

The Bloat Brew Owl

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Glass bottles clinked together loudly as a case was dropped on the table, the contents of the bottles within swirling and splashing about. The gray goat who'd just released the case grinned triumphantly at a large owl nearby, as if expecting immediate praise. Only when it was obvious none was coming did he speak.

"Well Lane, I *told* you I was going to find the best bloat brew, didn't I?" The goat again awaited praise.

The owl scoffed. "August you just said you were getting drinks. And I bet it was just the first apple cider variant you spotted!"

August was momentarily flustered. "It's not my fault apple cider is undeniably the best no matter the form! But honestly the brand's never let me down so try one."

Lane picked up a bottle and examined it. He didn't actually doubt its taste—he just liked messing with his friend. The real question was how well it lined up to the title of bloat brew. A good one could leave you with a wonderfully round balloon belly full of carbonated gas, maybe even large enough to serve as a bed for smaller friends. A dud would only make it look like you sipped on an air tank. Of course there was also the chance it'd work *too* well, and creaking blimps were rather prone to ending up as confetti. Not that Lane necessarily considered that outcome a bad one.

Such drinks were part of a rather niche market, appealing either to pranksters wanting to swell up their friends or inflation enthusiasts. Lane and August were a little of both.

On that night they'd planned to game and bloat, a tradition that usually ended with both too round to move let alone hold a controller. If they were feeling it they might even blimp up whoever was unlucky enough to deliver their pizza. A third player was always appreciated, after all.

The cap of the bottle was popped off, the sound of fizzing bubbles bringing a smile to Lane's face. He took a quick swig to test the flavor and—satisfied—followed with a much heartier chug.

As the apple-flavored bloat brew poured into Lane's stomach he almost immediately felt the tickling of carbonation. His middle was expanding—he was certain of it—but the owl's considerable heft prevented it from being obvious at first. He happily patted his belly with both wings, purposely disturbing the soda so he'd swell faster. Knowing the cider's potency was important for deciding just how much of it Lane would be indulging in.

Initial changes were subtle. Lane's belly became unnaturally rounder, and faintly taut. Creases on his shirt diminished in size as it was stretched out. Unimpressed by the speed of his inflation, Lane casually tossed back the rest of his bottle and moved on to another.

"Don't get *too* carried away!" August chuckled, giving his friend's gut a playful slap. "I'm not deflating you if you end up too bloated to even play the first game!"

Lane snorted. "With how weak this stuff is I could probably down a whole six-pack and still be able to waddle around—*uorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrp!!*"

The sudden, powerful belch caused Lane's middle to shake wildly, the cider within sloshed and tossed about. There was a surge of fizziness, the owl burping up a storm uncontrollably. In a flash his belly ballooned outward with enough force to cause him to wince as he felt his shirt grow terribly tight.

Lane was rapidly swelling, stumbling as he adjusted his gate to compensate for his bigger gut. There was a look of annoyance on his face as he put down his second cider. In his cockiness he'd drunk most of it, an act he was already regretting.

"Ha, what did I tell you!" August bleated in delight, snagging a cider of his own. "Been a while since I was able to use you as a gamer chair~"

"Oh don't—*braaaaaap*—get ahead of yourself!" Lane shot back. "I'm sure it'll settle down soon, and then I'll just—*urrrrrp*—belch myself back down to size."

Unfortunately the owl's rate of expansion wasn't slowing in the slightest. He couldn't remember

the last time he'd dealt with such an excessively potent brew, at least one that *wasn't* meant to turn a person into an orb right away. If August had bought a prank brand—unintentionally or not—then the goat would have hell to pay.

“Dude belching never works, you'd be at it for hours!” August had opened his cider and taken the smallest of sips. “But thanks for taking the first drink—I'd be a big old blimp myself otherwise.”

Lane didn't appreciate the boastful teasing. As August took another drink, Lane grabbed the end of the bottle and tilted it up while pushing it forward slightly. The goat's eyes bulged as cider rushed down his throat. His attempts to remove the bottle failed thanks to Lane's persistence—and strength. Soon the bottle was empty, August coughing once he was free of it.

“N-No fair!” August said, eying his own plump middle as if it were a ticking time bomb. “Just cause you were reckless and turned yourself into an instant balloon doesn't mean you get to make me one too!”

“I just thought you'd enjoy getting the full flavor experience of the cider, that's all.” Lane chuckled for a few seconds before stopping, realizing his laughter only antagonized the brew more. “Just wait till you're tasting it on your belches!”

The goat had been so focused on staying perfectly still he didn't have time to dodge his friend leaning in. Lane gripped August's soft sides with both wings and shook him as hard as he could, a series of surprised bleats and burps ringing out. By the time Lane was finished August was dizzy, the goat nearly tripping over himself as he tried to regain his footing. Just like with Lane his belly swiftly puffed up like an airbag.

As much as Lane wanted to gloat, he was still dealing with his own out of control inflation. His belly was massive and round, his thighs and arms bloating from the influx of carbonation. Had he tried to wobble around he would have undoubtedly ended up wedged in a doorway—maybe even a hallway. Mobility simply wasn't an option anymore; not that he wanted to disturb the volatile cider more. At least blimping up August had improved his mood.

August was belching far more than Lane had, which only managed to shake his gut more while barely releasing any of the built up gas. For a brief minute he fumed, but eventually he accepted there was no stopping the bloating and mellowed out. He'd been planning on getting huge that night anyway, and all that had changed was the haste of it. The goat would still be able to tease his recently-immobilized friend a bit before he ended up in the same position.

“You know—*buorrrp*—what? The stuff does make my burps taste good, thank you!”

August gave Lane's balloon belly a trio of sharp slaps, prompting the owl to belch and bloat. With an embarrassed hoot Lane toppled onto his middle, flapping his wings as he rocked back and forth.

The goat turned towards the case of cider. “Wow Lane, you're looking pretty thirsty there, why don't I help you out?”

“Don't you—*bub-urrrrrp*—dare!” Lane could only wobble in place, his wings too puffed up to be of use fending off his mischievous friend. “Another one of those and I might pop!”

Another bottle was already in August's hoof, the cap flicked off. “Oh like I haven't seen you end up as a pile of festive feathers a dozen times before! Now open wide Blimpo!”

Hoots of protest proved useless, and August inevitably found a way to force the bottle into Lane's beak. He could hear the cider splashing inside the owl's mostly hollow middle, like a distant waterfall. A scowl awaited him after.

August merely grinned in reply, then pressed hard on his friend's taut body. Lane's cheeks puffed up, his eyes closing as he unleashed a thunderous burp right in August's face.

“Well Lane, you know how much I love an impromptu durability test~”

“Ugh, once I re-form there's a helium tank with your name on it, dude!”

August didn't seem too intimidated by the balloon. “Don't sell yourself short, you might remain intact! I mean, I'd probably have to burst ya just to leave the room once you've filled half of it, but we'll

worry about that when it happens.”

Lane's attempt at a comeback was thwarted by the impossible to ignore pressure building within him. He was almost entirely spherical, his talons, wing-tips, and head all barely sticking out. His feathers were ruffled and floofed, a few popping off on their own as his hide grew tauter. Even after becoming a ball he continued to expand in all directions, his body pressing up against furniture and walls. The frequent, miniature spikes in pressure made it hard for the owl to concentrate. He also couldn't help but blush at how massive he'd become.

August was on the verge of immobility himself. He'd managed to remain standing as his shape grew rounder and rounder, allowing him to shuffle around at a snail's pace. The advantage was mainly used to keep ahead of his swelling friend so he wasn't knocked over by a wall of owl.

“Da-Damn it August,” Lane mumbled in a daze. “I hope my—*urrrp*—beak knocks you upside the...the head...”

Loud creaks were reverberating from the owl's body. August couldn't imagine how impossibly taut Lane must have been, and was genuinely impressed with how much of the room his friend had filled. Clearly years of inflating had done wonders to his capacity. His instincts told him to seek cover for the impending explosion, but there was nothing big enough for the goat orb to hide behind—nor any way he could roll himself to it. Instead he watched with a wide grin.

Lane frowned as he felt his hide giving up, tiny geysers erupting all across his body, adding hisses to the creaks. His last conscious thoughts revolved around how he'd get back at August.

The geysers expanded into tears, and in the blink of an eye the massive owl was turned into a cloud of feathers. A sound vaguely akin to a deafening belch was accompanied by a blast of released carbonation that rolled August backwards into a wall, his horns embedding into it from the force. He winced at the rough chair and bookcase that pressed into his hide, but initially he seemed to have survived the explosion unscathed.

The curved beak ricocheting off the ceiling and right at August was a blur. He felt the pressure of its blunt end slamming into him, his sides bulging and warping. Through sheer force the beak won out.

A bleat was swiftly drowned out by a second explosion, scraps of gray hide joining the feathers still falling around the room. August's horns remained in the wall, imbedded just a little deeper.

Furniture had been slid and knocked over, picture frames tossed. The whole living was a mess of feathers and hide. Cleaning it all up had the potential to be just as annoying as popping, perhaps even more...