VI

The best part about having a personal trainer was that, even if you were ultimately responsible for your own weight loss, they were there to help keep you motivated and point you in the right direction.

When Riley had met Cheyenne, she had been two hundred and ninety-five pounds of pure blubber. She had absolutely no idea what exercises she should be doing to lose weight, she was still eating almost nothing but junk food, and she had almost no confidence in herself. Over the course of a grueling fifteen months, she had helped chisel the best out of her client from that dumpy wide-bottomed marble with intensive exercise, a positive atmosphere, and (perhaps most importantly) a dedicated food journal.

When she had taken Cheyenne on as a client, Riley had made her *promise* that she would always log everything that she ate—even the stuff that she knew would look bad. Honesty was at the core of the relationship between a trainer and her trainee. A little disappointment here and there was a lot better if it knew that Cheyenne was being honest with not only her trainer, but also herself.

And looking at her, Riley knew that Cheyenne hadn’t been telling her the truth.

“You’re *sure* that this is all you ate last week?”

“Yeah.” Cheyenne’s eyes trailed to the left, “Pretty sure.”

Right away, Riley had known that was a lie. Cheye had been looking puffy for the past few weeks, but it was only until recently that her belly started to fold into little rolls again. Just above the high waist of her leggings, there was a pinchable inch of chub just hanging over the lip of her bottoms, visible through her tight tank top. Not to mention the curve of her belly, which had started to pooch outwards and press tight against her gym clothes.

“You’ve got to be a little more than pretty sure with this thing, Cheye.” Riley put her hands on her hips, “Promise me that you’re going to be more careful about what you log in this book, okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

Her face was rounder, especially noticeable when her long dark hair was pulled back into ponytail like now. Cheyenne’s soft olive colored skin shone in the fluorescent lighting of the gym. She was coated with sweat.

“It’s really important that I know if we have to work a little harder. Things happen, and it’s not anyone’s fault, but we’ve *got* to stay on track.”

“I know…”

It wasn’t anything that they couldn’t reverse, and Cheyenne’s weight loss journey hadn’t been without a few bumps and relapses in the road. As much as Riley liked to give Cheyenne the freedom to police herself, twenty pounds in just a few weeks was cause enough for her to place her hands back on the wheel… however gently.

She didn’t want to scare Cheye off. Ultimately, that wouldn’t help anybody—she might balloon back up, and Riley would be short one of her most promising clients.

“I won’t get mad if you slip up now and again.” Riley did her best to soften her expression, “Okay?”

“…okay.”

**\*\*\***

Avery’s takeaway from the story hadn’t been exactly what Cheyenne had intended.

“What a bitch.” Avery scoffed, “Does she want to know every time you get your period too?”

Cheyenne’s explanation as to what had taken so long to get out of Planet Fitness had started in the parking lot and lasted throughout the drive over to Frogurt Mountain. Originally, she was going to use it as a reason as to why they *shouldn’t* have gone to Frogurt Mountain, but by the time that she had finished the story, Avery had already unbuckled and rocked herself out of the driver’s seat.

They were already there, she seemed really angry about what Riley had said, and…

Honestly, Cheyenne was feeling pretty low about how today’s session had gone. She’d put on twenty pounds in a few weeks and as stupid as it sounded with all that considered, she *really* needed some comfort food.

At least it wasn’t ice cream, right?

“No, Riley’s not being a bitch.” Cheyenne’s lips tugged to the side as she stirred the remains of her medium bowl around morosely, “She’s just doing her job. It’s literally what I pay her for.”

“Still.” Avery suckled on her spoon, still going strong on her large bowl with extra toppings, “Doesn’t mean that she has to judge you so harshly. Like, okay, we get it you’re perfect—the rest of us like to go out to eat sometimes! Right?”

Cheyenne couldn’t help but chuckle. As much as Riley talked about having cravings, it was hard to picture her going to town on a bowl of Fro-Yo. The idea of her squeezing into her jeans before work? Couldn’t happen. Riley was perfect and fit and had probably never even *heard* the phrase “comfort food”.

“Guess that’s just one of the ways that I’m different from personal trainers, huh?”

“Yeah, and that you’ve got an ass.” Avery flipped the self-deprecative tone right on its head, “I mean, come on… have you *seen*… what’s her name, Riley?”

“Riley, yeah.”

“She’s as flat as a cutting board.” Avery waved dismissively, “You actually *have* an ass. Excuse you for needing to eat sometimes.”

“Ugh, I’ve got too much ass.” Cheyenne took another mournful bite, “Do you think we can get, like, smoothies or something next Friday?”

“Yeah, sure, smoothies.” Avery nodded as the sound of her spoon scraping against the bottom of the bowl caught her attention, “Looks like I’m out… you want another bowl?”

Cheyenne looked up from her soupy serving like a deer caught in headlights.

“You kinda look like you’re having a shitty time there.” Avery clicked her tongue as she collected the paper bowl and plastic spoon from her side of the table, “And you know… it’s Fro-Yo. That’s like diet ice cream, right?”

Cheyenne’s chest rose with a deep sigh, inching up ever so slightly on the black-painted canvas of her rounding middle…

“What the hell.” She finally said, “You don’t think I’ll have to list every topping that I put on it, do you?”

“Cheyenne, come on…” Avery snorted, “It’s a cheat day.”

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With Cheyenne and Avery now slowly repairing their fractured friendship, things were much more peaceful around the apartment.

There had been much discussion as to how they should spend their time together in hopes of making sure that another rift between them didn’t crop up where a bridge was slowly being built. Brooke had been the one to suggest a regular night for the three of them to get together—at least once a week, where their schedules permitted.

But since she was the only one with a regular schedule, there were plenty of nights where “Roommate Wednesday” turned out to be just her and either of them. Very rarely were all three of them actually on the couch together.

While Avery was usually the one to suggest a back-up day in addition to their allocated hangout time (usually Sunda afternoon, so Cheyenne could get in a good rest before going back to the gym on Monday) it was, in fact, going to be one of the rare occasions where all three of them were going to squeeze onto the couch and watch a schlocky eighties horror marathon; a favorite past time of theirs, complete with a hearty menu of pizza to match the ones they’d order in high school.

“You sure Cheye won’t mind us ordering pizza?”

“We got her a plain cheese one.” Avery lifted a greasy triangle from the box and reeled it in floppy-end first, “*And* it’s not stuffed crust.”

“Smart.” Brooke smiled as she reached for a breadstick, “That way it’s not too many extra calories.”

Avery tugged at her pajama bottoms as she waddled over to the couch before plopping down; her designated pizza box steady while the rest of her body wobbled with the impact. Multiple 2-Liters of various sodas had been stationed within an arm’s reach on either side of the couch and the open boxes (plus Cheyenne’s plain cheese) had been placed on the coffee table in front of them.

If you could have placed the scene in Mr. Mason’s living room and played the sounds of Brooke’s sister getting laid in the background, it would have been a picture-perfect recreation of how the three of them had spent almost every Saturday night growing up.

Growing up, nights like these had been invitations to do whatever they pleased. To stay up as late as they wanted, to be comfy for as long as they liked, and to eat as much as they desired. When they were in high school, they had been almost weekly events! The three of them would giggle and talk shit about girls that they didn’t like or boys that they did well into the wee hours of the morning, and they almost never left any leftovers for a cold pizza breakfast…

Never mind that it was perhaps *because* of these nights in that the three of them had graduated at so much heavier than they had been when they’d enrolled.

“So today’s gonna be her cheat day?”

Brooke asked the question helpfully from the other side of the long L-shaped couch, her stomach folds buried beneath the baggiest t-shirt in her closet. Her brown curly hair was left down and she’d taken out her contacts.

“Oh… yeah.” Avery shrugged her shoulders as she gnashed her lips, “She like… got permission from her trainer or whatever.”

“Well that was nice.” Brooke smiled, “And you know who else is nice? *You*. For going to all this trouble to make sure we all get to hang out together.”

“Oh stop.”

“No Avery, seriously, I’m really impressed.” Brooke took a swig of Sprite, leaving it on the end table for steady use and ease of access, “This is a really nice thing that you’re doing for Cheyenne. You’ve been spending a lot of time with her lately, and I think… I mean, I think it’s really cool that you guys are getting so close again.”

“Yeah, well, she *is* one of my best friends.” Avery folded her slice down the middle and dipped it in a cup of ranch, “I just want things to get back to normal with us. All of us.”

“Well… this feels pretty normal to me.” Brooke smiled warmly, “Hey! Do you think I could start coming to the gym with you guys? You know, make it a new tradition between the three of us?”

Avery sucked through her teeth.

“I don’t know, Brooke…” she winced, “Cheye only gets one guest pass. And that’s like… sixteen dollars a month for a membership.”

“Oh…” Brooke sank slightly, her double chin creasing into another little frown, “…Well, maybe I could ask—”

“She only gets one a week.” Avery’s wince grew more exaggerated, “Sorry, hun.”

“Aw… well… that’s okay.” Brooke bounced back relatively quickly, “At least we all get to hang out!”

“I couldn’t agree more.” Avery raised her glass of Dr. Pepper to clink against Brooke’s Sprite, “And besides, you don’t want to put up with Riley. She’s a *total* bitch.”

“Really?” Brooke made a face, “Cheyenne always says that she’s super nice!”

“Yeah, she’s nice to Cheye because she *pays* her.” Avery scoffed, “Nothing but a total bitch the rest of the time though.”

“Oh no! I’m sorry she’s so mean to you.”

“Well… it’s alright.” Avery took another folded bite of ranch-drenched pizza, “I try not to let it bother me *too* much because… you know, she and Cheyenne are pretty close.”

“Right.” Brooke burped, “You’re such a good friend, Avery.”

“I really, truly am.”

VII

Before Cheyenne had known what hit her, the needle on the scale was back at settling on just over two hundred pounds.

It wasn’t that she was surprised. Cheyenne had known that she was eating like shit again, and she had cancelled a few lessons with Riley here or there before this moment. Her clothes were getting tighter and she was having to wear leggings more often. She wasn’t *stupid*—she could see all of the telltale signs of her getting fat again.

Gaining control over her bad habits had been one of the hardest things that she’d ever done in her life. And it was disheartening to see that her struggle had, while not exactly all for naught, was so easily reversed by merely enjoying her life with her friends.

The woman staring back at Cheyenne in the mirror was one that she unfortunately recognized—give or take a few years, she looked almost exactly like she had back in Junior Year. Just take away the braces and bless her with some bigger tits, maybe an inch or two in height and it would have been a picture-perfect comparison.

The love handles, she could deal with. Her belly swelling out and getting its little droop down towards her crotch wasn’t great, but it was a lot better than having top and bottom parts to her tummy. Her double chin didn’t come out too often unless she yawned or opened her mouth too wide. Her arms were rather jiggly, but not *too* gross. Even her fat ass and chunky cottage cheese thighs, she could live with…for the most part.

There had been a time when she would have *loved* to have been this size again.

But whittling herself to two hundred pounds *down* fromthree hundred pounds was a major accomplishment. It was something that she had worked tirelessly for, and for over a year. She had denied herself even a sniff at fast food for fifteen months. She’d hired a trainer and had spent countless hours in the gym getting healthy and fit. While getting “just under two hundred pounds” had been her goal when she’d started out all those months ago, Cheyenne had gone so far as to zoom past it! Getting down to one sixty had been an enormous boon to her self-esteem!

Creeping back up to two hundred and three from there had made the love handles, the tummy, the arms, and her big fat backside a lot harder to swallow.

*Not that swallowing is all that hard for you is it, Double Stuff?*

Cheyenne blinked back tears as she stepped off of the scale, feeling a firm hand on her shoulder as she deliberately avoided the full-length mirrors hung in the women’s lockers.

“Cheye… *Cheye!*” Riley repeated more firmly as she caught hold of her slippery client, “We can fix this. Come on, don’t get discouraged!”

Cheyenne’s façade of stoicism had cracked even before Riley whipped her around. Two little hot streams of tears rolled down her chubby cheeks as her lower lip quivered. Her big brown eyes were watery, her vision clouded, and her chest heaving erratically as she fought against breaking out into tears right there in the women’s locker room.

“Hey hey, come here come here.”

Riley had always been firm but affectionate with Cheyenne. With most of her clients, reportedly, but especially Cheyenne.

It was something that she had always appreciated about her trainer, and one of the reasons that she had kept coming back to her. In the first few months of her weight loss journey, when it had been especially hard, Riley had held her once or twice like this before. To the then nearly three-hundred-pound Cheyenne, seeing five-pound gains as signs of defeat and a reason to surrender, Riley had been the one to keep her from walking back on all of the progress that she’d made in the meantime.

And she was a great hugger.

“It’s gonna be okay, Cheye.” She said softly, wrapping her arms around her client’s soft back, “Shhh…”

Silently waving curious patrons of the gym away, Riley steered her client towards the big wooden bench that sat in the middle of the lockers. Holding her tight by the shoulder now, one arm wrapped behind her back, she placed a strong hand gently over Cheyenne’s.

“This is *no reason* to give up on your weight loss goals, okay?” Riley’s tone changed to something a little stronger for Cheyenne to lean on, “It’s just a little backslide—”

“IT IS NOT A LITTLE BACKSLIDE!”

Cheyenne had said that a little more loudly than she’d intended to. In her frustration with herself, to anyone else, it might have looked like she was yelling at Riley. But her heaving chest and tomato-red face told a different story as she broke down. Her elbows on her plush knees and her face buried in her hands.

“It’s… it’s forty pounds!” she consciously corrected herself, wary of the stares that they were now attracting, “I’m back up to two hundred!”

“But you’re still *down* a hundred pounds from where you started!” Riley said with the confidence and support of an older sibling, “You’ve still come *so far* since you first walked in here.”

“B-But…” Cheyenne sniffled, “I-I…”

“Shhhh…”

The two women sat on the bench for a while, with Riley rocking her client a little in a gentle, swaying motion. As Cheyenne’s sobbing eventually calmed into more manageable crying and sniffling, the two of them stopped swaying. Riley eventually placed a hand on Cheyenne’s chunky thigh and brought her back out of herself.

“Hey, I tell you what—it sounds like we are *both* having mutually shitty days.” Riley squeezed, “What do you say we get in our cheat days a little early? Huh? You and me—my treat?”

\*\*\*

For as long as she’d known Riley, Cheyenne could have never imagined that she’d ever see her in a Cook Out parking lot. Or eating a milkshake. Or knowing that she had a “go-to” order. A chicken quesadilla tray with hush puppies and fries—plus a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup milkshake that she used to dip the fries in.

Riley’s car was just barely almost clean, even discounting the debris from their order and the gym bag haphazardly thrown in the backseat. The seats were leaned back, she had an Aux cord instead of a Bluetooth connecting radio…

Somehow, it was so comforting to see this side of Riley—to know that not only was she a trainer, but that she was… human? Was that the right word to use here? Obviously she was human, but Cheyenne had put her up on this pedestal over the course of getting to know her as her trainer and…

Well, this was nice.

“I found out my girlfriend was cheating on me yesterday.” Riley said with a mouthful of spoon-thick milkshake, “With her old boyfriend none the less.”

“Oh no…” Cheyenne sniffled, having already devoured her share of hush puppies from her tray, “That’s awful.”

“No, what was *awful* was having to cancel all my clients this morning so that I could help her get her shit out of our apartment.” Riley picked up three fries and scraped them across the surface of the shake, “I mean, we dated for a year and she cheated on me. How do I know she won’t steal my stuff, right? I *had* to be there.”

“Understandable.”

“Glad you think so—I *really* needed this.” Riley said with a thick sigh as she scarfed down her shake-dipped fries, “And, you know, while I don’t normally *advocate* for eating your feelings. Sometimes it helps us deal with stuff.”

Cheyenne glanced guiltily over her already almost empty share of the Cook Out haul. She’d hoovered down her hush puppies and practically choked on her barbecue sandwich. The only thing that was left were fries, and only a few at that. Meanwhile Riley was just barely half-way done!

“…yeah.” She sighed, “I know the feeling.”

“I don’t… you know, want to pry or anything.” Riley took a fryless spoonful of milkshake and popped it into her mouth, “But is there something bothering you? You’ve been pretty down almost every time that I saw you.”

“I don’t *like* going to the gym, Riley.” Cheyenne ventured a smile, “You were the one who said that there were two kinds of people.”

“Yeah, okay, that’s just one of the ways that we’re different I guess.” Riley chuckled, “But it’s not… you’re not just *not looking forward to exercising* you’re like… you’ve just been kind of distant lately is all.”

Cheyenne gulped.

“You don’t have to tell me or anything. I just wanted to let you know that I’m here for you if you want to talk.” Riley placed a hand on Cheyenne’s shoulder as it bulged out from under her bra strap, “We don’t just *have* to be train*er* and train*ee* you know. We can be friends.”

And here, Cheyenne smiled.

“Until I catch you lying in your food journal again.” Riley laughed, pointing to her milkshake, “You think I don’t know what a “blended dairy beverage with chocolate and peanut extract is”?”

They both shared a laugh at that. It was so strange to hear Riley talk about cheating on her own diet. For so long, Cheyenne had looked at her as a pillar of resoluteness and strength when it came to diet and exercise. Seeing her be… well, she’d call it *normal* was so surreal.

“So.” Riley cocked an eyebrow, “You wanna talk about why you’re skipping sessions and fudging your food journal?”

“My friends…”

“Avery and Brooke?” Riley’s expression hardened, “I thought you guys were getting along great?”

“W-We are!” Cheyenne corrected, “It’s just… I’ve been hanging out with them a lot and they’re not really… I mean it’s *my fault* but… I…”

“Look, I’ve seen Avery. I’ve *met* Avery.” Riley stirred her milkshake with her spoon before looking back up, “I know I’ve always told you that you should take responsibility for your own actions, but it’s okay to call someone a bad influence.”

Cheyenne shrunk in her seat, her little double chin rolling out. In the past few months, she and Avery had come so far in patching up their relationship. Not too long ago, she wouldn’t have hesitated to agree with Riley, but not too long ago she and Avery were fighting almost every day. With how far they had come in becoming each other’s best friend again, it had suddenly started feeling like talking badly about her back would paint her as a bad friend. And then they’d start fighting again, before she knew it…

“It’s okay—there are *gonna* be people who don’t want to work out, want to eat like crap, and they’re *gonna* pose a problem for those of us who want to get in shape.” Riley took a bite of quesadilla, “For you, it’s Avery (and maybe Brooke, I haven’t met her) but for me, it’s *my* best friend Astrid. We’ve all got our own personal road blocks on our weight loss path.”

Cheyenne straightened back up slightly.

“It doesn’t mean that they’re bad friends, it doesn’t mean that you’re bad for realizing any of that, and it’s good that you don’t want to push responsibility off onto them.” Here, Riley’s tone shifted back into her Trainer’s intonation, “But you’ve got to be realistic and see what’s in front of you… okay?”

“…okay.”

“Good.” Riley smiled warmly, clinking their Styrofoam cups together, “Now on Friday, I’m gonna make you go an extra three minutes on the treadmill and an extra two on the elliptical.”

“Whaaaat?” Cheyenne whined in (part) playful distress, “Riley Noooo!”

“*You* scarfed down your Cook Out Tray *and* stole my fries out of my bag. That’s right, I saw you.” Riley folded her arms, “The scarfing down I could forgive, but you sealed your doom when you snuck from my bag. *I don’t play with that shit, Cheye*.”

VIII

“You never told me that Riley was gay.”

That seemed to be the main sticking point that Avery had retained from Cheyenne’s telling of the tale of Riley in the Cook Out parking lot. Not the fact that Cheyenne had been having a bad day, not the fact that she was back up to two hundred pounds, and not the fact that she had been bawling in the women’s locker room.

Cheyenne had initially told Avery about her cheat day with Riley as a way to get her to back off on all the mean stuff she said about her, and a way to maybe get back some of her groundwork in a way that wouldn’t sacrifice their friendship again. She had meant to frame it as a reason why she was going to have to cut back on eating junk. Why she would have appreciated it if, instead of ordering her a pizza, Avery and Brooke could just skip ordering her anything at all on Wednesday nights. A way of reintroducing the idea of her going back to having her own shelf in the fridge.

But somehow the bombshell topic of the day, in Avery’s mind, was the fact that Cheyenne’s trainer was a lesbian.

"Well now we know why she wanted to get your ass in shape, since she stands behind you on the machines during your sessions."

“Goddammit, Avery.”

“She’s probably enjoying the show.”

“I swear to God you’re an actual fucking child.”

Despite Cheyenne’s insistence that they go somewhere healthier, Avery had still settled on the Barnes & Noble Starbucks. Cheyenne had been fine with it, since it meant that she could try to get herself back down to a tall iced coffee without any flavors in it. Sucking tersely on her Venti Caramel Macchiato, Cheyenne’s brow furrowed in consternation of Avery’s insensitivity towards both the topic of Riley’s sexuality *and* her weight problem.

“What? I mean, it might be *true* you know.” Avery paused to slurp down about a half of an inch of her Salted Caramel Mocha Frappuccino, “You might be her type.”

“I don’t think I’m Riley’s type.” Cheyenne said with some exasperation to her voice, “I saw pictures of her girlfriend. Tall, redhead, skinny.”

“*Ex-*girlfriend.” Avery pointed out, “And you never know!”

“Avery, Riley isn’t *my* type.” The chubby brunette said flatly, “So I don’t think it matters if she likes me, because she’s got a little too much estrogen for my tastes and is missing some *pretty* important equipment down there.”

“Yeah, and you’d know with how tight those leggings are.” Avery scrunched her fat face in annoyance, “But *she* doesn’t know that. Maybe she was trying to ask you to be… *more than friends?*”

Cheyenne turned a bright crimson as she sucked down her coffee. That was, admittedly, something that she hadn’t considered when Riley had asked her to join them at their next cheat day. When the aforementioned woman walked over from the coffee bar holding a medium iced latte with toffee nut syrup, Avery had been the one to quickly killed the conversation with a particularly loud and unsubtle shushing sound. One that had Riley looking at the two of them cock-eyed before she even sat back down.

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When Riley had proposed that she start to accompany Cheyenne and Avery on their post-workout trips to various places nearby, it had been entirely out of the best interest of her client.

Cheyenne had confided unto her that she felt that Avery was a bad influence on her and a deterrent to her weight loss goals. And while Riley was sympathetic to a degree of professionalism, she was also worried about her as a friend. Cheyenne was at a rocky precipice, and having someone like her around to help keep things “under control” so to speak might have made a world of difference to her.

Over the course of the three Fridays that she had gone out with Avery and Cheyenne, it had been purely with the intention of helping to make sure that the latter stuck to her diet. What Avery did, she honestly couldn’t have cared less—though she *did* jokingly admonish her here and there where it was appropriate to do so.

She was there for Cheyenne.

In hindsight, for Cheyenne in more ways than one.

Being at such a rocky place in her own life, with her girlfriend leaving her and her roommate bringing home her own string of girls left and right, Riley would admit to being… *aware* of the fact that her love life was a little more than lackluster lately. And as much as she liked to separate her personal life from her work life, there was a small selfish part of her that liked hanging out with Cheyenne.

Not as a client, but… in her weakness, a little more than as a friend.

They had known one another for almost two years now, and they were close. She knew the ins and outs of Cheyenne’s lifestyle, and (except, apparently for the fact that she was a lesbian) Cheyenne was pretty well-versed in a day in the life of Riley.

Begrudgingly, Riley would take fault for keeping that part of her life a secret. Living and working in one of the reddest states this side of the coast, she’d gotten so used to just not mentioning her sexuality that it just never came up organically between her and Cheyenne. Perhaps, if it had earlier, all of this could have been avoided.

But she had thought that there was a little chemistry between the two of them. Cheyenne never mentioned her love life around her (from what she understood, it was a little lacking) and Riley had never thought to ask…

But she had thought that there was a little chemistry there between them.

Maybe it was just the closeness of their trainer/trainee relationship, but it had been enough for Riley to get her hopes up. Coming off of such a messy breakup, she had known that she should have been more careful, but… well weirder things have happened to her than hooking up with a client.

And if that had been what had happened, she definitely would have walked out of Planet Fitness that evening in a much better mood.

“Hey, Cheye.” Riley’s voice had been tinged with an uncharacteristic wavering to it. She seemed unsure since perhaps the first time that Cheyenne had met her, “Uh… good workout today.”

“Thanks. I’m really trying to get myself back up to where I was before…” Cheyenne chuckled awkwardly, “Well, before I started cancelling on you all the time. Again, I am *so* sorry about that—”

“No way, it’s… you know, it’s totally cool.” Riley bit her bottom lip, “Um… thanks again for letting me pal around with you and Avery on Fridays. It’s been great, you know, getting out of the apartment.”

She shifted awkwardly on her long, elegant feet.

“My, uh… my roommate thanks you too.” She stuttered, “Since she doesn’t have to worry about me coming home and wrecking her dates.”

“I should really be thanking you.” Cheyenne laughed, her little double chin creasing and her jelly belly bouncing, “It’s been really cool having someone to keep me in line when I look at the menus pretty much *everywhere*.”

“Yeah, ha…”

Again, for perhaps the first time since they had known one another, there seemed to be a looming weight hanging overhead. At the time, it had seemed like a good thing. Some mutual awkward attraction that had awoken between them. A sign of something (hopefully) to come. Maybe dinner, drinks… then her place? Just something to get her mind off of Stephanie…

“Hey, um… I was thinking.” Riley stiffened up and steeled herself, “Would you, you know… like to do something Saturday?”

“That sounds like a great idea!” Cheyenne’s big brown eyes lit up, “Me, Avery and Brooke were gonna have a *Star Wars* marathon, and it’d be *great* if you could keep me from—”

“N-No, not… not like that.” Riley laughed awkwardly, “Just… you know, the two of us.”

She glanced down at her fingers, twiddling them subconsciously as she wrestled with herself over even asking such a stupid question.

“And… you know, not as train*er* and train*ee*.”

Growing up, Riley had always (or at least, as long as it had mattered) been attracted to women. In her high school years, she had asked out two girls and dated them for like two months before they broke up with her. But in her adult years she had dated quite a few women. More importantly, she had asked out quite a few women.

And she had learned that the long, *long* pause that had come after her question meant that her proposal was dead as soon as it hit the water.

Cheyenne’s face turned *bright* red and her eyes went wide with a sea of visibly mixed emotions. Her mouth opened up ever so slightly and the whole tone of the conversation shifted in about two-point-five seconds in a direction that Riley had really, *really* hoped that it wouldn’t have gone.

“Oh.”

That damned oh that Riley had dreaded hearing. Every time that there was an attractive woman that she got along with that wasn’t into her, she’d get that exact same *oh* from every single one of them.

“I’m not…” Cheyenne shrunk away from her, “I-I don’t really swing that way, Riley.”

And all of the color had drained out of Riley’s face. Again, in hindsight, the incompatible orientation had been there from the start. But hey, her last girlfriend was bisexual. Fuck her for thinking that maybe this cute client that she’d known for years was too, right?

After all, it wasn’t like she hadn’t been given the green light.

“Rrrrrright.” Riley forced a smile, “You’re… absolutely right. I am so, so sorry for putting you on the spot like that.”

“Y-Yeah.” Cheyenne’s eyes were now locked to below waist-level, “Um… I don’t…”

“I know you don’t and I’m sorry and I…” Riley’s chest deflated as a long, painful sigh escaped her, “I really hope that this means you won’t start looking for a new trainer.”

“N-No, I… I won’t.” Cheyenne blinked dumbly, “We’re, um… we’re cool.”

“Are you sure? Because I really like you and—” fuck Riley fuck fuck fuck, “—*as a client*, and—”

“I really need to get going.”

“Yeah me too.”

And in about two minutes, it was as if two years of client-trainer build up had gone out the door with her. As Cheyenne’s plump rump shrunk in the double doorway that looked out into the parking lot, Riley couldn’t help but feel like she’d made an enormous mistake.

*I should have fucking guessed*.

Riley pursed her lips tight as she felt her heart sink to lower and lower depths in her chest. That had been embarrassing as hell, and it may have cost her a client. Another client. Not only that, it may have just costed her a friend! Cheyenne was the closest thing that she had to one of those these days outside of Astrid and her roommate, now that Stephanie was back with Trent.

Slouching against the elliptical, Riley let out another deep-chested sigh. All she could do now was hope that Cheyenne wasn’t too freaked out by her to come back and keep up her training.

*A fucking predatory lesbian, that’s what you are*.

Riley groaned as she whipped out her phone, debating whether or not to message Cheyenne and tell her what had happened. Would that be too weird? Would that have made it even worse? What was the correct protocol for having hit on a straight client who was shaping up to be a potential outside-of-work friend?

*Put it away, put it away…*

Listening to the little voice inside her head, Riley decided against messaging Cheyenne any further. Whatever was going to happen from here was entirely out of her control. If Cheyenne kept her on as a client… if Cheyenne didn’t think that she was just being nice to her because she was attracted to her… if they could still be friends…

*Why the fuck did Avery tell me that I had a shot with her?*

IX

Normally, at this time of day, Cheyenne would have been at the gym.

But ever since that awkwardness of Riley asking her out, something that Avery had been calling for weeks as though it had been obvious. Despite her promise that she and Riley were cool, a steadily chunkier Cheyenne had cancelled on all but two of her sessions with her sapphic trainer—each on either side of the last month that she’d paid for.

Even though she had no problem with Riley being a lesbian, it was just too weird knowing that her personal trainer was attracted to her. That had been one of the main reasons that she’d signed up for a woman instructor in the first place! And with how awkward she had left it with Riley, well…

Cheyenne honestly didn’t think that she was going to renew her contract for another term.

And she really, really needed it. Now more than ever.

Sitting on her butt for most of a month had seen Cheye backslide even more in her fitness goals. Now back up to nearly two hundred and forty pounds, she was busting out of absolutely everything in her wardrobe.

Her stomach had grown back out into a jiggly, fleshy apron of olive-colored chub. She had to tuck it into the crotch of her jeans again, and her fupa was back with a vengeance. Her ass was spreading wider and wider across the couch while her thighs practically thickened before her eyes. Her arms were getting wobblier and less toned, and even her fingers were starting to get all chubby again!

Laying around with a frown and a double-chin, she had been inconsolable pretty much ever since she realized that she wouldn’t be able to continue on as she had with Riley.

And after a few weeks, *someone* had to say *something*.

“Avery, I’m really starting to get worried about Cheye.” The big-chested brunette said in a hushed voice, “She hasn’t moved… *all day*. I think she’s depressed.”

“We’re all depressed—we’re millennials.” Avery had answered nonplussed, shaking a box of Cheezits over her open mouth, “What of it?”

“Avery, you’re such a child.”

While it had been nice, at first, to have Cheyenne around the house more (it meant that there were *plenty* of more opportunities for the three of them to hang out) days like today made it clear that Cheyenne was sort of just going through the motions. And eating. She’d been doing a lot of that.

She and Avery had kept the tradition of going out to eat on Fridays to various eateries around town, but now they *took place* of going to the gym instead of occurring afterwards. They spent roughly the same amount of time out and about, with the exception of burning far fewer calories and doing a lot more window shopping—for clothes, mostly. Something that all three of them were in desperate need of.

“I know that she’s a little wigged out by going back to Planet Fitness, but…”

Brooke took a passing glance at the brown-haired plumper as she slouched on their couch like a lump on a log.

“Do you think maybe if you two started going back to the gym she’d snap out of it?”

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Avery had let out a loud, belting yawn almost as soon as she’d pulled up in her Honda Fit to the Planet Fitness—a believable side-effect to having arrived at no earlier than 9pm.

As stupid as it sounded, it was the only way that Cheyenne knew that she wasn’t going to have to look Riley in the face and explain why she had decided not to renew her contract for another period. She knew that Riley always went home to feed her dogs around seven in the evening and, not wanting to cut any corners and to be doubly sure that she wouldn’t run into her now *former* trainer, Cheyenne had been the one to suggest doing it at nine in the evening.

As a joke, mostly, but she had been surprised when Avery agreed to it.

“I’m here to support you.” Avery said with a sleepy smile, “You go do your thing, and *I’m* gonna fuck around on the exercise bike.”

Cheyenne was absolutely busting out of her workout clothes. She hadn’t bought any new ones since she’d last been to the gym with Riley. She hadn’t had much of a need to. Convincing herself that a break from the gym was what she’d needed, she hadn’t had much choice *but* to squeeze into leggings that had ripped almost as soon as she’d started walking, or a tank top that hugged her so tight that her arms bulged out of it like bread baking around twine.

Granted, not that Avery was much better. Her belly bounced with every pathetic lap the pedals made around the bike. Her lowest belly roll actually *laid against* the middle console for the handlebars…

*What the fuck am I doing*? Cheyenne caught herself *Avery’s being a good friend and going with me to the gym and I’m judging her for how big her tummy is.*

For the past month, Cheyenne had felt lost. Over the course of two years and some change, she had learned to schedule herself around Riley’s available appointments. Taking her workout times *out* of her hands had been one of the main reasons that Cheyenne had been able to stick with it. She hadn’t been able to negotiate a time with Riley once since they started to get to know one another.

But now, without her, Cheyenne was suddenly *very* aware of the fact that she hadn’t done her regular routine this month outside of two days.

Every movement on these machines had felt like pins and needles pressing into her slowly atrophied muscles. Her lackluster performance *before* she’d decided not to renew her contract with Riley certainly couldn’t have helped any, but the month of laying around and eating her troubles away had meant that she was even more out of shape than the last time she’d struggled against the elliptical. Cheyenne was having an absolutely dreadful time trying to get through her routine without Riley there to motivate her, and it had started as early as ten minutes into her first attempt at cardio in more than two weeks.

“Fuck…” Cheyenne gasped and puffed, “Try… try to remember what… Riley taught you…”

*Think about things that motivate you*.

It was Riley’s voice in her head, imparting as much wisdom as she had retained in the two years and then some that she had taken from Riley’s tutelage.

*Yeah, what motivates you fatty?*

Cheyenne struggled against the resistance that her heavier weight provided. It was nothing that she hadn’t done before, but the last time that she had been on an elliptical at two hundred and forty pounds, it had been with sixty pounds lost and muscle mass gained under her belt. Now she was going at it at nearly eighty pounds *gained* and almost a month of inactivity.

Out of habit, she had set the thing for thirty minutes. That was the minimum requirement for cardio workout and, for Riley, the minimum amount of time per machine. If she ever wanted to lose weight, she was going to have to be able to tough it out…

Ten minutes in, and Cheyenne was sweating like a mule. Her back was sticky, and her tummy had worked its way out from her leggings. Not only that, an inch of belly blubber was now flying free for all to see as she wobbled and waddled awkwardly on an easier setting than the one she had been at before she’d abdicated. Her tank top was stuck to her back rolls, her crack was showing, and it was all she could do but to thank God that almost nobody came to Planet Fitness in the evening.

“Woo!” Avery clapped enthusiastically, “Go Cheyenne!”

A little bit of encouragement was welcome. Needed, even. For too long, Cheyenne had gotten used to relying on someone else for their support while she worked on losing weight. Having Avery there to cheer her on (after a pitiful five minutes on the exercise bike) had meant the world to her.

“Come on Cheye-Cheye!”

“Fuck…fuckfuckfuck…”

Cheyenne had hit a wall only fifteen minutes into her workout. The muscles that she’d gained over the years of exercising were still *there*, but buried underneath nearly eighty pounds of fat. She was heavy. She was slow. She would have done anything if it meant that she didn’t have to do any more laps. Moments like this, where Riley would have come in handy, were the bane of her fitness existence—she was really, *really* bad at keeping herself motivated.

“Fuck… fuck…”

Cheyenne began to slow down. Her footfalls became less rapid, her form less precise, and eventually she slowed down to a brisk walk as the machine rocked back and forth thanks to her weight. She slowed even further from there, literally covered in sweat. Her thighs chafed, her chest heaving… Cheyenne was not having a good time.

“I… I kicked too early…” Cheyenne made an excuse for herself, “I… phew…I don’t think that I can keep going…”

Avery smiled.

“That’s okay, Cheye.” She extended an arm to help her friend off of the elongated pedals of the elliptical, “I still think you did pretty good.”

“Thanks.” Cheyenne huffed and puffed weakly, “But… I didn’t even finish my set.”

“Well, you’ll finish it next time.” Avery pat her friend on the back, “You’ll get back into the swing of things.”

“Fuck…” Cheyenne said breathlessly as she leaned against Avery for support, “I didn’t think that I was this out of shape.”

“Hey, that’s what the gym’s for.” Avery said with a light squish of Cheyenne’s side-fat, “Getting you back in shape after you fall off the wagon.”

“Sorry to drag you out here so you could watch me putter out and die up there.”

“No way—did you *see* me on the exercise bike?” Avery laughed, “I *so* don’t belong here.”

“I guess… we sorta stick out like sore thumbs, don’t we?”

“Yeah, I guess we do… I think we’ve earned some Cook Out though. What do you think?”

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From there on, it was more or less child’s play to wean Cheyenne off of going to the gym.

After all, she hadn’t been going regularly for a month. Her main pillar of support had been Riley, and with everything that had happened between them, it was becoming clearer and clearer that Cheyenne’s workout regimen pretty much depended on having someone there to coach her on. A role that Avery stepped into most readily.

Changing the schedule meant that they now only worked out at night. When they remembered. Sometimes, Avery would work late. And Cheyenne *couldn’t* go to the gym without her Gym Buddy. Otherwise Avery would be upset…

But when they *did* go, there were always late-night milkshakes to reward them for venturing outside of their comfort zone for a session in the gym… however brief.

Eventually, the aspect of the gym had been dropped entirely. Cheyenne was now paying sixteen dollars a month *not* to go to the Planet Fitness off of Asheville Highway, and instead to drive through the Cook Out window and order milkshakes.

As time wore on and their affinity for the late-night crowd at their local gym waned, they would simply give themselves the gift of immediate gratification—skipping the gym for a late-night outing to McDonalds or Taco Bell, and ordering the exact same amount of food that they would normally reserve for “rewarding” themselves.

“We’ll work it off next time.” Avery would insist

“It’s our cheat day.” Avery would coddle

“You’ve earned it!” Avery would placate

And by the end of a month, the talk of cancelling Cheyenne’s gym membership entirely had been put on the table. It was another couple of weeks until she did it, but Avery’s repeated jokes about how she was paying to *not* go to the gym had finally struck a chord.

Cheyenne had all but given up on losing weight at Planet Fitness.

And Avery was right—she *had* liked Cheyenne better, now that she was fat again.

X

It was a chapter in life a little too early to remember all that well, but Cheyenne had not always been fat.

For comparison, Avery and Brooke had both always been rather plump. At least, for as long as it had mattered. With Avery’s issues over her parents’ divorce leading her towards food for comfort and Brooke’s genetic predisposition towards a general overall chubbiness, Cheyenne had stood out as the only formerly thin girl between them. In fact, she had gained notoriety once upon a time as a mid-level player on their middle school soccer team. Believe it or not, Cheyenne was a former athelete.

While Avery was plumping out into a spoiled child of divorce and Brooke had already become known as a chubby little bookworm, Cheyenne (for however brief of a period of time) had enjoyed moderate popularity as the goalie on her girls’ soccer team. She and her fellow teammates had almost gone to the State Championships. She had only played for the two semesters that she’d attended Mabry Middle School, but it had been enough to help propel her upwards into the social ladder that high school not only provided, but enforced.

Now, *quitting* the soccer team (or at least, deciding not to try out for the high school team) had been her own decision. Her parents had been very adamant about not wanting her to spend her high school years doing something that she hated and, over the course of two years, she had grown to dislike soccer intensely

Trying out for Chorus had been where she’d initially met Brooke and Avery—as a satellite member of one of the popular girls.

Moving forward, she had been *Kennady Flemming’s* friend—as in, the girl who used to make fun of Avery for getting and being fat. Kennady had once upon a time been on the same team as Cheyenne during middle school, and the two of them had grown close enough that the flood of new faces in high school had meant that they were each other’s best friends.

However, Avery and Kennady had been inseparable up until middle school, when Avery’s parents had divorced and set her eating disorder into motion. By the time everyone had entered middle school, Avery had put on nearly fifty pounds of pre-adolescent chub and ostracized herself from girls who were either too shallow or too unsympathetic to care about the reasons *why* she may have put on the weight.

Ever since that point forward, she and Kennady Flemming had held a bitter rivalry for one another (still did, that stupid cunt) and she had wasted no opportunities to make fun of Avery for her spectacular weight gain. Day after day, she had endured countless taunts of varying amounts of creativity regarding her weight gain and, eventually, it had reached a breaking point for more than a few people.

It was true that Avery had been quite the plump kid. Ever since middle school, she had steadily grown into a chunky teenager. But bringing in other girls to make fun of her had been the absolute lowest of the low, at least to Avery. Kennady, she could deal with. But the other girls… they were just there for the popularity high.

Cheyenne, at the time, included.

Winning her over had been just a matter of time as far as Kennady’s natural lack of charisma was concerned. Avery wasn’t unpopular (and neither was Brooke, thus how they met) and she was a far sight more sociable than the inept-but-affluent Kennady Flemming. The four of them were all in chorus together and, one day, Kennady had picked on Avery a little too much and made her cry.

Cheyenne’s natural empathy (as someone who was used to getting picked on for growing up poor in the Mill Hill) had shone through and… well, the rest was history. She eventually started to sympathize more with the unjustly antagonized Avery rather than the spoiled bitchiness of Kennady Flemming, and slowly but surely she became *Avery’s* friend.

And with that, Avery had started inviting Cheyenne over as much as possible. Avery’s parents were never stingy with how much food she could eat, and that extended to her guests. Going over to Brooke’s house now included Cheyenne, and they would eat pizza until they felt like they would barf. Cheyenne would go home almost every other outing with a full belly and an unbuckled belt, slowly growing outwards until she developed a weight problem of her own.

Growing up poor, she had never had the opportunity to stuff herself like she did at her friends’ houses. Fueled by an arguing set of parents that never seemed pleased (or even fazed) by her academic marks, she had taken to food for comfort. She had become enamored with the surplus that their friendship provided. And, in Chorus, she burned almost no calories. Cheyenne had practically inflated as soon as she made friends with Avery, and their mutual acquaintance Kennady started to snub her too.

By the time that they had all hit Senior Year, the Cheyenne who had made fun of Avery was almost unrecognizable to the one who waddled beside her, down the halls of Chapman High School. She, Avery, and Brooke were now three recognizable characters in the social hierarchy as the popular (albeit fat) girls, while Kennady’s popularity had faded due to her misanthropy and the general shittiness of her personality.

Waddling off of the high school graduation stage at more than two hundred and fifty pounds, Cheyenne Harlowe would eventually enter college as a grade-A chunker.

But then, all three of them had—Avery, Brooke, and Cheyenne were just as inseparable there as they had been in high school, and it wasn’t like they had developed hobbies outside of binge-watching movies and going out to eat constantly. Hanging out in Avery’s dorm (and eventually, her on-campus apartment), getting to do everything that their parents wouldn’t let them do at home, they quickly developed a taste for laying around and eating pizza while expanding outward ever still. Brooke settled somewhere around two hundred and fifty, Avery reached new heights at two hundred and eighty while Cheyenne continued to puff up and up…

Sooner, rather than later, Cheyenne had eventually eclipsed both of them in weight—waddling off yet another graduation stage at just under three hundred pounds of bottom-heavy blubberpot, she entered the world as a heavyweight Communications Major destined for retail. She, Brooke, and Avery had all moved in together and gone on to enable each other in their own respective ways.

With the stress of her job and her own issues with food, Cheyenne only continued her steady expansion outwards. Hitting three hundred pounds had come as a hard wakeup call to her. While it had been some time since she’d thought of herself as a “former athelete” (did anyone actually *do* anything on that field?) nobody else in Cheyenne’s family had ever had a problem with their weight.

This wasn’t a genetic thing that she could blame her issues with food on, like Brooke.

Her parents fought, but they hadn’t divorced like Avery’s.

Cheyenne’s issues with food were learned. It had been a coping mechanism to deal with her various problems in life. Seeing that enormous number on the scale had finally motivated her to do something about it And even if she had never gotten around to blaming her friends for her weight problem, all of Cheyenne’s eating disorder could be amounted to social learning. The fact that she ate when she was depressed, or angry, or even happy had weighed heavily on her for a while now, but seeing that three-double-zero on the scale had shown her that she needed to make a change.

Once she’d started veering away from the normalcy that had helped the three of them get through their lives together, however, Avery had started to buck.

Sure, she could go to the gym. At first, it hadn’t impacted their lives all that much. For the first few months, Cheyenne was still the lazy fatty that she’d grown into being through years of indulgence and immediate gratification. However, once she met Riley and signed on to be her trainee, things had started to go south…

Ever since, Avery and Cheyenne had been steadily building up this animosity with Brooke seated front and center. Sandwiched between a steadily slimming Cheyenne and an increasingly antagonistic Avery, the poor third in their friend group had barely an idea what to do…

And the rest, as they say is history.

Cheyenne eventually fell out with her friend group, and Avery was there to scoop her right back up.

Just like old times.

The only one who remembered this tale (or at least, most of it) had been none other than Avery herself. The names that Cheyenne used to call her back when they were both young occasionally reared their ugly head, but it hadn’t been a problem in so long. Now that she and Cheyenne were friends, she hardly ever thought about the days when they hadn’t been—but whenever she did…

Don’t be mistaken, their friendship *was* one on mutual affection for one another, but the idea that the girl who used to bully her (Double-Avery had been Cheyenne’s cat call of choice) had now gotten *fatter* than her was something that had brought her at least a small amount of joy.

Until it hadn’t.

Cheyenne slimming down posed the biggest threat to Avery’s newfound sense of normalcy, and she hadn’t been happy about it at all. Why the fuck did everything have to change just when she was getting comfortable? If Cheyenne slimmed back down, who was to say that she wouldn’t go back to acting like that skinny bully from back in high school?

Riley had posed the biggest obstacle in getting Cheyenne to quit going to the gym. For a while, she had seen the personal trainer as an untouchable part of Cheyenne’s life. But as soon as she’d been able to exploit a chink in the relationship between her and Cheyenne, Avery hadn’t hesitated. Without her around, Cheyenne would have no choice but to go back to the way that things used to be between them.

And so, she’d done everything in her power to make sure that Cheyenne puffed back up again.

It had been the same outcome, just with a little bit more deliberation in its execution—if she’d said it once, and she’d definitely said it a few times, Avery liked Cheyenne better when she was fat.

When she was fat, Cheyenne was more fun. When she was fat, Cheyenne didn’t ask too many questions. When she was fat, Cheyenne ate and she laughed and she watched movies and the two of them got along so much better. Perhaps most importantly, when Cheyenne was fat things were *normal*. There wasn’t this stress of things changing around her. When Cheyenne was fat, Avery had a friend group that she could depend on, and there was no looming threat of change…

And now that she had talked Cheyenne into just cancelling her Planet Fitness membership outright, Avery never had to worry about Cheyenne losing weight any time soon. Brooke was happy that everyone was hanging out again, and so was she…

Things were finally back to *normal* between the three of them, and Avery wouldn’t have had it any other way. From here on out, it would be nothing but smooth sailing between the three of them. Things had finally gotten back to normal…

But in so many ways, ways that Avery could have never imagined, things had changed.

Things had changed so, so very much.