

A Weight Off Your Shoulders

A plus-sized piece of Zootopia apocrypha.

The air hung warm and humid in the enclosed courtyard of Mystic Springs Oasis, Sahara Square, Zootopia. The lush greenery echoed to the happy sounds of yoga, deep breathing, meditation and water-sports. Chief Bogo *hated* water-sports. He hated the whole airy-fairy ethos of Mystic Springs. Clad stubbornly in his full ZPD uniform (whilst everyone else visible had three palm leaves and a clamshell between them), the burly buffalo's hooves echoed resoundingly on the tiles of the enclosed walkway surrounding the naturist club's arabesque courtyard. He particularly hated the fact that *he* was here amongst it all. Especially because he wasn't here on police business. Technically, this was his lunch break- the first he'd not had at his desk in over a month, probably. Or was it longer? Who cared- there was *always* more work to do.

Following the directions from the stoned-seeming yak at the front desk- the Chief had just been itching to book him for *something*- he reached an open doorway... and hesitated. The buffalo took a couple of deep, shirt-stretching breaths, visibly steeling himself. He *could* do this. With great reluctance, he ducked inside.

Compared to the steamy antics outside, the atmosphere inside was surprisingly cool and tranquil. The Chief wasn't buying it for one minute. The I-shaped room was like a cross between some oriental temple and a health spa. The walls were smooth blocks of dressed stone, and at the far end a fountain bubbled irritatingly. In the antechamber- the top of the 'I'- were a couple of old-fashioned lockers, with benches in front of them that wouldn't have been out of place in the old Zootopia Police Academy gymnasium. Pride of place was given to a huge raised marble slab down the stem of the room, sitting at waist-height. The Chief eyed it balefully.

"You must be my next appointment. Yer late."

The voice came from behind, without warning. Trapped, the Chief spun around to face the intruder, instinctively reaching for his tranquiliser gun. His hand paused half-way as his eyes assessed the scene, and his jaw fell open slightly. Filling the doorway to the chamber was a rhino, dressed casually in cut-off jeans, flip-flops and a white T-shirt. Now, Bogo was used

to working with rhinos, so ‘big’ animals didn’t phase him in the slightest, but *this* guy was a scale-crushing behemoth! He made Officer Clawhauser look like a stick of celery. Forget ‘burly’ or ‘solidly built’, he was an out-and-out lardball. The obese beast’s gut filled his frame to make him as wide as he was tall, and his neck had almost vanished into his bloated shoulders and rolling chest, which stretched that tentlike T-shirt out taut over them. A thick roll of bare belly hung out from under the strained hem of the garment. The pachyderm’s pneumatic proportions made even a rhino’s horns look stubby, his snout preternaturally foreshortened by the plumpness of his features and the flabby double-chin that merged seamlessly with his cheeks. His arms and legs were doughy hams- hams? whole hogs, more like- and as he pushed brusquely past the buffalo, who was still staring slack-jawed, the rhino’s gait had a lumbering quality that only just fell short of being a full-blown waddle. You can imagine how tight those ragged jeans were around his rear. Despite this, he carried himself with complete indifference to his shamefully excessive size.

The Chief got a grip on himself, and his truculent scowl returned. He forced his gun hand away from his holster.

“*You’re* the masseur?” He didn’t even try to keep the disdain out of his voice. He’d been expecting someone who looked after their body, not this... pachyderm porker.

“No wonder yer in the police, with powers of deduction like *that*,” the rhino replied sarcastically. Bogo’s nostrils flared, but he kept a lid on his temper- it took some doing. He brandished the appointment chit he’d brought with him like it was a charge sheet.

“I’m-”

“I know why yer here.” The rhino’s voice was deep and resonantly authoritative- almost more so than Bogo’s own- and he spoke with a faint but noticeable brogue over his downtown accent. “Yer doc *ordered* you to come here for some physiotherapy.” He interlocked his sausage-like fingers and cracked them for emphasis. “Sore neck and shoulders, right?” he continued in a more business-like tone. Slightly mollified at this promising sign of professionalism, the Chief nodded reluctantly.

“It’s just a twinge sometimes- probably just a sprain or-”

“Get yer clothes off,” the rhino interrupted him brusquely- actually interrupted him!- “and get on my slab.” He pointed peremptorily at the marble. When he met the buffalo’s apocalyptically affronted stare, he actually grinned. “Tell you what- if yer shy I’ll let you keep yer pants on.”

Chief Bogo's hands clenched and unclenched at his sides in barely-controlled fury. The... *nerve!* He was used to getting respect. He *demande*d respect.

"Do you *know* who I-?"

"I know who you are alright," the rhino said sardonically, "and it don't make the slightest difference to me, y'hear? Yer here because you wanted the best in town, and that's me, like it or not." He grinned again, evilly. "I ain't even decided if I'm taking you on yet, not until I've had a proper look at you."

With an effort Bogo gritted his teeth and bit down on his instinct to bawl out this big-mouthed, bad-mannered blob. The act of doing so sent shooting pains up the back of his neck again, making him grimace. He folded his arms across his chest and glowered at the rhino in silence. The rhino copied his stance exactly, and they faced off against one another. For once, Bogo came off worst.

"You want to walk back out that door, tough-guy, go right ahead." The rhino gestured dismissively. "It don't matter to me one way or the other. But *don't* waste my time- I've got plenty of folks needing my help."

"...Alright." Another twinge of pain convinced him. He couldn't afford to be (ha ha) stiff-necked over this. That didn't mean he had to *like* it, though.

"Then strip." The rhino fixed him with an impatient look. "Now."

With extreme reluctance, Bogo unbuttoned his shirt from the top down, slid it off his broad shoulders and carefully folded it on one of the benches. Then came his black under-vest. Finally he unclipped his utility belt and laid it on top, too, then turned to face the rhino, feeling almost more naked without his badge than if he'd taken his trousers off. That said, the bare-chested buffalo couldn't help but make a favourable comparison between the two of them. *He* at least took care of himself...

"I ain't got all day, you puny li'l shrimp," the rhino commented. Bogo's molars clenched. The rhino smirked. "If you grind yer teeth like that, it's no wonder yer neck's hurting."

Hating himself every step of the way- and hating this rhino even more- Bogo approached the marble and gingerly laid himself face-down on top of it, as though getting onto a bed of nails. The stone was cold and slick against his grey hide, making him suck in an involuntary breath and stiffen his back, abs clenching. With a certain amount of pride he registered that his shoulders were wide enough that, if he didn't take care, one arm or the other would hang over the side of the marble-

A hand *smacked* the seat of his pants out of nowhere. With a startled- and embarrassingly high-pitched- bellow of surprise, he nearly jumped through the roof, before he fell smack onto the marble again, gasping like a landed fish.

"Just getting you to loosen up," the rhino commented none-too-innocently as Bogo twisted to glower furiously over his shoulder, painfully aware of how his cheeks were burning with embarrassment. "Geeze, yer more uptight than my underwear."

That *tore* it. Spluttering with incoherent rage, Bogo struggled to rise from the table and storm out of here. But a weight like a wrecking ball suddenly pressed onto his back, squashing him down onto the slab, leaving him wheezing for breath through his mouth, one cheek hard against the cold stone. He was just able to see the rhino looming over him, that enormous balloon of a belly laying on top of him like a lead weight! Talk about adding insult to injury!

"What's yer rush- you just hear a crime being committed or something?" If anything the sarcasm made it worse- like a red rag to a... buffalo. Bogo got his hands under him and tried to *heave* himself upright, but the effort left him gasping, without moving him an inch. He was pinned like an insect! Snorting, muscles quivering, the buffalo tried another furious heave, but just then thick, stubby fingers stabbed into the muscles either side of his neck, and flexed. Bogo let out an involuntary groan, a shiver spasming down his entire body. He sank against the marble, panting, suddenly helplessly limp. "Hmph," the rhino commented disdainfully, as though there was nothing unusual about this whole situation. "Thought so- yer shoulders are hard as iron. No wonder yer neck's hurting."

The hands moved, pressed again, and fireworks went off somewhere behind the Chief's eyes.

"*Unghh...*" Was that *him*? The weight on top of him squeezed down more.

“Let’s just get something straight,” the rhino’s voice said in a calm, conversational tone. There were sticky-sounding noises in the background. With difficulty Bogo managed to glance up for a moment, and saw the rhino rubbing his porky hands together supplely, oil glistening on them. Then those fat fingers seemed to stab right through his shoulder muscles, and left them quivering. Surprisingly strong, those chubby digits began to knead, hard. “On my slab, *I’m* the boss. You ain’t Chief of no Police here, you hear me Bogo? Yer just a hunk of meat. In fact...” the rhino shifted his weight as his hands slid to a new position, and the enormous pressure of his belly rolled up from the small of the buffalo’s back to compress his chest, making him gasp, “you ain’t even gonna be ‘Bogo’ to me- from now on yer just plain ‘Bo’. Y’got that, Bo?”

Bogo tried to answer the bigmouthed beast back, but for the moment he couldn’t summon the breath, and then the rhino put his shoulders into what felt like a judo hold. More fireworks.

Pinned beneath that boulder of a belly, all he could do was grimace and groan as the rhino gave him a pummelling that at times felt more like he was being beaten up. His arms were nearly wrenched out of their sockets and his neck was twisted this way and that, the rhino making the occasional ‘tsk’ by way of commentary. He was sure he heard his spine go ‘crunch’ at least a couple of times. It felt absolutely excruciating... and then suddenly it wasn’t anymore. A deep, blissfully warm numbness started to seep through his upper body from the inside out, and for the first time since he-couldn’t-remember-when, he felt his shoulder muscles unlock. A deep, low groan escaped him. His grizzled chin thunked against the marble, and his arms dangled limply. He dimly heard a snort from above.

“Now we’re starting to get somewhere, Bo...” The pummelling continued, hands jabbing and kneading into his back with an astonishingly firm and assured touch, whilst all the time there was the weight of that belly holding him down, rippling up and down his spine. He felt like a lizard being squashed under a tractor tyre, or a piece of pastry being rolled out. His body started to feel so numb he wondered if he was having an out-of-body experience. Or maybe this was paralysis. Then, abruptly, the pressure disappeared, and it all stopped.

“...Hrnn?” he croaked, eventually.

“Time’s up, Bo,” the rhino said gruffly. “Get off my slab.” A couple of smacking sounds suggested he was wiping his hands clean on his own t-shirt. The lazy slob, Bogo thought woozily. He tried to sit up, but his body barely twitched in response.

“Ughh...” A deep ache spread across his back and shoulders, and it felt like his flesh had been turned to jelly and poured back into shape. On the third try he got his arms to obey him- it felt like he’d had to push both shoulders back into their sockets. He levered himself up, arms shaking as he did so- he’d been less wrung out after seeing action as part of a riot squad! Finally he got himself upright and sat on the edge of the slab, his body feeling like a sack of mouldy onions. He could barely lift his head! When he did so, he saw the rhino at the far end of the room at a messy workstation half tucked out of view in one nook of the I, modern computer and all. The rhino glanced up- Bogo got some satisfaction that he’d put on a pair of reading glasses.

“You can put yer clothes back on too, if you feel like it.”

By the time the rhino lumbered back towards him, Bogo was feeling strong enough to risk standing. And his neck... felt good! He just had to contend with the *rest* of him aching, instead.

“...I guess you *do* know your stuff,” the Chief conceded grudgingly, rubbing the back of his neck gingerly. He could be fair. “Thanks for that.”

“Uh-uh,” the rhino contradicted him baldly, “I ain’t done with you yet by a long chalk.” He stood, flip-flopped feet akimbo and chubby arms folded across his bloated chest. The Chief blinked, nonplussed. “Yer in a shocking state, Bo- it’s gonna take *weeks* for me to straighten you out.” Bogo felt his habitual scowl returning, making creases in his forehead. Pushing past the rhino, he stomped to his precisely folded clothes, and started to struggle back into them.

“I feel *fine*.”

“It ain’t yer muscles that’re causing the problem. It’s yer *head*- yer stressed, Bo.”

“I am *not* stressed!” the buffalo insisted as his head popped through the neck of his vest.

Perhaps he said it more vehemently than he’d intended, but he could feel his fuse starting to shorten already.

“*Sure* yer not.” Bogo glared defensively at the rhino, who was giving him an ironic Look. The rotund rhino snorted. “Yer wound tighter than a spring- it’s a wonder yer head hasn’t popped like a cork.” He shook his head in dissatisfaction. “A bit of physiotherapy just ain’t gonna cut it- you need something more.” He abruptly shoved a sheaf of printout at the Chief.

“I’ve set up weekly appointments for you. In the meantime,” he snorted, “I’m gonna get you to *relax* some. And with yer stubborn, uptight attitude, *that’s* gonna be the tough part.”

Half-dressed, the Chief’s temper finally erupted.

“I don’t *need*-!”

“Yes, you *do*,” the rhino cut across him brutally, taking Bogo aback. “Whether your ego can take it or not, you need my help, Bo.” The rhino thrust the paperwork at the Chief again. “Or yer gonna be stuck with a sore neck forever- I ain’t wasting my time if yer not prepared to help yerself.” He folded his arms again, facing Bogo down. Fuming, the buffalo cavilled at this high-handed approach, then reluctantly took hold of the paperwork. Hands still trembling a little, he struggled to finish buttoning his shirt, but when he finally got them done up, he felt more like his old self. And, to be fair, his neck *was* feeling a hell of a lot better.

“So I guess this means you *are* taking me on?” he grunted sarcastically as he fastened his belt. It wasn’t a great comeback, but the best he could manage under the circumstances. The rhino snorted with amusement.

“Call it my civic duty, ‘Chief’.” Unexpectedly he thrust out a hand. “The name’s Budweiser, since you didn’t ask, but I guess you can call me Bud, anyhow.”

Bogo blinked, but was reluctantly compelled to shake hands- the rhino had obviously washed his sometime after finishing with him, it was clean and dry to the touch.

“Nice to have met you, Bud. But now I’ve got to get back to work.” The paperwork would be piling up.

“And I’ve got other clients waitin’ on me. But I’m gonna prepare something for you later this afternoon- I’ll send it round to yer office.”

“What?” Bogo asked, his suspicions immediately aroused.

“A sleep tape.”

“*What?*” This time the crime-busting buffalo’s tone was incredulous.

“I’m serious,” Bud said with a wry smile. “It’s gonna help you to relax. I’ve tried them with tough cases like this before- they work.” The rhino’s expression hardened. “Yer gonna give it a shot, too.” Bud’s tone of voice brooked absolutely no argument. The Chief snorted, half amused, half irascible.

“And if I *don’t*?”

“Then don’t bother coming back.” The rhino abruptly turned away and lumbered to his computer, the Chief utterly dismissed. The buffalo stared hard after him for a moment, then left without another word.

Back at his office, Bogo spent the afternoon slumped in his chair, every muscle in his back still tingling. He had to admit, despite his complete and utter prior scepticism he did feel better for the massage. But the rhino’s attitude had really got up his nose- he wasn’t sure if he could put up with it much longer- another three minutes felt like it would be pushing it. Besides, his neck felt *fine*, now.

However, after a long afternoon of paperwork he began to feel his tension headache returning already. He took off his reading glasses and rubbed his tired eyes. As he leaned forward, his neck gave a familiar, unwelcome twinge.

“Damnit!” he growled. His office phone rang, and he stabbed the ‘speaker’ button.

“*WHAT?!*”

“*Uhh... Ch-Chief?*” Clawhauser on front desk. “*Is th-this a bad time?*” Bogo took a deep breath, a mental image of that damned rhino suddenly smirking at him. Stressed, you...? He forced his voice to a calmer volume.

“No. What is it, Clawhauser?”

“*Someone just dropped a package off for you, Chief. From... Mystic Springs Oasis?*” Even over the phone the chubsome cheetah sounded perplexed. “*On second thoughts, it has to be a mistake or something- I’ll get it sent straight back. Sorry to have bothered you.*”

Bogo’s shoulders slumped, his humiliation for the day nothing less than complete.

“...No, I was expecting it.” He’d half-forgotten about it, half-hoped it wouldn’t arrive. “I’ll pick it up on my way out the door this evening.”

“...*Ok, Chief.*” If anything, Clawhauser sounded even more bewildered.

“And don’t tell *anyone* about it!” he rasped irritably. That Gazelle incident had been bad enough.

“*Yes, Chief. I mean- n-no, Chief.*” The phone clicked off hurriedly. The burly buffalo sighed, slumped in his chair and drummed his finger-hoof tips on his desk- ok, maybe he *could* use a little help to relax....

He took the delivery home without opening it- at least that way it was an anonymous envelope, even if the Mystic Springs logo was embarrassingly obvious, and it smelled of flower-water or something equally cissy. Safely back at his apartment, he teased the flap open, and a ZooPod Hummingbird fell out into his palm, headphones and all. Despite himself, he was grudgingly impressed. Some sleep-tape. He turned it over, and found a post-it note stuck to the underside. It read 'Use me, Bo!', in thick felt tip. 'Use me' was underlined twice. Crumpling the flimsy note, Bogo's lips pressed together, and he tried not to grind his teeth. He was going to have Words with that rhino... Bud, wasn't it...? about that demeaning little nickname...

After a long, hot shower he finally began to feel better. Actually, quite a lot better. The afterglow from that massage seemed to be kicking in again. He worked his shoulders one after the other as he stumbled out of the bathroom, towel still around his waist. He paused in front of the full-length mirror he used for dressing in the mornings- as Chief, his appearance was important. He turned and glanced backwards at his reflected shoulders, half-expecting to see hand-shaped bruises through the fur. He turned back and surveyed himself, smacking a hand to his taut midriff above the towel. He allowed himself a grunt of satisfaction- still rock hard around the middle. Still keeping trim. Especially compared to some- how a physiotherapist had let himself balloon into such a total, unashamed barrage balloon... well, that was beyond him. He allowed himself a superior quirk of the lips at the comparison.

After a light supper, Bogo felt just about ready for bed. More than ready, actually- being nearly twisted in half seemed to have really taken it out of him. He was struggling to keep his eyes open this evening. A huge yawn took him by surprise, and made his jaw creak. Oof, maybe an early night wouldn't be a bad thing... The ZooPod was sitting on the nightstand by his bed, where he'd dismissively chucked it earlier. Bogo picked it up again, reluctantly. But he might as well give it a try- he could always give up if it turned out to be completely useless- as he strongly suspected it would. Sitting on the edge of the bed, the buffalo pushed the earbuds into place, then brought up the little device's menu. There was only one option in the memory. He hit 'play'.

"Bo, don't you dare skip forward through this to try gettin' a preview."

The startled buffalo almost dropped the ZooPod, then felt a wry smile twisting the corners of his mouth. Ok, he *had* been intending to skim through it, just quickly. The rhino's gruff, burly voice continued in his ears.

"This stuff works through yer subconscious, so if you listen to it while yer awake, it'll be useless. So leave it running, and just go to sleep, y'hear me? Go to sleep. You've got about three hours of nothing to look forward to."

The voice fell silent. Squinting at the controls- he'd already put his glasses away- Bogo found the file was still running- it was over six hours long. No wonder there was only the one. He nearly turned the whole thing off in exasperation, but as sat back abruptly a dull ache blossomed between his shoulderblades, like the ghost of pain. Argh... enough was enough, he was willing to try anything at this stage. Oh, 'Try anything'... ha ha. Resignedly, Bogo dropped the little music-player onto the nightstand, laid back, and tried to make himself comfortable. In fact, he forgot the earbuds were there pretty much immediately, and they muffled the otherwise distracting sounds of the street outside. Kind of like wearing sound-deadening earplugs, he guessed... Lulled by the warm shower and the residual benefits of that massage, the bushed buffalo fell asleep in under half an hour.

Two hours and twenty-five minutes later, the silence in his ears gave way to the quiet sounds of an African night. Insects chirping, the occasional rumble of thunder, the sound of light rain. Bogo stirred uneasily in his sleep, but the rhythmic, natural sounds continued and, like an audio-hypnotic, gradually sunk him into deeper, slow-wave sleep. In the dreamless depths, Bogo's unconscious mind relaxed further.

Over the sounds of nature, a voice began to talk, just enough to be audible, but not enough to awaken.

"Bo, are you listening?" Bogo's brow furrowed slightly. *"Listen up, Bo."* Bogo's frown deepened. *"You need to relax, Bo. Just... relax."* The buffalo's frown slowly faded.

"That's it. Relax. Trust me, Bo. Relax. Listen to my voice, Bo. Do what you're told, and relax. Bo, you need to relax..."

The voice continued softly, repeating itself over and over again, whispering through the comatose buffalo's ears, bypassing his conscious brain but registering somewhere else, somewhere more primitive. Bogo stirred, but didn't wake. Slowly, the remaining tension in his body faded away.

"Relax, Bo. That's it. Relax, and do what you're told. Listen to me Bo, and trust me. You need to relax. Just relax. That's it. Listen to my voice, and do what you're told, Bo. Relax, Bo, and do what you're told..."

After two hours the whispering stopped, leaving only the peaceful, familiar sounds of nature playing on in the dead of night. Then those finally faded down, letting the far less peaceful, urban Zootopian night back in, sometime before dawn. By the time the Chief's alarm woke him for work early the next morning, the ZooPod had already switched itself off.

* * *

A week later, and Bogo really wasn't feeling the benefit. He'd given Bud's stupid 'sleep tape' a fair try, but he was convinced it was a load of bull- he certainly didn't remember anything about it in the mornings, and he didn't feel any calmer. In fact, after a couple of particularly stressful days in ZPD his neck was aching as much as before. So much for being more relaxed- he'd not even had time for lunch! Just then, his office phone rang.

"Bogo," he answered it tersely.

"Chief?" Clawhauser was on front desk again. *"There's a call for you."*

"Who is it?"

"Mystic Springs Oasis." Bogo blinked in surprise.

"Put it through." There was a click as the call was transferred. "Chief Bogo speaking," he said.

"This is Bud, 'Chief'," a familiar voice growled cheerfully down the phone. Bogo felt his scowl deepening- it sounded like the rhino was only just refraining from openly sniggering.

"Just wanted to make sure that you ain't forgotten yer due for yer physiotherapy. Yer gonna need to leave soon if yer gonna make it on time."

"I'm not *going* to make it," Bogo snorted testily. His schedule was just too full for that kind of time-out today. "I'm busy."

“...*Yer neck’s miraculously gone and got itself better then, all of a sudden?*” The rhino’s voice asked caustically, after a deliberate pause. The Chief felt his jaws clench.

“I don’t have *time* for-”

“*You’ve gotta make time, Bo. Remember, you’re supposed to relax.*” Bogo nearly laughed down the phone at him.

“I’m the Chief of ZPD! I can’t just-”

“*Bo, are you listening to me? You ARE gonna show up here, y’hear me Bo?*”

“I...” The Chief’s argument stalled in his throat. His head seemed to spin momentarily- oof, maybe he shouldn’t have skipped lunch...

“*Listen up, Bo.*” Bogo realised he was still holding the receiver. The rhino’s voice was uncompromising. It seemed to boom in his ears. “*You’ve got an appointment, Bo. Don’t be late.*” The line clicked off abruptly, and the dialing tone whined in his ear.

The Chief blinked and leadenly replaced the phone, his fingers oddly numb, then sank back in his chair. The buffalo stared blankly into space for a moment, then shook his head abruptly to clear it. He let out an irascible snort. The nerve of that... that fat oaf, ordering *him* about like that! Well, he knew where he could stuff that appointment of his. Bogo deliberately returned to the urgent case files he’d been working on...

“So you could make it after all,” Bud smirked, overflowing the office chair in front of his computer. He swung slowly around to face the door, and pointedly checked his watch. “And you got here on time, too.”

Bogo ground his teeth. It had been no good, that phone call had just kept nagging at him- he couldn’t concentrate on anything else. Besides, his neck *was* throbbing today... he really could do with that massage. He’d ignored the odd look Clawhauser had given him when he’d left- if *he* wasn’t allowed to take a lunch-break, then who in ZPD was?

It turned out the rotund rhino was still polishing off *his* lunch- he had a bag of doughnuts open, and was devouring one in greedy, cheek-bulging bites. No wonder he was the appalling size he was.

“Hungry? I saved you one,” the rhino proffered the paper bag, obviously misinterpreting the buffalo’s fixed stare.

“I don’t like doughnuts,” Bogo declined it shortly. Bud raised an eyebrow, his ears cocked. “A cop who doesn’t like doughnuts?” The rhino’s tone was sardonic. “What, were you bullied at school for being fat?” The buffalo just folded his arms across his powerful chest, and glared. Bud snorted, visibly unimpressed. He took out the last doughnut and bit into it, custard bursting from the far end. “On second thoughts, yer probably a fruit pastry kinda guy. All those flaky layers, and loads of cream. Or do you like those dinky little cakes with the pretty icing on?” If anything Bogo’s silence became even stonier. The rhino smirked as he popped the last of the doughnut between his lips. “You really *are* a stubborn ox, aren’t ya Bo?”

“*Don’t* call me that,” the Chief rumbled ominously.

“My slab, my rules,” Bud said, unrepentant. He sucked his chubby fingers clean and hauled himself heavily to his feet. “Did you bring yer sleep tape with you?” Bogo brandished Exhibit A.

“It was a complete waste of time,” he snorted, not without some satisfaction. “Didn’t do a *thing* for me.”

“I’ll be the judge of that, once I’ve had a look at you,” Bud disagreed calmly as he took the ZooPod from the Chief. “Speaking of which, get that shirt off. Yer here for a massage, not a fashion parade.” He turned and stomped back to his computer, leaving Bogo glaring at his wide back before he reluctantly complied.

Leaning over his workstation, belly dangling voluminously against the desk, the rhino plugged the little music device into the computer and clicked a few icons.

“How’ve you been sleeping?”

“...Ok, I guess,” Bogo admitted grudgingly.

“You dreaming any?”

“Gee, not that I can remember,” the Chief replied in an acidly sing-song tone, making it clear what he thought of this line of questioning. As his head popped out from under his vest, he found the rhino grinning at him.

“Finally, a sense of humour. That sleep tape’s doin’ *some* good, then. And it’s even cleared up a few of those dark bags under your eyes.”

There was a long, dangerous silence.

“...You’ve got a bad attitude,” Bogo growled eventually.

“But I get results,” Bud commented with a smirk, lumbering over to the massage table. He tapped it with a fat hand, and looked pointedly at the Chief. “What’re you waiting for, backup?” With an aggravated snort, the bare-chested buffalo finally stomped over and laid himself on the marble. Propped on one elbow, he reached back and tapped his neck, skewering the rhino with a volcanic glare that would have had the whole of ZPD cowering under their desks.

“Stop talking, Wise-Guy, and just. FIX. This.”

A large hand pressed suddenly on the small of his back, forcing him down flat against the cold marble. He wheezed as a weather-balloon full of chocolate pudding landed heavily on top of him. Deliberately heavily.

“Oh, don’t you worry,” Bud’s voice commented, accompanied by the sound of cracking knuckles, “By the time I’m done with you, you’re gonna feel like a whooooole new buffalo.” His hands closed on Bogo’s shoulders, and squeezed.

“Gngghh!” The Chief’s eyes crossed.

“Geeze, Bo, we’re right back where you started, ain’t we?” Through the fireworks, he heard the rhino tut. “This time, I’m gonna have to *really* put my back into it...” Before Bogo could protest, Bud did just that.

“You been eating right, Bo?” Shirt still only partly re-buttoned after his steamrollering-sorry, massage- Bogo stopped in his tracks and half-turned to glare at the rhino.

“What’s *that* got to do with anything?” His glare lacked its usual force- he was still feeling too weak for that. His shoulders were aching like someone had pulled them off, tied them in a knot and then shoved them back on. But, weirdly, in a good way.

“I’m betting you skipped lunch.” Bud was leaning over his workstation again, overblown bare bellyflesh disgustingly on display, the computer’s mouse clamped in one bloated mitt. Bogo gave a non-committal grunt, and resumed buttoning up. When he’d finished he glanced back, to find the rhino watching him again. “Bad habits, Bo,” he said. “You’ve got a whole load of them.” He tutted in a way the Chief found particularly galling. “I’m gonna have my work cut out with you, and no mistake.” Turning back to the desk, Bud undocked the ZooPod with a forcible tug. Then, without looking round, he held out a fat hand, palm up. “Gimme your phone.”

“...*What?*”

“Your phone, genius.” Still bent over his desk, he gestured with his hand again, less patiently. The Chief snorted and crossed his arms, half amused, half infuriated.

“There’s no way in hell I’m-”

“Bo, do as yer told, and hand it over.”

Bogo blinked as the rhino took his phone from his suddenly outstretched hand.

“Don’t worry,” Bud said sardonically as the Chief opened his mouth and made to grab it back, “I ain’t gonna hurt it.”

Bogo closed his mouth again as the rhino plugged his phone into the computer.

“I’m giving you a new playlist to listen to.” A couple of swipes and the upload progress bar began to fill. “It’s to help you to unwind.” He unplugged the phone and abruptly thrust it back at Bogo, who nearly dropped it.

“You mean like that *sleep tape* did?” The bewildered buffalo had enough of a grip left to make a snarky comment.

“Sleep therapy ain’t some miracle cure. It takes a while for the results to show.”

Bogo snorted, but he was only half-listening, protectively checking the files on his smartphone. What had he been thinking, just handing it over like that?

“What did you just put on here?” If the rhino had so much as rearranged his Gazelle albums...

“Chopin and Sibelius mostly, bit of Mozart for variety.”

“*Classical* music?!”

“Uh-huh. Piano,” Bud said imperturbably, entirely ignoring Bogo’s ‘you have got to be kidding me!’ expression. “Music has charms to soothe the savage beast, Bo.” He turned around and poked the Chief in the chest, actually driving him back a step. “And yer gonna start *listening* to it, you got that? It’s all part of your treatment.” Again, the Chief found himself with his mouth open, totally unable to think of a decent rebuttal, so he just grunted and shoved the phone safely back in his pocket. He’d see. Then- the final straw- Bud shoved the Zoopod back at him, too. “And we’re gonna carry on with the sleep therapy for a while longer.”

“Like *hell* I’m-”

“I’ve made some tweaks to the program.” The rhino casually ran roughshod over the Chief’s objections. “Let’s see if this loosens you up any better.”

Turning purple, Bogo opened his mouth to tell Bud where to stuff his program- then his phone chirped. ZPD. Must be an urgent case.

“Got to go,” he grunted, then turned and stomped to the door, grabbing his belt on the way.

“Oh, Chief?” Bogo glanced back over his shoulder. The smirking rhino was standing there, holding out the Zoopod. The Chief’s nostrils flared as he ground his teeth, but then he reached back and snatched the little object, stuffing it deep into a pocket. He stormed out, belt in hand, already calling up the precinct for a sit-rep.

That night, as he undressed for bed, the Zoopod fell out of his pocket and landed with a thunk. Bogo picked it up, and scowled. That ruddy rhino was so damned insistent... well, he’d give it one more try. One. He popped the earbuds in, and hit ‘play’.

“You know what to do by now. Get to bed, Bo, yer tired. You need to get a good night’s sleep.”

A huge, unexpected yawn cracked the Chief’s jaws. He blinked, and half-smiled. Geeze, the power of suggestion or what? He blinked again, his eyelids feeling leaden. Still... that dumb rhino had a point...

The Chief was out like a light ten minutes later, the Zoopod still playing. In the dead of night, it started to whisper in his sleeping ears.

“...Sleep deeply, Bo, and relax. That’s it. Take nice, slow, deep breaths for me...”

“... Relax Bo, and do as yer told... Listen up, Bo...”

* * *

Different week, same crud. Behind his desk, Bogo rubbed his eyes and wiped a hand down his scarred snout. No matter how good a night’s sleep he got, he always seemed to be wiped out by lunchtime.

He reached for the phone and dialled an outside line. He’d been putting this off for long enough.

“That Mystic Springs? This is Chief Bogo,” he said, before the irritating yak at the other end could start yakking his metaphysical whoosits. “I need to cancel my appointment today - yes, the one in five minutes!” he barked into the receiver. “And while you’re about it, cancel all of them. I’m through. You got that? Good.”

He thunked the receiver down, and slumped back in his chair. So much for massage. He’d be better off spending the time down the gym, anyway. His workout routine had been slipping lately. He grudgingly put it down to stress- he just couldn’t seem to summon the energy to pump iron with his usual force. Even worse, he’d started snacking- actually *snacking*! That *never* happened. But recently, every time he passed the vending machine in the corridor, he’d had to fight the urge to grab a bite.

...Yer a grazer, Bo. Buffalo’s gotta graze...

Sure, the massages had helped- only a *bit*, mind- but he’d stuck with the sleep tape for two more weeks now- and why exactly had he even bothered doing that?- and as far as he could tell it had had zip all effect on his mood. ‘Give it time, Bo...’ The Chief mentally mimicked the rhino’s excuses, then snorted derisively. He’d given it time.

So why was he still feeling guilty? Why had it been so hard to make that phone call?

Bogo sank further down in his chair, and his scowl turned to a mortified wince as his uniform shirt pulled tight around his stomach. All that snacking was having unwelcome side effects. Ok, so maybe it wasn’t noticeable to anyone- not anyone who’d dared mention it, anyway- but he *felt* bigger. He could feel the way his stomach pressed against the top of his belt as he sat there. Well, that was going to stop, too. Right this minute.

His phone rang. Not the office phone, his phone. Blinking, he fished it out of his pocket and squinted at the screen- his glasses were on the desk... somewhere... in amongst all the paperwork. He didn’t think he recognised the number, despite the blur. He picked up.

“Who is this?”

“*Who do you think, Bo? This is Bud.*” The Chief stiffened in his chair.

“How did you get this number?”

“You gave it to me, don’t you remember?”

“No, I damn well didn’t!”

“Bo? Listen up.” The Chief’s indignant bellow stalled in his throat, and he blinked. He’d been... about to say something, hadn’t he? *“Yer sounding way too stressed to me - I want you to relax.”*

Mouth still ajar, the buffalo slumped slowly back in his office chair. He let out a low grunt. His shoulders were tingling.

“That’s it, Bo. Relax.” Bogo’s shoulders slumped a little further. *“Now, we’re gonna do a deep breathing exercise down the phone. Take a few deep breaths for me, nice and big and slow.”*

“Wh... what...?” The Chief managed.

“C’mon, Bo, lemme hear it. Nice, slow, deep breaths, Bo.”

Bogo breathed in, then out.

“I can’t hear you, Bo!”

The buffalo took a deeper breath, held, then released. Another, even deeper breath, held released.

“Deeper, Bo, deeper. Take a deeeep breath for me.” An even deeper breath... *“And hold...”*

Against his middle, he was dimly aware of a button straining, then pulling loose with a soft ‘pop’ as the thread snapped. The pressure on his uniform eased slightly.

“...And... relax...” His breath came out in a slow, long whoosh, his shoulders sinking limply on his beefy frame. He sat there, his eyes slightly unfocused.

“That’s better. You listening to me, Bo?”

“Uh... huh,” he grunted.

“You ain’t quitting on me, you hear that? You ain’t quitting.”

“I... I...” the buffalo mumbled feebly.

“I’m booking you in for a new slot this evening. Six o’clock. Don’t even think of skipping on me this time. You got that, Bo?”

“I...”

“Tell me you got that.”

“Y-yeah, I got that...”

“Good. Bring yer sleep tape with you. And Bo?”

“Y-yeah?”

“Go down to the cafeteria and get yourself some lunch- you sound awful hungry to me. You ain’t gonna relax right on an empty stomach, Bo. Go fill yourself up good and proper.”

The Chief blinked, and blearily realised that Bud had hung up. He was still holding the phone to his ear. With some effort he brought it down and put it away. Blinking again, he wiped his forehead, and found he was sweating. That... wasn’t right... was it?

Buffalo gotta graze...

Bogo stood shakily up from his desk and headed out of his office. What he needed was some lunch- his stomach felt almost painfully empty. No wonder he couldn’t think straight...

* * *

“Nice to see you made it this week, without me having to come get you.”

Unbuttoning his shirt, the Chief paused and glared over his shoulder. He didn’t want to even think about the fiasco last time. When it became clear the lard-ball rhino wasn’t going to comment further, just stand there smirking in that infuriating way of his, Bogo grudgingly continued to undo his shirt. Taking a deep breath, he slid the shirt off his shoulders, squared them, then turned to face Bud.

Needless to say, it had not been a good week for the Chief. He just couldn’t think what was wrong with him- it was like his body had developed a mind of its own. He’d even skipped his workout altogether once, because he was ‘tired’. What kind of an excuse was that?! He’d never say it, but he was actually grudgingly glad that the persistent pachyderm had talked him out of quitting altogether like that. Today he really was feeling the need for a massage- he even found himself warming a little to Bud’s gruff but straightforward personality.

“What’re you waiting for, Chief, a warrant? Get on that slab, squirt, I ain’t got all day.”

Or maybe someday he was going to *kill* that obnoxious, overbearing, *obese* smart-aleck... *After* he’d fixed his neck. Smouldering impotently, Bogo moved to the masseur’s table, and laid down.

Groggily, the Chief resurfaced in the land of the living. He was draped across the slab, arms hanging out in front of him.

“Unghhh...”

If anything, this felt worse than last time, but weirdly better at the same time. Someone had replaced his iron shoulder muscles with warm butter. His neck, too. Ugh, had he *dribbled* on the slab? As feeling returned, he shakily propped himself up, but then Bud’s hands pressed him back down. It was almost a relief to just lay there.

“I... I really needed that,” he heard himself admit, somewhat to his own surprise.

“You sure did, Bo,” was the rhino’s response. His chubby hands rested on the buffalo’s shoulders, then his thick thumbs slowly rolled up the back of Bogo’s bull-neck. A tremor ran through his entire body. “You get any horn-ache at all?”

“Uhh... no.”

“That’s something, at least. How’re you coming along with that sleep tape? Still using it?”

“Yeah,” the Chief grunted, anvil chin resting flat on the marble, his engrained scowl relaxing enough to permit a wry half-grin. “F’r all the good it’s been doing me.”

“Actually, you ain’t as bad as you were- yer shoulders are down to being hard as wood, rather than battleship armour plating.”

The rhino’s hands slide down to just under Bogo’s shoulderblades and began to squeeze him rhythmically. The Chief let out a low, long grunt that was juuust short of a moo. Then his ears twitched. He raised his head slightly, then snorted in irritation and laid it back down, scowl firmly back in place.

“You ain’t been listening to that music I gave you, though, have you?” Bud commented drily, fingers pressing more firmly. “I told you to give it a try, Bo.”

“I did,” Bogo replied shortly, quashing a sudden stab of guilt. “Not my thing.” It had been a rather brief try, to tell the truth. Music of the same type was now playing in the background through some kind of hidden speaker setup. “Does that *have* to be on?” The rhino’s hands squeezed harder, triggering a deep shudder through his shoulders. “Oooghh...” He heard Bud give a paternal tut.

“These sessions ain’t just about physiotherapy- they’re supposed to be getting you to unwind, Bo.” His hands lifted, leaving the hide they’d just been touching feeling suddenly cold and exposed.

“*Don’t* call me- oooffff...” a by-now almost familiar weight rolled unexpectedly onto his back, albeit with less spine-crushing abruptness than usual.

“Dang,” the rhino’s voice commented. “Yer a tough case, aren’t you? You’ve been coming here over a month and yer *still* tensing up around me.” The Chief felt the enormous pachyderm paunch resting on his back wobble ponderously as the rhino shifted position, then replaced his hands back on Bogo’s shoulders. “So, you stubborn ox, yer just gonna lie there until you get a little used to having this big ole belly o’ mine sitting on top of you.” A gunshot sound followed by another ripple on his back strongly suggested Bud had given his belly a slap. He could hear the grin in the rhino’s voice. “If *this* doesn’t get you to loosen up around me, nothing’s gonna.”

The Chief’s cheeks were burning, even as he started to sweat a little.

“Get... *offa* me, you... you *fat*...”

“Yeah, I’m fat alright.” Bud snorted in good-humoured amusement, but didn’t budge an inch. “I’m a big, FAT rhino. You got a *problem* with fat guys, Bo?” Unseen, his grin became slightly more evil. “Yer worried it might be catching, or something?” The buffalo beneath him struggled stubbornly, but the rhino just leaned forward a little further, letting even more weight rest on him. “Sure comes in handy for keeping puny squirts like *you* in line.” Grinning lazily, he placed his hands on Bogo’s shoulders and leaned forward until his lips were close to his ear. “Bo, *relax!*”

The buffalo let out a grunt, and abruptly stopped struggling. The effect he had, the rhino might as well have hit him hard on the head with a hammer.

“That’s right, Bo,” the rhino continued in the same calm, authoritative voice. “Take a couple of deep breaths for me. Deep, relaxing breaths.”

“Wh... what...?” Bogo managed to croak dazedly.

“Bo, *listen* to me,” Bud chided him gently. “Big, deep breaths, Bo. In...” Beneath him, he felt the buffalo’s chest expand, “...and out.” The buffalo deflated. “In... and out. In... aaand... out...”

The buffalo lay motionless on the slab, breathing slowly, face turned to one side. His eyes were open, but blank, his body completely limp. The rhino’s belly slowly wobbled and rippled atop of him in time with his breathing.

“*That’s* better,” Bud said with some satisfaction over the background music. He very slowly eased his weight off the buffalo, who lay there, unresponsive. “You still listening to me, Bo?”

“Uh... huh,” he got a dreamy-sounding grunt in return.

“Good. Roll over, Bo. Roll onto yer back, and show me that li’l gut you’ve been tryin’ to hide.”

Slowly, mechanically, the buffalo twisted and rolled until he was laying flat on his back atop the slab, looking blankly up at the plain stone ceiling. His chest rose and fell with his breathing, as did his middle. Of those previously rock-hard abs there was now no sign, just a smooth curve of buffalo hide, slightly raised.

“C’mon, Bo,” the rotund rhino tutted. “Stop suckin’ it in.” There was a soft bovine grunt, and that buffalo hide rose a couple of inches more, now pooching against the waistband of his uniform pants in a distinct belly. “You don’t ever need to keep it sucked in around me, y’got that, Bo?” The buffalo on his slab grunted. “Tell me you got that, Bo.”

“Uh-huh,” the response was more certain this time, although the buffalo’s expression was still passive, still slack. Bud chuckled softly, and lightly placed one pudgy paw on the top of the bovine’s bare, battleship grey belly. It wobbled very slightly under the pressure.

“Yer startin’ to thicken up, Bo. I thought that shirt was looking a li’l snug when you walked in here today. It feeling tight to *you*, Bo?”

“...Yeah,” the buffalo responded like a sleep-walker. Bud snorted in satisfaction, his hand starting to rub in a slow circle.

“And it’s the next size up from what you were wearin’ before, if I’m any judge. Am I right?”

There was a hesitation, but then a grunt and a nod. The rhino smirked chubbily, his thick fingers tracing a circle around the buffalo’s navel. “I guess yer finally starting to eat right. But I’ll bet you skipped lunch again today, didn’t you, Bo?” Another pause, longer this time. “Bo?”

“...Yeah.” Finally, a grunt of admission.

“Figured as much. Good job I came prepared.”

With his free hand the rhino pulled a shopping bag closer, and fished out a foil-wrapped snack-cake. He unwrapped it, slowly and deliberately, then lowered it in front of the bovine’s snout. The buffalo didn’t even blink.

“Open up, Bo. Here’s lunch.” The buffalo opened his mouth, like a patient at the dentist. Bud slowly pressed the end of the snack-cake in. The buffalo bit down reflexively, and then began to chew, his brown eyes still vacant. “That’s it, Bo. Buffalo gotta graze...” The sweet mouthful was swallowed with an audible *glop*. “Open, Bo. Open wide...” The buffalo opened, and the second half of the snack cake was pushed in. He started chewing. “Yer not gonna skip lunch again, you got that Bo? A big guy like you’s gotta eat regular. Lots of snacks, and you don’t skip lunch, ever. A guy’s gotta eat, Bo. You listening, Bo?” Mouth still full, the buffalo nodded, then swallowed. The rhino laid his hand flat on the buffalo’s belly again, slowly wobbling it. He got a grunt in response. “Tell me you got that, Bo- no skipping lunch.”

“I... got it. No... skipping... lunch,” the buffalo responded, his gaze unfocussed, his voice sounding far away.

“That’s more like it, Bo.” With a grin, the outrageously obese rhino gave the buffalo’s baby-belly a little pat, then he pulled another snack from the bulging bag at his feet and methodically began to unwrap it...

“Wakey wakey, Chief!”

Bogo blinked. He was staring up at the ceiling.

“H-Huh...?” He made to sit up, but the muscles around his stomach protested agonisingly, and he flopped back, panting. A wave of fullness rose up from his hooves and didn’t stop until it reached his horntips. “Wh... what...?” he managed to gasp out. He felt like he was going to pop!

“You fell asleep on me, big guy,” Bud commented cheerfully. Suddenly chubby hands were under the Chief’s shoulders, and he was abruptly hauled into a sitting position. Bogo wheezed, his head still swimming. For a second it felt like dangerously like his middle was going to burst, but then the crisis seemed to pass and the feeling receded to a deep, all-encompassing stomach ache. “Normally I don’t put up with that kinda cheek on my slab, but I figured the rest would do you some good. I must be going soft on you, or something.”

“I... I fell asleep?” Bogo wrestled with the notion. His head felt full of fog... and why did his middle feel full of lead? Ugh... he felt so *full* he could barely think...

“Sure did. That’s actually quite a healthy sign- though I doubt its done yer back any good, sleeping on a rock like that.” The rhino grinned sardonically and slapped Bogo on the shoulder, hard enough to rock him forwards.

A deep, rolling belch welled up from nowhere. It *echoed*. The Chief froze, mortified.

“What’re you doing still sitting there? I need that slab for my next appointment. Quit slacking, Chief, and get back to work!”

“Uhh... y-yeah, right.” Bogo realised the ache in his middle receded enough to let him move. Wheezing and disoriented, he hauled himself off the slab and stumbled heavily towards the bench where his uniform shirt lay. He shook his head to try to wake up, one hand gingerly pressed against his taut, aching stomach. Hadn’t he skipped lunch today? No, that wasn’t right... was it?

“Don’t forget yer ZooPod, Bo,” Bud commented, holding out the hated little machine. He didn’t even remember handing it over. Bogo snatched it without a word and escaped, still in the process of buttoning his uniform. For some reason, he really struggled with the middle button all the way back to the station- he just could not pull it far enough across his stomach to mate with its opposing hole. A couple of attempts to contract his stomach muscles left him panting in pain, so in the end he had to leave that button undone.

Sleeping on that slab must have messed him up more than he thought...

* * *

It had been another long week at work. Thank Gazelle his shift was over. Back home, Bogo began to free himself from his uniform. In the mirror, he tried to avoid looking at his

reflection as he fumbled with his shirt buttons. He had to admit, his stomach was sticking out a little more than it had been- he stopped abruptly, and faced himself squarely in the mirror. He sighed slightly. ‘Stuck out’? Who was he kidding? He had a *keg* for a belly. It was stretching his uniform- *another* size up- so tautly that buttons creaked if he breathed in too deeply.

He just didn’t know what was wrong with him. He’d spent the entire week eating like a pig! He barely made it to his desk in the mornings before he was looking for an excuse to pass the vending machine. A couple of days, he’d even sunk so low as to ‘commandeer’ one of Clawhauser’s doughnuts- now that had felt like kicking a puppy. Hadn’t stopped him, though, had it? (And he was starting to see why Clawhauser ate so many- they were madly moreish). The result... this. Geeze, he felt so heavy and slow. He could actually feel his gut hanging off of him, dragging his centre of gravity down from his chest into his stomach. And somewhere he’d lost all enthusiasm for working out- possibly because his workout clothes barely fit him anymore. But... as he looked his humiliatingly big-bellied self over in the mirror, somehow he was feeling surprisingly calm about all this...

Buffalos are big guys, Bo. YER a big guy. It’s only natural...

...In fact, he was starting to feel calmer about a lot of stuff. He wouldn’t have credited it, but that rude rhino actually seemed to be on to something with his classical music. It really did seem to be helping his mood. A few times now the Chief had found it so relaxing he’d sort of blanked out whilst listening to it at work, coming to with a start to find he’d just been sitting there, staring into space whilst the notes flowed past him. And- a big plus- for the last week or so he’d hardly heard anything from his neck. Those massages were finally starting to do some good, too. Bud had certainly put him through the wringer, earlier on today.

He couldn’t put this off any longer. Slowly, he started to unbutton his shirt from the top down, the two halves peeling apart as each button came undone to expose his body to critical examination. By the third button his bare chest was visible, framed by the tight blue fabric and sitting on top of his jutting stomach. Ok, he really *was* going to have to get this under control- somewhere along the way his pecs had gone from solid squares of brawny bovine beef to undeniable bull-udders. Pretty hefty bull-udders, at that. And was that the suspicion of a second chin, there?

So you've put on a few pounds. Who cares? A guy's gotta eat...

...But, he had to admit, the cafeteria food at lunchtime had actually turned out to be a lot more edible than he remembered.

You work better on a full stomach, Bo, you know that...

Bogo had three shirt buttons left to undo, his stomach half-freed from their constraining clasp when his phone rang suddenly in his back pocket, making him jump. He grimaced as he struggled to free it- his pants were starting to feel like they'd shrunk in the wash.

"Bogo," he said distractedly when he finally got it to his ear. "Who's this?"

"What, don't you recognise me, Bo?" a voice burred down the line. The buffalo swayed unsteadily, like he'd been punched in the gut. Everything around him seeming to go a little glassy. The buttons on his shirt creeeked as his stomach muscles unconsciously relaxed, that belly in the mirror swelling a little bigger. *"I'm right outside yer door, Bo. Let me in, will ya?"*

"How..." Bogo's mouth worked sluggishly, his tongue feeling thick. "H-how did you know where... I...?"

"Open the door, Bo."

Eyes glazed, and still holding the phone, Bogo found himself walking unsteadily to the front door. He slid back the bolt, threw the two catches and turned the handle. It swung inwards, to reveal the bulging pachyderm parade-balloon of a masseur standing in the entrance, still stuffed into the same casual clothes he always seemed to wear, though perhaps with a couple of extra food stains evident. He grinned amiably as he put his phone away. Bogo realised his own phone was still glued to his ear- he pulled it away.

"You still seemed a little tense after yer session today, Bo. Had me a li'l worried about you. Thought I'd pay a house-call." He tipped his head to one side, questioningly. "You're ok with that, right buddy?"

"Uhh..." The buffalo blinked vaguely, realised he was sweating, for some reason. He squinted in concentration. There was something... he'd been going to ask, just now... "H-

how did you find out where I lived?”

“That ain’t really important, Bo, now is it?”

“Oh.” That seemed... fair enough. “Okay.” The rhino tilted his head again.

“You *are* fine with me coming here, aren’t you, Bo?”

Trust me, Bo...

“Y-yeah... of course.” Whatever Bud said, he guessed was ok with him. He stumbled back from the doorway. “C’mon in...”

The rhino followed, squeezing his humungous frame through the doorway, big belly rippling as he did so under his tight T-shirt. The familiar surroundings seemed to make Bud look even more massive to Bogo. The rhino took a long, slow look around.

“Nice place you got here.” He was carrying a couple of plastic shopping bags in each hand—each one looked ready to split under their enormous load. There was a strong, greasy smell of Chinese take-out—sweet and sour sauce combined with health-and-safety-violating concentrations of MSG. The rhino hoisted the bags up without apparent effort and grinned cheerfully. The thought floated vaguely through Bogo’s head that Bud might be a fat slob, but he was still pretty damn strong...

“I figured you could use some help to chill out, big guy. I brought along some dinner, and a few beers to wash it down.”

You relax better on a full stomach...

“I... I was getting changed...” Bogo protested, though it came out as more of a mumble.

“Nah, you don’t need to bother with that, Bo.” The rhino rumbled persuasively, making a show of slowly looking over the half-dressed officer. He grinned suddenly. “You look just fine as you are. Come and sit down, and relax.”

The buffalo’s phone dropped to the carpet, unheeded. Smiling, Bud flopped a companionable, corpulent arm around the bovine’s beefy shoulders and ushered him unprotestingly to the small table in the lounge/dining area. He pressed the burly, blank-faced

buffalo down onto one of the formed wood laminate dining chairs. The two overloaded bags were plonked onto the table, nearly bursting with their contents.

“Now,” Bud’s meaty mitts clapped together. “Let’s eat.” Bogo’s eyes widened slightly.

“All THAT?”

“Uh-huh. I’m a Big Eater, Bo. Can’t you tell?” With a smirk the rhino turned side-on and slapped a hand to his belly, making a noise like a flabby gunshot and setting it rippling. Bogo stared at the oceanic wobbling unavoidably in his eye-line, seeing the rhino’s navel shift and distort hypnotically like the eye of the storm. “Don’t worry- I’ll leave you some.”

Bogo found his attention being dragged back towards the bags of take-out. The aroma from them was permeating the air in a greasy haze. Bogo was worried at just how appealing it smelled to him. It was basically junk food, after all.

“I don’t...” Why was it so tough for him to *think*, all of a sudden? “I... I don’t...”

“You’ve been letting work get to you again this afternoon, Bo,” the rhino’s voice chided, suddenly coming from behind him. “I can see it in yer shoulders.” Plump hands gripped his musculature through the fabric of his shirt, squeezed his shoulders firmly but gently. The buffalo let out a low grunt, and as they kneaded, his shoulders sagged in stages, the last of the tension in them draining away. “Bo, *relax*...” The laminated wooden back of the chair creaked as it flexed, taking its occupier’s full weight as he sank back with a groan.

The rhino waited a few heartbeats, hands resting lightly on his patient’s slumped shoulders.

“You still in there, Bo?”

“Uh-huh,” came the reply.

“Good. Then let’s eat.” One plump paw lightly patted the buffalo’s shoulder, and the floorboards creaking as Bud lumbered back into view. “You *are* hungry, right Bo? It’s been a long time since lunch.” On cue, the buffalo’s stomach growled.

“Y-yeah... it sure has.” Suddenly all that take-out smelled absolutely delicious. He was *ravenous*. He could feel his mouth watering in anticipation. Blinking, he suddenly found he was holding a pair of cheap plastic chopsticks in one hand, and a foil tray in the other, savoury steam rising from its gloopy contents. He snorted, a dreamlike sense of bewilderment building in him.

“I... I *never* eat like this...”

“Y’don’t need table-manners around me, Bo,” the rhino’s calm voice cut across his confusion. Sitting opposite him, suddenly Bud seemed to demand his entire attention. “I understand big guys like us.” With a wink, the porcine pachyderm put a hand to the bare, exposed curve of his belly, and shook it. It rippled with a heavy ‘gloop’ sound. “We need to eat *big*, it don’t matter if we look pretty doing it. And eating big... Boy, that’d feel *good* right now, huh Bo? Real good...”

“Y-yeah... real... good...” It felt like he was floating in a warm ocean, his hooves a long way from touching bottom. Bud’s voice washing over and through him like the sea. His gaze was magnetized by the rhino’s wobbling bulk, those ripples still echoing beyond his belly, before his gaze was dragged up to the rhino’s plump lips. He couldn’t tear his eyes away as they moved.

“Let it go, Bo. Eat. Stuff yerself till yer finally, properly *full*. You know you want to. Eat.”

It was like a spring had been released. Bogo plunged the chopsticks into the gooey mass of noodles and dragged half the contents up with them, beanshoots and waterchestnut slices in sticky sauce dripping from it as he stuffed the whole mass into his mouth. His chiselled cheeks bulged with the effort of trying to contain such a volume of food, stretched more as it fought for room as the buffalo chewed greedily. He gulped, sending the whole load down his throat like a greased cannonball. The effort of swallowing that much in one go leaving him panting for breath. Almost at once, he stabbed the chopsticks down again, gorging on an equally gluttonous mouthful. He couldn’t seem to stop himself. But it tasted so good... why would he *want* to stop?

“Feels *right*, don’t it, Bo?” he was distantly aware of Bud speaking as he started working on his second tray- or was it the third? “Yer a big, beefy buffalo, Bo- it’s only natural you want to eat like this. You *deserve* to eat like this.”

“Mphh...” He didn’t waste time with anything more than a grunt for an answer. Sometimes, during heavy workouts he became aware of himself- his own breathing loud in his ears, the smell of his own exertion. Now he was aware of the noises he was making whilst eating- the smack of his own lips, the pig-like snort for breath as he engulfed another mouthful, the sloshing sound of his own chewing echoing through his skull. Did... did he always sound like this? But... a guy’s gotta eat, after all.

“Here...” A bottle was pushed unexpectedly into his hand between one carton and the next, shockingly cold after holding the hot metal. “Have a beer, Bo. Tastes real good with Chinese.”

I never drink when I'm on duty tomorrow... It was his rule. He'd always stuck to it. The words formed up at the back of his mind, but for once they seemed to lack any binding force. I mean... It wasn't actually a *rule*-rule, as such... And with the cap off, that beer smelled awfully tempting...

“Ain't you *thirsty*, Bo?”

He *was* thirsty. Fingers clasping around the bottle, he brought it to his parched lips and sucked. Frothy liquid fizzed into his mouth and down his throat, sweeping away all that sticky food and MSG coating them. Reflexively, he kept on sucking, gulping down mouthful after mouthful, nostrils flaring for breath until a milkshake-like slurrrrr told him the bottle was dry. He uncorked it from his lips and sat there, panting for air. Then, another tempting foil package was pressed into his hands...

“You can't be done *already*, Bo...”

The buffalo opposite Bud was sprawled in his chair like a sack of grain, powerful arms sagging bonelessly his sides. Even his ears seemed to be hanging limply. His broad jaw hung slightly open, and he was panting for breath, his chest rising and falling above a drum-tight feed-bag of a belly. A couple of noodles dangled unnoticed from his lower lip. The detritus of a spectacularly large Chinese meal was scattered all around, including on his uniform, which had now gone from ‘somewhat snug’ to ‘skin tight’. The badge pinned to his chest looked ready to pop free under the pressure. The shirt, which no longer had a single wrinkle in it, certainly contained a bellyful. It protruded painfully over the vice-like retaining wall of his utility belt, hanging there like a flood ready to be unleashed.

“Here, lemme get that for you...” The buffalo let out a long, low moan of relief as the clip-buckle on his belt was released. His stomach abruptly sank into his lap with an audible ‘bloomp’ and a protesting creak of overstressed buttons. The lower edge of it rolled over the

top of his waistband, police blue rubbing on police blue. Still constrained by that shirt, his gut sat there, quivering

“You full, Bo?” Panting, the buffalo nodded, his expression glazed. Looming over him, the humungous rhino- who, a part of him vaguely realised, he couldn’t actually remember seeing eat anything- regarded him steadily. Then with a small, sly grin commented, “Nah, you’ve still got a li’l room in there.” A fat hand reached out and gently laid itself on top of that swollen bovine belly. With his other hand he held up the last container of takeout. “You want to finish this, don’t you?”

“I... I-I...” The buffalo mumbled hesitantly, his brown, blank eyes fixed on Bud’s fat features.

“Sure you do, Bo,” the massive masseur said. “You want to impress me, right? *Right*, Bo?”

“R-right...” the buffalo panted. He focussed on the container, but let out a low groan.

“You’ve got room for this, Bo,” the rhino said, his tone persuasive. “You CAN do this.” He patted the buffalo’s stretched, be-shirted stomach lightly, making a solid slap-slap-slap noise like a sack of cement. “Quit sucking it in, Bo: show me what you’ve got.” The bloated bovine, sweat beading above his eyebrows, let out a grunt, and his middle wobbled. “C’mon, Bo, let it stretch ...” the pachyderm purred encouragingly, “Let it... re-laaaaax....”

There was a low gasp, and the police-animal’s packed paunch pushed out against the porky palm of Bud’s hand. The two remaining buttons of his shirt, still done up, now strained audibly with each and every breath. Between them, the two edges of his shirt pulled apart, revealing a peek of grey fur, and the indentation of his navel.

“See?” Bud said with a sly grin, “Big guys like us can ALWAYS make room for more.” One hand still on that belly, he held the edge of the container up to the buffalo’s lips, tilted it. The buffalo began to eat, didn’t even need prompting. In a few large, painful sounding gollops, it was gone. Letting out a supremely stuffed belch, the buffalo collapsed back even further into his seat.

“That’s it.” The rhino grinned, and sardonically slapped the side of Bogo’s straining stomach. “Yer finally starting to impress me a little, Bo. It’s taken yer long enough.”

The buffalo was so full, he was immobilised. Helpless. The hefty pachyderm paw resting on his stomach started to rub in a slow circle, dragging it with him through his uniform's fabric. He let out a belching groan of distress, struggled to sit up.

"Bo, *relax*." The buffalo sank back obediently, eyes glazing over once again. That over-filled uniform creaked in protest, the belly inside it wobbling tautly, like an over-filled waterballoon on the verge of popping. "I'm gonna make you more comfortable." With a couple of expert moves, that thick, grey thumb pressed those remaining, recalcitrant buttons through their eye-slits, and his stomach was finally freed from its prison. The buffalo made a low, groaning noise, even as he was conscious of his distended stomach swelling further. The... *relief*...

"Heh, guess we finally got you out of that uniform of yours, huh Bo?" The hand resumed its slow rubbing, bare flesh now in contact with stretched, furry hide. "Yer ok with this, right Bo? It's just ole Bud- I'm yer physiotherapist, after all. Nothing wrong with me giving this li'l belly of yours a massage, right?"

"R-right..." the fit-to-burst buffalo responded, panting, the word emerging almost as another belch.

"Besides," the rhino commented with a sly grin at the buffalo's vacant expression. "Plenty big guys... appreciate a belly-rub. Especially after a good meal." His hand continued to circle, slowly jostling that stuffed, swollen stomach. He watched with satisfaction as the bovine's normally so-stern expression started to shift, the bliss of stuffed-drunkenness working its way past his remaining defences. Sinking deeper... deeper... deeper. Overwhelmed by stupefying fullness, Bogo relaxed utterly.

"Tell me who you are," the rhino said quietly, grinning as his hand slowly manipulated the panting buffalo's belly.

"I'm... B-Bogo..." the response was sluggish. The rhino shook his head in slow disapproval.

"Tell me who you are," he said again.

"Chief... Bogo...?" This time the buffalo seemed uncertain. Another shake of the head, horn swinging from side to side.

"Tell me who you are, *Bo*." The rhino's hand stilled, stopped moving across the buffalo's belly. "Who are you...?"

"...Bo." The buffalo's brown eyes looked up into his. They regained a little of their focus.

"I'm... Bo."

“That’s right, Bo. That’s *exactly* who you are.” His hand squeezed that swollen stomach slightly. ‘Bo’ let out a moo, and his eyelids flickered closed. “And that’s starting to feel GOOD, isn’t it Bo?”

“Uhh...” the buffalo groaned in response. “Uhhh... huh...”

“It feels GOOD to be full, right Bo?”

“R-right...”

“It feels GOOD to eat, right?”

“Right...”

“And it feels GOOD to be this big...” his hand lifted the buffalo’s packed paunch, held it for a moment, then let it slap back into his uniformed lap. A deep, snorting gasp escaped the buffalo’s lips. “*Right*, Bo?”

“R... R-riiiight...” It was more of a sigh than a word. The rhino’s smirk broadened. He patted the bovine’s uniform-stretching stomach again. The back of the buffalo’s neck was ruckling against the back of the chair. His eyes were already half-closed as the food coma began to kick in.

“Course,” Bud added conversationally. “You’ve got a long way to go before yer in *my* kinda league.” He released his grip on Bo’s belly to jiggle his own huge pachyderm paunch proudly, his chest lifting along with it. He grinned, and took a step closer. “Impressive, aren’t I?” The buffalo blinked, his eyes struggling to re-open. “Aren’t I, Bo?” he took another small step, the front of his belly now almost pressing into the buffalo’s chin, which had sagged down another notch. He filled the blissed-out buffalo’s view. “I’m one BIG sonofarhino, ain’t I, Bo? Makes yer feel pretty small in comparison right now, huh?”

“Y... yeah...”

“You don’t like feeling small, do you, Bo?” The rhino’s voice was silken, persuasive.

“...No.”

“If you were this big... YOU’D be the impressive one then, wouldn’t you?”

“... Y-yeah...” the buffalo’s utterly passive face twitched slightly. “Im... impressive.”

“YOU want to be impressive, right Bo? YOU want to be the Big Guy.”

“...Yeah...” Another twitch, a slight snort, his nostrils flaring. “I... want that...”

The rhino chuckled, suddenly jovial.

“Then I guess you’ve got a lot of work to do to catch me up, haven’t you, shrimp?” Sliding one arm under the stuffed, boozed-up buffalo’s shoulders, he helped haul him to his hooves.

“Go get some sleep, Bo. Yer tired.” His smile turned sly as without a word the half-dressed buffalo obediently began staggering towards his bedroom, yawning. “Go to sleep, and when you wake up tomorrow yer gonna remember just how much *I* ate tonight, right?”

“...Right.”

Bo didn’t even need to be reminded to put his ZooPod on.

The next morning, Bogo staggered into the lounge, tripping over his discarded utility belt—wow, he **MUST** have been tired last night. He was never this untidy.

Funny, try as he might, the events of last night just wouldn’t come back to him clearly...

He stared in bleary disbelief at the wreckage still piled high on the dining table, and things started to come back into focus. Wow, just how much had that eating-machine of a rhino eaten? What a PIG. No wonder he was bucking for reclassification as a whale! But still... he blinked, and shook his head rapidly. Woah. For a moment there... he’d actually found the idea of that sumo-sized slob eating that much kind of... impressive? Bogo snorted in grim amusement. He must need a vacation...

* * *

Chief Bogo was on lunch-break. For a big eater like him, this could take a while.

He sat at his usual seat in the ZPD cafeteria, stolidly working through his second tray... or was it the third? Nah, it couldn’t be— even HE started to feel full by the third tray, and he was feeling no-way near full yet.

He broke off from eating for a mouthful of drink to wash it down. As he reached for it, the extension cord of his utility belt stretched around his uniformed middle, pushing out as far as his knees. The seat beneath him creaked from the load.

Come to think of it... how long had he been here? He squinted at the clock, then blinked in confusion. No, that couldn’t be right. Cheeks bulging from his mouthful, he shook his head,

and frowned in concentration. What had he been doing before lunch? He'd taken a phone call... hadn't he? He'd been in his office then... and that felt like only a few minutes ago...

He was distracted by another pang from his stomach. He was so hungry, no wonder he couldn't concentrate! He resumed his meal, found the tray was almost empty. Clearing it in a few urgent mouthfuls, he slid it to the side and moved onto the next one he had prepped. Part of him knew he couldn't spend all day here, but there was no need to rush. After all, a Big Guy's gotta eat.

"Uhh... Chief?" Bogo looked up from his meal into Officer Clawhauser's full features. He looked nervous. With a grunt of acknowledgement, he popped an earbud out. In the long pause that followed, he took the opportunity to have another mouthful of lunch. "Is... Is everything *alright*, Chief?" the feline asked, almost writhing on the spot for some reason. A lot of officers seemed to be staring at him.

Bogo thought about this, chewing meditatively.

"Actually," he said in mild tones, "now you mention it, I *could* do with a refill." He jabbed his fork towards his plastic drinking cup, then looked down at his tray. His stomach gave another pang. "And another helping of this."

"...Right!" Officer Clawhauser's face went entirely blank, then locked into an expression of maniacal helpfulness. He backed away. "Absolutely! Coming right up, Chief! No problem. Right away. Leave it to me..." He turned, and practically scampered towards the chow-line.

Chief Bogo resumed eating. Just before he replaced the earbud, he caught some muttering amongst the members of his squad behind him. Glancing back, he spotted the usual suspects nudging one another. There were even a couple of funny looks in his direction, hurriedly disguised. With a snort, he jabbed his fork down again, and engulfed another large mouthful. Seriously, what *was* their problem? Buffalos were *meant* to be big, beefy guys.

Unconsciously, he shifted his weight on his seat, trying unsuccessfully to fit both cheeks onto the stupidly small support.

So he'd put on a little weight recently. It wasn't as though he'd been 'small' for a little while, now. Thinking back to those days, he suppressed a snort. Why'd he been so obsessed with keeping 'in shape'? Tell the truth- it had made him miserable.

"H-here you go, Chief..." A fresh tray was plonked down in front of him. He blinked. Already? Now that was fast work.

"Thanks, Ben." He briefly watched the chubby cheetah hurry off, clutching his own loaded lunch-tray, and suppressed a smile. It was good to see another officer with a healthy appetite. Clawhauser was as efficient and hard-working as you could ask for. And a clear example that there were animals wearing the uniform who were *far* bigger than he was.

As Bogo shifted his weight, his figure-hugging uniform let out a creak. Behind him, a few officers stared at him, then shared significant glances amongst themselves.

Ok, maybe not *that* much bigger, any more. Rff, this old uniform of his was starting to feel a tad tight. Maybe it was time he thought about trading up to the next size on the rail. Why'd he always worried about that so much? There were plenty of sizes above him, up to and including *elephant*. Heh- a small smile twisted his lips around his latest mouthful. Thinking about it, the next size up would put him in the same uniform as *McHorn*. Now that was pretty impressive for a buffalo, you had to admit that. And- he was starting to admit to himself- the bigger he got, the more imposing and authoritative he *felt*...

Clearing the last of his tray, he started on the one brought to him by Clawhauser. Maybe this'd finally fill him up. He didn't want to go back to work on an empty stomach.

There's always room for more, Bo...

Officers Hopps and Wilde walked past with their lunch trays. Wilde actually did a double-take and stared outright at him. Hadn't the skinny fox seen someone eat a *proper* meal before? Bogo stolidly ignored the insubordination. It was lucky for Wilde he was more relaxed about life these days, or he'd have chewed him up and spat him back out again.

Wilde raised one finger and opened that smart mouth of his, but just in time Judy grabbed his arm and practically dragged him away, whispering frantically to him. The Chief didn't

bother to watch them go- there was still food on his plate, and he didn't like to be interrupted at mealtimes. But... sheesh, what was everyone's *problem*? A twinge started up between his shoulders. Ugh... he was beginning to get stressed again, he could tell. Maybe Bud could fit him in for an extra massage session... That'd feel pretty good, right about now. He really was going to have to talk with someone about getting properly-sized furniture for this place- it was playing hell with his posture.

After he'd had dessert...

Unconsciously, his fingers turned up the volume on his phone. Classical piano music filled his ears like a waterfall, drowning out the muttering around him, and the increasingly small part of him that kept asking what the heck he was doing...

* * *

Bud sat at his workstation, catching up on paperwork between appointments. He paused at the sound/feel of heavy footsteps in the passage outside. They approached, then stopped.

"Knock knock," Chief Bogo's voice said. The rotund rhino swivelled his office chair to face the door.

The buffalo in the doorway, one hand casually resting on the lintel, certainly didn't *look* much like ZPD's famous Chief Bogo. For one, this guy was FAT. His gut preceded him into the room by a good three feet, and it bounced and rippled sluggishly with every lumbering step. Both it and the generous, tyre-like lovehandles at his sides combined to make him as wide as the door he'd just squeezed through. His middle was even wider than his shoulders- obviously still strong but plumped out with plush padding. Between his shoulders and that gargantuan gut sat a pair of moobs the ironic description 'beefy' couldn't really do justice to. It looked as though this overfed beast would have difficulty seeing past them, the way they jutted forward beyond his chin, nearly pressing up under his chin. What little space they left was filled by a second chin softening the first and a thick tyre of a neck that no uniform collar looked capable of containing. Instead of the Chief's familiar chiselled features, plump prominent cheeks dominated, jiggling slightly against his broad snout. Despite the similarity in the markings, this couldn't be the face of Chief Bogo- perhaps a cousin, one who'd spent

way, way too much time grazing in front of the fridge. A lazy, flab-filled slob who barely got up from the couch unless it was to grab another snack, or a beer.

In short, even in Zootopia, with its preponderance of pachyderms, you'd look twice at this guy in the street and tut about today's obesity epidemic, or how it was unbelievable about how some animals let themselves go so unforgivably. He rivalled *elephants* for weight.

If further proof was needed, as he stepped into the room his walk spoke further volumes against his being Bogo- it was relaxed! He had the slow casual lumber of someone hauling 500lbs+ in bodyweight around, and who didn't give a damn! Any musculature in his legs was hidden by thick slabs of blubber plumping out his thighs and lower legs. They shifted a rump that most rhinos would think of as 'embarrassingly big', which bounced slightly with each step. As he walked, his arms- stretching the armholes of his T-shirt- were held a little out from his sides the way some weightlifters' arms are, giving the impression he was carrying a couple of invisible barrels. This was thanks to the sheer bulk of his chest and the thick bulges of flab under his arms. He walked with the kind of attitude that suggested he was on his way to a keg party- and would drink at least a couple of kegs all by himself.

Thirdly- and perhaps most importantly- he was smiling! Those fat features lacked the Chief's trademark stern glower, the permanent scowl-in-waiting that always creased his brow. His eyes were the colour of the Chief's, and there was a similar sense of alertness to them, a slight hawkishness, but *this* guy looked like he was waiting to pounce with a witty one-liner rather than bawl you out.

"Hey, Bud," the visitor rumbled cheerfully. His teeth flashed a wry grin. With both him and Bud in the room, there wasn't much space for anyone else.

"What's this?" Standing up slowly, the rhino lumbered over and made a show of inspecting this scale-breaking bovine blimp. He grinned back. "Out of uniform?"

It was true- perhaps the most shocking thing of all. This bloated buffalo's bulk was adorned in a casual T-shirt- easily 5XL, but still failing to fully cover the enormous ball of grey-furred mozzarella that hung to his knees. Tight wrinkles under his arms and around his chest, and the way the fabric pulled when he performed movements- such as breathing- suggested that this guy had grown substantially since he'd bought that T-shirt. Stretched around his bottom

half were a pair of old, faded blue shorts that might just be ZPD issue- but then again they could easily be not. A pair of flip-flops slapped sloppily against the stone floor.

This *couldn't* be Chief Bogo... could it?

“You taken a day off or something, buddy?” The rhino enquired casually. The behemoth buffalo snorted in seemingly genuine amusement.

“I’ve been put on *sick leave*.” His voice carried the timbre of someone with a good joke to share, and his eyes flashed with mirth. “Apparently City Hall thinks I’ve developed some kind of stress-induced ‘eating disorder’.” He dropped sardonic air-quotes around these last two words, then slapped a hand to the bare slice of stomach sticking out from under his inadequate T-shirt, and wobbled it. He gave the rhino a conspiratorial smirk. “Maybe I ought to see this therapist I know.”

“Pshaw!” Bud exclaimed with good-humoured derision. “You ain’t sick- yer lookin’ great.”

“I *feel* great, too!” The colossal cop lifted his arms and gestured down at himself in satisfaction, before letting them drop back to their well-padded rest positions. “I’ve never felt better.”

“Yeah, I can see.” The rhino cocked his head to one side. “You, uh... *upset* at all about being put out to grass like that?”

“Nope,” Bogo grinned chubbily, the expression making his fat face light up. “It gives me more free time to enjoy myself, after all.” His smile broadened. “I’ve got a whole wish-list of restaurants to work my way through.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Smirking, Bud took a step forward and gave that huge buffalo belly a teasing poke. “Nice to see yer finally learning to relax, Chief.”

“Hey.” With a suddenly lunge, the pachyderm-sized police-buffalo surprised Bud by playfully bumping him backwards against the wall, pinning him there, belly-to-belly, hands planted either side of the rhino’s head. This close up, the casual observer would be shocked to see that the buffalo’s belly slightly out-sized the rotund rhino’s. The two sumo-sized stomachs wobbled and jostled heavily for space. Bud wheezed as the behemoth bovine leaned his weight against him, smirk deepening as he leaned his fat features in close. “Who’s this ‘Chief’? You? You call me ‘Bo’. Y’got that, *squirt*?”

“Ngh... oh yeah, loud n’ clear, Bo,” Bud panted, grinning back at the beaming buffalo.

“That’s me- and don’t you forget it.”

“Fat chance of that, huh?” The big buffalo snorted in amusement. “And nice to see yer learning to throw yer weight around, finally” the rhino commented with another wheeze, still pinned against the wall.

“I had a good trainer,” Bo grinned, abruptly stepping back and releasing the masseur, but not before giving him a playful slap on his own gargantuan gut.

“Damn right.” The rhino grinned, then clapped a hand onto one of Bo’s bloated shoulders.

“Speaking of training, get that butt of yours on my slab, so I can give this big ole’ pile of buffalo beef the pummelling it needs.”

“I thought you’d *never* ask.” Snorting deeply, Bo’s shorts-stretching backside eagerly slapped down on the cold stone and spread substantially, even as he tugged his tentlike T-shirt up and over his horns. Bud grinned and advanced on the bare-bellied buffalo, cracking his knuckles.

“Ughh... I swear this feels better every single time.” Sitting up on the slab, Bo’s tongue was almost hanging out of his mouth as Bud worked the meaty mass of the buffalo’s swollen shoulders.

“Yer bringin’ me better beef to work with, that’s why, Bo.” With a grin the rhino reached round from behind and delivered a firm slap to the buffalo’s flab-swollen side. “Oh, did you bring that old sleep tape back for me?” His hands traced down the curves on the buffalo’s bloated back, making him shiver.

“Yeah, s’in my bag.” Bo chuckled deeply, his bulk rippling in response. “I still don’t think it did a damn thing.”

“Well, sometimes that stuff works, sometimes it don’t,” Bud responded, hiding a sly grin.

“One think I am sure of- you certainly don’t need it *now*.”

“Yeah... you’ve done a great job on me, Bud. Thanks.”

Just then they were interrupted by a loud, tectonic grumble. It came from the buffalo’s middle. Bud slowly took his hands away and gave him an accusing look.

“You skipped lunch, Bo? I thought we’d *cured* that bad habit.” The buffalo snorted, and gave the rhino a surprisingly uncertain smile.

“I, uh... was wondering if you’d like to grab some lunch with me after this? There’s, uh, an all-you-can-eat buffet opened up in town I hear nearly lives up to its name.”

“...I thought you’d never ask, Bo,” Bud replied with a big grin. He playfully punched the bashful-looking bovine on his ample arm, making it ripple. “C’mon, or there’ll be competition for the chow. Let’s go get *stuffed*.”

“Rff... sounds good to *me*,” Bo replied, heaving himself off the slam and onto his flip-flopped hooves. As they hit the floor, his belly bounced heftily. “But *this* time I’m going to out-eat you for sure.”

“Hah, fat chance of *that*, Bo,” Bud said, flipping the buffalo’s discarded tent of a t-shirt into its owner’s face. He watched the buffalo’s titanic torso ripple as he struggled back into it.

“You ain’t impressed me *that* much, yet.”

Bo’s horn’s popped out of the neck-hole, followed by his fat face, a confident grin writ large across it.

“Oh, you’ll see. I’m not *nearly* done growing on you.” He smacked a hand into his bovine belly, and gave the rhino a proud smirk.

“Ooh, fighting talk, Bo.” Grinning, the rhino flopped a fat arm around the buffalo’s equally fat shoulders, then dug a finger playfully into his bulging buddy’s swollen side, sinking in almost up to his wrist. “Let’s go put yer mouth where yer mouth is, shall we? Then we can talk about getting dinner...”