

Austin woke up in a familiar place. This was his spaceship, the one he was using to try and deliver some cargo. He sat in the pilot's seat, aching all over and unable to stand. The lights were all off, and he couldn't see out of the display unit. He had crashed after failing to take this planet's atmosphere into account, and for now he was stuck in here. His hand wandered to a compartment near his seat, which he opened. He hastily fished for a bottle of pills: Painkillers. He poured out two capsules and quickly swallowed them, groaning as they dropped down his throat to work their magic.

"Fuckin'... shit, God damn... fuck, does this thing even work?"

Austin grabbed a flashlight from the compartment and turned it on, shining around the room. Nothing was on, not even the refrigerator in the corner, leading him to believe the crash had somehow caused a power outage. There was no calling for help even if he tried, Austin was as isolated as it got. He waited for the painkillers to kick in and, once they did, he slowly forced himself to his feet. His legs were still wobbly, so he gripped onto some machinery for support. Slowly, Austin walked over to the first door he could find, hoping to get a good view of the outside. This door had a small window which was normally covered by a metal panel. He slid the panel off and looked outside.

To his surprise, the entire ship was submerged underwater. He knelt down to look through the window at a different angle, hoping he could catch a glimpse of the water's surface. As it turned out, the water was fairly shallow, so he could easily swim to the top. The only problem, then, was getting out of that damned ship in the first place. If he opened this door, the ship would flood with water, and he figured he would have to return to this thing eventually so damaging it was out of the question. The only other option was that air hatch in the back, the one they used for transitioning into low-oxygen areas. He knew for a fact the thing was air-tight, no water was going to get through there, and so that was where he was going.

Austin stumbled through the dark and dreary ship, slowly regaining the ability to walk normally as he did so. Perhaps it was the painkillers, or perhaps it was the desire to leave this submerged prison of his. Regardless, if this was Austin's only way out of here, then by God he was going to take that chance. Finding a ladder, he climbed up and crawled through a small doorway in the ceiling. Once he was through, he shut the door and stood up, catching his breath and taking a moment to look at himself.

His outfit was, suffice to say, not ideal for swimming. A leather jacket and boots, with denim jeans and a white shirt underneath. The man was clearly going for a "tough guy" image, but he unfortunately couldn't quite pull it off. He wasn't sure why it didn't work, maybe he was

just a little too pudgy, but he still liked the ensemble enough to keep wearing it in private. This was his own ship, after all, and he could wear whatever he damn pleased. He ran a hand through his hair and sighed, pointing the flashlight up toward the ceiling.

There was another doorway, albeit not one with a knob. Rather, this one opened via a button on the ship, and was the only doorway on board with an additional one-way forcefield: Once a lifeform was detected as being nearby, it would pop up, allowing him to pass through without the fear of being bombarded by a sudden onslaught of alien water. Only things that were considered “alive” could get through, and only those of a certain size to prevent things such as dangerous parasites from passing. Most ships had these on all doors, but this wasn’t exactly a hi-tech model, so he only had the one on what was basically an emergency passageway. It was whatever, the ship had sentimental value to him, and he wasn’t in any condition to sell it for something better. Pressing the button, the door opened, leaving a flat, transparent layer protecting him from the water.

Now that Austin had a better view of the world around him, he took a moment to gaze up at the natural world. It seemed to him that he crashed on a slope, either that or the landing cratered the earth beneath the ship. He could see the water’s surface more clearly than ever, and with it an easy opportunity to get out of the water and onto land. Austin for sure felt unprepared, but he wasn’t getting his diving suit with the power off, so he had to settle with what he had. Grabbing a portable oxygen tank on the wall, he took a deep breath of its contents and hoisted himself through the forcefield.

Instantly something felt wrong. He felt a painful, stinging sensation all over his skin, like he was being doused in chemicals. Shit, shit, he had to get out of whatever the hell he was in fast. Getting back in the ship wasn’t going to do him any good, though, so his best course of action was to get to the surface. Austin swam up, kept his eyes shut and attempted to force himself to the surface. Urgently he moved, hurrying toward the hill and eventually grabbing onto the surface once he reached it. It was thick and muddy, and he was able to get a grip without much problem. Austin pulled himself and stuck his feet onto the surface, picking his legs up to ensure his boots weren’t stuck. Once he did so, he took a moment to pause, before bending his knees. Once his legs were bent, Austin launched himself upward. The force was enough for him to easily reach the surface, and he finally opened his eyes.

The world around him was wet, marshy, and green as could be. It was a pleasant sight, but Austin had to hurry and hoist himself onto land before he could enjoy any more of it. With a deep breath, he threw himself onto a patch of grass, the pain returning as he landed with a thump. This combined with that still-stinging liquid coating his body was overwhelming to the ship

pilot. Austin rocked back and forth, attempting to focus his mind on ignoring the pain. He couldn't remember if he had any spare pills with him, so he checked...

"...shit, nothing."

There Austin sat, in some damp grass, breathing heavily to make the pain more tolerable. He looked down at himself; his clothes were absolutely soaked, and those boots were going to be ruined if he attempted anything like that again. God, he needed to find the nearest civilization fast, he just had no idea how to get there. Austin gripped his head with his hand and sighed, before feeling something... wrong. There was something about the sensation of that touch that rubbed him the wrong way. Maybe it was that fake water all over him doing it? He removed his hand from his forehead and looked at it, wondering if something was wrong.

Shit, his hand. Something was wrong with the color, his palms were a light cyan. And the back of his hand, that was an even darker shade of blue. This seemed to be spreading slowly, slowly creeping its way to the tips of his fingers and down his wrist. Once it reached those tips, the liquid on his hands ran over his nails, completely covering them in that dark blue coat. Once the tips were all covered, it was like the nails weren't even there to begin with. He touched it with his other hand, which seemed to be going through the same crisis, and found it... weirdly smooth, unsurprisingly wet.

"Oh God, what the fuck...!"

There was a scream, and then yet more changes. He saw his reflection in the "water," and there was more screaming. His face, something was wrong with his face, it looked... long. He held a hand to his face and winced as it seemed to push forward, feeling his bones cracking and shifting underneath. His hair shriveling up and falling out, only to disintegrate as it fell, did not help. Most of his head took on that darker blue shade, though his chin seemed to fade into cyan. His ears disappeared into small holes onto the side of his head, and he struggled to get used to the change in hearing. He now had a round, blunted snout, something unmistakably not human.

These changes would soon spread to other parts of Austin's body. He could see under his drenched shirt the numerous shades of blue creeping down his neck, down to his shoulders. Speaking of his clothes, they started to feel more and more uncomfortable by the second, like that new skin was reacting negatively to it. Breathing deeply, he tossed his jacket on the ground and soon followed it up with his shirt. Now, he could plainly see the blue creeping down his

body: Everything from the shoulders up, and his arms were all covered in this moist skin. To say Austin took this well would be... well, it would be a complete lie.

“I-is anyone here!? What the Hell’s happening to me...!?”

“Stay put!”

Who was that? Austin glanced around him, working on removing his boots as he did so and hoping whoever was yelling was friendly. He eventually saw someone: Out of the corner of his eye, there was some sort of... non-mammalian biped. Their skin was mostly black, splotched with red and orange, and a long tail dragged behind them. Most eye-catching, at least to Austin, was their complete and total nudity; everything from head to toe was exposed, though their “parts” appeared to be hidden away somehow. Nevertheless, considering their flat chest and, just based on assumptions, Austin assumed this was a male of their species.

“W-where did you come from?”

“The village south of here. Please tell me what’s wrong.”

“I-I’m...” Austin paused for a moment, his voice quaking. “I’m turning into something, I... I don’t know what it is, but fuck, dude, I’m freaking out...”

“I can tell, sir.” The figure placed his hands on Austin’s shoulders. “Please, try to relax. I don’t know what’s going on here, but I’ll try to get you through this unharmed, okay?”

And so the stranger tried his best to keep Austin sane throughout this process. It was not long before everything above the waist was changed, rendering him unrecognizable as a human. That discomfort, meanwhile, crept down to underneath his clothes. Lifting himself up, Austin slipped his boots and socks off, followed soon by his pants. This left him in nothing but his briefs, which looked out-of-place in a sea of blue.

“Try to talk me through this,” the stranger said. “Who are you, why are you here?”

“My name...” Austin took a deep breath, hand clenched against his chest as he stared at the new skin creeping down his legs. “Agh... my name’s Austin Weiler. I’m a deliveryman from the KB-315 station. Human... I mean, I’m supposed to be human, but I... I don’t know, I...” It almost felt like the blue crept further down with each breath.

“KB-315? That’s a while away. I should probably introduce myself then, I hope this small talk is helping you calm down.” The stranger began to slowly massage Austin’s shoulders, sending shivers down the near-human’s spine. “My name is Kytel Azhtan, of the Urodela. The closest Earth equivalent, I believe, is the salamander. I heard a crash last night and came here to investigate. Was that... was that you?”

Austin nodded. Wincing, he pointed to a spot in the watery substance, a general guess as to where his vessel crashed. He’d noticed that there was a distinct lack of apparent impact damage. Perhaps the material on this planet was incredibly resistant to meteorites? When the spot was pointed out, Austin took the time to explain between breaths just how he got to land. The word choice was enough to make Kytel’s eyes widen

“You crashed inside the gene pool? Oh, Heavens above, that’s where our young are raised. And you had to swim through it to get up to the surface? Oh no, I’m so sorry... I had no idea this had such an affect on humans, sincerely, so few come here and...” Kytel seemed to panic for a minute but was quick to return to his calm demeanor after only a minute. “I’m sorry, I should not have lost my composure there. Just know, I’m here for you, Austin. Okay?”

“A-alright... thanks, Kai... Ky... tel... okay, I think that’s it.”

It wasn’t long before Austin felt a sudden, sharp pain in his lower back. He gasped, and could feel something poking the waistband of his briefs. Though he couldn’t see what was going on down there, he had a good guess, and sure enough, whatever that... thing was, it was getting longer and deeper into his briefs. Austin looked back at Kytel, so completely comfortable with himself and trying to do the same for him. It had him wondering...

“...should I...”

“If it makes you more comfortable, Austin, go ahead.”

Sighing, Austin sat up and, carefully, popped his briefs off before that thing could tear it into pieces. There he was, just as exposed as Kytel, his changes already nearing completion. It was enough to send the young man blushing; he was clearly not used to this level of attention. The blue reached his knees, then crept to his ankles, and finally the last of it was covered. There wasn't a bit of human skin left, just this.

"H-h-hah... breathe in... breathe out..."

"There you go, breathe in deep, try to relax..."

There was just one thing left to add to this package: That thing protruding from his lower back. It was clear, at this point, that this was supposed to be a tail. Lengthening, tapering, that tail soon reached the ground and only got longer. As it grew in length, Austin found that he had a surprising amount of control over it. Even as the pain of its growth forced him to sit still and breathe, Kytel's presence was enough to keep him from panicking anymore than he had before. The tail grew longer, and longer... until there was no more tail left to grow. It was that darker shade, tapered at the end and as long as one of his legs. He was unmistakably one of the Urodela now, at least physically.

"Hah... hah... this... how did this..."

"Austin, I think it's over. You should be safe to stand now. Do you need my help?"

Austin nodded and staggered to his feet, while Kytel wrapped his arms around his torso and hoisted him up. Though his legs were still weak, he was able to remain upright with his new acquaintance's help. Kytel eventually let go, allowing Austin to try and get used to his new body and all it entailed. Austin took a few steps, feeling the earth beneath his feet. It was a surreal experience, and not one he could tell if he enjoyed or not. This just felt like one unfortunate circumstance after another; at least there was this stranger here to help him out. That, at least, helped to put his mind at ease.

"Kytel, I... shit, dude, I think I get walking now? It ain't much different, but like, shit... this still feels wrong. Don't feel like myself, just feel like I'm, like... piloting some suit. I hope this is reversible, but if it's not..."

“Is it reversible? I don’t know,” Kytel admitted. “Here, how about you come with me. I’ll lead you to my village, and we’ll see what we can do about getting you back to your station, okay? Hopefully, they have a method of making you human again, too. It might take weeks, months, even years, but you’re stuck in this for no fault of your own, it’s only right that I try and help you.”

“You...” Austin breathed deeply, tail wrapping around his leg. “You think you can do that? Damn, I’d really appreciate it, this has been just... a lot, you know?”

“I’ll do what I can. Here, let’s grab your clothes and move south. You won’t need them for now, but if we can turn you human again, you definitely will.”

“A... alright...”

The pair soon grabbed the former human’s clothes, Austin taking the pants and briefs, Kytel grabbing the shirts and footwear. Taking care, they moved south, toward the village. The long walk gave Austin plenty of time to reflect on what just happened. So, he was some sort of salamander now? There was so little he knew about this race, hopefully his new friend would help him navigate this place. He would ask questions as he walked, and Kytel would answer them, and as Austin learned more, the more he had to wonder about his future. He hoped his future was bright, that he could take these lemons and make lemonade, but as the saying goes, only time will tell.