

## Casual Pop

By: Indi

Tycho couldn't hear the creaks over the music, but he did hear the rising gasps and cheers. The lion knew what it meant.

Someone was about to blow.

Against his better judgment, Tycho turned towards the noise. A blue jay was bobbing on the ceiling. At least he assumed they were a blue jay. All he could see was a sphere covered in blue feathers, with a beak barely jutting out. A hose ran from the beak, leading to a helium tank dangling in the air. He didn't know why the blue jay didn't spit out the hose, or why no one in the crowd surrounding them didn't shut off the tank.

The floating borb seemed to shake. Some of the crowd stepped away. Tycho braced himself.

The explosion happened in an instant. The walls rattled and people shouted in surprise, even ones who'd been keenly watching the action. Tycho winced at the noise. Blue feathers flew across the room, landing on furniture and guests alike. The blue jay's beak ricocheted off the floor and a wall before skidding to a stop a few feet away from Tycho, spinning in place.

After some hearty laughter and applause, the guests went back to partying.

"I can understand the appeal of inflating, but I'll never understand why some recklessly overdo it like that," Tycho said, shaking his head. His attention was already drifting to other spherical guests.

The gray snake next to him laughed. "Accidents happen—especially at parties."

"Popping's a bit more than just an accident, Vex," Tycho said. "When you end up as a pile of scraps, there's no coming back."

"Very insightful, dude,"

"Well I'm not wrong!" Tycho insisted, pointing towards the fresh debris. "All that's left of that bird is a bunch of feathers and a beak. They'll probably be used to stuff a pillow and decorate a mantle."

"Honestly if I was a bird I'd love to go out that way," Vex said.

"I'd rather stay in one piece. I wish Lane would host normal parties and not a blimpy thunderdome." Tycho's gaze was on a rotund anaconda. They were guzzling beer and belching, their round body expanding steadily.

"You're making it sound so ominous."

"It is!" Tycho fumed. "I haven't even been able to enjoy a drink because I don't know what's spiked. If I pick the wrong can I might pop!"

"One drink isn't going to make you explode, you dork. And they're really easy to spot, too. Just look for the ones with balloons and blimps on them. The branding is comically unsubtle," Vex said.

Tycho shook his head. "Won't matter if I'm too drunk to pay attention. Can't

even have fun at these parties; I'm not sure why I let you talk me into this."

"Dude, I didn't think it'd be this inflation-heavy," Vex said. "Do you want to leave?"

Tycho was silent. He glanced back at the anaconda. "Yeah, I think I do."

"Alright, then we'll leave. I don't want to force you to stay here. Besides, what I did see was worth it," Vex said.

"Thank you," Tycho said. "I'll go tell Lane we're heading out early, then. Pretty sure he's in the basement." The lion hurried off, dipping down a hall and through the door that led downstairs.

Vex decided to spend his last few minutes at the party enjoying the sights. A zebra had picked up the blue jay's fallen helium tank and began filling up, stripes stretching as they rounded out. Meanwhile, the anaconda was a sphere. Vex saw the light shining off the snake's taut scales, making them look more like a balloon than ever. Considering how volatile blimp beer could be, he guessed they were likely to pop soon.

A deer walking past the anaconda slipped, falling backward against them. Vex grinned as he saw the deer's antlers press hard into the anaconda's taut hide and pierce it. The blast threw the deer way and added scraps of glittering green to the blue feathers.

Vex snickered at the destruction. He enjoyed inflation, but preferred to do so in the safety of his own home, where accidents were far less likely to occur. He didn't feel much sympathy for those who took the risk while surrounded by booze and drunks. It was their own fault for being foolish.

More time passed, with Vex shifting his attention to the expanding zebra. They bounced around on the ceiling but showed no signs of potentially bursting; the helium tank had run dry.

*Wonder what's taking Tycho so long,* Vex thought to himself, growing bored. Lane could be chatty, so he guessed the lion had gotten trapped in a conversation. "Time to rescue that dork again."

Vex headed in the direction of the basement stairs, passing a few other inflating folk along the way. He didn't hear any talk echoing up the stairs as he went down them. When he reached the bottom, he laughed at the reason why.

Tycho was an orb. He giggled as he wobbled and creaked. Lane stood beside him, the owl sporting a balloon of a belly himself. A bunch of air tanks stood on the ground near them, each connected to hoses.

"All that fuss upstairs about swelling up and popping, yet you snuck down here and blimped up anyway?" Vex grinned. "What made you change your mind?"

"Lane hooked me up with the—hehe—with the good stuff," Tycho said, slowly. "Everything's good now. I could be a blimp forever, hehe."

The lion looked and sounded high, but Vex didn't smell weed. "Yo, Lane, what'd you pump the dork up with?"

“Good old nitrous!” Lane said proudly. He slapped his belly, a hollow *thunk* echoing out.

“Laughing gas? Well if anyone needed to mellow out it was Tycho.” Vex guessed Lane was high off it as well, though nowhere near Tycho’s level. The lion was practically a giant tank of laughing gas at that point. Unless someone deflated him, he’d be out of it all night. Which meant Vex could stay and enjoy the party at his leisure.

The snake smiled wide.

“It’s been a while since I last got to tease a lion balloon,” Vex said, walking up to Tycho. He poked his friend, chuckling as they creaked and wobbled. “You might actually enjoy bouncing this time~”

“Wanna puff up?” Lane asked.

Vex looked over his shoulder at the owl, who was waving a hose at him. There was a mouthpiece with a strap attached to the end for ease of inhaling. “Nah, I’m good. I’m in the mood to play with blimps, not be one.” He turned his attention back to Tycho, wondering what he should start with. Rolling was good, but so was squeezing. Decisions, decisions.

“Dude, you should at least try it for a bit,” Lane said. He held up the mask attached to the hose and shoved it over Vex’s muzzle, strapping it on tight.

Vex’s cheeks puffed up as the laughing gas flooded into his mouth and down his throat. His belly ballooned outward in an instant, pushing into Tycho. He clawed frantically at the mask, trying to pull it off, but Lane held it in place. Within seconds his middle had become massive, and the rest of him started blimping as well. Far too late he realized Tycho likely hadn’t inflated willingly.

The bigger Vex grew, the harder he found it to concentrate. The laughing gas overwhelmed his senses, and the snake stopped struggling, right before his arms became too puffy to use. Swelling *did* feel incredible, so why fight it?

“See, inflating improves everyone’s mood,” Lane said, admiring the rounding figure of his friend. “It even mellowed Tycho out and made him stop whining about popping.”

Vex nodded as best he could. His body was taking on a spherical shape, his limbs ballooning into domes. Being big was good—*really* good. He didn’t understand why he hadn’t drained an air tank the second he’d arrived. So much time spent standing around doing nothing when he could’ve been blimped up.

“This stuff was pricey, but I’m so glad I took a chance and nabbed some,” Lane said. He drummed lightly on Vex’s side. “Next time I’ll have enough for everyone.”

“Dude, do me a favor and top me off,” Tycho mumbled.

“Sure, sure.” Lane grabbed another hose and hooked Tycho up to it. The lion’s eyes widened as the gas began to flow, then narrowed as he grew higher...and rounder.

Tycho had already been a sphere, and the fresh intake of laughing gas pushed his body to its limits. He creaked louder and more often. His paws vanished from sight,

sinking right into his taut, ballooning body. Little-by-little his head was pulled in, as if the lion were in quicksand. Soon, only the hose remained, snaking out from the top of the perfectly spherical feline.

Even high, Vex knew Tycho was about to blow. He didn't consider warning Lane, he simply watched. He saw the lion's wobbles steadily cease as the pressure sent them into a deep daze. The creaking was constant. Then Tycho shuddered.

Vex thought he saw Tycho's middle bulge outward mere seconds before the lion exploded into scraps. The brown confetti pelted Vex and Lane. The laughing gas within Tycho was released all at once. Lane waved a talon in front of his face and then stumbled, losing his wits as he took in a deep breath of the gas. He stopped paying attention to Vex, who continued swelling up.

Vex couldn't help but giggle, despite the fact his friend had just been reduced to scraps. Popping really did seem like a fun way to go, especially with an audience. He wished he'd been able to record it, so he could watch it again over and over. Tycho would've been furious—not that he'd have been able to do anything about it.

The snake finally rounded out, claws lifting off the ground. He wobbled in place, helpless but happy, having no desire to deflate. A wave of pressure spread through Vex, making him dizzy and rattling his thoughts. Though he'd become a sphere, Lane hadn't turned off the laughing gas tank or pulled out the hose. The owl was in a stupor, playing with Tycho's scraps and oblivious to his blimping friend.

Vex felt his claws pulled into his body. The pressure spikes were intensifying, disrupting his thoughts. He realized he was bound to pop, just like Tycho had. He let out a muffled laugh. He couldn't believe he was about to explode on accident. It was such a silly, easy to avoid fate. If he'd paid more attention to Lane he'd never have gotten caught. But he never would've gotten to experience being blimped up on laughing gas, either. Perhaps it'd be worth it.

Oh well, at least the party had been a blast. Vex giggled to himself until his head sunk in completely.

The snake held together only a few seconds longer than Tycho had. He'd become lost in a pressure daze, and never felt the pinprick of the first leak that turned into an eruption. Vex burst in a flurry of gray hide scraps and a flood of laughing gas.

The blast knocked over Lane and the gas tanks. The startled owl watched the scraps of a second friend raining down upon the room with blank eyes. "Oops," he said, laughing, before passing out from the gas.