

Columbia State 29: Waiting for the Bus

By: IndigoRho

Nightfall was hours away, but the city was still quiet enough for Raf's every step to echo loudly as he hurried down the sidewalk, much to his annoyance. Raf didn't like being noticed; it was inconvenient, it was dangerous, and he cringed at the sound of his own sneakers. In reality, though, the hyena would have been impossible to miss no matter how silent he was. Raf was overweight—enough so to prompt a second glance from certain hungry preds—and was prone to dyeing and styling the tuft of fur running down his head and neck in bright colors, such as the neon pink it was today. His clothing didn't help, either. An untucked dress shirt and plaid button-up only managed to emphasize his weight, and the loose pink tie and bracelets drew eyes toward him, not away. The outfit tended to receive a mixed reaction from onlookers, not that Raf cared. He'd learned early on not to let the opinions of others get to him, though the revelation did little to ease his perpetually grumpy mood.

Despite his innate ability to stand out in most crowds, Raf was a survivor. He naturally came across as intimidating, which had discouraged countless attempts to eat him throughout high school and college. Anyone who *was* stupid enough to try and eat the hyena quickly learned Raf could hold his own in a fight. Fortunately for the few dumb ones, Raf didn't care much for eating others, though admittedly for somewhat selfish reasons. He wasn't fond of the weight he gained the rare occasions he did digest an attacker, and hated dealing with attempted reprisals from friends or family of the meal. Not to mention the hassles of digesting another living being and all the protocols involved. Vore was simply another annoyance in Raf's life, so he did his best to avoid it, regardless about how his one living sibling felt about the matter. Dwelling on that was annoying, too.

Ever vigilant of his surroundings, Raf let out a quiet sigh of relief as he spotted his destination a short walk away, the bus stop that would take him home. Unfortunately, his sense of relief was quickly crushed once he realized there was someone else already at the stop, sitting on the covered bench. Even at this distance Raf could recognize the obvious signs of a meal in progress. A pair of jeaned, flailing legs were jutting from the open mouth of the pred on the bench, who appeared to be a massive red panda. The red panda's large, round belly was shaking, the bulges of fists and a head barely visible beneath his sheer bulk. Most of his gut was still covered by a stretched purple hoodie, bearing the bold initials of Columbia State University. Only an active pred would bother wearing clothing designed to contain a prey-filled belly, and being a fellow CSU student simply strengthened the assumption.

Raf only stopped for a moment, unwilling to miss the next bus home just because a gluttonous classmate was gorging nearby, and the red panda hadn't even noticed him yet. The pred didn't seem to be in much of a hurry to consume his meal, taking short gulps and even tickling their paws on occasion. His belly was slowly exposed more and more with each new swallow, though, the movement within growing increasingly frantic as the unknown victim inched towards their fate. Raf had seen those struggles often; in class, on the bus, in his own living room. He'd even been the one fighting for his life once, many years ago. While a part of him felt pity for the fur who was about to add to the already obese red panda's waistline, he also didn't question that potentially being eaten was anything but normal.

The red panda eventually spotted Raf's approach out of the corner of his eye and ended his teasing, suddenly gulping down the last of his meal, though he couldn't resist running his tongue over their paws a few times before the final swallow. Even with an entire fur in their stomach, the red panda's school hoodie still covered a solid half of their belly. Their middle was now a swollen, bulging lump spread out over their lap, jostling violently as the fur trapped within desperately tried to find some way to escape what in all likelihood would be their tomb. Raf kept a watchful eye on the engorged pred as he passed, making an effort to stay well out of arm's reach once he came to a stop. Despite keeping his distance, the hyena could still hear the muffled cries of the red panda's meal, a distorted mix of yelling and begging that was vaguely recognizable. He did his best to ignore it.

While Raf was content pretending he was all alone at the bus stop, the red panda was apparently feeling talkative. “Oh...oh man that was a close one,” he gasped, rubbing a paw across his face, which quickly shifted to a frown. “I can't believe Julian actually tried to eat me, we've known each other since high school.”

Raf continued seemingly-ignoring his peer, though he quietly groaned as raindrops began to fall on his snout.

The red panda gingerly grasped his squirming belly as if it were completely foreign to him. “Dammit Julian, I never thought I'd end up having to eat anyone again, let alone a friend.” His voice sounded genuinely sorrowful. “God, how am I gonna explain this to the others?”

The drizzle quickly turned into a steady rainfall, threatening to soak Raf's clothes and fur. His attempt to seem unfazed by the situation was going poorly.

“H-hey, you're free to wander in here and get out of the rain,” the red panda said, staring directly at Raf and taping a paw on the short bit of unoccupied bench. “You can even sit down and rest. I don't mind.”

“No thanks, not in the mood to be eaten today. Or ever,” Raf said, bluntly. The fur within the red panda apparently heard Raf's voice, as his struggles picked up in hopes he'd be rescued.

The red panda's eye twitched for a moment. “W-why would I do something like that?” He looked down at his wobbling belly in despair. “I only ate Julian in self-defense, there wasn't another option. Eating others is horrible!”

“Your act's obnoxious,” Raf replied, before nodding down towards the discarded pair of neon-yellow sneakers resting beneath the bus stop bench. “Greg's stupid shoes are hard to forget, and I saw just enough of your meal to know you've got a wolf in that fat gut of yours. Plus your stomach sounds like him, too.”

The red panda—Liam—tensed up slightly and his eyes narrowed. “Gonna play hero, mohawk?”

Raf snorted. “Not my fucking problem. Besides, you just cleared up my Tuesday tutoring obligations. Though I'm sure Professor Taylor would've dealt with him soon enough.”

Liam let out a laugh and gave his belly a hard pat. “Didn't know my guest was so unpopular!” He smiled as he felt the wolf within him thrashing about, slowly exhausting himself. “Probably for the best, though. I'm sure you'd taste delicious, but I'm supposed to be cutting back on the snacks and losing weight.”

“Yeah, good luck with that,” Raf said, sighing as he felt his shirts begin to cling tighter to his gut as they got wetter.

“Greg was surprisingly easy to eat, you know?” Though his lie had fallen apart, the red panda still wanted to chat. “He kept his distance at first, but I could see him eying my belly in admiration. All it took to lure him onto the bench was a well-timed stretch and a little flirting.”

Raf didn't respond. He'd noticed Greg ogling his own gut often during their tutoring sessions, and he could only imagine how alluring the red panda must have looked in comparison. Being fond of fat was dangerous in a world where so many preds were eager to turn you into pudge, though.

“I let him rub my belly, told him how wonderful it felt,” Liam said, reenacting the event with his own paws. “Told him how I'd love for him to help make it bigger.”

Raf hated how audible Greg's cries for help were. He didn't necessarily care much for the guy—and was genuinely thankful to not be tutoring him anymore—but hearing the wolf's final moments struck a nerve. Especially since he swore he could hear his name being shouted occasionally.

Liam let out a short, wet belch, his stomach constricting slightly around Greg and making the prey's bulges a little more distinct. “Seriously, I've said that line to so many meals right before I eat them, and they never catch on! I swear some people just don't have any survival instincts whatsoever.” He shook his belly rather aggressively, giggling as the wolf was tossed around. “They really are better off being turned into fat.”

Raf glanced down the street, hoping to see the approaching lights of the bus. Nothing.

“How does it feel, Greg, knowing that over the next few hours my stomach's gonna churn you into a thick soup and give me a fancy new layer of fat?” Liam taunted his meal, feeling the struggles diminish. “Kind of a shame I'll end up shedding those pounds soon. You won't have much time to enjoy being belly fat.”

The rainfall slowed back down to a drizzle, and to Raf's relief the bright headlights of a bus finally came into view.

Liam, meanwhile, had retrieved a carefully hidden phone, the sticker-coated cover of which Raf recognized as another gaudy belonging of Greg. The red panda seemed to be thumbing through something, when his eyes suddenly lit up. “Oh Greg, you've got a couple of delectable looking friends! This plump wolf in the picture of you at the water park is making my mouth water. Definitely looking into him once I've slimmed down.”

Raf clearly saw the movement in the red panda's gut pick up at the comment, until a long burp rid Greg of what little air he had left. By then the bus had come to a slow halt before the stop, and Raf eagerly waited for a lone rider to get off before rushing on to escape the rain and annoying pred. Thankfully there weren't many passengers on the bus, and Raf made for the empty seats towards the rear entrance, grumbling as he was forced to slide past the rapidly expanding gut of a snow leopard slurping down a pair of twitching paws. He was already situated once the massive red panda finally lumbered onto the bus.

Liam spotted Raf sitting in the far back and gave him a coy nod. He'd had his fun with the adorable hyena, and went about searching for a potential second course, just in case his stomach started growling before he got home. A slim, oblivious horse sitting close to a window became his unfortunate choice. The red panda waddled down the aisle and squeezed his massive body into the chair besides the horse, catching him by surprise and almost pinning him against the wall. He squirmed a bit but didn't protest the act, obviously concerned he was in danger of becoming a meal and hoping compliance might save him.

Liam turned to the terrified horse and smiled. “Sorry little guy, I forget my own bulk sometimes.”

“N-n-no worries, I've got enough space, I'm fine!” the horse said, nervously.

“Oh, good, good. Don't want you feeling uncomfortable, especially if the rain or traffic makes the ride last longer.” Liam gave his now-still gut a gentle pat. “Hopefully that doesn't happen, though. Wouldn't want to get hungry again before I reach home.”

The horse slunk as far into his seat as he could, trembling. The bus finally lurched forwards as it continued onwards to the next stop, the driver sighing as he overheard dispatch warning of a collision further along the route that might cause delays...