

You know, it had been a nice day—school was out, homework was finished and out of the way, I managed to get over to the downtown area to do some free-running, and my friend was having a party that night; it was all good!

...And then something happened. Whether it was a bad thing or a good thing, I'll leave the verdict up to you, but one thing's for certain: it was far from ordinary.

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The sun was still above the horizon as I drove through the forested neighborhood. Light rays filtered through the foliage above, gaining a slight green to their tint as they beat down on the hood of my car. I downshifted, pulling off the main drive and onto a backroad of sorts. Navigating through its twists and turns, I found myself at a sizable mansion when the road ended. Rolling through the driveway, I selected a spot and parked my car. Stepping out, I couldn't help but marvel once again at how I had come to make friends with somebody of such class.

Grabbing a few items out of the back seat, I locked up Fireball and walked down towards the front doors, gazing around at the colorful shrubs that adorned the pearl-white walls of the manor, and the tall, drooping water oak that stood proudly in the middle of the circular driveway.

A door banged shut ahead of me and I heard a voice call out as somebody approached. "Hey, Voltaire, my man!" I turned to see my friend approaching me. Casually dressed, he was wearing polished black shoes, a dark pair of jeans, and a simple white polo. His eyes and bearings were relaxed and bright, as usual, and his brown hair was as long and thick as ever.

We reached each other, partaking in the customary handshake. "Hey Esan!" I smiled, swinging a free hand into his. "How's it going?"

"Good, good," he nodded. "Nice to see you here."

"Hey," I shrugged, "I wouldn't be here if you weren't."

"That is both friendly and morbid all at once," he replied. "Glad to have you on board!"

I laughed, walking with Esan toward the doorway. "So," my friend asked, "whatcha' got in the bags?"

"Uh, there's some sherbet," I said, lifting one bag, "and my nicknamesake," I smiled, lifting the other.

"Gonna' make that punch of yours?"

"Can it truly be a party without punch?" I asked with mock seriousness.

"Nope!" Esan said as we stepped inside. I could hear music, some sort of heavy metal or something; not anything I had a problem with, really, just not exactly what I was used to. My friend pointed off towards a set of stairs. "Party's on the lower floor. There should be a punch bowl down there for you to use; I'll be right on down, just give me a sec."

"Got it," I nodded, and headed on down the stairs, which went straight down halfway, turned a corner, and then continued to the bottom. The music intensified as I descended, finally coming to a peak as I rounded the bend and entered the main room. Down here, the lighting was dimmed down a bit, giving a nice cozy feel to the whole place. People were mingling, lounging on the two couches, eating snacks, and all around just chilling; I even saw a few people playing some Chinese checkers over on the coffee table.

The food table was right next to the entrance, so I simply slid in behind it. There was a sizable punch bowl there, just as Esan had said there would be. I set my bags on the table, cracked open the contents, and began mixing together the delicious combination. The blue soft drink fizzed and frothed, the foam chilling down and stabilizing upon contact with the sherbet; always a fun sight to see. "And the last ingredient," I said to myself, looking through my bags in search of it. My face gradually gained a bothered look when I failed to find what I was looking for. "Ah, dang it..." I mumbled. "Forgot the lemonade." Stepping out from behind the table, I made for the stairs.

I was stopped on my way out, however, by a tap on my shoulder. "Hey, is that punch?" a hefty looking fellow asked me.

"Yes," I said, "but it's not ready yet. I forgot something in my car and I'm going to go and get it real quick." I started up the first couple steps, then looked back down and added sternly, "don't touch it yet, 'kay?"

"Yeah, alright," he replied nonchalantly.

I wasn't exactly convinced, but I wasn't too worried about him either. I quick-stepped up the rest of the stairs, and rounding the corner at the top I walked towards the double front doors and stepped outside. Arriving at the Fireball, I unlocked it and looked inside. After a moment of searching, I found the forgotten lemonade underneath the passenger seat; it must have slid out of its bag during the ride over. Grabbing it, I locked the car and returned to the house.

Once again I descended towards the heavy music, stepping out into the party room ready to finish what I had started. When I turned towards the concessions table, however, I felt a slight pang of annoyance when I saw the hefty guy serving himself a glass of the unfinished punch. Glancing over his shoulder, he dropped the ladle back into the bowl and quickly walked away, his hand casually resting in his pocket. I kinda' wanted to go after him, but at the same time I knew it probably didn't matter. He sneaked a cup of punch—so what? It was meant for drinking either way.

But, dang, he downed that cup pretty quick; it was already empty when he had turned to walk away.

Pushing the distraction from my mind, I ducked behind the snack table again, cracked open the lemonade, and poured it into my concoction. "And there we go," I said slowly, shaking out the last drops. Tossing the empty container into the trash bin, I reached for a cup and dipped

out some of the drink for myself. The flavorful mixture felt good in my mouth; cold and smooth from the sherbet, fizzy and sweet from the soda, with a subtle tingle from the sour lemonade. I swallowed, satisfied with my work.

But there was a sort of aftertaste, a funny flavor that was left behind. I couldn't quite place it though. Taking another sip, I swished it around in my mouth before letting it trickle down. No, I still had nothing; no idea what it could be. There was also a weird feeling it left behind too, almost like I had gotten a spray of powdered chalk in my mouth; it just left this coating of... something in there. It wasn't all that noticeable, but it was hard to ignore once I did notice it.

All the same, I was a teenager, and I wasn't about to let a little aftertaste get in between me and an otherwise good cup of punch. Polishing off what remained in my glass, I walked over to spectate a heated battle of Chinese checkers.

It wasn't long, however, before I began to feel unwell. At first my stomach became nauseous and unsettled, but I didn't think much of it at the moment; things like that happened sometimes, and it would probably blow over soon enough. But when my head started hurting too, I began to suspect that something was up. I excused myself to no one in particular and made my way towards the stairs.

Esan passed by me as I climbed up. "Hey, Volt. Where you goin'?"

"Bathroom," I grunted back to him as I turned the corner and hurried on. It seemed as if my condition was worsening by the second.

Mercifully, there was nobody in the restroom when I got there. Stumbling in, I closed the door behind me and kneeled down by the commode, waiting for my upset gut to reject whatever was bothering it. I don't exactly remember how long I had sat there, but it wasn't pleasant. I wanted to just hurl and have it over with, but at the same time I really hoped I wouldn't; parties are for having fun and celebrating, not losing your lunch.

Oddly enough, however, the feeling gradually lessened on its own, eventually becoming only a fraction of what it had been. My head still pounded fit to burst, but at least it was the only thing to deal with now.

"That was... weird," I muttered to myself as I stood up. Walking on unsteady feet, I made my way towards the door, rubbing my stomach. In doing this I noticed that it felt... softer, somehow? I stopped, confused. How could it possibly feel that way? I began unbuttoning my shirt. Undoing the last one, I pulled back my top and turned to face the mirror.

"Oh, bloody heck!" I exclaimed, stumbling backwards against the wall. There, right in the center of my belly, was a patch of black fur. What was even more shocking to see was that it was growing, the hairs crawling out of my skin and gradually covering more and more of my torso. I placed my hands around it, desperately trying to halt the fur's progress. Honestly, I don't why I thought that would work; the stuff just kept sprouting, even going as far as to gain speed as it continued its spread.

Dismayed, I realized that I couldn't stop it. As it traveled, the fur made a transition to a deep turquoise color, finally disappearing beneath my clothing. I still felt it, though, a burning pulse that coursed along my appendages and around my back. I was just preparing myself to watch it reappear out from beneath my sleeves, but was immediately interrupted by a sharp pain at the base of my spine. I winced, hearing muffled pops and feeling things move where they shouldn't have moved to, my bones gradually shifting and multiplying. Looking over my shoulder, I saw a tail growing out of my lower back, feeling it swish and twitch in response to my own discomfort.

This new appendage distracted me so much that I didn't even notice the progress that had been made on my arms and legs. Nevertheless, I did notice when my hands and feet exploded with a stinging ache, as if I had just made a heavy landing on a cold winter day. The feeling grew swiftly, and unable to stand any longer, I fell against the wall, sliding quickly to the floor. I had no control, and could only watch as my hands, now covered in black fur, trembled and clenched, my ring fingers sinking away into them. I could feel my bones disappearing, the other ones around them moving in to fill in the gap left behind, even as my fingers grew in size, becoming rounder and more paw-like. Judging by the constant twinges I was getting in my feet, I could only assume that the same thing was happening with them.

At this point, I'm sure many people would have expected me to lose a pair of Nicky's to my growing feet, but no. Granted, I myself feared the same when my toes started to feel constricted inside the tips of my shoes, but that's as far as it got before the growth stopped. I kicked the sneakers off, relieving my black-furred paws of the pressure.

But the process wasn't done yet; the fur that had stopped growing at my neck suddenly started again, shooting up my face and around my head. Once again, I felt the harsh sensation of bones being separated, rearranged, and grown. My ears shifted up on my head, dragging their nerves through my skull behind them and elongating to tapered ends. But what really sent my senses firing off was when half my face got pulled forward, my jaw and nose jutting outward into a muzzle, and the teeth inside my mouth reshaping into a full canine jaw set; it hurt, a lot, and if my mouth wasn't too busy being dragged outwards, a shout probably would have escaped it. The process soon ended, however, and a last little bit fiery pain went off in my eyes before the transformation was over.

I sat still for a while, breathing heavily in pain and disbelief. I didn't want what had just happened to be real; things like that don't just *happen*. Things like that don't happen at all! But... it just did happen...

Using the wall behind me for support, I stood up on shaky legs, though still gazing downward. "*Do I dare?*" I thought. Steeling myself for what I would see, I lifted my eyes to the mirror. The downturned face of a blue and black wolf looked back at me through the loose bangs of his now white hair.

I was surprised by how familiar he looked, and, despite my confusion and dismay, began turning and tilting my head to examine my furry reflection. The eyes weren't my usual muddy grey color; instead they were bright green, and the thick brows above them were straight up black, unlike the brown ones that had preceded them. Examining my paws-slash-hand-things, I found that my fingernails had been replaced by short, dark claws with a slight green tint, a color that matched my new paw pads to a tee. Fortunately, I only lost one digit and managed to retain my thumbs—it would have been a pain to lose those. Similar changes could be found on my feet, which had also been reduced to four toes. Then, of course, there were the tail and ears, but I didn't see any new things besides these.

As terrifying and unexpected as all this was, I had to admit it was pretty cool, in at least a few ways. Something I thought to only exist in fictional stories, something I had only ever imagined and wrote about, had actually happened—unless I was dreaming, but it felt all too lifelike to be a dream.

My thoughts jumped around for a while, questions and ideas stirring around my head. But they suddenly landed on something that made them stop. *"I am at somebody else's house, with a party going on full swing right bellow me. How the heck am I supposed to get out of here?"* Even as I asked myself this, there was a knock on the door.

"Hey, Voltaire, you in there?" It was Esan's voice, just a hint of concern behind it.

"Uhhh, y- yeah." I reached over and clicked the lock on the door. "Why?"

"I was just wondering how you were doing," he replied. "You looked kinda' sick coming up those stairs there, and it's been a good ten minutes since then."

"Really?" I asked, looking around for an escape. "That long?"

"Yeah. You okay?"

"Uh, sure," I said unconvincingly, judging the size of the bathroom's small window. "I was just a bit nauseous. It's gone now."

"Okay, well, come on down then. The party's waitin' for you!"

"I- I'll be out in a bit. Don't wait for me though." By this point I was standing on the toilet, trying to get a better measurement of the potential escape route.

"You still got stuff to do in there?"

I looked over my shoulder at the door. "Well... kinda'?" I knew I had messed up as soon as the words crossed my lips.

Esan's voice became stern. "Volt, what's going on?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I know something's up. I know you're not lying, 'cause you don't do that, but I can tell when you're trying to avoid a question; your responses take longer and you answer stuff in backwards and cryptic ways. Now tell me what's going on."

I sighed, knowing he had gotten me. "Fine..." I mumbled as I stepped onto the ground again; I would never fit through that window anyways. Walking over to the door, I leaned in

close and whispered through it. "I'm going to open this now. But... please don't freak out." Scared half to death by what I was about to do, every part of my new body screamed for a safer way. All the same, I set my face and stalled my thoughts, giving my paw just enough time to reach out and open the door before I could decide against it.

"WOA-!", Esan started to shout. But, with a swiftness I didn't even know I possessed, I reached out and tugged him in, closing the door behind us and clamping a paw over his mouth. I held his flailing body for a moment, sighing deeply. "I said don't freak out." I looked at him in the mirror, gazing calmly into his eyes until his movements calming down. "We good now?" I asked. He nodded, and I released my hold on him.

Esan stepped back, a confused look on his face. For a while we just stood there facing each other in silence, neither of us really knowing what to say. I could feel my tail waving back and forth and my ears twitched skittishly, the movements mimicking my own nervousness.

Finally, Esan spoke. "I mean, I knew you were a furry and all," he chuckled, "but don't you think this is a bit much?"

The question was so unforeseen and casual, especially for the circumstance; I released the breath that I had been holding, chuckling weakly myself. "Look, I didn't ask for this! And I have no idea how it happened." I paused, patting my leg anxiously. "I mean, that's as much as I can really say; you can see for yourself what happened."

"Yeah," Esan said, looking me up and down. "I can see."

I brushed a hand paw through my hair. "Either way, I kinda' feel like it'd be best for me to go; your house is full of people, and this," I motioned at my changed form, "is probably something that they don't really need to see."

"I'd have to agree with you on that... So how you gonna' get out?"

"I dunno'..."

He pointed behind me. "What about the window?"

"I measured; it's too small."

There was a short pause in the conversation before Esan spoke up again.

"...Well," he said, "why don't you just try walking out? There's not really a whole lot of people up on this floor, and the front door is right out there, so it shouldn't be too hard."

"I guess?" As simple as the idea was, I didn't see how it could be any worse than other more elaborate ones I could entertain.

"Stay here," Esan said, and left the room. I could hear him walking around in the hall outside for a bit, then the door opened up again and he poked his head in. "All right; coast is clear."

I snuck a peak out the door, just to be sure for myself, then followed him out of the bathroom. Stepping quietly, we made our way towards the front door, and almost reached the corner of the hall, when suddenly a voice called from the room across from us. "Esan!"

I froze up, completely at a loss of what to do; fortunately, my friend thought faster than I did. Shoving me down behind the side of a nearby cabinet, he continued forward towards the kitchen at a casual pace. I could hear his conversation from where I hid, holding my breath.

"Yeah Mom?"

"Could you help me take this plater down to the basement? It's just a little heavy for me."

"Yeah, sure. Oh, hey; weren't you gonna' make some tea? We could take it all down at once and save a trip."

"Oh, you're right. Good idea."

"Kay then. I'll be right back; Voltaire was wanting some help with something, and it shouldn't take too long."

"Okay, but make it quick."

"Will do!"

I heard Esan's steps coming back my way, accompanied by the click of a door closing. He appeared next to me, grinning with relief. "Well, that was close."

"No, dip..." I whispered, getting up and following him around the corner and to the double front doors. Looking back towards the kitchen, I saw that the once open door had been closed. Despite his lighthearted attitude, my friend certainly knew his way around risky situations.

We stepped outside and onto the front drive, rushing up towards where I had parked.

"Wow," I said with relief as we ran, "that actually worked."

"Of course it worked," Esan said matter-of-factly, "we were the ones who did it."

I chuckled. "Whatever you say, man."

Arriving at my car, we stopped for a bit to say our goodbyes. "Well, don't get caught by the po-po," Esan said jokingly.

"I'll try not to," I smiled, sliding into the driver's seat. It was a bit awkward with a tail though...

"Oh, hey," my friend said as I started the car. "Let me know how things go, okay?"

Looking back at him, I suddenly felt thankful for a caring friend. "Sure thing." I hesitated for a bit, then added on to that. "Thanks."

And with that, I shifted my car into gear and drove off into the darkening evening. As I piloted Fireball back up through the winding drive, my mind started thinking, wondering how this all happened. I thought back through the evening, trying to remember all the details I could, then I landed on a possible thought. It wasn't exactly plausible, but things did seem to line up towards it, somehow. I stopped, pulling out my phone to shoot Esan a text.

Hey man, I had a thought. I'm not entirely sure, but just in case, get rid of the punch—I think someone might have been messing with it.