

Alex tugged down his shirt. It was riding up again, barely covering the great orb of belly that hung from his front. It sprung back to its previous position almost immediately, much to his dismay.

The lack of presentable uniform was grounds for discipline in most retail and food service jobs, and he didn't want to be caught out by it. He huffed and tugged at it again, unable to get the hem of it lower than his navel; he tried sucking in his gut, but the shirt barely shifted, and just rode up again once he relaxed. Sighing in resignation, he could only thank that his sagging muffin top covered the unbuttoned front of the trousers he had spent all breakfast time to barely squeeze on.

Opening time was coming up and Alex—having already set up the stations for the day—was awaiting inspection. Tables were cleaned up, ingredients laid out, the electronic overhead menus and advert boards switched on and glitch free. He'd opened up the restaurant that morning, his manager apparently off sick, and head office had stepped in to provide the necessary backup for that day. His temporary manager wasn't here yet though, and it was precipitously close to opening.

Fatway—short for “Fat Away” if the adverts about being a healthier alternative to fast food were to be believed—was the fourth largest fast food chain in the country. Known for footlong sandwiches with

an offensive quantity of salad, it was also unusually free of franchising; every store was overseen by a single head office that seemed impossibly obsessed with micromanagement. Ingredients came from regional warehouses, supposedly to protect industrial secrets. Surveillance cameras littered their buildings, all of them feeding to some building hundreds of miles away. Stores seemingly opened and closed at random without explanation. Not knowing what was going on was a common part of the everyday if you were just some schlub “sandwich artist.”

And Alex didn't know what was going on with this shirt! It was a perfectly fine fit—a little baggy even—when he got it a couple of months ago, but now his grey-furred gut was springing it open with ease. He was still tugging on it when his new manager finally arrived, and all his worries about uniform quickly disappeared.

An otter stood in the doorway. A large otter, both taller than Alex and quite a bit wider, clad in strained fabric that had clearly already begun at a few sizes larger. His uniform most certainly did not fit.

“Hey,” he muttered gruffly as he waddled up to the counter, hips and gut sloshing around in the confines of his clothing.

“Hi, I'm Alex, I think I've got everything ready for opening now but if you could just check over—“

Not listening, the otter squeezed himself behind the counter and started pulling ingredients out of the trays they kept behind there, piling them into a paid of footlong, “Sorry, missed breakfast,”

Alex watched as handfuls of the food he’d just laid out were piled into a sandwich. The otter rang up the till himself, the cash drawer opening but being closed again without any money added to it.

“Whoa hey! You can’t do that! The cameras will see you!” He pointed his wing to one as emphasis.

“They don’ cware,” the otter muttered, his fat cheeks already stuffed with a mouthful of excessively filled sub, grabbing a bottle of ranch sauce and squirting it directly into his mouth. The store stayed quiet. No alarms went off. There was no retribution or curse from above. He offered the bottle to Alex, “Haff swum,”

“But we have to open in two—“

“Haff it!”

He took the bottle, the obese otter rather intimidating with his size and brashness, never mind his seniority. He squirted a little sauce into his mouth.

Alex gasped as flavour immediately filled his muzzle, every tastebud and pore suddenly tingling with deliciousness. This was not ordinary ranch sauce.

“Eat,” the otter ordered, another sub in his hands. Alex complied, picking up a pale, limp triangle of cheese and placing it onto his tongue where it suddenly exploded with flavour. He audibly moaned, the otter cracking a grin.

Alex shook back to his senses, “I shouldn’t,”

“You shwuld,”

“I did miss breakfast...”

“Thwen you weally shwuld,”

“Maybe just a little...”

Grabbing a footlong roll from the shelf (or ‘a bread,’ as corporate was so keen to push) he started putting together a quick sandwich, piling it up to try and sate his empty stomach and slathering it in that delicious ranch sauce. Each bite was like heaven on his tongue, the sauce somehow enhancing every

morsel to levels he had never experienced. He scoffed the sub in a couple of minutes, groaning in bliss as parties of flavour fairies danced on his taste buds.

The otter was already assembling more sandwiches, handing one over to Alex. “Minh, by the way,”

Alex bit off the end of the footlong, tears of joy welling in his eyes. His voice lowered to a Whisper. “Why does everything taste so good?”

Those sandwiches vanished quickly. Stomaches growled aloud, minds and midribs begging for more of the extravagantly delicious everything. Overcome by desire, Alex tore bread from shelves and filled his mouth with them—even the dry, barely mid-range rolls tasting of fantasy. Minh—exonerated by Alex’s loss of control—opened up the drink dispenser, chugging the sickly sweet syrups in between scoffing handfuls of cookies and doughnuts.

Their uniforms stretched and tore as they swelled, each calorie quickly finding a place to settle inside of them. Minh’s shirt rolled upwards, exposing his moobs as his stretched trousers tore apart, threads spreading to allow brown blubber to spill out. Alex’s shirt folded and bunched up below his chins, exposing hundreds of pounds of freshly-formed gut to the world. Struggling to reach for

the lower shelves, they turned towards the sandwich assembly station and the tubs of meat, salad and sauces housed there, paws shoved into them as they disregarded their food safety training and concentrated on gorging themselves on the fantastical flavours that permeated their mouths. Meatballs in marinara sauce proving just as flavourful and filling as limp, watery lettuce. *Everything* was amazing, every mouthful turning out more delicious than the last, they couldn't help but have more... and more... and...

“Mooooore...” Alex moaned, forcing slices of turkey breast past his lips, his gut bloating at a spectacular rate as it pressed into the floor alongside Minh's. He was having to reach over his moobs to reach the countertop now. His shirt sleeves torn apart as the pressure of his arm fat overcame the weave of the fabric. His trousers were most definitely not buttoned on correctly now—they had burst apart.

Minh was faring no better. His gut was starting to brush Alex's, belly having squashed up against his supposed subordinate on its way to the ground. His rump and tail were thickening up spectacularly, mounting an offence on the counter behind him and seemingly winning that battle with ease; his rudder almost reaching to the overhead menu screens behind them.

They continued to grow, their bodies seemingly defying biology and the food seemingly defying nutritional values as they heaved and huffed to ever greater size until they became like whales, beached with their feet off the ground, held aloft by thousands of pounds of belly fat at the perfect counter height where they could continue to glut themselves with reckless abandon. The effects of their extreme weight gain were starting to show. Breathing was becoming more slow and purposeful, gasps of air audible between mouthfuls of food. Slick sweat dribbled from under their arms and folds, internal temperatures skyrocketing as their natural insulation inched outwards across the floor. Congealing sweat was starting to pool around them, sticking to seemingly every surface in their vicinity and dripping into their makeshift trough. Their lateral growth spread wider than the countertop, Minh's tail and butt shoving the overhead monitors askew.

The store was well overdue for opening by now, but thoughts of observation and consequence had long left their minds. No one batted an eyelid when the front shutters slammed shut, plunging the store into near darkness, or the cameras turned and oriented themselves towards the counter.

The overhead menus, the promotional screens, all went black. The PA—intended for music but rarely used—crackled to life. A slow, muffled voice called out to them through the darkness, compelling

them to stop eating for the first time in perhaps an hour. A dim silhouette appeared, repeated across every monitor.

“Two code reds, in th’ same shop, in th’ same morning? S’it Chris’mus already?”

A small spotlight turned onto the silhouette, highlighting a pair of eyes whilst the rest remained in shadow. “Minh an’ Alex, I am talkin’ ta you,” The eyes seemed to be shifting somehow. Alex focused on them, trying to work out how they were moving. “You have both proven yerselves worthy of a promotion to ‘ead office. Yer families have been informed of yer relocation. I want yer t’clear yer minds of any worries an’ focus on what makes Fatway great—th’ food. That is all.”

The monitors all reset to their previous configurations. The PA resumed silence. Everything remained still for a single moment before a hazmat team burst through the storeroom door and everything suddenly went dark.

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He floated weightlessly.

Somewhere, underground perhaps, he floated. His promotion was simple: to eat and to float. Endlessly. Forever.

Every second of every minute of every day the hose delivered to him a liquid feed. A delicious, moreish, filling liquid, thick enough to feel like food and smooth enough to swallow without having to think about it. He had already grown so many more tons thanks to it. Minh was in the holding tank next to him; another dozen tanks filled out the warehouse floor, each one home to another “code red” Fatway customer.

His body, it turns out, wasn’t sweating—it was manufacturing. Manufacturing Fatway’s secret secret ingredient, the one that made their products so delicious, so filling, so... addictive. The company collected it up, refined it and used it in their products.

Alex relaxed, contented; sucking from the hose attached to his maw, happy to float for a very long time.