

Swell Drinks

By: Indi

Tycho held the bottle of grape cider up and looked it over, trying to muster some enthusiasm for it. Ultimately the lion failed. The cider didn't look bad, and he'd probably enjoy the taste, but it wasn't exactly the reward he'd been expecting when he'd gone after the bounty. If he'd been lugging a few crates of the stuff, sure. But a single bottle wouldn't last long, especially considering he'd be sharing it with his friend Indi.

"Mind if I open our payment?" Tycho asked Indi.

The blue jay had just finished taking off his pack as they took their break alongside the trail. It was filled with the alchemist's many potions, and he was clearly relieved to get the weight off his shoulders for a bit. "Go ahead. Just don't guzzle it all at once," he snickered.

"No promises," Tycho said, rolling his eyes. He was admittedly notorious for his love of cider, and had—on numerous occasions—drained entire kegs of it by himself. Big kegs, too. He tended to claim the durability enchantments on his clothing were so he didn't rip them in combat, but the truth was they were meant to ensure he didn't burst right out of them while indulging at taverns.

Tycho dug the cork out of the bottle with a claw, took a quick whiff of the aroma, and smiled. He hoped it tasted as well as it smelled. The lion took a deep swig of the cider, deeper than he should've, really. A fourth of it was gone by the time he pulled the bottle away from his lips. "Huh, this stuff's really good—*uorrrrp!* Excuse me."

"You say that about every cider," Indi said. The blue jay turned around and began digging through his pack, taking out potion bottles and rearranging them.

"Not *every* cider!" Tycho insisted. He stifled another belch, and twitched as he felt a cool chill spread through his body. The weather was cloudy but warm, so he welcomed it.

"I literally can't remember you ever claiming a cider wasn't tasty," Indi said. "But I do remember that time I had to roll you out of a tavern after you volunteered to drink all their cheap cider that'd been hexed by a drunk mage. You were sloshed and sloshy for days!"

Tycho blushed. "It was my duty as a paladin to deal with that hex!"

The back-and-forth conversation was enough to distract Tycho from the fact his fur had begun turning a deep shade of purple. The change had started unseen, spreading outward from his flat middle until every inch of his body was some shade of purple. When the last patch of brown had turned to purple, Tycho's belly immediately ballooned outward. Faint bubbling and sloshing sounds were echoing from the lion's middle as he steadily swelled, but they were easily drowned out by the talking. And with his enchanted clothing stretching to compensate for the belly he was suddenly gaining, Tycho couldn't even rely on a sensation of tightness to warn him something was amiss.

"I'm pretty sure you said the same thing when you drank that booze elemental before I could use a freezing potion on it," Indi said, shaking one of his potion bottles and watching the contents swirl around. "And when you chugged all the water in a reflecting pool to uncover treasure that was maybe two feet deep at best."

"Well...both those strategies worked, remember?" Tycho couldn't really think of a good

excuse.

“Technically, sure. But I’m beginning to think you just like filling up your belly whenever you’re given the chance.” Indi turned around. His eyes widened and his smile switched to a surprised smirk.

“What?” Tycho asked. He wondered if the blue jay had just realized he’d forgotten something back in town.

“Oh...nothing,” Indi said, his eyes drifting towards Tycho’s middle. His friend’s belly was huge, and growing rounder and rounder by the second. He was also puffing up elsewhere. It was a miracle the lion hadn’t noticed yet. “You said the cider was good, right?”

“Yeah,” Tycho said, a little baffled. “Flavor’s strong, but I’d recommend it. Want some?”

Indi snorted. “No, I don’t think I’m in the mood to be sloshy today.”

“What is that supposed to—the Hell!?” Tycho couldn’t ignore his condition any longer, stumbling as his body blimped out of control. He was already too inflated to move around easily, and didn’t bother trying to waddle. “Why am I turning into a giant grape!”

“Probably the cider,” Indi said, showing no sign of concern.

“Well duh, but why was the cider spiked!” Tycho was swelling up fast, his arms and legs now rigid and useless, slowly getting enveloped by his increasingly spherical body. His tunic and pants fit mostly perfect despite looking comically stretched, though his belt was tighter. It struggled to keep up, squeezing the large lion.

“How should I know, I’m not the one who spiked it.” Indi shrugged. “Though they certainly picked a good variety of berrification to afflict you with. Grape suits you.”

Tycho was unamused. He’d been turned into a berry before—an orange and a blueberry to be precise—but that didn’t make him any less nervous. One could never tell just how volatile berrification could be. The effects could even remain permanent if the berry wasn’t juiced quickly enough, and there wasn’t exactly any way to do that in the wilderness. The lion imagined having to deal with his body always producing fresh grape juice, swelling slowly throughout the day as his fur shifted from brown to purple, needing to get juiced daily in order to remain mobile. And from what he’d heard, permaberries tended to plump up quite a bit thanks to how fattening the constant supply of juice was. It wasn’t an ideal fate for a paladin who prided himself in being nimble.

“Ugh, just hurry up and get me an antidote. I swear half your potions blimp people up, so you’ve gotta have at least one that deflates them!” Tycho demanded, on the verge of being spherical. His feet were barely touching the ground, while his arms had swelled into domes with his paws jutting out. The weight of the juice within him made even the slightest movements difficult.

The paladin’s belt was squeezing his middle so hard it could barely be seen, though the creaking was impossible to miss. Tycho was on the verge of begging it to just snap apart, fearful the sharp pressure might actually pop him. Fortunately his swelling middle managed to defeat it, and the belt dramatically tore apart, flying off and wobbling the lion as his belly ballooned outward further, no longer restrained.

“Nothing in my pack is gonna slim you down, grape.” Indi walked over and poked Tycho hard with a talon, causing the lion to wobble backwards some.

“H-Hey, be careful with that!” Tycho whined. “And stop joking!”

“I’m not joking. Berrification’s complicated, I can’t just make a universal cure. The couple I’ve got are specifically brewed to counter my own personal inflation potions. If you drank one you’d be more likely to swell up even more rather than return to normal.” The blue jay grinned, and gave Tycho another poke. “Which could still be fun.”

Tycho felt his swelling cease. The juice inside him was gently sloshing. The pressure was noticeable, but not too bad—at least as long as his friend wasn’t prodding him. He tried to see if he could wobble forwards on his own power, but the weight was just a little bit too overwhelming, and all he did was sway some. Either he was too round, or needed time to adjust to his size. Which meant he was completely at the mercy of Indi.

“I’m big enough already,” Tycho insisted. The lion wasn’t able to hide his blushing, though, as his thoughts drifted to being even larger. “So let’s just roll me back to town so I can get juiced and avoid becoming a permaberry paladin.”

Indi’s eyes lit up in a way that instantly made Tycho nervous. “A permaberry paladin, eh?” The blue jay began to circle the lion, lightly thumping on his round friend’s taut hide and ignoring his protests. “You know, I *have* been needing a new source of juice for my berrification potions. And if I happened to have a big, juicy berry on hand at all times I’d save a ton on ingredients. Might even be able to run some experiments on making my potions more potent.”

“Indi, try not to forget the fact we work together on missions. Missions that make you a decent amount of gold when we’re not paid in cursed wine,” Tycho said. His nervousness was seeping through.

The mischievous blue jay leaned against Tycho and smiled. “Honestly I think I’d make more selling berrification potions in bulk than going out on missions. A lot less traveling, involved, too. I’m sure you’d enjoy an early retirement~”

Indi leaned in a bit more, prompting light creaks from the helpless lion. Tycho’s face twisted as he felt the spike in pressure, a trickle of grape juice leaking from his mouth. It only encouraged Indi to start teasing him more. The blue jay spread his arms wide and gave Tycho a hug, squeezing them just hard enough to provoke wiggles and whimpers. All Tycho could do was wave his useless paws and occasionally growl, but neither looked intimidating coming from a massive, bloated grape. Every poke, slap, and squeeze reminded him of how huge he’d become, how he was essentially just a well-dressed ball. And if Indi had his way, he might honestly be stuck like that forever.

“Oh come on! I become a grape and your first instinct is to roll me off to your damn lab forever?” Tycho whined. “Friends are supposed to help each other, Indi!”

Indi turned away and headed to his pack, shifting through it until he pulled out a clear potion that looked like fizzy water. “Yeah, and that’s why you’re helping me make a fortune while I help you stay safe and sloshy. I’ll finally get to use that berry tap I’ve had lying around.” Indi cackled. “Guess it’s a good thing I packed a strength potion. It’ll make rolling you around a whole lot easier.” The blue jay chugged the potion in one long gulp, and burped. “Huh, don’t remember it being so bubbly before. Must’ve messed with the recipe lately.”

Tycho had started trying to wobble away, even though he knew he’d never be able to

outrun his friend in his current, spherical state. But as he did, he noticed Indi's middle had grown rounder. For some reason, the blue jay was inflating. He hadn't changed color, so the wine wasn't to blame. Maybe it was a side effect of his strength potion? But he was swelling pretty fast.

"Considering your size, I may need to make some space in the lab to fit you. I'm sure I can make it work, at least until I've had the time to expand my operation and get you your own room. One with plenty of room to ripen and grow. Might need to invest in some storage kegs, too. And an industrial pump. This is going to be fun!" Indi laughed again, but was interrupted by an even louder belch than before. That's when he noticed how much he'd blimped up. The blue jay cawed in confusion and squeezed down on his swelling middle with both talons.

"I take it you didn't mean to turn yourself into a balloon?" Tycho asked, snickering bitterly.

Indi stumbled around, inflating far too rapidly for his own liking. He didn't feel any heavier. In fact, he somehow felt lighter. A *lot* lighter. As if a stiff breeze would blow him away. As if he'd just guzzled one of his helium potions. The blue jay's eyes widened.

"Oh no, oh no!" Indi wobbled back to his pack as fast as he could. He needed to grab an antidote before he was too late. He only made it three steps before his fourth touched air. He'd started floating.

Tycho watched the blue jay flailing as he floated right off the ground, slowly and helplessly spinning around. Feathers were fluttering down, dislodged by his frantic movements. His flailing slowed as he ballooned in size, turning into a spherical borb whose talons were almost completely enveloped by his blimpy body.

The paladin couldn't resist laughing.

"So *that's* how birds fly! You're a very graceful balloon, Indi!" Tycho bellowed, his juices sloshing.

"This isn't funny! H-Help me down before I float away!" Indi squawked, his previous smugness completely gone and replaced by panic.

"Kind of hard for a big grape like myself to reach you, buddy," Tycho said with mock regret. "Maybe if you'd been more focused on helping me out than plotting to hook me up to a pump, you wouldn't be a blimp right now."

"It was a joke!" Indi was floating higher and higher, well over ten feet off the ground. There was nothing for the blue jay to grab ahold of, not that his talons could really reach. The breeze and frenzied wobbling kept him spinning, so his view constantly shifted between the increasingly distant ground below and the seemingly endless sky above.

Tycho's smile gradually faded as he realized something. If Indi floated off into oblivion, there'd be no one around to roll him to town and get him juiced. He'd have to wait for the next traveler to come along, and hope they were willing to help. And by the time that happened, he'd more than likely be a permaberry. Suddenly Indi's karmic predicament didn't seem so funny.

Tycho watched the blue jay soar higher and higher, his pleas for help diminishing as the distance increased. Eventually they passed through a cloud, and out of sight.

The paladin let out a dismayed sigh. In all likelihood, his berrification was guaranteed to be permanent now. But he wasn't quite ready to give up. With considerable effort Tycho managed to wobble forwards, steadily gaining some momentum as he learned to move his round body. He wasn't getting anywhere fast, but every little bit helped. The grape lion's journey back to town was going to be a long one.