

A Prize-winning Grape

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After a bout of cold weather the temperatures had finally risen a fair amount, and the park was bustling as people tried to enjoy it while it lasted. Amongst them was August, a rotund gray lion who was waiting for his friend Indi. While the park was busy, August knew he'd likely be able spot the midnight-blue cheetah from quite a distance, if only because they were even rounder than he was.

Sure enough, August saw the blubbery feline waddling down the path long before they were close enough to even shout at one another, and waved excitedly to get his attention.

"Wow, with how much you were wobbling I'm surprised you were able to fit through your front door to get here!" Indi teased.

"Says the talking blueberry!" August countered. "I was half-expecting you to roll the whole way."

Such jokes were common between the two, especially as August's girth had steadily increased over time to match Indi's. It was all good natured ribbing, accompanied by plenty of pokes and prods and exaggerations.

"Pfft, at the rate you're going I'll be slim compared to you soon enough!" Indi grinned a little wider than the joke deserved, before fishing something out of his bag. "Oh yeah, I discovered a really refreshing local soda a few days back, and thought you might enjoy it."

August accepted a bottle from Indi and looked it over. He'd never heard of the brand before, and the label was dominated by a big grape and little else. There was a delightful hiss as he twisted the top off and took a long drink. It was certainly delicious, not particularly better than some of the other grape sodas he'd had before but still nice. He didn't notice just how gleeful Indi appeared to be.

The friends began to chat, but as August continued drinking the soda his fur took on an purpler and purpler hue. Conversation proved just distracting enough for August to remain unaware of the change, and of course Indi wasn't about to point it out to him. After all, he'd known exactly what the soda would do to August.

Simply turning August purple wasn't enough, though. A faint gurgle echoed from within the lion's belly, which slowly started to balloon outward, as if he were being inflated.

No amount of distraction could keep August from feeling the growing weight of his middle, and inevitably a look of confusion came across his face, his gaze drifting downwards.

"Whoa whoa whoa!" August said, startled first by his color and then by the obvious fact he was swelling.

"Huh, you're blowing up just like a balloon," Indi chuckled, poking August's middle just hard enough to make the juice bubbling within slosh about. "I guess it was a bad batch of soda. Oops~"

August didn't believe Indi's lie for a second. "I can't believe you lured me here on such a nice day just to blimp me up! Well, I guess I can, but still! You'd better have an antidote in that bag too, otherwise you're gonna end up as a blueberry pancake flattened beneath my purple tush!"

The lion tried his best to puff himself up and look somewhat intimidating, but all he managed to do was puff up. The swelling seemed to be speeding up, August widening his gait as he rounded out. He could feel the juice slosh whenever he made even the slightest movement, and couldn't help but feel like a massive water balloon--one that would only get bigger.

"I don't know big guy, unless you've got a rolling head start I think even I should be able to waddle clear of ya." Indi started to circle his friend, sneaking pokes at his taut sides while the lion struggled to turn himself around to keep an eye on him. At times he'd succeed at swatting away Indi's paw, but that became harder and harder the rounder he got. "Besides, my grand plans require a big grape, and I'm not about to give up the biggest grape in the state!"

"You can just go to the grocery store like everyone else!" August nervously insisted.

All too late the lion made a run for it, which in truth was more of a frantic, noisy waddle. Indi casually followed behind him, amused.

The sight of the purple, wobbling, swelling feline was gradually getting the attention of everyone one else in the park, much to August's dismay. He could see phones getting aimed his direction, dozens of photos and videos undoubtedly being taken. There was laughter and surprise, so many eyes locked onto his comical flight.

August was already imagining what would happen once friends found the footage online, how much more he'd be teased about being a juicy grape, *especially* by the slimmer ones. The thought alone was enough to make him blush bright red.

A couple minutes later August found himself too round to even waddle, having gone nowhere fast.

His massive, spherical body was beginning to envelop his limbs, his face growing rounder as it sunk in as well. The pressure building within him was difficult to ignore, a persistent reminder of how big he was. August swore he heard a creak or two coming from his taut hide, ears twitching in the direction of every ominous sound, real or imagined.

"Honestly August I'm starting to think spherical is your natural shape!" Indi snickered from somewhere behind him, more teasing pokes accompanying his arrival. "I mean, I doubt any of our friends would bat an eye if you rolled up to them right now. Just the usual hellos and asking if you'd had to widen the hallways again, nothing out of the ordinary~"

Despite being almost completely round, August was still growing, the nervous lion's gaze darting wildly as he felt himself taking up more and more space. "I'm not an grape I'm a lion! Hurry up and roll me to a juicer Indi!!"

"Eventually. Maybe." Indi grinned as he watched August swell like an enormous purple balloon. The concoction had promised to make the lion big, but it was exceeding his expectations wonderfully. "The most important thing is making sure you're ready for the produce competition at next weekend's farmer's market—first prize is a nice bundle of cash and your picture on the front page of the newspaper and I'm sure you'd *love* that."

"W-Wait, why didn't you just enter yourself then! I bet a blueberry as big as an elephant would do much better than a little grape like me!" August wiggled his paws, increasingly worried his hide might not be able to keep up with his out of control swelling. Or what if he ended up pressing against a bare branch in the tree above? His hide couldn't be too durable with how stretched-thin it was.

"Blueberries aren't in season!"

"Neither are grapes!!"

Indi ignored the fact. "Don't worry August, after you've had a good run of the county fair circuit and won enough ribbons to bury you under, it'll be time for a much more relaxing career. I'm thinking keg..."

"Keg!?" August's eyes widened.

"Just think of all the money I'll make selling your juice!" Indi chirped. "Plus it'll help you ease into an immobile life afterward."

There was a loud whimper from the top of the towering grape. "Why would I be immobile after all that!"

"Well all that grape juice is gonna make you pack on the pounds, so by the time you're finally juiced you'll probably still be spherical—just a whole lot softer," Indi said as he gently tapped on the lion's taut side with a paw, being careful not to scratch him with his claws. "Too blubbery to move, and of course trying to slim down from that will be close to impossible so best not even think of it. At least you'll be able to double as a couch when friends visit!"

What August had originally assumed was a simple prank was swiftly getting out of control. "You're just joking, right Indi? Right!?"

Indi gave no response.

August finally stopped growing, having become an absolutely massive grape twice Indi's height. He loomed over his friend, barely able to wobble thanks to the countless gallons of grape juice within him. The lion was taut and helpless, overwhelmed by the sensation of just how immense he was, how immense he was always going to be. As Indi began to slowly roll him away from the park, August glumly wished the weather hadn't held up that day...