

The Experiment.

a short story by

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The lab was silent for once. Professor Standish had left early for a meeting of the university heads of departments. Word was that budget cuts were imminent, and Experimental Chemistry, of which, Standish was head, was in line for the axe. "Over my dead body," Standish yelled when he first heard it. He had calmed down a bit since then, but was still pretty touchy about it. With that in mind, Allen Caldwell, Standish's assistant, had made a serious effort not to mention it, or say anything that might remind the boss of it, so far, with some success.

The meeting had been called a couple of days earlier, so that attendees might have some time to prepare their statements before hand. Standish had prepared all right, he was ready for anything.

Allen, being alone in the lab decided to do some work on a theory that Standish had put forward some time earlier. It had intrigued Allen at the time, though he hadn't had opportunity to work on it since. He set about bringing together all the components he felt he would need to begin the work. It took almost an hour to source everything, but eventually, he had it all together in one place.

The premiss was that a newly discovered chemical could attract molecules to its host, thus increasing its mass. The thought was to use it in crop production and on certain animals that were a large part of the food chain. Chicken being the primary target. Chickens as large as Turkeys were predicted, but it was all theoretical thus far. A chemist in California claimed to have increased the size of a sparrow by two hundred percent, but as yet, no one had seen any proof of this, and... It was America.

The formula for the new chemical was not difficult, it just required a little heat to help the component parts to mix together. The temperature as it mixed was quite crucial to the final result, so Allen had a highly controllable oven on hand just for the purpose. "Now is that everything?" Allen asked himself before beginning. It all seemed to be there, so he began.

The base ingredient was water, which had lent a certain amount of credibility and 'safeness' to the whole thing, and there were no toxic substances involved, so it was not anticipated that anything bad would come from such an experiment. Allen began the procedure, carefully measuring each component before adding it to the mix. All the while, keeping an eye on the temperature.

It was going really well. Each stage seemed to be without flaw, and nothing spilled or splashed which Allen felt was a good sign. Several hours later, he was finished, and the mixture was in the oven simmering nicely. At this stage, Allen could relax for the half an hour the mixture had to cook. He decided to go and eat his lunch on the grass

outside the lab. He opened his lunch box before going outside to see what his wife had packed for him. "Ah, my favourite." He said with a smile. "Melissa really does know how to look after me." He set the open box down to remove his white lab coat. He hated going outside whilst wearing it, it made him feel geeky. And he hated it when the students looked at him in that way.

The phone rang... "Yes Professor..." Standish was in full flow and Allen didn't get another word in. It seemed that Standish felt he had to give Allen a blow by blow account of how the meeting had gone. Poor Allen just kept thinking about his lunch which prevented him from really listening to what Standish was saying. The minutes passed with no sign of a let up from the professor. Allen turned and looked longingly at his lunch box which was over twenty feet away. He even tried to will it to slide along the bench toward him, but nothing happened.

Suddenly, the fire bell rang and all hell broke loose. "Sorry Standish, I have to go, the fire alarm just went." Allen didn't wait for a response, he just slammed the phone down and ran for the door. His meeting point was on the car park on the far side of the college building. He made it in less than a minute. Waverly, the grounds man was already there clipboard in hand. It was his job to make sure everyone was present and correct, a job he enjoyed as it gave him authority over everyone for a short time.

Waverly paced up and down at the front of the gathering bunch of people from the Chemistry and science departments. These two departments were housed in a separate building away from the main building. Perhaps they were afraid of explosions. Waverly began to call out the names. It took fully eight minutes to get through the register, and by the time they had, the alarm had stopped. "Thank you everyone," Waverly shouted, "it seems there was a false alarm." Groans went up from the onlookers and a slow shuffle back to work began.

Allen looked at his watch, lunch time was over. "Damn!" He said, "I was looking forward to my lunch." He shrugged his shoulders and joined the shuffle back into the building. It was then that he remembered the experiment. It had gone clean out of his head with all the excitement. He began to run, shouting, "gang way, gang way," as he tried to force his way through the crowd. When he got back to his bench, he found the experiment had spoiled. It had boiled over and was useless. "Bother!" He said in frustration, "That's the day wasted." He pondered about starting again, but had lost heart now, so he disposed of the mess in the usual manner and packed up his things and went home early.

Melissa was pleased to see him home early for once. It didn't happen very often. Allen explained what had happened and she comforted him by making a pot of tea. "You can eat your lunch now dear, it's a shame to waste it." He agreed and decided to sit in the garden and do just that. The sun was out, and for November, it was a fine day. He settled back in a garden lounger and opened his lunch box for the second time. Melissa brought him his tea and joined him in the other lounger. She settled back and closed her eyes.

Allen ate his lunch and enjoyed every mouthful of it, though he had thought the salmon

didn't taste as it normally did. He wasn't complaining, it just seemed a little different this time.

Lunch eaten and tea drunk, he settled back in the lounge to have a nap. Melissa was ahead of him in this regard and was dozing magnificently. He soon joined her, and the pair of them slept peacefully in the afternoon sunshine.

It was the ache in his back that woke him. He didn't normally get aches and pains, but right now he had a real sizzler, the back of his neck was really giving him gip. And he let out an "OUCH!" as he tried to raise his head. This woke Melissa, who turned to see what he was on about and promptly screamed. "What is it?" Allen called back, a little panicky. She just screamed all the louder. Allen was beginning to think about the neighbours, and so tried to get up and comfort her. He rolled over towards her and felt a sharp crack beneath his right leg. The lounge had snapped and dumped him on the grass. Also, he had some difficulty moving his arms, it was as though they were tied in some way.

Melissa saw him coming and passed out. "O dear, she's fainted." He said, to himself. "Fainted! You're not pregnant are you?" She didn't respond. In frustration, Allen yelled, "What's wrong with me, why can't I get up?" he made an enormous effort to get up, it took all his strength. There was a ripping sound, and after it he could move more freely. Allen stood up. Everything seemed wrong, his balance was shaky and he was light headed. "Get a grip man!" He told himself. He took a deep breath and steadied himself. "Right, that's better." He was more himself now and turned to his comatose wife to assist her.

He felt a cold breeze on his arms and legs. It took him by surprise and he looked to see what it was. To his surprise, his arms were bare, as were his legs. "Am I dreaming?" He asked himself, but he wasn't. His shirt was in shreds, and his trousers split down both legs. His feet, which seemed an awfully long way away, had pushed through the peep toe sandals he was wearing. "What on earth is going on?" He yelled, and fell over the wrecked lounge. The fall knocked the wind out of him and he lay still. Melissa came to and saw him on the grass motionless and screamed again. "I'm all right Mel', Just fell over and got winded." She looked at him strangely. "What's happened to you Allen... Y... You're so big.

Allen didn't go to work the following day. At ten feet tall, he thought the students might stare. No, he felt it better to wait until it wore off. He couldn't help wondering though, if it ever would.