

“Oi, Phil, you done with those samples yet?”

Phil barely glanced up from his workstation, too busy securing the last few test tubes and vials back into their respective containers. “Almost, just finishing up here! Have some patience, Roeschelle, jeez.”

Phil’s lab partner, a middle-aged Vietnamese woman, rolled her eyes behind thin-framed glasses. “Yeah, like what you had when these samples came in. Really, Phil, you’d think you’d have learned by now.”

Phil closed the glass case surrounding the vials, then (and only then) did he take off his rubber gloves. He didn’t respond, instead turned his attention to his workstation: The same polished chrome and teal as it always had been, clean countertops and immaculate equipment mirroring everything else in the lab.

It was company policy to keep things clean, after all. What with their new... *project*...

“Phil, are you coming? Or you just going to stand there? Hel-*lo*?”

Roeschelle’s voice jarred him out of his tangent. Still as crass and curt as ever, it seemed. “Yeah, yeah, I’m comin’, keep your tits on, woman.”

“How many times have I told you not to say that!?”

As he grabbed his coat on the way out, Phil just shrugged noncommittally. Yeah, he knew he probably wouldn’t, and Roeschelle had gotten mad at him for it. But the fuck did he care?

Then she proceeded to hit him in the shoulder. And *goddamn*, for how old she was, she could still pack a pretty damn good punch.

The door closed behind the two, the automatic lock catching a moment later with a loud *click*. The lights clicked off, one by one, plunging the laboratory into darkness.

Nobody was there to see the dark, viscous liquid in one of the test tubes bubble and shift, causing the poorly attached stopper to loosen with a slight *pop*.

The harsh fluorescent lights suddenly sprung back to life as the door opened, letting Phil back into the lab. Not even bothering to hang his coat up, he just tossed it into a chair off to the side. The clock over the far wall read 11:27.

Some days, he didn’t know why he still worked at this godforsaken lab. The higher-ups didn’t give two shits about him or his lab partner, not in the entire five years that he’d worked in this same building, this same facility, the exact same chrome and teal tiles holding the same exact

equipment. Back to the same exact person in the same room every day, 365 days a year, same working hours every time.

Sometimes Phil regretted the day he signed his name on the line to work as a ScionTech laboratory technician. Yeah, sure, he got to work with the latest and greatest in technology, and the pay was absolutely outstanding. But some things... weren't so great.

Being a literal slave to the company, regardless of pay.

Being under a constant NDA.

Never getting to leave.

Roeschelle...

As he mindlessly went through the usual rounds, adding the mandatory PPE's and giving the equipment a half-zoned-out checkdown, part of him was glad his lab partner had gone back to her prison cell. (That's essentially what they were, prison cells with a little less iron and a lot more comfort, but the lack of windows and distinct use of cinder block didn't exactly help things.) Phil didn't exactly feel like dealing with Roeschelle at the moment. Not after that fiasco of a dinner.

Phil grabbed a couple of the test tubes from the rack, not paying that much attention.

The loose cap got knocked off the one test tube, sending the contents, a viscous, rubber-like substance, spilling out onto both the work table, and the glove of Phil's PPE.

Time stopped, if only for just a moment.

Phil just stared at the small black spot on his glove, not daring to breathe. Then, his training kicked in, and his first instinct was to rip the glove off, immediately tossing it into the incinerator to his left, along with the rest of his PPE. Close the latch, turn the knob, and he didn't allow himself to breathe a sigh of relief until the bright flames danced behind fireproof (and reinforced) glass, and the PPE inside was nothing more than ash.

Phew. Close call, but training had saved him... this time.

He was still shaking from the adrenaline rush, but still otherwise alright. He remembered enough about the file they'd been given on the stuff to know what he was messing around with.

Living latex. Somehow, the higher-ups had managed to distill pure magic and infuse it with liquid rubber, creating a substance capable of transforming a human with nothing more than a drop. So far, nothing was known about the transformation process other than it was supposedly

permanent, which is where Phil and Roeschelle came in. He didn't know exactly what they expected him to *do* with magic, but oh well. He'd do his best.

He took one step before something snared his ankle, sending him tumbling to the floor. Something... cold.

Cold... and *wet*.

Phil's heart froze.

He tried to scamper away, but the latex already had its hold on him. The thick, black liquid glued his sneaker to the floor, and as he watched in horror, it snaked its way up his ankle, up his calf, slithering its way under his jeans and making the fabric bulge from the inside out. Batting at his pants did nothing, only succeeded in squishing the latex around under his pants, and he dared not push it any further as the fabric started dissolving under his fingers.

His throat finally unclenched, and he found the words to yell.

*"HELP! SOMEONE! WE HAVE A CODE AMBER IN LAB 15, I REPEAT, IF ANYONE CAN HEAR ME WE HAVE A CODE AMBER IN LAB 15!"*

Nothing. No response.

Damnit! That's right! Why in the *fuck* did they think it would be a good idea to soundproof the lab!?

His sneaker was almost entirely dissolved, his entire right leg from the knee down nothing but latex. He tried pulling himself back out, nails scrabbling against the linoleum, but the latex's hold was far too strong. As it marched ever upwards, causing his jeans to bulge and tear as the latex claimed more of him in its cold embrace, it sent out tendrils towards his other leg despite his best efforts to keep it away from the growing corruption changing him. Once those cold tendrils touched his other leg, it forced it back towards the growing latex puddle, starting its ascent on that leg, too, worming its way under his pant leg and over his shoe.

Phil could feel the latex against his skin as it climbed upwards, almost to his waist now. It filled every pore it came across, thick, stifling rubber cementing his lower body into the dark latex puddle that crept its way up his side, intent on changing his arms despite his attempts otherwise. Despite this substance being magic, somehow multiplying as it climbed upwards and encased his entire lower half in nothing but corrosive liquid latex, it still felt exactly like rubber.

There! A fallen piece of rebar from when they'd updated the lab's interior a few months back! He could use that!

The cold reached his stomach now. His legs were entirely numb, coated in liquid rubber, and somehow... somehow, they looked both heavily distorted and much too small under the thick blanket of rubber. Almost as if they'd swollen, bloated somehow, but also... shrank. He tried to move his legs, to force himself to move, but they were so numb he couldn't feel anything below his waist, let alone move it.

Just- a little- further-

Bingo!

Phil grabbed the rebar and immediately swung for his legs. And yet, the rebar simply sank into his right leg with a *glorp*.

He immediately felt sick.

Somehow, the latex didn't stick to the metal like it was his skin, so it easily slid out of the latex puddle. The sizable dent in what should have been his leg simply sat there, proving that his legs were not, in fact, his legs, but more of the same latex making its way up his chest. This latex wasn't just transforming him. It was transforming him... *into the latex itself*.

If he still had lungs, he would have hyperventilated. His entire lower half was almost entirely gone, completely turned to latex, and he felt the stuff making its way through his organs, melting them into more of itself underneath his lab coat. It wasn't painful, only numb as his nerve endings and muscles liquified into rubber, but the mere thought of it made his (still human) head spin trying to comprehend it.

The latex had such a strong hold now that it was physically pulling Phil into the puddle, and all he could do in a feeble attempt to fight it was to reach out with his free right hand, scrabbling at the tiles and watching his fingers bloat and swell into an animalistic paw, constantly dripping with that liquid latex and much heavier than his hand had been. Black streaks were left anytime he touched a surface, courtesy of the giant gooey paw he now possessed, and as his arm started to lose its shape as it swelled and melted, he had an idea, one last desperate attempt to end things *his way*.

Phil slammed his entire face into his paw, intent on changing his head on *his* terms, not the rubber's. All vision ceased, he felt his entire face start to melt away into rubber under his paw. Hearing was the next to go, then feeling, and as he sank into a black void, completely devoid of any sensation, he wondered if he was about to die.

Roeschelle's card beeped green, signifying the door was now open. That dinner date had been an awful idea, management's attempt to try and force the two to get along against both of their wishes. And after a nearly \$300 (compensated) meal complete with more than a few arguments, Phil had stormed off back to the lab, leaving Roeschelle by herself in the private dining area.

She'd taken her sweet time finishing up, not wanting to deal with Phil any more than she had to. That man... Hoooh. Not only was he rather misogynistic, but he was just downright *insufferable* at times. Never, in her nearly 30 years with this company, had she met someone as fucking horrible as Phil. But all things had to come to an end, she supposed, so back to work it wa-

Roeschelle took one look at the scene before her in complete shock.

No Phil. A giant, viscous black puddle of something on the floor (and trailing all the way back to Phil's workstation), and the Incinerator was just finishing up a cycle.

Code Amber. *Code Amber!*

Roeschelle immediately closed the door, flipping the switch for a Code Amber. Normally, that would have locked the entire Laboratory Ward down in an instant, meant to quarantine any experimental accidents, but...

Nothing. The switch just clicked, not doing anything.

Roeschelle panicked. Not once, in almost *three goddamn decades*, had the Code Amber alarm not worked! She flicked it a few more times, feeling increasingly more panicked, and each time it yielded the same result.

"Ro-Roeschelle! Roeschelle, wait!"

She balked, flattening herself against the door.

The- the liquid.

*The liquid was moving.*

And as she watched, speechless, that giant blob of... *thing* started to take more form, clearly growing upwards out of the puddle as the puddle itself shrank.

"Roeschelle! Don't run- it's me, Phil!"

"Wh-"

That- liquid was... *talking*...?

The upper half of some creature, made entirely out of the liquid. A clearly defined torso, with two arms and a clear head now, a head that was looking straight at her. The thing continued.

"Well... Uh. I think it's a success?"

Out of any immediate danger, Roeschelle managed to tamp her adrenaline down to assess the situation. The liquid was clearly the latex they'd been assigned to work with. Phil had probably... spilled it on himself, judging from the incinerator, but hadn't managed to get it off in time, triggering the magic. And now he was... a latex... thing.

"What- Phil, what the fuck!? What's OSHA going to say when they find out about this!?"

The latex beast laughed, slightly warbled but clearly still Philo's voice. "Fuck OSHA, this shit's awesome! Glad to know it works, at the very least, so we have that much."

The creature moved, almost as if to step out of the puddle, and a small pillar appeared out of the latex, quickly swelling and forming into a leg. By the time Phil managed to get to his feet again, all the latex was gone, absorbed into his form.

He was very much animalistic, somewhere in a weird grey area between reptilian and vaguely feline. The latex itself was sleek, somewhere in between fur and rubber, and it squeaked every time he moved. Because of the sheer amount of latex making up his form, he was both significantly taller and significantly heftier than Roeschelle, with a sizeable girth to his shiny black thighs, tail and middle, and his entire form was constantly dripping, leaving a small puddle under his swollen paws that was quickly absorbed by the rest of him. He flicked an ear, flinging a small droplet of latex.

Roeschelle had to admit. If the higher-ups had managed to make something this effective within weeks of tinkering... maybe they were onto something.

"Huh. It dissolved everything but my lab coat... weird, huh?"

"Then again, these lab coats aren't your normal Nylon. They're specially treated. Latex probably didn't like the chemicals."

Phil adjusted his lab coat, which looked completely untouched by the ordeal, and the two shared an awkward silence.

Phil was the first to speak again after a moment.

"Roeschelle- I'm sorry for earlier. I was a complete dick to you, I have been a dick ever since I started working here. I-"

Roeschelle didn't say anything, just held up a hand to cut him off.

"This is the first time you've ever apologized to me. And for that alone, I'm willing to accept your apology. Now, I'd suggest starting to work on your sexism next, but that's just me."

More sheepish silence, during which Phil slightly deflated, his form becoming less defined. Roeschelle slowly slid down the double doors to the lab, hitting the cold tiles under her.

“You know- I could probably do this exact same thing to you.”

Roeschelle glanced up.

“What?”

The blob that was Phil showed no emotion, but instead went on, seeming to reform a tad as he did.

“The latex was what did it, right? So I bet if I touched a person, I could change them too. But- only if you wanted it. I know you’ve had- problems with- *things*- in the past, and-”

Roeschelle managed to laugh, shocking both of them. A surprisingly lighthearted sound, she knew exactly what he was referring to.

“Was it always that easy to tell? You could’ve just said something about it, idiot.”

Somehow, Phil managed to look sheepish, despite the glob of latex dripping off his shiny muzzle. “Sorry! I just- that’s your business, and-”

“Just busting your balls, Phil. Assuming you still have some.”

Phil scowled, eliciting another laugh from Roeschelle. After a moment, he went on.

“Like I was saying! I could probably do this to you if I touched you. If not, yeah, I get it, but I just- thought I’d ask. It didn’t hurt, but I did lose vision and hearing for a little bit- it’s kinda scary being in that puddle, not knowing if I’ll come back up...”

Roeschelle didn’t even have to think. She’d been human for too long, and the instinct deep within her was already answering for her.

“Yes. Do it.”