into the crate for an apple, Ruby started chowing down on that as well as she checked the letter. She gasped—it was from her old friend Orchid!

The two of them—Zangoose and Mienshao—had trained in the same guild to be explorers, back in the day. Orchid had ultimately bowed out, deciding that the explorer’s life wasn’t for him, but Ruby had kept in contact over the years. He ran a small shop in a town a ways away.

Unlike most members of his species, Orchid was *quite* large—something that came from him continually sampling his own wares. He had a huge round belly and puffed-out cheeks, and even a small amount of physical activity was known to tire him. At times, Ruby wondered how he was even mobile. Despite the fact that he looked friendly and approachable, he was known to be slightly sensitive about his weight.

Snapping open the envelope, Ruby picked up a third snack, her apple already eaten through. Inside, Orchid waxed nostalgic about their time in the guild together and mentioned how long it had been since they’d hung out.

*We should meet up again!* he said. *I’d love to visit your new digs. And besides—I have something interesting to tell you! I’ve started exercising and going to the local dojo! I’ll still never be as capable in combat as you explorers (haha) but I’m hoping to change the way I look. I’ve already lost a lot of weight!*

Now *that* was something to hear! Orchid had always been huge for a Mienshao, and Ruby almost couldn’t imagine him svelte—but if shedding pounds would make him happier, she’d support him all the way. As soon as she was finished, she grabbed a reed and parchment to pen a response.

*I’d love to see you!* she wrote. *And congrats on the weight loss! Meanwhile I’ve gained a few pounds myself... haha. This moratorium against exploration has left me bored and I just sit at home and snack all day! Even this morning I found myself getting out of breath carrying in a crate. If I don’t get back in the field soon, who knows how I’ll end up! Hugs and kisses!*

After folding up and sealing the envelope, she glanced ruefully down at her belly. She was still a bit trim, what little pudg she’d picked up over the past few weeks of laziness only barely

showing through—but that crate incident this morning had really driven home that she was slowly starting to plump up.

Shaking her head, she figured that it was only a temporary thing. She'd get back to exploring soon enough.

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When Lyle dropped off Orchid's reply a little over a week and a half later, Ruby opened the door to greet him in person again—and he started. “Oh! Ruby!” His astonishment had a clear origin—before he realized what he was doing, he was staring right at her stomach. In the past week and a half, she'd been eating more than ever—and she was cognizant that she was now noticeably chubbier. No one would ever call her fat, but she no longer had the lean build expected of an explorer either.

“Hey Lyle,” she replied with a small, embarrassed smile. “Don't mind me. Just been... snacking a bit more than usual, lately. Still waiting to hear back on that expedition they sent those scarf-wearers on. Stress eating, you know?”

Lyle nodded. “I feel ya. Didn't mean to make you self-conscious! Just got...”

“Surprised,” she finished for him with a small laugh. With a wry observation, she noted that her rolls jiggled oh-so-slightly as she chuckled. “Yeah, you're not the only one.”

Heading back into her little cottage and sitting down at her table where another of Madam Blissey's unfinished pies sat (her fourth this day, she thought ruefully). Carving out a slice, she bit into it, savoring the sweet flavor as she thumbed open Orchid's letter.

*Hey, nothing wrong with getting a little squishier! I think pokemon look cute with a little plumpness on them. (And before you go calling me a hypocrite, I was more than just a 'little'*

*plump, okay!)* When we catch up, we can compare our chub if you like, haha! And I'm so psyched you want to meet—when would be a good time for you?

Quickly penning back that she'd be down to meet any time—it wasn't like she had explorations to go on—Ruby leaned back, studying her own paunch. “Getting squishy?” she mused. “Me?” She reached down to poke idly at her chubby tummy. Just a few months ago, before this big end-of-the-world nonsense had ground her life to a halt, there would have been no give—she had been firm, flat, and athletic. Now, though, there was a small, almost playful give as her little layer of fat dimpled around her touch. She'd felt a bit self-conscious about it—but Orchid's words had given her cause to reconsider. “Does he really think pudgy pokemon are... cute?”

Truth be told, she enjoyed seeing a bit of chub on other pokemon as well—but it had always seemed weird to want it on herself. She was an explorer! She was meant to be physically fit—ready to fight at any moment! But as the Zangoose reached down and poked at her belly again, she giggled as it molded around her. “I guess I *am* getting squishy,” she said with a small laugh, once again feeling her fat shake from it.

Her doubts dispelled, she took a short walk to drop off the letter—and pick up a few more snacks while she was at it.

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“Hey there!”

This time, Ruby was the one to get Lyle's attention when the mail carrier touched down. She strode up with a smile, cogent of how she jiggled as she walked—her steps shorter, her pace slower. Simply walking to town was starting to sometimes leave her out of breath, and she was noticeably chubbier now. Still not ‘fat,’ but definitely worthy of being called ‘plump.’ (Nowhere *near* as big as she remembered Orchid being—she wondered how smaller he'd gotten? Blushing, she found herself hoping he was still at least a *little* round.)

“Hello, Ruby!” Lyle said. There was no staring this time—it appeared he was embarrassed about their last encounter.

“You don’t have to act like nothing’s up, Lyle!” Ruby said teasingly. “I know I’m getting pretty big!” She placed her paws on her belly for emphasis.

He laughed good-naturedly. “I wasn’t gonna say anything, but so long as you’re aware! Here’s the letter.” He handed it to her, the parchment tight in his bill. “By the by, Madam Blissey told me to mention that your double-size order is coming in a day or two!”

“Good!” She slapped her tummy, smiling at the jiggle. “This squishy girl needs her food! Tell her the butterier and sugarier, the better!”

Heading inside and getting started on yet another snack (nowadays she ate more before noon than she used to in a single day!), Ruby opened Orchid’s latest letter. He’d supplied a prospective date in two weeks’ time, asking if that was alright for him to swing by.

*I’m so looking forward to seeing you! he said. Especially so I can introduce you to the new me. I’m still losing weight, but don’t worry though! I’ll never be a small Mienshao like those others. I’ve merely gone from “borderline immobile” to “pleasingly plump,” or so the people at the dojo say! And speaking of, you still getting soft and squishy? I have to admit, you were always so athletic and thin back at the guild, I can barely imagine you with chub! I bet you look cute with it—if you don’t mind me saying so!*

Feeling herself blushing as she downed yet another snack, resting one paw comfortably on her new squish even as she fumbled for reed and parchment with her other, she wrote back.

*I don’t mind at all—and I look forward to having you here! Feel free to stay for a couple days—or longer if you want! I can’t wait to see the new you either. And bring some snacks! (Please!)*

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Two weeks passed, and in the middle some news came from the north—the heroes were successfully, the day was saved once more, and explorations could resume! Ruby politely declined an offer from the expedition society to resume work, citing a forthcoming meeting with a friend. The day arrived and Ruby waddled out of her door to wait by the road to see her friend. It had been too long since she and Orchid had spent any time together—and truth be told, she knew that he was looking forward to it too.

At this point, she had no problem admitting it—she was good and fat. She ate just under a dozen pies a day, coupled with berries, apples, and other assorted snacks and treats. The sugary goodness had piled on layer after layer of pleasing pudge, and her thighs, too, had gone from toned and muscular to soft and round. She *definitely* didn't have a thigh gap.

It was an hour or two before noon when she saw the purple shape on the horizon. It quickly morphed into a visible dot—her friend, the Mienshao, coming her way. When he noticed her, he raised one arm in salutation and picked up his pace.

By the time he arrived, he was slightly breathless, his cheeks red from exertion—and probably not just that. He looked at his friend with undisguised awe. “Wow, Ruby, you really outdid yourself!”

She glowed with pride. She was *fat*—still big enough to walk around comfortably, but definitely bigger than most other Zangoose she'd seen, and far too big for explorations to be a realistic prospect. (Though of late, she'd looked forward to returning to the field with less and less fervor.) Even her face was bedecked with chubby cheeks and her arms were heavier.

Orchid was surprisingly *smaller* than her now, a reversal of their past as guild apprentices—though he wasn't *that* much smaller. She remembered him being out-and-out obese, so huge it was surprising he could walk some days. (Unsurprisingly, his parents had pressured him into joining the guild; he hadn't been that keen on the explorer's life.) Now he was round but also active, a sort of plumpness that exuded confidence as he went about his day.

The two of them hugged, both delighting in the feeling of their chubby bodies squishing against each other. Orchid left a small peck of a kiss on Ruby's cheek, the touch dimpling her rolls a bit, and she giggled. "Come inside," she said, still blushing.

He smiled back. "I got the snacks."

Inside, they quickly devolved into feeding each other little bite-sized morsels. It wasn't going well since the two of them kept giggling. Finally, after they were finished, Orchid glanced down at Ruby's huge soft belly. "Can I?" he asked.

When she nodded, he reached out with one paw and rested it on her tummy. He held there for a minute, his paw sinking into her and her fat billowing around his digits, before slowly rubbing his paw along her roundness. Judging from her blush, she liked the attention as well.

"You look really nice, Ruby," Orchid said, smiling. "You're cute."

"You too."

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When Orchid inevitably had to take his leave a few days later, they lingered at the gate, holding paws. "Come back soon, yeah?" Ruby said.

"For sure," Orchid replied. "And you come visit sometime when you're done exploring!"

"About that..." Ruby looked aside with a small smile. "I don't know if I want to go back to the exploration life. I've been talking with Madam Blisse... I might end up getting a job with her in town."

"Just don't eat all the stock. Trust me! It's not good!"

She shoved him playfully. “Thanks, you know. For letting me know this is okay.”

He smiled and pecked her on the cheek again, and the touch made her want to melt under the sun. “Thanks for having me over. See you soon?”

“Definitely!”

Ruby stood by her fencepost, watching Orchid wander away with a smile on her face before turning to head inside. Somehow, the drama unfolding that had kept her from exploring had turned out all right in the end. She glanced at a mirror and smiled at her new plush self. She felt confident, happy... and squishy.

And she wouldn't have it any other way.