

Travis stopped for a moment to wipe the sweat off his brow. The reflected midday sun glaring down on him from the dozen multiple floored office buildings above the street, making him overheated. But it was worth the exertion to travel downtown to check out the local flea market this weekend, in the hopes of scoring big. Big by his standards, at least.

Travis always had a passion for antiques and visited this particular market often. However, the larger gathering space acquired for this weekend encouraged even the most recluse of business people to come out and try to move their wares. It was a potential treasure trove Travis couldn't afford to pass up. He'd been anticipating this day for weeks!

However, after just under an hour of browsing, Travis felt his spirits begin to fall. Everything was too shiny, too new, too...tacky. It was a common trend nowadays, even in places like this. People just considered antiques to be junk. The casual passerby didn't really share Travis's passion for old dusty things.

Travis sighed. Lately, it felt like such a chore to indulge in his hobby. Hours of wasted effort browsing useless things left little hope of finding one of his hidden treasures.

He sat down, catching his breath before making one final round and heading home empty-handed. Yet a more thorough scan drew his attention to a stand he had initially missed. Travis squinted in the sunlight, looking up at a faded sign hanging above a hastily put together tent. Surely, something that out of place had some good loot!

He got up with a spring in his step as he entered the musty smelling tent. The light was dim, mostly filtering through the opening. But it was sufficient to see what the display had to offer. Travis was greeted with a surprisingly large wall of relics, which made his heart leap. Each item looked more tantalizing than the last. A myriad of history lay beneath each dusty piece of glass or faded metal. He had no idea where to even start!

He didn't see anyone minding the merchandise, however. Perhaps the owner had gone to the restroom? Oh well. He had no intention of stealing anything. He would gladly pay a decent portion of his wages for some of this stuff!

Travis scanned the dimly lit space once more, hardly sure of where he should start. Everything held such promise! He settled on a corner of the room where the spine of an obviously ancient book stuck out to him. He did, in fact, have a habit of judging a book by its cover, or at least its spine. The level of wear and the design on the spine was a clear indication of the early era. Travis carefully grasped the weathered edge, careful not to damage his prize as he pulled it out for closer inspection.

Travis opened the dusty cover, hoping to find a date. To him, it was an indication of the volume's value, and the older, the better! He was somewhat surprised to see that the text was written in a language he was totally unfamiliar with. Travis wasn't a linguist by any means, but he did come to recognize a few different dialects from his explorations. Yet there was not even a single recognizable digit to give him any chance of comprehending the tome.

He quickly flipped through the pages, more of the bizarre language greeting his eyes. He sighed. There was no way for him to value the book based on that, not without further research anyway. He'd have to ask the owner about it whenever they returned.

As he continued to flip through the antiquated pages, a particular image caught his attention. It was a sigil, resembling a small mammal like a badger, perhaps. Imprinted below it was a few lines of text, different than the rest of the tome. They were still foreign, but at least something that appeared akin to an English alphabet.

Feeling almost silly, Travis tried to recite the words, enunciating the strange symbols as best he could with his limited knowledge. He found the syllables

almost rolled off his tongue, and he giggled at how terrible they sounded to his ears. He was glad no one was around to hear him.

Just then, a violent gust of wind swept through the tiny space, making Travis shudder. He felt strange, as though a surge of energy had overtaken him. Travis could almost swear it was welling up from the tome in front of him. He felt a buzz reverberating in the air around him, a strange humming that overrode his senses. He nearly dropped the book to cover his ears and make the overwhelming sensations stop. Yet his affinity for handling antiques allowed him to maintain his grip.

“Hey! Put that down!”

A sharp elderly male voice made Travis stop dead in his tracks, and he nearly dropped the book onto the ground once more.

“I’m sorry sir, I wasn’t stealing...” Travis tried to stammer, but it was no use.

“What have you done!? Close that NOW!” Boomed a voice that was not suited for the stature of the man before him.

All at once, the old man came rushing at Travis with a ferocity he wouldn’t have expected from someone so frail looking. Travis quickly closed the book, no longer caring about damaging the volume as the man wrenched it from his grasp.

Travis was so stunned by the suddenness of the situation he hardly knew how to react. With a start, he flew out of the shop, mind awash in embarrassment and shame. He’d done nothing wrong, had he? Yet he’d lost the chance to buy anything from the old man, much less the book itself.

Travis continued to run, wanting to leave the awkward event behind him. Even as he did, he found himself occasionally rubbing at his hands to try and

remove the electric tingle that had caused him irritation. He ran as far as he could before he had finally had to stop, panting heavily and winded.

His thoughts had been racing the entire time, running the scenario over and over in his head. He could hardly blame himself, yet self-deprecation was the first place his mind went. Yet he was unlikely to ever see that man again, and the flea market was so large that no one would recognize him. Travis tried his best to clear his thoughts, to enjoy the warm summer air as he walked the rest of the way home.

As he did, however, the odors in the air seemed to stick out to him. It was more than the fragrance of fresh mowed grass and flowers. The more he focused on the scents, the more he realized how complex and intricate they were. Travis let himself go to focus on the strange flood of experiences his nose was trying in vain to process.

In short order, he found himself getting a headache at the sensory overlord. It was as though everything STANK! Smells were so much more pungent than they'd ever been. He lowered his head, trying to breathe through his mouth as he picked up his pace. Finally, the scents became more manageable, his senses evidently adjusting to the over-stimulation.

It was more than just odors distracting him, however. As he closed off his sense of smell, he started to realize that his hearing had altered as well. Everything seemed so loud, as though the volume had been turned up a few decibels too high for his comfort. He had no idea what was going on. Perhaps his ears had popped? Whatever the reason, it only served to contribute to his headache and made the travel home more troublesome.

Travis increased his pace, hands covering his ears, trying to drown out the ambient background noise to a reasonable level. He desperately tried to ignore the irritation of his nails digging into his flesh as he walked. Yet the most annoying part was how much more animal noises stuck out to his ears. In particular, the sounds of dogs barking sent nervous twinges down his spine. Strange, since he'd

never been particularly afraid of dogs. The old man must have made him jumpy, he reasoned.

Travis finally reached his house, located at the end of his suburb, bordering an expanse of woods that normally made the long walk more bearable. But this trek had done a number on Travis, making his muscles stiff and sore. He chalked up to the walk, but even as he ran a bath and relaxed in his tub, he could not seem to relieve the sensations.

And evidently, he had gotten filthy during the day! He rubbed his arms, trying in vain to remove a thick layer of what appeared to be dirt from his epidermis. He scrubbed the area over and over, the discoloration not fading even as his skin began to feel raw. Touching the area more gingerly, he was shocked to discover not only had his skin grown coarse and blackened, but his hands and arms were covered in what looked like a small forest of hairs.

Travis felt he should be panicked by the notion, but his mind was a little foggy. Maybe he was overtired. A passing thought dragged up memories of stress hormones that could cause a whole host of ill effects. Sudden hair growth wasn't too out of the question. Clearly, he just needed a good night's sleep.

Travis got into bed shortly afterward and passed out almost at once. Yet he didn't remain unconscious long. Travis found himself dreaming, though it seemed more surreal than any dream he'd recalled in the past. He was floating above himself, watching his body crawling along a forest floor, sniffing and digging as though he belonged there. He was covered in the strange hair from before, but otherwise mostly human. Yet there was no denying how happy he appeared in the bestial act. It was immensely reassuring to see himself in his forest home, close to his burrow.

He had a sudden urge to experience what his body was feeling first hand. He felt himself floating downwards, entering his other self, and becoming awake to the millions of sensations that assaulted his body. He could smell every lingering odor,

hear the smallest vibrations. It was as though he had been blind but could now see the world for what it was.

There were dangers, to be sure, but he was near his burrow for shelter should he need it. He felt somehow smaller than he remembered, but that was ok. He was still shrinking, changing, becoming more fit for this forest habitat. Yet he was strong, fast, fierce in the face of any adversary. He had his claws, his teeth, and his powerful muscles to ward off threats. Only the biggest creatures would dare mess with him.

He dug into the ground, making his burrow larger while scouring the earth for tasty grubs to satiate his appetite. A familiar scent suddenly hit his nostrils, more pungent than all the others. It smelled of family, of female, of mate. He waddled towards the source, feeling himself getting aroused by the prospect of bestial release. He desired nothing more than to alleviate his carnal lusts, and his mate was in season. He mounted the female without any foreplay, seeking her own need, feeling his member enter her tight, welcoming tunnel. He gave himself over to instinct, feeling his lust building, his end growing near-

Travis awoke with a start, the heavy stench of his release hanging in the air, along with a myriad of other scents he could only begin to guess at. Had the dream been that arousing?

Travis sat panting in his bed, the stink of his cum overpowering. He blinked a few times, trying to focus his thoughts. The images were so real, so vivid. It was a shock to his system to find that he wasn't in his forest home, but rather a human dwelling, confined, TRAPPED! He needed to be free!

He kicked at the bedding surrounding him, hearing a strange ripping as his nails became caught in the fabric. The more he struggled, the more he became entangled in the cursed bedding.

Everything felt wrong. Where was the warmth of Travis's burrow? Where were the sights and scents of the woods, of food, of mate? He shook his head, trying to wake up to his reality. But he couldn't deny those intrusive thoughts. Travis was human and in his home and bed. Wasn't he?

He rubbed his scalp a few times, trying to clear the fog from the dream. He slowly realized that he still ached all over, feeling itchy and hot. It was even more irritating than before! Careful of his thick nails, he slowly crawled out of bed, only to hit the floor with a smack. It was as though his legs were shorter than he'd been accustomed, and the sudden drop startled him. He scrambled to his feet, grunting in pain from the awkward position. He felt somehow hunched over, shorter, though he lacked a frame of reference in his pitch-black room.

Travis was frightened by this point. This was more than some flu or workout soreness. He needed to see himself and figure out what was wrong. Travis reached up to turn on the light, only to find his fingers were oddly stiff and restricted. He tried moving them, alarmed at the lack of mobility they possessed. He could tell that his nails were wrong, extended like someone trying to achieve a world record.

Travis struggled with the simple switch, his smaller stature and awkward hands making the simple task Herculean. Finally, after much trial and error, his thicker nails scratched against the switch as with a blinding flash, the light came on.

The first thing Travis noticed was his hands. He had been curious about the extent of the changes but was not prepared for what greeted his eyes. His once very human fingers were shorter, the nails thicker and grotesquely long. Each digit had shrunk significantly, accounting for the lack of mobility they possessed. Yet far worse were his thumbs, which had migrated up his wrist and hardly moved at all even as he tried. Turning them over, Travis was shocked to see the once pale skin had thickened to black and looked rough across his palms and fingertips. They almost seemed like the claws of some animal!

The gray and black hair that he'd seen earlier had grown longer, thick and covering his arms in a fine coat. His arms themselves were much shorter and with his shoulders rotated forward made him feel hunched. He tried to rotate his arms, but they, too, seemed to lack the range of motion he once enjoyed. He could help but notice the hair had extended down his chest, the surface strangely compacted and lacking what little he maintained of his pecs. What the hell was happening to him?

He had to see his face, to view the extent of the changes. He stumbled his way over to his dresser mirror, shocked at the sight that awaited him. He had to stand on tiptoes to see himself reflected in the glass, translating into about a foot of lost height. Still, he managed to raise himself enough to observe the alien face reflected back at him. His face was covered in the same gray fur as his hands and arms. A distinct white stripe of hair ran down either side of his face, surrounding both of his eyes, which themselves had darkened. His cheeks were black, the fur steadily growing like a thick beard. In fact, every inch of his skin seemed to be enveloped as it steadily grew to merge with his shirking hair.

Travis blinked a few times, realizing how hard it was to see, as though his vision had dimmed. Yet he could still make out the alterations to his visage, which became more alarming the longer he viewed them. His nose was thick and black, and further away from his face than Travis remembered. In fact, if he crossed his eyes, he could see the significant portion it took from his field of vision.

His mouth had puffed out to match it, looking for all the world like a proto muzzle. Opening it revealed a maw with several dozen dagger-like teeth and a long thin tongue. His ears were higher on his head and rounded, their cavities twitching from the prickling of longer hairs growing. Hell, even the shape of his skull seemed flattened, looking more at home on an animal than a human.

Travis spent a few moments staring vacantly into the mirror, trying to rationalize what the hell had happened to him. This was impossible, wasn't it? He looked like a horrific mix between a badger and a human! This was far beyond

what any makeup or effects could achieve. Worst of all, the pricking across his body could only mean that the changes were far from over!

The tingling seemed for a moment familiar, reminiscent of energy that had flowed over him from the ancient tome. Travis played over the images in his mind, in particular the badger sigil above the words he had read aloud. As impossible as it was, there was no other explanation for his situation. His only hope for maintaining his humanity was to find that man, to get back to the tent to try and fix this!

At least that was what he tried to tell himself. His newly acquired abilities agreed he simply needed to get OUT, away from human stench, and into a more natural home. The instincts assaulted Travis all at once, the fragments from his hazy dream welling inside his psyche like slow-rolling clouds. It was almost like being back in that dream, as though he was losing control of the narrative. But he couldn't give in. He didn't want to turn into an animal!

His boxers hung loosely around his waist, an indication of his shrinking stature. His shorter legs, thinner chest, and smaller frame seemed to support that notion. He found it hard to keep his underwear on as he waddled away from the frightening visage in the mirror. Travis stumbled awkwardly on his legs, his back sore as he shrank further. His eyes scanned the dirty floor for his clothes from the day before. Yet everything seemed far too large for him now.

The moment he donned anything, Travis shivered at the uncomfortable sensation of human fabric against his still-sprouting fur. Travis knew he couldn't be seen naked like this, but he couldn't bring himself to wear any of the smelly garments that littered the floor. He longed to be naked and free as he was intended to be.

It was becoming far more taxing for him to think. The changes were coming so fast now. Every inch of his body ached as new fur sprouted from his pores. He could almost feel his muscles twitching, his human body diminishing with each

passing minute. He knew he didn't have much time before his transformation was completed. Yet the human part of him knew he needed to try.

Ignoring his clothes, Travis stumbled as best he could with an aching back suited for bipedal travel as it had been this afternoon. He reached for his door handle, noticing how short his fingers were, stubby lumps barely able to close around his salvation. His thumbs were much further up his arms than he would like to see, which made his task all the more difficult as he struggled against the meddlesome door handle. Finally, his efforts were rewarded with a click as Travis almost fell outside from the shift in weight.

The cool night air stimulated his senses far beyond what he had experienced earlier that day. He could smell so much more, hear things he'd never dreamed of. The human side of him knew he needed to hurry to save himself, but the animal was calm, at peace. The animal knew home was near now that it was free from the stink of human trappings.

Travis found himself moving towards the woods on impulse. His back continued to ache, and his hunched form grew ever closer to the inviting ground. Deep down, he knew that his salvation was in the other direction, but he was unable to suppress the animal instincts welling up inside him.

He had to try and return to the shop, even though it was nearly impossible. However, his thoughts were already cloudy, images from the dream encroaching slowly over his shrinking brain. The more he tried to fight, the more he found the human side losing. The animal instinct was more powerful, more exciting than anything he'd known. And deep down, he knew the changes were coming too fast. He wouldn't have time to make it to town, let alone find the shop owner that might have an answer or a cure.

Travis tried to take a few steps in the opposite direction, a final act of defiance, but the badger inside him had already won. He got down onto all fours as his back legs continued to shorten and made the position more natural, more

comfortable. He pressed his nose to the ground, his snout getting longer as he continued to shrink. There were so many smells! He could scent the presence of many other animals, of humans, of...FOOD!

Travis scurried along the ground, waddling awkwardly as his hips were not quite accustomed to a quadrupedal stance. His senses were honing on a small collection of larva under a fallen log. He set to work digging, the new front claws of the badger he'd soon be more than up to the task of exposing the scrumptious larvae to be lapped up by his waiting tongue. A twinge of humanity was disgusted by the act, but his mouth was already salivating.

His body cracked and groaned as the final changes overtook him. Travis, the human, was merely a spectator to a body now nearly controlled by animal instinct. His awareness continued to wane, the smaller braincase unable to hold the level of human consciousness he once enjoyed. Yet the more he transformed, the less afraid Travis became. It was truly impossible to know if he was now accepting of his form or if the process simply made it impossible for him to comprehend the implications of the change.

He watched as though from afar as his hips cracked and groaned, his torso shrinking as the fur along his exposed back thickened. His feet were now adorned with the same powerful claws, moving the dirt out of the way so his front paws could continue their work uninterrupted. His mouth lengthened, his teeth sharper as he dug into his collected morsels with gusto. His stubby tail wagged furiously as the animal he'd become revealed in the simple actions of being free in his new form.

One scent stood out as the last remnants of his human mind began to fade. FEMALE! He made his way towards the intoxicating aroma, all human inhibition or morality long since diminished. There she was, angry at his presence, but in need all of a virile male all the same.

His last human thoughts were aware of the sensations of mounting, of breeding. The satisfaction of completing the carnal act, and the waves of pleasure floating from his member all throughout his tiny body, left the former human Travis feeling at peace.

The old man watched under candle flame as the light from his tome began to fade, the spell completed. That fool had no idea what he'd touched. He sighed. It was necessary to keep the volume close at hand, but such mistakes were inevitable at times. The man was thankful no one else had come into contact with the spell, lest they too fall victim to the ancient curse. Oh well.

He hoped the former young man would at least lead a good life, enjoying all that being a wild animal had to offer. That fool was not the first to find his way into the woods from these tome's spells. Perhaps the young man had made a mate of one of the book's other victims. Hell, there were likely some out there that would welcome such a fate. The old man chuckled, finding the idea not so strange, perhaps a perfect way to spend his old age as he contemplated the tome on his shelf and the possibilities it might bring.