

How Big Is Your Love Like

The hustle and bustle of the streets of Ōsaki played like a peaceful white noise-***COUGH***-at least it did. In the flow of commuters, a certain hyena was making his way to work, stumbling every now and then to have another coughing fit. It had been a week since leaving the hospital, and Haida's cough had still not gone away.

"Ugh, man...I thought laying in a hospital bed hacking the entire time was bad, now I have to cough up a lung bean counting." Haida paused for a second to let out a particularly awful cough. "Nngh, maybe it'll get better after a bit. I don't need anyone avoiding me like a plague. Especially Retsuko..." He couldn't help but think back to that afternoon Retsuko visited him—how he dumped out his feelings.

"Maybe I should stop by and get something for her. Something to break the ice and formally ask her out. No more of this, 'Hey, me and Fenneco are going out for drinks, wanna tag along?' stuff"

CLACK

As he passed a dark alley, something in the darkness made a sound that abruptly interrupted his train of thought.

CLACK* *CLACK* *CLACK* *CLACK* *CLACK* *CLACK* *CLACK

He could make out clicking from a pair of wooden blocks being smacked together, getting louder and faster, when a sudden fog started to flow from the alley. "W-what the?? I-is this some kind of prank show or something??" As he looked for any hidden cameras, he practically jumped out of his skin as a lone candle lit within the fog. when the fog lifted, a small, old, cat-woman at what looks like a makeshift market stand appeared. She put down a pair of wood blocks to reach under the counter. A tape being put into a player could be heard, and she turned it on to play the sound of a man yelling, like you would hear in some kabuki production. After a minute of awkward silence, the woman finally spoke.

"I sense that you seek something...or someone~"

Haida could only look on in confusion, thinking that walking away as fast as possible would probably be the best option. "No thanks! I'm good!" he yelled with an awkward laugh, turning his heel ready to bolt it down the sidewalk. Before he could take a step, however, the woman interjected.

"You won't get her with just flowers and candy!"

The gears in his head quickly stopped, his mind now thinking that there was no harm in seeing what she could've had. With a sigh, Haida turned back and walked into the alley. "Alright, what could you have that's better?"

"I'm glad you asked~ My exotics are only of the highest-" the smoke machine the woman had tucked into a corner cut on again, refilling the alley with fog, causing Haida to go into a fit of hacking. The woman jumped to turn it off before going back to her pitch. "My apologies. As I was saying, my exotics are only of the highest quality, and I can guarantee you that I have something to help you. This!~" She raised up a small bottle of glistening, rose-tinted liquid-glistening because she was shining a flashlight into it, the amount of natural light in the alley being short of nonexistent.

Haida's eyes took on the same artificial glint as he looked at the bottle with curiosity and slight wonder. "What does it do?"

“This nectar will do nothing more than show the person you care for how *big* your love for them is~”

Haida choked a little at that, “W-wait! Let’s not quite go there yet, we still haven’t even gone on a date!”

“Uh huh, whatever, how much you like them. The price is ¥2,000, take it or leave it.”

“I don’t know...”

“It can also help with your cough.”

Haida clopped down the sidewalk, fiddling with the mysterious bottle. “I can’t believe I actually bought this. It’s probably just cough syrup.” In the distance he could see the office and before his dread could improve, he began coughing again. “Well, cough syrup’s better than nothing...” Twisting off the topper, Haida tilted back the liquid, tasting strong of cherry and thick like syrup, which helped to coat his throat. “Huh! That actually feels like it helped. No more hacking for me!” With his cough now seemingly cured, he happily trudged along, seeing some of his other coworkers coming in to work, as well as Retsuko!

He immediately had a stomach full of butterflies as soon as he saw her, the butterflies getting worse when he realized that he still had no gift or surprise for Retsuko! Tried as he might to calm himself down, he could not ease his stomach. Stifling a burp, he began to worry that he could actually be getting sick from nerves.

The closer he got to the office, the more nauseous he began to feel, so much so that he had to pause and catch his breath. He did not know why, but he began to feel constricted by his clothes. Stopping another burp from coming out, he began to think this might just be a severe bout of gas. With that possibility in mind, he felt there was only one way to help it. Looking around to make sure no one was within earshot, he considered it safe enough to get some relief. As soon as he felt the gas bubble rear itself again, he let it loose with a cacophonous belch.

“Aaah~ That’s much better.” ***ping*** Haida’s eat perked at the sudden sound. As he tried to pinpoint the sound’s origin, he realized that his stomach still had a bloated feeling. In fact, it was getting worse. He looked down just in time to see what caused the sound, because right then a button popped off of his shirt. It took another second, however, for him to realize that his stomach was now the size of a beachball!

“W-what the?? What’s happening???” His paws flew to his belly finding it unbelievable that it has grown to this size. Even more shocking was that he could still feel it growing. ***ping*** Watching another button fly off sent him into a panic which worsened as his belt popped along with his pants button. He tried desperately to push at his belly, hoping it would make it go down. “Nooooo, nononononono! T-this can’t be happening!”

“Mister? Are you okay?”

The small voice was enough to distract him from his belly, which was quickly growing past yoga ball size, and he finally noticed that a kid had been standing there for who knows how long. There was also a crowd behind that kid; a big crowd, most with their phones out...taking pictures!

Haida jumped up to run, but quickly lost his balance as he found himself lighter than usual. Slowly, he fell forward and landed on his belly with a hollow thump. Rather than stay on the ground, though, gravity lost its hold on the growing hyena, and he began to fly into the air like a helium filled balloon.

"I-I can't get back down!! Help!!!" As Haida rose higher in the air, turning listlessly, he was able to catch a glimpse of the crowd underneath them, looking as if they are doing their least to actually get help for him. His slow turn continued and he could see himself in the office windows. He had to be at least close to ten feet wide. Luckily, his growth seemed to have stopped, but it does not seem he will be able to get down any time soon. With a groan, all he could do is resign himself to his fate and hope that it's only temporary.

HRRK

Haida was suddenly choked when something suddenly got a hold of his tie. Looking down it, he could see a paw gripping it tightly. Following the paw, he could see that it was none other than Retsuko.

"Oh, hey Retsuko...RETSUKO??" Haida started to flail helplessly trying to get away as if floating aimlessly would be better than being held close to the building where it would be easier to help him. A stream of words began to pour out of his mouth that the author could not be bothered to transcribe as they were too fast for even him to process, but luckily for both Haida and the author, the stream was quickly interrupted.

"Haida?"

"-Uh...yes?"

"What happened?"

After a second to collect himself, Haida took a deep breath and recounted the events that happened before he came up to the office: the mysterious woman, the mysterious bottle, and the mysterious situation he found himself in.

"So...that cough syrup shows how much you like me?"

Haida choked a little, a furious, red blush peeking through his fur as he began to stammer, "W-w-well, I-I mean, I guess?? I-It could j-just be an allergic r-reaction, you know, o-or maybe some new supervillain that w-we don't know about, or-"

"You must like me a lot, huh?" Retsuko said with a beaming grin.

"Uh...I mean, yes! Y-yes, I do."

"Then let's try it!"

Haida blinked in confusion. "T-try what??"

"Going on a date!"

Something clicked in Haida's mind. At that moment, all thoughts of embarrassment about being blown up big and round went out the window as a romantic symphony played in reverie within his head.

"The woman did have a point though."

The symphony died down to a stop as Haida came back to reality, and he looked at Retsuko questioningly.

"I actually don't care much for flowers, candy, or stuff like that...I actually prefer balloons!"

THE END