

Raf the Balloon Cow

By: IndigoRho

There wasn't a mirror in sight, but Raf didn't need one to know he looked ridiculous. He'd volunteered to work at the dairy farm's market stall because he thought it'd only involve sitting down and providing minimal customer service. He was notoriously incapable of feigning cheeriness after all. Instead his boss had handed him an inflatable cow costume with their logo on the belly. At first Raf had made a pitiful attempt to refuse, but it didn't take much cajoling to get him to agree.

Though the costume was one-size fit all, Raf was a considerably hefty guy, and it wasn't very loose on his wide frame. He also wasn't fond of how hard it was to see out of the head, and how it flattened his pink mohawk. At least no one could see how much he was blushing.

"Ugh, this is so dumb," Raf complained, his voice echoing out of the costume's muzzle. "My hair's gonna be a mess after this!"

Raf's boss rolled his eyes. "I think a bad hair day is worth the sale's boost. Now cheer up and pump up—no one's going to buy milk from a deflated cow!"

The boss chuckled, and Raf sighed. A quick flick turned on the costume's fan, cool air rushing in and causing the grumpy cow to puff up. The thought of looking even bigger only made Raf's face flush redder. His boss poked his poofy sides, provoking grumbles.

"Alright Raf, ready to sell your weight in milk?"

Raf wished his glare could be seen.

The next few hours dragged on for Raf. He'd wave but rarely speak, the costume unable to completely disguise his disinterest. Occasionally he'd be coerced into miming drinking a fresh bottle of milk. All the while he had to endure a constant barrage of teasing pokes and prods from passersby. And the hissing of helium tanks at the balloon stall next door. The experience made Raf miserable, but in an hour he'd finally be free.

"Hey Raf, I'm gonna use the bathroom real quick, watch the stall while I'm gone!"

Raf couldn't give a thumbs up while in costume, but he managed a nod as his boss left. The peace would have been appreciated—had it lasted.

"Wow, looks like one of the cows escaped the barn!"

"Or maybe he just grew out of it!"

"I'd say we should try rolling him back but we'd probably end up flattened!"

Raf recognized the voices before he even turned to get a clear view of them. They were a trio of farmhands from a farm that neighbored the one Raf worked at, and they'd convinced themselves there was a grand rivalry between the two. There wasn't, of course, but Raf had ended up as the target of their petty pranks far too frequently. He doubted the three were aware of who was actually in the costume, only intent on being jerks after indulging on beer.

Raf did his best to ignore them. Unfortunately his three tormentors weren't sober enough to give up. They circled around, preventing Raf from leaving. Not that he'd had any plans to abandon the stall to begin with.

"Hmm, I think I know the perfect solution to our lost cow problem," one said with a snicker, before wandering out of Raf's field of view.

Raf doubted the "plan" would involve anything more sinister than giving him a drunken shove, and thus continued to ignore them. Though they tended to be annoying, they'd never been malicious.

The balloon stall next door was in the middle of closing down, and by chance was temporarily empty of staff. There was no one to stop the farmhand from grabbing the largest helium tank he could find and lugging it towards the unsuspecting Raf. His friends grinned once they saw what he'd brought. The tank's hose was uncoiled, one hand already clutching the knob.

"Don't worry Mr. Cow, we'll make you light as a feather!"

Raf didn't have time to be confused by the promise before the hose was shoved into the muzzle of his costume. Unfortunately for him, the farmhand's tipsiness caused him to put more force on the hose than intended. Rather than just entering the suit, the hose went straight into Raf's actual mouth and down his throat. He gagged and coughed, the combination of the hose and costume making every word he tried to speak utterly incoherent.

The tank was turned to full blast, a chill racing through Raf's body as he felt a gush of helium begin to flow into his stomach. Within seconds he felt stuffed but not stated. Then his middle began to balloon outwards.

Though he couldn't see it through his inflated costume, Raf could certainly *feel* himself expanding. He frantically attempted to pull the hose out, but seeing it was almost impossible with the cow head on, and firmly grasping it with the costume's puffed up hooves was just as difficult. His pleas for assistance were garbled, and unheard over the sound of the hissing helium tank and the farmhands laughing. A handful of bystanders had witnessed the prank, but they all assumed it just a stunt or show, none intervening.

Raf's inflation swiftly forced out the air within his costume as he grew to fill it instead. When he felt the costume suddenly clinging to his swelling belly his worry only increased. While before the cow had merely been dancing in place and comically flailing at the hose, now everyone watching could see its middle blowing up.

The material of the cow costume was surprisingly stretchy, creaking some as Raf inflated by not immediately ripping apart at the seams. His own clothes underneath weren't fairing as well, tightening and tearing more and more with each passing second. He only wished it were enough to distract him from the comments coming from the crowd.

"That cow's getting huge!"

"I've never seen a costume that can inflate that big, I wonder if it was specially made?"

"Think he'll keep growing until he's a sphere?"

"The suit's definitely gonna pop!"

Raf's belly had grown immense, like a massive beach ball. He was trying not to move too much while still futilely working on the hose, afraid he'd topple over. Having an audience for his blimping was embarrassing enough without running the risk of getting rolled around. Or worse—getting bounced from person to person.

The mascot's voice had become high-pitched thanks to the deluge of helium, to the point where Raf ceased grumbling just to avoid hearing the squeaks. He was feeling strangely light, but not in a way he could actually enjoy. There was a nagging sensation in the back of his mind that he should be worried about that feeling, though there was so much to worry about it got lost in the panic.

To Raf's dismay his arms and legs started puffing up as well, limiting his already questionable mobility. Of course it was nothing compared to his immense middle, which was well on its way to becoming spherical. He couldn't believe the intense pressure building up within his body, or that he was actually inflating like a balloon. The costume was finally reaching its limits, tiny tears appearing across its surface, revealing his taut flesh underneath.

Unfortunately for Raf, his ordeal was far from over. To his surprise he felt his feet lift off the ground, and his flailing returned. Gasps and laughter filled the small audience as they watched the cow mascot begin to rise like a real blimp. At first the farmhands were amused, but the higher Raf got the more nervous they became, and they stealthily fled the scene.

Raf's heart was racing, his limited field of vision preventing him from knowing just how high off the ground he actually was. It didn't take long to reach the end of his hose, which caused him to steadily tilt downwards to face his tether. Being able to see the crowd below turned out to not be much of an improvement.

The bloated mascot wobbled and waved, desperately hoping someone would realize they weren't watching a show and help pull him back to earth. They were all too busy taking pictures and

filming his unknown plight, though.

The tank itself was too heavy to get airborne, and Raf felt the hose slowly slipping from his throat. He tried biting down on it as the tip re-entered his mouth, but the influx of helium puffed up his cheeks and forced open his jaws. With his grip released, Raf was now helplessly floating upward.

Raf let out a few high-pitched whimpers as he drifted, the people growing smaller, then the market. The costume had remained mostly intact, perhaps the only silver lining to the whole ordeal. As Raf continued his unexpected balloon ride he was left alone to his thoughts, which were dominated by all the headlines that'd be caused by his misadventure. His blushing intensified...