

“All done. Just need to get this printed and... oh.”

Alex was in the middle of a victory stretch, having finally conquered his foolish final exam. Too many sources, too much research, but the paper was done! Not that the dingy computer lab much cared who or what was done in its space; it was a place of last resort for those who did not have the sort of fancy computers the cool kids had.

Such as it was that he saw the most empty of printer carts. Firm bold plastic on caster wheels with nothing at all to carry about. **“Fuck,”** he declared, as if this would make anything better.

Should he try and email it to himself? No, there wasn't a printer back at the dorm either. Send it to the professor with an apology? No, the teaching assistants would be picking it up in person tomorrow. It needed printing, and it needed to be printed now!

Thankfully, Alex was his own backup plan.

It is a rare and versatile skill to speak the spellcraft of objects; to understand what they are conceptually and allow one to slip into their state of being. A printer was certainly complex, but at the same time the computer lab *knew* what a printer was. Alex could feel it, in memories of a time when the lab actually had its own printer, and didn't have to share one on a cart between various rooms. This room knew where its printer-shaped void was, and he was capable of filling it.

Awkwardly, of course, but capable.

One does not merely sit upon a printer cart. Careful measuring against the wall to avoid toppling the poor thing is required, and though Alex was quite light compared to his friends, he was still far heavier than an average printer (for now). Feeling the space where the printer should go, he allowed himself to slip into its role.

Much like liquid in a funnel, his essence poured into the existential space of what a printer was. He didn't quite know the particulars of that space, only that he could fill it up and approximate the idea. Clothing began to harden and congeal into that beige sort of computer plastic that was all the rage in the 90s. Was he going to be an old printer? Hopefully not. He felt modern, at least, as his face started to glisten and shine with all the electrics necessary to power an LCD screen.

There is a moment, very brief, between where emotions go from one form to another. A smile on one's lips is not the same as displaying a smile on a screen; and when one is lacking in both lips and screens the emotions tend to wriggle a bit. Hiccups, he called them, though they quickly spilled out into the new method of expression once all was said and done.

It helped to focus on the boundaries of the thing, to avoid getting caught up in all the hiccups. He was filling its container, purpose was being expressed in a different way while still existing all the same. His arm reached out towards the outlet, cabling and rubbering into a three pronged tentacle that could slide neatly into the... oooh.

“Always feels weird to be on city power.”

It would liken it to being on an IV drip, though perhaps a more forceful, insistent one. Its nerves circuits churned with energy, and his systems could find a better place to reside in the plastic carapace that was slowly boxening out. Alex' liver was more like an inkjet, capable of spraying all the color that was digested out into the paper that flowed through him... paper?

“Crud, forgot the paper.”

A brief exodus from his shifting, hold up now need to get something. Like reaching, straining for some object on a boat before going for a dive, not quite ready to sink under the water. A long plastic arm noodled towards a stack of paper on the table, grabbing and stuffing a few pages into his mouth.

Its mouth felt wide, concerningly so, but without teeth and gums and saliva it wasn't really a problem. It wasn't really going to speak with its mouth, that sort of thing came up on his screen instead. There you go, eat the paper, very good. Now that it wasn't going to be starving, Alex could get back to the process of becoming a printer, as one does on a Tuesday afternoon.

Its intestines could become feeds, little greebls to grab the paper and flow it through his system so that the inkjet could properly splatter onto the page. Its mind leaned back, flattening and splitting evenly into a nice glass pane. What was that? A scanner? Probably more of a mouth than the paper feed, but for its mind. Regardless, the lightbulb in its brain wasn't quite on right now, and it could simply settle for having its screen burble with little eyes on the front. Alex wasn't quite ready to see through its mind, thank you very much.

The last remaining noodly appendage slithered out, cabling towards the computer. This sort of change was a double, needing to get the right format of the adapter to plug in. But the computer definitely remembered what its socket felt like when it was filled, and was happy to show Alex exactly what sort of printer-cable needed to go in. Yes, that's the spot, right there. Ding!

Alex' mind opened up. The computer was talking to him, directly to his mind. There was a space deep beyond its cable, full of toys and objects and files. Many were incompatible, but it could print SO many things!

“Ack! No, I'm here for my report, thanks.”

>>Searching...

>>12 results found.

Crud. A lot of people had done reports on this machine and failed to delete them afterwards. It was one thing to know that he'd saved it as AlexFinalReport.docx, and another to actually feel the files conceptually and try to gather which one was which. It was hard to focus on the file names, smatterings of text and words blaring in his mind. This one was about raptor eggs. This one was on the business processes of morons. Aha! Found his report.

<<Print.

Immediately its internals came to life. Vrooom! Ci-chun-ci-chunkakun. *Vrrrrp*. It drew the paper in, began to spit out its ink rhythmically in a manner most equal to the thoughts of the report in its head. It felt like going through the motions, not a very emotional process but one that could be dealt out handily(like working in retail). One page... two pages... four pages...

Its insides felt warm, rollers frictioned up and circuits hot. Strangely invigorated, the sort of adrenaline that came from going for a run, but supported by the power cable all the way. Very nice, very pleasing, if a bit bizarre.

“There, all done. Just unplug from the computer, an-”

The door opened. Alex’ screen blanched, social anxiety writ upon every pixel. One does not simply reveal themselves to be a printer in front of others (how scandalous). He’d done something of the sort once, and never heard the end of it. Best to lay low, to wait for the intruder to leave.

This one was towering, brown haired and unkempt. Perhaps the printer was just small on the cart, compared to the monolithic humans that stomped about and did their human things. Alex definitely felt constrained in the role of the printer, unable to properly ask the human to leave or to not make things awkward. Maybe a message on the screen? No, that would just intrigue them.

“Oh hey, that’s where the new printer was.”

Fuck.

“Order a nice inkjet, and then someone runs off with it. Who runs off with a printer?”

You! You’re running off with one, with him, with it! Stop it!

“Let’s get you back to IT, yeah?”

Noooooooo...

The cord was popped out, the tasty thrill of electrical power denied as the IT worker calmly began to wheel the cart away. Like being taken for a ride, sitting in the backseat of a car while someone else drove you around. But Alex could not escape the ride, could not simply ask his driver to please not take it away for printerly deeds.

Elevator music played, and Alex screamed inside. Not outside, for the printer had no power, but its memory banks were churning all the same.

Light came on, and it found itself in a smaller room, filled with electronic doodads and fixtures.

“There we go, power in. Let’s get you plugged up...”

Bwom! The feeling of a computer on the other end of the link came through, though this time it was vast and expansive. The IT computer reached out to all the machines in the place, and if he so chose he could have escaped across the net. But it would not do to pop out at another computer, to leave behind a printer and steal a computer somewhere else that he might make his escape. The first rule of object shifting was to leave the way you came in, however he could.

“Just get these papers going.”

Ah crud. If the IT department had been lacking in a printer for a while, certainly there would be a backlog. How many files... that’s too many files. Please stop queueing them. It... ahhhhh.

Page after page fed through its internals, as Alex printed out so many internal memos and process sheets. **“Gah!”**

“Huh? Did someone...?”

But no, he needed to be silent. To churn and burble, to slowly heat up and jet ink upon the paper. Its head opened up, and something was placed inside. What? No! Don't just...

>>Scanning...

A strange daydream played out across his mind, the showing of what looked like... some sort of dog person. Drawn in ink, crudely, on graph paper. What was that? DONUT STEEL, ORIGINAL CHARACTER. How quaint.

"Might as well upload this one. Starting to get good at this, drawing during downtime."

No he wasn't! The anatomy was all wrong, and...

But Alex wasn't Photoshop. Didn't want to be, anyway. He could feel the art suite across the cable, and it felt bloated, full of libraries that threatened to overwhelm his senses. He would let the strange IT worker have his picture, sending the dream off to the computer to be handled somewhere else.

Hours passed, before the lights turned low and the IT worker finally gave up his shift. The room was empty. At last!

Slowly, gently... Alex untangled itself.

Cable out of the computer, already turned off, a blank void like smooching ones face against a blank screen. Power cable out of the wall, delicious as it was, for he was going to go home and eat some actual people food. Paper out of the feed, because bleh that doesn't go in your mouth. Ink turned back into enzymes, into vitamins and nutrients as circuits became arteries and veins.

"Guh. Not how I wanted to spend my afternoon."

The cart began to teeter, as his feed stretched out into legs once more. But his feet found the floor as shoes reformed around them, and he slid forward. Something dragged behind, sliding and slipping along the plastic of the cart, not quite meshing with the pants that were coming back into existence. What was...

"...why do I have a tail?"

He remembered. The drawing, the IT worker's artwork. It had still been in his head when he shifted back, still been in the scanning tray. Excess concepts, straining to break free. It wasn't a bad tail, all things considered, though not quite 100% human. Should he shift back to empty it out?

"...I'll do that back home. Not in the mood to stick around in the IT closet."

Alex shook his head from side to side, dripping little bits of ink out of his ears. There were still bits of residual change that didn't quite come over, but some good food would fill him back up and make everything settle in properly.

He'd halfway gone through the motions of turning the doorknob when his face slammed into the door.

"...why is the door locked?"

Fuck. He could turn into a key but... today had already gone pear-shaped. **"Really need to stop getting into messes like this."**