

The night air rippled along Ripcurl's fur as he walked the last block, eyes peeled for the house mentioned in his friend Ipequey's directions. For most people, having a friend call them up late at night to rave about a new pool and urge them to immediately check it out would seem odd. Ripcurl knew better, though. He was well aware that Ipequey, the living pool toy that he was, didn't need to sleep, so time of day meant less to him than it did for the furred-and-blooded Ripcurl. As a raccoon, Rip was fine operating at night, and he personally loved the water, so if this pool was as good as Ip had gushed on the phone, he was more than willing to ignore the vinyl wolf's oversight.

Having found the building in question—gray walls, red roof, wooden fence—Ripcurl walked around to the side gate specified in the directions. It was locked.

"Ipequey? Mind letting me in?" He called out. No response. As a consummate surfer, Ripcurl possessed the relaxed attitude stereotypical of his calling, so the lack of reply made him more confused than annoyed.

"Ippy?" He tried again. "It's Rip. Can you pop the gate? You can't call me out here and not even let me see the pool!"

The silence persisted. Ripcurl's footpaw tapped on the ground as he twisted his shark-tooth necklace while considering what to do. On the one paw, there was a large "NO TRESSPASSING" sign nearby. On the other, he didn't have anything better to do. Ripcurl's ponytail bobbed and swayed as he clambered over the fence.

Dropping down on the other side, Ripcurl immediately saw what had made Ipequey so excited about this pool. First off, it was big—always a plus. As the night breeze, tinted with water, wafted around his muzzle, he couldn't help but smile. Ripcurl's years as a connoisseur of many different pools had honed his senses for their quality. The raccoon's whiskers quivered happily as they discerned only the lightest touch of chlorine—just enough to keep things sanitary without causing irritation or staining. From beneath the surface, lamps illuminated pristine waters clear of any dirt, leaves, or stray fur. Smile widening, Ripcurl shrugged off his Hawaiian shirt as he approached the poolside; a quick dip before heading off.

**\*clatter\***

The noise came from a large storehouse next to the pool. Ripcurl spun towards it. "Ip?"

Again, no response. Bemused, Rip entered the storehouse. "I can see why you got excited about the pool." He called out, voice echoing amongst stacks of pool noodles and beach balls. "I'm also sure it's safe to say that whatever prank you're trying for isn't gonna work."

There was a rustle from the pile of noodles. Rip gave a chattering chuckle as he grabbed one of the foam tubes and pulled. "Gotcha, Ippy! Now let's go have a swim before I use you as a floater!"

A rumbling growl filled the storehouse as the pile fell away and a large figure rose up. Ripcurl had barely enough time to register fierce red eyes, the white of long claws, and a gleam of hungering fangs before the growl erupted into a ferocious roar. Sufficiently terrified, Ripcurl fled.

The beast pursued the raccoon through the storehouse. Noodles, water wings, life preservers, and more were sent flying as Rip rounded the makeshift isles, with each obstacle either bouncing harmlessly off the chasing creature or being swatted aside. Although he had a strong surfer's build, Rip's fitness was not offering much help. His strength lay in the upper body and balance, not running. Of course, Ripcurl was not actively aware of this fact. His current level of thinking as he ran for his life would be best articulated as, "ohmygoditsgonnaeatmegottastayaheadohpleaseohpleasedontletiteatmeeeee!"

The moment he spotted an opening towards the door, Rip charged and burst back out to the poolside. He sprinted for the gate and wrenched at the handle. An unyielding rattle reminded him too late that the way out was locked. His fur stood on end as he felt the presence of the beast draw near. Cornered, he could do nothing to stop the beast as it lunged, teeth bared in snarling hunger.

**\*CHOMP\***

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Eh?

Ripcurl opened his eyes. He wasn't dead. But that made no sense. Not that he was complaining, but the beast had been about to tear into him. Noticing an odd pressure on his leg made Rip look down. He was promptly met with the sight of the beast—now identifiable as a monstrous wolf—with its jaws clamped around his leg. A startled chitter and some choice expletives later, Rip registered that the wolf wasn't doing any harm. The thing's teeth weren't even sharp. They were dull and squishy and actually felt a bit...rubbery?

"Hey," Rip said as he shook the wolf off his leg. "Lemme get a look at you."

Apparently sated by its ineffectual gnawing, the wolf reared up. Under the light of the full moon, Rip instantly saw what he was looking for. Exaggerated, rounded paws, smooth furless skin, apparently painted-on features, and a telltale valve where a bellybutton would be. Ripcurl had been running for his life from an inflatable werewolf. A *blue and white* inflatable werewolf, just like...

"Ipequey?"

The werewolf tilted its head, producing a squeak in the process. There was no mistaking it now—Rip could recognize his friend's sound anywhere.

"Blast, Ippy, it is you!" Rip laughed as he grabbed the werewolf into a hug. He grinned as the cool, sleek vinyl pressed against his fur. Were-Ipequey, lacking his full faculties, was seemingly unsure what was going on. He could understand that the squishy hug was meant as a friendly gesture, though. Rip found himself on the receiving end of a big, rubbery facelick.

"Hah!" Rip chattered, "So, from fierce monster to oversized, inflatable puppy, huh?"

Ipequey barked happily and wagged his tail; each producing a flurry of squeaks. Ripcurl smiled.

“White I’ willing to wait until you’re back to your normal self for an explanation, lppy, I think you owe me something for this little scare.”

lp gave a cautious, squeaky growl. Rip grimed. “You’re too big right now to make a good surfboard, but I’m sure we can work something out.”

His eyes gleamed mischievously.