

Linus' Promotion

By: Indigo Rho

Linus' paw hovered before the door to their boss' office. All the lynx had to do was knock. Just a quick little rap. Maybe even a tap. That was always enough to rattle the shaded window of the door and get their boss' attention. But then they'd have to enter the office and learn why they'd been called over on such short notice.

Life in the rest of the office continued around them. Keyboards clattered, phones rang, and a half-dozen phone calls all blended together.

Linus procrastinated by checking their outfit again. Their slacks were tighter around the thighs and rump than they'd have preferred. Their dress shirt clung to their soft belly, the lowest buttons strained, as usual. At least their tie still fit properly. The lynx's slight pear shape had always made finding well-fitting clothing a struggle. Their appetite certainly hadn't helped, either.

After confirming yet again that they were as presentable as they could possibly be, Linus returned to staring at the door.

Their boss—August—rarely called on them. Which meant they were in trouble. They *had* to be. But they swore they'd been getting all their reports in on time. And they weren't at odds with any of their coworkers. Not that they knew of. Did the call have to do with them sneaking extra donuts from the breakroom? They cursed their hubris.

"It's only a couple donuts," Linus muttered under their breath in a self-mocking tone. "Everyone definitely won't see the evidence on your gut." They glared down at the curve of their paunch, as if it had snatched the donuts on its own.

Suddenly, the door to August's office swung open. Linus jumped, causing his guilty belly to bounce up and down.

A lean, gray and white snake stood in the doorway. His tongue flicked out, and a smile slowly spread across his face. "Just the cat I was looking for. Do come in." He stepped aside.

Linus followed August's order without hesitation, desperate to prove they were a model employee and not a donut hoarder. August shut the door behind them with a nudge of his tail.

August didn't direct Linus to a seat as they expected. Instead, he began circling the nervous lynx. He eyed Linus up and down, his gaze frequently lingering on their doughy middle.

Linus sucked their gut in, only managing to relieve a small amount of the strain on their buttons. The donuts were why they'd been called in. There was no other reason for their boss to be ogling their belly. August's tail trailed behind him, trapping Linus in a ring of snake. They braced for the verbal onslaught.

August nodded, still smiling. "Yes, yes, I definitely chose right. Congratulations on the promotion, Linus."

Confusion knocked aside all the worry that'd built within Linus. "The what?" The words came out of their mouth without thinking.

"The promotion," August repeated.

"But I...I didn't apply for one." Not that they remembered. They'd dreamed about getting one someday, but there had been so few openings in their department.

"No one applied for it. It's a new position, you see, and the execs decided to have me discreetly pick a proper candidate. And you are, without a doubt, the perfect candidate for the position." He gently slapped Linus on the shoulder. "You met every single requirement I was given."

The praise flustered Linus. They clasped their paws together and briefly looked away from August, smiling. "Oh! What exactly were those requirements?" They wracked their brain trying to figure out which of their strengths in particular would've caught August's eye.

"No need to go into boring details like that," August insisted. "Just know you've done a swell job showing your potential the last few months."

His words were enough for Linus. Their excitement over the unexpected promotion buried any concerns they might have had. After all, why question such good luck?

But in the middle of their elation, a thought came to Linus they couldn't ignore. "Uh, what exactly does this new position involve?" they asked.

"It's very straightforward, really, and plays to your strengths," August said. He tapped his chin with a finger in thought. "Technically, it's part of the marketing department."

Linus frowned and their heart sank. A horrible mistake had been made. “But sir, I don’t have much experience in marketing.” In truth, they had *zero* experience. They didn’t even know where marketing was in the building. There had to be a different lynx or Linus in the office who was a true marketing genius. Or a coworker’s resume had accidentally been mixed up with their own. Just like that, their dreams were dashed. August would be furious.

“Which is one of the reasons I chose you!” August happily declared. He slid his arm around the lynx’s back and pulled them in close. “Linus, we need someone with an outsider’s perspective in this position, someone who can see the bigger picture. Just between the two of us, everyone in marketing is so,” he took a moment to come up with the words, “narrow-minded. So don’t worry about that. This is a grand opportunity with plenty of room for growth. Very hands-on.”

August’s assurances had lifted Linus’ spirits once again. “How so?” they asked.

“Showcasing the product and spreading the word to potential customers. A much easier job than you’d suspect. I’ve got a feeling it’ll be effortless for you,” August grinned. “So, you’ll accept the position, won’t you? I guarantee you it comes with ample benefits.”

Excitement bubbled within Linus. Finally, after years of hard work, they were getting the recognition they deserved. They were too caught up in the moment to consider asking questions about the position. “Of course! I mean, it’d be an honor.”

“Excellent.” August’s tongue flicked out. “Let’s get the initial paperwork out of the way, then.”

He guided the lynx over to his desk, where a thick stack of documents sat. He grabbed a pen with his tail and handed it to Linus. Linus scribbled their signature on page after page, never having time to catch more than a few lines of text. As far as they could tell, it was the usual dense legalese they’d seen dozens of times before. They’d look over a copy of it later.

Linus pulled their pen away from the final sheet, and August scooped the pile up and dropped it in a drawer. “Congratulations, Linus, you’re now officially part of the public marketing initiative.”

Linus’ smile pinched their cheeks. “When do I start training?” They

hoped there was *some* form of training.

“Oh, I don’t believe you’ll need any training. You’re going to be a natural at this, Linus. In fact, I’d like you to start right away.” August strolled over to a closet and pulled something out. It sort of looked like a scuba diving suit to Linus, but with a considerable sheen. “First things first: please put this on.”

Linus’ eyes darted between the suit and their boss. “Is that, uh, really necessary?”

“Absolutely. And once you’ve put it on, I’ll tell you exactly why.” August pointed towards a door in the office. “You can change in that closet; it has plenty of space.” He held the suit towards Linus.

They accepted the suit with great reluctance. It didn’t even remotely adhere to the company dress code, but if their boss insisted on them wearing it, then it had to be alright. They crept into the closet and quietly changed clothes.

The material of the suit creaked as Linus squeezed into it. The rubber stretched, but also clung to them, flattening their fur. It had a slimming effect while also highlighting their size. The suit’s belt dug faintly into their middle, but otherwise stretched as easily as the rest of it.

Their face twisted as they looked down at themselves. Curves. They were all curves. From their gut to their butt to their thick thighs, the lynx’s weight was undeniable. They couldn’t possibly wear such an outfit on the job. None of their coworkers would be able to take them seriously, let alone the customers.

It had to be a prank. Just a silly hazing ritual to welcome them into the position. August would chuckle and have his fun, then let Linus change back into their normal clothes. It was embarrassing, but worth the promotion. They took a few breaths—trying and failing not to blush as the rubber suit creaked in response—and stepped out of the closet.

No laughter awaited Linus. No one jumped out of their hiding place to point and take pictures. August smiled the same smile he had been since Linus had arrived. It was a relief, but also incredibly confusing.

“The suit fits perfectly,” August said. Once again he circled Linus, eyeing them up and down.

“Why is this suit so important?” Linus dared to ask. Surely a few

innocent questions wouldn't hurt.

"It's part of a new line of wetsuits the company is working on. We've been expanding into the sporting goods market lately. Swimwear, diving equipment, surfing gear—a wide variety, for sure, but sometimes you have to cast a wide net to see what bites." The snake's gaze frequently darted to Linus' middle and rear. "I have a feeling these wetsuits will be our first real win in the market, and all thanks to their unique safety feature."

"Oh?" Linus hadn't realized the company was doing so much experimentation. Not that they'd admit that to August.

"Do you see that little ring connected to your belt?"

Linus followed August's gaze to their waist. A single, little ring hung on the belt. "Yes?"

"Pull it," August said with a toothy grin.

Linus slid a finger through the ring and pulled.

The sound of hissing reached Linus' ears, and their rubber suit rapidly ballooned in every direction, filling with air. They barely had time to yelp as they grew rounder and rounder by the second. They tried to push down on their blimping suit with both paws, but they couldn't hope to hold back the swelling. Soon their sleeves puffed up as well, locking their arms and legs in place.

Linus' limbs were sucked into the inflating suit. The bottom curve of the spherical suit nudged their paws off the ground, causing them to teeter back and forth. The hissing ceased. Stuck, they wobbled in place. They'd become a helpless, gleaming sphere.

The pressure on the inner lining of the suit was inescapable. To Linus' dismay, it actually felt somewhat good, like an intense, full-body massage. They fought the urge to blush and grin in front of their boss.

They'd broken the suit, they must have. They'd pulled too hard, or damaged something while putting the suit on, or pulled the wrong cord. And to make matters worse, they'd ruined things in front of the boss. How could August possibly respect the giant rubber ball they'd become?

"I'm sorry!" Linus babbled immediately. "I didn't mean to mess it up!"

"Nonsense, Linus, the suit worked perfectly," August said.

"But...but I'm a ball." Linus stopped wiggling. Just moving around threatened to fluster them.

“Exactly! The wetsuit doubles as a floatation device. One tug and you’ll be safely above the waves no matter how rough they are.” August slapped Linus’ side, producing a hollow *thunk* that vibrated through the suit. “And of course the expanded size improves visibility so rescuers can find you quicker. If you’re injured or unconscious, they can even roll you to safety without endangering themselves. Let me show you.”

Before Linus could object, August rolled them onto their back with a shove of his tail. Linus wiggled their paws as a slight spike in pressure spread through them. A second shove sent the lynx rolling halfway across the room.

“Woah woah woah!” Linus yelped as the room spun. The suit creaked and squeaked as it traveled the room. They came to a gentle stop against a wall. Then August’s tail turned them around and rolled them in the opposite direction.

Linus bit their lip as pulses of pressure hit them like soothing waves. Being rolled felt good, they couldn’t deny it. August couldn’t know. But they couldn’t exactly order their boss to stop the demonstration, either. So they endured, simultaneously embarrassed and overjoyed.

August eventually rolled them upright again. He leaned against Linus, his elbow sinking into the inflated suit. “How do you like the suit?”

Words escaped the flustered lynx. They resisted admitting their pleasure. “It seems very revolutionary!” Generic, but dignified compared to the truth. They still wondered why they needed to wear the suit in the first place. Maybe they were simply supposed to give it a test run so they’d understand the product better?

August nodded in satisfaction. He pressed down on the suit with his palm, provoking a chorus of creaks and a twitch from Linus. He slowly rubbed, the delight plain on his face. “Seeing you in this wetsuit has only reinforced how good an idea it was to promote you.”

“Thank you, boss!” Linus said.

“Before we move on to your next task, there’s one last feature of the wetsuit I’d like you to test out.” August reached over and flicked open a small flap on the front of the suit. He dipped two fingers into it and pulled out the end of a clear tube. “Alright, Linus, bite down on this tube for me.” He waved it in front of Linus’ face.

It was an odd request, but no stranger than anything else August had

asked them to do that morning. Linus eagerly chomped down on the tube, expecting further instructions. The moment they did, air rushed into their mouth and their cheeks puffed out.

Their eyes widened and they wobbled in surprise. They could feel their belly rapidly ballooning outward as the air that filled the suit moved to fill them instead. Belly and suit pushed at each other, sending Linus into a euphoric pressure daze. The swelling was happening too fast for them to react in any meaningful way.

Within seconds, the creaking of Linus' hide joined that of the suit. They wiggled and groaned, their eyes nearly rolling into the back of their head as they blimped up like an airbag.

As swiftly as it'd started, the flow of air ceased. Linus finally let go of the tube. They tried to say something, but only a moan came out. The pressure they'd felt from the suit paled in comparison to the pressure of so much air pushing their hide in every direction. Every inch of them tingled. A slight wiggle of their paw was enough to send a pleasurable surge through half their body.

Once more the wetsuit clung skin-tight, though now it was around the lynx's spherical body.

August poked Linus' side with the tip of his tail, grinning as he heard the employee creak and meow. "Linus, you swell so wonderfully well, you really do. That was the most important qualification for the position."

"Huh?" Linus managed through their lingering daze. "Why would—*mmph*—I need to swell?"

"To increase your surface area, of course," August replied matter of factly. "As the company's newest ad balloon, it's important that as many people can see you as possible. You'll be rolled to various high-traffic locations—beaches, malls, stadiums, convention centers—and promote our product with your mere presence. You'll be like a giant, mobile billboard that creaks a lot." He snickered and poked the helpless lynx again.

"We'll slap some product labeling on you, and let the spectacle of a giant, inflated cat advertise our goods. If we're lucky, you'll go viral! No one will be able to forget such an advertising stunt." August nudged Linus from side to side with his tail. "I'm going to get one hell of a bonus for coming up with this idea."

Linus wiggled and wobbled in alarm. “I—*errmph*—changed my mind. I don’t—*mmph*—want to do this anymore.” The money wasn’t worth being a balloon. They were big enough already, they didn’t need to be a comically bloated sphere all day.

“What was that, Linus? I couldn’t hear you over the creaking. I’ll just assume you were thanking me for the opportunity once again,” August said with a devilish grin. “Let’s get you rolled downstairs and properly labeled. Your adoring public awaits.”

August pressed his claws against the side of the flailing lynx and started rolling them. It was a tight squeeze through the office doors, and the noise drew the attention of nearly everyone on the floor. Workers peeked over and around their cubicles, gasping and snorting as they saw Linus big, round, and clothed in the revealing wetsuit. Linus blushed as they noticed the crowd forming to watch them go. They could already imagine the plethora of nicknames they’d accumulate after today. Even if they went back to their regular job, they’d never escape the embarrassment of being rolled through the office by the boss. Work had suddenly become much more complicated.

Amidst curious mumbles and amused chuckles, Linus was paraded around. When they finally reached the elevator, they could barely fit. August had to recruit two other workers to push and shove the massive lynx into the elevator, before sliding in himself. As the doors slowly closed and Linus fought off a pressure daze, they wished it’d been a regular, boring day.