

## **Sterling and the Endless Donuts (Popping)**

By: Indi

Prince Sterling winced as the hood was pulled off his head. Once again able to see, the golden lion looked around. He was bound to a chair in front of a long, wooden table. A woven basket stood in the center of the table, but nothing else. Magical glow lights lit up the windowless room, which lacked decoration. If it was supposed to be a dining room, it was the gloomiest he'd ever seen.

"Enjoying the sights?"

Sterling turned to face a purple unicorn. His dark purple mane was braided and tossed over a shoulder. He wore round glasses and dressed in the style of the local nobility. Sterling didn't recognize him from any of the grand balls or banquets he'd attended, though.

"Have you any idea who I am?!" Sterling demanded, fighting futilely against his bindings. "I am Prince Sterling, member of our glorious royal family and thirteenth in line for the throne!"

"Of course I know you, that's why I kidnapped you," the unicorn said with the slightest of smiles.

"Then let me free this instant!"

"No."

Prince Sterling's face twisted into a furious scowl. He wasn't used to being told no. "Guards! Guards! Help me, damn it!"

The unicorn laughed. "Your guards are far, far away. By now they've been rolled back to the city to explain how they managed to let you get kidnapped so easily."

"Those useless fools! I'll have them thrown off of the royal guard the instant I'm home! No, thrown into a cell for failing me!" Sterling fumed.

Good luck finding a cell big enough to fit any of them," the unicorn said. "I left them fattened to immobility. Blobs wider than they are tall. It's a shame you didn't see it. Bellies bursting out of ornate plate armor. Belts snapping. Swords clattering to the ground as paws grew too doughy to hold them. They were all a flustered, whiny mess in the end. It'll be a long, long time before any of them are slim enough to move let alone perform guard duties."

The unicorn had relished every second of his ambush on the royal carriage. Alistair prided himself in his magic skills, and taking on a group of guards on his own had been a breeze. His weight-gain spell had sowed chaos.

"You better not have ruined their armor. That's royal property!" Sterling growled. "Release me!"

"Do I really have to remind you that you're a captive, and thus entirely at my mercy? Even a prince's power ceases to be once they're tied to a chair with no loyal guards in sight," Alistair said. You'll only be released when I've gotten a ransom."

“Well then get it so I may be free! My cousin is the king, and he will surely pay a small fortune to ensure my safe return. So don’t do anything rash!” Prince Sterling demanded.

“All in due time my obnoxious liege,” Alistair said. “I’ve already had my demands sent to the palace. Your weight in gold.”

The prince scoffed. “That’s all? I’m worth far more than a measly one hundred and thirty-five pounds in gold! I’m worth ten times that amount, easily!”

“Oh, I agree. I just feel the King might be reluctant to pay such an exorbitant price for you,” Alistair smirked. “I’ve heard you may not be well-loved at court.”

Sterling frowned and looked away. “There may be some who don’t provide me with the respect my position demands.”

“It sounds more like they all believe you to have the attitude of a petulant child who causes nothing but embarrassment and can’t be trusted with even the lowliest barony,” Alistair said.

“Baronies are beneath me!” Prince Sterling huffed. He made no effort to refute the other accusations.

“Regardless, I do believe you have use as a source of great riches to me, personally,” Alistair said. “Once I’ve gotten the King to accept the seemingly-harmless deal of you for your weight in gold, I’ll reveal to him a prince far more portly than he remembered. One worth half the kingdom’s coffers in gold.”

Sterling let out a dismissive laugh. “Impossible! I won’t be even an ounce heavier by the time the deal is made. You’ll get barely a drop of my family’s vast wealth, and will inevitably be brought to justice. The dungeons will have plenty of room for an insolent unicorn like you.”

“We’ll see if you think the same way once you’ve finished your feast.”

“What feast?” Prince Sterling asked, eagerly looking over the table again. Being kidnapped had left him peckish. His gaze settled on the basket. “I doubt a satisfying meal could fit in a basket as small as that.”

“Oh, on the contrary, it’s far deeper than it looks.”

Alistair’s horn glowed, and he zapped the basket with a spell. The basket opened, and a dozen large donuts floated out. They hovered in the air, before flying at Sterling. The prince yelped, and the donuts dived down his throat. Another dozen appeared from the basket just as he’d finished the first. Soon they too had forced their way into the lion.

Prince Sterling squirmed in his seat, frantically trying to escape as donut after donut filled his stomach. His flat middle ballooned outward steadily, straining the buttons of his royal robe. He winced as he felt a tightness around his middle. Suddenly buttons began to burst, freeing his growing belly and providing a hint of relief.

Alistair watched the flailing, swelling lion with glee. “I do hope you’re enjoying my latest acquisition. It’s called a Basket of Endless Nourishment. Sounds useful, doesn’t

it? It *is* technically cursed, though. While the nourishment it provides is truly endless, it comes exclusively in the form of terribly fattening sweets.” He chuckled. “I tested it on some servants, first. One feeding session was all it took to turn kobolds into massive blobs. I expect a prince will take at least two.”

The news made Sterling wiggle harder, not that it helped. He was still rapidly filling with donuts. No matter what direction the lion turned his head in, the donuts always found a way in. He felt compelled to open his maw to accept them. The thought of losing his lean figure horrified him. He didn’t want to become fat like a common noble!

“Oh this is going so wonderfully well already,” Alistair said. “You’ll be stuffed until your belly is as big as a hill. Then you’ll be allowed to fatten up before we do it all again. Your plumping won’t stop until you’ve practically filled the room. I wonder if there’ll even be a scale in the kingdom big enough to weigh you?” Even if there wasn’t, he’d get his reward.

Sterling’s belly spilled over his lap and against the table. He was slowly pushed away, still seated, his gut greedy for room. Beneath him, the chair groaned. It quaked, struggling to handle the weight of the engorged lion. Before long the legs snapped, Prince Sterling plummeting to the floor as he flattened the chair. He whimpered between gulps, his rear sore and his belly continuing to grow.

Alistair walked up to his captive and rolled him onto his gut, much to Sterling’s displeasure. “How dare you—*omph*—handle a—*omph*—prince in such a—*omph*—way!”

“Would you rather be buried beneath your belly?” Alistair asked. “Because I’d gladly roll you over again if it’ll silence you for the rest of the feeding.”

Prince Sterling whimpered and gulped in response.

Soon the lion was straddling a belly wider than he was tall. Alistair circled him, poking his gut to make him squirm and whine. Sometimes he’d grow bold enough to slap or squeeze it.

“You’ve gotten huge, Prince,” Alistair said, wobbling the lion. “And to think your journey towards immensity has only just begun. You’re going to be pure blubber in the end. Just like my servants and those guards you derided earlier. Arms and legs too fat to move. Your neck will be a series of doughy rolls. Your cheeks so round they press against your snout. Breathing will be enough to jiggle the mountain you’ll become.”

“Returning to normal would be a herculean task. Obviously you’d be too massive to exercise. You may be assuming magic would save you, but there’s only so much they can do. Weight-loss spells aren’t that common, and they’re notoriously weaker against magical gains. It’d take dozens of powerful rituals to slowly slim you down.” Alistair pushed a hoof into the ballooning lion’s side. “The royal family may not even bother. Why waste resources on an unimportant fool who cost them a fortune. At least as a blob you could never get kidnapped again.”

“They won’t—*omph*—pay a—*omph*—blob’s ransom—uworrp! Just let me—

*omph—go!*”

“Don’t worry, I’ve considered that possibility already. If they refuse to pay for you, then I’ll simply kidnap another member of the royal family and fatten them up as well. I’ll keep it up until I’ve got a hoard of lion blobs!”

Alistair leaned back against Sterling. The stuffed lion was exceptionally soft. “Though perhaps I should do that anyway? Security will tighten with each royal fattened, but before long the royal guard will be barely mobile themselves. Once the King’s been blimped up I can usurp the throne myself. It’s not like anyone will stay loyal to a herd of helpless blobs. King Alistair. It was a wonderful ring to it. If anyone thinks otherwise, they’ll be free to join the former royal family in mountainous exile.”

While the unicorn daydreamed of glory yet to come, Sterling continued to grow. And grow. And *grow*. The lion had filled nearly half the room. He swelled over the table, slowly crushing it. His eyes were glazed over, stuffed with so much food he couldn’t think. He’d become lost in the daze of a powerful food coma, oblivious to Alistair’s taunts and schemes.

Alistair looked at the enormous lion and grinned. “Alright, I think that’s enough for your first feeding session. Time for you to get to work fattening up!” He slapped Sterling hard on the side.

The unicorn walked around Prince Sterling so he could reach the basket to deactivate it. As he came around the left of the lion, he found his way blocked by their blubbery belly. He shrugged, and went around the right. The same belly blocked him. “I did a little too good feeding him,” Alistair sighed. He nodded with his horn in the direction he thought the basket was in.

Nothing happened.

Alistair tried again, only to be met with more failure. Over and over he zapped, his spell fizzling out as soon as it struck the lion. With dismay, he realized he needed eye contact with the basket to deactivate it.

“Oh...oh this is bad.” Beyond the belly of the growing prince, the rest of the table snapped apart. There weren’t any exits on his side of the room, and he was running out of space fast. He needed to come up with a solution before he was flattened by his own captive.

Alistair considered trying to scale Sterling to reach the basket or the exit, whichever proved more viable. He quickly rejected the idea as foolhardy. Climbing a growing lion would be difficult. If he were to lose his grip at any point he could slide off and then be squashed as Sterling’s belly swelled over him. Eventually Sterling would cover the basket, and then it would stop feeding him, giving Alistair time to escape.

Alistair calmly settled in a corner of the room and erected barriers. The first was raised only a foot away from Prince Sterling. Seconds later the lion’s immense side pressed against the barrier. Alistair felt the force against his barrier. It quaked, and he raised a second one behind it, then a third.

Prince Sterling's belly ballooned against another wall. The corner grew dim as more of the lion reached towards the ceiling. Beyond the barriers was a mass of golden fur.

The barriers inched back. Alistair's horn glowed as he poured more magic into the barriers, but it did little to slow the progress of the swelling lion. Little-by-little Alistair's sanctuary shrunk. He backed into the corner.

A deep creaking echoed throughout the room. Alistair saw Sterling's side quake. The barrier continued to get pushed back, leaving Alistair with barely a couple feet of space. The walls behind him shook. Room and lion alike were struggling to remain intact. Rumbles and creaks filled the air.

In desperation, Alistair threw every ounce of magical energy he had into the barriers. They stopped moving, but began to groan from the pressure. A small crack formed. More appeared.

"Why didn't I climb?" Alistair asked, right before the barriers shattered.

A wall of lion rushed towards Alistair. It enveloped him in an instant, shoving him against stone. His horn dug hard into the taut side of the prince, stretching it to its limits.

With tremendous force, Prince Sterling exploded. The storehouse he'd been held captive in was obliterated, stones hurled in every direction as the walls were blown out. The blast rattled the entire countryside, knocking over trees and sending animals fleeing. A crater was dug into the ground.

Alistair groaned and opened his eyes. His entire body felt sore, but he seemed to be in one piece. Scraps of golden hide were fluttering to the ground around him. It was like confetti.

The unicorn sluggishly leaned up on his elbows to survey the damage. His hideout was gone, and someone was bound to investigate the explosion. He doubted they'd be able to guess the cause was a prince popping.

"What an embarrassing mess," Alistair grumbled. "All that work and the dumb prince gets himself stuffed to bursting! I'll have to nab a more competent captive next time."

Alistair saw movement in the corner of his eye and looked toward it. The magic basket had survived the explosion completely unharmed. Before he could breathe a sigh of relief at the good news, donuts rose from it.

The unicorn's eyes widened as they flew toward him. He tried to deactivate the basket, but he'd spent all his magic on the barriers. A few sparks of magic came from his horn, but it fizzled immediately.

The barrage of donuts forced their way into Alistair, whose belly rapidly began to balloon in size. As he swelled out of control, the unicorn realized with horror there'd soon be a second massive explosion.