

Bzzt! Bzzt! Bzzt! The deliberately irritating, almost mosquito-like alarm blared through the dark, stuffy, and previously-silent room, crashing upon the ears of anyone in its vicinity. Its volume was such that it all but drowned out the vague and muffled 'mnuh?' the large lump in the bedclothes made as it was roused from its slumber. An arm emerged from beneath the blankets, chunky fingers fumbling around the bedside table until they happened upon the phone that was making all the racket. After opening the battery settings, taking a photo of the gloomily-lit ceiling, and googling 'ihasfjd', they finally extinguished the persistent screeching.

The arm withdrew back into the depths of its cocoon, taking the now-silent device with it. Unseen eyes studied the numbers emblazoned on the screen, their meaning obvious to anyone with a clear head, yet obtuse enough for whoever lay in that cosy cavern to struggle with for several moments. Understanding was finally reached, heralded by a sleepy groan and soon followed by unenthusiastic struggles to escape the warm trappings of the layers of sheets, duvets, and blankets that had the bed and its occupant firmly swaddled.

The arm re-emerged, setting the phone back on the table, its dimming screen still displaying the digits 9, 4, and 5. The chubby hand of before grasped the thick layer of covers and flung them unceremoniously off the rest of its owner's body, the colder air eliciting a gasp.

A pair of legs were swung over the edge of the bed and two large, greenish-blue feet hit the thin and worn carpet with a couple of thumps. Said legs then straightened, the pyjamas covering them riding rather low and struggling to contain the two thunderous thighs and thick calves despite the 'X's emblazoned on the label which jutted above the waistband whose elastic had been stretched beyond the point of resuming its original dimensions by the broad hips and partially revealed expanse of round, scaly rump. Above this jutted a long, thick tail, the same colour as the feet which had preceded it, at the end of which was a broad, flat fin which rose perpendicular to the floor.

The corresponding pyjama top had fared little better during its term of service: the hem of it had been forced upwards by a hefty helping of creamy belly which wobbled violently with each step its owner took out of the bedroom and into a narrow hallway; even if an attempt was made to pull it back down to cover the jiggling mass and its accompanying love-handles, the whole area south of the deep navel would have been left exposed to the wintery air. The owner's chest did not spare the shirt either as two sizeable breasts sat atop the beyond-chubby tummy, causing the feeble thread connecting the clear, circular buttons to the expanse of tired fabric to strain and stretch across terrain for which it had never been intended. Even the sleeves had begun to be punished: the source of their plight was a pair of thick upper arms whose girth had pulled the material so taut that a split had begun forming on the underside of the right, although it had so far gone unnoticed.

Protruding above the collar was a neck of slightly above-average length, but its considerable width made it seem rather short and squat. Its extent up to its owner's head was framed by several locks of dark, shoulder-length hair whose natural spikiness extended all the way up to the pair of fin-like ears and formed a fringe long enough to need to be swept clear of two sparkling green eyes. A sharp snout protruded beyond them, ending in a point which then swept down to a wide mouth which had a reputation for forming broad grins and comprising the entrance to a black hole-like digestion.

Liana arrived in the kitchen of her small apartment, her hair looking even more tousled than it did when she'd made one of her vague efforts to tame it. The autopilot that always directed her when first emerging from her cluttered bedroom guided her to the kettle, which she refilled and soon had bubbling and hissing in the background as she fetched four slices of bread and crammed them into the large toaster that occupied a substantial corner of the countertop. Knowing that she wouldn't

sate her morning hunger with a measly helping of toast, she also dumped almost half a box of cereal into a large bowl which was soon swimming in copious quantities of milk. She stood at the counter, idly ladling up spoonfuls of the sugary mixture, some of which reached her mouth when it wasn't splashing back into the bowl or dribbling down her chin.

The bowl was already considerably less full by the time a pair of *dings* told her that the rest of her breakfast was ready. Soon enough, she was sat in the living room, alternating between cereal, toast, and coffee while the best thing she had managed to find blared out of the TV at the high volume to which she had become accustomed.

Her expression gradually changed from one of deep resentment at being dragged from her warm and comfortable bed as she filled her impressive stomach and pumped caffeine into her system: her drooping eyelids regained the ability to stay open under their own steam, her chin raised itself off her chest, and the yawns that punctuated every few mouthfuls or sips died away. By the time she reached full perk (and coincidentally the bottom of her mug), smears of jam and butter coated her chin, spots of milk and coffee adorned the corners of her mouth, and her prodigious cleavage was littered with crumbs of all persuasions. However, she only dealt with the first and second of these issues for she saw little point in rummaging in that deep chasm when the time to make herself presentable for the world was no doubt approaching. For the time being, though, she had Saturday morning garbage in front of which to vegetate.

As the clock ticked ever closer to midday, the moment for Miss Requin to leap into action dawned. With a grumbling sigh, she heaved herself to her feet and extinguished the inane reality show which had commenced moments prior; such a decline in programming quality would have likely fuelled her desire to vacate the sofa.

Her tailfin brushed the walls of the hall that led to the small bathroom that seemed all the more cramped when graced with her presence. Shedding the near-rags that were her pyjamas, she switched on the jet of water and, after giving the spray a moment to warm up, stepped over the edge of the tub, ducking her head under the rail on which the shower curtain was hung.

I've gotta find a bigger place, the large shark thought to herself as she lathered her hair with copious amounts of first shampoo, then conditioner. Like the rest of her current abode, the shower and bath combo was small and cramped: her hips were rarely clear of either the wall or the curtain, her tail had a maddening habit of extinguishing or changing the temperature of the water, and the showerhead only reached the eye-level of her six-foot-four frame at its highest extent. Nevertheless, the combination of a warm cascade of water and a large portion of her bottle of bodywash did the job of ridding her expansive body not only of the sizeable crumb population that had colonised her cleavage over the preceding twenty-four hours, but also of that indistinct feeling of dirtiness one acquires over the course of a day.

When she emerged into the fog (something which reminded her that she had an extractor fan) and wrapped herself in a towel, her dark hair was plastered to the back and sides of her neck and she was smelling decidedly fresher than she had been fifteen minutes earlier; fragrance was something she reserved only for dates and special occasions, as such she preferred to purchase her toiletries from the neutral or more masculine shelves.

Drying such a large expanse of scaly flesh understandably took some considerable time, but soon she emerged from the bathroom in a billow of steam in all her sharky glory, her hair having been given a cursory brushing and her mouth basking in minty freshness. She strode across the hallway to her bedroom; the lack of any hint of a waddle in the gait of a woman as large as she rarely failed to

surprise those who encountered her. Throwing the curtains wide to let wintery sunlight spill into her bombbsite of a bedroom, she began to hunt for her rarely-used hairdryer which was undoubtedly buried somewhere in the depth of the clutter, not giving a hoot who might clap eyes upon her four-hundred-pound birthday suit.

With a great creaking of long-abused bedsprings, Liana seated herself on her dishevelled cocoon of blankets and was soon wafting warm air over her still-damp hair with an awkward heavy-handedness that proved her lack of interest and expertise in the realms of personal beautification: all she knew was that it was a good idea to dry and brush her hair before going out, otherwise vague, unidentifiable 'bad things' would happen to her spiky locks. She was just as brief with her use of the hairdryer as she had been with the brush: damp patches continued to hold court in the layers nearest her scalp. A second, equally hasty brushing followed before she abandoned both implements on the bed as she began her search for clothes that weren't on the slopes of Mount Laundry.

Around a quarter of an hour later, the large shark emerged into the chilly winter air. She let a long breath tumble from her mouth, enjoying how it immediately formed into a cloud of hazy vapour as it drifted past her vision. An equally misty chuckle followed as memories of grasping a pencil between her index and middle finger as a child in winter formed, pretending that the fog escaping her mouth was cigarette smoke; she knew better than to get into something like that now, though.

A capacious bag was slung over her shoulder, bumping against her side as she strode down the street. Her legs were crammed into the most accommodating pair of jeans she could find while her torso was encased in a thick hoodie that, despite its bulkiness, failed to conceal the size of the torso beneath. However, being perfectly confident and content with her largeness, the fact it was being made so plain to anyone who saw her by her wardrobe didn't bother her in the slightest. She was no stranger to whispered comments and looks that ranged from intrigue to disgust, but generally paid little mind to such things; it was rare for anyone to make any remarks on her appearance audible: after all, who in their right mind would say such things to a shark who could fill a doorway in both dimensions?

It was a lonely wait at the bus stop for Liana, traffic rumbling past at regular intervals but not a soul to join her in her contemplation of life's mysteries. Fortunately, she wasn't left standing in the cold for more than a few minutes: a luridly painted conveyance ground to a halt with the squeak of weathered brakes, the door opening right in front of her with a faint hiss. The shark had no sooner boarded the bus, paid her fare, and had turned to grab a comfortable seat (or two) when her previously quietly cheerful expression fell: dozens of eyes were staring at her nervous surprise, and it seemed that every seat had already been claimed. After taking a few steps deeper into the confines of the bus and scanning the rows carefully, she spotted one last space open for her.

Careful not to swing her hips too much in case she dealt her fellow passengers a concussion or two, she made her way up the aisle to the promised land: a berth next to a diminutive, blue-scaled dragon who was gazing up at her in a mixture of awe, horror, and perhaps a hint of something else now he'd dragged his eyes away from the peep-hole he'd made in the otherwise condensation-soaked window. She lowered herself into the seat but, as she'd expected, it was woefully inadequate for a woman of her size. She'd heaved a sigh and was steeling herself for a journey with half her butt dangling in the void of the aisle when she felt something small tentatively tapping at her thick upper arm. Turning her head, she saw her neighbour attempting to make himself as compact as possible. Delighted by this disappointingly rare display of consideration, she beamed down at him as she shuffled across into the territory he'd relinquished for her. It seemed that he may have

underestimated how much room he needed or how big she was, however, as he found himself crammed against the window as Liana's bulk invaded a good half of his own seat. As she heard no complaints from the little dragon, the shark assumed that he didn't have too much of a problem with the new arrangement.

Their fellow passengers stole glances at the pair of them as the bus trundled towards the heart of the city, stopping occasionally to exchange new riders for old, but never freeing enough seats for Liana to acquire space enough for her bulk without squashing another gallant neighbour against the nearest window. She could feel the dragon's head pressed against her upper arm, his forearm digging into her love-handle and side-rolls, his leg partially trapped beneath her dwarfing thigh, yet he still raised no objections. In fact, she had practically forgotten he was even there until she pressed the buzzer to alert the grizzly at the wheel of her intention to disembark at the next stop, when her arm was met with another nervous prod. Glancing down, she saw a phone being offered to her. She took it and peered more closely at the screen: on it was displayed the various fields for adding a new contact of which all were blank except for that for the contact's name which had been set as 'Beautiful shark goddess'. Rolling her eyes, she laughed softly as she humoured his request and tapped her number into the corresponding box, returning the phone to the furiously blushing dragon just as the bus came to a stop.

She left him to his thoughts and increased personal space, her hips brushing both sets of seats as she disembarked. A light rain had begun to patter down on the pavement and the numerous weekend shoppers who were flitting in and out of stores. However, Liana had no interest in purchasing any of the garments on show in the many fashion houses lining the street, no matter how much she might have needed to. Her sole focus was the café a block away where the solution to the gaping hole that had formed in her stomach since breakfast lay.

What had been barely more than drizzle when she'd alighted had become steadily heavier during her block-and-a-half walk, and the large windows at the front of the café were liberally streaked with droplets; the trails they left on their slow, meandering paths towards the pavement made the images of the diners within the cosy establishment shimmer and distort oddly to the eyes of those who were unfortunate enough to be hurrying past in the increasingly aquatic outdoors. Liana soon became the largest of those blurred figures, her outline becoming gradually more indistinct as she shuffled her way through the mass of tables and chairs, virtually every one of them occupied by a furry, scaly, or feathery customer who was adding to the cacophony of happy babble and the scrape of metal on porcelain that was just as warm as the establishment's temperature and décor.

At a table on the far side of the room, sat with her back to one of several heaters dotted around, was a pure white stoat staring pointedly over the rim of her cup right at Liana as she edged her way closer. It was a characteristic stare, one which told the shark that her friend had been waiting for some time already and wasn't pleased. Indeed, when Tabitha set her vessel back on its saucer, it was clear even from a distance that she'd had time enough to drain its contents while expecting her friend's arrival.

"I'm sorry!" cried the shark as she sank into the seat opposite, bypassing all pleasantries in her efforts to placate the small figure across from her.

"It's fine," Tabitha said stiffly, then seemed unable to restrain herself from articulating her disdain for her friend's tardiness: "Let me guess: you went to bed super late, set your alarm for as late as you dared, then spent the morning eating and watching garbage on TV?"

"Pretty much..." Liana admitted in a sheepish mumble.

The stoat sighed, clearly exasperated. “Whatever. Choose what you want,” she instructed, gesturing to the regular menu and the specials which were handwritten on large, neighbouring chalkboards.

Ignoring the ominous creaking groans of protest coming from her frail wooden chair, Liana twisted around to peer at what was on offer. Her eyes raked the menus, each item being put onto either the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ pile that her mind had constructed. She also considered the cabinets at the counter which housed various further options, both sweet and savoury, before announcing her decision to Tabitha: “The carbonara sounds good and,” the stoat raised an eyebrow at there being more than one part to her friend’s intended lunch, “a brownie wouldn’t go amiss.”

The mustelid sighed, fixing Liana with a disapproving stare, “Li...”

“What? I’m going to the gym after this!” the shark said defensively, nudging the bag on the floor beside her chair with a large foot.

“Ugh! Fine, but I’m not paying for you,” Tabitha told the larger woman as she got to her feet, “What do you want to drink?”

Liana had the courtesy to look sheepish and embarrassed as she rummaged around in her bag. “Large hot chocolate,” she answered quietly, handing the stoat a couple of crumpled bills before the latter strode away to place their respective orders.

Tabitha’s tone and disposition softened considerably as the two settled into conversation, particularly once they were both tucking into their respective lunches, as evidenced by the small smirk on her face as she questioned her friend on her recent life: “So, what *have* you been doing apart from lazing around, eating everything within reach?”

Liana stared across the table with a furrowed brow, a mouthful of pasta being chewed up and swallowed before her retort came, “Tabby, I test games for a living, lazing around is what I *do*.”

“You’ll never convince me that’s a real job,” the stoat scoffed, picking through her salad, “As far as I’m concerned, you’re just a bum who conjures money from thin air.”

Liana chose not to rise to the bait, contenting herself with a scowl and pointedly-large final mouthful of pasta from which sauce dripped onto the fabric of her top.

The pair left the café around twenty minutes later, both considerably fuller and in better spirits than when they’d first sat down. They paused once out in the feebly spitting rain, the stoat unfurling an umbrella a little unnecessarily as she spoke, “You promise you’re going to the gym, right?”

The shark rolled her eyes, shifting her large bag a little more securely onto her shoulder, “Would I have bothered bringing this thing if I wasn’t serious about it? I mean, think who you’re talking to.” They shared a laugh and a hug – during which Tabitha got a face-full of shark boobs – then parted ways with a wave.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Liana’s size-13 sneakers hit the treadmill with a resounding crash with each stride she took, causing more than a few of her fellow gym-goers to look round in alarm. She, however, remained entirely unconcerned about the stares she was receiving: she had grown used to them over the years and

she was happily plugged into the music being fed through to her ears by her phone which was attached to her left arm by a strap originally intended for someone's thigh.

Those who had had the courage to approach the shark about her exercising exploits had consistently exclaimed about the surprisingly athletic figure she cut: "You run like a woman half your size," a trim kangaroo girl had commented as Liana had passed the elliptical she was using.

Naturally, Liana was proud of how she was able to reconcile her size with a reasonable level of fitness and couldn't help but feel a wave of smugness wash over her when she lasted longer on the treadmill than those who had looked her up and down mockingly on her arrival.

As she raised an arm to mop her heavily perspiring brow with one of several sweatbands she wore on her wrists, any onlookers were afforded a substantial glimpse of how Liana's body handled vigorous physical exertion. While her chest remained largely stationary thanks to her acquisition of a sports bra, the large belly that hung below it jostled and wobbled about violently, occasionally emerging from beneath her singlet in all its creamy glory. Her overstretched, extremely formfitting pants had steadily bunched up around her extensive posterior, not only emphasising these other jiggling masses but also revealing her requirement for knee supports. To cap the unflattering image off, the copious sweat she was producing gathered in strategic areas, outlining exactly where her numerous rolls were hiding beneath her outfit.

After a solid half hour of deafening everyone in the cardio room with her rhythmic four-hundred-plus-pound footfalls, the treadmill let out a series of beeps and the belt began to slow. Liana immediately seized her capacious water bottle and gulped its refreshing contents down gratefully, allowing her legs to continue moving of their own accord until the surface beneath her feet stopped completely. She wiped the machine free of the many flecks of sweat that dotted its surface, then strode away in the direction of the weights room without a hint of a waddle or a wobble in her gait.

"Hey, gurl! Looks like someone's gonna need a spotter."

Liana brushed her sodden locks back and out of her eyes to see a short, muscular, and flamboyantly gay lion approaching her, his ever-changing mane today cut short and swept back from his face. "Oh, hey, Sam. Yeah, that'd be great."

She had walked past him in the direction of a free bench when she felt a solid shape thump against her back. "You can start by squatting your favourite gym buddy," Sam said with an extra lilt in his voice she knew to indicate teasing as he wrapped his arms around her neck and his legs around her waist.

She turned her head to give the feline an incredulous look, "I was just going to do upper body stuff today, but I'll humour you," she agreed as she veered away from the benches in the direction of the squat racks.

Facing a floor-to-ceiling mirror that stretched the length of a wall Liana tugged her top down to cover the few inches of gut she was showing, then lowered herself into a deep squat.

"Feel that burn!" Sam cried encouragingly as he watched his face rise back up to a level a good head higher than it was used to.

"What burn?" Liana teased as she squatted down again.

Ten reps later, the large shark heaved a small sigh. "This isn't working. Make yourself useful and load up a bar for me."

The lion looked surprised and a little hurt at these words. "But..."

"Sam," Liana said firmly, looking at him through the mirror, "I can probably squat you while you're holding what you squat, now go!" She unclasped his hands from around her neck, then watched him drop out of sight behind her bulk.

Liana duly proved her point to the smaller feline: while she was by no means in top form after a lengthy and vigorous cardio session, she was still capable of squatting what Sam was unable; she didn't, however, take him up on his invitation to have both him *and* a barbell on her back at the same time.

Thereafter the shark reverted to her original plan: she took Sam back to the bench she had been eyeing up before their little diversion and, with his assistance, set about pumping some considerable amount of iron in various exercises that belied her flabby appearance. The contents of her water bottle quickly dwindled – necessitating in the lion running several errands to the fountain in the corner – and her sweatbands became more sweat than band.

After close to an hour in the weights room, Liana carted her sweat-sodden self back to the locker room where her second shower of the day and a considerably fresher set of clothes beckoned. Entirely unconcerned by the presence of more than half a dozen complete strangers casting furtive looks towards the mountain of perspiration, adipose, and well-disguised muscle, she peeled her singlet, pants, and underwear from her body and shuffled off to find a free showerhead. Unlike what she had to contend with at home, Liana was able to stand comfortably beneath the jet of water, even permitted to stretch and not worry about knocking anything over with all the body she could throw around: to her, it was luxury.

Having stuck with the same gym for over a year now, Liana had become quite familiar with the area surrounding it. As such, she had the next hour or two mapped out in her mind: pick up the necessary from the supermarket a few blocks away, jump in a cab at the reliably-manned taxi rank around the corner from it, then maybe (*maybe*) cook some dinner.

The shower and change of clothes had given the shark a new lease on life and as the rain had mercifully abated, she strode what would otherwise have seemed like 'literally miles' with a small smile of contentment and achievement on her sharp features.