

# CASSANDRA

*By Cheryl Lynn*



*ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART*

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A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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## CASSANDRA

**BY CHERYL LYNN**

The long line of limos wound slowly down the narrow serpentine drive. Gusty winds lashed the rain against windshields and curbs as the heavens poured forth their condolences on the sad procession. The lead limousine came to a stop and a man dressed all in black leapt out and unfolded a large black umbrella. Holding it protectively over the rear door, the figure reached out to open the limousine door.

A heavily veiled woman dressed all in black from gloves to heels emerged to take the umbrella possessively. She left the man standing in the rain with water pouring off the sleek beak of his cap like a veil. She carefully made her way up the walk and past the silent, dripping marble monuments and headstones. As she walked, others emerged from their vehicles and quickly followed. The women all wore black and the men dark suits and ties. There was much soft sobbing and low murmuring as the group gathered around the open grave.

Almost as if prearranged, the heavens opened with renewed energy and as a massive lightening bolt crashed out in stunning brilliance.

The preacher stepped forth. He took his place at the head of the white oaken casket. His robes were dripping wet as he began the service. Lightening flashed and the rain thundered off the fluttering canvas awning that provided very little protection for the mourners huddled beneath. The loud tattoo of the rain drowned out what the preacher was saying to those standing just a short distance away.

It was a forlorn day and a miserable time that seemed somehow fitting. It was as if the heavens grieved along with everyone else now that Cassandra was no more. The very light of her mother's eye and the very breath of her being was the beautiful Cassandra. Cassandra's mother was strong, both in mind and body. To her great credit, she did not sway or bend under the awful burden that death had wrought. She cried, oh how she cried, but with the rain and her resolve no one saw. No one knew, just how deeply the hurt had penetrated into her very soul.

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“Dust to dust, ashes to ashes,” the service continued to its conclusion. With rain saturated clothing clinging tightly to their bodies, everyone was more than anxious to get out of the weather and back to their vehicles. The final words had hardly been uttered when they all hurried away.

Decorum forgotten in the downpour. Soon, only Cassandra's mother and the driver remained.

“Ma'am,” he said softly to the grieving woman, “Ma'am, please! It's time to go. You have to let go. Come, bring your grief with you, if you must, but everyone has gone and the storm is getting worse.”

He took her arm and carefully led her back down the cobblestone walk.

She held the umbrella in a death grip and did not say a word, but she allowed him to lead her back to the car. She was numb from both the cold dampness and the grief that filled her. As she settled into the back seat, she pulled the wet veil back over her head. The face was sad, but its underlying beauty could not be hidden.

Time heals all wounds, it is said. But what of a mother's loss? Now that is the makings of our tale.

So let us jump forward in time to another day, in another year, and in another place.

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Sam brushed the hair out of his eyes as he peered out into the traffic. The light wind whipped at his face, flipping his rather long brown hair back into his eyes.

“Aghhh,” he groaned as he once again brushed it away. “I’m going to get this stuff cut off the very next chance I get,” he said to no one in particular. The light changed and he stepped from the curb as another breeze flipped his hair.

He felt the hand grab him under his collar and forcefully jerk him back. He almost lost his balance and had to windmill his arms and do a little hop/skip backwards. As he turned his head a quarter turn and opened his mouth to yell out a few choice expletives, the side panel of the delivery truck filled his vision and the air horn blasted loudly into his ears. Stumbling backwards his right foot was grazed by the passing truck, spinning him back around and into the arms of a tall, thin, grubby looking bum.

“Hey, man!”

Sam saw the bum in that focused intensity that only comes with fright. The man was wearing tattered army greens, sweater, frayed army jacket, and a pair of scruffy jungle boots. It was obvious that he was both homeless and probably crazy to boot.

Sam pulled back his hand and making a fist was getting ready to punch the guy's lights out, but paused in realization that this bum had just saved his life.

“Hey, cool it man!” the bum yelled. “I wasn't tryin' nuthin'! Youse almost got ran over, man!”

“Oh boy!” Sam exclaimed in a rush of held in air, as he realized what had just happened. Lowering his fist, he tried to apologize and thank the man who had pulled him from the street.

“Doan mean nuthin' man! Stay cool, dude!” the bum said as he brushed off Sam's clothing and with a pat to his butt quickly strode out of arms reach and turned the corner. Soon he was lost in the crowd.

Sam started to turn around when he felt a sharp pain fly up his leg from his ankle. “Ahhhhhh,” he cried as his leg collapsed sending him to the pavement. Sitting on his butt, he reached out and grabbed his sore ankle. It hurt like the dickens and left him panting. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead and it was all he could do to keep the tears from flowing down his cheek.

“I'm acting like some big sissy,” he mumbled as he rocked slowly back and forth while holding tightly to his throbbing ankle. “Damn, damn, that hurts,” he said as he looked up into the soft nose of the police horse. “Ahh, the mounted police here at last.”

After what seemed like years, Sam was taken to the local public hospital where he was admitted with a broken ankle. It was while they were removing his clothing in the examination room that Sam discovered that his wallet was missing. It seemed that that bum stripped him of his only identification and money. Every penny that he owned was in that wallet.

“Man, what a bummer!” was all he managed to say.

Dressed only in a hospital gown that left nothing to the imagination, Sam laid on the table listening to the doctor. Fortunately the pain killer that the nurse had given him made the loss of his wallet and dignity seem less of a burden at the moment.

“You're very fortunate,” the emergency room doctor told him. “Usually in these circumstances, the ankle bones are shattered from the force of the blow, but you are a mighty lucky man. We're only going to have to put one or two pins in it. My guess is that you'll be laid up for only ten or twelve weeks. Hope you've got somebody to look after you. You're not going to be able to move around much until we take the cast off.”

Turning away from him, the doctor told the nurse, “Go ahead and admit him. Schedule surgery first thing in the morning and inform Doctor Cooper. Okay!”

Switching his attention back to Sam, the doctor finished, “Well, er...Sam,” he said after looking down to the chart he held in his hands to double check his name, “the nurse will take care of you. Doctor Cooper is our Orthopod and he'll stop by in the morning to check with you. Don't worry about a thing, everything is going to be all right.”

Sam was restless. He couldn't get comfortable no matter how hard he tried. Not only was his ankle still throbbing despite the pain killers, but that little hospital gown they gave him kept riding up around his waist. That would not have been so bad if he had a pair of shorts to wear, but they did not even leave him that little bit of modesty.

To add to his discomfort, his roommate was some kind of wacko psychotic that had tried to commit suicide but only managed to break both of his arms.

This was turning out to be one hell of a fine day.

Fresh off the bus with no one to call on for help, Sam was in pretty dire straights. Even if he could get to the bus terminal and retrieve his suitcase, there wasn't going to be anything for him to wear once they applied the cast to his leg.

Not only that but the key to the locker had been in his stolen wallet. Lost in despair, it was beginning to look like absolutely nothing was going his way. Letting his head fall back into the small hard pillow, Sam let a tear escape out of the corner of his violet blue eyes. As he wallowed in his melancholy, a thin wailing moan came from across the room.

“Great! Just fuckin' great!” Sam muttered as he pulled the pillow up around his ears trying to deaden the noise from his roommate. He tried his best to scrunch up under the covers trying desperately to muffle the noise. The tears flowed freely down his cheeks as he clenched his eyes closed and gritted his teeth in a vain attempt to shut out reality. Sometime during the night, he managed to fall asleep.

He wasn't sure what it was that woke him, but everything was quiet.

*“Maybe that was it,” he thought, “it is so quiet. Yeah, its just too quiet now. Just as well, maybe now I can think of a way out of this mess I got myself in. Come on man, get a grip! There has to be some way to get over this hump. Just takes a little thought. I've gotten this far on my own, I can work it out. Just think, all I've got to do is apply myself and a solution will pop up.”*

Sam reflected that he had been out on his own ever since leaving home nine months ago. His stepfather and he did not get along one bit and with his mother's illness and confinement, it was time to pull up stakes. So here he was in the big city alone and on his own. Like every other "Gomer Pyle" fresh out of the country, he'd been taken for a ride as well.

*"This was going to prove an expensive lesson,"* he thought as he lay there.

"Good morning Mr. Waters," a toothsome nurse greeted as she entered the room and walked over to him. "And how are we feeling this morning? I'm nurse Winters and I'm here to prep you for your surgery this morning," she continued without skipping a beat. She picked up his chart from the front of the bed and, flipping it open, gave it a quick scan before writing something in it and then with a loud "plop" slammed it back into its slot.

"Look Nurse," Sam said, "I'm really starving. How about something to eat before we do anything else, huh? Then, maybe you can do something about getting me moved some- place else. This wacko across from me has been moaning and screaming all damn night long and I can't get any sleep. How about it, please?"

Setting a tray alongside his bed, Nurse Winters pulled back his covers before he could do or say anything else.

"Mr. Waters you ought to know that we cannot give you anything to eat just before surgery. Didn't anyone tell you that you were NPO. Can't have you go gagging all over the OR now can we? Don't you worry, we'll have you out of surgery before you know it and; then, if you feel up to it, a nice meal will be waiting. Now then, just you settle down while I shave your legs for you."

Sam tried to wiggle back under the covers while the nurse was talking, but only managed to raise his hospital gown up around his waist exposing himself all the more to her amused stare.

"Oh, don't worry about that," the nurse said as he hurriedly pulled the hem of his gown back down. "If I've seen one, I've seen a million of 'em in my time. Now you just relax and let Nurse Winters get you all ready for surgery."

With that she began soaping down his right leg in a thick lather. Picking up a straight razor, she smiled into his slack jawed face and began stripping away the hair. Stroke after stroke she carefully and methodically applied the razor blade. She removed all the hair on first his right then his left leg, all the way up to his groin.

When he questioned the need for shaving both of his legs, was told it was to ensure a sterile field and that she had to do it all the way up past his crotch. Sam smiled nervously while staring up at the acoustic tiled ceiling, he did his best to ignore nurse Winters as she happily shaved the hair from around his penis. He blushed bright red as she lifted his balls and quickly removed the hair there.

At last, the nurse finished her preparations and put the tools of his great embarrassment away. Sam thought that he would go through the ceiling when Nurse Winters casually flipped his penis out of the way using the back of her hand as she scraped the hairs off the inside of his thigh. If the truck hadn't killed him, the nurse's familiarity just about did. The only thing that had kept him still was the thought of

what would happen if he suddenly jerked while she held the razor so close to his very vital organ.

As a final insult, Nurse Winters had him roll over on his side while she injected several shots into his bare rump. With the indignity still fresh in his mind, another woman walked into the room just as the nurse left.

“Oh Damn!” Sam whispered, “Just what I need. Another woman coming to embarrass and harass me. You'd think that they had enough fun tormenting me by now.”

Sam rolled over trying to ensure that his gown was tucked in enough to offer some concealment and modesty. As he turned to face the newcomer, he heard a small yelp of surprise and the sound of something hitting the floor. He was looking at an older woman, good looking and refined, but strange nonetheless.

She was positively gawking at him. Her mouth was open but no sound came out and she was clutching her hands to her ample breasts. A binder was laying on the floor where it had fallen.

Almost as soon as it happened, the woman bent down and picked up the binder all the while not taking her eyes off of Sam.

“I'm sorry,” she said in soft tones. “I thought that...that you were someone else. Please...er...please forgive me. I did not mean to startle you. It's just that you look so...so much like...like someone I knew....but never mind about that now. I'm Mrs. Norris.”

Sam found himself getting dizzy and laid his head back down on the pillow.

“*So he reminded this woman of somebody. Big deal!*” his thoughts were becoming fuzzy as well. “*Must be the drugs,*” his mind told him.

“Sooooo, whooooo arrrreee youuuuu?” his slurred voice asked. It sounded to him like his own voice was coming from inside of a tunnel.

“Why, I'm Mrs. Norris. The social worker and I'm here to see if I can help you. I understand that you are an indigent patient and came to us without any identification or anything. According to our records..that is...you were a victim of a mugging? Was it?”

“Ye...ah,” Sam managed to force out between suddenly very thick feeling lips. His mouth was so dry. “I...I wa...was robbed of my wa...wallet....an....and..I..ju..just got here. No....no wh...where n...no one to hel...elp meeee.”

It was getting very difficult for him to remember what he was trying to say, much less actually say it. The drugs were beginning to take full effect.

His last conscious thoughts were of seeing the woman bending over his bed looking at him. He thought he heard her say, “Cassandra?”

When Sam woke up in the Recovery Room, his whole body was numb. While uncoordinated and lethargic, he was aware of the heavy weight dragging at his right leg. He tried to rise, but did not have the strength. He felt an arm reach around his shoulders and help prop him upright. While still supported by the arm, a glass appeared in front of his face and he sucked greedily at the straw.

Finishing about half the glass, Sam's mind cleared somewhat and he became aware of the woman, though he couldn't remember much else about her, that had been with him last. She supported his head while holding the glass of water. He mumbled his thanks and with a last look at the plaster cast running the length of his right leg, let himself down to the pillow. With a heavy sigh, he closed his violet blue eyes in slumber.

“Oh dear, oh dear,” the woman muttered. “The only thing keeping you from being the exact clone of poor Cassandra is your sex. I wonder if I should tell Mabel about you? Once she sees those eyes of yours..ummm...well I don't know. It just may be too much for her.”

Mrs. Norris turned to the bedside table and replaced the glass. Moving a little ways back from the bed and the sleeping youth, she continued her reflections, “If she only saw you the way I did when first we met. The way your hair was spread on the pillow, even the nose so like hers, but the eyes. Those violet blue eyes so rare and yet so....so absolutely devastatingly expressive. They capture the soul. Yes, I do not have any real choice in this matter. I owe her that much at least. You rest now. I'll be back when you are awake.”

Thirty minutes later, Mrs. Norris hung up the telephone. Mabel had been more than eager to hear what she had to say. While the woman sounded somewhat dubious, she said that she could not take the chance that her daughter had returned from the grave. Gloria Norris just shook her head as she hung up the phone feeling sorry now for calling.

*“Mabel had never completely gotten over her loss, but maybe, just maybe seeing this young man would jar Mabel back to reality,”* Gloria thought. *“After all, she wouldn't be able to claim it was her precious Cassandra in any event. The shock of seeing her daughter's eyes in the face of a man would undoubtedly destroy any notions she had that Cassandra would return. Well, at least that was her fervent hope.”*

Gloria let her thoughts skip through time. Mabel had been a very good friend and her daughter's death had struck deep.

*“Miserable child that she had been. Always breaking her Mother's heart. Mabel had so wanted a frilly feminine daughter that she could dress up and show off to society.”*

Gloria shook her head as she let her mind continue its train of thought, *“Instead, she had gotten a world class beauty that hated dressing up. Cassandra preferred jeans and tie-dyed shirts and beads to the trimmings of society. Cassandra even gave up her religion to become a Buddhist. Of all the nonsense, a Buddhist no less. It just about broke her Mother's heart and then to so waste her life on a drug overdose. Tsk, tsk, such a waste. Such a waste!”*

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“Oh, Gloria, I don't know just how to thank you for telling me about Cassandra's return. I just can't wait to see her. You know its been such a long time,” Mabel Johns was saying as they walked past the Cassandra Johns' wing of the hospital.

They paused in their walk for a second while Mabel looked at the plaque, then continued on their way.

“Look Mabel dear,” Gloria countered. “I did not say that Cassandra had returned. I only said that a young **MAN**...looking like Cassandra...had been admitted here at County General. I did not say she was really back. If I thought that you were going to go on like this. Well! I never would have called. I'm sorry, I did it now. Mabel, you really must get over this obsession of yours that she will return. This young **MAN** only bears a striking resemblance to your baby **AND** that's all! Look, if you don't get control of yourself, I won't take another step. Do you hear?”

“Oh, Gloria. You're just overreacting as usual. I'm sure that once I see this young man of yours....that I'll realize that you are just pulling my leg. You just imagined that you saw violet blue eyes when what you probably saw was just a deep blue. No one could have eyes like my Cassandra. No one! Don't you understand.”

“Well, I know what I saw and what I saw were her eyes,” Gloria responded. “More than that, he has her facial structure as well. Here, let's go into my office and continue this chat. I do not feel comfortable talking like this out in the halls. It's right over here.”

She did not like having her ideas ridiculed or rebuffed either, but did not say so out loud where Mabel could hear. She went over to her desk, picked up the thermos and poured two cups of tea.

“One lump?”

Seeing Mabel nod, she dropped the sugar cube into the steaming cup. Handing the cup to Mabel, she sat down beside her on the couch.

“Just you wait,” Gloria continued after they settled down on the couch. “Once you have a chance to meet him, you'll know that he isn't Cassandra. He is all male, if you know what I mean! Heck, I was there when they prepped him this morning. I ought to know the differences in the plumbing by now. I've been married for many years you know.”

“Oh, don't go getting your panties in a bind, Gloria dear. I am just so excited about your news that I got a little over zealous. I am not questioning your judgment nor am I saying that I believe that it's my little girl come back to me either. Once I've had the chance to see and talk to her...I mean him, myself; well, then I'll make up my mind what I believe.”

Mabel paused to sip her tea, then looking off to the side like she was embarrassed softly saying, “You don't really think that I'm being serious when I say that I believe in all that heathen stuff, now do you? Reincarnation of all things! Gloria, I was so hoping that you'd at least have a better opinion of me.”

Hearing her friend hastily deny any such notion, Mabel happily continued, “So, tell me all that you know about him. Everything, and don't leave out the tiniest detail. It may be important.”

With the slightest misgiving, Gloria shrugged off her concern for her best friend and resumed her story. Besides, where was the harm in making an old friend happy?

“Well, from what I've managed to gather, he is new to the city. Just got off the bus in fact. I know that sounds a bit corny, but it's true. He just arrived from a small town

in deep northwest Texas somewhere. Checked his bags into a locker at the Greyhound station and headed out the door. Seems he wasn't paying attention and almost got run over by a truck. Then, to add insult to his injury, the guy that saved his life snatched his wallet and took off. Just left our Sam Waters sitting on the curb with a shattered ankle. It was a mounted policeman that called it in to us.

“He underwent surgery this morning and now he is in recovery. I stopped by just after the surgery and he is doing fine. Poor boy has a cast running up his entire right leg. He's going to have one heck of a time managing things lugging that load around. Best I can figure, he doesn't have any place or anyone to go to. All alone in the big city. Don't know anything about family back home or nuthin' like that. I haven't had the opportunity to really talk to him yet. I was going to see about placing him at the Salvation Army Center. That's why I was up in his room when the nurse was prepping him. He is all man Mabel!”

They chatted some more until it was time to go and check on the subject of their conversation.

He was back in his room resting peacefully when the two women walked in. A soft halo of light filtered around his shoulder length blond hair as it fanned out around his face. His eye lashes were thick and his brows shaggy but not overly bushy. His face was delicate and his cheekbones too prominent to be considered rugged. His nose was even a little upturned with a sprinkling of freckles.

*“Just like Cassandra's,”* Mabel thought. *“If I did not know better!”*

Well, when he woke she would have a better idea of what it was she wanted to do. She was ready to believe that Cassandra just may have returned to her. Except for the obvious physical differences like two day growth of beard and hairy body, but Mabel was willing herself to over look such minor details. Details that Gloria hastened to point out to her as well as those which weren't so obvious.

“No,” Mabel said to herself, “It'll be in the eyes. I'll be able to see my baby reflected in the eyes!”

Telling Gloria to go on about her business that she was going to stay for a time, Mabel pulled up a chair and sat. While she waited, she let her eyes roam over every inch of the man that was laying partially covered in the bed. She noticed how much his build and coloring was so like her darling daughter's. And the hair, that same straw wheat color that gleamed so in the sun and felt like spun gold when she washed it. Mabel let her head fall back, closed her eyes and began reminiscing of days gone by when she had her little girl to tend and to love.

A loud cough brought her out of her reverie and she sat up, hearing her neck crack in the process.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I must have dozed off,” she mumbled. As she looked over to the bed, Mabel saw the most vivid violet blue eyes she had ever seen with one major exception, Cassandra. “Oh dear!” was all she could say at that moment.

“Who are you?” Sam inquired.

“Oh, I'm Mabel Johns. I'm.....I'm a good friend of Gloria Norris, the social worker here at the General. She...she told me all about your accident and the problems you were having. Gloria, Mrs. Norris that is, informed me of your situation. I find it intolerable that on your first visit to our fair city you found such an undeserved welcome. I was considering the possibilities of your convalescence occurring at my home. If you do not think it too out of line, I would like to try to make amends by offering you the use of my place until you can take care of yourself. Unless, of course, you would prefer staying at the Salvation Army Center?”

“Salvation Army Center?” Sam asked to no one in particular. “I...I don't quite understand. Why on earth would you want me to stay at your place? You don't know anything about me. I could be a crook or something.”

“Well,” Mabel began, “Sam, you don't mind if I call you Sam do you? No, fine. Sam, in the course of my life, I've had to make a number of rash, on the spot judgments about people and let's just say that I have a very good feeling about you. I sold my business a few years ago when my daughter passed on. I retired then and well, now, I enjoy helping out. You know....giving something back.”

She paused to help Sam get a drink of water, then waited patiently as he drank thirstily. “Business, oh, you want to know what kind of business I was in. Well, let's just say the computer software business. It's somewhat technical but in essence we created interfaces between the computer and machines. It was challenging, but like I said it's time to give some of my fortune back. That, in a nutshell, is why I wanted to offer you respite while you recuperated.”

She waited for a moment before continuing in a rush, “You don't think that you can take care of yourself with that cast on your leg do you. I would be careful about putting myself in the Salvation Army's hands. Don't get me wrong! They do a wonderful job, but a person with your restricted capabilities. Well, do I have to say more. Please? Sam, let me help by agreeing to stay at my place for a while at least. If you don't like it, you can always move out. What do you say?”

Sam let his head fall back on to the pillow.

“Oh man, all this is coming so fast. I just want to get out of here, but I don't know what to do. I don't have any money to pay you for your kindness and....and I can't even get my clothes out of storage cause I lost the key with all my money and identification. Man, things are piling up so fast. Lady, I...I couldn't ask you to go so far out of your way to help. I wouldn't wish me on anybody.”

“Well, if you don't want me to help, then what about family? I'd be more than happy to contact them for you. Gloria said you came from some place in Texas. You just give me a number and I'll call them right away. I'm sure..”

Sam cut off her statement by telling her he did not have any family.

“No, I don't have anyone. I'm on my own now, besides, I don't know of anyone else. Look lady, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but right now I just want to sleep, OK?” With that he tried to turn on his side away from her, but the cast wouldn't let him. In his frustration, he muttered a “fuck” into the pillow and kept his head turn away from the woman.

Mabel waited for a few moments, then said, "I understand this has been most traumatic experience for you, but I'll be back after you have had a chance to rest. Think about my offer while I'm gone. It's still good."

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Several days later, Sam fully understood just how helpless he was. Even the simplest chores like getting out of bed required the assistance of a nurse's aide. The full leg cast went from around his foot all the way up his hip where it joined with his groin. While it was made of lightweight plastic, it was still quite heavy and cumbersome to deal with. The bulk and weight contributed to a constant lower back pain that the mild drugs administered to him failed to alleviate. Needless to say, it also required the continued use of a hospital gown which left his butt exposed.

Mrs. Norris had visited him frequently offering suggestions for him to consider when he would be discharged. Since he did not have any money or friends that would care for him, he really had no choices. It would be either the Salvation Army, or a flop house that accepted Welfare recipients. In either case, he would be totally on his own as the state did not provide coverage under his circumstances for any other care.

The enormity of the difficulties facing him, soon got the better of Sam. In a mounting despair, Sam silently cried himself to sleep on more than one occasion. When the day finally arrived for his discharge, he was at a total loss.

He had tentatively told Mrs. Norris that he would appreciate it if she would set him up at the Salvation Army Center, but he was filled with misgivings.

His old roommate, now long gone, had ranted and raved about the horrors of living in such places. It seemed that flop houses and charity shelters were pest holes crawling with all kinds of low life. He was just about to give up all hope after the doctor discharged him, when Mabel entered his room.

"Well, how are you doing today dear?" she asked merrily as she came in and stood by the bed rail. "Look what I brought you! I hope you don't mind, but I did so want us to part on good terms."

She held up a bouquet of flowers tied together by a lavender ribbon.

"I understand that you asked Gloria to help you get into the Center. Well, I'm sure you did what you thought best, didn't you dear?" she continued as she walked around the bed and placed the flowers in his hands. Smiling broadly looking deep into his eyes, she placed her warm hand on his as they gripped the flowers.

"Dear, you look worried and tired. Haven't you been getting your rest?" she asked.

She listened attentively as he related how his back was giving him fits and all the other worries that had been bothering him. She patiently patted his hand reassuringly and made comments as necessary to keep him talking. Finally, after he seem to have exhausted himself, she bent down and kissed him on the forehead. Standing up, she smile down at him and once again said that her offer to let him stay with her was still good.

“No, don't say anything just yet,” she cautioned. “I have to go and visit with my friend Gloria, but you think about my offer and I'll be back before you have to go. Dear, I'm sure you will make the right decision.”

*“This Mabel Johns was likable enough and seemed sincere, but there was something about her that was eerie,” Sam thought. “Nothing I can put my finger on, but, well, many little things just don't seem to add up. First, there was something in the way she looked at him, as if seeing someone else. Second, she was all kissy-kissy, lovey-dovey and he was not used to being around that kind of person. She was way too familiar with him and it made him feel very edgy. Finally, he was used to having his space.”*

Not for the first time did a nagging doubt enter his mind over her sincerity.

“No,” he decided, *“smothering was not entirely his cup of tea and for now the shelter offered him the best alternative. Heck, can't be much worse than Scout camp.”*

Mabel did not show any sign of disappointment when he told her of his decision which in a way surprised him. She told him that if he ever changed his mind to just let her know. She patted him on his hand and left so that he could get dressed.

Mrs. Norris had given Sam a pair of bright yellow wide legged terry cloth shorts with an elastic waist band and an equally bright Hawaiian short sleeved shirt. He looked ridiculous by his standards, but it beat the hell out of the hospital gown he had been wearing.

By his second hour in the shelter, Sam regretted ever coming here. The place was full of winos and spaced out addicts. When they weren't trying to steal him blind, their foul body odor, stench, and noise caused him total misery. Life in the shelter had not been understated by any means. The good news, in the Army's defense, there were some kind and caring people there that tried to help.

Regardless of their intentions, he had his medicines and suitcase, just recently recovered, stolen before the second night was over. The remnants of his possessions and what remained of his dignity were all dissolving away before his eyes. His back hurt worse than ever.

The third night of his stay in the shelter was his last. Sometime in the early morning hours, a large man decided that he wanted Sam's blankets. When Sam refused to give them up, he was severely beaten and stomped by the rampaging psychopath.

Sam woke in pain back in County General. Only this time, he resolved not to go back to the shelter. No matter what.

When everything seemed to be working against him, Sam saw a familiar face enter his room.

“Hello, Mrs. Norris,” Sam greeted. “I didn't expect to see you so soon.”

“Well, I imagine not under these circumstances at any rate,” Mrs. Norris replied. “Now dear, is there anything that I can get for you? I guess that you don't want to go back to the shelter when the doctor releases you this time, do you? No! Well, as I said before there are not a lot of alternatives available.”

She paused in thought, tapping a pencil against her chin, then continued, “There's the flop house, but then, you'd be totally on your own. Yes, dear. I know that idea isn't

to your liking either, but.....well let me see what I can do. You know that your particular circumstances do not leave me much choice. I'll see what I can come up with, but at least in the flop house you'd have a room of your own. Oh, well, sleep tight and don't worry. I'm sure something will come up to resolve your problem. I'll stop by again tomorrow. Bye.”

**-000-**

Back in her office, Gloria picked up the telephone, reached up and pulled the earring from her lobe and said, “Yes? Mrs. Norris, may I help you?”

It was Mabel on the other end. They chatted briefly before Gloria told her that Sam had been readmitted. When she told her what happened to the poor boy, Mabel sounded like she wasn't surprised. Yes, she was concerned about his injuries and asked several questions, but acted too calm about the whole thing.

Gloria promised herself to check closer with the shelter and authorities about the incident. Something just did not ring true in her mind, but it would have to wait until she had the time. Right now she had too many pressing cases that just had to be processed before she could allow herself the luxury of investigating this one case.

Besides she was just being silly, how on earth could her friend Mabel be involved in such a ghastly deed.

Sam was feeling desperate by the time the doctor notified him that he would be discharged in the morning. He had no clothing, other than his all too loud shorts and flowered shirt, and no place to go. Unless you counted the flop house as someplace to go, but what choice did he have. All-in-all his prospects were looking pretty dim.

Gloria promised to drop off some more clothing she had gotten from the shelter for him. She also promised to see that he got safely to the hotel that was to serve as his home until he could do better. Unfortunately, that was the best she could do for him at the moment. She was trying to speed up the Welfare application to get him some cash, but that wasn't the same as getting food and shelter. It took its own bureaucratic time and couldn't be rushed.

“Maybe, in time,” Mrs. Norris informed him, “she could find some other placement for him that would be more acceptable. Until then he did not have any alternative.”

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It was while he was in his deepest despair that another familiar figure knocked on his door and entered.

Coming over to his bedside Mabel Johns smiled broadly at him.

“Hello again dear,” she began, “I'm ever so sorry to hear about your misadventure. I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by to pay a little visit. If you don't mind that is? No, well I'm glad to see that my visit has brought a smile to your lips. When I first entered, you looked like you had just lost your very best friend. So tell me everything dear. Yes, everything since last we visited.”

She reached out, took his hand in hers and squeezed it gently. As he began telling her the events that led to his new stay in the hospital, she stared into his eyes and smiling nodded her understanding.

After what seemed like hours later, he was completely and absolutely spent. All the emotions and feelings of inadequacy had been released and their burden taken up by Mabel. Her motherly attention and soothing understanding eased a great burden from his care worn body. He felt so relieved that he enthusiastically jumped at the chance to accept her offer of a place to stay.

“Yes! Mrs. Johns, I would love to come and stay with you!” Sam almost shouted in relief. “I...I just wish I had sooner, then this wouldn't have happened,” he raised his left arm now in a cast as well.

Smiling sadly, he went on, “Are you sure that you want to take on a loser like me? You know, I'm going to be a handful until I can maneuver on my own? You sure that you want to take me on like this right now? I'll do my best to behave and not be a bother to you ma'am. I swear!”

“Why, of course! Think nothing of it my dear,” Mabel replied. “Now you don't worry about a thing and in the morning you give this address to the cab driver or whoever Gloria gets to take you. I'll be waiting for you at home. Won't that be nice dear. You'll be safe there. Well, you get your rest and I'll see you first thing in the morning. Oh...dear...by the way, don't say anything about this to Gloria. She worries so and I don't want her concerned about me being able to care for you, Okay? Good night dear.”

“Gee, I don't know how to thank you,” Sam replied feeling very happy even if it meant he would have to endure some overbearing mothering. It would be a darn sight better than the beatings. “I really appreciate you kindness and I won't mention anything to Mrs. Norris.”

Mabel bent over and kissed him on the forehead, turned and left. For the first time in days, he felt at peace. After all, what could possibly be any worse than having to stay at the shelter or a flop house. Compared to that all his previous misgivings were mere trifles, really nothing. He was just over- reacting. He slept soundly and did not stir during the night.

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Mabel left Sam's room and turned down the hall heading to the elevators. Taking it down to the subbasement, she checked to make sure there was no one about; then, stepped out. Quickly she walked down the deserted hall arriving at the frosted glass paned door with the name “Dr. Jonas Little” painted in neat black letters, she raised her hand and gently rapped on the door.

Without waiting for a response she turned the knob and entered the room.

“Oh!” was all she said as she saw the elderly white haired man sitting before a microscope on a stainless steel stool. He raised his head and pulling down his spectacles, closely examined her.

“Mabel, Mabel Johns, is that you?” he asked as he rose from the stool and began walking over to where she stood.

“Dear Jonas, yes and how are you. I...I heard that...er.. that you were down here and since I was in the neighborhood just thought I'd drop by and say hello. So how have you been?”

Dr. Little reached out and took Mabel's hand in a soft grip, then pulling her close, gave her a hug. Stepping back smiling, he said that he was doing fine and that all was well. He escorted her over to the stool and asked her to sit. In the awkward pause that followed, he remembered to ask her if she wanted anything, “coffee, or a coke maybe?”

“Oh, that would be lovely dear Jonas,” Mabel replied. “Would it be too much trouble if I asked you to get me a cup of tea? A cup of tea just sounds so...so right just now. I haven't had a cup of tea with you in oh so long. Not since....well you remember I'm sure.”

“Think nothing of it Mabel! Consider it a joy and sincere pleasure. Let's see, one lump and just a splash of cream, right? It will take me a minute, have to go up to the cafeteria you know. Now you make yourself comfortable and I'll be right back.”

Dr. Little left the room remembering that the last time they had tea together was at her husband's wake.

*“Positive shame the tragedies that poor woman had faced,”* he thought as he headed for the elevators.

Satisfied that the good doctor was out of sight, Mabel quickly went over to the locked white cabinet and fumbling with her purse finally came up with the set of keys her husband had left behind. “Now if the hospital was still the old conservative trust- ing facility it had been when her late husband worked in this very same lab,” she thought as she inserted the key.

“Klick!” the latch opened and with a quick twist of the chrome handle, she opened the drug cabinet. Mabel searched through the contents pulling out several vials and containers which she dropped into her purse.

Locking the cabinet, she went over to another one and with the next key on the ring opened it. She spent several minutes digging through the contents of this one before selecting several pill bottles and boxes and syringes filled with a premixed solution. Satisfied, she straightened the contents before re-locking it as well. She just managed to get back to her seat and settled as the door opened and a smiling Dr. Little returned.

How Mabel was able to sit and sip her tea while making small talk for the next hour was just amazing. If she had been caught with the experimental drugs and prescription medications she had filled her purse with, she would probably still be in prison. Her legs were just a little wobbly as she finally stood and excused herself. The feeling of success more than compensated for the fear of discovery that had filled her earlier.

**-000-**

Sam was escorted down to the medical transport car by a nurse and Mrs. Norris. Neither of them wanted to bring the conversation to the serious concerns they were both thinking about. So they kept it cordial and inane. They chatted amicably as they walked until Gloria heard her name being called over the PA system. She felt bad

about leaving, but she had to go. She bid him good-bye as she gently squeezed his hand.

Sam felt like Mrs. Norris was feeling kind of guilty for not being able to help him any more than she had. He hastened to assure her that he was more than happy with all her efforts and that she shouldn't worry about him any longer. He was going to do just fine and who knew, maybe he'd find someone to care for him until he was better.

"Yes, Mrs. Norris," he said as they parted, "It's not like I broke both my legs and arms, hahaha. Besides, I have a feeling that everything will work out just fine. So you don't worry that pretty head of yours over me any longer. You'll see, everything will be all right and you don't need to concern yourself any longer. Thanks, thanks for everything. Now don't you worry, I've finally got things under control."

The nurse finished escorting him down to the waiting transport and helped him get in. She smiled at the driver and told him to make sure that Sam got to the hotel okay. The driver said something about giving her a lift and tucking her safely into bed as well. They exchanged some more friendly banter until the nurse said, "All right Jack, that's enough I think our friend here is getting tired. I'll see you later! Bye Sam, Jack you drive carefully now."

As the car pulled out from the curb, Sam leaned over and handed Jack the piece of paper with the address of Mabel John's house.

"Look buddy," Jack replied looking down at the scrap of paper. "I'm supposed to take you to the hotel. I did not get any instructions to do anything else."

"I know, but I am really expected there. Promise! I'm sure that you will be paid any additional fees for taking me there. It's either this or you can just let me out right here. Okay, pal?"

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The car drove up a circular drive to the front entrance of what could only be described as a mansion. It was big, but not pretentious. A two story colonial with red

brick and two chimneys-one at each end of the building. The house sat on what he later learned was three acres of wooded property, fenced and secured by an electronic system throughout the premises.

The estate was in a nice upper-class neighborhood and while secluded was within a short distance to all the conveniences.

Sam was impressed as he was helped out of the car. Somehow the air just smelled so much fresher out in the open. He smiled warmly at Mabel as she walked out of the front door with her maid at her side.

He was so happy to be out of the hospital that he failed to notice his bag containing the meager clothing Mrs. Norris had gathered sitting on the rear floorboard of the car as it drove off. Good to his word, Mabel had paid the driver handsomely. He wobbled unsteadily on his crutches as Mabel and her maid give him some support.

Tottering but kept upright, he eventually made it to the second floor of the house and into the open doorway. Inside was a relatively large bedroom but furnished in a style that made him uncomfortable. The wallpaper was in an expensive silk material. It was colored with alternating lilac and white stripes.

The floor was covered in a thick plush off white carpet. The large mahogany spindle bed, covered in an elaborately frilled comforter of bright white satin with purple floral bouquets design and matching lilac dust ruffle, filled one side of the room.

A mahogany dresser, bureau, and vanity with a white satin padded stool, side table with an elegant French figurine ceramic lamp completed the furnishings. On the bed were two large pillow shams in matching patterned satin and an antique Victorian doll. All in all with the prevailing aroma of fragrant flowers filling his nose, the room was the most feminine that he had ever seen.

"Errrr, Mrs. Johns," he began trying not to sound too ungrateful,"errr, don't you think...er....I mean...isn't this room....ahhh..don't you have another room..er...not..not so feminine? It...its not like I don't appreciate what you're doing for me, but this.....ah...well...this is a little..er...you know? Like, I mean I....I just don't belong in a room this err..nice. You know?"

"Oh, don't be silly dear," Mabel replied. "Of course you deserve a room all your own and this nice. Isn't it just absolutely gorgeous! It was my daughter's now don't you know. She didn't like it all that much either. I'm afraid she was entirely too much of a tom boy. If...if I had it to do all over things...things would be different. I can promise you that."

Sam hastened to agree that the room was pretty enough. Then he noticed Mabel looking like she was going to start crying. "Golly, Mrs. Johns. Now don't get me wrong, I think its a really pretty room, but I wouldn't feel comfortable using your daughter's room. Gee, I would think with a house this big you'd have a room that wasn't so....so personal for me."

"Oh, don't be silly," she said as she wiped her eyes with a hanky. "I really don't have any choice. This is the only other room besides my own that has a connecting bath. I just thought that with your leg and all. Well, I thought that it would be so

much easier on all of us if you had a bathroom close at hand. It's not like you can move all that fast or....I'm sorry dear."

She paused with a look of sad concern on her face.

Sam felt like he had just kicked a puppy. "*Oh, don't look at me like that,*" he thought.

"I don't mean to harp or belittle you," she continued. "I'm just concerned that's all. But if you insist, I'll have Dottie here fix up one of the older unfinished rooms for your use. The rooms up here aren't all bedrooms you know. I have my sewing room, then there's the maid's room, my room, Cassandra's room, and the other two have never been furnished.

"So you see, by not using this one, well dear, I just didn't think. Can you forgive an old woman? I didn't realize that you wouldn't want to stay here. It may take Dottie awhile to get one of the others ready, but until then...."

Sam couldn't stand anymore so before she could finish what she was saying, he interrupted her.

"Mrs. Johns, please. I'll...I'll gladly stay here. I don't mind at all. I...I just..just thought that well I'd be better off in another room where it did not bring you bad memories that's all. No...no this room will be just fine and you're right about needing to be near a bathroom."

Sam was sitting on the stool while the maid, Dottie, pulled back the covers and prepared the bed.

Mrs. Johns walked up to him carrying a pile of lime green colored material over one arm. As she walked in front of him, she pulled the cloth off her arm and shook it out to reveal a very feminine night gown.

The night gown was sleeveless with spaghetti straps and had a gathered round neckline. The skirt was full and hung from an empire waist that tied with a bright emerald green satin ribbon. The skirt had a translucent pleated lime green tricot outer layer and a brilliant lime green nylon full skirt under it. A band of floral lace with a bright green ribbon threaded through it was attached to its hem. It seemed to just float before his startled eyes.

"I see that you don't have any nightwear, so I just thought you might like to wear this. This negligee was one of my favorites that I bought for Cassandra, but she seldom wore it. Why it's practically new. I know it's a bit much, but there is only the three of us and Dottie won't tell anyone. Besides, with those casts on you can't wear pajamas."

Blushing bright pink, Sam managed to let her know, not too unkindly, that he would be perfectly happy wearing the shorts and shirt that he had on. He could change later into some of the other clothing Mrs. Norris had gotten him.

The words had barely left his mouth when he realized that he had forgotten his spare clothing. In a flash, he saw the skimpy bundle sitting on the floorboards of the car's rear seat, right where he had left it. The picture of his spare clothing did not deter him from refusing Mabel's offer.

He remained adamant that the clothing he was wearing was more than enough for him to get by with until he could obtain others. Mabel just shook her head, folded the gown back over her arm and left him alone. Sam watched Dottie as she spread a plastic sheet over the mattress then pulled the pale purple satin bottom sheet back over it. He started to say something, but decided that he had said enough for one day.

*"Might as well accept it,"* he thought, *"It's not like I have a lot of choices. I just hope that I won't cause them any more problems than I already have."*

Sam was resting comfortably in the bed. His head and back were propped up by two overstuffed pillows and he was shuffling through several magazines. He finally gave up and started reading one of the articles with a more general topic, "Fifteen Minutes to a Flatter Stomach."

He knew he was getting desperate if he started reading these magazines, but he was bored to tears and he'd only been there less than a day. No TV, no radio, no nothing! All he had been given to pass the time were stacks and stacks of old women's magazines. There were even a number of teen magazines twenty years old in the stack he had been given.

Mabel tried to appear apologetic when she brought them to him, but her eyes lit up when she mentioned that her daughter had enjoyed reading them. Yes, she had been sorry that she could not offer him TV, a radio, or newspaper, but since the accident she had them all removed. Seemed that she couldn't bear to see or hear about her daughter's passing; especially, the graphic scenes that had been played on the television. The shock of seeing her child laying dead on the gurney being rushed to the ambulance was more than she could stand.

Without anything else to take his mind off his disability, Sam began reading each magazine in its entirety. How to choose the "just right lipstick" and "creating lasting pin curls" were read with no enthusiasm, but they helped pass the time.

Sam was in the middle of a strangely interesting article on "What a Woman Must Know About Her Menstrual Cycle," when Mabel entered his room. Quickly, he flipped the magazine closed and tried to dampen the blush that flushed his cheeks.

"Hi there dear!" Mabel said as she came over by his side. "It's getting late and I'll be going to bed soon and I just wanted to check up on you before I did. Do you need help going to the bathroom or anything else? No! Well dear are you sure that you don't want to change? No, well okay, if that is what you want."

Mabel paused and lifted a small silver plate with a glass of water and several pills on it up to where he could see it.

"Darling, I brought you some pills that your doctor gave me when I told him you would be coming here. You are supposed to have them now. Let's see, I think one is for pain. Yes, it's this purple one here; then, there is a muscle relaxant, the yellow one, and the pink and white ones are vitamins. I added those in myself!"

"Pills? The doctor did not tell me about any pills," Sam replied. "How come, he did not tell me anything about them?"

“Why, I guess because he knew that under the State's welfare program the cost would not be covered. He knew that you couldn't pay for them on your own, so he did not order them for you.”

“Oh,” Sam simply said.

Mabel continued as if talking to a recalcitrant child.

“Something about ‘Take Home Pharmacy’ and what not. So I asked him if he would have ordered some if you could have paid for it. Well, the rest of the story should be obvious to you. I went ahead and purchased what he thought you would need. Don't worry I was a Registered Nurse before I married Doctor Johns. I hope that you do not think it too presumptuous of me? Getting these pills, I mean.”

“Awe, Mrs. Johns,” Sam started but was interrupted by Mabel before he could go on.

“No! You stop calling me Mrs. Johns right this minute! You've been calling me that all day and I am tired of it. I'm Mabel! Just plain ole Mabel! If you call me Mrs. once more, I'll take a belt to you, understand? Now, no more of your whining or thanks, just take your medicine. Here!”

Mabel shoved the tray under his nose and Sam scooped the pills up, plopped them into his mouth, and swallowed them down with a gulp of water. He tried to thank her, but she turned on her heel and left the room.

“*Oh well,*” he thought, *“if it relieves the aches and helps me sleep, how can I argue.”*

**-000-**

Much later in the early hours just before morning, Sam tossed as much as his casts would let him as he was haunted by a nightmare. In his dream, he was scared. Scared to the point of dumping in his pants. The dream was so very vivid that he came partially awake as he felt his bowels move and the odor filled his nose.

In the morning, he awoke to discover that some of his nightmare had actually come true. Partially awake, he felt his hand press into something soft and wet. As he pulled his hand out from under the covers, he realized the awful truth. He'd actually shit in his pants! *Damn!*

He was blushing a very vivid beet red as Mabel with the help of the maid, rolled him onto his side and cleaned up the mess. He was almost in tears, as he felt them wiping away his filth. Fortunately, the maid had thought to put a plastic protector under the sheets. Sam was helped from the bed and placed on the towel covered vanity stool. He sat fighting tears of embarrassment with his hands covering his naked groin. His casts the only covering on his body.

The bed was remade in bright pink satin sheets and then Dottie left the room.

Sam looked up into the kindly face of Mabel who stood before him holding the pale green night gown in her hand. Smiling, she handed it to him without a word. Sam quickly grabbed it and let it drop over his still blushing face.

He was in no position to argue with her over the matter and he really did not mind. At least, he had something to cover himself with. It was soft and cool as it settled around his body.

Mabel bent forward, pulled the bright green ribbon sash of the nightie tight and tied it in a big bow just below his male breasts.

"There, there dear," she said as she walked to his side. "Now don't go feeling bad about yourself. These things can happen when you're ill. Now don't think nothing of it. Besides, like I told you, I was a nurse once and I'm used to such. Now let me see."

She stepped back to look at him, then, bent forward and adjusted the ribbon she had just tied. Smiling she regarded him once more. "You've got your hair in a tangle too. Tsk, tsk, we really need to wash this out. I think we'll just brush it out for now. After you've had your breakfast, then we'll see about a nice hot bath and shampoo. Here you just sit still for a minute and I'll give it a quick brush."

Mabel brushed his hair for some time, chatting softly and about nothing in particular. Finally, Dottie returned carrying a tray of food and set it down for him on the vanity. Mabel quickly finished brushing his long hair and after telling him to enjoy his breakfast, left the room with the maid following behind.

Sam was starved and almost swallowed the single scrambled egg and plain toast in a single gulp. Finished, he was still very hungry and wanted a cup of coffee, but settled for the orange juice and pills. A cup of good strong coffee would do wonders for him, but Sam just wasn't in a position to demand anything. Besides, he was hesitant to do so under the circumstances.

He just sat on the vanity stool waiting for them to return. He thought about getting up, but the cast was just too unmanageable. So he just sat biding his time. Mabel had brushed his hair into a page boy style parted down the middle. It wasn't what he'd have done, but with a sigh he let the thought pass.

How in the world could he even begin to complain about anything that good woman had done. If it hadn't been for her, well, Sam did not want to think about that. He was going to have a very difficult time telling her anything that may hurt her feelings. After all she had done, there was just no way he could be that mean. He couldn't even bring himself to demand that she get him some men's clothing. No, it just wouldn't be right.

The two women finally returned and together they helped him into the bathroom. They sat him on the commode and telling him to call, left him alone. At least they were giving him some measure of privacy.

Sam gave a big sigh and shifted slightly on the commode.

Finished, he called out and they returned. He was assisted over to the old fashioned footed tub after it had been filled with frothy bubbles. It wasn't easy, but between the three of them, Sam was helped into the tub. With his right leg propped up on the edge to keep the cast from getting wet, Mabel began scrubbing him with a sponge and floral scented soap.

While Mabel scrubbed his skin bright pink, Sam tried not to think about what she was doing to him. He did not protest too much when she began shaving his face for

him as well. His beard was sparse to begin with, but he felt uncomfortable and a little nervous when she scrapped the razor under his chin. When she commented about how prickly his left leg was from being shaved, he had stated that it itched too. That was all the excuse she needed and shaved his leg as well.

“No reason to feel scratchy and cause snags in Dottie's nice clean sheets,” she had said. “Uh, you know you have a rather strong aroma too. How about humoring an old woman and let me take care of this too?”

In a matter of moments over his sputtered objections, Mabel shaved his underarms. It was obvious Mabel's mind was made up and there wasn't much he could do about it.

So Sam was left with no recourse but to let her do as she planned. She even flicked off what little chest hair he had. Commenting as she did so that it would be a shame to waste the little bit of shaving cream she had left.

It was gone before he could say anything.

Being shaved for surgery was one thing, but this was something altogether different. Under different circumstances, Sam would have raised the roof before anyone could do this to him. Only now, Mabel made it awful difficult for him to refuse her anything. So he obligingly let her have her way while he laid back in the soothing bath. It wasn't like he couldn't grow it back and she had only copied what the surgeons had done to him.

“*Oh well, what the hell,*” he thought as the maid returned to help Mabel get him out of the tub.

With their help, Sam was able to get out of the tub and stand while they dried him off. Putting down the towels, Mabel picked up a crystal container filled with powder that had a big fluffy powder puff as its lid. Soon a cloud of dust filled the air as she patted the lilac scented bath powder all over his body. Sam's first reaction was a sneezing fit that took his breath away. By the time he cleared the fragrant powder from his nose, it was too late.

Rubbing at his watering eyes, Sam was led over to the sink where Dottie had placed a tall stool for him to sit on. Still naked Sam hunched over the sink with his legs pressed tightly together in an attempt to keep some modesty.

Mabel stood beside him shampooing his hair. Sam's protests went unheeded as his hair was rinsed, scrubbed, rinsed again and shampooed once more. Washing out the last of the soap, Mabel told him to keep his head down while she tried something out.

Without Sam's blessing, Mabel began dying his hair a raven black. Sam caught glimpses of her glove covered hands lathered in the dying solution as she worked it into his hair. He did not know what was happening, but couldn't bring himself to scold her.

She was just trying to be nice to him.

Finished, he was assisted back into the bedroom with his head wrapped in a towel turban fashion. As he was helped from the stool, Dottie pulled a light filmy garment around his shoulders.

“To keep off the chill,” she had said.

Sam opened his mouth to protest, but decided that silence would be the better part of valor on his part. *“They were only trying to be nice,”* he said to himself.

Being nice to these women who were ruining his masculinity was going to drive him to distraction. It was one thing for them to clean him up and care for his needs, but it was a totally different matter when it came to dusting, shampooing, and all the other stuff they were doing to him. Their good intentions were going to drive him nuts.

*Take that blasted robe for example.*

The robe, if you could call it that, was made of sheer nylon in a pale green color. He heard Dottie call it “Seafoam”, but to him it was pea green. In any case, it was most definitely a woman's robe and matched the nightie that he had been given earlier. In some regards, he would rather have the nightie back instead of this so called robe.

Big puffed sleeves ballooned down to his wrists in a very sheer nylon that had bright green satin stripes woven into the fabric. You could even count the individual hairs on his arm through the flimsy material. The balloon sleeves were ample enough to allow his arm cast to slide right through the sleeve without snagging or binding.

*“Now what kind of robe do you call that?”* his mind asked.

The elasticized wrists were held in place by bright emerald green satin ribbon bows threaded through the lace cuffs. The rounded collar fastened to a single pearl button at the throat and hung open down to his ankles where it flared out in a large dust ruffle. A band of delicate floral lace trimmed the slash opening and hem of the robe. All in all, a very feminine garment and he was wearing it. Of all the foolish notions, but how could he be angry with them after what they had just done for him?

He sat on the satin covered stool by the vanity as Mabel removed the towel from his head. He felt damp hair fall to his neck as she did so.

“Now dear, I'm going to put a dryer bonnet over your head to dry it out some. You wouldn't want to catch a cold now would you?”

He felt her pull the plastic hood over his head and settle it in place around his ears and nape of the neck. He was facing away from the mirror so he did not see the sleek black hair as it was shoved up under the cap. The pink hood filled with warm air as the dryer was turned on and Mabel sat down beside him on the cushion.

“Here dear,” she said, “let me fix your nails for you. They look badly in need of trimming and buffing. When was the last time you trimmed these? Here, let me have your hand. This won't hurt one bit.”

Thirty minutes later, Sam sported nice oval nails painted in a clear lacquer that made them shine. He had fussed about having nail polish put on his fingers, but Mabel assured him that it was only clear polish and that men of refinement always did this. Not so sure about what she said, Sam reluctantly allowed her to paint not only his finger, but his toe nails as well.

Actually, Dottie did his toe nails while Mabel did the others. He did not complain about the way she had trimmed his nails. They were trimmed in an oval instead of straight across, because he had been too preoccupied with the nail polish.

Sam sat with his hands still covering his groin area while the ladies removed the dryer hood and began working on his still slightly damp hair. He felt them comb it out, then after putting a towel around his shoulders, began trimming it. It wasn't until Mabel combed the hair into his eyes and cut across his forehead to create feminine bangs that he noticed the darker color.

“Hey, what gives!” he exclaimed fingering a small bundle of his shorn locks. “What have you done?”

“Oh, now don't you fret dear,” Mabel replied. “I've just darkened it up some. Don't you think it looks much better than that mousy brown you used to have? It's not like I've done anything permanent. I just wanted to see if the darker color would bring out the violet in your eyes more.

“You have such beautiful eyes and the color is so rare, you know. My daughter, Cassandra, was the only other person I've ever seen with eyes that color. I hope I haven't offended you, but I just had to see. Once you see the results I think that you will agree with me dear! Here take a look for yourself.”

She held the hand mirror to his face and the dark raven colored hair certainly brought out the violet in his eyes. His eyes seemed to just glow with a purple fire now. In the past, they just seemed to hint at the possibilities. He had to admit that his eyes did look much more expressive and alive now.

*“Yeah! But what man wanted to have bright expressive eyes?”* he asked himself. At least they were somewhat hidden under his bushy brows.

He hemmed and hawed for a few seconds, but finally just shut up and let Mabel continue working on his hair. The bangs she had created would have to go of course, but what harm was there in a slight change in his hair color? He was being overwhelmed by matronly kindness. It's not like he did not know beforehand that he would have to face Mabel's over protective mothering.

Mabel brushed his hair out and began taking segments and rolling them tightly upon bright blue plastic rollers.

“Hey,” Sam began as he felt his hair being rolled up tightly against his scalp. “What are you doing now? Haven't you two done enough to me for one day? Come on Mabel, please? Hey, that's pinching my scalp. Mabel...” Sam stopped when he hit his head with the cast on his arm. “Ouch!”

Mabel shoved his up flung hands out of the way and tried to ease his mind.

“I am only trying to make this unruly, wild hair of yours behave itself,” she told him. “Why dear, lots of young people get their hair done this way. I just bet that you've seen more than one or two having the same thing done to theirs when you went to have your hair cut. Besides, this is only going to add a little control to it. You'll be pleased, I'm sure. In any event, it's not like I'm giving you a permanent.”

*“Behave itself?”* Sam thought, *“What the shit? The poor old woman is only trying to help. I guess and she is partially right. I've seen guys getting it done. Damn, I can't hurt her feelings now after all that's happened, can I? Might as well just let her have her fun. How permanent can it be anyway?”*

His hair now pinned tightly to his scalp in neat rows, Sam flinched as he felt a cool damp mist hit his neck and ears. Mabel sprayed something on his hair, then put his head back under the dryer bonnet. She smiled at him as she handed him a woman's magazine telling him to relax and she would be back after a while to finish up. In the meantime, Dottie would bring him something to eat.

"It was lunch time already!" Sam muttered just under his breath. "Where did the morning go?"

Sam did not realize just how hungry he was until Mabel had mentioned food. He was starving, but yet his stomach was doing flip-flops at the very thought of food.

Well, he'd solve that with some good food soon enough. Only when it arrived, he could barely swallow it down. He had totally lost his appetite. He did good just to gulp the pills and orange juice down. Even the whole wheat toast had a hard time going down. He just did not have any appetite. It was taking a lot of self control just to swallow what little he could. He wondered whether or not he was coming down with a virus or some kind of bug. It wasn't like him to have a queasy stomach.

Beside it felt strange, very strange indeed just sitting there wearing nothing but a woman's see through robe and a hair dryer bonnet. Not to say anything about the magazine article, "What Women Fear Most About Losing Their Man," he had been reading when Dottie brought him his meal.

With the dishes taken away, Sam sat while Mabel removed the rollers from his hair. Tiny spirals of black hair sprang to life as each blue roller was removed and dropped into the pale pink plastic tray. With all the rollers removed, Sam's hair sat on his head in a confusion of spring curls.

Mabel brushed and combed the curls out into a full and wavy feminine style that caressed his face. His bangs fell to just above his brows and the sides covered his ears in a cascade of waves falling back to his shoulders. Two spiral bouncing ringlets fell down the side of his face where he once wore sideburns. They tickled.

He wanted to see the final result, yet at the same time didn't.

Two pictures of Cassandra looked back at Mabel from the vanity. One in a gold frame and the other sitting in real life before her eyes. She was now sure that she had been right.

*"Yes, my daughter has returned to me,"* she thought. *"Yes, somewhat different than I had pictured, but with work I will have my daughter back."*

Mabel pushed the three by five gold framed picture to the side and focused on the young man sitting on the stool. *Yes, it was one and the same person.* Only this time, Mabel would wield a stronger stick when she dealt with her daughter.

In any case, Mabel put aside her thoughts and helped Sam to stand. With Dottie's assistance, he was moved over to the bed. While Dottie steadied him on his feet, Mabel removed his robe. Quickly she picked the nightie up off the bed and holding it over his head, let the green full skirted sheer nylon fall gently over his body. It took both women to get him back into bed as the slinky materials of nightie and sheets conspired to make his body slide and slip off the edge of the bed.

With Sam finally in bed comfortably propped up with several pillows, the skirts of his nightie arrayed all around him, they left him to his reading. He had blushed a bright crimson, as Dottie opened the magazine to the article he had been reading and placed it into his hands.

“We girls can't ever know enough about how to keep our men, can we dearie?” Dottie teased with a wink as she turned and left the room.

In his distracted embarrassment, he did not see Mabel put a gold framed picture in her apron pocket as she walked out the room.

Sam sat confused and bewildered for a long time after the two women had left him. The magazine lay closed in his lap unread with his manicured fingers tapping absently on the cover. He knew that when he agreed to come here that he would be in for an unwelcome mothering, that was why he went to the Center the first time. This was becoming more than he had bargained for.

Oh, he had to admit that the care they were giving him was necessary, but did they have to try making him into something else. He wasn't sure, but their behavior seemed strange. Until he could get the casts off, he was going to be at their mercy. In a perverse way, their logic for doing everything that they had to him was perfectly normal given the resources at hand.

The nightie and the satin sheets felt luxurious on his now clean shaven skin, but he wasn't supposed to feel like that. It wasn't right and he was confused. For the life of him, he could not figure out just how in the world he had let Mabel do all the things she had to him.

On the one hand, he felt guilty about letting them treat him like a girl, but on the other hand he felt guilty about not being appreciative of all they had done for him. He was caught between a rock and a hard place as far as he was concerned. Under any other circumstances, they would have had to use wild horses to drag him kicking and screaming through the streets before he would let them put him into a tub full of scented bubbles. Much less any of the other things they had done.

Sam decided that there would be little to gain by continuing with his current line of thought. He was stuck in a situation of his own making. No matter how distasteful it may be, he had very little choice for the present. He couldn't bring himself to deny or object to anything Mabel did for him either. After all, she was only doing the best she could under the circumstances. It wasn't her fault that she did not have any masculine things for him. She was certainly bending over backwards to help him out.

Screaming silently to himself while squeezing his eyes tightly shut, he slammed his balled up fists into the silky material covering the bed.

“Damn!” he muttered after a few more seconds, “That felt good.”

Feeling better, he picked up the magazine and thumbed through it until he came upon a feature that piqued his interest, “The Joy of the Hunt.” It wasn't until the second paragraph that he discovered it was a “how-to” piece on the oldest hunt of them all. Man hunting from a woman's point of view.

Figuring that it might come in handy to be able to recognize marital stalking before it got too serious, Sam soon lost himself in the article. Absent-mindedly, he raised his hand and gently pulled at the spiral curl hanging beside his left cheek. A few seconds later, he brushed at the ticklish frill of hair touching his forehead. Not once did he notice just how feminine his actions were.

Before he knew it Mabel came back into his room carrying a tray full of food.

"I thought you would be hungry by now dear. You really did not have that much to eat today. Here I've brought you some nice homemade chicken broth, toast lightly buttered, some Jell-O, and a cup of nice herbal tea. Oh, yes, and this nice ripe pear. We don't want to upset your stomach any more than we have too. Now do we dear?"

Sam roused himself out of a dreamless sleep. The magazine lay open to a story on a celebrity's wedding. He smiled at Mabel and then broke out in a great big yawn.

"Must have dozed off there for a few minutes. I didn't think I was that tired. Uh, I don't think I'm that hungry though. My stomach is still a bit woozy."

"Don't be ridiculous, you have got to put something into your stomach. Here! At least get this broth down. Maybe, you ought to take your medicine first? Considering how you are feeling, I think it would be okay to take two purple pills tonight. Oh, and I added this one here for your...well..you know. Your little problem this morning. It will help out. Now come on sit up...and here...let me feed you."

Thirty minutes later, Mabel was cleaning up the last of the crumbs from his chin.

"My, my dear, you were hungrier than you thought. Just like I told you dear. Maybe next time you won't raise such a fuss when I tell you something. Now, I think it is time you got some rest dear. Let me get you ready for bed. Need to go potty? No, Okay, let me move this out of the way first."

Putting the tray aside, she went over to the vanity and returned with a jar of scented cream that she began putting on his face. It smelled like a garden in full bloom as it was massaged into his flesh. Mabel took her time putting small dabs of lotion on his face then rubbing it deep into the pores. He just sat there while she covered his face with the cream. Taking a tissue she lightly removed the excess.

Helping him settle back flat on the bed and covering him in the blankets, she leaned forward over his head and said, "Now be a good girl and give me a kiss good night."

Sam did as he was instructed, letting the good girl comment slip right past him. He was strangely exhausted and feeling very content at the moment.

*"That extra pain pill must have hit the spot,"* he thought, *"Yeah, just what the doctor ordered."*

Sam was dead to the world in a matter of minutes after Mabel had kissed him on the forehead. He did not suspect anything odd about the pills Mabel had given him. He also did not have the faintest idea as to their nature or use. He was still feeling a strong itching sensation from his cast encased leg and arm, but did not connect the feeling to the pills. If the pain pills were what Mabel told him they were, he shouldn't be feeling any sensation from his leg-itch or otherwise.

Mabel pattered around in the room until she was positive Sam was out for the night. Quickly, she retrieved some items from outside the room and making space on the night stand put them down. Pulling down the covers and the hem of the nightie up, she exposed Sam's nude body all the way past his navel.

Moving with a practiced grace, she unfolded and spread a green colored towel along side of the sleeping youth and slid it under his hips. Next, she went into the bath, filled a pan with hot water, and returned to begin scrubbing Sam's loins with a disinfectant soap.

She paused to dry her hands and bending over, pinched Sam's arm.

He did not stir even when she stuck him with a needle.

Satisfied that he would not wake, Mabel opened the other cloth covered tray she had brought in with her. Removing a pair of latex gloves she snapped them on and using a scalpel slit his scrotum neatly up its underside.

Opening a half inch incision, Mabel then inserted a pair of forceps into the cut and pulled out the spermatic cord which connected the testis with the body. Clamping the cord on two sides, she cut it and shoved it back into the sack.

Mabel repeated the process on the other testicle and before sealing the opening with surgical glue, filled the sack with a slowly absorbed hormonal emulsion. Satisfied with her work, she gave Sam an antibiotic shot in the hip, pulled down his gown, and replaced the covers.

Sam would be none the wiser unless he carefully checked himself out. The odds were against that as he would be preoccupied.

Mabel would see to that.

"Yes," Mabel thought as she deftly rolled his dyed and femininely styled hair onto the plastic curlers. *"I think that you will have enough on your mind tomorrow to keep you occupied."*

Finishing up, Mabel reached over to the container holding the remaining rollers and pulled out a package. Opening it, she removed a frilly green nylon hair cap. It had a rich emerald satin lining covered in a white transparent nylon.

A bright green ribbon threaded the two layers together leaving a two inch border and streamed down the back. Lace frills trimmed the ruffled edge. A very feminine article of clothing that even in a plain style would never be found on a man's head.

"I do hope you love your pretty new hair cap, Cassandra dear," Mabel said softly as she fitted it over the curlers. "I picked it out myself. See all the lovely ruffles and lace trim. My, my you used to hate such frilly things, but I'm raising you now dear. This time we'll do things differently!"

**-000-**

That next morning Sam awoke feeling groggy and exhausted. He was totally disoriented. There was an ache in his right thigh, and an odd numbness in his testis, but he did not think anything of it as he hastened as quickly as the casts would allow to the bathroom.

*"Damn!"* he thought as he hobbled down from the bed, *"I feel weaker than a kitten. Woo boy, dizzy too."*

His stool flowed easily and he completed his toilet quickly. It wasn't normal for him to finish so quickly and it reminded him of his great embarrassment of the day before.

Even splashing cold water on his face did not help clear his mind which seemed to be in a fog. Sort of like the feeling one gets just before coming down with the flu.

At least that would explain his weakness and dizziness.

Standing over the basin, he couldn't help but notice how soft his skin was getting. Sam let out a groan as he noticed what Mabel had done to his hair. He raised his hand to pull the offending cap off his head, but instead let his hand rub the curve of his chin.

His light beard wasn't as prickly either. Suddenly feeling unsteady on his feet, Sam ignored the cap sitting atop his head along with the scalp pricking rollers for the time being.

He decided it would be better if he returned to bed. Maybe he was coming down with something after all, he told himself.

His stomach was churning and dizziness made his head twirl as he made his way back to bed. While he was still upset over the hair cap, he was feeling too bad to spend much time worrying over it. His primary goal in life right at the moment was to just get back under the protection of the bed covers.

Mabel's doting and mothering would just have to wait until he could spare the effort.

**-000-**

A very cheerful Mabel entered his room carrying a serving tray with his breakfast. Her good mood could not be soured by Sam's complaints and demands. She just sat her food tray down and began feeding him.



He tried to sputter his protest, but no sooner did he open his mouth than Mabel stuck a spoon in it.

He managed to turn his head away and blurt out that he wanted her to stop mothering him.

“Look Mabel,” he almost shouted, “I can feed myself and....and I appreciate what you've done, but you've got to stop it. I am a big boy! I can do things on my own!”

“Such a hissy fit,” Mabel said as she spooned another helping of oatmeal into his mouth. “Dear, you must learn to accept your limitations.”

Sam tried to be firm but she shoved another spoonful his way.

“Mabel look I don't need this and I certainly don't need this!”

“Now, here!” Mabel said raising her voice to him for the first time. “Stop that! Just stop it, I say!”

Mabel swatted Sam's hand away from the hair cap.

“Now don't you dare do that! Why, you'll mess your pretty hair all up and really get it tangled. Do you want to have to pull half your hair out of your head when you try to comb it? For crying out loud! Let it be! As soon as you've finished eating, I'll take care of it for you.”

Sam let his hand fall to his side once again defeated by Mabel.

She looked mad and he had made her feel that way. A point made clear by Dottie as she had entered the room carrying clean linens. They were clearly out numbering and over powering him.

Sam looked from one woman to the other, seeing their expressions of disappointment and hurt. They made him feel ashamed and he began to blush. They were trying to be so nice and here he was acting like an ungrateful pup. He had to do something though. He couldn't continue letting these women treat him like...like he was a girl.

“Look,” he began, “I'm sorry Mabel, Dottie if...if I have been a bother and.....and seem to be ungrateful for all you've done for me, but....er...but don't you see? Look at me! I'm...well I'm not used to dressing like this nor do I want my hair color changed or have to put gunk all over my body or any of that silly girl stuff! Look! If I didn't need a place to stay....er...I tried not to, you know.”

“Herrump!” Mabel loudly cleared her throat.

Sparks flashed in her eyes as she proceeded to jump down Sam's throat. She told him in no uncertain terms that this was going to be the very last time they had this argument. She had only done what needed to be done. If he were that ungrateful, then he could very well go straight back to the Center or anywhere else he darn well pleased. She had enough of his complaining and lack of cooperation. They were not his slaves! If he was not going to do exactly what she told him to and in a much more appreciative and cheerful spirit, then he could get his butt out of her house and life right that minute.

Mabel was so mad that she started crying and standing up swept the breakfast tray off the bed and onto the floor. Striding to the door, she stopped, placed her hands on her hips and looked straight into his eyes.

“This is positively the last time you will make me cry!” she said. “I just won't have it! I won't! You will do exactly as you are told, including wearing what I give you and taking care of your personal needs as I direct.”

She paused a moment to catch her breath before continuing. “There is nothing demeaning or belittling about paying attention to your appearance. 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' as the saying goes! I am only doing what I think best for you. I'll order the car around and you will be dropped off anywhere you desire. Just so long as it is no where near me! So, you either be ready to move out or I want to hear an apology. You have fifteen minutes!”

Dottie did not say a word, just shook her head and cleaned up the mess. When she had finished, she looked Sam in the eye, made a “tsk, tsk” sound and left him alone.

Sam was reeling from both the tongue lashing and physically.

He wasn't sure what had happened to set Mabel off like that, but he knew he was in no condition to go anywhere. His stomach began churning and cramping up on him. Fortunately, the waste basket was still next to the bed where Dottie had put it while picking up the broken dishes. He tossed his oatmeal and juice.

It was a very contrite Sam that met Mabel a few minutes later.

He abjectly apologized for his behavior and agreed to anything and everything Mabel said. He even signed papers to that effect, but by then he was feeling so bad that it did not matter what he signed just so long as they took care of him and helped him get well. He was feverish and dizzy as his bowels seemed to tighten into knots inside his guts. He did not bother to read any of the contents of the papers he signed in a shaky hand.

**-000-**

Sam was restless as he squirmed in the bed. He had been stuck in this place for several weeks and he was beginning to get cabin fever. To make matters worse, Mabel and Dottie had continued their relentless pursuit of treating him like a girl. His hair was still fashioned in a feminine style and he still wore a nightie. Sam did not even want to think about having to wear the hair cap or the other things they made him do.

To add to his indignity, Mabel was making him apply emollient oils and lotions to his arms, legs, and face every night now. She had said it was necessary to replenish and freshen his skin after the electrolysis treatments. It seemed that Dottie used too that sort of thing and she had been only too happy to help. The heck of it was that he had gotten himself into that predicament all by himself.

Seems that soon after he had agreed to do whatever he was told, he balked at having to use a pink woman's razor and lilac scented soap to shave. Mabel had calmly put the razor down on the side table, said, “fine!” and left him there.

Not fifteen minutes later, Dottie came in wheeling this contraption over to the bed. She explained what it was and clipping conducting wires to his chin began to prick his

face with an electrified needle. The conducting wires were moved as necessary. Dottie, once she had done as much as she could for one day on his face, proceeded to work on his chest, hands, and other body parts as she determined necessary.

“I need the practice. Besides it will help to keep your body clean. Being bed bound,” Dottie had added, “like you are causes one's body to develop all kinds of problems like bed sores.”

She insinuated that if he did not let them remove his excess body hair, he might have serious problems. Mabel even showed him some horrible pictures taken of patients with bed sores to let him know what it was like.

Since the electrolysis did leave his face irritated and stinging by the time Dottie had finished, he did not fuss too much when Mabel demanded he take care of his skin. So, now it was creams and oils every night and curlers and hair caps and all the other tom foolery he had to undergo before he was allowed to sleep.

He was being treated just like a girl and he had lost the ability to say NO! He could only whimper his objections, but they fell on deaf ears.

Each day intensified his feminization and his will seemed to desert him. His protests became weaker and weaker. He had been stuck in that bed so long he was even physically much weaker. He needed both women's help now to get to the bathroom.

Sam had no idea how much time had passed since his arrival here, but it seemed like ages upon ages. His body was shrinking or at least seemed to and he felt funny. He could not put a finger on it, but it was almost like Mabel had something to do with it. He pushed that thought right out of his mind as being impossible. After all the two women had done for him, he couldn't really blame them for how his body was reacting to its inactivity.

Even his arm and leg were loose inside the plaster cast. It had to be time for those blasted casts to come off though and Sam resolved to ask Mabel about it.

Maybe once he was able to get out of bed and start back doing his exercises, he would feel better.

**-000-**

Just the thought that he would soon be able to get at that annoying constant itching under the cast sent shivers of pleasure up his spine. He wouldn't mind getting free access to his leg or arm just so he could scratch it. As a matter of fact, he would pay a king's ransom for that pleasure. The itching was such a part of his everyday life, that it seemed to be spreading. Now his nipples had begun aching and itching as well.

“Psychosomatic,” he mumbled as he absently fingered his right nipple through the nylon of the red satin sleep shirt. He quickly pulled his hand away as the nipple became hard and tented the material away from his chest. A scared Sam decided he had to ask Mabel about getting a doctor's appointment.

**-000-**

That morning after the two women had finished fussing over him, Sam questioned Mabel about how much longer before the casts came off. He told her that he thought that they should be removed by now.

“Perhaps, she could arrange for him to see the doctor?” He had asked her in a hopeful voice.

“Well Cassie,” Mabel observed, “it really hasn't been that long. Usually they leave casts on for oh...twelve weeks or so if I remember correctly. Why dear, you've only been here four so that means you've had your cast on for only five weeks. I'm afraid that you have seven to go. If it'll ease your mind, I'll call the doctor. Now don't you fret, that thing will be off before you know it.”

“Cassie!” she had been calling him that for several days now. Said it sounded sweeter to the ear than Sam or Sammie. He had corrected her and Dottie when they called him Cassie, but it did no good. They ignored him and when they weren't calling him “dear” it was “Cassie.”

Before too long he quit trying to stop them.

Like everything else that was happening in his life, he had no control over the situation. He had learned to just go with the flow. Now when they said “Cassie,” he responded accordingly. It was getting so that he did not even notice it any more.

Well at least Mabel was going to call the doctor for him. It sure seemed like he had been there longer than just four weeks, but he had no way to contradict Mabel. After all, there was no TV, no radio, no paper, and he didn't see any calendars around.

Sam fervently hoped that Mabel had guessed wrong on how long the casts had to be worn. Once the casts were gone, he could regain control of his life and a measure of freedom. Freedom go come and go as he pleased once he had gotten some men's clothing. He would have to start working on that. Sure the nylon nighties felt good, but he was a guy. Besides while he felt a debt of gratitude to Mabel and Dottie, he did not owe them his life or anything like that.

Sam's rambling thoughts were interrupted by Mabel's return.

“I called the doctor, Cassie dear,” she said as she approached the bed, “and he said that the casts had to stay on for at least another six or seven weeks. An ankle injury is one of the most aggravating to fix he told me. We have an appointment to see him then. Now, can I get you anything while I'm here, dear?”

That wasn't what he wanted to hear, but at least she had called the doctor for him. Maybe he could just wait till then. His health problems had to get better didn't they? He was on the downhill slope now and it would only be a matter of time, right?

Trying to hide his disappointment, Sam smiled and asked if maybe Mabel ought to see about finding him some men's clothing to wear. He couldn't go see the doctor dressed in a nightie, now could he? he asked.

To which she only responded, “We'll see, dear. You still seem to be losing weight. No sense wasting money on clothing that won't fit. Now is there?”

That evening as Sam put his hair up for the night and arranged the nylon hair cap over his head, Mabel brought him a cassette recorder with his nightly pills and juice.

“Look darling, I found this old thing. Dottie put some new batteries in it and I found some of your..er..I mean some old tapes I thought you might enjoy listening to. Here, why don't you put these ear plugs on and listen to them while you rest.”

*“Oh joy of joys, something besides those silly women's magazines,”* he thought as he gratefully accepted the gift. He placed the headset into his ears and pushed the play button. It was a tape of classical music. Not his cup of tea, but a new diversion that he knew he was going to enjoy. Too bad it wasn't some heavy metal.

The tape hadn't played half way through before Sam was sound asleep. The sedative disguised as vitamins doing what it was designed to do. His eyes began rapid eye movement and his breathing deepened.

He did not stir as Mabel came into his room and changed the tape. She inserted the gleaming needle into his arm as gently as she could and pushed the plunger.

The tape began instructions for his sleeping mind to absorb. The soft feminine voice was melodious and hypnotic in nature and repeated the same things over and over. Sam did not notice when Mabel stepped in and replaced the tape in the early morning hours either.

**-000-**

The days went by and at first Sam tried to keep track of them, but he soon lost interest. He played the tape constantly and found himself agreeing more and more with Mabel and Dottie. It was easier that way. He no longer minded being referred to as Cassie or having to put his hair up at night.

It just seemed right this way.

**-000-**

In the early afternoon when the house was totally quiet, Sam lay in his bed scratching furiously with a stretched out coat hanger inside his leg cast. It was itching something terrible and he just wanted to scream out in frustration at his inability to stop the dang blasted itching. As his elbow came up and back before starting its downward thrust, it bumped into his right titty.

“Oooh man!” he exclaimed as a sharp tingling radiated from the nipple down to his spine. The sensation confused and confounded him. His breasts were becoming absolutely distracting. They were both sore, swollen and sensitive to the point of distraction.

Several weeks ago, just after his bath, Sam had noticed that his nipples were looking strange. As he lay back in bed alone in his room, he overcame his misgivings and pulled out the bodice of his night dress.

The soft nylon tricot gown was new and a pretty peacock color. It was in a Canterbury style with embroidered eyelet and ribbon trim. It was generously sized with a button front placket and elasticized ruffled cuffs and a flounced hem reaching to his lower calves. It felt like the touch of feathers on his soft skin.

As he looked down at his chest, he couldn't help but notice his nipples. They stood up on his chest, tenting the soft material, like tiny barrels. With a trembling hand, he pulled the bodice away from his chest and reached down with his good arm to gently touch the nipple.

He did not remember them being so prominent or sensitive. He just had to reach up and touch them with his thumb and forefinger. He was surprised to see the nipple

jump into erect hardness and send a thrill rippling down to his spine. They positively tingled.

He pulled his hand away from his tingling nipple like he had been bitten. Staring bug eyed down at his chest for a long while watching the silhouette of his nipples moving with his shallow fear filled breathing.

*“They were like independent living organisms.”*

Much later his courage reasserted itself and he pulled the gown away from his flesh. His nipples radiated with sensation as the material shifted over them, making them stand out once again. Tentatively, he reached back into his gown and gently cupped his breast. It felt unusually warm and swollen. He could feel something like a lump just under the nipple and he quickly pulled his hand away once again. The thought, “*Cancer*”, flashed across his mind.

Later when Mabel had brought him his lunch, he managed to stuttered out his concern. He blushed bright red as he told her and asked for her help.

She smiled kindly down at him and did her best to ease his fears.

“Cassie, dear, now don't you worry. I am sure that you are much too young to concern yourself about having cancer. I just bet it is because of your lengthy inactivity. Here let me have a look. Now don't flinch, I'm not going to hurt you.”

She pulled the gown away from his shoulder and down enough to expose his breasts. Tilting the lamp shade upwards to reflect more light on the subject of her inspection, she carefully cupped his left breast.

She squeezed it until it almost filled her palm and the nipple fairly jumped out between the web of her thumb and forefinger. Releasing that breast, she repeated the procedure on the other. Smiling to herself, she then pressed each of his nipples back into the aureole and watched them bounce right back.

“See dear,” she said her examination over and his gown drawn back up to cover his chest. “I don't think that you have anything to worry over. It's just that you have had so little exercise. That, and I suppose, the constant rubbing of your clothing across your nipple area are primarily to blame. You have been very inactive and laying down pulling the material across your chest like that...well you know. That's one of the reasons we have found you so many soft nighties, but I guess we may have to do something else.”

She paused to straighten out the neckline of his gown before continuing, “I wouldn't let it bother me, if I were you. I am sure that they will get back to normal once you are back on your feet. Tell you what, suppose I have Dottie get you some cream to rub on them to ease your irritation. That should do the trick. Okay, I'll tell her to begin tonight. Now, dear, why don't you tell me about this book you've been reading.”

Sam blushed even harder at the mention of the book. It was a Harlequin romance filled with throbbing lovelorn hearts and masculine heroes of epic proportions. Dottie had put it on his bedside table the other day and out of desperation he picked it up and began reading it.

Sam welcomed the chance to change the subject from his chest to the book. While it embarrassed him to admit that he was reading it, it was easier to bear up to than thinking further about his nipples. Maybe, Mabel did have a cure or, at least, a probable solution to his problem.

**-000-**

Later that evening, Dottie entered his room after clearing away the supper dishes with a tray covered with jars. She helped him remove his gown and rolling him over onto a plastic sheet, began massaging a fragrant floral smelling lotion into his skin. Sam was beginning to look forward to these nightly treatments designed to prevent bed sores from developing. It positively relaxed him and made his whole body limp as a wet dish rag.

He had objected at first because he had to strip naked and let Dottie cover **all** of his body and it smelled so frilly.

“Awe, come on you guys,” he had complained, “Can't you use something else that doesn't smell so perfumery.”

“Don't be silly,” Dottie told him, “Do you think that I want my nice clean house to smell like a hospital or...or a horse stall reeking of liniment! Now, you just lay there and let me do my job or would you rather do it yourself? Ha! I'd like to see that. You'd be in sad shape in no time at all. Now hush up and let me finish!”

That ended that. Now Dottie was slowly working into his skin, around his breasts, a cool penetrating lotion. This was Mabel's new treatment and seemed to be doing the job. It felt so good and he could feel the heat being drawn right out of his swollen chest flesh. He could almost purr it felt so good and he relaxed completely.

As he let himself get lost in the new sensations filling his nerve endings, Sam smiled in relief. The constant itching and swollen heat was quickly being drawn out by the cool lotion. Finally, Dottie covered his nipples in a thick layer of cream lotion and placed a 4 x 4 gauze pad over each of them.

“Huh? What are you doing Dottie?” he asked as he looked at the coverings over his nipples.

“I thought it would be best if I put a generous portion on them this time, Cassie. The gauze pads will protect your gown as soon as I can get some tape to hold them in place. Now you sit right there until I get back.”

She was gone for some time and Sam had to keep replacing the pads as they tended to slide off. Sam couldn't help himself as he carefully fingered each of his swollen nipples. They felt like erasers perched on his chest. Hard, rubbery objects that tended to expand and send tingling sensations along his nerve endings. His breast flesh was cool now to his touch as well as a little bit greasy, but he did not mind. They no longer itched or felt inflamed. Hearing someone's steps approaching, Sam quickly withdrew his hands back to his sides.

When Dottie returned she tried and tried to tape the pads to his smooth chest, but the tape just would not stick. So out of desperation, she left him once again telling him

that she had a solution. When she returned this time, she was carrying a smooth stretch satin, lavish multicolored floral embroidered underwire bra in a soft peach.

“Oh no you don't!” he protested loudly. “Just what do you think you are going to do with that thing? You're not thinking what I think that you are thinking are you? Well, you can just forget that! No sir! I ain't wearing that, no way!”

“Oh be quiet!” Dottie replied hotly. “Do you have a better idea? Well do you? I guess you would rather keep irritating your nipples until they just fall off I suppose! Well! Do you have a better idea? No! Well then, it is either this or nothing! Besides, I don't want to be the one to have to remove the grease stains out of your nighties. Now what are you worried about Cassie? There ain't nobody here but us girls! So quit your fooling around and lift up your arms. I just hope this fits.”

In no time at all, Sam found himself wearing a bra. It fit entirely too snugly around his chest. That's what he thought as it puffed up his flesh. The bra left red indentions in his flesh when he removed it for his bath as well. His chest looked much worse to his eyes now than it had even done before.

“It was either the bra or severe irritation,” Dottie told him waving aside his complaints. “You need the covering to hold the pads in place and to protect your tender flesh.”

Mabel was no more sympathetic to his cause, when he later complained to her. Telling him that he would eventually get used to it and the red lines were a sign that the bra was fitted correctly.

That is what the two women told him at any rate. He had to believe them because with the bra on he did not have the constant itching, tingling sensation he had been getting before from his nipples. With the bra, he had a noticeable cleavage, but it was better than the alternative he supposed.

**-000-**

Several weeks later, Sam was in a very blue mood. He was restless and cried over nothing as he lay in his satin covered bed. Looking down at his feet which he hadn't seen in some time because of the prominent mounds tenting up the fabric of his nightie, only made his crying worse.

The bright yellow nylon of his waltz length gown rose up before his red rimmed eyes, and the cleavage between the cups of his bra filled his vision. Sam had to turn his head aside in an attempt to avoid looking down his own growing bosom. A mental picture of days gone by when he eagerly looked for such a sight only made matters worse.

In a fit of temper, Sam threw out his left arm sweeping everything off his night stand. He could feel his arm loosely moving inside the cast as it hit into the hard wood of the table top. Flinging his other arm across his tear streaked face, covering his sight of the horrible swellings on his chest, he moaned loudly.

In his anguish, his right leg pushed its way out from under the covers and slid off the side of the bed nearly tugging him along with it. He instinctively grabbed the

sheets with his hands as he felt himself falling, following the weight of the cast on his leg.

Mabel and Dottie found him half on and half off the bed, his arms stretched over his head grasping at the hot pink sheets while his cast covered leg was stretched out across the floor.

He was crying for all he was worth and presented a very sorry picture indeed with his nightie pulled up over his shaven groin and bunched around his slender waist.

Mabel and Dottie looked first at the sprawling youth then at each other. Wordlessly, they both noted how far their ward had come in recapturing what once had been Cassandra. Sam's hair was long and raven black hanging just past his shoulders framing a pale peaches and cream delicate face. A face filled with two wide expressive violet blue eyes that now reflected only misery, but promised so much more.

The body was slim, much slimmer than when it had first arrived with skin as smooth and soft as velvet. Only the groin indicated the true sex of the person sprawled out across the bed and even that was somehow not quite natural. The penis was short and shriveled more like a child's than a man's and the scrotal sack was taut across two very small round objects. It was much too small and spherical to be natural.

With smiles filling their faces the two women walked over to the poor youth, and helped him back up onto the bed. Mabel cuddled Sam to her ample bosom wiping away his tears with a tissue as Dottie pulled the covers back onto the bed. She held her beloved daughter close to her heart, whispering encouragement as she slowly rocked on the bed.

Once Sam had quieted down, Mabel released him and fluffing up the pillows helped him to get comfortable.

"Mabel," Sam said, his voice cracking.

She handed him a glass of water and a greenish colored pill. Settled back on the pillow, he swallowed to clear his throat and began again.

"Mabel, I can't stand it any longer. You have just got to call the doctor and get him to remove these casts. They are driving me crazy. If you don't do something soon, I...I'm going to crack them open myself. The itching is unbearable and I can't take any more you hear! I've got to get out of these damnable things!"

"Cassie! Watch your mouth dear. We do not condone such filth. Now say you are sorry and then I will see what I can do about your casts. Come, come, let me hear you say that you are sorry."

Sam meekly apologized and sniffing, asked Mabel to help him. Seeing her nod of approval, he took the offered tissue and blotted his eyes. Settling back on the pillow, he felt his hostility and anguish begin to fade as a lassitude over came him. Slowly, he allowed himself to sink into a deep dreamless sleep.

**-000-**

Later, Sam did not know if it was the same day or a different one, he awoke feeling much better. His right arm was slung across his chest just below his breasts and he could feel the gentle rub of nylon as he breathed moving up against it. Opening his

eyes, he noticed the yellow mounds then glancing away quickly noticed Dottie looking down at him.

“Hi there sweetie,” she said seeing him awake. “Here, I've brought you something to eat. Mabel called the doctor and he won't be able to see you for a while, but,” she hastened to add seeing the wildness flare back into his eyes. “But told Mabel it would be all right to remove the casts. Provided, mind you, provided you agreed to stay in bed until he can come and examine you himself. Do you think that you can do that? Yes! Good. Here now you scoot up and let me set this tray in your lap.”

Sam ate with relish for the first time in what seemed like years. His casts would soon be coming off and he'd be free or at least freer than he had been. He couldn't wait to get back on his feet. He just had to start exercising his wasted body soon or he'd never get back to being his old self. His skin was positively too white and creamy smooth for a man and he was afraid to even get on a bathroom scale.

He had wasted away to nothing. A ninety-eight pound weakling would be a gorilla compared to his sparse frame. Holding up his left arm it looked to him like a dead fish. All hairless and white, you could even see his veins through the skin. Instead of the smooth honey brown tan, Sam could see small blue lines streaking through the soft white flesh. What hair remained was pale fine tufts. His flesh and hair looked like they had been bleached, and seemed unhealthy by his standards.

He reached out with his good hand and easily slid his index finger into the space between the cast and arm. When it had first been applied, he could barely get a stretched out coat hanger between the space to scratch. Now, well, now he could get his whole finger in there.

A shiver passed down his spine as he contemplated the amount of weight he must have lost. He had weighted under one fifty before his accident, but now he would be lucky to tip the scale at a hundred. Much later, when Mabel put him on the scale, he weighed in at ninety eight.

With his meal finished, Dottie removed the dishes.

Mabel had entered his room just as Dottie left carrying an old physicians black bag. Setting it on the bedside table, she opened it and pulled out a cast saw. It was a small toothless saw blade attached to a chromed barrel motor.

“I hope that you are feeling much better Cassie,” Mabel said as she sat her bag down and began pulling stuff out of it. “I found my darling husband's old bag and I think this saw still works. We'll find out soon enough. Dottie told you about my call to the doctor, er, yes? Oh good. She'll bring a plastic sheet with her when she returns. Don't want to get plaster dust all over the bed now do we?”

Sam was beaming from ear to ear as the cast saw whirred loudly in his ears. His spirits soared as he watched the saw slice through the plastic shell covering his leg.

Mabel was standing over his leg wearing a green surgical gown, cap, and mask while she sawed away. White dust seemed to be coating everything, but Dottie was standing by with the vacuum.

When the cast fell away in two parts, Sam waited impatiently for the dust to clear. Getting a look at his leg, he was amazed to see it caked in ugly yellow-grey-green scabby looking clumps.

“Oooh my Goooooood!” he croaked as Mabel lifted his leg up and away from the split cast.

“Posh!” she chided, “It's just dried up dead skin and hair that's all! No need to get all queasy on me now. We'll have that scrapped off in no time. Now, I want you to scoot your pretty little buns over this way so I can lay your arm over this here plastic sheeting. Dottie has more plaster dust than she needs and we don't want to make any bigger mess than we have too.”

“Bzzzzzzst,” the saw started up once again. It roared loudly as it sliced through the plaster surrounding his arm like a hot knife through butter. In almost no time at all, the cast was piled with the shards of the other. His arm looked no better than his leg and was close enough to his face for him to get a whiff of it as well. It stank to high heaven and made him cringe as he looked at its shriveled musculature.

“No wonder it itched so bad,” he muttered. “Can...can you clean it up so that its...er...you know normal?”

“Of course Cassie, Dottie will bring a basin over and we will wash and scrape it nice and clean for you. It is disgusting though, isn't it? Now don't you go moving around a lot! We still do not know if it has completely mended until the doctor sees it. So I want your promise that you will not, I repeat, will not try to get out of this bed without either Dottie or myself here to help you. You don't want those casts reapplied, now do you?”

Sam held his hand up in front of his face, squeezing it into a fist over and over again. He marveled at how weak his grip had become while his arm had been imprisoned in the cast.

Dottie and Mabel had scrubbed him free of the sickening scabious tissue that had covered his arm and leg leaving behind a white, soft skin that glistened with the oils and lotions they had applied.

His leg was in the same shape as his arm, but Sam was feeling better than he had in a very long time. No one could appreciate the depth of his relief at being freed from the casts. It was almost like being blind then being able to see. Whole new vistas were opened to him that had been forbidden. Once he had some strength back in his leg, he would be completely mobile. With mobility, he had freedom.

He had laid back while the two women worked on his encrusted flesh, washing then shaving the limbs. His mind worked over details of what he intended to do once he had his freedom. He did not care that they shaved off what hair remained on his arm and leg nor did he pay particular attention when Dottie flipped his penis aside as she finished shaving up his thigh.

He was feeling entirely too happy to worry about any of the women seeing his nakedness or even touching his privates. They had done it a thousand times over the duration of his confinement. Heck, he had even seen them in their flimsy night gowns which had left little to the imagination.

The fact that his penis had not reacted in any manner normal to a young man did not enter his mind. He had thought about not having any wet dreams during his illness, but blamed it on the medication and inactivity. Besides, what real man could get it up when he was surrounded only by old biddy's and satin and lace.

Sam just lay back and luxuriated in the sensations of air and temperature just touching his uncovered leg and arm. His senses seemed to be heightened and much more sensitive in his newly exposed body parts.

The silky softness and coolness of his satin sheets sent thrills down his spine as he moved his naked leg over them. The smile did not leave his lips even as he slipped back into slumber. His dreams were comforting and unlike so many in the past, fun. He slept soundly with a broad smile on his lips.

**-000-**

Later that night, Mabel came back into his room carrying her medical bag. Carefully sitting it down on the night stand, she bent over him. Seeing that he was sleeping soundly, she opened the bag and removed a drug filled syringe. Wiping his bicep with an alcohol sponge, she injected the medicine into his arm.

“Now to finish the job,” she said softly as she waited for the anesthetic to work.

She pulled Sam's legs up and away from his body frog style, tying them to the bed frame with nylon ribbons. Carefully sliding a green sterile cloth up under his hips, she then soaped down his groin. Washing it thoroughly, she patted it dry and rubbed disinfectant over the area. Mabel paused in her work when Sam moaned and tried to turn in his sleep.

Satisfied he was still sound asleep, she began removing a suture set, scalpel, forceps, and other surgical implements from the black bag.

Almost two hours later, Mabel stood back and removed the mask from her face. A big satisfied smile lit up her face.

“Cassandra darling, you are back,” she whispered. Closing up her bag after making sure that everything was properly put back in, Mabel tucked the covers up under Sam's neck. Bending, she kissed him on the forehead, and turning out the light left him to his dreams.

**-000-**

With the morning Sam awoke groggy and feeling like he had cotton balls in his mouth. He had one of those headaches that seem to radiate out of the back of his head as well. Reaching up to rub his eyes, Sam's hand smacked him in the eye.

“Dang!” He mumbled, “I've got to be more careful now that the cast is off.”

While his eye hurt, it was a good hurt as it reminded him that the cast was off and he was soon going to be free.

As he started to sit up in bed, Sam felt a pull in his groin area. It did not hurt, but felt strange. He started to pull up his nightie and check himself out, when Dottie came in carrying his breakfast tray.

“Good morning Cassie dear,” she said placing the tray on his lap. “Did you sleep well last night? You did? Well fine. Here let me help you put this napkin under your chin. Is your pillow okay? Well, all right, enjoy your breakfast, Mabel and I will be right back to help you go potty.”

Sam looked down at his tray.

*“The usual,”* he thought, *“plain toast, marmalade, tea with a slice of lemon, and one poached egg. Man am I getting sick and tired of this! First thing I'm going to do when I get outta here is get me a real man's breakfast. Two, no, four eggs, sunny side up, a pound of bacon, yeah! Some grits and biscuits 'n red eye gravy. 'N a whole pot of strong coffee! Oh, what I'd give for a real cup of coffee right now. Man! I can't wait!”*

Sam ate like a starving man, even if the food was pretty plain it filled his shrunken stomach. No sooner had he swallowed the last bite of toast, than Dottie and Mabel came into his room.

Dottie moved the tray over to the night stand, and Mabel taking his arms assisted him in sliding out from under the covers.

Sam half stood half leaned against the bed frame.

*“Strange,”* he thought, *“for just getting up, I feel really weird. Sorta like the feeling I get from a head cold.”* He just did not seem to be able to think clearly.

Mabel slid a pair of three inch high heeled pumps with tufts of fuzzy stuff covering the toes on his feet. The shoes were in a pale violet satin and the fuzzy balls were a bright white.

He started to shove his feet away from the offending shoes, but Mabel told him to hold still.

“Cassie darling,” Mabel told him, “Hold still. I want to put these heels on your feet. Before you say anything, just look at how your poor feet just flop loosely at the your ankles.”

He looked down as she instructed and his head began to spin a little bit. He fell back against the bed and raised his head up. The dizziness passed and he shook his head trying to clear out the cobwebs.

“Oh boy, I feel like I'm coming down with the daddy of all head colds,” he muttered.

“Nonsense dear,” Mabel replied. “You are just tired. That's all. I am sure that it will pass. Now where was I, Oh, yes your feet. They get that way because the tendons loosen up and relax to the point that your feet will just flop around. That is caused from being bed bound so long. By putting on these high heels, your tendons will once again be shortened. See, I bet you can feel the difference already.”

Sam had to admit that she had something there. He had stubbed his toes on more than one occasion in the past because his feet seemed to just flop on the ends of his ankles.

*“Well maybe she had a valid point,”* he thought as she forced the second shoe onto his foot.

The fit was tight but gave him a sense of support. They also forced his longish toes into the sharp points of the shoe, pinching them. The instep dug into his foot as well, but he could live with it if they did what Mabel suggested they could. The sooner his feet were back to normal, the easier it would be to get out of Mabel's care.

He was wobbly and favoring his good foot as Dottie grabbed him under his other arm. Walking in the heels would take a lot of practice and getting used to before he would be able to do it on his own. The pinching tight fit actually felt good as he hobbled to the bathroom.

Together, Mabel and Dottie guided him into the bath where he was placed on the commode.

He was used to their presence by now, and it did not bother him as much as it had at first. As he sat relieving himself, they waited patiently until he was finished. As he urinated a puzzled expression flicked across his face. Something did not feel quite right, but he couldn't quite identify it.

When he made a move to grab the hem of his gown, Dottie rushed to his side and taking a handful of tissue cleaned him up. He tried to protest since he no longer had on the cast, but it was too late. Dottie ignored his complaints completely. She just smiled and told him it was no bother as she had been doing it for so long it seemed to be a habit.

Finished, they helped him up and over to the sink. While he cleaned up at the sink, Dottie went to change his linens. Sam washed his face in cold water only, then brushed his teeth. He checked his smooth milky skin as he rubbed his hand across his cheek. No stubble, no healthy tan, nothing but peaches and cream complexion.

*"Like a baby's butt,"* he thought, but strangely pleased. Slowly he rubbed his fingers across his face once more. The mirror reflected back a great big smile.

He was almost back into his bed before he realized that something was missing in his morning routine. He worried over what was missing until it registered—he hadn't gotten to take his morning bath. A good hot bath felt great in the mornings and besides he had gotten used to it.

"What no bath this morning?" he asked even as they were helping him back into the bed.

"No dear," Mabel replied. "We thought it best if you did not strain yourself at first. Let's just get used to not wearing those horrible casts. Shall we? But before you get back under the covers, put these on."

Sam's eyes locked onto the pair of frilly lilac colored panties. Mabel held them stretched out in her hands waiting for him to step into them. As he just stood there doing nothing but opening and closing his mouth without saying anything, Mabel looked up at him.

"Tsk, tsk," she clucked with her tongue, "What is the matter with you dear? It's not like we haven't gone through this before. Now! Quit your lollygagging and step into these panties! What's the matter with you? Do you think that they will bite you or something? Come on, I haven't all day to wait for you to do this. It is really quite sim-

ple. You put one foot in and then you put the other in. Now hurry up. My back is not used to staying bent like this.”

Reluctantly giving in, Sam slowly guided first one then the other foot through the lace frilled leg openings of the panties.

Mabel pulled them up under his nightie and let the floral lace elastic band snap around his waist.

“Now! That wasn't so bad, was it? If I live to be a hundred I'll never understand why you young'uns don't like wearing pretty frillies. Here, go ahead and get into bed. I want to brush your hair next.”

Sitting up in his bed, Mabel had him lean over with his face almost pressed into his knees as she flipped his long black hair up and over his head. Quickly, she began running the brush through it combing it up and away from his lowered head. Brushing it until it shone, she then had him raise back up. Patting it with her hands she then began slowly to brush it into shape.

“Oh, I do love this look on you Cassie dearest. It is so much easier to care for and look how it just fluffs up. Don't you just love it darling?”

Sam really did not hear anything Mabel was saying. Instead he was letting his thoughts drift. The newness of wearing panties, however, soon occupied his mind. The cool nylon of the panties felt confining but different at the same time. They felt like they were riding up between his legs and the crack of his ass at the same time, but that was ridiculous. If it weren't for the elastic hems, it would feel like he didn't have anything on at all.

“Well,” he thought, “*nothing for it I guess. She means well and I'd better accept it for now. Once I get my walking papers, though, I'm outta panties, nighties, and especially these tight bras.*”

His thoughts were broken by Dottie who was busily cleaning up around him. She looked up from her vacuuming and smiled. Sam returned it with a smile of his own. It was the beginning of another day just like the one before and the ones before that. Bored was just too simple a word to express just how tired of the situation he had become.



Even the tape player they had found for him was boring. All the tapes that came with it had fallen apart after just a few playings. Except for the couple of elevator music ones which he did not particularly care for. He only listened to them at night because they helped him sleep sometimes.

Mabel had finished brushing his hair and had left the room promising to return later with some new magazines for him to read.

Dottie followed soon after leaving him alone with his thoughts.

At least with the removal of the casts, he could look forward to getting away soon. Hope put a great big smile on his face as he let his head fall back onto the pillow. He had to admit that there were some things he would miss about his recuperation. He had gotten positively spoiled by all the attention the two women were showing him. He especially enjoyed having his hair brushed. It was so relaxing and darned if he didn't miss his morning bath.

On her return, Mabel asked him if he would like to get out of bed and sit in the chair for a while.

Sam was more than ready, and with the help of both women, was soon comfortably sitting in the chair. His head seemed to be clearing up and he felt much better than he had earlier.

Mabel squatted down in front of him once again and fitted the heels snugly onto his feet reminding him that the longer he wore them the quicker his feet would recover.

Dottie gave him several of the latest women's magazines to pass the time. He accepted them greedily as he had grown almost addicted to them. They provided his only glimpse of the happenings of the outside world.

The chair faced toward the window and the drapes had been drawn back giving him a clear view of the front of the estate. The trees were green and the sky was bright blue, it was going to be a wonderful day.

Sam was almost nodding in his chair, the magazines piled at his feet. He had a strange sensation like he needed to pee, but more of an itchy tingling feeling. Unconsciously, he reached down between his legs to scratch the worrisome itch and move his penis into a more comfortable place. As his fingers probed into the folds of his pretty pink nightie with its lavish spill of floral lace trim, his eyes popped wide open. He pressed his fingers deeper into the clef between his legs.

His scream of absolute terror brought both women running back into the room.

Mabel quickly grasped the situation, and plunged a needle into his upper arm. The sedative coursed through his veins and soon his ranting and flailing about stopped. He just sat there, unmoving with his mouth open breathing harshly. While the medication calmed him, it did not ease his mental anguish. At last, his eyes closed and his chin drooped to his chest.

"Come on Dottie, help me get Cassie back into bed," Mabel said. "I was afraid of this, but it just couldn't be helped. Now could it? Not if I wanted my Cassandra back. I must have my darling Cassie back, I must!"

"It's okay Mabel," Dottie replied rising up off the floor where she had been holding Sam by his legs to keep him from jumping up out of the chair.

Mabel pushed herself up off his lap where she had been sitting also holding him down until the drug became effective. The empty syringe rolled out onto the floor and up against the night stand.

"What did you do Mabel? What could have made him so...so distraught?" Dottie asked as they dumped Sam's unresisting body back on the bed.

"I just removed the final barrier to our Cassie's return Dottie. That's all. Really!" Mabel replied as she pulled the soft pink satin sheet up under Sam's chin. "I did it last night, just like I told you I was going to do. No! I didn't need any help and I did not want to disturb you. You would have tried to stop me! This was my idea and I couldn't wait any longer. I just couldn't, you hear!"

"Well, Mabel, you should have waited as we discussed earlier. It is much too soon to have done this. You saw his reaction or were you somewhere else when all the screaming started?" Dottie was angry and she did not mind letting her sister know it either.

Pretending to be a maid was bad enough, but to see all her carefully laid plans rushed like this upset her. She had wanted her niece back even more than Mabel did, but rushing into this final stage might disrupt all her plans.

*"Mabel had rushed into this without really planning on how her patient would react to the changes,"* Dottie thought angrily. *"If she just had patience and waited a little longer. Long enough for the pharmaceutical therapy she had concocted to make him more pliable and unresisting. One more increase in the dosage and another week or two at the most and everything would be so much easier. Oh, well can't be helped now."*

"All right Mabel," Dottie said as she looked her sister in the eye. "What's done is done! You stay here and keep an eye on our darling child while I go and prepare another shot for her. We'll have to keep Cassie carefully sedated for a while, but maybe we can salvage this.

Dottie went back to the kitchen where she gathered a number of the vials and boxes of medications Mabel had collected many months ago when she visited Dr. Little. Her years of psychiatric pharmacy experience were put to good use as she began mixing ingredients. Just enough of mind altering chemicals to make the emerging personality pliable to alteration and adaptation, more and they could wind up with a vegetable.

**-000-**

Cassie sat up in bed, the pile of baby books and memorabilia sliding across the bed spread as she tried to get more comfortable.

Mabel and her Aunt Dottie had given her so much to read and study trying to get her memory back.

She still did not remember the accident nor anything else that had happened to her. All that she could remember was a vague unsettling image of a long haired young man and a few flashes of odd memories, but that was all.

According to her Mom, she had a bad fall from a horse and they had feared for her life. Now she was home, in her own bed, with all her favorite clothes and nick nacks. She even kept her doll that her Daddy had given her on her twelfth birthday sitting beside her on the bed. Well that is what they had told her, but Cassie did not remember any of it.

Nothing, not even her mother or aunt were familiar to her. They could have been total strangers as far as she was concerned, but what total stranger would treat her with such love and devotion. What they were telling her had to be the truth, besides the proof was sitting right there before her in the photo albums and baby books.

Cassie pulled the headphones from her head as she turned in the bed. She looked over at the bureau mirror once again seeing the same expressive violet-blue eyes and black hair reflected in the photographs scattered before her.

*“Cassandra Deanne Johns, that's me!”* she thought, but a tinge of misgiving accompanied that thought. *“You should think that I would remember something about my life. Some tidbit, like what my Dad looked like or...or a special event or something I could relate to. This...this nothing but flickering images and vague half thoughts of some young man. Was he my boyfriend or maybe lover?”*

A blush flashed across Cassie's cheeks at this last thought.

*“Why hadn't her Mom or Aunt Dottie said anything about him and why did they ignore her questions about this strange image that kept popping up in her mind.”* Cassie's thoughts continued.

The way the two women kept avoiding even talking about him made Cassie think all the more about the young man in her dreams. Like who was he and why did his image look so sharp to her mind's eye when everything else was so blurred.

Unanswered questions and faded images made her feel so confused and lost. Perhaps her Mother and Aunt were right and she should try to block out all thoughts but those they wanted her to build upon. That is why all the baby books and photo albums were piled around her.

“Remember and if you cannot remember, then memorize these to make them real in your mind,” Aunt Dottie had instructed. “While you may not feel comfortable with these memories now, in time you won't think twice about them because they will be a part of you. The real you! Cassie dearest. Now, you just look at the pictures and read the captions to make them part of you. Here let me tell you about this photo darling. That was taken when you were....”

Cassie looked into the full length mirror on the back of her bathroom door. Glancing down, she smiled in satisfaction at the reflection of her long shapely legs.

*“Legs that reached all the way up to her ass,”* she thought. *“Now why did I think of that?”* She pondered. *“What a silly comparison. Of course her legs went all the way up to her heine. Where else would they go? Hehehe.”*

Cassie was satisfied with the soft smoothness of her legs now that they were both the same size and tone. There, for the longest, she thought that her broken one would

never get back to the same size as her other leg. The aerobic exercises her Aunty made her do three times a day had certainly helped.

Humming to herself, Cassie began lifting the straps of her neon blue and turquoise leotard off her shoulders. Pulling down the leotard, she stepped out of it; then, rolled down her pastel pink tights. Standing in only her sports bra and spandex brief, she looked back at her reflection.

A puzzled expression of confused emotions flashed across her face.

On the one hand, she felt a revulsion at the sight of the well formed torso and smooth white skin; then again on the other hand, felt just as deeply a joyous sense of well being. She turned away in some confusion as she finished disrobing.

Stepping into the warm shower, she began carefully soaping her soft smooth white skin in body lotion. She let her mind drift away from the disquieting thoughts and concentrated on lathering her body. Pausing only briefly to lather the furry slit between her legs.

Out of the shower, Cassie quickly completed her toilet.

Stepping into her bedroom, she carefully chose her wardrobe for the day. Selecting a pair of frilly peach panties with eyelet lace on the waistband and floral lace inserted at the leg openings, matching nylon bra with soft, slightly padded cups, satin garter belt, black sheer hose, a camisole in a soft champagne with matching half slip frothy with lace at the hem and bodice, beige poly blouse with full billowing sleeves and frilly lace jabot, and a lined grey wool blend skirt were piled on the bed. A pair of black patent pumps, matching clutch purse and gold and pearl jewelry including dangling earrings completed her selections.

This was going to be her first day out since her accident and she wanted to look just right. As she let her index finger trace absently along the lace edging of her bra, she paused to wonder why her mother and aunt insisted she wear such frilly garments.

Somewhere in the corner of her mind, she seemed to remember reading that young women of today no longer wore such frills. Opting instead for comfortable cottons and getting away from all that itchy and scratchy lace.

The lace did bother her, itching and scratching at times, but they insisted that she always loved her frills and lace. For now, she would wear what they thought best for her, but maybe later she would see about getting more wearable clothing.

*“Perhaps,” she thought, “maybe today when they browsed after lunch she could pick up something for herself.”*

Mabel had arranged for her to get a complete beauty regiment at her salon and afterwards they were going to do some shopping. She couldn't wait, as it promised to be an eventual day. They were even going to stop at the Tea Garden for a light lunch. One of her favorite places to eat. It was so feminine and intimate.

It was going to be a lovely day, simply lovely. They served the most delicate finger sandwiches she had ever had there. Well that was according to her Aunt at any rate. Dottie positively drooled when she spoke of how refreshing the crust and cucumber

sandwiches were at the Tea Garden. As a matter of fact, every memory, every detail Cassie devoted to the Tea Garden was planted there by her aunt. Cassie, try as she might, just could not remember a single thing from her past.

Dressed in her slip and camisole, Cassie sat at her vanity brushing her hair. It flipped up and framed her face beautifully. Her eyes, highlighted in their subtle shadows and mascara, shown brightly and her lips looked rich and inviting in their thick coffee red lipstick. A spritz of cologne behind the ears, a daub on the wrists and some behind the knee were the final touches, before she finished dressing.

“Oooh Cassie darling,” Mabel greeted her as she walked into the foyer. Aunt Dottie seemed to glow in reflected admiration and smilingly gave Cassie a hug. Both women gave Cassie a kissy kissy brush on the cheek before leaving the house.

As they walked down the steps to the waiting limo, Aunt Dottie was telling Cassie all about her first trip to the beauty salon when she was a young debutante. Cassie was just very happy to finally be outside and on her way someplace. Any place was better than staying cooped up in the house one minute longer.

As they neared the limo, Cassie looked up at the tall muscular chauffeur dressed in a gray uniform with black boots and hat. He turned to face the ladies as they descended the steps and Cassie saw his face. For a brief moment everything seemed to freeze in place.

A flash of blurred memory ran through Cassie's mind in which someone very similar to the driver hovered over her, striking her arm with a pipe or stick of some kind. Only the picture flashing in her mind contained the arm of a man raised protectively before a chauffeur dressed like a bum. Only in this case, the chauffeur was striking out at a man.

“Cassie, Cassie!” her mother's voice cut into the flash-back.

Cassie shook her head to clear it of the confused pictures, and smiled weakly at her mother.

“Cassie are you all right dear?”

“Huh? Yes Mother. I am fine. The sun it...it must have blinded me for a moment that's all. I'm fine, just fine.”

Cassie was very confused by her waking dream. She looked down at her feet and did not look back up at the chauffeur as she entered the car. She was addled enough by the experience and certainly did not want to aggravate it.

These waking dreams bothered her, but she did not want to talk about them.

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The trip to the salon was uneventful and the strange thoughts that flashed through her mind were, while not totally forgotten, driven back into her subconscious. They were just too unsettling to be mulled over. At least not now. Cassie wanted to be out and about and if she dwelled on her crazy delusions, they might take her back home. So she sat pretending interest in what the other ladies were talking about, but her fingers curled and twisted a tissue until it was in tatters.

Absently Cassie began wondering if going out was such a good idea. She couldn't remember the last time she had ventured forth, but it had to be some time back. Back to before her accident that had laid her up so, so long and robbed her of so many memories.

According to her mother, Mabel, she had been thrown from a horse. Besides breaking her ankle and arm, she had been unconscious for months. They had been seriously afraid that they might lose her, but miraculously, she had pulled through.

For some strange reason, she was now afraid of going out in public. Cassie did not have the faintest idea as to why she was afraid of appearing in public, but it gnawed at the back of her mind. Cassie was able to push those fears into the back of her mind, but others popped up to take their place.

Her mother and aunt had insisted that they treat Cassie to a real make over at the salon. As a special treat, they had arranged for a tattooist to fix her make-up permanently. They had already paid for it in celebration of her recovery. Therefore, the two women had argued, there was no use complaining.

“What was done, was done,” according to Dottie.

However, Cassie was having second thoughts about getting her skin permanently dyed as the two older women had wanted. True she was having a difficult time re-learning how to apply her eye liner and such. Just like she had never done it before, but permanent ink was something altogether different.

It wasn't the possibility of pain so much as the idea that she would have bright red lips and black eye liner permanently etched into her skin that really bothered her. While her two mentors insisted that the old Cassie had truly loved wearing tons of make-up and fancy lacy clothing, the new Cassie did not.

There was just something innately wrong with applying gobs of colored paste to the flesh and wearing lace positively itched. Cassie did not know what to do, but she did not want to upset either of the two women after all they had done for her. So she sat in the back seat of the car, twisting the living daylights out of her tissue as recompense.

Even as Cassie removed her outer clothing and pulled the pale chalky pink nylon smock over her undies, she could not bring herself to protest what was about to happen. The woman was nice and chatted inanely while the needle buzzed contentedly around Cassie's lips. It reminded Cassie of honey bees hovering over a bright spring blossom and was strangely relaxing.

The woman carefully outlined Cassie's lips in a dark red dye before filling in the outline with a brighter than natural pink filler dye. The tattooist soon completed Cassie's mouth giving it a full luscious pouty look. Exchanging the pink dye for an ebony black one, she asked if Cassie wanted to get up and stretch for a moment before continuing.

Cassie reached up to gently touch her puffy lips with tentative finger tips.

“Oooh they sting!” Cassie whispered as she felt the heat and tenderness of her mouth.

“They will feel like that for just a little while, dear,” the woman replied. Once I finish with your eyes, I'll give you an ice pack. It should cool off that burning sensation quickly and you'll be as good as new in no time. Now, come on get back in the chair and let me finish! This is the really hard part and I need you to sit very still, understand?”

After what seemed like hours, Cassie removed the blue ice pack from her face. It no longer stung where the needle had done its very thorough work. Bright full lips and mysterious looking eyes stared back at her from the mirror.

*“Well, Cassie girl,”* Cassie thought. *“It looks like you won't have to worry about fixing your face anytime soon. Darn! If I don't look like some painted hussy!”*

With her face finished, Cassie was escorted back into the main salon where a stylist began working on her hair. Laid back in the chair, her longish hair was washed, rinsed, and dyed a rich blue-black. With her hair still wet, the stylist began trimming off the split ends while talking aimlessly. Cassie just said “Unhuh” and “em” as the stylist rambled on. Talking of just about everything and nothing at the same time.

With a final spritz of hair spray and a pat to set some imaginary stray hairs into place, Cassie was allowed to get out of the chair and examine herself in a full length mirror. Placing the tip of her right toe to the floor and pivoting around it, Cassie examined herself.

As she came full circle, she froze as the full impact of the extremely feminine reflection hit her. She did not know why it bothered her so, but it really scared her to see what she now looked like. The distinct feeling of her tight skirt pressing against her calves as she pirouetted, the feather-like brushing of her chin by the lacy jabot of her blouse, and tautness of her nylons were for a moment etched into her mind.

Cassie stood silent as all these feelings and impressions impacted her sensory organs and filled her brain.

*“Why am I feeling so strange...and....and why doesn't this all seem right? I should be enjoying this...bu..but I'm scared, really scared right now!”*

Both her aunt and mother misunderstood her reaction for shocked joy. Cassie was a very beautiful young lady even if they had to say so themselves. Their beaming smiles of satisfaction spread across their faces as the beautician even said what a gorgeous young woman their Cassie was. Filled with matronly pride, they escorted Cassie out of the salon babbling all the while about how lovely she was.

Cassie for her part followed meekly, allowing the women to guide her along. Mabel had a gentle hold on her elbow as she led the way back to the car. Aunt Dottie was at her other side, talking about those stupid cucumber sandwiches at the Tea Garden. Cassie's mind still had not come to grips with her new improved image, even as they reached the restaurant.

As she sat quietly in the back seat, a flicker of bright sun- light slashing through the side window briefly blinded her. As she blinked, an image of a young man on what seemed to be an operating room table came to her. His leg was elevated and was being coated in plaster. The bright lights of the Operating Room poured into his eyes, just as the sunlight did just then.

Cassie had the strangest feeling as her mind's eye picked out the details in the photographic negative-like image reflected inside her head. Slowly the image of the young man blurred, faded out of focus, then became herself. She blinked one more time and shook her head trying to clear it of these haunting pictures.

“Well, Cassie darling, are you ready for the Tea Garden?”

Her Aunt Dottie's voice cut into her awareness bringing her back to the here and now.

“Cassie are you all right dear? You look like you've just seen a ghost. You're not feverish, are you? Here let me feel your forehead!”

Dottie twisted around in the passenger seat and reached out with her hand.

“No...you don't seem to be feverish. You're not feeling faint or anything? No! Well, it must be the excitement and all that. I think that once we've had tea we may skip the shopping trip. I don't want you to relapse on us because we tried to do too much. What do you think Mabel? Yes, let's just get some lunch. We can shop another day.”

“I'm fine! Just fine!” Cassie stated almost too loudly.

She was shaken by the mental images that invaded her thoughts. She looked down at her hands which were shaking visibly and clutched the tissue, wringing it tightly. As she tried to focus all her attention on the quickly shredding tissue, her heart raced beneath her bosom.

The mental thought, *“I'm losing my mind!”* screamed out to her. This was scary stuff for someone just recovering from being in a coma. She was too afraid to say anything to her mom and aunt.

*“Perhaps if they knew, they could help me, but..”* her thoughts betrayed her... *“but what if...what if they thought that I was CRAZY! Oh Lord! What would I do then?”* Her mind raced even as the tissue disintegrated into tatters.

“Cassie!” Aunt Dottie's voice made itself heard. “Cassie! What on earth dear! Oh my! You have positively destroyed that tissue. Here! Give me that and stop your nervous twitching.”

She took the tattered tissue and appraised her niece. She carefully examined her every feature with her eyes. Then smiling continued, “Why, you are a lovely young woman and we are going to have the most marvelous luncheon. So there is nothing to worry your pretty mind over.”

She stopped talking as she looked down and reached into her purse. Looking back at Cassie, she finished, “I realize that it has been awhile since you were out, but there is no need for you to work yourself up into a fit over it. Here, take this new tissue and do try not to destroy it quite so quickly darling.”

Cassie breathed a sigh of relief at hearing her Aunt's misguided conclusions for her nervous twitching. She gratefully accepted the offered tissue, if for no other reason than it gave her something to do. Anything to distract her from her crazy thoughts. *“But what if,”* echoed in her mind just loudly enough to keep her from saying anything about her misgivings and obvious delusions.

They parked the car near the door to the Tea Garden's main entrance. Cassie looked questioningly at her Mother and then back to the blue handicapped sign looming over their parking space. Mabel's only answer was to take Cassie's elbow and lead her toward the door.

“Oh, hello Miss Mabel and Miss Dottie,” the hostess said as they entered the building. It was just as Aunt Dottie had said it would be. Very frilly and feminine to the point of being overdone. “It has been awhile since your last visit and we have missed you,” the hostess continued. “Er, table for three....yes. Fine, I have a very nice one all ready for you and your party.”

Cassie looked at the tall woman dressed in a turn of the century English matron's attire. White starched mutton chop sleeved blouse with high collar and tiered jabot, flared khaki colored skirt reaching almost to her ankles with a bustle of gathered material at the back and large buttons running down the front. Her skirt was protected by a long crisp white apron with ruffled hem.

“Thank you Frances,” Mabel said. “I don't believe that you have met my daughter Cassandra. She will be having tea with us today. Cassie.....er...well she has been.....away. Away for some time, but she is back now...to stay of course. Is the table by the fountain available. I...I have always enjoyed sitting there.”

“Oh, yes of course for you Miss Mabel. That was where I was going to seat you in any event. It is a pleasure Miss Cassandra to meet you. This way ladies,” she said turning to lead them into the fashionable tea room.

The room was filled with oak tables covered with bright pink tablecloths then recovered such that the corners of the cloth were opposite to the first covering, with a white one. Bright pink napkins shaped into fleur-de-lis filled long stemmed crystal glasses and a complete twelve piece silver service complimented English porcelain.

The place settings were atop what appeared to be hand knitted doily place mats. Smaller doilies covered the arms and backs of the padded chairs. A pretty, fresh floral arrangement was centered on each table as well. There was a low buzz of conversation in the room and most of the tables were occupied by little old ladies.

They were led over to the far side and into another adjoining room. There, tucked into one corner, was what appeared to be a little garden with a fountain bubbling in its center. The far wall was constructed to resemble a large English bay window and the sunlight spilled into the ivy covered garden.

The center piece of the garden was the large antique bronzed water fountain. At its apex stood a Greek goddess holding forth a ewer from which a steady stream of water poured. It fell into a bowl and, filled, spilled over in a fine curtain of liquid into a much larger one. Then it finally overflowed into a marble pond complete with various types of goldfish.

“I hope that your experience here is most pleasurable. If there is anything that I or our staff can do to make your visit more enjoyable just let me know. Ah, here we are ladies. Enjoy and Betsy will be your server today. Once again, it is my pleasure to assist you. Miss Mabel, Miss Dottie, and Mistress Cassandra,” Frances said giving a quick dipping curtsy then she turned and went back to the front.

“Well, what do you think dear?” Aunt Dottie asked Cassie. “Isn't it the most relaxing and enjoyable place you've ever seen? I do love coming here so.”

The thought, “*GaGa!*” popped into Cassie's mind as she took note of her surroundings and Aunt Dottie's comment.

“*Now, why did I think that,*” she continued to say to herself. “*This should be every woman's dream come true of a relaxing atmosphere.*”

“Hello ladies,” Betsy said as she came over to their table. She dipped into a curtsy before continuing. “Would you like to order something to drink while you decide on luncheon or would you rather just enjoy a spot of tea?”

They sat and ate mostly in silence. Cassandra enjoyed the relative quiet and relaxing gurgling of the fountain. It was pleasantly cool and comforting sitting here sipping on her tea. The unsettling flashbacks and strange thoughts forgotten in the calm imposed by the Tea Garden.

The food had been served and eaten with relish. Now sated, the three women were enjoying a final pot of fragrant herbal tea.

Cassie idly watched a pair of goldfish chase each other in the pool. The slightly larger one was pure spun red gold in color and the other a mottled white, black and orange color. Aunt Dottie's running commentary about the food and ambiance of the place were only vaguely heard droning in the background as she concentrated on the antics of the two fish. Cassie was almost relaxed to the point of falling asleep.

“Cassie, Cassie! Darling!” Mabel's voice cut into her reverie. “Darling, you're not falling asleep on us are you dearest?”

“Er, no Mother. I'm fine. I...I was just thinking that's all. Are we ready to go yet? I need to use the ladies room before we do anything else.”

“You go ahead dear. Dottie and I will get the check and we'll meet you by the entrance.”

Cassie picked up her purse from the floor where she had placed it and headed for the restroom. She did not really have to go, but she couldn't think of anything else to say. There was just something about sitting in that room staring down into the pool that sent shivers up her spine.

The play of sunlight on its rippling waters reflected into her eyes, sending unpleasant thoughts and images back into her conscious mind. Everything had been fine, until just a few moments ago. Then something about how the light reflected off the pool brought back memories.

Shaking her head to force the unwanted images out of her mind, Cassie pushed open the door to the ladies room. As the door swung open, she almost collided with another woman leaving.

For a moment they stood face to face, bosom almost touching bosom. Neither spoke as time itself seemed to stand still.

Cassie looked into the startled eyes of the woman standing frozen in place before her. Finally breaking eye contact, Cassie looked down and to the side.

"Oooh, I am so sorry," Cassie managed to say at last still looking away from the woman. There was something especially familiar about her, but when Cassie tried to concentrate, she felt a migraine coming on. "Please excuse me. I...I didn't see you."

"Thin....think noth....nothing of it my dear," Cassie heard the woman say as she stepped back into the ladies room and turned to the side. "It....it was...er...nothing."

Cassie still looking down at the floor started past the woman when she felt a hand touch her arm.

"Sam....er...Sam is that yo....you?" a hesitant voice asked.

It was as though a flash from a camera went off in Cassie's eyes followed by a pain. A sharp, stabbing pain that gripped the back of her skull in a vice tight embrace.

As the bright flash filled her mind, Cassie saw a young man lying on a bed. A hospital bed, with his right leg in a cast and this woman was standing over him note pad in hand. The image was as clear as daylight. As it burned painfully deeper into his conscious, Cassie could have sworn that it was as if she were looking at the woman through the young man's eyes.

"Who, who? Are you speaking to m...m..me?" Cassie turned toward the direction of the pull on her arm. Cassie brought her fingers up to her face and pressed them to her eyes. "Oooh the pain!" she mumbled silently. "I...I....I do...don't...."

"Oh, I am so sorry. I...I must have been mistaken. You...you just....just look so very familiar. I'm Gloria Norris and you are...," the stranger said looking Cassie straight in the eyes.

"Cassie....Cassandra Johns. Now, if you will excuse me..." Cassie noted as she fled to the nearest stall.

Her head was pounding now like there was no tomorrow and perhaps there wasn't going to be one. Cassie felt that her head was getting ready to explode and was visibly shaking. The fear that she would have a relapse and return to her comatose existence scared her deeply.

"I am sorry....to have bothered you," she heard as the other woman apparently left the restroom.



Cassandra sat for a long while, before she felt good enough to get up. She slowly made her way over to the sinks and splashed cool water on her face. Holding a dampened towel to her face, she took several deep breaths. Finally, she felt good enough to fix her ruined make-up and head for the door. No sooner had she reached the door, than she felt the need to pee. After all that time on the pottie, she had forgotten why she had gone there in the first place.

“Cassie, are you all right darling? You look so pale. You're not feeling bad are you? Oh, you poor dear. We have kept you out entirely too long. Come, come, let's go. Here, let me and Dottie help you. Dottie! Grab her other elbow and let's head back to the car.”

Dottie shot Mabel a look that spoke volumes. When Cassie had gotten up to go to the ladies room, they had a quiet talk about the day's events. Dottie was not pleased about taking Cassie out into the open this soon, but Mabel had over- ridden her.

Now there would be some hard work to reaffirm the new Cassie she had created. Dottie wasn't positive that Cassie was having problems dealing with her new inner self, but could see signs of serious strain. She wanted to get home soon and mix up some more of the drugs. A booster shot would go a long way in easing her mind about just how well the new Cassie was emerging.

As the three women slowly left the Tea Garden, Gloria Norris stepped out from behind a large potted plant off to the side of the hostess' stand.

*“Well, well! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes! Mabel and her crazy sister Dottie and Sam. Poor Sam! What have they done to that child! I had better do some serious investigating and make sure of my facts first. Mabel is just too influential and rich for me to take on without serious proof.”*

“Hello! Agnes? Oh, hi! It's me, Gloria Norris. Ahh, yes, I'm fine and you? Look! I am just calling about something that happened over at the shelter several months ago. I'm hoping that you may remember something about a young man I placed with you. The one who was so badly beaten and robbed while staying there at the shelter. Oooh, you do remember. Yes! The one with the unusual eyes. That's the one. Yes, I know that you told the police all you knew, but I was wondering.....”

Gloria hung up the phone after spending some time discussing the events surrounding Sam's beating at the shelter with Agnes. She was particularly interested in the description she was given concerning the man who had beaten poor Sam to a pulp. Now, she would have to find the nurse who had escorted Sam to the waiting transport to see if she could shed any light on the subject.

An earlier call confirmed the fact that Sam had never reached the flop house where he was supposed to have gone.

Gloria only hoped that the nurse could provide some additional clue to confirm her belief. She was in luck, the nurse was still on the seventh floor station.

“Hi,” Gloria said as she stepped up to the desk. “You're the nurse that helped me take young Sam down to the medical transport. Nurse Heather Simon right.”

This conversation proved most interesting. It had taken her awhile to get nurse Simon to remember the specific case and young man. But when she did, she had proven to be a wealth of information. Jack was called on the CB and now Gloria just had to wait for him to drive up.

If what she now felt sure happened really did and Jack confirmed her ideas, then, she would pay her old friend Mabel a visit.

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Cassie was standing by the bed beginning to undress when his Aunt walked in carrying a tray. Sitting on the tray were a porcelain tea pot decorated in small delicately formed lilies with matching cup and saucer. A glass of water and napkin were also on the tray. Placed on the white linen napkin were several pills.

“Here dear,” Dottie said. “It is a hot cup of tea. It will relax you. Do you need any help?”

She placed the tray on the corner of the dresser and walked over to her niece.

“Here let me,” she said reaching over to unhook Cassie's bra. “It feels so good without that tight elastic band crunching your chest, but alas we ladies do need the support. Don't we darling? Now why don't you hurry and finish up while I pour you a spot of tea. Oh, do put on that scrumptious lilac colored nightie that I gave you sweetheart. You look positively adorable in it.”

“Yes, sure,” Cassie replied. “Just let me get into the bathroom and finish up. I'll just be a moment.”

Alone in the bath, Cassie had to place both hands on the sink's rim to hold herself steady. She felt so weak and dizzy and the pain. Oh, the migraine was splitting her head open right down the middle. It felt like something was trying to jump right out of her skull.

Taking a deep breath, Cassie managed to bend over the sink and splash some fresh cold water on her flushed face. It felt soothing and helped lessen the throbbing in her temples. Soaking a washcloth in the basin, she wrung it out and held it against the base of her skull.

Putting the towel down, she pulled her robe tightly around her waist and cinched it closed with the broad satin ribbon. As she walked out of the room, you could easily see her undies right through the material of the robe. It was gossamer thin in a pale violet color with bright purple satin trim. It's balloon sleeves were tied with purple satin ribbons which trailed down from the wrists and elbows.

The shoes were three inch heeled mules.

Cassie grimaced in pain as the sound of her heels striking the tiles on the bathroom floor echoed into her skull.

“Oh, would this headache ever go away,” she mumbled.

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Dottie was carefully arranging the three full syringes on the sterile green cloth as Mabel walked into the room.

“Do you really think all that is necessary Dottie?” Mabel asked. “Cassie did very well today and.....and I don't like you putting all that chemical stuff into her system. We really don't know what all the side effects are. I don't want to lose my Cassandra again.”

“For your information sister dearest, I do not want to lose my darling niece either, BUT you did not see the stress and confusion that she was going through like I did,” Dottie replied as she folded the cloth over forming a neat green bundle and placed it in the vanity drawer.

“I would have much rather waited another week before venturing out like we did today. The exposure may have been too much and I...we don't know what effect meeting someone he may have known would do,” Dottie observed as she closed the drawer.

Turning to face her sister she continued, “I still think that I saw that snoopy Gloria Norris outside the Tea Garden this afternoon. What if that old biddy spotted our Cassie and put two and two together? We need to make sure that our Cassie is completely and I mean completely ours before we do this again. Now, don't you worry, this series of booster shots should solidify our hold on her without doing any permanent harm. I'll give them to her just as soon as she is asleep and we can hook up the tape. By this time tomorrow night Cassie will be back permanently!”

“If you are sure Dottie, you know...oh, I hear her coming back. We'll continue this discussion later. You have the tea ready? Good, I'll slip out and return in a moment or two.”

“Here Cassie,” Dottie said as she handed her a cup of steaming tea. “It's vanilla flavored. I find it very refreshing. Come, come. Sit here at your vanity and sip it while I brush out your hair for you.”

“Thank you Aunty,” Cassie said accepting the offered cup. “I don't much feel like fooling with my hair tonight. I have such a splitting headache. Just the thought of pulling a brush through it tonight makes me shudder.”

“Drink your tea dear, then you can finish changing. By then, I think that you will have forgotten your headache. Here swallow these pills, they will help you forget all about that nasty headache.”

Cassie did not argue. Anything was preferable to this stabbing pain. She took the offered pills and the glass of water, quickly downing all. Placing the glass back in her Aunt's hand, she turned and walked over to the bed where her nightie was laid out.

Removing the robe, Cassie then shimmied out of her panties being careful to keep her back to her Aunt. Carefully picking up the delicate silk bikinis between thumb and forefingers, she arched her foot and stepped into the leg openings. They were made of real silk and were hand painted with violets and lilies. They were a get well gift from her mother soon after she had regained consciousness. Cassie had to be very careful not to run or otherwise snag them. Settling the waistband comfortably around her now tiny waist, she picked up her sleep bra.

It was a floral stretch lace material in a pale violet color that matched her silken undies. She pulled it over her head and breasts, letting it snap into place. She had to

reach into the cups to settle her pert young breasts into their proper positions. They were so much bigger now than she remembered them being.

Next she reached down and picked up the full skirted nylon and lace violet colored nightie. It was made of the softest sleekest nylon available and caressed her skin in pure luxury. She had to pull it over her bra covered breasts, and the empire waist up-lifted her womanly charms even more.

It tied with a wide purple satin sash just under her breasts. The knife pleated skirt-ing flared out from there to fall just below the knees. The rounded neckline was held in place by two broad pleated shoulder straps that merged into a deep "V" plunging down almost to the crack in her cheeks in back.

Pulling the robe back on and fastening it closed, Cassie walked back over to the vanity. Carefully flaring her skirts out over the stool, she sat on the cushioned seat. Her cup of still steaming tea sat on the right hand corner of the vanity top.

Aunt Dottie stepped behind her and began slowly pulling the bristled brush through her hair.

Cassie began to relax and sipped carefully at the flavorful tea. She cupped it in her hands and took a deep breath of its refreshing fragrance before putting it back into the saucer. She then leaned back, letting the soothing pull of the brush running through her hair remove her fears and turmoil.

Cassie was feeling very relaxed now and did not want this moment to pass. It was surprising just how quickly she had recovered once she arrived back home, away from all those annoyances and distractions. Come to think of it she hadn't had a bad thought since she had returned to her room. Now even her vicious headache had gone away.

**-000-**

Gloria was rushing out of her office when she crashed into someone walking past her door. She spilled her purse and briefcase onto the floor while hearing a crash of someone hitting the ground. She reeled backwards hitting her head on the door frame in the process.

"Agh! Oooh, that smarts!" she heard someone say as she tried to get her bearings. Rubbing the back of her head, she looked down and saw a rather plump older man in a white smock sprawled out on the floor. A scattering of papers surrounded him, and he was sitting up holding his left elbow with his right hand.

"Oh dear! Are you all right?" she asked while bending down to assist him.

"What in thunder is going on here?" he bellowed. "Can't you watch where you are going!"

"Oh, it's you Doctor Little!" a somewhat surprised Gloria said seeing who she had knocked to the ground. "Plea... Please forgive me. I didn't mean to trip you up, honestly I didn't. Are you hurt? Shall I call someone to help?"

"For Christ sake woman! Stop babbling and help an old man up off this gosh darned slippery floor. And, no I don't need any help. I just bumped by crazy bone when I fell. Now, here give me a hand up if you please."

“Gee, I am, really, really sorry,” Gloria said again.

“I...well. I just have to get down to medical transport. That Mabel Johns has really got me riled now! If it weren't for her, I'd not be in the rush that I'm in and wouldn't have knocked you off your feet. Oh, I do hope that I haven't hurt you? Please forgive me, but I am in a hurry now. Here! Let me just help pick up these papers, then, I must be on my way.”

“Did you say Mabel Johns?” Doctor Little asked while pulling some of the scattered papers into a pile. “Why I had a lovely visit with her just a few months ago. Don't see why such a lovely woman should bother you so, though. Seemed extremely nice to me and all.”

“You visited with Mabel Johns?” Gloria asked suddenly very intent. “May I ask what you were talking about?”

“Why I suppose so,” he answered. “We...we were just having a spot of tea you know. Her husband used to work, well actually was in charge of the lab down there you know. He did some really interesting studies in behavior modification through drug intercession. Seems he believed that with the appropriate drug therapy, he could literally reconstruct one's memories giving that individual a whole new personality.”

“Yes, doctor that is fine and interesting, but what I...” She paused in mid-thought just as her mind caught up with his words.

“Did you say he found a way to make someone forget who they were and superimpose another completely different identity in that person?”

“Well, yes. I believe that is what he was trying to prove, but I don't know where he finished. You know he died before he could complete his work and I have my own research. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, I have my reasons,” Gloria replied.

“You say Mabel visited with you recently? You didn't notice anything particular about her visit or afterwards, did you?”

“Now that you mention it, but it probably has nothing to do with Mabel. The medicine cabinets seemed to have been tampered with. No, nothing serious that I could tell. No marks or other indication that they were broken into, but the contents were arranged differently than I remember. That's all. Probably just an old man's inattention. Why?”

“Look Doctor Little, I have to get to transport now, but could you do me a very great favor. Go back and check the inventory of those medical lockers for me, please. It may be very important! A matter of life and death actually. Will you do that for me?”

Seeing the doctor's nod of agreement, Gloria excused herself apologizing once again.

Soon she was down in medical transport talking to Jack.

He had been the driver that had taken Sam and remembered the incident.

She made it plain that it may be a matter of life or death that he remember as many details of that day as possible.

“Well seeing as how it be dangerous as all that,” he had said. “They paid me quite well and made me promise not to tell a soul about where I dropped him off. I am a man of honor, you know.”

“You said 'they'. Who exactly were 'they',” she demanded. “‘They’ did not pay you not to tell who 'they' were! Now did they?”

“Well, you got me there Miss Gloria. It was a rich old lady and her maid, I believe it was. She handed me a hundred bucks like it was of no matter and swore me to silence. You know, I think I still have that scrap of paper with the address wrote down on it somewhere hereabouts. Let me look in me cab.”

**-000-**

It was getting late by the time Doctor Little finished the inventory.

There were four people in the lab and several containers of carry out food and drinks scattered about.

Gloria was acting like a nervous Nellie pacing about and poking her nose into everything. She would sit for a moment then get up walk around to where the doctor was taking his tallies; then when he glared at her would return to her seat. Every now and then she could be heard mumbling, “If any harm comes to that poor boy...”

Finishing the last tally, he turned to Gloria shaking his head.

“My, my we are missing a surprisingly large amount of material here. Gloria! If you would please stop that pacing. Thank you. Now, as I was saying much more is missing than I would have expected judging by what's left. There are some common narcotics and sedatives missing as well as some experimental ones.”

He placed the clipboard with the itemized listings on the table top. Taking a sip of tea, he swallowed then licked his lips before continuing.

“That's the difficult part, I'm not certain that I knew exactly what was in that other cabinet over there. That was the one Doctor Johns was utilizing in his research. So as you can see, I wouldn't have a detailed knowledge of what it contained. Just this old listing to go by that is all. She could have taken anything.”

“Oh, dear!” Gloria said to Doctor Little's findings.

Turning to the side table where two plainclothes policemen sat she continued, “Officers, do you think that you have enough to go there now? I am really frightened of what they might have done to that poor man. If we don't act soon, it may be entirely too late. If it isn't already.”

The two detectives looked at one another and nodded their heads.

“With Doctor Little's testimony and what little information that you have gathered, we have probable cause. I guess it won't hurt to call up Judge Gomez and get him to sign a search warrant. Now, you all just sit tight. We'll let you know what we find. If we find anything.”

“Now you just wait a minute!” Gloria said firmly. “You don't have the faintest idea of what you are going to find there. So I'm going with you! They have that poor young man so totally screwed up that if they tell him he is Martha Washington he will believe

that is who he is. Now, how are you going to tell if what he's saying is what he wants to really say? Can you answer that? No! You can't, so I'm going with you! Okay”

“If they take you they might as well take a doctor too,” Dr. Little stated from where he was standing. “I'm probably the only one here that can diagnose drug euphoria. Do you mind?”

**-000-**

Cassie was beginning to feel really tired. She put the back of her hand over her mouth to cover a deep yawn.

Dottie was almost finished rolling her hair while Mabel had come into the room and sat quietly on the bed watching both of them.

Their presence helped to calm Cassie's fears and that, combined with the pills, was working to quickly send her to lala land.

Cassie was just standing up, when they heard a loud banging on the front door.

The door chimes clanged away as well.

“Now who on earth is calling at this hour?” Mabel exclaimed to no one specifically.

“Lord knows,” Dottie replied. “Go on down and see who it is while I help Cassie get into bed. She can barely keep her eyes open as it is. Go on, scoot! We still have a lot to do tonight, don't you know!”

Mabel caught the glowering look from Dottie and knew what she was insinuating. She also knew that Dottie was still very angry with her for rushing Cassie's introduction to the world.

*“Well can't be helped now,” she thought as she left the room to answer the door. “Can a mother help it if she gets on pins and needles awaiting the arrival of her only daughter.”*

Dottie was standing over the sleeping youth, a syringe held in her right hand. As she started to inject the fluid into Cassie's vein, the bedroom door slammed open with a loud bang.

“Freeze!” a deep male voice rang out.

The glass syringe plunged to the floor and shattered.

“Don't move! Don't even flinch!” the voice continued.

“Keep your hands where I can see them and move over away from the bed.”

Gloria rushed over to the bed and looked down at the still form. Her eyes opened in awe at what she witnessed lying on the bed.

It was positively amazing what the two sisters had accomplished. The beautiful feminine face with its pouty red lips, arched eyebrows, and soft creamy skin were to die for. The gentle rise and fall of an obviously womanly bosom covered in an all too feminine nightie.

Gloria just stood there in shocked surprise. Seeing the young man dressed for tea versus seeing an almost nude young man like he was now.....well...it was just too much. Gloria was just not prepared for it all.

Fortunately Doctor Little was there and he took command.

“Here, move over some Gloria, let me have a look see. Hmmm...” Doctor Little said as he carefully lifted Sam's arm and removed the rubber tourniquet. His eyes took in every detail of the sleeping form lying on the bed. A quick exploratory examination revealed all the truth of what had happened to Sam.

At first, the doctor and even Gloria were confused and the possibility of a mistake entered their minds. That is until Doctor Little pulled on a latex glove and probed the feminized figure. Removing the gloves, he turned to face an ashen faced Gloria.

“Well, it looks like your young man has some major adjustments to make Gloria. They did a real piece of work on him all things considered. I'm afraid that your young man is no more. These aren't just superficial changes. They are permanent!”

“Is...is he...er..she..er..I mean, oh I don't know what I mean, but is he all right ? He..she is just lying there!”

“Take it easy Gloria, she's just sleeping. Looks like they gave her some sedative so they could finish what they were doing. You see if you can get her ready and I'll call an ambulance. It's going to take some intensive therapy to get your young friend here back to normal. Normal as we can make it that is.”

## **EPILOGUE**

It was a crazy mixed up world that Sam Waters woke up to that next morning. Slowly over the ensuing weeks, he began to remember his life and the events leading up to his involuntary reincarnation as Cassandra. Gloria was instrumental in his ability to cope with the situation and Doctor Little did much to explain all the options available to him.

The DA's office was also helpful and quickly received a court ruling giving Sam access to the victims relief fund. This provided him with sufficient resources to obtain an apartment and the necessities of life while undergoing further treatment.

Fortunately, much of what Mabel and Dottie taught him of living like a lady stayed with him and he was able to cope as a woman. He still found it most disconcerting to have a man's mentality while occupying a very feminine body.

Here again, Doctor Little came in handy. With the controlled use of the psychotic drugs, Sam was able over time to adapt.

To keep things as simple as possible, he decided to keep the Cassandra identity given to him by Mabel and all the clothing that went with it. The sisters in the meantime, pleaded no contest to the charges of kidnapping and wrongful endangerment. They were placed in a psychiatric hospital for treatment. As recompense, Mabel made Cassandra her legal heir and benefactor. With her death two years later, Cassandra inherited a nice estate.

Cassandra used that money to resettle somewhere in the Midwest and complete her transition into womanhood.

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