

An Explosive Feast

By: IndigoRho

Dominic stared across the expanse of the palace's Great Hall and took a deep, calming breath. The blue jay was the highest-ranked royal chef in the kingdom, a title he had increasingly considered a curse over the last few years. Every meal he prepared was excessively scrutinized, his creativity was stifled, and—worst of all—his gluttonous king tended to crave servants when hungry rather than regular food. Recently that strange preference had grown considerably, leaving Dominic fearful of the day the King would request blue jay for breakfast. Intent on self-preservation, Dominic had concocted a plan to save his own feathers.

After another breath, Dominic gripped the handles of the enormous push-cart he was behind and wheeled the night's main course across the room. Atop an intricately carved throne sat King Orion, a phoenix with brilliant orange and red feathers whose majesty was only dwarfed by his girth. His round gut wobbled atop his lap as he tore into a chunk of roasted boar, washing every other bite down with a copious amount of wine. Orion had always been an unrepentant glutton, a trait born from his boredom and resentment as third in line to the throne with little hope of grandeur. After the passing of his father, though, he'd put that gluttony to good use, ascending to the throne when his older brothers mysteriously “disappeared”. His coincidental sudden weight-gain was quietly ignored.

Orion tossed aside the picked-clean stick of boar and gave his belly a firm slap with a wing, provoking a belch that echoed throughout the room. A cloud of thick smoke poured from his beak in return, a downside to the phoenix's raging inferno of a stomach. He waved the smoke away, and was about to dig back into the boar until he spotted Dominic approaching.

“Finally!” The King's voice boomed. “I was beginning to think I'd starve.” Orion pushed aside the carts of emptied platters before him, making room for the feast Dominic was bringing.

“Apologies your majesty. I took some extra time to ensure the main course was one you'd never forget,” Dominic said as humbly as he could manage.

Once Dominic arrived at the King, he lifted the heavy lid of the cart, revealing a bound, gagged, and obviously over-stuffed cardinal. The plump cardinal's feathers glistened and his gut sloshed with every squirm as he tried to break free, to no avail. King Orion's beak was already watering, and it took every ounce of restraint for him to resist gobbling up the meal immediately.

“Sire, I dare say that Easton here is my most delicious creation yet,” Dominic said. “He's been soaked in dressing for an entire day, layered in spices, and filled with some of the kingdom's finest wine.”

“Excellent, excellent! And this one finally has some meat on his bones.” King Orion grabbed one of Easton's love handles and gave it a squeeze. “Alright dinner, time to serve your King!”

With his stomach growling, Orion rolled Easton onto his gut and slid him across the cart, opening his beak wide and shoving the terrified cardinal's head right in. The explosion of flavor in his mouth was completely unexpected, and Orion couldn't help but moan contently as his tongue tasted every inch of his thoroughly seasoned dinner. Dominic had never put this much effort into preparing a live meal before. If the chef kept this quality up, perhaps he'd abandon mundane food entirely.

Covered in slick dressing, Easton practically glided down Orion's throat with every gulp, his struggles doing nothing to stop his descent. Still, the cardinal knew very well what awaited him within the King's dreaded stomach, and continued squirming and fidgeting desperately. Dominic watched the unfortunate bird gradually vanish down the greedy king's gullet with a hint of guilt. He'd chosen Easton as the sacrifice primarily due to the cardinal's weight, weight he'd gained during a year of taste-testing Dominic's meals. Everything would be worth it if his plan worked, though.

As King Orion's beak stretched around the swollen gut of his dinner, Dominic made his move. The blue jay shoved Easton's butt hard, forcing even more of the cardinal down Orion's throat and prompting him to instinctively swallow faster. The King cringed as his gullet was strained from

essentially chugging an entire person, but he needed to continue gulping so he could demand answers from Dominic. His middle lurched and wobbled as the rest of Easton was dumped into his toasty stomach. Orion gasped for air and opened his beak to yell at the disrespectful chef—only to suddenly have it closed shut as Dominic wrapped a rope around it.

There was just enough confusion for Orion to overlook the struggles in his stomach pick up as his internal flames kicked in, but he couldn't ignore his belly violently ballooning outward with enough force to shove the push cart away. Orion looked down at his massively bloated gut with shock, his eyes growing wide once he realized he was still swelling. With renewed desperation Orion tried to undo the rope around his beak, but his feathers were coated in dressing from his dinner and couldn't maintain a firm grip. Dominic, meanwhile, was slowly backing away from the rapidly expanding phoenix.

The King had always seemed proud of his furnace of a stomach, and Dominic was delighted to use that pride against him. With his beak clamped shut, Orion had no way of releasing the smoke cloud growing in his belly, turning him into a ticking time bomb. Easton's dressing may have been tasty, but it was also the most flammable Dominic could find, and the “wine” in the cardinal's gut had simply been pure oil. The perfect, combustible meal.

King Orion waddled a single step away from his throne before the sheer size of his bloating belly caused him to topple over onto it. Tiny wisps of smoke seeped from his beak, but it was nothing compared to what grew within him. His whole body shook as a muffled explosion erupted inside him, causing the phoenix to swell twice as large in a painful instant, yet still somehow remain intact.

His skin tingled as his body was stretched well beyond its normal limits, terrible creaks and groans echoing around him. He fidgeted atop the growing sphere of his middle, feeling the throne behind him slowly start to press against his taut hide. Reaching his beak was next to impossible now, not that Orion had any real hope of removing the rope and belching out the smoke. The guards were elsewhere—ordered away any time the King decided to gorge—and Dominic was obviously not about to interfere.

The flames in Orion's stomach were burning hotter than they ever had before, hot enough to gently lift the bloated phoenix off the ground ever-so-slowly. The King's struggles only became more frantic as he took flight. Dominic watched on in amusement as his liege rose like a feathered sun, his fears turning to relief as the voracious bird neared a humiliating end. Content the plan would play out on its own, Dominic hurried out of the throne room, intent on not being found nearby once the King went boom.

Hovering in the air and hopeless, King Orion was convinced every sharp tingle was the final blow. The actual end came like a wave of needles jabbing his entire body at once. King Orion burst apart into a billowing cloud of smoke and flaming feathers that shook half the palace. His crown was imbedded into the ceiling and his beak the door, all that remained of the gluttonous king aside from ash and burnt feathers. The exact truth of the event would never be known, but the cautionary tale of a king who ate till he exploded would spread far and wide, for years to come.