I

Friendship isn’t a big thing—it’s a million and a half little ones that, with proper care, can last a lifetime.

This is the kind of friendship that carries you from one stage of your life to the next, and is unfortunately an exceedingly rare thing. Too often, when we undergo a change of scenery, we run the risk of losing those that are closest to us. Whether it be graduating from school, getting a new job, or moving away from home, even the most ardent companionships can be tested and fail in the face of change. It is in the midst of these great upheavals in life, too often, that we find out who our friends truly are.

However sometimes stagnancy is the cause of these rifts. Rather than any great *outward* change, sometimes an inner development can test the waters of a once great friendship, only to find that it comes up shallow.

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“Have you guys seriously just not moved since I left this morning?”

Cheyenne had shut the door more aggressively than she’d intended, and it had left her re-entry into the apartment with a nasty punctuation. The clutter on the kitchen counter and its sister pile on top of the fridge trembled enough to make a small secondary noise, alerting her housemates to a perceived annoyance that she held with their laziness. She just barely fought back a wince.

“Why, would that be a *problem*?”

Avery pitched a fat arm over the back of the couch, turning to face Cheyenne belly first with no small amount of contention. Brooke peeped out from behind her, looking more like a deer caught in headlights as she did her best to ward off any potential confrontation between the three of them with creased eyebrows and a worried look.

“I was just joking, Jesus.” Cheyenne turned corner to open the fridge, “God you’re so sensitive.”

“It didn’t *sound* like you were joking.”

Avery’s thick thumb pressed down hard on the Roku remote’s central pause button. Brooke’s stomach squelched uncomfortably in the face of conflict, something that she’d gotten used to over the past few weeks and months. Passive-aggressive comments had laid the groundwork for quasi-aggressive arguments to start cropping up over nothing. With the way that the little black remote had come undone at the edge, the force with which Avery had said her peace before slamming it down on the arm of the unfortunate couch beneath them, it appeared that today was going to be the fabled day.

“Look, I’m sorry I slammed the door okay?” Cheyenne whipped around with one of her smoothies in-hand, “I’m not trying to start anything today.”

“And neither am I.”

“Okay, then don’t.”

“I *won’t*.”

“Good.”

The two of them let out similar sounding huffs before begrudgingly resuming their day-to-day schedules. Avery remained in place on the couch while Cheyenne stomped through the kitchen, behind her roommates, and into her bedroom along the back wall of the apartment. This time she *did* mean to slam the door.

“I *hate* her.” Avery said loud enough that Cheyenne could have heard it even if she hadn’t been right next to the door, “I really, really mean it.”

“Avery—”

“No, I do! She’s such a fucking *bitch* to me now. To both of us!”

Avery tossed the Roku remote petulantly across the room. It collided against the wall but remained intact. If either of them were the sort of woman to get up and grab the damn thing as it laid on the floor, Avery was certainly the type of person to give smashing it against the walls of her apartment another go. Months of bubbling anger and frustration against someone who was one of her very best friends had left her a grumpy mess.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t going to resolve itself any time soon—despite what Brooke had been telling her for weeks now.

“Well, I mean… she was probably just tired from going to the gym.”

“So she shouldn’t fucking go!” Avery shouted, “I go to work and I come home just like everyone else and I don’t slam doors and start shit with you guys!”

Avery bowed her elbows and pushed hard against the arm of the couch, a lethargic grunt escaping from deep in her belly as she stood on her feet for the first time in a few hours. Pop Tart crumbs tumbled from the canopy of her upper tier of stomach and onto the floor as she took some heavy-footed steps towards the kitchen. Soft flesh trembled side to side with her every quaking step, her leggings rode down the slope of her ample cheek meat. Picking at the waistband with one hand, she grabbed a soda with the other and whipped back around.

“You want one while I’m up?” Avery cracked the top with chunky fingers

“No, I’m good…”

Brooke averted her eyes as Avery killed an entire can of soda before making her way back to the couch. Crunching it in her hands, the bodacious blonde opened the fridge and grabbed another one from the shelf. She tossed it to Brooke who, just barely, managed to catch it.

“We’re almost out—you know Cheye will pitch a fit if I order more before they’re all gone.”

“Ugh, you’re right…”

Brooke eased the pop top open, her chunky left arm held taut while her right bent with surgical precision. *Crack!* The carbonated brown bubbles fizzed as a small cloud of the stuff began to foam over the hole. After a few seconds, she finished the job and opened up the can for good.

“I just hate her now. She’s all…” Avery crinkled her nose and furrowed her eyebrows as she searched for a word that sounded classier and more accurate than the generic *bitchy*, “Like, you know, ever since she lost all that weight—”

“Oh my god you are *not* bringing up her weight loss again.” Brooke shifted in her squeaking seat on the couch, “Avery, just because someone decides to lose weight doesn’t mean that they stop having fun. She’s still *Cheye*.”

“Okay, but like no she’s not.” Avery leaned on the kitchen counter, her stomach cutting into the edge and rolling over by a good margin, “Ever since she decided that she was too good to hang out with us, all she’s done is bitch because we don’t want to go… *jog* or whatever.”

Brooke bit her bottom lip, silently pleading with her friend to not raise her voice so loud that Cheyenne might hear her in the other room. Holding out her hands in front of her belly, Brooke urged Avery to calm down. Or at least lower her voice.

“Ugh. You’re such a Mom Friend.” Avery swiveled back around on her heels to grab another soda, “But come on, you have to admit it—life was *way* better for all three of us back when Cheyenne was fat.”

Here Brooke stifled a laugh. Avery saw it, and cracked a smile. It had done more to ease the tension than any whimpering that the busty brunette on the couch had done, and it was *almost* as cathartic to say out loud as it had been to toss that stupid tiny remote against the wall.

“That’s mean; we should really be more supportive.” Brooke’s words fell flat when she couldn’t wipe a guilty little grin from between her cheeks, “You know she lost, like, two hundred pounds.”

“Yeah, and it all came out of her personality.” Avery chuckled, “Seriously, you give me the choice between tacos and beer or a flat belly and I’ll pick tacos and beer every day of the week.”

“Obviously.” Brooke cut eyes at Avery’s roly-poly middle

“Obviously.” Avery said with a little pat of her belly, “But you know, it’s not like I’m some fat slob. I’m not a horrible person for *liking* myself.”

“Somebody has to.”

“I’m serious!” Avery laughed, “When Cheye said she wanted to lose weight, I was supportive. Wasn’t I supportive?”

“You were.” Brooke took a sip from her soda, “We both were!”

“And I never made her feel bad for dipping out on movie nights.” Avery held up a proud, pudgy pointer finger, “*Or* for not helping pay for takeout anymore—”

“She stopped *eating* takeout, Avery.”

“Okay, but whatever. The point is, I didn’t act like a bitch when *she* wanted to change everything about how we all hang out together.”

“No more than usual.”

“Exactly! Like, we’ve all been friends for *years*, so what, she loses weight and she decides that she’s better than us?”

“I don’t think that she thinks that she’s *better* than us, Avery.” Brooke continued with some trepidation, “She’s just trying to get healthy.”

“Fuck, she already lost 200 pounds… how much healthier can she get?”

Avery’s footsteps echoed in the floor below her as she trekked back towards the couch. Her tummy trembled, nestled snugly in the roomy crotch of her trusty sweatpants, and shaking from side to side at every step. Squatting back down onto the couch, a relieved grunt of satisfaction sounding from deep in her chest, she laid one hand back on the arm of the couch while the other laid rest across the swell of her stomach.

For as long as it had mattered, Avery had always been fat. All of them, the three of them, were. That was (in a weird way) one of the reasons that they all got along so well.

With other friends there had always been the looming reality of being their group’s Fat Friend. It had reared its head as early as Middle School for Avery and Brooke, and then eventually in High School for Cheyenne. The fact that, regardless of how their social circle changed according to the whims of adolescent socialization, they were always the biggest girls in all of their friend groups had been a strange topic of conversation to get onto but one that proved invaluable nonetheless.

When they started hanging out with each other, there was none of that. They were just three girls who knew enough of the same people, *disliked* enough of the same people, and had a mutual appreciation for food and natural affinity against exercise. It had carried them through high school, through college, and into their twenties.

Their friendship had been so simple.

Why Cheyenne had decided to fuck that up was beyond Avery.

“Healthier than us, that’s for sure.” Brooke sipped on her soda before running a deprecative hand over her own tubby tummy for emphasis, “I think I actually managed to find some of the weight that she lost.”

“Yeah, well…” Avery grumbled, drumming her stomach contemplatively, “I still liked her better when she was a fatass like the rest of us mere mortals.”

“I know you did, hun.” Brooke pat her friend on the shoulder placatively, “But…”

Brooke sighed. The sad, dejected sigh that she had been doing for the past few weeks while she’d been waiting for the tensions to boil over and fizzle out. Avery already knew what her friend was going to say before it had time to crawl up to her lips.

*“Everything will work out in the end.”*

They had both said it in unison, with Avery’s eyebrows furrowing crossly at her more passive friend who sheepishly bowed away from the topic.

“Did anybody ever tell you that you’re predictable?”

“Once or twice.” Brooke offered a smile before putting her can down, “I’m gonna get ready for work. Are you guys gonna be okay if I leave you two alone?”

“No, we’re not going to claw each other’s eyes out or anything.” Avery sniffed, “…But I might sit on her for a little while.”

The two of them shared a good laugh at that, with Brooke grunting and rocking much the same as Avery had before her. Plodding and plumping along the floor of their third-story apartment, Brooke wiggled her way tummy-first into her bedroom and shut the door behind her.

Avery’s face fell back to bitter as soon as she was alone. Reaching over to paw at Brooke’s abandoned soda, she managed a strained missive:

“Don’t care *what* you say… I *still* liked her better when she was fat.”

II

Cheyenne’s trainer had always told her that there are two kinds of people in every gym, with two wholly unique approaches to how they view exercise.

Some people would never come around to exercise as a way of recreation. No matter how many times they did it, no matter how “easy” it became for them, they would never truly see things like going to the gym and waking up early to go jogging around the block as things that passed for “fun”. It wasn’t that they weren’t capable, but rather that they viewed exercise as a sort of routine preventative maintenance. This first gym-goer would always face an uphill battle when it came to personal fitness, no matter how proficient they may be.

The second type of person was the exact opposite, and viewed exercise as a way to have fun. These kinds of people weren’t inherently more capable than anyone else, they just had a passion inside of them for getting their bodies moving. These people believed firmly in things like getting pumped and reaching past thresholds, even if they weren’t necessarily good at being athletic. These are the types of gym-goers who would gladly wake up early (or stay up late) and get in their exercise should their schedules allow it.

And as much as Cheyenne liked to tell herself that she was the latter, even her trainer had known her to be the former.

Even after years of using an elliptical, she still felt the burn in her thighs and arms. Her head swam with thoughts that pulled her off to one side of the machine, subconsciously lassoing her away from her goal. Learning how to deal with these thoughts had been the first step in her losing weight, but accepting that they were always going to be there to tempt her away from her goal was something that she feared she would never get used to.

“Come on Cheye, just two more minutes!”

“Fuck…fuckfuckfuck…”

She had been sweating buckets for the past forty-five minutes. Cardio days were always the hardest for her. Strength days weren’t exactly easy, but at least she could stop and take a breather. She had Riley to spot for her and help her out if she ever felt like she was in over her head. But running on the treadmill, the elliptical, the Stairmaster… Cheyenne knew that no one could make her run, but sometimes she wished that her contract had come with a Cattle Prod clause to help keep her motivated.

*Maybe if they waved a donut on a stick in front of your face you’d do it, huh fatty?*

Grumbling at her inner critic, Cheyenne mustered forward.

“One minute and thirty seconds, and you can get off this thing!”

These minutes were the hardest in her life, even after all of these months slimming down. The last five minutes of every workout were agonizing. The final *minute* may as well have been a year. But Riley keeping her motivated by telling her how much time had passed was a good start towards keeping herself from getting lost staring at the digital clock that was still dewy with her sweat.

“Fifty-seven seconds, Cheye—come on, you gotta want it!”

“I… want… it…”

“You gotta want it, Big Girl!”

“I… *want*… it!”

She cheated a little, stealing a glance at the clock. She wasn’t supposed to (at least, according to her own rules) but sometimes it had helped. Fifty-two seconds now, and fifty-one. Fifty. According to the purple and black display on the head of the elliptical, she’d burned just over nine hundred calories since she got on this damn thing. Her whole body ached and begged her to stop. She knew that she was reaching her plateau. The last minute was always the hardest.

She decided to kick ahead—digging deep into her reserve of energy in order to power through the last measly forty-seven seconds that separated her from being done for the day. The last forty-five seconds that were keeping her from rewarding herself with whatever she’d told herself that she’d use her cheat day on. An extra smoothie from the fridge. A Caramel Frappuccino from Starbucks. A fucking Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese, no pickles no onions—

“Thirty seconds, Cheye *come on!*”

“Fuck…fuh…ckk…”

Cheyenne gripped the bars hard and dug her nails into the black padding. She shut her eyes tight and started kicking like crazy. Fuck her form, fuck all of the things that Riley had been bugging her about. All she wanted was to be off of this stupid machine and away from this gym and in her tub at home with a goddamn milkshake and two thick patties of all-American beef that dribbled grease into the bathwater while she wolfed the whole goddamn fucking thing down—

“*Fifteen seconds, don’t quit on me now*!”

*Come on fatty, just fifteen more seconds!*

She cheated a little more this time. Pushing up on the bars so as to take the pressure off of her heels and ankles. It was a little thing, but she didn’t think that Riley would notice. It was just for the last thirteen seconds. Ten seconds. Eight seconds.

“Kick, kick, kick!”

“Um… tryin…”

Five… four… three… two… one…

The machine’s *beep beep beep* was the sweetest sound that she had ever heard. Three times a week for the past fifteen months and she had never gotten tired of hearing those little chimes that announced, with flashing orange numbers, that she was finally finished for the day.

Her limp legs struggled to acquiesce to the ground, ready to roll her ankle. She’d done it before and, if it hadn’t been for Riley holding her steady, she might have done it again.

“Great job today, Cheye.” She said with a firm hard slap on her client’s hot, sweaty back, “You know how many calories you burned today?”

“Fuck… a… billion?”

“Good guess.” Riley rolled her eyes, glancing down at her tablet with a proud smile on her face, “Fifteen hundred, so you were close.”

“That’s… a lot…” Cheyenne puffed, bracing herself on the smaller woman’s shoulder as she held herself steady, “Water. Gimme water.”

“You’ve earned it.” Riley beamed, handing over a faded and worn Planet Fitness bottle, “I gotta ask—what’d you think about to get through those last few minutes? You looked like you were really struggling there for a while, but your eyebrows did that thing.”

“That… thing?”

“Yeah, the thing.” Riley did her best to furrow her tight trimmed and waxed brow into a facsimile of what Cheyenne’s had done, “You only get that look on your face when you’re *really* pissed.”

In that moment, she had almost wanted to tell her trainer the truth. That she had been thinking about fucking cheeseburgers. The fact that she’d wanted one for about a month but hadn’t worked up the nerve to pull into the McDonalds drive-thru on her cheat day. The phantom taste of her regular order had lingered on her taste buds even now.

“My roommate and me…” Cheyenne lied, “We… had another fight... few days ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry about that.” Riley clicked her tongue, “This is Avery, right?”

“Yeah, she’s… kind of a bitch.”

“Well, I’m sorry to hear that.” Riley put a firm hand on her shoulder, “But you know, if you ever need someone to talk to, I’m here. Okay?”

“Yeah.” Cheyenne nodded in agony of her burning lungs and needled muscles, “I got it.”

“Do you… wanna talk about it now?” Riley ventured with an inquisitive eyebrow, “My next client cancelled on me, so I’ve got at least an hour.”

“Sorry, I can’t. I’m… actually meeting her to talk about everything.” Cheyenne grimaced, “Gotta shower off.”

“Yeah, you’re pretty ripe.” Riley joked, “Just… hey, don’t forget. You’ve all been friends for a long time. But don’t forget that *you’ve* gotta come first sometimes. Okay?”

Cheyenne smiled. A genuine one that distracted her from the aching pain in her… everywhere.

“Yeah, I know.” She said with a slap of Riley’s defined biceps, “Thanks, coach.”

“Any time.” Riley smiled back, “Now go wash up. I wasn’t kidding about you being ripe.”

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Avery had asked to meet up at the Barnes & Noble Starbucks, just down the street from where Cheyenne’s gym was.

On another day, Cheyenne would have (and had, plenty of times) said no to such a request. But today was going to be a cheat day. And as much as she wanted to finally grab herself a nice greasy burger (no matter what Riley might have said about it after the fact!) Cheyenne figured that a Grande Caramel Frappuccino was as good of a treat as any—especially if it meant that she and Avery could sit down for the first time in weeks and *not* have a fight.

“Did you… have a good workout?” Avery ventured blindly, “Get your pumped maxed or whatever?”

“Mostly just whatever.” Cheyenne snorted, “Enough whatever that I probably shouldn’t have gotten the Venti.”

“Hey, it’s just a few extra calories.” Avery offered a weak smile, “I think you’ve earned a treat.”

Cheyenne chuckled at that. It wasn’t often that she and Avery agreed on much of anything these days. But she had felt that, after everything, an extra inch of squishy iced coffee and some artificial flavors wouldn’t be the end of the world.

Honestly, it felt like the greatest fucking thing *in* the world right now. She was still so exhausted. This was the last day of the week in her routine—her two days of rest were about to be upon her, and she wasn’t about to lift a finger if she could help it. Off from work, off from the gym, and laying at home in her pajamas…

“So… about the other day.”

“Yeah, about that.”

A collective gasp for breath, an audible steeling of the nerves.

*“I’m sorry if I came across as a bitch”*

They had both said it at the same time. Considering how long that they had been friends, neither was surprised to learn that the other one was on the same plane. These past few weeks and months had been filled with arguments and apologies as Cheyenne tried her best to slim down to a manageable weight. And while Avery and Brooke had proven themselves resistant (if not at times obstructive) to that goal, both of them had clearly had enough of the fighting for now.

“Jinx, you owe me a Coke!”

“Oh, fuck you.”

Avery stuck out her tongue before taking a big slurp of her Frappuccino. Cheyenne kicked her friend softly in the fat shin with her sneaker.

“It tell you what—how about instead of a Coke, I buy you one of those for the road?” Avery pointed at the half-empty Venti cup, “You know those things go to shit the closer you get to the bottom.”

In the time that Cheyenne had been under Riley’s wing, nearly thirteen months and counting, she had undergone a lot of work in refusing (what her trainer called) “toxic reinforcement”. The kind of behavior that gets you thinking about how good of a job you’ve done with your workout, so you don’t think twice about a big reward for yourself. Things like extra slices of cake, a soda, maybe a beer, those were all well and good in moderation. But Cheyenne’s problem for years had been that she didn’t know when to stop.

But it had been a long time since she and Avery had sat down and had a conversation that *didn’t* end in a fight. She didn’t want to push her luck.

“How about an iced coffee instead?” Cheyenne placed her cup down, “A *tall* iced coffee.”

“With hazelnut syrup?”

“…Okay, fine.” She relented, “But if Riley asks, it was just an iced coffee.”

III

Tensions around the apartment had cooled for the moment.

Despite their heart to heart in Starbucks, things were still a little awkward between Avery and Cheyenne. Instead of finding reasons to yell at one another every time they so much as made eye contact, they were now down to fumbling around in conversation. Something that had never been an issue until recently—Avery, Brooke, and Cheyenne *always* had something to talk about.

“What are you guys watching?”

Cheyenne had ventured the question with some hesitation. She was still trying to mind her tone so that she didn’t come across as too bossy or intrusive. She propped herself up on the back of the couch with both arms, spreading the central width of the couch and leaving about a foot on each side. John Williams’ fanfare filled the apartment.

“Uh, duh.” Avery snorted, “*Star Wars* marathon.”

“Ooh.” Cheyenne purported interest, “Classic, Prequel, or Sequel?”

“Prequel.” Brooke leaned back and pat the empty space between them, “Wanna watch with us?”

“Yeah, come on Cheye, join us.” Avery sipped from her soda, “It’s been *forever* since we all got to indulge in America’s favorite past-time—”

“*Star Wars* fans ripping on *Star Wars*.” Cheyenne nodded warmly, “Best way to spend a Sunday.”

“You in?”

“Nah, I can’t.” Cheyenne sucked through her teeth, “Gotta meet Riley. She’s gonna be out of town Monday, so we’re getting in my workout in today.”

And there was that little vein in Avery’s head. That special little crease that only seemed to fold just right whenever Cheyenne talked about working out. Her face would purse and she’d slump slightly, her lips pooched contemplatively out in front of her while things between the three of them grew quiet.

“Okay, well, if you can’t you can’t.” her voice jumped an octave, “We’ll see you when you get home.”

“I know, I suck.” Cheyenne offered a weak smile in apology, “But I tell you what, why don’t I pick up Moe’s on the way home?”

“You can still *eat* at Moe’s?” Avery cocked an eyebrow, “What, that’s not like… against your diet or whatever?”

“Yeah, I can still get some things on the menu…” Cheyenne’s smile flattened, sensing the tension rising between them already, “I’ll, uh… I’ll text you when I get out, okay?”

“Have fun!” Brooke waved, “Try not to hurt yourself!”

As soon as the door clicked shut behind her, Brooke paused the dive scene to the Gungan capital and swat her friend across the arm.

“What the hell was that about?” Brooke rasped, more concerned than angry, “I thought you two made up!”

“What the fuck are you mad at me for?” Avery’s petulant gesticulation sent ripples through her arms and stomach, “She’s the one who blew off our *Star Wars* marathon so she can go… *work out*!”

“She’s blown off like three other *Star Wars* marathons and you never got pissed at her before!”

“Correction, I got *very* pissed every single time.” Avery huffed, “It’s just… I don’t know. I thought we were making progress.”

“We’re *not* making progress? Avery that was the first time you two haven’t screamed at each other first thing in the morning for like two weeks.”

Avery huffed petulantly and bit into her biscuit.

“Look, I wanted her to sit down too, but we’ve got to respect the fact that she doesn’t want to lay around on the couch with us all the time. Honestly, *we* should probably have gone with *her*—”

“Would you listen to yourself?”

“*You* listen to *your*self, Avery!” Brooke’s voice rose to an uncharacteristic shout, “You’re mad at Cheyenne for not sitting down and watching a movie with you, you’re mad at her for not eating takeout food with us, you’re mad at her for spending time going to the gym… and now you’re mad at me for suggesting that *we* should have made an effort to do what she wants to do!”

“I’m not doing this today.” Avery abdicated her place on the couch, pushing off the arm and grabbing her Bojangles bag, “I’m *not* fighting with you too.”

“Avery we’re not *fighting*!” Brooke’s big doe eyes welled up with tears, “You’re just acting like a total bitch to me for no reason, and—"

The door slammed shut behind her as Avery strutted out into the hall, carrying her purse, her phone, and a bag of greasy takeout breakfast. Muttering to herself about ungrateful friends and bitches this and bitches that, she jammed a fat finger into the elevator button. While she waited, biscuit crumbs tumbled down the bigness of her belly while she forced angry bites into her mouth.

By the time the elevator had reached her floor, her second biscuit was gone.

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Whenever Avery was upset, she would eat.

Her weight problem had begun in earnest when her mother and father had gotten divorced. At about twelve years old, she had learned that food had brought her *much* more comfort than the consolation prizes of a doubled present ratio for Christmases and birthdays as well as having two bedrooms all to herself, even if one was only for the weekends. Food had even helped her through the awkward alternating holidays, the getting grilled on either side by both of her parents trying to dig up dirt to spite the other one, and cringe conversations with her new step-father as he tried not to “overstep his boundaries”.

From that point onward, you could watch in old photos as Avery steadily grew outward from a gangly little blonde pre-adolescent and into a chunky teenager, before finally graduating at just over two hundred and fifty pounds by Senior Year. Thankfully for her, as she’d gotten older, her gain had plateaued around there. After hitting an all-time high of two hundred and eighty pounds in her Sophomore year of college, she’d mostly teetered on either side of two-seventy since graduation.

However, days like this threatened to put that delicate balance into jeopardy.

Driving behind her, you might have assumed that Avery was ticking off drive-thru windows as she went along. She made a stop at all of her favorite places and ordered her favorite things—milk shakes, chicken nuggets, burritos and square hamburgers… all tried and true methods of raising her spirits when she was down. Or, failing that, at least letting her feel *something* other than anger.

“Ahh…”

 Satisfied with what had been her biggest binge in a while, Avery untucked her belly from underneath the crotch of her leggings. A full six inches of stomach, her lowermost roll of meaty middle, were on display as she leaned her car seat back to a more comfortable position.

Her eyes were still red and irritated from crying. The guy in the Wendy’s drive-thru must have thought she was totally insane, getting an earful of her life story. But goddammit she *needed* someone to talk to and he was there, and he was a *lot* nicer than that skinny bitch working at Taco Bell…

Avery’s phone beeped through the Bluetooth connection. Yet another text message to add to the pile, but this one wasn’t from Brooke.

*Hey I heard you and Brooke had a fight. U okay?*

“Fuck you.”

Avery tossed the phone into the floorboard. Cheyenne had absolutely *no* reason to get involved when *she* was the reason that they were all fighting. If she had just watched the fucking *Star Wars* movie with them, Brooke wouldn’t have jumped down her throat and then Avery wouldn’t have had to leave and everything would have just been *normal*.

At least, for the past few months, it had been her and Brooke against Cheyenne. They had *both* agreed that Cheyenne should take it easy and that she was working herself too hard, that she looked fine before the weight loss and that she could be a little judgmental now that she was all fit and shit. But now, all of the sudden, *Avery* was the bad guy?

“*Fuck you, Cheyenne*.”

She said it again, a little louder, and to absolutely no one at all except for anyone unfortunate enough to hear her in the mall parking lot where she’d stationed herself for her impromptu lunch. She shoved a few more fries into her mouth, debating on leaning over and grabbing the phone from the floorboard to tell her as much in text.

Fortunately for their friendship, Avery was too big around the belly to bend that way—at least not easily. After a couple of half-hearted attempts, Avery had deemed it impossible for her to do on a full stomach, and ultimately not worth the effort. She returned to her reclined position more frustrated than ever.

*“UGGGGGGGGH!!”*

If she had been a teenager again, she might have brought pillow to her face to muffle her scream. But as it was, she was just an angry, fat twenty-something who now felt ganged up on by *two* of her closest friends. Her roommates, no less.

Why was everything changing? All of the sudden, out of the blue. Why, after literally *years* of everything being so perfect between the three of them, did Cheyenne have to go and fuck everything up? Now *she* looked like a bitch for not being supportive!

“I swear to fucking God, I liked Cheyenne so much better when she was fat.”

Avery’s expression tightened into a pout, her brow stern and her chubby cheeks rosy.

“Fuck her for trying to act like she’s better than us.”

She wiped her nose on her arm and sniffled heartily, choking back more tears.

“It’s *her fault* for getting Brooke mad at me, and it’s *her fault* for being such a fucking cunt to me all the time…”

Her lower lip trembled, however briefly, as a genuine sadness overtook the sort of petulance that fueled her usual temper tantrums.

“I just want my fucking friend back.”

*We should be more supportive*…

“Fuck being supportive.”

*She lost, like, two hundred pounds…*

“I hope she gains it all back. Every single fucking pound.”

*She’s just trying to get healthy…*

“Then maybe at least she’d act like my *friend* again…”

She tried to imagine it—to will it into existence—Cheyenne just plumping back out until she weighed three hundred pounds again. To see her smug, skinny face with round cheeks and a chunky double chin again. Her big fat ass ripping through leggings, puttering around whining that she was chafed from having to fucking stand all day. That belly drooping and sagging with her tits sloped from side to side as the apartment quaked from her footsteps.

God, it would have been so sweet.

And then, there wouldn’t be any problems between them, because Cheyenne wouldn’t strut around like she was better than everyone. Like, okay, yeah, you managed to lose two hundred pounds. Whoopty-fucking do. It didn’t change how she made everyone else feel around her, and Cheyenne had done nothing but make Avery feel like shit about herself, about her body, and about what she liked to do *on her own time* ever since she started this stupid weight loss journey.

Things would go back to normal between them.

No more fights. No more shouting. No more stomping around the apartment. A return to a Golden Age of just the three of them ordering bullshit takeout food and sitting through as many fucking movie marathons as they could stomach.

How great would it have been if she could just… *undo* everything for the past few months? To have Cheyenne go back to being the person that she used to be? Sure she’d be fat and lazy, but they were *all* fat and lazy. At least, they all used to be…

Avery took a slurp from her dry well of what had once been a large Baja Blast. Her eyes lingered wistfully the R on her gear shift as she palmed the shaft and backed out of her parking space.

IV

Cheyenne had been surprised when Avery asked to meet up with her after she got out of the gym.

With the way that they’d been getting on lately, she hadn’t been expecting it. They had been down this road before, of course. Cheyenne’s weight loss had followed a dotted line where she and Avery would fight, blow up at each other, and then make up before starting the process all over again. But all throughout the course of her quest to slim down, it had never been Avery who had made the big step forward. Always, it had been Cheyenne (and at least once or twice, Brooke acting as a neutral party) who had extended the first olive branch.

*Maybe she’s finally ready to be the bigger person…*

And Cheyenne had caught herself at the unintended meaning of her phrasing.

*Not like that, just…*

The last thing that Cheyenne needed was for one of her best friends in the world to think that she was being a health Nazi. So when Avery had decided to meet at the Dunkin’ Donuts just down the way from Planet Fitness, she wasn’t in much to refuse. Her friendship with Avery might have well depended on keeping every meeting for at least the next few weeks—were they in that dire of straights now?

To think that there had been a time when she *hadn’t* looked forward a coffee break with her oldest friend like a bank robber looked forward to a lineup.

But Avery had surprised her. There had been none of the usual histrionics that tended to come when they were on the outs. She had let her order her own coffee (she hadn’t snuck in any extra sugars or anything!) and hadn’t even pressured her to pick out something from the menu (despite having ordered a breakfast sandwich that she’d picked at throughout their meeting). There was almost none of the awkwardness, they passed stories back and forth, and it had just felt really, really comfortable between them for the first time in…

God, Cheyenne couldn’t remember.

But Cheyenne had been at a loss for words when Avery had asked her the nine words she’d never thought that she’d ever hear fall out of Avery’s mouth:

“Can I go to the gym with you sometime?”

Cheyenne had almost spat out her coffee as soon as she’d heard it. *Avery*? At a *gym*? She’d never though that she’d live to see the day!

“What, like… seriously?” Cheyenne asked incredulously, “You… you want to go work out with me?”

“No, I *want* us to be friends again.” Avery said with the cutest little huff, “But I realized that I’ve been asking *you* to make all of the sacrifices without actually… you know, doing any work of my own. And that’s not fair to you and I just feel like maybe us having this… you know, *thing* together is the best way to get back to some kind of normal for us.”

“That’s… really, really sweet.” Cheyenne could only smile warmly, her eyes welling up, “Of course you can come with me—Like I’ve said before, I get to bring a guest.”

“I don’t want to go crazy, okay?” Avery held up a chubby white hand, as if to stall Cheyenne in place, “Just like… once a week. Thirty minutes of cardio. Something to help keep me in these jeans. Maybe like… Fridays?”

“Hey, that works out great for me, Riley and I are switching to a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday schedule after this week!”

“Oh.” Avery made a face, “Well… would it be okay if we did it Saturdays?”

“Sure but, I don’t think Riley will train you for free.”

“That’s fine!” Avery smiled and took a big chomp out of her sandwich, “I just… you know, I don’t want you to make an extra trip just for me. Plus, I just want to do a little. And we can get coffee after! It’ll be so much fun!”

“Yeah!” Cheyenne beamed wide and proud, “Do you think we could carpool?”

“Absolutely.” Avery’s smile was dotted with crumbs, soon hidden as she rose the lid of her coffee over her mouth, “I just want to get back to being *us*… you know?”

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It didn’t take a trained physician to see that Avery hadn’t really earned her never-ending break.

“So that’s… *Avery*… right?”

With the way Riley had asked it, you would have thought that she was asking about an ex-lover. There was a distinct cadence to her voice that, through no fault of her own, conveyed a certain level of disdain for the belly-heavy blonde that was currently sitting on the weight bench and modelling for her Instagram. For someone who had known her for more than a year, Cheyenne could tell by the way the bridge of her nose crinkled and the way that the corners of her mouth tugged that her personal trainer didn’t think very highly of the day’s guest.

“Yup, that’s her.”

Cheyenne had said with a small purse of her lips. A very subtle way of mediating between “this is what I have to deal with” and “I can’t say anything too negative about her, because we’re best friends” that wasn’t lost on Riley.

With *how much* Riley had heard about Avery and Brooke over the course of Cheyenne’s weight loss journey, she almost felt like she knew her already. Truthfully, she hadn’t been surprised when she’d crapped out on the treadmill after almost a minute. Nor had she been particularly stunned by the fact that she hadn’t so much as done a single rep on that weight bench she was squashing.

“She said she wanted to start coming to the gym once a week.” Cheyenne smiled, though it appeared somewhat pained, “I said that I thought it sounded like a good idea, and… here we are.”

“Here we are.” Riley parroted the words again, “Here… we… are…”

Avery couldn’t have looked more out of place in this gym if she’d tried. Her form was awful, her breathing was loud and obnoxious, and she had just sort of floated for the entire two hours that she’d been in attendance. It was obvious that she was Cheyenne’s guest from the get-go, so no one really expected her to do more than get her feet wet. But as far as a trained physician was concerned, she hadn’t really even done that. Any of the sweating she’d done was just due to her being out of shape. She hadn’t really exercised for much longer than it had taken her to grow immediately disinterested with the exertion that she’d put out…

In short, Riley felt justified in labelling Avery as her client’s X-Factor.

“We’re, um… we’re gonna go out and get coffee after I’m finished up.”

“An iced coffee?”

“Yeah, iced coffees.”

“Just making sure.” Riley had paused a little too long for it to be comfortable, her brown eyes darting to the floor as she avoided Cheyenne’s, “You know, sometimes—”

“Hey Cheyenne!”

Avery had waddled over tummy first and fat arm wobbling as she signaled to her friend from across the gym. Her tank top was fresh from Target without so much as a sweat stain on it, though discolored around the underboob. Her great gut sloshed from side to side as her chunky thighs fought for space in similarly fresh from the rack lycra pants. Avery’s round face bunched into dimples as she greeted her more active friend with a happy grin, evidently eager to get out of this place.

“You have a good workout?” she asked, hands on her hips

“Sure did!” Cheyenne had answered confidently, “Sorry we made you wait for so long.”

“No no, don’t apologize.” Riley stepped in, “You put in a lot of good work today.”

Then, eyeballing Avery up and down, she decided to take it a step further.

“Good job today, Cheye.”

“Oh my god that’s so weird, I call her Cheye.” Avery took a step forward, “You know, like, since we were in high school.”

“And you aaaaree…?”

“*Avery—*it’s *so* nice to finally meet you. Cheye talks about you *all the time!*”

“She talks about you too.” Riley smiled venomously, *“Avery*.”

Perhaps sensing the tension slowly building between the two of the main “people” in her life, Cheyenne wisely stepped in and played mediator. How Brooke of her, she idly thought, as she put on her best smile and physically parted the two of them.

“Thanks again for today, Riley—I’ll see you next week?”

“Next week, Cheye.”

Cheyenne was practically pushing Avery out the door of her gym.

“Hey Cheye?” Riley extended an arm, “Make smart choices today, okay?”

And Cheyenne actually paused. She had completely understood the subtext of their conversation without having to ask so much of a follow-up question. The little nod in Riley’s neck, and the width of her eyes, all aligned with Cheyenne’s *present company* could have only meant that she was wary of Avery’s interference in all of the good work that they’d done together.

“You got it Riley.” Cheyenne finger-gunned, “Smart choices.”

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“Oh God, you didn’t tell me that she was such a *bitch*!”

Avery and Cheyenne hadn’t been in the Barnes & Noble Starbucks for longer than five minutes before the topic of the latter’s personal trainer had come up in conversation.

“Hey, come on now…” Cheyenne had said with a slurp of her macchiato, “Riley’s really nice when you get to know her.”

“Yeah, okay. I definitely believe that, while she was peeing all over you like a fire hydrant.” Avery scrunched her face before taking a big swig of her latte, “All I’m saying is that she looked at me like I was the anti-Christ.”

“No, come on.” Cheyenne laughed, “Stop. You two just… aren’t wired the same way.”

“Yeah, I like to have fun.” Avery rolled her bright baby blues while she scanned her Facebook feed, “Like, okay, I’m glad you like her, but at the same time… *blegh*.”

Cheyenne couldn’t help but laugh. She understood what Avery was talking about—she’d felt it herself when she was just starting out as Riley’s client. She could be a little intense… maybe a little judgmental. But maybe that meant that this was just the first step for Avery on her weight loss journey? It certainly wouldn’t have killed her to lose a few pounds, and the fact that she had felt so similarly about Riley when they were just starting out, well…

Let’s just say that Cheyenne was looking forward to having Avery as a gym buddy.

“Yeah, I know how you feel.” She said with a simple, solemn smile, “You feel like you’ve earned that coffee today?”

“Totally.” Avery snorted through her nose, “I haven’t sweat that much in *years*. Like, probably since prom. Do you remember when Cory asked me out and I so desperately wanted to hit that?”

“Fuck, you had low standards.”

“Says the girl who went out with Caleb Garret.” The bodacious blonde said through her nose before taking another hearty slurp and snatch from her rather decadent post-workout meal, “You think I don’t remember things, but I do.”

“What*ever*, okay?”

The two of them laughed, almost like they used to laugh before all of this had come between them. They way that they used to talk to one another… Cheyenne had missed it. Sure she could hang out with Brooke any time she wanted to feel nostalgic, but it was nice knowing that she and Avery were on the same page for once.

Knowing that they were making progress towards repairing their friendship, well… it made Cheyenne happy in a way that even bringing up their sub-par dating lives couldn’t bring her down.

“Oh fuck, you know what I could really use right about now?” Avery asked suddenly, sharply diverting from her phone, “A trip to Cook Out. You wanna go?”

*Make smart choices today, okay?*

“…sure, what the hell.” Cheyenne had said with a smile, “I’ll just have my cheat day early this week.”

V

In the uphill battle that is weight loss, just about everyone suffers a little downhill slide now and again—Cheyenne Harlowe was no exception.

In just fifteen months she had seen an astonishing drop in her weight. Losing more than two hundred pounds thanks to the support of her trainer, and no thanks to her roommates, Cheyenne had shrunken down to an manageable level of thickness in her figure.

She was never going to be *slim*. Her quarter-black ancestry meant that she had a fine set of T&A that had been the envy of her friends as early as Middle School. She was corn-fed, and there wasn’t much that she was ever going to be able to do about the extra skin that had plagued her even as she’d managed to slim down. She was still a head-turner, despite (and perhaps because) of her extra weight.

But the needle had been moving in the wrong direction for just a little too long, and it had spread just a little too wide for her tastes.

It wasn’t much. Fifteen pounds at the most, give or take whether or not she weighed on a full stomach. But it was becoming obvious, even to Cheyenne herself, that she had hit a serious amount of resistance in her weight loss goals.

“Yeah, I have no idea.” Cheyenne had told Riley sheepishly, one day at a monthly weigh-in, “I’m… you know, I’m sticking to the plan and I’m making every meeting with you. I guess I’m just starting to plateau as far as my weight loss goes.”

Which wasn’t all bad! Cheye had managed an incredible amount of loss in a comparatively short amount of time. It was only natural that there was going to be some pushback from her body *eventually*. Now Riley knew just where the “natural” weight of her body was bound to fall. She had said so herself! And it had come after another successful workout, so she didn’t have any *reason* to believe that she’d been cheating on her diet.

Which, as far as Cheyenne was concerned, she wasn’t *really* doing.

“Come on, it’s your cheat day!”

Avery had gone ahead and ordered for their post-workout trip. The Cook Out was in the same parking complex as the Planet Fitness, which meant that all Avery had to do was walk over as soon as she’d felt like she’d put in enough exercise on the elliptical and she could go wait for Cheyenne to finish up with Riley. More often than not, that’s how they did it, with Cook Out becoming their regular after-gym hangout place.

Cheyenne *would* have complained, if it hadn’t been the one thing that kept Avery coming. Getting a milkshake after she worked out every time, without fail, wasn’t the best way to actively lose weight. But Avery had made it clear from the get-go that she had been there to support Cheyenne first, and not lose any weight.

The fact that she was trying meant so much to Cheye that she hadn’t the heart to suggest another place to meet up after working up a sweat.

Even if it *was* a significant dent in her workout routine.

But at the end of the day, Cheyenne had started walking away feeling like she *deserved* a Peanut Butter milkshake.

“Here, let me pay.” Avery said as she reached for her wallet, “I feel bad about… you know, everything.”

“You really don’t have to feel bad about it.” Cheyenne said with a shrug, “It’s okay Avery, really, you don’t have to pay every time that we get milkshakes.”

“Okay, well, then it’s a reward!” Avery smiled, “Consider it an “I’m proud of you for working out so hard” milkshake!”

Cheyenne couldn’t help but laugh.

“Okay, I’ll let you pay as long as you’re rewarding me for cheating on my diet.”

“Any time, Cheye.” Avery winked, “We won’t tell Riley.”

For the past few weeks, it had really felt like a step in the right direction as far as her friendship with Avery was concerned. There hadn’t been any big fights, she and Avery were talking again, and the whole vibe of the apartment had been that same kind of comfortable feeling that it had been back when… well, back when Cheyenne and Avery didn’t fight all the fucking time.

At the same time, she knew that she wasn’t working as hard as she ought to have when it came to turning down extra snacks. That was, unfortunately, the price that she seemed to keep paying when it came to hanging out with her two oldest friends. Avery and Brooke were big girls through and through, and she wasn’t about to ask them to make compromises in their day to day lives. Not when things were finally starting to get back to normal.

And, if it meant getting to enjoy a spoon-thick milkshake once in a while, Cheyenne wasn’t about to rat herself out for having a good time.

“Oof!”

Cheyenne had collapsed into the bench seating, her glutes sore and her thighs still burning from the workout that she’d endured. Somehow, she’d started feeling it more in the past few weeks. But then, the Autumn months had been hard for her last year too.

“You starting to feel it, Cheye?”

“A little.” She smiled, “How about you Avery? You seeing any progress?”

“Hardly.” The fat blonde scoffed as she picked at her milkshake—still steaming cold, “But there’s, like, an uphill curb to this thing or whatever. I’m sure I’ll start slimming down soon.”

*Not if you keep eating all these milkshakes…*

Cheyenne couldn’t help but make these little comments to herself. Constantly watching what she, herself, ate was one of the biggest steps that she’d taken towards making sure that she could form healthy habits. Extending that towards Avery, and to a lesser extent Brooke, wasn’t exactly the best way to make sure that everything stayed hunky-dory between the three of them though…

She swallowed a mouthful of milkshake and went with platitude.

“Yeah, you’re doing great!” Cheyenne grinned, “You’ll start losing weight in no time—that’s how it was with me.”

“Yeah, I remember.” Avery chuckled, “You know, it doesn’t seem like *too* long ago that you were bigger than me.”

There was an uncomfortable amount of silence as the mood seemed to drop into dire straights. Avery palmed her stomach as it bulged out from underneath her skin-tight tank top, a tight frown on her face. Her soft pink lip bulged in a playful, but judgmental sort of way.

“I feel like such a cow standing next to you, you know?”

“Oh Avery, don’t say that.”

“It’s true though! You’ve lost a shit ton of weight since we graduated.” Avery’s pout grew more exaggerated as she jiggled her jelly belly as it poured into her wide open lap, “If anything, I think I’ve found it.”

“Honey no, you’re beautiful.” Cheyenne fell into form rather quickly, “You look great. I can already tell a difference since you’ve been coming to work out with me.”

“You think so?”

“I really do, and I can tell you why.” Cheyenne took a happy spoonful of her milkshake, “You’re losing *visceral* fat first—that’s the really jiggly stuff. But the *subcutaneous* fat is gonna take some time to work off.”

“Here I thought I was just one big bloop of fat.”

“Well… you know, the milkshakes don’t exactly help.”

And for the first time in what had been far too long, that little innocuous comment *hadn’t* led into a big knock-down, drag-out fight between the two of them. Avery laughed, Cheyenne laughed, and nobody’s feelings were hurt! The big-bellied blonde across the booth slurped some of her milkshake, chuckled merrily, and that was the end of it. Cheyenne couldn’t believe that they’d come so far in such a (comparatively) short amount of time!

If being “workout buddies” with Avery would have fixed their problems this fast, she would have been more serious about asking Avery if she wanted to go to the gym with her all those months ago!

“Speaking of being fat, you wanna go ahead and order something else?” Avery asked with a passing glance at her phone, “Brookey’s gonna be working late, so she’ll probably just grab something on her way home.”

“Oh fuck, Avery I don’t know…” Cheyenne bit her bottom lip, “I better not.”

“Oh come on!” Avery whined in that comically overexaggerated way that she always did, “It’s your cheat day and everything!”

“I know, but that doesn’t mean that I need to eat junk for dinner.”

“*Doesn’t it though?*” Avery asked with a shrug of her meaty shoulders, “I’m pretty sure that you’ve earned it. Come on Cheye, I’m *starved*!”

As much as she was loathed to admit it, Cheyenne was feeling a little hungry herself. But… not for anything on the menu at Cook Out. As much as she liked the milkshakes here, she still hadn’t been given much of a reason to order off of the menu for anything but the price. The Quesadillas were crap and the portions were *way* too small…

And Avery was right—it *was* a cheat day. Riley couldn’t get mad at her for following *her* carefully laid schedule.

“Okay, but…” Cheyenne bit her bottom lip contemplatively, “what do you think I should get?”

“I don’t know—it doesn’t have to be from here.” Avery shrugged, nonplussed, “It’s *our* cheat day, right?”

“I mean… I guess so…”

In that instance, and perhaps a little bit before, Cheyenne had known exactly what it was she wanted to blow her cheat day on. That double Quarter Pounder with Cheese that she’d been thinking about almost nonstop for the past three months now. She still hadn’t worked up the nerve to do anything about her impotent cravings for greasy burger meat, mostly because it was *way* out of her calorie budget for the week. Month.

“You wanna go get something from McDonalds?” Avery asked with a wry pique of her eyebrow, “It’s on the way home, and I’m driving, right?”

“You *are* driving…”

Cheyenne was already squirming in her seat. She had been craving this for so long, and it just now seemed like it was able to become a reality. And it wouldn’t have *really* been her fault, considering that Avery was the one driving and she had been the one limiting the menu. Like, okay, sure she was supposed to be making Smart Choices, but what was one burger between friends?

A burger that she’d definitely earned.

It had been so long since she’d indulged in a big, fat, greasy hamburger the way that she’d wanted to. And Avery had been such a good friend to her, why would she have ever thought about saying no at a time like this?

“I think I could swing for some Mickey Dee’s.” Cheyenne smiled a little too eagerly, “You paying this time?”

“Fuck no, I paid for Cook Out.” Avery snorted, “You gotta buy your own burger.”

“Okay, deal.” Cheyenne was practically licking her chops, “But, uh… standard Cheat Day Rules apply, right?”

“I won’t tell Riley shit.” Avery winked as she took a satisfactory slurp of her milkshake, “Our cheat days are between you and me. After all, what’s a Gym Buddy for if not to keep secrets?”

“Amen to that.”

Avery and Cheyenne clinked Styrofoam cups together in a sense of solidarity. Cheyenne, feeling empowered by her companion, scooped heartily from the mushy mass that was her milkshake. While Avery smiled warmly into hers, pacing herself pleasantly with a reserved sense of accomplishment.

“You want to make this a regular thing?” she asked, “You know, going out and getting milkshakes and burgers.”

“Oh fuck, Avery, I better not…” Cheyenne winced, “Riley would fucking kill me.”

“Well, I mean, you wouldn’t have to *tell* Riley. And it wouldn’t have to be milkshakes and burgers, per se…” Avery audibly back pedaled in the face of Cheyenne’s resistance, “Just like, you know, getting coffee or something after we go to the gym. With me. Your best gal pal.”

Cheyenne’s apprehension was palpable.

“I… don’t see why that would be a problem.”

VI

The best part about having a personal trainer was that, even if you were ultimately responsible for your own weight loss, they were there to help keep you motivated and point you in the right direction.

When Riley had met Cheyenne, she had been two hundred and ninety-five pounds of pure blubber. She had absolutely no idea what exercises she should be doing to lose weight, she was still eating almost nothing but junk food, and she had almost no confidence in herself. Over the course of a grueling fifteen months, she had helped chisel the best out of her client from that dumpy wide-bottomed marble with intensive exercise, a positive atmosphere, and (perhaps most importantly) a dedicated food journal.

When she had taken Cheyenne on as a client, Riley had made her *promise* that she would always log everything that she ate—even the stuff that she knew would look bad. Honesty was at the core of the relationship between a trainer and her trainee. A little disappointment here and there was a lot better if it knew that Cheyenne was being honest with not only her trainer, but also herself.

And looking at her, Riley knew that Cheyenne hadn’t been telling her the truth.

“You’re *sure* that this is all you ate last week?”

“Yeah.” Cheyenne’s eyes trailed to the left, “Pretty sure.”

Right away, Riley had known that was a lie. Cheye had been looking puffy for the past few weeks, but it was only until recently that her belly started to fold into little rolls again. Just above the high waist of her leggings, there was a pinchable inch of chub just hanging over the lip of her bottoms, visible through her tight tank top. Not to mention the curve of her belly, which had started to pooch outwards and press tight against her gym clothes.

“You’ve got to be a little more than pretty sure with this thing, Cheye.” Riley put her hands on her hips, “Promise me that you’re going to be more careful about what you log in this book, okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

Her face was rounder, especially noticeable when her long dark hair was pulled back into ponytail like now. Cheyenne’s soft olive colored skin shone in the fluorescent lighting of the gym. She was coated with sweat.

“It’s really important that I know if we have to work a little harder. Things happen, and it’s not anyone’s fault, but we’ve *got* to stay on track.”

“I know…”

It wasn’t anything that they couldn’t reverse, and Cheyenne’s weight loss journey hadn’t been without a few bumps and relapses in the road. As much as Riley liked to give Cheyenne the freedom to police herself, twenty pounds in just a few weeks was cause enough for her to place her hands back on the wheel… however gently.

She didn’t want to scare Cheye off. Ultimately, that wouldn’t help anybody—she might balloon back up, and Riley would be short one of her most promising clients.

“I won’t get mad if you slip up now and again.” Riley did her best to soften her expression, “Okay?”

“…okay.”

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Avery’s takeaway from the story hadn’t been exactly what Cheyenne had intended.

“What a bitch.” Avery scoffed, “Does she want to know every time you get your period too?”

Cheyenne’s explanation as to what had taken so long to get out of Planet Fitness had started in the parking lot and lasted throughout the drive over to Frogurt Mountain. Originally, she was going to use it as a reason as to why they *shouldn’t* have gone to Frogurt Mountain, but by the time that she had finished the story, Avery had already unbuckled and rocked herself out of the driver’s seat.

They were already there, she seemed really angry about what Riley had said, and…

Honestly, Cheyenne was feeling pretty low about how today’s session had gone. She’d put on twenty pounds in a few weeks and as stupid as it sounded with all that considered, she *really* needed some comfort food.

At least it wasn’t ice cream, right?

“No, Riley’s not being a bitch.” Cheyenne’s lips tugged to the side as she stirred the remains of her medium bowl around morosely, “She’s just doing her job. It’s literally what I pay her for.”

“Still.” Avery suckled on her spoon, still going strong on her large bowl with extra toppings, “Doesn’t mean that she has to judge you so harshly. Like, okay, we get it you’re perfect—the rest of us like to go out to eat sometimes! Right?”

Cheyenne couldn’t help but chuckle. As much as Riley talked about having cravings, it was hard to picture her going to town on a bowl of Fro-Yo. The idea of her squeezing into her jeans before work? Couldn’t happen. Riley was perfect and fit and had probably never even *heard* the phrase “comfort food”.

“Guess that’s just one of the ways that I’m different from personal trainers, huh?”

“Yeah, and that you’ve got an ass.” Avery flipped the self-deprecative tone right on its head, “I mean, come on… have you *seen*… what’s her name, Riley?”

“Riley, yeah.”

“She’s as flat as a cutting board.” Avery waved dismissively, “You actually *have* an ass. Excuse you for needing to eat sometimes.”

“Ugh, I’ve got too much ass.” Cheyenne took another mournful bite, “Do you think we can get, like, smoothies or something next Friday?”

“Yeah, sure, smoothies.” Avery nodded as the sound of her spoon scraping against the bottom of the bowl caught her attention, “Looks like I’m out… you want another bowl?”

Cheyenne looked up from her soupy serving like a deer caught in headlights.

“You kinda look like you’re having a shitty time there.” Avery clicked her tongue as she collected the paper bowl and plastic spoon from her side of the table, “And you know… it’s Fro-Yo. That’s like diet ice cream, right?”

Cheyenne’s chest rose with a deep sigh, inching up ever so slightly on the black-painted canvas of her rounding middle…

“What the hell.” She finally said, “You don’t think I’ll have to list every topping that I put on it, do you?”

“Cheyenne, come on…” Avery snorted, “It’s a cheat day.”

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With Cheyenne and Avery now slowly repairing their fractured friendship, things were much more peaceful around the apartment.

There had been much discussion as to how they should spend their time together in hopes of making sure that another rift between them didn’t crop up where a bridge was slowly being built. Brooke had been the one to suggest a regular night for the three of them to get together—at least once a week, where their schedules permitted.

But since she was the only one with a regular schedule, there were plenty of nights where “Roommate Wednesday” turned out to be just her and either of them. Very rarely were all three of them actually on the couch together.

While Avery was usually the one to suggest a back-up day in addition to their allocated hangout time (usually Sunda afternoon, so Cheyenne could get in a good rest before going back to the gym on Monday) it was, in fact, going to be one of the rare occasions where all three of them were going to squeeze onto the couch and watch a schlocky eighties horror marathon; a favorite past time of theirs, complete with a hearty menu of pizza to match the ones they’d order in high school.

“You sure Cheye won’t mind us ordering pizza?”

“We got her a plain cheese one.” Avery lifted a greasy triangle from the box and reeled it in floppy-end first, “*And* it’s not stuffed crust.”

“Smart.” Brooke smiled as she reached for a breadstick, “That way it’s not too many extra calories.”

Avery tugged at her pajama bottoms as she waddled over to the couch before plopping down; her designated pizza box steady while the rest of her body wobbled with the impact. Multiple 2-Liters of various sodas had been stationed within an arm’s reach on either side of the couch and the open boxes (plus Cheyenne’s plain cheese) had been placed on the coffee table in front of them.

If you could have placed the scene in Mr. Mason’s living room and played the sounds of Brooke’s sister getting laid in the background, it would have been a picture-perfect recreation of how the three of them had spent almost every Saturday night growing up.

Growing up, nights like these had been invitations to do whatever they pleased. To stay up as late as they wanted, to be comfy for as long as they liked, and to eat as much as they desired. When they were in high school, they had been almost weekly events! The three of them would giggle and talk shit about girls that they didn’t like or boys that they did well into the wee hours of the morning, and they almost never left any leftovers for a cold pizza breakfast…

Never mind that it was perhaps *because* of these nights in that the three of them had graduated at so much heavier than they had been when they’d enrolled.

“So today’s gonna be her cheat day?”

Brooke asked the question helpfully from the other side of the long L-shaped couch, her stomach folds buried beneath the baggiest t-shirt in her closet. Her brown curly hair was left down and she’d taken out her contacts.

“Oh… yeah.” Avery shrugged her shoulders as she gnashed her lips, “She like… got permission from her trainer or whatever.”

“Well that was nice.” Brooke smiled, “And you know who else is nice? *You*. For going to all this trouble to make sure we all get to hang out together.”

“Oh stop.”

“No Avery, seriously, I’m really impressed.” Brooke took a swig of Sprite, leaving it on the end table for steady use and ease of access, “This is a really nice thing that you’re doing for Cheyenne. You’ve been spending a lot of time with her lately, and I think… I mean, I think it’s really cool that you guys are getting so close again.”

“Yeah, well, she *is* one of my best friends.” Avery folded her slice down the middle and dipped it in a cup of ranch, “I just want things to get back to normal with us. All of us.”

“Well… this feels pretty normal to me.” Brooke smiled warmly, “Hey! Do you think I could start coming to the gym with you guys? You know, make it a new tradition between the three of us?”

Avery sucked through her teeth.

“I don’t know, Brooke…” she winced, “Cheye only gets one guest pass. And that’s like… sixteen dollars a month for a membership.”

“Oh…” Brooke sank slightly, her double chin creasing into another little frown, “…Well, maybe I could ask—”

“She only gets one a week.” Avery’s wince grew more exaggerated, “Sorry, hun.”

“Aw… well… that’s okay.” Brooke bounced back relatively quickly, “At least we all get to hang out!”

“I couldn’t agree more.” Avery raised her glass of Dr. Pepper to clink against Brooke’s Sprite, “And besides, you don’t want to put up with Riley. She’s a *total* bitch.”

“Really?” Brooke made a face, “Cheyenne always says that she’s super nice!”

“Yeah, she’s nice to Cheye because she *pays* her.” Avery scoffed, “Nothing but a total bitch the rest of the time though.”

“Oh no! I’m sorry she’s so mean to you.”

“Well… it’s alright.” Avery took another folded bite of ranch-drenched pizza, “I try not to let it bother me *too* much because… you know, she and Cheyenne are pretty close.”

“Right.” Brooke burped, “You’re such a good friend, Avery.”

“I really, truly am.”

VII

Before Cheyenne had known what hit her, the needle on the scale was back at settling on just over two hundred pounds.

It wasn’t that she was surprised. Cheyenne had known that she was eating like shit again, and she had cancelled a few lessons with Riley here or there before this moment. Her clothes were getting tighter and she was having to wear leggings more often. She wasn’t *stupid*—she could see all of the telltale signs of her getting fat again.

Gaining control over her bad habits had been one of the hardest things that she’d ever done in her life. And it was disheartening to see that her struggle had, while not exactly all for naught, was so easily reversed by merely enjoying her life with her friends.

The woman staring back at Cheyenne in the mirror was one that she unfortunately recognized—give or take a few years, she looked almost exactly like she had back in Junior Year. Just take away the braces and bless her with some bigger tits, maybe an inch or two in height and it would have been a picture-perfect comparison.

The love handles, she could deal with. Her belly swelling out and getting its little droop down towards her crotch wasn’t great, but it was a lot better than having top and bottom parts to her tummy. Her double chin didn’t come out too often unless she yawned or opened her mouth too wide. Her arms were rather jiggly, but not *too* gross. Even her fat ass and chunky cottage cheese thighs, she could live with…for the most part.

There had been a time when she would have *loved* to have been this size again.

But whittling herself to two hundred pounds *down* fromthree hundred pounds was a major accomplishment. It was something that she had worked tirelessly for, and for over a year. She had denied herself even a sniff at fast food for fifteen months. She’d hired a trainer and had spent countless hours in the gym getting healthy and fit. While getting “just under two hundred pounds” had been her goal when she’d started out all those months ago, Cheyenne had gone so far as to zoom past it! Getting down to one sixty had been an enormous boon to her self-esteem!

Creeping back up to two hundred and three from there had made the love handles, the tummy, the arms, and her big fat backside a lot harder to swallow.

*Not that swallowing is all that hard for you is it, Double Stuff?*

Cheyenne blinked back tears as she stepped off of the scale, feeling a firm hand on her shoulder as she deliberately avoided the full-length mirrors hung in the women’s lockers.

“Cheye… *Cheye!*” Riley repeated more firmly as she caught hold of her slippery client, “We can fix this. Come on, don’t get discouraged!”

Cheyenne’s façade of stoicism had cracked even before Riley whipped her around. Two little hot streams of tears rolled down her chubby cheeks as her lower lip quivered. Her big brown eyes were watery, her vision clouded, and her chest heaving erratically as she fought against breaking out into tears right there in the women’s locker room.

“Hey hey, come here come here.”

Riley had always been firm but affectionate with Cheyenne. With most of her clients, reportedly, but especially Cheyenne.

It was something that she had always appreciated about her trainer, and one of the reasons that she had kept coming back to her. In the first few months of her weight loss journey, when it had been especially hard, Riley had held her once or twice like this before. To the then nearly three-hundred-pound Cheyenne, seeing five-pound gains as signs of defeat and a reason to surrender, Riley had been the one to keep her from walking back on all of the progress that she’d made in the meantime.

And she was a great hugger.

“It’s gonna be okay, Cheye.” She said softly, wrapping her arms around her client’s soft back, “Shhh…”

Silently waving curious patrons of the gym away, Riley steered her client towards the big wooden bench that sat in the middle of the lockers. Holding her tight by the shoulder now, one arm wrapped behind her back, she placed a strong hand gently over Cheyenne’s.

“This is *no reason* to give up on your weight loss goals, okay?” Riley’s tone changed to something a little stronger for Cheyenne to lean on, “It’s just a little backslide—”

“IT IS NOT A LITTLE BACKSLIDE!”

Cheyenne had said that a little more loudly than she’d intended to. In her frustration with herself, to anyone else, it might have looked like she was yelling at Riley. But her heaving chest and tomato-red face told a different story as she broke down. Her elbows on her plush knees and her face buried in her hands.

“It’s… it’s forty pounds!” she consciously corrected herself, wary of the stares that they were now attracting, “I’m back up to two hundred!”

“But you’re still *down* a hundred pounds from where you started!” Riley said with the confidence and support of an older sibling, “You’ve still come *so far* since you first walked in here.”

“B-But…” Cheyenne sniffled, “I-I…”

“Shhhh…”

The two women sat on the bench for a while, with Riley rocking her client a little in a gentle, swaying motion. As Cheyenne’s sobbing eventually calmed into more manageable crying and sniffling, the two of them stopped swaying. Riley eventually placed a hand on Cheyenne’s chunky thigh and brought her back out of herself.

“Hey, I tell you what—it sounds like we are *both* having mutually shitty days.” Riley squeezed, “What do you say we get in our cheat days a little early? Huh? You and me—my treat?”

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For as long as she’d known Riley, Cheyenne could have never imagined that she’d ever see her in a Cook Out parking lot. Or eating a milkshake. Or knowing that she had a “go-to” order. A chicken quesadilla tray with hush puppies and fries—plus a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup milkshake that she used to dip the fries in.

Riley’s car was just barely almost clean, even discounting the debris from their order and the gym bag haphazardly thrown in the backseat. The seats were leaned back, she had an Aux cord instead of a Bluetooth connecting radio…

Somehow, it was so comforting to see this side of Riley—to know that not only was she a trainer, but that she was… human? Was that the right word to use here? Obviously she was human, but Cheyenne had put her up on this pedestal over the course of getting to know her as her trainer and…

Well, this was nice.

“I found out my girlfriend was cheating on me yesterday.” Riley said with a mouthful of spoon-thick milkshake, “With her old boyfriend none the less.”

“Oh no…” Cheyenne sniffled, having already devoured her share of hush puppies from her tray, “That’s awful.”

“No, what was *awful* was having to cancel all my clients this morning so that I could help her get her shit out of our apartment.” Riley picked up three fries and scraped them across the surface of the shake, “I mean, we dated for a year and she cheated on me. How do I know she won’t steal my stuff, right? I *had* to be there.”

“Understandable.”

“Glad you think so—I *really* needed this.” Riley said with a thick sigh as she scarfed down her shake-dipped fries, “And, you know, while I don’t normally *advocate* for eating your feelings. Sometimes it helps us deal with stuff.”

Cheyenne glanced guiltily over her already almost empty share of the Cook Out haul. She’d hoovered down her hush puppies and practically choked on her barbecue sandwich. The only thing that was left were fries, and only a few at that. Meanwhile Riley was just barely half-way done!

“…yeah.” She sighed, “I know the feeling.”

“I don’t… you know, want to pry or anything.” Riley took a fryless spoonful of milkshake and popped it into her mouth, “But is there something bothering you? You’ve been pretty down almost every time that I saw you.”

“I don’t *like* going to the gym, Riley.” Cheyenne ventured a smile, “You were the one who said that there were two kinds of people.”

“Yeah, okay, that’s just one of the ways that we’re different I guess.” Riley chuckled, “But it’s not… you’re not just *not looking forward to exercising* you’re like… you’ve just been kind of distant lately is all.”

Cheyenne gulped.

“You don’t have to tell me or anything. I just wanted to let you know that I’m here for you if you want to talk.” Riley placed a hand on Cheyenne’s shoulder as it bulged out from under her bra strap, “We don’t just *have* to be train*er* and train*ee* you know. We can be friends.”

And here, Cheyenne smiled.

“Until I catch you lying in your food journal again.” Riley laughed, pointing to her milkshake, “You think I don’t know what a “blended dairy beverage with chocolate and peanut extract is”?”

They both shared a laugh at that. It was so strange to hear Riley talk about cheating on her own diet. For so long, Cheyenne had looked at her as a pillar of resoluteness and strength when it came to diet and exercise. Seeing her be… well, she’d call it *normal* was so surreal.

“So.” Riley cocked an eyebrow, “You wanna talk about why you’re skipping sessions and fudging your food journal?”

“My friends…”

“Avery and Brooke?” Riley’s expression hardened, “I thought you guys were getting along great?”

“W-We are!” Cheyenne corrected, “It’s just… I’ve been hanging out with them a lot and they’re not really… I mean it’s *my fault* but… I…”

“Look, I’ve seen Avery. I’ve *met* Avery.” Riley stirred her milkshake with her spoon before looking back up, “I know I’ve always told you that you should take responsibility for your own actions, but it’s okay to call someone a bad influence.”

Cheyenne shrunk in her seat, her little double chin rolling out. In the past few months, she and Avery had come so far in patching up their relationship. Not too long ago, she wouldn’t have hesitated to agree with Riley, but not too long ago she and Avery were fighting almost every day. With how far they had come in becoming each other’s best friend again, it had suddenly started feeling like talking badly about her back would paint her as a bad friend. And then they’d start fighting again, before she knew it…

“It’s okay—there are *gonna* be people who don’t want to work out, want to eat like crap, and they’re *gonna* pose a problem for those of us who want to get in shape.” Riley took a bite of quesadilla, “For you, it’s Avery (and maybe Brooke, I haven’t met her) but for me, it’s *my* best friend Astrid. We’ve all got our own personal road blocks on our weight loss path.”

Cheyenne straightened back up slightly.

“It doesn’t mean that they’re bad friends, it doesn’t mean that you’re bad for realizing any of that, and it’s good that you don’t want to push responsibility off onto them.” Here, Riley’s tone shifted back into her Trainer’s intonation, “But you’ve got to be realistic and see what’s in front of you… okay?”

“…okay.”

“Good.” Riley smiled warmly, clinking their Styrofoam cups together, “Now on Friday, I’m gonna make you go an extra three minutes on the treadmill and an extra two on the elliptical.”

“Whaaaat?” Cheyenne whined in (part) playful distress, “Riley Noooo!”

“*You* scarfed down your Cook Out Tray *and* stole my fries out of my bag. That’s right, I saw you.” Riley folded her arms, “The scarfing down I could forgive, but you sealed your doom when you snuck from my bag. *I don’t play with that shit, Cheye*.”

VIII

“You never told me that Riley was gay.”

That seemed to be the main sticking point that Avery had retained from Cheyenne’s telling of the tale of Riley in the Cook Out parking lot. Not the fact that Cheyenne had been having a bad day, not the fact that she was back up to two hundred pounds, and not the fact that she had been bawling in the women’s locker room.

Cheyenne had initially told Avery about her cheat day with Riley as a way to get her to back off on all the mean stuff she said about her, and a way to maybe get back some of her groundwork in a way that wouldn’t sacrifice their friendship again. She had meant to frame it as a reason why she was going to have to cut back on eating junk. Why she would have appreciated it if, instead of ordering her a pizza, Avery and Brooke could just skip ordering her anything at all on Wednesday nights. A way of reintroducing the idea of her going back to having her own shelf in the fridge.

But somehow the bombshell topic of the day, in Avery’s mind, was the fact that Cheyenne’s trainer was a lesbian.

"Well now we know why she wanted to get your ass in shape, since she stands behind you on the machines during your sessions."

“Goddammit, Avery.”

“She’s probably enjoying the show.”

“I swear to God you’re an actual fucking child.”

Despite Cheyenne’s insistence that they go somewhere healthier, Avery had still settled on the Barnes & Noble Starbucks. Cheyenne had been fine with it, since it meant that she could try to get herself back down to a tall iced coffee without any flavors in it. Sucking tersely on her Venti Caramel Macchiato, Cheyenne’s brow furrowed in consternation of Avery’s insensitivity towards both the topic of Riley’s sexuality *and* her weight problem.

“What? I mean, it might be *true* you know.” Avery paused to slurp down about a half of an inch of her Salted Caramel Mocha Frappuccino, “You might be her type.”

“I don’t think I’m Riley’s type.” Cheyenne said with some exasperation to her voice, “I saw pictures of her girlfriend. Tall, redhead, skinny.”

“*Ex-*girlfriend.” Avery pointed out, “And you never know!”

“Avery, Riley isn’t *my* type.” The chubby brunette said flatly, “So I don’t think it matters if she likes me, because she’s got a little too much estrogen for my tastes and is missing some *pretty* important equipment down there.”

“Yeah, and you’d know with how tight those leggings are.” Avery scrunched her fat face in annoyance, “But *she* doesn’t know that. Maybe she was trying to ask you to be… *more than friends?*”

Cheyenne turned a bright crimson as she sucked down her coffee. That was, admittedly, something that she hadn’t considered when Riley had asked her to join them at their next cheat day. When the aforementioned woman walked over from the coffee bar holding a medium iced latte with toffee nut syrup, Avery had been the one to quickly killed the conversation with a particularly loud and unsubtle shushing sound. One that had Riley looking at the two of them cock-eyed before she even sat back down.

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When Riley had proposed that she start to accompany Cheyenne and Avery on their post-workout trips to various places nearby, it had been entirely out of the best interest of her client.

Cheyenne had confided unto her that she felt that Avery was a bad influence on her and a deterrent to her weight loss goals. And while Riley was sympathetic to a degree of professionalism, she was also worried about her as a friend. Cheyenne was at a rocky precipice, and having someone like her around to help keep things “under control” so to speak might have made a world of difference to her.

Over the course of the three Fridays that she had gone out with Avery and Cheyenne, it had been purely with the intention of helping to make sure that the latter stuck to her diet. What Avery did, she honestly couldn’t have cared less—though she *did* jokingly admonish her here and there where it was appropriate to do so.

She was there for Cheyenne.

In hindsight, for Cheyenne in more ways than one.

Being at such a rocky place in her own life, with her girlfriend leaving her and her roommate bringing home her own string of girls left and right, Riley would admit to being… *aware* of the fact that her love life was a little more than lackluster lately. And as much as she liked to separate her personal life from her work life, there was a small selfish part of her that liked hanging out with Cheyenne.

Not as a client, but… in her weakness, a little more than as a friend.

They had known one another for almost two years now, and they were close. She knew the ins and outs of Cheyenne’s lifestyle, and (except, apparently for the fact that she was a lesbian) Cheyenne was pretty well-versed in a day in the life of Riley.

Begrudgingly, Riley would take fault for keeping that part of her life a secret. Living and working in one of the reddest states this side of the coast, she’d gotten so used to just not mentioning her sexuality that it just never came up organically between her and Cheyenne. Perhaps, if it had earlier, all of this could have been avoided.

But she had thought that there was a little chemistry between the two of them. Cheyenne never mentioned her love life around her (from what she understood, it was a little lacking) and Riley had never thought to ask…

But she had thought that there was a little chemistry there between them.

Maybe it was just the closeness of their trainer/trainee relationship, but it had been enough for Riley to get her hopes up. Coming off of such a messy breakup, she had known that she should have been more careful, but… well weirder things have happened to her than hooking up with a client.

And if that had been what had happened, she definitely would have walked out of Planet Fitness that evening in a much better mood.

“Hey, Cheye.” Riley’s voice had been tinged with an uncharacteristic wavering to it. She seemed unsure since perhaps the first time that Cheyenne had met her, “Uh… good workout today.”

“Thanks. I’m really trying to get myself back up to where I was before…” Cheyenne chuckled awkwardly, “Well, before I started cancelling on you all the time. Again, I am *so* sorry about that—”

“No way, it’s… you know, it’s totally cool.” Riley bit her bottom lip, “Um… thanks again for letting me pal around with you and Avery on Fridays. It’s been great, you know, getting out of the apartment.”

She shifted awkwardly on her long, elegant feet.

“My, uh… my roommate thanks you too.” She stuttered, “Since she doesn’t have to worry about me coming home and wrecking her dates.”

“I should really be thanking you.” Cheyenne laughed, her little double chin creasing and her jelly belly bouncing, “It’s been really cool having someone to keep me in line when I look at the menus pretty much *everywhere*.”

“Yeah, ha…”

Again, for perhaps the first time since they had known one another, there seemed to be a looming weight hanging overhead. At the time, it had seemed like a good thing. Some mutual awkward attraction that had awoken between them. A sign of something (hopefully) to come. Maybe dinner, drinks… then her place? Just something to get her mind off of Stephanie…

“Hey, um… I was thinking.” Riley stiffened up and steeled herself, “Would you, you know… like to do something Saturday?”

“That sounds like a great idea!” Cheyenne’s big brown eyes lit up, “Me, Avery and Brooke were gonna have a *Star Wars* marathon, and it’d be *great* if you could keep me from—”

“N-No, not… not like that.” Riley laughed awkwardly, “Just… you know, the two of us.”

She glanced down at her fingers, twiddling them subconsciously as she wrestled with herself over even asking such a stupid question.

“And… you know, not as train*er* and train*ee*.”

Growing up, Riley had always (or at least, as long as it had mattered) been attracted to women. In her high school years, she had asked out two girls and dated them for like two months before they broke up with her. But in her adult years she had dated quite a few women. More importantly, she had asked out quite a few women.

And she had learned that the long, *long* pause that had come after her question meant that her proposal was dead as soon as it hit the water.

Cheyenne’s face turned *bright* red and her eyes went wide with a sea of visibly mixed emotions. Her mouth opened up ever so slightly and the whole tone of the conversation shifted in about two-point-five seconds in a direction that Riley had really, *really* hoped that it wouldn’t have gone.

“Oh.”

That damned oh that Riley had dreaded hearing. Every time that there was an attractive woman that she got along with that wasn’t into her, she’d get that exact same *oh* from every single one of them.

“I’m not…” Cheyenne shrunk away from her, “I-I don’t really swing that way, Riley.”

And all of the color had drained out of Riley’s face. Again, in hindsight, the incompatible orientation had been there from the start. But hey, her last girlfriend was bisexual. Fuck her for thinking that maybe this cute client that she’d known for years was too, right?

After all, it wasn’t like she hadn’t been given the green light.

“Rrrrrright.” Riley forced a smile, “You’re… absolutely right. I am so, so sorry for putting you on the spot like that.”

“Y-Yeah.” Cheyenne’s eyes were now locked to below waist-level, “Um… I don’t…”

“I know you don’t and I’m sorry and I…” Riley’s chest deflated as a long, painful sigh escaped her, “I really hope that this means you won’t start looking for a new trainer.”

“N-No, I… I won’t.” Cheyenne blinked dumbly, “We’re, um… we’re cool.”

“Are you sure? Because I really like you and—” fuck Riley fuck fuck fuck, “—*as a client*, and—”

“I really need to get going.”

“Yeah me too.”

And in about two minutes, it was as if two years of client-trainer build up had gone out the door with her. As Cheyenne’s plump rump shrunk in the double doorway that looked out into the parking lot, Riley couldn’t help but feel like she’d made an enormous mistake.

*I should have fucking guessed*.

Riley pursed her lips tight as she felt her heart sink to lower and lower depths in her chest. That had been embarrassing as hell, and it may have cost her a client. Another client. Not only that, it may have just costed her a friend! Cheyenne was the closest thing that she had to one of those these days outside of Astrid and her roommate, now that Stephanie was back with Trent.

Slouching against the elliptical, Riley let out another deep-chested sigh. All she could do now was hope that Cheyenne wasn’t too freaked out by her to come back and keep up her training.

*A fucking predatory lesbian, that’s what you are*.

Riley groaned as she whipped out her phone, debating whether or not to message Cheyenne and tell her what had happened. Would that be too weird? Would that have made it even worse? What was the correct protocol for having hit on a straight client who was shaping up to be a potential outside-of-work friend?

*Put it away, put it away…*

Listening to the little voice inside her head, Riley decided against messaging Cheyenne any further. Whatever was going to happen from here was entirely out of her control. If Cheyenne kept her on as a client… if Cheyenne didn’t think that she was just being nice to her because she was attracted to her… if they could still be friends…

*Why the fuck did Avery tell me that I had a shot with her?*

IX

Normally, at this time of day, Cheyenne would have been at the gym.

But ever since that awkwardness of Riley asking her out, something that Avery had been calling for weeks as though it had been obvious. Despite her promise that she and Riley were cool, a steadily chunkier Cheyenne had cancelled on all but two of her sessions with her sapphic trainer—each on either side of the last month that she’d paid for.

Even though she had no problem with Riley being a lesbian, it was just too weird knowing that her personal trainer was attracted to her. That had been one of the main reasons that she’d signed up for a woman instructor in the first place! And with how awkward she had left it with Riley, well…

Cheyenne honestly didn’t think that she was going to renew her contract for another term.

And she really, really needed it. Now more than ever.

Sitting on her butt for most of a month had seen Cheye backslide even more in her fitness goals. Now back up to nearly two hundred and forty pounds, she was busting out of absolutely everything in her wardrobe.

Her stomach had grown back out into a jiggly, fleshy apron of olive-colored chub. She had to tuck it into the crotch of her jeans again, and her fupa was back with a vengeance. Her ass was spreading wider and wider across the couch while her thighs practically thickened before her eyes. Her arms were getting wobblier and less toned, and even her fingers were starting to get all chubby again!

Laying around with a frown and a double-chin, she had been inconsolable pretty much ever since she realized that she wouldn’t be able to continue on as she had with Riley.

And after a few weeks, *someone* had to say *something*.

“Avery, I’m really starting to get worried about Cheye.” The big-chested brunette said in a hushed voice, “She hasn’t moved… *all day*. I think she’s depressed.”

“We’re all depressed—we’re millennials.” Avery had answered nonplussed, shaking a box of Cheezits over her open mouth, “What of it?”

“Avery, you’re such a child.”

While it had been nice, at first, to have Cheyenne around the house more (it meant that there were *plenty* of more opportunities for the three of them to hang out) days like today made it clear that Cheyenne was sort of just going through the motions. And eating. She’d been doing a lot of that.

She and Avery had kept the tradition of going out to eat on Fridays to various eateries around town, but now they *took place* of going to the gym instead of occurring afterwards. They spent roughly the same amount of time out and about, with the exception of burning far fewer calories and doing a lot more window shopping—for clothes, mostly. Something that all three of them were in desperate need of.

“I know that she’s a little wigged out by going back to Planet Fitness, but…”

Brooke took a passing glance at the brown-haired plumper as she slouched on their couch like a lump on a log.

“Do you think maybe if you two started going back to the gym she’d snap out of it?”

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Avery had let out a loud, belting yawn almost as soon as she’d pulled up in her Honda Fit to the Planet Fitness—a believable side-effect to having arrived at no earlier than 9pm.

As stupid as it sounded, it was the only way that Cheyenne knew that she wasn’t going to have to look Riley in the face and explain why she had decided not to renew her contract for another period. She knew that Riley always went home to feed her dogs around seven in the evening and, not wanting to cut any corners and to be doubly sure that she wouldn’t run into her now *former* trainer, Cheyenne had been the one to suggest doing it at nine in the evening.

As a joke, mostly, but she had been surprised when Avery agreed to it.

“I’m here to support you.” Avery said with a sleepy smile, “You go do your thing, and *I’m* gonna fuck around on the exercise bike.”

Cheyenne was absolutely busting out of her workout clothes. She hadn’t bought any new ones since she’d last been to the gym with Riley. She hadn’t had much of a need to. Convincing herself that a break from the gym was what she’d needed, she hadn’t had much choice *but* to squeeze into leggings that had ripped almost as soon as she’d started walking, or a tank top that hugged her so tight that her arms bulged out of it like bread baking around twine.

Granted, not that Avery was much better. Her belly bounced with every pathetic lap the pedals made around the bike. Her lowest belly roll actually *laid against* the middle console for the handlebars…

*What the fuck am I doing*? Cheyenne caught herself *Avery’s being a good friend and going with me to the gym and I’m judging her for how big her tummy is.*

For the past month, Cheyenne had felt lost. Over the course of two years and some change, she had learned to schedule herself around Riley’s available appointments. Taking her workout times *out* of her hands had been one of the main reasons that Cheyenne had been able to stick with it. She hadn’t been able to negotiate a time with Riley once since they started to get to know one another.

But now, without her, Cheyenne was suddenly *very* aware of the fact that she hadn’t done her regular routine this month outside of two days.

Every movement on these machines had felt like pins and needles pressing into her slowly atrophied muscles. Her lackluster performance *before* she’d decided not to renew her contract with Riley certainly couldn’t have helped any, but the month of laying around and eating her troubles away had meant that she was even more out of shape than the last time she’d struggled against the elliptical. Cheyenne was having an absolutely dreadful time trying to get through her routine without Riley there to motivate her, and it had started as early as ten minutes into her first attempt at cardio in more than two weeks.

“Fuck…” Cheyenne gasped and puffed, “Try… try to remember what… Riley taught you…”

*Think about things that motivate you*.

It was Riley’s voice in her head, imparting as much wisdom as she had retained in the two years and then some that she had taken from Riley’s tutelage.

*Yeah, what motivates you fatty?*

Cheyenne struggled against the resistance that her heavier weight provided. It was nothing that she hadn’t done before, but the last time that she had been on an elliptical at two hundred and forty pounds, it had been with sixty pounds lost and muscle mass gained under her belt. Now she was going at it at nearly eighty pounds *gained* and almost a month of inactivity.

Out of habit, she had set the thing for thirty minutes. That was the minimum requirement for cardio workout and, for Riley, the minimum amount of time per machine. If she ever wanted to lose weight, she was going to have to be able to tough it out…

Ten minutes in, and Cheyenne was sweating like a mule. Her back was sticky, and her tummy had worked its way out from her leggings. Not only that, an inch of belly blubber was now flying free for all to see as she wobbled and waddled awkwardly on an easier setting than the one she had been at before she’d abdicated. Her tank top was stuck to her back rolls, her crack was showing, and it was all she could do but to thank God that almost nobody came to Planet Fitness in the evening.

“Woo!” Avery clapped enthusiastically, “Go Cheyenne!”

A little bit of encouragement was welcome. Needed, even. For too long, Cheyenne had gotten used to relying on someone else for their support while she worked on losing weight. Having Avery there to cheer her on (after a pitiful five minutes on the exercise bike) had meant the world to her.

“Come on Cheye-Cheye!”

“Fuck…fuckfuckfuck…”

Cheyenne had hit a wall only fifteen minutes into her workout. The muscles that she’d gained over the years of exercising were still *there*, but buried underneath nearly eighty pounds of fat. She was heavy. She was slow. She would have done anything if it meant that she didn’t have to do any more laps. Moments like this, where Riley would have come in handy, were the bane of her fitness existence—she was really, *really* bad at keeping herself motivated.

“Fuck… fuck…”

Cheyenne began to slow down. Her footfalls became less rapid, her form less precise, and eventually she slowed down to a brisk walk as the machine rocked back and forth thanks to her weight. She slowed even further from there, literally covered in sweat. Her thighs chafed, her chest heaving… Cheyenne was not having a good time.

“I… I kicked too early…” Cheyenne made an excuse for herself, “I… phew…I don’t think that I can keep going…”

Avery smiled.

“That’s okay, Cheye.” She extended an arm to help her friend off of the elongated pedals of the elliptical, “I still think you did pretty good.”

“Thanks.” Cheyenne huffed and puffed weakly, “But… I didn’t even finish my set.”

“Well, you’ll finish it next time.” Avery pat her friend on the back, “You’ll get back into the swing of things.”

“Fuck…” Cheyenne said breathlessly as she leaned against Avery for support, “I didn’t think that I was this out of shape.”

“Hey, that’s what the gym’s for.” Avery said with a light squish of Cheyenne’s side-fat, “Getting you back in shape after you fall off the wagon.”

“Sorry to drag you out here so you could watch me putter out and die up there.”

“No way—did you *see* me on the exercise bike?” Avery laughed, “I *so* don’t belong here.”

“I guess… we sorta stick out like sore thumbs, don’t we?”

“Yeah, I guess we do… I think we’ve earned some Cook Out though. What do you think?”

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From there on, it was more or less child’s play to wean Cheyenne off of going to the gym.

After all, she hadn’t been going regularly for a month. Her main pillar of support had been Riley, and with everything that had happened between them, it was becoming clearer and clearer that Cheyenne’s workout regimen pretty much depended on having someone there to coach her on. A role that Avery stepped into most readily.

Changing the schedule meant that they now only worked out at night. When they remembered. Sometimes, Avery would work late. And Cheyenne *couldn’t* go to the gym without her Gym Buddy. Otherwise Avery would be upset…

But when they *did* go, there were always late-night milkshakes to reward them for venturing outside of their comfort zone for a session in the gym… however brief.

Eventually, the aspect of the gym had been dropped entirely. Cheyenne was now paying sixteen dollars a month *not* to go to the Planet Fitness off of Asheville Highway, and instead to drive through the Cook Out window and order milkshakes.

As time wore on and their affinity for the late-night crowd at their local gym waned, they would simply give themselves the gift of immediate gratification—skipping the gym for a late-night outing to McDonalds or Taco Bell, and ordering the exact same amount of food that they would normally reserve for “rewarding” themselves.

“We’ll work it off next time.” Avery would insist

“It’s our cheat day.” Avery would coddle

“You’ve earned it!” Avery would placate

And by the end of a month, the talk of cancelling Cheyenne’s gym membership entirely had been put on the table. It was another couple of weeks until she did it, but Avery’s repeated jokes about how she was paying to *not* go to the gym had finally struck a chord.

Cheyenne had all but given up on losing weight at Planet Fitness.

And Avery was right—she *had* liked Cheyenne better, now that she was fat again.

X

It was a chapter in life a little too early to remember all that well, but Cheyenne had not always been fat.

For comparison, Avery and Brooke had both always been rather plump. At least, for as long as it had mattered. With Avery’s issues over her parents’ divorce leading her towards food for comfort and Brooke’s genetic predisposition towards a general overall chubbiness, Cheyenne had stood out as the only formerly thin girl between them. In fact, she had gained notoriety once upon a time as a mid-level player on their middle school soccer team. Believe it or not, Cheyenne was a former athelete.

While Avery was plumping out into a spoiled child of divorce and Brooke had already become known as a chubby little bookworm, Cheyenne (for however brief of a period of time) had enjoyed moderate popularity as the goalie on her girls’ soccer team. She and her fellow teammates had almost gone to the State Championships. She had only played for the two semesters that she’d attended Mabry Middle School, but it had been enough to help propel her upwards into the social ladder that high school not only provided, but enforced.

Now, *quitting* the soccer team (or at least, deciding not to try out for the high school team) had been her own decision. Her parents had been very adamant about not wanting her to spend her high school years doing something that she hated and, over the course of two years, she had grown to dislike soccer intensely

Trying out for Chorus had been where she’d initially met Brooke and Avery—as a satellite member of one of the popular girls.

Moving forward, she had been *Kennady Flemming’s* friend—as in, the girl who used to make fun of Avery for getting and being fat. Kennady had once upon a time been on the same team as Cheyenne during middle school, and the two of them had grown close enough that the flood of new faces in high school had meant that they were each other’s best friends.

However, Avery and Kennady had been inseparable up until middle school, when Avery’s parents had divorced and set her eating disorder into motion. By the time everyone had entered middle school, Avery had put on nearly fifty pounds of pre-adolescent chub and ostracized herself from girls who were either too shallow or too unsympathetic to care about the reasons *why* she may have put on the weight.

Ever since that point forward, she and Kennady Flemming had held a bitter rivalry for one another (still did, that stupid cunt) and she had wasted no opportunities to make fun of Avery for her spectacular weight gain. Day after day, she had endured countless taunts of varying amounts of creativity regarding her weight gain and, eventually, it had reached a breaking point for more than a few people.

It was true that Avery had been quite the plump kid. Ever since middle school, she had steadily grown into a chunky teenager. But bringing in other girls to make fun of her had been the absolute lowest of the low, at least to Avery. Kennady, she could deal with. But the other girls… they were just there for the popularity high.

Cheyenne, at the time, included.

Winning her over had been just a matter of time as far as Kennady’s natural lack of charisma was concerned. Avery wasn’t unpopular (and neither was Brooke, thus how they met) and she was a far sight more sociable than the inept-but-affluent Kennady Flemming. The four of them were all in chorus together and, one day, Kennady had picked on Avery a little too much and made her cry.

Cheyenne’s natural empathy (as someone who was used to getting picked on for growing up poor in the Mill Hill) had shone through and… well, the rest was history. She eventually started to sympathize more with the unjustly antagonized Avery rather than the spoiled bitchiness of Kennady Flemming, and slowly but surely she became *Avery’s* friend.

And with that, Avery had started inviting Cheyenne over as much as possible. Avery’s parents were never stingy with how much food she could eat, and that extended to her guests. Going over to Brooke’s house now included Cheyenne, and they would eat pizza until they felt like they would barf. Cheyenne would go home almost every other outing with a full belly and an unbuckled belt, slowly growing outwards until she developed a weight problem of her own.

Growing up poor, she had never had the opportunity to stuff herself like she did at her friends’ houses. Fueled by an arguing set of parents that never seemed pleased (or even fazed) by her academic marks, she had taken to food for comfort. She had become enamored with the surplus that their friendship provided. And, in Chorus, she burned almost no calories. Cheyenne had practically inflated as soon as she made friends with Avery, and their mutual acquaintance Kennady started to snub her too.

By the time that they had all hit Senior Year, the Cheyenne who had made fun of Avery was almost unrecognizable to the one who waddled beside her, down the halls of Chapman High School. She, Avery, and Brooke were now three recognizable characters in the social hierarchy as the popular (albeit fat) girls, while Kennady’s popularity had faded due to her misanthropy and the general shittiness of her personality.

Waddling off of the high school graduation stage at more than two hundred and fifty pounds, Cheyenne Harlowe would eventually enter college as a grade-A chunker.

But then, all three of them had—Avery, Brooke, and Cheyenne were just as inseparable there as they had been in high school, and it wasn’t like they had developed hobbies outside of binge-watching movies and going out to eat constantly. Hanging out in Avery’s dorm (and eventually, her on-campus apartment), getting to do everything that their parents wouldn’t let them do at home, they quickly developed a taste for laying around and eating pizza while expanding outward ever still. Brooke settled somewhere around two hundred and fifty, Avery reached new heights at two hundred and eighty while Cheyenne continued to puff up and up…

Sooner, rather than later, Cheyenne had eventually eclipsed both of them in weight—waddling off yet another graduation stage at just under three hundred pounds of bottom-heavy blubberpot, she entered the world as a heavyweight Communications Major destined for retail. She, Brooke, and Avery had all moved in together and gone on to enable each other in their own respective ways.

With the stress of her job and her own issues with food, Cheyenne only continued her steady expansion outwards. Hitting three hundred pounds had come as a hard wakeup call to her. While it had been some time since she’d thought of herself as a “former athelete” (did anyone actually *do* anything on that field?) nobody else in Cheyenne’s family had ever had a problem with their weight.

This wasn’t a genetic thing that she could blame her issues with food on, like Brooke.

Her parents fought, but they hadn’t divorced like Avery’s.

Cheyenne’s issues with food were learned. It had been a coping mechanism to deal with her various problems in life. Seeing that enormous number on the scale had finally motivated her to do something about it And even if she had never gotten around to blaming her friends for her weight problem, all of Cheyenne’s eating disorder could be amounted to social learning. The fact that she ate when she was depressed, or angry, or even happy had weighed heavily on her for a while now, but seeing that three-double-zero on the scale had shown her that she needed to make a change.

Once she’d started veering away from the normalcy that had helped the three of them get through their lives together, however, Avery had started to buck.

Sure, she could go to the gym. At first, it hadn’t impacted their lives all that much. For the first few months, Cheyenne was still the lazy fatty that she’d grown into being through years of indulgence and immediate gratification. However, once she met Riley and signed on to be her trainee, things had started to go south…

Ever since, Avery and Cheyenne had been steadily building up this animosity with Brooke seated front and center. Sandwiched between a steadily slimming Cheyenne and an increasingly antagonistic Avery, the poor third in their friend group had barely an idea what to do…

And the rest, as they say is history.

Cheyenne eventually fell out with her friend group, and Avery was there to scoop her right back up.

Just like old times.

The only one who remembered this tale (or at least, most of it) had been none other than Avery herself. The names that Cheyenne used to call her back when they were both young occasionally reared their ugly head, but it hadn’t been a problem in so long. Now that she and Cheyenne were friends, she hardly ever thought about the days when they hadn’t been—but whenever she did…

Don’t be mistaken, their friendship *was* one on mutual affection for one another, but the idea that the girl who used to bully her (Double-Avery had been Cheyenne’s cat call of choice) had now gotten *fatter* than her was something that had brought her at least a small amount of joy.

Until it hadn’t.

Cheyenne slimming down posed the biggest threat to Avery’s newfound sense of normalcy, and she hadn’t been happy about it at all. Why the fuck did everything have to change just when she was getting comfortable? If Cheyenne slimmed back down, who was to say that she wouldn’t go back to acting like that skinny bully from back in high school?

Riley had posed the biggest obstacle in getting Cheyenne to quit going to the gym. For a while, she had seen the personal trainer as an untouchable part of Cheyenne’s life. But as soon as she’d been able to exploit a chink in the relationship between her and Cheyenne, Avery hadn’t hesitated. Without her around, Cheyenne would have no choice but to go back to the way that things used to be between them.

And so, she’d done everything in her power to make sure that Cheyenne puffed back up again.

It had been the same outcome, just with a little bit more deliberation in its execution—if she’d said it once, and she’d definitely said it a few times, Avery liked Cheyenne better when she was fat.

When she was fat, Cheyenne was more fun. When she was fat, Cheyenne didn’t ask too many questions. When she was fat, Cheyenne ate and she laughed and she watched movies and the two of them got along so much better. Perhaps most importantly, when Cheyenne was fat things were *normal*. There wasn’t this stress of things changing around her. When Cheyenne was fat, Avery had a friend group that she could depend on, and there was no looming threat of change…

And now that she had talked Cheyenne into just cancelling her Planet Fitness membership outright, Avery never had to worry about Cheyenne losing weight any time soon. Brooke was happy that everyone was hanging out again, and so was she…

Things were finally back to *normal* between the three of them, and Avery wouldn’t have had it any other way. From here on out, it would be nothing but smooth sailing between the three of them. Things had finally gotten back to normal…

But in so many ways, ways that Avery could have never imagined, things had changed.

Things had changed so, so very much.

XI

One of the most visceral struggles in losing weight is learning how to control yourself around food.

It wasn’t until Cheyenne had identified her problems with her desire for food and tackled them head-on with the help of her trainer that she realized just how consumed by her appetite she had become. It wasn’t a hyperbole to say that, even when she was skinny, Cheyenne would privately fret about when her next meal would come to an unhealthy degree.

With Riley’s help, she had learned to get that under control. But once she had stopped paying a personal trainer to be her personal sounding board about her issues with food, that only left her other friends—it should have gone without saying that Avery and (to a lesser extent) Brooke weren’t nearly as apt to help her reign in her cravings for junk food as her personal trainer had been.

“You want burgers?” Avery asked, “Where from? Five Guys?”

Cheyenne bit her bottom lip as she fought back against her baser instincts. She *did* want burgers. But she hadn’t been prepared to share that with someone who would just cut out the middle man and suggest that they actually *go get* burgers. For so long, she’d been spoiled by Riley tempering her appetite that she hadn’t put much thought it what it would have been like to have someone around who actually *indulged* her.

“I don’t know, I don’t… really want to put on pants.”

It had been a weak excuse, but it was the only one that she could think of that might have deterred the idea of eating out again. It had been so much lately, and she could feel her leggings starting to get tight again…

“Pssh, pants.” Avery snorted, “You act like DoorDash isn’t a thing—come on, you can Venmo me half.”

Living in an age where she didn’t even have to get up off the couch in order to get her greasy fast-food fix was dangerous for someone like Cheyenne. Riley had actually made her uninstall apps like UberEats and DoorDash because the temptation was too great—for a while, she couldn’t even open up Instagram because of the amount of food porn that people would post to their accounts. It was all too much for Cheyenne to deal with alone.

But after hanging out with Brooke and Avery more, there wasn’t anyone there to *remind* her of these things that she had known she ought to have been doing. There wasn’t a needling nudging slowly back across to the left to act as incentive for her to cut back.

“I… guess it’ll be okay.” Cheyenne gulped, “I…”

“Cheye, it’s *okay*. You’re with your *friends—*we’re not gonna judge you for having a fucking cheeseburger every now and then.”

“Yeah, it’s *okay* to like to eat food. You don’t have to feel bad about a little takeout now and again, right?” Brooke added helpfully, slapping her on the thigh, “Besides, how often do we all get to hang out like this together, huh?”

Cheyenne’s stomach couldn’t have agreed more, growling in want of yet another tasty treat as its lower crest oh-so-slightly brushed against the fibers of the couch cushions.

“I… *guess* so.”

Cheyenne tucked awkwardly into herself, her thick chin crease deepening as she laid her hands on her stomach. It rolled out heavily in front of her, the outer flanks coming to rest on the meat of her thighs. They were so thick that they touched all the way down to her knees, even while she sat.

She had been avoiding the scale for months. It was her last defense against fully acknowledging that things were getting bad again. She had known, consciously that she ought to do something. That she and Avery could start going to a new gym, or even just her going back to Planet Fitness was the best way to take steps in the right direction. But when she thought about how fat she had gotten and how much she had fucked up her diet and how far she had fallen off of the fitness wagon, all it did was stress her out.

She *knew* that she needed to start making healthier choices, but…

“Don’t get me the double patty burger though, okay?” Cheyenne signaled Avery with a halfway-raised hand, “Just a single.”

“You want fries?” Avery turned slightly, “If you’re gonna get a drink, you might as well just make it a combo.”

“Yeah, sure.” Cheyenne nodded, “Sweet potato fries, please.”

“You got it, Cheye.”

*There, that wasn’t so bad, was it?*

Cheyenne leaned back into the couch with a small amount of satisfaction with herself. She hadn’t gotten the burger with two patties on it. Just the one would do her fine. That was making a healthy choice, right? Riley had always told her that the first step to managing a healthy appetite was with moderation. One was one less than two—it seemed as good of a start as any!

*Of course you’d think that way, fatty.*

Who was she kidding? Cheyenne knew that settling for one less patty on her burger was like choosing crack over heroin. It wasn’t nearly as healthy of an option as she was telling herself. But at the same time…

She *wanted* it. Was that so wrong? To want food?

She had spent the past two years of her life giving up one of her greatest joys… and for what? For her to just wind up falling off the wagon anyway? For her to just balloon back up again, to the point where she was having to crib clothes from her roommates?

It was just a little break. Just a little, tiny break in her fitness routine. This was just a detour back through her awkward “fat years” before she circled back and turned everything around.

She would get back to the gym. She would get back on track. She’d work herself out of this funk, and she’d slim herself down again.

But first, she was going to have a cheeseburger, sweet potato fries, and the biggest, fattest cup of Coca-Cola that anyone had ever seen…

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“I feel… like I’m gonna… gonna pop…”

Cheyenne’s stomach domed out from underneath her shirt, her legs spread wide on the couch as she leaned back with a heavy belly and glassy eyes. Her labored breathing forced her chest up and down erratically, the pain in her stomach like a stabbing knife as she struggled to digest the enormous amount of food that she had taken on over the course of yet another day on the couch.

They hadn’t done this in a long time. At least not since college. Just sat down and had a girls’ day where they did each other’s nails, watched shitty movies from the 80’s, and ate literally everything that they wanted with no questions asked.

And with everything going on in her life, Cheyenne wanted to eat *a lot*.

There were, unfortunately, many times in Cheyenne’s life that she had gone on a proper binge. High School had been challenging for her with her rapidly rising weight, and college had been even more stressful with much more deliberate consequences. With her dating life in the toilet and her parents’ marriage no more miserable than it had been when she was a teenager, Cheyenne had always found plenty of reasons to pig out.

But it had never been (*almost* never been) just because she wanted to.

There was always some excuse that she could hide behind. A contributing factor that had helped to pus her over the edge, or so she told herself. When she’d been working out with Riley, she had learned that at the end of the day these things didn’t matter as much as how she reacted to them. The fact that she was in control of her actions was one of the ways that she had learned to cope with the fact that she was probably *always* going to have a fixation on food—the fact that she was ultimately responsible for whether or not she pigged out was sort of zen… in an odd way.

But the junk food wrappers surrounding her and the girls on the couch; she counted at least four different fast food chains, and at least a third of the total number counted had to have been her fault.

The empty 2-liter that she’d emptied into her tankard stomach, along with the window-rattling belches that she’d belted out were all on her.

The gross, greasy feeling that she felt after waking up still stuffed full of burgers and fries and burritos and milkshakes and cheap Chinese food and sub sandwiches and God knows *how* much other crap?

As much as she hated to admit it, it was all on her.

Panting hoarsely and fighting back heartburn as she laid belly-up on the couch, Cheyenne had come down from her punch-drunk food coma. Her mouth was dry and sticky, fat pink tongue lolled out as she struggled to maintain her erratic breathing.

The girls were in similar straits—Brooke on the floor whereas Avery commanded the entire other side of the L-shaped couch. Snug as two chubby bedbugs, they didn’t seem to be battling nearly as much as Cheyenne was.

Had they *eaten* as much as Cheyenne had?

If they had, they were probably used to it by now… and as judgmental as that may have sounded, Cheyenne could at least justify her train of thought. It had been *so long* since she’d made such a fucking pig out of herself.

*God, I feel like I’m dying*…

Cheyenne burped thick and wet as she readied to rock herself to a standing position.

Her ass was so fucking heavy. It was like lifting an avalanche of pizza dough. And with how stuffed her gut was, leaning too hard on it just made her feel like she was going to barf. Getting onto her chubby little feet was a Herculean struggle with her wobbling knees and her porch-pillar thick thighs. She had honestly had better hangovers than this.

*I’ve gotta—*

URRRRAAAAP

She burped loudly, causing Avery and Brooke to stir in their slumber.

*—I’ve gotta get back in control of myself…*

Cheyenne waddled to her room as quietly as someone in her position was able to. The floorboards creaked beneath her heavy footfalls as she waddled belly-first into her bedroom.

*Oh my God…*

*That can’t be me…*

Catching sight of herself in the full length mirror, Cheyenne audibly gasped as she recoiled in horror of the enormous woman on the other side. Her ample stomach sloshed lazily as she teetered on cankled feet to get a better look at herself. Her double chin creased in impunity of the thickness of her face and neck, the shock only growing as she travelled down, down the expanse of her ruined figure…

She didn’t even *fit* in the mirror anymore—she was practically fucking spherical!

“I can’t… fucking deal… with this right now…”

Shuffling and puttering all the way to her bed, Cheyenne threw herself down just as she had all those years ago back in high school. She wasn’t going to deal with this. She couldn’t.

The lump in her throat and the hot tears in her eyes didn’t stop even after she’d plopped down in bed. Gripping the sheets with thick, angry fingers, it was all that she could do to keep from bawling right there in her bedroom.

How had she let this happen to her? *Again*?

Everything had been going so good for her for the past few years, and now… now she was right back where she started.

She’d already given up so much time and energy in getting herself fit. And she had done it with Riley! But now things with her weren’t ever going to *not* be awkward again, and… and…

For the first time since she hit three hundred pounds, Cheyenne had well and truly felt alone.

XII

*God if you make me skinny again I swear to you I won’t fuck it up this time*.

Both Brooke and Avery had HaHa reacted Cheyenne’s meme on Facebook, but both of them had seen the sentiment behind the reason she’d shared it. Even if she had done her best to maintain an outward pleasantness and general sense of togetherness around her roommates, both of them knew the reason that she had been so down about herself lately.

For the second time in her life, Cheyenne Marlowe had weighed more than three hundred pounds.

She had been a grumpy, angry bitch for pretty much three days straight after the revealing weigh-in. She had stomped her feet and spat and called everyone a bitch and had just acted very volatile, but neither of them really blamed her for it. Cheyenne had always been especially sensitive about her weight and hitting a big number like three hundred was bound to set her off.

She had even tried going back to the gym. She’d renewed her membership at Planet Fitness and worked in thirty minutes of cardio before promptly giving up after getting sweaty and exhausted. Then she’d driven through Cook Out, ordered two quesadilla trays and a Strawberry Cheesecake Milkshake, and managed to finish it before she walked through the door to their apartment.

In short, it wasn’t hard to tell that Cheyenne was an absolute wreck.

And without her personal trainer to rely on, it was now almost entirely up to Avery and Brooke to make sure that she managed to see herself through this thing.

“Hey, I… really hate to ask this, but…” Brooke clicked her tongue apprehensively, making sure that Cheyenne couldn’t hear them as they spoke about her from the other room, “Do you think that you could spend some time with Cheye this week? I’m really starting to get worried about her.”

“Yeah sure. It’s the least that I could do.”

Ever since Cheyenne had entered this new level of depression, Avery had felt increasingly torn for her part over her part in its creation. Though she had been happy to have Cheyenne back and the normal social hierarchy restored, it had brought her discomfort to see her like *this—*a lump on the couch who didn’t do much but lay around, eat, and go to work.

The least she could have done was come clean, but with things as tentative as they were right now, Cheyenne needed friends a lot more than she needed to be mad at Avery.

And besides, who else knew how to make her feel better like someone who had known her for years?

“I’ll take her downtown or something. We’ll get breakfast and get our nails done…” Avery looked over to the blobby brunette as she chugged a beer from the can, “Trust me, I know *just* what she needs to get back in the swing of things.”

“Thanks, Avery.” Brooke nodded, “I think that, between the two of us, we can help her get through this…”

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Like most other millennial women, whenever Cheyenne faced times of great duress, dying her hair had always helped her feel just a little bit better.

“Red’s a good color for you!”

“Thanks…” Cheyenne huffed and puffed, “You don’t think it’s too bright?”

“Of course not—you look super cute, Cheye.”

Avery hadn’t been lying. She really thought that the deep red looked good on her! The light olive tones of her skin worked well with the color, and it had helped her look a little slimmer in the face. Something that was needed, since it had only gotten chunkier in the time it had taken for her to go through the hair-dying stage of dealing with her problems.

Waddling through the narrow streets of downtown hadn’t been particularly fun for either of them, but even Avery agreed that the fresh air might have done Cheyenne some good. Her sidewalk-sized hips and ass swaying dramatically from side to side had meant that they had to walk butt to gut if they wanted to get to the Crepe Factory without having to look over their shoulder for the occasional car, and the fact that she was having as much trouble with her breathing as Avery suggested that she’d fallen pretty far to seed.

*Jesus, she really is out of shape…*

The pot called the kettle black as Avery waddled gut-first towards the Crepe Factory. Her great white stomach hung low into her lap as it wriggled and jiggled its way out from underneath her shirt and leggings. She was practically bouncing her gut against her legs these days as her own weight steadily increased from all of the effort she’d put into knocking Cheyenne off the fitness wagon—her concern was well-placed, but would have definitely come across as hypocritical if she had ever decided to voice it out loud.

The two of them were so wide that they couldn’t enter together; Avery had had to hold the door open for her friend so that they wouldn’t jam the doorway with their collective bulk.

“Good mornin’, y’all want a table for two?”

“Please.” Avery puffed, “Do you care where we sit, or—”

“Anywhere’s fine, just come up to the counter whenever you’re ready to order.”

She had thought that the crepe factory would have been a good mixture of what Cheyenne wanted. The portion sizes sucked, but they had a great breakfast menu. Plus, they were only open for a few hours a day, and Avery always went there when she got the chance. The fact that they had some pretty good food to offer meant that she and Cheyenne at least had something to look forward to, no matter how small.

Much like the doorway, she’d had to waddle behind Cheyenne’s corpulence as she wriggled her way through the narrow aisle provided by the counterspace and the tables.

But when Cheyenne had carefully wriggled her way into one of the chairs and the poor thing had groaned in metallic agony of the heft it was to endeavor, even Avery couldn’t help but feel embarrassed for her friend. No doubt that was going to eat away at her self-esteem…

“What do you even *get* here Avery? Like, for real, I’m starving.”

Avery’s own chair had also proven less than accommodating as far as her size went. Her belly was pinched on either side by the too-narrow armrests, and the stupid thing squeaked when she sat down across from Cheyenne. The two of them must have looked like quite the pair, waddling in behind one another and parking themselves down for a breakfast of sweet pancakes and eggs.

“At least two plates, Cheye.” Avery scoffed, “Fair warning, the portion sizes here *suck*.”

The two of them had shared a good-natured laugh at that. It certainly hadn’t been the first time that they’d shared a mutual disappointment in an establishment’s inability to cater to their appetite and, with the way that Cheyenne was going, it certainly didn’t look to be the last.

They had both decided on ordering an apple-topped pancake with fruit as a side as a standard between them, with a chocolate chip with whipped cream for Avery and a hearty pecan pancake for Cheyenne. The waitress had brought the plates out (expecting to see four, but plating for two) and placed them in front of the pudgy patrons.

Between the two of them, the four plates hadn’t lasted long enough to get really into any conversation. Four pancakes had practically been hoovered down with the sides and all as Avery and Cheyenne fell immediately into the swing of things—the rhythm set by their many meals at home.

What’s worse, they were still hungry!

“That *so* wasn’t worth thirty bucks.”

Avery had come out scoffing at the price tag that had come with trying to feed her and her friend up full. She wasn’t surprised, having warned Cheyenne herself about how small the portion sizes were, but she had been a little miffed at the fact that she had walked away from brunch with her belly still rumbling for more.

“You want to get some coffee at Starbucks?”

“Sure thing.” Cheyenne had said as she waddled behind her, “I’ll buy—you spent *way* too much money at that dump…”

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Somehow, Avery and Cheyenne spending the day together had become less about making sure that Cheyenne was okay and more about trying to make sure that they walked away from whatever table that happened to hold them as full as could be.

The two tremendous fatties had gone from building to building, across the streets of Downtown, in an attempt to satisfy the grumbling in their stomach. And it had taken *hours*.

Starting at the Crepe Factory and working their way down towards the Starbucks, the two of them eventually found themselves at Wild Wings. After they’d ordered what they considered a more *proper* lunch (actually walking away from the place feeling full) they had gone back to the Starbucks for another cup of coffee.

Cheyenne had been the one to suggest the House of Noodles. She had always wanted to try it, Avery said that she could eat, and the rest was history.

They waddled down the street to the bar after that and the rest was history.

Avery and Cheyenne didn’t come home until late at night, still drunk and giggly from their evening downtown. Collapsing onto the couch, neither of them had known that Brooke was watching them before she’d piped up and asked if they’d had a good time.

“We hadda *great* time.” Avery tittered, “Cheyenne… URRP… Cheye’s gonna be *fiiiiine*.”

“Yeah, like… it’s really sweet of you to worry about me Brookey Brooke but… you know…” Cheyenne ran a hand over her stomach, “I’m gonna… you know… m’gonna get back in shape soon. It’ll all be okay.”

“That’s… good.” Brooke answered warily, “So… did you guys get your nails done?”

The two of them exchanged confused glances before they’d finally pieced together just what exactly Brooke had meant by that question—they had spent so long going from place to place that they had forgotten the entire reason that they’d gone downtown in the first place!

“We kinda got distracted.” Avery admitted with drunken laughter

“Yeah, there were some more important matters to attend to.”

As Cheyenne slapped her tankard of a gut and Avery shoved her playfully from side to side, Brooke couldn’t help but wonder if getting the two of them together hadn’t been a mistake. Not just because she had missed out on a good time, but because… well…

They were both looking increasingly round lately.

Not that she was one to talk, of course, but the longer that Cheyenne stayed inside and away from the gym the bigger she seemed to get. She knew for a fact that she weighed at least three hundred pounds, and that couldn’t have been great for her already rocky sense of self-esteem.

But, and maybe it was just because she was looking at her on a full stomach, Avery wasn’t exactly slimming down either.

“Soooo… you’re not upset?” Brooke finally shut the door behind them, softly turning around to face her roommates as they retired drunkenly to the living room, “Cheye? You’re feeling a little better?”

“Maybe a little.” Cheyenne’s face curled to one side as her drunken mind puttered to ponder just how exactly she had felt sober, “I had a lot of fun.”

“Same.” Avery burped, “Nothin’ like a good old-fashioned fat girls’ day out.”

“And, like… okay… yeah I pro—UURP—probably ate too much.” Cheyenne’s face creased a little more as hints of a third chin creased beneath her second neck roll, “But like… you know, it’s all just temporary. I’m gonna get back to the gym *eventually* and, you know, who the fuck cares if I don’t?”

Brooke raised her eyebrows.

“Yeah? You… think you’re in a good place?” she asked hesitantly, “One night, going out and having a drink with your friend got you feeling better about yourself?”

“Definitely.”

Cheyenne had clearly not caught the sarcasm in Brooke’s intonation. She struggled to stand herself up and waddle back towards the front of the apartment, towards her bedroom.

“I think I’m gonna be—” another loud, neighbor-waking burp traveled up from the pits of her stomach, “—I think I’m gonna be okay.”

XIII

“I’m really starting to get worried about her, Avery.”

The two of them had been communicating about Cheyenne for a lot longer than either of them cared to remember. Brooke had been taking Avery into the other room, whispering at her in the kitchen, or chittering in hushed tones while Cheyenne was in the bathroom for weeks now and it had always started the exact same way.

“Brooke, you’re *always* starting to get *really* worried about her.” Avery scoffed, her cheek meat bunching around the folds of her neck, “For the last time, Cheye is *totally fine*.”

As Avery leaned forward into the fridge, Brooke couldn’t help but notice that she was struggling with the heft of her own chest, and the weight of her gut as it caught against the condiment bin and brushed against the crisper drawer. Avery’s arms were getting thicker and spread wider when they rested against her flabby torso, literally bulging out of every sleeve in her closet. Her heavy ass pulled the seat of her sweats down far, giving her roommate a good look at a solid six inches of fleshy crack before she craned one meaty arm to tug it back to a semblance of modesty.

“Still…” Brooke made a face, “Don’t you think that she might be leaning… you know…”

Avery hefted herself up with a mighty Dad Noise, returning from the inside of their fridge with the Sara Lee pie that had been thawing since this morning. Holding it in her hands, pressing it slightly against her shelf of a stomach as she hip-checked the fridge door shut, Avery’s attention was now primarily on the latest in a long line of desserts in front of her.

“You’re not… gonna eat all of that, are you?”

“Nah, me and Cheye were gonna carve it up together.” Avery placed it on the countertop and began rummaging through the cutlery drawer, “Why, you want a piece?”

Avery’s ass slowly began to bulge out of her sweats again as she leaned forward slightly. Her roly poly love handle eeked slowly over the top like rising bread, back fat slowly swelling out from underneath her shirt. Untucked from her sweatpants, the lower swell of Avery’s stomach hung low and exposed in a pale fleshy apron that pushed hard against the counter faces.

“…Not right now, thanks.”

Brooke had known better than to try and approach Avery’s own weight problem with her. She had thought it best to stick with one issue at a time—the most pressing one being Cheyenne. She’d been acting so differently lately, and it seemed like *Brooke* was the only one who was concerned by how much she’d changed.

“Don’t you think that maybe Cheyenne is… you know…” Brooke sucked through her teeth, “Don’t you think that she’s maybe leaning *too far in the other direction?*”

“What*ever* Brooke.” Avery sniffed in dismissal of her friend’s concern, “Can’t you just be happy that things are finally back to normal between the three of us?”

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Avery panted lightly as she kept a pace of two steps in front of her whale of a roommate. The two of them together painted quite a sight.

“Can you—*URRRP*—slow the fuck down, Avery?”

Thick black leggings stretched taut over the olive-colored pillows crammed into their reinforced fabric, fading around the chubbiest parts of Cheyenne’s legs. Behind her, though visible from the front, an enormous set of ass cheeks jiggled and wobbled as much as their confining lycra prison would allow—the color and outline of her tent-sized panties on display as her cheeks squished and rolled with every belabored step. Cheyenne’s fat pink tongue lolled out as she struggled along the decrepit flooring of their local mall. Her tremendous thighs jiggled from back to front as she kicked one fleshy leg in front of the other, kneeing the swell of her stomach as it drooped down low in front of her.

“We… *just* ate, I’m… *uurp*… I’m riding with a full tank here!”

Even in her biggest clothes, Cheyenne’s stomach had regressed to the point where it could no longer be tucked into her bottoms. At least, not when it was full. Her olive-colored paunch jiggled and wobbled with every heaving step that the bottom-heavy beauty managed to take, lugging that gigantic ass behind her all the while.

“Sure thing, Cheye.”

Avery slowed her already glacial pace, allowing Cheyenne to catch up in just a few steps. Her ample pounds of ass fat sloshing to and fro bumped against Avery’s overly fluffy thigh from the side, sending her into a brief unbalance. Steering at her size was something that she had yet to re-learn.

“Why is this place in the *back* of the mall?” Cheyenne whined, “You’d think they’d know that nobody who actually wants to *shop* here would want to *walk* this fuggin’ far.”

“It would have taken us just as long to get back into the car and drive around to the rear entrance.”

“Still…” Cheyenne huffed, “It’s fucking stupid.”

“Jeez, lighten up Cheye.” Avery rolled her eyes, “You would have thought that you were running a marathon.”

*“Aren’t we, though?”*

When they were growing up as teens of a certain size, fat girls like Avery and Cheyenne didn’t have stores like Torrid. They had to shop carefully and, as they’d steadily gotten bigger, even having to special-order clothes online from retailors who didn’t carry their size in their brick-and-mortar stores. Cheyenne had only ever had to rely on Torrid for a few years before she’d decided to lose weight, and stepping inside of what she’d labeled as a “fat girl’s store” after such hard work slimming down was more than a little disheartening.

Up until this unfortunate point, she’d been able to mitigate her shopping with hand-me-downs from Avery and Brooke. They’d always shared clothes growing up, so it hadn’t felt too weird asking for a pair of pants or a cute top. If anything, it had helped bring them closer together. Sure, she’d had to place an order here and there as she’d steadily fallen off of the fitness wagon, but it was so much different when she was being forced to accept that she literally didn’t have any other choice *but* to shop at Torrid that had really helped put things into a new perspective for her. Everything else in the apartment, even Avery and Brooke’s clothes, were too small for her to squeeze into anymore. The only things that fit her what she had on and the “fat pants” that she kept in her closet for motivation.

And both of those ensembles were fucking *tight*.

She knew that she needed to get back into the gym.

She knew that she needed to get back on track to losing weight again.

She knew that she was getting bigger and fatter than ever.

But the fact that nothing in the whole apartment had fit her when she’d tried to get dressed had certainly helped to set the mood for the rest of the day. Thus explaining the trip to the Red Bowl in the food court, where she’d gorged herself on sushi and appetizers during Happy Hour for the better part of the afternoon…

She could find a new gym tomorrow. All Cheyenne really wanted, for the rest of the day, was to get this shopping over with and plop back down on the couch so that she could be miserable and eat frosting straight from the can.

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“This is cute~”

Cheyenne waddled out of the changing room with all the grace and poise of a hippopotamus, hips catching the sides of the booth. Dressed in a cute patterned number that was about the size of a circus tent, Cheyenne burst belly-first from the surprisingly tiny room with about an inch and a half of olive-colored stomach chub eeking out from underneath the slight gather that had been sewn in to the hem.

All three of her chins frowned in disapproval of Avery’s platitude, her shoulders sinking as she slouched in rejection of ever feeling cute again.

The jeans were as tight as could be, stretched around the landscape that was her ass and even buttoned over the bottom swell of her tummy. They cut deep into the meat of her thighs, hugging every bulge and fold instead of her natural curves as they threatened to overwhelm the poor denim pattern. With one wrong move, Cheyenne felt like she was going to pop out of these things!

Not to mention the fact that one of the biggest sweaters in stock couldn’t fully cover her love handles. Even with the little gather in the front, the sides of her gut were on full display as they rolled out from over the waistband of these tight-ass pants.

With the struggle that she’d undergone in putting these damn things on, she wasn’t sure that she’d be able to get them *off* without Avery’s help…

“I feel like a balloon.”

*You look like a balloon.*

Cheyenne’s frown tightened and her brow furrowed as she turned to the side, getting a good look at just how deep she was getting. Her ass was fucking *huge*, and stuck out about a food behind her in shelf space. Her stomach drooped low and heavy in front of her crotch, outlined clearly in the tight canvas of the biggest jeans that they had in stock.

*Three balloons, actually*—*one for your big fat gut, and two for your big fat ass, you fucking blimp.*

“What do you think, hun?” Avery clasped her hands together, “I think you look *great*.”

“It’s fine, whatever.” Cheyenne puffed, “Do you think we could get something to eat after we’re done here? I’m starving.”

Avery smiled in confusion as soon as she had processed just what Cheyenne had told her. They’d just eaten, like, twenty minutes ago. In fact, they’d run up a pretty big bill even during Happy Hour, when sushi and apps were half off. How could Cheyenne have still been hungry when Avery was stuffed?!

“Sure thing Cheye, we can…” Avery shuffled awkwardly on her feet, hand on her still-distended stomach as she ignored the tightness in her own jeans, “…grab something little on the way home, I guess.”

“Great.” She rolled her eyes, “Let’s just rip the tags off and pay for them, I’ll wear it out.”

Avery’s face scrunched in concern for her friend. Cheyenne had been in a mood all day, but who wouldn’t have been after learning that they’d outgrown everything in their closet? Avery had been dealing with that kind of thing since she was in middle school. She knew better than anyone what that kind of thing could make you feel…

“Tell you what.” Avery took a big step forward and wrapped her arm around Cheyenne’s meaty shoulder, “Why don’t we stop at that ice cream place in the food court before we go?”

“Sounds fucking *great*.” Cheyenne’s whole body trembled as it began to move slowly, belly-first and ass-last as the two of them waddled toward the checkout counter, “I’ve been wanting to try it since it opened up.”

“Ice cream makes everything better, right?” Avery fingered one of Cheyenne’s fluffy side rolls

“Thanks.” Cheyenne took a moment to smile at her friend, “And… you know… sorry for being kind of a bitch all day.”

“No problem, Cheye.”

The two of them walked side by side, hips and bellies brushing against one another as they worked their collectively enormous way towards the Torrid checkout counter.

“After all, what are friends for?”

XVI

Over the course of the next few weeks and months, Cheyenne would only continue to balloon.

With Avery remaining steadfast in keeping her friend away from the gym and back on the couch, where she felt that she belonged, it was only a matter of time before any possibility of returning to the way that things had been for the brief moment in her life where Cheyenne was thin was out of the question. The siren song of comfort and familiarity eventually came to outweigh of ever being thin again.

With some help, Cheyenne had become convinced that losing weight was a pipe dream. After all, she’d sacrificed almost two and a half years to the goal of losing weight, and for what? She’d only managed to blow up bigger than ever before after she’d stopped going.

Eventually, the thought had left her head entirely.

Giving up on her fabled fitness regime was ultimately for the best, she’d told herself. With her job, who could find the time to get to the gym? Moreover, who could afford it? That extra twenty bucks a month could be dinner, or go towards the water bill, or… *something*.

She had been skinny when she was a kid, and then for a shining brief moment she had gotten to be “thicc” in her twenties, but she didn’t think that she had it in her to try for a third time around the tiny waist track. It had taken time, and more than a little prodding from Avery but eventually Cheyenne had come around to accepting the fact that she was just *meant* to be fat.

And in that acceptance, Cheyenne had felt a similar freedom that had come with her decision to start working out so long ago.

At least, this way, she was *in control* of what her body looked like. Felt like. Weighed. Giving in (not giving *up*, but giving *in*) to what appeared to be the natural state of things was oddly relaxing. If nothing else, it was easier than having to wake up early and stay out late toiling away on the ellipticals and the treadmills and the Stairmasters that had ruled her life for what seemed like such a very long time…

Now that things were “back to normal”, Cheyenne had felt more comfortable than she had in years.

And when Cheyenne was comfortable, she ate.

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It wouldn’t be a stretch to say that most of Avery and Cheyenne’s friendship had come to revolve around food.

Avery stroking Cheyenne by the chins and leading her back into the lifestyle of overindulgence and hedonism that had fattened her up in the first place, along with her insistence that she was better off “accepting who she was” had formed a snowball effect that had left her feeling breathless after each and every meal that she sat down and shared with her friend.

“Oh God…”

Avery’s sausage fingers fumbled stupidly with the clasp on her biggest pair of elastic-blend jeans in her closet. As soon as the button had come undone, her stomach burst through the flaps and flooded into her lap. Relieved gasps and pathetic panting sounded as she laid a hand on her fat stomach, stuffed to the brim with cheap sushi, more than a few appetizers, and the contents of an entire bento box. On top of everything else that she had eaten today, this had just been entirely too much.

“What?” Cheyenne’s face rippled in laughter as she watched Avery struggle with her pants, “You making some room there, Avery?”

Avery could only just barely manage a laugh as she pushed back against the table as far as she could go. Cheyenne took up most of the other side of the booth in Red Bowl, and pushing the table into her belly as it laid to meet the edge wasn’t exactly feasible. With her seat-squashing bottom half and her layers of thick stomach, Avery wouldn’t have found it hard to believe that her friend had finally gotten too fat to fit into a booth.

But the fact that she was right behind her was more than a little troubling—even to an out-and-proud big girl like herself. Avery had been fat for as long as she could remember, but she’d never been so big that there wasn’t enough room for her to get comfortable in a booth…

“The portion sizes here *suck*.” Cheyenne wrinkled her nose pushing back another plate after having sucked down roll after roll of half-priced sushi, “What do you think would go better with the Crazy Roll—crispy cheese wontons or the pan fried pot stickers?”

“Oh gosh, Cheye I’m…*uurrrrp*…” Avery burped into her balled hand, her stomach squelching and burbling in pain as she fought against fullness and the tightness of their seating arrangements, “I’m feelin’ pretty full.”

“Seriously?” Cheyenne snorted, “*Okay*, but… you know, I’m still kind of hungry.”

Avery groaned inwardly—she’d created an absolute *monster*.

“Okay, just… let me sit here and digest for a bit.” Avery frowned sickly, “You get what you want.”

“Pot stickers *and* wontons.” Cheyenne said proudly to herself, “You sure you don’t want to split?”

“I’m sure.”

“Suit yourself, Avery~”

The poor waitress was dumbstruck when Cheyenne ordered yet another course of food. In a bustling restaurant preparing for the dinner hours, their Happy Hour prices were there only out of a technicality. They’d been in that booth for hours now just stuffing themselves, and even Avery was starting to get embarrassed on top of feeling enormous and full. They’d both been there for *so long* and they’d been eating until it had gotten dark outside…

“Holy fuck.” The sudden excitement to Cheyenne’s voice had taken her right out of her self-pitying, “Avery, is that who I think it is?”

“Wha—?”

“Over there, at the counter.”

Avery’s belly was way too full and her mind way too bleary to focus on anything other than putting one foot in front of the other and heading out the front door of the establishment. But slowly, she did her best to focus on the couple of women at the front of the store. Arching her neck (it was getting harder and harder to see *over* Cheyenne lately) as the women came into view, the couldn’t help but draw a blank.

“Doesn’t that look a lot like—”

“…Cheye?”

It had been quite a while since she’d seen (or even thought about) Cheyenne’s old trainer, Riley. In and of as far as getting Cheyenne *away* from her former personal trainer, she had little to no reason to think about her much anymore. After all, things were back to normal with her and Cheyenne and Brooke, right?

But seeing her walk up to the table, looking as perfect as ever, made Avery feel a deep sense of embarrassment for having put on so much weight since the last time that the two of them had seen one another. For someone like the perfect personal trainer to have not gained a single pound while she and Cheyenne had blown up like two zeppelins was embarrassing even for someone who had no illusions about her own size…

“Oh my gosh it *is* you!”

Cheyenne was not in any position to rise to her full height. With her full stomach and the heavy weight that helped pin her down in her seat, she looked like a blob of lightly browned cake batter stood up into the vague shape of a woman. However, her excitement at seeing Riley again for the first time after so long must have outweighed the natural sense of laziness that had grown like a weed in her trainer’s absence. Riley walking over and spreading her arms wide for a hug had Cheyenne wriggling and jiggling her way to her feet, effectively unsheathing her enormousness for all those in the restaurant to see.

Riley’s eyes widened as soon as her former client had turned fully to face her, silently marveling at just how *wide* she’d become. With her flaring fat hips and sizeable saddlebags that poured over her thighs, from the ass-end out Cheyenne was easily as wide as three Rileys put together! Not to mention the great gut that had ballooned out into a doubly-tiered behemoth of belly that drooped low and hard in its supremely stuffed state. Her thick neck rolls bunched and her wide arms wobbled as she held them out for a hug—one where Avery noted that Riley couldn’t even wrap her arms around Cheyenne anymore!

But, if Riley had any choice words to say to her former client about the astonishing amount of weight she had put on, she’d kept them to herself.

“Hey Cheye!” Riley hugged her client as tight as she could, happy as a clam to see one of her most long-time clients after so long and parting with a big smile, “How’s it been, girl?”

“Oh, you know.” Cheyenne shrugged her massive chest and pillowy shoulders, creasing her triplicate of chins, “Same old same old—hanging out with Avery.”

Avery waved, shyly, as she slowly remembered the wedge that she had driven between client and personal trainer all that time ago. She wasn’t sure if the considerably less enthusiastic greeting that she received had been any indication, but she was almost sure that Riley remembered it too.

“Hey, I’m being rude.” Riley, thankfully, changed the subject, “I’m actually on a date with that really cute girl over there in the booth—”

She pointed over to the booth on the other side of the restaurant near the rear exit. A rather thick-set girl with brown hair and olive colored skin, squeezed into a tight little cocktail dress and done up a bit too fancy for a rather affordable chain restaurant like Red Bowl. The girl smiled, waved, and went back to ordering drinks from the waitress.

“Isn’t she sweet?” Riley exposited happily, “It’s our *third date* so I’d better not keep her any longer than I have to.”

“Oh my gosh she’s so cute!” Cheyenne was already just a little out of breath from hefting herself onto her feet, “You’ve got great taste.”

That, perhaps, hadn’t been the right thing to say given the way that things had parted. But Cheyenne was clearly a little flustered, if not genuinely happy to see someone that she’d known for two years on a semi-daily basis. Avery could have only imagined the kind of embarrassment that came with running into your former personal trainer at almost two hundred pounds heavier than the last time you’d seen one another, but if Cheyenne was particularly upset by it, she didn’t show it.

“Hey, I’m working at a new gym—” Riley finger-gunned awkwardly, “—If you ever want to come by and see me sometime, it’s right next to the coffee shop where I met Mona.”

“I might do that!” Cheyenne said after a brief hesitation, “Go enjoy your date, Riley. It was good to see you, hit me up on Facebook sometime!”

“Well *I* might do *that*!” Riley laughed, “See you later, Cheye.”

She turned and, with the passion of someone saying goodbye to their least favorite aunt, Riley parted with Cheyenne’s tablemate as well.

“Bye Avery.”

And with that, Riley was seated at her table across the restaurant. Cheyenne lowered herself back down into the booth, happy to be off of her feet, and laid her hands on her stomach while she caught her breath.

“Hey Cheye…” Avery piqued, in her friend’s silence, “You okay?”

“Yeah, just…” Cheyenne wriggled her way back into the booth by pushing it hard against Avery’s stomach, “Ugh… you know… seeing her reminds me of going to the gym and stuff.”

Avery felt her hair stand up on end.

“You… want to talk about it?”

“Nah, let’s get out of here.” Cheyenne finally said, reaching for her purse, “Poor waitress is probably sick of our fat asses anyway.”

Avery had never been so relieved to hear that she would be leaving a restaurant in her life.

“It *was* good to see Riley though…” Cheyenne paused the great process that was heaving her bulk out of the booth, “Do you think we could stop and get milkshakes on the way home? I’ve got a real craving for Cook Out all of the sudden…”

XV

At the risk of sounding passe, it is often true that birds of a feather will flock together.

In the grand scheme of things, the time that Cheyenne and Avery spent at one another’s throats had proven to be nothing more than a fleeting hostility, if not without a certain amount of gravitas that had forever changed their friendship.

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Brooke had squeezed herself into a matching set of workout gear, her reward for being almost forty pounds down from when she’d started going to the gym.

It was a bold look for the mousy brunette. Even if it was still a little too small, the solid black had proven itself slimming enough for her to feel confident squeezed into it. Her jiggly parts were restrained by the tight spandex, where they hadn’t hardened as the subcutaneous fat had been trimmed away. Her tummy was more structured, if still round and soft, while her arms and legs had toned considerably since she’d started working weights into her exercise routine.

Her breasts had shrunken, and that was a bummer, but she was still nestled comfortably into her C-cup bras. Thankfully, it was only the number on the tags that were going down. The women in her family tended to keep and store weight there, and any time she’d ever brought up slimming down growing up her aunts and her mother had always joked aboutit.

*Watch out, don’t wanna lose your ta-tas!*

It had made her laugh now, but that kind of thing had really helped to convince her that it was okay to not exercise and be healthy growing up. Something that had come to bite her in the increasingly fleshy kiester as she’d grown out into a chunky young woman.

The pink piping and accents on her workout gear, however, were something new that she was trying for. Tying back her flattened brown mane and strapping on her new FitBit, Brooke had honestly in that moment felt rather pleased with all of the progress that she’d made since she’d decided to start exercising and eating right.

Was she supermodel skinny? Absolutely not. But then, who was these days?

The point was, if she kept going at the rate she had been, Brooke would be down to two hundred pounds in just a few months. And while the snail’s pace that the needle on her scale had been crawling at was frustrating at times, she knew that she was doing the right thing by getting herself up and moving.

In this apartment, *somebody* had to move—at least, for longer increments than it took to get from the couch to the fridge.

“Hey guys, I’m gonna head to the gym.”

Brooke’s announcement had been met with absolutely zero fanfare. But then, she had been extending the same offer for months now, and neither of them had exactly jumped at the call before then. Why she had expected something different now, well…

Even if she knew better than to try and interrupt another Classic Simpsons marathon courtesy of the Disney+ subscription that *she’d* paid for… she liked to think of herself as something of an optimist.

“Kay, have fun.”

Avery had said it flatly from the comfort of the couch as it bowed underneath her bulk. Armwings pooling on the headboard of her cushioned throne, she extended one improbably meaty arm in hopes of getting a better reception from the cheap Roku remote without having to actually move. With her awkward grunting motions, the unfortunate thing beneath her would squeak ominously—hinting at future collapse.

“Think you could stop and pick up some Chipotle on the way back?”

Cheyenne’s answer wasn’t much more enthusiastic. Her jowls rippled and bounced with her buried jawline as she muttered her response through mouthfuls of salt and vinegar potato chips. She brushed her sausage-thick fingers off on what bit of shirt that hadn’t ridden up over the great glob of her stomach. She looked over expectantly, waiting for Brooke to respond.

In the long (long, *long*) time that she had known Avery and Cheyenne, Brooke had always thought herself to be more passive between the two more hot-headed personalities. Even back when they were kids, she had always played mediator between them. When Cheyenne was going through her own fitness phase, hadn’t Brooke been supportive? Hadn’t she done her level best to keep Avery from killing their friend and roommate every time that they had a fight?

“Would it *kill* you guys to be a little more supportive? You know I’m on a diet.” Brooke rolled her eyes, “If you’re both *so* intent on not moving today, can’t you just DoorDash it?”

Avery and Cheyenne exchanged knowing, lazy glances.

That was the problem with having these two as roommates—nobody supported her in anything that wasn’t laying around on the couch and eating junk food. Or watching movies. Or breaking her diet.

Yeah, Brooke *liked* to do those things, but it seemed like all Avery and Cheyenne existed for was to take up space!

“Avery, Cheye, would you mind locking the door behind me?” Brooke said in a huff, “I just want to make sure that you can both still *get up*.”

Brooke had slammed the door a little harder than she’d initially meant to, leaving something of a sour punctuation to her already rather dramatic exit. But she felt that her point had been made, and she wasn’t about to apologize for how those two lazy lumps had been making her feel lately.

Walking down the hall and hitting the elevator button, Brooke waited patiently for the doors to open and stepped inside…

“Jesus, what was that about?”

Avery shrugged her shoulders and struggled to bring herself to stand. The enormous weight of her stomach sagged down low, just over her knees as she began her wide-gaited lumbering waddle. Her stomach leading the way by a full foot and a half, the fat blonde heaved and ho’d herself to the front door of their apartment and turned the deadbolt to one side.

“I don’t know, she’s been a real pill lately.” Avery scratched the lowermost section of her stomach as it rolled out from underneath her biggest tank top, “You want a beer while I’m up?”

Cheyenne belched loudly, *URRRAAAAAAP*, and shifted in her seat.

“That’d be great.” She panted, “We got any more of those little key lime pies?”

“Sure thing.” Avery took the necessary three steps that were required to turn her spherical shape to one side, “Lemme just…”

Getting herself into the fridge seemed to be getting harder and harder. The sheer width of her stomach was quickly becoming an insurmountable obstacle in squeezing herself in far enough to reach whatever *wasn’t* within arm’s reach. While it wasn’t exactly likely that she was up on her feet, and an equally unlikely event that this house had any leftovers, until they could afford a minifridge that had been built into the side of the couch (or perhaps some kind of personal bartender, they’d often joked) heaving her fat ass up off of the couch to get her own beers and soda was a necessary evil. When Brooke wasn’t around, or when she couldn’t convince Cheyenne to grab her some, anyway.

Though, Cheyenne took plenty of convincing to get up off of her seat these days—and with the amount of strain it took to get her standing, Avery could have definitely gotten to the beer first.

“Here ya go, ThunderBuns.”

Avery gently tossed a can of Bud Light to her roommate. The silver cylinder landed on her airbag of a stomach, making the meaty mass wobble with impact as the can rolled down onto the open space of her thigh and getting caught in the deep crevice between the two. Reaching for it with chubby fingers, Cheyenne popped the tab off of the top before giving Avery the pink of her tongue.

“Very funny, Wide Load.”

“Hey, Brooke said it best when she said she just wanted to see if you could still move.” Avery’s voice was thick and heavy as she waddled through the living room before plopping back down in her usual spot, “Without taking the whole ass couch with you, anyway.”

“Ugh, she’s been such a bitch lately.” Cheyenne chugged about half of her can and let out a deep belch, “I mean… like for real, it’s *not* like she’s that much skinnier than us.”

“I know—she’s been going to the gym lately.” Avery’s chins creased tersely as she cracked her own beer open, “God, can you imagine your ego being so fragile that losing a couple of pounds manages to put you over the moon?”

“I’ve *been* skinny.” Cheyenne said with another mouthful of chips, “It’s *not* that great.”

If Avery hadn’t been there, she never would have believed it. The girl was enormous and bottom-heavy, with barely a muscle to be seen on her big blubbery body. With how wide Cheyenne sat on the couch alone, she had made it so that the three of them had to squeeze uncomfortably on its giant L-shaped bend. That had probably helped to explain why Brooke had ditched them—she was tired of squeezing in the corner so that Cheyenne and Avery could have all the long parts…

Well, that and being the designated snack gopher.

“Ugh…” Cheyenne grunted, her neck rolling thickly as she turned her head to the side, “Can I tell you something?”

“Of course, Cheye.”

“It makes me sound like a total bitch.”

“What doesn’t?”

Cheyenne laughed, a wicked little smile lingering on her lips.

“I liked Brooke *way* better when she was fat.”

\*\*\*

**Bobo the Hobo** has been writing weight gain and BBW erotica for more than ten years on [writing.com](https://www.writing.com/main/portfolio/view/psuedophobic) and [DeviantArt](https://www.deviantart.com/bobothehobowrites), where he both hosts and posts thousands of free chapters and short stories available through his portfolio.

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