

A Light Snack

By: IndigoRho

Rai growled as a sharp gust of wind flung leaves into his face, one nearly going right into his mouth. The lime-green eastern dragon decided he was best off jogging the rest of the short distance to the front door of his parents' house, swiping away a few more airborne leaves along the way. He'd been asked to drop off a couple things for his dad after work, and Rai was already regretting the minor inconvenience of it all. Traffic had been a pain, he'd stepped in a couple puddles, and the wind was going out of its way to mess up his teal mane. Being nice wasn't nearly as rewarding as he'd been told.

As the impatient dragon finally reached the front porch of his old home, he spotted a wrapped gift basket waiting for him. Or, to be precise, waiting for his older brother Kai. The basket was a little roughed up, having apparently tipped over in the wind and crushed a few of the pastries within. Rai lifted the package in one claw as the other stumbled about with a key, the dragon nudging the front door open just as another small gust came by. He quickly shut the door behind him.

The lights were off, and a few loud calls soon revealed neither of his parents were home. Dropping his bag on the floor, Rai gave the mystery basket a curious look over, meandering towards the kitchen as he did. His brother was an exceptional pastry chef—and fairly likely to take over the family bakery in the future—so Rai couldn't understand why he'd bother ordering something online he could easily make himself. Most of the basket's tag had been torn off by the wind, so the dragon didn't have anything else to go by other than the contents seemed to be cream puffs of some kind. There was always the possibility they were a gift from a relative or friend. Still, to the bored dragon, the basket didn't make any sense.

Rai carelessly dropped the basket on the kitchen counter, and was about to head out when his curiosity got the better of him. The detour to his parents' place had thrown off his eating schedule, and Rai's stomach was finally beginning to rumble and complain about the lack of food. Even the fairly slim dragon couldn't ignore his hunger forever. On sheer impulse he decided to snag a couple pastries from his brother's package, doubting the other dragon would either notice or realize who the true culprit was. Their father was a bit of an overeater, after all.

With little subtlety Rai opened the cellophane wrapping of the basket and plucked out two of the nicer-looking cream puffs. He eagerly tossed the first right into his open mouth, delighted to discover they had a minty lemon flavor. The second was swiftly gobbled up, along with a third just to be safe. Rai happily licked his claws clean of frosting, before lazily making his way back towards the entrance. As he walked, though, a change began to come over the dragon. Rai's fairly flat, white-scaled stomach abruptly started rounding out, gradually making the dragon look chubbier and chubbier. The creases on his loose shirt soon vanished as it stretched tight over his expanding middle, his belly threatening to peek out from underneath.

Rai didn't notice the change at first, shrugging off the strange sensation of feeling fuller than usual and thinking about what he would do once he returned home. When he finally bent down to retrieve his bag at the front door, though, his swollen gut was impossible to ignore. The dragon leaped in surprise as he saw how bloated he'd become, groping his middle with both claws to ensure he wasn't just imagining things. Unfortunately he wasn't. With a bit of effort he pulled off his shirt once it started feeling uncomfortably tight, tossing it aside so he could get a solid look at what was happening. His belly was still visibly swelling, and Rai could swear his expansion had sped up, too.

Confused and nervous, the one thing Rai knew for sure was the source of his rapidly growing pot-belly: the cream puffs. Rai rushed back to the kitchen, gut bouncing all the way, and frantically scoured every inch of the gift basket in search of clues. Despite his best efforts, the dragon couldn't find an ingredients list, a brand name, or even a company logo. Nothing. By then his middle was larger than a beach ball, and Rai was becoming increasingly concerned about just how large he was going to get. He poked and prodded his gut, trying to get a feel for what was filling him. There wasn't the tell-tale

sloshing of juice or water, and while he didn't feel much heavier, his hide lacked the tautness associated with air or another gas. There was a bit of give, and perhaps a very faint squishing sound. While he couldn't be certain, Rai guessed there was a chance the mystery substance was literally cream filling.

The bloating dragon was well-acquainted with prank pastries, having baked his own plenty of times to terrorize friends and strangers, but he wasn't sure why his brother would bother to order any. Just like him, Kai could've easily made some himself. Obsessing over the “why” was proving costly, though. Rai's hips and chest had begun to swell as his body rounded out, the expansion spreading dangerously outwards. Rai had no way of knowing for sure how volatile the pastries were, and he didn't know where his parent's kept their inflation-suppressant meds, or if they had any at all. There was a terrifyingly high possibility he'd fill till he burst apart.

Out of sheer desperation he waddled towards the bathroom, only to find himself wedged firmly in the kitchen doorway as he tried to pass. Rai growled and huffed as he attempted to force his swelling body through the suddenly narrow frame. He could feel himself growing tighter by the second, and nearly flew into a panic as he slowly inched his way through. His arms, legs, and tail had all begun puffing up as well, stiffening in the process. With an audible *pop* the dragon managed to free himself from the doorway, falling forwards onto the floor of the living room, a suspiciously high-pitched yelp marking his landing.

More confused than ever, Rai let out a few cautious words, each squeakier than the last; he sounded like he'd gulped down a tank of helium. He'd have screamed in frustration if the noise wouldn't have been earsplitting. Helium-infused snacks were almost always volatile enough to bring someone to the bursting point—something he'd learned after a few of his “innocent” pranks ended in messes—and he'd gluttoned on three of the once-harmless looking treats. Now completely convinced he was in danger of exploding, Rai struggled to get back onto his claws and find some medication, any medication. The dragon wobbled and rocked as he fought against his blimping belly, his limbs far too bloated to be of use.

Rai could hear his hide creaking slightly as it stretched, the dragon's form becoming more and more spherical as the minutes passed. He whined and grunted as he continued flailing to no avail, limbs bloating till they were merely domes rising from his rounded body, his claws puffing up as well. Eventually there was enough helium in him to lift the dragon off the floor. Wobbling in fear, Rai gently hovered into the air, whining as he felt the pressure within growing noticeably uncomfortable. The creaks and groans of his hide were increasing, getting louder, more ominous. His head had sunk into his swollen neck and his cheeks bloated, the tips of his short antlers pressing lightly into his own ballooned back. All he could do was whimper and wait.

The dragon's flight was painfully slow, though Rai was thankful there'd been nothing sharp clattering up the room nearby. His rear gradually angled upwards, and Rai winced as his tail bumped into the ceiling first, causing him to bounce and creak a little. For minutes he floated, eyes darting around for impossible salvation, expecting to hear a horrible tear or rip at any moment, to burst apart and cover the whole living room in fresh cream filling. The sound never came. Though there were plenty of light groans, his internal pressure seemed to have stabilized, a simple sign he'd stopped inflating.

Despite the passage of time, Rai couldn't feel completely safe. He remained high on the ceiling for what seemed like hours, an impossible to miss green-and-white sphere. Nearly on the verge of falling asleep from exhaustion, the sound of a key fidgeting in the front door snapped him back awake. Rai's hopeful look evaporated into a scowl as soon as he saw who'd arrived: Kai.

Kai started laughing before he'd even closed the door, spotting his blimped up brother right away. “You do know you have to be *outside* if you want to float home, right bro?”

“Shut it Kai, this is all your fault!” Rai snapped, his voice ridiculously high-pitched.

“I don't see how I managed to stuff a helium tank in your mouth while I was at work, but sure, all my fault,” Kai continued laughing.

"I didn't inflate myself you ass, this was all from those stupid prank pastries you ordered!" Rai was beginning to bounce slightly as he raged.

Kai's laughter suddenly stopped. "Wait, my pastries arrived? And you *ate* one?"

"Well, more like three, but that's not the point! They weren't properly marked, what if I'd exploded!" Rai's squeakiness was making it impossible to sound imposing.

"Uh, how long ago exactly did you eat those?" Kai seemed the slightest bit more serious now.

Rai had to think for a moment, trying to remember when he'd arrived at the house. "I don't know, maybe around three-ish? Like you care how long I was stuck up here!"

For a split second Kai's eyes went wide. "Oof. Honestly bro, you might have been better off popping. Those are some extra volatile pastries, if you're inflated by them for too long there's a bit of a chance the effects become...uh...permanent."

"What!" Rai had switched back to being frantic. "T-this isn't funny Kai, get me down, quick!"

Kai simply shook his head. "Yeah, that's not gonna help. You've already been that way for close to five hours, and even if mom and dad had a ladder I could use to reach you, they sure as heck don't have anything to empty you of all that cream. Hate to break it to ya, but you're boned."

Rai was beside himself. He was friends with a couple people who were permanently stuck as berries, and had always been thankful to not be afflicted with the condition himself. Now he was, in all likelihood, doomed to be a waddling cream puff. The unfortunate dragon couldn't think of a word to say, half-starting sentences before breaking down into whines. How could this have happened?

Kai, however, seemed pretty apathetic about his obnoxious younger brother's predicament. As far as he was concerned, the other dragon had no one but himself to blame for eating something that wasn't meant for him. Besides, he knew Rai had popped at least a couple others in the past, so if anything he was being hit by karma. "Just look at the bright side Rai, you'll make a perfect advertisement for the bakery!"

The dragon snorted as he brought out his phone to call for help, Rai fuming and wobbling above.