

SUMMARY: With his marriage of the rocks, David happens to rescue a young man from a car wreck which leads to a visit from his mother, a mysterious who promises to help his struggling relationship...soon David starts to experience changes which will give him a greater understanding of his wife's needs.

# *All for Holly*



*Story and Illustrations  
by Valerie Hope*

# ALL FOR HOLLY, Part One

by Valerie Hope

I THOUGHT I WAS A lucky man.

Most of the other guys I'd known, back in college, were just floundering around in their lives, with no idea what they wanted to do, who they wanted to be, or with whom they wanted to do and be it. And I will confess, I was one of them; majoring in undecided at the state university, bouncing cluelessly from girlfriend to girlfriend with no idea of meaning or depth or permanence.

Until September the 28<sup>th</sup>, 1994. At 5:42 p.m. When *she* walked into the little study carrel in the library, arms clutched around a huge stack of books and her hair dishevelled, looking distracted and harried and exasperated.

“Are you David Martin?” she asked irritably.

“Yes,” I said, barely looking up from my textbooks. “Can I help you?”

“You sent an email about an economics tutor?”

“Oh... yeah. Yes, I did,” I said, gesturing to the stack of books. “I'm completely lost.”

She stuck out a slim hand. “I'm Holly. Holly Ross.”

I took the hand she offered in my own, and I felt a tingle of purest electricity jolt up the length of my arm and settle – permanently, as if it were meant to be there – in my heart, which obligingly skipped a beat. Her brown eyes sparkled for a moment – perhaps that is my romantic streak tinging that memory, but I like to think she felt the same thing I did – and she offered me the shy, knowing smile which captured my heart every day since – and sat down at the cramped desk next to me.

“Well, if you're lost, then maybe I can find you,” she told me.

I spent the next seventeen years trying to convince her that she did. We dated throughout the rest of college – and even through the drunken hedonism which comprised higher education at a state university, I can honestly say I never once looked at another woman. She filled every thought I had. By the time of our fourth date, I knew I had found the elusive *One*. The soulmate the storybooks described. I could no longer imagine a life without her in it, sharing my victories and my setbacks, my heart and my bed. I didn't just fall in love with Holly, I *rammed* into it at top speed.

When I dropped to one knee in the dead leaves beneath the oak trees outside her parents' cottage on the lake, pulling the ring from my pocket and asking the dread question, there was not the barest little twinge of fear or apprehension in my heart or my mind. It only made perfect sense, to ask this woman who intoxicated me and bewildered me and made me want to strive and grow and be better to spend her life with me. When the whispered “yes” escaped her tender lips, I

finally knew what joy truly meant. And I swore to myself I would spend a lifetime deserving her.

We married in a garden, in a blur of congratulations and far-too-expensive food and flora, me in an ill-fitting rental tuxedo and Holly in her grandmother's gown, and I struggle to remember anything more than her beaming and somewhat tired smile. We did the normal wedding things – stuffing cake in one another's mouths, dancing with one another's parents, sitting through toasts and posing for endless pictures, but I thought only of getting away, out of the cacophonous press of humanity and to a place of solace where I could begin my life in earnest, attached forever to this wonderful, perfect woman who was now, inexplicably, my wife.

Which is why, two weeks before our sixteenth anniversary, I tried to take stock of all the collected moments which comprised our union and figure out just *where* and *how* it all went wrong. The best of the pictures taken that day, surrounded by a sterling silver frame, showed a *happy* couple. I looked at that picture every day before I left for work and first thing when I got home, watching that happiness slip further and further away from me, watching the smiling, vibrant woman who used to laugh at my lame jokes and leap into my arms to kiss me after we'd been apart turn slowly into a tired, joyless, distracted and sexless drudge, slaving away at a job which gave her no sense of satisfaction and keeping a house which I could sense she no longer wished to inhabit.

I stared at the picture. My eyes caressed her image, centering on that beaming smile. If I could only find a way to bring that smile back to that beautiful face. I would do anything, if I could only figure out what it would take.



I thought I would be the proactive one. I had simply asked, the way all the relationship books suggest. She looked at me so viciously when I did, her eyes oozing accusation and something which might have been despair. Her lips thinned and she said nothing. That silence hurt me in a way that words never could. Because the accusation in her eyes spoke volumes. She wouldn't tell me what was wrong between us, but I knew from her look that whatever it was, she considered it my fault.

“Holly, please,” I begged her. “Just tell me. What can I do to make you happy again?”

She dug violently into the groceries she'd just bought and began slamming them down on the counter. “Nothing,” she said. “I'm not unhappy.”

“You're acting unhappy.”

“You're reading too much into it,” she hissed.

“Is it that you don't want me to know?” I asked her plaintively.

“Can you just drop it?” she said hotly. “I mean it, David, I *don't* want to talk about this. I've told you and told you, nothing's wrong. I'm just having a difficult time at work and it has me stressed out.”

I tried to take her hand but she snatched it away, plunging it back into the relative safety of the grocery sack. “Holly, if your job is causing you this much grief, then quit it,” I told her. “I mean it. I'm making enough that we can scrape by for the time it would take you to find something you like. It would be tight, and we'd have to do without a few things, but it wouldn't be any worse than our first year after college. I can't stand thinking that you're hurting yourself like this just so we can maintain some meaningless standard of life. So we'd have to cancel a vacation and maybe go without cable for a few months. Maybe I don't download a few audio books and listen to the radio on the way to work instead. None of that matters to me so long as you're doing something you like.”

She paused, her ire temporarily forgotten, and her brown eyes softened. “David, you are sweet,” she said fondly, the first tenderness offered since I came home. “But it will sort itself out. There's no need to make these huge, sweeping changes. I will figure this out on my own and things will be fine.”

I put an arm around her, and thankfully she didn't try to squirm away. “You do realize that I want to help,” I told her. “I would do anything for you, honey. Anything at all.”

She smiled a little. “I know you would,” she said. “And I'm sorry. Really. I shouldn't be taking this out on you, I should leave work at work. But I don't *want* you to do anything. It's not important enough to need assistance. It's something I can fix.”

“You're not sparing me by not letting me help, you know,” I told her, helping her put away groceries with a lot less vigor. “I *like* helping you. No job too small.”

She chuckled. “My knight in shining armor,” she said wryly.

“If you'll have me,” I said.

She cuddled against my shoulder for a little – warming up a soul grown cold when she did – and then finished the stowage of the groceries with a better humor. We spent the rest of the evening in companionable silence over a light dinner and spoke no more about it.

But the distance grew. Whatever it was that Holly meant to solve on her own, it took the better part of her to solve it, because our companionable silence stretched on and on into months. We barely even exchanged words over our anniversary dinner, and the lovemaking afterwards felt numb and obligatory. A gulf widened between us, deep and cold, and I felt us slowly transforming into strangers. And I felt powerless to stop it, much less reverse it.

I tried not to pester – I know she hated it, and it certainly made me hate myself for it – but when she actively began trying to avoid me, leaving rooms when I entered or suddenly engrossing herself in a book or a newspaper when I gave the slightest indication I might want to talk, I gave up on trying to make connections on my own. I simply cornered her in the bedroom as she changed from her work clothes – trying not to run covetous eyes over her lovely skin clad only in a pale coral bra and panties – and spoke directly.

“I made an appointment for us,” I told her without preamble. “Monday afternoon.”

“What kind of appointment?” she asked.

“Couples counseling,” I said. “Dr. Fischer, the counselor that Brad and Kelly Mendoza recommended.”

“Why do you think we suddenly need couples counseling?” she asked flatly, no emotion in her voice.

“Suddenly?” I asked with a near-hysterical laugh. “Look at us, Holly. We barely speak. You don't let me touch you. I ask what your day was like, how work was, and you spit out these one- and two-word answers and then let hours – if not days – pass before you say another word to me. It's like I'm not even here, or like you don't want me here. And it's been going on for months. So don't give me suddenly.”

She shrugged. “Fine. Monday afternoon. If you think we need it.”



If I'd thought that the neutral environment of Dr. Fischer's office might make Holly feel safe enough to open up, I was wrong. She sat next to me, but only physically, and maintained her

new philosophy of answering any question asked her with a terse, brief reply. I gave my very best attempt and describing to the therapist what had happened, and how I felt about it, but Holly wouldn't even meet my eyes and blew a few exasperated snorts at some of the descriptions I gave of her behavior.

The therapist, to his credit, didn't let her off the hook so easily. He pressed her – dangerously, I thought, because I'd been on the receiving end of her razor-sharp tongue a few times – and finally got the first answer from her longer than three words.

“Because my youth is gone,” she said emotionlessly. “That's what's bothering me. I grew up, and I can't even recognize myself in the mirror any more. I am so far from the woman I thought I'd be – much less the woman I wanted to be – that it's almost laughable.”

“But you're only forty,” the doctor said placatingly. “You're not that old.”

“But I'm certainly not a girl any more,” Holly rejoined. “I thought I would have a life of adventure. I thought I would be one of those exciting, dangerous people who did things and took risks and never spent a moment bored. And look at me now. The most predictable, unexciting, colorless little house-frump the world has ever known.”

“Haven't you done exciting things? Haven't you taken risks?” the doctor asked.

“No,” she replied. “I got married and I settled down. I bought furniture and I went to planning meetings and I drive a Honda Accord and I shop at J.C. Penney's. I didn't even get the joy of having a family – and I'm *not* blaming you for this, David, I'm really not – but I might have even been willing to trade all of those dreams if it meant I could have been a mother.”

I unsuccessfully covered a sigh. We had tried for years to conceive, but a botched implanting of an IUD in Holly's youth had caused endometriosis and formed too much scar tissue in her uterus to ever allow her to carry a child. We'd considered adoption – even started the paperwork a few times – but the cost and the heartache proved too much. We abandoned the search in the middle and never really spoke of it again.

“If you're that dissatisfied with your life, then you still have the time to change it,” Dr. Fischer said.

“No, I don't,” she countered. “And it's my mistake, Doctor. All my fault. You see, I never replaced my dreams. I got busy, and learned to be a wife and a project manager and spent all my time on that. My dreams are girl dreams. I never changed them out for mature ones. And now it's too late. I'm not a girl any more. And I don't have any dreams that involve a barren, middle-aged project manager at a software firm who hyperventilates at the thought of doing anything which would raise an eyebrow on the women in her book club.”

“I didn't know you felt like this,” I croaked. “No wonder you don't want to be near me. This all started because we got married. How can you say you don't blame me?”

“Because I don't,” she said. “You proposed, sure. But you didn't say *yes*. I did that.”

“And you regret it?” Dr. Fischer asked bluntly.

She wiped her eyes angrily. “Of course not,” she spat. “Or maybe... it's not that cut-and-dried. David, I love you. I've loved you for as long as I've known you. You're the sweetest, kindest, most patient man I have ever known and I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate it. It's not that I made some concrete choice between a life of excitement and you. I wanted both. I wanted you to have that life with me. It just didn't work out that way. We got so focused on everything else. Remember how poor we were, just out of college? How much it meant to us to get our student loans paid back and get a place of our own? We got distracted. We got caught up in all the other stuff. It didn't seem to bother you. And for a while, I thought it didn't bother me, either. But it did. I tried to ignore it, but it did.”

She dissolved into tears. I tried to put an arm around her, but she shoved me away. That one act, more than any of the words or lack of words or distance or coldness between us, showed me more succinctly just how *unmarried* we were in that instance. I sank back into my own corner of the little couch in the doctor's office, swallowed up in misery and helplessness.

I don't recall what the doctor said – typical “you can get through this” therapist stuff – but I know that moment marked the end of something between me and Holly. Something was broken, now, and beyond repair. Our lives separated so utterly that we could only marginally be called roommates. She never looked at me, only rarely spoke to me and then only on the meaningless, day-to-day business of the household. She began rapidly putting on weight and spent all her time either reading e-books on her tablet – tales of romance and high adventure, I noticed – avoiding me at every turn, or turned so far inwards that no amount of tenderness or temptation would possibly lure her out.



Quite simply put, my wife was *gone*.

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October came, and with it one of the worst rainstorms in state history. I had never seen water come down from the leaden sky the way it did that week, sheets of it, obscuring everything in the distance and filling the turgid air with a constant roaring. Holly – an indifferent driver at best – became a complete shut-in, leaving most of the outside chores and errands to me.

I crept my car through the pouring deluge, eyes squinted through the nighttime gloom and the sheets of pouring water, coming home from having prescriptions refilled and getting a few necessities at the grocery store. Some traffic passed by me, phantom headlights coalescing from the murk into two blinding points of light, streaked by dark stitches of driving rain, then past my left shoulder and into the torrent behind me, receding twin points of red. I used every ounce of my skills garnered driving over two and a half decades simply to keep the car on the road, fixating on the broken white stripe appearing from the haze a scant few feet in front of me.

I turned the car off of the main road and onto the little suburban lane which led to my house. The little creek which babbled beneath a concrete bridge just at the entrance to our middle-class enclave roared violently, lapping over the edges of the bridge, and I slowed the car

dramatically to get across without hydroplaning. The vehicle decelerated suddenly in the deep pool of water and I kicked up a huge rooster-tail of dirty water into the weeping sky, fighting to keep the car straight so that I didn't enter the bridge out of square and risk going over the edge.

Somehow, in my dogged concentration, I noticed the blinking yellow light in the light woods to the side of the road, just past the bridge. Just a turn signal, perhaps a driver who had exercised the better part of valor and pulled to the roadside to await a lull in the downpour, but something about it seemed odd. Dimly, I registered what was out of place: firstly, the car's headlight was to the right of the road, not the left – it was facing the wrong way. Secondly, the turn signal flashed rhythmically, amber in the darkness, with no headlights above it. Meaning that either this driver was a madman, driving without lights in these conditions, or that the headlights were smashed.

Thinking to myself, *he's not the only madman*, I pulled to the side of the road and clambered out of the car into ankle-deep water. Splashing and slipping my clumsy way down the embankment, lamenting the loss of my new-ish shoes in the process, I managed to reach the bottom upright and clutching my coat closed around me. A small sedan – nondescript and of an unguessable dark color in the falling rain – had skidded off of the road past the bridge. I tracked the deep muddy furrows in the grass to my left. The car had spun around and rolled, from the way the debris was scattered and the damage to the roof of the car, before sliding headlong into a thick-boled hickory tree, crushing the front end and shattering the headlights and windshield. The car's engine had been punched physically through the top of the hood, such was the force of the collision. Grunting and wiping collected droplets from my glasses, I forced my chilling legs to move and wended my way through the debris and the broken branches to the driver's side of the car.

The car door, crushed from impact, stood out with concave edges from the body of the car, and I could only just see a mat of dark hair through the large-ish crack, pillowed on the deflated airbag.

“Hey, are you okay?” I yelled through the roar of the rain. The figure did not move. I saw dark stains on the white fabric of the bag.

“Don't move,” I told the motionless figure somewhat inanely. “I'm gonna get help.”

I fumbled my phone from the pocket of my trousers and dialed 911. The operator answered immediately. “911, what is the nature of your emergency?”

“My name is David Martin. I'm on Lonely Ranch Road, just east of Widow's Creek. Someone has left the roadway in the rain and hit a tree. I don't know, but I think his car rolled over. He's inside, still, but he's not moving and he's not answering me when I talk to him.”

“You're there now?” the operator asked.

“Yes, ma'am,” I replied. “I'm not sure, but I think I can get the door open if I try.”

“I'm sending the fire department and an ambulance right now,” the operator told me. “Are you going to stay with the vehicle?”

“Yeah, I’ll stay here. I’m not supposed to move him, right?”

“That’s correct, sir. He could have a neck or back injury.”

“Okay. Tell the fire department to look for a blue Mazda on the shoulder, just past the Widow’s Creek bridge. It has its emergency flashers on. That’s my car. I’m about seventy, maybe eighty yards down the embankment at the tree line. And tell them to be careful. The bridge is almost washed out.”

“I’ll pass it along,” the operator told me.

“I’ll stay here until they arrive,” I told her. “But I’m gonna try and get that door open.”



“It would be better if you stayed on the line, sir,” the operator suggested.

“Fine,” I told her. “I’ll put you on speaker.” I punched a few icons on the touch-screen – difficult in the driving rain collecting on it – and put the phone in my breast pocket. “Can you still hear me?”

“Yes, sir,” she said over the phone’s tinny speakers.

I wormed my fingers through the cracks between the door and the frame, wincing as my fingers lacerated on broken glass, and gave an experimental tug. Metal groaned and the car rocked, but the door showed no signs of budging. I looked down and kicked away some thick mud piled against the door, then reset my feet and got a fresh grip. I pulled as hard as I could and the door came away a few precious inches with a groan of overstressed metal. The driver inside never moved.

“Just hang in there, buddy,” I told the unconscious occupant. “I’ll have this door open in a second.”

I pulled again and was rewarded by another deep grunt of metal and another inch or so. I could just get my arm inside the car now. I kicked away more of the piled mud – the door was dragging a deep rut in the sodden ground and the mud acted like a very efficient doorstep – and tried again. Nothing. Then again. Another inch. Broken glass rained down around my hands and the frame surrounding the driver's window bent dramatically. I let go and hiked my coatsleeves over my bleeding hands, then grabbed the doorsill with a crunch of glass and pulled again. Another few inches. One of the hinges shrieked alarmingly and popped. The metal of the door bent garishly, like the car was inhaling deeply.

“Sir?” the operator asked. “Is everything okay?”

“Fine,” I grunted. “I’ll have it open in a minute.”

“The fire department is almost there,” she told me. “They’ll have tools.”

“This guy needs a hospital,” I told her. “He doesn't have time to wait for them to cut the door off. I want him ready to go when they get here.”

I pulled again, using all the helpless rage and exasperation I'd felt over my marriage and my home life and channeling it into underused muscles. With a grunted oath, I felt the door buckle and then swing open on mangled hinges, giving me my first unobstructed view of the driver inside.

“Got it!” I exulted into the falling rain.

The driver was a young man, his long dark hair matted with blood. I resisted the urge to shake him, to try and bring him around, but checked closely and saw the shallow rise and fall of his chest against the steering wheel where he slumped.

“He's breathing,” I told the 911 operator. “He's alive.”

“The fire department is almost there,” the operator replied.

I saw the attenuated red and blue strobes of the fire engine at the top of the embankment and heard the wail of the siren, muted strangely by the rain. I jumped up and down, waving my arms.

“Down here!” I shouted. “Hurry! He's still alive!”

The grim-faced rescuers slid and hopped down the muddy slope, hauling bags of equipment and a long plastic backboard. With a minimum of talking, the young men placed a stiff collar around the young driver's neck and slid him out onto the backboard, securing him with straps and carrying him up the hill towards the waiting ambulance. The entire scene, lit by alternating garish red and blue, barely jelled in my mind, so surreal and otherworldly it was.

I gratefully accepted the assistance of a young firefighter to ascend the hill back to my car. I could barely see the young driver, surrounded by firefighters and paramedics, but they had an oxygen mask on his bloodied face and the paramedics called out vital signs, letting me know the young man still clung to life.

“Is he going to be all right?” I asked the firefighter.

The young man shrugged. “I wish I could tell you,” he replied. “I can say that if he does, you have a lot to do with it. Good job getting that door open. We'd still be down there, trying to cut him out. Getting those heavy tools down that slope would have been a cast-iron bitch, if you'll pardon my French.”

I passed a sodden business card from my wallet to the young firefighter. “Could you give him this for me?” I asked. “I'd like to know how things turn out for him. Maybe he could call me if he comes to.”

The firefighter grinned. “I doubt that,” he said. “He'll be in surgery for the next few hours. Medics are saying he's really messed up. But I'll give it to him. If he pulls through, I bet he's gonna want to thank you.”

“Could you possibly let me know where you're taking him?” I asked. “I know it's none of my business, but maybe I could call tomorrow and check on him?”

“You're a nice guy,” the young rescuer told me. “Mercy General is the closest trauma hospital. I bet they'll take him there, in this kinda weather. You can try and check on him, but they're pretty tight-lipped about their patients when you're not family.”

The ambulance was loaded and moving back down the nearly-flooded road and the firefighters had returned to the relative dryness and safety of their engine by the time I crawled back into my still-idling car. My muscles ached in protest of their recent exertion and my hands, shredded by the broken glass, throbbed terribly as I tried to grip the wheel. Watching the rescue vehicles in my rear-view mirror, I saw that they safely crossed the flood-compromised bridge before putting my own car in gear and making my careful way back home through the rain, back to my loveless marriage and my drab home.

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The next morning dawned pink and rosy, with a chill in the air the only reminder of the last night's horrific rain. Several ambitious birds warbled tentative songs in the still air to the counterpoint of the drips from the eaves of the little suburban homes. I watched the dawn through the window, gauze bandages on my hands, unable to reconcile the dangerous, apocalyptic conditions of last night with the calm and placid morning just beyond the glass.

Holly had already been asleep by the time I got home, and gone to work by the time I rose, so I didn't even have a chance to relate my heroic story, making it seem almost fictional in my own mind. Sipping a cup of wonderfully scalding coffee, I yawned and stretched my complaining muscles. I picked up my phone from its charger by the door and wiped off a few determined raindrops and used my mobile internet to look up the phone number for Mercy General, then dialed.

“Mercy General, how may I direct your call?” the switchboard operator asked brightly.

“Emergency room, please,” I replied. Cloying soft jazz filled my ear when she placed me on hold, then a babble of noise and voices stung my hearing as the call connected.

“Emergency room,” the tired-sounding voice answered.

“Hi,” I told her. “I'm trying to find out some information on a patient that got brought in by ambulance last night. A young man in a car accident. I witnessed the accident and I'm trying to find out if he's okay. I don't want any personal information or anything – I'm not family – I just want to see if he's all right.”

“Name?” the clerk asked me.

“That's just it. I have no idea.”

I heard a suppressed sigh, and I knew I caused problems, but I plowed ahead insistently. “He was in his twenties, with long dark hair and a moustache. I think I remember hearing he had a head injury before the ambulance left. He wasn't conscious. They brought him in about nine p.m. last night.”

“Okay, gimme just a second,” the clerk said, and I could hear typing on the line. “We had two John Does come in around that time last night. This one – wait, you said in his twenties?”

“That's right,” I confirmed.

“This one wouldn't be him,” the clerk said. “That guy was at least sixty. The other one, hang on a second, lemme see... twenty-six years old sound about right? About six feet, maybe 150 pounds?”

“That sounds about right,” I said.

“Let's see. Yep. Car accident, rollover – he had a broken femur, a bunch of broken ribs, a punctured lung, and... yes, you were right. A subdural bleed. There's your head injury. What is it you want to know?”

“Just if he's okay,” I said.

“Okay is kind of a broad term,” the clerk said sardonically. “I can tell you he's alive, though. Looks like they were able to stabilize him here, then send him to the OR. He got out of surgery and they transferred him up to the ICU early this morning. Anything more than that, and you're going to have to call the ICU directly. I can transfer you, if you want.”

I let out a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding. “That's great news. I was worried.”

“Worried about a complete stranger? That's pretty rare,” the clerk commented. “Yeah, he's alive. Anything else you wanna know about him?”

“Is it okay if you let me know his name?”

“I'm not supposed to release any personal information to non-family,” the clerk said.

“Not even a first name? Any way to find him?”

“Sorry,” the clerk said.

It was my turn to sigh heavily. “I guess I can understand that,” I said, voice flat with defeat. “I don't suppose there's any way to get a message to him, is there?”

“I'll transfer you to the ICU. I don't think you're gonna have much luck, but you can try. Hang on a minute, okay?” I heard the soft jazz once again.

The doorbell rang suddenly and I distractedly moved towards the front door, opening it without even looking through the peep-hole. A truly strange character awaited me outside on my porch. The woman stood straight and tall despite obvious age. Her face was a map of lines and creases suggesting a hard life spent outdoors. She wore a riot of prints on her blouse and skirt, and on the shawl-like thing tied like a nun's wimple over her dark hair. Gnarled but strong-looking hands twisted a strange backwards-facing apron as she shifted her weight from foot to foot in the chilly morning.

She fixed me with a direct, penetrating gaze. “You are David Martin?” she asked.

“Uh... yes,” I said, phone forgotten against my ear.



She handed me the soaked business card that I remembered passing to the firefighter on the roadside last night. The ink on the cheap card had run and the paper was dissolving into pulp from being soaked, but my name and phone number were still just this side of legible.

“Where did you get this?” I asked her.

“I found it in the pocket of my son's jacket,” she told me. “My son, Evan. I think you know him. He was in an accident last night. The paramedics told me he almost died, except for the actions of a man who pulled off of the road and called for help, then stayed and forced open the door of his car so the fire department could get to him more easily.”

I looked at the phone in my hand as if surprised to see it there. “Oh, my God. I was just trying to call the hospital and find out how he was doing,” I told her. I clicked the phone off with a soft beep. “But I didn't even know his name.”

“Evan,” she told me again. “And I have you to thank for his life, Mr. Martin.”

Again, I snapped heavily out of some dim place in my head and found a sudden flash of manners and decorum. “I am so embarrassed. I don't know what's become of my manners. Please, come in. Can I get you some coffee?”

She smiled a broad smile and stepped across the threshold, gathering me up into a firm hug with surprisingly strong arms. “You saved my son,” she whispered into my chest. “I am forever in your debt, Mr. Martin. Forever in your debt.”

“Not at all,” I told her. “He needed help, and I was there.”

“And you did not turn a blind eye or put your own problems before his,” the woman told me, “even though I can sense your own problems weigh heavily on you.”

“How on earth could you possibly know that?” I asked.

She broke her embrace of me and smiled again, this time knowing and warm and motherly. “Because *everyone's* problems weigh heavily on them. That doesn't take a psychic.”

“Please, do come in,” I asked again. “Let me get you some coffee. You must be freezing.”

“Where I come from, Mr. Martin, this is springtime weather,” she laughed. “But I would love some coffee. It smells marvelous.”

I busied myself leading her to the kitchen and giving her a seat at the breakfast table. “I'm sorry, I must have forgotten your name,” I told her.

“It's Madga,” she told me, accepting the coffee in an earthenware mug.

“How is your son?” I asked her.

Her piercing eyes became a bit faraway. “Alive,” she told me. “He is a strong soul. He will recover. I don't envy him the pain he will be in for the next months. But he is alive. That's all that matters.”

“Amen,” I told her, raising my own mug. “I'm so relieved.”

“You cannot know how much it means to me, your stopping and going to the aid of my only child.”

“I can imagine,” I told her, a bit uncomfortable in the face of such overwhelming gratitude.

“No, you can't,” she said. “I see that you have no children of your own.”

It was my turn to drift away for a bit. “How could you know that?”

“The pictures on your walls,” she told me. “Parents – they always have pictures of children. You have none. I assumed.”

“You assumed correctly,” I told her. “We're just one of those couples. We tried – for years. It just never happened. There were... obstacles. I don't know why I'm telling you this.”

She grinned. “I have that effect on people,” she told me.

“So, what is it you do, Magda?” I asked, trying to change the subject.

“I’m an honest-to-God gypsy,” she told me with a twinkle in her eyes. “What else can I do? I tell fortunes. I read palms. I have a little shop downtown.”

“A real fortuneteller?” I laughed.

She shared my laughter. “I know,” she said. “Mostly it’s a con game, and a considerable amount of tea and sympathy. I like to think of myself as an unlicensed therapist. And people are willing to pay to have a total stranger tell them that everything is going to be all right.”

“Sounds like a niche market,” I told her.

“Very much,” she said, sipping coffee. “But I do have certain skills. Not just anyone can do it.”

I missed the poignant lowering of her tone when she spoke the last, barreling right past it into more small talk. “I bet you see all kinds of characters in your line of work.”

“All sorts,” she said. “But they all have one thing in common. They’re lost. I help them find their way. Usually by simply stating the obvious. I tell them things they already know, or maybe can’t admit to themselves. Sometimes I even make a discovery, but it’s rare.”

“What kind of discovery?”

“Holes,” she told me. “Holes in lives. Wishes, usually, that never came true.”

I sighed. “I should introduce you to my wife.”

“I would very much enjoy that,” she told me, “but you are my foremost concern.”

“Concern? Me?”

“Concern,” she restated. “I owe you all the light in my life, Mr. Martin...”

“David, please,” I interrupted.

“David,” she said. “I owe you my soul’s happiness. My baby lives because of you.”

“You’re forgetting an awful lot of firefighters, paramedics, nurses...”

“Who would never have known he was there, if not for your generosity,” she interjected. “You saved the light in my life, David. The least I can do is try to shed some light back into your own.”

“Does my life seem that dark to you?”

“Everyone’s life is dark somewhere,” she told me. “It’s only a matter of finding out where.”

## Part Two

WE SAT THERE, AT MY kitchen table, for several hours. Madga didn't lie – she was *impossibly* easy to talk to – and I found myself telling her things I rarely mentioned, or only dimly remembered. I got the impression that she saw through me, somehow, and that trying to dissemble or lie to this woman would be difficult to the point of impossibility. By the time the topic of conversation came around to my marital woes, her easy manner and keen insight soon had me spilling my guts, bemoaning the loss of love and even mere companionship in my broken marriage at great length. The level in the coffee pot dwindled to nothing and I brewed another, thankful to be able to turn my back to her for a moment and hide my face from her piercing, knowing gaze.

“I am sorry,” she told me when I finally turned to face her once more. “It always disturbs me to hear of happiness lost. And your love for your wife is obvious. Only a fool could not see it.”

“You think Holly is a fool?” I asked, a little hotly.

“Perhaps,” she said. “Only she can answer that. No, I think she is as lost as you are. More, maybe. She strikes me as a woman who has a life full of unfulfilled wishes and hopes. The noise of hers drown out the noise of your own. You have gotten lost in the background of this.”

“You think?”

“I know,” she said with certainty. “I've seen it a hundred times, in a hundred couples, David. It's more common than you could know. In any relationship, in any pairing, there is always one partner who makes the noise and one who stays quiet. You are the quiet one, and you have made her noisier by making her more important than yourself.”

“She is more important,” I told the woman plaintively. “She's always been.”

“I can see that you believe that,” she told me. “But, in answer to your question, no. I don't think your wife is a fool. I think she loves you dearly, and has never stopped. I don't think she would be able to even function if not for that love, and the certainty of that love. The faith in it she has. But it's all gotten so small, so overlooked, in the face of all that noise.”

“What do you mean, noise?”

“The static, the interference. Think about it. You love this woman. You feel it in your bones, in every breath you take or let out. She owns a part of your soul. Do you dwell in that feeling, every second of every day?”

“I try to,” I told her.

“But do you succeed? Were you thinking of the love you have for your wife when you cut your poor hands open on that car door last night?”

“I don't suppose I was,” I said.

“Of course you weren't,” she said. “There was something else, something bigger, right in front of you. And it drown out the other. Noise. Your wife, your Holly – she has let the mistakes and the losses of her life make so much noise that she can't hear anything over them. She can't even hear you any more.”

“That makes me very sad,” I told her.

“And Holly's noise drowns out the things in your life you should be paying attention to,” Madga went on. “Because she is so important to you, and you are so selfless.”

“Selfless? Me? That's a stretch.”

“You stopped for my son. You tore your hands to ribbons trying to help him. You crossed a flooded bridge and ran down a muddy slope to get to him,” she told me. “People who think only of themselves do not do things like that. I can prove it. If I were to give you one wish, David – one wish that I could guarantee would come true – what would that wish be?”

“Easy,” I said. “I would wish for Holly to be happy.”

She snapped her fingers. “You see? Selfless. Of all the things you could wish for, you wished for her. That is selfless. *You* are selfless.”

“Fine, you win,” I chuckled. “So I have to wish for something for myself?”

“If you want it to come true, then yes,” Magda told me.

“Okay, then... I wish I could be the person who could give Holly the life she wants. I wish I could be the person who fills all those holes in her life, makes her satisfied and lets her be happy. I wish I could be someone who could give her everything she wants – emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, you name it.”



“You wish this with all your heart?” she asked me.

“With all my heart,” I said, and it wasn’t a lie.

She stood, taking my face between her strong hands, and kissed me soundly on the forehead. I thought I heard her whispering something in a language I didn’t recognize before she did. She pressed her dry, warm lips against my forehead for a long time, holding me close to her wizened body, before she broke away and looked me in the eyes.

“So be it,” she told me simply. “And now, David, I really must go. I need to see my son.”

“Of course you do,” I told her, a little bewildered. “Will you tell him that I’m so relieved he’s okay?”

“I will,” she said. “I expect he will want to meet you, when he’s up to it.”

“I’d love that,” I told her. “I’ve never done anything like this before. I actually hope that he and I come to be friends. I think getting to know someone I helped like that – that would be something special.”

“I think you're probably right,” Madga said. “Thank you for everything you did, David.”

“Please, don't mention it,” I said. “I'm just glad he's okay. And come by any time. You're always welcome here. I've enjoyed talking with you.”

“Likewise,” she said. “I'll check in soon. Let you know how Evan is doing. And see how you're doing. But it might be a while. I expect you'll be busy.”

“Busy?” I asked.

“I'm a fortuneteller, remember?” she chuckled. “Madam Magda, she knows all.” She delivered the last in a put-on Romanian accent worthy of any cheesy Bela Lugosi vampire flick and we both dissolved into giggles. She hugged me close one more time and then left the way she'd come, looking back over her shoulder and giving me a companionable wave.

I couldn't put my finger on it, but I felt lighter. More at ease with myself than I'd felt in ages. Maybe just the simple act of unburdening myself, talking about my problems, took a weight off of my heart that I'd grown so used to that I didn't realize how heavy it was until it was gone. But I even caught myself humming as I tidied the kitchen, feeling cheerful and happy for the first time in ages.

Gasping a little at the time, I hurried into the bedroom and quickly dressed for work. I scarcely paid attention to the clothes for the day, just my usual nondescript dark suit and a blue dress shirt, then my heavy woolen topcoat against the morning's chill. My mind already leapt to the endless succession of meetings and emails that faced me at my job as an account manager at an online brokerage, trying to force my mind onto the boring day-to-day against the lightness in my heart and the spring in my step telling me to call in sick and spend the day doing enjoyable things, away from the cubicles and fluorescent lighting and stolen moments on Facebook between tasks only meaningful to people I barely knew who made so much more money than me that we scarcely inhabited the same world.

My sensibility overrode the urge – with no small twinge of disappointment – and I poured myself a travel mug of coffee and steeled myself for the morning commute. I walked out into the chill, my breath misting in front of me, and unlocked my car, still humming a happy tune, unable to get the lilting lift out of myself even in the face of the humdrum day approaching.

I slid into the driver's seat and turned the engine over, trying to find a station on the radio which suited my mood. Strangely, it was the local top 40 station that caught my ear, playing some sexual thumping house beat over the breathy soprano of some random, oversexed pop princess who panted rhythmically and squealed and moaned like sexual abandon beneath the lyrics. I didn't simply tap my fingers or my feet to the music – I danced along behind the wheel as I backed down my driveway, learning the repetitive chorus and singing along.

I *never* sang along with the radio. I'd broken myself of that particular habit early in my marriage, since my singing voice sounded like an unoiled power tool and it drove my darling wife *crazy* to hear it. It was one of the very first casualties of our long-term relationship, one of the first things that the *cute* wore right off and became annoying.

I hadn't gone more than a quarter-mile before I heard my phone ring. Probably work, wondering where I was. I normally got there early, so habitually that I think my bosses expected it. I fumbled in my pocket, searching for my ringing phone, to no avail.



Looking to my right, I tracked the muted sound to an unexpected location. A large, black leather purse sat on the passenger seat above my copy of *Forbes* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Gucci, unless I missed my guess, stylish and scandalously expensive.

*Now how in the hell would I possibly know that was a Gucci purse? I thought disconnectedly. I've never paid the slightest bit of attention to that sort of thing. It looks like any other purse I've ever seen, but somehow I just knew? How?*

I fished in the purse, my hands caressed by the silk lining, fumbling for my phone. I picked it up and pressed it to my ear.

“Hello?” I said, still a little bewildered. I dimly registered that I should have been panicked – did someone leave it there in my car, maybe at the accident site? Could it be Magda's? She didn't strike me as the sort to carry a designer purse, and what could she have been doing in my car?

“David? Honey, it's me,” Holly's voice said into my ear. There was a warmth there I hadn't heard in seemingly forever, and its balm on my heart soothed away any residual weirdness I felt at the unexplained appearance of a \$1200 purse in my front seat, which had my mobile phone in it when I was *certain* I'd put it in my pocket on my way out the door.

“Holly,” I breathed. Even after all these years, saying her name made me feel good. “I was just thinking about you. What's up?”

“I didn't see you last night and you were still asleep when I left,” she explained. “I didn't want to wait until after work to tell you.”

“Tell me what?”

“How much I appreciate how patient you've been. How understanding. I know I've been a complete and utter bitch to be around lately,” she said. “I've been taking all my frustration out on you, and you've been such a dear through it all. So kind and so patient. I love you, David, and I am so thankful you're my husband.”

My words caught in my throat in their rush to escape. “Holly, I...”

“Don't say anything,” she told me fondly. “I know you're uncomfortable with that kind of thing. I just wanted you to know. I'm gonna try harder, David. I'm gonna try to let this go. I don't know how quickly it will happen, honey, or even if I'll be successful, but I'm gonna try.”

“That makes me so happy,” I croaked around the lump in my throat.

“You deserve it,” she said. “So. Anyway. Have a good day, honey. I'll see you when I get home.”

“We should go out,” I managed. “A nice dinner, maybe? Something a little romantic, to remind us of what things used to be like?”

She made a happy sound, deep in her throat, a treasured noise I feared I might never hear again. “That sounds wonderful,” she purred. “Really wonderful. I have yoga after work – I'll be home by seven, I promise. Then we can have our date.”

“I can't wait,” I told her. “Oh, hey... I have a question.”

“Shoot.”

“Did you happen to leave a purse in my car?” I asked.

“A purse? What kind of purse?”

“A really nice one,” I told her. “Dressy. Black leather. Looks expensive.”

“Nope,” she said. “Maybe it's your lover's.”

“Nah,” I grunted. “She doesn't have anything this nice. She's way too slutty. Y'know how tacky those eighteen-year-old Japanese masseuses dress these days.”

“It's probably nothing,” Holly chuckled. “Check it for I.D. I'm sure you can figure it out.”

“I'm really glad you called, honey,” I told her. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she said warmly. “I'm sorry I haven't told you that enough, lately.”

“I know you meant to,” I said. “Bye.”

“Bye,” she said.

I slipped the phone back into the purse – it just felt like it belonged there, somehow – and occupied my mind a little further on the mystery of the purse. I fished around a little bit more, finding a leather ladies' wallet. I dumped it into my lap and waited until the next red light to open it, looking for a driver's license or a credit card or anything.



I found the little card and held it up. A picture of a stunningly pretty blonde girl smiled at me from the driver's license, named Brooke Elizabeth Martin. Strangely, the address on the card was the same as my own and the birthdate was the same as mine, as well, only a decade and a half later. My puzzlement faded behind shock, however, when I noticed the hand holding the licence – my hand, or at least I thought it was – sported long, sculpted nails done in a French

manicure and decorated with black flourished and a line of rhinestones. A little silver ring, pierced with little heart cutouts and also encrusted with rhinestones, encircled the thumb.

As if the shock of the jewelry and the manicure weren't enough, the fact that I smiled broadly and happily at how *pretty* it was added to the mix to make my breath come in shallow gasps.

*What the hell is happening to me?* I thought frantically.

My original thought for the day resurfaced and this time wasn't shouted down. I pulled my smart phone from the designer purse one-handed and tapped my way through the menus expertly, given my new long nails, until I speed-dialed my work.

“Curtis? It's David Martin,” I said numbly. “Listen, I'm really under the weather today. I don't think I should come in today.”

\* \* \*

I screeched into my driveway and piled out, slinging the purse over one shoulder as if I'd been doing it instinctually for years. The house – my residence and my refuge for over ten years, as familiar to me as any place I'd ever known – seemed a little different. Nothing glaring, but I noticed that the landscaping in the front seemed a bit more manicured, the lawn a little greener, and the exterior a little tidier. Even the paint on the gables seemed a bit lighter shade of green than it had before I left for work.

I hurried inside, not even noticing that my usual clomping gait now resembled a sashaying catwalk strut, my hips swiveling and my arms moving more side-to-side than front-to-back. It made the heavy purse bounce against my ribcage. I tried not to think about it too deeply as I fumbled my key into the lock with numb fingers. Our old brass knob, covered with the patina of age and exposure, had been replaced with a shiny new one, top-of-the-line with a double-core deadbolt above it. The key seemed shinier and in better repair, as well. It fit and turned, thankfully, and I ducked inside out of the chill.

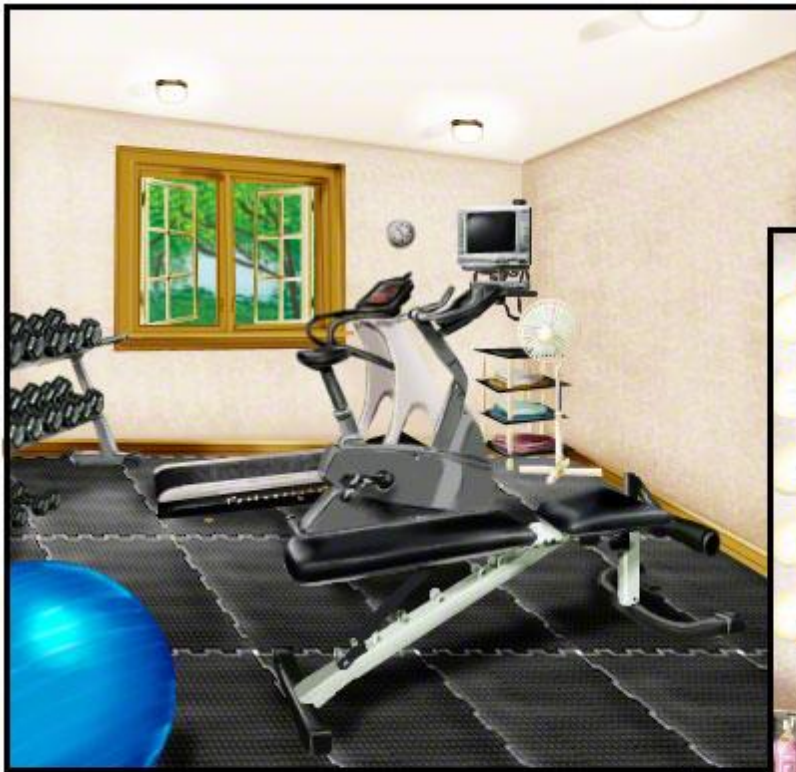
Again, the little differences struck me – things that would've been unnoticed in a place less familiar. A table had been moved a little bit. A crystal ashtray on a side-table where a decorative statuette sat for years. A random landscape painting – bought on a whim at a flea market in our first year of marriage – in a battered wooden frame above the mantelpiece was now a striking Mark Rothko in a chrome-edged frame. As a matter of fact, all of our old art, placed on the walls in lieu of family pictures, had been “updated,” becoming more modern, more *chic* and infinitely more erotic. Apparently, the new phantom decorator had a thing for female nudes. Not that I necessarily minded, *per se*, but I didn't think that Holly would be all too thrilled.

I dropped the purse and my heavy topcoat next to the computer in the little home office – the weatherbeaten Acer we'd bought on sale two years prior now a stylish and overpowered PowerMac – and went directly into the bedroom, hoping to find an old prescription for anxiety medication in my medicine cabinet and hoping it was still potent. But the bedroom brought me up short. A closet had appeared, opposite the large walk-in I shared with Holly. An entire room, conjured from thin air? *What in the hell was happening?* This wasn't possible. It simply couldn't happen.

I scrubbed my eyes with balled fists and looked again. The closet was still there. I moved on to the bathroom, as I'd originally planned, but again stopped in amazement and shock. Our bathroom sported a double vanity, with twin basins, one of the nicest features when we'd bought the house. Holly's side looked no different, but mine – once populated only with a toothbrush, a razor and a stick of deodorant – now overflowed with every manner of cosmetic I could imagine, including a few I couldn't name. Hair dryers and rollers and flat irons connected to an overstressed wall socket above the counter in a wild rat-tail of cords and ground fault interruptors. I gasped and leaned heavily against the wall. Where had all of this come from? The flood of new additions caused me to completely overlook the fact that the walls were now done in a muted pastel pink, with matching towels and shower curtain.

I staggered out of the bathroom and back towards the little home office. Maybe there was some more information to be discovered in the designer purse I'd found. All of these strange changes started after I'd found it. Perhaps there was some clue as to why – never mind *how* – every single thing in my life seemed to be changing right behind my back, normal and familiar one moment and then morphing into something utterly alien the moment I diverted my vision.

In the time between dropping the coat on the chair and going into the bathroom, the little home office had become easily three times its original size. The desk stood crammed into one corner and the rest of the floor, covered in strange interlocking rubberized mats, now sported a very modern and very well-appointed home gym. The big pieces – the two workout benches, the stationary bike, the treadmill and the stair-climber – dominated the room, but racks of hand weights, stacks of kettle bells, exercise balls and steps and the like crammed the available space.



Valerie Hope  
2013



I sagged, sliding down the wall with my eyes pressed into the heels of my hands. I hadn't even known what to call a kettle bell until I laid eyes on the equipment. Bad enough that it was there – but this unlearned knowledge of it, springing into my head like this, unnerved me just as badly. *It's for resistance training*, I thought numbly, barely even shocked any more by my use of the term instead of *weight lifting*, which I'd always used before. *But it uses ballistic movement, so there's cardiovascular and flexibility training added. The center of mass is extended beyond the hand, so you have to use swinging movements which will strengthen the posterior chain muscles. You do more reps with kettle bells, which makes it more like high-intensity interval training than traditional resistance training. A 20-minute snatch workout burns about 14 calories per minute aerobically and about 7 anaerobically. That's about the equivalent of a 6-minute mile pace.*

I blinked. How could I know that? I felt certain that if I went onto the internet at that moment and looked it up, those unbidden facts would be completely accurate.

I walked back into the bathroom in a numb haze. I ran my hands through the piled and stacked cosmetics, lifting a strange tube up and examining it. *Lip primer. I've become quite fond of this brand with the plumper already infused, along with Vitamin E and shea butter. Lips just can't*

*be over-moisturized, and it really locks the lipstick in place, particularly if I use liner and then a good gloss. The plumper gives a nice, sexy little pout, but mostly this primer just keeps the lipstick in place during the day really well. So much better than no primer or something like pressed powder. And since I like to put foundation on the lips, then primer on top of that – I get double the benefit.*

There was the unbidden knowledge again, but now personal preference surfaced. Like it wasn't bad enough that I recognized and understood what lip primer was and its uses, but now I had the singular impression that of all the lip primers out there, this was my favorite. The impression that I had tried others and this one gave the best results.

My vision swam. I leaned heavily against the counter, head pounding, panting for breath. I slowly realized I was hyperventilating and my chest felt like a vise clamped around it. I tried to force myself to calm down, with questionable success.

*Look, you just need to let it go. You're not gonna find a rational explanation for this, I thought to myself. It's probably stress. You're hallucinating. None of this can possibly be real – houses don't just change in fifteen minutes. You don't suddenly know things you haven't learned. This is some kind of a dream. You need to settle down and get your feet underneath you, then things will get better.*

I decided to quit paying so much attention to the changes around me and just change clothes and take a shower. Getting out of my suit and tie and letting some warm water run on my naked body sounded like a good way to just let things return to normal. I shucked my work clothes and left them on the bed, then pawed through my drawers looking for something comfortable – and familiar, that would help a lot, too – to wear for my unexpected day off. But the drawers yielded very little in the way of hope for alternatives. My blue jeans and my college sweatshirt must have been in the laundry. Yearning for the feel of those familiar garments on my body, I padded barefoot across the changing house into the small laundry room just off the garage.

Sure enough, a stack of newly-cleaned clothes sat folded neatly in a pink laundry basket on the floor in front of the appliances. It struck me as out of place that they were folded – Holly never folded them in the laundry room, she always brought them into the living room so she could watch television while she folded. Maybe I did the laundry? I didn't remember doing it. But then again, I didn't remember ever learning what lip primer or kettle bells were, and I seemed to have become an expert on those things overnight, so my doing the laundry didn't seem so odd by comparison.

I leafed carefully, so as not to destroy the neatly-folded pile, looking for something comfortable to wear. But the load seemed to be all Holly's clothes; panties and bras, fluffy socks, tight jeans which looked doll-sized to me, shirts and blouses, skirts and dresses. Not one item in the basket that I recognized as mine, all in pinks and pastels and with flowery appliques.

I held up a petite little pink-and-white striped blouse – *rib-neck tee*, my altered memory corrected me, *with side ruching* – and held it up. I didn't recognize it, but then again, somehow I did. *This is mine*, I thought with no small amount of discomfort. *I bought it at Old Navy, on sale. I needed something to go with the Miss Me jeans that Holly got me for my birthday, the ones I wanted to wear with the pink suede ankle boots I found online and didn't have anything*

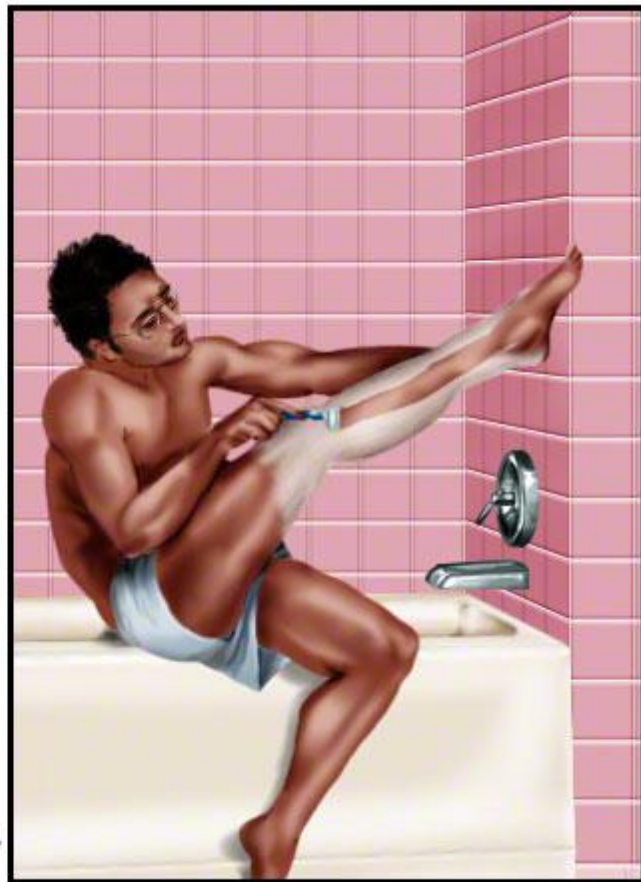
*that went with them. I bought four more in different colors – it was one of those insane 5 for \$25 sales that Old Navy runs from time to time – but the pink stripes was my favorite.*

*I folded it neatly – now why had I done that? I wondered, when my first impulse had been to drop the offending garment like it had been a poisonous snake – and placed it back in the basket, then selected another, a pale yellow sweater, and held it up to examine. Mine, I thought. I needed something for the fall weather but nothing too bulky. I hate winter fashion, it hides too much. I found this little cable-knit in the Body Central catalog and just had to get it. I love the “cold shoulder” look with the cutouts and this one left my belly bare. Perfect for a cool day but completely useless for the cold. And I look fantastic in it – Holly loves me in this sweater.*

I crouched down and pawed through the basket in earnest. With a few exceptions, everything in it was mine. Even the folded panties and the bras. I felt a strange sense of kinship with each article of clothing – that sense of familiarity I had been longing for – and felt pulls towards favorites like the pale yellow sweater, like I'd been wearing these strange feminine clothes for years.



Yale & Hope  
2011



I decided to opt out of finding something familiar to wear and just go straight to the shower. The shelves inside teemed with exfoliators and body scrubs and moisturizers and

keratin-infused shampoos - *to keep the frizz down, I know how frizzy my hair gets when the cold weather hits and everybody starts running the heaters*, I thought to myself unbidden. I immediately sat myself down on the edge of the tub, still in my boxers, and I slathered my legs with an expensive-looking moisturizing shave gel and began running a razor up my shins automatically.

It never even struck me as odd, looking at the smooth and shiny, hairless skin left behind the razor's swathe and smiling to myself a little. I tried to ask myself why I did it, why I shaved my legs, but the answer seemed so obvious – *I want to surprise Holly by wearing some sexy lingerie when she gets home from yoga. I was way too fuzzy to wear silk stockings, so I thought I'd better shave.*

It made perfect sense to me, and this time no swell of panic rose in my chest. I looked down at myself critically – I needed to run the razor in my armpits, as well, and my bikini line was in such a state that I should call Clarissa today and make an appointment for a wax this week. The image of a young, attractive girl in a pastel pink lab coat with a beaming smile and throaty laugh popped into my head. Clarissa, of course, the girl who'd been doing my pubes and my eyebrows for at least three years now. She had a light touch, she understood skin care and she was quick – three things you really wanted in a waxing technician. I felt certain she was every bit as good as I was in that department, maybe even better. But people could be so rude to waxing techs – even though they paid for it, they still blamed the tech if it hurt – and I didn't like the bullshit. So I'd gone in other directions.

*Other directions?* I thought as I rubbed conditioner into my hair, under the warm water. *What other directions did I go? I'm a project manager for an online brokerage!*

*Among other things*, I amended to my previous panicked thought, and calmness descended on me once more. I was being unreasonable. Nobody was just one thing. I could have assorted skills. Everybody did. So what if it wasn't my job, I could care and be educated about skin care and hair removal and kettle bells if I wanted.

I blew out a long, pent-up breath. No more reason to be stressed out. Besides, most of my plan had succeeded: I was in a hot shower and I didn't feel so panicky any more. And besides, I had the whole day now, after calling in sick, to putter around the house and get a few chores done, and then get ready for Holly to come home. I couldn't wait to see her, but I knew that was typical. I always waited in breathless anticipation to hear her key in the lock. I hated being apart from her, even for a second. She'd be home tonight and I vowed I would have a delicious dinner on the table for her, her house clean and scrubbed the way she liked it and I would be dressed to impress, ready for her, not a single hair out of place. Because she deserved it and because it made her happy. Making Holly happy blotted out the rest of my problems and worries completely – it was the most important job in the world.

\* \* \*

I lingered in the shower a bit longer than I'd anticipated – the hot water did feel incredibly good, especially in contrast to the chill outside – and toweled myself off quickly. The evaporating water gave me immediate chills, so I dove into the clothes I'd brought with me just to warm up. Thick woolly socks, striped in pinks and blues, and some shapeless blue jeans and a

long-sleeved tee shirt with a hole in one elbow. Not exactly what I'd come to expect, given the quality of the clothes I'd found in the laundry room, but serviceable – *cleaning clothes*, I thought, *my “grubbies.”* *Not something nice that I'd want to mess up* – and comfortable. I didn't think too much about them – other than a wry thought of how much having Punchy from the old Hawaiian Punch commercials on my t-shirt was incredibly hipster and not exactly *me* – because I had a long list of chores to leg out and not a huge amount of time in which to accomplish them.

First and foremost was to allay any incursions by the outside world, which meant answering emails and returning phone calls. That list was thankfully short, nothing pressing, just confirming a few appointments. I remembered to call Clarissa and get myself a booking for Thursday.

Next, the kitchen. A lot of our old appliances seemed to have been replaced – the realization didn't alarm me, as it had been doing, but delighted me instead. Our dishwasher, for example, was much nicer than the old one, one of the new LG steam washers that didn't require as much hand-scrubbing as before. Not that I'd particularly minded being up to my elbows in soapy water after mealtime, but it took so *long*, time I could have been spending with Holly. The fact that I rarely – if ever – washed dishes before in my marriage didn't faze me. Whatever was inside me that made me rebel against these changes seemed to have run its course.

I decided on something simple, a quick stir-fry, something I knew that Holly liked. I cut vegetables quickly on a bamboo cutting board and soon had an impressive stack of carrots, ribbons of cabbage, broccoli, shiitake mushrooms and water chestnuts stacked on the board. I soaked a block of hard tofu in salt water and then pressed it under a cast-iron skillet, then emptied a few cans of chickpeas into the Nutri-Bullet blender that had appeared on the counter with some garlic and roasted red peppers. I added a few spoonfuls of tahini and a little lemon juice and blended together a nice hummus, which I spooned into a bowl to be heated later and then dressed with olive oil and paprika. Seizing a wild hair, I put a large baking stone in the oven and kneaded together a large ball of dough from water, yeast and whole wheat flour. I wrapped it in plastic wrap and let it rise, then made a mental note of when to start baking the flatbread so that it would be warm and fragrant when it was time to eat the hummus. I sealed everything in tupperware and put it back into the refrigerator, including the cream I'd whipped for the fresh strawberries for dessert.

I chuckled. “Last night I could barely boil water,” I commented. “I guess this whole thing has an upside. I always wanted to be able to cook.” It took me no time at all to tidy up the kitchen back to its pristine state, then I moved on to the rest of my daily chores. I had housecleaning down to a science, I discovered, moving quickly and efficiently through dusting, vacuuming, taking out the trash and separating the recycling, cleaning the bathrooms and making the beds. I knew I had a system – daily chores took an hour a day, then I did a big job every other day for an hour. I didn't mind the housework – making the house nice for Holly and keeping it spotless the way she liked it made a warm blossom of purest happiness sprout in my chest.

I chose cleaning the upholstery on the couch for the day's big job. One of the closets once dedicated to old photographs and the Christmas tree now yielded a high-end carpet steamer with an upholstery attachment. I spent about an hour, maybe an hour and a half on my knees steaming the couch and the two armchairs in the living room, plus the dressing stools in the bedroom and a few other pieces. Satisfied with my quick progress, I stowed the steamer back in

the closet and then finished the last few little chores of the day – ironing a few clothes and wiping down and disinfecting the gym equipment – while I listened to the news on television.

I did stop to think how very little housework I had done in the past. For that matter, I hated it. I tended to let it pile up until situations became intolerable or until Holly yelled at me, then did it as a binge, hating every second. I tended to volunteer for the outside chores, which didn't rankle me as much, such as keeping the lawn or cleaning the gutters. Most of the housework fell to Holly, or to the blissful year when my yearly bonus let us employ a young woman to come in and clean twice a week, then the dregs would fall to me.

But I found now that the domestic work could be quite enjoyable. I sang and hummed and danced while I worked. Once I realized *why* I kept house – not for me, but for Holly – a happiness and satisfaction infused the job and I worked gladly. There was even a strange sort of peace in the monotony of it. Sure, they were tasks I'd performed dozens of times, but the repetition let my mind wander while my body switched to “autopilot” on the ingrained motions and tasks. Add to that what seemed to be a flair for organization – I had the profound sense that I had put a lot of thought into my system, a lot of trial and error, and this was by far the best way I'd found – and a happy, unencumbered heart, and I could honestly say that I enjoyed housework.

I enjoyed housework. I was an above-average cook. I kept the household organized and stocked full and clean, I kept its members well-fed and well-clad and warm and happy.

*I'm a helluva wife*, I chuckled to myself as I hung the last of the ironing on hangers and shut off the iron. The cold tiles of the laundry room penetrated even the warm embrace of my woolly socks and I moved inside the house proper to continue my preparations for Holly's arrival home.

\* \* \*

With time on my hands, I decided against working out in the new gym – although I knew instinctively that I usually spent any extra time I found in there, sweating – because I'd already showered and wiped down all the equipment. Instead, I tried to busy myself reading, but the book on my bedside table just couldn't hold my interest the way it had the night before. The intricate plot and intrigue of the spy novel I had been utterly engrossed in last night now just turned me off. It was all so dark and colorless now, the characters didn't interest or engage me, and disappointed me completely. I didn't care how the main character intended to get the top-secret files out of the locked vault. I wanted to know about his wife. Where they met, how she made him feel.

I closed the book and rose to put it back on the shelf unfinished, then changed my mind and dropped it into the rubbermaid bin in the closet where we kept the books we meant to resell or donate. The other three novels in the series – how could I have once considered them my favorites? – joined it, along with my huge collection of Tom Clancy and Stephen King. Very little of my pleasure reading library remained after I was done. I couldn't really find anything in Holly's bookcase which interested me – it all tended to be rather dry, concentrating on self-help and organization more than entertainment, so I had to settle on an old copy of *Vogue* next to the toilet. It was a month or two out of date, but it had Emma Watson on the cover and I thought her lyrically gorgeous and oh-so-stylish. I became quickly engrossed in the magazine, running covetous eyes over the expensive designer clothes and jewelry in the ads and picking up some

things I'd never known before in the beauty section – an article on how to use makeup to even out a freckled complexion really got me thinking.

Making a quick decision – I knew I would have to explain this to Holly later, since she was in charge of the money in the house and didn't like me spending without asking her first – I logged onto the Internet and placed monthly subscriptions to *Vogue*, and also to *Elle*, *Allure*, *InStyle* and *Glamour*. Any publications which could give me so much raw information to process would be well worth having delivered to the house. I forewent *Cosmo*, for the most part – it tended to focus on a younger demographic and seemed a bit lurid and campy to me. I wasn't interested in sex techniques or dating articles, I was creative enough in the bedroom and happily married, thank you very much. I wanted articles focusing solely on beauty and style. Nothing extraneous. Although I did occasionally like to take the quiz, but that was available online. I didn't need a subscription for it, and besides – I already had enough explaining to do to my darling wife about spending money without her foreknowledge. I was probably gonna get it.

Why did the thought of “getting it” from my wife thrill me all of a sudden? The thought of her angry at me used to make me feel cold and dreary inside, the thought of her razor-sharp tongue turned in full fury against my collection of character defects even more so. But now, the thought of facing an irate and indignant Holly carried with it fear, but also excitement, as if it might lead to something thrilling and wonderful. Like I almost looked forward to it, but feared it at the same time? A breathless anticipation of just *what Holly might do to me* made me almost shiver in anticipation.

Did I actually do “naughty” things which I knew would piss Holly off just so I could feel that?

I think I *did*. The word “bratting” sprung into my mind unbidden. But I had no idea what it meant.

I walked back towards the kitchen to start dinner – the time for Holly's arrival home approached fast – and caught a glimpse of myself in the full-length mirror in the bedroom and gasped aloud. I was still in my grubby housework clothes. I would have to hustle if I intended to get myself presentable in time for Holly to get home and still get dinner on the stove.

I ran a quick brush through my hair and set it with a little mist of hairspray. A little bit of moisturizer – it was dry inside the house, but blessedly warm – on my face, hands and arms and my newly-hairless legs to take away the dryness and scratchy feeling. I sat on the lid of the closed toilet and indulged myself in coating my toenails with two thick coats of pink enamel polish, just to make myself happy. I'd never experienced the little “kick” of self-confidence and silly giggling joy that painting my toenails might bring – I'd only thought that with the ornate rhinestone manicure I sported on my fingernails, I should probably do something with my toes. The little burst of happy expanding in my chest counted as a pleasant and unexpected by-product.

Then on to the closet. I passed right by the chest-of-drawers, knowing that contained mostly casual stuff and most of that still sat in the laundry basket in the room with the inordinately cold tiles, and into the new “mystery” closet that I hadn't shown the nerve to enter yet.

The closet that somehow, I knew was *mine*.

Continued...

?

## Part Three

THE CLOSET LIGHT CLICKED TO life above my head, and I let my eyes adjust slowly over the neatly-organized but completely packed space. I obviously spent a great deal of time and money on a do-it-yourself closet organizing system, making ample use of the limited space by the additions of floor-to-ceiling shelves and racks and hangers. To my left seemed to be things like shoes, belts and purses, coats and scarves and a neat row of hat-boxes along the top. To my right were dresses, skirts, sweaters and blouses. Directly across from me, in some glass-fronted drawers, was my lingerie.

I moved back on my heels for a moment. Even though the panic and vehemence of my former realizations of these physical changes in my life was gone – thank God – I still couldn't help but think *this shouldn't be here*.

But I also couldn't help but think *it's all so pretty*.

Pretty.

That word seemed to take on a strange meaning for me. I had liked pretty things, before. Admired them. But there was always a separation between *me* and *pretty*. These clothes, these shoes, these accessories – they were more than just garments. They were a gateway. A way for me to get from where I was to *pretty*. Or more than just pretty. Beautiful. Glamorous. Seductive. Cute. Carefree. Anywhere I wanted to go. Even “slutty” or “trashy” could be achieved, and I didn't look down on the words. Those words could be fun, given the right circumstances. They could even meld together. I could go with “cute” and “playful” and merge them with “professional” and “polished” if I put my mind to it. The possibilities staggered me. I had never before put any thought into how I dressed. I just threw clothes over my body and kept to the societal norms of acceptability. Suits and ties for work, jeans and t-shirts for yard work, khakis and polos for casual. Nothing outside the lines, nothing creative. Now I could *play* with my clothes. I could express myself and my mood with them. Maybe I felt seductive and alluring – a little black dress and some smoky dark stockings would let me show that to the world. Maybe I felt girly and young – a plaid schoolgirl skirt in pink tartan and a white cardigan sweater, my hair pulled into pigtails, that would let that be known.

Just to keep myself from becoming too chilly, I slipped into a pair of pink thong panties which pulled my testicles and penis back cruelly into my crotch – *beauty requires sacrifice*, I told myself as I fought back a little wave of nausea – and pulled a pink t-shirt over my head with the word “Princess” picked out in rhinestones across the chest.

So, then, that begged the question – what did I want to express through my clothing to my Holly? How should I dress for *her* pleasure, not simply my own? I wanted to show her glamorous. I wanted to show her beautiful to the point of making her glad she married me. I

wanted to show her sexy. I wanted to excite her, to thrill her, to make her want me and want to be near me.

Somehow, it dawned in my feverish brain that I liked to dress from the ground up. I liked to pick my shoes first and then choose an outfit to go with it. I knew, somehow, that through years of trial and error, using that formula tended to work best for me. I also knew that I shopped for shoes first and then spent the remainder of my retail outings searching for the clothes and accessories to match. The shoes were the key to my entire wardrobe.

My eyes fixed on a pair of platform open-toe pumps, black patent leather with leopard-skin printed insoles and a lovely animal-print collar for my ankles. I think I'd bought them in secret with my clothing allowance and had been waiting for a chance to wear them. Something told me Holly liked to see me in animal prints – she liked the thought of me as a wild thing – as much as she liked seeing me in heels and I'd selected them just for that purpose.

I pulled them down from the extensive rack – *God, I owned a lot of shoes* – and examined them. A five-inch heel and at least an inch worth of platform, maybe more. The distance between my feet and the actual ground daunted me a little bit, particularly since a part of my mind still screamed that I had never been in a pair of high heels in my life and I would almost certainly fall and break my neck if I tried to wear them.

I wrestled with myself for a few minutes, trying to busy myself by pulling a pair of pink thong panties with white lace trim from the underwear drawer up my smooth legs. The panties pulled my penis and testicles cruelly back into my midsection, making me fight back a little bout of nausea, but I told myself that *beauty requires sacrifice* and I did my best to ignore it. Eventually, as I pulled on a tight pink t-shirt with a red heart and the word “Princess” picked out on the chest in rhinestones, my body acclimated to the new geometry and I found myself able to breathe a little better.

I even found a little rack of hair accessories – ribbons and bows and the like – and picked out a pale pink silk flower attached to a little barette which I clipped into place over my right ear, then decided

I had pattered around to a point where I could find no more excuses to delay the inevitable, then stepped up – a *long* way up, it seemed – into the platform pumps and quickly tied the ribbon laces across the uppers. I tottered dangerously, grabbing a nearby shelf to keep myself from going over, and tried not to think of my ankles and their very real danger of snapping in half if I stepped wrong. But *damned* if I was taking them off.



I windmilled my arms and teetered dangerously for my first foray out of the closet, making it only a few feet before having to use the bed and the chest-of-drawers to creep along, like a toddler pulling up. I brachiated along the bookshelves, forcing myself to overlook the hot-needle cramps in my calves and thighs and the dull, throbbing ache developing in the arches of my feet, finally discovering that by shortening my stride, moving my arms more side-to-side than back-to-front and placing one foot in front of the other, I managed to keep myself upright and maintain a much better semblance of balance.

Still, each traverse of the bedroom floor gave me a chance to pause in front of the full-length mirror and admire just how *incredible* the skyscraper heels made my legs and butt appear. Between the artificial length of the pumps and the high cut of the panties, it made my legs go on forever, and sucked my posterior into a delicious little bubble which jiggled and wiggled when I walked.

I started making circuits of the bedroom, practicing until I could manage to infuse my stride with a little bit of self-confidence but still far short of the self-assured, sexy catwalk sashay I wanted to achieve. I expected that would take a lot more practice on my part, something I willingly accepted. The image of myself, swaying and strutting along the street, drawing covetous glances

from the boys and jealous ones from the girls, made me smile and *want*. I would not stop practicing until I pulled it off.

Even with an uncooked dinner waiting in the refrigerator, I couldn't tear myself away from dress-up just then. I needed more. I wanted a riot of pink, like a life-size Barbie doll, all glittery and sparkly and fun and girly. I decorated myself briefly from one of the overstuffed jewelry boxes atop the chest-of-drawers, hanging a huge pink plastic Eighties-style bangle bracelet off of one wrist and cramming rhinestone-encrusted rings onto my fingers until they twinkled with every movement of my hands. I added a darling sparkling heart pendant on a long herringbone chain and a large string of plastic beads around my neck to set off my face. I wished I could add some cute earrings – I owned a *ton* of them – but no holes existed in my earlobes, and I didn't find any clip-ons in my huge assortment.

I stepped into the little plaid schoolgirl skirt with the pastel pink tartan that caught my eye in the closet and shimmied and shook until the tight garment crested my hips onto my waist. My paunchy gut caused it to cut into me painfully, rolling the waistband over in a most unattractive way. I sucked in my stomach and grunted and groaned until I wormed the side-zipper up into place, then secured it in place (and got the waistband laying flat) beneath the disgusting “muffin top” with a pink *faux*-leather belt studded with rows of sparkling rhinestones. My mind immediately flew to a little cropped fuzzy angora sweater such a pale pink it could easily be mistaken for white which would set the ensemble off perfectly. Maybe even some white tights or knee socks, although the thought of taking the heels off for even a moment galled me.

*I can't believe I know so much about clothes, I mused. It just all fits together so naturally in my head. Do I actually have a knack for this? I think I do. I think I might actually be naturally stylish.*



Before I committed to the sweater, I wrapped my torso in a pale pink bra – unadorned satin, but pretty – and fumbled blindly behind my back in an attempt to get the clasps closed. After several frustrating minutes, I gave up and spun the brassiere around so that I could close it in the front, above my revolting paunch, then slid it back around myself and threaded my arms through the straps. I fiddled with the straps, untwisting them and getting them to lay flat and comfortable against my skin, when a voice behind me snapped me from my unintended reverie.

“David? My class let out early, honey, so I stopped by the store and got... *David?*”

Holly appeared in the doorway behind me, reflected in the mirror that transfixed me. Her jaw dropped open, her arms clutching a paper sack of groceries close to her midsection.

I turned to face her – slowly, since I hadn't yet mastered lateral movements without losing my balance – and offered her a weak smile. “Don't you like it?”

“I... I don't... Where did you get those clothes?” she stammered.

My heart fell in my chest. “You hate it,” I said. “I can tell. I'll take it off. I should go start dinner. Sorry, I lost track of time.”

“I don't hate it,” she said placatingly, but with doubtful sincerity. “It's just... so... David, I didn't even know you liked this. Honestly.”

I reached behind my back to try and unhook the stubborn clasps of the bra. “I should start dinner,” I mumbled, heartbroken. “Won't be a minute. You can leave give me those and I'll put them away.”

She slid the bag gently onto the bed – I hoped there was nothing wet or melty in the bag, since it would be me scrubbing stains from the eider-down comforter if that happened – and stepped closer to me.

“David, I don't want you to go. I'm sorry,” she whispered.

“I didn't mean to lose track of time,” I offered.

She stepped closer. I could smell the clean scent of her sweat and the hint of the morning's perfume. “David, look at me.”

I met her eyes reluctantly. Her shock and speechlessness had made me feel like a freak. Shame gripped me from top to bottom and all I could think of was how much I wanted to run away.

“David,” she said, lifting my chin with a finger to face her directly. “I'm sorry.”

“No, *I'm* sorry,” I whispered. “I shouldn't have shocked you like that. It was too much. I got carried away, that's all. I'll dial it back a little. Maybe it will be better if we ease into this.”

She inched closer still, almost nose-to-nose. I could feel the warmth of her skin against mine, smell her breath. Little electric charges – the ones that always accompanied being near her – capered and frolicked up and down my body, leaving me a little breathless.

“Listen to me,” she bade me just above audibility. “I reacted poorly. I'm the one who's wrong. I should never have acted that way. You look adorable. Pink really suits you.”

“I think it's kind of my trademark color,” I said.

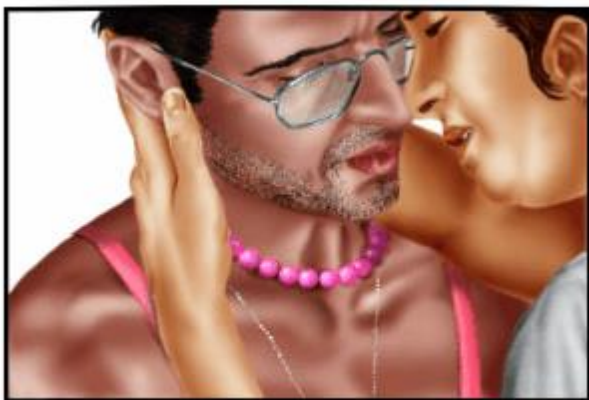
“Really? I didn't know you knew so much about clothes,” she whispered, eyes taking on the hooded look that meant she wanted a kiss. I leaned in, almost imperceptibly, drawn to her like a magnet.

“Neither did I,” I confessed. “Just go with it. It's been that kinda day.”

“Honey, you... you look beautiful.”

“I do?”

“Absolutely beautiful,” she said, and her lips parted, and I leaned into her, desperate for the contact.



Yakine Hope  
2011

She pressed herself against me and I fully expected to feel myself harden in response, but just the opposite happened. I... *softened*. Softness meeting softness, yielding meeting yielding. My body tugged and tucked, and the brutal cutting feeling of the tight skirt and the pinching shoes, the cruelly binding panties and the pinching bra just evaporated. My vision framed itself in thick, lush black above and below and I could feel my eyelashes tickling my cheeks as I leaned to kiss her.

A sudden tugging on the back of my head and a curtain of feathery softness slid over my shoulders and down my back. My neck craned – I had always leaned down to kiss Holly before, but now I felt myself leaning *up*, making me feel small and treasured. I kissed her as passionately as I ever had, but there was no aggression in it. I surrendered to her, opening to her. Before, I had always kissed Holly. Tonight, it was Holly who kissed *me*.

I threaded fingers in her soft, sweat-damp hair and pulled her close as she kneaded the muscles of my shoulders and my back, pulling me closer with a strength now far superior to my own. A sigh escaped my lips, high and breathy. I moaned and sucked greedily on her tongue, wanting only to pull her *deeper* into me, to draw her into myself and surround her with warmth and love and slick desire. Something I had never felt from her before seemed to blossom, palpable and hot, between us – a naked hunger for me that warped the air around me and made my head swim with the intoxicating tonic of being *wanted* and *longed for*.

She had said I was beautiful. Now she made me feel beautiful.

Her hands left my shoulders and slid down my slim arms to my wrists. She pulled my arms around her waist and kissed me harder, then slid her hands back up my arms, across my chest and onto my breasts, making me gasp and moan deep in my throat.

*Waitaminnit*, a detached part of my brain screamed at me. *My breasts?*

I pushed myself away from her suddenly, eyes wide, stumbling on my towering heels and slumping unceremoniously onto a small table near the door. Honey-blond hair, kittenishly soft, spilled over one shoulder. I looked down at myself, past the smallish breasts riding high on my chest but enough now to fill out the cups of the bra with firm, pale flesh, through the cleft

between them to a flat, muscular belly and downwards to long, willowy legs tapering to dainty feet.



“I... I don't... what just happened?” I asked, my voice now a perky soprano with an upwards lilt and the barest hint of throaty purr.

“Oh, my God,” Holly breathed, eyes wide with surprise and desire. “You're... you're *perfect*.”

I blushed and swept blonde hair behind one ear with long, lissome fingers. “You think so?”

Holly nodded, biting her bottom lip with suppressed desire. “Honey – you're the woman of my dreams. Absolutely the woman I have always wanted, down to the smallest detail.”

I blushed an even deeper scarlet. “That makes me really happy... wait. The woman you've always wanted? I don't understand.”

Holly sighed. “I guess the cat's out of the bag,” she said, looking down at the floor as it came to be her turn to blush crimson.

“Are you saying..?”

“It's why everything went so wrong,” she told me. “Why our marriage just lost all its color, honey. I tried to tell myself it wasn't, that it was a sacrifice I was willing to make so I could be happy with you – and I *was* happy with you, for years, honey – and maybe have a family. But when we couldn't have a family, and it dawned on me we never would... I just couldn't deny it any more. I couldn't make it matter less than the other things any more. And I started to feel like I'd wasted all that time, time I could never get back, and I started to blame you for that...”

I laid a finger across her lips, stopping her in mid-sentence. “You're gay?” I asked point-blank.

“I always have been, sweetheart,” she told me, feeling like she had to force the words from her throat but incredibly relieved once she did, like lancing a boil inside herself. “I'm so sorry. I never meant to hurt you – but now... look at you. My God. You're *exquisite*. Breathtaking.”

She leaned back in. “I want you so much,” she finished.

“You've never said that to me before,” I told her, a lump in my throat.

“You weren't... *this*, before,” she told me. Something flashed in her deep, fathomless brown eyes – something predatory. It made me feel vulnerable and weak, small and helpless. And I *loved* it. I felt my pulse pick up speed in response, and my nipples stiffen almost painfully against the smooth fabric of the bra.

“Shouldn't we eat something, first?” I asked, demurring and instinctually playing “hard-to-get.” It only made the predatory gaze sharper, causing a fresh wave of thrill and, for the first time in my life, a spreading warm wetness between my thighs.

“I know what I want to eat,” she purred, and I nearly jumped from the spike of pure desire running straight up my spine.

I pouted a little for her benefit, and I could see her respond with stiffened nipples against the confines of her jog-bra and her breath coming between lips parted with desire. “But I worked so hard...” I whined.

Her voice hardened a little. “I don't want any fucking dinner,” she growled. “I want *you*. Naked. Now.”

I should have been shocked – she *never* dropped the *f*-word, it was far beneath her dignity – but something visceral responded to the commanding growl. I bobbed an unconscious curtsy, purring, “yes, ma'am” immediately and without the slightest intention of disobeying my beloved wife.

She smiled. “I liked that,” she said. “You, so quick to do what you're told. Just like a good little girl.”

There was nothing gentle or seductive about her next kiss – Holly grabbed me roughly by the hair and around the shoulders, nearly pulling me off-balance in my tall heels, forcing my soft lips apart with her own and thrusting her tongue into my mouth, probing roughly and thoroughly as I yielded to her, moaning deeply in my throat and opening my mouth wide to let her do as she wanted. Holly – sweet, gentle, passive Holly – awakened something deep within herself, something dormant and long-repressed, and she gave in to her overwhelming desire for female

flesh by just *grabbing* and *taking*. She bit my bottom lip hard enough to make me gasp and pulled my hair sharply, making me yelp between our crushed lips but then pant with breathless desire. She clamped her lips around my out-thrust tongue and sucked hard and started grinding her dampened crotch against the top of my thigh. I could feel her nipples poking insistently against me, even through a sports bra and an overshirt, as she gratified her long-sleeping desires to touch – and be touched – by another woman.



She guided me to the bed, tossing me down roughly, causing my hair to fan out around my head. I gazed at her with unabashed desire, lips parted and panting, eyes burning as they caressed her form, while she stripped out of her workout clothes and stood naked before me. I wormed my hands around behind myself, fiddling with the clasps of my bra, but Holly held up a finger.

“Just the panties,” she told me. “Leave the rest.”

“Yes, ma'am,” I told her again, breathlessly.

I slid my panties down my long smooth legs and bared my crotch to her, flipping the hem of my skirt up to display myself. She looked at me as if I were something tasty to eat and made a happy sound deep in her chest, melting me a little.

“I really like that *ma'am* you use,” she told me.

“I want to do things that you like,” I told her honestly.

“I want to hear you say what you want me to do,” I told her.

“I want you to kiss me,” I panted.

“Kiss you where?” she demanded.

“On my... my...”

“Say it,” she hissed, kneeling between my spreading legs.

“My pussy,” I blurted. “I want you to kiss my pussy. Please, ma'am. Please kiss my pussy?”

“Mmmm,” she purred. “I never knew how sexy it was to hear you say *please*.”

She lowered her head between my legs and planted a hot, wet, snail-tongued kiss on my nether lips, which blossomed open immediately to her ministrations. My breath caught in my throat, and I balled up the comforter in fists which clenched in an overwhelming spasm of pleasure. No sound even escaped me – I literally choked on pleasure.

“You like?” Holly asked, equal parts turned-on and amused at my reaction.

“Oh my God,” I breathed.

“You want some more?” Holly asked.

“Yes,” I moaned, squirming. “Please, ma'am. Please, please, *please*.”

“You beg so prettily,” Holly smiled, a cruel smile but at the same time adoring. Her face lowered again and I found myself again unable to talk, to move, to breathe or to make any sound at all.

The kiss lasted, this time, and the slow wet tongue picked up speed, finding the little concentrated node of purest pleasure at the apex of *my pussy*, teasing and flicking it. I drew in a ragged gasp and then screamed, biting my bottom lip until I feared I might draw blood, thrashing my head back and forth and squealing like a girl.

I felt pressure, strange but not unpleasant, as Holly worked a hand beneath her chin and slowly pushed, inexorably. I gave way – for the first time – allowing an invader *inside* my body, *within* me. The pleasure I'd felt before paled into nonexistence before what assaulted my brain now. Meaningless syllables escaped me, growled and mewled and squealed, as I arched my back nearly to the point of pain and went rigid, panting and clenching every muscle in my body.

“Oh, my,” Holly said delightedly. “Such a *horny* little girl.”

“Please, say my name,” I gasped, panting. “Please, ma'am, my love – call me by my name.”

Holly sounded taken aback. “I... what *is* your name, honey?”

“Brooke,” I said with utter conviction. “My name is Brooke, ma'am.”

Holly's voice held a warmth I thought long gone from between us as she purred, “I love you, Brooke. More than anything in the world. I love you with all my heart.”

\* \* \*

Miracle of miracles, I managed to force my rubbery legs to carry me – still in my heels, I would have died before taking them off – into the kitchen to prepare the almost-forgotten dinner. The last curling tendrils of my first experience with the female orgasm still clung to my spine and extremities. Before, when I had been so unfortunately male, before I could truly make my Holly happy, orgasm consisted of the entire universe distilling itself down to just my cock and balls, as if nothing else existed. The ultimate turn inwards. But as a woman – how I liked that newfound description of myself: *woman* – orgasm turned me outwards. I could sense every cell in my body, every strand of hair, acutely. Pleasure brimmed up in me until I thought my slight frame could hold no more, then exploded out of me in a sense-shattering wave. And the lack of a refractory period stunned me more than a little – not two seconds after my first orgasm, Holly picked up speed and urgency with her tongue and fingers and brought me immediately into a second and then a third, each more intense than the one before, not even giving me a chance to catch my breath from the one before. I finally had to beg her to stop – which she *thoroughly* enjoyed, I could tell. Then I spent about an hour in reciprocation, crouched between Holly's wide-spread legs ministering to her tenderly with lips, tongue and fingers. I remembered her orgasms being quiet, curling-up affairs punctuated with a tiny little shudder and a girlish whimper; now she growled and cried out, pulling my hair painfully and grinding her clitoris mercilessly into my chin and nose. Her newfound fondness of the *f*-word resurfaced – she ended every screaming orgasm now with a breathless “oh, fuck” which brought fresh stirrings of desire and want to flickering life inside me.

We spent another hour in the sixty-nine position, lying on our sides with our soft hair forming a dampened pillow against a creamy thigh for each of us, continuing the wonderful exploration of one another's noises, our likes and dislikes, what made us cum and what overwhelmed us. I felt like I knew her better and more intimately than I ever had before. I knew *just* how to touch her now, when to slow down, touch lighter, then speed up and be more firm. I knew when she liked two fingers inside her and when she preferred three.

By the time we finally collapsed against each other, playing with one another's soft hair, our actual physical hunger made itself known in the form of an ululating bubbling growl from Holly's stomach which left us both giggling.

“Okay, okay,” I said. “I'll go make dinner. If I can walk.”

“Oh, you can walk,” Holly teased. “You're a sexual animal. I think you could probably go for another three hours, and then go out for a run afterwards. I've never seen energy like yours.”

“Well, let me make us something to eat and we can see about a Round Two,” I said, standing weakly and giving myself a moment to adjust. I stood naked, except for my high heels. I turned to the mirror again, looking at the reddened handprint standing out on the pale flesh of my ass. Holly spanked hard and sharp – stronger than I thought her capable, actually. That surprised me enough, but the fact that I went off like a bottle rocket when she did it – that completely floored me.

“God, you're beautiful,” she breathed, drinking me in with her eyes as she propped her head up on her hand.

“So are you,” I told her with a beaming smile.

“You're sweet,” she said. “You're full of shit, but you're sweet.”

“Full of shit?”

“I am *not* beautiful,” she said. “I'm fat. And mousy.”

“Honey, you are a lot of things, but *fat*? *Mousy*? You're out of your mind.”

“Well, compared to you, everybody's fat,” she grumped. “What are you, like 2% body fat? You couldn't weigh more than a hundred ten. You look like a Victoria's Secret model. You make me feel like Jabba the Hutt over here.”

“All you need is some cardio and to adjust your diet,” I told her in a rush. “You skip way too many meals. You're in starvation metabolism. If you ate six times a day, about 200 calories a meal, and made most of it protein, you'd pack on lean muscle and soon your metabolism would burn off that excess fat for you. You would only need to get your heart rate up once, maybe twice a day.”

“Wow,” she said. “How do you know so much about that stuff?”

“Just kinda came to me,” I said. “Just like I know what colors will work best with your complexion and that you should probably start eating gelatin to strengthen your hair and nails. Stop all that breakage. And that you're not getting enough Vitamin D, you should start spending more time outdoors, and that if we don't adjust your diet you're a prime candidate for Type II diabetes in a few years.”

“What's happening, Brooke?”

“I wish I knew,” I said. “This just started happening. Before I could even think about controlling it, or analyzing it. Somewhere between Orgasm #10 and Orgasm #11, I stopped trying and just went with it. Somehow, I'm supposed to be Brooke now.”

“You know this is absolutely impossible, right?” Holly asked.

“Obviously not,” I said, gesturing down at my naked body. “We can figure it all out later, baby.”

“Mmm,” she purred. “I like it when you call me *baby* like that.”

“Me, too,” I said with a nose-wrinkling grin. “But we can figure it all out. There's no rush. And in the meantime, you need to eat something. Believe it or not, eating regularly will help you lose weight.”

“I believe you,” she said, “but do you even care that I'm not particularly hungry?”

“No,” I said honestly. “You're gonna eat something. Doctor's orders.”

“Okay, okay,” she laughed, holding up her hands in mock surrender. “You win.”

I was halfway to the kitchen when it dawned on me what I'd just said: *Doctor's orders? Now why in the hell did I say that?*

\* \* \*

Holly had always cringed a little when I cooked before – a forced smile and half-hidden expressions of distaste when I wasn't supposed to be looking, humoring me for all she was worth – but she tucked into my stir-fry with absolute gusto, devouring the steaming bowl of Thai rice noodles and vegetables with tofu that I placed in front of her. She opted for a glass of white wine with dinner – in celebration, she told me – even though it was a departure from her usual iced tea.

I took a few moments as I tidied the kitchen – *my kitchen*, I slowly realized – to take stock of the new changes which seemed to be happening still, albeit much more slowly. I found an entire cabinet full of dietary supplements, and I laid out a copious assortment in front of Holly as we waited for the coffee to brew after the last of the strawberries and whipped cream.

“Just take 'em,” I said. “Trust me. You'll be able to tell the difference in a couple days.”

She took them en masse, opening her throat wide and washing them down with a generous gulp of wine. Pushing back from the table contentedly, she stood and knuckled her back, then opened an antique flour jar on the countertop and fished inside. Her hand emerged holding a pack of Virginia Slims cigarettes and a disposable lighter.

My eyebrows shot up. “What the hell is that? Is this something new?”

She blushed, looking sheepish. “Actually, honey... this isn't anything new at all.”

I clucked my tongue. “You little sneak... how long?”

“Since college, actually,” she said. “I've managed to keep it from you. Lots of Altoids and changes of clothing, and I usually only smoked at work. Or when you left. I have a little place in the back yard, right behind the little pecan tree.”

“You've been keeping this a secret from me for over fifteen years?” I asked. “Not bad, actually. I mean, don't go thinking I approve. But that's pretty impressive.”

“Just didn't feel like keeping it a secret any more,” she said, sliding one of the skinny white tubes from the package and dangling it from one lip. “So, here goes. This is me, smoking a cigarette.”

She lit it and filled the kitchen with the stale, sharp scent and a pale blue cloud that billowed softly under the light above the table. I coughed dramatically. “I would appreciate it if you kept it outside, for the most part,” I said, eyes watering a little. “It’s my job to keep this house nice, missy, and that smell just *never* comes out.”

“It’s as much my house as it is yours,” she said sternly, blowing out a lungful of smoke. “I picked it out, if you’ll remember. My name is on the mortgage right beside yours. So if I want to smoke a cigarette in here ‘cause it’s colder than shit outside, then you’re not gonna say a word to me about it, okay?”

Without even thinking, I bobbed another curtsy and lowered my eyes. “Yes, ma’am,” I said automatically, and felt instant shame for speaking out against my beloved wife, along with a new wash of wetness between my thighs.

“I didn’t mean to be harsh,” she said, more softly. “I just don’t like being told what I can and can’t do, sweetheart. I don’t want you to think I don’t care. I will try to keep it outside, weather permitting.”

“And I won’t be a bitch about it,” I told her, giggling a little at using the word *bitch* in reference to myself without any irony involved. “It *is* your house. You should be comfortable in it.”

“See how easy it is now?” Holly said, marveling. “Before, honey – you realize the screaming fight we would’ve had about something like this?”

“I was actually just thinking that,” I said. I dried the last of the dishes and put it back into the cabinet, closing it with a very satisfied nod of my head. “What now?”

Holly ran the remnant of her cigarette under the tap and tossed the extinguished butt into the trash. “Take me back to bed,” she said. “I want to curl myself around you and bury my face in your hair and wake up just like that.”

\* \* \*

Sunlight peeked through the blinds, the eastern sky just starting to progress from the pale pink and lilac hues of dawn into the full yellow of bright morning, and I looked down at the sleeping face of my beloved wife, thinking back on the last night. Sexless nights together used to have stung me horribly – but now, the closeness and the sense of being united weighed every bit as intimate to me as sex.



I loved the feeling of her soft skin against my soft skin, a meeting of softness, and could not imagine a woman more beautiful or more perfect to me. Warmth suffused my body and I smiled, at just the same moment as she released a baby-soft moan and opened her own eyes, smiling up at me.

“Good morning, beautiful,” I whispered to her.

“Good morning, yourself,” she said. “I thought I was ready to wake up next to you, Brooke. I wasn't. In this light, looking at me like that – my God, sweetheart, you are so *gorgeous*.”

I looked over at the alarm clock next to the bed. “Neither one of us has to be up for work any time soon,” I commented. “Wanna do something about it?”

“I do,” she purred, running a caressing hand down my belly. “But would you mind, terribly, if it wasn't like last night?”

“What do you mean?”

“I *fucked* you last night,” she told me. “We both wanted it, but that's what it was. I still haven't made love to you, yet, and I'm dying to.”

I kissed her, just a light brushing of my lips against hers. “That would make me incredibly happy,” I told her honestly.

“Well, then, if that's the party we're having, we're both overdressed,” Holly said, rising to her hands and knees and sliding downwards, looking up at me with purest love and desire as she undressed me with her teeth.

I dimly realized how long I'd wanted her to do something like that for me, in my male incarnation. It had been an unfulfilled fantasy of mine since college, to have my love take charge and *want* me every bit as badly as I wanted her.

Maybe it wasn't just Holly's wishes that seemed to all be coming true.

To Be Continued...!

## Part Two

I TRIED TO REMEMBER HOW long it had been since Holly and I enjoyed a quiet, intimate breakfast together in our kitchen – *my* kitchen, now, I felt in my bones – sharing smiles and whispered endearments to one another and finding excuses to press our bodies together in the close quarters. We shared fresh fruit from one another's bowls and gazed adoringly at one another as we buttered toast and sipped coffee. I noted now that even our groceries had changed – gourmet seven-grain bread and Kona coffee in a bag in the door of the freezer, ground with an expensive little grinder on the countertop. Organic fruit from a local farmer's market. Raw brown turbinat sugar and antibiotic-free milk. Very healthy and extremely *chic* and stylish – a far cry from our usual Borden and Orowheat, shelf-bought groceries.

I had stepped down out of my tall heels – regrettably – and padded around my immaculate kitchen in bare feet, wearing only a long sleep shift in various shades of pink, displaying a glamorous picture of Marilyn Monroe in monochrome. Holly stood up to take her bowl to the sink for me – *sweet girl!* I thought – and stopped suddenly, eyes wide. “Whoa,” she said.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

She giggled. “C'mere. Stand over here next to me.”

I did as she bade me, stepping close, our breasts brushing each other just enough to tease our nipples stiff beneath our nightclothes. I had to crane my neck to look up at her smiling face.

“Either you just got shorter or I got taller,” she said. “Look how much taller I am than you.”

Holly – last night of a height with me – now topped me by at least four inches. “I don't think I shrank,” I told her. “I can still reach everything in the cabinets that I could yesterday. You grew, honey.”

I stepped back from her. “I'm gonna go put my heels back on,” I said, a little petulant.

She laughed. “If you do, I’m gonna go find a pair even higher, short stuff,” she said. “I *like* being taller than you. I used to have a permanent crick in my neck from looking up at you all the time. Now it’s my turn.”

I laughed. “I kinda like it, too,” I confessed. “My big, strong wife.”

“My delicate little flower of a wife,” she whispered back. She put the bowl in the sink and slipped into some woolly slippers, wrapping a thick robe around herself so she could step outside on the back porch and have her morning cigarette. I tidied my kitchen, restoring it to its spotless perfection with quick rehearsed precision, feeling every inch the little domestic goddess and smiling with the unexpected pride that carried with it.

I fluffed my long blonde hair over one shoulder and finger-combed it, wondering idly what I was going to do with it that day. Probably just boost the volume and wear it down, straight and shiny in a natural, healthy beach-bunny look. I did need to do a protein treatment in the shower, I reckoned, just to get a start on preventing the breakage that would inevitably come with all the heaters coming on in this first foray into chilly weather for the year.

Wondering just how I knew as much as I did about haircare, and knowing the answer would invariably be *because I do, now*, I forced myself off the subject and wondered what could have happened to transform me – and my whole life – so utterly. I could truly say that I was happier now than I had ever been, and I suspected Holly felt the same, but what could have caused it?

The last thing I remember out-of-the-ordinary was a visitor. Dimly remembered, like last night’s dream, dark hair and eyes and a kind smile, asking me what I would wish for in all the world. I chewed my bottom lip in thought, desperately trying to remember what I said. The view of my cherished wife, seen through a screen of slowly browning ivy, standing on the back porch and contentedly smoking a cigarette, brought my own words – in a now-unfamiliar raspy baritone, harsh to my ears – back to me:

*...I wish I could be the person who could give Holly the life she wants. I wish I could be the person who fills all those holes in her life, makes her satisfied and lets her be happy. I wish I could be someone who could give her everything she wants – emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, you name it.*

Was that me, now? This leggy blonde bombshell, muscled like a panther, hanging on Holly’s every word and desperate to fulfill her every desire, acting one moment the oversexed little minx and the next the contented, submissive little housewife – was *she* giving Holly the life she wants?

I thought Holly was a little deeper than that. Sure, the change in gender suited Holly’s hidden sexual orientation, and I didn’t mind as much as I thought I would. I hadn’t been any runaway champion as a man, I actually looked forward to finding out if I would be a better woman. And the “fringe benefits” of finding myself a girl had been beyond my wildest expectations. How wonderful it was to be beautiful. To be sexual and alluring and seductive. To be small and weak and helpless, to yield and to submit, to have my happiness tied so completely to the happiness of another. But is this *all* Holly could have wanted out of life? Is this everything?

I thought about the actual phrasing I used. I wanted to be the person who could *give* Holly the life she wanted. I needed to think harder about what I could give.

A bright sparkle, catching the morning sun, on my finger drew my attention suddenly. My plain, simple white-gold wedding band, the one adorning my finger for the last sixteen years, changed into a slim band of platinum crusted with diamonds, and against it lay a staggering engagement ring, also in platinum and dominated by a huge, four-karat solitaire.

I'd never worn an engagement ring, before. I'd given one, but never received it. If I wore one now, that meant that Holly would have been the one who proposed to me, not the other way around. It meant that Holly had chosen me, had pursued me, and won me finally, dropping to one knee and asking me to spend my life with her, instead of the months I remembered convincing *her* that I was worth spending a lifetime beside. That ring meant *I* was the one who was wanted the most. I was the one who required convincing.

A nearly painful swell of pride, gratitude and self-satisfaction strained the capacity of my heart to feel. She *wanted* me. Enough to win me. I had never before felt *wanted*. Even in the early days, when I was male and Holly still expressed her love for me openly, with affection, there was always the phantom sense that she could do better, that I had better earn her love anew every day or she would move on to something better, younger, more attractive. Now that feeling no longer existed in my house. I was the one she wanted. She proved it, with that ring on my finger. I didn't *have* to earn her love, every day, through word and action. I could do these things for her – clean her house, cook her food, wash her clothes and bring her to ecstasy in our bed – because I wanted to. Because it made me happy to make her happy. Because, at the very core of my soul, my deepest desire was to please her.

I looked over at the clock on the microwave and chewed my lip. I had work in about two hours, but I could not figure how I would be able to walk into my online brokerage in the body of a lithe, gorgeous blonde with a lingerie-model body and the face of a wide-eyed beauty queen and expect them to recognize me as David Martin, their manager of ten years. I was certain that I had work, though. I knew I needed to go – if anything, to bring the paycheck home and keep the standard of living that Holly enjoyed so much. But I was just as certain that David Martin, account manager at WireExchange.com, no longer existed. So where the hell did I work?

I had the length of a shower, and a good long stretch in front of the makeup mirror in the bedroom getting myself perfect for the day – and for my Holly – to figure it out.

\* \* \*

It dawned on me, as I brushed and sprayed and gelled and shined my hair, that a sort of autopilot had developed inside me with the transformation. If I didn't try to interfere with the natural flow of things, then some things simply came naturally to me – I first truly noticed it when I looked down the packed rows and shelves and drawers of my closet, crammed to bursting with different articles of clothing in different, unfamiliar cuts and colors, some of which I didn't even know what to call. I had never seen any of those garments before in my life, but somehow – if I didn't concentrate too hard and accidentally mess it up by trying to be *in charge* of it – I knew exactly where everything was in that closet, and what went with what.

I wondered, as I spread liquid BB cream primer on my face to moisturize and even out my skin underneath my makeup, if that same autopilot might extend to more of my life. I kissed Holly goodbye – that took longer, actually, than I'd planned on, and we came *dangerously* close to getting carried away – and slung my designer Gucci purse over one shoulder, the purse which had started all of this yesterday, and walked out to my car.

My nondescript Camry fled in the night, leaving parked in its place a shiny black Audi, waxed and polished worthy of the showroom floor. I clicked the fob on my keychain and delighted to hear the happy chirp of the alarm deactivating – *yes, Brooke, that actually is your car* – and slid myself into the driver's seat, already magically adjusted perfectly to my new, diminished height. I even somehow knew to keep my knees together primly as I sat and not give a huge panty-shot to the neighbors, then rotate around into the car before shutting the door.

Driving in my tall heels proved difficult, occupying just enough of my concentration to keep from gunning the powerful engine or locking up the brakes, using just my toe to depress the pedals instead of the entire foot like I remembered from masculinity. And, coincidentally, occupying enough of my attention to let the autopilot guide me in a completely opposite direction from downtown, towards the medical district and into a parking place in front of a small clinic just blocks from Mercy General Hospital. I locked my car, slung my purse, slid my glasses up my nose and walked towards the very *chic* and upscale-looking clinic to the feminine, staccato *click-clack* of high heels on pavement as the first bitter gusts of winter streamed long blonde hair across my face.

A soft bell above the door rang as I entered, stepping into welcome warmth. A very attractive young brunette with a distinctly Asian look to her stood up as I entered, offering me a bright smile.

“Good morning, Dr. Martin,” she said brightly, stepping behind me to take my coat. “Did you manage not to wash away in all that rain the other night?”

*Doctor Martin?* I thought incredulously. *I'm supposed to be a doctor? But... autopilot is one thing, but I could kill somebody! This can't be possible!*

The receptionist – her name was Ashleigh, I noticed on the little wooden name-plate sitting on her desk in the waiting room – replaced my pink wool top-coat with a starched white lab coat, hung my first coat up carefully in an adjoining closet, then handed me a cup of fragrant gourmet coffee which warmed my fingers delightfully. Sure enough – in answer to my worst fears – the pocket of the lab coat sported navy-blue embroidery: *Dr. Brooke Martin, M.D. over the smaller Aesthétique Medical Associates.*

*Holy God,* I thought in near panic, trying desperately not to hyperventilate. *These people actually expect me to be a doctor. They expect me to know medicine.*

Ashleigh ushered me back through reception and into a busy hallway, crammed with computers and file cabinets and medical equipment and men and women going back and forth busily, wearing scrubs. A few early patients – *none of them mine, please, God,* I thought – were undergoing the typical pre-exam tasks such as being weighed and having their blood pressures taken. I squeezed through the press of people, nodding numbly at the bright and chipper “Good morning, Dr. Martin”s that several of them offered me. I finally found a polished wooden door

at the end of the hallway, emblazoned with a brass nameplate displaying “Brooke Martin, M.D.” I unlocked it with a key – thanks be to my autopilot – on my ring and stepped inside.

A luxuriously-appointed office, decorated with chrome-and-glass furniture and tasteful sculptures, pictures of cutaway feminine perfection – sculpted abs, a perfectly firm curve of breast, a bubble butt and an alabaster cheek, chin and nose – hung in *chic* frames on the walls. A fish tank bubbled happily in the corner, full of exotic-looking life, in front of two polished bookcases filled from top to bottom with impressive-looking medical texts.

Feeling uncharacteristically self-conscious, I pulled a makeup compact out of my purse and flipped it open, running an unneeded coat of pressed powder across my upturned nose and checking my face for imperfection. A soft knock at the door snapped me out of my primping and preening in the little mirror. A stunning redhead – five-foot-nine, about one-forty and built like an Amazon but with the sweetest little-girl face and dimpled smile – poked her head through the door and offered me a glittering smile.

“Hey, Doc,” she said brightly in a silken contralto.

A name popped unbidden into my head. “Good morning, Danielle,” I said warmly. I got the distinct impression from my autopilot that this woman was a friend and confidante. “How are you?”

“Not bad,” she said. “Ms. Naranayan, your nine o'clock, is here in Exam 3.”

“Refresh my memory?” I said.

“Lipo, tummy tuck and a butt lift,” she told me. She had come into the room just enough to allow me a glimpse of her pink scrubs, embroidered over one of her magnificent breasts with “Danielle O'Meara, R.N.” in a darker pink.

*Holy shit*, I thought to myself in utter shock. *Am I a plastic surgeon?* A vivid memory of those magnificent breasts on Danielle's slender chest coalesced in my frantic mind. Breasts that were nowhere near and perky, firm and spherical – or as large – as when I'd first seen them. Those breasts were *my* doing. I was certain of it.

Numb with the shock of it all, and terrified that my lack of medical knowledge might harm one of the people coming to see me, I stuffed a stethoscope from my desk into one pocket and cleared my throat. “Lead on, Dani,” I said with considerably more optimism than I actually felt.

Danielle led me through the press of people – my newfound lesbian sensibilities, not altogether different than my old heterosexual ones – kept my eyes firmly transfixed on the gently swaying posterior in the pink scrubs as she brought me down another hallway and into a large, airy examination room dominated by an adjustable table and pictures of the anatomy of the human breast. I noted a framed document on the wall near the door as I entered – a medical degree lettered with the name Brooke Elizabeth Martin, M.D. from a prestigious medical school. A lovely middle-aged woman, regal-faced and exotic like most Indian women I'd seen, sat on the exam table expectantly and smiled as I entered.

“Good morning, Ms. Naranayan,” I said perkily. “How are you this morning?”

“I am wonderful,” she said in a light and incredibly pleasant accent that bespoke of a London education before emigrating here. “Yourself?”

“Great,” I told her, taking a file from Danielle's hand and flipping it open. “Danielle tells me you're interested in some lower body work. Abdominoplasty, and some gluteal augmentation with a little bit of liposuction?”

“Yes,” she said. “I have some very stubborn fat in my lower back, thighs and my flanks.”



I nodded. “The adipose tissue – fat cells – that deposit there have a tendency to become very tough and fibrous as we age,” I explained to her. “Traditional diet and exercise can have mixed results, but I do need to ask you, just to be conscientious: have you tried losing that weight by conventional means?”

She nodded. “For years. It's so stubborn.”

“I understand,” I said. “You understand, though, that I can recontour your shape and remove a large percentage of the fat cells in that area but I can't remove them all. Even if you have this

work done, Ms. Naranayan, you'll need to continue to exercise and watch what you eat or you will gain that weight back.”

“I understand,” the woman said.

“Tell me a little bit about your medical history, if you don't mind,” I asked her, toying with one of the large dangling gold hoops in my earlobes. I jumped slightly – *I didn't wear earrings this morning, my ears aren't pierced*, I thought, but the jewelry clearly hung from steel posts threaded through the flesh of my ears. I could distinctly feel them poking through the holes. “Have you, or anyone in your family that you know of, ever had a bleeding or clotting disorder?”

“No,” she told me. Behind her, Danielle made meticulous notes on a clipboard. “Aside from a little bit of high blood pressure – I take medication for it – I've been very healthy.”

“Do you smoke or drink?” I asked.

“I don't smoke,” she told me, “and I will occasionally have a glass of wine with a meal. I would say, maybe, one or two glasses of wine every month, perhaps.”

“Very occasionally,” I confirmed. “That's wonderful, Ms. Naranayan – you're an excellent candidate for the procedures you want. So, I'll step outside for a moment, and if you wouldn't mind disrobing, we can see which areas you want me to target, then we can take a few pictures and talk about moving forward, shall we?”

\* \* \*

The autopilot carried me through the rest of the morning – thankfully – and it slowly began to seep in through my panic that not only *was* I a doctor, it seemed that I was actually a very *good* doctor. I had a knack for setting my patients at ease, I spoke knowledgeably and concisely about the subject and my patients and nurses seemed to genuinely trust me and like me. By the time lunchtime rolled around, I had scheduled surgery for Ms. Naranayan and consulted three others: a breast reduction, a nose job and removal of a winestain birthmark. I knew this probably wouldn't be considered “real” medicine, not to the medical community in general – I certainly wasn't saving lives. But I enjoyed my work, and liked the feeling of helping the people who came to me feel better about themselves.

Ashleigh, the perky receptionist, came into my office just as Mr. Llewellyn, the winestain birthmark patient, put on his coat and left. “Randy is heading out to Jason's Deli,” she announced. “You want anything?”

I nodded, feeling the emptiness in my stomach. The PowerBar I'd chewed in between patients around ten that morning did little to carry me. “Vegetarian club and an iced tea,” I told her gratefully. “Sprouts on the side, please?”

“You got it,” Ashleigh told me with a coy wink. “Oh, and when you get a minute, Dr. Travis asked if you could poke your head in.”

I smoothed my lab coat. “I guess I have that minute right now,” I said. “Stops me thinking about how hungry I am.”

“I’ll tell Randy to hurry,” Ashleigh said conspiratorially, and left back into the choreographed chaos of the hallway outside. I stepped across the hallway to another polished wooden door, with a brass nameplate that matched my own reading “Dr. Joel Travis, M.D.” and tapped on the door lightly.

“Come,” I heard a mellifluous bass voice say through the barrier.

I opened the door and stepped into the office. His furniture carried gravity, all dark polished wood and shiny brass, as dark and heavy as mine was light and airy. A tall man with a chiseled jaw sat at the large desk, typing busily on a computer keyboard with deft hands, a careful *coif* of dark hair setting off a soft brow over deep-set, dark eyes which turned to me sharply. An easy, practiced smile spread across his face, showing chalk-white veneered teeth.

“Dr. Martin, I was just sending you an email,” he told me.

“What can I do for you, Joel?” I asked, using his first name companionably as though we were friends.

“Got a crazy case I needed your input on,” he told me. “Guy up at Mercy – thirty-four year-old male, got his left hand caught in an industrial metal roller, y’know, for making aluminum sheets. Got wound around three or four times before they shut it off. I’ve been asked to reconstruct the hand.”

“Wow,” I said. “Got any film?”

He nodded, gesturing me over. I stepped behind him, smelling the clean masculine scent of him beneath a tasteful application of cologne, something with a sandalwood base which made me want to inhale more deeply, if not just bury my nose in the cleft between his neck and jaw. The wetness Holly had familiarized me with so eloquently last night suddenly sprang to life between my legs.

*But I’m gay!* my thoughts protested. I tried to put it out of my mind, but those broad shoulders kept calling my attention back to the tingling moisture spreading between my creamy thighs.

“Jesus,” I breathed, adjusting my stylish designer glasses with one hand as I leaned in, gratefully forgetting this strange attraction I felt in favor of the complications of reconstructive surgery. “Looks like he misplaced every single metacarpal bone. They’re wrapped around behind one another, look.”

“I think the tendons look intact,” Dr. Travis said, pointing. “But the ligaments and connective tissue have to be shredded. And it looks like he lacerated hell out of the third and fourth metacarpal arteries.”

“And the pisiform bone is completely displaced. Looks like it’s actually floating free,” I commented. “If I were you, I’d go in through the thenar crease...”

We talked at length, me standing comfortably in my heels and toying with my new earrings while I pointed and offered opinions for how to rebuild this poor man’s hand. Joel kept pace with me but I could tell it was a struggle – I seemed to think a lot faster than he did and had more of a feel for long-term recovery and function than he did. We’d only just reached a consensus –

if one could define consensus as his taking every suggestion I made after restating it in such a way as to make it sound like he came up with it himself – when Ashleigh returned with lunch.

“Thanks,” he said, standing – he topped me by almost a foot, and we stood so close together that my neck craned back just to look at him. He made me feel positively *tiny* and completely weak. I fought back a longing to be completely in his power. “Knew I should consult a real doctor.”

I blushed prettily and brushed hair behind one ear, looking downwards. “You're sweet,” I told him. “You'd've gotten it.”

“Bullshit, but thanks,” he said, accepting a little brown Jason's Deli box from Ashleigh. “I appreciate your time.”

“Anytime,” I said, walking away with Ashleigh and closing his door behind me.

“God, he's cute,” Ashleigh commented as soon as the latch clicked shut.

“That he is,” I confirmed, accepting my sandwich as gratefully as I did Ashleigh's well-timed interruption. “Not much of a surgeon, but he does wrap it in an awful pretty package.”

“And he is *so* into you, Doc,” Ashleigh commented.

“Really? You think so?”

“Think? *I know* so. You know as well as me that he's screwed his way through every nurse in this place except Matt, Randy and your Dani. And not for lack of trying with Dani, by the way, but she's totally in love with her husband who's deployed overseas in Afghanistan. But even when he was dating them, they all said, every time you walked into the room he acted like the girl he was with wasn't even there.”

“Wow,” I said, opening the door to my own office and leading the cute receptionist inside. “How clueless am I, if I didn't see that?”

She giggled. “Not clueless,” she said. “Everybody knows that you only have eyes for Holly.”

“Yeah,” I said. “That's true, too.”

“Still, I would *totally* hit that,” she said, looking over her shoulder at Dr. Travis' closed door. “Too bad I got hired after he stopped hitting on the girls here.”

“You're terrible,” I told her. Inside my purse, I could hear my phone ringing. I wiped mustard from the corner of my mouth daintily with a paper napkin and dug it out. “Oh, speaking of Holly... I need to take this, do you mind?”

Ashleigh patted my hand and took her lunch off my desk, taking it back to her reception desk. I took a moment to admire her swaying tush before sliding the bar on my smartphone from red to green and pressing it against my ear, loving the little clack as it struck my earring.

“Hi,” I said, a flood of affection pouring out of my voice. “I was just thinking about you.”

“What's going on?” Holly asked me, her own voice brightening.

“Not much,” I told her. “Just a couple more patients to see, then I'm on my way home.”

“So, you remember the other day – and I mean *before*, by the way, before all this happened – we talked about how miserable I was?” she asked.

“Uh-huh,” I said, playing with a lock of my blonde hair, just loving the sound of her voice.

“And you said that if my job made me feel so shitty, that I should just quit?”

“I remember,” I told her.

“Well, does that offer still stand?” Holly asked. “I'm serious, Brooke. They're trying to get me to take one of those promotions where I take on twice as much responsibility and don't make any more money. I'm so sick of being their bitch. I was about to just beg off sick for the rest of the day, but then I remembered what you said, and I thought...”

“Do it,” I told her. “Get the hell out of there. I'm a surgeon, now, for Chrissakes. I think we have plenty of money in the bank. Go find a job that you *do* like.”

“I already have a few ideas about that,” Holly said. “I'm gonna do it, Brooke. Right now. I'm gonna go hand in my letter of resignation.”

“Good for you,” I told her proudly. “It's about time.”

She let out a pent-up breath. “Good thing I'm already out on vacation starting tomorrow.”

“You are?” I asked.

“Don't you remember? My birthday present?” she said, a little incredulous.

“I don't... your birthday was last month...”

“I'm on your table tomorrow,” Holly said. “Six a.m., I'm all yours.”

\* \* \*

I wiped my chin and looked into the mirror to begin the task of repairing my makeup, now that I'd thrown up every bit of the sandwich I'd anticipated so much. Tomorrow morning, I did surgery. For the first time in my life, I would be expected to safely cut into another human being and remove or add something, then stitch them back together and somehow miraculously keep them alive throughout the entire ordeal. No matter that I'd never once done anything even remotely like that before. This new world, this new life I had didn't seem to mind that it would be the first time I'd ever even held a scalpel in my hand.

Nor did it seem to mind that the first person for me to use that scalpel on would be the person I loved most in all the universe.

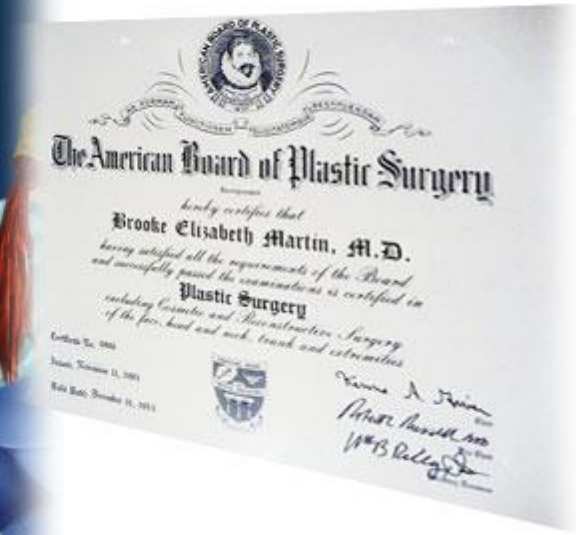
I finished my patients for the day in a detached, numb haze, barely even remembering the patients who came into my office or the examination room down the hallway. I stammered a

few good-byes to the nurses and staffers who bid me good day as I replaced my lab coat with my topcoat and walked hazily outside to my car for the drive home. Holly was there, but asleep, as I stumbled through my cleaning, started a load of laundry and made a very uninspired dinner. Holly slept long and hard – I was sure she slept off the long-held-in stress of her job and the gleeful release of finally walking away – so I ate alone, then nodded off on the couch watching the BBC World News on public television. I didn't stir until my phone alarm went off, jolting me from unsettled dreams in a gasping panic.

I showered and shaved my legs, then dried my hair and styled it back in a very meticulous French braid which I knew to be ideal for days when I had surgery. I applied my makeup in a haze, barely even acknowledging Holly's kiss and whispered “good morning” as she slid in beside me to brush her teeth. I could see the strain of going without her customary coffee and cigarette first thing, but she obeyed my strict orders of nothing by mouth and no nicotine prior to her procedure. We drove to the surgery center – across the street from my clinic – in relative silence, then I handed her off to Danielle while I went back to the OR and scrubbed up. My hands moved mechanically, going through the tasks as if done hundreds of times, and I hoped that would be enough.

By the time I stepped into the operating room, Holly was already anesthetized and had the tube placed in her throat, and Danielle checked her vital signs and the ventilator dutifully as I entered. Holly's face sheltered behind the drape, and only her chest was exposed, lit harshly by the surgical lights which left no shadows on her creamy skin.

I sighed, poising the scalpel over her exposed chest, marked with blue dotted lines to delineate body contours and incision sites. I let out long breath and Danielle smiled at me. “Relax, Doc,” she told me companionably. “How many of these have you done, anyway?”



“It's easier when they're not your favorite breasts in all the world,” I said hoarsely.

“Try not to dwell on it,” Danielle said. “You're a brilliant surgeon. Your hands already know what to do. Besides, I saw the diploma on the wall. Board-certified, all that stuff. You have the papers to prove it. So try and relax, okay? You got this.”

I smiled. “I guess you're right,” I said, clearly picturing the board certification in its frame on my wall and feeling a lovely solid wave of confidence spread up my spine. “So it's breast augmentation, abdominoplasty, liposuction and gluteal implants, right?”

“And lip implants, chin implants rhinoplasty and an eyelid lift,” Danielle said, consulting the checklist. “Complete redo.”

“Better get started, then,” I said. “I still have Mrs. Johansson's boob job this afternoon. Making the first incision now.”

And, just like that, Dr. Brooke Martin, M.D., board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon, moved her scalpel deftly across the skin and got to work.

\* \* \*

I walked into the recovery room, where Holly – bandaged and sore – sat up and sipped water from a big insulated mug. She looked like the Mummy; gauze wrapped her chin, face, nose, chest, midsection and backside, with a few surgical drains dangling here and there.

“Hi, baby,” I said brightly. She turned slowly to face me. “How do you feel?”

Her voice muffled and muted past her swollen lips and face. “Like I got hit by a truck.”

“Well, you did just go to sleep and let me stab you a whole bunch of times,” I told her. “Everything went perfectly, honey. No problems at all. I just need to go and check on Mrs. Johansson over in Room Three and then I can load you up and take you home.”

“How soon before we can get started?” Holly asked.

“Get started?” I asked.

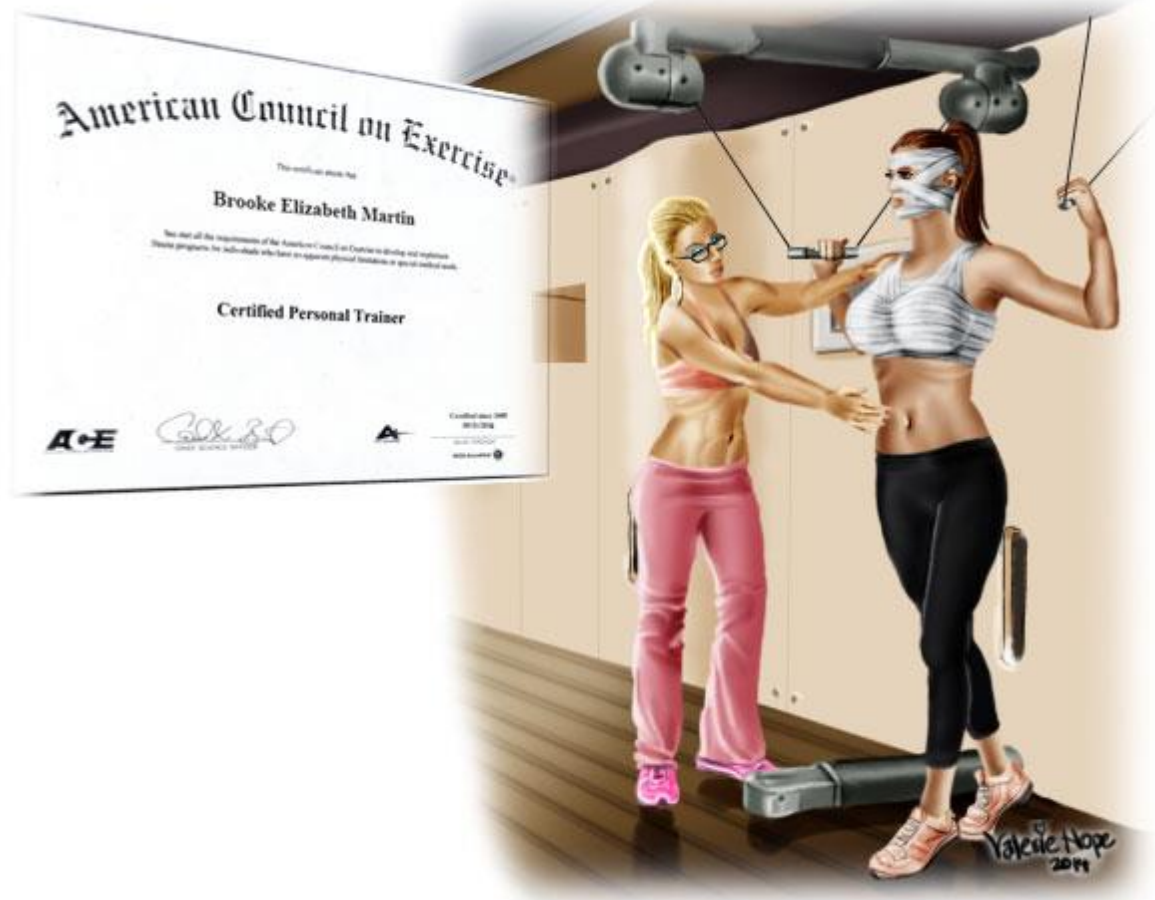
“With the rest of it,” she said. “You promised me a total transformation. I’m ready to get started.”

\* \* \*

I shepherded Holly's recovery in addition to seeing my patients and keeping the house, leaving little time for sleep or pleasure. I distinctly noticed the lack of sex – something totally unfamiliar from a feminine standpoint, making me waspish and, I hated to admit, *bitchy* around my co-workers – but the sheer amount of surgery Holly received at one time made her recovery a long and very painful process. At least she didn't develop any infections – my medical knowledge told me she was an extreme risk for staph – and I badgered her daily into getting up and around and making sure she stretched and used the cruelly abused muscles.

After about four days, I led her into the gym for some light resistance exercise. She couldn't do much, and had very little stamina, but I stepped into the role of both watchful guardian and patient cheerleader as if born to it, coaching her to exercise properly and encouraging her when she felt drained, pushing her where she needed pushing and allowing her to rest when she reached her limits.

She spent the next week dutifully following my instructions, working out faithfully and giving it her very best effort while I stood by, making minute corrections to her stance and her body mechanics and keeping her focused. Again, like I'd done the first time yesterday when I inserted a tampon and when the night before that when I'd plucked my eyebrows for the first time in my life, I wondered just where the knowledge of exercise and personal motivation sprang from; in my mind's eye, I saw an expensive mahogany frame on the wall of my home office, filled with a certificate decrying me as a certified personal trainer, educated and trained in helping people strengthen themselves and lose weight.



Holly's recovery took on speed under my tutelage of exercise and healthy eating. I removed the bandages from Holly's midsection at the end of the first week and revealed a flat-as-a-board tummy, dimpled with gentle swells of abdominal muscle – not so defined as my own, but much more feminine and sensual. I longed to lay my head against that wonderful combination of soft and firm and let my soft hair spread out around her, to trace her adorable innie bellybutton with a long fingernail and pepper her entire midsection with soft little baby kisses until she moaned.

I looked forward eagerly to the ends of Holly's workouts – becoming more and more strenuous as she added strength, flexibility and endurance under my patient and watchful eye – so that I could begin my own. I never remembered having much in the way of strength or stamina before, in my male life, having been only generously described as average. But now – I worked out like a demon, with minimal pauses for rest or recuperation between sets of weights, long runs on the treadmill which caused my small breasts to bounce deliciously against me and my soft hair to whip back and forth behind my head in its customary ponytail, covered in sweat and loving the exertion. Exercise, always a chore wracked with unpleasantness, now filled me with joy and achievement. I considered it *fun*, and a great reliever of the gathering stress inside me from lack of sexual release. Just for the sheer pleasure of *doing* it, I walked over the the hanging heavy bag in the corner near our rack of hand-weights and jumped onto it, clamping it vise-like

between my muscular thighs and hanging upside down through sheer force, then cranking out a set of fifty sit-ups in about a minute. The burn and ache in my stomach felt *good* to me, like a reward. The whispers of the nurses in my clinic, meant to be private from my hearing, talking about “what *insane* shape” I was in gave me a special glow that felt as good, in its own way, as hearing Holly say that she loved me. I even found myself surfing the Internet during my precious leisure time, looking for 10K races and half-marathons and even considering a triathlon, just to prove that I *could*.

Midway through the third week, after taking out Holly's surgical drains, a huge package arrived by UPS at our doorstep. I opened it to reveal a mass of very expensive cosmetics and skincare products, as well as a complete set of hair extensions and a professional haircolor set-up. Holly nearly skipped with joy at the news it had arrived, and all but dragged me into the kitchen to drape towels and plastic around a chair and the floor.

Again, the unknown knowledge in my head asserted itself. Intimate knowledge of every last tube and pot of powder, every bottle or vial, sprang into my head in its entirety. I used foil squares and a mixed paste, separating Holly's hair into sections and coating each one liberally, then sent her into the bathroom to rinse as soon as my kitchen timer rang. I spent the next two hours using a little hot-iron and complicated braiding to lace long, light blonde hair extensions into her scalp, then gluing permanent lash extensions onto her eyes, plucking her eyebrows and making her face up dramatically, using vivid colors and heavy lines, seeing yet another frame on the wall in my office, occupied by yet another certificate, stating unequivocally that Brooke Elizabeth Martin was a certified cosmetologist, trained to do nails, hair and makeup.



I sent Holly into the bathroom to remove the last of the dressings from her abused face, then spent a happy hour covering her bruising and the like with heavy theatrical makeup. We chatted amiably throughout, gossiping (something altogether new to me and *intensely* enjoyable) and talking about nothing of consequence, another well-honed skill necessary to the vocation of the professional hairdresser, manicurist or makeup artist.

“We need to hurry,” Holly bade me as I brushed dark powder into the creases of her eyelids, giving her a smoky evening look the way she'd requested. “We're running low on time.”

“What's the rush?” I asked.

“I have a job interview in an hour and a half,” she told me. “I still have to get dressed.”

“You didn't tell me,” I said in protest.

“I didn't know the extensions were gonna take that long, honey,” she explained placatingly. “I was gonna slip out and make it a big surprise.”

“Well, go get dressed, I can finish the rest after you're ready,” I told her. “And shame on you. You can't drive, you're still on painkillers. Tell me the address, I'll give you a ride. You should know better.”

“Yes, doctor,” she sighed dramatically, then cloistered herself in her bedroom to dress. I cleaned up the accumulated mess of the extensive makeover from the counter, organizing the new cosmetics expertly on Holly's side of the double vanity, and waited to see the “big reveal.”



The door opened and she stepped out, striking a seductive pose against the doorframe, purring, “Well? What do you think?” Long, platinum blonde hair spilled over narrow shoulders to frame a seductive oval face above a long, lissome neck. Huge – and I do mean huge, since I had been the one to inject the 1200 cc's of silicone into the cavernous implants – 38DD breasts strained the tolerance of a red lace bra above a flat chest, a tiny waist achieved through dutiful exercise and liposuction, rounded hips and long, flawless legs ending in dainty feet.

“My God,” I breathed. “Incredible.”

She slipped into a sequined “little black dress” which only barely covered her enormous breasts – making me wonder *just what kind of job interview makes you dress like that, anyway?* in the

back of my mind but unable to voice anything resembling a criticism in the face of her naked sexuality.

She forced me to hustle, not allowing me much in the way of time to admire my handiwork *or* the breathtaking sexual masterpiece my wife had become, almost pushing me into her electric-blue Lexus SUV – another addition from the magical transformation which happened when our backs were turned, Holly telling me it had simply been waiting for her in her parking space at work when she came out – and following the GPS on her phone to give me instructions. I drove her to a very upscale part of the warehouse district, an early convert in the city's gentrification, and let her out of the car. She trotted around on dangerously high heels, making her mince adorably and her new gigantic boobs bounce and threaten to escape their tenuous sequined restraint at any upswing, opened my door and pressed a sticky lipstick kiss on my cheek, whispering “Thank you” in a way so heartfelt that I grinned like an idiot and melted, emotionally, into a giant puddle of goo, right there in her driver's seat.

“I'll be back in a little while,” she said. “Go get some coffee or something, okay? I'll text you when I'm done. Have fun, baby! I love you!”

I watched her mince and jiggle up the stairs to a warehouse loft in utter astonishment.

I had never seen her so happy.

And it was all my doing.

## Part Five

MY SINGLE CUP OF COFFEE turned into three, along with a cover-to-cover reading of this month's *Glamour* and *Women's Health*, then a long stroll through the nearby bookstore, before my phone dinged happily with a message from Holly. I drove the few blocks back to the place where I'd dropped her off and she met me on the curb, tossing her cigarette and waving happily to me as I pulled close and unlocked the doors.

She looked a little disheveled and even a touch sweaty, her hair mussed and a nervous smile on her face. I could scarcely contain my curiosity while she buckled herself in and smoothed imaginary wrinkles out of her tight-as-sin sequined cocktail dress.

She slid a pair of designer Dolce & Gabbana sunglasses onto her slender, newly-modified nose and sat back, finger-combing her long blonde hair, playing completely coy until I could stand it no longer.

“Well?” I demanded, half whine and half giggle.

“Well what?” she teased, her nose wrinkling adorably.

“Well, how did it *go*, baby?”

“Oh, the interview?”

“Of course the interview. You're killing me, here.”

She laughed. “I got the job,” she said happily, doing a little seat-dance.

“Good for you, Holly,” I congratulated. “How was it?”

“Oh, y'know, the usual stuff. Do you have any experience, where did you work before, are you okay with stuff like anal and gangbang, that kind of thing,” she said.

“I'm sorry, what was that again?”

“Well, I'm okay with gangbang but I'm on the fence about anal. I didn't really tell them yes or no, I thought I could just experiment a little and see how I feel,” she told me. “Then, they brought in this gorgeous stud of an actor and had me do a little impromptu scene with him, right there on the couch...”

“You just interviewed to be in porno movies?” I said, aghast.

“What did you think I was gonna do, answer their phones?” she laughed. “Baby, you can't think I stayed married to a man for all those years because I didn't like cock. And I love you – don't ever think that I don't, you're the light of my life. But I never wanted to give up dick. Now, I never have to.”

“But... you're gonna fuck for money?” I said, tears gathering unbidden in the corners of my eyes, threatening to wreck my meticulous makeup.

“If you're saying that makes me a whore, then you're right,” she said. Did I miss my guess, or was there a little note of pride in her voice? “I don't care. When you get right down to it, baby, we're all whores, down deep inside. Look, I didn't come to this decision lightly. It's not just something I picked out of the want ads. I had a real dilemma: how to be in love with you, and stay emotionally faithful to you, but still get the dick I wanted at the same time. Now I can. You have to understand something, Brooke, these guys I'm gonna be fucking – they're nothing to me. I fuck them, I get paid, I come home to you and love only you. It's business. For me, and also for them. There's no danger of falling in love, no risk to our marriage. It works out perfectly.”

I sniffled. “I didn't know you were even considering this,” I sobbed. “You never even talked to me about it, asked me what I thought...”

“Of course I didn't,” she told me. “Because I know you. When you try to plan for things, Brooke, you overthink them and you ruin it for yourself. You did it when you were still a man. I can call you a lot of things, baby doll, but *spontaneous* isn't one of them. And don't get me wrong – I'm not criticizing. You being a careful person, a planner, has saved my ass a million times and probably will a million more. But I knew you would be more liable to adjust to this if I just got in the car with you and said, 'it's done' than if I talked it over with you beforehand.”

I dabbed at my eyes and nose delicately with a tissue from my purse. “You really think I’m not spontaneous?”

“I never wanted you to be,” she said, patting my hand warmly. “It’s probably why that didn’t change to suit my desires along with the rest of you. I’m not an idiot, Brooke, I can see that everything has changed around us both so that I could have what I wanted. I like your cautious nature. But I also know that it can hold me back if I don’t just barrel ahead sometimes.”

“Easier to get forgiveness than permission, right?” I sniffled.

“I’m hoping you come to see it as nothing that needs forgiving,” she said. “My plan was just to give you time to adjust.”

“Solid plan,” I said grudgingly.

“For what it’s worth, baby, I mean to extend the same latitude to you,” she told me. “I only demand emotional fidelity from you. You can fuck around whenever you like. You’re only allowed to love me, but you can spread those gorgeous legs of yours for whomever strikes your fancy.”

“And if I only want to spread them for you?” I asked.

“Then only spread them for me,” she told me. “It’s completely your call to make.”

“I don’t know, baby,” I said in a small voice. “I guess I thought – with all these changes – that I would suddenly be enough for you. That you wouldn’t need anyone else.”

“I don’t,” she said. “Brooke, honey – if I suddenly said to you, ‘I really feel like some Oreos and milk,’ what would you do?”

I shrugged. “I’d go to the store and get you Oreos and milk.”

“And if I said, ‘I feel like a vacation in St. Bart’s,’ what would you do?”

“Go online and book a hotel and plane tickets,” I told her honestly.

“And if I said, ‘I feel like getting a great big cock stuffed up inside me and a hot load of cum all over my tits,’ what would you do then?” she asked, one eyebrow raised.

I cleared my throat. “I guess I’d get you some condoms and tell you to be careful.”

“And I found a way to steer clear of the bar scene, all the weirdos and STDs and uncertainty. A pool of clean, healthy, unemotional, well-hung guys who have no intention of calling me back to choose from, and a nice fat paycheck to go along with it,” she explained. “I’m still waiting for you to show me the downside.”

“The downside is, none of those well-hung guys are *me*,” I said.

“No,” she told me, “they only wish they were you. Baby, let me try this out. My contract is for four movies before we renegotiate. It’s like a trial run. I’ll tell you what. You let me have this

– let me fulfill the contract. If, by the end of four movies, you decide you can't handle it, then I won't re-up. I'll quit and find something else. But if you find out that it works...”

“I guess I can handle that,” I told her.

“Good,” she said. “Y'know, Brooke, you've only been a woman now for six weeks. I still have an awful lot to teach you about this. If you trust me, and if you let it – this might actually even turn out to be a lot of fun for both of us.”

“I do trust you,” I told her. “I just wanted to be your everything.”

“No, you don't,” she said softly, stroking my hair. I loved the feel of her long acrylic nails against my scalp, bringing me out in goosebumps along my shoulders and neck. It made me want to purr and I felt my hurt and indignation leeching away. “I don't want you shouldering that kind of responsibility.”

“And if I wanted to shoulder it?”

“I wouldn't let you,” she said. “Don't be my everything. Just be my Brooke. That's all I want.”

“Okay,” I said, sniffing again and trying to offer her a brave smile. “I'll do my best.”

\* \* \*

We talked about everything *but* my wife's new career for the next day, concentrating instead on decorating the house for Christmas. The house configured itself, during the transformation, to accommodate being occupied by two women now, and all the Christmas decorations were in lightweight waterproof containers instead of moldy cardboard boxes now, and kept stored low instead of up a rickety attic ladder. I didn't need to be the 'big strong man' to get them down. We spent the day in our pajamas, drinking wine, and put up the tree together, kissing under the mistletoe and hanging the stockings. Even our decorations were nicer than before, and I felt an emotional connection to them which never made itself known in my days as a man. Decorating for the holidays, as a male, never delighted me – it was a backbreaking chore. Truth be told, I *hated* it. Not any more. I felt some kind of emotion with every single ornament I unwrapped and hung on the artificial tree.

The sun crested overhead and began its short downwards winter descent by the time I finally dressed myself in a skin-tight sweater and overalls with fuzzy Ugg boots and a cute pink stocking cap made to look like a cat, pink fuzzy gloves and a heavy denim jacket to go outside and string the outdoor lights along the gables. Holly bundled up in a pair of second-skin jeans tucked into snakeskin high heeled boots, a knitted cap with a pompom and tassels hanging to either side of her face and a puffy blue ski jacket. She held the ladder for me as I scaled, a laboriously untangled string of lights in my hand, and started the arduous process. My system of bent nails, hammered in a decade ago, had been replaced by handy plastic hooks spaced much more closely together – the magic adjusted reality to suit my new long nails and shorter reach and let me keep my gloves on, with my lowered tolerance to cold – and made the job go much faster than it had previously. We girded the eaves in record time and admired our handiwork with arms around one another, kissing passionately in our yard for all the world to see, then used the last of the fading daylight to put out the big rubber snowman and the little penguin 'helpers' at

the base of the sprawling oak tree next to our door. I found a hammer – newer than the one in my toolbox from my male days, and lighter – inside and set to the task of hammering in the little stakes which would hold the whole thing down in the wind. Nearby, Holly rummaged in a box for the weatherproof cables which we used to tie the display to the stakes, and my eyes riveted themselves to the perfect bubble curves of her augmented and enhanced derrière. I missed my mark and whacked my thumb full force, howling out in pain and jumping around in circles.

Holly ran to me and pulled off my glove, looking at the finger carefully to determine the extent of injury. I hadn't even chipped a nail – just a glancing blow, probably just a little bruise, nothing that would affect my ability to perform surgery. Then, I noticed that Holly wasn't looking at my thumb any more. She was looking at my breasts with a very considering look on her face.

“What?” I demanded. A part of me blamed her – and her perfect, delectable ass – for distracting me.

“Nothing,” she said. “I just noticed your nipples.”

“So? It's cold out here,” I told her.

“They weren't that hard before. It's the first time I've seen you that pointy since we came outside, actually,” she said with barely-disguised amusement.

“I don't see your point,” I told her.

“Brooke, honey – are you turned on?” She leaned close, then sniffed deeply of the air near my belly, then giggled. “Oh my God. You are. You're totally turned on.”

She was right. In my shock and the resulting indignation, even I hadn't paid any attention to the wetness between my legs and the tingles running up and down my spine.

“Brooke, baby, do you... I mean... are you into pain?” she asked, a little shocked. The porno actress, shocked. I could scarcely believe it.

“Into pain?” I asked. “What does that even mean, Holly, I don't...”

She interrupted me with a full-armed slap to my face which knocked me sideways. My ears rang and my cheek stung from much more than the bitter north wind as I looked up to face her, lips parted and naked desire burning in my sapphire eyes. I moaned a little.

“Holy shit,” Holly breathed. “I thought that was just a passing fancy.”

“You thought *what* was a passing fancy?” I asked, still vibrating with awakened sexual desire.

“When you were still David,” she said. “I had this fantasy. I don't know where it came from, it just showed up one day, but I would imagine tying you up and spanking you and making you do whatever I wanted. I used to masturbate in the shower thinking of it. But nothing ever came of it, and gradually the fantasy just faded away. I never thought it actually *said* anything about me, but now – with you changing to match my desires, maybe it means that I was a lot more kinky than I thought I was.”

“So wait a second,” I said. “Never mind that I got all hot and bothered when you slapped me. You mean to tell me that you got all hot and bothered when you did it?”

She opened her coat and showed me her own proud, erect nipples poking through the nothing-to-the-imagination lycra Under Armour top she wore beneath her coat. She bit her bottom lip in desire.

“Oh, honey,” she purred throatily, sucking one finger subconsciously as she looked me over in what I suspected was a whole new light, “the next few nights are gonna get *so* interesting.”

\* \* \*

I drove home from work so nervous I could barely keep the car on the road. My hands shook so badly that I'd needed Danielle to give Mrs. Lancaster her Botox for my last appointment of the day. Holly had told me – *commanded* me, actually, leaving me utterly breathless to hear it – to be home promptly at six o'clock. Following her instructions precisely, I walked inside the door and hung my coat, then stripped off all my clothes and step into the pair of six-inch spike heeled black patent leather pumps waiting next to the door. The incredibly high heels made my feet ache and pinched my toes viciously, and made me take the tiniest mincing steps to preserve my balance, but if Holly wanted them, then I would wear them no matter how uncomfortable. I walked into the bedroom shyly, scared and excited all at the same time, looking around like I expected Holly to jump out of any closet and beat the hell out of me at any moment.

It made me so wet I actually feared I might drip on the carpet.

I trembled by the time I walked into the middle of the bedroom, looking curiously at the dark, polished wooden chair sitting at the foot of our bed. I jumped back, standing at rigid attention and teetering on the colossal heels, as I heard the door shut behind me.

“Eyes straight ahead,” Holly's voice – soft and menacing but filled with throaty desire – commanded me. I felt her step up behind me, soft breasts with hard nipples against my back, and she lowered a strange object over my head. I'd only seen ball gags in pictures before, and I never got a good look at this one before Holly's hands forced it roughly between my teeth and buckled it tightly into place behind my head. I breathed through my nose and tried, experimentally, to make a sound. The tiniest little whimper escaped the gag.

Eyes still submissively forward, Holly grabbed each of my arms and fastened a tight leather cuff, lined with fleece, around each wrist with a large padlock. A stainless steel D-ring, mounted to each cuff, then attached to a quick-release on the end of a stout-looking nylon rope. Behind me, I heard a loud snap and the release of a spring, the *whir* of rope being pulled through loops, and my arms jerked cruelly up, above my head until I nearly left the floor. Only the pointed toes of the painful heels I wore touched the carpet.

“Perfect,” Holly breathed as she walked around in front of me. She wore thigh-high leather boots, polished and shiny in the dim light of the bedroom, and a leather corset which left her breasts bare. Her long, extended hair gathered into a luxurious horsetail at the crown of her head and spilled in chalky waves over one shoulder. She stooped in front of me and fastened two more cuffs, identical to the ones on my wrists, to each ankle and then clipped a rigid bar between

them, leaving me unable to close my legs. I dangled helplessly in front of her as she toyed with a cat-o'-nine in one hand.

“My God,” she said wonderingly. “I only thought you looked beautiful before. But like this, all trussed up and completely in my power. Brooke, you're the most beautiful creature I've ever seen.”

I must have blushed, because she blew me a little kiss from a red-glossed *moué* and laughed. She slipped the glasses from my nose, blurring the world, and folded them carefully to set them on top of the chest-of-drawers.

“But, beautiful or not, you are still a naughty little bitch,” she growled, suddenly menacing again. “Making me explain myself like you did about my incredible new job. You should have been happy for me and not said a fucking word. But no. You had to go and be a selfish little brat about it.”

*Whack.* The leather fingers of the cat-o'-nine hissed through the air and impacted the trembling flesh of my bare ass. I yelped through the gag and squirmed in my imprisoning restraints, making chains jingle and ropes creak.

“And then you had the audacity to judge me,” she said. *Whack.* I squealed again, spasming.

“Inferring that I was too wild,” she went on. *Whack.* This one brought tears.

“Well, you stuck-up little brat, I'm here to tell you, I'm not the problem.” *Whack.* I screamed, twisting and writhing in my bonds. The juices of my intense arousal ran down my legs and filled the room with my musky scent. I felt sure if she hit me again, I would break down in tears. Just as sure as I was that if she hit me again, I would cum like a madwoman, right there in my shackles.

“I'm not the wild one. It's you who isn't wild *enough*,” she said. *Whack.* Both my predictions came true. I sagged against the restraints, sobbing, until Holly raised my chin with the handle of her flogger.

“Time for you to learn to be a little wilder,” she said, eyes hard and malicious and *sexy*. I almost came again, just looking at them. “Or at least look the part.”

She turned my head to one side with the handle of the whip, towards the bathroom door. I felt her soft cheek against my own tear-streaked one. The door opened, flooding the dim bedroom with light, and a darkened figure – a very large and muscular-looking one – filled the doorway. I could only just make out that he wore nitrile surgical gloves and carried a large fishing tackle box in one hand.

Holly stepped behind me, and I heard the scratch of a match. I smelled the sharp, stale odor of a cigarette in the room. “This is James,” Holly said, pausing to blow smoke. “He's here to help us make you wilder. He's really good at what he does. You're going to hate him before it's all over.”

I heard another snap and suddenly the tension holding me upright disappeared. I sank painfully to my knees in a cascade of falling rope, only seeing Holly's spiked heels and the toes of her

boots. I felt a strange urge to kiss those boots, but could not with the gag in my mouth. Strong hands – Holly's and the hulking James – lifted me into the wooden chair I'd found. Two arms winged out from behind it, standing straight out from the back of the chair, and my wrist-cuffs shackled onto latches at either end, keeping my arms held straight out and unable to move. James secured my ankles to the legs of the chair while Holly fastened a stiff leather collar around my neck, attaching it to the chair as well, keeping me sitting completely straight and my head pulled back at an uncomfortable angle.

Holly slipped the gag from between my teeth. "I'm doing this because I want to hear you scream," she purred to me, "but not because I want a single word of your bullshit. Not a word. You say one thing during this, and I swear I'll whip the hide off of you. Understand?"

Scared to say a word, I swallowed hard and nodded. Holly patted my head. "Good girl."

Holly stood and took a long, contemplative drag from her cigarette. "I think we should start with her tits," she told the silent James, who only nodded and opened his tackle box. He came back to me with a long-handled surgical clamp in one hand and a cruel-looking needle in the other. I smelled the sharp tang of antiseptic, mingled with my own arousal and Holly's cigarette. My eyes cut over and I saw a little jewelry dumbbell sitting in a dish of antiseptic atop the tackle box, and realization dawned.

I whimpered as the clamp closed painfully around my erect nipple, then screamed full throated as the needle went through. I ground my hips into the leather seat of the chair as I came harder than I ever had before. Behind it all, I could hear Holly's throaty chuckle as I watched her smoke and masturbate to the scene unfolding before her.



I stood in the bathroom much later, gazing in the mirror, clad only in a loose-fitting workout cover-up and some thigh-high athletic tube socks which kept my legs and feet comfortably warm. Every part of my body ached – my ears, now pierced with four holes in each lobe and two in each cartilage; my nose, with a glittering diamond now embedded in the skin above my right nostril; my swollen tongue, now pierced with a stainless steel stud right through its center; each of my nipples, now held painfully and permanently erect by a little dumbbell threaded through each; my navel, which dangled a little rhinestone heart, and the hood of my clitoris, which sported a 'doorknocker' ring held closed by a screwed-on ball which pressed directly on my clit and make me shudder every time I sat down; and the small of my back, where I now carried a tribal tattoo with a pink heart in the center just above the crack of my behind, in perfect 'tramp-stamp' position.

I finished my examination of myself and set about applying topical antibiotic to each of my new and unexpected piercings, then gave myself a shot of prednisone in my thigh – far from the worst needle stick I'd endured that night – to keep the swelling to a minimum. Holly had been right about one thing – other than my dark-rimmed glasses, I did look like a wild biker chick now. I

would never be able to completely hide my other life from the general public again. And I literally felt dehydrated and drained from the number of times I'd cum, shackled to that chair and then face-down, hogtied on the bed while I'd gotten the tattoo. The lingering tingles from the countless orgasms, plus the still-surging endorphin high from the excruciatingly painful piercings, left me giggly and vacuous and made me struggle to keep my balance. At least the difficulty in stringing together a coherent thought allowed me to easily admit the truth of the encounter: I had loved every second of it. Were I sober, I could not have accepted that so easily. But I did love it. I was submissive, and a sexual masochist, and loved being helpless and I loved being hurt. It turned me on and brought me to orgasm after shuddering orgasm.

I expected to feel shame, or at least to feel *dirty* after I'd been tied down and forced to submit to body modification against my will, but instead I just felt clean. Light enough to qualify as weightless. And I could see, in the background of the entire painful ordeal, how *happy* and *fulfilled* it made Holly. That made everything worth it. Even if it didn't make me cum like fireworks, I would have endured it, knowing how happy it made my wife. The multiple orgasms for me were just icing.

I padded into the kitchen in my sock feet to get some ice for my various swellings and almost bumped into Holly, who sipped a glass of water and looked out the window at the dim view of the stars in the city lights nearby. I slipped my arms around her and pulled myself into her back, burying my face in her hair and moaning happily.

"It's gonna be ridiculous to hear me squeak for a few days," I told her around my grossly swollen tongue. She laughed and leaned back against me.

"I don't mind," she said. "I think you sound adorable. And it just reminds me how incredible it's gonna feel when you eat my pussy once that swelling goes down. I may get one myself."

"That was incredible, sweetheart," I told her. "I never felt like that before. Not ever."

"It was intense," Holly agreed. "I don't know if I could take a constant diet of it, but wow."

"If you wanted a constant diet, I'd stay with it," I told her honestly. "I loved it."

"I'm really glad."

"Can I ask you something, baby?"

"Sure," she said.

"Even if we don't do this all the time," I told her, turning her around to face me, "could we keep one thing about it constant? The one thing I love most."

"What's that?" she asked, curious.

"Will you stay the one in charge?" I asked. "I love when you make decisions. When you tell me what to do. I feel so safe and loved. I want that to be always."

"Anything for you, little angel," she said, kissing the tip of my nose. "Now get yourself to bed. You're probably as worn out as I am, and I have a busy day tomorrow."

I curtsied, this time because I wanted to and not because of my autopilot. “Yeth, ma'am,” I told her lovingly, and scampered off to bed with my ice-pack.

\* \* \*

I called Holly from work the next day, just because I hated the distance between us and not seeing her after such an intense experience of the night before. The nurses and staff at the clinic all commented behind my back where they thought I wouldn't hear about my multiply-pierced ears, nose and tongue. All of them seemed a bit taken aback at my wildness, but admiring at the same time. Like they respected me more because I'd managed to keep it a secret from them for so long.

“Hey, baby,” Holly's voice said brightly on the other end of the line. “I'm so glad you don't sound like Daffy Duck any more.”

“You and me both,” I said. “I just have to keep ice water going all day. If I let it dry out, it swells up again. God, baby, everything hurts. You put so much metal in my ears I can hardly hold the phone against them.”

“What's up?” she asked me.

“I just wanted to tell you that we're running behind,” I said, and one could almost hear my petulant pout. “I'm gonna be a little late getting home tonight.”

“Don't worry about it,” she told me. “Tell you what – I was going to go out later. Just feeling a little cabin fever. Thought I'd put on a cocktail dress and go for a drink at that new bar we saw on Seventh. Why don't you meet me there after work?”

“That sounds really fun,” I told her. “I don't know what time I'll get away, though.”

“When you get there, you get there,” Holly said. “I can't wait to see you.”

“Me, neither,” I told her. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

This day resisted any attempt to force it to hurry – almost slowing down to a crawl out of spite if I tried to rush through – so it felt like days had passed before I finally pulled on my woolen topcoat and crocheted cap and scarf and headed out into the first flurries of winter to my car. Luckily, the upscale bar which Holly selected lay on back streets, so I never had to deal with the freeway at five thirty in the snow. Seeing Holly's Lexus SUV parked near the door made my heart skip. I grabbed my purse and hurried inside, out of the wind.

Holly saw me and waved grandly from the bar, motioning me over. I shed my coat and took the stool beside her, ordering a vodka and cranberry from the bartender.

“Wow,” Holly said at my choice of hard liquor. I usually avoided it even when I had been male. “Rough day?”

“Not rough,” I told her. “It just wouldn't end. All I could think about was seeing you, and the patients just kept coming in and they never seemed to stop.”

“Poor baby,” she told me fondly. “Hopefully, this will cheer you up.” She clinked her glass with the one the bartender handed me and we sipped in companionable silence for a few minutes, just listening to the babble of the voices and the canned music.

“This is kind of a neat place,” she told me after a while. “There seem to be some pretty cool people here, I’ve talked to one or two of them. And don’t look now, but – I think that one is giving you the eye.” She gestured discreetly to a tall, athletic-looking thirtysomething with sandy blonde hair and a chiseled jaw where I spotted the implant scar – *he should’ve found a better surgeon* – instantly. He saw me looking and gave me a shy and boyish smile that looked just the slightest bit rehearsed. A player.



“Hmph,” I said. “Too slick for my tastes.”

“Aw, don’t be so standoffish,” Holly chided. “He’s cute. He looks a little like Thor.” She referenced Chris Hemsworth, the actor who set women’s hearts racing the world over. Strangely enough, thinking about the muscular Australian even made my own heart flutter a little, against my will.

“Go on,” Holly said. “Powder your nose and then go over and talk to him. It’ll be fun.”

“I don't know, Holly, I just wanted to see you...”

“Do it,” she commanded sternly.

“Yes, ma'am,” I said obediently, slipping my compact out of my purse and checking my makeup quickly. I dabbed a bit of powder onto my nose, touched up my lip gloss and took my drink over to the corner table where the man sat.

“Hi,” I said. “Mind if I join you?”

He sat up straighter and moved his coat off of the chair next to him. “Please do,” he said. “I'm Jeff.”

I offered him a slim hand, palm downwards, which he took in his very warm one. My mind whirled quickly, trying to think of a quick alias so I wouldn't give this guy my real name. I didn't want him to ever find me outside of this place. “Jeff, I'm Nicole,” I told him, giving him the name of my seventh-grade girlfriend as I sat down next to him and crossed my legs demurely.

We sank into where-are-you-from-what-do-you-do small talk, back and forth, and I let Jeff think he worked his practiced charms on me expertly. I played with my earrings and made lots of eye contact, just like I'd seen the girls do when I hunted the bars for company on the other side of the gender divide, playing him like he fancied himself playing me. I could see Holly, still at the bar, watching me like a hawk even through the constant barrage of men who came up and bought her drinks. I suffered through a long and entirely too detailed account of Jeff's trip to Barbados, designed to impress me, I think, when I saw Holly tap on her phone with manicured thumbs. My own phone dinged in my purse with a text message, seconds later. I dug my phone out of my purse and looked at what she'd sent.

**Take him in the back n blow him.** I looked up at her in shock. She mouthed the word *now* theatrically and gave me a wicked smile. I gulped, thunderstruck, and turned back to Jeff, who had not noticed the exchange. Terrified, but also excited in that way only Holly could make me, I scooted closer to him and “accidentally” brushed my breasts against his forearm as I leaned across the table to get a napkin I didn't actually need. He responded with a knowing smile.



For the life of me, I don't remember the rest of the conversation. I do remember we progressed from touching one another's hands to leaning much closer then to hand in his lap and then kissing one another. I now had undeniable proof that I preferred kissing girls, my lips crushed and aching from the roughness of his lips against mine and my cheeks abraded from the stubble of his beard. By the time I asked him if there were someplace private we could go, however, I had managed to get turned on by the naughty thrill of it coupled with the arousal I always got from following Holly's orders. Jeff found a secluded storeroom off of the hallway leading to the restrooms and jimmied it quickly with a credit card, allowing us inside. The music and voices faded to a dull mute as the door closed behind us.

He moved to kiss me again but I'd had enough of that. Instead, I sank to my knees and opened his fly, gazing up at him adoringly. He leaned against a stack of boxes as I reached into his boxers and closed my hand around his warm, semi-erect length and drew it out. I'd never before looked at a cock from this particular angle, nor had I ever scrutinized a cock that wasn't my own. For a moment, it actually made me feel revulsed, like I might vomit; for another moment I felt my arousal take a turn and I felt gay. Even though, technically, the contact was now heterosexual, I guessed a part of me was still male inside. But orders were orders. Holly said suck, so I parted my lips and slipped the organ into my mouth.

The taste actually surprised me – I didn't hate it. Jeff was sharp and musky and warm. I even liked the way it felt when he went from only semi-erect to hard and throbbing against my tongue. He moaned and threaded his hands in my hair as I licked up and down, trying to feign enjoyment, lubricating him so I could start the slow pistoning of my head up and down his shaft.

He moaned and told me how beautiful I was. I really didn't care. My mind stayed fixed on the beautiful, commanding blonde at the bar outside who had told me to do this. I really didn't even particularly care who I did this to, only that Holly wished it. I added a few moans and some wet slurps just to tease him, knowing that if I could turn him on enough this wouldn't last long. I pulled a page from one of the fuck-flicks I'd stashed in my closet during my male days, tapping his cock hard against my outstretched tongue as I gazed up at him. He gasped and moaned and pulled my head forward, easing himself back in. I fucked him with my face, like the good and obedient girl I was, hoping Holly would be pleased. In a thankfully short amount of time, Jeff began to grunt rhythmically and I slipped him free from my mouth, jerking him off roughly into a nearby mop bucket. He sighed theatrically and slumped against the wall, panting.

I stood smoothly. “That was really fun,” I told him, lying glibly.

“I... Do you want me to, y'know... return the favor?” he gasped.

I shook my head, jiggling my huge hoop earrings against my neck. “No, baby, but thanks,” I said. “That's all I wanted, really. I had a good time.”

“Wait... can I get your number or something?” Jeff asked, pulling up his pants and fumbling with his buckle.

“I don't think that's a really good idea,” I said, holding up my left hand to display my wedding band and huge engagement diamond. “My husband might be a little grouchy if you called.”

“You're married?” he said, losing color.

“Relax,” I told him. “He fucked around on me, so I sucked off a total stranger I met in a bar. I get my payback and you get to brag to all your friends about the hot blonde bitch that blew you in the storeroom. We both win. Can't we just leave it there?”

He regarded me with fresh eyes and gave me a conspirational grin. “Nice to meet a fellow player.”

I shrugged. “Happy hunting,” I told him, then ducked out the door and back to Holly, gathering up my coat and purse on my way.

“Well?” Holly asked expectantly.

“I'll give you details in the car,” I told her in a rushed whisper. “But for now, let's just get the hell out of here. And I don't think we'll be coming back. Or at least I won't.”

Holly giggled. “That's okay,” she said. “This place is kind of a meat market anyway, and they play *lame* music. I promise I won't make you the resident slut in a place we both like.”

“Deal,” I said, paying our tab.

\* \* \*

I'd spilled the details of the encounter on the drive home – I chauffeured again, since Holly had been drinking a lot more than me – and Holly seemed to take great delight in my exploits. She laughed aloud a couple times at some of Jeff's more inspired pick-up attempts and questioned me closely on the play-by-play of my first and only blowjob. I was surprised at how much I recalled. I think it was possible, if only for a few moments, that I actually liked doing it. She did seem disappointed that I didn't swallow or at least take his cum into my mouth before spitting. I knew the next time she ordered me to my kness in front of a man, she would be much more specific about how it ended. I couldn't tell whether or not I was excited or nauseated at the prospect.

“Do you mind if I ask why?” I said after a brief silence. “Why did you make me do that?”

Holly got suddenly serious. “You know I shoot my first scene tomorrow,” she told me. “I thought about what you said, and felt a little guilty about it. I decided that maybe, if *you* went first, and could see how you could have sex with a guy and not feel anything, then maybe you wouldn't feel so messed up in your head about my doing it.”

“Oh, sweetie,” I said meltingly, rubbing the palm of my hand against her soft cheek beneath the lustrous curtain of her hair. “That is the most fucked up – and sweetest – but completely deranged and dysfunctional and *so* romantic thing I've ever heard.”

“I never promised you sanity,” she told me, laughing.

“Sanity's boring,” I replied. “You know, you can always just say these things without the whole forcing-me-to-suck-a-stranger's-dick part.”

“Nah,” she said, lighting a cigarette and cracking a window to let out the smoke. “Not as much fun.”

\* \* \*

I fidgeted my way through Holly's entire sit in makeup, wondering if the girl they'd hired for this shoot would be able to do as good a job as I would. I thought about talking to the producer about offering my services, but thought to keep my world and Holly's world separate right at first. I poured myself a margarita from a pitcher at the nearby craft service table and waited, sipping drinks until I got quite tipsy. Then, from the depths of immobility, the porno set sprang to sudden life. A tall Latino man appeared from a back room, wearing a crisp linen suit, and then my darling Holly – made up adequately in an overdone, slutty way – mincing on platform lucite heels and wearing only a white g-string and white t-shirt which displayed her prominent nipples.

“Okay, Derrick, and... April, is it?” the director asked.

Holly nodded. She'd chosen April for a stage name? Pretty. I wondered where she got it.

“You two have been arguing, you think he's cheating on you. So for this scene, April, I want you to be a little angry. Aggressive. Pull his hair a little, grab him and pull him. Kiss him hard, then be a little rough when you suck him. When he finally penetrates, I don't want to see a

full-on grudge fuck, y'know, but definitely a little bit of payback. Like you're a little bit angry when he makes you cum. Think you can show me that?"

She looked glowing and breathless and incredibly turned on and nodded brightly.

"Okay, so... here we go," the director said. "Quiet, please, and roll camera."

"Speed," the camera operator said.

"*Horny Housewives*, Scene 3, Take 1," the assistant said, slapping the clapper down.



"Action," the director called.

So there I stood, shifting from foot to foot in my platform heels, watching a cluster of guys point cameras and microphones at my darling wife while she stripped out of her clothes and had writhing, panting, gymnastic sex with a man not ten feet from me while I sipped margaritas. She sucked his cock like a starving woman and fucked him with such abandon, howling her orgasms one after another, that I wondered if I actually *was* enough for her. That, or she was the greatest actress in all of cinema.

“Cut,” the director called after a particularly spirited doggy-style. Holly grimaced a little – her co-star swung a titanic cock, ten inches long if it was an inch, as big around as her forearm – as he slid out, and the crew moved lights and cameras for the 'money shot,' where the well-hung porn stud would gleefully shoot a load of his cum all over my wife's upturned face. I started to wonder if I could watch.

One of the other starlets – a tall brunette with star tattoos on her breast and the glassy haze of drugs in her pretty green eyes – leaned close to me as she poured herself a drink from the pitcher I'd been steadily draining.

“You another actress?” she asked.

“Me? Oh, heavens, no,” I said, abashed.

“You could be. You're hot enough,” the stoned girl offered.

“Thanks,” I said.

“So that means he must be yours,” the girl said, pointing to the star.

“No, she is,” I told her.

“Cool,” the girl replied. “She's really good. A total natural.”

“She is?”

“Completely,” the girl said. “Honey, I been doing this for four years, and I still can't be that convincing when I fuck. Some girls can, some girls can't. She's gonna make a *lot* of money in this industry. She can make it look like she's in love.”

“And how can I be sure she isn't?” I asked.

“Honey, this industry ain't got room for the jealous type,” the girl cautioned, slugging her drink. “You gotta lighten up or this will end your relationship in a big fucking hurry. Of course she isn't. The minute Larry calls cut, she walks away. She goes and sits way over there. She doesn't touch him or let him touch her. This is just business for her.”

“That's a relief,” I said, giggling a little from alcohol and relief. “Thanks.”

The girl smiled. “Glad to help, sweetie. And you should seriously consider trying this. I know Larry would put you in a scene, as hot as you are. You can do one with me. I would totally fuck you.”

“That's really sweet of you,” I told her, “but I'm spoken for.”

She looked me up and down like I was a particularly nice car or tasty snack. “Shame,” she muttered, turning on her platform heels and tottering away.

\* \* \*

I managed to stay for the rest of the shoot – Holly did the scene with the horse-cocked Derrick, then another with an equally well-endowed man name Stuart with a girl named Jessica at the same time – and stopped my drinking so I could fend away the constant advances by the crew and cast. Strangely, the girls in the cast tended to hit on me more than the males. By the time Holly wrapped for the night, I had a touch of hangover and was ready to go. I wanted woolly pajamas and curling up on the couch with Holly's hair all around me.

“Well?” Holly asked as we got into the car. She still had her big, overdone hair and makeup from the shoot, and a little bit of dried cum on her chin and cheek.

“I think it's gonna be okay,” I told her. “I know it's just business for you – I could see that. I don't know that I want to watch you work very often, because I did get jealous. But I'm not going to get crazy about you doing it.”

“Good,” Holly said.

We drove home chatting about nothing in particular and I busied myself making dinner, just a quick salad, while Holly took a shower and changed. I had just sat down, waiting for her to come out. I gathered my long hair into a ponytail and made a little bow out of a separated strand, just for the fun girliness of it, when I saw something sparkling descend across my field of vision.

“Holly? What did you do?” I asked as her nimble fingers fastened the incredibly expensive necklace around my throat.

“I wanted to get you something. A thank you for being so cool about all of this.”

“Honey, you shouldn't have. It's beautiful. I love it. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she said, kissing me fondly. “Y'know, some of the other girls were talking about you, on the set. They said you were really nice, but seemed kind of nerdy and uptight. They didn't really see the two of us together.”

“Their mistake,” I told her.

“Not necessarily,” Holly rebutted. “They do have a point, a little. It dawned on me, while I was there, that almost all the stress around my going to work there came from you not being able to loosen up and just go with it.”

“I'm sorry,” I said honestly. “But it's how I am. If you didn't want it, on some level, then it would have changed, right? Didn't we figure that out?”

“Maybe,” Holly said. “But I think the magic only goes so far. I don't think it's still changing anything, to be honest. Nothing in the house has changed in over a month. We certainly haven't. I didn't get my big gorgeous tits straight off the bat, I had to make that happen with you. I think we changed, both of us, and now it's up to us to keep changing. Adapting to one another. We can't just stay the same, after all, neither one of us. I changed, and took up this job, and now you have to adjust and change to stay with me.”

“I guess you're right,” I said, taking off the necklace and setting it on the table to admire but feeling a little foolish wearing ten grand worth of diamonds while talking about this. “But what do we do about it?”

“Find a way to loosen you up,” Holly said. “Maybe party a little. Let you discover for yourself how good it feels to be bad. Maybe you'll decide that being a goody-goody isn't all that.”

“And how do you intend to do that?” I asked her, a little nervous.



So I sat in the bedroom for the rest of the night, dinner forgotten, just the way my darling wife and demanding mistress ordered me, wearing a red cocktail dress and my trademark giant hoop earrings, sipping champagne that Holly poured for me and smoking cigarettes that she lit for me and snorting lines of cocaine that she cut for me. Every line I snorted, every glass I emptied, every butt I stubbed out in the ashtray brought me a reward, either a nice spirited fucking over the footboard of the bed by Holly's new large purple strap-on cock, or a lovely little fingerbang, or even Holly's talented tongue. I knelt in front of her and sucked her strap-on in a “shot-for-shot remake” of the blowjob in the bar storeroom and then laid back, letting Holly lick and finger me while I slugged champagne and smoked long, skinny cigarettes – so used to them now that I didn't even cough when I breathed in the stale smoke – and begged her to make me be

naughtier. Even Holly finally passed out around three a.m. while the cocaine I'd inhaled kept me up well past dawn, cleaning the house impulsively, masturbating, working out past the point of exhaustion and writing furiously in my journal. I passed out in the middle of re-organizing my calendar for the third time, a cigarette still smoldering in the ashtray and a white crust riming the outside of my nose.

I hoped that was enough for Holly.

But then, the last part of my brain to fall to unconsciousness reminded me that I had yet to encounter the thing that was actually *enough* for Holly.

?

## Part Six

I TAPPED MY FRESHLY MANICURED nails on the steering wheel, idling the car to keep the heater on in the thickly falling snow which came down in lazy swirls from a leaden sky. Holly's movie shoot had been supposed to wrap up thirty minutes ago and I really wanted to get home before the weather took a turn for the even worse. I'd sent a text to her, telling her I was outside and waiting, but while my darling Holly would answer my texts within minutes, April Raynes – her stage name, the rising adult star that got nearly two thousand hits a day on the Internet and had a half-million horny Facebook followers – didn't answer texts until she felt like it. If at all.

Finally, the doors opened and the cast and crew emerged into the cold, dreary day. Holly was hugs and cheek-kisses all around, wrapped in her long wool coat and with the cute pink wool beret on her blonde locks that I'd gotten for her online. She waved to me happily – she was always happy after a shoot – and then talked for a moment with a few of her co-workers, just quick goodbyes, on her way to the car. I noticed that her eyes wandered, though, and I caught the looks she gave because I had once been a male and had secretly looked at women that same way, when I thought they wouldn't notice. Three of the porn starlets caught my wife's eye and turned her head. All of them tall and fit, long haired and fresh-faced. Traits I had or could at least compete with. But all these girls also had boobs which weighed in at least at a C-cup, most bigger, all silicone perfection. I couldn't help but feel inadequate, and look down at my own shallow B-cup breasts which barely swelled the front of my cable-knit sweater.

Holly piled into the car, brushing snow from her shoulders, and leaned across to give me a warm, passionate kiss. I tasted something musky and broke the kiss suddenly.

“Oh, ew,” I said, pulling a face. “Holly, baby, do you still have cum in your mouth?”

“No,” she said defensively. “I brushed my teeth, just like I promised you I would. Jesus, Brooke, do I have to get more champagne and blow? I thought I had finally loosened you up after that night.”

I pouted. “Maybe you did,” I said petulantly, “but the three-day hangover I had might have tightened me back. I’m not cut out for that kind of partying. I’m sorry if that makes your friends think I’m uptight, but it’s true. I can’t live like that.”

“I wasn’t asking you to,” Holly said. “I wouldn’t ask you to do that.”

“I know,” I said, putting the car into gear and pulling away from the curb slowly in the accumulating snowfall. “I guess it’s all this talk lately. About how I’m jealous, and uptight, and too careful and not spontaneous. I think it all started to get to me. Made me feel like I’m just not good enough for you.”

“Honey,” Holly said in a singsong, sympathetic tone, “I don’t ever want you to feel like that.”

“I can’t help it,” I went on. “Y’know, Holl, I didn’t have one of those Duraflame logs swinging between my legs like your co-stars in there, but I wasn’t exactly tiny in the cock department. The thought of those guys in there, maybe giving you something that I can’t... baby, it’s really hard not to feel deficient and inadequate.”

“I am *so* sorry, Brooke,” she said, her eyes glistening. “Look, it sounds like we need to make some changes. I can pass on that new contract, maybe find something else to do for a while, and we can concentrate on each other for a little bit.”

I held up a gloved hand placatingly. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” I said. “Holly, baby, I *want* you to take the new contract. I think it’s the best thing right now.”

“Wait – you *want* me to go to Los Angeles for a month?” she said.

“Want you to? No. I’ll miss you so much, I won’t be able to stand it,” I said. “But I think it might be a good thing. Holly, this has been wonderful, these last six months. Wonderful and intoxicating and I fall a little more in love with you every day. But it’s been *intense*. I went from middle-aged male to hot young female, then before I even caught my breath I was doing surgery without any training that I remembered, then I became a piercing fetishist’s wet dream, then my wife was a blonde bombshell with giant tits that I surgically implanted in her chest, then she’s a porn star and I’m blowing strangers in a storeroom, next I’m compulsively cleaning baseboards on a monster cocaine high with a cigarette dangling out of my mouth... Holly, I’m *burned out*. Completely emotionally exhausted. It’s been so much, so fast, with no time to adjust or get used to anything before the next earthshattering change hits. I think we could both use a little quiet time. And we can’t be together for that, because when we’re together things just *happen* and we make more changes.”

Holly sighed heavily. “You’re right,” she breathed. “I know you’re right. I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t thought the same thing once or twice these last few weeks. I just hate to admit it. I’m such a better person when I’m close to you. You make me feel so loved, and so safe, and so happy... I feel like if I’m apart from you I’ll lose it all as quickly as I gained it.”

“You won’t,” I told her. “I’ll be right here, waiting for you when you get home. Better. More relaxed and ready for the next big adventure. I know it will be a good thing. I’ll make it a good thing, I promise.”

She dabbed a tear from one eye, careful not to smudge her eyeliner. “Okay, I’ll call Stacey and tell her to fax me the contract,” she said, referring to her new agent. Another stunner, a tall redhead with porcelain skin and titanic silicone breasts, I recalled with a sharp twinge of jealousy.

“It’s for the best,” I reiterated, patting her hand. “I just know it.”

\* \* \*

I got back from the airport about noon, having asked Ashleigh to clear my schedule so I could see Holly off. All the girls flying with her – four other starlets, trying desperately to hitch their wagons to Holly’s rising star – fit that tall, athletic and giant-breasted mold which churned my guts with envy.



Holly seemed so different around them. Like those girls had a power I did not, an ability to draw out something visceral and sexual and primal in my wife that I simply lacked. I saw the want in her eyes when she looked at them, and I never saw the same want when she looked at me; a different kind, but I wanted it *all*. Maybe I couldn’t control her lust for cock, but I could certainly strive to be the only woman for her, leaving all the others behind in terms of attractiveness and raw sex appeal. I didn’t want her to ever look at another woman than me. I looked in the mirror in the bedroom, sliding my hands up my rock-hard abdomen, tenting my

shirt with my hands and trying to imagine myself with bigger breasts. It had to be the boobs; I cooked, I cleaned, I was dynamite in the sack, I didn't have an ounce of fat on my body and I earned high six figures for her. The only thing those other bitches had that I didn't were the knockers.

An idea formed in my brain, something wild and impetuous and ill-advised. A slow smile spread across my face as I put the pieces together and something foolhardy and headstrong blossomed in my chest, making me breathless and wet even considering it.

*We'll see who isn't spontaneous, Little Miss Porn Star*, I thought to my phantom wife with a little bit of spite but mostly wild hope and burgeoning excitement. *We'll see who's uptight*.

\* \* \*

Missing Holly became a problem to solve. I had my plan, but I also had many hours to fill in the meantime while it bore fruit. To help pass the time and keep my mind off of how badly I missed my wife, I took on a job at a local gym as a personal trainer. I selected one of the prohibitively expensive, upscale fitness clubs near downtown that reveled in its elitist policies, selecting only the wealthy and attractive for their membership. I taught krav maga, pole dancing and pilates three nights a week and picked up individual clients – mostly rich, bored trophy wives who had to keep in shape to please their sugar daddies – here and there. Between that and my patients, it kept my days busy and full. And the extra money would be nice, I decided, once my plan reached fruition.

I had a breast augmentation the Thursday morning after Holly had left, and took a few moments to head home from the surgery center before going to the clinic to see patients. The boob job went perfectly – I really was *quite* a competent surgeon – and actually felt routine and a little bit boring now. I checked my watch, slugging a hot cup of Starbucks chai latte as I drove, thinking I could *just* make it if I hurried. I liked having a tight schedule. I felt like it kept me at my best.

I decided to dress in such a way that I could put my plan in motion if the opportunity presented itself. I took a little time to volumize my hair – flattened by my surgical cap and looking a little tired – and reapply my makeup along more dramatic lines, with heavy eyeliner and glossy lips. Then I selected black silk stay-up stockings with feminine lace tops, black stiletto pumps with an ankle-breaking five-inch heel and a small platform, a black thong panty and a matching push-up bra with an adorable little pink bow between my small breasts. Over this, I put a figure-hugging coral sweater dress with a high neck and short hemline which put my muscular legs on display admirably. Since beginning to teach physical fitness classes, my body – while approaching perfection before – had hardened and slimmed even more. My latest body mass index put me at the low end of healthy, only nine percent body fat, and my muscles were even more well-defined. I looked so incredibly fit and healthy now that one of the managers of the fitness club where I worked had approached me about some print modeling. I gave the offer serious thought.

Makeup, hair and perfume freshened, I exchanged my paper Starbucks cup for an aluminum travel mug and refilled it with the gourmet Kona we kept in the freezer. I chewed a stick of gum while I waited for the coffee to brew, a little angry at Holly for my enforced night of hedonism which now had me secretly craving a cigarette in the mornings. I was a *doctor*, for

Chrissakes. What was she thinking? But I managed to metabolize the alcohol and the cocaine well enough and didn't particularly miss them. I wouldn't ruling out doing that again, someday, but I felt certain I remained far from addicted. But the nicotine, that was another matter. In the drugstore the day before, looking at the huge display of tobacco products behind the counter, it was all I could do not to ask for a pack to go with the bottled water and aspirin I'd bought.

I came to the clinic leisurely, in plenty of time, and checked in with Ashleigh and Danielle for my appointments for the day. Danielle gave me a measuring look as I yawned dramatically and knuckled my back.

“Rough night?” she asked me pointedly.

“Rough few nights,” I told her. “My wife's out of town, so I'm not sleeping really well, and then surgery this morning and my protein bar is sitting like a brick in my stomach.”

“Y'know, Doc, it's hard to read the signs because you always look like the cover of *Vogue*,” she said, chuckling, “but I'd swear you were hung over.”

“You're good,” I told her. “I kinda went on a bender a few nights ago. Really cut loose. I've been hung over for three days.”

“You want an IV?” she asked me.

“Maybe,” I said. “Sadly, what I really want is what I can't have.”

“What's that?”

“A fucking cigarette,” I confessed. “I got drunk enough to smoke, and overdid it. I've been jonesing for nicotine ever since.”

Danielle winked at me and dug in a pocket of her everpresent pink scrubs. “Here,” she said. “This really helps. Gets me through the days.”

She handed me a slender pink pipe with a silver mouthpiece, decorated with a band of red rhinestones. Quirking an eyebrow, I took the little e-cigarette from her as she gave me an abashed shrug. “What can I say?” she said. “I smoked in college. It's hard as hell to quit.”

I took two generous puffs from the little atomizer – Danielle's fluid of choice tasted like peppermint – and let the vapor out in lazy curls from my pursed lips. I felt the little tensions ease, just a bit, and gave it back to Danielle with a grateful smile. “You're right. That does help.”

Danielle put it back in her pocket. “I have another one, in my locker, if you want,” she said. “It doesn't work quite as well, but you can totally have it. You can send Ashleigh out for fluid at lunch. Tell her it's for me if you want to keep it a secret.”

“You're a doll,” I said, “but I can get my own. I don't really want to feed the addiction, but I'll come find you if it gets really itchy again. Oh, waitaminnit – there's Dr. Travis. Excuse me, Dani, but I have something I need to talk to him about.”

“No problem,” Danielle said warmly. “Mr. Henderson called to say he's running late. Your ten o'clock might be more of a ten thirty.”

“Perfect,” I said over my shoulder, navigating the hustling hallway expertly on my high heels. I dimly remembered teetering around and barely being able to keep my balance on them, not so long ago. Now it seemed like I had *learned* to walk in them; it seemed so effortless, now. Dr. Travis caught sight of me – he always smiled desirously when he did – and I “shifted gears” with my stride. I'd stayed up until midnight last night taking online modeling classes, learning the trademark “catwalk strut” and practicing back and forth across the living room. I lengthened my stride, zigzagging my feet one in front of the other and keeping my weight on the ball of my foot, swiveling my hips and swinging my arms dramatically while keeping my shoulders and head dead level, still feeling the heavy book I'd placed on my head while I practiced, learning to walk like a model until I could cross the room without its falling off.

Dr. Travis' eyes traveled down my form from head to toe and then back up again, appreciatively. I tried to keep a satisfied smirk from my glossed lips. Step one, check. Holly's repeated assertion was correct: if one knew what one was doing, men *were* pretty easy.

I offered him an inviting smile and little coy wave, then ducked into the coffee room – more of a cramped little alcove off of the main hallway than an actual room – and went filled my little pink “Doctor Sexy” mug (an impulse gift from Ashleigh a few weeks ago) with coffee and set about adding cream and sugar, thinking self-satisfiedly, *In three... two... one...*

Dr. Travis crammed into the alcove behind me, taking the opportunity of a tech passing by with a heavy cart of supplies for restocking the examination room to press his body against me. I rewarded his ploy by standing straight and pressing back against him, grinding my lush backside against his crotch a little and giving just the barest hint of a satisfied little gasp.

“Hi,” I half-purred. Dr. Travis was a little more refined than the average guy-in-the-bar, my only real experience with seducing a male, so I thought coming on too strongly might be detrimental. “How did that chin reconstruction go yesterday?”

“It was a nightmare,” he said, reaching into the cabinet above my head to give himself an excuse to lean further against me. I liked the feel of his firm, chiseled body against mine a lot more than I'd originally thought I would. I felt myself getting warm and slick inside. “I should've followed my first instinct and called you to back me up. The guy's mandible was in a million pieces, Brooke, I shit you not.”

“All the king's horses and all the king's men,” I said in commiseration and sympathy.

“Seven hours, it took,” he said. “And I'm still not done.”

“Tell you what,” I told him, turning around to face him but not really breaking contact with his delightful body. We wound up being almost nose to nose, and I felt that old thrill of having to crane my neck upwards to meet his eyes. So big and powerful and strong. I loved the way it made me feel, and my breath came a little faster. “When the x-rays come back, I'll take a look. Maybe I can help steer you around the curves when you go back in.”

“I have them in my office, actually,” he said. “Got a second to come in and look?”

“For you?” I teased. “I’ve got two.”

I took my coffee and followed him into his office, allowing myself a very informative stare at his firm backside and wondering idly what those hard, sculpted muscles might feel like in my hands. I closed his door and discreetly thumbed the lock while he went behind his desk and rummaged around in his briefcase.

“Let’s see – oh, *tell* me I didn’t leave them in my car – wait a second. Here they – no. Dammit!” he muttered as he searched. “I’m sorry, Brooke, I think I lied. I don’t have them here after... all...”

He trailed off into incoherency. I’d used his distraction to slip out of my dress and bra, and stood there bare-breasted with my pierced nipples prominent at the end of his couch.

“Brooke?” he said weakly.

“I decided I just don’t want to fight this any more,” I said softly. “Working in this place with you, day in and day out – it’s torture, trying to keep it professional. You can’t tell me you don’t feel it, too.”

“I...”

“Don’t bother,” I told him. “I already know the answer. I can see how you look at me. I’ve known how badly you wanted this since we opened the practice. I’ve waited for you to come to me, but you’ve been a complete gentleman. You wouldn’t come to me, so I guess I have to come to you.”



I sank lithely to my knees and began to crawl across his imported rug, eyes locked on him, slinking and slithering like my spine was slightly liquid. His breath came in shallow gasps.

My manicured fingers found his zipper and I gazed up at him adoringly – it wasn't, I discovered to my shock, nearly so feigned as I thought it would be – as I stroked him through his pants. The nurses whispers painted him as extremely well-endowed, but they'd been being stingy. Dr. Travis would not have been the slightest bit out of place on any of Holly's movie sets. I purred a happy noise, deep in my throat. "Oh, my," I said. "Is all of this for *me*?"

I pulled out the prodigious member and laved it with my tongue from root to tip, then back down again. My experience of actually owning one of those particular appendages granted me a keen insight as to just *how* and *where* to touch a cock to make it feel a particular way.

"I can't believe this is happening," he rasped, looking down at me in what I could only best describe as *ownership*. I got the distinct impression that he saw me as his property, now – and the sexual submissive side of me delighted and gloried in that. I could be very happy being his bitch. His little fucktoy. The thought made me even wetter than I already was.

“Oh, it's happening, baby,” I said between loving licks. “And it's going to happen a *lot*, from now on. I have wanted you since the moment I saw you. And now that I'm not fighting it any more, I intend to have you as deep and as fast and as nasty and as *often* as I want.”

I slid him as far into my throat as I could – my lips could only barely crest the halfway point, no matter how I pushed – and sucked deeply. He moaned.

“Oh, yeah,” I whispered, rubbing the hard, warm, spit-slick flesh against my soft cheek with a very satisfied smile. “As much as I want.”

“Just like that?” he asked.

I giggled a little. “Do you want there to be more? I'm not like those other girls, baby. I *know* what I want, and I know how to get it. But if you want this to be some kind of a transaction... well, I guess I can manage that. I do something for you, you do something for me? Would that make it feel more normal for you?”

“You're already doing something for me,” he said, rocking his hips a little and face-fucking me gently.

“This doesn't count,” I told him. “Think of something else. I'm already your little cocksucker. What else do you want me to be?”

“I wanna fuck you,” he breathed.

“You're not being very imaginative,” I told him. “Honey, I'm not talking about just sex. You have to know by now that you can fuck me however you want. There has to be something you want from me.”

“What, you mean like how we are together?” he asked.

“If that's what strikes your fancy,” I said, engulfing him in my hot mouth.

“I don't know if you want to hear it,” he said gruffly.

“I'm not gonna make you cum until you do,” I teased, massaging his balls and teasing the tip of his magnificent cock with my tongue. I struggled to keep from imagining the huge member pushing its way into my soft inner velvet. I needed to keep that in reserve for now.

“You are twice the doctor I am,” he said brokenly, his excitement building. His hands grasped at the back of my head. “Everybody knows it. It makes me jealous, sometimes. I wish maybe you weren't as good at it. That people thought that I was the better doctor.”

I thought for a second, then went wide-eyed suddenly. I wound a tendril of my soft blonde hair around one finger and gazed guilelessly up at him. “So, um... like... maybe, y'know, if people thought I was some kind of a bimbo 'n' stuff? Would that, like, make you feel more kick-ass, if, y'know, I acted like I was totally ditzy or something?”

He gasped and screwed his eyes shut. “Oh, my God,” he moaned. “Brooke, that was *so* fucking sexy.”

I muffled my reply with a big mouthful of his lovely cock.

“Is that the kind of thing you wanted?” he asked me.

“Mm-hmm,” I confirmed around his stiff length, pistoning my head up and down in a quickening rhythm.

“So, if you do that for me, what do I have to do in return?” he asked.

I licked his balls playfully as I stroked him, loving the hot, slick weight of him throbbing against my smooth forehead. “Um, y'know – that's hard 'n' stuff,” I half-whined. “Thinking, like, isn't really my thing any more, is it?”

“I like that,” he groaned. “You don't have a thought in your pretty little head.”

“Yeah,” I giggled. “But I do like to think about you, baby. Making you all hard 'n' stuff. Being all pretty for you. Dressing how you like, and, like, acting the way you want me to act, y'know?” I started lilting a little, using teenager 'up-talk' inflection to make everything sound like a question and making myself sound like a vacuous little bimbo in the process. I could see it drove him wild.

“I'd like that, too,” he said. “A *lot*.”

“Ooh! I know!” I said suddenly. “I totally know something you can do for me.”

“What's that?” he asked. “Anything.”

“Give me bigger tits,” I told him. “You're, like, *such* a kick ass doctor 'n' stuff. I just know you could give me a perfect set of boobs. I want 'em *so* bad, baby – I'd totally do *anything* you wanted. Just imagine me, y'know, with a big set of jugs. You would make my body *totally* perfect.”

“Are you serious? You want augmentation?” he asked.

“Are you gonna do it for me?” I asked, slipping him deep into my throat and combining my mouth's downstroke with upstrokes of my hand, with a twisting motion, which made him stagger against the edge of his desk and grab the back of my head roughly.

“Please?” I whined.

“Yes,” he breathed. “Yes. Anything you want. I'll do your surgery. Tonight. Just make me cum.”

“Don't beg,” I told him, stroking him hard. “I'm the one who begs, baby. You're, like, supposed to tell me. Don't ask – I like it when you just, y'know, *tell* me stuff. Be all in charge 'n' stuff. Please? Call me a dumb blonde and a bimbo 'n' stuff, baby, please? Tell me what to do?”

His voice took on a hard edge that thrilled me no end as he rasped, “Suck it, you stupid bitch. Suck that cock, you fucking brainless bimbo. Make me cum. Swallow it all, bitch, like a good little blonde cocksucker. Swallow every fucking drop.”

His words shot straight into my brain, driving me wild in a way I'd never experienced before, not even with Holly. I pumped my head up and down, using my mouth like a wild, wet pussy, milking him and moaning in ecstasy as I did it, streamers of spit escaping my swollen lips and swaying on my chin. He grunted and groaned deliciously and thrust himself forward, almost gagging me, and I tasted the warm, salty flood for the first time. To my endless shock, I didn't just like it – I *adored* it. I couldn't keep up with the flow and it ran over my bottom lip, dripping onto my chest. I kept sucking, dutifully, like the dumb blonde cocksucker he wanted, until his sensitivity made him grab my head and force me to stop. I scooped up the cum from my chin and chest with one finger and licked it clean as he watched.

I stood briskly and found my compact in my purse, repairing my makeup and lipstick – I didn't mind actually *being* his little fucktoy, but I didn't want everybody *knowing* I was his little fucktoy, after all.

“That...” he panted. “That was *incredible*.”

“Glad you liked it 'n' stuff, baby,” I giggled, playing with my hair. I slipped back into my sweaterdress and fluffed out my hair, checking my appearance carefully in my little mirror for telltale clues that I'd just sucked off my colleague. “So, like – I'll talk to Kim up front, y'know, and get on your schedule, okay? I go on vacation next week, baby, so I really want you to do my tits before then.”

“Anytime you want,” he said.

“So, like, I should probably start acting all bimbo-ey slow 'n' stuff,” I said. “If I just suddenly go all Kardashian 'n' shit, y'know, all at once – people are gonna know something's up 'n' stuff. But I promise, if I go too slow or whatever, you can tell me and I'll totally fix it. And I'll bend over your desk and you can spank the fuck out of me 'til I squeal and beg you to stop, okay?”

“You are *seriously* kinky, you know that?”

“That's what my wife says, baby,” I said, blowing him a playful kiss. “Ciao.”

I shut the door behind me, unable to keep the grin from my face. I shocked myself at the depth of my own depravity. This was something even Holly's creative mind would have struggled to concoct. In one deft motion, I had gotten exactly what I wanted and a mouthful of surprisingly delicious semen as a side-benefit. I couldn't believe how pleased I was at being so underhanded and manipulative. I never saw manipulation as a distinctly feminine trait, but I did consider women superior at wielding it. So it was hard not to see myself as stepping into womanhood completely, after using my sexuality and attractiveness to get what I wanted.

All that, and what promised to be an extremely satisfying office affair.

Holly was either going to praise me to the heavens or spank me until I couldn't sit down. I struggled to figure out which I wanted her to do more.

\* \* \*

Two days later, I took a cab home from the surgery center, my chest wrapped in gauze and compression bandages and groggy from the anesthesia. I stumbled into my house, fumbling

with my keys, and slumped heavily on the couch. Dr. Travis said the surgery went perfectly, and the phenomenal physical condition of my flawless body promised a quick recovery. I took a couple of puffs from the little baby-blue e-cigarette I'd purchased the day before, even though I knew nicotine would slow the healing process, but the lingering nicotine craving hadn't gone away like I'd hoped it would.

Dr. Travis – he insisted that I call him Joel, now, in the office, and call him things like *baby* and *sweetie* behind closed doors – gave me two weeks before I tried to lift anything heavier than ten pounds, but I was still the better doctor even though I couldn't act that way, and I knew if I pushed a little, within reason, I could shave that down to a week before I could work out again. I resolved to practice in my high heels, going back to the 'catwalk' lessons online, since my center of gravity had shifted dramatically and I would have trouble with my slinky, self-assured walk for a while. I didn't intend to wait around. Holly would return from the West Coast in three weeks, and I intended to be completely polished and used to my new additions by the time she got back.

I pushed my way bullishly through the next two weeks, weaning myself quickly off painkillers and onto Motrin for the minimal postoperative soreness. I forced water and limited myself to five or six long puffs from the electronic cigarette a day, powering down protein in massive quantities and pushing my upper body workouts to strengthen the muscles in my pectoral wall, above the massive silicone implants I had conned Dr. Travis into giving me free of charge.

I spent my downtime reading – I needed a few Continuing Education hours to renew my medical license, my physical training license *and* my cosmetology license, which at least made for an interesting variety of online learning experiences. I found my old (old? It was the first time I'd ever seen it, but it felt old to me, and familiar) practice head from beautician's school and practiced braiding until I mastered some of the new styles I'd found in one of the hairstyling magazines I picked up at the drugstore.

I also downloaded several podcasts and audio recordings of some of the media's most popular ditzes. I stocked my little pink iPod with long dissertations by various Kardashians, Paris Hilton, the girls from Jersey Shore, anything I could get my hands on to give me ammunition to practice my new 'bimbo' voice and usage for Joel's benefit. I made friends with a few girls in my little sphere, a couple at the fitness center and one at the tanning salon next door – it took my getting a membership, but that didn't matter to me – and a few in the hair salon. All of whom spoke and acted like perfect little airhead sexpots. I surreptitiously recorded several conversations on my phone, along with a few half-shouted exchanges with a few strippers one evening at a local gentleman's club. I listened to them on repeat while I cleaned house and worked out, practicing diligently and even recording myself so I could play it back later and make notes. I attacked the problem of being vapid and brainless like a true academic – an irony that did not escape me and amused me to my polished toenails.

At the end of two weeks, I finally decided to unwrap my presents, and used a pair of surgical shears to cut away the layers of gauze and tape covering my new breasts. They popped free of their prison and bobbed deliciously in the loose confines of the surgical bra I wore, firm and spherical and absolutely *perfect* – some of Joel's finest work. I suspected he took his time and did a masterful job because he stood to be one of the first to get to touch them. I smiled at the prospect of finally being able to wrap his massive dick in the firm, flawless flesh of my new

36DD boobs and slide them up and down, masturbating him with my soft tits until he sprayed a load all over my face and chin. The whole imagined tableau made me giggle and my pierced nipples stiffen in anticipation.



Which made my first order of business to show myself off. I wrapped myself all in spandex and slung a gym bag over one arm, driving the few miles to the luxurious fitness club where I taught for a slow workout designed to display my delicious new body to all the appreciative males. Pushing a pair of prescription sunglasses into my soft blonde hair, so I wouldn't need my usual eyeglasses, I stepped into the foyer and loved the unabashed stares which flocked to my new, curvaceous form. I made a mental note to go through my closet as soon as I got home and throw out anything that didn't cling tightly to my every curve.

My self-indulgent “hey everybody, look at me” workout came and went – I didn't even remember what I did, but I knew it only got me sweating enough to glisten and call still more attention to my heaving chest – and I ended with a quick shower where I discovered, using warm water and a soapy bath pouf, just how sensitive my new additions actually were. Then off to the nearest Victoria's Secret store to buy several hundred dollars' worth of new bras, in every cut and color and configuration they had in stock, to add support to the massive mounds which jiggled

along to my every step. I slung the pink-and-white striped bag over one shoulder with my designer purse and headed back to my car, jiggling brazenly as I went, as happy as I had been in recent memory. I now fully realized why Holly had demanded I make her so big. The looks and suggestive glances I received were positively *caressing*. Not a single twinge of regret at my rash decision to fuck for new boobs entered my thinking. I had *so* done the right thing.

I spent the rest of the time waiting for Holly to return teaching classes at the gym and deep-cleaning the house from top to bottom until it gleamed – I intended to enjoy my time away from the clinic by doing absolutely *nothing* medical. I managed not to give anything away on my nightly phone call to Holly, and by the day she returned she had no idea what waited for her at home.

I squirmed a little in the bed – I'd done a tiny little bump of cocaine from Holly's stash just to bring my horniness to a higher level – as I heard her key in the lock. I heard the rollers of her suitcase on the terracotta tiles in the foyer and the sharp clacking of her platform heels.

“Brooke? Honey?” she called. Her voice melted me – I had missed her so much.

“I'm in here,” I called back, my voice almost cracking with expectation. She walked into the room in a fuck-me red dress which hugged her every perfect curve, and looked down at me displayed on the bed, strewn with rose petals, a little Christmas bow decorating the nipple of my new, enormous silicone breasts standing proudly in defiance of gravity on my narrow chest.



“OhmyGawd, Brooke – you got your boobs done!” she squealed, bouncing up and down delightedly.

“Surprise!” I crowed, jiggling them up and down with my hands. “You like them?”

“Honey, I *love* them! My God, you got 'em so *big*! They're almost the size of mine!”

I sat up on the edge of the bed and took her hands in mine. I drew her palms close, placing one on each oh-so-sensitive breast, and looked up at her adoringly. “There,” I said happily. “I wanted *you* to be the first one to touch them.”

“Mmm,” she moaned lovingly. “They're perfect. Just the right mix of firm and soft.”

“Wanna suck them?” I asked her hopefully.

“More than anything,” she told me, her breathing becoming a little shallow. “But the first thing I want is a kiss, you sexy bitch.”

I jumped up, throwing myself into her arms and kissing her as hard and as passionately as I could, pouring all the excitement and thrill and naughtiness and absence and longing of the past

three weeks into it, wrapping my legs around her tiny waist and tangling my fingers in her long, soft hair. She had a little trouble adjusting to the weight of me – she was stronger than me, but not *that* strong – and she sat me on the edge of the little desk built into the wall near the window and gave the kiss the attention it deserved, crushing our breasts between us nipple-to-pierced-nipple, making me moan in my throat from purest delight.

\* \* \*

Several hours later, she pressed soft kisses into my scalp and drew lazy circles around one distended areola with a manicured fingernail. Our sweaty bodies lay tangled on the rumpled sheets. I tickled her chin with a rose petal and she smiled the smile that only *I* got. The smile that was just for me.

“So,” she said at length. “How much did these set us back, anyway?”

I blushed crimson. “Not a penny,” I told her.

“Seriously? You got a free boob job? How the fuck did you manage that?” she asked incredulously.

“Well, not exactly free,” I confessed. *Here goes nothing*, I thought, hoping I wouldn't make her angry. “Remember how you said I could fuck around on you like you do on me? Well, that really cute doctor at my practice, Dr. Travis. I... uh... I kinda sucked his cock until he promised to give me the procedure on the house.”

I looked at her expectantly. Several quick emotions flashed through her chestnut eyes, none of them particularly violent or impassioned, before she giggled broadly. “Wow,” she said. “I can't believe you did that.”

“Are you mad at me?” I asked in a little-girl voice.

“Of course not,” Holly chuckled. “Jesus, girl, I'm actually a little bit *proud* of you. You just shocked me, that's all. I didn't expect it. You're really changing. On the inside as much as you did on the outside. You saw what you wanted, and saw what you needed to do to get it. Just like I would.”

“I'm glad you see it that way,” I told her. “Because I did it for you. It may take me a little time to pay him back, though. Not that it's going to be unpleasant, but it might just be a few months before he and I have settled up.”

“How long do you think you're going to have to blow him?” Holly asked.

“Oh, a few months. And I promised I would fuck him, too. But the bimbo thing, that's probably permanent.”

“What bimbo thing?”

“He said it made him jealous, that I was such a better surgeon than he is. So I promised him I would act and talk like a bimbo so people would think I was stupid and he could look like a bad-ass. I don't think he'll ever let me off the hook on that one.”

“You're playing dumb for him? Well, c'mon... let me see,” she laughed. “I can't imagine you as a dumb blonde, Brooke.”

I propped myself up on an elbow and wound my hair around one finger, eyes wide and vacuous. “But, um... y'know, like, just 'cause you can't imagine me doing it 'n' stuff, like, that doesn't mean I can't, y'know? 'Cause I don't do anything where I don't do my best 'n' shit, baby, so if I gotta be a bimbo, y'know, then, like, I'm gonna be a *totally* incredible bimbo.”

Holly's jaw fell open. “Holy shit,” she breathed.

“Whatevs,” I said, giving her a delighted smile. “So, um... what do you think?”

“I think that may be the hottest thing I've ever seen you do,” Holly said. “And I think I'm not gonna let you get away with just talking that way for him. No way. If he gets you as a horny little bimbo, then I get you as a horny little bimbo just as much.”

“You mean, I have to talk that way all the time, even at home?” I said, eyebrows climbing.

She narrowed her eyes in the way that told me my mistress had returned, not just my wife, and my pussy became dewy from the unspoken menace in her eyes.

“So, um... I guess I better plan to practice a lot more 'n' stuff, y'know?” I said.

\* \* \*

My last two days were spent happily in Holly's arms – I don't think I wore a stitch of clothing the entire time, or said a single non-airhead word. I discovered reruns of shows like *America's Next Top Model* and *Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making the Team* online and uncovered a wealth of sexy bimbo research material, downloading it all onto my iPod and spending long runs on the treadmill or in our chilly wooded neighborhood, listening to the girls I'd downloaded and trying to perfect my technique. The voice seemed to come a lot more easily, but still felt put-on and artificial. Holly spanked my ass pink when she caught me slipping, which excited me no end, but I still found the whole thing frustrating. Especially when so much seemed at stake now. I found myself feeling stressed out and haggard, trying to keep everyone happy and skirting around the consequences of the smallest mistake. Holly and her creative punishments, for one thing, and Dr. Travis and the constant threat of exposing me as a slut who fucked to get what she wanted, destroying my credibility with the staff and my patients. I found myself wondering just how I got myself into this mess.

I practiced my voice, and also with increasingly bigger vibrators, until I returned to work and stayed late to do “dictation” but, in actuality, to deliver the first payment on my installment plan to Joel for my lovely new tits. I giggled and smacked my gum as I squirmed on his fingers, sitting in his lap, and finished with a bottle of baby oil and my very first tit job, which Joel seemed to thoroughly enjoy, all the while praising his skill in the creation of my new tits and telling him how much better a surgeon he was than me, how I'd never managed a set of tits so perfect and big and round, and that I felt embarrassed even having my name on the door beside his.



I ended the day outside, in the cold chill without my coat, Joel's cum drying on my chin and chest as I stood in the little service driveway behind a chain-link fence, fishing in a package of Virginia Slims for a cigarette I now felt that I needed, just to steady my nerves. I supposed I had all the pieces I needed to be happy, but couldn't fit them together in my heart, leaving me just an emotional wreck, struggling unsuccessfully to keep from taking up smoking and to adopt an entirely new persona in such a way as to not alienate every single employee I had but still quickly enough that I could avoid exposure as a manipulative slut at work and get tied up and spanked within an inch of my life at home.

I smoked and worried, sucking on the cigarette like the stale, acrid smoke held some kind of answer.

It didn't. I breathed it out in a long plume onto the chilly breeze, disappointed and lost and thoroughly unhappy.

## PART SEVEN

HOLLY'S NEW CAREER SEEMED TO skyrocket after her shoot in California. Her phone rang constantly with calls from her agent and successful producers, forcing her to hire a manager just to help navigate the astounding career moves now available to her. After several movies, a stunningly successful website launch and an Adult Video News Award for best new performer and best anal scene for her performance in *Backdoor Bitches III*, she finally settled on a small production company run by a few retired adult performers focusing on fewer releases with a much higher production value. They even hired real screenwriters, and many of the scripts and treatments delivered by FedEx to our door actually had things unheard of in the adult industry, like plots and character development. Holly enrolled in acting classes just so she could meet the standard.

Much of her work involved going out and being seen, which meant that I had to go out and be seen with her, even though she occasionally used one of the male stars in her new company, a sweet and quiet man named Eric Baumann, as a beard at some functions. She had to maintain the illusion of being a wild party girl for her fans, so she “dated” around as well, being seen at many night-spots in the company of sports stars and counterculture glitterati. It left me with a lot of time on my hands, which I spent working out and cleaning compulsively, teaching at the gym and seeing patients. I diligently practiced my bimbo-speak, but I felt like I'd hit a wall. At least I didn't slip very often, and the corporal punishments had stopped. The girls at my clinic, and also my gym, hadn't seemed to notice my gradual step down from polished, erudite surgeon to gum-smacking airhead. Apparently I'd done it right, and I still managed to gain my patients' confidence even though I talked like a dimwitted teenage girl.

Holly texted me on and off during the day, and unless I was teaching or actually with a patient, she expected me to answer promptly – she hated waiting for people to text her back. Her latest message, which dinged happily on my phone just as I finished injecting Restalyne into Mrs. Phillips' smile lines and tossed my gloves into the trash, said only: **grab ur swimsuit bitch n meet me @ Tiffanys house**

I sighed. Getting bossed around still turned me on, but it also frustrated me no end. Holly's success eroded her realization that I actually had a life, and she never asked me for anything any more – she just demanded that I drop everything and cater to her. I still lived to make her happy, but I now saw the difference between making Holly happy and just following her orders. I did very little of the former and seemed to be drowning in the latter. Still, I hated telling Holly 'no,' so I stuffed the bikini I used at the tanning salon into my gym bag and skedaddled out the front door of the clinic, rummaging in my purse for my car keys and a cigarette as I went. I tried to console myself by smoking the ultra-skinny, low nicotine Capri 120s, mentholated – cigarettes for girls who didn't actually like smoking – but it still served as a constant reminder that blindly following Holly's orders and catering to her whims could easily find me doing things that weren't good for me. I only wished I had a good enough excuse to quit, something that Holly would accept and not try and punish me by making me smoke two packs in a single sitting and re-addicting me hopelessly or something equally as awful.

I drove into the hills outside of town, into the exclusive gated communities out there, to the house of Tiffany Sloane, Holly's new business manager. She did her job well, throwing lavish parties which she referred to as *do's* at any time of the day or week to entertain clients, potential investors or new talent. She invested heavily in Holly's new company and pushed hard to make it an overnight success, capitalizing on the existing fan-bases of Holly and some of her co-stars to make the company's first release, a pornographic sci-fi epic called *Univerz*, the biggest release in adult film history.

I air-kissed Tiffany's cheek as I entered her lavish foyer, exchanged a little bit of small talk and found a nearby bathroom where I shucked out of my clothes and changed into my barely-there black bikini. I gave myself a liberal coat of aerosol sunscreen, stepped back into my high heeled pumps and sashayed my way onto the back deck, helping myself to a glass of wine set out for guests as I passed the kitchen.

The poolside looked like a scene from an adolescent boy's id. About a dozen women, established or aspiring adult actresses, sprawled on chaise lounges or sipped drinks at low tables, sunning themselves in a dizzying array of oiled, firm flesh and womanly curves.

Holly sat at a table, her skin a golden amber which positively glowed in the sunshine of early spring, and waved happily when she saw me. I wove through the labyrinth of sinfully displayed girl-skin effortlessly in my heels and made my way to her, taking a seat next to her.

“So, um... what's the big emergency 'n' stuff?” I lilted in my best *faux* bimbo.

She smiled. “I figured you could stand to, um, expand your client base,” she whispered. “So I thought I'd invite you over for a little networking.” She turned to the statuesque blonde sunning next to her.

“Hey, Kennedy, this is my girlfriend I was telling you about. Dr. Brooke Martin. Brooke, this is Kennedy Burke. She just hired on with us last week.”

“Oh my God, you're *gorgeous*,” Kennedy said admiringly. “Doctor, huh? Doctor of what?”

“Surgeon, actually,” I said plainly. “Reconstructive and cosmetic.”

“Oh, shit, April, you hooked up with a plastic surgeon?” Kennedy laughed, using Holly's stage name.

Holly shook her firm, bountiful tits in response. “Any girl with fingers that could give me these has fingers I want in other places,” she bragged.

“No shit?” Kennedy said, raising her sunglasses to her head and appraising me non-sexually for once. She turned to two other girls in the assemblage. “Marissa, Brandi, Dyanne! This is Holly's girl – she's a plastic surgeon! She's the one who did Holly's boobs, can you believe it?”

A leggy brunette with the most kissable pouting lips I'd ever seen stood and walked over a little drunkenly. “Are you serious?” she asked me. “Are you taking new patients?”

I cleared my throat, a little taken aback. “Um, like... sure! For a friend of hers, y'know, whatever!”



I reached in my purse and passed her a business card. Then another, to the girl who walked up next. I talked to them about things like butt lifts and tummy tucks, silicone versus saline implants, eyebrow lifts and cosmetic fillers and Botox. By the time the last of them returned to her drinks, I ran out of business cards and noticed several of the girls on their mobile phones, already making appointments with Ashleigh.

“Wow,” I said, breathing a little hard from the unexpected sales pitch I'd given. “That will really help the clinic's bottom line, y'know? Our accountant has been, like, *such* a bitch about cash flow. This will *totally* shut her up.”

Holly beamed with happiness. “I thought it might help,” she told me. “I, um, accidentally overheard you on the phone with your CPA. I thought maybe I could do something. I even talked to Tiffany about it. We're considering making your clinic the 'official' plastic surgeons for the production company. Giving you an exclusive contract.”

“That might actually put us over the top for constructing a new surgical suite in-house,” I breathed, scarcely able to contain myself and my bimbo act forgotten in my excitement. “Honey, do you know what that would do for us, not having to rent the surgical facility?”

She patted my arm. "I've been selfish, baby," she told me softly. "I've only been thinking of myself lately, and not thinking about the beautiful woman who busts her ass night and day to give me everything I've ever wanted. I decided I needed to give you something back."

"You don't owe me anything," I told her.

"I know I don't," she said. "I *wanted* to."

"That is so sweet."

She leaned back, dropping her sunglasses back over her eyes and taking in the sun. "I have a question to ask you," she said, "and I really need you to be completely honest, okay?"

"Okay," I said.

"The whole airhead thing," she told me. "I love it. It makes me wet. And it's a condition of your deal with Joel Travis. I get that. But... does it make you happy?"

"It might, if it wasn't such a struggle," I said. "I mean, I like how happy it makes you, and I do like the funny looks I get from patients and other doctors, the Barbie surgeon who talks like a ditz and cuts like Hawkeye Pierce. I'm actually getting a fair reputation in the field. The Bimbo Surgeon. But it's so *hard*, Holly. If I don't concentrate every time I open my mouth, then it doesn't come out. You have no idea how much work it all is."

"I have a pretty good idea," she said. "I feel the same way about being April Raynes, sometimes."

"Sorry," I told her, "didn't mean to be insensitive. Still, I'm afraid if I let it slip then you're gonna whip me or paddle me until I can't sit down, or I'm terrified that Joel will out me to the staff and tell them how I paid for my boob job and then I won't have any credibility with the staff. I'd have to quit. Go someplace new and start over. And I get so nervous, I make mistakes. I forget to talk that way."

"The problem is, you see yourself as a surgeon who has to talk like a ditz," Holly told me. "It wouldn't bother you so much, or be so much work, if you saw yourself as a bimbo who just happened to be a fantastic surgeon."

"And how, pray tell, do I manage that?"

She slid her sunglasses down and regarded me flatly over the tops. "First thing, stop saying snobby shit like 'pray tell,'" she suggested. "And second, there's this." She handed me a little iPod shuffle, in my signature pink, wrapped in the ear buds and cord.

"I already have an MP3 player," I said, a little confused.

"Not like this one, baby," she said, sliding her sunglasses up and laying back. "I thought about the problems you seemed to be having and pegged it to be just what you just said. So I called a very passionate member of my fan club. His name is Justin, he lives in Atlanta, would do just about anything for a private show from me and just happens to be one of the most successful and respected hypnotherapists in the country."

“Hypnosis?” I asked.

“He says it only works if you actually want it to,” she told me. “That’s why I asked if it made you happy. If you want it, then listen. If you don’t, then, well, I’ll let you off the hook. Maybe you can talk that way for anniversaries and Valentine’s Day, that kinda thing. I don’t know what to tell you about Dr. Travis, but I’m sure you can figure something out. I don’t want you all stressed out and sneaking cigarettes in the back yard where I’m not supposed to notice and not sleeping well because you’re trying to figure out how to make it all work.”

“But Holly...”

“But nothing,” she said. “You keep going on about making me happy. And you do. More than anything or anyone in the whole world. But I can’t be happy, Brooke, if you’re not happy. The whole system falls apart. I’m so sorry I was part of the problem. But I can fix it. For once, I need you to tell *me* what to do. You make the call, and I’ll support you no matter what you choose. Okay?”

I looked at the little metal square and nodded, chewing my bottom lip. “I’ll think it over,” I told her. “I’ll give you an answer in a day or two. Is that all right?”

“Take however long you need, baby,” Holly said. “And in the meantime, take those days off. Talk and act like Smart Brooke around me. You need a break from all this.”

“Yes, I do,” I confirmed. “And thank you, honey. You don’t know what this means.”

She smiled, eyes still closed beneath the golden sun. “I have a pretty good idea,” she repeated. “Now, how about you rub some lotion on my back?”

\* \* \*

Brooke Martin, the Bimbo Surgeon. Strangely enough, it opened doors. People *wanted* to meet me, experience me and then tell the tale. Even around the city where I worked, there were women with boob jobs and then there were women with Bimbo Surgeon boob jobs. I’d become a bizarre status symbol among the city’s wealthy elite. And the women who I worked on seemed to tacitly agree – a brainless airhead who knew the power of big, firm tits would know exactly what kind of tits to give a woman desperate to keep a husband, or nail down a promotion at work, or attract that special guy, or make a flat-chested girl feel infinitely better about herself and make the world around her see her differently. They recognized me as having a fundamental understanding about the benefits of being *hot* and it made my work more desirable than other surgeons.

So after a couple days, I decided to just go ahead and try the hypnosis recordings, unsure if they would even work but still openminded and optimistic. I climbed on the treadmill – eager to stress my body and spend a blissful hour in clean, honest sweat – stuffed the ear-buds in over my trademark gigantic hoop earrings, set the machine for the toughest interval training program in the memory and then pressed ‘play.’

A soft voice and some soothing, atonal melody filled my ears as I struck my customary, ground-eating pace, feet thumping rhythmically on the rotating band. “You are relaxed. You

are completely calm. The world, and all your worries, are getting father and father away from you. They still exist, but they are far away. You are safe, and calm, and completely at ease. An island, in the middle of a storm. You can see it, but you cannot feel it. Where you are, there are only calm breezes and warm sunshine and the gentle lullaby of the waves against the sand...”

As suddenly as the music and the words had begun, they stopped. I blinked my eyes in rapid succession, then looked down at the display panel on the treadmill. *Eighteen miles? I ran eighteen miles?* I thought calmly. I should have been alarmed, but I just couldn't manage to freak out. I'd been on the treadmill for an hour and a half. My legs screamed in pain and exhaustion. I knew I needed to cool down, especially after running most of a marathon without even feeling the time pass, so I slowed the pace to a brisk walk and breathed heavily, forcing past the pounding ache in my calves and hamstrings. Sweat poured off of me in rivulets, making puddles on the rubberized floor beneath me.

I could only think of a bath, and I stripped off my shoes, then my sodden socks, sports bra and yoga pants, leaving them in a sweaty trail of discarded clothing behind me on the way to the bathroom. I ran the water steaming hot and added a generous dollop of rose-scented oil, lit a lavender candle, and sank gratefully beneath the surface.

I dared not press 'play' again, lest I lose track of time and find myself pruny and dehydrated in a tub of ice-cold water. Instead, I just played with my beautiful new tits and my sensitive pussy, bringing myself to a lovely little shuddering orgasm as the hot water eased the aches from my overworked muscles. I stood up, dried off, and wrapped myself in a woolly bathrobe on my way to the kitchen to stuff a protein bar into my mouth, gobbling it down in two bites, and then a huge glass of orange juice and then a recovery shake made in the blender with strawberries and bananas thrown in for flavor.

I sat at the little dressing table in my room, taking my time to style my hair and apply my makeup with even more than my customary care, wanting myself to look runway perfect today for some reason. I felt nothing but pure girlish delight as I spread glittering color on my face and sculpted my hair into an artful, windblown masterpiece. I knew I could be sexy and beautiful whenever I wanted – today, I felt like looking otherworldly, like some work of art carved from perfect milky alabaster. I was just dusting my face with pressed powder and getting ready to do my lips when Holly came in, smelling sharply of her morning cigarette and a cup of coffee in her hand.

“Hey, beautiful – oh my God! You look incredible,” she said.

“Thanks, babe,” I told her warmly. “Sit down. I wanna do you.”

I spent another happy hour standing behind the love of my life, making her look as perfect and flawless as I did, running my fingers through her soft hair and lovingly brushing color across her porcelain cheeks, evening out every tiny flaw until she looked like a retouched photograph. I dusted her with powder as I had myself, then gave her a tiny little affectionate kiss on the end of her nose before swabbing it playfully with the big, round powder brush.

“Just like a Playboy centerfold,” I said happily. “My beautiful, exquisite wife.”

“I love you,” she purred. “What do you want to do today?”

“Don't care,” I said, shrugging elaborately. “Just as long as I do it with you.”

We dressed to relaxed, happy chatter about nothing in particular – I even managed to express a little bit of my trepidation about letting Joel fuck my pussy with his mammoth cock, which Holly soothed away by convincing me how good it would feel, having that giant fleshy bat stuffed deeply inside my belly. A cold snap, the last little vestige of the winter gone, blew in last night and we had to bundle up a little – Holly in a sparkling sweater-dress with tempting cutouts that clung to her delicious curves, and me in an adorable pink wool pea-coat with a short hemline that looked like something out of an Audrey Hepburn movie, and we set out to just walk around the pedestrian mall downtown and window-shop.



Feeling completely safe in Holly's company, I decided to take a little 'reality break,' stuffing the earbuds back into my ears and playing the second track of the hypnosis program she'd given me, letting her lead me around by the hand while I spent another hour and a half deep in a trance. I came to, walking easily on my four-inch heeled booties in a pink that exactly matched my coat, still holding Holly's hand while she smoked a cigarette and looked in the windows of the new boutiques just opened along Front Street.

“Welcome back,” she told me happily. “Did you have fun?”

“Um... I'm not sure,” I said vapidly. “How far did we walk?”

“Oh, about two miles,” she said. “This is our third lap. I didn't want to stop until you were done.”

“Ohmah*Gawd*, you are *soOOoo* sweet,” I lilted, as natural to me as if I'd talked that way since childhood. I pressed a light kiss into her cheek. “I love how you take care of me, baby.”

“Listen to you,” she said. “I guess those tracks are working.”

“Y'think?” I said, eyes wide and guileless. “Cause it feels like nothing's, y'know, happening. I'm still speaking in, like, my normal voice.”

“Yeah, I can tell a little difference,” Holly said with a fond smile on her face. “Do you feel different?”

“I dunno, maybe a little more chilled out 'n' stuff, maybe, but... ooh! Look, baby, I *so* need that yellow leather jacket! Tell me you wouldn't *totally* love me in that!”

\* \* \*

We had a late lunch in a little Italian restaurant near where we parked, even indulging ourselves by splitting a piece of cheesecake for dessert. I figured I could stand the calories, given how far my legs had carried me today, and Holly would no doubt fuck it off in her next shoot, or I would get to be the dominatrix for a few hours in our gym and get her back to trim and smooth.

I even allowed myself a cigarette, standing on the sidewalk in front of Holly's parked car, puffing contentedly – and without a single twinge of guilt, for the first time since I fell to the habit – and eye-flirting with a couple cute guys walking by in the opposite direction.

“Are you happy, baby?” Holly asked, brushing a loose strand of blonde silken hair from my face where the wind had blown it free from my elaborate hairstyle.

“I thought I was, before,” I told her, “but I wasn't. Not like now. I didn't even know what happy even *meant*, y'know, until today.”

“But... completely happy?” Holly asked.

I giggled. “Are you trying to get me to say something particular or, y'know? 'Cause I'd rather you just, like, said it,” I told her.

“I just want to know if it feels complete. Or if it feels like anything is missing,” Holly clarified.

I shrugged. “I dunno. Maybe. Yeah, actually, but I don't know what or nothing,” I said. “I *totally* have no clue what could make me any happier than I feel right now, baby, I really don't. I mean, I feel like maybe there might be something, but I don't want to, like, *quit* feeling happy like this just so I can, y'know, figure out what the hell it is.”

“Do you trust me, Brooke?” Holly asked, suddenly very serious.

I tried to laugh it off. “What kind of question is that, baby?”

“I mean it, Brooke,” she pressed. “Do you trust me?”

“You know I do,” I said, all traces of flippancy gone.

“I just needed to hear you say it,” she said. “Because I think I know what it is. That thing we're missing. But it scares the hell out of me and will probably scare the hell out of you, and if we do it, you'll have to trust me like you never have before.”

\* \* \*

She drove me home with no further reference to that mysterious missing *thing* she thought she'd discovered, turning the conversation back to the happy, shallow things we'd talked about for the rest of the day – clothes and movies and music, makeup and dancing and dream vacation spots. We even talked about renewing our vows and what kind of ceremony we might have. By the time we'd spent several billion imaginary dollars on the most lavish wedding in recorded human history, laughing and giggling throughout the entire process, we were pulling into our driveway just as the sun went down.

“I need to go run a quick errand,” Holly said, letting me out. “I'll only be a few minutes, okay, baby? Why don't you scoot inside and make us a little dinner and I'll be right back.”

“Okay,” I said, blowing her a pouty kiss and giving a little Marilyn Monroe shimmy. I scampered inside, lighthearted and free of the slightest care, already making a mental tally of what we had in the refrigerator and what I might conjure from the raw materials.

I fixed a quick and easy southwestern-style taco salad which I was just spooning into bowls from the stewpot when Holly came back, carrying a little paper sack which she stuck in the freezer before she ever even gave me my 'hello' kiss.

“Ooh, was that ice cream?” I asked hopefully.

“Better,” she said. “I'm gonna go change, okay?”

“Hurry quick, baby, or it'll get cold. Want some wine or something?”

“No, thanks,” she said. “And neither do you. Just water tonight.”

She trotted into the bedroom happily while I set the table and poured two glasses of ice water, telling myself that I could probably use the rehydration after my prolonged exercise. Holly came back in, wearing a black satin nightie tied with a pink ribbon sash, and gave me a very passionate, exploratory kiss which curled my toes and left me completely breathless, leaning against the table to keep my balance.

“What was that for?” I asked happily.

“What, I can't kiss my wife? What kind of chickenshit outfit are you running, here?”

“Sit down and eat,” I told her mock-sternly. We continued our loving chat from earlier, just shooting the breeze airily, while we ate, then while I washed the dishes. Holly surprised me by taking a towel from the handle of the oven and drying, making the job take half the time. That

little gesture, helping me out with the task traditionally mine, warmed me all the way to my scalp.

“Come into the bedroom,” she told me huskily, eyes smoldering. I’d hoped the evening would end this way, and I let her lead me by the hand with no objection. I noticed she’d fastened the leather wrist cuffs to the headboard and I purred deep in my throat. I *really* liked it when she tied me up.

She took a little moment, kissing my shoulders and teasing my pierced nipples with her fingernails, while I dressed myself in the black latex waist-cincher corset she’d laid out for me on the dressing stool, helping me lace it tight beneath my breasts, making them stand out even more perkily than Dr. Travis’ handiwork could alone. I looked almost like a cartoon, wearing it – with my wide, muscular hips and my huge bustline and my waist nipped down to a waspish nineteen inches.

Holly excused herself for a minute, leaving to go into the front of the house. I busied myself in the meantime gathering my long blonde hair into long pigtails, like a naughty schoolgirl, fastened with a pink ribbon over each ear. Holly came back in, laying something on the bed, and regarded me with naked desire in her sparkling eyes.

“I *love* that look,” she told me. “So naughty. So *you*.”

“Glad you like it,” I purred, pulling one pigtail over my shoulder and finger-brushing it sexily.

“Would you mind wearing it that way for me all the time?” she asked. “It really turns me on.”

“Would I mind? Baby, all you have to do is tell me, you know I’ll do it.”

“I don’t feel like commanding you,” she said. “I like it better when you *want* to do it.”

“If you like it that much, I’ll wear my hair this way for you every day for the rest of my life.”

She led me to the bed by the hands and sat me on the edge, kissing me passionately and stroking the back of my neck until my entire body positively vibrated with desire. She put her hands on my slender shoulders and pushed me gently backwards, eyes brimming with desire, while she buckled me in. She said nothing, just dropping to her knees between my widespread legs, and fell to with tongue and fingers, making me squeal and squirm in my bonds, breathing hard and moaning for all I was worth.

“I love you so much,” she whispered, looking up at me through the cleft between my proudly upstanding silicone breasts.

“I love you, too,” I breathed huskily.

“Tell me you trust me,” she said. “Tell me you believe that I would never do anything to hurt you.”

I giggled a little. “You know that’s true.”

“Just say it,” she told me. “I need to hear it. From you.”

“Okay,” I said, wondering why everything seemed, like, twice as intense all of a sudden. My mind couldn't fight through the pleasant pink fog which had settled in it this morning, making it hard to concentrate and difficult to understand everything that went on around me. “I trust you, Holly. With all my heart. You would never do anything to hurt me.”



She reached beneath the covers and brought something out, holding it up to the light to show me. A turkey baster. Filled with a milky white fluid.

“Oh my God,” I breathed. “Is that...”

“It's from Joel Travis,” she told me. “I've been emailing him about it for nearly a month. I think he would've preferred doing it the traditional way, but I wasn't comfortable with that idea. I couldn't stand the thought of it, to be honest. But you know he's healthy and comes from good people. He's intelligent, he's gorgeous, tall and strong – you have to be curious...”

“Enough,” I said in a hoarse whisper. “Do it.”

“Are you...”

“I’ve never been so sure of anything in my entire life,” I told her. “Holly, baby – this is what we wanted. Not having this – this is where it all started to go wrong between us in the first place. You can’t. A lot about you has changed, Holly, but you and I both know that hasn’t. You can’t have one. I *can*. It’s what we both want. It’s what we both always wanted. Do it.”

“In all the times you talked dirty to me,” Holly said, eyes brimming, “nothing you’ve ever said has turned me on or made me love you more.”

“Just one thing,” I said. “Neither of us *ever* refers to this as Joel’s baby. This is *our* baby. That sperm is *yours* and I’m having *your* baby. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” she sniffed.

“Did you know that the female orgasm increases the chance of conception when the woman is laying on her back in the supine position by up to thirty percent?” I teased. “Give me what we both want, my love. Give me your baby. Knock me the fuck up.”

\* \* \*

Spring came and went, then a very mild summer broke through, sparing us its usual drought conditions with frequent rain showers and keeping the grass and trees green well past the point where they usually browned in the relentless sun. I thanked heaven for not broiling me alive, on top of the discomfort I already bore. Swollen ankles, room-clearing gas, searing back pain, bizarre food cravings that, when satisfied, brought crippling cramps or explosive diarrhea and seesawing between maddening insomnia and sleeping sometimes twelve or thirteen hours at a clip. My swollen belly tented the front of my maternity coveralls and nearly knocked over a display of breast pumps stacked neatly at the end of an aisle in the upscale maternity boutique.

“Oh, Brooke, look! How cute is this?” Holly gushed.



I turned, my huge hoops and my now-everpresent pigtails, tied today with royal blue ribbons over each ear, swinging against my neck and shoulders. Holly, still centerfold gorgeous in stark contrast to my bloated hideousness, held up a little pink onesie with “Little Diva” silkscreened on it in glitter.

“That is *precious*,” I commented. I had been sobbing uncontrollably about twenty minutes ago – someone had cut us off in the parking lot and I convinced myself it was a worldwide conspiracy to make Holly and I miserable and make sure our baby grew up in squalor with nothing nice to call her own. Damned hormones had me careening back and forth between despondent tears, bloodthirsty rage, out-of-control horniness and giddy euphoria at the slightest provocation. I decided to take warm, comfortable and loved while it lasted and held Holly's hand tightly, snuggling against her firm, nubile body and kissing her smooth shoulder.

“Now, don't get carried away, baby, 'cause, y'know, we're only here to pick up that lactation book and some more nursing bras,” I cautioned her fondly. We had yet to leave a baby store for less than two hundred dollars. Our little girl would be spoiled beyond the bounds of reason. But it made Holly so happy, spending the money she'd made in her new production

company on our baby. And it finally gave me the viable excuse to quit smoking that I knew she would accept without punishing me.

“Ooh,” I said, rubbing my swollen belly. “Easy, girl. I guess he likes the onesie.”

“Is she kicking again? Lemme feel, lemme feel,” Holly cooed, putting her hand on my belly and marveling at the movement inside me. I detected no lingering jealousy that it was me and not her, and I shared her smile. I didn't find myself wishing that she could feel what I felt. I liked that it was private, mine alone. I shared what I could, of course, but I got the advantage of falling in love with this little creature before anyone else got the opportunity and I intended to take it.

“How are you feeling?” Holly asked. She always became solicitous when she felt the baby move.

“Hungry, actually,” I said. “Aren't we about a block or so from that cute little Fifties diner?”

“Uh-huh,” Holly confirmed. “You want me to go get the car?”

“No, baby, the walk would do me good,” I said. “Can't wait to get Junior out so I can get back to working out. I still wanna run that half-marathon in October.”

“You'll be the human muscle again in no time,” Holly said fondly. “Why the diner?”

“I want pork chops,” I said flatly.

“Aren't you a vegetarian?”

“Yeah,” I said, “but I want pork chops.”

“Whatever my baby wants,” Holly said, threading her arm through mine.

\* \* \*

#### EPILOGUE: ONE YEAR LATER

“Bahd.”

I bent over the top of the stroller, following the fat finger where it pointed. “That's right, baby,” I said in the warm, throaty “mama” voice I developed the instant I'd given birth. “That's a bird. A starling.”

“Bahd,” the little voice repeated happily. “Bahd, mama. Bahd.”

“How many words is that, now?” Holly asked.

“Twenty-six,” I said proudly. “She's talking up a storm.”

We rounded a corner in the little downtown pedestrian mall where we'd taken to walking in the mornings when I didn't have surgery. I taught a spinning class at six a.m., and was usually home and showered by the time little Jennifer woke up. Since she'd taken up solid food, Holly never missed a chance to feed her breakfast, no matter how late she'd been up the night before in the

editing bay – having moved from acting to directing had been a tough transition for her, but she was smart and capable and never stopped learning, but I supported her decision to get out from in front of the camera now that a very impressionable little girl dominated our lives. She never wanted to have to explain away something on the Internet to our precious daughter. She never wanted Jennifer Rose to know her beloved mother fucked for money, or have to defend that to any of her friends.

“Did you call that day care that Tiffany suggested?” Holly asked.

“Not yet,” I said. “I still don't want to put her in day care just yet, baby, I don't want to share her with anyone for a little while longer.”

“I know, but we have to,” Holly said. “Your practice is suffering. Joel said as much, without ever coming out and actually saying it. He's worried, Brooke, and if he's worried, then you should be.”

I nodded. I still saw patients, just not nearly as many, and Joel didn't have the wherewithal to take up the slack. Partnering the Bimbo Surgeon made him look like the better surgeon, but it didn't actually *make* him the better surgeon. I didn't need him to tell me this; I could see it in the reports from the partners' meetings. He never said it to me outright, but that was because our private meetings usually had me bent over the conference table while he put the cock to me and I squealed like a schoolgirl. He turned out to be much kinder and more generous than the polished 'player' persona he exuded. He sent little presents to Jenny all the time, and started a very generous college fund for her on the day she was born. He had been asking me to let him take her to the park. This new Joel – I was leaning towards a *yes*, and Holly had told me it was entirely my call to make.

“I wish I could just quit,” I grumped, tearing my mind from happy thoughts of Joel back to the practice and the ages of time it stole from me, time I could have been spending with my darling little daughter. “Be a full-time mom. Drive a mini-van. Bake brownies and sell Girl Scout cookies.”

“You'd hate it after three weeks,” Holly said, and I knew she was right. “You wouldn't be able to stand not being *Doctor* Brooke Martin.”

“I'll call tomorrow, I promise,” I told her.

“Doggy.”

“No, honey, that's a fire hydrant,” Holly said.

“Fiya hynte.”

“Awesome!” Holly said, clapping a little. “Twenty-seven!”

“You are *so* adorable,” I said from the depths of my heart.

“You look happy,” Holly said.

“Pot. Kettle. Black,” I accused.

“That's because I am happy,” Holly said. “I have the perfect life. Everything I ever wanted.”

“And how about you, little angel-face?” I said, bending low to press a kiss into my fingers and put it on Jennifer's nose, making her giggle and squirm. “Are *you* happy, too?”

“Fiya hynte.”

“Close enough,” I said.



Neither Holly nor I noticed the kind dark eyes, bent into half-moons above a kind smile in a face mapped with weather and wrinkles and care, watching us from the window of the palm-reader's shop on the square.

Magda turned back to her son, still using a cane but getting around better every day. “Tea, mama?”

“I would love some,” she said.

Her son's eyes followed his mother's gaze to the two statuesque, huge-breasted blondes passing by. “Wow,” he breathed. “Beautiful girls.”

“You have no idea,” Magda said cryptically just before her smile returned once again.

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