

Friendship Means Birding Up

By: Firingwall

Commission done for Vulblaze

“PSSSSST! Vul!” The fox's ears twitched. “Vulblaze! Over here!” The fox came to a complete stop near the entrance of the ballpark. He looked to the right where he could hear his name from.

Peering around the corner of the building, a mysterious person was waving and calling to him. He was not remotely conspicuous. He stood out like a sore thumb with his oversized trenchcoat and fedora on that hot, summer day. Many people noticed him, often hurrying away from the weirdo.

However, Vulblaze did no such thing. After staring at the oddball for a moment, the fox recognized him. That curved beak sticking out of the shadows cast by that hat cinched it.

“Nico?” Vulblaze asked, tilting his head, “What are you-”

“Quick!” The bird waved a feathery hand at him quickly, urging him to get close. “Over here! I need your help!”

Vulblaze frowned. “But... I'm just about go in-”

“NOW! Come on!” Vulblaze was getting confused. His friend was one of the players at the baseball game he was attending. That was how he was able to get a ticket to the show in the first place. Why was he being pulled away like this?

Still, curiosity got the best of the vulpine, and he certainly wasn't going to leave his friend hanging with... whatever was going on. “Okay, what's up?”

“Just follow me!” Vulblaze did just that, walking over to his bird pal and following him closely around the side of the stadium. Nico seemed to be leading him over to a side entrance. Was he about to get a backstage tour?

Though, he quickly noticed something else that was up. His friend was limping, having a hard time walking straight. Something was definitely up...

“And now I'm out for, like a month at least!” Nico sighed, rubbing his face before letting his large hands slide down the sides of his beak. “I can't play... I can't even practice!”

Vulblaze gently nodded, listening the whole time. He had been brought to a private side room of the stadium, one that seemed like a disused locker room. He had expected the worse the longer he watched his friend lead him to this place with his limp.

However, he didn't truly expect how bad it was between the story he told, and showing off how truly bandaged his limping foot and leg were. All he could say at this point was, “That's a shame, buddy.”

“Ugh... that frickin' slide I made. What was I thinking?”

Vulblaze could only imagine. His cockatiel friend was a bit of a showoff and liked overextending himself. He would try some risky moves or plays to impress the other players or his coach, wouldn't he?

“Well!” huffed Nico, rubbing his face again and looking a bit more nervous now, “I'm really not in a good spot. The team, the coach, the manager; they're all pretty pissed off! They're saying it's my fault!” He grumbled. “Well, sorry!”

The bird let out a long, deep sigh, eyes closed as he did so. “Okay!” He looked intently at the fox. “I promised I would make it right. That's why I need you!”

Vulblaze's ears twitched. “What do you mean? How can I help?”

“I need you to fill in as my double!” The cockatiel said it as if it was the most natural, normal thing one could ask a person.

Unsurprisingly, the fox had to do a double take. “Excuse me?”

Nico reached into the duffel bag that was nearby, already in the room when they arrived. He pulled out a baseball cap, one that had his team's logo on it. “I got this from a witch last night. Put this on, and you can step into my talons for the next month while I recover!”

Vulblaze was just at a complete loss for words. He was the one rubbing his face, trying to comprehend everything he had just heard and had been told. “I just... I just... I...”

“This is crazy, man!” the fox was positively shouting at this point. Magic? Oh, he completely believed in that, no doubt. He believed the hat could probably do what Nico said it would do. Witches weren't that uncommon in their area.

But the thing he was suggesting him to do... that was so wrong to him!

“You're the only one I can turn to on short notice!” Nico's staring was serious, but there was also a sense of warmth coming to it now. “You know, this is an incredible opportunity.”

“What?”

“What have you always talked to me about? How you wish you could change things up, do things differently! Try something new, something amazing? Welllll, this is it!”

Vulblaze frowned but did not say anything as Nico went on. “Pluuuus, I'll give you half the pay I make for these ballgames! Come on, you don't have much going on anyway. You don't get out, and you're just a freelancer who works from home! Think of this as making something of yourself!”

Vulblaze gave him an annoyed look, but he was carefully thinking over everything. An incredible opportunity? Do something new and amazing?

Nico was right, he did want to do more with his life. He had been feeling like he was in a rut, and, at worse, sometimes a directionless, nobody goober. What this offer was, as completely crazy and unconventional as it was, could've been just what he needed.

Taking a deep breath, the fox released it and said slowly, “Okay... fine. As long as this isn't crazy or dangerous, I can try it, but just for today.”

Nico brightened right up. “Don't worry! It's perfectly safe!”

He handed him the baseball cap, Vulblaze yanking it out of his feathery hands. His eyes narrowed, him trying to act as seriously as possible. “Just so you know, you owe me big for this; bigger than everything else!

“Don't worry! You'll be getting plenty outta this!” Nico smiled, unperturbed.

Vulblaze placed the hat on top of his head, carefully adjusting it so that it sat between his ears without bugging them too much. He looked at it, only seeing its rim, and then looked back at Nico. “Okay... So, what hap-”

He never got to finish his sentence.

It all happened in a blink of an eye. The fox's longer, fluffier head fur, a lot of which stuck out of the cap, suddenly shrunk. The fuzz pulled in under it or shrunk down to better match the rest of his shorter head fuzz.

POP! Then, the cap flew right off. Thick, yellow bird feathers had sprung out the back and top of his head like an airbag. He now had a sharp bird crest.

Vulblaze blinked. He reached up, running his paws against his new crest. “The heck?!”

Nico smiled and spoke... presumably. His beak moved, but the fox heard absolutely nothing. He slid his paws across the top of his head. His pointy, fluffy ears were gone!

“...and this is going to turn out great!” Nico's voice returned, along with the low hum of the lights above. It seemed like Vulblaze's hearing came back. Did he gain whatever kind of ears birds had? He didn't know much about avian anatomy to be honest.

Regardless, he was happy to hear again. “What d-did you say, Ni-”

He tried to talk, but he felt so strange. A warmth was running through his body, causing him to flinch and tremble. His tail suddenly went stiff, frozen and unable to move like it was made of stone.

“Eep!” He twitched, lurching forward. His tail suddenly shot back into him like a released, stretched-out tape measure. It finished right into his body, leaving no trace behind.

Then, he jerked backwards, right back into place. Something shot right out of him, taking the place of that appendage. It was tail feathers! These were dark beige with a slight, yellow undercoating at the very base of them. They went just past the midpoint of his thighs, a far cry of the leg-length of his old tail.

Vulblaze looked over his shoulder. “Whoa...” He gently shook his rear, watching those new feathers sway with his movement. “They're just like yours!”

“Of course they are!” Nico grinned. He turned and swayed his hips, showing off his identical feathers. “That's the point of all of this. You get to have my nice feathers!”

The fox looked at his friend's tail feathers and then back at his own. “Yeah...” His new feathers were quite nice. Saying and thinking it outloud, he couldn't help but feel... pride.

Vulblaze looked forward again, catching something out of the corner of his eye as he did. He lifted his hands to his face, finding them trembling. The changes had reached them now, his pink pads sinking into his fuzz.

His fingers jerked, hands clenching and unclenching repeatedly. Little by little, his black fur was shifting, becoming dark beige feathers like his tail ones. His digits popped, extending longer and longer as his hands got wider. The feathers grew out more, making his hands look even bigger than they were, almost like wings.

Vulblaze flipped them over and back again. "These are pretty cool..."

"Aren't they?" Nico chuckled, "We birds have... oh! Easy there!" Nico limped over to the fox, taking him by the arm. "Careful! Can't have you getting injured too!"

Vulblaze had started to sway. His balance felt off and strange there, like he couldn't stand right on his feet... or there was something wrong with them.

Sure enough, a quick look told him everything. His toes had merged together, stretching and creeping forward as two large digits. Fur fell away, revealing pinker, rougher skin beneath. The claws extended out even further, forming into sharp talons.

As another toe emerged from his heels, the fox knew what he had. He placed his foot closer to one of Nico's, a perfect clone in every way. "Whoa..."

"Whoa indeed!" Nico grinned, holding out his good foot and wiggling his top two toes. "Pretty cool, right? It might not look it, but we birds can run super fast with these grippers!"

Tsk, I already knew that! But, did he really already know that? Or, did that knowledge just suddenly come to him? ...*weird*...

He didn't have time to reflect on what that all meant. He was suddenly distracted by the fact his clothing was squeezing him. His trim and slender frame was bulking up all over. Broader shoulders, wider chest, buffer arms and legs, the whole works.

It didn't make him into a muscle brute or anything, but a person who definitely hit the gym often. Or, at least, he became as fit as a baseball star should be.

"Wow!" Vulblaze felt his arms, taking in that muscle density he never had before. "This is pretty cool!"

“I know, right?” Nico chuckled. He flexed his arms, those biceps of his popping out amongst his feathers. “I’m pretty much perfection, aren’t I?”

Perfection... Vulblaze smiled and did the same thing, showing off his new guns. His muscles looked even bigger now. He was a bit thankful to be wearing short sleeves, otherwise he might start ripping holes in longer ones.

His orange-red arm fur shook gently, beige flowing over them. It ran all the way down to his wrists, meeting his feathery hands. Speaking of which, fur shifted in almost a blink of the eye, becoming feathers as well.

Some of the feathers grew longer. Longer and longer, thickening and growing strong, they ran along his arms from his wrists to almost his arm pits. A tannish, whitish, coloring came to them, making them stand out amongst his dark coloring. It looked as if he had wings.

Just like Nico. It was so undeniably true. He was to become his friend completely.

He just soaked it all in, his body tingling as the plumage flowed. Every part of him was cloaked in feathers, doing away with that overly warm fuzz of his. The only part that wasn’t were his calves down to his feet. They took on the same pink, roughish skin as his talons.

The tannish white cloak flowed up his neck, reaching his head at last. Everything below looked just like Nico’s now. Same feathers, same broad body with chest & denser limbs. Looking between the two, the “fox” couldn’t see any differences there.

I’m just like Nico. Vulblaze trembled. His heart soared, pride beaming so strongly. He was going to become as the cockatiel put it: perfection.

Numbness was closing in all around him. He could barely feel his head, even as his nose and jaws twitched. The tip of his black snoot brightened to a lighter brownish pink, everything hardening and pushing out. His lips and teeth became one, hardening and joining his nose.

His head pushed forward more and more, feathers covering everything that wasn’t toughening up and smoothing out. Soon, he had a fair beak and light yellow feathers all over his dome. The only part that wasn’t was a splotch of red on his cheeks.

And that was that. The former fox regained feeling in his face but stood still. He waited a little more, but he felt nothing else. The changes were over.

He reached up, feeling every inch of his noggin closely. He spent a long time on his new beak, really absorbing its new shape and features. It was so different from that of his muzzle, but

still just as malleable and flexible as it somehow. Again, he just didn't get bird anatomy despite feeling like he knew a lot more now.

That didn't really matter though for him. He looked at Nico, his heart beating quicker. "So... how do I look?"

He already knew the answer though. He knew what his friend was going to say, and it absolutely delighted him. He just needed some ego stroking, smugness strong within him.

And sure enough... "Fantastic!" Nico chuckled, "Just like a million bucks!"

Vulblaze smirked, cockily answering, "Only a million?" The two cockatiels laughed in identical unison.

The original bird stroked the bottom of his beak, his grin wider than ever. "I can't believe it worked out this well! You got it all! The look, the shape, even my vibe down! All you need is the duds, and nobody'll be able to tell us apart!"

"Then make with the clothes, bub!" "Vulblaze" huffed, "I gotta be on the field soon! Rick isn't gonna put up with me being late after all the hassle." He didn't know where he got the name, "Rick" from or how he knew it belonged to Nico's manager, but he just knew it.

He knew a lot of things. He knew Nico's favorite foods, clothes, movies, and more. He knew everyone's name on the team (the ones that mattered to him at least). He had muscle memory on how to bat and run. He knew how to reach the locker room from this one. He knew it all, his old memories feeling so distant in the back of his head now.

Not that he cared. That old stuff? Nowhere near as important or as cool as being Nico the Awesome Baseball-Playing Cockatiel!

Nico seemed to pick up on that. "Looks like you got the important memories down!"

"Aren't all my memories, along with everything, important?" snickered Vulblaze.

"True dat!" Nico laughed. "'Man, I'm such a genius! This plan is going to work!" He hurried over to the dufflebag from before, reaching in and digging out clothes.

While he did that, the new bird reached into his pocket... struggled to reach into his pocket not built for bird hands and took out his phone. He started snapping selfies, eagerly soaking it all in. He looked even better now that he could actually see himself.

One handsome bird, ready for some baseball! He stroked his beak, soaking everything he saw in. He certainly felt a lot better about himself. Heck, he could hardly even remember what he was so down about in his life before.

Though, he supposed, that was only natural. He was Vulblaze before. Now, he was Nico and every bit of greatness that entailed.

Mmmm... The former fox thought a bit. *Maybe after the month is over, Nico can let me stay like this longer. Surely, a guy as awesome as us could use a double every once in a while.*

The End?