

The heavy metal door screeched as it was dragged open. You cringed, glancing around quickly, but there was no-one left in the facility to hear the sound. You debated shutting it behind you, but thought better of it.

Nobody really knew what this facility was. It had popped up almost a decade ago, along with a myriad of armed guards and barbed fences, but ever since the Covid shutdowns the place had been abandoned, seemingly overnight. Even then, nobody dared going near it, out of pure fear that it had something to do with the virus that took the world by storm.

But you had a different theory in mind.

As you darted to the nearby hallway, clicking your flashlight on, you took a moment to take the floor in. Massive metal vats, tipped on their sides and clearly emptied. Catwalks above each and every one of them, connecting the upper rooms together, and hallways off to the left of the floor, presumably leading to offices and whatnot. You disappeared into one of them, as from a glance the floor had nothing to offer.

Your footsteps reverberated off the walls, the beam from your flashlight illuminating the linoleum floors and dusty wallpaper around you. You passed by a few offices; the doors were locked and the blinds were down over the windows, and so you moved on. You doubted you'd be able to get through those windows, judging from the thin metal running through them, and you were certain the doors probably had them too.

The hall turned left; you followed it. More doors, also locked, and more shuttered windows. You almost started losing hope of finding anything, until... at the very end of the hall, an open door! Ajar, the lock rusted through, but still open. With a surge of adrenaline, you darted into the room, closing the door behind you.

Just... a seemingly normal scientific office, albeit abandoned. Papers scattered the floors, various test tubes and beakers strewn about on the tables, file cabinets rusting and falling apart with age, and a thick layer of dust over everything, making you sneeze.

Nobody had been here for a *very* long time.

Out of curiosity, you opened one of the file cabinets. Or, tried to, at least. The first one was rusted shut, and you quickly gave up on it. The next one opened with a bit of "persuasion", but didn't hold anything in it except for a clipboard and a mug, complete with decade-old coffee stains to boot. It wasn't until the third one that you happened upon something interesting.

A vial. A *filled* vial, and stoppered, too.

You picked the vial up, the inky black substance inside giving no clues as to what it could be. You shook it; nothing happened, except the liquid sloshed around exactly as you expected. Viscous, but still liquid enough to flow somewhat normally.

Funny. You almost wanted something... more. Maybe some kind of explosion, perhaps? No, that would be stupid. And dangerous. You put the vial in the backpack slung over your shoulder, intending to keep going.

The door clicked open. You wheeled around, not having been anywhere near it, and quickly hid behind the filing cabinets, afraid someone may have caught you in the act. You killed your flashlight and held your breath, heart pounding.

One... two... three...

You risked a peek.

Nothing.

Nothing but dust and shadows, at least. You sighed, then coughed again from the dust. Places like this... guess they had a way of getting to you. Laughing to yourself, you clicked your flashlight back on, and continued out of the room, down back the way you'd come and to the other hallways.

A couple of hours later, you'd amassed a pretty sizeable haul from the various abandoned rooms that had been unlocked. You'd found more of those weird ink samples, this time in various colors and consistencies. Most of them were the same as the first you'd found, inky black and somewhat viscous, but you'd also found a few vials and beakers of different colored liquids, the various whites, blues and pinks ranging from tarlike to water in their consistency. You'd also found a good several random artifacts too; an enamel pin with a beaker and the words "EMOS Safety Labs", a model atom caked with dust and a few various folders and albums you hadn't had time to look through. The glass items had carefully been wrapped in the papers littering the floor and put into a separate pocket of the backpack, while the pin went on your jacket and the folders into another part of the pack. Double checking you had everything, you carefully slipped out the door, easing it back closed (but still not avoiding that earsplitting screech.)

By the time you got home, back to your tiny little house on the edge of the city, it'd taken everything in you not to just collapse on the couch and go to sleep. Instead, you carefully laid out all the beakers, vials and folders on your kitchen table, eager to find out more about your prizes.

Absently fiddling with the first vial you'd found, you opened the first folder and began to read.

*Experiment Log #354*

*Universal DNA sample research (Referred to as Unicellular, for some reason) is progressing smoothly. Every subject so far has exhibited immediate signs of bonding once in contact with*

*the substance. Every. Last. One. No matter what we've thrown at it, be it mice, raccoons, hell, Mike managed to trap a coyote last week! Every single animal subject has shown the exact same reaction to the substance, and that's been a near complete DNA restructure. Every single subject's become a sort of "host" for the Unicellular sample, creati-*

The rest of the page was ripped, nearly... burned. You looked around for the other half of the page, flipping through every page in the folder, checking on the floor around you, but nothing.

Creating what? What were the samples? Were they the things you'd collected? Maybe. You shuffled a couple of pages, intent on finding some kind of answer.

*Experiment Log #401*

*First human test with the Unicellular sample. A death row inmate, apparently (I thought they banned death row, but that's better for us.)*

*Test went exactly the same as previous tests. I do mean EXACTLY the same. Complete and utter restructuring of the DNA. Same as every other test subject.*

*Although we did notice an interesting difference. Human skin is apparently resistant to the compound. Every animal subject began host bonding upon contact, but not with our human subject. Experimented with different methods of introduction, conclusion is oral introdu-*

Again, the page almost looked burned, and terminated early.

Oral introduction? Like, drinking?

You glanced down at the vial in your hand. No way, you'd never drink this stuff in a million years! Would anyone actually be stupid enough to do that!?

You set the vial down on the table and continued reading. You didn't realize how close you'd set it to the edge, though; the vial rolled right off the table, smashing on the hard kitchen floor and all over your ankle and sock. Cursing, you quickly grabbed a paper towel. Good thing that file had said it didn't start by touch with people, because it was *all over* your ankle.

Ugh. Guess that was a sign you should be heading to bed. It was past midnight, after all.

You didn't even take your clothes off. As soon as you hit the couch, you were out like a light.

You blinked awake. Rolling over, the microwave said "3:47 AM." Only 4? You groaned, having only gotten a couple hours of sleep. Wait. You'd been so tired, how-

Then the thirst hit you.

Oh *god*, you'd never felt this thirsty in your life! Still half asleep, you nearly crawled off the couch, somehow managing to grab a glass and fill it without breaking anything else. Down went the water, and you smacked your lips, expecting the thirst to go away, or at least get weaker.

Instead, another wave hit you, stronger this time. In your grogginess, it took you a couple tries (and a sizeable puddle at your feet, soaking into your socks) to fill another glass, only to have the same effect: The thirst came back, stronger still. In your tired frustration, you nearly threw the glass, but managed to simply drop it into the sink. You rubbed your eyes, scanning the table for anything that could help.

As soon as you saw a glass object on the table, you knew that would help. You couldn't remember when you'd left your old Science Club commemorative beaker glass out, let alone what you'd filled it with, but there it was on the table. You quickly grabbed it, downing the water inside it. Still half-asleep, you tried to turn the glass over to read the words on the glass, but there wasn't enough light to do that. Eh, whatever. You could feel the thirst going away finally, so maybe you'd just been *really* dehydrated or something. Letting out a huge yawn, you dragged yourself back to the couch, not even bothering to take your wet socks off, or even let go of the beaker, before crashing out again and immediately falling asleep.

The sunlight was the first thing you noticed. You could see it through your eyelids, so obviously it had to be morning. Cracking your eyes, you wiped at your mouth sleepily, trying to get that weird taste out of your mouth. It almost tasted like... rubber?

Groaning, you managed to haul yourself off the couch. Everything from last night was still on the table, exactly as you'd left it. Ignoring that for now, you shuffled to the kitchen, grabbing your glass from last night from the sink and filling another glass of water, feeling oddly parched again.

Except, it didn't go down smooth.

It felt like there was something in your throat, stopping the water from going down in one gulp. You managed to get it down, but it felt like a chore the entire way, nearly painful.

What was going *on*?

You leaned over the sink, a sudden bout of nausea hitting you out of nowhere. You tried to keep it down, but it seemed that water didn't particularly like being drank...

Despite your best efforts, the entire contents of your stomach splattered against the sink, staining the metal black. You collapsed against it, losing all strength.

Wait.

## *Black?*

Your hand shaking, you reached out and touched the inky black liquid now coating the inside of your sink. The exact same liquid that'd been in that vial you'd dropped last night. Still coughing up more of that black sludge, you managed to crawl your way to the couch, grabbing the beaker you'd drank from in your tired haze. Here, in the morning light, you could clearly see the words "EMOS Labs" printed on the side.

Oh no.

You didn't have time to react. Your stomach heaved, cramped, and you found yourself throwing up again, this time directly onto your carpet. More inky black bile, this time with lumps of unidentified substance mixed in, laying there on your carpet and glistening in the early morning sunlight. You gave it a tentative poke; it didn't move.

Your stomach felt... empty. You glanced down, and it wasn't until you saw the gaping hole in your torso that you realized what you'd just thrown up, and that alone made you puke again. The hole in your stomach only grew, the strange substance you'd ingested eating away at your organs and internals, leaving a massive hole in your stomach, eating into your chest, dripping into the carpet below you in splatters and chunks.

You gasped, somehow still able to breathe even as your lungs melted, but that didn't do much to offset the panic you felt. You tried to stand up, tried to grab the phone to call for help, but the substance you'd touched earlier was already making its mark. As you tried to grab the table to haul yourself up, your half-liquified fingers simply splattered against it, gaining no grip and causing you to tumble to the floor with a wet *splat*. Your entire hand was melting now, down to the wrist, and the gaping hole in your stomach was now eating away at your chest, too.

You hadn't realized it before, but your clothes were also dissolving as the strange liquid touched them. While it wasn't affecting the carpet under you somehow, any time your clothes touched any of the liquid they sizzled, eaten away almost as if by acid. By now, nearly your entire shirt was gone, and your pants were soon following, as the hole in your chest now straight through your body. Horrified, you tried to reach through, but your entire wrist simply sheared off into your chest cavity, causing you to throw up even more black bile onto the carpet.

You had no idea what was happening. Everything was completely painless, as your nerves had already been dissolved, but that didn't make it any less terrifying. You should've read more of those papers, more of those documents... maybe there was still a chance! If only you could get back up to the table-

Determined, you reached out with your other hand, your intact hand, fighting through the nausea and your spinning head to wrench yourself up. You didn't care that your entire arm below the elbow was gone, reduced to black sludge. You didn't pay attention as the hole in your

chest grew, nearly severing you in half. You didn't care as your legs were eaten by the substance, muscle and bone showing, then dissolving into black.

All you cared about were those documents.

And there they were, exactly as you'd left them when you went to sleep last night. Frantically, you flipped through them, finding another page you hadn't yet read:

#### *Experiment Log #476*

*The tests... were a success. We've successfully managed to create a stable and healthy host bond with a human subject. It looked rather painful, from observation. Subject completely melted from the inside out, just as every other subject had. Except... we were still getting readings from the stuff. Electrical impulses. Brain functions, despite the lack of a brain. This thing was still... still alive.*

*Keeping subject in observation for now. Short log, but a necessary one.*

No. No, no! There had to be more!

As the black sludge finally separated you in half, your legs slumping over in the chair under you, you lost your balance, falling over sideways out of the chair. Your intact arm flailed, trying to grasp anything that could help you stay up, but all you succeeded in doing was knocking over the other vials and beakers that were on the table, a few of them hitting you and shattering on impact. The addition of different colored substances only served to add more horrifying and mind-bending effects to an already strenuous transformation.

A beaker of blue sludge smashed into your leg, and immediately the black liquid eating you alive bubbled, as if boiling. Several of the bubbles popped violently, sending black and blue sludge and glass shards flying, and you screamed as some of them hit your eye. Immediately your vision in that eye went dark as it too, melted and bubbled, spreading even more of yourself around the room.

A vial of pink liquid broke right next to your intact arm, and in your panic you accidentally put your elbow into it. Immediately, your arm swelled, melting away into the viscous pink slime as it did so. With both arms now gone, your panic only rose, and your legs were soon to follow. You tried to kick, forgetting you were now separated at the torso, but somehow your leg responded. Black sludge went flying, and as soon as the pink and black liquids mixed, the swelling only got exponentially worse.

A white vial broke directly on your face, and you screamed again as glass flew into your good eye and mouth. It hurt; but as soon as the white liquid followed it into the wound, it immediately stopped, and you felt yourself... *reshaping*. The white liquid was pulling at your face, simultaneously melting you and adding more of itself to the front of your face. You couldn't see,

but you could still hear, and once the white slime met the unholy concoction of everything else eating you, you heard an almighty sizzle, then a massive *pop!*

Everything else not already covered was immediately coated in the mixture of colored liquids, and your hearing immediately cut out as your ears were enveloped, melting, reshaping and swelling.

You didn't know how much of you was left. You didn't know what parts of you were left. And as your mind finally gave up, as you found yourself blacking out, you didn't think you wanted to know.

You gasped awake. You couldn't see. When you tried to raise your arms to rub your eyes, you felt no response. You still couldn't see. You- couldn't *breathe*. Immediately, you started hyperventilating, but even then, you still weren't breathing.

Were you- *dead*? Had you died? Had that weird black sludge *killed* you!?

Then, all at once, you found you could get up.

You recoiled as your head hit something, and hit it *hard*. Strangely, it didn't hurt, but it definitely took you aback. This time, when you went to grab your head, there *was* a response, and you clearly felt your hands against your head... although it all felt *off* somehow. Muted, almost as if it wasn't quite... right.

Then, you opened your eyes.

It took you a moment to take in everything you were seeing. The carpet was... quite a ways away below you. Glancing up, you recoiled from the dent you'd made in the ceiling, even as more plaster rained down into your eyes. Instinctively, you blinked, before realizing the plaster... didn't hurt. You shook your head, and it glanced off, along with several black globs that stuck to the walls. A quick glance down only revealed a massive pillar of black sludge, black sludge that presumably *was you*.

Mirror. You needed a mirror.

The one on the wall over the couch had somehow been shattered during the course of your transformation. You tried to pick up one of the shards, but the massive log of sludge that was your arm was several times bigger than the shard, and couldn't get a grip. After a few failed attempts at trying to pick it up, you sighed, defeated.

Looking around, there wasn't anything else reflective enough (or big enough) to really give you a sense of what had happened. The fridge was too matte, the TV was covered in sludge (and trying to wipe it off only knocked it onto the floor), and the window was too small.

But the back door wasn't.

You managed to latch onto the glass, opening the sliding door and leaving a black splotch on the glass. The opening was much too small for you, yet somehow, your body deformed, squeezing its way through the opening, until you slid out with a wet *shlorp*.

Finally, now, you managed to stand up to your full size. Nearly twice as tall as your house, and nearly as tall as the trees around you. Here, you glanced down and saw your body had a proper shape; or, at the very least, something more definite. Two digitigrade legs, and your arms looked like proper arms now, complete with pitch black paws on both sets of limbs.

Laying back down, you managed to catch a glimpse of yourself in the reflection of the glass door. A black, slimy *creature*, somehow vaguely vulpine and reptilian at the same time. You had a fox's ears, but your muzzle was significantly blockier than a mammal's, and your tail looked like a mixture between the two. And most of all, your eyes were swirls of white, blue and pink, the colors of the other vials you'd accidentally smashed on yourself.

Standing back up to your full height, you had a thought. Without even as much as trying, you reached out towards a tree on the other side of the house, and your arm simply *extended*, grabbing it with effortless ease. Reeling it back in, you managed to do the same with your leg, kicking the chimney off your house from across the yard.

After several more minutes of testing the abilities of this new slime, you'd managed to find not only could you extend your limbs, but retract them, too. You'd managed to retract your arm back to your shoulder, and had also figured out how to reshape it. But that gave you an idea...

You squeezed yourself back down, now as tall as your roof, then shorter. Within a minute, you were back to your old height, albeit with a few extra limbs. You smiled to yourself, heading back inside, sweeping together all the forms you'd gotten from the old factory, somehow untouched by the massive amounts of goo that your transformation had brought on.

Stuffing them back inside the folder, you grabbed your coat and car keys.

You were headed to get answers. And EMOS had some explaining to do.