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Nory Horace was trying to turn herself into a kitten.

The kitten had to be a black kitten. And it had to be completely kitten-shaped.

It was the middle of summer. Nory was hiding in her family's garage. *Kitten, kitten, kitten*, she thought.

She was hiding in case something went wrong. She didn't want anyone to see. Still, if something went *really* wrong, her brother and sister would be close enough to hear her yell for help.

Or meow for help.

Or roar.

Nory decided not to think about that. Hopefully, she wouldn't need help.

Kitten, kitten, kitten.

She had to master kitten, because tomorrow was the Big Test. Tomorrow, after so many years of waiting, she would finally take the entrance exam for Sage Academy.

The school was very hard to get into. You wouldn't be accepted with anything less than amazing talents. Nory's friends weren't even bothering to try. They were all taking tests for easier schools.

If Nory passed the Big Test, she would start fifth grade at Sage Academy in the fall.

If she failed the test . . .

No. She couldn't fail. She wasn't taking tests for any other schools. Not only because Sage Academy was a very important, very fancy magic school, but also because her brother, Hawthorn, went there.

And her sister, Dalia, did, too.

Plus, Nory's father was kind of the headmaster.

Okay, not kind of. He was definitely the headmaster.

Thinking about the Big Test made Nory queasy. Her magic was strong. There was no doubt about that. But sometimes her magic went wonky.

And Sage Academy did not want wonky.

A black kitten was likely to be on the Big Test tomorrow. It was a beginner animal. Nory had turned herself into a black kitten loads of times, actually. The problem was what happened *after*.

But Nory would not think about that. Instead, she took a deep breath and lifted her chin.

Kitten! Kitten! KITTEN!!!

The world went blurry, and Nory's heart beat faster. Her body stretched and shrank. There were popping sounds.

Yay, kitten!

But wait.

Her mouth felt wrong. Nory clacked her teeth together. Clack, clack, clack. *Whoa*.

These weren't normal teeth. These were long. These were sharp. These were powerful. Long, sharp, and powerful enough to chomp through wood!

Hmm, Nory thought, feeling odd. Why would a kitten want to chomp wood?

Nory looked over her shoulder. She saw a perfect black kitten tail swishing in the air. Connected to the tail was a set of black kitten legs, with padded feet and sharp claws.

She looked down, expecting to see a matching set of front legs where her arms used to be. But . . .

Her front legs weren't kitten legs. The fur was brown and slick. Also, she seemed to have a fat, round tummy. And what was this nose?

She couldn't see it well, but it had nothing kittenish about it. It was more of a snout.

A beaver nose.

Zamboozle! I'm half kitten and half beaver, Nory realized.

Her magic.

Had definitely.

Gone wonky.

Not again! she thought. *What am I doing wrong? I'll fail the Big Test if I do this tomorrow! I should change back right away and try again for perfect kitten. Yes. That's exactly what I should do.*

But the beaver-kitten part of Nory wouldn't listen. Beaver-Kitten-Nory didn't care about the Big Test. Beaver-Kitten-Nory just wanted to chew stuff with her awesome beaver teeth.

She searched the garage. Wood! Where was the wood around here?

Must chew, Beaver-Kitten-Nory thought. *Must make beaver dam.*

No! No! said the dim voice of Girl-Nory.

Beaver-Kitten-Nory waddled out of the garage and into the house. Then she went upstairs and into her father's office. Tree stumps would do, or branches. Anything, really, made of wood.

Nory spotted her father's bookshelf.

It was very beautiful, having been lovingly built over two hundred years ago by craftsmen in Europe.

It was a very important, very expensive piece of furniture.

It looked delicious.

Oooh, Beaver-Kitten-Nory thought. *Look at that! A wooden tall-thing! Chewy rectangle-things!*

She nudged one of the books onto the floor and nibbled it.

Hard on the outside, like bark. Tender on the inside, like leaves. *Mmm. Chew, chew, chew.* Beaver-Kitten-Nory gnawed through four of her father's books.

Then she bit through the legs of her father's solid oak desk.

Next she chewed off a section of her father's favorite armchair. She dragged fluff and wood into the guest bathroom and built a small beaver lodge under the sink. Then she chased her kitten tail for a couple minutes and used a pile of ripped-up pages for a litter box.

It was awesome. *She* was awesome. She, Beaver-Kitten-Nory, felt better than she had in weeks!

At least, until her brother, Hawthorn, found her.