

Chase's Hefty New Reality

By: Indigo Rho

Chase knew the last slice of pizza was a mistake even before he'd grabbed it, but the river otter had been at the mercy of his appetite all Spring Break. Ever since returning to his hometown of Echo, he'd felt as if his appetite had tripled. It was strange, but he brushed it off as a side effect of stress. Yet another reason to question his decision to come back, even only for a week.

Chase leaned back into the couch, barely resisting the urge to hold his small, chubby belly. Instead, he distracted his paws by scratching the goatee he'd put so much effort into growing.

"That was good," Chase groaned. He stifled a belch.

"Thanks for leaving some scraps for the rest of us, rudder butt," Flynn scoffed. The grouchy gila monster was glaring daggers at Chase.

"Huh?" Chase didn't understand what had suddenly riled his friend up. "I didn't eat that much."

An overweight ram nearby laughed. "Dude, you ate half a pizza, a bag of chips, a bunch of wings, and guzzled most of a two-liter. You gonna devastate my birthday cake next?" Carl asked with a big grin.

"It *was* quite a bit," TJ added sheepishly. The lynx was poking at one of the generic salads the group had bought with their order.

"And that's quite the understatement," Jenna said. The fennec fox had put down her plate and crossed her arms, giving her full attention to Chase. "This isn't some weird bet, is it? Or a prank?" She shot him an accusatory stare he knew meant she'd be annoyed if she hadn't been brought in on a prank.

Chase vehemently shook his head. "No! I just, I don't know, got carried away, I guess." So much so that he felt like he'd swallowed a lead weight. He didn't realize pizza and chips could weigh so much.

"Chase's diet isn't any of our business," Leo snapped. The red wolf had fanatically leapt to Chase's defense yet again, much to his dismay. His ex had been clingier than usual the last few days.

"It is if he stuffs himself with a party's worth of food," Flynn said, pushing back at Leo. The gila and wolf hadn't gotten along well recently. "And Chase, how the hell are you not fat?"

"What?"

"Why. Aren't. You. Fat?" Flynn repeated slowly. "With how much you eat, you should be huge. You should be dwarfing Carl, for Christ's sake!"

"I don't eat like this all the time." Chase found himself oddly flustered. It wasn't the conversation he'd expected to have that night. Or any night, really. He didn't consider himself fit, but he was only a bit chubby, at worst. He tried

not to think about the paunch he might eventually obtain if his dad was anything to go by.

“Good one,” Carl giggled. Chase assumed the ram was high again. “Just cause I’m a stoner doesn’t mean I forgot our first semester of college. Or the Freshman 15.”

Why don’t you remind your tubby friend how ravenous he was during the only semester he could handle? an uncomfortable voice in the back of Chase’s head suggested. Chase agreed. He didn’t care if it was Carl’s birthday; he didn’t want everyone to keep obsessing over how much food he ate. “I’m sure you remember the Freshman 15 every time your hoodie rides up when you laugh,” Chase grumbled.

Flynn narrowed his eyes at Chase, and Jenna raised a brow, but Carl looked unfazed. “Dude, you gained the Freshman 15, too. Hell, you gained it faster than me.”

“That’s ridiculous; I’ve barely gained a pound since high school.” A strange chill passed through Chase’s body, and the otter felt dizzy. A tingling sensation stirred in his stomach, drawing his attention downward. His belly suddenly bulged out with enough force to jiggle him. His blue shirt clung to his slightly rounder middle, and the waistband of his shorts dug into his hips. Even the hole in his pants for his tail felt tighter. It was as if all his clothes had magically shrunk a size.

“What the?” Chase wondered if his indulgent meal was giving him indigestion. He’d never dealt with bloating before, but he wasn’t used to overeating, either. He nervously lifted his shirt and poked his belly. To the otter’s confusion, his finger sunk in a little. He wasn’t just bloated; he was actually fatter. “What happened to me?” he muttered in shock.

“The Freshman 15, duh,” Carl said. “You blamed it on me for some reason. You didn’t *have* to order take-out every time I did. I warned you that you’d get fat if you ate like that, and you ignored me.”

“But...but I didn’t,” Chase swore, even as phantom memories of fast food in the dorms invaded his head. Just a greasy burger and fries at first. Or a small to-go box of Chinese. Then he’d started adding a soda to his order. And choosing a bigger burger. And then a second burger. He remembered the meals like they’d happened that morning rather than years ago, yet he knew they couldn’t possibly have happened at all.

“And the gains didn’t stop after Carl dropped out of college,” Jenna said. She gave Chase a stern look, the same she gave him whenever he said something dumb and was in need of a lecture. “Your next roommate didn’t smoke as much weed as Carl did, but he convinced you to pick up the habit with edibles and a ‘smoking hot ass’ if I remember your thirst texts correctly.

Too bad you get the munchies hard when you're high, and you kept your room loaded with junk food."

To Chase's horror, his belly puffed out again, peeking out from under his shirt. "That can't be right. I had a bad trip with a blueberry muffin and swore off edibles. Carl, back me up here. You helped me out after that!"

Carl tilted his head at Chase. "I mean, you made a fuss about them for a while, but you sent me, like, fifty texts when you got high off that first edible your new roomy gave you. I've never been prouder," he laughed.

The dreadful memories that shouldn't have existed needled Chase's brain again. Weekends spent gobbling up large weed brownies and zoning out, followed by food comas from snacking non-stop. The teasing from his roommate about how chubby he was getting. How he'd torn a hole in his pants sitting down in class once. As the memories settled in, his clothes loosened some, easing the tightness that'd come with his fantastical gains.

"This doesn't make sense," Chase squeaked.

"Excess calories lead to weight gain. It's pretty basic stuff," TJ said in a tone that sounded like he was apologizing for the fact. "Hearing from Carl about how much you were gaining was one of the reasons I decided to study athletic training after high school. Not the main reason, though!" the lynx frantically added.

"I guess some good did come from you ballooning," Flynn snickered.

"Mocking his weight doesn't help, Flynn," Jenna said. She switched to a more sympathetic smile, maybe something she'd learned from a psychology course. "Look, Chase, you made a few mistakes, and they had consequences. Taking on such a stressful course load your first year while also losing control of your diet was an unfortunate combination. It didn't help that every time we got together to study, you managed to bring or order food. A *lot* of food. You turned into a textbook example of a stress eater."

The tingle returned, and Chase was powerless to stop his belly from bloating outward with a jiggling jolt. And it wasn't just his belly that'd grown, either. His chest was soft, and his rump filled more of the couch. When he squeezed his tail, it felt softer and looked thicker. No amount of indigestion could explain away how the rest of him had obviously become fatter. He was downright plump now.

How had he let his weight get this bad? If he'd spent less time eating and more time studying, he could've held his gains at bay rather than share a waist size with his ex, Leo. But he hadn't *needed* to hold back because he hadn't gluttoned during freshman year—or *any* year, for that matter. He didn't care what the others said or what his strangely fresh memories said; he knew something was wrong.

Or maybe you're in denial, big guy, the voice in the back of his head snickered. The last thing the otter needed was self-deprecation.

Chase grabbed his belly. "I can't be the only one seeing this," Chase begged.

"It's not like it's hard to miss," Flynn said, ignoring the side-eye Jenna gave him. "You fucking ballooned. I never expected you to make Carl seem like a sensible eater in comparison, but damn! Every time you posted a new picture of yourself online, you looked fatter. And your attempts to disguise your gains were just sad. Clothes a size too big, sucking in your gut, hiding halfway behind other people, poor lighting, weird camera angles—it was ridiculous. As if none of us would notice you'd reached Carl's size in the middle of sophomore year. That had to have been, what, a hundred pounds in a year and a half?"

No no no, Chase whined silently, expecting another fattening. Unfortunately, the otter wasn't disappointed. His belly ballooned bigger than ever, billowing out from under his shirt. His cheeks and chins jiggled as they abruptly rounded out, and he swore his ass wobbled from its gains. His tight clothes sluggishly stretched to handle his new weight. Just as Flynn had promised—or threatened—Chase looked as doughy as Carl.

But worse than the terrible gains were the memories. He remembered shopping for loose shirts he hoped would hide the curve of his belly. He'd held his breath any time he spotted a camera aimed his way and hidden from them more often than not. How much time had he wasted testing various angles on his phone, convinced he could find one that didn't make him look like a balloon?

Chase patted his body up and down with his paws, willing away his unwanted girth, but the pounds remained soft and horribly real. Something had felt off about Echo since the moment he'd returned, but he couldn't explain how his friends could make him retroactively gain weight. They all sounded convinced he truly became a glutton during college. Was it all an act? Had they spiked his food with drugs? Had TJ told the others what really happened at the lake when they were kids? The voice in the back of his head cackled.

"I'm not fat. I can't be fat," Chase muttered, but his belly resisted the plea.

"There's still time to make things right, Chase," TJ said.

Chase froze in place. His eyes darted to TJ, trying to stare holes through the lynx.

TJ flinched as if Chase had thrown a punch his way. "I mean, there's still time to establish a proper exercise regiment and lose weight. I tried to help after I started college and was sort of closer to you and Jenna. But you were,

um, kind of resistant. You didn't want to jog around campus because you said otters weren't made for jogging. You stopped going to the gym because you swore people were laughing at you behind your back. I thought swimming at the pool would work since you're so fond of being in the water anyway, but you didn't want to be seen shirtless." The lynx's ears flattened, and he rubbed his arm. "Maybe you wouldn't have kept gaining weight if I'd been more assertive.

Chase's belly wobbled larger, becoming a doughy globe in his lap. He was noticeably fatter than Carl now. Embarrassment poured into him thanks to the new memories created by TJ's claim. Exercise only made him jiggle, which made people laugh. No one at the campus gym was trying to lose weight like him; they were all building muscle or maintaining trim, athletic bodies. Whenever he'd struggled on a machine, nearby students had shared whispers, mocking him. The pool would've been worse, especially with all the other, sleeker otters doing laps. So he'd given up and gotten fatter.

"This can't be happening." Chase clenched his eyes shut, but his belly remained the same when he opened them. He needed to snap his friends out of their delusions before they made him fatter. He turned to Leo. If anyone would side with him, it'd be the wolf. "Leo, you know I wouldn't let my weight get this out of control. Please, believe me," he begged.

Leo smiled, but the words that came out of his mouth dashed Chase's hopes. "I worried this would happen when you said you were going to college. Remember the summer after you graduated high school? We went for fast food practically every day. I even joked you were trying to fatten me up. But you always ate way more than me, which was already obvious by the time you left Echo. You carry the weight, well, though! And no one expects a journalist to be skinny, so don't let the pounds get to you," the wolf beamed.

Chase lurched forward as he instantly packed on a couple dozen more pounds. He smelled the burgers and fries. The tacos and burritos. The fried chicken. But it made no sense. He hadn't had the money to spend on the endless fast food his new memories insisted he'd gorged upon. Yet his belly still bulged from a fattening diet that'd allegedly gone on for years. The doughy otter couldn't take it anymore; he needed to get away from the reality-warping stories his friends wove.

Chase slid off the couch, blushing the second he felt himself jiggle. "Something fucked up is happening here! There's no way any of this is real!" He squeaked and bolted away from the living room as fast as he could waddle.

Escape was all Chase could think of—that and the bulk that slowed him down. The otter's belly was in a state of perpetual motion. The doughy ball bounced up and down, left and right, wobbling wherever it damn well pleased. His thighs smacked together, and his heavy tail felt like a ball and chain

dragging behind him. Even his cheeks and chins jiggled. The strange sensations were new and old at the same time. One second, he'd think back to how he'd seen Carl jiggle at times, then he'd find himself remembering *himself* jiggling while huffing it to class or rolling out of bed.

"I'm not fat! I'm not fat!" Chase shouted desperately.

Chase skidded around a corner towards the front door but found himself staring down an absurdly long hallway he didn't remember existed. Carl's house was huge—nothing in Echo came close to its size—but Chase had never gotten lost before. When he was younger, he was over so often he practically lived there. Confused and driven by terror, he kept going anyway, taking a left at the end of the hall.

"What's the rush, dude?" Carl asked.

Chase shouted at the sudden appearance of the ram blocking his path. "How did you?" he blathered.

"You're not gonna leave before cake and ice cream, right? We've got gallon buckets of every flavor my parents sell." The ram shoved his hooves in his hoodie's front pocket and sighed wistfully. "I miss those nights we'd hole up in the dorm, doing nothing but playing video games and seeing who could eat the most ice cream. And you always managed to beat me—at least at eating."

Chase pushed down on his belly with his paws, but no amount of force could hold back the instant gains Carl's comment inflicted upon him. His face flushed red when he felt the pudgy bulge between his fingers.

"Stop doing this to me, Carl!" Chase turned and ran in the opposite direction, remembering all the flack he'd gotten for saying vanilla was his favorite ice cream flavor after downing a gallon in one sitting.

A few inexplicable turns later, Chase stumbled into Leo.

"Running only tires you out, Chula," the red wolf said. "But that's nothing to be ashamed of! Being fat means you can hang out on the couch with me all day, drinking beer and eating chips. It'll be like the week I visited you at college. You spent most of it in a food coma."

"But you never visited! I hadn't seen you in almost three years before this week!" Chase bellowed out the truth, but his words did not affect the curse targeting his waistline and memories. The ill-advised weeklong binge with Leo came back to him. He remembered being so uneasy he'd stuffed himself silly and guzzled liquor whenever he could, just to have an excuse not to answer Leo's questions about their former relationship. Both habits had persisted long after Leo returned to Echo, to the detriment of Chase's ballooning weight.

Chase fled his ex with renewed vigor, but it wasn't long before he came across TJ. "Jesus Christ!" the otter squeaked.

“Chase, language!” TJ sounded horrified. “You sound just like you did when you broke your leg skiing.”

“I’ve never skied a day in my life!”

“That’s why I took you. I thought it might help you get out more and lose weight, but it was a disaster.” TJ’s ears flattened, and his bottom lip quivered. Chase wished he’d cry because then he wouldn’t speak the words that’d doom him with more pounds. “You tripped and broke your leg before we even left the lodge. You spent almost two whole months in a cast recovering without any way to stay active. That’s when you really ballooned.”

“You didn’t have to say ballooned!” Chase growled as his belly and rump puffed out like an airbag. His middle resembled a padded beach ball, framed by a blue shirt that just barely fit. He ran away from TJ before the lynx did further harm.

Chase found Jenna not even a minute later. The otter held up his paws. “Please, Jenna, don’t say a word. Every time you claim something made me fat, it actually makes me fat. I’m twice as large as I should be!”

“This isn’t the time to make up outlandish excuses for why you got fat, Chase. Personally, I think you look cuter with a gut. Which was why I made sure to keep plenty of snacks and soda at my place so you ate plenty whenever you dropped by.” The fennec fox winked at him.

“Why would you fatten me up?!” Chase seethed. Every inch of the otter grew thicker until he felt as big as an elephant. “Why is this happening to me?” he whined as he waddled away from yet another treacherous friend.

To the hefty otter’s horror, the house had seemingly turned into an endless maze of twisting corridors that made zero sense. Every door he tried was locked, and halls changed appearances when he doubled back. Having never been in shape to begin with, Chase’s pace slowed to a crawl. He lacked the energy to gasp when Flynn eventually blocked his way forward.

The gila monster shook his head. “I’ve spent years convinced Carl would end up as a blubber ball if he didn’t kick the weed habit and start eating better. And Leo gaining a gut was inevitable once he stopped playing football and adopted a diet of beer and microwave dinners. But I never suspected *you’d* become the fattest of us all, Chase.”

“I’m not...supposed to be,” Chase panted. “It’s a curse.” Or ghosts or demons or something unnatural. Chase was willing to believe any explanation that didn’t involve him steadily putting on weight over the years. *Or maybe you were destined to be huge*, a voice in his head jabbed at him.

“It might be a curse to you, but it’s a boon to me,” Flynn smirked. “Carl’s been less down on himself since you blimped past him in size. And nothing gets him eating healthier like showing him a picture of you to remind him of

what will happen if he loses control. So do me a favor, blubber butt, and keep glutting to your heart's content. Keep ordering take-out. Keep hiding from exercise. Keep grazing on fattening snacks. Keep piling on the pounds until all you ever think about is eating!"

Flynn poked Chase's belly with every declaration. Whenever he pulled his finger back, the otter's gut swelled further. Chase swayed from the onslaught of girth. His knees quaked, and he felt the oppressive pull of gravity. With a yelp, he fell onto his pillowy ass and onto his back. He was as wide as he was tall, too fat and tired to stand on his own.

Chase's friends loomed over him, their expressions shifting from shock, to disappointment, to amusement. "Please stop. Make me slim again," he begged in vain.

"Eating four meals a day isn't good for you, Chase."

"Just because you can eat an entire pie in one sitting doesn't mean you have to."

"Do you ever stop eating at parties?"

"You drink so much soda, you slosh like a water balloon."

"Did you pop another button?"

"Going to the buffet *again*?"

"Chase, you eat like you've got a bottomless pit for a stomach."

Chase's head spun in circles as new memories dumped into him. So much eating, so little exercise. His hunger never seemed to go away, nagging him at all hours of the day. He couldn't stop stuffing himself, and—though he loathed to admit it—he sometimes didn't want to stop. Nothing matched the comfort of a full belly.

The otter swelled in every direction like a marshmallow in a microwave. The seams of his clothes tore, then mended, then tore again as they struggled to keep up with his steady gains. The hands of his friends pressed into his blubbery middle, prodding and rubbing and teasing him. He moaned from the attention, his will to resist buried under inches of wonderful fat.

Bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, the voice in the back of Chase's head urged. *Lumbering from breakfast to lunch to dinner to breakfast again until you're practically rolling in circles.*

"Bigger," Chase mumbled in a daze as his mountainous belly blocked his view of the world.

Chase woke with a yelp. Breathing heavily, the otter looked around and saw he was lying on the couch in Carl's living room. He vaguely remembered staying overnight for Carl's birthday party.

"What are you squeaking about now?" Flynn came into view with the same old look of disapproval on his face.

"Just a weird dream," Chase said.

"Were you naked in class again or something?" Flynn snorted.

"Something like that." Chase wasn't about to tell anyone about his nightmare of being fattened to immobility, especially Flynn. Everyone teased him about his weight too much already.

Chase eased himself into a sitting position. His doughy ball gut rolled onto his lap with a satisfying wobble. As expensive as the couch at Carl's place was, it wasn't designed with a 400-pound otter in mind. Not that the motel beds were much better. He accepted that he wouldn't get a good night's rest until he returned home to his king-sized bed and memory foam topper.

Flynn stared at Chase's belly and shook his head. "Have you gotten fatter this week? Because you look fatter."

"No!" Chase blushed and tugged down on his tank top. A few deep breaths were all it took to get his belly peeking out again. "Have *you* gotten fatter?"

Flynn scowled. "Nice try, but you're the only blubber ball here." He flicked his tail and smacked Chase's belly, causing it to bounce and ripple. "Maybe skip out on fourths for once."

"I don't eat *that* much," Chase grumbled. "Maybe you and Jenna should stop acting like my personal trainers."

"We're just trying to prevent you from having to be rolled onto stage at graduation. Who ever heard of an immobile journalist, anyway?" Flynn scoffed and walked away. "And before you ask, breakfast will be ready in about thirty minutes."

Chase didn't dignify the comment with a response. Breakfast *had* been on his mind, though. Eggs sounded good. And pancakes. And waffles. A few links of sausage. Oh, and biscuits. His stomach rumbled loudly.

"Calm down." Chase patted his belly. "I can't believe everyone thinks I'm gonna get massive before graduation. People don't double in weight overnight." Only in silly dreams that made no sense. He remembered how slim he'd been in the dream and felt the strangest sense of longing. Which was ridiculous, since he'd been on the heavy side forever. There'd never been a time when he *wasn't* the fattest person in his friend group. Only Carl came anywhere close to him, and that gap had widened further during college.

Don't let their teasing get to you, the persistent voice in the back of Chase's head assured him. *You're perfect just the way you are. A few curves never hurt anyone.*

Chase nodded, his gaze distant. "There's nothing to worry about. I don't have to starve myself because others think I'm too fat," he mumbled. Pleasant thoughts of breakfast drifted into his head, drowning out a whisper that something wasn't quite right.