
Volunteer wanted, must love science - the flier had said. Jessica had taken one of the detachable email addresses and applied; figuring she needed the money, and that Science and her were on pretty good terms. As it turned out, the gig was pretty simple. They were testing some sort of anti-stress medication, so they wanted her to speak in front of a small group of people once to establish her "base stress rate" or something - hers was pretty much exactly the average, they discovered - and then do the same again with a different group after she'd taken their medication. This little injection (eventually it would be a pill, because who could shoot themselves up with something just before going on a stage and not look like a drug addict?) would keep her from being nervous and overexcited, without making her lose focus or concentration. Or, in the words of one of the researchers, it would "cool her heated blood". Jessica did not much like that researcher. Regardless, she thought, they're official college doctors, so what could go wrong?

They gave her the injection just before she went into the classroom they had set up. It was fast-acting enough for that, they said, and they also wanted to measure the difference in her stress level as it took effect. She was wearing a sleeveless top - they'd told her to do so, so they could measure her stress by the amount of sweat on her exposed skin - which meant she hadn't even needed to roll her sleeve back down after getting the injection. It felt cold; a dull pulse of ice slinking through her veins, and yet somehow oddly refreshing. She scratched the injection mark once and then stepped up to the podium.

They'd slipped in a particularly cute grad student in the front row of this group, Jessica noticed, which she felt was a little unfair. She breathed out deliberately and looked down at the paper in front of her. It was on Political Theory, another area she knew practically nothing about, but at least it was better than the Comparative Theology she had last time. She felt the liquid cold sensation spreading through her arm, and was surprised to find that it actually was a little comforting. She took another breath, and began.

It started out simply enough. The first page was on the proportional representation system in America, which she got through without much trouble. Every time she started to feel nervous the calming sensation swept across her a little further, making the act of public speaking feel much less nerve-wracking than it should have been. When she went to turn the page however, she found the fingers on her left hand seemed oddly stiff. No matter, she thought, and simply used her right hand instead.

Halfway through her discussion of the British parliamentary system she felt the sensation reach her neck, and that seemed to cause a massive rush to her head. She felt herself blush, but her cheeks flashed exceptionally cold instead of hot. She blinked, her vision blurring, the words on the page shifting out of place as she had to grab onto the podium and steady herself for a few

moments. It felt weird, some sort of electric-cool sizzle sliding up against her skull. She blinked again and shook her head briefly to throw it off. She would see this through - the researchers had told her she'd only get paid half if she didn't complete either lecture, and she wasn't about to let a little brain freeze put her off.

Turning to the third page proved even more difficult. Both her hands felt stiff and awkward, and the cold sensation now seemed to be actively numbing each of her arms. She managed it eventually, revealing that her next topic was the absolute monarchy of Brunei. She started reading as the cold sensation began sweeping down her chest, but before she could get past the first sentence she felt it reach her heart.

The feeling was indescribable; it was as though her heart started beating a million times a minute but from a different room than the rest of her body. She tried to keep talking, but suddenly she had too much tongue - she found herself saying "here we have an example of the third type of ssssysstem", unexpectedly throwing that poor last word into a sibilant oblivion. She gripped the podium again, but this time the tips of her fingers dug into the wooden surface hard enough to leave marks. Catching sight of her arms she finally noticed they were rapidly turning a dark shade of green. A thin coat of scales swept down her shoulder as she watched, rows of them sliding out of her skin and slotting themselves neatly into place.

She lurched forwards; her waist suddenly bulging alarmingly as though her legs were rushing to join with the increasing layer of scales that slid down her chest. Her top rode up; her pants had nowhere to go and so simply ripped in several places around her reforming body. She felt her teeth press against her lower lip, her eyes focused desperately on the several inches of tongue hanging out of her mouth, and now she could barely stand against the podium as her legs seemingly flowed into each other. She looked up again, seeing the audience looking concerned and... warm? Falling to her knees just before she no longer had knees, she managed a brief "class disssmissssed!" before her head hit the floor and she passed out.

"Ssso, what now?"

"Um..."

The researchers had carried her back into one of their labs while she was out. One of them had taken the time to convince the people in the audience that they were the ones being experimented on, testing their reaction to a new Hollywood effects technique; which, Jessica had had to admit, was pretty quick thinking. Now they had her sat - or curled, or perched, or whatever; the long, thick tail that had replaced her legs made the exact term for what she was doing an open question - on a metal chair in an empty white room, while the three of them sat together at the other end of a long, bare table.

She was still clothed (although her pants were now more of a ripped skirt), but what areas of skin she could see were still resolutely green and scale-covered. Even her hair seemed to be a

shade greener than its normal black. If it wasn't for the fact that the calming influence of the injection had kicked back in Jessica was sure she would be freaking out, but logically she knew that was only a matter of time. For now she tapped her fingers - now practically claws, apparently - against the table. The effect was disconcerting.

Eventually one of the researchers made a proper reply. "Well, you could be a superhero. Or a supervillain, I guess."

"Please don't be a supervillain" another added.

Jessica rapidly revised her opinions on the intelligence of college doctors.

"Actually," said the third, "you could probably only do either during the day. You probably won't have the energy at night, if you're cold-blooded now."

Jessica remembered that this was the researcher she already didn't like. She glared at him. She was well-suited to that now, and he visibly shrank in response, saying quietly "please don't eat me."

She sighed, and the resulting hissing sound was not one the researchers found comforting. "I'm not going to eat you, you jackassss. I'm a vegetarian." She paused a moment as a thought occurred to her. "...probably. Man, if thisss makess me have to do anything grossss like eat live miccce I really am going to have to kick your guy'ss assssses. Why didn't you tessst this ssstuff before giving it to people?"

"We did!" said one.

"...on snakes" another added.

"They seem fine", finished the third.

Jessica glowered, the calming sensation definitely starting to fade. "What? That's it? Ssscrew sssnakesss! I'd sssay you and your sssnakes can bite my asssss, but I'm not even sssure where that ISSS anymore!"

"Actually, you're probably snake-like enough now that other snakes wouldn't bite you."

"What?" interjected one of the researchers, "snakes bite other snakes."

"Really?"

"Yeah, pretty sure dude."

"Oh."

There was a long awkward pause, filled only with Jessica's increasingly hateful stare. Finally, the last researcher turned to her and quietly admitted "we... may not know that much about snakes."

Jessica put her head in her cold, clawed hands. "Ssssuper."
