



Chapter Four: Growth Spurt

Darkwing Duck (Cartoon 1991) · Not Rated · 6837 words

by Arukir

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Chapter Four: Growth Spurt

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An alternate origin story for Doctor Reginald Bushroot. Featuring Monster!Bushroot and Evil!Rhoda.

Trigger warning: Emotionally/Verbally abusive relationship, with the victim thinking some not-great things about themselves and self-blaming.

Nothing graphic, no sex, no gore.

Technically part of a series, but works as a standalone!

Hifar - Sapient being.

Hifar trials = human trials.

Chapter 1

I don't know what gave Reggie trauma over touching his neck. I'm thinking it was either a specific incident, a crappy childhood, or an abusive ex, but I'm not sure. If you have any suggestions, I'd love to hear them!

"Come on, Reggie! Give it up already." Doctors Gary and Larson, a stork and crane duo, had been hounding Reginald for weeks about his latest project. "Hand it over to us, we can actually make it profitable."

Speciest jerks -- the richest guy in the *world* was a duck like him (not like him). They didn't say it this time, but the two had made it clear what they thought of him and his ability to actually sell anything.

Reginald ignored them, slowly heating the chemicals he'd been working on. He wasn't in this for money, he was in this to change the world for the better. Imagine, a world where no one ever starved, where everyone could freely take advantage of the biggest source of energy available -- the sun!

So caught up in his thoughts, Reginald didn't notice the continued teasing of his colleagues. He as well didn't notice that he'd reached into the wrong container, sprinkling some of his home supplies into the vial rather than the Lab's, until it started bubbling and shaking.

Oops. Reginald took a calm step back, watching passively as yellow smoke billowed outwards, green and red sparks shooting out. A deep cackling came from the potion, deep echoes whispering in old languages, the wind briefly picking up. Of course, understanding the words perfectly (a blessing for successful brewing), Reginald wasn't scared in the slightest.

Gary and Larson, on the other hand, had pushed themselves into a far corner, staring in blatant shock and terror. Now *this... I could have fun with this.*

Reginald let a grin twist his beak in an ugly way, before dropping back into a frown. Rhoda hated it when he got revenge, and he wouldn't want to make her upset, so...

With an inward sigh, Reginald locked eyes with the other two, picking up the vial and dumping its contents onto the Venus Flytrap he'd been researching. He didn't blink once, smirking as they dusted themselves off and tried to act all haughty again, as if they hadn't just freaked out over an incomplete level two summoning. *Normals.*

Reginald rolled his eyes and went back to work, using a microscope to study the chlorophyll in leaf cuttings. He was almost there, he just needed a little more time...

Hours later, almost certainly past when he should've gone home, Reginald was completely ignorant of his surroundings. He wrote note after note, triple-checking his findings, going back to the microscope just to be sure -- yes, he'd done it! He had figured out how to give people the ability to photosynthesize, he was certain of it. Now he simply needed to start Hifar trials-

Something touched his shoulder, brushing his neck and sending a pulse of fear through him. He spun around with a hiss, fangs extended and ready to bite, before he registered the face in front of him. Rhoda pushed past him, looking at his findings.

"Dr Dendron, w-what are you doing here?" Reginald said through a slight lisp, fangs retracting and red eyes fading back to a calm blue. He looked around for a clock, knowing it had to be late.

"I was worried when I didn't see you leave, Reggie." Rhoda answered, putting her hands on his shoulders to look him in the eyes, concern etched onto her face. "Have you been getting enough sleep?"

"W-well, I-" Reginald cut himself when one of her hands rubbed against his neck feathers, sending him into a full-body flinch as he scrambled to get away from her. She was so forgetful! It was part of her charm, but still.... "Dr Dendron, you know- know I-I-I don't like my neck being t-touched."

What was it about the swan's presence that turned him into a stuttering mess? Her big soft eyes, the way she'd sometimes call him Reginald, how excited she got over his work? He sighed, outwardly this time, as he got lost in her beauty. Her looks were surpassed only by her intellect and heart, so caring and kind...

"Are you seriously still freaking over that?" Rhoda asked playfully, forgetting her strength and punching his arm a bit too hard. Her laugh was like soft bells. "Oh, Reggie! You have to get over that, you big hatchling."

"I know, I know." Reginald laughed along, rubbing the back of his head self-consciously. Trauma wasn't easy to 'get over', but he knew Rhoda was just trying to support him. He noticed her looking through his papers, immediately brightening up. "Oh! Dr Dendron, you'll love this. I finally figured it out, I just need to start live tests and then we can market it to the masses."

"Reginald, this could change the world!" Rhoda sighed sadly, sitting on the desk and twirling a strand of her hair around a finger. "Too bad it'll never get to testing."

Brain still shorted-out from being called 'Reginald', rarely getting to hear his name spoken outloud, it took a second for the words to register. He squawked "W-w-w-what?!"

"Dean Tightbill is cutting your funding." Rhoda looked so sad when she said that, Reginald's heart skipped a beat. No one had ever been upset on his behalf before he'd met her. "He wants you to assist Dr Gary and Dr Larson on their work instead. You have three days to clear everything from the Photosynthesis Project away, or you'll be fired."

"B-but he can't!" Reginald took a deep breath, not wanting to scare Rhoda by going full Monster. "Not when I'm this close, he just needs to see my findings. He'll change his mind, he has to."

"Reggie, don't be stupid." Rhoda rolled her eyes, and suddenly Reginald felt like a whining child. "Of course he won't change his mind, he won't understand a single thing

about the science involved. Even if he somehow sees its value, he'll just lock it away and accept millions of dollars from food industries to make sure it never sees the light of day."

"He wouldn't do that." Reginald argued weakly. "Even he has to see that the benefits to the whole of civilization are more important than the profits."

"All he cares about is lining his own pockets, Reggie." Rhoda clicked her beak sympathetically. "He'd set off atom bombs on every populated island on the planet, if it would make him rich."

"B-but..." Reginald collapsed onto his desk chair, knowing she was right. Tightbill, Gary, Larson -- they were all the same. Monster or Normal, the ones he answered to always cared for money over all else. "So that's it? All these years, and my life's work is just going to be thrown out? I'll spend the rest of my career as a glorified lab assistant to those bumbling morons?!"

He was lisping and hissing, realizing dully that his fangs were back out. Rhoda looked at them with a sneer, and he covered his beak with his hands while he calmed down. He knew Rhoda was disturbed by his fangs, he should've been more careful with them. Just another failure to add to the long story of his life.

"Reggie..." Rhoda started slowly, hesitantly. "What if I told you that I might know another place where you can do your tests? A place the University doesn't own, so you could sell your results as you pleased?"

"I'd say it sounds great." His lisp was almost gone again. He thought for a second; great things almost never happened to him. "What's the catch?"

"It's not the safest environment." Rhoda shrugged, already gathering his papers. "And it's not the most, uh, legal place either."

"I-I don't want to be a-a-arrested." Reginald twisted his hands nervously. Just what sort of stuff was Rhoda talking about? "Maybe I should- should just try to talk to the Dean, but thank you anyways, Dr Dendr-"

"There you go being stupid again, Reggie." Rhoda sighed exasperatedly, ignoring the other's flinch. "Dumbest genius I've ever met. Do you want to change the world? Help people? Go down in history as the man who ended world hunger? Or do you want to be the guy that let the discovery be sealed away, the key thrown out while Dean Tightbill becomes richer than McDuck?"

Reginald tried to answer, but she didn't let him.

"I want to see you succeed, Reginald." Rhoda smiled softly, putting a hand on his cheek. "This is the only way to do it. Are you in or out? It's that simple."

Reginald swallowed. This was a really bad idea. "I-I... I'm in."

Chapter 2

Vampyr don't suck blood, and aren't dead/undead, but can suck energy from a person (which doesn't kill the person nor lower their lifespan).

Poor Reggie loves his plants.

Near-total isolation isn't good for anyone's mind.

Reginald wasn't really sure what he'd expected, but a greenhouse wasn't it. It was beautiful, larger than any other greenhouse he'd ever seen, filled with colorful and exotic plants.

He'd spent a full hour geeking out, running from plant to plant and rattling off facts, lost in his own excitement. It was enough to temporarily make him forget the panic that had risen after he'd quit his job.

Rhoda had followed him with an amused smile, nodding as he spoke. He knew she wasn't really listening, but she was so polite to pretend; it was more than anyone else had given him.

It couldn't last forever, unfortunately. They had to get to work, after all. There was a living area at one corner of the greenhouse, where Reginald could keep his stuff and sleep in between working.

He didn't get much sleep, but he got plenty of work done. He had to finish the last few calculations, figure out a plan for Hifar testing, and put together a list of materials for Rhoda to gather. After that, he had to build the machines himself, which was a level of labor he wasn't used to.

"I thought Monsters were supposed to be strong?" Rhoda had joked when he complained. "Just use a spell or something."

"O-only Enchanters can cast True Spells, I'm a Vampyr." Reginald had explained for the hundredth time. She really was so forgetful. "And I'm only half, I don't really have all that much strength."

"Come on, Reggie, stop whining. I believe in you, you just have to believe in yourself. Now back to work!" She walked off, slapping him on the back in what was certainly supposed to be an encouraging gesture, but landed a little too close to his neck. He flinched, shuddering. So forgetful...

He eventually got used to the difficulty of the building, and the following weeks were actually nice. He managed to find a little free time each day to walk through the greenhouse, caring for the plants and talking to them, relaxing as much as he could between the leaves. Then it was back to his near-literally-back-breaking work.

Nights were a little better. He turned in late, cleaned oil and sweat off himself, then made a small dinner of soup or maybe a couple breadrolls. He'd make some final rounds checking on the plants, feed his rapidly-mutating Flytrap, then fall into a surprisingly restful sleep.

His favorite days were when Rhoda visited. It was so lonely, spending months by himself in the greenhouse, though the plants helped. He worked extra hard when he thought she might visit, because if he'd made enough progress she'd stay and have dinner with him. He only had a small stove and not many ingredients, so he couldn't make anything really worthy of her, but it was nice to be able to just talk.

He got to hear all sorts of gossip from the University, what sort of stupidity Gary and Larson has gotten into, how her other research was going. He almost missed his life there, though it was nice to be away from all the bullies, and his current work was important. He tried to tell her about his life, but it always somehow circled around to his work. Though, his life was more-or-less entirely his work by this point, so that made sense.

And the best part was that he'd gotten away with calling her 'Dendron' instead of 'Dr Dendron' several times! And she'd even been calling him 'Reginald' a lot more. He was almost certain that this was what love felt like, especially on the day he finished building.

He'd ran to the wall-mounted phone, double checking it was after 17:00 (he wasn't supposed to call her before then), and dialed Rhoda's number.

"Reggie, I know you don't need groceries, so what is it?" Rhoda sounded grumpy, but that made sense, she thought he was using the phone for something unimportant. Though, he was down to his last three cans of soup, so he kinda *did* need groceries...

"Dendron, I-I've finished it!" Reginald hopped in place, trying to get a lid on his excitement. "W-we can s-sta-start the tri-trials!" He mentally cursed his worsening stutter, nervously hoping Rhoda wouldn't scold him for it again.

"You're serious?" Rhoda gasped. "I'll be right there first thing tomorrow with some volunteers. Reginald, you're a genius!"

"T-thank you." Reginald blushed. "I c-c-couldn't have done- done it without you, Dr Dendron."

"See you tomorrow, Reggie." She giggled. "Oh, and please, call me Rhoda."

Reginald barely registered the dial tone, beak hanging open. He numbly hung up the phone and collapsed onto his bed with a grin. He turned to his perplexed flytrap. "Spike, she told me to call her Rhoda!"

Spike whined, straining his stem as he tried to lean over the edge of his pot. Reginald chuckled, pulling the plant close and petting him, much to Spike's delight.

"Rhoda..." Reginald sighed breathlessly. "She really likes me!"

Chapter 3

Five imaginary bucks to anyone who can guess the identities of the hippy poodles.

It is canon that Bushroot is meek until he's pushed too far, at which point he's pretty much one of the most wrathful characters on Darkwing Duck.

I interpret my version of Rhoda as actually being attracted to Reggie, both for his mind and body, but is still abusive towards him. She wants him, but only if he'll submit entirely to her wishes.

This does not reflect how I see Rhoda in canon, in the slightest.

Reginald squinted at the mirror at his partly transparent reflection, adjusting his lab-coat and combing through his thinning headcrest. He wanted to look perfect for Rhoda, but as well for the test subjects. They were the first other people he would see in a quarter-year, and they'd never trust their safety to a scientist that looked disheveled.

"How do I look?" He asked his reflection, getting a thumbs-up in reply. He twirled, and the reflection started soundlessly clapping. Reginald rolled his eyes. "Flatterer. Wish me luck."

He pulled down the old black tarp that had been above them, his reflection disappearing as light flooded in. He heard footsteps, and Spike started growling. He quickly shushed his pet, hurrying to meet up with Rhoda.

"Whoah, dude. Waaay cool!" Two poodles were following Rhoda, dripping wet from the storm that had been going on all day. Neither seemed all that intelligent, but their intelligence wasn't needed for the experiment.

"Hello, D- Rhoda." He should keep a professional atmosphere around the subjects, but he just couldn't stop himself from using her name. "I see you brought the subjects."

"Yes, this is Teresa and Maxwell." Rhoda introduced them. "Numbskulls, this is Dr Bushroot."

"Nice to meet you, Doc B." The female poodle stuck out her hand. "I'm Teri. Might I just say, totally righteous place you got here."

"Thank you." He had absolutely no idea what that meant, but her tone was positive. He calmly shook her hand and turned to the male. "So that means you're Maxwell."

"To the Max, dude!" Maxwell laughed, holding up his fingers in what Reginald thought was probably a peace sign. "Radical digs, man."

Reginald and Rhoda shared a look, him silently asking *What is wrong with these people?* and her answering *No clue*.

"Well, let's get to it, shall we?" Reginald smiled reassuringly at the poodles, trying to keep them calm. Test subjects always freaked out over the next little bit of paperwork. "First of all, I need you to sign some waivers, in case of death or injury."

"Oh, we already signed those in the FOWL base." Maxwell waved his hand dismissively. His eyes bugged out and he gasped. "Oh, uh, I meant-- not FOWL?"

Teresa smacked him lightly, glaring. "Idiot, we weren't supposed to say that! Now he knows we work for FOWL! Not radical!"

"You work for FOWL!?" Reginald squawked. He'd thought the boy had misspoke. He looked around, spotting an old spade and grabbing it as a makeshift weapon. "Put your hands up and do not approach. Rhoda, call 911, quickly."

The poodles smirked at each other, as if they thought his threat was cute. Which made sense, considering that they were supervillain agents and he was just some guy with a tiny shovel. What made considerably less sense was Rhoda's reaction.

She scoffed, rolled her eyes (he was rather used to that by now), and snatched the spade from him. "Relax, Reginald." He was almost used to being called by his name. "Where were you expecting me to get volunteers for our *illegal experiment*? Post an ad online?"

"B-but FOWL?" Reginald shook his head, not able to believe this. "Rhoda, they're villains! They... They hurt people, exploit them, *kidnap* them. You- you c-can- you can't-"

"I can't?" Rhoda asked, voice quiet and dangerous, stepping closer to Reginald. He gulped, backing away slightly. "Silly man, you think I answer to you? FOWL is offering a good deal; we stop world hunger, they get research on causing rapid mutation, and there's a good deal of profit all around. We're doing this, Reggie, and if you don't like it..."

She glanced at the poodles, who took a second to register they were supposed to do something, before the two dropped into fighting stances. Fireballs appeared in Maxwell's hands, while Teresa's eyes swirled purple.

"Either you're a part of the solution, or you're part of the problem." Rhoda ran her fingers across his shoulder, trailing his neck before cupping his cheek. "FOWL isn't

bad, Reggie, they want exactly what we do. To change the world, for the better. Don't be stupid, help them help us to help everyone. Come on, Reginald, do it for me."

"R-Rhoda, I..." He trailed off. Her hand slipped back down to his neck to play with the feathers there, and she just ignored the flinch, gripped his upper arm with her other hand when he tried to move away. She wasn't just forgetting.

"Are you in or out, Reginald?" Rhonda asked, hand still on his neck, his name suddenly sounding wrong in her mouth.

"I-I-I-" She'd never forgotten, had she? It was on purpose, always on purpose, how could he have not seen that?

"I'm getting tired of this, Reginald." Rhoda sighed, pouting. "Don't be stupid, you know what the right answer is."

"Y-you're right." He slumped a little. It was all just a manipulation, wasn't it? Every single word she'd spoken to him. Just as much a bully as Gary and Larson, but so much worse. "I do know the right answer."

Rhoda smirked, letting him go with one last too-hard cheek pat. "Good boy. Now, let's get started."

He was so done with bullies. Reginald's eyes glowed a terrible red, and he whistled loudly past his fangs. "Spike!"

Spike came bounding up, pot forgotten, growling and barking. He'd grown over the night, not too big, but big enough. Reginald pointed to the FOWL agents "Sic 'em, boy!"

"Reginald, what is th-?" Rhoda blinked, looking closer as the poodles tried to fend off Spike. She laughed, cruelly. "You mutated your widdle pet flytrap. You really have no sense of scientific ethics, do you? You were the perfect mark, Reggie."

"Y-you... You...!" He didn't know what to say, he could only see red, but he still couldn't harm her. He wouldn't even send Spike after her. He deflated, voice dropping to nearly a whisper. "Just go, Rhoda. Leave me alone."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Reggie." She pulled something out of her purse, ovaloid and purple. She sighed sadly, pushing a button. Smoke filled the room, and Reginald's vision started going blurry, barely hearing Rhoda's words before he blacked out. "It's too bad, Reginald, that you couldn't play ball. We could've been great together."

Chapter 4

Ivia is the Bird Goddess. Her mammal counterpart is Mima.

Gee, I wonder whatever shall happen now? Surely it doesn't involve plants and mutating, right? ;)

Reginald would've woken slowly, his mind was clogged enough for it, if a wave of terror hadn't shocked him into consciousness: there was something around his neck. There were restraints along each limb, holding him to a tilted metal table, but the one around his neck was the one he was most concerned about. It might've been his panicked imagination, but it felt tighter than the other restraints, nearly choking him.

"Hello, Reginald." Rhoda smirked, coming up the dirt path. Dirt path, glass roof, plants -- they were still in the Greenhouse. "Nice to see you're *finally* awake, lazybones."

Reginald looked around. He was strapped to his own machine, but some modifications had been made (mostly the addition of restraints), and a beautiful hybrid Nightshade was hooked up near him. Some time had passed, since the poodles had locked Spike in a cage and pulled off a costume change. To his absolute horror, it seemed they were trying to figure out how to operate the machine, which meant...

"You c-can't use me as a test subject!" He squawked, terrified. "I-I-I- Vampyr can't process sunlight, I'll have an a-almost zero chance of sur-sur-surviving!"

"Sur-sur-surviving." Rhoda mocked in a high pitched voice, scowling. Why had he thought she'd care? He really was stupid. "Seriously, Reginald, we've talked about this. Stuttering is low class, you have to work on it. If you do somehow survive, anyways. Send him up, numbskulls!"

How funny, Reginald thought hazily as the metal table started lifting towards a hole in the ceiling (**something it was not supposed to do, this wasn't how the machine was operated, what were those idiots doing, how-?**), all I used to want was for her to call me 'Reginald'. Now I don't think I ever want to hear it again, even if I survived.

Lightning flashed, raining pelting him so hard that it got past his feathers, making him shiver from cold. He was going to die, he knew it, and it was his own fault. His own foolish fault for falling for her falsehoods. And that poor flower would die with him. Maybe that shouldn't be what he was thinking, but he'd always had a soft spot for plants. He would die, and so would that poor, innocent plant.

What would happen to Spike? He couldn't think more about that as lightning struck the machine, chemicals rushing through him, feeling as if he was boiling from the inside out. It might've been minutes or days, he couldn't tell (much of anything) through the pain, but at some point it stopped. At some point he was lowered back down and the straps were released, but he just slid to the ground to slump over.

He wanted to move, to open his eyes, but he just couldn't. He wasn't even entirely sure he was still breathing, but was almost certain his heart wasn't beating. How was he still aware of anything? This wasn't death, he would know (Monsters always knew). But it didn't exactly feel like life.

Slowly, voices filtered in.

"-ulse. Pretty sure he's gone, Boss lady." A voice that he was pretty sure belonged to Teresa was saying, and he could just barely feel a pressure on his neck. He didn't even have the energy to flinch. "Bummer, guess it's a dud. Should we, like, resuscitate him, or..?"

"Don't bother, Flybrain." He could practically see Rhoda rolling her eyes, just like he knew she was glaring when Teresa cut herself off from trying to correct that her name was Flygirl. "Leave him in the woods with his pet, the thing will probably tear his body up enough to make the authorities assume monster-on-monster violence. Don't leave any DNA, not even a strand of hair, or I will make sure High Command uses you as the next victims- I mean, *subjects*."

"Yes Ma'am!" The poodles said in unison. He could hear the sound of metal scraping across the ground, and Spike's desperate barking.

Reginald was lifted into the air by an even pressure across his entire body. He might've thought that it was just the way his senses were acting up, but he recognized the feel of levitation. He hung loosely in the air, no outer sign of how terrified he was. Spike wouldn't really harm him, even if he thought Reginald was dead.

He was almost entirely certain of it. But if he was wrong, he wouldn't be able to fight back, and that was terrifying. He'd be completely helpless, out of control, maybe he'd even live through every moment of the pain. He wasn't sure, he'd technically just survived worse, after all. Then again, with how numb his body was...

Maybe he wouldn't even feel it.

Oh, he *definitely* would've felt it. By the time he was thrown unceremoniously on the ground, he felt like his whole body was on fire, twisting even though he wasn't moving. But it still wasn't as bad as the machine. He was pretty sure he could've moved, had he tried, but he didn't want to let his captors know that, so he didn't try.

"How are we leaving this beastie?" He could hear Maxwell over the sound of Spike's howling. He heard a snap and a whimper that hadn't come from the Flytrap. "Getting torn to shreds is *not* radical, girl."

"Leave it me, Hotshot." Teres- Flygirl said with an obviously false confidence. Maxwell (Hotshot?) seemed to fall for it, though, as he made a noise that sounded like an agreement. "Get over there. I'll just open the cage with my powers, then we'll..."

He heard the cage door scraping open, then a very deep growling that definitely came from Spike, though he hadn't known the plant was capable of such a noise.

"...RUN!" He couldn't tell whether Flygirl or Hotshot had screamed, maybe both of them. He heard them scrambling to get away, stomping through the forest, with Spike pursuing them.

Maybe he wouldn't have to worry about Spike maiming him, if Reginald could get up before he got back. But it was so *hard*. Every twitch and breath felt torn from him, as he struggled towards a tree to hold himself up.

Come on, Reginald. You can do this. He tried to encourage himself, but instead he flinched. It was too similar to something *she'd* say, when she wanted him to listen and obey without really thinking about it. By Ivia, how had he never figured it out? How could he have been so blind?

He'd always loved his name, but somehow she'd taken that. He didn't want to be Reginald anymore, didn't want to hear anyone call him that. But if he wasn't Dr Reginald Bushroot...

...Who was he?

Chapter 5

Warning: Reggie calls himself a few not-nice things, and starts to have (non-graphic) violent thoughts.

Poor Reggie's mind's a little scrambled, post-mutation.

He as well very confused by how good sunlight, since as a half-Vampyr he'd always found it somewhat annoying.

He had managed to get up, and was hobbling through the woods for a few hours, using the trees for support. He didn't really know where he was going, he just knew he had to tell someone about FOWL's presence. Even if it meant he himself was arrested (it was what he deserved, gullible fool).

His increasingly self-deprecating thoughts were cut off by the sound of barking. Spike, much bigger than when he'd last seen him but getting smaller (size changing? That could be useful), came bounding up to him. He was sniffing the ground, as if he'd been following the other's scent.

"Spike." He rasped out, falling to his knees to hug his beloved pet. It was the first words he'd spoken, since the incident, and he sounded... Different. His voice was deeper, a little raspy from thirst, and had a slight rumbling quality. But he didn't really have time to think about that.

It took a few tries, but he managed to talk enough to tell Spike that they needed to get out of the woods. The way too dark woods. He'd never minded darkness before, but for some reason he did now. He was *craving* light, and wasn't that just insane?

Was he insane? His mind was definitely working unusually. As he let Spike half-carry him through the woods, he felt almost as if the Flytrap was talking in something besides words. His thoughts felt random, scattered, and he could've sworn he sensed heard silent whispers.

It got worse and better when they got out of the woods, his energy slowly returning as sunlight washed over him. He couldn't think straight enough to connect it to his experiment, and any inkling of suspicion disappeared once he spotted a building in the distance.

The University. All that driving around in practically circles to get to the greenhouse, and Rhoda had only ever taken him to within walking distance of their her work. All those times he'd had to ration because she was 'too far away' to do a quick

shopping run. All those times he'd wanted a quick walk to a nearby town, but they were 'miles into the countryside'. She'd just lied, and he'd never thought to check.

But that made sense. He was a fool, and she was always in control.

He sighed, making his way to campus. Maybe if he begged, his former colleagues would help him. Maybe at least give him water, he was so thirsty.

A tree lifted down a branch, water cupped in its leaves, and poured it by his feet. He felt the water seeping into his body, and breathed out in relief.

"Oh, thank you, I really nee-" his eyes shot wide open. He blinked at the tree, pointing. "You moved. Did you just move?"

The tree nodded, but he was already distracted by his hand. He'd been too distracted by his bitter thoughts to realize his body had stopped burning, or that it changed. His hands were leaves. He looked down at himself, inspecting. His green body was so thin he'd slipped out of all his clothing, allowing him to clearly see the roots that his feet had become. Further inspection revealed purple fuzz on his head that was some parody of hair.

He flexed his new deformed fingers, finding that he could still probably grab things that weren't too heavy, despite their thinness and the fact the fingers were mostly joined together. He looked back at the lone tree, one of a few that grew away from the main forest.

"I... I made you move." He groaned. This was too much. "I think I need to sit down."

A flower sprouted underneath him, growing big enough for him to sit on it. Spike jumped into his lap, and he petted the Venus Flytrap while he tried to calm down.

He could control plants. Or, he could communicate with plants, allow them freedom of movement and growth, and they seemed rather open to fulfilling his requests.

So, now he was a Monster, a Normal, a Halfling, and a Mutant. If he wasn't a freaky outcast before, he certainly would be now. But maybe it wasn't all that bad. After all, he now had powers. Who knew what else he could do, what he could get plants to do?

Maybe he could fight Hotshot and Flygirl, steal his equipment back, get revenge on Rhoda for all she'd done. He was strong, he could feel it, none of them would stand a chance against him! He'd like to see Gary and Larson try to push him around now, he

could just push them right back, make them suffer every bit of pain they'd ever inflicted on him when he was Reginald...

He shook his head to clear it, watching small thorns retreat into his body, strange discoloration disappearing as he calmed. He as well felt his fangs retract, and shuddered, feeling glad that there had been no one around to bite.

What was wrong with him? His thoughts were much too violent, moreso than Reginald's had ever been. But he wasn't Reginald anymore, he didn't act the same. He didn't look the same. He didn't sound or think or even feel the same way ol' Reggie had. He wanted to hurt something, and that scared him.

Monsters were more violent than Normals, because they had a harder time controlling their primal instincts. He'd always done a pretty good job, but now he felt like he might give in no matter how much he struggled not to.

If Reginald was gone, did that leave only the Monster behind? He didn't know, but he would find out, he had no choice. He got up, thanking the helpful plants before he and Spike resumed their trek to the University.

It took a little while to figure out the best way to walk on his roots, but once he did he went much faster than he ever had before. If his arms were weak but flexible, his roots were felt strong enough to throw good-sized boulders. Spike ran to keep up, yipping happily, and he actually laughed.

Not the nervous or smitten chuckles he'd had with Rhoda. Not the sarcastic or embarrassed sounds he'd made with his colleagues. A real, overjoyed laugh he'd hadn't made since childhood. The plants around him sang in songs that he couldn't understand yet somehow did, he could feel the sunlight flowing into his body, and the wind rushed past him as he ran with a body much stronger than his old one.

How funny, that his lowest moment would give him something this grand. He was still broken up inside, his thoughts still manic, and he certainly would shed more than a few tears about everything that had happened. But for now, this one moment, he felt free.

Chapter 6

Warning: Bushroot gets really angry and chokes someone, intending to hurt them badly. He comes back to his senses and stops before they suffer any permanent damage, even giving them a healing potion, but still thought I should warn.

And that's Bushy's new origin. What do you think? Do you want to see more in this universe? Did you catch any grammar/spelling/storyline mistakes? Please comment! I like comments more than kudos.

The University campus was exactly as he remembered it, which annoyed him. It should've changed in some way after all things months, still old and grand and stuffy. After all, he'd changed so much, he wasn't even Reginald anymore.

"Sorry, no Monsters on campus without a visitor pass." A very familiar voice said as he walked past the door. "Too many dangerous experiments that react badly to certain sorts of magic, you know?"

"Oh, shut up, Gary." He shouldn't have said that outloud, but he honestly didn't care. That was a perfectly reasonable rule, of course, but they both knew Gary and Larson only bothered enforcing it because they were freaked out by his kind.

"How do you-" Dr Larson, beside Gary, squinted his eyes. "... Reggie? That you?"

"What?" Dr Gary took a closer look himself. "Hey, you're right? Woah, what happened to you, Reg?"

"I-I-I had an acci-accident." He hadn't stuttered around his plants, but these two speak five words and he's right back to it. He'd never been this pathetic before. "I'm sorta p-p-part plant, n-now."

"I knew you were obsessed with plants," Dr Larson laughed, "but turning yourself into a vegetable's a bjt much, no?"

"Hey, Reggie's a Veggie." Dr Gary grinned, and both started stupidly chanting. "Reggie's a Veggie, Reggie the Veggie!"

How had he ever been intimidated by these morons? He should've gotten a real revenge a long time ago, instead of just not hiding his Monster side. He should've poisoned them, or punched them, or-

He shook his head roughly, trying to get rid of such thoughts. He growled, making the others pause. He was too angry to stutter. "Would you guys listen for once in your miserably insignificant lives?! This is important! Rho- Dr Dendron is working with FOWL, they're running off with a machine I made, planning to make a super army. I need a phone, so I can call SHUSH and get authorities here before they get too far away."

"Rhoda? Working with FOWL?" Dr Larson shook his head. "You must've fried your brain when you turned yourself green, Bushroot."

"But don't worry -- if it's one of your projects, it'll probably just explode before they can use it!" Dr Gary guffawed, clapping him on the shoulder, right next to his neck.

It was the final straw. The Monster was loose, and he didn't try to hold back, colors changing and thorns growing and fangs expanding. He saw only red, barely registering Spike jumping into action as his roots shot out, colored like blood.

He held Dr Gary against the wall, roots tightening around the other bird's neck. He growled and hissed, more menacing than he'd ever sounded before. "How many times. Must I tell you. Not to. Touch. My. Neck?!"

"I-I'm sorry..." The other choked out. Dr Larson was only barely being held back by Spike.

"You're sorry?" He asked. He laughed. "All these years, and you've finally said you're sorry, after I've become the bully. You pushed me, and pushed me, and everyone pushed me! The worst I ever did was not act like a Normal! But now you're sorry. Well guess what? I don't give a cluck!" He sing-songed. "Not a cluck-cluck heeere. Not a cluck-cluck theeere. Not a clucking cluck *anywhere!*"

You try acting sane after being tortured and left for dead. I *dare* you.

The man continued to choke and gasp, while his partner had started begging, and... He couldn't do it. He was a Monster, he was bitter and angry and very much done -- but he wasn't cruel. Or, Reginald hadn't been cruel, and a little bit of that man still existed in him. The roots loosened, thorns retracting, just as sirens sounded in the distance.

Cluck.

"Where are your car keys?" He demanded, thinking quickly. He wouldn't find help here, he had to get away and clear his head.

"W-what?"

"Your car keys for your life, seems a fair deal if you ask me." He growled again, already searching with his other roots. He knew he'd hid it somewhere...

"Here, take them." Larson handed over his keys, still crying. "Just don't hurt him, please."

One good thing he could say of them? They really did love each other. He pushed Gary into Larson's arms, finally finding the small vial taped to the inside of a banister.

"This is a healing potion, to be applied to the skin." He calmly explained, putting it in Larson's. He eyed the wounds along Gary's neck, ignoring a pang of guilt. "I started hiding vials of it here after the third time one of you morons blew up my experiments. Drink a lot of water afterwards, or you'll pass out. *Have a nice day.* Come, Spike."

It was easy to find the car, a white-grey thing that thankfully wouldn't draw much attention. He took a few minutes fitting his body inside and figuring out how to drive with his new body shape. But he did it, getting out of the area without running into any cops.

He wondered if someone had seen him attack Dr Gary and called, or if some sign of what had happened in the greenhouse made it to the authorities, or if it was something entirely unrelated. It didn't matter, they wouldn't help him anyways. No one ever helped him, no one ever cared about him, except his plants

Making it to the highway, Spike slobbering happily in the back, he felt strangely calm. Not peaceful, just more numb. His thin leaves gripped the wheel hard as he thought.

Reginald wouldn't have hurt them. Scared them? Definitely. He loved showing his Monster side.

But the Monster wouldn't have spared them. He would've at least maimed them, left them drained of energy and forever traumatized. It was a Vampyr's instinct.

He wasn't either. He was someone -- something? -- new. He was... He'd have to think about that.

He thought for a long while, until the sun had long set and he'd abandoned the car. He thought as he sought shelter, thought as he curled up with Spike in a dirty cave. He thought until he was almost asleep, before he remembered the poor flower who'd lost

her life to turn him into what he was. The Hybrid Nightshade, a beautiful rarity created by scientists who just wanted to see if they could.

So he would be Nightshade, in remembrance and in promise. He had been created by scientists . Dr Reginald had helped create him, and so Nightshade had spared his tormentors, did what Reginald would have wanted. But he'd as well been created by FOWL, by Rhoda and her minions.

And they wouldn't be so lucky.

— end of "Chapter Four: Growth Spurt" —