

Spectral Prank

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Dark clouds filled the sky and rain poured as a fierce storm hit Columbia City. Most of the populace had retreated to the safety of indoors, eager to avoid getting drenched. Aaron was beyond such concerns. The deer was one of the city's many ghosts, and the raindrops passed effortlessly through his faded form as he relaxed on an apartment's balcony, enjoying the day's dreariness. While many would have lamented being in his position—or at least attempted to reverse it—Aaron reveled in the opportunity. Being alive was boring, but being a ghost let him have fun at the expense of others. Like the unsuspecting victim in the apartment behind him.

On the other side of a sliding glass door, engrossed in math homework and a growing pile of emptied snack packages, was an obese hyena. Raf was in his usual bad mood, one paw scratching his pink mohawk while the other scrounged for any bit of food within reach. His pink tank-top had been gradually riding up his gut throughout the day as he cleared out the pantry, exposing his sandy-brown flab. The hefty hyena had always struggled to control his appetite, and the fatter he got the grumpier he got. Fad diets and exercise regiments had failed him; even “surefire” spells and a host of charms had been unable to counter Raf's growing waistline. He was convinced he was cursed, despite the assurances otherwise from numerous mediums.

Unfortunately Aaron had the perfect solution to Raf's weight problem in mind. Finally satisfied with the weather, Aaron glided through the wall and past his unaware victim, stopping near the apartment's fuze box. With practiced ease he fazed his hoof into it and concentrated, causing the lights of the apartment to flicker a few times ominously. Raf sighed and glared at the lights. Not wanting to get caught in the dark, the hyena slowly lifted himself out of his chair and began waddling towards the closet where he kept a flashlight. Along his path was a still-plugged in vacuum cleaner, which Aaron swiftly hovered to. As soon as Raf had passed the vacuum Aaron possessed it, forcing the extendable tube attachment to stalk his prey.

Raf stopped in his tracks when he felt something tap his shoulder. The hyena turned around, confused, and found himself facing the floating tube of his vacuum. He let out a yelp as it lunged, providing the perfect opening for the tube to snake its way into his mouth and down his throat, before the whole vacuum spontaneously roared to life. Expecting suction, Raf instead felt a blast of air rocketing into his stomach. Raf gripped the tube with both paws and desperately tried to tear it out as his sagging belly grew round and firm. Unfortunately the tube didn't budge an inch.

No matter how much he twisted, turned, and clawed the tube held strong, Raf's belly swelling more and more as it filled with air. Once his middle had reached the size of a large beach ball the expansion spread, his waist and chest beginning to round out as well. The shorts he'd been wearing were able to stretch with him for a while, but they couldn't handle his blimping thighs forever, tearing apart at the seams and falling to the ground in shreds. His tank-top suffered a similar fate, riding up his ballooning gut before being torn off by the pressure. Raf's whole body was rounding out and puffing up, and soon his arms were too stiff to even flail at the vacuum tube.

Raf whimpered and wobbled as he heard his hide creaking faintly as it continued stretching. He didn't know precisely what was happening—whether the attack was the work of a curse or even maybe a ghost—but he feared what the objective was: to burst him. Though Raf could think of a few worse fates than popping, he wasn't eager to be reduced to a mess of scattered scraps, the true cause never known and never investigated. His obnoxious twin brother would likely claim he ate so much he exploded.

Inevitably Raf could no longer maintain his balance, and the expanding hyena toppled over onto his round middle with a muffled grunt. He flailed his paws in distress as the inflation caused him to rise higher. His body was swiftly becoming spherical, and even his back had puffed up and rounded to an extent. Raf's arms and legs were gradually engulfed, till only his bloated paws were left jutting out. The

creaks and groans had gotten louder as Raf's hide became tauter. Nearby furniture was pushed away or outright knocked over as he grew, and fortunately none of it had been sharp enough to rupture him in the process, though he still winced whenever any of it brushed against his increasingly sensitive skin. The pressure within was nearly unbearable. Even breathing seemed to put him in danger of tearing apart.

Raf grimaced in anticipation of the end, but then the vacuum abruptly turned off and the tube retreated from his mouth. He gently rocked back and forth, the apartment now quiet aside from the sounds of the storm and his creaking. Talking felt like it'd put too much of a strain on his fragile body, so the hyena could do nothing more than wait silently. A rattling on the kitchen table caught his attention, and the terrified Raf glanced over just in time to see a box of pop-tarts lift into the air and head in his direction. Brief seconds of confusion were quickly replaced by horror as Raf guessed what was happening.

"P-please, don't! No! No!" Raf managed in a hoarse gasp as he wobbled, watching a package of pastries escape the box and open seemingly on its own.

A new voice echoed throughout the room, almost distant, scattered. "But you look absolutely famished! You've eaten so much already, I'm sure you can handle one, little snack still."

Raf whimpered and clenched his jaw shut, but the unseen force had little trouble opening it against his will. The first pop-tart soared into Raf's mouth, the hyena forced to chew and swallow it all. A long creak followed as the pop-tart fell into Raf's cavernous hollow belly, the simple treat increasing his internal pressure noticeably. Tears welled in Raf's eyes as the second pastry was shoved into his mouth. Raf knew everything was over the second he made his last gulp.

A tingling sensation surged throughout Raf's immense body as a painful creak echoed out. The initial pin-prick of a tear appeared somewhere on his side, and in the blink of an eye it raced across the circumference of his entire body, splitting the hyena in two. Raf's eye's went wide within seconds of feeling the first sharp tear, and he remained conscious just long enough to feel his body begin to flap and lose form as it was launched upwards, before his vision went blank. The sudden release of air sent papers flying and knocked over a couple chairs, while the noise from Raf's explosion shook the walls and cupboards. The two largest swathes of Raf's hide were hurled to opposite sides of the room, a handful of smaller scraps fluttering down in every direction, littering the floor.

Aaron smiled as he watched the hyena burst apart. Popping others had been a hobby of his even while he was still alive, and becoming a ghost had only made it more enjoyable. He did lament being unable to keep souvenirs while incorporeal, but at least he had the memories. There weren't any bystanders around to mourn the loss of Raf, so Aaron had no reason to linger. Instead the spectral deer floated through the wall and back outside, in search of a new distraction.

On the floor—right where the biggest remaining swathe of Raf had come to rest—a new ghost gradually faded into existence. Raf groaned as he came to, his mind a jumbled mess. He remembered the pressure, the pain, the panic, the growing darkness. When he finally opened his eyes he got a good look at the couch beyond his translucent paw and yelped, before letting out a frustrated grumble. With some effort he "stood" back up, surveying the mess his explosion had caused and glaring at his own remains.

"I swear, if my brother makes a damn rug out of my hide I'll haunt the crap out of him," Raf growled.

The hyena continued grumbling and pouting, now forced to deal with the hassle of being a ghost. At least he probably couldn't get fatter now...