

Iskander's Feast

By: IndigoRho

Heavy clouds covered the stars and moonlight, making the night darker and warmer than usual. In a quiet outdoor enclosure of the Columbia City Zoo, the lion Iskander lay on a cool patch of dirt, restless. His attempt to fall asleep was proving futile so far. The indoor section of the enclosure had been too noisy and cramped, while the outdoors had proven just warm enough to be uncomfortable. To make matters worse, his large stomach was growling, demanding to be filled. Just as he was about to give up and test a new sleeping spot in the yard, though, a wonderful aroma drifted past his nose. The lion sniffed the air deeply, recognizing the undeniable scent of fresh meat. Curious, Iskander lifted himself off the ground and wandered inside, his respectable belly swaying as he went in search of the wonderful smell's source.

Iskander padded by the handful of other dozing lions—none of whom had noticed the aroma, apparently—until he found himself standing before the large gate that separated his enclosure from the rest of the lion habitat building. Assuming his quest had been foiled, the lion pushed his nose against the bars, hoping to at least get a good sniff of the mystery meat that alluded him. To his surprise, the gate slowly creaked open as he pressed into it. Unwilling to squander his sudden luck, Iskander nudged his way through, sniffing the air and following the alluring smell as his empty stomach rumbled louder. The trail grew stronger and stronger, and Iskander was gradually able to distinguish the individual scents of a variety of meats, all of which he loved. Eventually his journey ended at an open doorway spewing a wave of relaxingly cold air down the hall.

Within the meat locker of the lion habitat, a gazelle named Rowan was busy lugging heavy slabs of meat from a trolley to a shelf, music blaring from his earphones as he worked. Eager to finish his last task of the night, Rowan was completely oblivious to the arrival of the hungry lion. He wiped away a line of sweat from his brow after he finally emptied the cart and turned to leave—only to stumble backwards as he saw Iskander blocking his path. Rowan had never seen the large predator up close before, and for a brief moment was convinced he was doomed to be Iskander's feast. Fortunately, Iskander seemed far more interested in the plethora of food lining the walls than the quivering, chubby gazelle.

Realizing he might have a chance of survival, Rowan nervously grabbed the closest hunk of meat, the lion's eyes following him intently. He carefully tossed the treat towards Iskander, hoping for the best. Iskander tore into the gift right away—barely taking the time to chew as he scarfed it down—and looked back up at the gazelle in anticipation once he was finished. Rowan gulped. The trapped gazelle passed a second chunk, then a third, and a fourth, his captor gobbling them up almost faster than he could provide them. Iskander showed no signs of slowing down or getting full, his already hefty belly gradually swelling as the lion gorged to his heart's content. He wasn't sure why the strange smelling, two-legged creature in the back of the room was providing him with such a wonderful meal—and larger than he was accustomed to having, no less—but the chance to truly satiate his immense hunger was too good to pass up.

Rowan couldn't believe the lion was still eating, having been convinced he'd become content after just a few large chunks. He watched Iskander's gut growing larger and larger, terror filling his mind as he imagined himself in the meat's place, wondering if he was just going to end up as the engorged lion's dessert. Eventually he noticed the lion beginning to pant, and decided to try his luck at sneaking past. Iskander's eyes followed his every step, though, and the lion's attempt to patiently await more meat was mistaken for something sinister. The gazelle decided then that the only way he could escape without filling the lion's belly was to stuff him till he was practically immobile.

With a burst of desperation-fueled adrenaline, Rowan began tossing meat towards Iskander as fast as he could manage. Beef, chicken, pork, even some rabbit, all began to pile up in front of the confused lion, who responded by eating even faster than before and giving up on chewing altogether in

order to keep up. His golden-brown belly was ballooning outward with every hasty swallow and gulp, gently shaking as the lion forced himself to consume all that ended up before him. He didn't know if he'd ever get the opportunity to indulge to such an extent again, and besides, the meat was too irresistible to ignore. Iskander imagined just how jealous the other lions would be once they learned of the feast he'd been granted. They didn't necessarily challenge his superiority, but another solid reminder was always welcome, especially one he could gloat about for years to come.

Engrossed in his smug fantasy and obsessed with stuffing himself, Iskander didn't notice just how large his gut was becoming. When the first bit of bloated belly sagged onto the cold floor he winced, but quickly shrugged it off, enjoying the cool feeling spread over his middle. The pressure within him was immense, his stomach stretched far greater than ever before. Despite the pain he continued, refusing to rest in between gulps of meat out of fear he'd pass out and be denied more. He could rest once the meat pile stopped growing, if it ever stopped growing.

Rowan's initial optimism with his plan was rapidly fading. The lion's gut was a seemingly bottomless pit, swollen to a ridiculous degree from gorging on food that should have been too much for the zoo's small pride let alone an individual. He was like a monster, a black hole on four paws. How was he still eating? If Iskander didn't pass out or become immobilized soon Rowan's fate would be sealed, as the once plentiful stock of meat was dwindling fast. Before the dread could truly kick in, though, Rowan noticed the lion's balance wavering, his paws struggling to remain on the floor. Iskander leaned forwards to reach a slab of beef that'd fallen a little short, and the resulting shift in his gut was enough to finally conquer the feline.

With a loud groan Iskander rolled onto his side, panting non-stop, his tongue hanging from his mouth and a hind leg in the air. The lion's enormous belly sprawled across the ground, a golden orb packed to the brim with countless chunks of meat. Iskander had never felt so full in his life. Despite the slight pain, though, he had no regrets. There was an unexpected pleasure in gorging to the point that he could barely move, knowing his hunger would be satiated for hours. He didn't even care that he was effectively trapped in the strange room. After all, it was delightfully cool compared to the other areas of the habitat, and a gentle humming noise was proving to be rather soothing. Iskander's eyes slowly closed as the lion fell into a food coma, finally able to sleep.

Rowan watched the blob of a lion uneasily as it toppled over and seemingly passed out, fearful Iskander was simply putting on an act to lure him in closer. After a few tense minutes of waiting—his eyes locked on the lion's rising and falling balloon belly—he finally gained the nerve to take a few steps forwards. Iskander didn't budge. The gazelle crept around the engorged feline, drenched in sweat and shaking a fair bit. He didn't breathe a sigh of relief until he'd stepped out of the meat locker and pushed the heavy door closed, locking the predator inside. Rowan began laughing, overwhelmed by the terrifying encounter. He'd been cornered by a ferocious beast that apparently could have gobbled him up with ease and not only had he escaped, but he'd escaped in one piece!

The gazelle's celebration was short lived, though, as a question he'd somehow failed to ponder finally entered his head: how had Iskander gotten to the meat locker in the first place? Suddenly filled with terror again, Rowan ran as fast as his chubby frame allowed, not stopping until he was safely out of the lion habitat building. He loathed the call to management he was going to have to make, and was already planning on leaving out the part where he'd stuffed one of their prized lions to the brim with food. Hopefully when they came across the bloated lion they'd just assume Iskander had gorged *without* anyone's assistance. Otherwise they might fire him, or worse—make him pay for all the wasted meat.