



SUMMARY: After a scientific experiment gone bad, the males in the group find that they are turning into the twins of female in the group who was killed.

ACTING OUT, Part One

by Valerie Hope

COREY REYNOLDS SAT BACK AND rubbed his eyes, thinking the creak of the Aeron chair matched the creak he felt in his aching back. The flickering of the computer monitors gave a fitful, ghostly light to the lab. The sun had gone down and Corey hadn't even noticed again. He looked around and saw another shape in the half-gloom. Tammy Tomlinson's head was bobbing up and down slowly to the sounds of whatever was playing on her iPod as she prepared the samples for the test in the morning.

She was one of those girls that tried very hard not to be pretty and couldn't ever completely hide it. Her baggy khakis and roomy sweater didn't completely hide the lovely small waist and curvaceous hips, the well-toned posterior and the ample breasts. The rumpled white lab coat didn't offset her lovely unblemished skin with the coppery-gold overtones of time spent in the sun. Her shiny chestnut hair was full and thick even though it was tied in a careless knot at the nape of her neck with a pencil stuck through it. The big eyes and high cheekbones couldn't hide behind the big, thick-rimmed glasses, nor could the full, kissable lips ever fully go unnoticed behind the cap of the pen she constantly chewed.

Corey beat down the "thing" he'd had for her since he signed on at the NeoLife research lab. They took sexual harassment very seriously here and wouldn't downshift before firing his ass if they thought his conduct would jeopardize their precious funding. He got her attention with a timid wave and she pulled the bud of the earphone out of one ear.

"Where's Steve?" Corey asked, hoping his voice didn't break.

She shrugged. "He stepped out a minute ago. Said he'd be back."

The door to the outside balcony opened almost as if on cue, and Steve Harrison came in out of the drizzle, smelling faintly of cigarette smoke from his break. Corey didn't pay it any mind, but Tammy could never let it go.

"Those things will kill you, Steve," she said, making a grandiose show of turning back to her work.

"If I'm lucky," Steve shot back, slumping into his chair in front of a tandem-monitor computer. "Anything is better than dying of a terminal migraine trying to figure this shit out."

Corey chuckled. "It was your idea."

"You two didn't have to listen to it," he complained, typing loudly.

"Just close your eyes and think of the Nobel," Corey said.

"Sure, right," Steve grumped. "And while I'm at it, I'll dream I'll receive it from Angelina Jolie and she'll fall madly in love with me on the stage. She'll invite me for a threesome in Bermuda with Jenna Jameson and we'll all live happily ever after."

"You forgot the seven-figure bank account and the Maserati," Tammy said.

"Oh, yeah. Those too."

Corey snorted loudly. "Since when did I become the eternal optimist in here? This is going to work. I can feel it."

"Oh, great. He can feel it. We're saved," Steve grouched. "I can stop worrying."

"Don't be a prick," Corey shot back. "This shit is brilliant. Tammy's nanites never miss."

"Damn right," Tammy added.

"It's not about the nanites," Steve said. "It's the process that worries me. It's too complicated. The more complicated the system, the more places where things can get hinkey. We're just using too many steps."

"Look, nanite technology is limited by size," Tammy explained, taking on her 'guest lecturer' voice. "We have to have division of labor or these things get too big. Better a complicated process than a complicated nanite."

"I understand that," Steve replied. "Maybe we're trying to do too much."

"It's not that complicated," I grumped.

"Corey's right," Tammy said, taking up my banner. "The master nanites read the healthy DNA and stay present in the blood. The slave nanites take the healthy genetic information into the cells and overwrite faulty encoding, then stimulate mitosis in the cell. It's not that complicated."

"That's if one of those little nanites don't get a single A, C, T or G out of place," Steve parried. "Then they're writing DNA with encoding errors and making mutant tissue, maybe even worse than the original error."

"My babies don't miss," Tammy said. "Look, this duplicates the natural process of a cholesterol-based steroid exactly. It's a natural hormonal process. The cells are designed to respond to direct gene activation like this."

It was too cute how she thought of the nanites as her babies. Corey his his smile.

"I'm not going to be relaxed about this until I see them work," Steve said.

"And why else are we up at this place at 4 in the morning on a Saturday?" Tammy rejoined. "My babies are going to show you everything you need to know."

"Where do we stand?" Corey asked.

Tammy put her pipet in a rack and put the segregated tray into the infusion chamber. "The master nanites have been infused with my healthy DNA," she said. "Another ten minutes until full absorption."

"The skin samples are prepared," Corey said. "Irradiated with good old-fashioned uranium radiation for three days. Cancerous as hell."

"And the slave nanites are okay, too," Steve said. "Inactive and suspended in 100% O₂, ready to be introduced into the environment. Just mix the masters into the gas and turn the valve. The natural heat by-products of the tissues will activate them."

"You understand, if this works, that we're going to make history. We're going to cure cancer," Tammy said. She looked a little flushed about the idea.

"Don't jinx it," Steve warned. "You'll draw the wrath of the whatever from high atop the thing. Not another word about it."

"Ten minutes," Corey said. "Time enough for me to check the chamber."

He stood stiffly and worked my way across the cluttered lab to the airtight hyperbaric chamber where the nanites would be introduced into the samples. All the seals looked good and all the indicator lights were green. He went over everything three times, just to make sure, checking and rechecking to make sure nothing would go wrong.

Corey took time to share a shy smile with Tammy. He was nervous, to be sure - the feeling on standing on the precipice of history was very present, even Steve could feel it. But there was also the part of him that believed - in a shy and prepubescent way - that after they'd done it, after they'd found the cure for cancer in humans, and all the puzzles were solved and the deadlines met and the pressure dissipated, that maybe - just maybe - there'd be a time where he and Tammy could be more than colleagues. That somehow, she felt the same way about him and they could fall into one another's arms, let the suppressed passion flow between them like lightning. Even though the rational part of his mind knew how unlikely that was, there was the eternal adolescent in him that still believed that the letters to Penthouse were real.

He stared at her, drinking in the barely concealed curves of her through the frumpy lab attire. He stepped forward and a haze of red blurred his vision.

"Ow!"

"Corey? You okay?" Steve asked, looking up in alarm.

Corey had his hands clamped over his forehead where he'd dinged his head hard against the top of the hatch to the hyperbaric chamber. "Yeah," he groaned.

"You need some ice?" Tammy asked, standing up and moving in the direction of the refrigerator in the break room.

"No," Corey sighed, more hurt that she'd seen him do such an idiot thing than by the head trauma. "I'm okay. More embarrassed than anything else."

"Sit down, Johnny Smooth," Steve said. "Let me at least see if you have a concussion. You bonged that thing pretty hard."

Corey nodded weakly and stepped out of the chamber, pulling the door closed behind him, never seeing the tiny, invisible hairline crack he'd put in the light bulb just above the door.

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Steve's hand hovered over the switch connecting the airtight bags to the chamber. "Infusing master nanites now," he said. Corey made a dutiful note of the time as Steve depressed the switch. A slight hiss, and one of the big clear plastic biohazard bags deflated, releasing millions of the tiny little nanites, each encoded with Tammy's healthy DNA, into the hyperbaric chamber.

"Twenty seconds until absorption," Corey called.

"I still think using 400cc's of the nanites is overkill," Tammy said, checking readings on her monitor next to the door of the chamber. Her fingernails tapped nervously against the thick metal of the chamber wall.

"It's our first test," Steve said. "Let's just make sure the damn things work before we worry about dosages."

"It's enough for six adults," Tammy shot back. "By your logic, if taking one aspirin for a headache is good, then taking sixty is even better?"

"Leave it," Corey cautioned. "Get ready to release the slave nanites."

"Ten seconds," Steve said, his hand moving to the next switch on the panel.

"Do it," Tammy said. Another hiss, and the next, larger plastic biohazard bag deflated, releasing 1600cc's of the slave nanites into the environment. By Tammy's estimation, enough for a dozen people. Steve was taking no chances.

"One minute until absorption," Tammy said. "Clock is running."

"C'mon, babies, c'mon," Corey whispered under his breath. There was a lot riding on this. Tammy noticed him cheering on the nanites and gave him a reassuring grin that made his blood pressure spike about ten points.

"Pressure is steady at 1.5 atmospheres," Corey called out. "Start heating the samples to body temperature in ten seconds."

Steve nodded, his eyes never leaving the window where the innocuous samples in their trays were sitting on a featureless white shelf. The tension in the room was palpable.

Corey slowly began to add heat to the samples, simulating the natural body heat which would activate the nanites in a human. The sensors which were measuring the hypotonic solution where the samples swam read a big fluctuation in concentration. The diseased cells were drinking deeply.

"They're waking up," Corey said, his voice barely above a whisper. "It's working."

"Temperature," Steve demanded.

"Ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit," Corey responded. "Solution is nearly isotonic."

"Complete absorption in three... two... one," Tammy reported. "The samples have absorbed all the nanites they're going to."

"Now we see if the little beauties work," Steve said. "How long?"

"Basal metabolic rate is pretty high," Tammy said, looking at her monitor. "Higher than normal, it looks like, and still climbing. The nanites are stimulating cell division! They're making the cells divide!"

Corey grinned. "They're doing it, Steve."

"Don't pop the champagne just yet," Steve replied.

Corey checked the timer. "That should be it," he said to Tammy. "Time to put them under the microscope, Tammy."

Tammy took a moment to make sure the airtight helmet on her clean suit was sealed completely and closed the door of the emergency vent behind her. She gave the others a thumbs up at the hatch.

Her hand closed on the latch and pulled down.

The door swung open on well-oiled hinges.

Air escaped the pressurized chamber in a giant rush.

The cracked light above the door came on.

A tiny spark in a pressurized atmosphere of pure oxygen.

The world erupted in a gout of white flame and shattering glass.

Corey and Steve only had time for the briefest of screams.

And then, only blackness.

* * *

"Mmph."

"Try to relax, Dr. Reynolds," the disembodied voice said. "You're restrained. Don't worry, it was just for protection."

"Where..?"

"You're at the research hospital," the voice told him. "There was an accident in the lab."

"Steve?"

"Recovering. You're both very lucky. Can you tell me what happened?"

"Explosion. Something set off the oxygen."

"Best we can determine, it was a cracked casing on a light bulb. The spark from the filament ignited the oxygen."

"Tammy?"

A long pause. "Dr. Tomlinson was killed. I'm terribly sorry."

"Oh God." Wetness on his cheeks.

"There's more," the voice said. Corey tried to open his eyes, but the blur of searing light made him groan and close them again.

"The casing of the containment room was shattered on impact," the voice went on. "You and Dr. Harrison were both exposed to massive doses of the nanites. The heat from the explosion activated them all."

"Are we..?"

"You're perfectly healthy. There are several... side effects, however."

"Side effects?"

"Increased metabolism, for one. Your injuries healed completely in a matter of hours. No scar tissue, nothing. It's like you were never injured."

"That's good," Corey mumbled.

"Dr. Harrison wasn't so fortunate," the voice continued. "There was a great deal of flying glass and debris. His carotid artery was severed, and he lost a great deal of blood before the nanites repaired the damage. We can't be sure until he's awake, but we're fairly certain he has sustained brain damage from lack of oxygen. The nanites make an MRI very difficult, so we have no way to be sure right now."

Corey thought about his brilliant friend for a moment, about that boundless, keen mind and its remarkable ability to visualize and solve complex problems. The world would miss that ability. Corey would miss that ability. It was two deaths to mourn, now.

"Can the nanites repair the brain?"

"Unlikely," the voice said. "Although the nanites can initialize some cell division in nerve tissue, it seems limited to the peripheral nervous system. We think it's because the nanites are too big to penetrate the blood-brain barrier."

"Such a loss," Corey bemoaned, softly. It was only then that some of the strangeness leached through the curtain of numbness that had descended on his senses. His voice was softer. Much softer, and higher. Not his voice at all. Even though it was filtered through the resonance chamber of his skull and palate, he could tell that he sounded more like Tammy Tomlinson's husky contralto than his own mumbled baritone.

"What happened to me?" Corey asked. The vehemence in his demand seemed blunted somewhat by the melodious quality of his voice.

"Easy, doctor," the voice said, and unseen hands tried to soothe his jerky movements. The touch on his bare skin seemed different, somehow, more pronounced and sensual.

"The nanites worked perfectly," the voice explained. "The slave nanites did precisely what they were designed to do, rewriting the cellular DNA in your body and stimulating cell division in accordance with the DNA contained in the master nanites."

"But the master nanites were encoded with..."

"I know, doctor," the voice said. "Can you open your eyes?"

"The light hurts."

There was a decrease in the onslaught of light against his closed eyelids. "Is that better?" the voice asked. Corey reluctantly feathered his eyes open, all too conscious now of the long, cheek-brushing eyelashes which drooped across his blurred vision.

"Unfortunately, you inherited Dr. Tomlinson's nearsightedness," the voice explained. "We have glasses made from her prescription. One moment."

Disembodied hands placed lightweight, all-too-feminine glasses across Corey's nose, and two pools of clear vision settled over his eyes. He took a moment to adjust and looked at the man in the white lab coat - grey-templed and tall, with a grandfatherly face and laugh lines.

"I'm Dr. Kennedy," the man said. "You can call me Tom."

He gingerly held a hand mirror over Corey. The face that looked back was Tammy's - overlarge, girlish eyes of a brown so dark it was almost black, the high 'Sophia Loren' cheekbones and the full, kissable lips. Only the total lack of hair in eyebrows or scalp distinguished Corey's new heart-shaped face from Tammy's old.

Corey looked down to the generous swells tenting out the hospital blanket beneath his pointed chin. Slender, willowy arms with no hair led down to humane restraints secured to the bed-rail. Not that the restraints were necessary now. There wasn't enough energy in Corey's body to do anything more than stare in total shock.

"You're perfectly healthy," Dr. Kennedy said. "The metabolic changes from the nanites keep your bodies at a remarkable level of health. In fact, I'd imagine that the regeneration rates of the cells under nanite control keep your functional age at about twenty-one or twenty-two years. You may have stumbled onto the Fountain of Youth, doctor. I've ordered a great deal of tests to make sure. Your discovery is remarkable."

"I'm a girl," Corey breathed.

"Genetically, yes," Dr. Kennedy said calmly. The still-logical part of Corey's mind admired the bedside manner. This was an excellent doctor - the fact that Corey wasn't thrashing around and screaming was evidence of that. That, and God knew how much sedative in the IV hanging over Corey's left shoulder.

"Functionally?"

Dr. Kennedy looked a little sheepish. "Yes. You've actually begun your menses."

Corey started laughing - not from humor but from barely suppressed panic. He screamed hysterical, humorless laughter for a time that seemed to him like eternity, until the trapped energy dissipated.

"We have some very skilled therapists standing by, Dr. Reynolds," Dr. Kennedy said. "People with long experience dealing with gender disorders. You're going to be fine."

"Steve is like this?" Corey asked.

"Your identical twin," Dr. Kennedy said. "Both of you are exact genetic duplicates of Tammy Tomlinson. You're effectively sisters."

Sisters. The use of the feminine noun started up the trapped, hysterical laughter again, fresh with the purpose and power of the incomprehensible fear in Corey's mind and heart. With no

sign of it abating, Dr. Kennedy administered something calming through the IV, gave a kind touch on Corey's slimmer shoulder and left the room, clicking off the lights behind him.

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Corey tried very hard not to think about the weights bobbing up and down on his chest as he set an easy pace on the treadmill. Everything about his body dynamics were different, different weight distribution and different muscle groups. The subtle art of moving a female body was still eluding him. Several lab technicians were watching the monitors that he was hooked to by no less than a dozen different electrodes. They'd prodded and poked him relentlessly, trying to get all the data they could on the remarkable nanites and what they were doing to his body.

As if the breasts and vagina weren't data enough.

The week since he'd awoken had been a long blur of near-hysteria on one end of the spectrum and a doped sedative numbness on the other. The doctors at St. Ignatius' research hospital were equipped to deal with anything his body could throw out, but they were sadly lacking in the emotional and mental department. Their solution for any emotional difficulty with this sudden irreversible transition from male to female was a healthy hit of Ativan and a few hours looking droolingly at the ceiling tiles.

"How are you feeling, Corey?" one of the techs asked over the top of the flat-screen.

"No worries," Corey said, his breathing elevated but nowhere near as bad as he should have been panting, given the four miles he'd already put on the treadmill.

"Amazing," the tech said. "You're barely working. Try going as fast as you can."

Corey nodded and put the hammer down. He didn't feel the telltale thump of his heart in his ribcage as a warning that he was overdoing. His breathing deepened and sped up, the heart rate elevated, but there was none of the protest from aching joints or muscles, the searing pain in the chest and lungs as his body fought for air. Thank God that Tammy Tomlinson had a genetic predisposition to be in excellent shape.

"Okay, Corey, warm down," the tech said. "You hit 17 miles per hour there. That's pretty damn fast."

"That's Olympics fast," one of the tech beside him mumbled in disbelief.

"Increased metabolism," Corey said as he slowed to a trot, then a brisk walk. "There's cellular energy to spare in the muscles. I probably have an elevated red blood cell count, too. I didn't even feel any discomfort. I could have kept that up indefinitely."

"Amazing," the tech repeated.

Corey stepped off the treadmill and towed a light sheen of sweat off his brow. One wall of the rehab room was covered in floor-to-ceiling mirrors, and he caught sight of himself, just a week later. A trim, tight body - dressed only in loose sweats and a jog-bra holding his 36B breasts tightly above a stomach dimpled with hard abdominal muscles. Long swan's neck and an adorable heart-shaped face. White, straight teeth and full, kissable 'Jennifer Garner' lips. Wide eyes and high, arched eyebrows. Slim, lightweight rimless glasses perched on a

long, aquiline nose with an adorable little button on the end. And then there was the latest addition.

The increased metabolism engendered by the nanites caused Corey's hair and nails to grow at an alarming rate. His hair hung down to the tops of his shoulders in a soft, luminous waves, the ends pointed and damp with the sweat of exertion. But there was something that interfered with the production of eumelanin and pheomelanin in the hair cuticle, leaving only sparsely packed proteins in no significant quantities, leaving the hair a gleaming, shimmering platinum blonde, almost white. His eyelashes, eyebrows and pubic hair were the same.

It also left Corey's nails in a constant state of accelerated growth. Even with the last trimming just before bed last night, at eight in the morning they were already past the edges of his fingertips. If he didn't trim them every day, then he awoke with long, dragon-lady fingernails that made it impossible to do anything with his hands.

A man had entered the rehab room, a tall, stylish man in a Hugo Boss suit and high-dollar Italian loafers, carrying a scandalously expensive attaché case. He extended a well-moisturized hand to Corey.

"Dr. Reynolds. This is remarkable. I could never tell you weren't born a woman."

"In essence, I was," Corey replied. "And you are?"

The man cleared his throat. "Sorry. Kevin Franklin. I'm with Turner, Franklin and Stowe. We represent NeoLife."

"Ah," Corey said. "I was wondering when the lawyers would show up. I told you on the phone, I don't intend to sue anybody, just pay the medical bills."

"There are no medical bills," Franklin replied. "This is all going on the books as medical research for the nanites. NeoLife stands to make billions. The least they can do is help you and Dr. Harrison in any way they can, and that's why I'm here."

"Look, Mr. Franklin, I don't want your money. I just want to go home."

"To your apartment? The one leased under the name Corey Ambrose Reynolds? You honestly believe that the landlord is going to believe that you're Corey Reynolds now?" Franklin said amusedly. "I suppose you could show him your drivers' license. But that says that you're male. Do you begin to see what I mean, Dr. Reynolds?"

Corey looked at the lawyer wide-eyed for a moment and drew a deep breath. "I guess I didn't think of that."

"No reason you should have," Franklin said smoothly, waving it aside with one hand weighted by a glittering Harvard class ring. "Those things are my job to think about."

"What do you suggest - I mean, what should I do? I can't stay at the hospital forever."

Franklin gestured to two folding chairs by the mirrored wall. Corey sat, wide-legged like a man, which seemed to amuse Franklin all the more. Seeing the spread-eagled reflection in the mirror, Corey adjusted with a blush to a more reserved way of sitting.

"You obviously need help," Franklin said. "We've informed the State of your, um... condition. You'll be fingerprinted and photographed, of course, but the State is willing to issue a new birth certificate and drivers' license. Once those are in place, we can file to transfer your

social security number, bank accounts, credit rating, medical records... we've even contacted Johns Hopkins and can get your diploma and medical license reissued. I'm not sure about your undergraduate degree, but we're looking in to it."

Corey whistled slightly. "You certainly are thorough."

"That's why I get paid the big bucks," Franklin said with no trace of conceit. "I have some documents that require your signature, of course. And NeoLife has some other things they'd like me to discuss with you."

"Such as?"

"Dr. Harrison. The brain damage is pretty extensive - the doctors estimate that he will have the mind of a ten-year-old child. Someone needs to have power of attorney, possibly even legal guardianship over him. Since you're essentially his twin sister..."

"I see," Corey said. "I don't..."

Franklin put a very warm hand over his. "It's not something you have to answer right away. NeoLife has also instructed me to offer you some additional assistance. We have contacted some very prestigious coaches. You and Dr. Harrison will both need a lot of assistance if you're to live as women. We're prepared to provide that."

"Coaching? For what?" Corey asked.

"How to sit, for one thing," Franklin said with a wry smile. "Dressing. Hygiene. Etiquette. There's a lot more to being a woman than peeing from the seated position, I imagine. I don't profess to know what you're going through, doctor. But I do want to get you all the help you need."

Corey sighed. "I suppose that's wise."

Franklin patted his hand brusquely. "That's the spirit."

"Look, I need to take a shower and change," Corey said. "And then I need to go and visit Dr. Harr- I mean, I need to go and visit my sister."

Franklin gave him an unreadable smile and stood. "I'll have the documents sent to your room," he said smoothly. "I admire the hell out of you, doctor. I don't know that I could go through what you're going through."

Corey shrugged elaborately. "I'm not sure I can go through what I'm going through."

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"Corey! Hi!" Stephen squealed, waving frantically. The room was a child's room, decorated with bright colors and plush stuffed animals and balloons.

"Hi, Steve," Corey said, a little subdued. Looking at a physical copy of himself like this, in this state, brought heavy 'there but for the grace of God' thoughts, which made his transformation a little easier to bear. At least Corey Reynolds still had his mind.

"Uh-uh," Stephen said, shaking his head vigorously and setting his platinum blonde mane swaying over his narrow shoulders. "Dr. McCullough says that's a boy's name. I don't want a boy's name if I'm gonna be a girl."

Dr. Evelyn McCullough, the therapist assigned to helping Stephen Harrison adapt to both his new body and his new mental ability, gave a shy smile. She was a matronly looking woman with salt-and-pepper sable hair and horn-rimmed glasses. She had to have been a looker when she was younger, but good food and comfortable living had combined with age to make her look like the stereotypical, TV-commercial grandma. Corey couldn't help but return the smile - Dr. McCullough had a way of putting people at ease.

"That sounds like a good idea," Corey said, sitting gingerly on the bedside. Stephen grabbed both his 'sister's' hands and started swinging them back and forth gently. Contact between them seemed inevitable, and Corey's sister's happy mood began to infect. The corners of Corey's mouth turned up despite themselves.

"What are you going to call yourself, then?" Corey asked.

"Well, my mommy and daddy named me Stephen, and I don't want to change that 'cause I love my mommy and daddy," Stephen explained in a rush. "So Dr. McCullough said I could choose the femdamin- fembla-"

"Feminine," Dr. McCullough supplied gently.

"Right, feminine, the feminine form of my old name," Stephen continued. "'Sides, I think that Stephanie is a pretty name, don't you?"

"I really do," Corey said, smiling. "A pretty name for a pretty girl."

"I'm not as pretty as Britney," Stephen/Stephanie pouted.

"Sure you are," Corey said. "I think you're even prettier."

"You're just saying that 'cause you're my sister," Stephanie told him sullenly.

"No I'm not," Corey said, giving his 'sister' a playful poke in the ribs that set him giggling. "I promise. You're prettier than Britney ever could be. In fact, if you did your hair and put on a little makeup, you'd be way prettier than Britney."

"You think so?" Stephanie said, bouncing a little. She turned to Dr. McCullough with wide, excited kid-in-the-toy-store eyes. "Can I? Please?"

"Can you what, dear?" Dr. McCullough said, trying to follow the quicksilver logic.

"Have some makeup and do my hair," Stephanie blurted, gasping a little. "Corey can help me learn how, I promise I'll eat all my vegetables and do all the exercises you gave me please please please..."

Dr. McCullough gave Corey a measuring look before smiling and patting Stephanie's hand warmly. "I'm going to hold you to that promise, dear. All the exercises."

Stephanie straightened up and assumed as serious a tone as he could. "I'll only use my new girl name and only use words like 'she' and 'her' for myself. I'll do whatever the doctors and my sister tell me and I'll tell somebody if I feel sad or mad. I'll write in my little book every day and tell you every time I have a dream, even if it's bad."

"Well, if your sister says it's all right," Dr. McCullough said.

Stephanie turned the puppy-dog eyes full blast on Corey. "Please, Corey?"

"Sure, sweetie," Corey said, wondering why his attitude on the whole thing had changed so quickly. At first he'd been appalled at the thought of makeup. Maybe it was seeing the exuberance and excitement in his twin's eyes. It was almost as if he could feel it himself.

"Yay! I'm gonna be prettier than Britney!" Stephanie said, doing a little dance in her bed. "And I'm gonna learn to dance like her, too."

Stephanie sprang out of bed and did a dance around the room, finally hugging Corey close. "You're the best sister," she whispered.

"Thanks. I like you too," Corey whispered back.

"Nuh-uh, we're sisters. Dr. McCullough says sisters love each other, like mommies and daddies do," Stephanie explained as if to an idiot.

Corey chuckled. "She's right. And I do love you. But can't I like you at the same time?"

"I dunno," Stephanie said, looking to Dr. McCullough for guidance.

"Of course you can. You can love each other and like each other at the same time. You can even love each other and be mad at each other. Love is what keeps people together, even if they're mad or sad or tired or sick."

"Love is what keeps people together," Stephanie repeated. Suddenly she looked sheepish. "Um, Dr. McCullough, can I, um..."

Dr. McCullough looked at her watch and clicked her tongue. "I suppose so. But you know I don't approve of that."

"I know. I'm sorry," Stephanie said. She opened her bedside drawer and fished around for a pack of cigarettes and a disposable lighter. She cracked the window and lit one, blowing the smoke into the outside air.

Corey had a strange sensation of relief. It made him a little uncomfortable.

"I think Stephen - excuse me, *Stephanie* - would be devastated if you didn't participate in learning makeup and hairstyling with him - I mean, *her*," Dr. McCullough said softly, leaning close to Corey. "Are you sure you're ready to do that?"

Corey looked compassionately at his sister. "He got so happy. Hell, it might be fun. I'll look like a streetwalker, but it might be fun. I'll pretend it's Halloween."

Dr. McCullough smiled a very crinkly smile. "Excellent attitude, dear. Stephen - *Stephanie*, I have to remember that - is making excellent progress. And he - *she* - looks up to you so very much."

"That's sweet," Corey said.

"Be sure that you use feminine pronouns and language towards her," Dr. McCullough said, watching Stephanie smoke out the window as she danced a little to the music from a car radio heard from the street below.

"Dr. McCullough? Should I do the same for myself?" Corey asked.

"When you're ready, dear. *Stephanie* needs more guidance than you do."

"Trust me, Doc, I need all the guidance I can get right now," Corey admitted.

"It's all up to you - you're better able to monitor your only progress than Stephanie. Oh, I got it on the first try! When you're ready to begin a mental and emotional transition towards womanhood, you can find all the help you need."

Corey hefted his breasts in both hands. "Well, I can't deny I'm feminine on the outside. I thought, I guess, that I didn't need to change on the inside. But I see how happy it's making Stephen --"

"Stephanie," Dr. McCullough corrected.

"Right. Stephanie. I see how happy it makes Stephanie, and I wonder if it can't do the same for me. Because now that the numbness is starting to wear off, I'm starting to wonder if I'm ever going to be happy again."

"You know that you don't have to get guidance specifically from a professional," Dr. McCullough said gently. "There are others who can help you find your way."

Corey followed McCullough's eyes to the dancing figure in the window.

After an indeterminate pause, Corey cleared his - *her* - throat. "Hey, Stephanie?"

The girl turned, the light limning her face making her quite beautiful. She smiled a genuine, if vapid, smile.

"Would you like to help me pick a girl's name, too? For myself?"

"Like I did?" Stephanie asked.

"Yeah, just like you did."

Stephanie squealed with delight and hopped up and down before tossing her cigarette out the window and running to knee-bounce on the bed beside her sister. "Do you want it to be like your mommy and daddy named you, like I did?"

"Just like you did. Middle name, too."

"Oh, no, I forgot my middle name! I have to find one for me! We both get new names! This is gonna be so much fun!" Stephanie cooed, upsetting a water pitcher and a stuffed bear in her grab for the thick 'Name Your Baby' book beside her bed. She opened it and stuck her glasses on her slender nose in one motion, flipping the pages at methamphetamine speed.

"Boy's names, boy's names, we don't need no stupid boy's names!" Stephanie said as Dr. McCullough pulled the door shut behind her exit. "We're all girls, here!"

Ω



SUMMARY: After a scientific experiment gone bad, the males in the group find that they are turning into the twins of female in the group who was killed. part two

ACTING OUT, Part Two

by Valerie Hope

DR. EVELYN McCULLOUGH HAD BEEN a psychotherapist for twenty-six years, and had seen all manner of wounds of the human psyche. She thought she'd seen it all. But the sudden and unexpected transformation of two medical research doctors into perfectly functioning young women by a freak lab accident had her completely out of her depth.

"I don't know what to do for them, Mr. Franklin," the frumpy psychotherapist told the slick lawyer who was handling the legal ramifications of the accident. "I'd say to find someone more qualified with things like this, but no one is qualified with things like this."

"I understand," Kevin Franklin said, sipping his coffee. "What, exactly, is it that you can't help them cope with?"

"The best I can do is to try and re-parent them as young women," Dr. McCullough said. "It's easy with Stephanie. The damage to her brain from the accident has regressed her to the mental age of about 10 years. It's Corey that worries me. Excuse me, Courtney. Her new 'sister' has persuaded her to change her name as well."

"But what is the actual issue that you're trying to help them overcome, Doctor?"

McCullough sipped her coffee. "Most people with gender identity issues are trying to cross the gender line by choice," she explained. "These young men - young women, now - were forced across. Neither one of them asked for it. Now, in addition to the trauma of almost dying in a lab accident, they've been forced together as a family - they truly are twin sisters, down to the genetic level - and they have to cope with unlearning a lifetime of socialized behavior and relearning everything as a woman. And none of it by choice."

"So Corey - I mean Courtney, God, it will take forever to get used to this - Dr. Reynolds is the sticking point," Franklin asked by way of clarification.

"I suppose you could call it that. Dr. Reynolds retains all of her memories and identity from before the accident. It's a much more difficult transition for her than Stephanie. Stephanie's diminished mental capacity finds a childlike delight in everything, especially the trappings of being a young girl. Pretty clothes, makeup, pop music, stuffed animals - she's essentially trapped at that level, so whatever makes her happiest will continue to appeal to her indefinitely. Right now that extends to *Seventeen* magazine, Britney Spears and Hilary Duff. That's more than enough for Stephanie. I believe that Courtney will require quite a bit more."

"I see," Franklin said, tapping his lower lip in thought.

"We don't have much time, Mr. Franklin. We have to find them some better help."

"What do you mean, not much time? I thought they were perfectly healthy," Franklin protested, raising his eyebrows.

"They are," Dr. McCullough said, "that's the problem. Their first menstruation happened shortly after Dr. Reynolds regained consciousness. That was twelve days ago. Very shortly these young women will undergo ovulation, Mr. Franklin, and that means the first real hormonal flow. Sexual maturity. Stephanie will be difficult enough to control under the influence of these new hormones. Courtney may undergo serious emotional trauma."

"You mean you're worried because they're about to ovulate?" Franklin asked, a little abashed and out of his depth.

"I mean, Mr. Franklin, that I'm worried because these young women have no experience with what's coming," she explained. "I mean I'm worried because they're both about to get very, very horny for the first time as girls."

Franklin sat back, considering. "I see," he said faintly, lost in thought.

* * *

"You understand, I'm not to be connected to this in any way," Franklin told the woman as he slid the thick envelope across her denim-clad thigh under the table in the upscale bar.

"I don't understand a damn thing about it," the woman said, sipping her cosmopolitan diffidently and watching the people go by, looking disinterested in the conversation. "All I know is that you're paying me a lot of money to do whatever you tell me to. That's enough for me."

"It better be," Franklin said. "There's an address in the envelope. Be there tomorrow at nine a.m. and dress like a professional. You'll be contacted once you get there with what to do. And avoid Dr. Evelyn McCullough at all costs, do you understand me?"

"Sure, whatever," she said.

Franklin got up and left the bar without another word. Susan Callow watched him go with a grin of amusement. She'd been paid to do some pretty crazy stuff before, but this was pretty much the be-all-end-all.

It would be interesting to see where it all led.

* * *

"Hi, Stephanie. I'm Dr. Callow," the new woman said, tucking the lab coat under her thighs as she sat in the chair next to Stephanie's bed. Stephanie pulled the earphone buds from her iPod out and smiled vacantly.

"Are you new here?" she piped happily.

"I am," Susan replied. "Mr. Franklin thought it would be a good idea. I'm here to help you out, and hopefully your sister too."

"Help me how?" Stephanie asked, chewing one end of her lengthening platinum-blond hair absently.

"You don't know a whole lot about yourself right now," Dr. Callow said. "You have a lot of catching up to do, because you weren't born a girl."

"Dr. McCullough has taught me a whole lot," Stephanie argued.

"I know she has," Susan replied. "But I'm here to help her teach you the rest."

"Okay," Stephanie said, bouncing a little. She pulled her pack of Marlboros off the side table and held them up. "Do you care?"

"Only if you don't give me one," Callow replied, smiling.

Stephanie squealed and giggled. "Somebody else who smokes! Everybody around here doesn't like it that I do and they make faces whenever I try," she said, passing a cigarette over to Susan and lighting them both with a disposable Bic. "They're always bitching at me for something or another. 'Stephanie, don't sit with your legs open.' 'Stephanie, don't smoke. Use proper grammar. Don't cuss. Don't do this. Don't do that.'" She ended her tirade with a wet raspberry.

"You don't like them making you do these things?" Susan asked.

"No," Stephanie grumped, pouting.

"What kinds of things do you want to do, then?"

"I dunno," Stephanie said, shrugging. "I just want to pick it, not them."

"That sounds fair," Susan said. "I tell you what we're going to do. I want you to watch TV with me and we're going to pick out things that you like. We'll make a list, and afterwards we'll try them all out and see how you like them."

Stephanie's eyes were as big as saucers. "For real?"

"Absolutely," Susan said, surprised at how easy it was to establish a rapport and trust with this woman. "Now come away from that window. They shouldn't make you hang out a window every time you want to smoke. We'll use the flowerpot for an ashtray and we just won't tell the nurses, okay?"

Stephanie's eyes glittered as she regarded her 'new best friend.' She ran and jumped square in the middle of the bed, blonde hair flying as she bounced up and down.

* * *

Susan looked at the two-page list. "This is a lot of stuff."

"And I wanna try it all, too," Stephanie said happily.

"Mr. Franklin has given me permission to take you out for some of this, but I feel like I should ask Courtney too, don't you? She's your sister, after all."

"Yeah, I guess," Stephanie said, absentmindedly watching an episode of *The Anna Nicole Show* while they talked, her attention span dwindling.

"You don't like Courtney?" Susan asked.

"Hell, no," Stephanie said, quickly and firmly. "I love her. She's my sister and my best friend. It's just that..."

"Just that what?"

"I get sick of her telling me what to do all the time. Like she's so smart, right, and she automatically knows what's best for me. Just once, I wish I could tell *her* what to do. See how she likes it."

"What would you make her do?" Susan asked.

Stephanie shrugged. "I dunno. Wear a bikini, kiss a boy, get a boob job, something that makes her super-girly. It's like she hates being a girl. I keep telling her, it's pretty cool, but she goes, 'I don't care if it is or not, I never asked for it.' And I go, 'Well, we're stuck with it,' and she goes, 'I don't need you to remind me of that' and walks off all pissed off and stuff."

"So you think you could make her enjoy being a girl?" Susan asked, her eyebrow raised quizzically. She'd been writing a lot of things down for the last few minutes.

"Sure, I guess," Stephanie said.

"Do you two ever fight?" Susan asked.

"Not really. We just bitch at each other, but we don't scream or yell or hit each other. Courtney's not like that. Neither am I. Besides, every time I get really mad at her, she gets this weird look on her face and then just quits arguing and does whatever I say. Afterwards she's all like, 'why did I do that?' and I go, 'because sometimes I'm right' and she looks at me all funny and then gets real quiet and thinks a lot. It's stupid."

"It sounds like it," Susan said, writing furiously. "Why do you think she does it?"

"I dunno."

"Have you ever asked her?"

"No," Stephanie said.

"I want you to try something for me, Stephanie, okay? Next time you're arguing with Courtney, I want you to think really hard about making her do something. Something she'd never do on her own. Think as hard as you can, and then tell me what happens. Can you do that?"

"Sure," Stephanie said. "You want me to tell her what it is?"

"No. As a matter of fact, don't even tell her you did it. Let's just see what happens. It could be fun, if it's a secret. What do you think?"

"It does sound fun."

"Okay, sweetie, I have to go," Susan said. "I'll be back tomorrow morning. But in the meantime, I have some presents for you."

"Presents?" Stephanie chimed, tearing her attention away from the TV and focusing it entirely on Susan. "What kind?"

"Well, you said you hated when they made you turn your lights out and go to sleep? I sent a friend of mine out to pick some stuff up for you to help with that. Here's a portable DVD player with headphones, so you can watch TV and nobody will know. Just hide it under your blanket like this, see, and everybody will think you're asleep."

"Cool! OhmyGod, thank you!"

"That's not all," Susan said, handing over a plastic sack. "There's a bunch of DVDs in there for you - I got you the first season of *Anna Nicole*, some *Lizzie McGuire*, some Britney and Christina videos, some movies you'll like - *The Girl Next Door*, *Eurotrip*, *Austin Powers*, stuff like that, and a couple of videos about doing your hair and makeup."

"I don't have any more makeup," Stephanie complained. "I didn't do my exercises and Dr. McCullough took it away because I broke my promise."

Susan passed over another bag. "Now you do."

Stephanie squealed and hugged her tight. "You are so cool! I can't wait for Courtney to meet you!"

"And I can't wait to meet her either," She handed over a smaller bag. "In there is an ashtray, some packs of cigarettes and some air freshener."

"These aren't my kind," Stephanie said, pulling out the long packs of Virginia Slims.

"I know, but they're girl cigarettes. Just for girls. I thought you might like them. If you don't, you can throw them away and I'll get you the kind you like."

"You are so sweet," Stephanie told her with genuine affection. Susan smiled, thinking this was entirely too easy. She hoped fervently that working with the sister was as simple. Sure, Courtney was a super-Ph.D. *bona fide* genius, but hopefully waking up with tits and a pussy would make her a little less on guard.

"Okay, there's one more thing, but this has to be a complete secret. You can't tell anybody, okay?" Susan said.

"Promise," Stephanie said as solemnly as she could in her little-girl soprano.

Susan passed over a few more DVDs. "I want you to watch these tonight after lights-out. Tomorrow I want to talk to you about them. It's really important - these are all about the most important part of being a girl. You don't know this, you're not a girl at all."

"Okay," Stephanie said as seriously as she could, looking intently at the covers of the DVDs. "I'll watch this one first."

"*Jenna Loves Briana* is a good choice. It's one of my favorites," Susan said.

* * *

"Are you okay, Courtney?" Dr. McCullough asked, looking in a little bit of alarm at the dark circles under the eyes of the remarkably pretty young woman. Her white-blonde hair had grown past her shoulders, and it looked as shiny and soft as a Pantene commercial. The hair was incredibly thick, too, and bounced as the girl walked to the little cafeteria table in her choppy, mannish stride.

"I didn't sleep at all last night," Courtney said. "Weird dreams."

"Nightmares?" Dr. McCullough asked. "Do you want to talk about them?"

"Not nightmares. Weird dreams."

"Weird how?"

Courtney blushed a little. "Sexual. Very sexual."

Dr. McCullough smiled a little. "That's natural. We talked about this."

"I know, I know, I just didn't think ovulation would be so... *urgent*. Vivid. Most nights I can barely remember my dreams. Last night was 3D, surround-sound smell-o-vision. And it was wild, out of control. Even when I was a teenage boy, I didn't dream like this."

"I suppose it's to be expected, dear," Dr. McCullough said. "Brain cells don't regenerate. Your old, male brain is soaking in a vat of brand new, very powerful and unfamiliar hormones. Extreme mood swings are a very likely effect. I wouldn't worry about it very much. As a matter of fact, I think you could actually go out on a limb and try to enjoy these dreams. They can be very pleasant if you let them."

Courtney managed a weak smile and slugged some more of her coffee. "I'll try."

"And if that doesn't work, honey, go play with your massaging showerhead," Dr. McCullough suggested. "It might ease your tension and let you get some sleep."

Courtney giggled, a very girlish sound uttered unknowingly and without intention. "I guess you're right. Still, I hope Stephanie had a better time of it than I did."

"What do you mean?" asked Dr. McCullough, buttering her toast.

"I just... *know* somehow, that she had the same kind of dream I did. I don't know how I know, but I'm as certain of it as I am of sitting here, talking to you. Maybe it's the genetics, or just the situation, but we're connected somehow."

"Many studies have been done on identical twins, Courtney," Dr. McCullough said. "We haven't even scratched the surface. My money is on the fact that the two of you are connected, possibly more deeply than either of you suspects. You're truly sisters."

"So strange," Courtney mused, munching a green grape. "Two months ago all I had was a father that I didn't really like very much. Now I have Stephanie, and then all the people I've started to care about here. Dr. Kennedy, Mr. Franklin, you - you're closer to me than my birth family ever was. You've certainly all stuck by me more than my parents ever did."

"That's very flattering," McCullough said, coloring a little at the high praise.

"Even this new one, Dr. Callow," Courtney said. "She seems a likeable enough woman."

"I haven't met Dr. Callow," Dr. McCullough said. "Franklin recommended her. I don't know all that much about her, except that she was in the military. Most of what she worked on was classified, but she's obviously at the top of her field."

Courtney pushed her lightweight glasses up her nose with a long finger. "I don't know much about her either. To be honest, I never studied behavioral research much. I was more of an A's, C's, T's and G's man."

She looked down sheepishly at the cleft just showing above the button of her blue cotton blouse. "I guess I earned that 'was' on lots of accounts."

Dr. McCullough placed a warm hand over her friend's. "There is nothing keeping you from remaining an A's, C's, T's and G's *person*, Courtney," she said, emphasizing the gender-neutral form purposefully. "You're a gifted doctor and scientist, and there is nothing wrong with your

brain. I'm sure the medical team working with you and Stephanie would benefit greatly from your expertise. Why don't you ask them if you can join in? The lion's share of being a woman is social interaction anyway. I think you could only benefit."

"I guess I could. I just feel a little guilty, I guess, being able to go back to work when Stephanie can't," Courtney said honestly.

"Stephanie is very happy," Dr. McCullough said. "Very happy. You can't let her rule your life."

"She has a way of doing that without meaning to," Courtney said, smiling ruefully. "Still, it is nice. Whatever she's feeling just kind of rubs off on me. If she's happy, I start feeling happy. Or if she's excited, or frustrated or angry. I just seem to pick up on her moods very quickly."

"That's what sisters do," Dr. McCullough said.

"I wonder if she feels the same way about my moods?" Courtney wondered. "I should go and ask her. Besides, I told her I'd come see her first thing this morning anyway. She said she had something she wanted to talk with me about."

"Any idea what?" Dr. McCullough asked, curious and amused.

"I doubt it will be about the economy," Courtney said, shrugging. "But I'm sure it's the most important thing in the world to her, and so it's pretty important to me too."

* * *

Courtney listened curiously to the clatter and thump behind Stephanie's door after she'd knocked. "Steph? You all right?" Courtney called to her twin.

"Just a second," her sister answered, a little strained.

Concerned, Courtney opened the door a crack. "Are you okay?"

She stopped in shock. Stephanie was quickly trying to hide something under the bed, but she wasn't doing a very good job. A box full of DVDs and a portable player were plainly visible. Stephanie's eyes were dark with makeup that Dr. McCullough had supposedly taken away as consequence of Stephanie's breaking of a promise to do all her exercises. A crystal ashtray sat by her bedside with a cigarette smoldering in one of the notches, even though Stephanie had promised to either smoke out the open window or let one of the nurses take her down to the parking lot. The soft, smoky rap of Ciara's "Oh" was playing through the portable speakers attached to Stephanie's pink iPod Mini, even though she was only supposed to listen to her headphones. Courtney's eyes narrowed a little behind her eyeglasses and she affected a look of deep disappointment.

"Stephanie Ashlyn, I'm surprised at you," she said, using her sister's adopted middle name to make the recrimination sound more severe. Courtney tried not to remember the happy, scary day when she'd asked her sister to help her pick a new name, the day that Stephen Ashton Harrison and Corey Ambrose Reynolds had been reborn as Stephanie Ashlyn and Courtney Amber Reynolds. Courtney hardly ever thought of herself as masculine now, and the few people who mistakenly called her Corey weren't answered - Courtney was the more familiar name.

"I didn't know you were coming," Stephanie said weakly.

"You know better than this!" Courtney scolded, shutting off the iPod just as Britney's "I Got That Boom Boom" began. "I can't believe you'd go behind Dr. McCullough's back like this."

"She's not my mommy," Stephanie said, stubborn and defiant. "I'm a grown woman, even though, like, y'all say I'm not. I can make up my own fucking mind."

Courtney blinked in surprise. Swearing was strictly frowned upon. It seemed that all the boundaries that Courtney, McCullough and the rest of the staff had tried to erect to protect Stephanie and ease her transition were crumbling in the face of this unexpected rebellion. Courtney found herself getting very angry - possibly a reaction to her sister's anger. She did find herself adopting her twin's moods very quickly.

"Oh, so now you're talking like white trash, too?" Courtney said biting. "Is there anything we asked you to do that you *are* still doing, or have you just decided to break everybody's hearts?"

"What the fuck about my heart, Courtney? Like I don't ever get sick of doing what everybody always tells me to do?"

"We're just trying to look out for you!"

"I can look out for myself! Stop being such a bossy bitch all the time and just let me do what I want!"

Courtney took a breath and tried to calm down, but the anger was pretty unreasoning. But any further and she might hurt her sister's feelings. "Stephanie, honey, please. I don't want to fight. I just want to know why you all of a sudden started ignoring everything everybody's been trying to tell you."

Stephanie's eyes were as round as saucers as she looked at her twin in absolute shock.

Courtney exhaled a jet of bluish-white smoke towards the ceiling of the room, asking, "Why are you looking at me so weird? What..."

It was only then that Courtney realized she'd picked up one of the long skinny Virginia Slims cigarettes from Stephanie's pack, lit it, and had taken a deep drag from it. She looked at the fuming cigarette held between the first two fingers of her right hand like it was a live adder.

"Holy shit," Stephanie breathed, giggling a little. "It worked."

"What worked?" Courtney said in shock, dropping the cigarette in the ashtray and stepping back from it like it was explosive.

Stephanie's demeanor changed a little, more commanding and maybe even a little menacing. "Sit down," she said firmly.

Courtney started to protest but her knees seemed to act without her permission. She plopped unceremoniously in the chair next to her sister's bed.

"Oh, wow," Stephanie said, and giggled. "This is going to be so cool!"

"Stephanie, please tell me what's happening," Courtney pleaded, her voice very small and afraid. Stephanie smiled and stroked Courtney's lengthening blonde hair reassuringly.

"Don't be scared, Courtney. This is going to be fun. I promise," she said, pulling her box out from under her bed again. "We're going to have a great time."

"Stephanie..."

"Shh, honey," Stephanie said, smiling broadly. "You're really going to like this. Finish your cigarette and just wait."

Courtney picked up the cigarette while Stephanie dumped makeup on the bed. She giggled and bounced happily while she uncapped a tube of cream foundation and advanced on her sister, sponge in hand.

* * *

Susan Callow was waiting outside in her nondescript blue Nissan Altima, engine idling. She pushed her sunglasses up her slender nose irritably and looked around, wondering when the little airhead blonde would be down.

She spun about with a start when the back door of her car opened and two women piled in quickly. Stephanie's smiling face popped in between the seats.

"Sorry," she said, a little breathless. "We had to wait on the stairs while some nurses got through talking. Hope you weren't waiting too long."

"What's all this about?" Susan demanded, looking a little askance as she looked at the silent and sullen face of Stephanie's sister Courtney. Courtney's clear blue eyes were red-rimmed and she looked a mixture of horror and disbelief. Thick, inexpertly-applied makeup was caked on her face, streaked by tears.

"It worked, Susan! OhmyGawd, it totally worked!" Stephanie cheered.

"Slow down. What worked?"

"I did what you told me to do, to think real hard about making Courtney do something she doesn't do. I thought real hard, and she totally did it! I made her smoke a cigarette!"

Susan looked wildly at Courtney. She'd suspected that there was some influence between the sisters, but she never thought for an instant that one sister could make the other do something against her will.

"Is this true, Courtney?" Susan asked.

Courtney looked at her like a hunted animal, then nodded, almost imperceptibly, choking back a sob. The ice-blue eyes lowered to the floor of the back seat.

"What's wrong with her?" Susan asked.

"She's pissed at me," Stephanie said. "She goes, like, 'you don't know what this means' and I go, 'I do too,' and she goes, 'no you don't, you can't' and I'm like, 'you think you're so fucking smart all the time, let's see how you like it when everybody thinks you're stupid like me.' She won't talk to anybody now."

"Why not?" Susan asked both sisters.

Stephanie gave her twin a giggling, happy nudge. "Tell her."

Courtney looked ready to die of shame as she looked up and in a very small voice, said, "I, like, totally don't like how I talk 'n' stuff now, y'know? She totally, like, makes me sound like a total

airhead and she totally thinks it's, like, funny 'n' stuff." She even twirled a lock of blonde hair around one finger as she spoke, smiling vapidly.

"I don't even have to think about it, either," Stephanie said. "She totally does whatever I say, and once I say it she has to do it until I make her stop! How cool is that?"

"Interesting. Do you have any theories, Courtney?" Susan asked.

Courtney looked abashed. "D'you have any gum?"

Susan looked a little taken aback and offered a stick of Juicy Fruit from her purse. The blonde took it and started chewing it loudly, playing with her hair.

"She can't answer unless I say she can, 'cause I want her to sound dumb," Stephanie explained. "Go ahead, sweetie, you can tell her. But sound happy, okay? Smile!"

Courtney brightened immediately, smiling widely as she smacked her gum, but her eyes still betrayed the terror she was feeling. "Um, okay, so, like the little robot thingies we made - "

"The nanites," Susan supplied.

" - whatever, the little thingies, they're like, two kinds 'n' shit, right? One does all the work while the other ones, like, sit there and tell them what to do. So I'm, like, Stephanie totally was bleeding from her head, when our, like, place went all *whoosh* and she was totally standing closer to the bag of the second kind. And I'm, like, ohmyGawd, they totally got into her head, like through her cut 'n' shit. So she goes, 'do this, Courtney' and her little robot thingies tell all my little robot thingies and I'm all like, 'yes master' and I do whatever she, like, tells me to do."

"How does that happen?" Susan asked.

"So, like, the first kind of little robot thingies make NDA - "

"DNA," Susan corrected.

" - whatever, like, God, can I finish a sentence? But like the DNA or NDA or and or whatever the fuck, it makes protein, right, and those work on the neryv thingies in my brain and back and I do whatever Stephanie says 'cause her little robot thingies are telling mine what proteins to make 'n' shit. It totally makes sense when you think about it."

"Isn't that cool?" Stephanie chirped. "So I totally want to show Courtney a good time and there's like no way we can do that in that stupid-ass hospital."

"What kind of a good time?" Susan asked.

"Well, we totally don't have shit to wear," Stephanie said, "and I can't do makeup like the magazines. Then I totally want to get our bellybuttons pierced, and our ears, and get our hair done, and then do what was in those videos you gave me."

"*You* gave her those?" Courtney interjected.

"Oh, shut up, Courtney," Stephanie said. Courtney fish-mouthed, trying to speak, but she could make no sound come from her throat. Stephanie giggled.

"This is gonna be *great*!" Stephanie promised.

Looking a little strangely at the two identical women in the rearview mirror, Susan shrugged and put the car in gear. As Stephanie busied herself with braiding her sister's hair, Susan pulled a cell-phone from her purse and dialed her employer.

* * *

Stephanie looked up happily from the clothes rack she was pawing through in the trendy little boutique where they arranged to meet, waving happily. "Mr. Franklin! Hi!"

"Hi, Stephanie," he said, gathering Susan Callow in by eye. "Where's your sister?"

"Outside, pouting," Stephanie said, gesturing through the store window to where a long-legged blonde girl leaned against the wall, smoking a cigarette with a murderous look on her pretty face. The wind blew her long blonde hair around her face and she scraped it off her cheeks with long, square-cut nails, buffed and polished in a French manicure.

"I made her get her nails done," Stephanie said, "but she doesn't even look at them. I mean, like, God, she's so pretty like that, and she won't do anything but look at me all mad all the time. She's not having any fun at all, and I can't make her have fun."

"And you made her smoke, too?"

"Totally. I got sick of being the only one. I just wanted her to be my friend and have fun with me, do the things I do before she said I was doing shit wrong all the time."

Franklin smiled easily. "That sounds fair. But she's scared, Stephanie, she's doing things she never expected to be doing. What if that happened to you? Wouldn't you be scared?"

"I guess so," Stephanie said. "She feels more mad than scared."

"You can tell what she's feeling?" Franklin asked.

"Totally. Right now she's pissed as hell, and nervous. But that's cause I'm totally making her flirt with guys. Damn, I wish she's just loosen up and enjoy it."

Susan gestured to her boss and they stepped to one side, leaving an easily-distracted Stephanie pawing through the racks again.

"First of all, I need money to cover purchases. Stephanie has very expensive tastes, and I'm already completely out of cash."

"Done," Franklin said. "I'll contact the bank immediately."

"Secondly, I haven't planned for this," Callow continued. "I thought this would take place in stages, like all the other times. I planned the first stages, but preparations for late-stage development like this aren't done. I'm working without a net, here."

"You're a professional, you'll cope," Franklin said.

"I'm a behavioral modification specialist..."

Franklin's voice became a vicious, rasping whisper. "You're a goddamn *torturer*, and quit trying to convince me otherwise. My contacts at the Pentagon say you're the best there is at making people do what they don't want to do. The plan progresses as intended."

Susan's eyes narrowed. "Watch your tone, Mr. Franklin. I'm not some secretary you can bark at and watch me hop. Believe me, you do *not* want to get on my bad side."

"I assumed, Dr. Callow, that when you joined this little business venture, the idea was to get rich beyond your wildest imaginings," Franklin said. "Those two women have the secrets to the cure for virtually every disease known to man and the Fountain of Youth as well, all *rolled into one*. Have you stopped and thought about that yet?"

Callow's eyes betrayed only a little shock as the enormity of the proposition settled into her mind. "And you plan to take it from them?"

"It's very simple. They'll sign it away in a heartbeat if they're no longer interested in it. Stephanie is easy. Courtney would have been the difficult one, but the nature of the nanites makes it easy as well."

"It doesn't work that way," Susan corrected. "Stephanie can only make her act certain ways. She can't affect her thoughts, or her emotions. She may act just like a brainless sorority girl, but believe me - one of the top genetic engineers in the world is still there behind those eyes."

"All I need is for her to sign some papers," Franklin said. "A *physical* task. Once she signs over the intellectual property, we change her name and ship them off to some warehouse in Nicaragua or sell them to the Sultan of Wherever-the-Fuck as a matched set and never hear from either one of them again. And we get richer than the European Union."

"So hear me well, just make Stephanie think it's a good idea. She'll make Courtney do it, and then it's over," Franklin finished. "Until then, you do whatever it takes."

"Fine," Susan said. "You're a sick, cruel bastard, Franklin."

"Say that again when both of us have a stack of money so high we need a forklift to carry it," Franklin said. He turned and put on his best, brightest high-paid-litigator smile, all chalk-white fraud.

"Stephanie, honey, have you found anything you like?"

"Oh, totally," Stephanie said. "This cute skirt and this top, and I totally love these jeans, they're just like Jessica Simpson's in *People* last month."

"They're on me," Franklin said, pulling his wallet out of an inside pocket. "As a matter of fact, the whole day is on me. Just be sure you buy two of everything, one for Courtney too. I want you two girls to have a really good time."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously," Franklin said. "Don't worry about money. You can have anything you want. Anything at all."

She gave him a tight hug, and looked at him as seriously as the vapid young woman could. "You mean it?"

"Of course. Have I ever lied to you? Now, tell me what it is you want."

"I dunno. It's pretty big," she said.

"Try me."

"Big boobs," Stephanie said, blushing and giggling. "Like Anna Nicole's, or Jenna Jameson's."

"You want breast augmentation?" Franklin asked. "Today?"

"Yeah," Stephanie said. "I mean, look. We got our bellybuttons pierced today." She hiked up her pink t-shirt to show him the little stainless-steel dumbbell driven through the taut flesh above her navel. "Tongues, too," she said, sticking out her tongue to reveal another dumbbell driven through the thick pink muscle. "And ears, twice in each one. The girl at the piercing place said they'd take months to heal. But look!"

Franklin inspected the young woman's flat-as-an-ironing-board belly. No trace of blood or pinkness at all. No swelling or irritation. It looked as if it had been done years ago.

"It doesn't hurt or nothing," Stephanie said. "Courtney says it's cause the little robots inside us make us heal real fast, and I thought maybe we could get big boobs and the same thing would happen. Don't you?"

Franklin gave her a measuring look. Maybe the Sultan of Wherever-the-Fuck would pay more for the matched set if they had gigantic fake knockers. They'd certainly be easy to spot in a crowd. He smiled widely.

"Anything for my special girls," he said, pulling out his cell-phone and paging through the electronic phone book. Finding one of his ex-clients, he speed-dialed and set the phone to his ear.

"Hello, let me speak to Dr. Feingold, please. Tell him it's Kevin Franklin."

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: After a scientific experiment gone bad, the males in the group find that they are turning into the twins of female in the group who was killed. part three

ACTING OUT, Part Three

by Valerie Hope

THE SHORT RIDE TO THE clinic took longer than expected due to the 5 o'clock traffic and an accident on the feeder road of the freeway. Susan tapped her fingers on the wheel nervously, while behind her the girls giggled - Stephanie had forced her sister to giggle - and looking through the several thousand dollars' worth of clothes, shoes, jewelry and makeup the young women had bought. Both were coiffed and manicured at the finest salons in the city, their makeup dramatically done by professional artists to the stars, and dressed in the latest fashions. Stephanie wore her hair down, wraparound sunglasses pushed into the thick moussed fullness of her hair. Both of them had thick hair which grew at incredible rates, but with all the volumizers and teasing and backcombing they'd undergone at Raphael's Salon, they were now the sort of women whose hair was so thick and full that it made their heads and faces look small.

Courtney was giggling and simpering over the clothes as much as her sister, but her eyes looked detached and calculating. She was playing the part her sister forced her to play, like a life-size breathing doll, but the mind inside was as alert and keen as ever. Susan secretly hoped that Kevin Franklin hadn't grossly underestimated the young woman. The look in the heavily-made-up, ice-blue eyes was one of cold, clinical murder.

Stephanie was nattering incessantly about how much fun she'd had. The former geneticist had the quicksilver mind and moods of a ten- or eleven-year-old girl, which Susan Callow had fostered greatly by indulging her. Particularly now that Stephanie was thrust into the overwhelming world of her own sexual maturity, she was particularly malleable. Susan used that to full advantage, and Stephanie's uncanny control over her sister guaranteed that both of them would go where the more irresponsible one led.

It would have been fascinating if not for the danger inherent in Kevin Franklin's plan. The slick lawyer planned to use Stephanie's diminished mental capacity and her control over her sister Courtney to force them to sign the intellectual property rights of the remarkable nanites that had transformed them into beautiful blonde twins and then pawn them off somewhere where they'd never be heard from again. It was all happening too quickly. It was too bold, too impulsive. Something was bound to go wrong.

Susan Callow pulled her blue Nissan up to the little portico outside the upscale cosmetic surgery center she'd been directed to. Kevin Franklin waited there, with a couple of nurses approaching physical perfection and a tall, tanned man in surgical scrubs. Dr. Hiram Feingold was a nationally-recognized plastic surgeon. Franklin had represented him once, long ago, which was why these two young women were actually able to get into his OR on about two hours' advance notice.

Stephanie and Courtney piled out of the back of the car in a rush, bouncing up and down with excitement and happiness at seeing their 'friend' Franklin. He returned the hugs warmly, exuding the slick friendliness that no doubt influenced juries around the state. Callow couldn't completely subdue her distaste for the man. Men like him had made the advancement of her Navy career a living hell. They'd made her residency difficult, and one night in undergraduate school, a man very like him had raped her twice in her dorm room. But the lure of the potential billions he promised bought a lot of forbearance.

"Are you ready?" Franklin asked the effervescent Stephanie. She bounced up and down on her toes excitedly, clapping her hands. With a halfhearted gesture, she made Courtney do the same. She then dismissed her sister to go smoke a cigarette, which the former geneticist did immediately, lighting the long Virginia Slims and walking a short distance away to 'enjoy' it.

"She doesn't look too enthusiastic," Franklin remarked, indicating Courtney.

"She'll like it once she gives it a chance," Stephanie said. "She totally doesn't get it yet, but I'm, like, doing all this for her. 'Cause I love her and I want her to be happy like me."

"You're a good sister."

"So," Dr. Feingold said happily, "which one of you young ladies is going to be first?"

"Oh, me!" Stephanie said, bouncing and waving. "I want to go first."

"Okay, then, into the chair," Feingold said, gesturing to one of the wheelchairs held by one of the beautiful nurses. "We'll bring your sister in once she finishes her cigarette."

"Okay," Stephanie said. "Don't go anywhere, Courtney! It'll be your turn soon!"

The silent sister only nodded, her eyes a little haunted, and took another drag off of her cigarette. Susan came close to her and put a hand on her shoulder.

"I never meant for any of this to happen," she said softly.

Courtney only looked at her sullenly, with her eyes narrowed a little in rage. Susan had been instrumental in her sister going uncharacteristically wild. Suddenly unashamed of the ditzy way Stephanie made her speech, she snapped, "Hel-lo, totally your fault 'n' shit. Stephanie was, like, totally cool before you started fucking with her."

"I didn't know she was going to carry it this far. I just wanted her to trust me."

"Like you even feel bad at all. Every time Stephanie says shit to you, you're all, like, 'Oh Stephanie, that's such a great idea! You should totally get your tongue pierced! You should absolutely get a boob job! Oh, and make your sister totally get one with you!' Bitch, please. You're, like, so to blame for this."

"It was Franklin's idea," Callow complained, trying inexplicably to gain this young woman's trust. It just suddenly became vitally important to her to have Courtney Reynolds not hate her. And Susan Callow had learned to listen to her instincts, the same instincts that had broken some of the strongest military prisoners in American custody. A torturer, Franklin had called her. Skilled interrogator, to be sure. Behavioral modification specialist, it said on her résumé. Susan preferred to think of it as having a willingness to do whatever the occasion called for and having the right instincts for the job.

"You coulda said 'no' 'n' shit," Courtney growled. "Don't *even* try and fuckin' sell me on this 'boo hoo' shit. You did all this to me 'cause, like, you're totally getting off on it. I can't even fuckin', like, talk, you cunt! Fuck you!"

"You could just try and accept that this is your sister trying to do what she thinks is best for you," Susan said. "Misguided as it may be, Courtney, this is Stephanie trying to tell you how much she loves you."

Courtney blew a long plume of smoke from her pert, kissable lips which was carried away rapidly from her face on a strong breeze which whipped her platinum blonde hair across her porcelain-doll perfect face. "Um, so, like, her making me flirt with all those fuckin' guys downtown, y'know, that was her saying 'I love you?' Bullshit."

Susan lowered her eyes. The sum total of Stephanie's social skills had been gained by television and movies, and *The O.C.* wasn't a great way for a young woman to learn interaction with her species. Susan didn't tell Courtney that her twin sister's complete ideal of sexual maturity was the Jenna Jameson porn videos that Susan had given her. And she'd heard a little of what Stephanie planned for tonight - sexual escapades worthy of any porno movie. Stephanie was sure that if she just overloaded Courtney with enough of her feminine ideals, her twin would come to a sudden realization of how much fun it all was. Stephanie actually believed that her sister would end up thanking her.

"I'm sorry," Susan said softly.

Courtney took a fierce drag on the long, skinny cigarette. "Whatever."

* * *

"Like it or not, I still need signed releases," Dr. Feingold was assisting. "From both women. I'm not going to operate otherwise."

"You'll have it. I will have power of attorney transferred to my firm as soon as..."

"No, Kevin. They sign or they walk," Feingold insisted.

"Oh, very well. Courtney is the legal guardian and has power of attorney for them both. We'll get her to sign," he said. Courtney looked up from the *Vogue* she'd been reading and sullenly accepted the clipboard from the admitting nurse.

"Remember to do it the fun way, okay?" Stephanie said from her wheelchair.

Courtney gritted her teeth. It had been her choice to amend her name from Corey Ambrose Reynolds to Courtney Amber Reynolds, but none of her decision rested in the way her fingers curled around the pen, careful of her long manicured nails, and in a bubbly, rounded script scribed her name as 'Kortnee' because her sister thought it was so much cuter that way. She scrawled a heart after her name, then signed for her sister as 'Stefanee.' She noted, absently as she handed the clipboard back to the nurse, that she wrote like a cheerleader in a high-school yearbook.

"Great," the nurse said. "Everything's in order."

"Next time we see each other we'll have great big titties," Stefanee called, waving happily to her sister. "It's going to be so cool!"

Kortnee grasped the doctor's wrist. "Be careful with my sister," she warned.

"I will. Don't worry about a thing. As a matter of fact, why don't you go to the relaxation room? You look pretty tense. The procedure takes about two hours and then we'll be ready for you. You could probably use the calm."

Kortnee shrugged and heaved herself up, walking sinuously past the nurse, Franklin and Callow into the little high-dollar spa reserved for rich women who were worried before their face lifts. The minute the door closed behind her, she rubbed her temples. Pain like a hundred little needles stabbed into her temples. She bit back a cry and grabbed her forehead, narrowly avoiding stabbing herself with the long nails.

The headache was clearing quickly, and Kortnee shook her head to clear it, dropping her new Prada purse and shrugging out of the pink leather bolero jacket she'd been wearing since she bought it in an upscale downtown boutique.

And she stopped in shock. Stefanee had forbidden her to take off any of the clothes she'd bought until she was allowed to, the better to get the feel of the 'girl' clothes and get used to it. She'd been wearing the platform boots, the abbreviated midriff sweater and the pink-and-black plaid schoolgirl skirt which barely covered her ass, cinched by about six studded leather belts of varying widths.

With a surreptitious look around to see if Franklin or Callow had noticed, she cleared her throat and said, "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world!"

She bounced, looking very much like her sister, on her toes and tried instantly to hide her excitement. She would be watched, by Franklin or Callow or both. She couldn't let them know. She sat and tried to look bored and detached, all the while trying to reason out why she could think and act independently of her sister's orders. Stefanee couldn't be under anesthetic yet, so that couldn't be the reason. It had to be something else. The doors were plain wood, the windows plain glass. The room had ordinary furniture, a little waterfall and some massage tables, lots of aromatherapy candles, magazines, nothing out of the ordinary.

Except for the little black box sitting on a bookshelf. A single green light shone on its unmarked exterior. It must be interfering somehow with the wavelengths that the master nanites embedded in Stefanee's brain were using to activate the slave nanites embedded in Kortnee's nervous system.

Kortnee picked it up and examined it closely. It was a simple white noise generator, which didn't account for the interference. The nanites didn't communicate by sound, so white noise wouldn't interfere. Defeated, she almost set the thing down and continued her search, but she allowed herself one last look. And had trouble biting back a cheer of elation.

Kortnee hadn't designed the master-slave nanite communication algorithm - that had been Tammy Tomlinson, the deceased scientist whose DNA had given Kortnee and her sister their new feminine bodies. She didn't really know how it all worked, but she did know how white noise generators broadcast white noise. They did it with a speaker, and speakers used

magnets. Powerful ones. Powerful enough to easily overwhelm the microfarad charges which the nanites used to communicate with one another.

She waited until she saw Franklin and Susan retreat to a corner and smashed the little gadget hard against the side of the table. The plastic case disintegrated quickly and Kortnee sorted through the pieces quickly. Moving as rapidly as she could in the tight skirt and platform heels, she fished the rechargeable NiCad battery out of Stefanee's portable DVD player. She had to work quickly, for as soon as she unplugged the white noise generator's cord from the wall, the commands which Stefanee had given would be completely evident. Kortnee fervently wished that her sister was under anesthesia, and unable to maintain her commands, or that the fact that her sister had never expressly told her that she *couldn't* build a magnetic interference device to overpower her control powered off the battery of one of her favorite electronic gadgets. Hoping for luck, Kortnee wrapped long-nailed fingers around the cord and yanked. The plug popped from the socket with a faint blue spark.

Working as quickly as she could with the long fingernails, Kortnee bit the wires which fed electricity to the generator and speaker and stuck them to the leads on the battery pack with her ever-present chewing gum. She shoved it in her purse, hoping past hope it would work, at least until she could build something better. She swept the remnants of the gadget behind a bookcase with her toe, and put her jacket back on, trying to follow her sister's orders to the letter. With a vacant smile, she pushed through the door. Callow and Franklin turned to look at her.

"Um, like, ciggie break?" she asked, waving her pack of Virginia Slims. Franklin nodded absently, returning to his quiet phone conversation. Staying where she could be seen, Kortnee lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall, trying to look like she wasn't thinking about anything. But in reality, her mind was speeding.

* * *

She'd been taken a little by surprise when the nurses came for her. Kortnee tried to cadge, but she'd been ordered by her sister and she had to follow those orders to maintain her charade. The timing of her hastily-conceived plan was key, and it was far from time for her to reveal her hand. A part of her wanted desperately to cry, another to fight - she didn't want breast implants, not by any measure, but in order to finally be free of this...

With a deep sigh, she sat in the wheelchair and tried to look cheerful, which her sister had demanded she do. The nurses wheeled her into the pre-op and instructed her to strip. Thinking she'd found a way out, she didn't move. Stefanee had commanded her not to remove any of the trendy clothing she'd bought.

A muzzy voice sounded from behind a curtain in the room. "S okay, baby, go ahead."

Cursing inwardly, Kortnee started unbuckling the myriad of belts over her skirt. "Don't make me do this, Stefanee," she pleaded.

"Don't worry, it doesn't even hurt. You just go to sleep," her sister said dreamily. Even now, Kortnee suspected, the nanites were working overtime to repair the damage from the surgery. She doubted there would even be scarring.

Fighting back the rising sense of alarm that resulted from this invasion of her person, Kortnee started looking for a way out. She'd overheard much of Franklin's phone conversations while

she'd smoked several cigarettes just outside the window of the waiting room where he paced. She knew he intended to steal their nanite technology and sell it, making an uncountable fortune, while shoving Kortnee and Stefanee off somewhere where they'd never be heard from again. Even though the end result of the technology would be released to a world that desperately needed it - which was why Kortnee had joined the project in the first place - she would be damned if she was going to let a worm like Franklin get the credit for it. That would mean that Tammy Tomlinson and, to a certain extent, Steve Harrison had died for nothing. Kortnee was the last one of them left truly alive. She had to fight for them.

Sighing, wishing there were another way, she laid back on the itchy sheets of the gurney. The nurse started an IV, and Kortnee closed her eyes, now just waiting for it all to be over. At least her purse was stowed on a little shelf beneath the table where she'd hidden it while getting undressed. Hopefully the nurse wouldn't notice.

* * *

Bright lights pried their way into her eyelids. She felt sore and bruised, and her throat felt like she'd just swallowed broken glass.

"Hello, sweetheart," the nurse said brightly. "Welcome back."

Kortnee moved and struggled to rise, but gentle hands held her back against the pillow. "Don't try to move just yet, honey. Just lie still. You're just out of surgery."

"Ow," Kortnee mumbled.

"I know, sweetie. I remember how bad it hurt when I had mine done. But don't worry - in a month it'll feel like you were born with them," the nurse said, wrapping a blood pressure cuff around Kortnee's arm and putting the buds of the stethoscope in her ears.

"Um, like, where is my purse?" she asked, her throat a rasp from intubation.

"Right over there," the nurse said, gesturing to a small bureau next to the bed. "One-ten over seventy, right where it's supposed to be."

"How long was I asleep?"

"About six hours," said the nurse. "You had a nice, long sleep. Looks like you needed it. How do you feel?"

"It hurts," Kortnee said, groaning not from the pain but from the four-hour life of the portable DVD battery. Even with the decreased load, Kortnee estimated that there wouldn't be too much time left before her twin's mental dominance would take her over again. So little precious freedom to act, and she'd been asleep through most of it.

"Your sister is already up and around," the nurse said. "She's got an awful lot of energy for somebody who just had surgery. Dr. Feingold is completely amazed. Wonder if the same goes for you?"

"Probably," Kortnee said. "We were always quick to bounce back." She straightened on the bed a little, careful not to disturb the IV in her arm. "I'm Kortnee, by the way."

The nurse smiled a glittering smile, full of high-dollar porcelain veneers. She could easily have made the cover of a fashion magazine. Just the right advertising for a plastic surgery clinic. She took the offered hand and shook it warmly. Her skin was soft beyond soft.

"I'm Kelli," she said. "Nice to meet you."

"How long am I going to be here?" Kortnee asked.

"As long as you need. But you should be able to go home soon. Are you excited?"

"Not right now, it just hurts."

"The operation was completely successful," the nurse announced. "No problems at all. Do you want to see them?"

Kortnee didn't even want to think about them, but she'd have to get used to the idea sometime. She gave a small, reluctant nod. The nurse stepped on the pedal which automatically raised the head of the bed, bending Kortnee gently into a sitting position. Unfamiliar weights shifted and stretched painfully on her chest and she moaned. Kelli pulled aside the sheet to display the largest, puffiest red breasts Kortnee had ever seen. They were ugly and bruised purple, the nipples jutting angrily from red, swollen flesh. They were easily as big - possibly bigger - than Kortnee's head. She officially had more boobs than brains now. The strange elastic straps of the compression garment pushed them down hard and uncomfortably against her chest. Kortnee touched them lightly - even the smallest pressure hurt like hell, and found that she couldn't contain them in her hands, not at all.

"I didn't expect them to be *this* big," she said, trying not to sound crushed.

"They aren't, honey," Kelli said, chuckling a little. "They're just swollen. It'll go down and you'll be a nice, firm 36DD. Pretty big, for your size, but the doctor said that's what you and your sister wanted. And you had a lot of nice, healthy breast tissue to start with, so the implants aren't that big and your breasts should be nice and soft and natural-looking."

"That's still a pretty hefty rack," Kortnee said, trying to hide her misery.

"Sweetie, you'll be surprised at how quick you adapt. And you're going to look *hot*."

Kortnee started to sigh, but kept it inside. She mustered a weak smile. She didn't want to look hot. She didn't want to look anything. That was all Stefanee. She lay back and let Kelli continue taking her vitals, trying to think of what she was going to do once the battery ran out.

Kelli finished her ministrations and gave Kortnee a friendly pat on the shoulder. As she left, Kortnee asked for her purse. Kelli gave it over without question. As the nurse left, Kortnee checked the makeshift jamming device she'd cobbled together, even though there was nothing she could do to extend its life. As she slid it back in the purse, she noticed something that hadn't been there before. She pulled the Nokia cell-phone from where it had been hidden in the side pocket and looked around furtively. She dialed it with the tips of her manicured fingernails - already almost unmanageably long, since they hadn't been cut that day, and her supercharged metabolism made them, and her hair, grow at a supernatural rate.

Tucking the little phone against her ear under the thick soft curtain of her blonde curls. In a soft voice she said, "I need to speak to Dr. Evelyn McCullough. Please tell her it's Kortnee Reynolds, and tell her it's urgent."

* * *

Kevin Franklin finished overseeing the loading of all the blood that had been soaked up by gauze during the surgeries into the trunk of his Infiniti sedan. That gauze was saturated with thousands of the tiny little nanites which were going to make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. No way was he going to leave them with this doctor, no matter how trustworthy he might be.

Stefanee was sitting against the hood of the car, smoking a cigarette and jiggling her enormous breasts. Within eight hours of the surgery, the wounds had closed and the swelling had receded. Stefanee couldn't stop looking at them or touching them, and she smiled broadly whenever they jiggled.

"Happy, sweetie?" he asked.

"Totally. These are so cool! Just like Jenna's!" she exclaimed. "I can't wait to see Kortnee's! Ooh, I know - maybe we can go to one of those, like, strip clubs and dance on stage or something, with our new titties out! How cool would that be?"

"Whatever you want, sweetie," Franklin said, hardly able to contain his happiness.

She took the crumpled list, written on notebook paper in pink ink shot through with misspellings, scratch-outs and little heart doodles from her scandalously expensive Gucci purse. She unfolded it carefully and read it, her lips moving almost imperceptibly as she struggled through the words.

"Cause I only have one thing left on the list," Stefanee said. "I totally have to get us laid tonight. Kortnee so needs to get laid, and so do I."

"You shouldn't have any trouble with that," Franklin commented.

"Do you think I can do it as good as Jenna?" Stefanee asked guilelessly.

"Of course I do."

"Ooh! I can't wait to see Kortnee suck dick! I'm going to make her do it just like Jenna! Once she does that, I just know she'll be all happy that this happened!"

Franklin nodded. "You know your sister better than anybody," he said noncommittally, hiding his smile. "But don't keep her out too late, sweetie. She's going to be tired from all this, and the surgery. She needs to rest, because I need to talk to her first thing in the morning."

"How come?" Stefanee asked.

"Just some business. I hate to even have to do it."

"Does it suck?" Stefanee asked.

"Yeah," Franklin replied. "Boring. I wish I could just get her to let me handle it, but you know how stubborn she is. She could be out having fun with you, but she insists on meeting with me to take care of all this stupid paperwork."

Stefanee's nose wrinkled in distaste. "But I was gonna get us some Lasik tomorrow so she won't have to wear these nerdy glasses anymore. She won't wear contacts like I do. I mean, I guess I can just, like, make her, but I'm getting tired of making her do everything all the time. Maybe after I get her laid, she'll want to do shit with me."

"I hope so, too," Franklin said. "Hey, I have an idea. What if you just told Kortnee to let me handle all the business stuff? All she has to do is sign a couple pieces of paper, and then she never has to worry about any of that stuff again."

Stefanee's eyes were wide. "You'd do that?"

"Of course I would! Who are my two favorite twins, after all?"

She bounced. "Us! OhmyGAWD you are so cool!" She jumped up and wrapped him in a tight hug, her enormous new breasts flattening against his chest.

"You two just go have fun tonight," he said, trying to calm her down.

"Um, Mr. Franklin? Can I, like, ask you something?" she said, her eyes searching his for some kind of approval.

"Anything you like," he told her.

"So, like, y'know how we're going out tonight? To get laid? And you know how much I totally like Jenna, right? And I want to be able to do stuff just like she does? Um, I don't know if I can do it that good, and I don't want Kortnee to see me mess it up."

"I see," Franklin said, a little confused.

"Okay, so, I really like you a lot, and I thought maybe 'cause you're so cool and everything, that I could, like, I dunno, practice on you first 'n' stuff?" she asked, blushing.

"Practice on me?" he asked, more than a little abashed.

"You know," she said, smiling and staring at the ground, blushing furiously and wrapping a long strand of her gum around one long-nailed finger. "Can I, like, suck your dick and fuck you 'n' stuff?"

"Seriously?" he said, eyebrows nearly in his scalp.

"I *said* I really liked you," she said, blushing, hands clasped behind her back as she swung her upper body back and forth, jutting her immense breasts out in an inordinately sexy way.

He opened the back door of his car and gestured inside. Stephanie jumped up and down, once, with a girlish squeal and piled in. Her expensive sweater rocketed out the door before Franklin could even turn to follow her in. Long-nailed fingers grasped him by the waistband and pulled him into the car. He barely got the door closed behind him before she had his fly down and her soft, nimble hands were searching his boxers, withdrawing his rapidly-inflating cock and smiling hungrily.

"Tell me if I don't do it like Jenna, okay?" she asked, stroking him lightly.

He could barely speak. "Okay."

She lowered her head with a huge smile and began to emulate her favorite porn star.

It was a perfect emulation. Franklin reminded himself to give Dr. Callow a hefty bonus.

* * *

Kortnee fought to keep some semblance of concentration. It was like a wall existed between what she thought and what she was able to express to the outside world. The battery had worn down to nothing on her jamming device, and she was once again the brainless bubblehead that her sister made her be. She smacked her gum loudly as she dressed, this time in a scandalously tight pair of low-rise sandblasted jeans with flared legs, platform sandals and a midriff-baring lime-green sweater that strained teasingly over her large, round breasts. Thankfully, Kelli had been more than kind in bringing her a bra to suit her 36DD masterpieces. If the nurse felt any shock about the rapid healing - there weren't even any scars now - that Kortnee showed, she didn't show it. She was probably being paid handsomely to not ask too many questions. It still didn't keep her from getting Kelli's phone number. Kortnee needed all the friends she could make right now, and fully intended to take the nurse up on her offer of a coffee sometime.

Slinging her purse over her shoulder, she kissed Kelli's soft cheek lightly so as to not leave a lipstick mark. Kortnee was actually starting to get used to the marks of her lipstick left on the rims of her cups and the filters of her cigarettes. She actually liked the feel of makeup, beyond the shallow enthusiasm that Stefanee commanded. It made her feel not quite so naked and exposed as she usually did. Putting her lightweight glasses on her nose, she sashayed out of the post-op and into the waiting room outside where Callow, Dr. Franklin and Stefanee waited.

"OhmyGawd, Kortnee, you look so good!" her sister fawned, running forward to crush her in a tight hug which flattened their immense breasts together.

"Thanks, baby girl," Kortnee shot back, kissing her sister's cheek. She'd left off feeling angry at Stefanee. There would have to be a long discussion about boundaries, soon, but Stefanee was as much a pawn in this as Kortnee was. And she had to protect her sister, too - Franklin's plans for Stefanee were every bit as ugly as his plans for Kortnee.

"I totally love 'em," Kortnee went on, shimmying her new breasts back and forth and smiling, then doing a little dance to make them jiggle. Their effect on Franklin wasn't lost on her. "I so want to do something for you, Steffie - can we, like, go someplace where I can, like, buy her a present 'n' stuff?"

"A present?" Stefanee said, eyes wide and hands clasped.

"Y'know, to say, like, thanks for my new boobies," Kortnee said. "Can we, Mr. Franklin? Pretty please?" She leaned forward just enough to let him get a teasing glimpse down the low neckline of her sweater at the new additions.

"I don't see why not," he said, clearing his throat.

Kortnee turned to her sister in a rush. "Okay, but, like, you can't come with, okay, 'cause I want this to totally be a surprise. Promise?"

"Cool! Yeah, I promise!" she said.

"Excellent. Let's motor," Kortnee said, shouldering her way through the door as she put a cigarette in her mouth and fluffed out her now waist-length platinum-blonde mane.

* * *

Kortnee giggled. "I told you, baby, you go look around in 'Wet Seal' and I'm gonna, like, meet you there in an hour or so, 'kay?" she asked brightly, trying to mollify her sulking twin. All eyes in the mall had been on the bombshell twins, the females envious and the males openly desirous. Stefanee had loved it, and she wanted her sister to come with her and flirt.

Before her sister could protest, or worse, force her to acquiesce, Kortnee was off across the mall, purse swinging over one shoulder and buttocks tracing an inviting figure-eight through the air behind her. She'd pulled on a jaunty newsboy cap and headed off towards as upscale a jewelry store as the suburban mall had to offer.

Kortnee spent a little while just browsing through the display cases until she was sure that Stefanee had been occupied elsewhere - a group of soccer players was doing the job nicely, and her sister was flirting for all she was worth. Callow had all she could deal with just keeping Stefanee from stripping off and gang-fucking the whole team in the middle of the mall, and Franklin had parted ways with them a long time ago.

To cover her deception, Kortnee did buy some things - a cute pair of diamond earrings and a matching pair of belly-rings with diamond-studded teddy bear dangles. She did want to get her sister something pretty. As soon as she paid for her purchase with the cash that Callow had given her, carefully husbanded against her needs, she leaned against a column and tried to fend off the attentions of an acne-faced skate punk who had serious problems with personal space, and apparently some with personal hygiene.

"I'm here," said the whispered voice of Evelyn McCullough from the other side of the pillar. "Are you all right?"

"A buncha cup sizes bigger, but yeah - okay," Kortnee answered, promising with a half-hearted wave to watch the death-defying stunts the skater was performing for her benefit. "Callow's, like, over there 'n' stuff."

"I saw her," McCullough said. "It's remarkable what your sister is unable to influence you to do. I hardly understood you on the phone."

"Hel-lo, I told you so. It's totally fuckin' impossible 'n' stuff to make myself understood, y'know? It's, like, ohmyGawd, please, just let me talk normal for, like, two seconds. She's got me smoking like a fuckin' train, too, and flirting with every, like, fuckin' mutant that walks up to me. Gawd, could you die?"

"It must be very uncomfortable for you, dear," McCullough said, ever the therapist.

"S okay," Kortnee said. "It's totally nothing compared to, like, the entertainment she's got planned out for, like, tonight 'n' stuff."

"How can I help?"

"Callow's, like, watching me like a fuckin' hawk," Kortnee said. Clandestinely, she slipped a list in the rounded, cheerleader script written in lavender ink around the column to McCullough's warm hand. "I have to pretend to be, y'know, interested in these skaters and then I can probably buy, like, another hour taking pisses and smoke breaks and browsing shops before Steffie gets totally bored and wants to do something different. Can you get all that shit for me? You can totally find it in the Radio Shack over there, and there's a wad of cash in there. I'd

do it, but it would look totally suspicious and the nerd-o boys in there would totally be macking on me."

"Done. Where should I meet you with it?" McCullough said.

"I'll, like, meet you in the shoe department of Dillard's in twenty minutes," Kortnee said.

"What's after that?" Dr. McCullough asked.

"I need you to, like, make some phone calls 'n' stuff for me," Kortnee said. "This here bubblehead got a fuckin' *plan*, baby girl."

* * *

Dr. McCullough watched carefully over the rims of her glasses at the passersby, pretending to examine some towel sets. Kortnee was seated cross-legged on the floor behind a display of shower curtains in the Dillard's houseware section, hastily assembling something from the hodgepodge of parts that McCullough had bought for her in the electronics store. A long string of wires and a magnet from a clock-radio, several batteries, all joined together in a complicated fashion that McCullough couldn't figure out and secured to the inside of an overlarge, hollowed-out plastic bracelet bought minutes earlier in the misses department. Kortnee clicked it shut over her wrist and rattled it back and forth. Using the tip of the little screwdriver she'd used, she felt it click audibly against the plastic.

"Fuckin' wicked, bay-bee," she said, scooping up her tools and spare parts into the plastic sack and tucking them in her purse.

"Did it work, dear?" McCullough asked.

"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god!" she recited with a look of complete relief. "It worked. But I have to keep the ditz act up or they'll know I'm jamming the signal. Besides, it's actually getting to be kind of a habit. Frustrating, but still a habit."

"Why not call the police, Kortnee?" Dr. McCullough asked.

"They'd never believe the story I had," Kortnee answered. "I don't believe some parts of it myself. And it doesn't let us get Franklin. I don't even care so much about Callow, just so long as I get to nail Franklin to the wall."

"I understand," Dr. McCullough said. "But do you think it will be safe?"

"As long as they think I'm still under Steffy's control, it will be fine. Callow and Franklin both know full well that if they hurt me, Stefanee would turn on them like the Tasmanian devil, and *poof*, there goes their fame and fortune," Kortnee said. "I'm just hoping I don't wind up on my knees blowing some frat boy before I can spring the trap."

"You have tremendous influence with Stefanee, dear," McCullough told her. "Especially now that you can appeal to her on her own level, as an equal. Use that. They're bending over backwards to keep Stefanee happy. Use that."

"Doesn't feel right, using my sister like that," Kortnee said, not even realizing that she didn't even hesitate before naming Stefanee as family. The short, infinitesimal pause that had always been there before was completely gone.

"Would you rather blow the frat boy?" McCullough asked.

Kortnee made a face. "Look, I gotta motor," she said. "Ten o'clock, all right?"

"I won't let you down."

Kortnee shot her a look of purest gratitude as she hustled out of the store, her sexy sway drawing nearly every eye on her way out.

* * *

Stefanee was delighted by the matching belly rings, and insisted they head to the huge public restroom to put them in at once. She and her sister posed sexily next to the mall fountain for a picture, taken with a disposable camera by Susan Callow. They ate at the food court, the center of attention by most of the boys hanging out there, and chatted gaily about whatever struck their fancy. Kortnee acted the part flawlessly, simply letting the impetus of the previously implanted commands carry her along. It was actually good protective coloration - the ditzier she acted, the easier Susan Callow acted.

Stefanee stood to go and talk with a cute cashier from Panda Express who was taking a smoke break. Kortnee sipped from her straw - an astonishingly sexy proposition with her full, kissable lips - and leaned closer to Dr. Callow.

"Thanks for the loan," she said, pushing the cell-phone she'd found in her purse across the table with one long-nailed finger. The nails were manageable again, as was the hair, after a quick visit to the nail salon and Visible Changes in the mall. Hopefully Kortnee wouldn't need another haircut or manicure for three days.

"How did you..."

Kortnee wound a tendril of blonde hair around her finger and giggled. "I'm, like, only a ditz on the outside, baby girl," she said, her eyes betraying her anger. "Why did you do it?"

"Franklin hired me," Callow said. "I didn't know what for. I thought it was to get information out of you. I didn't know it was so he could steal everything from you and sell you off to some pimp somewhere. I couldn't let it happen."

"So, you're, like, on my side or what?" Kortnee asked.

"Let's just say I'm not on Franklin's," Callow admitted.

"I so don't trust you," Kortnee said. "But I need you."

"What do you have in mind?" Callow asked.

"Just keep one thing in mind, 'kay?" Kortnee said, even her frivolous airhead persona seeming oddly threatening. "Fuck with me or my sister, and I can find more nanites. I don't think you'll like being triplets."

Susan paled a little, but nodded.

"Okay, so, like, here's the plan..."

Ω



SUMMARY: After a scientific experiment gone bad, the males in the group find that they are turning into the twins of female in the group who was killed. part four

ACTING OUT, Part Four

by Valerie Hope

SUSAN CALLOW SAT BACK IN astonishment. Kortnee Reynolds' ditzzy featherbrain persona had lulled her - as fine a mind as ever she'd known still ticked behind the gum-smacking, cheerleader attitude.

"Do you really think it will work?" Susan asked.

"Relax, Suzie," Kortnee said, gesturing expansively with her lit cigarette. "Franklin still thinks I'm, like, a total bimbo 'n' shit. And he's gonna keep thinking that, too."

"It's dangerous. Franklin can still see to it that you and your sister disappear."

"Whatever," Kortnee said, dragging on her cigarette. Damn her sister, anyway - she was actually starting to really enjoy the things.

"I'm serious, Kortnee," Susan said. "Your lives could be in danger."

"So what? Like I want to live as a whore in some harem someplace. I'd fuckin' rather be dead, 'kay? So quit being all, like, 'ooh, don't do it, you could get hurt' 'n' shit, okay? And don't, like, pretend that you even give a shit what happens to me and Steffie, either, 'cause you're part of the reason we're in this mess."

"Fine," Susan snapped. "I suppose I deserved that."

"Totally," Kortnee said, dragging imperiously on her Virginia Slims. "Just do what I told you, 'kay? Everything's gonna be fine, girlfriend."

"I suppose I better go get Stefanee," Susan said, looking at her watch. "She should have been back by now."

"She's probably fucking somebody," Kortnee said. "You had to, like, go and give her those pornos."

"I was following orders. I told you that I didn't know," Susan protested.

"Yeah, you're, like, a total saint," Kortnee said, snorting in derision.

Susan's eyes narrowed. "Too bad you didn't watch them, too," she hissed. "Because that's just what Stefanee's going to have you acting like tonight if I don't do my part. Just remember that you need me, Dr. Reynolds. All I have to do is make a phone call."

Kortnee tried not to look scared, even though she undoubtedly felt that way. She snorted again, putting her palm up in an exaggerated "talk to the hand" gesture. Susan, exasperated, dug out her PDA from a jacket pocket and examined the screen.

"Oh, Christ," she breathed. "She's on the loading dock."

Kortnee grabbed the PDA. The screen showed a blocky layout of the mall with a flashing red dot on the northern edge marked "Subject One."

"Is there, like, a 'Subject Two?'" Kortnee asked, turning the gizmo back over.

"Of course," Susan said.

"You lo-jacked us," Kortnee said.

Susan nodded. "Your tongue studs. I felt it was in my best interests to know where the two of you were at all times. You can't fault me for doing my job, Kortnee - you still think I'm the bad guy, but part of my job was to keep you both safe and happy."

"Safe and happy so Franklin could fuck us over," Kortnee amended.

"As it turns out," Susan said. "But now look - who's helping who, here? I could be telling Stefanee to put you to sleep or paralyze you, and calling Franklin right this second. I agree with you - I think the man is a slime. I don't care if you like me, Kortnee, but you're in a really bad situation and you better start trusting me."

"I'll trust you," Kortnee said. "So long as once this is over, I never see you again."

"Deal," Susan said, setting off after Stefanee.

* * *

The young woman was indeed the center of attention, laughing and squealing with delight as a very handsome young man - the cashier from the food court - pumped into her doggie-style while Stefanee sucked off another, taller young man standing in front of her. The young men were obviously having a good time and thanking the heavens for their good fortune, composing their letter to *Penthouse* as Susan walked up.

"A-hem," she said. The young men jumped at the interruption but remained stock-still.

"Are you friends of my daughter?" she asked pointedly. The young men vanished in a flurry of clothes gathered on the wing and pressed in various places to cover themselves.

"Aw," Stefanee complained, flouncing to her knees and pouting adorably. "They were totally cute, too."

"Sweetie, you..."

"Did I look like Jenna? Did I do it like her?" Stefanee asked brightly, referring to her favorite porn star. Maybe Kortnee was right, Susan thought. Maybe giving the girl those films was a bad idea.

"Yes, honey, you did," Susan said.

"Cool!"

"Not so cool," Susan scolded, taking on a motherly tone that had worked wonders in the interrogation chamber. "You can't just do that with total strangers, Stefanee. It's dangerous. You could get a disease."

"Nuh-uh," Stefanee countered. "Kortnee says that my little robot thingies won't let me get sick."

"You could get pregnant," Susan said.

"And my baby would have my little robot thingies, too? That would be so awesome, they'd grow up to be just like me. And they'd grow up, like, super-fast, too, wouldn't they? Like the way Kortnee and my hair grows?"

"One of them could hurt you," Susan cautioned.

"But I wanted them to do that to me," she said.

"Look, Stefanee, you should be more careful about who you do that with."

"How come?"

Susan sighed. "Because boys think differently. When you let them..."

"Fuck me?" Stefanee supplied.

"...all right, when you let them fuck you like that," Susan continued, "they can start to feel like they own you. They act funny. They start telling you what to do, and not letting you have any fun any more, not see your friends or do any of the things you like. And if you try to do it anyway, they can try to hurt you."

Stefanee's eyes were wide with concern. "Will Mr. Franklin be like that?" she asked.

"What do you mean, honey?" Susan asked.

"Well, I let him fuck me, and now is he, like, gonna act like he owns me? Is he not gonna let me have any fun any more?" she asked, guileless blue eyes filling with tears.

Susan saw an opportunity and seized on it. "He has been acting a little funny about you," she said, and promptly gathered the half-naked girl into her arms. "Don't worry, though. Don't worry at all. You know who you should talk to about this? Your sister."

"Really? How come?"

"Sisters just seem to know what to say," Susan told her.

"Uh-huh," she said. "Kortnee always makes me feel better. I hope she's having fun today. Everything has been for her, y'know? I hope I made her feel special."

"I'm sure you did. C'mon, Stefanee, I'll take you to her and the two of you can talk about this," Susan said, fishing the girl's pink lace panties out of the bushes and handing them to her.

"But I promised her we'd, like, go out tonight," Stefanee protested.

"Her sister will be more important, I promise," Susan said. "She wouldn't have a good time at all if you weren't happy."

"Really?"

"Talk to her," Susan said. "You'll see."

* * *

Kortnee looked at her sister intensely, holding her shoulders at arms' length so she could look into her twin's ice-blue eyes, two long-nailed fingers of her right hand extended to hold the long, skinny cigarette.

"You fucked him? Why?" she asked incredulously.

"Cause I liked him, and I didn't want anybody to think I wasn't any good at it," she sobbed in a small voice. "I wanted to be able to show you how good I did it, like you always show me how to do stuff you're good at," Stefanee sniffled.

"You really wanted to impress me that much?" Kortnee asked in disbelief.

"Duh," Stefanee said, wiping her eyes. "You're, like, my hero. I just wanted you to think I was good as stuff. I wanted you to have fun. You're, like, so serious all the time, and I felt like you never got to have any fun. And when I made you talk like me and dress like me, you looked happy."

"I guess I was," Kortnee said.

"And then I wanted you to get big titties 'cause I wanted you to see how pretty you are, and I remember that you had that calendar back in the lab and liked girls with big titties," she continued.

Kortnee blinked. She'd remembered the Carmen Electra calendar in his locker? As horrible as the day had been, she could follow the girl's logic. She was trying to be sweet and help her sister. Kortnee's anger and outrage slowly drained away.

"And now we're really like twin sisters," Stefanee said. "We talk the same, we dress the same, we even smoke cigarettes the same. We can do stuff together now, and before you were always on the computer or reading while I was watching TV or doing stuff by myself."

It struck Kortnee like a hammer. She'd thought that her sister's mind was gone, since it bore no resemblance to the mind of Dr. Stephen Harrison any more. Kortnee had mourned her friend and tried to start over, without Stephen. And it had made her avoid her twin, thinking that seeing Kortnee involved in the high-minded pursuits of science would just be a reminder of everything she'd lost. Kortnee had never realized that Stefanee didn't see it that way. She wanted to share everything she'd gained, things that were every bit as important to her as science and discovery had been before the explosion.

Kortnee's eyes softened and she blinked back a tear with long, mascaraed lashes. "You are so sweet," she whispered. "I love you so much."

"I love you too," Stefanee said in a very small voice.

Kortnee hugged her sister tight and smoothed the thick, sable-soft blonde hair. She then held her back at arm's length.

"Okay, so here's the deal," Kortnee told her sister. "I promise I won't just automatically say no to what you want to do if you promise not to *make* me do anything, ever again."

"Okay, I promise," she said, smiling through her tears. "I'm sorry it scared you so bad."

"I am, too. I know you were just trying to be nice. And I'm gonna take care of Mr. Franklin, too - just act like you always do and pretend that you still like him. I'll take care of everything else."

"Okay," Stefanee agreed.

"Let's go find Susan," Kortnee said, tossing her cigarette and turning on her toe to go back inside the mall. Susan had agreed to wait in a small coffee shop just beside the entrance.

"Um, Kortnee?" her sister said, like a small girl petitioning a parent to stay out past curfew.

"Yeah?"

"Um - can we still do the things from today we did together? I know you said I can't make you do anything else, and I promise I won't, but the things we already did - can we still talk the same, and dress the same, and smoke together and go shopping and get our nails done and spell our names all cute and stuff like that?"

Kortnee thought a moment. Who said that a top-flight genetic engineer couldn't be a clotheshorse and a bimbo. It should make the Nobel acceptance speech interesting. And she *did* have to admit, she looked awesome in the clothes, and her sister could be an awful lot of fun. And with no danger of cancer or emphysema because of the nanites, she was also forced to admit that the cigarettes tasted pretty damn good, and they looked sexy as *hell* with the manicured nails.

Kortnee smiled, the first genuine smile she'd given her sister in a long while. "I'm like, totally cool with that, baby girl. C'mere." She fluttered her fingers at the end of an extended arm. Stefanee tucked against her sister's side with a wide, relieved smile and they walked into the mall together.

"Y'know what I was thinking?" Kortnee was saying as they walked. "It would be totally cool to find a ring for my thumb 'n' stuff. I think that's hot."

"Oh, totally. Think Susan will let us look for one before we leave?" Stefanee asked.

"I think so," Kortnee said. "She, like, owes me one. Tell you what. You pick out one for me and I'll pick out one for you, and then we'll trade and surprise each other..."

* * *

"Hey, Steffie!" Kortnee called, standing in the middle of her room, now moved next to Stefanee's. Bags of bought clothes - more than she even remembered buying - and boxes of books and papers crammed the little space almost past the point of movement.

Her twin popped her head around the corner, curlers in her luxuriant blonde hair.

"Help," she said. "I can't find anything, and Franklin is going to be here in two hours," she said. "I need you to help me pick out an outfit. I gotta look *hot* tonight."

Stefanee brightened and bounded into the middle of the chaos, sorting through the bags from their shopping excursion. Clothes flew in every direction.

"Hey, you wanna do something fun tonight?" Kortnee asked her exuberant sister.

"You know it, bay-bee," she said happily. "Wanna go out?"

Kortnee smiled. "I had something else in mind. Like playing a little trick on Franklin."

"That shit," Stefanee said derisively, flipping a long-nailed bird to the hallway. "I totally hate him." She'd bought the story that Franklin was becoming a possessive jerk hook, line and

sinker, and the polished egomaniac would act the part perfectly just by being himself, if Stefanee had any doubts.

"Wanna trick him?" Kortnee asked again, turning up the CD she was listening to, a Destiny's Child album that Stefanee had lent her, to cover the conversation from anyone who might be passing by in the hallway.

"Totally," Stefanee said. "How?"

Kortnee's eyes took on a mischievous light. "Ever see a movie called *The Parent Trap*?"

* * *

Kevin Franklin sipped a glass of sparkling water while he waited for Callow to arrive with his two special girls. He'd already gotten several very lucrative offers from various sources in China, the Middle East, Africa and South America for a matched set of huge-breasted, beautiful young blonde nymphomaniac twins. Maybe he'd give the money to Callow as a bonus. Once he sold the nanites to the pharmaceutical companies after getting the patent in his own name, he'd be quite possibly the richest man in the world.

His desk intercom buzzed. "Mr. Franklin, Dr. Callow is here," his secretary announced.

"Send them in," he said, rising from his chair. "Thanks for waiting, Carol. You can go home, I won't need anything else tonight."

He checked the locating devices on his laptop screen as Callow led in the two twins. Stefanee was first, wearing an outfit that made his eyes pop a little - a skin-tight pair of vinyl pants that hugged her every curve, belted with a chain of huge, silver circular links which hung low on her hips. A bright green, long-sleeved fishnet top that left her silky shoulders and her entire plank-flat belly bare stretched over her enormous chest, and the mouth-watering breasts beneath were just barely confined in a lacy black push-up bra which created a long cleft of mesmerizing cleavage. She swayed sexily on lucite platform heels, at least eight inches high with a four-inch platform. Her hair was in an enormous, carefully coiffed pile on her head, with sexy little tendrils escaping to frame her trampily-made-up face. She gave him a bright smile and a wink, which set her enormous platinum hoop earrings swinging against her collarbones and ran a teasing long, French-manicured fingernail across the seven-row rhinestone choker which clutched her long, sensuous neck. She pursed her pink, glossy lips into an incredibly sexy moué and took a sensuous drag from her ever-present cigarette. The fishnet top covered her palms and knuckles like a fingerless glove, and rings sparkled on all the fingers of both hands.

"Hey, baby," she said brightly.

He regained his composure with an effort. "Stefanee," he said warmly, nodding to her. He looked to the other twin, wearing a bulky hooded sweatshirt which didn't hide her curves. She stared sullenly over the tops of her lightweight glasses and then put her eyes back down on the floor. Franklin could see that she had a similarly sexy outfit on, just peeking out from under the bottom hem of the sweatshirt. Stefanee had obviously made her wear it, and Franklin had no idea how she'd won the concession of the sweatshirt to cover up. Right now, on the brink of the most lucrative deal in his existence, he didn't much care. He pushed a prepared contract across the desk.

"Sign this, and everything will be taken care of," he said smoothly. "Remember to use your old names and the way you used to write, before the accident happened."

"I don't want to use that yucky old name," Stefanee said, pouting adorably.

"This will be the last time you ever have to," Franklin assured her.

"Okay, Kortnee, you go first," she told her sister. "Just do it and then we can all go out and have fun, 'kay?"

Kortnee stepped forward reluctantly, obviously enslaved to her sister's command. She shot a look of hatred at Franklin as she sat in front of the desk and took the offered pen.

"I should totally read this," she complained.

"Nuh-uh!" Stefanee said. "We so talked about this, like, for an hour! Kevin's gonna take care of everything from here on out. Just fuckin' sign it so we can, like, go to the club 'n' stuff, okay? I totally don't want to talk about this anymore!"

Her twin's hand jerked as if it had a mind of its own, flipping rapidly to the last page of the document and signing Corey Reynold's name on the line. She shot an ugly look at Franklin, then at her sister.

"Oh, if you're gonna act like *that*, then you can so go wait in the car," Stefanee told her. "'Sides, I wanna talk to Kevin anyway, so, like, go."

Kortnee pushed away the document in anger and stormed out the door, Susan trailing after. Stefanee perched on the edge of the desk, idly swinging a foot back and forth, and ran a fingernail across his tie.

"So, like, before I sign, you wanna have some more fun?" she asked outright.

Franklin looked around surreptitiously, making sure the secretary wasn't at her desk and Callow or Kortnee weren't anywhere to be seen.

"You want me to tell you if you don't do it like Jenna again?" he asked, loosening his tie.

"I was totally gonna suck your dick 'n' stuff," Stefanee said. "But right now I just, like, so want to get fucked. Can we just fuck?"

"Whatever you want," Franklin said.

She started to straddle him and tangled her fingers in his hair. "You don't act like none of the guys in the Jenna movies," she commented. "How come?"

"I don't know," Kevin said, burying his face in the sweet-scented cleft between her breasts. "I guess I don't know how."

"I can totally show you!" she chirped. "First, you, like, grab me and tell me what a naughty little bitch I am. You have to call me shit like that, y'know, like, bitch and cunt and whore. Then you totally tell me that I have to do whatever you, like, say, and when I go 'no' you go, like, 'you're gonna do whatever I tell you to do, bitch' and then you push me over the desk and pull my pants down and spank my ass real hard."

"You want me to do that?" he asked.

"Oh, *hell* yeah," Stefanee said. "It looks totally sexy when they do it in the movie 'n' stuff."

Franklin was obviously excited. "What next?"

"You go, like, 'I totally own you,' and then you spank me and go 'say it!' over and over and I'm all like, 'no! no!' and you're like 'say it, bitch!' and finally you spank me so hard that I yell it out, like 'you own me! you own me! i'm gonna do whatever you say!' and then you go, like, 'I'm gonna fuck you like a little whore and cum on your titties' and I go, 'please don't' and you, like, choke me 'n' stuff and say 'you'll do whatever I say' and then you make me call you 'sir' while you bend me over the desk. Then you're all like, 'say you want me to fuck you, say please' and I'm all horny and I go, 'please fuck me, sir. please fuck me.' And then we do it. And then you can be all like, 'sign it!' and I can say 'yes, sir' and totally sign the thing while you're fucking me! Wouldn't that be cool?"

Franklin wiped sweat from his forehead. "You really want to do that?"

"Pretty please?" she begged, eyelashes fluttering. "It's just like Jenna does, and it's totally the sexiest part of the movie. I, like, have to finger myself every time I watch it."

Smiling, Kevin grabbed her shoulders roughly and shook her. "You're a naughty little bitch, Stefanee. You're a nasty little slut and you're going to do what I tell you to do."

Stefanee looked a little scared, but mostly excited. "No I'm not, either."

He forced her face down across the desk, breasts flattening beneath her torso and pulled down the vinyl second-skin pants with a squeak. His hand raised. "Are you going to do what I tell you to do, you little cunt?"

"No. You can't make me," Stefanee said.

The first smack on the ass made her jump and squeal. Surprisingly, after the shock wore off, it felt a little good. She buried her face in her hair, mostly to hide the smile of victory.

* * *

He was panting roughly as he grunted, "Sign it, whore! Sign it!"

Kortnee had stopped pretending to be her sister a while ago and was coasting hard on the waves of pure pleasure coursing through her body. Her sister's advice - "just pretend like you're Jenna and don't think about it too much" - and the pint of Jack Daniel's she'd drunk had gotten her over the hump. But once the first orgasm had hit her like a freight train - so different from the sensations she'd known as a man - she didn't have to pretend very much. Sure, she was playing a part, but acting like she was thoroughly enjoying herself had long since ceased being hard. For a rat bastard, Franklin fucked pretty good. Kortnee grinned wryly as she pumped back hard against his thrusts, squealing and grunting with the delicious friction. Maybe her sister had been on to something. Maybe the next time Steffie suggested that they go out for the evening, she wouldn't be so quick to say no.

"Sign it!"

She bit back another squeal and panted, "Yes, sir." Pulling the contract towards herself with one hand, she fumbled for the pen and tried to steady herself as she signed.

The rising pitch of Franklin's grunts announced his nearing the end of his endurance. Excitedly, she channeled Jenna Jameson one more time and lurched forward, sliding her pussy off of him

with a wet smack. She turned quickly and sank to her knees, pulling up the fishnet shirt to expose the tops of her breasts invitingly as she pushed platinum blonde hair behind her ear and stuck out her tongue in readiness, looking up at his sweating face. With a cry of release, his frantically moving hand sent jets of hot white semen across her nose, her cheeks and onto her tongue, dripping onto her lovely huge breasts. Kortnee swallowed. Her worst fear - that she'd gag - wasn't realized. It didn't taste bad at all. In fact, she kind of liked it. Maybe she'd been wrong about the whole cocksucking thing, too. Stefanee seemed to have the inside scoop on a lot of things that Kortnee wasn't privy to.

"Mmm," she said, feeling like a cat in sunshine. "Thank you, sir."

She smiled, that rare happy smile that made her nose wrinkle adorably. Pulling her sinfully tight pants up over her hips and dripping pussy with a sexy little back-and-forth shimmy, she stood and retrieved her bra from the desk lamp and hooked it around her giant breasts with a practiced motion. She used some Kleenex from a box on the sideboard and blotted her breasts clean of Franklin's cum before she pulled her fishnet top down and snugged it under her breasts. Humming Beyoncé's "Naughty Girl" to herself, she put the Kleenex into a plastic baggie in her purse.

Franklin looked at her quizzically.

"DNA evidence," she said. "Might come in handy."

His eyes rounded in recognition. "Kortnee?"

She smiled. "You know it, bay-bee."

"But... I don't... How..." Franklin spluttered.

"Like we couldn't change our tongue studs. Duh," she said, pausing to light a cigarette.

"But why did you let me..."

Kortnee looked over her shoulder. "C'mon in, guys."

The door opened to admit Callow and Stefanee, now rid of the bulky sweatshirt and clad in a sequined little black dress that left absolutely nothing to the imagination. She waved to her sister merrily.

"I don't understand," Franklin said, pulling up his pants rapidly.

Susan held up a Mini-DV videotape. "You really shouldn't leave the controls to your security system by your secretary's desk, Mr. Franklin. You never know who might decide to record a confidential meeting."

"So what?" Franklin said. "It doesn't prove anything."

"It proves you had sex with a woman who is documented to have a mental age of ten," Kortnee said, squeezing her sister's hand. "Documents *you* prepared, by the way. You can probably argue your way out of the sexual assault charge, but it'll be tough to argue that you didn't coerce her into signing the document. You may not do time, but you'll definitely be disbarred."

"I'm not impressed," Franklin said, sitting smoothly and pouring himself a Scotch. "So I'm disbarred. I don't intend to practice law after this anymore, anyway. Who needs a job? I'll just retire to my private island."

"You may want to check that contract," Kortnee prompted.

"Your DNA is identical," Franklin said, not looking down. "There's no way to prove which one of you signed the agreement. Besides, Stefanee's signature isn't legally binding anyway. I have the only signature that matters."

"I don't know that Dr. Corky Ronalds carries much weight, though," Kortnee said. "And having the other signatory be 'Fuck you, Asshole' with big hearts around it, well - I doubt a judge will consider this legally binding."

"I doubt that you'll get that private island," Susan said. "Maybe a four-by-six cell. See, Stefanee and Kortnee spent a lot of time with their therapist. They talked a lot about what went on today, as a matter of fact. I imagine Dr. McCullough has called Social Services already. And there's also the matter of false identity papers that you procured."

"False identity? All those documents were legal!" Franklin protested.

"They're not legal. They're for a false identity," Kortnee said. She held up her birth certificate. "This is for Courtney Amber Reynolds with a 'C.' Everybody knows I spell my name with a 'K.' It's cuter that way."

"Fuckin' A," Stefanee added.

"And I think the State Department will be very interested in your phone records," Susan said. "You've been making lots of international calls. I happened to let it slip to a friend of mine at the Bureau that you might be receiving a call from someone on their terrorist watch list. Human trafficking is a very serious charge, Mr. Franklin."

Kortnee stood, grinding out her cigarette on the polished mahogany of his desk. "See ya, baby. Me and my sister are, like, going out to celebrate with our friend Suzie. Hope you enjoyed it - it's, like, the last pussy your ass is *ever* gonna get."

Franklin stood dumbfounded, the contract still dangling from his numb hands.

"One more thing," Stefanee said, turning before she reached the door and walking back across the deep-pile carpet on her platform heels to face the ruined lawyer. Putting her hands lightly on the man's shoulders, she leaned close and drove a savage knee into his groin. He screamed and bent double, plopping onto the carpet on his side, face red and coughing as he cradled his bruised scrotum.

"Jenna's cool to try and be like," she said. "But I also totally dig Xena. And you should so learn to treat women better."

She turned and gave her twin a happy high-five as they shut the door behind them.

* * *

"OhmyGawd, Steffie, you totally rocked in there!" Kortnee crowed once they'd reached the elevator, gathering her sister into a breast-squashing hug.

"I know, right?" Stefanee said. "I totally didn't know I was gonna do it until I, like, did it. Do you think it was over the top?"

"I think it *rocked*," Kortnee said.

Susan pushed the button for the parking structure. "So, ladies, what now?"

"Well, release the nanite technology, of course," Kortnee said. "The world needs it."

"You'll be very rich women," Susan said.

"I guess," Kortnee said. "I'll probably give most of it to charity. Oh, sure, we'll buy a nice house and cool cars 'n' stuff, but that's the fuckin' cure for *cancer*. We didn't do it to make money off it."

"No way," Stefanee said. "Maybe we can, like, build a hospital or something. We can name it after Tammy."

"You remember Tammy?" Kortnee said in wonder.

"Duh! We both look just like her. I remember you so had a thing for her, too."

"I did," Kortnee admitted. "But hey - now I can totally feel her up whenever I want to."

"Cool," Stefanee said. "So can I." She clutched her big breasts as an example, then her sister's. They both laughed. The elevator doors opened, and they stepped out into the humid evening, both twins stopping to light cigarettes before walking towards the car.

"What's up, Suzie?" Stefanee asked, looking at the interrogator's sad, distant expression.

"I don't know. I guess I feel like I owe you. I did the two of you pretty wrong, sold you out for money," she said. "I do have a conscience, you know."

"Did Kortnee make you feel bad about what you did?" Stefanee said, smacking her sister lightly on the shoulder. "Kory, you totally shouldn't do that. Suzie's on our side!"

"I know that now," Kortnee said. "Sorry, Suzie."

"You should totally spell it with just an 'i' at the end," Stefanee said. "It'd be so much cuter that way."

"You two girls are going to need someone to look after you for a while, until you get the patents and your identities sorted out," Susan said.

"The hospital said we can stay as long as we want," Stefanee said.

"I'm trying to be nice," Susan said. "What do you say? Want my help? It's the least I can do to help after what I did."

"Will you spell your name with an 'i' at the end?" Stefanee asked.

"Just for you," she promised as they reached the car.

"Cool, then," Stefanee said, convinced utterly. "Kory?"

Kortnee's flawless brow furrowed a little and she played with a strand of her blonde hair. "I guess we will need somebody to help us out," she said. "I was gonna ask Dr. McCullough about it."

"Go ahead and ask her," Susan said. "You two will need a lot of help. Personal help, business help, lots of stuff. Releasing those nanites to the public isn't going to be a walk in the park, even if you do have the patents."

"I dunno, I guess I'm okay with it," Kortnee said. "Just know that it's gonna be a while before I totally trust you, okay?"

"Okay," Susan said, looking a little relieved, but mostly grateful. Maybe she *did* have a conscience, Kortnee thought.

"Cool!" said Stefanee, bouncing. "Wanna come and celebrate, Suzi?"

"Wouldn't miss it," she said, opening the car door.

* * *

Epilogue: Six months later

Kortnee quickstepped down the concrete steps in front of the Tomlinson Cancer Center, her blonde hair billowing behind her like a cape. She took off her glasses and tucked them into the pocket of her white lab coat, which she shucked out of in the warm summer afternoon. Her floral-print dress hung to her every delicious curve and she drew more than a few eyes as she stopped to put her blue wraparound shades on and light a Virginia Slims before sliding into the leather seat of her red convertible RX-8. She turned the key and the radio came on loudly, blasting Britney's cover of "My Prerogative." Kortnee couldn't help but do a little car dance as she slipped the sports car into gear and pulled into traffic.

Traffic was thankfully light and she made good time, taking only ten short minutes to pull into the parking lot of the Hooter's on Kramer Avenue. She smiled - there was a brisk business, and the Monday Night Football crowd always turned a tidy profit. That, and Stefanee was always in a good mood when she got big tips.

Her twin sister bounded out the front door in her cute little orange short-shorts and the skin-tight white tank that clung to her giant breasts like a second skin. She waved goodbye to her friends and co-workers as she bounced to the car, her blonde hair billowing behind her. Kortnee gave her a wide smile.

"Hey, baby girl," she said to her sister. "Good day?"

"Totally," Stefanee said. "Brandi and I got a table of guys from Hawaii and they tipped us, like, twenty dollars apiece!"

"Sweet," Kortnee said. "What do you wanna, like, do tonight 'n' stuff?" She passed her lit cigarette to her sister, who took a grateful drag. Kortnee lit another for herself.

"I don't feel like going out," she said, pouting a little. "I felt like ass this morning."

"Me, too," Kortnee admitted. "I overslept and was totally late for a biopsy. We totally have to quit partying on Sundays."

"Like that's gonna happen," her sister said. They laughed.

"So, like, why don't we call Suzi and just watch movies or something?" Kortnee asked.

"That's cool," Stefanee said, shrugging. "But she's so totally into that Mike guy, she's probably gonna stay home and fuck him."

"Shit, wouldn't you? He's fucking *hot*," Kortnee commented. "Well, it can just be us. We'll get a pizza and rent some movies."

"There's a new one with Jenna," Stefanee said.

Kortnee smiled. She'd been thinking *Hotel Rwanda*, her sister was thinking porn. Still, watching Jenna Jameson naked wasn't a bad thing. "I just have to make, like, one itty bitty stop to pick up my tickets to Stockholm."

"You're so gonna win," Stefanee said.

"Who the fuck cares? I just told an eight-year-old girl she was going to live," she said. "Fuckin' Hodgkin's lymphoma and she's gonna live. Fuck the Nobel prize."

"Still, it would be cool," Stefanee said. "And lots more people will look at our website, 'cause it would be totally hot to, like, see a Nobel prize winner naked with her twin sister."

"They don't care if I have a Nobel or not," Kortnee said.

"I do," Stefanee said with a smile and a very penetrating look.

"Love you, kid," Kortnee said.

"Love you too," Stefanee said happily. "I totally couldn't make up a cooler sister."

"Me neither."

Stefanee *oo*hed happily as the new Beastie Boys came on the radio and cranked it high. The kickass Bose speakers rose admirably to the challenge as they car-danced through the light traffic toward the travel agent, the video store, the pizza parlor, and then home.