

A Swell Christmas

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On Christmas Day Aster and Louie had settled into the living room, content to simply relax with a little hot chocolate. Outside a gentle snowfall was busy blanketing the city in white, providing a pleasant backdrop for the day's festivities. Their tree sat gleaming, a large collection of opened presents, empty boxes, and crumpled wrapping paper huddled around its base, clean-up delayed for the time being. The pair had, however, both decided to wear the gaudy joke Christmas sweaters they'd gifted each other. Aster—a light purple tiger—had on an excessively bedazzled piece depicting surfing reindeer that seemed to catch every beam of light in the room. Louie's, meanwhile, included brightly colored savannah animals, fitting for a lion.

As Louie finished the last sip of his hot chocolate he couldn't help but poke fun at his boyfriend's sweater. "I'm beginning to wish I'd gotten sunglasses this year, I can barely glance your way without being blinded." He raised a paw to mimic shielding his eyes.

"That's not the fault of my sweater, I'm just naturally aglow," Aster replied with a smile.

"Though I guess I can move a little so you can safely bask in my presence.

The lion smirked as his boyfriend shifted about till his legs were over the chair's arm, entering a goofy faux-seductive pose. "No denying the view's delightful," he said, ogling the tiger from afar. "Unfortunately I can't return the favor and flash you some tum cause *someone* bought me a sweater that was a size too large. I'm not sure if it's a mistake or a suggestion fr me to have seconds at dinner tonight."

"Well that's not a very difficult problem to solve." Aster swirled his paw dramatically, sparkles of light manifesting in the air beside his chair. The glimmers began to join together, forming into a solid shape that was only vaguely anthro at first but gained detail swiftly. A tiger of golden glitter soon took shape, easily recognizable as a duplicate of Aster himself, sans the Christmas sweater. Of course Louie was familiar with his boyfriend's ability to create specters of stardust, though he had no clue as to what Aster intended to use his shiny copy for.

"Aster, you never told me you had a handsome twin brother!" Louie joked. "I'd *love* to get better acquainted."

"Trust me, you'll be getting incredibly familiar with him!" Aster said deviously.

The specter casually approached the bemused Louie, who made no attempt to leave his chair. He giggled when the specter poked his modest belly and shook its head in disapproval, but an attempted snarky comment towards his boyfriend was prevented by two paws sneaking past his lips the moment they opened. His eyes widened in surprise before quickly narrowing, the delicious taste of gingerbread teasing his tongue as the specter eagerly began to feed itself to Louie. While he certainly hadn't requested the sizeable meal he also made no attempt to resist it. Louie let out a muffled chuckle when he felt the specter's fingers push into his stomach, opening his maw further to accept the prey's head and shoulders.

Aster lazily slid from his chair to get a better look at the action. He watched in glee as Louie's doughy middle slowly started to swell, filling out the loose sweater in a matter of gulps and then peaking out from under it, a wobbly ball of tan. With a thought he tweaked the specter's dimensions to ease its consumption, ensuring it was light enough to lift with ease yet strong enough to continue forcing itself down Louie's throat; not that the lion needed any outside motivation to eat. Louie raised the specter off the ground as he reached its waist, groaning faintly as he felt his stomach stretch to handle his meal. The lion's swallows were barely able to keep up with his prey's aggressive wiggling. He responded by clenching his eyes shut and extending his jaws as wide as he could manage, hoping to hastily finish off his admittedly delicious feast.

As Louie entered the home stretch Aster began to rub his growing gut, and commanded his specter to follow suit as best it could. The onslaught of massages outside and in caused the gorging lion

to moan and forget the minor strain he was experiencing. A thin layer of stardust was left on his lips and mane as his maw finally sealed shut, the bulge in his neck vanishing as his meal settled fully into his stomach with a firm wobble. Despite the general willingness of both himself and his prey, scarfing down the duplicate had left Louie fairly exhausted, and he leaned back deep into his chair, panting. Aster was still attending to his bloated middle, obviously pleased with the temporary expansion of his boyfriend.

"I see you're enjoying my late Christmas present," Aster mused, lifting and shifting the lion's gut so he felt every ounce of specter filling him. "Sweater looks perfect on you now by the way."

The sweater was scrunched up above Louie's distended middle, obviously in no way capable of covering him.

"Yeah it really—*oof*—really highlights my figure." Louie was still a bit winded, keeping his movements to an absolute minimum despite the unnatural lightness of his big meal.

"Looks like lunch took a lot out of you," Aster teased, tapping his fingers on his boyfriend's belly, the lion wincing ever-so-slightly at his touch. He knew he wasn't causing Louie actual pain. "If I'd known you'd become such a lightweight I'd have just conjured a stardust salad instead."

Louie wasn't about to let the joking jab at his stomach capacity go unchallenged. "I don't know what you're talking about!" he insisted, on the verge of catching his breath. "The snack was appreciated, but I'm definitely still famished."

His ridiculous boast was met with understandable disbelief, at least until Aster came up with a suitable retort of his own. "Is that so? Well, remember there's always more where that came from. *A lot* more."

The lion knew right away he'd chosen his words poorly, and the sudden sensation of his hide stretching again was confirmation; his prey was getting bigger. The weight of the stardust tiger wasn't increasing, but it was plainly expanding in some unseen way, all thanks to the mischievous Aster. He squirmed in his chair as his middle began to grow unwieldy, sides slowly pressing into the arms till he was practically wedged in place. Expecting only a mild swell as "punishment" for his bravado, Louie was surprised when his belly continued getting bigger and bigger. The bulges made by the specter within him were smoothed away in places, revealing to the lion his meal was in all likelihood being inflated; Aster had shown off such power before.

"O-Ok, that's nice and—*huff*—filling now!" Louie let out a nervous laugh, already close to being more belly than lion.

Aster seemed to consider Louie's claim for a second before shaking his head. "Don't be so modest, you said you were *famished* after all." He prodded his boyfriend's gut with a fist, noting it had more give than before, like a thick balloon. "I'd be a terrible boyfriend if I let you starve on Christmas of all days."

Louie squirmed in his seat, too bloated to escape—not that waddling away would've been possible. "If I eat too much it'll ruin my appetite, what about our dinner plans!" He doubted his negotiations would have any effect, but he had to try.

"Don't worry, I'm sure you'll be back to your old slim self by dinner, and if not...well rolling you there shouldn't be an issue," Aster said as he diligently toyed with Louie's rotund middle.

The mere mention of being rolled made Louie gulp. He'd need to be fairly huge for that to be possible, and he didn't doubt Aster's drive to expand him to such a degree. Having an overstuffed gut was one thing, but ending up an utterly immobile blimp was a whole nother. At least "inflating" with prey simply felt odd rather than exhausting, though that could change in a heartbeat. "S-surely I'm big enough already—whoa, whoa, whoa!"

Within Louie the weight of the specter had been increased just enough to shift his delicate center of balance, causing the ballooning lion to gradually topple forwards onto the floor, a barely audible *pop* sounding as he was freed from the confining chair. Expecting to bounce a little, Louie was surprised to find himself actually sink slightly into his belly, as if it were a massive cushion.

Aster was amused by his boyfriend's confusion. "I see you noticed the little improvements I made to your meal. Foam's a much better filler than air in *certain* situations," he chuckled, letting Louie ponder his intentions further.

As Louie rocked back and forth he found his paws hovering inches off the floor, proof he wouldn't be walking around any time soon. While there were still a few sparse lumps visible of his prey, a casual observer would be more likely to guess he'd swallowed an oversized beach ball than a tiger. Lying atop his own middle made the building pressure inside him far more noticeable than before, though at the moment it was mainly just an inconvenience. Worried about rolling into an uncomfortable position, Louie merely ceased his squirming altogether, reduced to simply keeping a vigilant eye on Aster.

Minutes later Louie's belly was as big around as Aster was tall, but the tiger wasn't content yet. Aster embraced the puffy sides of his boyfriend's inflating gut, squeezing *just* enough to provoke a few faint creaks, much to Louie's objection. "Hmm, you always look great chair-sized," he said, making sure the lion could see his cheeky grin. "Of course, I bet you'd look even greater *bed*-sized."

Louie couldn't help but blush, his mind creating the same mental image as his boyfriend's: Aster resting, slightly sunken into the lion's immense air-mattress of a middle. The thought was an undeniably delightful one, but also implied Louie would remain inflated for far longer than an afternoon. "We already have a perfectly good bed, with brand new comfy blankets and everything! Louie replied, slowly rising higher at the mercy of his gut and boyfriend. "A bed you won't accidentally roll off of, or risk popping in the middle of the night with sharp claws."

"Oh my claws aren't *that* sharp." Aster extended them on command, lightly running a single claw across the entire circumference of Louie's middle. The lion shuddered from the ticklish sensation, holding back a giggle to ensure the teasing didn't unintentionally turn into an actual bursting. Sure he'd re-form after a while, but he wasn't eager to lose the rest of the day or potentially disrupt his sleep schedule.

"B-be careful! One puncture and all you'll have to nap on is a pile of scraps." Louie hoped his warning would convince Aster to tease him in a less risky manner.

The tiger retracted his claws in a show of good faith. "Louie I think I've inflated you often enough to know your durability." He returned to merely poking at his expanding boyfriend instead, patting on him as if he were a drum.

Louie finally gave up on complaining, accepting he'd have to deal with the clashing feelings of nervousness and joy he was experiencing. Bigger and bigger the lion grew, ominous *creeeeks* echoing from within as his hide was stretched taut and thin. Aster's chatter drowned out most of the cautionary noise, the false sense of security emboldening his quest to make Louie larger than ever before. Whenever the lion gained a foot Aster would hug him deeply, burying his muzzle into the furry blimp that was his boyfriend and snickering as he felt him inflate beneath his embrace. The temptation to slowly roll the lion onto his back so Aster could lay on him was strong, but there wasn't nearly enough space for him to do so without knocking over the tree in the process. Covering Louie in stardust and rotating him around in place crossed his mind, though he wasn't sure the effort would be worth it in the end. Besides, soon there wouldn't be much room up there to relax on.

Inevitably Louie's back pressed into the ceiling, the lion wiggling as he felt himself gradually pinned in place once again. Since his belly could no longer grow upward it resorted to swelling outward even more. Aster celebrated the milestone by taking advantage of the fact Louie was no longer in danger of rolling off, kneading the blimped up lion's middle even harder. The chair that'd been more than large enough to fit Louie a few minutes ago was now tipped over and pushed away by his seemingly unending expansion, along with a table and a floor lamp. Even the branches of the Christmas tree were starting to tickle his sides, though that tickling was steadily turning into more menacing pokes as he pushed further and further against them.

The creaks and groans from within Louie were getting too loud to ignore, and the lion swore he

could feel his hide on the verge of failing in various spots. “Uh, Aster, maybe it's time to stop, I'm getting too big,” he said as clearly as he could, his bloated belly threatening to muffle his voice. “Aster? I'm gonna pop!”

Unfortunately for Louie his boyfriend was far too lost in the moment to pay attention. The lion was filling half the living room, but Aster still wanted him larger, swollen enough to cover every inch. He leaned back against Louie's quaking middle and smiled, letting it nudge him slowly across the floor. “Oh you'll be *fine*. If you were gonna explode I'd definitely—”

The combination of the extraordinary internal pressure and dozens of pointy furniture edges finally proved too much for Louie's overexerted body. His eyes bulged as he felt the first tear appear, but he barely had a few seconds to react before abruptly bursting apart with a thunderous *boom!* Aster suddenly found himself stumbling forwards, ears ringing as a strong gust of wind rushed all around him. Walls shook and windows rattled. Tan scraps of hide and golden stardust rained down over the entire living room, coating the tree, presents, furniture, everything. For a brief while Aster just stood still, eyes following the debris, until he dared to turn around and confirm the obvious: Louie had popped.

Aster futilely attempted to brush off the fresh layer of stardust from his clothes, frowning. He hadn't meant for Louie to explode, and genuinely felt embarrassed about letting things get so out of hand. Not that there was much he could do now. With Louie “away” for the time being, Aster faced the possibility of spending the rest of Christmas Day all alone, a very boring prospect. The tiger would also have to handle the clean-up on his own, a task made far more difficult thanks to Louie's well-scattered scraps. Of course, there was an easy—albeit somewhat extreme—solution to all Aster's new problems. A grin returned to the tiger's face as he concentrated on manipulating the stardust once again, his own belly now beginning to swell from beneath his sweater. Why should Louie get to have all the bursting fun?