

He ran through the shiny elevator doors after they opened, as usual. He pressed the button labeled “39” for his floor, as usual. When the doors closed and the elevator began to move upward, he gripped a large paw on the rail along the walls. Mathis never liked using the elevators to get to his office, but he knew it beat using the stairs any day. Being a naturally large guy covered in a thick, black layer of fur, he wouldn’t be able to climb 38 flights of stairs in the ten minutes he had before being late again.

“Thank God that guy helped me stay dry on my way here,” he thought to himself as the elevator ascended, “just my luck a storm had to hit as soon as I left home. I’d probably be an hour late instead if I had to dry all this fur when I got in.” He thought back to the stranger. “Come to think of it, I’m glad he didn’t run off like most people would when they see a Were fully transformed.”

He reached floor 14.

The elevator stopped many times on the way to pick up fellow coworkers or clients. Some only went up a few floors, others went up ten, none of them needed to go to floor 39. Mathis tend to do fine riding the elevator; usually only one or two people would get on, or there would be none at all. But a menagerie of them constantly went in and out of the elevator but only had quick rides. He’d huff or snort out of distress every time someone entered. At one point, he got backed into a corner when the elevator got crowded and soon started to hyperventilate; he kept this as quiet as he could until most of them got off. When he would get distressed, many of the other patrons would either look at him quizzically or just shrug him off and ignore him.

He managed to crawl up to floor 25, despite the elevator’s frequent stops.

After this, he had a smooth ride up. No stops. No one constantly going in and out and invading his space. Nothing. He took this time to calm down and enjoy what little space he had; the small, 7 by 6 foot elevator cab felt more like his 14 by 12 foot living room at home. He never felt cramped anymore, unlike the cage he lived in most of his life when he was younger.

Mathis became more and more calm with the situation, trying to block out the fear from his childhood. He watched the digital screen in the cab go from 36 to 37.

And then the elevator came to a screeching halt. Mathis bent the rail as he gripped it hard to keep his balance, but he found himself on the floor anyway. He stood back up.

The elevator never beeped indicating it stopped at a floor.

The doors didn’t open.

He panicked.

To no avail, he tried to slow his breathing. He began encouraging himself, telling himself this happens to this elevator from time to time, due to its frequent use. He told himself it'll get fixed soon and his manager would understand; he'd get a verbal warning at best. He reminded himself he was strong. He's not one to go down easily and can handle any amount of abuse to his body and mind.

And that's when the painful memories impaled him.

He thought he suppressed his years as a slave to the circus, as a part of the freak show. "There are plenty of Weres out there, I know it. They could just look 'em up. So why me?"

That last question ran through his head over and over and over. He enjoyed being in his bear form, even since birth; for whatever reason, it gave him comfort. He couldn't remember who, but someone told him he transformed as soon as he was born, a rarity of his kind. And that is why he never knew his parents.

What he did remember was only a childhood locked in a cage. He was pushed to his physical limits to entertain strangers who mocked him from the safety of the stands. The balancing acts put too much strain on his knees and elbows; his captor didn't care. If he couldn't perform, he was whipped and scolded, and then sent to his cage. When he traveled with them, they locked him in a cage. It didn't matter if he was bipedal and could speak; they treated him like the other animals that were part of the troupe. Yet they weren't Weres, just normal animals. These creatures that didn't have the chance for human freedom like he had; a chance he never took.

Freedom from the circus came when he volunteered as part of a research project for a cure to his so-called "disease" or "anomaly." Despite the offense, he was glad there was someone in the world that cared about him. They claimed it would be like a check-up at the doctor's: lots of different steps, but relatively painless. They even helped him get documented as a suspected Were, even though he already kept his bear form, and get him on his feet. And he's lived like that ever since.

"This elevator...this damn elevator!" he roared. He pounded a fisted paw on the reflective wall, forming a bear paw sized dent. "I knew this would happen one day." His breath quickened. "Now I'm sure I'll get fired if I get out of here."