

The 21st Year

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Okay, birthdays are supposed to be special right? After all, they are the milestone of surviving another year in the crazy world and celebrating the day of your birth. If you think about it in general, certain birthdays always seem more important than others like your tenth, your thirteen, your sixteenth, your eighteenth and for good reason, with the milestone brings new change, possibilities, and perks. I get that sometimes these perks can be a bit exciting and sometimes even crazy, but let me tell you about my birthday today, my twenty first to be exact.

My name is Aaron Weber, and let me start off by saying that throughout all of my life I've loved to swim. Surfing, Water skiing, Deep sea diving, any activity that had to do with the ocean or other large bodies of water, I enjoyed. Maybe it was because I was born in a state next to the coast and spent a lot of my free time since age three hanging out with friends at the beach or maybe it was because my dad was a swim coach, but I was easily the best swimmer on the swim teams since grade school all throughout high school. I even broke the state records in the 50 and 100m freestyle but I preferred the distance races like the 1500m freestyle. Swimming was just always second nature to me and any excuse to stay in the pool longer was fine with me. Eventually the big university down in Florida gave me a scholarship, and that has brought me to where I am today.

I majored in journalism, don't ask, my dad talked me into it figuring that if somehow I didn't go pro (Like that was going to happen >.>) I could at least report about it from the sidelines. I was thrilled to be a student here and it didn't take long to earn a top spot on the team and win a title last year, however journalism has been slowly taking up all of my free time, leaving little to no time at all to go for a quick dip every once in awhile, and not swimming for a long period of time just didn't seem comfortable to me.

So here I am, a Junior, in the Fall semester of Journalism doing a report about our rather...expressive basketball coach, on my birthday no less. I sighed unentertained, sitting on the stadium bleachers observing the players practice. I fidgeted uncomfortably in the hard cramped seat and fiddled with the pencil I held. I'd been sitting there for hours waiting for this practice session to be over so I could enjoy my birthday, also my one day off from school during the week. The report itself was actually finished, with the way the coach acted it wasn't hard, but I needed tidbits from the players and a comment from the coach, typical journalist stuff.

"Alright, do something, show me what you got." The coach says playing defense on one of the players. The sounds of rubber shoes squeaking against the polished hardwood was heard. The player picked up the ball after taking three dribbles.

"What the f%\$# was that!?" The coach exclaimed. He turned to the shooting guard, my friend from middle school, Devin Walker. He was easily their best player, but rather than try his chances in the NBA draft he decided to stay his whole four years like me, "Walker did you see me? I was like, 'do something' and he didn't do s^%\$!" The coach stated. "That's why your ass don't play." He turns and announces to his players, "If your last name ain't Walker, and you shoot the ball, I'm sittin' your ass down!"

I face palmed, nearly dropping the journal from my lap, it was amazing that this school was a winning team with a coach like this.

"W-wait a minute, who the hell are yall?" The coach asked two players.

"We're the bench." One of the players responded.

"Man get the f%&^ off the court!" The coach ordered. The players reluctantly did as told. He went over to his tallest player, "Alright you big dumby, this is called, defense." He gets down in a basic defensive stance.

"Oh, okay." The player answers.

"You get your legs down like this, move your hands around..are you even getting this!?"

"Then I come up and shoot it right?" The player asks.

"Mother F%^\$#@ you on the bench, come up with that!"

"I thought I could shoot it?"

"Walker shoots!" The coach barks.

"Hey Coach what's this move you did?" Another player asks coming to him and getting into a basic defensive stance.

"Stupid mother..." He blows his whistle. "Practice is over!"

I finally drew a breathe of relief, the quicker these interviews were done, the quicker I could get out of here, unknown to me that the coach would rant the whole next thirty minutes. Finally at about noon, with my project finally finished, Devin and I exited the arena. He was much taller than me, being a star basketball athlete and all, so whenever we talked it seemed like he was always teasing me about my short height of 5'8".

The sun always felt irritable, unless I got out of the water or something along those lines, but just going out into the hot Florida sun was enough to make me frown. Today it seemed like the sun was a lot more irritable than other days, almost a bit too hot.

"You ain't gotta' work today?" Devin asked referring to my job as a lifeguard for the beach. He was half listening to music on his headphones and half listening to me while we walked on the sidewalk back towards the student side of the campus.

"Nope, I'm completely free." I said with a bit of pride, I couldn't even remember the last time I could say that.

"It's your birthday right?" He asked with his eyebrow raised.

I nod reminiscing for a moment on the past twenty one years, or at least the parts that I actually could reminisce about.

"Your twenty-one right?"

I nod again.

He smiles widely, "That's what I'm talkin' bout," He starts, clearly thinking of the fact that I could legally drink now, "You doing anything tonight?"

I think for a moment, earlier this morning he got a very strange voice mail of his parents saying they sent a package yesterday and were coming to the campus as fast as they could. They said it for his birthday, but they sounded more worried than actually happy. He didn't pay much mind to it, after all a visit from a parent was always nice once in awhile (He needed some gift money anyway).

"Well I'm heading down to the beach later if anyone wants to join-" I start.

"Alright, alright." Devin nodded his head like he was planning something. "Look, I'll grab few people, grab a few drinks, head down there, have ourselves a little paaartay." He says.

I chuckle at Devin's consideration, a beach birthday party? I hadn't had one of those since Junior year of high school.

"Hey don't over-do it." I TRY to warn him.

"Man our games not till Monday, it's Saturday, I'm oughta my mind tonight." He laughs.

"All for you homie."

"Gee Thanks." I sarcastically say, I just think he wanted an excuse to party tonight.

"You know why?" He starts, "Cause you my nigga." He jokes.

"Wow, I'm honored, really.." I say holding back a laugh.

"And if you were any bigger, you'd be my bigga nigga." He jokes referring to my size again.

I couldn't hold it anymore and we both laugh.

"Alright." He waves, "I'll catch you down there later." He says heading towards his dorm room building. "Ay' gurls, party at the beach."

"See ya." I shake my head.

After saying goodbye to Devin my mind thinks about the party that's gonna happen tonight excitedly, but before I could really think about it I realized that it was blazing hot outside, I felt like I was getting baked in an oven and hadn't notice that I'd been sweating the whole time. I made the conclusion that I needed to relax and take a shower back at my dorm room, this sun had drained me.

After what seemed like the longest, hottest, walk to the dorm room, since lots of people kept giving me happy birthday wishes, I finally made it to my room, feeling the cool rush of air conditioning. It was enough to make me sigh from relief again, but this was shortlived because right when I walked in, I saw my artist roommate, Partick, at our kitchen table eating something out of a package that had my name on it. Crumbs were falling to our hardwood floor, which I had just swept yesterday!

“Oh..” He quickly says trying frantically to swallow whatever was in his mouth, “Package for you-” A crumb flies right out of his mouth and lands on the floor. I close the door behind me, a bit annoyed by Patrick’s habit of being a hungry college kid.

“It’s from your parents.” He says trying to still make up for being caught red handed.

“Your mom made cookies.” He says holding up a bag of chocolate chip cookies. “Dude, I looove your mom’s cookies. So moist you know?” He grins jokingly.

“You went through my mail?” I asked irritated.

“Well your mom always sends you cookies when they send you stuff, and she said I could have some.” Patrick protests.

“That was one time.” I say.

“How was I supposed to know?” Patrick asks wide-eyed.

I just chuckle, it wasn’t a big deal, I just wish Patrick would think before listening to his stomach.

“Well what was in it?” I say as I take off my sandals and walk to the fridge to get a cold water bottle.

“There was a note.” Patrick gives the note to me and then inhales another cookie. As I begin to read it, Patrick summarizes it for me.

“They say for you to drink lots of water.” He says, I was way ahead of him on that one. I was already done with the water bottle I just got out the fridge and went to the sink for a refill.

“They also say that you should keep this with you.” Patrick looked confused and pulled out a metallic round collar. On it’s sides it looked like it had glass containers built in that looked like it held a liquid of some kind.

“Is this like a new drink hat?” Patrick asks putting it on his head. “Is that a new swimmers thing for oxygen or something?”

I look at the collar just as confused as Patrick was, while drinking my second bottle of water.

“I have no idea.” I say. He gives it to me for observation. I closely look at it, from what it looked like, it didn’t look like it’d been manufactured. It looked homemade and of high quality. Still, I had no idea what it did or what it was supposed to do.

“Why would they want me to carry this around?” I asked and Patrick just shrugged his shoulders.

“This looks like something your character wears.” I say to him jokingly. Patrick was always on this website for furies or something like that. I didn’t judge, seemed a lot more reasonable than taking pictures of your food than posting it online.

“What are you about to do?” Patrick asks curiously.

“Take a shower, sleep for awhile, and then head down to the beach.” I say heading into the room we had to share, though Patrick usually just fell asleep on the couch while watching TV.

“What’s going on down at the beach today?” He asked.

"What do you mean?" I say taking off my sweat-filled shirt in my room.

"It's all over Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Hash tag Bigpartyatbeach."

"I literally just told him ten minutes ago..." I say.

"What?" Patrick asked inquisitively.

"Nothing, it's my birthday and we're having a party at the beach." I go to the bathroom and turn on the shower water, just hearing the sound of the water running relaxes me a little. Even with all this relief my body still felt completely drained.

"Can I come?" Patrick asks.

"Sure the more the merrime..." My eyelids slowly fall over my pupils, I snap to when I nearly fall over. My heart skips a beat, I almost passed out!

"What?" Patrick asks. "Are you okay?" he asks from the kitchen.

"I'm fine.." I say, "I just slipped." I shook my head trying to wake myself up, what was going on with me? A good shower and a little rest should fix me right up, and that's exactly what I did. The shower cooled me off, I didn't feel overheated anymore when I got out but as soon as I made contact with my bed, after drying off, putting shorts on, and downing another two bottles of water as if they were shots, I fell asleep.

I didn't know exactly where I was, or why I was there, but I dreamed of being in the ocean, deep underwater to the point where the water was a very dark blue. I could see all the ocean's fish, traveling in schools and I could feel the refreshing water holding me, keeping me weightless like a feather in the air. I could hear the whale's underwater calls, the music of the ocean. I didn't need to hold my breathe here, it felt as if the water were oxygen to me. I was in a deep state of relaxation, at peace, I could have stayed there forever....

"DUDE WAKE UP!" Patrick splashes water across my face. I quickly, thinking that I'm at the pool for 5am workout, hop up. This makes Patrick jump, startled and splash the rest of the water on himself. I look around in a short state of panic but then relax when I see I'm in my room. Plus the water felt refreshing. "What's wrong?" I ask, Patrick better of had a good reason for doing this.

"It's six thirty!" Patrick exclaims, "I thought you had a heatstroke and died! You've been asleep for six hours." He looks at how wet he is and sighs.

"What?" I ask confused. Was this some kind of joke? Who falls asleep for six hours from a short nap. It barely felt like twenty minutes had passed. I check my phone on the drawer and sure enough, to my surprise, Patrick was telling the truth, it was six o' clock. My party started in an hour and I was no where near ready. On top of that there were over 297 text messages from different people wishing me happy birthday.

"Crud.." I say still feeling groggy.

"Are you sick?" Patrick asks.

"I don't know..." I say. I felt just fine this morning but it was as if as the day went on I felt worse and worse. Maybe I was coming down with something.

"Oh, you're parents called." He adds.

"Our dorm phone?" I ask.

"No your cell phone, I answered."

I give him a look as if to say, 'dude really?'

"They kept wanting me to make sure you were okay and that you should call them. Also they said you need to keep drinking water. What is with you and water?" Patrick questioned.

I didn't know the answer to that but water sounded very good right now. So over then next thirty minutes I swallowed down four bottles of water. Patrick watched amazed that anyone could drink that much.

"You know muscles are seventy-five percent water?" Patrick asks.

"What? Where'd you read that at?" I raise my eyebrow as I put on a white V-neck shirt over my favorite pair of swim trunks. I slide my black sandals on.

"It was a fitness article online. I want to get buff like you so I started researching diets and stuff."

I chuckled a bit embarrassed by the compliment.

"I want to turn this flab to ab." Patrick says holding his gut. "Then I'll get all the bitches."

"The bitches?" I ask, grabbing a couple of beach towels.

"Yeah, this is Florida! We have bad bitches and palm trees. Skinny bitches, Water bitches,-"

I half listen to Patrick's ramble about girls and I finish getting ready. I sent a text to my parents, letting them know that I was okay and got there, rather strange, package. After a few more minutes of making sure I had everything, Patrick and I left and headed to the beach. He went back in the room for something, but I didn't ask. It's Patrick, for all I knew he was bringing a sketchbook to the party.

* Ten minutes had passed and we arrived at the beach at around six-fifty. Thankfully during my time here I discovered a good spot on the beach, behind the run-down coast-guard station, that was a beautiful spot and had little tourists and kids running around since it was well hidden behind palm trees and the ruins of the abandoned coast guard station. Today there seemed to be no one there, which was perfect. No one shows up to a party at exactly the right time, and a party of this magnitude would require an open and undisturbed area. I smiled, the sound of the ocean was very soothing as the ocean tide went back and forth along the shoreline. I could see the small waves forming in the distance, crashing back into the water after forming its temporary water tunnel. It brought back memories from when I was a surfer. "Woah, this place is sweet!" Patrick exclaimed setting down his Bluetooth radio which began to play beach themed music. "How'd you find this place?" He asked me. "I found it one day just from swimming out too far. I saw it in the distance and just went to it." I answered. I finally couldn't contain my excitement anymore, I've been waiting all month this relaxing moment at the beach. Just to hear it's natural noise was as if it were just calling to me. I set the towels down and set my bag next to them. I wasn't worried

that anyone was going to steal anything, if anything I was more worried about sand getting in my spare clothes. I smiled eagerly and took off my white-V neck shirt and black sandals. It felt good to feel the warm sand between my toes once again.

"Y-you're going in now?" Patrick asked me nervously.

"Yeah, is something wrong?" I asked.

"What if the girls come? I'll be the only one here." He says.

"Well then show them those abs." I joke and then walk towards the ocean tide. Just feeling the cooling water rush over my feet were enough to send chills through me. As a swimmer I was used to the feeling of first touching the water, that hesitation. However I eventually learned it's much better if you just jump right in. For some reason the water felt extra special today, so much more refreshing and intense.

"Oh boy.." Patrick says looking nervous about meeting new people.

I let out another breathe of relief and then dive right into the deeper part of the shallow end of the tide. I touch the wet sandy bottom, its form easily crumpling as I dig into it to crawl forward and come up. I rose up a little ways away from the shore, enough so that my feet were barely touching the sandy bottom that was riddled with seashells.

"Woo!" I cheer. This was awesome, being at beach while the sun sets, the moon just beginning to glow. The best of the sun and the best of the moon all wrapped into one short sequence called sunset. I backstroked parallel to the shore so I could say something.

"C'mon Patrick the waters fine!" I call.

"Uh..Maybe later!" Patrick says nervously. I remembered he didn't have swimming technique like I did, if anything he doggy paddled in the water rather than actually swam. This would be something he needed to work up the courage to do on his own.

"Haha." I laugh, having a blast in the ocean. I decided to dive down under and go even deeper into the ocean. The further out I went the better it seemed. I loved every second of being here, the feeling of the water, the sound of the waves, the sunset,..everything. I wasn't afraid of some shark eating me like it was JAWS or something like that. I learned those were all stories overhyped by people's fear of the ocean. Yeah there were attack on people but I wasn't afraid that it'd actually happen to me.

"Hahaha." I laughed just relaxing, letting the ocean current carry me. I felt so rejuvenated, full of energy. I didn't feel groggy or incredibly thirsty anymore. If anything I almost felt invincible in the ocean. I wasn't afraid of drowning or getting tired and falling under.

I smiled, remembering my lucid dream of being in the ocean, practically living there.

That was when it hit me. A sudden and intense jolt shot across my body I like just convulsed. The sudden feeling made me stop floating and wiped the smile right off my face. My heart sped up and I was in disbelief of what I just felt. I cringed while treading the water, "What the hell?" I asked out loud very startled. Suddenly the intense jolt came

again, “A-ha!” I yelled in a minor pain all throughout my body. My muscles all cramped at once and all I could do was desperately tread water trying to stay afloat.

“Oh sh-Oh sh\$#!” I curse, the cramps becoming more painful by the second. I feel myself slowly start sinking. My heart begins to race, there wasn’t a lifeguard on the planet besides me that knew I was out here. Patrick was way to far away to even see that I was struggling for survival!

“Pa-” My mouth fills with the salt water. I cough it all back out. “Patrick! Pat-” I slip under for a moment but desperately push back up and the cramps get worse. “Ahh!” I yell in pain, still using all my strength just to live and not be dragged under into the dark sea. I didn’t have enough strength to return back to the shore and I was sinking. It was then I realized that I was screwed, just like that. The fear of death began creeping into my mind, the fear of drowning. To have my entire life just end right here. Though I tried to fight through the pain and remarkably made it just a few feet further to the shore, my cramps got even worse and I heard a loud pop in my back. I yelled in pain but it was cut short my the salt walter entering my mouth and filling my lungs as I am slowly dragged down. I held my breathe the best I could, but I was quickly sinking.

The water pressure alone made it feel like my chest was being stepped on. I flailed underwater as the air was quickly leaving my lungs the deeper I got. I could practically feel them shriveling up inside of my chest. I was wide-eyed, I was too deep, there was no going up no matter how hard I tried. I was really going to die here because of muscle cramps that came out of no where. I couldn’t hold it anymore I took a big breath of water, and naturally coughed back out only to breathe in water even more. My heart moved what seemed like three beats per second and just as my vision began to fade, the darkness of death beginning to surround me in its cold embrace, my neck felt like it just got cut open in three lines running down on both sides.

The sudden stinging sensation of it made me yell whatever breathe I had left outwards, but only bubbles rose up. That was when I felt the immediate relief of air returning to me. I didn’t know how, but quite frankly at this point I didn’t care. The relief rushed over my entire body as I breathed very heavily underwater and I just sort of floated there a bit exhausted from nearly drowning. I’ll never take another breathe for granite ever again! The cramps in my body remained, but all I cared about was just getting my breath back, even if it was underwater. I grunted again, bubbles flying towards the surface, as my eyes began to burn as if they were being seared by a hot liquid. I figured it was because I opened them in salt water, but even when I closed them it provided no relief. I wanted to curse, and I did quite a bit underwater.

Those words going unheard by everyone. I brought my hands over my eyes in frustrated pain, and then my heart skipped a beat when I opened them. It looked as if I were transported into a completely different ocean in Hawaii or something. Everything looked so clear! There weren’t any blurred lines, no hazy vision or eye pain, it looked like I was looking through an HD underwater camera that someone had brought down. I

was wide-eyed, unaware that they had completely changed color from dark brown to a golden color, almost light green. All I could do was float in the deep ocean in shock at what had just happened to me.

The muscle cramps were beginning to cease, and the immense pain from them was fading, but I was in too much shock to notice. Then my mind began to race, Patrick must have been losing his S\$#! right now if he saw me go under. I truly wanted to know why it was I was still alive, I felt myself nearly drown and at the last second I could suddenly breathe again. What was going on!?

I brought my hand up to my neck and felt the indentations of the lines that had brought me so much pain earlier. They were opening and closing. Being ocean minded my whole life, I immediately knew what these were yet continued to be in disbelief, "Gills!?" I shout but my words are quickly muffled by the deep ocean. The only memento of their existence being the temporary bubbles of air that quickly floated to the top to dissolve. This wasn't possible! Humans can't just grow gills, they can't just grow anything! What was happening to me!? Just at that moment I caught a glimpse of my hands.

There was a cold sensation that began to form on my fingers as if a cold line was going down them. I looked at them with my newfound enhanced vision and saw that my nails were becoming thicker, and more dense. I heard cracking as they began to push outward forming into light claws. Claws!? My hand began to cramp badly, the pain was practically torture if I tried to forcibly work against the muscle spasm, so I went with it as the spasm forced my fingers to become splayed. I grabbed my wrist and shut my eyes, not believing what I was seeing.

An extra layer of skin, no, some sort of aquatic smooth...webbing began to grow in between each of my fingers, connecting and merging with one another until my hand didn't look human anymore. It looked like a hybrid cross between a fish and a man. "Holy \$%^!" I exclaim out of fear and shock. The back of my hand, where the cold feeling was running down, began to sprout green material, becoming yellow as it got closer to the inside of my palms.

I instantly knew that with fins, came scales. "No no no." I say in disbelief as aquatic hair began sprout on the back of my arms. The hairs floated with the ocean current and sailed more easily if I tried to move my arm. I held my entire arm from the elbow down to try and prevent further progression from whatever I was turning into. I didn't want to be a fish! I was human!

My efforts did little to stop the transformation as the same transition was happening to my other hand. I grabbed my stomach in pain, doubled over in the water, gritting my teeth as I felt a massive cramp spread in my inners. "Oh god.." I muffle. I could feel things moving around inside of me. Sometimes they'd rise up under the skin and go back down to a new position. Some organs were growing, others were shrinking.

“Ouu..” My teeth began to sharpen, my back molars were becoming just as sharp as my canine teeth. My regular hair on top of my head begins to feel weirder, I could feel the water much more now, and I instantly knew that my regular hair had become something aquatic like the hair that had grown on the back of my arms. My feet begin to ache ferociously. I hear them pop and snap. I look down to see that they were growing in size, becoming longer and wider. My toes scrunched together, against my will, and began splaying themselves.

I shut my eyes tight in pain as toe broke apart from its natural human state and began to fuse with another toe. The only exception was the big toe which just elongated and grew in size until each of my toes, now only three on each, looked more like very long fingers than actual feet. I grabbed my right foot and watched in horror as the same webbing spread across them, connecting with one another, forming a new foot or long flippers. The green and yellow scales continued to spread across my entire body as new claws grew on each end of my new found flippers.

“No!” I exclaim, then I hunch over in pain as I feel a piercing pain in my spine. “Ah!” I yell. I couldn’t see it but I could feel my spine protruding out from under my scaly skin. Underneath that I felt a massive bulge growing from the back of my swim trunks. I was in too much pain to reach back and take my swimming trunks off, so I just gritted my teeth as the bulge and pressure grew larger and larger every second that passed. “S%^&!” I curse as my spine suddenly snaps loudly three times. I could feel something growing off the three bumps the snapping had created. Suddenly my trunks could take not more punishment and I hear a massive *Scccchriip* with my new aquatic like ears that were more fin-like.

I looked down and saw a giant fish-like tail greet me, and I gave the biggest yell ever to be heard of by no one ever in my life. Webbing begins to form on the spines that shot out of my back. At this point I was in a state of panic, not knowing what to do, and then it happened. My face lurched forward quickly, causing me a great amount of pain as my nostrils split apart to a more fish like set. My face pushed out one more time and I yell underneath the ocean water.

As the transformation completed itself my gills began to increase in size, causing a burning sensation inside of my throat. I grab one side of my gills and looked at my finned hand in complete disbelief. What the hell was I? What did I just turn into!? I noticed that I could finally move myself once again, and move I did. I quickly and frantically looked at myself, my new self. I looked at my webbed feet or flippers. I didn’t even know what to call them at this point. I found myself being able to breathe more easily, and then I suddenly notice, this was exactly like the dream I had earlier. Being able to breathe underwater peacefully with no worries or fears. Only I did have a fear, a big one! I couldn’t go to school looking like this! Everyone would be terrified of me! I needed help from someone, anyone!

I swam upwards and instantly I noticed that I just covered a lot of ground just from a single stroke. I was practically darting through the water. A smile washed over my muzzle, I swam again and again underwater, quickly covering miles in just mere seconds. The thrill of going so fast underwater and being able to breathe underwater, practically every swimmers dream, was that I was still this way, though with abilities like these, plus the feeling of just being free in the ocean. He smiled looking himself over again. He could hear all the aquatic sounds of the ocean, just like his dream, and he could hear things on the surface as well. He smirked, how long would it take him to make it back to the surface. A minute? He smirked, becoming delighted with his new abilities. Maybe being this way wouldn't be so bad afterall, he was practically made for the ocean. Testing out my ability, I used all my might and darted towards the shore. Unknown to me at the time, I reached an unreal speed.

"Aight' yall, now look." Devin says holding a birthday cake standing behind a bunch of shrubbery while a bonfire goes off in the middle of the beach. He's there with almost dozens of college kids ready to party as the night was still young in their swim suits. "Now when Aaron comes out of the ocean, we're all gonna jump out and yell, 'Surprise!' got it?" He asks.

A lot of the students didn't hear so other people had to tell them what was going on. A lot of people brought tons of alcohol, water guns, pool toys.

"He won't even know what happened." Devin laughs, "Ay' as soon as we surprise him tho', we getting' this party started. Let's get F%^\$ed up." He says and a lot of the student cheer agreeing with him. "Ight' now Pat, you sure he's still swimming?" Devin asks Patrick.

"Uh..." He saw Aaron go under and had a light heart attack. The only reason he wasn't hysterical right now was because he refused to believe that Aaron was dead and was just playing some cruel and sick...yet humanly impossible prank. "Yeah, he's totally out there HAHAAH!"

"Uh...Ight' well bring em' out." Devin says.

"Oh god..." Patrick was about to break down.

"Patrick!" I call from the ocean water, "Patrick I need your help!"

"Oh thank f*^%\$ing god!" Patrick said, running out from the shrub. I immediately raised my eyebrow at that reaction.

"What were you thinking going out there!? You scared the S^&* out of me!" Patrick says walking towards me.

"Pat, I can explain." I say, "But you have to promise NOT to freak out." I warn.

"What? Did your shorts fall off? Gross dude." He says getting closer, he could only see the back of my head since I faced the other direction in the water.

"What? No! I mean I really need you NOT to freak out." I warn again.

"What happened?" He asks, becoming a bit worried.

"Well..." I stand up out of the ocean water and immediately feel the sting of the air hit my gills. I gag instantly, unaware of what was happening.

"Holy S%\$#! What the F%\$#!?" Patrick exclaims bewildered, stumbling back. Behind the shrubbery everyone has a very confused look on their face, only being able to hear the dialogue between the two.

"What the hell happened to you!? You're...y-you're.....AWESOME!" Patrick exclaims as I kneel on the sand suffocating.

"Dude you look like a total badass! That is so awesome! Why didn't you tell me you were a weredragon!?"

I look at him as if to say, 'Are you crazy!?' It wasn't even a full moon and I was definitely not a dragon. My breathing becomes short again, the same as if I were drowning, now on land. The irony was literally killing me.

I point frantically at my gills, as I try to crawl back into the water.

"Oh!" He says as if he had a realization, "Duh- You were bitten on the neck!" He nods his head as if he were right.

I cringe, trying to be so reasonable with him, but yet so frustrated.

"Oh-OH, the collar, right!" He frantically moves, "U-uh don't worry I'll be right back!"

That was the least of my worries, I was nearly out of air, or water, whatever..

Patrick frantically searches through his bag,

"A-ha, I knew you'd forget it!" He says and then runs over to the ocean water literally just inches away from my muzzle. (He really could have just pushed me an extra inch.)

He opened the collar and filled the containers up with the ocean water. He quickly put the collar around my neck and locked it on. I gasped for air and found relief, I could finally breathe again. The thought that my parents had sent me this collar told me that there was something that they were keeping a secret from me, as if they knew this exact thing would happen.

"Thanks Pat-" I start.

"Haaaaapy Birthday Homie-HOLY F*^*ING SH\$#!!!" Devin exclaims and drops the cake in the sand as he and the large group come out of the shrubbery for a surprise birthday beach party.

"SEA MONSTER!" A student exclaims.

"I F*^*ING knew they were real!" A girl screams and all the students drop what they had and take off running for their lives as if I were chasing and trying to eat them. One girl even fell and began crawling away like she had broken her leg in some cheesy horror movie. She later got up after a full thirty seconds of crawling and began to run away again. The only two who stayed were Devin and a girl who had her hair dyed blue. Devin just gave a dead stare at me, while the girl just shrugged her shoulders.

"Meh, I'm a furry, thiiiis....is pretty much a regular con for me." She says.

"Well hello there..." Patrick says immediately attracted to her and she smiles.

Devin continued to stare at me, which made me feel rather awkward just sitting there, tail in the water. Devin finally came to and just shook his head, "Definitely not drunk enough for this S#\$^." He picks up four beers and walks over to me sitting down and handing them out.

"You're not afraid?" I ask.

"Maaan, we go way back. Remember when forging each other's parent signatures in the 7th grade just to pass reading class?" He laughs.

I laugh too remembering that .

"I told you bro, you my nigga. I got your back. You getting all scaley and s%^\$ ain't gonna change that." He raises his beer after popping the cap off. "To your twenty-first." He raises his beer.

"To love-I mean the twenty-first." Patrick says next to the girl.

She just laughs, sensing the connection between her and Pat and raises her bottle.

I smile. Any stress I had about being this way began to fade. To still be accepted by friends despite being this way, was truly something special to me. I raised by bottle, a little curious, never having one before.

"Happy birthday, homie. Ay' don't even worry about the people who ran off, I swear on everything they'll be back in like ten minutes." He says, "Party mentality, happens all the time."

We all take a drink our beer, and I immediately spit mine out after the first taste, Patrick after his third.

"Augh, that stuff is horrible!" I exclaim. "How do you like this!?"

"I thought I could do it, I thought I could do it." Pat shakes his head.

Devin laughs, and so does the girl.

"Ay, and I ain't even gonna lie, you look badass as hell." Devin says.

I really don't even know how to take that compliment.

"See that's what I said." Patrick states.

"He reminds me of a dragon." The girl says.

"Exactly." Pat says agreeing.

"Nah, see yall got it all wrong. If you look at his tail, and then you look at the back, that's like..fish something," Devin laughs.

This was embarrassing my friends were observing me more than I had.

"No cause look at the feet, those are like flippers so.-" The three debate amongst each other about what I turned into and I can't help but laugh.

"I think I'm more of a merman." I state.

"Damn, Aaron stay out of your own business." Devin says and keeps debating.

I just laugh.

As we sat and talked, I thought about how when my parents would get here, we'd have a lot to discuss. About what I was, where I came from. Why was it on my twenty first

birthday I turned into this? But then I shook all those thoughts off, that was for another day, tomorrow to be exact, I just wanted to celebrate my birthday with my friends. And sure enough, like Devin predicted, the partiers did indeed come back. One even brought another cake and pretty soon the beach was full of people who partied hard and celebrated my birthday with me. The music was awesome, everyone had a good time, some even tried to challenge me to a race in the ocean, needless to say a lot of people were disappointed by the fact that before they got their second stroke in the race was over. Devin partied hard, I'm sure he felt that the next day. Still amazes me that they won Monday's game. Patrick even hooked up with Arlene, the girl.

Needless to say, it was in fact the craziest twenty-first birthday party ever, but I honestly wouldn't have it any other way. Best birthday ever!