

The Line Distraction

By: IndigoRho

“Ugh, this line never ends!” Indi whined.

Rho rolled his eyes, having long ago grown tired of the midnight-blue cheetah's complaints. Yes the registration line was long—very long—but Indi was quickly becoming the worst part of it. He'd started moaning the second they'd seen the line, and proven incapable of any conversation that *didn't* involve acting like it was the end of the world. With anyone else Rho would've at least been able to chat as a distraction, but now the orange-striped zebra was nearly as frustrated as Indi.

“Dude, you've been saying that nonstop, I'm sure it won't be that much longer,” Rho said.

“But it's barely moving at all!” The cheetah was fidgeting and frowning. “And there's *nothing* to do!”

At least you don't have to listen to how little there is to do. Rho sighed.

A flash of blue caught the zebra's attention, and he realized a few balloons were being batted around the snaking line. Probably just an attempt to distract the bored attendees. Rho wished the balloon would wander his way just so he could hit it away as hard as possible while imagining it was Indi.

A thought came to Rho, and he turned back to Indi. The zebra's hoof slid into his messenger bag and swiftly found a small metal cylinder. Few would carry around a tank of Floatium—a mix of air and helium—but Rho always seemed to find some use for it. The gas was perfect for making someone incredibly light without causing them to float off.

“...and there's nothing to eat, I'm gonna starve if this—*mrrrmph!*!”

The hissing end of a miniature tank silenced the cheetah's endless complaining, his eyes springing wide open and his cheeks puffing up. A hard shove from Rho sent the tank into the back of Indi's throat, and on instinct he gulped it down.

Indi coughed and gasped for air once he'd swallowed the inedible snack. “W-What was that!” he demanded.

“Just a way to get you thinking about something *beside* the line!” Rho said, giving Indi's round gut a poke. “Thought everyone would benefit from having a big beach ball to toss around.”

The cheetah's middle had begun to balloon outward steadily, tightening his shirt. He frantically pressed down upon it with both paws, but only managed a modest belch that did nothing to reverse his predicament. His panic was getting the attention of others in the line, who responded with a mix of confusion and amusement.

“Damn it, how big am I gonna get!” Indi asked, forced to widen his stance as his middle grew rounder and rounder.

“Not like it's the first time you've snacked on a tank before! You won't stop puffing up until you've become a taut, creaking sphere at the very *least*.” Rho slapped his swelling friend on the middle, snickering as he heard a hollow drumming sound echo out. “Course there's always a chance your hide will give up and you'll just go boom instead!”

Indi's glare was quickly replaced by a flustered frown as he felt his limbs begin to puff up as well. The seams of his clothes creaked, unable to handle how bloated the cheetah had become. Tears and rips heralded Indi's body taking on a mostly spherical shape.

By then *everyone* nearby was staring at the ballooning cat. Most were content to simply laugh, but a few were bold enough to poke Indi so they could feel just how inflated he'd become. At first he tried to swat them away, hissing and growling and making vague threats. The cheetah blimp was far from intimidating, though, and his grouchiness only seemed to encourage more teasing. Rho's encouragement certainly didn't help.

Inevitably Indi rolled atop his bloated belly, puffy arms flailing. His arms and legs were swelling into domes, his cheeks round as balloons. There were the faintest of creaks coming from his

immense body, enough to make him wince whenever he heard them.

Indi was surrounded by bored con-goers prodding him from all sides. His threats had transformed into whimpers and blushing, his glasses on the verge of sliding off. The crowd backed away as Rho stepped up.

“Well Indi, I'm sure being an overfilled balloon is more comfortable than having to stand on your own,” Rho said, giving his friend just enough of a nudge to wobble him backwards. “Oh look, the line's moving again!”

Indi gave a worried look as Rho placed both hooves on his sides. A careful shove rolled the helpless cheetah along, eliciting plenty of chirps even as others laughed. When Rho brought Indi to a stop he leaned into him, causing his friend to whine and clench his eyes shut at the sudden spike in pressure. The zebra squeezed and pressed into Indi a few more times, grinning wide.

“Wow, you're actually pretty comfy as a balloon. I could just rest on you for the rest of the line~”

Distressed chirps were the only reply Indi gave.

“But as fun as that would be, I wouldn't want to hoard you.” Rho bent down and lifted the round cheetah up with ease. It was as if he didn't weigh an ounce. “Honestly Indi you should just stay full of Floatium all the time. You're so light you could bounce to work!”

Rho released his grip on Indi, the cheetah chirping as he fell. Indi's whole body warped and bulged on impact, hide creaking in distress. He bounced right back into the air and Rho caught him.

“S-Stop that, I'll burst!” Indi begged, wobbling futilely.

“Oh you'll be fine,” Rho said. “But it's time to entertain the crowd!”

Before Indi could say a word in protest Rho launched him high above his head. A solid punch sent Indi flying and howling away. He spun out of control, his meow's only ceasing once someone else struck him, sending him off in a new direction.

There were plenty of cheers as Indi was bounced all over the room, no one listening to his increasingly frantic pleas to be let down or deflated. The bored crowd wasn't about to surrender their new distraction.

As Indi spun through the air he caught flashes of the many horns and antlers on the people below. Any one of them would be enough to burst him, which only made him more nervous.

The cheetah's worries proved prophetic. An eastern dragon in the line was focused on his phone rather than the massive cat balloon, and didn't notice the shadow looming over him.

Indi's eyes bulged open as he felt two pin-pricks on the center of his belly. In seconds their intensity increased, and the cheetah realized he was about to pop just before he actually did. The start of a chirp was cut short as a loud boom echoed throughout the room.

Some jumped, others crouched, as a flash-shower of blue hide scraps rained down over the line. The emptied tank of Floatium was also amongst the debris, skidding across the floor until it was stopped by a wall. The eastern dragon—with a death grip on his phone—was nervously looking around, still not one hundred percent sure what was going on. Inevitably enough cheetah-print confetti fluttered to the floor nearby for him to understand, and a look of sheepish guilt came over him as he poorly tried to pretend nothing had happened.

Rho had watched Indi's comical popping from a distance, laughing the entire time. Getting turned into a pile of scraps now and then was good for the cheetah as far as Rho was concerned, and he was glad fate had agreed. A single bit of blue hide managed to make its way to him, and Rho held out a hoof to catch it.

“You know Indi, I think the wait's not gonna feel nearly as long after that.

The scrap said nothing, and Rho laughed...