

TF-Tube.Com
Room 2: The Watcher
By Draconicon

Fen Chao closed out of the stream with a shake of her head, slumping back in her seat as she stared at the screen in front of her. She still couldn't quite believe what she'd seen, and if it hadn't been for the last week, she might have thought that it was impossible. Computer generated, perhaps, by some group of perverts that had some way of doing this on the cheap. It seemed plausible, even now, and she didn't know if she wanted to believe that the transformation she'd seen was a lie, or if she hoped that it was true.

Because if it was a lie, then it meant that she had only seen porn. That was common enough, and there was nothing that the government could condemn her for in that case. If it was not, however...

Then...she wasn't alone.

Turning in her chair, she looked out the window of the residential block that housed her, her family, and most of the people in the neighborhood. The lights were off, mandated to conserve power, but she could still see a few people moving in the night. A few smugglers on the streets, passing food through doors. A few teenagers, pretending that they hadn't seen the time change, that they still had some few minutes to use hand-lamps.

In the distance, she could just make out the lights of cars going down the road. Fewer of those than ever, now, considering the lockdown that they lived under. The government had decided that it needed to crack down on irresponsible energy spending, and that meant a new slew of rules for everyone.

Only a matter of time before they start restricting water as well as food and light, Fen thought, pushing her glasses back up her nose. And then they'll start turning off the electricity instead of just ordering us not to use it...

She dreaded the day that would happen. She didn't know what would occur then, whether she'd be able to keep her sanity. The limited connection she had with the rest of the world was entirely through a black market VPN and a series of jury-rigged generators to keep her computer online. If someone ever took that from her...

Fen shivered, and not just from the thought of a bleak, lonely future. Her skin was cracking, itching, and she knew that it wouldn't be long until it progressed further.

Tiptoeing from her room to the bathroom, she made sure that her mother and father were completely asleep before sliding into the darkened little closet of a room. She closed the door, stuffed a towel under it, and turned on the light.

The mirror wasn't kind to her. Her face was pale from spending time indoors all the time, but the cracking feeling on her hand had already spread up her arms, running along her neck to her cheeks. She could see the splitting skin, where it dried out as soon as the feeling reached it. It looked like she was in the process of recovering from a long-term sunburn, like the skin was dead and needed to be peeled off.

She hissed as she took off her shirt, feeling a layer of skin come with it. Painless, but the soft ripping sound that accompanied it always made what was left crawl. It just wasn't right. Not for a human.

Am I human? she wondered, running her fingers along her face. The skin came free, and beneath it were rough, lumpy scales. Sensitive, too, considering how they burned as she touched them.

Water. She needed water.

Twisting the handles of the sink, she cupped her hand beneath the tepid flow and brought it to her face. The heat faded as she washed the scales, and the lumpiness smoothed out. The water always helped. It was the only thing that did.

When she looked up at the mirror again, things had progressed further. Her small nose had flared wider, pushing forward along with her lips. The beginning of a snout, she knew. She almost never let it get this far, but tonight was bad. Tonight was very, very bad.

She thought back to the stream again. Yes, it was naughty. Very naughty, very deviant, and she would be in so much trouble if anyone ever knew that she'd looked at it, but...

But they'd been transforming. Every model on TF-Tube had been either shifting or about to shift, and she'd caught so many different people in the process of changing. The man changing into a fox was just one of them, and she shivered as she remembered how he'd become something so...animal. So different.

She'd seen others, too. A woman that became a seal. A man that became a flaming tiger. Someone that became a frog and seemed to shift from one sex to the other. There were more besides, men and women and things in between that shifted from their human form to different shapes. All of them flaunted what they had, all of them were proud.

And yet, as she looked in the mirror...

Fen ran her hand over the top of her head, the black strands of hair already loose, half of them falling out. She'd have to make sure that she got them all this time. Last time, mother had asked if she'd had a girlfriend over, and had threatened to call the authorities if she was trying to ignore the Sexual Regulations of Relations laws. If she missed the hairs again, her mother would make the call, despite the fact that Fen was flesh and blood.

She collected her hair and threw it in the trash, and by the time she was done, her hands had completely lost all human flesh, replaced by green scales that were as lumpy as the pebbles down in the public gardens. She pushed her hands under the water again, and watched as the water soothed them, smoothed them, leaving them soft and supple again. She ran her hands together, feeling the soft click-click of the scales as they rubbed together, waiting until it turned into more of a rasp as they smoothed out.

She'd waited too long. Her skin was flaking off from head to toe. There was only one thing that she could do now.

Hoping that her mother and father had over-indulged with their 'celebration' tonight, she turned on the water. No hot water, just cold. It would be fine, even if she shivered in it. All she needed was to wash it all away.

As the water filled the tub, she looked in the mirror again. More and more of her flesh was fading away, revealing more of the scales that hid beneath the skin. The first time this happened, the night when the Hong Kong riots started and she lost all communication with her friends across the quasi-border, she had panicked. She'd locked herself away, cried into her pillow, and where the tears fell, her skin peeled away.

It happened again every time that her lonesomeness struck her, or whenever she felt the need to be alone. Her skin started peeling off, shedding away, almost like something was pulling away what she had left. The only thing that stopped it from getting worse was water, washing herself and calming down so that it didn't take more. If she didn't...

Shuddering, Fen remembered what happened the one weekend that her mother and father had gone away. She'd been alone in the apartment, and she'd completely changed. She'd waited, wondering what would happen, and...

And it had been wrong. So wrong. She still hated the idea of it, hated the memory, and she pushed it down hard.

Pulling off her bra, she felt the skin give way, revealing breasts that were shrinking even as she glanced down. A soft pair of B cups were quickly turning to A, and if she didn't get into the water soon, they'd get smaller still. All the way down to nothing. To flatness. And even thinking of that made her feel wrong.

She pulled her panties down, not daring to look down there, and stepped into the water. It wasn't deep enough yet, but it was enough to submerge her feet and up to her ankles, and that was enough for her right then.

Fen sat down, feeling the water lapping at the scales and peeling away what was left of her skin. It was like sitting in a bath that was covered in moss, pale, dead moss that looked more like ash and bodies than anything else. Yet, through it...

She lifted her foot up through it, watching as the green-scaled toes rose up like spring from winter. A slight hint of webbing was growing between them, the start of something else, the start of something...pretty.

A slight smile crossed her lips as she pulled her foot back, lifting some of the cold water over it and rubbing it in. The underside went from pebbly to smooth, soft and supple again, and she kept rubbing it in, watching as the green scales spread along her toes, how the tips of her nails started to push outwards, growing into the tiniest hints of claws.

Between her toes, a firmer webbing than the frog-woman's on the internet started to grow, a bit more leathery, but nonetheless smooth. She worked it out, rubbing it, allowing it to grow from the slight bit that all humans had to what she always did. Her feet grew out with the rubbing, growing longer. Never wider, just longer, like a swimmer's soles.

Her hands became water-bearers, cupping the water and carrying it up her body, rubbing away the dead skin and allowing the scales to become soft again underneath. Her breasts stopped shrinking, and slowly came back out. Not enough to be completely normal, but enough to look like she had them again. Fen let out a long, slow sigh of relief, hugging herself, shaking her head as the water continued to rise around her.

Rolling onto her side, she felt her tail push out from her spine. She curled her legs up against her chest, letting the water ripple, rubbing her tail clean as it passed through the water on its own. She kept her breathing slow and quiet, a marked change compared to the first time that it got this bad.

As the long, muscular, and rather rigid limb pushed out, she cupped her hand again and washed her face. Her lips softened slightly, though there were still slight cracks in them compared to what she had before. No more than the rest of her body, but she had to remind herself again and again that her lips were normal. That they were fine for a...for what she was. That was fine. That was *fine*.

The water kept her feminine. The water kept her from looking...

She didn't let the thought continue. She just let it stay there.

Breathing slowly, she felt the last of her skin brush off, and she knew that the change was done. If she was good, if she could calm down by morning, she'd be human again. But at least, even if she could not calm down, she wouldn't be worse than human in the morning.

Slowly, she stood up. The mirror was still unforgiving, but at least it had less that it needed to forgive now.

Rather than a human, a reptile stood before the mirror. Fen looked at herself again, a wider face looking back. Green scales with blue stripes across her back shimmered in the light of the bathroom overhead, and she almost thought that she might have looked beautiful, if she hadn't been completely bald.

She ran her hands down to her sides. She had wider hips, now, slightly more like a mother's than a virgin daughter. Her breasts, small, were soft and a little more perky than they had been, almost as if this body didn't know how to deal with gravity just yet, or even what it was. She turned on her heels, looking at her tail, at her backside. The latter had grown out a little, too, but that was due to muscles, she felt. Her rump didn't...jiggle...the way that some of the bear women on the site had.

No, this was something. This was...there was something good here. If...

Fen bit off a laugh that was the first step down the road to hysteria. No. Even if she did know how to get in contact with that site, who knew if it was real or not? And more to the point, how would she even get to them? She was in China, her neighborhood under lockdown. There was no way out.

It's only a matter of time until someone finds out what I am, she thought, taking a spare towel and rubbing herself down. And when they do, I can say goodbye to freedom...goodbye to everything...

She knew where that line of thought went. If she kept thinking about what would happen to her when she was caught, then she'd never be able to calm down enough. She didn't have the excuse that her mom and dad were away for a few nights to wallow in this. If she was going to be human in the morning - and she had to be human - she had to be strong.

So, she took a deep breath, cleaned herself off, and wrapped herself in a towel. An aquarium net, something that she'd bought after the first time this happened, was hidden behind the last of the towels. She pulled it out and started cleaning out the tub.

The less mess that she had to explain in the morning, the better.

#

Fen had finished cleaning and had just returned to her bedroom when a shockwave burst overhead. She almost fell over, and barely kept herself from slamming her door shut.

Don't wake up, don't wake up...

When there was no sound from the rest of the apartment, Fen ran for the window. Had that been a bomb? Had something gone wrong with the protests? Fear gripped her by the throat, pulling her along as much as anything else.

There was nothing to be seen past the apartment block just outside. There were a few others that had run to their windows, but nobody could see down to hers, she knew. The curtains blocked out most things, and the lack of light did the rest. She poked her snout around the curtains, trying to see what had made that sound.

Nothing appeared to answer her question, though. The other people on the balconies on the building across from her shook their heads, going back to bed, but Fen couldn't look away. There had to be something. There -

“Boo.”

She yelped as she jumped away from the window, her eyes wide. Her mouth dropped open as she held her towel closed, long feet kicking her back from the balcony door.

The balcony had been empty only seconds ago. Now, however...now, there was a fox standing on it. A fox that stood on two legs, and one that she had been watching only a few hours ago.

He was dressed in a pair of black pants, and wore a jacket with no undershirt. His tails, all five of them, swept back and forth along the border of the balcony as he stepped up to the glass door. Black claws tapped it.

“*May I come in?*” he asked in Cantonese, his voice quiet, but somehow still coming through the door.

Fen didn't know what to do. Hell, she didn't know what to say. This was impossible. No matter what she'd seen on the internet, this was *impossible*.

“*I'm not going to ask again. May I come in? You need information that I have. And I have an offer that you need to hear.*”

“...”

Fen didn't want to just let him in, but she knew better than to wait for long. If he stayed out there, then there was every chance that one of the surveillance drones that the government was rumored to be using would see him. And if that happened, then she'd be investigated. There'd be no hiding her more reptilian state after that.

Slowly, she got back to her feet, moving with as much dignity as she could to the door. She pulled it open, and the fox - no, the kitsune - stepped inside. As she shut it, he nodded to himself.

“Ah. Chinese Water Dragon,” he said, shifting to English. “I suppose you're one of the empathic shifters, then?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, you speak English, least you weren’t lying about that on your profile.”

“Profile? What is going on here?”

“At this point, nothing more than an investigation. However, that might turn into an invitation, all things being even.”

The kitsune sat down on the foot of her bed, the same paws that he had been flaunting on his stream upraised as he crossed his legs and got comfortable. She remembered that she was in nothing but a towel, and covered herself a little more securely.

“What do you want?”

“A few questions for you first, if you don’t mind.”

“I do.”

“I think you have lived here long enough to know that whether you mind doesn’t matter. It’s whether you comply.”

The way that he said that, she somehow knew that fighting this would be as bad as fighting the government. Either way, she would be made to submit. Better to just...do it, she supposed.

She sighed.

“Ask.”

“Good. Now. This is not your first time shifting, is it?”

“...No.”

“I didn’t think so. You’re too calm about it. How many times, now?”

“Partial or full?”

“Oh, you’ve found a way to slow it down. I’ll bite. Both.”

“Twenty partial. Six full.”

“I’m amazed that you haven’t been caught yet. Lucky or -”

“I’m always near water. It helps.”

“Hmmm...”

The kitsune nodded a few times, his tails swaying slowly behind him still. The way that he kept looking at her was more than slightly unnerving, and it was taking all her best efforts to keep from freaking out. She forced herself to keep breathing evenly, particularly when she felt a small chunk of her scales start to pop a bit along the back of her neck.

No, no, calm. You don't have water this time. Calm. Don't. Freak. Out.

“You said ‘empathic shifter.’ What does that mean?”

“It means someone that transforms with a specific emotion as a conduit. Sometimes anger, sometimes lust - you disapprove?”

Her cheeks must have burned, she realized. She shook her head, gesturing for him to continue as she chewed her claws the way another might have chewed their fingernails.

“The more of an emotion they feel, the faster and stronger the transformation. In times of extreme emotional stress, it means that they can change into a more dramatic, less human form of their other shape. I’m assuming you’ve experienced something like that?”

“...Once. Can...that be controlled?”

“To a degree. If you can control yourself.”

“If I could control myself, then I wouldn’t be in this situation.”

“Obviously.”

He chuckled, shaking his head.

“At any rate, we don’t have much time, so let me cut to the chase. You were caught snooping around our website through an extremely strong VPN. We almost didn’t catch you, but you lingered a little too long on some of the streams.”

Fen would have cursed herself out if she didn’t feel like swallowing her tongue at the same time. If they had been able to catch her snooping around, then the government could have, too. If they did...

Oh god...

She leaned back against the window, feeling her scales flattening out a bit as she sucked in air. Soft gasps, harsh fear pushing through her. The cracks on the scales along her neck and shoulders grew stronger, deeper, more obvious, and she bit her lips, shaking her head.

“No, no, no.”

“Fear, then.”

“Nnngh...No...”

“It’s never as specific as you think. Fear is the best possibility right now. How do you usually calm down?”

“Water. Bath.”

“Is your family asleep?”

“I...I think so...”

“Let’s get you back there.”

#

Fen had never thought that she’d be sitting in the tub, naked as the day she was born, while a kitsune stroked her cheeks and back with a wet washcloth. She was shivering still, but the worst of her fear was under control. She wasn’t changing anymore.

“Well, there’s no way that you’re a government agent spying on us,” the kitsune - Haruki - said as he washed her back. “If you were connected to the government at all, I’m pretty sure that you wouldn’t have had a breakdown like that. But that still begs the question what you were doing lurking around the website in the first place.”

“I didn’t want to be alone.”

“Nobody does. They don’t usually buy an expensive VPN to make friends.”

“It’s not just you...” She shook her head. “It’s the only way to touch the outside world from here. We’re locked down. No way in, no way out. Except like that.”

“Now that *does* make sense. But why porn?”

“I was looking...looking for things on transformation.”

“And that just happened to take you to a porn site.”

“I was desperate.”

And so she was. And so she still was. At this rate, there was no way that she was going to be human again by morning. Everything had gone completely out of control, and she didn’t know what was going on anymore.

She leaned her head against her knees, pulling her legs a bit tighter together. Her heels pressed against her bottom, and she shivered as the cold water touched her sex.

“Cold-blooded?” he asked.

“Mm-mmm.”

“Lucky. I know a few reptiles that have to sun themselves for hours if they’re going to be anywhere cold. Do you know how hard it is to get an order of twenty heat lamps every time that we get a reptile shifter?”

“Heh...”

“Ah. There. Keep that.”

“What?”

“That smile. It helps.”

It did, though not as much as she would have liked. It didn’t make things worse, though, which was probably the most she could ask at this point. Fen took another deep breath, then let it out.

“You...you mentioned an invitation.”

“I did. The people I work for have some space for more folk like us.”

“Us?”

“Shifters. Magical, empathic.” He shrugged. “Unlucky. We have some space, if you want to come and work for us.”

“...With the porn website.”

“We don’t all do porn. Most of us, yes, since it gives us a bit of extra spending money, but there’s other jobs.”

The idea of putting her body on the camera to make money was not one that she was entirely willing to entertain. She looked...decent, she supposed, as a lizard, but that was not the body that she preferred. Her human shape was all that she needed, and the idea of giving that up for this was not something that she liked, even if she was getting a nice back-rub with a washcloth right then.

That said, she knew better than to think that she could hide forever.

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why invite me?”

“Well, one, it means I don’t have to kill you.”

She stiffened up so bad, her back going so pebbly and hard that she almost couldn’t move. The kitsune shook his head.

“That was a joke. A joke.”

“...A really...really bad joke...”

“Usually goes over better. Sorry.”

It physically hurt to have that sort of fear hit her, and her body didn’t like it, either. It took her a few minutes to stop being as hard and brittle as could be, and even then, she felt a bit off.

“What are the real reasons?” she asked.

“It removes a risk that would expose the rest of us. You know how it goes. As soon as one of us is found, it starts a hunt for all of us.”

“...True.”

“Second, you’re obviously decent with your computer. We could always use more techies.”

“I...wouldn’t mind that.”

“And third? Why would you want to stay?”

“...”

That was the hard question to answer, and she couldn’t help but stare down at her feet as she thought about it. The first reason why was her family, but considering that her mother was willing to rat her out to the government and her father had been an emotionally dead man for the last three years - ever since he lost his job - it wasn’t a viable one.

The second one was her friends in Hong Kong, but considering how that was going, she knew that there was almost no chance of them getting in touch even if she stayed there. If the group Haruki was working for actually had decent techs, she had a better chance making contact there than anywhere else in the world.

And after that...there really was no other reason. She had little more than her own connections here, her own stuff, to hold her down. The lizard sighed, leaning her head against her knees again and bumping her forehead against them.

“Should I take that as a yes?”

“Mmmph...”

“Heh.”

The washcloth stopped rubbing her back, and she knew that the kitsune was aware that he'd won. She looked up to see him getting a towel, and she sighed, covering her chest with one arm and holding her other out for the towel.

But he didn't give it to her.

“Come on...come on, let me have it.”

“Ah ah. Come here.”

“That's not fair!”

“If you're going to be part of the group, you better get used to being naked.”

“Why?”

“Even if you're not in the porn part of the studio, you're still going to be monitoring the website a lot. That's where most of our contacts are, how we find people like you. That means that you'll be staring at a lot of people like me doing their jobs, day in and day out. And if you're not comfortable being nude, I can't imagine you being that comfortable watching it.”

She would have pinned him to the wall with her glare if she could, but that wasn't going to happen. Instead, she was forced to get out of the tub, walking across the room with one hand over her breasts and the other over her sex. Fen bit her lips as she stood in front of him, glaring down her snout.

But he still held it back.

“Ah ah. Arms at your sides.”

“You are a cruel man.”

“I'm just helping you get used to this.”

“...”

“Arms. Sides. Now.”

“...Fine.”

She pulled them to her sides, her cheeks burning a bright blue from the blood rushing to them. The kitsune smiled, his eyes going up and down her body, staring at her breasts, then down at her sex, then back up again.

“A pity that you’re not interested in doing the porn side of things. You’d look real good doing it.”

“Give me the towel.”

“Here.”

He handed it over, and she immediately folded it around her chest and middle. She was still in the process of hiding everything when he chuckled.

“What?”

“I’m surprised you didn’t transform.”

“...what do you mean?”

“I thought you might be too afraid to get your towel. But I guess you were too angry at me, instead.”

“...”

“If you ever go in the field, watch that. Fear might protect you. Anger will get you killed.”

“I’ll...remember that.”

“You better. I’ll meet you on the balcony.”

#

It was an embarrassing ride to the strange vehicle that Haruki had arrived in. The fact that she couldn’t wear pants with her tail meant that she had to wear a robe, and that was constantly trying to fly open as she held onto a rope and was pulled up and away. The only saving grace was a lack of luggage, though she’d taken her VPN away from her computer after frying the hard-drive. No reason to get her family in trouble.

The rope pulled her into a low, disk-like vehicle that hovered over the building. Not a UFO, like an alien ship, but more of a dome-like thing that had a large hatch in the back and a swept cockpit in the front. And in the pilot's seat -

Her eyes widened at the sight of a lion on two legs holding the control stick. He turned, waved at her, and she hesitantly waved back.

“This is Shaka, one of our other field agents,” Haruki said as he sat next to the lion. “He’s the one that spotted you spying.”

“...Good job?” she said, hoping it was the right thing to say.

“You made it hard.” The lion shook his head. “Next stop, home.”

“And where’s that?” she asked.

“Oh, nowhere that you need to know. Yet.” Haruki smiled. “Now, listen carefully. Here’s some stuff that you’ll need to know by the time we get back...”

The End