

With a deep yawn, Trevor woke up to the sound of the radio on his alarm, lulling him from a dream. He had been in the middle of a sunny field, lying back with no cares in the world. Rested for the first time in forever. It had been a nice dream, he recalled. But it was time for him to get back to reality, and he had to go to work. The restaurant wouldn't open itself, after all. And no one could do it the right way more than him.

Yawning, Trevor became aware of how dry his mouth was like he had been drinking excessively last night. It was weird, something he normally partook in, but last night he had simply been too tired to bother with. He'd come home around 10 pm last night and passed out to his best recollection. Still, there was no denying the taste in his mouth was off, and running his tongue around his mouth, Trevor soon found it was rougher than before, as though coated in minor spines. A bizarre sensation, like he's been sucking on too many sweets or had some spicy food. Oven-cooked pizza and scrouging work scrapes had been all he'd eaten the past few days, and Trevor did his best to put it out of his mind. Was he getting sick? Work wouldn't accept him calling him. No one else could open the restaurant as fast as him, after all!

Some of the words on the radio, usually set to static, caught his attention, and Trevor's ears twitched. "-Reports state anyone experiencing symptoms should stay inside. The full scope of this epidemic is unknown. For now, it seems to only be affecting certain individuals, but there are always chances of a spread-" With that, Trevor turned the phone off, not having much time to get ready for work and not wanting to get distracted. They were simply talking about the pandemic. Over the last year, things had almost entirely returned to normal. Why they were talking like it was yesterday, he had no time to really consider.

Going about his morning routine, Trevor was a little surprised when taking a piss that his cock seemed a little redder, as though he'd chuffed it recently. And something pricked his fingers like he had something crusted to its surface. He paid it little mind, however, thinking he'd simply napped in his sleep or the like. A call to shower, but nothing he had time for this morning. Hell, more like a call to get laid if he was having wet dreams, but there was hardly the time for that either! Even his balls felt a little heavier, but he had no time or energy to deal with them. Maybe they wouldn't schedule him for a couple of days, and he could finally take the time to rest and recover. That wasn't happening any time soon, not with all the short staffing as of late!

There was something pungent about the scent of his piss, but there were a million other little factors that could account for that as he relieved himself. It wasn't booze, at least, though usually, he didn't smell this strongly when he went to take a piss. It was hardly the time to care, not that he had the time or energy to get to a doctor. Best to let those things sort themselves out.

Going to grab his work uniform, he was all at once hit by the smell of it. It had been a day or two since he'd washed his last set of work clothes, but he wasn't expecting it to smell so

rank. There was nothing to be done for it, no time to wash it before his morning shift. He wasn't the only one to go in with dirty clothes as of late, and what were they going to do, fire him? Have the franchisee open the store himself? HA! *That* was rich!

Pulling his dirty pants on, the smell bothering him but nothing to be done about it, something seemed to catch on the back of it, making it impossible for him to get them over his tailbone. Struggling as he was, the thing on his back did not relent, making him think he might have busted his tailbone or the like. It didn't hurt, thankfully, but the more he focused on it, the more he was sure it actually *twitched*, making Trevor nearly jump back. Fuck, he was overtired to be imagining something like that!

Trevor's shift opening the store started at 8 am, though generally, he tried to get there as early as the bus would allow. He just hoped the extra minutes he got there early were logged on his timesheet, though he never had the energy to look. His paychecks were decent as of late, they paid the bills, that was what mattered most. He would open the store, clean up the mess left by the closers, and prepare all the ingredients for the pizzas and other sports bar/family dining foods his franchise was known for. Things he would never eat, limited pallet as he had, but it was something he had mastered the art of prepping. Something that his years of college had no contribution to, but in this economy, it was to be expected, and he felt lucky to even have a job in the first place.

As much as he knew he was being taken advantage of for his work, Trevor still maintained a sense of pride over his ability to run the kitchen, at least in the morning. He didn't have the mental fortitude to handle the abuse that came with being a front-line worker, though it didn't stop management from trying, wanting to make him as well-rounded a tool as possible. Trevor resented that. Why these sorts of jobs never left well enough alone, he had no idea, but it was a tiresome process. Inevitably, they would train someone else to open only for them to fall well below Trevor's standards and leave the restaurant in ruin for the evening shift. Why they never learned, Trevor had no idea. The argument of 'what if he needed time off' was moot; it wasn't like Trevor had a life outside the store. There was no time, stubborn as he was about making sure his store was pristine.

At this point, he had worked six days in a row, many of them twelve-hour shifts to make up for the lack of staff and the insane guest counts their restaurant had been drawing in lately. Trevor, not to put too much pride in his abilities, was sure it was his efforts that kept the restaurant. After all, with sufficient supplies ordered, prepared, and ready to go, the efficiency of the entire staff was boosted to the point that customers left satisfied. He was literally the backbone of the store, and everyone knew it. Sure, a day off would be nice, but there was none of that for the foreseeable future.

The bus ride to work was strangely quiet, the driver not even looking back to acknowledge him. Trevor preferred it that way, going into the listen to podcasts and keeping to himself. However, to his surprise, sitting down gathered quite a few looks from other passengers, to the point that some got up and left. Sure, Trevor knew he smelled a little ripe, but there was little chance of the smell being the cause of their trepidation. Then, what were they on about? He wanted to take his headphones off to hear what they were whispering about, but he seemed to miss his ears when going to reach for them. Oh well, it was probably for the best not to listen. They would likely just say something to upset him anyway.

Tired as he was, Trevor was thankful he'd left early enough to grab a coffee at his favorite chain on the walk to work. No one else was in line, which was thankful. He even recognized the barista, someone he got coffee from often. She wasn't looking up at him as he ordered, and looking down, she accepted his debit before giving him a confused state. A look of shock crossed her features, as though there was something wrong with his face. Surely, Trevor looked haggard, and there was every chance he really did look off. But for that kind of reaction? He wanted to look in a mirror though didn't have time. Besides, in his focus to get to work, it was forgotten, only a rather peculiar itching across his face enough to denote there was anything wrong with it.

Putting all that behind him, Trevor unlocked the door with his key, something he was thankful to have. If he needed to wait for the manager every morning, it would be hell on his productivity. His fingers seemed a little stiff, and opening the door was troublesome with the key not quite going in the way he'd hoped. But he managed it, the door opening rather harder than he was used to, as though he'd put on some decent mass for the weight of it. Hell, if he thought he even had a spare minute, he might consider flexing in the mirror. But there was a store to open, and work that needed to be done before the restaurant could take on customers.

Taking a sip of coffee, a sharp pain burred from his canines, as though he'd the gums were inflamed. The pain was intense, leaving Trevor to lament the likelihood he needed to see a dentist, something for which he did not have coverage. Thankfully, the pain soon abated, as though the tooth had settled in his gums. The taste of blood was on his lips, and it grew worse as he closed his mouth, canines larger and shaper and cutting into his lip. The pain lasted only a few minutes, as though the wound had been felt. Trevor was left panting, not only from the pain but from the heat in the room. Was it always so hot in here? Sure, it was a kitchen, but he hadn't even turned anything on yet!

There was no time to check in the mirror with all he still had to do to get the store ready. Heating up the ovens, restocking the lines, boiling water for precooked pasta, a variety of tasks that should have taken several people to properly achieve. Not to mention being alone in a kitchen was a safety hazard, no one to report if something went wrong. But with the

unwillingness to keep labor income below profits the store was making, Trevor was the only one they allowed into the store at such an hour. Not that he cared, he was more than capable of opening the store by himself and even getting ahead on several tasks, to the delight of his bosses. He would never allow himself to fall behind or to need help. He had his pride, damnit!

Even as he started to go about his tasks, a pungent scent settled into his nose, one bothering his sinuses to the point it was impossible to ignore. It was garbage, waste, and a dozen things that ticked him off and tickled his nose. He went to rub it, feeling a stinging moist texture, and that it was flatter on his features than he was sure it should be. But there was little time to concern himself with it, taking some time to get used to the intensity of the odors to the point he was able to put it from his mind.

The itching under his uniform, however, was not so easily ignored. It was as though ants were crawling in his shirt to the point where he wanted to take it off. With the cameras running, there was no chance of that, so he forced himself to suffer, figuring it was simply the dirty clothing causing the itch. He was also noticeably overheated in the kitchen, not something unusual in and of itself, though the lack of sweat he was producing was. Trevor was left to pant, the motions shaking that damn growth against the back of his pants, something that was almost heavy now.

Lost in the bizarre irritations to his body, Trevor had forgotten to turn his music on to really get his tired sore body working today. Turning on the speaker, the sounds from the radio someone else had plugged in blasted through the restaurant. “We urge everyone with symptoms to call 311 non-emergency, not to panic, and report the specific symptoms. Services will be provided as soon as-” Trevor heard before turning it off. His ears reflectively twitched at the volume, annoyed by it as static filled the air and he pulled his phone, playing the familiar music that got him through the day. At least until the restaurant opened and he was forced to do his job with only the sounds of machines beeping and orders being shouted from the front of house staff. Ah well. Such was life. At least he could take pride in the fact he didn’t suck at his job!

As one of the early morning tasks, Trevor was to run trays of precooked chicken and burgers through the oven trays, getting them ready to be heated up on the fly. Why people would order that kind of food from what was generally a pizza place he had no idea. It was stupid, in his opinion, for people to order such cheap prepackaged food. But it wasn’t his business, beyond what he had to do to make sure they were ready for the cooks to serve to order. He had to precook them to temp, package, label, and date them, and make sure more than enough were ready for any rushes. After three years of doing it, Trevor considered himself an expert!

Yet, there was something about the scent of them this morning that made Trevor’s mouth water. Especially when the meat first went into the oven, when it was far too raw for him to eat.

It elicited a hunger in his belly, something he never felt in the mornings, usually too ill for him to eat. But right now, it was all he could do not to pull one out and eat it raw. Disgusting! And yet...He would have to pay for food, and the cameras were ever watching, so there was little to be done for it, even though he was in the restaurant by himself at this early hour.

Lost in thought as he was, Trevor found himself nearly falling over, as though his body was a little top-heavy, or perhaps his legs were shorter. Either way, it was harder to balance, making him think once more he was drunk or perhaps had simply hungover. No, that didn't make any sense, either. Right? The aches all over seemed to persist, and Trevor was once more aware of how heavy his balls were, and how weighty the growth on his back seemed to be. Hell, if he wasn't sure he could move it before, thinking about it caused the damn thing to *twitch*, something that should have alarmed him. But with so much work to do before opening...

Unlike the other changing, the persistent itching under his clothes was hard to ignore. It felt as though he was growing his beard at some sort of hyper speed, only all over and all at once. Worse, the hair top his head seemed much thicker, which shouldn't have been a surprise, given how long it had been since his last haircut. But it was too much for even that, getting into his eyes and making it impossible to see without moving it out of the way. With that in mind, Trevor moved to put on his hair net, the main priority not wanting to get hair in the food. Soon, however, he found his hair was too massive to be kept and worse than that, his fingers were stiff, nails catching in the fabric preventing from him managing such a thing. All he could do was hope his managers didn't notice, or that at least they could help him get it on when they got in!

The errant fibers of the hair net seemed to get caught in his ears as well, making them twitch unexpectedly. Though they were clearly in the wrong spot to get caught in such a way, Trevor could hardly bring himself to care, not when they seemed to be taking in sounds from the outside as well as in here. There was little traffic outside, even for the early hour, something that might have concerned him had he not been so preoccupied with his open. And the sensation of them twitching was bizarre in its own right, something he was sure he was not capable of before today. But, with all the stiffness and aches in his body, there was little to be done for it, no time to try and figure out what was wrong in the bathroom. He had a job to do, damnit!

Figuring if he was getting sick, he could at least put some gloves on, Trevor growled in an inhuman tone when he tried to work the latex over them. It was clear that even the largest size was insufficient for him to manage, his fingers thicker, if not shorter than he was used to. The skin on their tips was rough as well, though that was to be expected to some degree, given his work in a kitchen. But it was the nails at the end that kept poking at the tips which kept him from donning the protective wear. Trevor would have to manage to stay awake long enough after his shift to trim them!

With that, he went into the walk-in freezer to grab the rest of his produce to begin more prep. Yet, as he did so, the door caught on something swinging behind him, and Trevor let out an unexpected yelp, in a far deeper tone than he was accustomed to. It hurt like hell, as though he'd caught a finger in there. Looking back, what had to be a swinging tail reached out a foot behind him, itching as hairs grew from the tip. Trevor blinked a few times, glasses foggy from the cool air in the freezer. He must have been imagining things, he reasoned. No time to be worried about that now!

Another thing to add to the list of irritations were his shoes, something that had already been falling apart but now felt fit to burst, as though the balls of his feet had expanded within them. He wanted to kick them off, knowing he needed new footwear but was unable to afford them with his meager savings. All he could do was hope they held out at least till the end of the shift, though with the ever-increasing pressure within, that seemed less and less likely.

As Trevor exited the freezer, he became aware that he was still in the building alone, and that the manager had not come in yet. It was weird for her to be so late, Trevor having been here himself for almost an hour at this point. Part of his mind reflected on the words from earlier, how people were being advised to stay inside. But that was an old broadcast about covid, surely? The pandemic was as good as over. So then, what...?

All at once, a surge of electricity ran over him, muscles writhing under the skin in agony as the itching returned in spades. Trevor couldn't help but fall over as his hips made a sickening crunching sound. Reflexively holding his hands in front of him, Trevor was surprised the impact was minimal like padding had formed over the tips and palms to prevent injury. And his nails were nowhere to be found, as though they had been retracted into the ends of the blunt fingertips that remained. Trevor was instantly panicked at that, not from the changes themselves, but from the fact that if he couldn't stand up again, he couldn't get back to work! His perfect reputation would be ruined!

A groan escaped his lips as his tightening clothes grew more and more intense, ripping the seams and exposing swathes of tawny fur to the warm air. Yet, even as muscle and bone took on new shapes under the skin, Trevor could hardly bring himself to care, worried more about his inability to do his job. He would be fired for sure, he'd seen workers being fired for less. But they couldn't fire *him* of all people, right?! He was essential for this store to function properly!

Yet, the aches and pains preventing him from doing his job would not relent. At this point, he could see his nose in front of his face, like he had a blunt muzzle. Panting from the heat, he was aware his tongue was flatter, that his teeth were longer within. Ears twitching, it was akin to being in a dream like he was imagining this whole thing. That had to be it, right? It was getting so hard to think, like a heavy fog had descended over his thoughts. Even stranger was

when the colors of the room started to sharpen, even as the reds and greens faded and he was left looking out at the world through different eyes.

The sound of something crashing drew his attention just then, and Trevor looked up to see the tray of burgers had fallen out of the oven. Evidently, he had carelessly forgotten to put the guard up as he turned on the oven. Yet, rather than the usual panic over wasting food that would usually bother him, Trevor's mind could focus on only one thing. He was *starving*, and the burgers smelled heavenly to his new nose, drinking in the odor of meat. He could have done without them being so cooked, but it was enough that Trevor still wanted a taste. And despite every rational part of his mind telling him he could not eat any of the food without paying, it was getting harder and harder to justify such inclinations. After all, with all the hard work he'd done for the company all these years, maybe he'd finally earned a snack? He certainly needed one!

Padding towards the piping hot tray, Trevor found walking on all fours to be easier, as though his body was built for it. The clothes around his frame were tearing in several places at this point, hanging off him like rags as he moved, and shaking his massive frame immediately discarded what was left of his shift. Pants were kicked free as well, and Trevor struggled a little with his underwear, though with the positioning of his swollen testicles and the reformation of his hips, it was easier than he'd hoped it would be to be rid of them. Massive hind paws also soon did away with his shoes, but by this point, all that concerned him was the feast before him.

The burgers were still hot, of course, but his new tongue was made of sterner stuff. Taking one into his muzzle, the grease flowed over his tongue and lips and sent a contented growl through his being. There was delicious, and it took only a few bites to be done with one and to devour another. He was starving and felt he could eat the whole tray, but with no one else here, he was left to eat his fill, and get some much-needed rest afterward...

"There he is, don't move him!" Came the familiar sound of his manager, though sleepy as he was, Trevor could hardly raise his massive head in concern. He was relaxed, content, full, and happy. He had done his open, as much as he could with the sounds of the machine and the scents of food. And he'd been rewarded for his efforts. So there was little for him to be concerned about, right?

"He should still have some human intelligence, most subjects respond to the sounds of their own name, and most aren't hostile. I haven't dealt with anyone who turned into a lion before, though..."

“Trevor, right?” Came the familiar woman’s voice once more, one Trevor recognized as his manager. “Do you want to get up and come with us, boy? We have more burgers where that came from!”

Trevor could smell the nervousness in her voice, but it was of little concern. The words ‘lion’ came to his attention, and the faded part of his consciousness knew that to be true. It explained the paws, the tail, and the hair. Yet, he was a lion now, hadn't he always been? But how could a lion open a store? He would have laughed if he could!

Yet, one thing did stick out as he rose, the power in his body made aware as he padded toward the offering. More burgers would be just the thing, after all. He was a powerful beast that could eat a fair chunk of meat in one sitting, after all. And now that his opening was done, what did he have to worry about? Even someone taking pride in his work had to rest sometimes...