

Becoming a Queen - Part 2

For SpaceBanana
By TheSpiralledEye

John goes to visit his friend who has already started to transform only to realise he may be changing as well.

Unfortunately for John, his mother was not letting a horde of ants stop them from gardening. The next day he was once more kneeling in the dirt, groaning under the hot sun. Sweat gathered down his spine and John sighed, praying nobody walked past. He took solace in the fact that at the very least, Kevin would never see him sweating like a pig like this; he hardly ever left his apartment. Something John was exceedingly jealous of right now as he dug his trowel into the ground only for yet another group of ants to come spilling out and up his wrist. He smacked at them, swiping them all away before they could crawl into his glove but of course a few of them managed to get past.

The stink of ants and dirt was permeating his skin so much he was sure it would take a week of showers to get it out. He looked at the pile of bulbs at his side; just four more to do then hopefully his mother would realise this was cruel and unusual punishment and let him go inside. He let the closeness of salvation motivate him, digging the trowel in four more times in rapid succession, ignoring the tiny crawling insects in the earth and practically throwing the bulbs in.

“Done mom!” He yelled, wheezing to his feet and beginning the awkward dance of trying to get the ants off. “I am going to shower!”

She turned to face him, looking like she was about to argue when her face softened then furrowed, twisting up in disgust as she took in the ants crawling across his arms and legs.

“Good idea, honey.”

John was not the sort to give her time to second guess that decision, running toward the house desperate to feel clean.

“Get them off before you go inside!” She called, “I don’t want them in the house.”

Inches from the door he stopped, so close. Brushing them all off was going to take an age and even then, he'd probably miss some and he just wanted to be clean. Nothing for it then, if he was going to shower soon he may as well do this the hard and fast way. John began to smack, squashing the ants against his skin and screwing up his nose at the smell. When he was sure every last one was taken care of he beelined for the shower. He didn't even bother going down to his ensuite, instead running into the main bathroom and jumping straight under the blissfully warm spray. It had been so long since he had a proper hot shower he'd forgotten just how good it could be. Even at its warmest his broken old thing downstairs didn't get half as warm as this.

He sighed under the hot spray and let it wash the ant stink off him; he even grabbed a bar of that lavender soap his mother loved and scrubbed it across his skin to be doubly sure. As he did so, he smoothed the bar across his chest and winced; the skin there was puffy and sensitive. He looked down at his flabby chest and sighed in defeat, so much for losing that weight. It had been so long since he weighed himself he'd probably just forgotten how big he was. Perhaps the fat had just moved from his stomach to his chest. He scrubbed at his skin even harder, ignoring the ache it caused as he pressed his fingers into the soft skin and lathered on more soap. His good from last night had completely evaporated and all he wanted to do was dry off, go to his computer and check all the PC part websites again. Maybe he could get a small shred of silver lining in the cloud that was today and finally get that graphics card.

Once he was dry he didn't bother giving his mother a chance to bully him back outside. He descended back into the comfort of his man cave and collapsed into his computer chair with a heavy, relaxed breath. He hit the power button and closed his eyes; giving himself a moment to fully relax, sinking into the chair, thankful to finally have a few minutes to not think about ants. A series of pings made his eyes snap open as several messages from Kevin appeared across the corner of his screen.

Kevin: *Dude, have you seen the news?*

Kevin: *John! Seriously, this is freaky as, where the hell are you?*

Kevin: *Hello??*

He blinked in surprise, glancing at the time; it was almost lunch time, normally he was online first thing in the morning so the worry wasn't unwarranted.

John: *Yeah, mom was having me garden more. Bloody ants everywhere, I can't wait till we can get our hands on some spray. What's up?*

Kevin: *Check out the news, you won't believe it.*

John crossed his fingers it wasn't another silicone shortage, last time that happened the price on computer parts went up almost a third. He opened up the news tab on google and then felt his jaw drop.

'ANT PHEROMONES AFFECTING HUMANS?'

The headline was accompanied by what had to be a photoshopped picture showing what appeared to be a woman with skin that was slightly shiny and black like chiton.

Scientists are baffled as thousands report to hospitals across the country with strange mutations. Some, like Sandra, have seen their skin turn leathery or hard, others are developing strange new eyes and if reports are to be believed, some people are growing antennae. Doctors refuse to comment but many are quick to link these strange new changes to the strong pheromones produced by the ant population over the last week. People are urged to avoid contact with them at all costs and to avoid squashing the insects as doing so may cause concentrated pheromones from within the ants body to leech into the skin.

John felt itchy all of a sudden. This had to be a prank right? Was The Onion having a go at people's expenses? He looked through more websites, everything was reporting the same thing. This...couldn't be real, it just couldn't.

John: *What the fuck?*

Kevin: *I know right? I'm freaking out here dude, I squished a tonne of them last night!*

John remembered the dozens he had smashed into his skin mere minutes ago and shuddered.

John: *Me too. Fuck.*

Kevin: *Okay so, we're staying in our man caves forever now right?*

John: *Absolutely. Tell me if you start...feeling anything?*

Kevin: *Yeah, you too.*

John: *Want to play some games and not think about it?*

Kevin: *Definitely.*

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John threw himself into what he knew; work and computers. He doubled his efforts to find the graphics card of his dreams, talked to Kevin and staunchly refused to help his mother in the garden or go to the shops for ant spray. If it weren't for the increasingly alarming news stories; he could almost forget this madness was even happening. He'd even put on more weight, just to add insult to injury. His pecs were even more swollen and fat, taking on an almost round shape as his nipples turned dark and pink despite his darkening skin. Obviously those few hours in the sun had done more of a number on him than he realised because he had gained a light tan. If he wasn't so huge it might have even done him some good. As it stood, each time he looked in the mirror his first thought was a brown pig.

Each morning he looked down at himself with even more shame; he had full on man tits now, complete with nipples that got hard under the cold spray of his shower head. It was utterly humiliating but there wasn't really anything he could do about it. How did you focus on losing weight on your chest anyway? He did what he always had, which was try not to think about it very much. After a few days things had almost returned to normal for him; at least until Kevin sent him a message.

Kevin: Video call.

No greeting, no question, just two simple words. John felt his stomach clench, that couldn't be good. He opened up their messenger and hit the camera, Kevin answered immediately and at first, John couldn't see anything wrong. His friend looked the way he always had since transitioning, with his short cropped, blonde hair and double chin. John was never sure how, but Kevin always managed to look handsome despite being overweight. Unlike himself, Kevin looked almost huggable; his puppy fat as an asset rather than a hindrance. Then John saw Kevin's skin, before he'd always been pale but now it was a much darker brown. The kind of colour you needed to spend several hours in a solarium and a whole tube of fake tan to achieve this quickly. His light sun tan looked positively pale in comparison.

"Wow. That's certainly different." John said with an awkward smile, "You uh, still look good though."

"It's the ants, John!" Kevin blubbered, tears spilling out immediately, "I think it's that pheromone, it's got to me! I'm turning brown all over!"

Oh. Oh no.

"I've been looking up other people who have been affected, I'm going to be turned into an ant freak!"

"No, I'm sure it's not going to be that bad." John soothed, he hated seeing Kevin so upset, "The government is sure to figure out some cure or treatment soon, if so many people are being affected they have to. Who knows, maybe you just turn brown and that's it! Blonde hair and a dark tan is sort of in style now anyway!"

Kevin sniffed.

"If you're a bimbo."

They both laughed and John's heart slowly began to dislodge itself from his throat. If nothing else, he made Kevin smile. That was worth it.

"You're looking a little darker too." Kevin said after a moment, "You were out in the garden with all those ants do you think?"

"No." He replied just a little too quickly, "It was just the sun."

Though now that he'd seen Kevin he wasn't so sure. A tan wouldn't cover his entire body surely, wasn't he supposed to have lines where his clothing was? Did he have any? He couldn't remember. As he racked his brain trying to recall what his newly browned body looked like panic began to mount. He hated looking at his naked form but damn it, he should have inspected it further.

"You okay?"

Fuck, Kevin, he'd actually forgotten they were on a call.

"Fine." His voice came out a little strangled, "But I really have to go, sorry, can we hang up for a bit I'll call you back if you still need to talk."

"It's fine, dude." Kevin said as his brow furrowed, "Just keep me updated if you find out you're in the same boat, okay?"

"No problem."

He slammed his finger down on the button to end the call. Part of him felt bad, he was supposed to be comforting his friend right now but he just couldn't stop his mind racing. He practically ripped off his clothes, desperate to see some sign of suntan, a patch of paleness around his legs or shoulders where his sleeves and cuffs were. Nothing, just smooth, light brown tanned skin all across his body. No wait, not all, there were a few darker patches around his wrists and ankles...closest to where he'd squashed the ants.

A coincidence! That's all, that was just where his clothing moved and he got a little extra sun, right? It had to be that because the alternative was...

A tickle at his ankle, he jumped with a small shriek, watching a tiny black ant crawl down his leg. He brushed at it, terrified of the otherwise harmless insect. How did it get in? What was he going to do? He couldn't squash it, but he didn't have any other way to deal with it. After a few minutes of blind panic, he scooped the insect up and pushed it out the thin window at the top of his basement room. As he tightened the latch John caught a flash of his own reflection in the mirror and took in his wide frightened eyes. He was scared...of a single ant. How pathetic. He took a step back and actually laughed; he'd let this whole situation wind him up so tight he'd been reduced to a squealing school girl at the sight of one creepy crawly. He needed some perspective, a good few hours of gaming ought to cheer him up.

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The next day his mother and father went out; just another couple on the inevitable search for bug spray just like half the city. This should have made him more relaxed; it was rare to get the house to himself and he could enjoy himself without the constant reminder that his parents were upstairs judging him. Or worse, with the lingering dread that his mother would appear at the top of the stairs any second with another order to join her in the garden. Yet despite those stresses being gone something still felt off. Kevin wasn't replying to his messages and his skin seemed to crawl. He was constantly getting to his feet and checking over his body for any sign that the ant had returned and bought its friends but every time he was met with clean, human skin, no sign of chiton. That at least was a relief; he really had just gotten a tan outside, his overreaction yesterday was even more embarrassing with that hindsight.

Still he found his mind wandering, his focus split a million different ways until finally he gave up on working or gaming all together. He had the strangest urge to get out, plus he was worried about Kevin. Normally the several blocks walk would intimidate him but at least

it would give him something to do. Kevin was probably suffering and that idea made his heart ache; if there was anything he could do to help, he wanted to do it.

Stepping outside into the warm air felt oddly refreshing compared to the other day where it grated on him. To his surprise, he wasn't even out of breath by the time he reached the end of his block! He could almost hear his mothers 'I told you so' in his mind as he continued to walk; she'd never let him live it down. He had only ever walked to Kevin's once and that was years ago. As neither of them owned a car they relied on public transport or John's parents to get around so they mostly stuck to chatting online since finishing highschool. Still, he remembered the way and found for the first time that the outside could be bracing in the best ways. A gentle breeze blew through his short brown hair and the scent of trees and earth were oddly calming as he passed the various gardens and parks as he made his way into the city proper. His face scrunched up as the scent of pine and flowers was replaced with grease and smog; fortunately Kevin lived in a small apartment building right on the edge of suburbia so he needn't go too far into the city's stink.

An odd sense of accomplishment filled him as he entered the elevator and waited as it rose. That walk had left him a bit out of breath, but not nearly as much as it had in the past. For the second time in a very short period John felt a small burst of hope; perhaps he could lose this weight and get fitter. He'd never be a Ken doll or anything but maybe with this new sun tan he could be...attractive. Perhaps then, Kevin might even take notice. Unlikely, but a man can dream. He knocked on Kevin's door but there was no answer and John felt his anxiety rise; what if something was seriously wrong? What if Kevin had fallen down and hit his head, or his mutations had gone out of control and he'd somehow hurt himself? He banged on the wooden frame again, more urgently.

"Kevin? Dude? It's John, I'm worried." He called, not caring if the neighbours complained, "If you can hear me please answer."

The silence stretched on long enough that he was seriously considering breaking the door down and then...footsteps. They approached the door slowly and the sound of a latch moving on the other side met John's ears. The door cracked open but Kevin was out of sight, standing behind it.

"I'm uh, I won't say fine but I'm not in danger or anything. Sorry for worrying you."

"Well? Open up." John urged, "You can't keep me standing out here."

"...okay but, promise you won't laugh?"

John just blinked in surprise; it had only been a few days, surely the mutations couldn't be that bad? He'd been staunchly avoiding the news himself partly out of lingering fear. Had things become more serious than just a bit of skin discoloration?

"Of course I won't laugh." He promised, "I swear it."

"Okay..."

A hand removed the chain from the door, from the quick flash of movement John couldn't yet see anything unusual, save the darker skin but that was no different to when they had their video call. He stepped inside and Kevin flicked on the lights with a sigh. John felt his hands go to his mouth as he gasped; he certainly was not going to laugh but he simply could not hide his shock. His friend looked miserable and humiliated, his skin a shade darker now but the biggest change was his eyes. They were a shiny black, lid to lid. No pupils or anything, simply an inky void that while quite pretty John had to admit was a bit unnerving.

"I woke up like this." Kevin sighed, "I have no idea how it could have all happened so quickly but...at least I still only have two eyes? Do ants have more usually? I don't even know."

"I uh, I'm not sure." John swallowed, "But...honestly man it's not that bad."

Kevin gave a huff and rolled his eyes; at least, John thought he did. It was hard to tell without irises and pupils but everything about his body languages suggested it.

"No really." John insisted, "They're sort of cool! Like the demons from Supernatural!"

"You know I could never get into that show." Kevin sighed, "Are the demons cool?"

"Very cool." John said seriously, "And so are you."

Kevin actually chuckled as a small smile tagged at his lips; warmth and affection spread through John's body like a fire and he smiled as well. Then he felt it, a slight tightness in his chest, no, not his chest, his nipples. Were they getting hard? That had never happened before. He felt a flush of heat spread across his cheeks and he looked away from Kevin suddenly feeling quite flustered.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, fine, I just walked over here so I’m a little puffed out, y’know?”

“You walked here?” Kevin gaped, “Why on Earth did you not get a taxi or something?”

“I wanted to walk.” John admitted, “Don’t know why but it’s not important. I was worried.”

It was Kevin’s turn to blush this time, he rubbed at the back of his neck awkwardly and smiled.

“Hey man, that means a lot, sorry for worrying you. I should have answered your messages but I was sort of having a personal crisis.”

“Understandable. Did you want to talk about it?”

“Yes. No. I don’t know.” He threw up his arms in defeat, “What is there to even say?”

“Well...how about I check out that graphics card of yours. We can hang out like old times and forget about this whole eye thing until you want to talk through it. And if you end up just wanting to chill and ignore it for a bit, we’ll do that!”

“You’re the best, you know that?”

John felt his heart skip a beat. They settled in around Kevin’s PC and he loaded up several games in quick succession, each with the highest and most impressive graphics possible. John was in awe and full of jealousy looking at it. He could almost forget his friend’s new black eyes; almost. Occasionally his own eyes would slide from the screen to subtly stare at the glassy black voids that Kevin now possessed. It was odd; insect eyes always looked so cold and disgusting to him but on Kevin they looked quite beautiful. They reflected the light from the screen sending refractions bouncing over the void and each time he looked it took him a few extra seconds to muster the power to look away.

The hours passed so comfortably they both lost track of the time and it was only when John's mother called, asking why he missed dinner that he realised it was dark out and his stomach was rumbling.

"Why don't you stay here for the night?" Kevin asked, "Like old times. I can pull out the couch and everything."

"Pizza and games till the sun rises?" John grinned.

"You bet."

It had been so long since they'd hung out like this; John had actually forgotten just how nice it was to hang around with other people. They ordered two large pizzas each and a giant bottle of coke before setting up a schedule for the night; retro games before dinner, new games after, then a free for all from midnight on. John actually giggled; he felt five years younger and Kevin's smile was positively radiant, even with his new insect like eyes. After seeing him so crushed earlier watching him chat amicably while grinning ear to ear warmed John from the inside out. He hadn't been so happy or at home in years and for the first time in days; he didn't think about ants.

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He woke with a splitting headache the next morning; it had been a long time since he'd gotten a migraine from screen time, perhaps he really was starting to get old. The pain pulsed just above his forehead at two separate points, almost as if somebody was pushing a pair of sticks into his skull. Well, at least when his mother inevitably came calling he'd have a legitimate excuse. He groaned, reaching a hand up to rub at his forehead only to yelp as he pressed painfully into two small bumps. Instantly his eyes were open; he expected a new wave of pain as the light suddenly appeared but it didn't, this was no ordinary migraine.

The sound of snoring in the other room told him Kevin was still asleep, thank God. He got to his feet and raced for the bathroom, a hand still covered his forehead with dread. He swallowed, looking at his reflection with a growing sense of dread as he slowly lowered his hand. His jaw dropped as he took in two small, thin bumps growing out of his upper forehead. The skin around them was dark and rough as he gently brushed the pad of one of his fingers across it, they almost looked like the beginnings of...antenna.

John's heart fell into his stomach; his happiness once again plummeting like he was on the worst emotional rollercoaster of his life. This wasn't like Kevin's pretty eyes, this...this made him a freak and God knows what else was going to happen, what if they kept getting bigger? His heart was racing in his chest, and then a cold realisation fell over him; he had only seconds to figure out how to hide these new growths.

Because he couldn't hear snoring anymore.