

The Smorgasbord

By: Indi

Rho scrolled through the menu screen on the table, looking for anything that caught his eye. The plump, orange-striped zebra had never been to Cornucopia before, but he'd heard nothing but praise about the station's newest restaurant, mainly from his friend Tycho. As if the lion's words weren't enough, the recent additions to his waistline were proof Cornucopia was doing something right.

Tycho made his selection with a pudgy finger, a wide smile on his face. "You guys are gonna love this place!" He said with glee.

It was hard to believe the doughy lion had been thin only a few weeks earlier; at least until you saw him eat. After he'd become a regular at Cornucopia his appetite had skyrocketed and the pounds had piled on. His friends—Rho included—had teased him about his absurd gains, but he didn't seem to mind much. He laughed the comments off, sometimes hard enough to burst a button. That'd happened less often since he'd switched to wearing stretchy bodysuits.

"I'm kind of hoping it's mediocre. I don't think my apartment can handle me gaining any more weight," Indi snickered. The blue snake was the fattest of the trio by a great deal. His round, blubbery belly filled his lap, while his thick, wobbly tail curled around his chair.

"Yeah, I'm not looking forward to possibly replacing my whole wardrobe a dozen times over," Rho said.

"You're both acting like the waiter's gonna come over and force-feed you."

"With how fat you've gotten, can you blame us?" Indi asked.

"I've only put on a little bit of weight."

"That lie's as big as your chair-filling ass," Rho said. "How much do you weigh now?"

The lion looked away. "Uh, you know, about three hundred and sixty." He tried mumbling the weight, but was still heard.

Rho whistled. "Closing in on Indi fast! For once he won't be the fattest."

"It's never been a fair comparison," Indi insisted. "My tail throws the number off." He smacked it, making it jiggle.

"Unless your tail's over three hundred pounds, I don't think that's what's making you the fattest." He couldn't deny Tycho *looked* fatter than the snake, though.

"Meanwhile I'm over here being slim and trim," he said, with a belly-shaking laugh.

"Tycho balloons past you and suddenly you're acting like you're a track star, tubbo," Indi said. "I can't wait for this place to do to you what it did to him."

"My weight's been the same for close to a decade. One restaurant isn't going to change that," Rho said. He'd never been thin, but he'd never been one to pack on the pounds, either. He was pleased with the small belly he had.

“Guys, let’s just enjoy the good food. Neither of you is going to get huge,” Tycho said.

“Rho, if you’re so immune to the mystical fattening powers of this restaurant, then what are you ordering?” Indi asked. “I bet you’re going for a salad or a glass of water.”

Rho rolled his eyes. “I’m not afraid of this place. In fact, I’ve settled on the biggest thing the menu has to offer, the Smorgasbord. It’s a sampler of everything on the menu.”

Tycho’s eyes went wide. “The Smorgasbord? Oh wow, I’ve seen other customers tackle that before. If that doesn’t get you addicted to this place, nothing will!”

Tycho and Indi’s food arrived relatively soon after being ordered. Rho wasn’t surprised his order took longer, but as the minutes dragged on, he wondered if something had gone wrong in the kitchen. He knew he’d ordered a lot, but still.

A stunned look on Indi’s face a few minutes later was his first sign something was off. Rho turned to see a half-dozen hovercarts loaded with food heading their way.

“That can’t be for us,” Rho said.

“It’s not for us, it’s for you,” Tycho said, grinning.

The table was filled with plates, each one almost overflowing with food. It wasn’t as much a sampler as it was the full menu. What couldn’t fit on the table was left on the carts, which flanked Rho’s seat, boxing him in. He felt like he was trapped in a cage of food.

Concern that he’d gotten in over his head faded once he smelled the feast around him. The aromas were wonderful. His stomach rumbled.

“Yeah, good luck finishing all that,” Indi snorted. “The leftovers are gonna fill your whole apartment.”

“There aren’t going to be any leftovers,” Rho said with unwarranted confidence.

Rho started with the plate directly in front of him, a pasta dish. The first bite was good, enough to make him quickly go for a second. His bites gradually became bigger and bigger, and the taste of the pasta seemed to improve over time. He was shoveling it into his mouth by the end.

He understood then why Tycho had gotten so fat. None of the station’s fast-food restaurants compared to what Cornucopia had to offer. He’d have to be careful about not overindulging there in the future.

An artisan pizza was next, slices downed two at a time until the plate was pushed aside. Rho patted his belly and burped. He’d blown through the first two courses, which was gluttonous even for him. He noticed Indi had ordered seconds, while Tycho was browsing the dessert menu even as he worked on thirds.

Eating any more would be pure excess, but Rho didn’t want to go back on his boast. He pulled a plate of chicken over and dove in.

Plate after plate was steadily cleared. Rho’s belly slowly swelled as it filled with

the feast, spreading over his lap. The gray bodysuit he wore clung snug to his growing middle, but dutifully stretched. He was in no danger of bursting out of it, no matter how much he gorged. And gorge he did.

A tightness in the zebra's stomach nagged him in the back of his mind, but he kept finding the will to eat more. The incredible taste of the food helped. He didn't want to leave a single dish untouched, but couldn't stop eating once he'd started.

Burritos, pasta, steak, seafood, salads, soups. Cornucopia seemed to have a bit of everything on its menu, none of which tasted like an afterthought. At times Rho would delay his next course to groan, contemplating giving up. Then he'd see Tycho's awe or Indi's smug grin and suddenly he'd be taking another bite.

His belly had swelled against the table, impeding his quest to stuff himself. He'd wiggle in his chair as he leaned over his gut for the next bite, refusing to let anything stop him, not even himself.

Tycho and Indi finished their meals long before Rho, watching their friend glut in stunned silence. Tycho was practically giddy Rho was taking to the food so well, while Indi was begrudgingly impressed by his dedication to proving him wrong.

Eventually, Rho reached for the next bite and found nothing but a wasteland of empty plates around him. He smiled, belched, and collapsed back in his chair. "Told ya I could—*uworrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrp*—eat it all," he moaned.

"I have to admit, I didn't think you had such gluttonous potential. How the hell aren't you the fattest one in our group?" Indi asked.

"The trick is moderation. *Urrp.*"

"Whatever you say, jumbo."

"It was amazing, right?" Tycho asked.

"Fuck, dude, I can't even begin to describe it." Every dish lingered in his mind, as fresh as they'd been when he'd devoured them. "I'm definitely coming here again."

"Guess I'll have a blob for a friend in a few months, then," Indi teased. "Now as fun as it is watching you proudly pig out, I've gotta head out."

"I should really get going, too," Tycho said. "We already paid for our portions, so the waiter will only need yours when you're feeling good enough to go."

"Have fun," Rho said, sluggishly waving at his friends as they got up.

Rho spent half an hour lazing at the table and dipping in and out of a food coma. He knew he'd have to get up eventually, but didn't think his belly would cooperate with him.

"Are you ready to pay yet, sir?" a lean hyena waiter asked. Rho was amazed the staff weren't fatter. He knew he'd blimp up if he worked there.

"Yeah, let me just dig out my card." Rho slid a hoof into his pocket, but found it empty. "Uh, must be in the other one." He tried the other pocket, but only found his keys. No matter where he looked, he couldn't find his wallet. "Shit. This is really embarrassing, but it looks like I left my wallet at home."

The waiter frowned, then suddenly smiled. "Things happen. Fortunately for you, we're very generous when it comes to forgiving unpaid meals. You'll just have to help us out real quick and you'll be free to go."

"Huh?"

The waiter snapped his fingers, and was joined by two others. "The pleasantly stuffed gentleman forgot his wallet. Would you please take him to Chef Leopold?"

The two waiters lifted Rho out of his chair and gently placed him on a hovercart. They started pushing him away. "Wait, where are we going?!"

"To see the chef!" the hyena said as they left. "Have fun!"

Rho tried to get up, but was pinned down by his large, taut gut. He only managed to belch a little as he was pushed through the wide double doors and into the kitchen. Once there, the two waiters moved him from the hovercart to something that resembled the exam chair at a doctor's office. It was angled just far back enough that he couldn't get out of it, again impeded by his belly.

"What's going on?!" Rho demanded.

"A taste-testing, of course!"

The sudden arrival of a perky unicorn in a chef's uniform startled Rho so much he burped in surprise. The unicorn had on a wide grin and was tapping their hooves together. They acted like they'd just received the perfect gift.

"A taste-testing?"

"Yes! It's a shame you aren't able to pay for your meal, but the fact you finished every last bite of the Smorgasbord warms my heart. I consider it my crowning achievement, the culmination of my culinary expertise and passion," Chef Leopold swooned. "Anyone capable of eating it in one sitting is worthy of my praise, so I'm willing to wave your bill once you do me the honor of testing out a few more work-in-progress dishes."

Just thinking about eating made Rho groan. "I don't think I've got room for anymore. I already feel like I'm about to pop."

"Nonsense! That fullness is all in your head. You've got plenty of space left in that stomach of yours, and I'll gladly prove it." Chef Leopold trotted over to a cupboard and retrieved what appeared to be a funnel attached to a feedbag.

"Maybe we can reschedule this? I'm sure the food will be amazing, but I've already eaten so much and I've been thinking about watching my weight," Rho blurted out.

"Worrying about your weight is so unnecessary. I'm a firm believer that people should embrace their appetites, no matter the results. You'll understand, soon enough~"

Chef Leopold strapped the feedbag over Rho's muzzle and secured it tight, muffling his protests. The unicorn went into a large pantry and came out a minute later pushing two hovercarts full of desserts.

“Our dessert menu needs the most work. Customers barely buy a thing from it, despite praising how wonderfully filling everything else is.”

Rho wanted to say no one ever had room for dessert after the feasts they served as main courses, but the feedback kept him quiet.

“Now I know this isn’t the most elegant way to conduct a taste-test, but it *is* the fastest, and you’ve got a lot to get through. Let’s begin with the pies!” Chef Leopold said.

The chef adjusted Rho’s chair, leaning him further back. He then picked up a pie and started tossing slices into the funnel. Seconds later, Rho felt creamy chocolate press against his lips, and he started swallowing on instinct. It was incredible, even better than the feast he’d gorged on earlier. The crust was flakey and the filling divine. He didn’t need more, but he welcomed every slice that came his way.

“The chocolate’s a personal fave, but the pumpkin and pecan pies are great as well. And of course there’s apple, cherry, and blueberry as well. Oh, and key lime, how could I forget key lime!” Leopold exclaimed.

Every pie was pushed into the funnel and down Rho’s throat, their flavors blending together yet remaining delicious. He wiggled in his seat, still trying to escape but loving every bite.

“Cakes are tough, there’s just too many varieties for me to choose from.” Chef Leopold shook his head, dumping a double-decker fudge cake into the funnel. “I’ve already got a dozen on the menu, yet I’ve been contemplating at least thirty more! Maybe you can help me narrow them down?”

Rho’s eyes widened as he watched whole cakes enter the funnel, vanishing from sight with every gulp. The steady stream of sweets was causing his belly to balloon outward, spilling over his lap and impeding his half-hearted squirms. It was an absurd amount of dessert for anyone, but he couldn’t stop chewing.

“I know donuts aren’t the most common menu item, but I think mine are large enough and flavorful enough to make an impact. And not just on your waistline!” Chef Leopold playfully slapped Rho’s swelling belly. The zebra’s eyes rolled from the sudden spike in pressure.

Dozens and dozens of massive donuts made their way into the funnel, and all Rho could do was eat. It’d become mechanical, all instinct. The pressure of the feast he was being crammed with left him dazed, incapable of fighting back. He wiggled weakly in protest, not that it had any effect on his stuffing. His belly was well past his knees, and probably twice as heavy as he was. And it was only getting bigger.

“You like milkshakes, right? I’ll assume that rapid blinking is a yes. We offer free refills, because one glass is never enough. Two or three rarely are, either. I’m working on getting us supplied with miniature kegs to serve them in and save time. You can enjoy them fresh from the tanks, though.”

A hose was dragged out from a freezer and shoved into the funnel. The parade of

