Chapter 4:

The next morning Simon woke up feeling invigorated as usual at the normal time, the feeling of euphoria from his round of self-stimulation still tingling as he pulled the covers off and realized he had slept naked. He knew now more than ever that the symbiote that he had create was bonding with him both physically and mentally. All sorts of conflicting emotions were swirling around in his head now that he was awake once more, his brain trying to figure out what the best scenario to this could possibly be. Even if he wanted to go to someone to try and get it removed there was likely nothing that anyone could do for him aside from becoming some sort of lab rat.

*Don’t you dare think about trying to separate us.*

“Oh great, now you can read my thoughts,” Simon stated with a sigh as he got dressed. “Relax… it was just a passing thought.”

*It wouldn’t matter anyway, we have already bonded beyond the point of no return. You should know better than anyone that there were mental integrations that came with this.*

Simon didn’t need to be reminded of that fact, even without the equipment at the lab he knew that this wasn’t what was supposed to happen. The original plan was to integrate the symbiote inside of a suit so that they could run circuitry through it and control how it operated in order to enhance what was needed. What happened instead was that the symbiote was fusing with his cells, making what should have been a temporary experience a very permanent one. It was the reason that they had been careful to keep the samples separate from any type of human interaction, he could only imagine what would have happened had this happened with one of the ones that didn’t have any sort of intelligence.

Though the symbiote stayed silent he swore he could feel it thinking, which was quite disturbing when the only thoughts that he had previously had in his head were his own. He couldn’t allow this to take his mind out of the game though, since he had to figure out what he was going to happen he told his new mental passenger to keep quiet while he went to work. Instead of the usual time running he decided to go the usual bus route instead. Not only would it allow him to think more but if his enhanced speed and stamina was because of the symbiote then using it might hasten the bonding process.

*What would be the problem with that?*

“Shut it,” Simon replied, trying to whisper the response but still getting looks from those that were also in the bus. Though he tried to play it cool the situation he was in was becoming more worrisome by the second. In the beginning the symbiote would be more instinct than anything, maybe get out a word or two when there was something that it particularly wanted. Now it was putting together full sentences and using scientifically-minded words.

*We are bonding, evolving.*

Those words caused a chill to go down his spine, trying to think of a way to communicate that didn’t just involve the creature reading his thoughts and potentially getting better at it. As he looked around the bus he saw others going back to their normal routines and a few in particular sparked an idea in his mind as he finished around for his cell phone. “Hello?” He said quietly, once more drawing up eyes to him before they saw that he was on his phone. “Oh yeah, I was talking to you about how much of a problem that would be because we weren’t sure of what the end product would be.”

*There is no one on that device, I do not understand what you are doing.*

“I was talking to you,” Simon replied, trying to clue in the symbiote as he thought mentally that this was an inopportune time for the symbiote to not get it. “We were going over how we can think a work project is going well, everyone bonding and getting alone, only for one person to turn into a monster or something and it kills the project. Do you get what I’m saying?”

*Ah. You have no fear of me killing you Simon, that was not what I was created for. In fact while you slept I have taken care of three diseases floating around in your blood and what appeared to be a tear in your stomach. You’re welcome.*

Oh good, it learned his name and sarcasm Simon thought as he tried not to roll his eyes. “But you don’t know all the outcomes,” Simon said, his voice going lower as he tried to hide the anger and anxiety in it. “For all we know you could be making the situation worse, not better. I don’t want to suddenly have three stomachs because you think that it’ll aid in my digestion or something!”

*Perhaps we should save this for the lab.*

Simon just put his head against his forehead as he realized that he had once more been unable to control his voice and alerted nearly half the bus to his presence. After concluding his fake phone call he waited the rest of the trip to get to the facility, hopping off the bus still feeling a set or two of eyes on him. He tried to make his way past the coffee vendor as fast as he could but nearly felt his arm get pulled out of his socket and cause him to stumble backwards while the symbiote shouted at him to get muffins. Despite Simon’s protests that it was eating through his entire paycheck he found himself walking to the spire a few minutes later with yet another bag of jumbo muffins in hand, explaining his newfound need of baked goods to the vendor as bringing them to the office to increase morale.

Of course once more he walked inside the spire and found himself holding an empty bag yet again, sighing as he tossed it away before seeing that he wasn’t alone in the entryway like usual. “Hi there Simon,” the person he recognized as the one that was with Dr. Malcome the other day. “I’m here to start my job shadowing today?”

Simon tried to put on the best smile he could possibly muster and nod, asking him if he was provided with all the personal protective gear that he would need, the other researcher nodding. He motioned to follow before going into the changing room and getting his lab coat on while trying to keep his back to him. Whether or not Alex knew that his role was likely to be his replacement Simon found himself practically seething. It was possible that the one he was training knew that this was the case and that only served to further anger him more.

*We do not like this one.*

The sudden chiming in of the symbiote through Simon off guard, though he quickly hid his shocked expression with that same smile as he led Alex into the observation hallway. Simon already yknew that the symbiote was probably hijacking his senses or at the very least tapping into the parts of his brain that allowed him to translate the input, though he suspected the former since occasionally the world would grow fuzzy before everything becoming clearer in some aspect. Taste was apparently the biggest focus though as he continued to consume through his budget, which would be even more bothersome when he was soon to be unemployed. As they got through the door into the cold air of the observation hallway his introspection was ruined by Alex immediately asking him questions for the next hour on everything that Simon did as part of his process.

*We can make him ours you now…*

“Make him ours?” Simon said in question.

“What was that?” Alex asked, looking up from the tablet where he had been attempting to put in the results of all the data probes in the first of the other symbiotes.

“I was just saying… make-up hours…” Simon replied, trying not to make the transition awkward. “If you miss one of the testing cycles you have to make up the hours by looking at the history on the readouts and make sure that they go into the proper spots so you don’t mess up the data points.”

Alex just let out an ah of understanding before going back to work while Simon mentally berated himself for slipping up like that. It was still hard for him to think of the means of trying to hold a mental conversation with something that was inside him and the more talkative the symbiote got the harder it was going to be. It appeared though that it was calming down the longer that they stood in the hallway, which prompted it to explain that it was feeling tired. It was an interesting observation for Simon since he didn’t think that the symbiote got tired, making him wonder if perhaps the cold had something to do with it before he was called over by Alex.

“What happened to this one?” Alex asked as they got to the empty vessel at the end of the hallway. “It just says failed test parameters, specimen destroyed.”

“This one just happened to not make the grade when it came to the needs of the contractors that commissioned this project from us,” Simon explained, trying not to show on his face that it was a lie. “I’m sure eventually when we move on to the next phase of the project they will put another one in there or possibly split one of the others into two. Either way it was a shame, I had hoped we could keep it around for further study but the higher-ups didn’t want it in the system.”

“I see…” Alex replied as he looked back at the containment cell. “So what are these things supposed to do again?”

Simon tried to ignore the headache forming in the back of his head as he went on about all the things that this bioengineered goo was supposed to do, once finally finished testing it would be processed into a suit or armor in order to keep people safe as well as augment abilities. The entire time Simon explained it he wondered just how much the raw, unrefined version would do for him… though now that it appeared that he had put the symbiote to sleep his mind wandered to the option of getting it removed. He knew that there was the potential to possibly remove it from his body, but he would have to figure out the science himself and if the symbiote could tap into his thoughts he might figure out the plan. Of course if there was a bonding process there might be a point where they’d be too integrated for anything to take them apart.

As the hours passed the symbiote continued to leave him in peace while he remained in the cold of the observation tunnel while he continued to show Alex the ropes. One of the things that having someone else doing things helped with was that he could work on something else while they continued to learn how to input the data. He had brought in his tablet that he claimed was a back-up from work but was actually a personal one he used on occasion. It wasn’t the greatest in the world but it worked and more importantly it had a link to his home computer, the only thing was he had to risk being on the company wi-fi in order to use it.

At this point though the wheels were in motion to fire him, he thought to himself, so they would likely either just overlook the oversight or silently record it to use against him later. Even as he was putting in the calculations and using data from the other symbiotes there was one huge missing piece he still didn’t have, access to data measuring equipment that he could use on himself. There was plenty of it lying around in the spire but it was all regularly checked and recorded while it was in storage… but not when it was in use. As he got to the empty symbiote vessel he saw all the equipment in there, including the stuff he modified, and knew if he could just figure out a way to bypass the seal he could take it and no one would be the wiser… except maybe Alex.

Alex was something that at this point was going to be a major liability, Simon thought to himself, but that made him think to what the symbiote had said earlier about making him ours. It was a warm day out and when it came time to lunch he declined Alex’s offer to sit with him, stating he was going to go out and stretch his legs. The reality of the situation was that he was going out for two reasons, the first was to get the symbiote to wake up and the other was so that he could talk to it in private without needing to pretend he was on his phone. Even before he left the building he could sense the symbiote coming too, shivering when he felt thoughts that weren’t his own using his mind.

*I do not like that place…*

“You’re going to have to deal with it for now,” Simon replied as he pulled out his lunch and ate while he walked. “So what did you mean back in the observation hallway before you fell asleep. You said that you could make Alex one of ours, but I have never seen anything in the breakdown of the symbiotes that would possibly be able to do something like that.”

*There is a lot about me that you do not comprehend.*

“Then enlighten me,” Simon stated. “You have until I finish my lunch on how you propose we make it so we don’t have to worry about Alex anymore.”

At first Simon thought that he was going to be told what was happening, but instead he suddenly felt all his perception get focused inward as what felt like a memory was playing in his mind. It was a place that he recognized easily, feeling the heat of the incinerator as well as the symbiote completely covering his body. But this wasn’t from his perspective… everything he was experienced seemed to be flipped around as instead of feeling the liquid covering his limbs it was like he was coating his own body over the form of someone else. It didn’t take him long to realize what the symbiote was doing, showing him what had happened from his side of things.

Simon could feel his real body shudder as he heard himself shouting for help and feeling the instinctive need to silence his host, forming a tentacle before stuffing it between his lips. At the same time it covered his face and spread out over his head, pushing more tendrils into his nostrils and even into his ears. It managed to get past the defenses and into the brain and the second it touched the synapses firing through the soft flesh it was like getting struck with a lightning bolt. Feelings, sensations, finally the symbiote started to have an understanding as he absorbed all the electrical data from the creature that he was forming over.

While symbiote had some understanding of what was going on it was at this point that it truly began to think, and the first thing it did was start to find things out to survive. It found the part of his brain that Simon had stored all the knowledge of its kind and took that first, finding out what it could and could not do from the human. Then it began to extrapolate, use the abilities imbued into it to postulate and conjecture on other things it could do even though it didn’t know it was doing it. By this point Simon had passed out from the shock, though it could tell he was still alive since he had coated every inch of the researcher’s body under the hazmat suit.

The symbiote knew it didn’t have much time, having sensed the urgency from before it quickly tapped into how Simon worked next and learned everything there was to know about the species that called itself human. From there it formulated a plan and seeped deeper inside the human’s body, pouring itself into every pore and orifice it could so that it could manipulate his body. This was more than just being worn by the human like they wanted it to be, if he was going to save the both of them from being discovered it was going to have to take control and start bonding with him. So that’s what it did and soaked into muscle, brain, bone, any tissue it could find.

About a minute later the body in the haz-mat suit began to move, but it was not Simon that was doing the commands as the symbiote quickly learned how to match the brain and muscle signals to coordinate movement. As it did that it learned the reason why Simon had to maintain a strict time schedule and realized that it needed to pump something into the incinerator so that it could mark that the sample, which was it, was destroyed. Luckily the basement also had a few water pipes that the symbiote rolled the cart over to once it had mastered the art of walking on two legs.

It was a bizarre feeling for Simon watching in his own mind’s eye to essentially feel something else move his own body. As he watched it fill the empty containment cart with water it was like being a puppet with someone else moving his limbs. It was especially weird because the symbiote had just started bonding with him, which meant a lot of movement was done with tentacles of the thick ooze wrapped around his muscles and bones that he could feel squish against them when it needed to do something. Finally the symbiote-controlled body managed to get everything finished and signed off on the task before removing the helmet, the last thing Simon seeing before being shocked back into his body was a head covered in shiny black with a maw full of sharp teeth and a long, rubbery tongue lashing out of it.

When Simon blinked again he realized that he was standing in the same part of the path where he had been since the vision started, though when he looked down at his phone to check the time he saw that only a minute or so had passed. He looked around to make sure that no one else was watching him before he started moving again, eating the rest of his lunch while contemplating what the symbiote had showed him. It was clear what it meant by taking Alex as their own, somehow it would move over into Alex and do the same thing or something similar to him that it did in the incinerator room. Of course if it could do something like this alright why hadn’t it done it alright, or better yet just completely taken him over?

*I’m too weak to have even considered doing that to you. Plus you are different than Alex, just as I am different from the other symbiotes that you have in that lab. Together we could be unstoppable.*

Even though Simon didn’t like the way that it said such a thing he knew it would be true; a sentient symbiote combined with a host would create a highly-augmented creature with abilities the likes of which humanity had never seen before. “I still don’t like the idea of doing this,” Simon said as he started to head back towards the lab, knowing that soon his lunch break would be over. “I mean you did it to me but that’s because you were already intending on bonding with me. How do we know you can do the same things to others when you can’t even manifest yourself anymore?”

*Our strength will return.*

The symbiote said it with such assurance that it almost caused Simon to nod in understanding.

*Plus I’ve been practicing.*

“I mean if you think-“ Simon started to say before he stopped dead in his tracks. “Wait, you’ve been what?”

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A few hours later Simon returned home to his apartment; even with the training of Alex that he had to do the combination of the two working together did actually make the work go by faster. The younger researcher was definitely a quick learner, at this rate he probably wouldn’t even need the entire month in order to get where he needed to be to replace him. That wasn’t where his head was at, ever since the symbiote had clued him in to his own little experiment his mind was focused more on what was waiting for him when he got home. He tried not to look surprised when he saw his roommate standing there in his underwear on the couch, eating from a box of cereal and watching some documentary on the television.

Even though Simon knew he was staring he found it hard to look away, at least until he closed the door and brought Tony’s attention to him. “Oh, hey,” Simon said as he quickly averted his gaze from the mostly nude body to the screen. “What are you watching there?”

“It’s something that I got assigned for my advanced physics course,” Tony explained, seemingly not embarrassed at all that he was just sitting there with only a thin layer of white fabric covering him. “Didn’t think I would like it at first but the introduction has really got me. If that’s your think you can come and watch, I don’t mind rewinding it since it’s only like ten minutes in.”

“Uh, no thanks…” Simon replied while slowly backing away. “I’m just… going to be in my room now. You have fun with that.”

“Will do,” Tony replied with a wave. “If you want I was thinking of ordering pizza later, you want in on it I’ll add what you want to it.”

Simon thanked him for the offer once more before heading to his room, taking the door and locking it the second that it was closed. Even though they had never mentioned it to one another before Tony had never been out and about in such little clothing, even when he had a hangover from partying the night before. It was at the very least gym shorts, not just sitting there in his underwear. It wasn’t very thick underwear either as he could see every inch of what laid beneath it.

*See, we like Tony.*

“Stop it,” Simon nearly growled, sitting down in front of his computer. “Tell me what you did to him and how you can reverse it.”

*When he touched our body-*

“It’s MY body,” Simon interrupted, feeling a note of frustration from the symbiote at the declaration.

*…when he touched OUR body I was able to take several tendrils of myself and push them into Tony through his skin.* The symbiote explained, mimicking the emphasis that caused Simon’s eye to twitch. *It wasn’t enough to do much, but after examining your physiology I knew the best way to get to his brain. I didn’t have much time but before my essence completely dissolved away I was able to… tweak some thought patterns in his brain.*

“That’s impossible,” Simon replied, crossing his arms. “You can’t just change someone’s behavior like that without them realizing it, and even if you did somehow make him think it was alright to be stripped down to his underwear there should have at least been some embarrassment when I came into the room. The amount of intuition in thought patterns and brain chemistry to affect just that would have been astronomical.”

*Why don’t you look at yourself before you come to conclusions…*

Simon could feel the symbiote smiling as he slowly looked down at his body and gasped when he found that somewhere between the door and his computer chair that he had taken off his shirt as well. When he looked around he found it on the floor, laying there crumpled up even though his normal pattern was to hang it up. “Stop that!” Simon shouted as he went over to his shirt, hearing the symbiote laugh as he picked it up and put it away. “You know if you keep doing this I’m not going to trust you, and didn’t you say something about the two of us being together would be unstoppable?”

*It was just a bit of fun, you know you like it.*

“Regardless,” Simon said, trying to keep his voice down. “You said you know me, well I know you now and that you’re there to augment my mental abilities, not change them. Am I wrong when I say that if you do something to me that renders me an invalid all you have is some meat puppet that you’d have to spend all your energy controlling? Not much of an unstoppable force then, is it?”

The symbiote remained quiet and even though Simon had never thought about it that way before he somehow knew that what he said was absolutely true. Had some of the information the symbiote had figured out bled into his psyche? They were bonding, it would make sense that even if they remained two separate creatures that they would be more than implementing a shared mental space as well as physical. Even if it wasn’t true though the threat seemed to have the desired effect as he could feel remorse coming from the symbiote.

*Any modification made to you is to the betterment of us as an evolved creature. If you do not allow me to do so then it will cause… complications. As a compromise I will make it known when I’m trying to change some part of us, that way it will not take you by surprise like this did. Does that sound fair to you Simon?*

While Simon was still a bit perturbed by the fact that something was changed in his very way of thinking it appeared that the symbiote was being genuine, and he would know best since it was literally inside of him sharing his mental space. This was an extremely complicated relationship and to have it suggest such a thing was indicative of how they were going to need one another in order to survive this surreal bonding process that was happening to them. “I suppose it really doesn’t pay to fight when we literally can’t separate ourselves from one another,” Simon replied with a sigh. “But the first sign that you’re doing something like that to me again and I’m going to call every government agency I know and I don’t care if they dissect me at that point.”

*That is acceptable Simon. Now, the first thing that we’re going to do is remove some of the inhibitions that have been preventing us from bonding properly.*

“Really, just like that?” Simon replied. “Going to make me love you like you apparently love Tony so much?”

*It’s mostly in the subconscious, on a deep level you still reject me, reject the concept of us. If this continues it may cause physical damage, so the best option would be to remove such things.*

Though Simon still was unsure of the symbiote tinkering around in his head like that he knew that this was something that the symbiote would do naturally and he would have to follow the rabbit hole down. “Just… don’t remove all of them, alright?” Simon replied. “I’m afraid of what I’ll say if I don’t have a filter between my mouth and brain.”

*I am more than capable of being this filter.*

“Doubtful,” Simon stated while rolling his eyes. “Just do it before I change my mind and fight you on this.”

*Resistance is futile.*

Before Simon could comment on the reference he let out a gasp as he could feel something in his mind, getting up from his chair and holding his head as the symbiote that had been inactive inside that area suddenly came to life. Even though it wasn’t painful the bizarre sensation of something slithering through your skull was enough to bang himself up against his wall before sliding down against it. His position put him right back in front of the mirror doors of his closet and as he began to pant he could literally see tiny tentacles pushing up the skin underneath his skull. Even though what he saw was terrifying he couldn’t find himself looking away, not even when several tiny black tendrils pushed their way out of his eyes and nostrils.

Simon found his hands digging into the carpet as symbiote continued to change him. It was like all his thoughts were on a chalkboard and it was erasing certain words, the human literally able to feel his thought patterns change. His eyes squeezed shut as the changes were not just limited to his head; the veins in his arms and legs turned black like they were being burned and as the symbiote continued to shift through his body it pooled at his toes and fingers. Even though he wasn’t watching he could feel the digits lengthen, his fingers growing shiny black claws while the toes of his feet began to merge as they darkened. When Simon finally opened his eyes once more the sclera had started to become infused with black as his entire body began to shake.

“Too… far…” Simon struggled to say, though it came out slightly garbled as he felt his teeth begin to grow sharper.

*Relax Simon, and trust me.*

Simon let out another groan before starting to pant, pressing his head against the wall as the tentacles inside it seemed to grow even thicker. At first there was a building pressure there as the appendages slithered all over, pushing at his skin as the symbiote continued its work. Just when he thought that it was going to be too much his back arched and there was a bright flash of light before everything in the human’s body calmed down. As he felt the tentacles start to retract he watched as his body shifted back to normal, human flesh reclaiming where the symbiote had been bubbling to the surface.

When Simon turned his head back to the mirror however he was greeted with the same visage that he saw in his mind when the symbiote had taken off the hazmat suit head, staring into a nearly featureless face save for a proto-muzzle full of sharp teeth and a shiny black tongue hanging from his mouth. “You see Simon,” he watched the creature say, feeling his own mouth move as the unnaturally deep words came out from his throat. “Nothing to worry about…”