

New Lobby Decor

By: Indigo Rho

“What do you mean it’s ruined, Ceejay?” August barely kept his voice under control. The gray and white deer paced back and forth in front of the hotel lobby.

The nervous fox before him blew his long hair out of his eyes and shrugged. “Well, we tried inflating it, but we can’t. There’s a bunch of holes torn in it.”

“The reindeer blimp is our *most* important display! It can’t be ruined!”

“Can’t we use something else?” Ceejay asked. His bushy tail was flicking back and forth in worry, looking like a frantic paintbrush with its blue tip. It wasn’t *his* fault the old blimp hadn’t been stored properly. He hadn’t even been working at the hotel back then.

“Of course not! Our hotel has had an inflatable deer on display for decades. It’s what everyone expects when they walk through those doors, and it’s what gives us free publicity. Without it, people will be disappointed.” And he’d get an earful from management. “We need to replace it.”

“How? We can’t exactly buy a new one on short notice.”

“No, but we can make one. Remember the Balloon Carnival event we held last week?” August started walking towards a back room and gestured for Ceejay to follow.

Ceejay nodded as he caught up. “Yeah. Living inflatables being juggled and doing tricks. It was weird seeing them bouncing around the halls between shows. But they’re gone. How will that help?”

“They left behind a few canisters of the special gas they use to transform into inflatables. For once, I’m grateful we haven’t gotten around to throwing them out. And because they were doing a Christmas-themed show, one of them is for a deer.” Finally, some luck.

In the room, August opened a closet and pulled out a brightly colored handheld tank. It had a strap for attaching it directly to a person’s muzzle. The performers had dazzled guests by transforming before their very eyes while tumbling around.

A thought occurred to Ceejay. “Uh, boss, don’t we need someone to

become the deer blimp, though?”

“Yes, yes we do. Thank you for volunteering, Ceejay.”

“Wait, I don’t want to—*mmmph!*!”

The tank was strapped onto Ceejay’s muzzle before he could take a step back. He heard a hissing sound, and his cheeks puffed up comically round. His middle ballooned out, popping the buttons of his work vest in seconds. It wasn’t his abrupt puffiness that surprised him most, but the plastic valve that’d appeared where his navel should’ve been. The fur around it flattened and grew slick. He was starting to transform into vinyl. He couldn’t help but blush.

August wrapped an arm around Ceejay to keep him from fleeing or messing with the tank. “Think of this as a promotion, Ceejay. In a way, you’ll be in charge of greeting all our guests.”

Ceejay had no desire to be the center of attention, especially if that involved being an inflatable. But the strange gas overwhelmed him. His whole body tingled and started feeling lighter. The vinyl spread all over him, giving him a brilliant sheen. His limbs puffed up, tearing the seams of his uniform as squeaky thighs revealed themselves. He looked at his paws in time to watch them shift into hooves. Behind him, his large tail shrunk dramatically. His rump ballooned out and shredded his pants. Vinyl hooves pushed off his shoes. He stumbled at the awkwardness of his transforming body, but was held up by August.

August looked on with approval as Ceejay’s muzzle gained a sheen and then shrunk slightly. A pair of inflatable antlers rose from his head, creaking as they took shape. August waited for the tank to stop hissing, then he removed it. Ceejay’s face was frozen in a giant, cartoonish grin. He tried to protest his treatment, but no words came out of the inflatable reindeer’s mouth, only creaks. He couldn’t push away August or run away. He couldn’t move at all.

August released his grip on Ceejay, and the inflatable toppled over. He crouched down, so he was in Ceejay’s limited line of sight. “So, how does the new you feel?”

Ceejay creaked in response.

“Excellent! I admit your coloration isn’t exactly traditional, but we’ve needed to change things up forever. If anything, you’ll attract even more

attention with those blue accents of yours. At least once you're at the proper size." August smiled and patted the inflatable on the head.

August quickly removed Ceejay's useless clothing. He picked the inflatable up with one hoof and tucked him under his arm. He then grabbed a heavy-duty air tank on wheels and returned to the lobby.

Few were around at midnight, and no one batted an eye at August transporting an inflatable and an air tank. August stopped in the center of the lobby, where a winter landscape had been set up. A painted treeline, fake snow, and a large sleigh were carefully positioned around a wide, empty space. August plopped Ceejay down in the middle of it all.

"Alright, Ceejay, time to swell into your brand new role." August flicked open Ceejay's valve and shoved the air tank hose in. He turned the air tank on full blast, eager to get the job done so he could move on to other things. Like finding a replacement for the fox about to replace his blimp.

Ceejay's eyes would've bulged if they weren't merely painted on. His middle rapidly ballooned out, along with every other part of him. He could feel himself stretching all over, growing bigger and puffier by the second. He gently rocked back and forth on his blimpy belly, wishing he could roll away.

August circled the swelling reindeer, nudging him to test how taut he was becoming. The centerpiece of the display needed to be an eye catcher, so the bigger, the better. And Ceejay was proving exceptionally stretchy as an inflatable.

Rounder and rounder Ceejay grew, becoming more balloon than reindeer. He rose upon his massive middle, giving him a distressingly clear view of the entrance to the hotel. People were already stopping to gawk at him as they passed through. Someone was taking pictures. He knew they assumed he was a mere decoration, but that didn't stop Ceejay from feeling horrendously flustered. How many people would pass through the lobby once the holiday crowds flooded in on vacation? The inflatable's face flushed faintly, the closest he could come to emoting in his transformed state.

August tapped Ceejay's side and decided the reindeer had grown as big as he could, at least without bursting at the seams. He didn't need to lose *another* inflatable deer. He turned off the air tank and sealed Ceejay's nozzle. He nudged and turned Ceejay, until the giant inflatable was in a

satisfactory position.

“Perfect. Absolutely perfect,” August praised his transformed subordinate. “You’re going to be the best display blimp we’ve had in years! And if you perform well enough, we may have to consider making the position permanent. I’m sure you wouldn’t mind only working one month out of the year—and spending the other eleven in storage.”

Ceejay creaked in coincidental dismay. He heard August walk away, leaving him alone in the lobby to face his new position as decor. He hoped August had been joking about keeping him an inflatable forever. Otherwise, he’d have to get used to being creaky.