

Team Player

Written by KZ3

Dallon Derill was the star point guard of his team the Southeast Lobos and for good reason, he could see the floor like no other and he made passing look like its own art form. He practiced hard everyday and carried a basketball wherever he went; In short, he was a leader who had complete control over his team and there was nothing like the feeling of the whole crowd cheering whenever he dished an assist to his teammate because he never liked being the center of attention, he'd rather he was part of the team as a whole.

This left him unprepared for the big game against their rival school; It was a hard fought game but his team was down 72-73 with no time left on the clock however due to one of the opposing players accidentally colliding into him at the last second the referees called a foul which would allow him two free shots. If he made them both, he'd win the game for his team. However if he missed them both, he'd be the reason they lost. While his teammates reassured him before stepping to line since he was a 89% free-throw shooter and watching the opposing coach go verbally rampant at the referee for the call, Derill never felt so much pressure in his entire life.

It was all him, all alone standing at the freethrow line. Everyone's eyes were on him, half the gym filled with a silent and excited hope as well as a bit of empathy, while the other side was still booing the call and beginning to try and make as much noise as they could to distract him. He took a deep breath trying to put the fear of failure in the back of his mind and tune out all of the distractions, but the pressure itself from both sides was already a distraction. He stepped to the line and the referee handed him the ball, getting into his usual routine of two quick dribbles and a spin, he took a deep breath and raised up to his toes for the shot, business as usual.

The ball sailed in a nice arc towards the hoop and hit the back front of the back of the rim, immediately taking a hard bounce right back in his direction as if the rim were mocking him saying, "Too bad. Try again." The shot looked good and for a moment a little bit of the weight had been lifted off Derill's shoulders but now it seemed to only magnify as the opposing side went nuts now that the worse he could do was send it into overtime. "It's alright, you got this one." The denial of failure still on his teammates' faces, right now they had more faith in him than he did. He took a step back and sighed, the rim seemed to be a lot further and a lot smaller. He almost wished he was injured so he wouldn't have to take the shot but that was irrational. He shook these thoughts out of his but the fear of failure began to grow ever more, at this point he was just shooting to not miss. Both team's benches were on their feet and even the opposing coach was silent with his hands on his waist calculating whether he was going to have to coach an extra four minutes tonight.

Derill stepped back up to the line, he breathed slowly to try and calm his racing heart but between the loud sounds and knowing that everything depended on him made it hard to concentrate. Two dribbles, one, two, spin. He took one last look at the basket and rose to his toes, he released the ball and watched it sail through the air. Everything seemed to be in slow motion, though the ball would be up in the air for less than a second, it seemed like forever as the crowd goes silent with anticipation. The ball hit the front of the rim, spun around the inside and slowly spun out of the rim. Words couldn't even begin to describe the overwhelming sense of disappointment, guilt and defeat. The gym went incredibly loud with cheering from the rival's side and the players over there were jubilant from their triumph. Their crowd jumped up and down as their school theme played.

Meanwhile the other side looked on in disappointment and with sympathy as they watched Derill slowly crouch down, still at the line, staring at the rim as the image of his missed shot still replayed in his head. He couldn't believe he just choked when it mattered most. He would have stayed longer, but the coaches were already shaking hands and the team was lining up, his team moving slowly, with hands on their heads in disbelief while the other team was smiling and laughing with each other. Derill, gestured by his best friend Nick, the shooting guard, was slow to the line as the scene just kept replaying itself in his mind.

To say the locker room after the game was bleak would be the understatement of the year. The Coach gave a form of consolation speech about how they played hard and sometimes the things just don't bounce in their favor. Yeah, right, Derill didn't need anyone to tell him he was the reason they lost. The entire time he got redressed he couldn't help but feel that sense of guilt. After fifteen minutes of the team finally getting rid of the bit of tension to have a full conversation (A few specifically telling him not to worry about the shots) he headed out into the winter air with his friend Nick. After a few minutes of general conversation and Nick clearly trying to avoid the elephant in the room, Derill finally decided to address it,

"Look, I'm not upset alright?" He said with a bit of annoyance.

"Hrm-what?" Nick says acting like he didn't hear him like he always does whenever he didn't want to talk about something.

"It's just a game, I'm not going to get all depressed like my life just ended because of a freethrow. I'm not a crybaby or a sore loser."

"So..you aren't upset?" Nick asked almost condescendingly.

"No." Derill stated a bit more harshly than he should have.

"Cause it doesn't seem like you're not upset." Derill rolled his eyes but before he could say anything his friend continued, "Don't worry dude. Lots of people miss game winners, look at Michael Jordan, he missed nine."

"Did that help Nick Anderson at all?" Derill asks to simply undermine his statement. Nick Anderson was an NBA player who was tasked with shooting 4 freethrows to have his

team win the game. If he made just one, they'd win and not go into overtime. Somehow he missed all four and his team got beat in overtime. That game affected his entire career.

"Besides the point." Nick tries to say.

"I'm not mad about losing the game alright? We've got plenty more games," Derill states, "I just can't stand the feeling of letting everyone down you know?"

"You didn't let ev-" Nick tries to say and then realizes the uselessness of that false statement. "Well it's not like you did it on purpose, I mean if Lucky didn't miss that rebound-"

"If I didn't miss." Derill stated under his breath.

"I heard that." Nick states and then his eyes widen for a moment. Derill looked at him puzzled and Nick finally shouted, "Shit man, look, A shooting star." He pointed. Derill turned and was sure enough greeted by the bright shine of a fiery like thin light gliding quickly across the sky. "Make a wish."

"What are we, five?" Derill asks sarcastically.

"Yup. I wish for a million dollars, no, shit, I wish I got a D1 scholarship to Duke."

"I don't think you're actually supposed to say what you wish for." Derill chuckles.

"Whatever. What did you wish for then?"

"I didn't. You know a shooting star is just a meteorite entering the atmosphere right?"

"No. What would you wish for?"

Derill looked up at the shooting star and easily thought, "I wish I were a better teammate." Soon after the shooting star faded off.

"Well?" Nick asked impatiently.

"I wish I made those freethrows."

"Bah, hit the next ones. " Nick says once again returning to trying to take Derill's mind off the event.

Rather than go home right away Derill decided to go to the local 24/7 athletic center. They had an open indoor basketball gym where no one in the right mind would be playing at on a late Friday night. Since he always kept practice gear in his car he figured he'd use the time to just take his mind off things. As he entered the gym, all white with an old hardwood floor that creaked whenever a step was taken, he could see the usual turnout around this time, just him, just how he liked it. As he took a step forward on the freethrow line wearing a plain white t-shirt and black basketball shorts with a white trim, he couldn't help but be relieved by not having to shoot with all the pressure on his shoulders.

He took a deep breath, two dribbles, and rose to his toes while releasing his ball and-SWISSH-. The ball didn't even hit the rim, straight through the basket. All Derill could do was shake his head in disbelief, "Now where was that an hour ago?" He said

and then chuckled at his terrible luck. As he took a step forward he couldn't help but notice the uncomfortable feeling of restraint coming from within his shoes. He bent down and retied his shoelaces thinking that he simply tied them too tight and picked up the ball before doing a few dribbling drills and shoot around for twenty minutes he felt the effects of the game finally catching up with him, he was exhausted. He went to the side of the old court where he had placed his stuff against a wall and as he sat down breathing another heavy sigh, this time more from fatigue than disappointment. He set the ball to his side and began to take off his shoes so he could get his winter gear back on however upon feeling the relief of freeing his cramped feet he noticed little black nubs stuck out from the tips of the cotton of the sock and remnants of the torn fabric remained but hung loosely in a soft white fuzz. A little in disbelief, thinking it was just from fatigue, he moved his toes and watched as the black nubs moved along with them. He bent down and felt the dull tips and felt how they were each connected to his nails. He was baffled as he drew the conclusion that they were indeed his nails but now looked more like dull claws on both his feet. He was so surprised at the strange discovery that he was at a loss for words.

Almost as if on queue the black nubs began to grow, as well as his entire foot. Slowly more of the hardened black nails began to poke through the fabric becoming longer and sharper with every passing second, creating a crackling sound as new tissue was added to make the claws even stronger. Eventually the cotton fabric lost its battle and gave away, tearing apart to reveal the top half of his right foot which had begun to sprout a thick black hair all around; the foot itself kept growing and crackling against the hardwood floor and his left foot began to follow the same pattern as his right one, growing and shredding the fabric of the sock to reveal sharp inch long jet black claws.

Despite witnessing the transformation right in front of him Derill was still in a state of repudiation. He wasn't in pain, thank goodness, but it felt every second that past it felt like he would lose control of the changing muscle, they'd lock up and cramp for a second then release and then repeat the same pattern, each wave a little more intense and transforming more than the next. He felt a buzzing sensation, the kind you get when a body part falls asleep, on areas where thick black fur began to grow.

The tops of his feet were covered with it, including his toes, and he could also feel it growing on his legs. His heart began to beat faster as he slowly came to grips that what he was seeing was very real and he could only stare in a state of fear as the nails on his hands began to harden and sprout outwards. Natural reaction told him to try and push them back in, but he didn't dare go anywhere near those claws that looked as sharp as butcher knives.

He didn't know what to do as the tips of his fingers and palm began to cramp and push out; should he yell for help or run and hide? He didn't want to change like this but he didn't want to get in trouble with the police or any other agency either. He could only mutter panicked expletives to his himself as the skin from fingertips and hands

began to take on rough leather like texture and turn into a dark black color, much like his nails. He could feel the exact same changes happening to the tips of his toes as they formed toepads, the top of his mid-sole, and his heel, which had torn through the restraining cotton fabric of his socks. Black hair, now taking on a fur like appearance, began to spread all across him and he groaned as his shirt became tighter and tighter with all the growing hair, as well transforming muscles. While unknown to him, his eyes changed color to an ice blue; his nose had begun to make changes of its own. His sense of smell was beginning to magnify every second as his nose crackled and crunched as if someone was breaking crackers for their chili right in front of his face. It lifted up on its own and began to take on a pointed edge.

This made him bring both handpaws to his face as it seemed to push outwards and he was becoming overwhelmed with all the new scents; The old hardwood floors and the dust that collected on the sides, his own scent from sweat and his paws as canines sweated from them, the material of his clothes, and even scents from outside made their way to him. While he was lost in a state of curious astonishment from all the unfamiliar scents, he hadn't noticed the dental work that was being done to him. His canine teeth sharpened into fangs and his molars began to sharpen as if they were filed down. His tongue began to elongate and while his hands covering his mouth prevented its escape, it didn't prevent its growth into becoming canine like.

His cheeks bulged from its size, much to his surprise and he was forced to breathe from his nose, which kept magnifying in scent, making him lost in the curiosity of "what is that?". He let go of his face, now pushing out into a muzzle and let his tongue sort of hang; he now looked like a panting wolf as his ears stretched out into a point, magnifying the sound of the buzzing lights as well as letting sounds from outside the gym be heard.

He closed his eyes as he was overwhelmed with all the new senses but this was short lived as he they shot open he was forced to lean against the wall and inhale a huge breath of air as his fur covered chest pushed outwards, ripping his shirt apart to the point where it only hung loosely on his shoulder while the rest of the material fell to the hardwood. He made a mix of a yell and a growl in sheer shock as he looked down at his changed body, his muscles now more revealed as canines had little to no body fat. His heart kept racing and he was so preoccupied with what was happening in front of him, he hadn't noticed the giant tail ripping through the back of his pants; becoming pinned between him and the floorboards, its only way to grow was against the floor and towards the front as if he were sitting on it.

As the last of the black fur covered his face he felt an urge building within him, as if to yell out a giant 'What the fuck' from the transformation that just took place and as it built up with every breathe he took, he was beginning to think he'd go insane if he didn't do something. He took a deep breath but rather than a yell of panicked hysteria escaping his throat it was instead replaced by a giant thundering howl that probably

radiated across the facility, and possibly even outside of it. He knew it wasn't human and wrong, but it felt so good. It was as if all of his anxiety and fear were just relieved with that one howl to the world and he could finally calm down.

After a few seconds of being put in a relaxed state of being, he noticed that he didn't feel exhausted anymore; However whether this an effect from the transformation or the fact that he just went through a traumatic experience was an uncertainty. The fact that he had complete control over himself and his mind was the same which was a big relief, he didn't want to spend the rest of his life as a monster. Still, he knew he couldn't go out in public, let alone home, like this, and this worried him greatly. He looked over his hands; he gulped as he looked at his own claws. They could really hurt someone if he wasn't careful, more so anyone who saw them would run for the hills. He tugged at the black hair that was officially connected to him and made it feel like he was wearing his winter clothing already. He touched his new shiny black nose was visible in front of him and the bridge of his muzzle that made it so he had to turn whenever he wanted to look downwards in front of him, which was a hassle since he was trying to observe his chest that had expanded into a barrel like shape that canines have.

His stomach seemed to be nothing but abs from the growth in muscle, which was true for his arms as well as they had increased in both size and in tone. He wasn't hulking, which he was relieved by, but he was much stronger than before. Lastly as he tried to ignore his new tails existence, though it swayed in front of him on the ground mockingly, he looked at his newfound footpaws that were incapable of wearing shoes due to their size, as well as the sharp claws that would shred any material placed before them. He only sighed and placed his handpaws on top of his new mane that had grown from his head hair down to his now muscular and fur covered neck. Upon shifting his body position the floorboards creaked louder than usual and this was due to his immense growth in weight from the new found features his body now had.

He panicked, what if someone saw him like this, a big black werewolf. What if he spent the rest of his life like this? He couldn't attend school being a hazard (as well as distraction) to everyone, what workplace would even hire him? What girl would date him? What would his parents think? Typical and rather naïve highschool worries flooded his mind and rather than sit there and sulk he decided he'd have to get help from at least one person he could trust. He reached for his gym bag and upon opening it up to search for his cell phone he accidentally ripped off the whole top. He stared wide-eyed at what he'd just done and couldn't help but imagine accidentally doing that to someone.

He searched, more carefully, for his phone, but his claws kept tearing through the clothing he had as well as the bag itself. Finally after accidentally destroying everything he found his cellphone. As carefully as he possibly could, almost desperately, he pressed the power button, which lit up the screen. His ears perked as he could hear the frequency of the lights. Very slowly and carefully, he used one claw to ever so lightly tap

the button on the screen that could be used to make calls -CRRACK- the whole screen cracked from the force and Derill could only watch in disbelief. Regardless, the phone was still functional and went to voice chat so he wouldn't have to press any more buttons, (Not that the phone would be able to take it.)

"Please say a command." The automatic voice in the phone stated.

"Rargh Raick." Derill ordered and then covered his mouth. Did that mix of a growl and bark really just come out of his mouth?

"I'm sorry, I did not understand. Please say a command." The phone repeated.

"Crahw, Wrhick." It was so hard to speak with this muzzle. Everything came out as a bark or garbled growl.

"I'm sorry, I did not understand that. Please say a command."

Derill tried more slowly, "Carhh, Whnick."

"Did you say, Call Nick?" The phone asks.

Derill was relieved to hear that the phone actually managed to understand him.

"Rhyess." He growled unintentionally.

"Please say a command." The phone once again repeated.

Derill growled in frustration and gave up, he tapped number 3 on the digital dial pad and the screen cracked all the way and turned black. It was officially a broken smartphone but the order managed to go through.

"Calling Nick." The phone stated and the frequency of ringing radiated through Derill's pointed ears. After three rings Derill thought he wasn't going to answer but instead was greeted by Nick's voice.

"Okay, ignore the Facebook post dude, people are assholes." His voice sounded a bit worried and the sound of a keyboard being typed on was heard in the background.

"Rhack, Ra-" Derill was in the middle of his sentence before he questioned what Nick had just said. He simply shook it off, it wasn't important now and the extra pause gave him time to find a way to adjust his long canine tongue so his words weren't mangled.

"Nick," He said in a deep and somewhat monstrous voice, "Come to the Faith Center." He was surprised he managed to get that out.

"Hrm-what?" Nick asked, "It's midnight and there's no party and it's cold as fuck outside, the only place I'm going is bed dude." Derill could hear him yawn after saying that. "And what's with your voice?"

"It's an emergency." Derill accidentally let out a growl.

"Geesh, alright, calm down." Nick sighed, "What happened?"

"I..You..You just have to see for yourself." Derill says as his tail behind him wagged mockingly as if to say, 'Look what you are now. Everyone will be afraid of you.'

"...Someone better be dying." Derill could hear him moving and getting dressed, "I'll be there in ten minutes."

The minutes that passed were the longest of Derill's life, he sat there for a while with his heart racing as he contemplated how he was supposed to live his life as a giant

werewolf. He wondered if his parents would disown him or if some government would kidnap and experiment on him in some secret facility somewhere. It didn't take long for these silly thoughts to be shot down but the worry of having all eyes on him the rest of his life was too much to the point that he became anxious. He couldn't sit still and tried to get up, using the wall for support, but immediately fell forward, catching himself on all fours and cracking the floorboard a bit from his weight. His claws accidentally dug into the floorboards and he could only stare in a state of fear. Here he was, a giant wolf on all fours; if people weren't running for the hills when he was sitting, they definitely would be now if he had to walk around like this. He tried again to stand up, it felt like his feet were on stilts and he had to balance.

After a few tries, he managed to be able to stand up but just for a few seconds. It was like he was a toddler learning how to walk all over again. After eight minutes of 'walking practice' he finally got the hang of balancing himself on two's and taking a few steps, using the wall for support, but the practice was cut short as a new scent entered his nostrils. He sniffed the air, on instinct, as the scent became stronger and he heard the sound of footsteps coming his way. By this time Derill was on the other side of the gym, right of the doors, so he wasn't visible to anyone who was entering. Nick walked in, looking at his phone at first and then looking at the gym, noticing the shredded bag on the other side of the court and lots of large claw marks all over the floor and wall.

With a puzzled expression on his face, he walked towards the destroyed material and picked up Derill's destroyed phone. Derill watched, unsure of what to say at first, so he slowly walked on all fours to not startle him but the sound of the floorboards creaks were what gave him away.

Nick slowly turned, "Dude if you say you're not upset and then rage at least tell me befo-" His eyes shoot open and his jaw drops down as he sees the big beast in front of him with ice cold blue eyes piercing his soul.

Derill could hear Nick's heart racing and see the fear written all over his face,

"Wait-Wait!" Derill tries to say but Nick was already panicking.

"Get away from me!" He turned to run but the only exit was behind the monster. "What did you do to Derill!? You're not going to get me!" He stutter-steps, a move used commonly to escape defenders in both football, soccer, and basketball, and goes left, but immediately trips on one of Derill's large claw marks in the floor and faceplants onto the hardwood with a loud thud.

Derill knew the seriousness of the situation but after seeing his best friend clumsily faceplant onto the floor he burst out into laughter- but in this form, because of his deep and bestial voice, it sounded somewhat demonic. Derill couldn't help himself as he laughed hard, which caused Nick to turn around angrily, rubbing the side of his face. He finally managed to put two and two together, though, his eyes were still wide from shock.

“Yeah, laugh it up Dallon. Christ! Since when the fuck were you a fucking werewolf!? You scared the shit out of me!” He lies back, still on the floor, breathing a huge sigh of relief that he wasn’t about to be devoured alive. He was in just as much of disbelief Derill was in.

Derill’s laughter began to die down as he was going to try and explain what happened, “I did-“ He started.

“God, you look like the big bad wolf with basketball shorts on!” Nick sits up in both fear and awe. “Have you always been one?!”

“No.” Derill growls back accidentally.

“I didn’t even know those things were fucking real!” Nick kept staring at Derill wide-eyed however whenever Derill made the slightest movement Nick tensed up with uneasiness and fear.

“Same.” Derill stated and used the wall for support as he got on two’s and tried to help Nick up.

Nick was hesitant but slowly came to accept that the menacing creature was his best friend in both mind and heart. He accepted his aid and was helped back to his feet. But he held onto to Derill’s hand, examining it- examining him curiously, as humans are curious about what they fear most.

“Jesus...did it hurt?” He asks.

Derill shook his head, he was much more at ease from his panicked state from ten minutes ago.

“I mean holy shit, look at these things man.” He gestures to the giant claw marks on the ground. “Were you bitten?”

“No.”

“Is your mom one?”

“No, and why my mo-“ Derill shook his head, “No, this didn’t happen until now.” He got a little bit of pride in the fact that he could at least talk once again, but it still felt strange to have to bunch his tongue up like that.

“Did you fuck one?” His eyes shoot open, “Holy fuck! Was Meredith a werewolf!?”

“God no.” Derill snarls and goes back to being on all fours, pacing around. “We broke up before the season started, I think I would have known by now.” Derill growls.

“Well then, what the fuck!?” Nick asks, still staring at Derill. “It’s not even a full moon outside!”

“After the game I came straight here, and after shooting around I just turned into this.” Derill states and accidentally gets side tracked in taking in the scents all around him to get a sense of the surrounding area.

“...What about the shooting star?” Nick questions, “Did you wish for this?”

“One, shooting stars don’t work; and two, no! Why the hell would I wish for this!? I don’t want to spend my Senior year a canine monster!” He growls harshly.

“Well what *did* you wish for?” Nick asks.

"I don't know, I... wished that I was a better teammate. What does this have to do with anything?"

It took a moment of brief silence but then Nick began to laugh while Derill starred in a bit of annoyance.

"Oh shit haha." Nick chuckled with a bit of amazement, "I figured it out ha. You are so lucky I pay attention in Ms. Lewis's class."

"What?" Derill sighed.

"You wished to be a better teammate right?" He starts.

"Yeah?" Derill would have raised an eyebrow if he still had them.

"Well what team do you play for?"

"The Southeast Lobos... This going somewhere?"

"Well you wished you were a better teammate, by saying that you wish you were a better Southeast Lobo. Lobo is Spanish for Wolf and Southeast are where the black wolves are." Nick laughed.

"You can't be serious." Derill growled.

"Don't worry, there's plenty of teams you could play for now. New Mexico Lobos for college and if you want to go to the NBA you could always be a mascot for the Minnesota Timberwolves." Nick joked and kept laughing.

"Dude this is serious!" Derill snarls. "What am I going to do!? I can't go home like this, my parents will freak! You said it yourself- it's not even a full moon. What if I don't ever change back?"

Nick jumped at Derill's snarl but then went back to his laid back state of mind, trying to play it off, "Will you relax? Look... My parents are out of town for their anniversary, you can stay the night at my place."

Derill had forgotten that Nick was going to throw a house party on Saturday and he had the house to himself, well, aside from his little sister who he bribes to keep secrets.

"We'll figure out if you're stuck like this in the morning, it's not like worrying about it now is going to do anything." Nick reassured.

"How am I supposed to get out of here without being seen?"

"It's midnight and it ain't the 90's, this place is dead as fuck." Nick gestures around him,

"Who exactly would see you?"

"And your sister?"

"Fast asleep, and she's six, no one's going to believe a word she says anyway. Just don't go around breaking everything or tearing shit up and you'll be fine... and don't attack me." He says with a bit of worry in his voice.

"I won't." Derill says with the same frustrated tone he used when he restated that he wasn't upset after the game.

"Alright then Mr. Wolf, let's go." Nick says.

"Don't call me that." Derill says reluctantly.

It was tricky trying to fit into Nick's small car while Nick gathered his things and put them in the trunk. Sitting in the front seat was out of the question because it didn't go back far enough and it was hard to find a comfortable position in the back seat without his big hind paws sticking out the window. After a few minutes, Derill managed to twist himself so he was somewhat comfortable in the back seat but his tail kept swiping at Nick's face, much to his dismay, and the scents of everyone who had ridden or driven the vehicle swarmed Derill's nostrils.

After an eight-minute drive and Derill ducking every time a car passed them, they finally arrived at Nick's house. Nick wasn't exactly middle class, but he wasn't in the poor house either. His house was adequate for a family, they had enough to be comfortable, and though parts of the house did have wear and tear damage, it still looked like a decent place. There was already snow on the ground and Derill felt paranoid before getting out of the car; he didn't want to leave giant paw prints behind on a trail to the front door of the house. After a bit of convincing from Nick, Derill hurried out of the car and to the porch, trying to stay out of any possible sight. Nick stayed behind for an extra minute to cover the tracks Derill left and he reluctantly walked to the front door.

"Gah, it's cold as shit. Must be nice to have all that hair." He says through his winter coat.

"Trade it for yours." Derill joked.

"Nah, I like being human." Nick said as he opened the front door and the two quickly walked in to escape the outside. As Nick shivered for a moment and turned on the light to the hallway, Derill could only stare at the little girl with the same colored hair as Nick who watched them. He immediately caught her scent the moment the door was closed.

"Doggy!" The little girl exclaimed and rushed over to Derill, hugging him tightly and petting him. Derill wasn't sure wasn't sure what he was supposed to do and he was terrified of accidentally hurting her.

"Erin? What are you doing up?" Nick scolded her, "Do I have to tell mom and dad you're misbehaving?" He was trying to keep it tame, but Derill could see that Nick was just as terrified that she had discovered Derill.

"No." She says pleadingly, "I really had to use the bathroom and you left and it was scary and-."

"Eesh Alright alright...Erin, listen to me. You can't tell anyone what you saw, okay?"

"Why?" She asks confused, still petting Derill.

"Cause if you tell people, well then..." He looked at Derill a little baffled, "Then uh, doggy will go to the pound and everyone will be really sad."

Derill squinted his ice blue eyes at Nick, who could only shrug.

"Oh... okay." She nods.

"Now go back to bed." Nick ordered.

She slowly did as told and headed to the stairs, giving Derill one last look before heading up them.

“Doggy will go to the pound?” Derill asked.

“Hey, it’s true isn’t it?” Nick chuckled.

Derill growled, but playfully.

The two headed up the stairs and down the hallway to Nick’s room that was covered in dirty clothes and his natural scent was strong. It wasn’t overwhelming but it was enough to make it seem like he was in a gym locker room. Nick immediately went to his closet and pulled out a black comforter, and after moving some clothes around and clearing an area, he laid it down next to the bed, which was in the middle of the room. The walls had faded blue paint all around it and the floors were polished hardwood, like a basketball court. On his walls were a few posters of models, an area where all his awards were, a shelf that held his trophies, and underneath were medals. At the corner of his room, opposite of the bed was a desktop, its light still on from recent use and next to that was a window that showed the street they lived on. On the opposite side was his closet with white doors.

“Sorry about the mess, I wasn’t expecting I’d have someone over tonight...well actually I did, but she’s out of town too.” He says and takes off his coat, throwing it in his closet on top of all his basketball shoes. He sits down on his bed and grabs a pillow, setting it down on the comforter for Derill.

“Yeah.” Derill goes to the makeshift bed and lays down, but not before accidentally tearing apart a shirt that was left at the door. He was thankful Nick didn’t see that.

“Nothing seems to have gone right tonight.” He says sullenly, staring at Nick’s ceiling as the events of the night replayed in his head.

Nick kicks off his shoes and changes into basketball shorts and a tanktop. “What are you talking about?”

Derill took notice of the new scents and it slowed his response, “Well, had I just made those shots I wouldn’t be like this.” Derill growled to himself, “We would have won the game and I wouldn’t have disappointed everyone. We’d all be at a party right now, instead, I blew it and let everyone down...guess this is what I get.” Derill sulked.

Nick crawled onto his bed while Derill spoke and immediately after he replied, “Dude, we don’t like you just because we win basketball games. I mean - winning’s nice, but that’s fucking stupid. Yeah, you can say it’s your fault we lost but I guaran-fucking-tee you every single person in that gym thought, ‘Glad it’s not me’. Did I want you to hit that shot? Yeah. Was I disappointed we lost? Sure, but it’s not like you didn’t fucking try and it’s not like I can’t ever trust you again- that’s just dumb. And shit, you think everyone would be happy? What about the dude who fouled you and put you at the line in the first place? How do you think he would of felt if you hit both those freethrows and won, he’d of felt just like you did.”

Derill is silent as Nick speaks, his ears picking up everything.

“You didn’t have to wish to be a better teammate, you’re already the best teammate anyone could ask for. If it weren’t for you, we wouldn’t even be this good, you know that? Don’t tell anyone I said this, but we play like shit without you, the chemistry ain’t there; that’s why Coach keeps you on the floor the whole game, you play for the team and not yourself alright?”

Derill listened to everything Nick had to say and the more he spoke the more Derill began to realize that he was right. He shouldn’t belittle himself for what happened; his team loved playing with him for who he was and not just what he did. It was the reason they tried to console him after the game, though it fell on deaf ears, it was the reason he was here with Nick now.

“So yeah, losing sucks, let it suck for a little bit but stop doubting yourself, alright? Whether you make 100 game winners or miss 100 game winners, whether you’re covered in fur or not, you’re still my friend. We got your back.” Nick states and turns in his bed. Derill did the same thing only his eyes were open as he reflected. He felt an enormous weight be lifted off his shoulders and began to take on a whole new outlook. Finally he could put the game behind him and move on.

For the first time he gave a wolfish grin as he laid there thinking to himself. Over time he’d lost sight of what it meant to be apart of a team and had began to act as if he didn’t perform then he was failing them, but now he saw that being a team wasn’t about performing or underperforming, success or failure, it was simply about being there for one another, working together, and being there for the good and the bad. His mind went back to the transformation he underwent, and he found it ironic that he first had to turn into a creature that balanced on isolation and cohesiveness, to discover what it meant to be apart of a team. He wondered if he were indeed going to change back in the morning, but like Nick said, they’d cross that bridge when they got there. For now, he simply closed his ice blue eyes and welcomed the warmth of slumber.

“Thanks Nick.” He said, but upon looking he found that the teen was fast asleep.