

Sharing With the Class:
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Bright beams of sunlight pierced the closed blinds of Professor Kale Ellison's office, shining on his desk and highlighting the tiny dust motes in the air. The deer was relaxing in his chair with a half-eaten plate of birthday cake resting atop his round belly, conveniently covering the tufts of tan fur poking out of the gaps between the buttons of his stretched suit. His mood was good despite having to teach on his birthday. Friends amongst the staff had ensured his usual problem students were temporarily indisposed, the cake made for him was simply delightful, and his husband had promised him an excessively overindulgent dinner. Most importantly, though, was the gift his longtime rival Professor Trevor Hall was about to unknowingly give him.

Finishing the last of the cake, Kale set aside the empty plate and gently grabbed a small tiger plushy from his desk. The voodoo doll only vaguely resembled Kale's colleague, but the stolen tufts of tiger fur were all that really mattered. He'd only dabbled in the confusing mystical art a couple times before—back in his wilder college days—and had been inspired after a particularly amusing prank a student had pulled in his class involving a helium tank and a doll. Of course Kale had still punished the student for interrupting class, grinning as he remembered watching the frantic eastern dragon float off into the clouds. Professor Ellison's plan would be far more subtle.

The deer pulled a small canister from a desk drawer and forced it's nozzle into the open “mouth” of the voodoo doll, before donning a gas mask as a precaution. After all, getting caught in his own prank would have ruined his currently perfect birthday. With a low chuckle he turned the canister on and watched gleefully as the doll's middle slowly began to expand.

* * *

“That was an...um...interesting interpretation of the character relationship, Leo.”

Professor Hall was still trying to figure out where the red panda's conclusions had come from, but with his classroom so sparse he was simply glad anyone had answered at all. The obese tiger adjusted his sweater vest and glanced across the room once more. On a good day there'd be nearly thirty students at their desks, each eager to either discuss their latest reading assignments or just get on with the day. Currently there were a pitiful seven, arranged in a “U” shape for the lackluster discussion. A quick interrogation had implied most were victims of spiked “punch” at a party the night before—obviously liquor—and were still in the process of re-forming after popping. However, Hall had also overheard rumors of a beach get together to take advantage of the abnormally nice weather that Monday. Whatever the reason, Hall was irritated enough that he'd likely spend all afternoon scouring social media to account for the absences, and dole out spiteful punishments if he saw fit.

For the meanwhile, though, Professor Hall would have to make due with the students he had left. Zeke, an otter as shy as he was tubby, was right next to Leo, but his responses would likely be even more confusing than the red panda's, albeit more interesting in Hall's mind. He didn't want to call on Phil again so soon; the talented skunk could probably maintain the entire discussion himself if let loose. Andrew tended to ramble too much, and the elephant always fidgeted in his chair while talking, which would create distracting creaks due to his size. Arnold, a falcon, and Avery, a fellow tiger, were both fairly middle-ground students, and could help get the conversation back on track. Then there was Troy.

The german shepherd was the one student Professor Hall had *hoped* wouldn't show up that day, so of course he'd been the second one to walk through the door. Now he was half-asleep at his desk and providing nothing to the discussion. Feeling the need to reassert his dominance on what little of his class was present, Hall quietly approached Troy's desk before loudly asking for the student's thoughts. Troy inadvertently jumped a little in his chair, breaking into a sweat almost immediately as he tried to

think of something to say. He was just about to spew the vaguest non-answer he could think of when the professor's middle caught his eye. While Hall was a rather hefty tiger to begin with—his appetite was notorious—Troy was convinced it was, well, rounder than normal. At first he assumed his sleep-addled mind was playing a trick on him, but the longer he looked at Professor Hall's gut, the rounder it got.

“Mr. Troy, should I repeat the question, or are you still putting together an insightful answer?” Professor Hall asked sternly, an intimidating grin on his face and completely oblivious to the changes within him.

Troy still wasn't one hundred percent sure the professor was actually expanding, and was too afraid to point it out. “Oh, well...um there was a lot of...um...character g-growth in the chapters, especially in the middle—I mean midway point!”

Professor Hall narrowed his eyes at the german shepherd. He'd heard terrible responses from Troy before, but this one was worse than usual. “I was hoping for something a tad bit more detailed than that, Mr. Troy.”

By now the other students had begun noticing the Professor's ballooning middle, eliciting a few muffled giggles but mostly stares. Hall wasn't known for his jokes, so his sudden inflation was incredibly confusing. Just like Troy, though, they were all too nervous to point out the situation to Professor Hall. Instead, they collectively watched as the tiger's gut grew rounder and tauter, his expandex clothing easily handling the growth and keeping Hall blissfully unaware. Collectively they wondered how long it would take him to notice or acknowledge it, or if he was daring them to have a proper class discussion while he blimped out.

“Well Mr. Troy, is there anything else you'd like to...” Professor Hall had started to lean over the german shepherd's desk, his speech cut short once his belly pressed into the edge unexpectedly. He looked down in confusion, and his eyes grew wide the moment he spotted his giant beachball of a belly. Attempting to maintain his composure in front of the class, Professor Hall slowly stepped away from Troy's desk and prodded his middle with a paw, feeling the pressure and lightness within. The tiger had no idea why he was suddenly inflating. He hadn't eaten any suspicious food, didn't smell anything strange in the air, hadn't felt a prick or tingle at all, but for some reason he was rapidly filling with something light. His eyes darted between the few student in attendance, looking for any sign of guilt; all he saw was surprise.

The lack of answers merely increased Professor Hall's frustration and embarrassment. He'd never been so humiliated in front of his students before, never been left so potentially vulnerable. His face flushed red and he growled as he expanded enough to nearly throw him off balance, completely at a loss for words. The only solace was that his clothing dutifully expanded with him. Hall desperately tried to think of a way to deflate himself, concerned he wouldn't stop growing until the pressure became too great and his body burst to shreds, but a solution eluded him. Belching would be far too slow and ineffective, he never carried deflation meds on him, and he doubted the building even had a pump or vacuum to suck out the mystery substance. Sure, even if he did pop he'd just re-form later, but the humiliation would last a lifetime. He was doomed.

Professor Hall's limbs gradually stiffened as they puffed up as well, soon sinking into his rounder and rounder body. He remained as still as he could, carefully wobbling away from the desks so he wouldn't topple over while inflating, holding onto as much of his dignity as possible. No one in the class had said a word since their professor had started expanding, fearful of consequences, and in turn Hall hadn't said a word to them, too furious to speak coherently. The pressure inside his body was far more noticeable now, his hide stretched taut and thin to the point of being extra sensitive. His neck had vanished as his head appeared to sink into his bloated form, while his paws twitched unconsciously, on the verge of sinking in completely themselves. Professor Hall's long tail had poofed up dramatically, angrily swaying back and forth.

With his body inching closer and closer to the breaking point, Professor Hall felt something

force its way up his throat, and the tiger went into a coughing fit as faint smoke spewed from his mouth and nostrils. He let out a short yelp as tiny tears formed on his midsection, brief pinpricks of pain that merely heralded the end. Long rips spread all across the tiger's body in an instant, and with a horrible bang Professor Hall burst apart. The students—none of whom had dared leave their seats—shielded their eyes as a cloud of smoke and tiger scraps erupted from the center of the room and enveloped them. Professor Hall's clothes snapped back to a reasonable size once the pressure had been released, twirling in the air before falling to the floor in pristine condition.

Coughing echoed around the room as the stunned students attempted to wave the smoke away from their nostrils, though all managed to breath in a fair amount of the strange stuff. The chaos masked the second round of inflation all too well. Each student's middle began to swell, none spared from the volatile smoke. Shirts tightened, hoodies stretched, and buttons strained, but the terrible changes were too subtle for any to notice at first.

Leo was the first to become aware, opening his eyes and seeing Andrew's gut threatening to push over his desk. “A-Andrew, you're inflating man!”

The elephant coughed and looked down, trumpeting in shock once he realized Leo was telling the truth. “Shit shit shit!”

“Crap, I am too!” Leo shouted, standing from his chair and futilely pressing into his bloated belly.

One by one the students all became aware they were inflating, and inflating fast. Andrew and Zeke—the fattest of the group by far—had already expanded to the point where they couldn't escape their seats, both frantically bobbing back and forth. With the notable exception of Andrew, everyone in the room was wearing normal clothing, and it didn't take long for round bellies to be exposed all over. Troy attempted to flee the room in a panic, but lost his balance right away and fell to the ground, immobilized by his growing middle. Just like Professor Hall, none of the students could think of a way to avoid an explosive fate. They shouted accusations at one another, cursed, whimpered, and wobbled, but above all else, they swelled. Clothes were shredded and left in tatters on the floor, while Troy loudly yelped as his spiked collar was snapped off by his bloating neck.

Despite being the thinnest in the classroom, Troy was the first to come apart. The german shepherd's sides blew out like a failing tire, sending forth a gush of smoke and wind that rattled the desks and blimped students. Only a few pieces of scraps shot out, the majority of Troy's hide left intact, crumpled on the floor like a deflated balloon. While unsettling, the remaining students had little chance to worry. Phil was the next to reach his limit, a geyser of smoke erupting from his belly button just moments before he violently exploded. Avery had the unfortunate luck of being directly next to Phil when he went, and the force of the skunk bursting rolled his round body away fast and hard. He bounced over a couple desks before one's jagged, broken corner caught him directly in the middle, ripping a wide hole in the tiger and causing him to pop.

Scraps of skunk and tiger rained upon the last four students, all of whom were panicking to some degree as they felt the pressure within their bodies grow greater. Arnold's loud whimpers gave the others a few second's heads up on his impending demise. No leaks appeared on his body, he merely burst apart suddenly and completely, sending a wave of feathers in all directions that easily buried the scraps of his predecessors. His talons flew, too, though. Andrew winced as he felt too long scratches along his leathery middle, which had originally been thick enough to potentially withstand the internal pressure. Being raked by Arnold's flying talons created dangerous thin spots in the elephant's taut body, and it didn't take long for the tears to form in them. He desperately tried plugging the holes with his trunk, but they spread too fast, and with a frustrated trumpeting Andrew burst apart himself.

Leo and Zeke wobbled in place as their bodies creaked and groaned, surrounded by the tattered remnants of their classmates and professor, knowing they would soon join them as a mess of scraps. “Ahhh, d-damn it, I had plans today!” Leo moaned, feeling a small leak forming on his back. “I swear, if I find out who did this I'm gonna pop them a dozen times over!”

“L-Leo, I don't think I can get any bigger, I'm gonna be next!” Zeke squeaked in terror.

“D-don't worry man. It's...it's fast, you'll...barely feel...a...thing...uuuggh!” The tear on Leo's back rapidly grew, while a second formed on his front at almost the exact moment he burst apart, sending a large chunk of red panda hide flailing across the room along with the more common scraps.

Zeke was now the only one left in the room, a whimpering balloon of an otter convinced he'd explode in seconds. While the pressure within him remained intense, though, no tears formed. The seconds stretched to minutes, but the explosion never came. Through some sort of unbelievable luck, Zeke had ceased inflating while right on the verge of his breaking point. The otter continued panicking for quite a while until he finally accepted he wasn't going to pop, but his relief was short-lived. While happy to be intact, he was still immobile and very, very fragile. There was no way for him to move from his resting spot let alone escape the classroom, and picking up his phone to call for help was simply impossible. All he could do was wait for someone to stumble into the room, or for another class to start. Even then, there was always the chance his “rescuer” would burst him for fun rather than deflate him. Zeke squeaked in despair, all alone with nothing but furry scraps to keep him company.