Harvest Festival

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

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After weeks of begging, Andlat is finally allowed to go to the town Harvest Festival without even a single frill or bit of lace. He's meeting with his big boy friends after all, but will he be able to make it the haunted house through without seeming like a scaredy kit?

As he walked up to his friends, Andlat thanked his lucky stars that he had decided against wearing his Halloween costume to the town’s annual harvest festival. Neither one of them wore a costume. They were clearly too big for costumes and Andlat wanted more than anything to fit in with them. Daddy Jack clearly did not know what he was talking about when he had tried to pressure Andlat into wearing it.

“They're cool, daddy!” Andlat insisted. “They're too big for costumes.”

“Well,” Jack said, stretching the word out as he often did. “Don't fuss when you're the only one wearing boring clothes.”

“I won't.” Andlat had remained firm. Now, he was vindicated. Even his brush felt fluffier! He felt like he might skip with delight as he neared the boys, but he managed to restrain himself as he dodged around a mother pushing her cubs in a double stroller.

“Hey, Andlat.” Shuba said. The red panda always seemed happy to see him. Not that Rian was not, but he sometimes

seemed to act as though Andlat was an annoying little brother. “Rian wants a caramel apple. What do you think?”

“Sure!” Andlat said, already mentally reminding himself to grab a large pawful of napkins. There were few things in life worse than sticky paws. “Where’s the caramel apple stand?”

“Right over there.” Rian said. “Did your daddy give you enough money?”

“I said that once!” Andlat whined. “You’re never going to let me live it down.” The raccoon smirked.

“It’s funny. What can I say? Besides, you’re wearing that baby show shirt again.”

“It’s not a baby show!” Andlat protested. Ace Incredible and the Planet Strikers was cool!

“Quit it, Rian. Let’s go.” Shuba said, leading the way. “The sooner we get our caramel apples, we can go to the haunted house.”

“Haunted house?” Andlat stopped in his tracks. No one had said anything about a haunted house!

“Something wrong?” Rian asked, immediately picking up on Andlat’s trepidation.

“Uh, no.” Andlat fought to keep his voice level. “Just, doesn’t that seem like little cub stuff? Paper ghosts and people yelling boo from behind a bunch of fake trees?”

“He’s right.” Shuba said thoughtfully. “It could be dumb.”

“Naw, I heard Bobby Hettrick pissed his pants, it was so scary.” Andlat tried to hide his growing anxiety. If Bobby Hettrick, whoever that was, peed himself, surely that meant it was really scary. He tried to keep his tail from tucking between his legs, a sure giveaway of how scared he was.

“That can’t be true.”

“It is.” Rian insisted, the raccoon stamping his foot. “C’mon, I want a caramel apple.”

As they walked, Andlat glanced over at the pumpkin patch nearby. Jack had just brought him there a couple days ago to pick out their pumpkin. Carving it had been another scenario that, while fun, had led to sticky paws for him. He realized as they moved closer that the doe walking through the pumpkin patch was the same person who had complimented his dress. He blushed, worried she might somehow spy him and realize that this big boy was the same little vixenkit who she had called a princess. He quickly looked away and hurried to walk alongside Shuba.

Once again, he thanked his lucky stars that Jack had not walked him to his friends or did something else embarrassing. Knowing the wolf, however, he would pay for being so big when he got home that night. That was just the way things went and the twinge Andlat felt betrayed how much he liked that that was the way things went.

Andlat's nose twitched as the wind picked up momentarily. He preferred spring to autumn, but he loved the smell of autumn all the same. Fallen leaves had this certain scent that

filled him with warm feelings.

Purchasing caramel apples went off without a hitch, though the kindly brown bear working the stand seemed very amused when Andlat shyly asked for extra napkins. He sat down at a picnic table with Rian and Shuba, digging in. Despite how the caramel clung to his teeth, threatening to glue his mouth shut, Andlat finished his apple first. Jack always teased him that he should fox and not wolf his food down, one of those jokes Jack never seemed to get tired of.

Andlat used the extra time to wipe his paws and face clean, hoping that maybe, just maybe, Rian and Shuba had forgotten about the haunted house. He could see it in the distance as a chill so cold it made his tail twitch ran down his spine. Turning his attention away, he saw that his friends still had not finished.

“I’m gonna go pee.” He said, getting up. “Don’t, don’t go without me.” He looked to Shuba, who nodded.

“What? Do you need someone to hold your paw?” Rian asked.

“Naw, it takes both paws to hold my massive, uh, dick.” Andlat retorted. He figured he should at least try to talk like the big boy he was today, even if he knew Jack would never stand for such language. Jack was not here.

He walked toward the bathrooms a short distance away. Maybe, just maybe, they would forget about the haunted house. After all, there was a lot of other things they could do!

He was so distracted by the thought of getting out of the haunted house, he realized he had almost walked into the girls bathroom.

“Oops.” He turned and headed for the boys room. A snow leopard who looked almost as big as Jack was coming out and he smiled down at Andlat.

“You sure this is the right place for you?” He asked kindly.

“Yeah.” Andlat replied, pushing past him a bit rudely. Of course the boys room was the right place for him! He was a boy!

His business done, he made sure to wash his paws thoroughly to get rid of the last of the caramel before returning to his friends.

“What now?” Shuba asked.

“Haunted house, duh!” Rian said. “There’s just baby rides here otherwise.” Andlat looked around the festival. There was a lot more than baby rides. There were arts and craft stands, a face painting booth, and even hay rides through a cornfield. He had gone on that hay ride just yesterday wrapped in a fluffy blanket on Jack’s lap. This was like a whole different experience! He sighed as he realized that there was no other option; he was going to the haunted house.

“You coming, Andlat?” Shuba asked with a smile.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Andlat said hesitantly, trying his best to keep his voice level. How scary could it be?

It was the haunted house at the town's autumn festival. They would get sued or something if it was so scary that it made people pee their pants, right? Besides, he thought as they walked closer and closer to it, if it really made people pee their pants, there was no way Jack would have let him come with a… he glanced nervously at Rian and Shuba, not even wanting to think the word for fear they would somehow know.

Andlat was always very careful to never let them know about his secret other life, though he figured that, to them, it was probably so outlandishly weird, they would never even suspect. In a way, it was almost like having a secret identity, almost like being a superhero.

"You daydreaming?" Rian asked, tapping Andlat on the shoulder.

"Oh, um, yeah."

"Well, don't daydream through the whole thing! You gotta pay attention to get scared!" He smirked, clearly the most excited about the haunted house.

"Bet he screams the loudest." Shuba whispered. Andlat giggled at the thought. Surely with Shuba and Rian by his side, the haunted house would not be all that scary, right?

As they neared the front of the line, Andlat realized the fatal flaw in his logic. Another chill ran up and down his spine, making his brush bristle as he heard the attendant at the front of the line say four of the scariest words Andlat could have heard in that moment.

“You go through alone.” Alone? His paws twitched at the mere thought of having to walk through it all by himself! He glanced around, trying to think of some way to get out of this. Surely a haunted house attraction would have a scaredy cat line, right? Maybe he could make up some story about Jack needing to come pick him up. How was it possible that the overprotective wolf had not given him a cell phone in case of emergencies?

“Cold?” Rian asked, noticing the trembling fox.

“Yeah, I left my hoodie in the car.”

“It’ll be better inside, out of the wind.” Shuba said. Andlat nodded even as his latest idea popped into his head. He would stand between Rian and Shuba. That way, even if he got paralyzed with fear or something, the red panda would come up behind him and help him get through it.

“Almost our turn!” Rian said, the racoon practically bouncing with excitement. Andlat and Shuba exchanged a look.

“Rian might wet himself before we even get inside.” Andlat teased. Shuba snorted. Rian rolled his eyes, but Andlat could tell he had scored a hit.

“Alright, next.” The otter running the attraction said. Rian stepped forward. “Go through the door and then turn right, kay?” Rian nodded and disappeared inside eagerly. Andlat took a step forward, trying to control his breath as he felt his chest tighten. The otter looked him up and down and smiled. “Go through the door and turn left, okay?”

“Okay.” Andlat said. The otter patted his shoulder.

“This is your left, kiddo.”

“I know.” Andlat pushed her paw away.

“Have fun!” Andlat walked toward the door.

“I can do this, I can do this.” He chanted to himself, hearing muffled screams from inside. He would do this! If worse came to worst, he would just spend the night in Jack’s bed. “I won’t even need to.” He said, remembering he was wearing his Ace Incredible t-shirt. He was brave!

Stepping into the dark building, Andlat saw a sign on the wall. To the left was the Trick or Treat Trail. To the right lay the Marr Murder House. Well, he certainly was not going to go to the murder house! That much was for sure! Turning toward the Trick or Treat Trail, Andlat whimpered softly as realization struck. What if it was a trick and the Trick or Treat Trail was actually scarier? Had Rian gone to the right or the left? It made no sense to send them two different ways, but he wished he could remember just to be safe.

Andlat stepped into a forest, but the trees all looked fake. At least it was light enough to see that the trees were plastic. Feeling a bit more confident, he walked along, ears twitching for even the slightest sound. He spied a few paper skeletons and ghosts, smiling as he realized that his predictions were right on the money. Rian and Shuba would probably say that this was dumb, but he would at least be able to enjoy it.

Andlat strode forward, but yelped all the same as a monster

jumped out from behind a tree.

“Boo!” He hurried past before the monster could get a hold of him, but the trail was growing darker. Hearing a noise behind him, he walked a bit faster, running into something right at his midriff. He tried to touch it, but it was gone. It had felt almost like a broom. What had it been? A cackle suddenly filled the air and Andlat froze. That had to be a witch, right?

“It’s all fake.” He whispered to himself, but he was beginning to feel a little scared.

“I’m gonna get you.” He heard the witch croon from the dark.

“Nuh-uh.” He said to himself, quickly hurrying by. He glanced over his shoulder, but the witch was nowhere to be found.

Even in the darker part of the fake forest, the path was still easy to see, much to Andlat’s relief. Getting lost in a fake forest was something he would never be able to live down. Rian and Shuba were one thing, but if Jack heard… he did not even want to think about it.

“There you are!” The witch lunged out of the forest and Andlat dodged her, heart racing. He picked up the pace again, trying to make it look like he was not running. He heard a wolf howl in the distance and smirked.

“Just try and throw a werewolf at me.” He said, calming down. A big scary wolf? He went home to that each and every night. He heard a few more wolf howls, but was a little

disappointed when all he found was a few more skeletons lurking in the bushes before he emerged out into the overcast afternoon.

Rian was already standing there, looking visibly shaken. He stared at Andlat, baffled by how calm he looked.

“How was it?”Andlat asked calmly. Rian blinked.

“It wasn’t that scary.” His voice trembled. Andlat smiled. Had he handled it better than Rian? It sure seemed that way.

Shuba emerged a few minutes later, looking more like Rian than Andlat. He swallowed a few times before he found his voice.

“Wow, that was… something else.”

“Yeah.” Rian agreed. “The chainsaw, the blood. Wow.” Andlat fought to hide his confusion. What were they talking about? Chainsaw? Blood?

“Did you see the axe in that woman’s head? It looked so real.” Shuba shuddered, but then they both turned as one and looked at Andlat.

“You weren’t scared at all?” Rian asked.

“Not really. There were a couple scary moments, but” Andlat shrugged. Shuba and Rian exchanged a perplexed look. “Oh, I should probably go to the entrance. Jack’s gonna be here soon. See you later!” The two watched the little fox scamper away, looking cheerfully over his shoulder at them before disappearing into the crowd.

“I think we underestimated him.” Rian said slowly.