

## Surviving Halloween

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“Dude, why are you looking so spooked, we're not even inside yet!”

It was Halloween night on the campus of Columbia State University, and frat row was alive with the noise of numerous parties. Just outside one such party were a black, white-spotted cheetah and a horse in a backwards cap.

“Jet, these things are always nerve wracking,” the horse said. “I'm always eyed up so it's hard to have fun.”

The cheetah rolled his eyes. “Hungry enough to eat a horse is just a saying, Clyde. If you're that worried about getting gobbled up then just eat someone early on! No one wants to deal with tackling a stuffed meal.”

“That's easy for you to say, you're always the one with a full belly, not filling it!” Clyde pouted. “But whatever, I'll just stick to not drinking and hope I survive.”

“Oh stop being so melodramatic or *I'll* eat you myself!” Jet teased, before practically dragging his friend into the frat house. “Not like this is your first party.”

There was far more liquor at the party than costumes despite the occasion. Most of the guests were more interested in dancing, hanging out, and—of course—potentially snagging a lively meal.

Jet had a beer in his paw barely ten feet in, already searching for friends and anyone who seemed tasty. Clyde lingered close to Jet for the first half-hour, but eventually the horse wandered off to less crowded spaces, promising to meet back up later when they were ready to leave.

Two beers in, Jet merely nodded in vague acknowledgment, distracted by a chubby deer who made his stomach growl. Dealing with antlers seemed like a pain, though, so Jet decided against trying to add him to his waistline. A frat boy hippo, on the other hand, had no such qualms. Jet realized what was about to happen well before the hippo reached his prey, and gladly stood by to watch the show.

Antlers were snapped, startled shouts went out, but in less than a minute the deer was waist-deep in the hippo's mouth, his legs frantically kicking in the air. Aside from curious glances and heightened awareness, the party wasn't disrupted much by the unlucky deer getting swallowed whole.

Jet returned to his hunting.

Confident in his survival instincts, Jet drank profusely. He saw plenty of potential prey as he enjoyed himself, but didn't have as much luck sealing the deal. Some had too many friends around them who would have interfered, others seemed too likely to turn the tables on him or be a pain to lug around in his gut. Twice he lost a good looking meal to faster preds. By midnight the cheetah was hopelessly drunk...and starving.

Lights had been turned off all over the frat house to enhance the atmosphere as the night went on. String lights, glow-in-the-dark decorations, and a few strobes were now all that lit the place, making it increasingly difficult to tell who was who amidst the crowds. It also made sneaking up on unsuspecting prey in dark corners fairly easy.

Even while drunk Jet knew that, and his gaze always drifted to hallways as he continued partying. When he spotted someone texting on their phone down one with their back turned, he went on the prowl. Jet's footing wasn't perfect but he managed to avoid making any noise and alerting his prey. He couldn't tell what species they were in the dark, but they were alone and just the right size to fill him up without grounding him.

The prey was just starting to turn around when Jet struck. An arm was grabbed, the stranger's phone falling to the floor as they were shoved hard into the wall. They let out a short cry of pain before Jet shoved their muzzle into his maw, silencing them. He was too hungry to savor or tease his meal, and still had no clue as to what they were even after they'd been reduced to flailing legs.

Jet moaned as his flat middle swelled out from beneath his hoodie. The prey was fighting back admirably, but they were too deep to reverse their predicament. Still, their struggles were enough to

almost knock Jet over on a couple occasions, until he ended up leaning against the wall, cradling his squirming gut in both paws as his tail flicked in delight.

Faster and faster the cheetah swallowed, his throat straining from the speed. Sneakers were roughly pulled off and tossed to the ground. With a push and a long gulp the meal was over, Jet's stomach wrapped tightly around a frantic prey.

“Thought I was never—*buuh-urrrrrrrrp*—gonna find a good snack tonight!” Jet gloated to his belly, which he could barely see bouncing in the dark.

Though Jet could feel the vibrations of his prey shouting, the party drowned it out. Not that he was sober enough to properly taunt whoever was doomed to become cat fat.

He glanced down at the abandoned phone on the floor and almost picked it up before preemptively giving up, not wanting to exert the effort bending down. Besides, it was kind of fun not knowing anything about the person he'd just eaten. They were just food now, a nameless, faceless snack that'd be churned away.

Rejuvenated by the meal, Jet waddled out of the hallway, eager to strut around with his new gut.

The happy cheetah danced and mingled and lazed. At first he swallowed fresh air frequently just to prolong the squirms in his stomach, but as time passed he lost interest. Struggles faded, weak protests replaced by gurgling as the prey began to digest. Eventually Jet passed out, falling into a deep, drunken slumber.

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For Jet, waking up involved a lot of groaning and a piercing headache. The cheetah ached, realizing fairly quickly that he'd chosen to nap on the floor rather than a couch or bed. Of course he hadn't known the frat house well enough to find one sober let alone while on the verge of being blackout drunk.

Slowly Jet came to his senses, leaning up against a wall as he took a look around. He thought he remembered the room from the night before, a den where guests were playing games that tended to end with someone getting eaten. In the light of day he could finally see the results of all that partying.

A few other guests were still passed out, most sporting bulging guts of their own. Plenty of red plastic cups littered the floor, but there were also clothes. Lots of clothes. Shoes, pants, shirts, hats, a few stray costume pieces. They were gathered in piles and shoved under furniture or into corners. No doubt their owners were well on their way to being digested by now. Just like his own tasty snack.

The lumps had mostly disappeared from Jet's belly, though it was still fairly round. When he gave it a soft gentle a loud *slorsssssssh* echoed out. In Jet's opinion the “goop” phase was one of the best parts of indulging on a live meal. The sounds of soup and debris rocking within his stomach as delightful, as was the feeling itself. He couldn't wait to tease Clyde with it.

When the cheetah looked back up from toying with his gut he was startled to find Clyde standing right in front of him. He briefly blushed in embarrassment before trying to play things cool.

“Huh, didn't expect you to crash here for—*uorrrp*—the night, too.” Jet carefully lifted himself off the floor, belly jiggling the whole time. “Was your bed any comfier than mine?”

“I...um, I don't remember, actually,” Clyde said, looking rather confused. “Last night's kind of a blur.”

Jet snorted. “So much for not drinking! I'm sure it'll all come back to you soon enough, though.” He stretched and held his head, the headache persisting. “Why don't we head out before we either get roped into cleanup duties or put on the breakfast menu by a bunch of hungover frat boys.”

Clyde agreed, following after Jet as the cheetah navigated the house in search of an exit. No one seemed completely awake yet, the pair having to step over the occasional engorged sleeper. Jet grinned as he spotted the hippo passed out in a room, the bed beneath him crushed and his gut loudly breaking down more than just the lone deer he'd seen earlier. Such gluttony was tempting, but Jet didn't like

thinking about how long it'd take to work off such a ridiculous feast.

Clyde was quieter than usual, and seemed lost whenever Jet bothered to look behind him. His friend was starting to wonder if he'd actually gotten high instead of drunk.

Inevitably they found the wide-open front door and stepped out into daylight.

“See, we survived another Halloween party!” Jet declared, his middle wobbling. “And to think you were so worried about ending up like this bum in here!”

Jet gave his belly a thump, his cheeks puffing up as he unleashed a thunderous *buraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaap!* At the same time, something large and wet flew out of his mouth and landed in his open paws. It was a baseball cap.

The cap was stained by digestive juices and sported quite a few holes, but it was still recognizable. Jet stared at it for a solid minute, turning it over to examine every inch. The logo on the front was that of an east coast esports team, and he'd only seen one person where such a thing on campus: Clyde.

Jet looked from the cap to Clyde, who appeared pale in the sunlight.

“Um, I think I'm starting to remember last night, dude,” Clyde said nervously.

Jet reached towards Clyde, his paw shaking, and when he tried to poke the horse his finger went straight through. It was as if he wasn't there. The cheetah's mouth opened as if to speak, but he struggled to find the words.

“Then I...that means you're...”

Jet fainted on the spot, the force of his fall shaking his gut and forcing another messy belch. This time a horse skull launched out, rolling to a stop near Clyde.

The ghost horse frowned. “Man, I really should've just stayed home...”