

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part One

By Valerie Hope

“THERE HAS TO BE AN easier way to make a living,” Daniel thought. He swallowed again, trying his best not to gag from the stench of the rotten vegetables and other unmentionable smells reeking from the dumpster in almost palpable waves. The summer sun baked down on his bare head, making him almost swoon from the combination of fear, the horrible smell and the heat.

“You’re good,” his young runner called from the mouth of the alleyway after a few more insufferable minutes. On the street beyond, Daniel could just see the blue-and-white police cruiser pull away from the curb and speed away into traffic.

Daniel stood and took a few steps away from the offending dumpster, knuckling his back and groaning. “Man, fuck this shit,” he grunted softly as he picked his way over a stack of discarded wooden pallets and back into the blazing sunshine, squinting against the glare of the street beyond.

“Close,” his runner, Charlie, said softly.

“Yeah, I guess,” Daniel said back. “Cops around here don’t look that hard.”

Charlie looked hurt. “You said any cop, I should tell you...”

Daniel raised a placating hand. “Yeah, kid, I know I did. You did good. Don’t sweat it.”

He led Charlie by the elbow and found a shady spot underneath an awning for a little bar which hadn’t opened yet. They breathed twin sighs of relief as the temperature around them dropped a few degrees. Daniel’s practiced eye scanned the street, looking at the late morning gaggle of yoga moms and unemployed-but-still-solvent hipsters window shopping in the upscale little shopping district. All white as milk, too much free time and disposable income – perfect customers for the sort of enterprise Daniel ran to make bills.

A wide-eyed knot of teenage girls, dressed for the summer in midriff-baring tops and tight short-shorts, with their designer sandals and handbags and sunglasses, walked nearby chatting and talking on their mobile phones. One of the girls, a slightly pudgy but otherwise attractive little brunette with an ankle tattoo, eyed him appraisingly. He gave her a little wink as she passed, collapsing her into a fit of giggles with the girl next to him. He grunted. *Rich girls*, he thought wryly. *They love the bad boys. They’re, like, 90% of all the pussy I get these days.*

Charlie looked the other way as the girls passed and gave Daniel a little poke with his elbow. “Check it out,” he whispered, pointing covertly. Daniel turned his head and spied a young couple, walking arm-in-arm down their side of the street. The young man had the hunted look, sunken eyes and starving physique of a “repeat customer” and the twitchy little bottle-redhead next to him fit the bill nicely, too.

They walked up to him in that *faux*-casual way that most of his customers adopted, a mixture of breathless anticipation and fear shoved roughly down beneath a veneer of “no big deal.” Daniel tried not to laugh out loud. Like they were fooling anybody with that act.

The young man scratched behind his ear as he walked within earshot. “You Daniel?” he asked.

“Who’s asking?”

“Tony told me where to find you,” he said.

“Oh, yeah? How the fuck is Tone these days? He still with that crazy girl with all the tats?”

The girl next to him whispered into the young tweaker’s ear and he shook his head. “Nah, man, Tony’s a fag,” he said. “His boyfriend is crazy as shit, though.”

Daniel relaxed infinitesimally. “Okay, cool. What do you need, man?”

The young man dug in his pocket. “Couple crystals.”

“I can do that,” he said. “Pure glass. Make you feel all-fucking-right. Charlie?”

His runner nodded, raking a hand through his sweat-damp hair before taking off at a brisk trot between the buildings. The young couple tried their best for nonchalant but failed spectacularly, jumping like startled birds at the slightest noise. Daniel tried not to judge them but couldn’t help himself – why did people get themselves hooked on something that made them that crazy? What the fuck was wrong with them? But those tweakers paid his child support and kept him in groceries. In a way, he needed them as badly as they needed what he sold.

Charlie trotted back through the alley and passed the man a little plastic baggie, while Daniel took the wadded bill from his girlfriend. The couple paused, almost looking as though they wanted to make conversation, but Daniel turned his back on them. He didn’t want to know these people. He didn’t want to be friends or even acquaintances. They were just little tweaker ATMs to him, earning him money.

About a half an hour elapsed after the young couple wandered away, and the foot traffic on the street picked up a bit. Daniel and Charlie made a few more sales, just weed and a couple bars of Xanax, barely enough to kick back to their supplier and get them both a slice of pizza from a walk-up across the street. Finally, chugging soda and wiping sweat from their foreheads, Daniel turned to his young runner and shrugged.

“This place is dead as shit, Charlie, we should bail,” he said. “Once the club crowd comes back after dark, we’ll make some bank. No point sweating our balls off out here until then.”

Charlie looked a little crestfallen. “I don’t mind staying a while,” he complained. “I need the cash, man.”

“We’ll make it back tonight, kid,” Daniel reassured him. “Look, here’s your cut and run this cut back to ‘Berto, will ya? Meet me back here after dark and we’ll stack us up some paper.”

Charlie took the proffered money and tried not to sneer at the puny little wad of bills. He started to make his way back to the alley to pay their supplier but stopped after a few steps. “Hey, Danny, you remember how you said you were gonna let me start running my own corners? Y’know, at my school and everything?”

“Yeah,” Daniel replied. “You still wanna try that?”

“Well, yeah,” he said. “You said you’d help me.”

Daniel rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah, okay, I guess so. If you think you’re ready. I’m not gonna be too much help to you if you get yourself busted, kid, I got priors. So you better think it all the way through before you pull the trigger.”

Charlie nodded. “I know a guy. A chemist,” he said. “Friend of my sister’s. I think he can help us out with supply side.”

Daniel almost choked. “Are you fucking crazy, Charlie? Cut out ‘Berto? Those motherfuckers are *cartel*, man!” he said excitedly but softly. “If you try and cut them out, they will straight up kill you, understand? They will cut your balls off and dump you in the river, kid. Don’t even *joke* about that shit. Forget you ever met this chemist.”

“But he’s...” Charlie attempted.

“Doesn’t matter what he is,” Daniel interrupted. “We do *not* fuck with cartel, little man. Forget it.”

“We could make a lot of money,” Charlie said.

“I’d rather make a little bit less and keep my balls,” Daniel shot back. “Now get out of here and don’t tell anybody we had this conversation. You keep talking that kinda bullshit, I’m finding myself a new runner.”

Charlie gave him an unreadable look, then shrugged and walked away, eyes downcast. Daniel felt bad for stepping on him – Charlie was a good kid – but the younger man just didn’t understand what the cartel was willing to do in order to protect its interests. Daniel witnesses several acts of savage cruelty early in his career, for no more reason than an object lesson to the newest batch of street dealers. The cartel would maim and torture just to show people what they’d do to anyone who crossed them. Daniel hoped to spare Charlie that sort of brutal education.

Forcing it from his mind, Daniel shoved his hands in his pockets and set off down the street, trying to look like he fit in, hoping tonight would bring the kind of payday he promised Charlie. Nothing soothed hurt feelings like thick wads of green paper.

Daniel headed home to his one-bedroom loft about ten blocks south of the warehouse district where he plied his trade, an upscale little high-rise that catered to the gentrification crowd but suited his purposes well. He had little in the way of furniture or amenities because he rarely visited. He made his living out, and staying in the cramped and overpriced apartment ran counter to his purposes. Besides, he felt out the other tenants quickly after moving in a year ago. Apart from one or two folks who bought the occasional ounce of weed, no business thrived in the community there. Which suited him well. Cops looked at addresses and neighborhoods when they searched for suspects. Living in such a location provided excellent protective coloration for him, allowing him to concentrate on just not getting caught on the streets, which any entry-level dealer learned early.

He plugged his all-important phones into their respective chargers, his personal line and the burner he used to contact his superiors, and hopped into the shower just long enough to sluice the sweat of the day from himself. He wrapped his lithe body in a towel and padded across the laminate floors, grabbing a beer from the fridge and picking up his tablet computer from the little

table in the entryway, planning on watching a little Netflix and maybe even taking a nap before heading back out for the evening.

An email alert blinked in the upper right corner of the tablet screen once unlocked. Daniel tapped it and scrolled down into the body of an email from Rabbit, a wild-eyed hacktivist who lived across town and helped Daniel out from time to time. Daniel and Rabbit did a two-year stretch in County together and looked out for one another the whole time, becoming friends and forging a deep trust in one another. Daniel overlooked Rabbit's crazy conspiracy theories and quasi-anarchist political agenda in favor of remembering what he owed the bearded maniac from prison.

Rabbit's email, sent from a proxy server and bounced across the globe and back in the way Rabbit had, talked circuitously about Rabbit's quest to erase their criminal records. Rabbit possessed an astute talent for intruding into government computer systems and got it in his head a few months ago that Daniel's and his lives would be vastly improved if their criminal records could be "lost" in the digital ether. Daniel didn't much care one way or the other; dealing illicit substances carried with it a certain fatalist mentality. One day he'd get caught, he'd go to prison and he'd stay there. Daniel lived in the moment, spending his money as soon as he got it and not looking back. But Rabbit needed his *cause célèbre* to keep him out of trouble and maintain his focus in the face of his uncontrolled ADHD, so Daniel bore it all with good grace.

"Hey bro I think I found something. Need to see you, test a theory. Come by my place when you can, I'll be here," the message read. Daniel tapped his chin in thought. Rabbit hardly ever called for a face-to-face, so he must have found something *big*. Daniel made a mental note to stop by after the clubs closed tonight and the late-night partyers headed indoors.

He sipped his beer and stepped onto his balcony for a cigarette, just luxuriating in the unfamiliar feel of *nothing to do* for a languid hour. Ordinarily he kept a pretty rigid schedule – one of the reasons he'd been singled out by the cartel as a street dealer had been the color of his skin, but the other reason had been his application of a very rigorous work ethic to his vocation. Not many dealers woke up early and kept to a regular schedule. Daniel took no small amount of pride in the fact that he occupied such rarefied air, becoming that white whale for so many users, the *reliable* drug dealer. He kept his appointments, he called ahead, he informed people when he ran late and he tended to his regulars.

The sun crept lower in the sky, prompting Daniel to pull on a black t-shirt and worn jeans, stuff his phones in his pockets along with keys and wallet and walk down the stairs to the street below. He took a leisurely stroll down the sidewalk towards the small patch of city blocks he laughingly referred to as "the sales floor," watching the pedestrian traffic change from daytime casual to nighttime party crowds.

The heat held on, bringing out beads of sweat on his brow as he walked, even though the sun finally dipped behind the manicured trees and the streetlights began winking on in little patches – in the long shadows behind tall buildings first, then in the green spaces, then finally all along the street where he walked. Hot light gave way to clouds of moths clustered around islands of luminescence and the streets became slow-moving floods of twin white headlights or the retreating red stares of taillights. The nighttime voices – homeless begging for spare change, parking attendants calling out lot prices, the laughs and buzzing conversations of groups headed to the district to drink and dance – sprang out of the darkness between the street lamps, giving a festival air to the broken stillness of the hot summer day.

Daniel rounded a corner and leaned against the rail surrounding a small dog park, lighting a cigarette and scanning the crowd for sight of his runner. Charlie came up a few minutes later, accompanied by a gawky Latino with a scraggly beard and gapped teeth, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

Daniel raised an inquisitive eyebrow at their approach.

“Hey, Danny, this is Luis,” Charlie told him without preamble. “The guy I was telling you about.”

Daniel sighed. “Kid, what did I fucking tell you about that shit? The cartel will fucking kill you if you try to outsource,” he whispered urgently. “I don’t care who this guy is...”

“He’s smart, Danny,” Charlie protested. “Like, some super genius. He works for this big company downtown, he’s like one of their top lab guys...”

Daniel waved a hand down furiously. “Kid, you’re playing with all our lives. Even this guy’s. If ‘Berto or anybody he answers to finds out about this, they will never find our fucking bodies, d’you understand me?”

“Just listen to him, Danny, he has this stuff he’s been working on. Nothing else like it on the streets. We could make a fortune off this shit,” Charlie said.

“I don’t care,” Daniel said harshly. “Y’know what, kid? I’m done with you. You want to get fed into a wood chipper by some cartel goons, you go right ahead. But leave me the fuck out of it. I’m calling Russell, he can be my runner from now on.”

Charlie’s mouth dropped open. “You’re *firing* me?”

“You’re goddamned right,” Daniel spat. “Go home.”

Charlie drew himself up to his full but insubstantial height in outrage. “You dick,” he hissed.

“Life’s tough, kid. Maybe one day you’ll realize I just saved your fucking life.”

Daniel spun on his heel, dropping his cigarette onto the sidewalk and walked away. Without warning, Daniel’s back spasmed in paralytic pain, causing him to rise up on his toes. He turned in agony, looking down to see three syringes buried in his lower back, a panting Charlie staring at him in anger slowly giving way to disbelief at what he’d done.

“You little shit,” Daniel growled, grabbing his runner by the collar and shaking him before slamming him hard into the wrought-iron railing. He snatched the syringes from his back, causing a fresh wave of screaming pain, and jammed them into Charlie’s shoulder, depressing the plungers as one the rest of the way to the bottom. At least Charlie had only delivered approximately half of what was in the syringes before Daniel stopped him.

“What did you give me, you little punk?” Daniel hissed, jacking the younger man against the railing in a ringing clatter of metal.

Luis, the lanky scientist Charlie brought, took one look at the scene in front of him and ran, his feet flopping in their cheap shoes against the pavement. The unfolding drama drew eyes from passersby, something Daniel expressly did not want, so he dragged Charlie bodily past the dog park and into a deserted alleyway before shoving him roughly against a wall.

“What did you give me?” he asked again, naked murder in his eyes.

“Shit, Danny, I don’t know, just whatever Luis brought...”

“Goddammit,” Daniel swore, interrupting the younger man. “So now we’re gonna spend the rest of the night fucked up. Can’t earn. This was gonna be a big Friday until you fucked it up.”

“But you never fucking listen to me!” Charlie protested weakly.

“Are you starting to figure out why, dumbass?” Daniel shot back. “You didn’t get your way so you threw a temper tantrum like some little fucking baby and you shot me full of God knows what! Your chemist disappeared like a fart in the damned wind! And you probably cost us a couple G’s in lost work! I should beat the shit out of you right here, you deserve it, but the last thing we need is cops right now.”

Charlie began to wobble a little bit. “Danny, I don’t feel so good,” he said. His words slurred a little.

Daniel’s adrenaline wavered, granting him a sense of his own body again, and he noticed dizziness and nausea of his own beginning to develop at an alarming rate. The sweat on his forehead didn’t seem to be coming from the warmth of the fading day any more.

“It’s too far back to my place,” Daniel whispered, sagging against the bricks behind him to steady himself. “We have to find a place to hole up until I can get home.”

“What about me?” Charlie asked.

“I should fucking leave you here,” Daniel growled. “Let some fucking bums roll you and rape your asshole and leave you for dead. But I guess you’re coming with me.”

He levered himself up to his feet and the sudden change in altitude brought up bile. He spat angrily, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, and grabbed Charlie by the shirt, half-dragging the young boy in his wake, away from the gathering crowds.

The renovated and deeply gentrified warehouse district offered much in the way of eateries and boutiques, a lovely little pedestrian paradise in the heart of the city. But it also offered up empty warehouses, slated for demolition or remodel by the developers buying them up as quickly as they could. Daniel found an old garment warehouse surrounded by temporary fence, emblazoned with “Future Home of...” signs and stacked construction materials. He moved two of the bastions apart, wide enough for both of them to lurch through, and stumbled to one of the side doors. He elbowed the glass, cutting himself deeply on the embedded wire, but caused enough damage to reach through and pull the crash-bar on the other side. He fairly threw Charlie through the door and nearly fell in after him, letting the door bang shut on creaky hinges behind him.

The effort of the short walk finally caused Daniel to vomit, emptying his stomach onto the dirty concrete floor. He managed to crawl away from the spreading puddle and sag onto his right side, coming eye-to-eye with the crying Charlie.

“I should fucking kill you,” he muttered.

“I’m sorry,” Charlie managed.

“You sure as fuck will be,” Daniel said before a cramping spasm in his gut stole the breath from him. What passed next could have been minutes or hours or even days, so disjointed was Daniel’s sense of time. Headlights painted moving blocks of white across the floor through the dusty and cracked warehouse windows, marking a bizarre progression of the evening into night. Daniel and Charlie both writhed on the ground like snakes, moaning and panting for breath as

cramps wracked their bodies from head to foot. Charlie contorted wildly, at one point suspended in an arch above the floor on only his heels and the back of his head. Daniel might have done the same, but recollection eluded him. He felt too weak for such acrobatics. Mostly he tried to breathe through it and wait for his body to run out of energy.

Daniel faded into fitful semi-consciousness an unknowable time later. His eyes opened to morning light peeking through the warehouse windows. Blood from his injured elbow and pools of stinking vomit covered the floor around them both. Charlie huddled miserably nearby, cross-legged in a puddle of urine, speaking urgently into his own burner phone.

“Damn, Luis, it’s Charlie again. You have to call me back, okay? I have to know what was in those needles. I need to know if we need to go to the hospital. Call me, motherfucker.”

Daniel groaned and rolled onto his stomach, using what seemed the last of his energy to lever himself up onto his hands and knees. His hair, usually cropped short, dangled down into his field of vision, lank and lifeless and sodden with sweat.

“What the fuck happened?” he managed past a sticky and leaden tongue.

“I don’t know,” Charlie said. “I feel like ass.”

“What was all that shit you shot me up with?”

Charlie sighed. “I told you, man, Luis is a chemist,” he explained. “Not just some street cook, neither. He works for some big company downtown. Makes all kinds of crazy shit. He was going to show you everything. There were performance enhancers, memory drugs, even a shot supposed to get girls horny. He had all kinds of shit. I got pissed off, man, and I just grabbed what I could reach. I have no fucking clue what all I got hold of.”

“You little shit, you could’ve killed me.”

“Looks like you pulled through,” Charlie said defiantly. “None of this would’ve happened if you just listened to me in the first place.”

“Fuck you,” Daniel growled. “No fucking way is this my fault.”

Charlie shrugged. “We got to live with it, anyway,” he said. “Luis is running scared. He’s not returning my calls.”

“Then we go find the fucker,” Daniel said.

“How? I said he works downtown, but fucked if I know where. I only met him ‘cause he wants to bang my sister,” Charlie said. “It could take months to track him down.”

“Then we spend months,” Daniel said. “Whatever got done, he better be able to undo it.”

“Think we should go see a doctor?” Charlie asked.

Daniel snickered. “You’re a goddamn genius. ‘Hey, Doc, my drug runner shot me up with a handful of experimental drugs he stole from a chemist he barely knows. Can you run some tests?’ Use your goddamned brain, if you have one, Charlie.”

“Sorry,” Charlie said. “There’s got to be some way to figure out what’s happening. My insides feel like they’re squirming around like snakes.”

“Yeah, mine too,” Daniel said. “We need to get back to my place, pick up my car. I know a guy who might be able to help us.”

“Yeah? Who?”

“He lives in a little town called ‘none of your fucking business,’” Daniel spat. “Either come with me or don’t, I really don’t give a shit, Charlie. This is on you, and I personally couldn’t care less if you die from this shit.”

“Real nice, Danny,” Charlie said, hurt.

“Suck it up,” Daniel retorted hotly. “Now get up. We have to walk a pretty long way, and it’s getting hot again. Hopefully people will just think we’re drunk. Anybody calls an ambulance on us, we’re fucked.”

“I’m thirteen,” Charlie said. “They see me drunk, they’re more likely to call a cop.”

“Well fuck, Charlie, why don’t you call us a goddamned Uber, then?” Daniel said. “The only way to my place is to walk. You got a better idea?”

Charlie sighed and struggled to his knees. “I guess not.”

“Good,” Daniel said. “Now stop fucking talking to me. I need to think.”

Some miracle allowed Daniel and Charlie to stagger home in the growing morning heat, attracting no unwanted attention. They careened up the staircase, more dragging themselves up two flights by the handrails than anything else, and almost collapsed getting through Daniel’s front door. Daniel pushed the sweat-soaked boy aside on the way to the bathroom to splash cool water on his face. Looking up, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and stifled a gasp.

Perhaps one of the shots had been some weight-loss drug, because Daniel’s well-muscled frame and chiseled jawline now appeared sunken and gaunt. Ribs poked through the smooth skin of his torso and his well-defined abdominal “six pack” seemed softer and rounder than before.

Strangely enough, Daniel thought he might have also shrunk. Ordinarily he had no problem reaching the top of his bathroom cabinet, but now he could barely brush it with his fingertips even when standing on tiptoe. Could one of those experimental drugs actually cause him to lose four or five inches in height?

He brushed his lengthening hair from his face in exasperation – probably some cure for baldness mixed in there, but Daniel could swear his hair had grown at least an inch or two between the warehouse and his front door. His teeth seemed whiter, too, and straighter. But he continued his struggle for height, finally resorting to putting a knee on the bathroom counter to reach the top of the cabinet and retrieve his Glock 43 from its hiding place. The little “pocket Glock” usually got swallowed up by his large hands, but now it seemed his palms and fingers seemed more delicate and the gun fit his grip almost comfortably. He ejected the magazine and verified it was loaded before tucking it into his waistband gangster-style, gasping a little as the cold metal slid all the way through the waistband of his jeans and down his leg to clatter on the bathroom tile.

“What the fuck?” he muttered, retrieving the pistol and discovering that he trod on the cuffs of his jeans and the waistband gapped away from his belly by several inches. Those pants fit him

perfectly last night. They seemed tight through the hips, though, and uncomfortable. Tucking the pistol under his arm, he decided to change clothes before he left for the hour-long commute to Rabbit's place.

He exited the bathroom only to find Charlie staring at his own reflection in the mirrored door of Daniel's bedroom closet. He touched his face like it belonged to a stranger.

"Daniel, man, what the hell is happening?"

"All kinds of shit," Daniel said. "I'm shrinking, for one thing. I can't weigh more than a buck forty now, I was at least one eighty last night. And I'm only five-six, five-seven at best on my fucking tiptoes. My hair is growing so fast I can almost see it. My voice sounds funny, I can't keep my balance... hell, it even seems like my fingernails are growing."

"Mine, too," Charlie said, looking at his fingertips quizzically. "Same with the hair."

"Hopefully, my buddy can help us figure this shit out," Daniel said, shucking his clothes quickly and tossing them in the general direction of a hamper. He pulled out a plain white tee-shirt and pulled it over his head, trying not to groan when the tail of the shirt reached down to his mid-thigh. A pair of cutoff sweatpants with a drawstring covered him below the waist but made his butt look as though he were sticking it out on purpose. He tried not to look at the pert, gravity-defying little bubble poking out the back of the dark sweats.

"Don't you have anything for me?" Charlie asked. "My clothes don't fit that well either."

"I don't have anything that'll fit you," Daniel told him.

"Oh, come on, Danny!" Charlie protested. "Yeah, I get it. It's all my fault. I'm sorry, for the millionth time. But just 'cause you're pissed at me doesn't mean I don't deserve some clean fucking clothes. I smell like shit, I'm covered in piss and puke..."

"Jesus, Charlie, are you *crying*?" Daniel asked, staring at his younger partner's face in shock.

Charlie wiped his eyes angrily. "Fuck you," he muttered.

"No, you *are*," Daniel said. "You're actually crying."

"Just get me something clean," he commanded, hiding his face.

Relenting, Daniel pulled another clean vee-neck shirt from his drawer and pitched it unceremoniously at the younger man who pulled it over his head gratefully. They made a few half-hearted attempts at finding him some pants but failed miserably. Daniel finally just tossed the younger man a belt to cinch up the shirt around his waist. Hopefully no one would notice.

Daniel shoved his feet into some flip-flops since he couldn't keep from walking out of his shoes any more. Charlie managed his sneakers but only just, after stuffing a spare pair of Daniel's socks into the toes. Grabbing his keys and tucking his pistol into the new, snug waist of the shorts he wore, Daniel shoved a pair of aviator sunglasses on his nose and hustled the younger man downstairs to the parking structure. Upon reaching his assigned slip, Daniel pulled back the tarp on his vintage 1967 Mustang and brought the overpowered engine to roaring life. He pulled out of the structure and onto the street beyond in a roar of Detroit muscle and a chirp of tires.

Charlie thought to grab a couple bottles of water before they left and passed one to Daniel as he drove. Unbidden, a swell of gratitude and what might even be considered love expanded Daniel's

chest. He fought back a wild desire to hug the younger man, kiss his cheek perhaps, and thank him profusely for thinking of him.

Great, the fucking drugs got in my head now, he thought angrily, pushing the vintage muscle car through Sunday morning church traffic, trying not to get a ticket while still not betraying his sense of urgency. The water helped a little, beating back the last shreds of nausea and making him feel human enough to take a few pulls off of a cigarette as he entered the freeway and piled on as much speed as he could.

Charlie moaned in the seat next to him, clutching his stomach and mopping sweat off of his forehead with the back of his hand. Daniel cut his eyes over several times during the drive, checking on his younger counterpart. Strangely, it seemed like every time he looked Charlie appeared just a little bit different to him. His angular face, once a harbinger of rugged good looks, softened. Little things, difficult to track, sprung out at Daniel's observations. The nose, a bit longer and thinner. Fuller lips. Longer eyelashes. The hands, once nondescript, seemed to have become more delicate and slender. Graceful, almost.

Daniel jerked the rearview down and checked his own face, looking to see if anything similar happened to him. Other than a complete absence of beard growth – odd, in and of itself, considering he hadn't shaved yesterday – it appeared to be the same face staring back at him. Subtle differences, perhaps – a bit more arch to the eyebrows, some narrowing of the cheekbones, eyes that seemed a bit wider.

An eternity passed between his entering the freeway and finally signaling his exit in one of the sleepier suburbs about forty-five minutes later. He cut back on his speed, knowing the bored suburban cops here really had nothing better to do than pull people over for minimal reasons. He threaded his way through streets lined with manicured lawns and basketball hoops in the driveways, privacy fences and dog walkers. He pulled into a driveway at the end of a cul-de-sac, killing the engine and reaching over to shake his younger passenger awake.

Daniel's hand on Charlie's chest met a strange softness. It elicited a soft moan from Charlie's lips before rousing him. Daniel jerked his hand back as if scalded.

"C'mon, man, we're here," he announced, sliding off his seatbelt and opening the door.

Daniel and Charlie stumbled up the front walk to the door, but not from weakness or sickness as before. This time they staggered and tripped from a seeming inability to move their bodies properly. Feet too small, stride too long, centers of gravity shifted in subtle ways, all conspiring to make the science of movement elusive at best.

Charlie's eyes betrayed panic. "Daniel, I don't know what's happening."

"Try to relax," Daniel soothed, patting the youth's shoulder awkwardly. "I don't know either, but if anybody would know it's the dude who lives here."

"Who is this guy?"

"A friend. He goes by Rabbit. He'll help us out," Daniel reassured him. "We did a bit together in County. He's a good guy."

"Okay," Charlie said, going silent as Daniel knocked out a strange rhythm on the door.

A clatter and loud barking answered the knock, causing Daniel and Charlie to back up reflexively. A muffled voice from inside shouted “Relax, you idiot! Down!” before the clacks of multiple deadbolts being thrown made itself heard over the cacophony.

The door opened on a slightly overweight man in shorts and a t-shirt, barefoot and carpeted thickly with wiry black hair on his arms and legs. A wild, unkempt beard spilled like a bib down his broad chest, beneath a reddened bulbous nose. Intelligent, perceptive eyes peered at Daniel and Charlie from behind thick horn-rimmed glasses. The man raked a hand through tangled, bushy salt-and-pepper hair as he regarded them quizzically for a moment. His eyes widened as recognition dawned.

“Danny?” the man asked. “Is that you?”

“Yeah, Rabbit,” Daniel answered. “This is Charlie, he’s a friend of mine. We’re in some trouble, we could use your advice.”

“Damn, man, what the fuck happened?” Rabbit asked, stepping aside to allow them entrance.

“Not sure,” Daniel said, walking past Rabbit clumsily and offering a hand to the large Rottweiler behind the door who snuffled him curiously.

“Don’t mind Demon, he’s a dumbass,” Rabbit told Charlie as he noticed the younger man’s reaction to the fearsome animal. “All noise. He’s actually a chickenshit.”

“Right,” Charlie said.

Rabbit gave the customary conspiracy-nut look around before shutting the door behind them and securing all the deadbolts. He motioned them through an entryway cluttered with boxes and newspapers and directed them to an overstuffed couch, which the two men collapsed into gratefully.

“Talk to me, Danny,” Rabbit said, occupying a recliner opposite them.

“We got shot up,” Daniel told him, neglecting to mention the argument between himself and Charlie. He figured Rabbit would be more inclined to help Charlie if he didn’t know Charlie was the villain of the piece. “Met with a chemist, works in a lab downtown. Some next-level designer shit, he wanted to move it on the streets. Never heard of half this shit before, but things went south and he dosed us both before he disappeared.”

“Any idea what he gave you?” Rabbit asked.

“Could have been lots of things,” Charlie answered. “This dude had a little bit of everything. Performance enhancers, designer aphrodisiacs, you name it.”

“Wow,” Rabbit said. “You said this cat worked downtown?”

“Yeah,” Charlie confirmed.

“Couple of high-end biotech firms downtown,” Rabbit said. “Bleeding edge shit. You know this dude’s name?”

“He said it was Luis,” Daniel told him.

Rabbit reached over his shoulder and brought a closed laptop onto the coffee table, opening it and clicking around on the touchpad quickly. Reflections of changing screens reflected in his glasses, moving too quickly to track for anyone but the nimble mind of Rabbit.

He spun the laptop around, the browser open on a typical "About Us" picture of the gawky Latino from yesterday. "This him?" Rabbit asked.

"Yeah, that's the guy," Charlie said.

Rabbit spun the laptop back around and read aloud. "Dr. Luis Barrientos, M.D., Ph.D., associate director of new technology for BioRenewal Labs. Let's see, undergrad from Cornell, doctorate from... wow. This guy's a fucking braniac, that's for sure. He was up for a Nobel a few years back. Why would he want to sell on the street?"

"Beats me," Daniel told him. "Maybe he's strapped for cash or something."

"Doesn't look like it," Rabbit said, clicking frantically. "Credit's stellar. It'll take me a couple seconds to bring up his bank records, but I suspect your buddy Dr. Luis ain't hurting for paper."

"Maybe he wants it off the books," Charlie suggested. "Maybe he got in trouble with the wrong people or something, needs quick cash."

"Good thinking," Rabbit said. "Anyway, there's no way to know what he was working on. Biotech firms keep their R&D servers locked down tighter than Fort Knox. I could get in, but it'll take time."

"Shit," Daniel breathed.

Rabbit closed the laptop. "I'll poke around, see what I can find," he said. "In the meantime, you two look like you need sleep and food and a hot shower. I got some weed kicking around here someplace, if you think it'll help. I'll pull your car around back, you two can lay low here for a while until we figure something out."

"Thanks, Rabbit," Daniel said. "I owe you one."

"Bullshit," Rabbit said, waving a dismissive hand. "I would've been girlfriend to half the Aryan Brotherhood if it wasn't for you."

He led them to a back bedroom with two twin beds. Charlie crawled into the nearest one, eyes already closed. Daniel tottered on his feet, steadying himself against the doorframe. Rabbit put an arm around his waist to help. Daniel tried to ignore the warm coil of pleasure that spread along his skin at the touch.

"Daniel, man, this don't look too good," Rabbit whispered.

"I know," Daniel said. "I've dropped weight, I've dropped height, my guts feel like they're fucking rearranging themselves inside me."

"It's not just that," Rabbit said. "I don't even know how to say it."

"Just spit it out," Daniel urged.

"Danny, when I opened the door just now... I..."

"What, Rabbit?"

"You're *pretty*, man."

"Do what now?"

“I mean it. I opened the door, and the first thing I thought was ‘pretty girl.’ It took me a couple seconds to recognize you.”

“You thought I was a girl?”

“Yeah,” Rabbit confessed. “But not just a girl, dude. You’re kind of a babe.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“I’m not kidding,” Rabbit said. “Look, I’m gonna figure this out for you, okay? Just try and get some sleep.”

“Dunno if I’m ever gonna sleep again, after you tell me shit like that.”

“I can give you something, if you think it’ll help,” Rabbit said.

Daniel held up both hands. “No, thanks,” he said. “I’ve had more than enough drugs for one lifetime.”

Daniel lurched forward unsteadily, sinking to his hands and knees on the free bed and crawling towards the pillow. The sheets smelled freshly laundered, birds sang in the trees outside, and a sense of peace and safety descended on him. Daniel closed his eyes and allowed exhaustion to claim him, dragging him gratefully into darkness.

Rabbit watched from the door for a bit, regarding the slender figures occupying the beds in his guest room for a few long moments, trying to banish thoughts like *Daniel has a really nice ass* from his brain while he frantically searched for a sensible explanation to his friend’s dilemma.

He shut the door on the two sleeping men softly and returned to his computers. If the answers were anywhere, they’d be on the BioRenew server.

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Two

By Valerie Hope

THE SMELL OF COFFEE AND bacon woke Daniel from a deep sleep gently, bringing his mind up through layers of insensibility one at a time. Sensations came into focus slowly: the softness of his cheek pillowed beneath a tangle of soft hair. An unfamiliar pressure on his chest. A vague feeling of being cold. An empty stomach and a full bladder. Rubbing his eyes with slender fingers, Daniel sat up on the edge of the bed. His feet – now tiny and delicate – dangled an inch or so above the Berber carpet.

“Shit, I’m *shorter?*” Daniel asked the air, in a strange-sounding breathy voice he no longer recognized. He said a few nonsense syllables, hands to his throat, scratching the tender skin with much longer fingernails than before he’d slept. A mellow, hoarse contralto came from his mouth. A soft, warm curtain settled around his shoulders and spilled a short distance down his back. A wavy tendril of soft hair drifted across his eyes, grown well past the level of his chin.

The soft cotton of his t-shirt now tented out, stiffened nipples poking the cloth above two small soft mounds. Daniel tried not to touch them, but couldn’t help but check lower. He still had a penis, but not much of one. A slender, hypersensitive little inch met his probing touch, above a soft hairless scrotum deflated from its lack of “cargo.” Even a hard pinch brought no pain at all.

“Jesus, my balls,” Daniel said. “They’re fucking gone.”

The other bed revealed only covers thrown aside. Charlie awoke before him. Frantic to somehow gauge the changes in his younger partner, Daniel vaulted off the bed and stood, barely cresting five foot four by his estimation. He tried to ignore it, plus the strange sensation of trying to move quickly with an ass seemingly the size of a couch cushion and slender, tapered legs. He fumbled at the door and opened it, letting in enough bright sunlight to force a pained squint. The hazy image of long, dark lashes ringed his field of vision.

“Charlie?” he called in his higher, breathy voice.

“In here,” a voice answered. A very high, chirpy soprano, unmistakably feminine. A *girl’s* voice.

Daniel stepped out into the living room to see Charlie sitting on the couch, knees drawn up. Long, silky hair spilled over Charlie’s narrow shoulders, framing a narrow heart-shaped face with large, guileless eyes and a very pouty, kissable mouth. Little bumps of breasts tented the front of the t-shirt from yesterday that Charlie now wore as a dress.

“We’re girls,” Charlie announced flatly. “That shit turned us into girls.”

“I know,” Daniel said. “I’m not all the way changed yet. Are you?”

Charlie nodded. “Gone,” he said.

“I’m really sorry, bud,” Daniel said, sitting next to him and putting a hand on his hairless knee.

“Why? It’s gonna happen to you, too,” Charlie said. “Besides, it’s... not so bad. I thought it would be worse, but... it doesn’t feel like anything right now. It doesn’t hurt.”

“That’s good to know,” Daniel said.

“Do you think Rabbit can fix this, Danny?” Charlie asked in a very small voice. The octave’s up-shift in his vocal range made him sound very helpless and lost. Daniel fought an urge to hold him close in his arms and stroke his hair.

“No guarantees, Charlie,” Daniel said. “But we’re safe, and we’re on the right track. Just gotta be patient. Have you eaten anything?”

Charlie nodded. “Like, half a piece of toast,” he said. “That’s something else. I wanted bacon and eggs and biscuits, y’know. I woke up hungry as fuck. But all I could hold was half a piece of toast.”

“Maybe some kind of diet drug, or appetite suppressant in that cocktail,” Daniel said.

“Or maybe that’s just how us girls eat.”

Daniel flinched a little bit.

“Hurts, doesn’t it. *Us girls*. Wait’ll you reach down there and feel your pussy for the first time.”

Daniel snarled at him. “You’re still looking at this like it’s my fault? You stupid little punk.”

Charlie raised arched, delicate eyebrows. “I believe the word you’re looking for is ‘bitch,’ now.”

“Fine. You stupid little bitch. *You injected me*, remember?”

“Only because you never fucking listen...”

“Will you shut the fuck up for once in your life?” Daniel half-shouted. “You think you know everything, but you don’t know shit, okay? You were just a fucking *runner*, you dumbassed kid. You know *nothing* about the business, *nothing* about who we worked for. You were gonna get us killed!”

“You don’t know that,” Charlie shot back.

“You ever hear of Mike Peralto?” Daniel shot. “Of course you haven’t. He thought he would make a little extra cash off ‘Berto by cutting down his heroin with powdered sugar. Scammed ‘Berto for probably two- or three-hundred a night working corners downtown. Wanna know why you never heard of him? ‘Cause they found him hung upside down in an old meatpacking factory. He’d been gutted and strangled to death with his own intestines. Cops found a D-cell maglite stuffed up his asshole. Sound like fun?”

“How do you know...”

“How do I know it was the cartel? ‘Cause ‘Berto fucking bragged about it, man. Over beers at Lowjack’s two nights later, sitting two stools down from me. It was his flashlight. He entertained the whole bar trying to imitate the noises Mike made when they slit him open.”

“All for cutting down some smack?” Charlie asked softly.

“All for cutting down some smack,” Daniel confirmed. “And think about it. ‘Berto expected us last night. He’ll be expected us to call him today. I can’t talk to him with my voice like this, you sure

as shit can't. He's gonna think some lady found one of our burners. He'll never believe this story. Know what happens when you stand 'Berto up? He comes looking for you. He's gonna think we got brought in. Maybe even think we rolled on him."

"So what does that mean?"

"You have to disappear," Rabbit said, entering the room. He bore a heaping plate of scrambled eggs and bacon in one hand and held a steaming mug of coffee in the other. He placed them gently on the coffee table. "But that's not gonna be real hard."

"What do you mean by that?" Daniel asked.

"I mean, I hardly recognized you yesterday. I would never know I was looking at you now," he said. "All I need to do is pull together some identity papers, make y'all a little background..."

"Wait a minute," Daniel said. "You mean actually *be* girls?"

"Why not? You're gonna have to do it if you wanna step outside that door," Rabbit said.

"But I don't know the first fucking thing about being a girl," Charlie protested.

"So you get around other girls and you watch and learn," Rabbit said. "We didn't know the first thing about being inmates, Danny, but after a while we figured it out. I can get y'all some clothes and stuff, even some makeup if you wanted. Whatever you need."

Daniel thought for a moment. "He's got a point," he said at length. "We can't stay locked up in here forever. We're going to have to go out sooner or later, and we're gonna need to pass as girls when we do."

"But I don't *want* to be a girl, Danny!"

"Neither do I, but we don't have much of a choice right now. Especially if 'Berto's looking for us. Rabbit may be right. Looking like this is probably the safest we're gonna be if 'Berto calls the cartel to find us."

Charlie sighed. "What about Luis?"

"I'm working on it," Rabbit said. "I told you, that R&D server is locked up tight. Seven layers of security, and I've only managed to get past three so far. And once I'm in there, I'm only gonna have a few minutes to grab what I can before all hell breaks loose."

"If they haven't found you already," Daniel suggested darkly.

"Please," Rabbit said arrogantly. "I've gotten into the Department of Defense."

"You're the one always saying that private sector cybersecurity is ten times tougher than government," Daniel reminded him. "You sure they can't track you back here?"

"If they find me, they're gonna think I'm in Belgrade or Minsk," Rabbit boasted. "Everybody's so paranoid about Russians hacking them, that's the first place they look. Every hacker in the country is bouncing their shit off of Russian servers these days. It's actually pretty hilarious – Russian servers are ridiculously easy to hack. You'd think they of all people would know the value of good security."

"How long, do you think?" Charlie asked.

“Could be another twenty-four hours, kid,” Rabbit said. “There’s no way to give you an accurate estimate. This shit is complicated. Now, if the two of you could figure out a way to get me access to Dr. Luis, then I could shave down that time considerably.”

“First things first,” Daniel said. “We need a cover story.”

“Easy,” Rabbit said. “Anything you want.”

“Need us to be pretty nondescript,” Daniel went on. “Set us up to be average citizens, y’know? High school diploma, some medical records, a few traffic tickets.”

“Got it,” Rabbit said. “You’re gonna need a new car. That show pony of yours is pretty recognizable.”

“Nothing flashy,” Daniel said. “Something an average guy – I mean *girl* – would drive.”

“No problem, I’ll find you a Ford Focus or something off one of the rental car lots. I pick one that’s recently serviced or repaired and lose the release order. They’ll never put it back in the rotation, for all intents and purposes it’ll be yours, clean record and all.”

“Anything we can do?” Charlie said. “I hate just sitting here.”

“Well, you’ll probably have to spruce up a little bit. Gonna need pictures if we want your backstory to be plausible,” Rabbit said. “Nothing sells a cover like some family photographs, that kind of thing.”

“Family photographs?” Charlie asked.

“Makes sense,” Daniel said.

“*What* makes sense?” Charlie demanded.

“The only reason that an adult and a child would be living together and looking out for one another if they’re not parent and child,” Daniel said. “So that makes me Danielle, and you’re my kid sister Charlotte.”

“Dani and Charli. Nice,” Rabbit said. “Cuts down potential fuck-ups, out in public.”

“Kid sister?”

“You could be,” Rabbit said. “You actually look a little bit alike. You can always make it half-sisters, different dads if you’re worried.”

“Nah, make us orphans,” Daniel told him. “I’ll need guardianship.”

“Wait a minute, you’re gonna be my legal guardian?”

“You got a problem with that, *sis*?”

Charlie sighed. “I guess not.”

“Good,” Rabbit said. “Let me finish breakfast, then I’ll head out and get you some clothes, then get to work on your identities. In the meantime, you two put your heads together and figure out a way to get in touch with Dr. Luis.”

“Got it.”

“You want some breakfast, Danny?” Rabbit asked.

Daniel shot a curious look at Charlie, then sighed heavily. “Think I’ll just have a piece of toast.”

Rabbit’s taste in clothes proved rather eclectic – in typical Rabbit style, he headed straight to the nearest Goodwill and brought back a few changes of jeans and t-shirts. *Helping create jobs for homeless fuckers*, he explained. But at least they had something to wear long enough to hit a department store and get something better. Including things like socks and underwear that Rabbit completely forgot. Daniel tried not to roll his eyes in frustration, and forced down thoughts of *never send a man to do a woman’s job* which surfaced unexpectedly as he went through the sacks.

Daniel shimmied into a just-a-little-bit-too-tight pair of faded jeans with holes in the knees and pulled a vee-necked shirt in horizontal pink and white stripes over his budding breasts. A quick search through some discarded newspapers yielded a sturdy rubber band, enough for Daniel to draw his lengthening hair into a ponytail. His own aviator sunglasses fit him well enough and didn’t seem out of place with what he’d seen other girls wearing, and he stuffed his tiny little doll feet without socks into a pair of Keds sneakers. A part of him almost wished he had a little necklace or something, that his outfit wasn’t quite girly enough. He dismissed the thought and the sharp pang of desire that came with it. Too much to process, actually *wanting* and *caring* to look *pretty*. Now was not the time for such thoughts.

Rabbit proved true to his word – a red Chevy Malibu pulled up outside the house a few minutes later. The delivery guy took Rabbit’s signature, an illegible scribble, and left in short order after dropping off the keys. Rabbit’s computer destroyed any record of the delivery or the address by the time they turned out of the cul-de-sac.

His other side business, the one for which he’d originally done time with Daniel, paid off shortly thereafter. With a few mouse-clicks and some hasty digital pictures, the stolen machinery in his other bedroom hummed and clicked and whirred for a few minutes spat out driver’s licenses, school IDs, Social Security cards, even a low-limit credit card. They couldn’t help but look, trying not to panic over the ramifications of holding legitimate ID calling them “Danielle Elizabeth Mayfield” and “Charlotte Kimberly Mayfield,” sex *female*.

Daniel – *Danielle* – raised a delicately-arched eyebrow at the driver’s license. “You got my birthday wrong, Rabbit. This says I’m only twenty.”

Rabbit held up a finger. “First of all, you don’t *look* like your actual age.” Another finger. “If I’d made you twenty-six, that’s too old to have a thirteen-year-old sister unless you want a story that isn’t ordinary.” A third finger. “And nobody looks twice at an ID that doesn’t make you at least twenty-one. Those cards are good, better than anything else you’ll find, but they’re not perfect. Anybody that looked closely enough could spot them as fakes. But why would anybody carry a fake ID that wouldn’t let them drink?”

Daniel – *Danielle*, he reminded himself harshly – deflated a little, seeing the logic. “I guess so.”

“I can always go back and redo them later, if you need me to,” Rabbit said.

Charlie – *Charlotte* – tucked all the cards into a wallet which he – *she* – tried unsuccessfully to stuff into a tiny back pocket of the jeans he – *she* – wore. Rabbit noticed and chuckled.

“Those pockets are mostly for show,” he told him – *her*. “That’s why they have all those rhinestones and shit on them. Damn, I should’ve thought to grab y’all some little purses.”

“Now I gotta get used to carrying a purse,” Danielle groaned. “This sucks.”

“It doesn’t have to,” Rabbit suggested. “You’re gonna get into places as a cute girl that you couldn’t get into as a drug dealer or a grown man. You’ll never have to pay for another drink, either.”

“Not helping,” Danielle hissed.

“Maybe he’s right, Dani,” Charlotte offered. “Luis would jackrabbit if he saw us coming the way we were before. Now, we can sit down right next to him at the Starbuck’s and he’d never know it was us.”

Rabbit handed over a thick roll of bills. “Go get what you need,” he said. “There’s more where that came from. It’s out of a shady congressional campaign fund, nobody’s gonna ask too many questions. Last thing Congressman Howe wants is for somebody looking into this account. Cash withdrawals are pretty common, that’s how they pay for his cocaine and hookers.”

Danielle laughed. “You’re an evil genius, Rabbit,” she said fondly.

“I’ve got tracers out on Dr. Luis’ credit and debit cards,” Rabbit told them. “If he buys anything with plastic, I’ll know within a few seconds. I’ll let you know on these.” He handed over two smartphones in pink cases, suitable for a pair of young girls.

“All the numbers we need are in here?” Danielle asked him.

“Pre-programmed,” he replied. “You’re all set.”

“You think of everything,” Charlotte said.

“That’s why I’m not in jail,” Rabbit said. “You two stay under the fucking radar, got me? Not even a speeding ticket or this whole thing comes crashing down.”

“Yes, Daddy,” Charlotte said, then blushed at the unintentional sexiness of it. “Okay, I’m *never* calling you that, ever again.”

Rabbit cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Yeah, please don’t.”

“C’mon, let’s get out of here before you two need to get a room,” Danielle teased, loving the adorable blush covering her *sister’s* face.

Danielle piled into the driver’s seat of the Malibu, grumbling at the necessity of sliding the seat forward and pulling the mirrors down. She brought the little four-banger to life with a turn of the key and shoved it into gear. It rode smoothly enough, but Danielle missed the growling power of the Mustang. They turned left out of the cul-de-sac, away from the way they came, deeper into suburbia and the shopping meccas for all the rich white women with nothing to do.

They didn’t drive for long before finding an outlet mall crawling with shoppers. They managed a parking spot reasonably close to the front gate and headed in, trying to blend into the crowd as best they could with their ungainly masculine strides and mannerisms.

“Hey, Dani, look over there,” Charlotte said, pointing at a knot of adolescent girls nearby flitting from store window to store window. “We should find a group like that, make friends. We could learn a lot.”

Danielle could feel the pull, towards other girls, and the little lilt of pleasure she felt at the thought of *making friends*. She saw the desire to make friends, to fit in, to *be popular* play across Charlotte's face as well.

"Yeah, you're right," Danielle told her. "But not yet. Look at them, we'll stick out. We have to get some better clothes. Purses. Look, they all have purses. Stuff for our hair."

"They're all wearing makeup, Dani," Charlotte whispered. "We should wear it. There's got to be someplace around here we can get some."

"Okay, okay, we have a lot to do," Danielle said, placating with both hands. "Let's check a map. Purses first, then clothes and shoes. Makeup afterwards, then we can go find some girls to learn from."

Charli laughed. "Is it okay if I say 'that sounds like fun?'"

Danielle smiled. "Yeah, it *does* sound like fun. Ready to get started?"

"Let's go," Charlotte said.

Danielle wondered when things changed. The transformation began only about 48 hours prior, but things changed as subtly as they did quickly. The brutal afternoon sun annoyed him, slinging drugs on a street corner, but now felt blissfully warm and made her think fondly of her deepening tan. The crowd at the pedestrian outlet mall used to signify only potential customers, now it teemed with friendly-looking girls and what Danielle had come to realize were "cute" guys, precious little babies in strollers and older couples adorably holding hands.

Even the limitless, bouncing energy spilling out of Charlotte ceased to annoy her as it used to, instead filling her with a strange swell of pride and even envy. Dani found herself wishing that she could run around so energetically and never tire the way her kid sister did.

Another change. Charli with her little button nose and spray of freckles stopped being her ex-drug runner and attacker somewhere during the afternoon and she thought of the younger girl as her true sister, her own flesh and blood.

Even their reasons for what they bought seemed uncharacteristic but oddly thrilling – Dani looked down at the cute little Coach purse dangling from the crook of her arm, happy and satisfied that she owned one because of all the other girls had them, and she felt a safe and comfortable sense of community. Even more so that a similar one – in a pretty pastel pink – dangled from the arm of her sister. They wore Guess t-shirts that bared their enviously flat bellies, skin-tight Miss Me jean shorts with lace trim around the cuffs and Burberry ballet flats. The sacks from their stores advertised their conformity and devotion to fashion – Michael Kors, Bebe, Guess.

Charli fell in seamlessly with a group of five other girls turned loose by their parents, chatting and gossiping as if born to the role. Dani studied them from a distance, watching how they talked and interacted, how they walked and stood. She learned several things just by observation but felt a little strange joining in, being so far removed in age.

Charli took care of that for her, leading two of her group up by the hands with the other three close behind. A bright, toothy “cheerleader” smile brightened her face as she scampered up.

“Hey, Dani, these are my friends!” she piped cheerfully. “This is Piper, Kayleigh, Beth, Jordan and Heather. Guys, this is my sister Dani.”

“Hi,” Dani replied to the chorus of greetings that rang out. “How’s it going, Charli?”

“Great,” she said. “We were gonna head over to the food court, wanna come?”

“Yeah, why not?” Dani said, standing from where she leaned. “Just don’t forget we have an appointment at four, okay?”

“Yeah, I didn’t forget,” Charli said. Behind her, a three of the girls began whispering and giggling excitedly, blushing scarlet and not meeting Dani’s gaze.

“Something I’m missing?” Dani asked.

Charli turned around to them. “I *told* you she was cool, okay? Just *ask* her.”

“Ask me what?” Dani said.

“Will you, um... buy us some cigarettes?” one of the girls – Dani thought it was Kayleigh – managed before collapsing into embarrassed giggles.

Once a dealer, always a dealer, Dani thought wryly, smiling cryptically. “If your parents catch you, you never met me, right?” she said.

“Sure,” one of the other girls said, a little slack jawed that Dani said ‘yes.’

“Yeah, okay,” Dani said. She held out her hand, sporting even longer fingernails than when they’d arrived. “Ten apiece sound okay?”

“But they only cost seven-fifty,” another girl complained, digging in her purse anyway.

“Girl’s got to earn a living, right?” Dani said back with a knowing smile. The other girls agreed it was fair and ponied up willingly. “You guys go ahead. I’ll make the run and meet you at the food court in a few minutes, okay?”

Charli linked arms with two other girls and led them away happily, blowing a kiss to her sister over her shoulder and managing to make the word “bye” extend over at least seven syllables. Dani shook her head in wonder. Protective coloration, indeed. Nobody would ever connect the vivacious little teenager with the wide, toothy smile walking into the crowd with the furtive, lanky youth who ran drugs for her this time last week.

“Little bitch,” Dani said fondly as her sister departed. Shrugging, she set off in the other direction towards a convenience store outside the front gate. Now *she* was the runner.

Dani found them clustered around a table, texting and chatting loudly. A few other girls had joined them, all apparently friends from school. They giggled and avoided eye contact with a knot of three boys who sat in a nest near the gyro stand.

She seated herself next to her sister, who wrapped her in a fond hug. “Hey, girl, we missed you!” she chirped happily, her speech already taking on the lilting “up-talk” of her new friends, a sort of bimbo *patois* that made her seem alternately more approachable and just the tiniest bit sexier.

Dani dug deep into her purse and distributed the cigarettes beneath the table, causing wide-eyed excitement among the girls. They mouthed *thank you* and gave winks, smiles and hugs freely. Even though she knew she shouldn’t’ve – getting caught would have meant unwanted attention – Dani liked the feeling of being the adult among them, the cool big sister who bought her sister and her friends cigarettes and beer on the weekends.

She floated outside the conversations circulating between the girls, adding to them here and there but never committing. She enjoyed just being peripheral, laughing along politely, when a shadow fell across her. She turned to see a dark-haired twenty-something sitting across from her, carrying a paper drink cup. He gave her an easy smile, showing straight white teeth in sharp contrast to the dark stubble across his jaw.

“Hi,” he told her smoothly, an air of confidence about him that unnerved her. “I’m Eric.”

Something about him made her stammer a bit. She brushed her hair behind one ear. “Uh... hi! Dani. Danielle.”

“These girls all yours?” Eric asked, gesturing to the knot of teenage girls, some of whom eyed him appreciatively.

“That one is,” Dani said, pointing to her sister. “I have no claim on the rest of ‘em.”

“You in a position to take a little break from babysitting?” Eric said. “I could buy you lunch.”

“I’m not babysitting,” she replied, feeling a warm flush in her cheeks. The way Eric *looked* at her seemed to drive reason completely out of her head. “But I’m really not hungry.”

“Whatever, then,” Eric said. “Wanna just walk around? Get to know each other?”

Dani shook her head slowly, even a bit regretfully. “That sounds pretty nice, actually, but I can’t. I have a ton of shit to do today.”

He looked *faux*-disappointed, in the way guys had who weren’t used to being told *no*. Dani recognized it well. It was the way she had been, before Charli injected her. All of it – the direct eye contact, the slight lean forward and the attentiveness to every word. All pages from Dani’s former playbook.

“Too bad,” he said. “Maybe you might want to do something a little later? There’s a couple parties around town tonight.”

Dani began to resent his persistence a little. “Sorry, I’m really busy.”

“Can I at least get your number?”

She ran her lengthened fingernails along the back of his hand flirtatiously. “Look, Eric – you’re really cute. But my life is kinda crazy right now, and I really don’t have time for anything – and I mean *anything* – you have in mind. So, thanks but no thanks, okay?”

He started to protest, then thought the better of it and let it go with a charming smile. “Sure, no problem,” he said, standing. “Your loss, if you don’t mind my saying.”

“Whatever you say,” Dani said, laughing. He gave her one last alluring look over his shoulder before disappearing into the crowd once more.

“Holy crap,” one of Charli’s *coterie* said. “That was *awesome!*”

“Really?”

“I don’t know how the hell you said ‘no,’” another girl chimed in. “He was *super* cute. I would’ve gone out with him.”

“Nah, I don’t care how cute he was,” Dani told her. “When a guy won’t take ‘no’ for an answer like that, all you girls should know what a huge red flag that raises. ‘Cause maybe that means he won’t listen to ‘no’ in a different situation.”

“You think he was a rapist?” another girl asked, wide-eyed.

“OhmyGawd, Piper! Didn’t your mom teach you about that?” Charli asked.

“A little,” she replied.

“Any boy can do that,” she said.

“And some of them *are* really cute,” Dani added. “In fact, sometimes the cute ones are the ones who get the most pissy when you try to tell them ‘no.’”

“Wow,” Piper said. “I never thought of that.”

“I’m not saying that you shouldn’t be interested in boys,” Dani said. “But you have to protect yourself, too. They’re not all like you see on TV and in the movies.”

“Yeah,” Charli added.

Dani sat straight and stretched, feeling the swelling buds beneath her new bra – purchased just a few hours ago, a 32A – press outwards. Almost as though the brand-new garment fit too tightly now. Was she growing, still, even now? She tried to put it out of her mind.

“Hey, Charli, let’s head someplace that sells jewelry,” she said. “I need a watch, for one thing.”

“Can I get my ears pierced?” Charli asked breathlessly, her eyes shining.

Seriously? That seems a little permanent, Dani thought. We are planning to go back to our old selves, once Rabbit figures everything out, right?

“You really want to?”

“Oh, hell yeah,” Charli laughed. “Bellybutton, too.”

“Oh, totally,” Piper laughed. “*Everybody* has their ears pierced nowadays.”

“I know,” Dani said. “It’s just...”

“Our mom didn’t believe in it,” Charli piped up, saving her the trouble of a more involved lie. “She never let either of us do it, see?” She brushed Dani’s hair to one side to display her own unpierced lobes.

“Wow, I thought every girl had pierced ears,” another of the girls said. “That’s kinda sad, y’know?”

“Never really bothered me before,” Dani said honestly. She sighed. “Oh, sure, I guess so.”

Charli bounced happily in her seat and clapped her hands. “Really? Oh, Dani, you’re the *best*.”

“C’mon, kid, let’s head,” she said, taking Charli’s arm and standing up.

“Wait... won’t your mom be pissed?” another of the girls, Kayleigh, asked.

“Um...”

“Mom’s dead,” Charli said. “A couple years ago. Dani takes care of us both now.”

“Oh, shit! I’m so sorry, Charli.”

“No big, Kayleigh. You didn’t know,” Dani said.

“Hey, call me, okay?” Charli said to the group as Dani began to lead her away. “I wanna hang out with you guys some more.”

“Cool,” one of the others, an obvious alpha, said. “You coming to Peter McKenna’s pool party tomorrow?”

“If Dani says it’s okay,” Charli said, pleading in her eyes as she looked back at her sister.

“Maybe,” Dani said cautiously. “It depends on if we get done with everything we need to do, okay?”

“Right,” Charli said. “I’ll text you, okay?”

Dani tugged her sister away from the chorus of “bye”s around the table, pulling her into the safety of the crowd before giving her elbow a slight shake of exasperation. “What the hell, Charlotte?” she asked in a loud whisper. “You know what we’re up against. You can’t go making plans like that – what happens if we get to Luis tomorrow? Or Rabbit finds something out?”

Charli looked crestfallen. “I know, okay? Trust me, I know. I was telling myself that over and over the whole afternoon. ‘Don’t get attached.’ But it just... I dunno,” she said. “I... I never had friends before. I mean, you were my friend, but that was pretty much it. I never had people ask me to come and hang out. Or listen to me like that. I... I *really* liked it. It just pushed everything else out of my mind.”

Dani sighed. “I get it,” she said. “I wanted them to think I was cool, too, if you can believe it.”

“Well, it looks like neither of us ever fit in before,” Charli said. “Kind of addictive, if you ask me.”

“Yeah,” Danielle confirmed.

“Where to now?” Charli asked.

“Don’t you want to get your ears pierced, like you said? And I was serious about the watch.”

“Yeah, I was serious. About the bellybutton, too,” Charli laughed.

“Doesn’t that seem a bit permanent to you?”

“Yeah, I guess. I just really want one.”

“Why don’t you get your tongue pierced while you’re at it?” Dani chided.

“I will if you do,” Charli shot back.

Something strange seemed to take hold of Danielle in that moment, a sense of wildness straight from her loins, through her breasts and into the space behind her eyes. “Okay, fine. You’re on,” she said. Even stranger than the wildness that drove her to say it was the concrete feeling of absolute certainty she felt after the words left her mouth.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, I think I am,” Dani said. “I have to quit thinking about this, or I’m gonna wind up with a tattoo before the day’s over.”

“Lotsa girls have tattoos,” Charli said, “it would help us both fit in.”

Dani’s mouth dropped open. “Holy shit, are you *daring* me? What the fuck, Char?”

“I don’t know. You said ‘tattoo’ and I just started wanting one. Really fucking bad.”

“We have to stop this,” Dani said. “We’re not really girls.”

“But we *could* be,” Charli said. “And what scares me is part of my brain is asking ‘would that be so bad?’”

Dani shuddered. “Yeah, and the part of my brain scaring me right now is the part answering ‘no.’”

They both stopped in their stride and pulled one another into a tight hug. Charli’s breath came out of her in a fluttering breeze against Danielle’s neck. “This isn’t going to get any easier, considering what we have planned for the rest of the afternoon.”

“I know,” Dani said. “But I don’t know if I could walk away right now on a bet. If I think about not doing it, I get really fucking depressed. Like ‘shoot myself’ depressed.”

“I do, too,” Charli confirmed.

“But we can’t just dive in, either,” Dani said.

“You really think you can stop yourself? ‘Cause I sure as fuck don’t.”

“Well, let’s find out,” Dani said, taking her sister’s arm and leading her into the piercing shop.

I guess Charli was right, Dani thought despondently as she left the little studio an hour later. *I couldn’t stop myself after all*. She stung viciously all over her body – the multiple piercings in each ear which now dangled with little steel rings around the outer cartilage and a large pair of hoops dangling from the lowermost set of three piercings in her lobes; the annoying ache above her navel from which a stainless steel barbell hung with a rhinestone Playboy bunny head now depended; a rapidly swelling tongue threaded through with a stud capped with a pink plastic ‘tickler’; and a lingering sunburn-esque ache in the small of her back and on her right ankle that now sported tattoos. A little pair of interlinked hearts on her ankle and a tribal-looking butterfly for a ‘tramp stamp.’

“That wuth probably a really bad idea,” she lisped around her grossly swollen tongue.

Charli nodded. She moved stiffly, her own ears pierced multiply, along with her navel and tongue and even one in her clitoral hood. A part of Dani still felt jealous that Charli got that piercing and she didn’t, but she didn’t currently possess a clitoral hood, only a rapidly-deflating penis slowly retreating beneath the protective labia forming from what used to be her scrotum. Charli picked

at the plastic wrap protecting the little roses-and-thorns band tattooed around her upper left arm.

“Those girlth are gonna think I got the coolest thister in the whole world,” she lisped back.

“It justh thucks that tattooth mean we can’t get thpray tenth like I wanted,” Dani complained.

“It’th okay, Dani,” her sister soothed. “Here. I got u thomething.”

She handed over a little envelope from her purse. Dani looked at her strangely – oddly touched, heart swelling – and opened it to reveal a gift card good for three free spray tans.

“Now you can get one as thoon ath your tattooth heal,” Charli said.

“Not jutht me, babe,” Dani said, eyes tearing a little from sentiment she *never* allowed herself to feel before. “’Cauthe there’th no way you’re not coming with me, baby thithter.”

“We’re gonna need bikinith,” Charli said.

“Not jutht yet,” Dani said, sticking out her tongue and tweaking it with a fingertip to see if she could ‘jog’ it loose with physical force and stop her sounding like Sylvester the cat. “We thtill have our appointment, in –“ she checked her new watch, nestled in a clattering heap of cheap bracelets bought at the nearby jewelry store “—ten minuteth. We better huthtle.”

They picked up their pace through the thinning crowd, pausing only to grab a pair of popsicles from a cart vendor in hopes of shrinking their swollen tongues. Dani forced herself not to see the looks of genuine hunger flashed at her by boys fascinated by the image of her sucking on a popsicle.

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Three

By Valerie Hope

THE SUN CREPT LOWER IN the cloudless sky by the time Charli and Dani left the *Cosmétique* salon. Their load of bags nearly doubled under the weight of cosmetics and skin-care products they'd purchased. Enough retail therapy, Dani noted, to snap Charli out of her foul mood.

Dani had no idea the amount of artistry and technique involved in the application of makeup. The technicians there approached a scientific level of knowledge about skin types, color and blending. It reminded Dani of a guy named Snake she knew in the days before her transformation who airbrushed pin-ups on the sides of motorcycle gas tanks and pickup truck tailgates.

Dani leaned close and took another pleasant sniff of the expensive perfume her sister wore, delicately flavoring the air around her in a delightfully feminine way, leaving hints of roses and sandalwood in the air wherever she walked. Dani never noticed when the image of the *man* Charli would become slid aside in her imagination to be replaced by the image of the *woman* Charli would become. Something in Dani's mind associated that image strongly with the feminine floral scent. Somehow, Dani knew that the strong and beautiful woman her sister would grow into would forever wear that particular scent.

Dani caught a brief reflection of herself in the glass of a shop front and almost stopped short. The technicians plucked and preened them both, taking their vague and untested *prettiness* and converting it with their brushes and powders into *glamorous*, *sexy*, and *gorgeous*. Dani's brows now looked thick and meticulously sculpted, her eyes huge and ringed by spiky long false lashes, the subtle contour and highlight of her foundation giving her skin a glow and a perfection worthy of any magazine cover.

"I still can't believe that's you," Charli commented, looking over her sister's shoulder. "I can't believe it's *me*. I hate to say it, Dani, but... we're fucking *hot*."

"I'm starting to get that impression," Dani said absently, running her nails across the darkened reflections of her face.

"I'm starting to get that feeling again, y'know?" Dani said. "That wild feeling, like the one I got before we got our ears pierced?"

Charli looked excited. "Seriously?" she said. "'Cause I kinda liked it the last time you got that feeling."

"You're really into this whole girl business, aren't you?" Dani asked.

"I dunno, I guess so," Charli replied sheepishly. "What are you wanting to do?"

"Get my hair done," Dani said. "My nails. The whole package, y'know?"

"Mmm, yeah," Charli said. "I felt that one, too. Right in my gut."

“How can a fucking drug make me want to go get a fucking manicure?” Dani said frustratedly.

“We should head back,” Charli said. “Maybe Rabbit has some answers for us by now.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Dani said. “I’m kinda shopped out. You?”

Charli laughed. “I know it sounds like a stereotype, but not even close. I could live here and be happy.”

“My little shopaholic,” Dani teased.

“Damn straight, bitch.”

Dani looked down at the huge sheaf of bags dangling from her hands and Charli’s. “Is it just me, or do you just get the feeling that we could do this makeup stuff just as good as the girls in the salon? Like, on our first try?”

Charli looked faraway for a moment, then nodded. “I know I could.”

Dani shrugged. “How can *that* be a thing?”

Charli tapped her bottom lip – now fuller and poutier after the coat of lip plumper beneath her lipstick – in thought. “Luis did say something about a learning drug, I think. He talked really fast, but I do remember something about a memory drug that’s supposed to help people learn or something.”

“So we only have to see something once, and we just *know* it?” Dani asked.

“I dunno. I guess so,” Charli said. “Dani, I didn’t understand half of what Luis said to me.”

“Why did he come to you, anyway?”

“He didn’t, not really. He was kinda showing off. I think he wanted to bang my sister,” Charli said. “He had a couple drinks one night, started talking about all the miracle drugs they’re working on at his lab. Sounded like total bullshit, so I called him on it. Told him to prove it. He backed up real quick, y’know, until my sister joined in. He said he’d bring some samples one night, just to impress her.”

“And then what?”

“He brought over a performance enhancer, couple nights later. He called it nothing special. Said it was the first generation of a drug they developed a couple years back. He gave it to my sister’s friend Jaime. Dude was about a buck twenty soaking wet, and he benched two hundred seventy five like it was nothing. We couldn’t see how much he could lift because we ran out of weights.”

“I dunno what I was thinking, but I started talking about how much money he could make selling that shit. He ran me some bullshit line about FDA approval and side effects, that kind of shit, but I just kept talking dollars and cents, y’know? And the more I said about it, the hornier my sister got.”

“Gold digger, I guess.”

“Yeah, pretty much,” Charli said. “Anyway, I told him I’d talk to my partner. You. I just, uh... forgot to tell him that you shot me down. Between then and when I brought him over, I’m pretty sure my sister blew him or fucked him or something, ‘cause he was hotter than ever to move this shit on the street.”

“So he brought the whole bag of tricks to the meet, then,” Dani concluded. “Everything he thought might possibly sell. Performance enhancers for the juice-heads. Memory drugs for the university crowd. Horny girl juice for the players in the clubs. He mention anything else?”

“Nothing that I remember. Best I’ve been able to figure out, the combination of the performance enhancers and the roofie must’ve scrambled us up somehow. Maybe hormones, some kind of DNA shit,” Charli said. “I still don’t know why all this shit feels so good, Dani. I swear, when that girl started putting makeup on me, I thought I was gonna pass out. Seriously.”

“I don’t know either,” Dani said. “But I know it’s getting dangerous.”

“Dangerous how?”

“Well, think about it, Char,” Dani said. “What if we’re closing in on Luis, or running away from some cartel goon with orders to take us out, and we go past some giant shoe sale or some shit and we can’t keep going until we go inside? What happens if they do manage to track Rabbit’s hacking back to his house, and we can’t leave because we’re the kind of girls who can’t step outside without their makeup and hair done?”

“I don’t think it’s *that* bad,” Charli argued.

“Neither was the mild case of femininity we caught in that warehouse, yesterday,” Dani countered. “But look at us now. I’m gonna need to buy new bras, I’ve already outgrown the ones I bought a few hours ago.”

“Seriously?” Charli said, covering a chuckle with one hand.

“Yeah,” I said. “I took back all the ones I bought, said I got the wrong size. I’m a B-cup now. I’m scared I’m going to have to buy C’s tomorrow, or double-D’s by the end of the week.”

“Okay, y’know that feeling we talked about?”

“Yeah,” Dani said. “Shouldn’t have said anything about double-D’s. I feel it, too.”

“We should probably head back,” Charli said, standing up straight. “Looks like this place is starting to close up for the night.”

“Yeah, Rabbit’s probably worried.”

They slung their purses – as natural as breathing, no longer anything foreign about the weight dangling from their arms or shoulders – and took off towards the parking lot in the golden light and lengthening shadows of evening. Neither of the girls noticed their recent mastery of the subtle art of moving a female body, moving with confidence in their respective styles. Charlotte nearly bounced along, her stride peppy and cheerful, making her budding body jiggle in many interesting places and her steadily-growing ponytail swing back and forth behind her head like a russet pendulum. Her sister moved more languidly, a relaxed strut that directed her backside in lovely arcs behind her. They reached the Chevy Malibu in Lot B after attracting several pairs of eyes – the younger teenage boys drawn more to Charli and their fathers and older brothers giving the appraising eye to her older sister.

The two girls piled their bags into the back seat before sliding into the front and belting themselves in. Danielle noticed an appreciable *sinking* of the seatbelt between the two growing mounds on her slender chest and fought back a swell inside her heart, equal parts fear and pride.

“There almost has to be some kind of anti-anxiety drug in that mix you shot me with,” she commented, taking a cigarette from her purse and passing one to her younger sister as promised. “Because I *really* shouldn’t be *this* okay with everything that’s happening to us.”

Charli forewent a reply, concentrating instead on deep inhales from the white cigarette she lit, directing long plumes of smoke through the cracked window. Dani put the car in gear and pulled carefully through the traffic fleeing the closing mall and out into the deepening gloom. They stopped briefly at a Starbuck’s nearby – they both decided that some caffeine would not have gone amiss, and for some reason it simply *had* to be Starbuck’s, since all the other girls seemed to flock there – and got caramel lattes from the drive-thru. On a whim, Charli tuned the tinny stereo over to the mix station, filling the car with the insistent beats of white-girl rap and bubblegum pop. Dani couldn’t help but bob along as she drove, even singing along.

They inched along, caught up in the twin traffic disasters of the closing outlet mall and a concert letting out from a nearby venue. Beside her, Charli thumbed the touch-screen of her phone, lighting the car’s interior in garish light. Dani concentrated on trying to navigate the frustrating crawl of traffic, making rude comments about other drivers under her breath, while Charli smiled and chuckled.

“What’s so funny?” Dani asked.

“Oh, just this Tweet from Jordan about this boy who keeps hitting on her.”

“Seriously?” Dani asked. “Charli, you’re on Twitter?”

“Facebook and Instagram, too,” she said absently.

“What about avoiding unwanted attention, baby?” Dani asked, slumping a little bit in her seat in exasperation. “You really can’t help yourself, can you?”

“All the other girls kept asking me,” she said. “I didn’t want them to think...”

“You had to fit in,” Dani finished for him. “That urge, it’s like a drug. Char, you have to start fighting it a little. I know how good it feels, being just like the other girls, but if anybody looks at us too closely...”

“But that’s the cool part, right?” Charli said. “Nobody knows us, Dani. We can be whoever we want. All we have to do is keep our story straight between us. Rabbit can take care of all the rest.”

“It’s not that simple,” Dani countered. “We have to come up with these stories on our feet, like that tale you spun about us being orphans. Now Rabbit has to backfill it, come up with papers to prove it. We can’t just assume everything is as easy as he says it is, Char. For all we know, forging a death certificate for a mom and dad that never even existed could be the hardest thing there is to do. And the more documentation we need, the more chance somebody’s going to start looking closely.”

“And you think nobody will look closely at a thirteen-year-old girl who doesn’t have a Twitter feed?” Charli asked. “Look, Dani, fitting in was *your* idea. I’m actually trying to keep people from looking too closely at us. I want us both to be completely normal, ordinary girls.”

“Problem is, Charli, we’re not gonna wind up as normal, ordinary girls at this rate,” Dani said. “I mean, look at us. Did you see the way all the guys were staring?”

"I know," Charli said proudly. "We're hot."

"Exactly," Dani replied. "Hot girls stand out. We can't afford to stand out. Eventually, your little Lolita act is going to get you noticed. And looked into."

"Dani, we can't help being hot," she said with the effortless arrogance that hot girls seemed born with.

"Don't give me that 'I never asked for this' bullshit," Dani said, sipping coffee. She swore quietly, missing a traffic light for the third time in a row due to the crawling traffic.

"No, I never asked to be changed," she corrected. "But if I have to be a girl, I *do* want to be a little hottie. I'm never gonna lie about that. And you're lying if you don't say the same."

"I actually haven't thought about it that much," Dani said honestly. "Really. I've thought more about how to fix this."

"I don't think we're broken," Charli said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, sure we've changed. But I'm looking around at stuff. Like I'm seeing life for the first time, y'know?" she said. She paused long enough to slide another cigarette from the pack in the center console and light it with a match, ejecting a streamer of smoke through pursed lips.

"I used to be a little punk. Seriously, you knew me. The best I could ever have hoped for was dropping out of school and winding up in jail. Or dead. It was only a matter of time before I started trying the shit we sold and winding up strung out like the crackheads down on 9th. My sister was a gold digging slut, my mom was a drunk and I never knew my dad. My teachers hated me, I didn't have shit for friends."

"But now?" she went on, counting off points on her slender, long-nailed fingers. "I have a sister who looks out for me. There were some points today when I actually thought I might have a sister who loved me. I have friends now. A future. I'm *not* a punk-ass drug dealer any more. Even if this memory drug shit doesn't let me do well in school, I can still make a pretty good stab at being a model or something."

"I didn't know it meant that much to you," Dani said.

"None of it would have happened if we hadn't gotten changed," Charli said, fat tears sparkling in her eyes from passing headlights. "That's why I hate it when you talk about 'fixing' this, Dani. It doesn't need fixing. I think it probably saved both our lives."

"I don't know if I'd go *that* far," Dani said.

"Really?" Charli challenged. "All that talk about the cartel, how brutal they were? Those were the people you *worked* for, Dani, same as me. Sure, we could've wound up in prison. But you know as well as I do we probably would've come up short one week and wound up dead."

Dani sighed heavily. "I guess I always knew that," she said flatly.

"We're not drug dealers any more," Charli said excitedly. "Once Rabbit does his thing, the cartel will never find us. They're never going to be looking for two *girls* with no connection to our old lives, without only a couple parking tickets and minor-in-possession-of-alcohol charges on their records. We're safe, Dani. Free and clear."

“As long as nobody looks too close,” Dani argued.

“Honey, nobody’s going to look *at all*,” she riposted.

Dani raked a hand through her hair, now escaping from the cute little headband she’d bought that afternoon and drifting into her eyes and mouth at inopportune times. “I hope you’re right,” she said. “But you have to forgive me if I say I’m not taking any chances, Charli.”

“I get it,” she said. “You’ve seen what those bastards can do. I haven’t. Of course you’re gonna be more careful than I am.”

“And that makes you more prone to take risks,” Dani said. “Look, Char, what you said before. About having a sister that loves you. Sweetheart, I can’t say that you’re wrong. I don’t know much about love, but I’m pretty sure what I felt for you a couple times today got really close to what I’ve heard it’s like. You talk like we don’t have anything to be afraid of. But Charli, I don’t know what I’d do if anything happened to you.”

Charli sniffled loudly. “You’re sweet.”

“I *need* us to be on the same page, sis,” Dani went on. “I *need* us to be.”

“Okay, okay,” Charli said, dabbing at her eyes with one of the Starbuck’s napkins. “You win.”

Dani pointed through the windshield ahead. “Look,” she said. “It’s the highway entrance.”

“About fucking time,” Charli said, still sniffling a little.

“We’ll head home and see what Rabbit has to say,” Dani told her. “Then we’ll brew a pot of coffee and we’ll keep talking about this, okay? All night long if we have to.”

“Sounds good, Dani,” Charli replied. “Sounds real good.”

Rabbit snored noisily in his recliner, wearing only boxer shorts and a stained bathrobe. Several laptops and tablets lay around him, stacked on furniture and on the floor next to where he slept. Dani and Charli crept past, not wanting to disturb him, but the barking and the clicking of dog nails on laminate floors eventually woke him. He sat up with a startled snort, rubbing his eyes and scratching his belly absently.

“Where the fuck were you... holy shit,” he said, eyes coming into focus.

“What?” Dani asked, looking behind herself, trying to read the astonished look on Rabbit’s face.

“You... you look *amazing*, Dani,” he said. “Your outfit. Your makeup. You’re...”

“Beautiful?” Charli supplied.

“Yeah,” he breathed. “Completely beautiful.”

Dani felt color rise in her cheeks and she looked away demurely, only serving to increase her allure. “Thanks,” she said softly, brushing her hair behind one ear. “That’s really sweet.”

He shook his head and rubbed his eyes again. “Wow,” he breathed. “Just... wow.”

Charli struck a ridiculous burlesque pose in the doorway. “Aren’t you gonna say something about me?”

“Well, yeah. You look nice, too, Charli.”

“Nice?” Charli actually sounded a bit hurt.

“Don’t be so mean,” Dani chided. “Of course he’s not gonna say anything more than that, jailbait.”

“At least tell me I look older,” Charli said, pouting adorably with her bottom lip stuck out.

“Sure you do,” Rabbit told her. “At least fifteen.”

“Great,” Charli grumped, flopping on the couch in *faux* misery. “Still not old enough to buy beer.”

Rabbit chuckled. “Beer? Really?” he said. “A girl like you should be more interested in shit like wine coolers or hard lemonade.”

“Eat a dick,” Charli said.

“Actually, a glass of wine sounds pretty good right about now,” Dani mentioned. “You got any, Rabbit?”

He laughed again. “Yeah, you know me. Fully stocked cellar. I know all that shit about bouquets and noses and crap. Have you met me? Of *course* I don’t have any fucking wine. I *might* have some vodka in the freezer, maybe a beer stuck way in the back of the fridge.”

Dani laughed. “Yeah, guess I forgot who I was talking to.”

Charli cleared her throat softly. “You got anything for us, Rabbit?”

He nodded. “I’ve drilled through a few more layers of BioRenew’s security. Only one to go. As soon as I defeat that, I should be able to grab as much as I can before they shut me out.”

“So we don’t need Luis after all,” Dani said.

“Actually, you probably need him more than ever,” Rabbit corrected. “I can grab this shit all day, Dani, but unless you or Jailbait there happens to have a Ph.D. in molecular biology or biochemistry, we’re probably not going to be able to understand a goddamned word of it. We probably need Luis just to translate.”

“Shit,” Charli said.

“I had an idea about that,” Dani said, sitting down next to the window and crossing her legs demurely at the ankle. “You said you can track him by his credit card, right? Well, what if you sent him an offer?”

“What kind of offer?” Rabbit asked.

“Like a prize or something. A nice dinner someplace, or some kind of event,” Dani said.

“Someplace where we can lie in wait for him. I can doll up a little bit, maybe distract him by hitting on him or something. Keep his attention while Charli slips a roofie or something in his drink. Then we only have to get him outside and in a car.”

“You want to trap him? For reals?” Charli said.

“Easy, there, Jailbait,” Rabbit said. “Let’s think about this. That’s a federal crime. He’s a high-up at a big biotech firm. He doesn’t show up for work, doesn’t call in, his bosses are going to want to know why.”

“So we have him back by eight o’clock the next morning,” Dani said. “We only need him long enough to tell us what was in those syringes and what it did to us. After that, we’re done with him.”

“You don’t want him working on some way to reverse it?”

Dani shot a meaningful look at her sister.

“Yeah, about that…” Charli began.

“You’re fucking kidding me,” Rabbit said, astounded. “You want to stay this way.”

“Charli does,” Dani said. “And I’m on the fence. I just want to know that it’s not killing us somehow, then we’re done with Luis.”

“What if he talks?” Rabbit asked. “He knows what happened. He’s the only one who can connect the you and Jailbait there with the two street dealers you used to be. The cartel can be really persuasive, if they get their hands on him.”

“Shit,” Dani said.

“You’re not thinking we need to kill this guy,” Charli said, aghast.

“Of course not,” Dani said. “But we do need to make sure the cartel never thinks to talk to him.”

“Y’know, I’m sure BioRenew has offices all over the world,” Rabbit said. “While I’m inside their system, I could try to arrange some kind of transfer for him. A request from the head of R&D in Bora Bora or someplace like that, asking for Dr. Barrientos by name to head up some project.”

“You can do that remotely?” Charli said. “I mean, you’ll have to sign off on it as some executive. Somebody who can be asked if it’s legitimate.”

Rabbit shooed the thought away with a gesture. “You’re overthinking it, Jailbait.”

“Will you *please* stop calling me that?”

“Not as long as it still pisses you off,” he replied with a mocking smile. “But you’re giving these corporate guys too much credit. They don’t question the suits. If Reginald P. Moneybags the Vice President of Fucking the Environment decides he wants Dr. Luis on the next plane to Greenland, then you better believe he’ll be on the next plane to Greenland. They’ll sort it all out when he gets there, and nobody will want to own a mistake like that. It’ll get lost in the corporate accountability labyrinth and never be seen again.”

“You can pull all of that off in the window of time you described?” Dani asked.

“For you, gorgeous? Anything.”

“Okay, eww,” Dani teased.

“Yeah, I think I can. I just need to do a little research.”

“We should have a Plan B, just in case,” Charli suggested.

“Agreed,” Dani said. “Another way to make sure Luis leaves town.”

“Deportation won’t work,” Rabbit told them. “He’s a citizen.”

Charli snapped her fingers. "What if he went of his own free will?"

Dani followed the train of thought instinctively. "He knew who I worked for?"

"I mentioned it, yeah," Charli replied.

"Perfect," Dani said.

"Wanna clue me in, girls?" Rabbit asked.

"We make Luis think that the cartel is after *him*," Dani said. "Put word out. Cartel thinks he killed two of their street dealers, made them disappear. Then we stalk him a little. Cars parked outside, break-ins, people asking about him at work, that kind of shit. We can use Charli's sister as a go-between."

"That bitch will do anything for money," Charli said. "Shouldn't be hard to get her to make a panicked phone call to him."

"Sounds a hell of a lot easier than this transfer business," Rabbit said. "And probably more likely to work."

"Good," Dani said. "It's settled. Let's set it up. Does your sister have a friend that you can reach out to, maybe drop a dime that the cartel is looking for Barrientos?"

"I bet I can come up with one," Charli said.

"Y'know, we play it right, we can make snatching Luis up a part of the whole cartel thing," Rabbit said. "Get ourselves some big Mexican guys, stage the whole thing in a warehouse outside of town, make it look like the cartel caught up with him and started grilling him. Maybe even let him 'get away.'"

Charli chuckled. "That poor twitchy son of a bitch will run away and never look back."

"Y'know, you still think like a criminal," Rabbit commented.

"I should really try to change that," Dani told him.

"The hell you should," Rabbit replied. "It's sexy as fuck."

"Down, boy," Charli teased.

They slept light, waking almost instinctually when sunlight painted the little guest room in bright saffron stripes through the drawn blinds. Dani padded on bare feet into the kitchen where the coffee machine gurgled happily. She poured herself a cup and walked onto the little concrete patio overlooking Rabbit's overgrown back yard for a morning cigarette.

Rabbit emerged from his bedroom shortly after Dani came back in. He carried a triumphant look on his face, holding a flash drive in one hand. "Got it," he said. "Grabbed everything I could find off the R&D server. I'm pretty sure we have everything we need."

"Great," Dani said. "Cue it up, let's start going through it."

"Gonna take a few hours to break the encryption," Rabbit said. "We've got time to kill. Me, I'm gonna take a shower and get a few hours' sleep. You?"

Dani shrugged. “Wondering if there’s any of that petty cash left lying around.”

Rabbit looked at her askance. “Pretty girl, living in my house and spending all my money,” he chuckled. “We’re the great American love story.”

“Yeah, up until I start fucking the pool boy, handsome,” Dani teased. “Then I’m taking half of everything you own in the divorce.”

“Mama warned me about girls like you,” Rabbit said, scratching his beard. “Yeah, I can cut you loose some more cash. Big plans?”

“Just me and a salon chair,” Dani replied. “Got to get all gorgeous if I’m gonna trap us a Ph.D.”

“That’s my girl,” Rabbit said fondly. He dug around in a pile of papers on his kitchen table for a moment, then passed her a couple pre-paid credit cards. “They’re loaded with about five bills each. Should be more than enough for what you need.”

“Great, Rabbit, thanks. For everything, brother. I mean it.”

“Don’t sweat it, Dani,” he said fondly. “I owe you, for one thing. Flash me your tits someday, we’ll call it square.”

The flippant statement brought her up short for a moment. It had been the first overtly sexual statement that Rabbit – or anyone, for that matter, even the young player from the outlet mall yesterday – had made, the first expression of desire for her body, that she’d heard. A sudden feeling of shock passed through Dani’s mind, the first time she’d felt *lost* in a while. Of course men *wanted* her. She was gorgeous and sexy and alluring. But to be confronted with it like this – alone with a man – stunned her deeply.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” Rabbit said. “Look, that was out of line.”

Dani held up a hand. “No, it’s okay. I guess I better get used to shit like that sooner or later.”

“You know I’d never do anything to you, right, Dani?”

“Yeah, Rabbit, of course I know that.”

“It’s just that…”

“I get it, I get it. Don’t stress. I just wasn’t expecting it.”

“I really didn’t mean to freak you out.”

Dani leaned against the wall. “It’s just, there’s this whole other dimension to this. This ‘being a girl’ thing. I’ve been so busy obsessing about the way I look, the way I walk and talk and stand, I never let myself think about *that* part.”

“Can you even *do* that?” Rabbit asked. “I mean, do you have all the right *equipment* and everything?”

Dani’s eyes widened. “I haven’t checked. Not since yesterday.”

Ignoring the blatant sexuality of the gesture, Dani used her free hand and stuffed it down the waistband of the lacy panties she wore beneath the loose sleep shirt, both purchased yesterday during her spree. No semblance of a penis greeted her touch, just the soft folds of the labia that used to be her scrotum. She pried the folds apart, exposing acutely sensitive skin beneath, and

felt around. A tiny little nub that used to be her penis, the barest touch of which sent a little *frisson* of tingling pleasure through her entire body. Below that, a tiny indentation of a urethra, and below that an elastic opening. She teased it with a long-nailed finger and felt, for the first time in her life, something *enter* her. She jumped, pulling her hand away as if scalded.

“Oh, my God,” she whispered.

“It’s for real?” Rabbit said.

“I thought I would have noticed,” Dani breathed, leaning against the wall for support. “I mean, how would I not notice something like that?”

“You were busy, right?”

“It’s my *cock*, Rabbit. I mean, I feel like I should have at least stopped a second, maybe said ‘good-bye’ or something,” she said. “But it’s gone. Completely gone.”

“Sorry, Dani. Seriously.”

Dani gulped and nodded. “Thanks, Rabbit.”

“I feel bad, now, saying that shit about your tits, now.”

“Well, drop it,” Dani said. “I have those. Tits, I mean. I have tits. And a pussy, too. I have a pussy. There, I said it. I’m a fucking giri, and I have tits and a pussy to prove it.”

Rabbit seemed almost on the verge of tears. He stood up straight. “Look, Dani, I need to go back in. Make sure I covered all my tracks, that BioRenew won’t trace anything back here, y’know? I just wanted to get some coffee.”

Dani smiled. “Relax, Rabbit. It’s okay. It was gonna happen eventually. The sooner I get used to the fact, the better it’s gonna be for me. I knew it was coming, okay? I mean, yeah – it came as a little bit of a shock, but I’m okay. Really.”

“You’re strong as hell, you know that, right?” Rabbit said, walking into the kitchen past her and grabbing a clean mug from his dish rack. “I’d be falling the fuck apart right now, if it was me.”

“No, you wouldn’t,” Dani told him back. “You’re pretty fucking tough yourself. Remember those two guys that cornered you in that bathroom back at County?”

Rabbit shuddered a little. “I remember you saved my ass. If you hadn’t been mopping the front, come in there with that mop handle when you did...”

“But you stood your ground. Two against one, and you still didn’t back down. That’s tough, buddy. It didn’t matter if they kicked your ass or not, you didn’t give in to that fear. That’s some impressive shit right there.”

“You’re being nice,” Rabbit accused.

“I’m being honest,” Dani retorted. “Why the fuck do you think I came to you when this happened? Sick as fuck, half dead from those drugs, and all I could think about was ‘I gotta get to Rabbit, he’ll know what to do.’ You’re my guy. Always have been, always will be.”

Rabbit sipped his coffee. “Look, there’s as much for me to get used to as there is for you,” he said. “Because when my buddy Danny used to say shit like that, I wanted to give him a bro-hug or a high-five. But when this hot chick Dani who lives in my guest room says it...”

“What? Finish your sentence.”

“When she says shit like that, it makes me want to kiss her.”

Dani put down her own coffee and leaned against the counter. She took a deep breath. “Rabbit, you’re the only guy in the world right now I’d let do that.”

His eyebrows rose. “Seriously?”

She looked up at him, wide-eyed. “You still wanna do it?”

He gulped, then nodded.

The distance between their faces melted in increments, inch by inch vanishing into some lost place. Dani didn’t know where to look – his eyes, kind and intelligent, or his lips nestled in the wild bird’s nest of the black and grey beard. She turned her head a few degrees, opposite his. The approach felt identical to kissing when she’d been male, except performed while looking up instead of down. But a sense of the *size* of him suffused the motion now, a tingling sensation of being *small* and *helpless*. His hand cupped her shoulder and she felt a sense of foreboding strength.

For the first time ever, she felt warm slickness between her thighs. Her brand-new pussy worked as advertised, making her wet in anticipation. Her soft lips met his firm ones, the scratchy tickle of his beard and moustache gently abraded the skin around her mouth, the taste of coffee and toothpaste not her own teased across her mouth and tongue.

She yielded. Rabbit had strength, size and gravity on his side and he *pressed* the kiss into her, making her knees go a little wobbly. His strength overwhelmed her deliciously, making her body seem to melt a little. The contact began passionless, dry and chaste, but the feeling of physical inferiority ignited something powerful within her, making her want to crawl up him, to press him harder into herself. Her mouth opened and her tongue probed gently, the raw soreness of her new tongue stud causing little flashes of pain that her brain interpreted to mean *more*, somehow. Her eyes closed and her face tilted this way and that, seeking new angles and configurations, hungering for something she couldn’t identify.

They broke an unknowable time later, a bit breathless.

“Wow,” she breathed.

“That didn’t suck,” Rabbit panted.

“We, uh... we better quit. For now,” Dani said, sliding along the counter to create a little bit of distance between them.

“That bad?”

“That *good*, dummy,” she said, smiling coquettishly. “I like you, Rabbit, but I’m not ready to do you up on your kitchen counter. And that’s the direction I was heading there for a second.”

“You would’ve fucked me?”

“I dunno. Felt like I wouldn’t have been able to stop myself, for a little while.”

He sighed. “I don’t hate that idea, Dani.”

“Yeah, me neither,” she said. “But so not ready. Is that cool?”

“Has to be,” Rabbit said.

“No, you’re a part of this, too,” she corrected. “You want me, right?”

He couldn’t make eye contact, but he nodded in a mixture of shame and relief that the secret was out.

“It’s okay,” Dani said, putting her hand on the back of his. “I wanted you. It’s fading, but it was definitely there. I would’ve said you’re ‘not my type,’ but I don’t know what the fuck ‘my type’ even is. I do know you’re cool, and I trust you, and I know you’d never hurt me, and that’s not nothing.”

“Take your time,” Rabbit told her. “I can spank it in the meantime.”

Dani laughed. “Gave somebody my first case of blue balls.”

“You have a gift,” Rabbit confessed.

“Sorry,” Dani said. “I hated that. Back... y’know, *before*. I wish I was ready to help a brother out.”

“That makes two of us,” Rabbit said. “But I get it. I understand.”

“I know you do,” Dani told him. “You always do.”

She stood, shaking her head to clear the last little clinging tendrils of lust from her mind. “I better go wake up my sister,” she said, grabbing her coffee and taking a long sip. “She’ll sleep ‘til noon if I don’t go in there.”

“Fucking teenagers,” Rabbit grumped.

She started to walk back to the guest room, but stopped and looked back at him over her shoulder, unconsciously sexy. “Hey, Rabbit.”

“Yeah?”

“What’s your real name?”

He blushed a little. For the first time, Dani found herself thinking it was adorable.

“It’s Thomas,” he said. “My brothers used to call me Tommy.”

“Tommy,” she said, tasting the word on her tongue. “You look like a Tommy, actually.”

“That’s what my mom used to say,” he said with a slightly haunted smile. “Why’d you ask?”

Dani lowered her gaze, looking at him through a curtain of long lashes. “I dunno,” she said, a little sheepishly. “I guess I just thought, I should know my boyfriend’s first name.”

“Boyfriend?”

She smiled, genuinely happy at the idea. “Maybe,” she said. “Play your cards right, you never know. Keep being the amazing, cool, trustworthy guy you’re being for me, and anything could happen.”

To be continued...

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Four

By Valerie Hope

DANI PULLED THE LITTLE CHEVY into a parking space outside the upscale salon, just outside the section of the warehouse district where she used to sell. Her choice of this particular place killed two birds with one stone – first of all, all the little rich club girls raved about this place; second, she could listen to gossip and maybe get some idea of what movements the cartel made in the area. She doubted the stylists or the clientele would know anything overt, this was not the place where people discussed the finer points of the illegal drug trade, but Dani learned long ago to listen to what *wasn't* said and connect the dots on her own.

Behind her, Charli smacked her gum loudly and pushed her large round sunglasses up into her hair. They clicked across the black-and-white checkerboard tile in their low wedge heels. It had only taken Dani and her sister a few minutes to master the art of walking in them, some byzantine combination of the drugs they'd received allowing them to accomplish the work of hours in just a few short minutes. Dani knew she'd never run a marathon in them, but she could manage a pretty quick pace. And they did spectacular things for her calves and ass, she noted with no small amount of pride. A big part of her wanted to go higher still, to click and clack around town in a pair of platform Louboutins with the telltale red bottoms, elevated back to nearly her old height and swaying sexily as she walked.

The girl at the counter gave them a welcoming smile. "Hi, welcome to *Maison*, do you have an appointment?"

Dani slung her purse over one arm and leaned against the reception desk. "Yeah, sure do. Danielle and Charlotte Mayfield, eleven o'clock."

"Here you are," the receptionist said brightly, tapping her screen with a manicured nail. "Ramón and Belinda are just finishing up in the back, would you guys like to have a seat? Can I get you something, coffee or water, maybe a glass of wine?"

Dani smiled. They'd dressed the part, in their body-hugging sundresses and heels with their low-end designer purses and sunglasses and meticulous makeup. Nobody suspected they were anything other than two spoiled rich girls out to spend money that wasn't theirs.

"Sure, I'd love a glass of white," Dani said airily, trying to act the part. "You want a water or something, Charli?"

"Sure," she said distractedly, paying rapt attention to her phone in the way that bored teenagers had.

They sat in the waiting room, sipping their drinks. Charli paged through Twitter while Dani flipped lazily through a copy of *Elle* while they waited. The receptionist came back in a few short minutes to lead them back into the salon proper. The harsh smells of chemicals assaulted their noses, making them flinch a little bit, but they maintained the illusion of being familiar with the environment.

Charli slipped her phone into her purse and leaned close. "This place is swanky," she whispered.

"Act like you're used to it," Dani whispered back.

The receptionist introduced them to their respective stylists. Charli greeted a tall, whip-thin Latino with meticulously sculpted hair, dark brown with reddish tones and a shocking blonde streak who met just about every stereotype of the little gay hairdresser that either of them had ever heard. He led Charli away with a quick glance at Dani, silently asking for some elder sibling permission before setting to work.

"Whatever she wants as long as she doesn't ask you to shave it all off," Dani said.

"Okay. Charli, it's so good to meet you," Ramón said warmly. "Come this way, we're gonna get you shampooed, 'kay?"

The slightly *zaftig* girl with thick hipster glasses and dark blue streaks running through her shiny black hair stuck out a hand. "Danielle, right?"

"My friends call me Dani," she replied, shaking the hand warmly but not applying a masculine grip for fear of raising eyebrows.

"That's cute," the stylist said. "I'm Belinda. I go by Belle, since I get to call you Dani."

"Cool," Dani said.

Belle led her back into a small room where she bade Dani to leave her purse. Belle fastened a black plastic smock around Dani's neck and took out the little elastic band holding her hair, looking over her shoulder into the mirror as she fluffed out the hair, which now hung down past Dani's slender shoulders.

"So, what are you looking to do today?" Belle asked, finger fluffing as she spoke. Dani decided that she *really* liked it when people played with her hair.

"Belle, I'm *completely* bored with it. I've just finished growing it out for a while and I don't want to chop it all off again, but I am *sick* of my hair."

"I so get that. Any ideas?" Belle asked.

Dani smiled. "I'm headed off to the beach for a little while, in about a week," Dani lied glibly. "I was thinking, maybe I could do the whole beach bunny thing. How do you think I'd look as a blonde?"

"You mean maybe some highlights, go a few shades lighter?" Belle said, combing through the hair incessantly and causing Dani to come out in goosebumps at the pleasure.

"No, I mean bleach it," Dani said proudly. "Full-on Playboy centerfold. Think you can pull that off?"

Belle giggled. "Sounds like fun."

"Yeah, I thought so, too."

"I thought you said you *didn't* want to attract notice," Charli grumped as they walked out of the salon and down the sidewalk. Dani tried not to answer with the prideful smile she felt wanting to

come out. She adopted a little bit more of a slinky strut as she walked, the better to make her chalk-white salon blowout bounce and shine in the morning sun. The contrast of the almost white-gold hair with the tanned skin and the enormous wave of self-assurance that came along with bloneness drew every male eye in the little pedestrian mall they crossed.

Not that Charli didn't look fantastic. She'd lightened her hair a few shades as well, going more 'sandy' than 'platinum' like her sister, but she wore clip-in pink streaks and pulled the hair away from her face with a complicated and flirty little braid which snaked around her forehead and trailed back into the long fall of hair floating behind her. Dani noticed that Charli's hair seemed to grow faster than her own, that her sister's hair reached the bottoms of her shoulderblades now where Dani's only barely crested her shoulders.

"You don't think it looks good?" Dani said smugly, fishing for a compliment.

Charli blew a raspberry. "You know you're fucking gorgeous, bitch," she complained.

"Look, if you wanna do it, you can," Dani told her. "I just felt like a change. Besides, nobody in the cartel is gonna be looking for someone like this."

She held up the little bag in her hand, glossy pink with black stripes, emblazoned with the salon's *chic* little logo. "And when I put in these clip-ins Belle sold me, I'll have hair down to my ass. Who says camouflage can't look sexy?" she added.

Charli chuckled. "Can you believe I'm jealous?"

Dani smiled. "I figured you were," she said. "Relax, baby. You're cute as hell."

"But I wanna be sexy, like you," Charli said.

"You shouldn't be trying for sexy at thirteen," Dani replied.

"Fuck that," Charli said. "All the other girls are trying just as hard."

"I know," Dani said. "But that 'Jailbait' nickname that Rabbit gave you has some truth to it. I mean, you aren't gonna go long without netting yourself a boyfriend, that's for damn sure. Just make sure you color inside the lines until you're of age. That's heat we don't need."

"You're my legal guardian, Dani. I can do whatever I want, you're never gonna press charges against any boy I like," Charli challenged sullenly.

"Maybe not press charges, but I can get Rabbit to find me some muscle and have the shit beaten out of any teenage boy who messes with my sister," she corrected. "Look, Charli, I don't know if you've felt it like I have, but we don't have the strength or the toughness to defend ourselves like we used to. We need to take a class or something, maybe start carrying. We can't go toe-to-toe with somebody any more, we'll get the shit beaten out of us. And I am *not* gonna wind up somebody's battered girlfriend."

"You serious? About carrying, I mean?"

"I've been thinking about it, yeah," Dani confessed. "Easy enough to get. Shit, we can walk five blocks and see if Kenny is open for business over on 6th."

Charli thought a minute. "Yeah, maybe we'd better."

"And we can check out that little nail place and the tanning salon a couple blocks over, too, if you want," Dani added. "Rabbit sent us out with plenty of cash. Wanna get spray tans?"

"I don't have a swimsuit," Charli said.

Dani grabbed her sister's elbow and steered her towards a little boutique across the pedestrian mall. "That's easy enough to fix," she said happily.

The pre-paid credit cards took a serious hit between the pedestrian mall and the little alley on 6th Street and State House Avenue where Sick Kenny plied his trade. Both the newly-minted girls sported deep mocha tans, their skin glowing amber in the sunshine with teasing patches of white denoting the straps of their itty-bitty bikinis. The tanning solution stung like hell when it touched the raw new tattoos both the girls wore and the fresh piercings, but the end result pleased them both so much that they overlooked it.

Charli kept looking at the long, square-cut acrylic extensions they'd bought at the nail salon afterwards. "I hope I can even hold a gun with these," she said softly, wondering what on earth possessed her to get such long and unwieldy claws. But Dani knew the truth of it, seeing how gracefully she gestured and how self-satisfied Charli looked smoking a cigarette between her long-nailed fingers. The glamor and elegance of such long nails, that sense of *I'm so beautiful I never need to work with my hands* made her drunk. Not that Dani's own claws were any less extravagant. Neither were the platform heels, eight-inch stilettos with a three-inch platform, she perched on now after seeing them in a shop window and giving in to the delicious temptation.

"What are you thinking?" Charli said as Dani stopped at an ATM to withdraw cash from one of the pre-pays, bringing their ready cash reserves down into double digits.

"I still have my little Glock, the .380 six-shooter," Dani said. "I was thinking just get you a little pocket shocker, like mine. Neither of us should be walking around with hand cannons."

Charli chuckled. "Do they come in pink?" she teased.

Dani couldn't repress a smile. "Y'know, I was *just* fucking thinking that a few minutes ago."

They rounded the corner, seeing the venerable dusty green Ford pickup nosed into the alley and the obese, sweaty figure of Sick Kenny slumped on the tailgate, chewing on his customary cigar. His eyes widened at the sight of the two sexy girls and he jumped to the street, smoothing out his sweat-damp clothes and running a hand through his greasy hair.

"Hey," he said, a little breathlessly.

"Hi," Dani said brightly. "Um... are you Sick Kenny?"

"Who's asking?" he said warily, his years of being a veteran arms dealer on the streets coming well to the fore and making him understandably cautious.

"I'm Dani. This is my sister, Charli. Tyrone said we should talk to you about our little, um... problem."

The mention of the shot-caller for the local chapter of the Ninth Street Kings relaxed him a little. Tyrone Mills was one of Kenny's best customers, and a vouch from him meant money in the bank.

"How do you know Tyrone?" Kenny asked.

Charli piped up. “I partied with his little brother Jamal a couple times,” she said. “He sold me some weed.”

Satisfied, Kenny leaned back against the tailgate of his truck. “So, what’s this problem you think I could help with?” he asked, picking his teeth with a fingernail.

Dani tried not to grimace. *So gross*, she thought, but forced a smile to her face and said “Charli just broke up with her boyfriend,” she explained.

“He turned out to be a serious douche,” Charli supplied.

“Well, he’s gotten a little bit clingy,” Dani said. “Won’t let go.”

“Stalking you, huh, honey?” Kenny said.

“Tyrone said you might be able to help us find something that could make Charli feel a little bit safer, y’know what I mean?” Dani asked.

“Yeah,” Charli said.

Kenny smiled. “You came to the right place,” he said. “You know what you’re doing?”

“Yeah, our Dad showed us how when we were little,” Charli piped up.

“What’d you have in mind?”

Dani looked around cautiously to make sure no passersby could overhear. “Nothing bigger than nine millimeter,” she said. “And can fit in a purse. We don’t need a lot of hardware.”

Kenny nodded. “I got just the thing,” he said. “Nice little chrome-finish Sig, nine millimeter. Pocket gun. Five in the mag, one in the chamber. No serial numbers, no record with the cops. Clean as a whistle.”

Dani nodded. “Sounds perfect,” she said. “I’ll go two hundred.”

Kenny snorted. “You’re cute, girl, but not *that* cute,” he chuckled. “Four fifty.”

They haggled a little, quick and aboveboard, and settled on three hundred, which was what Dani expected to pay all along. They agreed to wait for him at a little coffee shop for him to deliver, handing him a hundred in earnest and the rest when they received the merchandise.

Dani barely got the foam sipped off her latte and a cigarette lit under their little table under the umbrella on the sidewalk when Kenny walked up, holding a folded newspaper. Kenny’s stash house had always been the stuff of legend in the district. Nobody had the faintest clue how he moved his hardware or where he stored it. Kenny prided himself on secrecy.

He set the paper down on the table as he took a seat across from them. Dani reached into the fold and drew out the little semi-automatic, pulling back the slide and ejecting the magazine. “Looks good,” she said, sliding the mag back into place and dry-firing the empty gun to uncock it. She passed the weapon to Charli under the table and tucked the remainder of the payment under her saucer, making sure not to ever physically hand anything to Kenny.

Kenny raised an eyebrow. “Slick,” he told Dani. “You’ve done this before.”

She sighed. *Not* the kind of attention she wanted. Being around criminals made her act like a criminal, when she should’ve been acting like a rich little bubblehead. Now Kenny would tell his

friends at Kruger's Bar this evening about the hot centerfold blonde who knew everything about conducting an illegal gun sale.

"A couple times," she said. "Not proud of it. Old boyfriend."

"Well, if you two girls know Tyrone, then it makes sense you know some sketchy shit."

Damn, Dani thought, catching Charli's eye and seeing that her sister knew the wrong turn they'd just taken, dropping names. *Now he's gonna ask Tyrone about us. This is a disaster! What the fuck was I thinking, I have a clean record, I could've just gone to a fucking gun store for this!*

"Well, uh... we're actually trying to get away from all that," Charli said.

"How come? Tyrone's a good guy," Kenny said.

"Yeah, but associating with him doesn't exactly look good on a college application," Charli said guiltily. "I like Jamal and Tyrone, but any girl that hangs with those guys is going to get her ass arrested at some point. It was fun, y'know, being around bad boys, but I wanna get into Cornell at some point."

Kenny nodded sagely, pulling on his scraggly goatee. "Yeah. Smart girl."

"Yeah, it sucks, but I'm totally ghosting him right now," Charli said. "Y'know ghosting?"

"What, like not taking his calls or answering his texts?" Kenny said.

Dani nodded. "Hopefully Jamal will just write her off as another stuck-up white girl who wanted to run with the bangers for a while and forget about her," she said.

"Fingers crossed," Charli added.

Kenny sat back, hands patting his ample belly. "I get it," he said. "So, I never saw you, that right?"

Dani gave him her most flirtatious smile. "Is that okay?"

He shrugged. "Yeah, I made a sale. Some fat chick. Real bad acne," Kenny said.

"You're the best," Charli told him, beaming at him.

"Thank you so much," Dani said, taking his hand in both of hers and giving a squeeze. She saw Kenny almost visibly melt. So the "damsel in distress" act worked on him. Dani made a mental note, in case things ever got bad. He could certainly give her access to a lot of toys if it ever came to that. If anyone could find out where his mysterious stash house was actually located, a sexy bleach blonde with big innocent eyes probably had a better chance than most.

Dani's phone dinged. She released Kenny's sweaty hands and picked it up where it lay facedown beside her cooling coffee. A text from Rabbit awaited her. "Found him. Call me ASAP."

"Hey, Kenny, thanks for everything," she said. "But considering we just, y'know, did something illegal, we should probably go."

"Yeah, I get it. Hope that little toy does the trick," he said.

"Hopefully I'll never even have to get it out except to clean it," Charli told him.

“Like I said, smart girl,” he told them, standing up. A good salesman knew when he’d been dismissed. He gave them both an appraising look as he backed away, checking them out in an oily, uncomfortable way, then disappeared around the corner, back to his alley.

Charli let out a long breath. “God, that was *dumb* of us,” she breathed.

“I know,” Dani said. “I don’t know what the fuck I was thinking.”

“I do,” Charli told her. “The last three days, it’s been nothing but ‘new.’ New looks, new names, new clothes, new everything. New fucking life. I think we both wanted something familiar.”

Dani stood and tossed her half-smoked cigarette into a nearby planter. “I’ve been riding your ass about not drawing attention, then the first thing I do is dye my hair blonde enough to see it from space and walk up to a known criminal and cartel associate and start dropping names.”

“Face it,” Charli said, pulling her purse from the back of the chair and slinging it around her shoulder. The weight of her new hardware made it bump heavily against the table and then Charli’s hip. “We suck at being criminals, now.”

“I don’t know about that,” Dani said, dialing her phone. “We’re about to step up to kidnapping. Maybe we’re just upping our game.”

The phone rang through in her ear, clicking against the dangling ghetto hoop earring in her lobe and making her hiss a little at the sting of her piercings.

“Hey, Dani,” Rabbit’s voice answered.

“Hey, sweetheart,” she said brightly.

“Sweetheart? Really?” Rabbit said, about the same time Charli gave her sister a slightly shocked look.

“Yeah, *sweetheart*,” Dani reiterated. “Get used to it.”

“Okay, sure,” Rabbit laughed. “Boyfriend. Got it.”

“Maybe,” Dani said teasingly. “It depends on whether or not you’re a douchebag about it.”

“My bad,” Rabbit said, a little chastened. “Hi, honey.”

“What did you find out?”

“Your Dr. Barrientos just used his credit card to buy movie tickets,” he said. “He’s going to that brew-house theater combo downtown, y’know, the place where there’s never any parking?”

“Yeah, I remember it,” Dani said.

“Don’t know what theater or what picture, or even what time or what day,” Rabbit said. “None of that information goes to the credit card company, just the location and the amount. I checked their website, it only sells tickets two weeks in advance, so it’s sometime in the next two weeks.”

“Not a lot to go on,” Dani said.

“Think y’all could head over there, maybe, bat your eyelashes and find out more?”

Dani nodded as she said, “Yeah, I think that’s do-able,” she said.

“They open in an hour,” Rabbit told her. “Let me know what you find out.”

“Yeah, okay, sweetie, I’ll call you,” Dani said. “We might swing back there in a while, change clothes.”

“Okay, let yourself in,” Rabbit said.

“Wait... you’re not gonna be there?” Dani asked.

“I might,” he said. “I was planning to go out for a little bit.”

“But you *never* go out,” Dani retorted.

“He’s going *out*?” Charli whispered in astonishment. “Where?”

“Is everything okay?” Dani asked, suddenly worried.

“Yeah, yeah, no worries,” Rabbit said. “Just, uh... felt like going out for a little while. There’s nothing to do here while the computer’s working on that encryption, there’s nothing on TV, so...”

“What’s going on, Rabbit?” Dani asked in the most serious tone her phone-sex voice would allow.

He sighed. “I, uh... I have an appointment.”

“What, like with a doctor or something?”

“No, it’s... I’m meeting somebody.”

“Who?”

“A personal trainer, okay?” he said, a little wildly. “I’m going to a gym to meet with a personal trainer.”

Dani covered her mouth, trying not to laugh out loud. “You’re shitting me. Why?”

He sounded sheepish and a little annoyed. “It was supposed to be a fucking surprise,” he grumbled.

“Why in hell would that be a surprise?” Dani asked him.

“Because this hot girl tells me this morning that she might want me to be her boyfriend,” he explained in a breathless rush. “So I thought maybe I should try to get in shape, maybe get a haircut or something. Make it worth her while, ‘cause she’s the kind of girl who normally wouldn’t look at me twice.”

Dani’s throat closed around the words, making her stammer and stutter. “Rabbit, I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t say anything,” he said flatly. “I just... y’know what? Never mind. It was stupid. I’m gonna cancel.”

“Don’t you dare,” Dani said. “Rabbit, I’m not making fun of you. Really, I’m not. I just... I didn’t know you felt like that. I didn’t know you would even consider something like that.”

“Neither did I,” he said. “But that kiss you gave me changed a few things.”

“Obviously.”

“You said I could be your boyfriend, and I *wanted* that, Dani. More than I’ve wanted anything in a long, long time,” he said. “But then I looked at myself in the mirror, y’know, and I thought, maybe I could make her want to be my girlfriend every bit as much. I don’t know if I can. I mean, I’m probably never gonna be some Calvin Klein underwear model, but I can at least drop a few pounds, maybe comb my hair every once in a while.”

Dani’s eyes welled up. “That is the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard, Tommy,” she said softly.

“Well, don’t judge until we see some results, okay? I might be the king of ‘what you see is what you get,’” he said, defeat in his voice.

“I don’t mind that,” Dani told him. “I like what I see, okay?”

“Yeah,” Rabbit told her. “Maybe it’s me that doesn’t.”

“You don’t have to…”

He cut her off. “I know I don’t have to. I *want* to.”

“You’ve already done so much for me and Charlotte.”

“I did that for Daniel and Charles,” he corrected. “This is what I’m doing for Danielle. The first thing I’m doing for Danielle. You see the difference?”

“No,” Dani said, “but it’s enough that *you* see it.”

“Good enough,” he said. “So, see you later?”

“Yeah,” she said.

“Okay. You two be careful,” he told her.

“We will,” Dani said. “Have fun, okay?”

“I doubt it, but I’ll try,” he said. “Maybe Barrientos can give me some of those performance enhancers, then I can do this in a fucking week and not have to keep going back.”

Dani laughed. “You really are sweet, Tommy, I hope you know that.”

“I like that *you* know that,” he told her. “That’s plenty for now.”

She looked at the phone wistfully as she thumbed the “End Call” button on the touchscreen with a soft click of her acrylic fingernail against the tempered glass.

Charli leaned against a wall, regarding her own manicure with *faux* patience, waiting for her sister to slip her phone back into her purse and wipe the silly smile from her face before stepping into her path, crossing her arms defiantly beneath her budding breasts.

“So, he’s ‘Tommy’ now?” Charli accused. “Start talking, bitch.”

Dani made a lengthy confession to her sister on the long walk back to the car, starting out slightly ashamed but giving way to fierce pride by the end of the story. Charli seemed more upset that Dani hadn’t told her straight away than anything else, even smiling and melting a little at the more romantic parts of the story, particularly Dani’s description of their morning kiss.

“Look, Dani, I don’t want us to be *those* kinds of sisters,” Charli said. “Not like my real sister. You keep secrets from me, that’s where we’re headed.”

“Why is who I kiss so important?” Dani asked, clicking and clacking on her heels across the sidewalk in a rush, finally catching sight of their car in the lot ahead.

“Because it *is*, okay?” Charli said in exasperation. “Because I want it to be important, just like I want it to be important to you who I kiss, okay? Because that’s the kind of sister I want to have, and the kind of sister I want to be.”

Dani stopped short, facing Charli. “You’re yelling at me,” she said. “You never yell at me.”

“Well, I’m sorry,” Charli said, blotting tears. “I just feel really strongly about this.”

“I can tell,” Dani said. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

Charli sniffed, looking intently at the toe of her shoe. “I guess so, yeah.”

Dani put a hand on Charli’s slender forearm and squeezed a little. “I love you, too,” she said softly.

Charli started to sob a little. “It’s just, my sister... she has a boyfriend... and... why wouldn’t I... be the very first person... you thought about telling?”

“I’m sorry, Charli, really. I was so freaked out, and I didn’t know what I felt about it, and confused...”

Charli launched herself into Dani’s arms, sobbing heavily and wrapping her tight, saving Dani from toppling backwards off of her skyscraper heels. Dani smoothed her sister’s hair, slick and bunny-soft from the salon blowout and smelling pleasantly of tea tree oil and her favorite perfume, rocking her gently back and forth.

“I do love you,” she murmured wetly into Dani’s cleavage. “I even loved you before we got changed. Everything I did back then was trying to get you to love me.”

Dani shushed her softly. “I know that now, baby. Shh. It’s okay. I know it now.”

“I just want my sister to like me,” she bawled.

“Honey... honey, I *do* like you. I *love* you. You’re my best friend,” Dani told her, her own eyes wet. “You were right when you said I never listened to you, back then. I didn’t. Too proud, I guess. But ever since we changed, and I stopped being mad at you... Charli, sweetheart, I’d’ve been *lost* without you. Every idea you’ve had, every direction you’ve suggested has been fucking *gold*. You’re so smart, honey. So brave. You’re the *perfect* little sister. Our whole cover story is yours. You’ve been my guardian angel.”

“Dani... I don’t...”

“Shh,” she soothed, “it’s okay, baby. Don’t worry. You don’t have to try so hard. I *do* love you. I really am your sister, you don’t have to make me that way. Not any more. I love being your sister. I *want* to be your sister.”

“I want that, too,” Charli blubbered.

“Well, you don’t have to want it,” Dani told her, smiling into her sister’s soft hair. “It’s true. You already have it. And I *will* do more. Tell you my secrets. What scares me, what excites me. I’ll be the kind of sister you want. I want that, too, okay?”

“Good,” Charli said, squeezing her tight enough to steal her breath before letting go and trying to compose herself.

Dani dug out a compact mirror from her purse and passed it over. “Oh, baby, look at you. You’re a mess.”

Charli wiped her eyes, carefully avoiding poking herself with her long nails. “I didn’t bring any makeup to fix it,” she said weakly.

Dani wrapped her in the crook of her arm and led her towards the car. “You can borrow some of mine, it’s not much, but...”

“I like that, Dani,” Charli said, leaning her head against Dani’s shoulder as they walked. “Borrowing my sister’s makeup.”

“Yeah,” Dani said. “I felt the same thing.”

“Can I also borrow that cute white skirt you bought yesterday?” Charli asked hopefully, brightening a bit.

“What, the leather one? I don’t know about *that*...”

Charli gave her a playful little shove. “Bitch.”

“Get in the car,” Dani bade. “You don’t want anyone seeing you like that.”

Charli nodded. “Probably not.”

“Besides, you need to look hot,” Dani told her. “You’re about to apply for a summer job.”

“Do *what* now?”

They managed to repair Charli’s destroyed makeup back into its pristine, glamorous state in the car, using the small supply of touch-up cosmetics in Dani’s purse. The two sisters pulled out onto the streets, slow due to the lunch rush and the increased pedestrian traffic. Dani stopped just outside the warehouse district at a big-box chain store, long enough to buy a tube of long-wear matte lipstick (something Charli needed but Dani hadn’t put in her touch-up supply) and a matching lip liner, a box of nine-millimeter bullets from their sporting goods counter, and a fresh pack of cigarettes. On a giggling whim, she purchased the super-slim variety favored by club girls, the kind referred to in his male life as “chick sticks.” Dani even got a pack for her younger sister.

Charli tore into the cigarettes gratefully when she received them, ripping the cellophane and pulling out the foil liner inside, hanging one in her mouth and fumbling for her matches. Dani handed her a disposable lighter, wishing to save her sister’s manicure, wrapped in a cute leopard-print pattern. Charli lit up gratefully, drawing deeply of the smoke and letting it out in a slow trickle.

“There are sexy,” Charli said, looking at the smoldering white cylinder between her fingers.

"I thought so," Dani confirmed.

"Good thing my big sister's cool enough to buy them for me," Charli said with a flash of pride.

"Yeah, you have that bitch pretty much wrapped around your little finger," Dani chuckled.

"She's pretty much a pushover. Oh, great. Thanks for the lipstick," she said, looking through the bag. She reapplied her lip color, taking time to line like she'd learned at the makeup salon yesterday, giving her mouth a sexy little pout. Dani busied herself threading nine-millimeter rounds into the magazine of her sister's new pistol, loading the weapon and passing it back to her sister butt-first. Charli checked the safety and the magazine expertly before tucking it back into her purse.

She looked in the bottom of the purse with a faraway smile. "Ever really look in there, Dani?"

"What, your purse?"

"Or yours," Charli said. "Kinda funny, what collects in there."

"Yeah," Dani said. "I thought it seemed like I had a whole makeup aisle in mine, but turns out I just have the bare minimum."

"Little chick smokes," Charli chuckled.

"I need to add a hairbrush," Dani confessed.

"And I need a little mirror like yours," Charli told her.

"Keep that one," Dani told her, "I have another one at home."

"Won't be too long before we're gonna have to drop a couple extra tampons in there," Charli said softly.

Dani sighed. "Trying not to think about that."

"It won't be long, at the rate we're going," Charli said. "Hey, why are you smiling?"

Dani sat back against the cheap cloth seat. "It just hit me what that means," she said dreamily.

"What, tampons?"

"Yeah," Dani said. "Tampons. Tampons mean periods. Periods mean menstrual cycle. Menstrual cycle means..."

"Means what?"

"It means I can have babies, Charli," Dani said.

Charli closed her eyes. "Wow," she breathed. "I should totally be freaked out thinking about that."

"Yeah, so should I," Dani said. "But I just feel..."

"Happy," Charli said. "Really fucking happy."

"Talk about a one-eighty," Dani laughed. "This time last week, the thought of having a kid creeped me out and made me all twitchy. Now, though..."

"I'm not in any rush, that's for sure," Charli confessed.

“Well, duh. You’re thirteen. You get pregnant now, you become an after-school special.”

“But the thought makes me go all squishy inside,” Charli said.

Dani let out a long breath. “We need to talk about something else,” she said. “This is making me think of shit I shouldn’t be thinking about right now.”

“You’d make a fantastic mommy,” Charli told her.

“Shut up, bitch, you’re gonna make me cry,” Dani said. “And you’ll be that aunt every kid wants, the one who’ll sneak you into R-rated movies and give you ice cream for breakfast. But not right now. Now, we gotta concentrate.”

“Right,” Charli said.

“So, you got your story straight for when we get there?” Dani asked, starting the engine.

“Standard stuff, like it has been,” Charli said. “No parents, older sister takes care of me. We’re running out of insurance money to live on. I need something part-time, after school, just to help you make ends meet.”

“Good,” Dani said. “Close enough to the truth.”

“You think I can pull it off?”

“It doesn’t matter if you do or not,” Dani told her. “All you really need to do is get behind the counter, look at their reservation system. Act cute and dumb, boys love to show off for clueless girls. Get them to show you how it works, if you have to, but find out what night and what time Barrientos is going out.”

“And then text you and Rabbit as soon as I know,” she said.

“Otherwise, don’t sweat the little shit,” Dani cautioned. “Even if you nail it, and they offer you the job, you don’t have to take it. We only need to get a look at their reservations.”

“And you’re gonna be there?” Charli asked.

“Yeah, I was thinking so,” Dani said. “Kinda looks better if your guardian is there, saying it’s okay for you to work part-time, right?”

“Yeah.”

“And that means I’ll be in the bar waiting to back you up on your cover story.”

“Don’t you think we look a little upscale for a couple girls trying to make ends meet?” Charli asked.

“Well, what if I work for a department store or something?” Dani offered. “I get sample sizes for free or something. That would explain it.”

“Yeah, cool,” Charli said. “You know something? We’re pretty good at this.”

“That remains to be seen,” Dani told her warningly.

“I’m just saying,” Charli went on. “We could make some money doing this, when this is over.”

“I’m not sure I want to be a criminal any more,” Dani told her.

“It doesn’t have to be illegal,” Charli countered. “We can solve people’s problems.”

“Or we can find you an agent and let you be a model like you mentioned,” Dani said.

“Yeah, there’s that,” Charli laughed.

Dani found a place on the sidewalk to park, sandwiched between two giant cowboy-wannabe diesel pickups. She started to make a joke about parallel parking *far* too well for a real girl but decided it wasn’t that funny, so she held it back. Charli straightened her clothing and took a last little primp in the pull-down mirror behind the sun visor before popping a breath mint and getting out of the car.

“You ready, Charli?” Dani asked cheerfully.

“Dollar dollar bills, baby,” her sister said, setting off with her resilient, bouncy “cheerleader” stride up the sidewalk towards the upscale movie theater. Dani followed along behind, purse bouncing against her hip, tingling with anticipation of watching her baby sister do her thing.

She just *knew* she would have the theater employees eating out of the palm of her hand in no time.

Charli was *that* kind of girl.

To Be continued...

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Five

By Valerie Hope

THE MOVIE THEATER LOOKED BUSY without actually *being* busy. Weekday matinées didn't attract much business, but the staff bustled around preparing for the night crowd where they generated most of their money. Dani made sure to walk behind her sister, letting Charli be the center of attention as best she could, given that Dani's effortless centerfold glamour and her eye-catching figure drew most of the male gazes.

A young hipster type, with the requisite horn-rims and bushy beard beneath the carefully-coifed hair, stepped up to the counter as they approached. His eyes betrayed naked lust as they ran across Dani's body and face, but he forced himself to focus on Charli once she tapped her French-manicured acrylic nails on the counter.

"Can I help you?" the young man said. "You here for a show?"

"Actually, I need to talk to a manager or something," Charli said. "I'm Charlotte Mayfield, I applied online for a job here?"

"Oh! Yeah, one sec... Frank's around here somewhere," the young man said, looking around. He waved above his head, attracting the attention of a lanky but devilishly attractive mid-twenties man with dark wavy hair and a disarming smile. He put down a tray of clean glasses he carried towards the bar and walked over, looking the girls over as he came without making it too obvious.

"Hi, can I help y'all with something?" he asked in a sexy baritone, folding his hands behind his back just *perfectly* to show off his sleek, toned biceps. Danielle found herself touching up her hair unconsciously.

"Hi, I'm Charlotte Mayfield, I applied for a job here?" Charli said, extending her hand palm downwards.

"Oh, right!" he replied, taking her hand but running his eyes over Dani. "Kevin told me you might be dropping by. I'm Frank. And this is..?"

Dani extended her own hand, which he took in a silken grip that quickened her pulse considerably. "Danielle," she said. "I'm Charli's older sister."

"Nice to meet you both," Frank said. "I'm not sure what we can do for you job-wise, Charli, to be honest. You're too young to work around the bar – state law and all that. Other than taking tickets, which doesn't pay a whole lot, there's not a whole lot for somebody your age to do around here."

Charli looked wide-eyed and wounded. "Seriously? I *really* need something."

Frank gave her his whole attention then, making Charli the one to unintentionally touch up her hair. "Why's that?" he asked.

Charli cleared her throat. “Well, um... Dani takes care of us,” she explained.

“Why’s that?” Frank asked.

“No choice,” Dani explained. “We lost our parents a couple years back. Car accident.”

“Oh, man, I’m really sorry,” Frank said, putting a hand on Charli’s shoulder. Dani watched her little sister lean into the touch a little bit before catching herself.

“It’s okay,” Charli said. “We managed pretty good on the insurance, but it doesn’t last forever, y’know? Dani’s working herself to death, and I feel like I should be helping out.”

“And it’s okay with you, Dani? Your little sister taking a job so young?”

Dani shrugged. “I’m not *thrilled* about it, but she’s right,” she said. “I mean, of *course* I wish she could just focus on school and that kinda thing.”

“I get it,” Frank said. “It’s stupid cool of you both, looking out for each other like this.”

“She’s my sister,” Dani said proudly. “What else am I gonna do?”

Frank chuckled. “My brother won’t even lend me gas money,” he said. “You’re both really lucky to have each other.”

Dani gave her sister a fond side-hug. “I know I’m lucky,” she said. “Charli’s the best.”

Frank bade them follow him with a gesture. The girls fell in behind him quickly, eager for a long look at Frank’s superlative backside on display in his tight jeans. It didn’t disappoint. Charli fanned herself ostentatiously and mouthed *oh my God* to her sister, then mimed grabbing motions at around butt level. Dani stifled a laugh and slapped her sister’s hands down, trying to be the grown-up in the equation.

“He’s probably a self-absorbed douche,” Dani whispered to her sister. “Guys like him usually are.”

Charli twirled a lock of hair around one manicured finger. “Not talking about marrying him, Dani,” she whispered back. “Just want to watch him do pull-ups.”

Frank led them into a small, cluttered office, obviously curious about their whispered conversation but at least classy enough not to pry. *Besides*, Dani thought wryly, *a guy that hot probably already knows exactly what a couple of girls might be whispering behind his back.*

“I wasn’t kidding when I said there’s not a whole lot I can do for you,” Frank said. “We split time here, between waiting tables and manning the counter. There isn’t really a dedicated ticket taker job. I’d basically have to create you one.”

“Well, wouldn’t that mean more tips for your other employees?” Charli asked.

Frank laughed. “Good point,” he said. “Didn’t think of that. How often could you work?”

Charli sat down in a chair across from him while Dani leaned against the door jamb behind her, trying to fade into the background as best she could. “At least three nights a week,” Charli told him. “Fridays and Saturdays for sure, and probably Wednesdays, too. I have stuff going on at school on the other nights.”

“What kind of stuff?” Frank asked.

Charli hadn't prepared for that, but she covered beautifully. "Well, I volunteer on Mondays at the animal shelter and I have cheerleading and dance class on Tuesday nights after school," she said, pulling a lock of her hair across her upper lip coquettishly. "Thursdays is Dani's and my movie night, and I don't want to wreck that."

"You cheer? Cool. My sister cheered. Madison High," Frank said. "Won't you have games on Fridays?"

Charli hesitated, unsure of how to cover the lie. Dani stepped in by saying, "She doesn't think she's gonna make the squad this year. I know she is, but she seems to think she's gonna mess up the tryout."

Frank smiled. "You ought to have more faith in yourself than that," he cautioned. "But football season isn't that long. You could pick up Fridays in late November, right?"

"Unless we make the playoffs," Charli said. "Assuming I make the squad."

"You've been practicing all summer long," Dani said lovingly. "You're *gonna* make it."

"Listen to your sister," Frank said. "And Sundays?"

"I could only work during the days," Charli said. "Probably wouldn't even be worth it, but I have to clean house and stuff on Sundays."

"Right, cool," Frank said. "So, you want to take a look around?"

"Sure," Charli said brightly, bouncing up from her seat. "I'd love that."

Frank stood lithely and poked his head through the doorway, granting himself an excuse to pass very close to Dani in the process, and gestured for another employee. A slightly rotund teenager with a just-this-side-of-out-of-control mop of ginger curls responded to Frank's summons.

"Charli, this is Tony," Frank said. "Tony, Charli here might be coming to work for us. Can you show her around the front desk, kinda show her how things work?"

"Sure," the boy said, completely besotted with the young, flirtatious Charli. She gave him a flirtatious little back-and-forth twist with her hands behind her back, accompanied with a suggestive little smile.

"Follow me," he said, flustered.

Charli pressed her advantage, taking his arm and pressing her budding breasts into his upper arm. "So, your name is Tony?" she asked him. "Do you like working here?"

Dani watched her walk away in wonder, already gathering other young boys in a flock around her as she plied her flirtatious magic to incredible effect.

She didn't notice how close to her Frank drew up from behind until she smelled his cologne and could almost sense the warmth of him against her back. Wetness began to flow inside her from his proximity alone.

"She's pretty spectacular," Frank commented, watching Charli wrap boy after boy after boy around her little finger with practiced ease.

"She amazes the shit out of me," Dani said fondly. She turned to face him, backing up a step, hoping to attenuate his intoxicating effect on her with a little distance.

“They might be a while,” Frank chuckled. “Especially if they each take a turn trying to impress her.”

Almost on cue, Charli’s loud giggle rang across the carpeted lobby. She leaned into another boy, patting his arm, saying “Oh my *God*, you are so funny!” Dani felt a bigger surge of pride. The boys led her behind the counter, opening up the ticketing and reservation system for her just as they’d planned while she looked on with wide-eyed innocence.

“You want a drink or something in the meantime?” Frank asked.

Dani looked at him suggestively through her eyelashes and toyed with a strand of her platinum blonde hair. “Sure, that would be great,” she said.

He led her to the bar – not set up for customers but for waitstaff – and hopped over the counter nimbly. “What can I get you?” he asked.

“Chardonnay, if you got it,” Dani said.

“Ooh, very classy. I like a wine girl,” he commented. He poured her a drink and set it down in front of her, watching her almost uncomfortably closely as she took a sip.

“So, you think you’ll hire my sister?” Dani asked.

“Direct and to the point,” Frank said. “Honestly, I have to think about it. There’s a lot of hassle involved with hiring somebody her age, even with your permission.”

“I understood that as long as I sign off, there shouldn’t be a problem,” Dani said.

“There’s taxes, that kind of stuff to think about,” Frank said.

Dani saw something dark flash in Frank’s blue eyes, something supremely self-absorbed and manipulative, but not entirely unpleasant. She responded to it with a different kind of desire, something beyond the purely physical attraction she felt towards him. More of a meeting of equals. A reflection of the darkness she felt inside herself.

She fixed him with a level look, as appraising and hungry as the ones he’d given her. “It sounds like you’d do it if somebody was willing to, um, *convince* you a little.”

His eyes widened almost imperceptibly, but then took on that hard, dark edge from before.

“What did you have in mind?”

Dani set her wine glass down carefully, then traced a casual circle on the back of Frank’s hand with a long, French-manicured nail. “You got a storage room around here someplace? With a door that locks?”

Dani actually didn’t like the kissing. Frank’s approach *took* more than it gave, completely unlike the kiss she received from Rabbit. He pawed at her, groping and acquisitive, like Dani constituted some kind of possession. A part of her didn’t mind being a *conquest* at all, but it certainly didn’t make her feel loved or even particularly *wanted*.

She finally thrust her chin upwards and let Frank kiss her neck, anything to keep him away from her lips. His level of attractiveness faded as he showed his selfishness and urgency – not like Rabbit, who treated kissing her like a treasure, and took his time to savor every moment – but the level of barefaced *want* swelling inside Dani’s belly more than replaced it.

“You gonna hire my sister or what?” she breathed, running her hand down his inseam and stroking him roughly through the tight denim.

“I still need some convincing,” Frank rasped.

Giving him a hungry leer, Dani licked her lips and sank to her knees slowly. Her long fingers nimbly worked at the studded leather belt, and snug button and zipper on his jeans beneath. She had a little trouble releasing the fastening with her long nails, but managed to get his jeans open without breaking one. She tugged down on his waistband and he sprang free. A respectably-sized penis – about the size that Dani’s own had been before the transformation – bobbed gently in time with his pulse, inches in front of her nose.

Dani swallowed hard, feeling a sudden flush of panic run across the tops of her breasts. She had seen penises before, in locker rooms and between her own legs, but never before from this particular angle. Something about having one *pointing* at her brought up uncertainty and fear, borne from her male life. She fought it down, grabbing the subtly dancing organ by the root with both hands, staring into its single vertical eye until the fear abated.

Looking up at him – remembering how sexy she thought it was when girls looked up when they did this to him, ages ago – and licking her lips, she kissed the tip gently and then laved it in a lazy circle with her tongue, dragging her tongue stud across the sensitive flesh and making him gasp a little. Trading it from hand to hand, she used her lips and tongue to coat it generously with spit and smeared lipstick, then opened her mouth wide and took a generous amount of his length into her soft mouth.

He tasted musky, salty, not unpleasant at all. Dani liked the soft throb of him inside her mouth. She gave a little moan, just to “sell” it to him, and pushed him a little deeper inside. He put a hand on the back of her head, becoming a little insistent, and she pulled away, giving him a teasingly level glance.

“Easy, there, cowboy,” she warned teasingly. “Let *me* drive, okay?”

He removed his hand, but a lingering promise that he would put it back whenever he damn well pleased hung in the air between them. She forestalled that sense of menace by pumping her lips up and down his length, sucking wetly, making him *thump* against the wall and the muscles in his thighs stiffen. Dani ran her hands over those taut muscles greedily. She didn’t particularly like what she saw *inside* Frank, but she could definitely distract herself from that by liking what she saw on the *outside*.

She moaned deeper, trying to force more of his length into her throat with each thrust, using her hands to stroke his length in counterpoint. When she needed to pause for breath, she would stroke him in twisting motions – something she’d *loved* when she had a cock of her own – and teasingly lick his balls with the tip of her tongue. He moaned and stiffened beneath her, trying to thrust himself deeper, but Dani governed him with her hands. His hand came to rest on the back of her head twice more, each time earning a gentle rebuke before she returned to her ministrations.

A part of Dani worried that Frank would only consider this foreplay, like some porno fantasy he might carry around in his mind. She wasn’t entirely sure she *could* be penetrated – her pussy seemed complete but she hadn’t had the opportunity to explore since discovering it that morning. But a fierce determination solidified inside her heart that she would *not* give her first penetration – her *virginity* – to anyone but Rabbit.

Luckily, Frank's innate self-centeredness asserted itself, causing him to buck against her tongue and begin thrusting into her mouth in short, sharp jabs that overpowered her hands' ability to hold him in place. She picked up speed with her strokes, willing her hands to pull the release out of him from its root while she trapped the head between her soft lips and teased with her tongue, making encouraging little moans and squeals.

He began to grunt, softly, in a rising arpeggio, going completely rigid. Frightened of her reaction to the taste, she popped him out of her mouth and stroked frantically, watching the hot jets of semen erupt from the tip to fall between them, splattering on the concrete floor wetly.

Frank sagged against the wall, moaning softly. "Oh, wow," he panted. "Oh, God."

Subtly, Dani knee-walked over the little puddles of cum on the floor, covering them with her body. She rightly assumed that Frank had no idea where he actually came, so she licked her lips and swallowed deeply to convince him that she'd swallowed his load dutifully.

"Mmm," she said softly. "So, about my sister..."

"Hired," he panted, eyes closed. "Totally hired."

"Good, glad to hear it," Dani said, rising carefully to her feet – more difficult than it looked in platforms – and pressing herself against him. He shied a bit from the contact – *typical*, Dani thought, *will take a blowjob but won't cuddle afterwards* – and straightened, tugging up his boxers and jeans and working on his belt and fly.

"Yeah," Frank said. "And if you ever think she needs a raise, call me."

Dani fought back a response along the lines of *you selfish dick* and substituted a smile instead. "Yeah, it'll have to be more than a couple cents an hour, if you expect treatment like that."

He chuckled richly, running a hand along the side of her neck and down to her shoulder. Oddly, even his raw physical attractiveness made Dani *want* his touch any more. She struggled not to flinch away. He unlocked the storage room door and stepped out. Dani waited a little while before she followed, stealing a napkin from the bar to surreptitiously clean Frank's cum from her knees and shins while she made a pretense of finishing her wine.

Frank made himself scarce, vanishing into the back to avoid awkwardness after their encounter. Dani didn't mind, finding herself wanting to be as far from him as she could. Luckily, she knew more about herself than she had before and didn't consider her exploration to be any kind of a betrayal of what she felt towards Rabbit.

Charli left the front counter, wiggling her fingers over one shoulder in a flirtatious wave at the knot of well-besotted boys behind her, saying "Thanks! I'll text you!" as she walked away in her peppy, bouncing stride.

"How'd it go?" Dani asked.

"Got it," she said. "Didn't you get my text?"

Dani blushed. "I was a little busy," she confessed. "I'll tell you later, 'kay?"

"Sure," Charli said. "Man, I need some higher heels. I *hate* feeling like everybody's taller than me."

Dani set down her wineglass and got to her feet. “Let’s just get out of here, ‘kay, sweetie?” Dani said nervously. “I need a cigarette. And a breath mint.”

“OhmyGod, Dani, you *blew* him?” Charli exclaimed, half-laughing and half-scandalized in the passenger seat, blowing smoke out the window as they began the hour-long drive back to Rabbit’s suburban refuge.

“I dunno, I felt like I needed to,” Dani said shyly.

“Dani, honey, I didn’t want the job that *bad*,” she said. “Or at all, really. All I needed was a look at the computer, not for my sister to give the boss head so I’d get hired.”

“I know, I know,” Dani said. “Don’t remind me.”

“Y’know, you can just admit that you thought he was hot,” Charli teased, “and that you *wanted* to blow him.”

Dani sighed, taking a drag off her own cigarette. “I thought that was obvious,” she said. “And I thought I did want to blow him. Until I started. Then – I dunno how to explain it, Charli, but I got this *sense* of how selfish he was, how he was only using you to get to me, and he just got... *disgusting* to me.”

“I don’t know how you could ever consider that yummy little piece of meat disgusting,” Charli said. “Hell, if I was five years older, then *I’d* blow him, job or no job.”

“Don’t sound like a whore,” Dani cautioned.

“Hey, it was good enough for you,” Charli half-accused, half-teased.

Dani’s lip trembled a little bit and she fought back a snuffle. Charli saw it and her entire demeanor changed. “Oh, God, Dani,” she breathed, gripping her sister’s forearm. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean...”

“I’m a fucking drug dealer, Char,” Dani nearly wailed. “I just sucked off a guy to get my sister a job she didn’t even want. I bought an illegal gun for my underage sister, like, three hours ago. I’m planning a fucking *kidnapping*! And I don’t want it! I don’t want *any* of it!”

“What *do* you want, Dani?” Charli asked gently, eyes welling along with her sister’s.

“This is gonna sound so weird,” Dani sniffled. “I wanna be a *good girl*.”

“That doesn’t sound weird at all,” Charli said.

“I guess it was all that talk this afternoon about babies,” Dani went on, wiping her eyes carefully with her long nails. The gesture seemed natural now, nothing awkward about it. Like she’d worn nails that long her entire life. “I can’t be bad any more, Charli. Not if I ever want to be a mommy.”

“Why not?”

“I can’t leave a baby at home, or a kid, if I’m in jail for slinging dope on a street corner. I can’t bring strange guys home, a different one every night. I have to clean up my act.”

“But we don’t know if that’s ever even gonna happen,” Charli protested.

“What if I *want* it to?”

“Dani, honey, you have to relax about this,” Charli soothed. “We’re in a bad spot. We have to do what’s necessary. Now, I know what you’re gonna say, that’s what every criminal says, but in our case it’s true, not a cop-out or an excuse to just do whatever the fuck we want. Neither of us want to do this. We don’t want to kidnap Barrientos, we don’t want to force him to talk, none of it. We don’t have a choice.”

“You’re right,” Dani said, composing herself visibly. “I know you’re right.”

“Damn right I am,” Charli teased gently. “But I hate to see you so messed up, Dani. Really.”

“I’m okay,” she breathed, then stronger, “I’m okay.”

“We’ve been through a crazy amount of shit the last three days,” Charli said. “It’s only logical to think we’d lose it, every now and then. The drugs might be keeping us from screaming in the streets, but it’s still got to come out of us somehow.”

“Like blowing a complete stranger in a storeroom when you didn’t need to?”

“Blowing a really *hot* stranger,” Charli corrected playfully. “Look, I get it. I would’ve done it, too, if it was, I dunno, legal. You wanted to, so you did it. You’re a healthy, red-blooded girl.”

“Only for three days,” Dani said.

“Like that matters,” Charli said. “And you’re hot as sin, babe. Seriously. We joke about me being a model, but you could totally do it, too. Probably get yourself famous. Guys have been throwing themselves at you since you changed.”

“I haven’t wanted them to,” Dani sniffled.

“Tough,” Charli told her. “You’re stuck with it. Same as I am. You say you don’t want to be noticed, but then you climb up on some giant high heels and wear the tightest clothes you can find and dye your hair so blonde you can’t look straight at it in the sun. Admit it, Dani, you *do* want to be noticed. You *like* it when the boys look. You’re trying to *make* them look.”

Dani hung her head. “You’re right,” she said.

“Honey, don’t you see? I’m trying to make them look, too,” she said. “I cannot tell you how bad I wish I wasn’t thirteen right now. How every cute guy I see is totally off-limits. I want to be doing the same thing you did in that storeroom. But I *can’t*. But I can’t stop the wanting to.”

“I’m sorry, Charli, I didn’t know...”

“Of course you didn’t,” Charli said. “I haven’t said a word. Not even to myself, really. I’ve just been biting my lip a lot to keep you from hearing me squeal under the covers at night.”

Dani laughed. “I thought your fingers looked a little pruny,” she teased.

“I keep telling myself, ‘don’t be jealous.’ So she had a dick in her mouth before you got to. That doesn’t mean you never will,” Charli said. “I have to wait, so I will. Don’t put yourself in the same trap, Dani. You’re free. You can do those kinds of things and you don’t have to stop yourself. So don’t. ‘Cause it fucking *sucks*.”

Dani sighed. “I just feel so out of control right now.”

Charli took a last drag from her skinny little girlie-cigarette and tossed it out the window. “You and me both, sister,” she said. “But we’ll get it together. That’s what this whole Barrientos thing is

all about. We're going to get ourselves some answers, and then we can make a plan. Once we have that, we'll be back in control again."

"I have my doubts, Charli," Dani said. "I feel like it's our only play."

"So we play," Charli said.

"I just wish there were other choices," Dani told her.

"Sure, me too," Charli said. "Those girls at the mall the other day. They're my friends. Dani, I've never had friends before. They text me, like, out of the blue. Ask me what I'm doing. Tell me random shit. I get to walk around feeling like people care about me, for the first time in my life."

"That must be wonderful," Dani said.

"It is," Charli said. "But if this shit with Barrientos goes wrong, or we find out these drugs have side effects and we're going to grow a second head or something – that means I never get to go to high school next year with them. I never get to *actually* try out for the cheerleading squad or be in the yearbook. I'll never get to give that first blowjob, or ask my big sister the super-slut how to do it right. We both have a brand new life ahead of us, and we both have it *all* to lose."

"That's actually what scares me the most," Dani confessed. "I'm not afraid to lose all that stuff. But I can't stand the thought of losing my little sister."

"Yeah," Charli said. "I start crying when I think about that."

"So what do we do?" Dani asked.

"We play the hand we got dealt, Dani," Charli told her. "We grab up Barrientos and we get some answers, just like we planned. It's like you said, it's the only play we have. So we play it to win."

"Right," Dani said. "Y'know, you're pretty smart for a spoiled little thirteen-year-old brat."

"You love me, bitch," Charli teased.

"I really, really do," Dani said.

The little red Chevy finally exited the freeway and out into the relative safety of suburbia. Dani pulled into a little parking lot outside of a generic strip mall, taking a few moments to repair her face and salvage what she could of the morning's makeup. Charli thought about teasing her, poking fun at her sister for wanting to look fresh and glamorous for her *boyfriend*, but decided the better of it. She opted for encouragement, instead, telling Dani how pretty she looked.

They threaded across the largely-empty surface streets into the secluded neighborhood where Rabbit lived. By the time they reached the little cul-de-sac, Dani's composure returned. She exited the car and walked to the front door with the customary, almost *trademark* self-assured strut, made all the more sexy by her towering heels.

Dani began the arduous process of unlocking all the deadbolts on the door – Rabbit's paranoia demanded a minimum of six per entry – with the three separate keys, fumbling a bit with her long manicure but managing. Charli tapped her toe impatiently behind her, wanting to escape back into the air-conditioning from the heat of the day.

They stepped inside to a strange scene. Rabbit's house – well-maintained, serviceable, but never what one might call *tidy* – underwent a radical transformation in their absence. The bundled newspapers and boxes no longer cluttered the hallways and living area. A worn-looking but still

attractive throw-rug spread beneath the mismatched furniture on the freshly-swept and mopped laminate floors. Even some faded drapes hung from rods above the living room windows now, and a vase containing a few assorted flowers adorned the kitchen table. Rabbit's usual chaotic "filling system" now resided in neat piles on the antique rolltop desk in the corner. He'd even hung a picture, a non-descript pastoral scene in a plain wooden frame – above the television.

"Wow," Charli said. "That must've been *some* kiss."

Dani couldn't keep the amused smile from her face. "Oh my God," she breathed, turning in a slow circle to take it all in. "I... I don't know... he... Charli... this is so fucking *sweet*."

"I know, right?" her sister agreed. She disappeared down the hallway. Dani looked around a bit more, amazed and delighted, until the sound of Charli's happy squeal echoed down the hallway.

Dani hustled into the guest room, only to find Charli kneeling on the little twin bed opposite Dani's own. Brass headboards now crowned the metal frames, and softly inviting duvets with a little floral *motif* covered them, with matching pillowcases and dust ruffles. A little crystal vase with more flowers sat on the night-table between the beds. A dressing table, complete with a mirror and velvet-seated stool lay tucked in the corner, with an old-fashioned jewelry box on top, one of the kind that popped up with a little plastic ballerina that spun in a lazy circle when opened.

"This is *amazing*, he even got me a teddy bear, look!" Charli giggled, holding up a white stuffed animal holding a little satin heart. "Dani, honey... this boy has it for you *bad*."

Dani couldn't quit smiling – and she both suspected and feared it might be a *loving* smile – as she ran her fingers across the new additions. "I know," she said. "I should be freaked out right now."

Charli smiled. "But you aren't."

"Nope."

"You're actually really touched."

"Yep."

"And maybe even a little turned on."

"Right again."

"Because you really like him."

"Afraid so."

"And I think that's really great," Charli said.

Dani sighed. "It's only been three days," she said.

"So make them *good* days, babe," Charli advised. "Hug him. Kiss him. Tell him how much it means to you. And for the love of God, do *not* sleep in that bed tonight."

"I'm not sure I'm ready for that," Dani confessed.

“The second you see him, you will be,” Charli said. “Remember, you’re doing it for both of us... while you’re losing your virginity to a *really* sweet guy, I’m gonna be in here letting my fingers do the walking. *Again.*”

Dani’s little romantic buzz vanished behind a look of purest sympathy. “Now you’re gonna make me feel guilty about it,” she said.

“Hey, my fingers aren’t *all* bad,” Charli said. “It’s pretty fun, actually. Way different from doing it when we were boys. You should try it.”

“I don’t even know if I have a hole down there yet,” Dani confessed.

Charli gasped, wide-eyed. “You mean you haven’t taken that thing for a spin yet?” she marveled. “Girl, what’s the matter with you? Since the second I grew boobs, I haven’t been able to keep my hands off of them. And once I finally had a pussy...”

“...off to the races,” Dani finished for her. “I’ve been pretty preoccupied.”

“Then you need to take a Xanax, drink a glass of wine, and relax. Climb into the bathtub and get yourself off a couple times,” Charli instructed. “You *won’t* be sorry.”

“It’s that different?” Dani asked.

Charli blushed. “No spoilers,” she said teasingly.

Dani’s curiosity finally did get the better of her. She poured herself a glass of wine, ran a steaming hot bath and added fragrant salts – jasmine and lavender. She even went as far as to light a couple candles, setting the cramped bathroom in a decidedly romantic light before lowering her body down into the water by inches, luxuriating in the delicious feel of the slick, oiled water crawling across her sensitive skin.

Niggling little girlish doubts, like hoping the bath didn’t screw up her spray tan or make the ink bleed in her new tattoos, tickled the back of her mind as she sighed deeply. Beads of sweat sprang out on her nose from the steamy water, taking her breath away just slightly and adding to her nervous excitement. She sipped the glass of decently respectable white – surprisingly good, considering its exile in the back of Rabbit’s refrigerator for God knew how long – and stretched muscles she hadn’t known were so tense. The hard porcelain of the tub seemed almost to massage her taut back, and she wiggled back and forth sexily to further loosen the tension.

She began by cupping her youthful, firm breasts, one in each hand. Harsh red lines crossed them, where the cups of her bra dug in during the day. They *had* grown since she purchased the garments, probably pushing a shallow C cup by now. *Not that it matters*, she thought wryly, massaging her breasts lightly with her long-nailed fingers. *I’m probably gonna wind up craving getting big plastic ones anyway, at the rate I’m going.* The thought did make her feel wonderful, and she hesitated to push it aside. Why shouldn’t she want a boob job? Everything about her, from the fake tan to the fake fingernails to the bottle blonde hair, screamed high-maintenance bimbo princess. Drastically inflated lips and gravity-defying silicone breasts only fit the image.

Which would have been fine, if the thought didn’t make her so goddamned *happy*.

Her initial ministrations to her breasts transitioned from massage to caress, and she teased her nipples into erection with the tips of her French manicure. The barest little flick against the proud

pink nubs made her breath catch in her throat, causing her to moan and bite her bottom lip. She easily could have spent an hour just playing with her tits, but the knowing smile on her younger sister's face at the mention of what awaited her down below pushed her hands down her smooth belly – past the still-painful piercing in her belly button – and atop the lightly-furred mound between her legs.

So odd, so foreign, and yet so *desperately* right, that shocking feeling of emptiness between her fingers. Dani's entire life, up until seventy-two hours prior, placing her hands in that vicinity always meant the feeling of warm, slack flesh. Folds and dense hair, sweaty and stuck together, but awaiting any opportunity to change shape, to elongate and harden and make itself insistent. Dani very intently felt the void between her thighs, where pendulous balls swung and adhered to the flesh of the legs, how they itched and moved and took up glorious space, a constant subtle reminder that *you are a man*. Now only smooth, delicate skin stretched across the place where the very fountainhead of her masculinity resided.

Nimble, slender fingers parted the musky, slightly sticky folds of her labia, what had once been her full scrotum, now stretched backwards towards her anus. The warm water flooded in, causing a delighted gasp when it met the exquisitely sensitive flesh beneath. Dani's fingers found the tiny nub of her clitoris, nestled snugly beneath its slick hood, and gave it a few exploratory strokes. Her eyes opened wide in a mixture of shock and disbelief. How could something so small cause her to feel so *much*? An unbelievable, almost *overwhelming* blast of purest sensation flooded through her, traveling along her skin in waves. Dani backed off – the sensation approached *too much* – and instead stroked the flesh around the sensitive little button, causing a much warmer, much more subdued but every bit as pleasurable sensation, one that didn't threaten to explode her mind. She quivered, biting her bottom lip again, and settled into a slow rhythm of lazy circles that seemed to make her melt a little, like her skeleton was no longer completely solid.

She switched the circles to her left hand, keeping up the undercurrent of pleasure, while her right hand quested further. Dani loved the feel of her fingers on her clitoris, but an insistent urge remained to find out if there truly *was* a hole between her legs, leading inside her to her deepest and most intimate recess. Her fingers crept lower, past the little indentation of her urethra and to the puckered opening of her vagina.

Softly, almost hesitantly, she wormed the hard acrylic nail through, taking a long moment to adjust to the completely foreign sensation of being *entered* for the first time. A combination of her natural wetness in response to her arousal and the oiled, scented water made her opening slick and welcoming. Her finger slipped in to the first knuckle, causing sensations to scamper through her body and mind that had no possible analogue to her male experience.

How deep am I? she wondered as the second knuckle disappeared inside, then the third. Dani forced herself into a few gentle contortions to allow better access without losing the contact with her clit, not noticing the speed and pressure of her lazy circles increasing.

Her index finger joined her middle finger, and the stretching sensation gave her the first taste of needing to be *filled*. The purely feminine desire shocked her, almost to the point of stopping, but the pleasure it granted overrode her fear and she began to thrust, very gently. The tips of her extended nails just brushed against a hard little dome inside her belly. Dani's ignorance of the female body – a pussy was only a pussy, before she had one of her own – tried to recall hazy memories of health class, wondering what all her new parts were called. The hard dome – *my cervix*, she recalled suddenly – didn't release more pleasure when touched, but there was

something distinctly sacred about it, something instinctually precious. The gateway to her womb. The entrance to her uterus, where a baby could grow.

Without even realizing it, Dani squealed softly in time with her own thrusting fingers, eyes screwed shut tightly and her breath quickening into raspy pants. She bridged up, raising her aroused pussy above the level of the water by pressing down on her heels. Purely by accident, Dani found a deliciously sensitive spot just beyond the entrance to her vagina, towards the front. By hooking her fingers slightly she could massage it, now aroused to the point where the sharp pressure of her long nails excited her, adding to the sensation. The fingers of her left hand moved fast, abandoning the circles in favor of a quick back-and-forth across the head of the clitoris, her hunger for release now overriding her shyness about its powerful sensation.

“Oh, God,” she breathed, panting. “Oh, *fuck*.”

The pleasure inside her began to build, suffusing her entire body instead of just her sex organs, the way she expected from her male life. It swelled into every part of her, from the roots of her hair to her toenails, even escaping her throat in low moans and high, girlish squeals. It expanded inside her, almost to the point of pain. Dani could imagine it stretching her skin, distorting her. Several times she thought she could take no more, and it showed her a new mountaintop beyond the summit she expected.

With a noise part-scream and part-growl, the pleasure exploded, erasing her mind and causing her to clench and relax simultaneously. Her unknowing stimulation of her g-spot, which she'd done completely by trial and error, made her squirt, ejaculating a thin, salty liquid onto the tiles of the wall where the bathtub taps mounted, a good three feet of distance. She bucked and squirmed, her entire body shuddering for long moments before sinking back beneath the level of the water.

She gasped, eyes wide, unable to fully comprehend what had just happened. So very different from orgasms as a boy. So much better. Dani expected lethargy, even sleepiness to claim her as it always did. Instead, she felt energized, refreshed, renewed. A lazy tickle across the face of her clitoris made her flinch – the sensitivity reverted back to overwhelming again, an almost painful pleasure now – but her body responded, bringing her out in goosebumps. A certainty solidified in her mind – *I'm ready to go again* – and she smiled. So she *could* multiple.

She glanced at the clock on the bathroom wall and gauged roughly how much longer the water would stay warm. With a devilish grin, she sank her hands back beneath the water, beginning the slow thrusts in and out and the lazy circles once more.

To Be continued...

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Six

By Valerie Hope

DANI STAYED IN THE BATH until the water cooled, bringing herself to three more shuddering, mind-bending climaxes in a matter of minutes. A part of her remembered the derision she felt, when she dealt drugs as a male, a lifetime ago, at the pathetic addicts who begged him for their fix. How far above them he felt, how innately *superior*. After the sensation she just experienced, though, Dani revised her opinion of those addicts. Now she knew how good she could feel, her own capacity for pleasure, and now she truly felt what it meant to be addicted to something.

She rose, dripping, from the water on shaky legs. "I need a cigarette," she breathed softly, stepping carefully over the edge of the tub and onto the fluffy bath mat, her muscles like rubber and not to be entirely trusted. She wrapped herself in a towel and shook her platinum hair down from the messy bun atop her head.

Charli slept on the bed in their shared room, her phone still cradled in her manicured hand. Dani smiled at the image of her peacefully sleeping sister, a swell of love and pride at the strong, capable woman whose life emerged inextricably grafted to her own. Dani pulled on a pair of soft black fleece leggings, making her do a sexy little shimmy as she worked them over her butt, and a loose cotton tee over her naked breasts, nipples still erect and sensitive from her self-exploration. She fished cigarettes and matches from her purse and padded outside on bare feet, thinking idly about what color to paint her toenails as she leaned against the side of the house and lit one of the super-skinny ultra-light cigarettes and savored the smoke in her mouth, escaping her lips in a lazy curl.

Unbidden, her ears scanned the ambient noise of the sleepy suburban street, waiting any sound that could foretell the Rabbit's return to the house. Even with the last thirty minutes wiping her brain blank, she never *really* stopped anticipating his homecoming. It scared her and thrilled her in equal parts, this tingling excitement, this *can't wait* attitude, this breathless and giggling waiting for her *boyfriend* to get home. The oh-so-girlish admission that she couldn't wait to see him. To hug him and kiss him, to hold his hand and feel him close.

Jesus, am I in love? she thought with a slight tinge of alarm. *So quickly? I mean, Rabbit's a great guy. I'd trust him with damn near anything. He's the smartest guy I know, and generous to a fault. He was the first person I ever met who I actually thought was kind. He's got a ton going for him, sure, but love? This soon? Is it the drugs talking, or do I really feel this way?*

Dani puffed contentedly, just glowing from the combined sensations of being a woman who just experienced several shuddering orgasms and a woman who just might be very much in love. Anyone seeing her in that moment would be hard-pressed not to have the breath stolen away from their lungs, imprisoned in a moment by her beauty. All the more beautiful because she had no idea how beautiful she was, simply staring happily off into space and twirling a lock of her chalk-white hair around one finger.

I seriously need to get back to my place, as dangerous as that may be, she thought. *I have about twenty grand in cash squirreled away behind my radiator, and probably another grand or so just around the house. More than enough to get me and Charli set up, so we don't have to sponge off of Rabbit like we are.*

She giggled, hugging herself below her breasts in delight. *Or I could blow it all on lip injections and a boob job, maybe getting my teeth whitened. Or some big blingy diamonds or some shit. Maybe a Porsche. I'd look fucking adorable in a white ragtop Porsche.*

She lost herself in some happy daydreams, being a pampered princess dripping with diamonds and designer clothes. She liked the imaginary look of herself all in skin-tight white, to match her hair and contrast against her artificially-tanned skin, every eye on her as she strutted around in her Louboutins while the world around her threw itself beneath her stiletto heels. Only the sound of tires crunching gravel in the front driveway interrupted her happy little fantasy. She took a last, hurried pull from her cigarette and dropped the butt into an empty coffee can Rabbit put beside the back door, then hurried inside.

An all-too-feminine swell of panic suffused her. *He's back,* she thought frantically, *and my hair's a mess and I don't have any makeup on. I dropped all my shit right in the middle of the bedroom floor before I got in the tub, after he spent all day cleaning up for me. He's gonna think I'm a fucking slob!*

She gathered up her discarded clothes in a dead sprint, tossing them into a nearby hamper – *is that new? Did he shop for us?* she thought in passing – and stooped before her new vanity table to finger-comb her dampened hair into some semblance of glamour. She only just managed to line her eyes, even 'nailing' her wings, and brush on a coat of mascara before she heard the long series of deadbolts begin to throw on the door.

Charli stirred, her voice thick with sleep. "Dani? You okay?"

"Yeah, honey, fine," she said a little breathlessly. "Rabbit's home."

"Cool," she said, stretching. Dani couldn't help but notice how her sister's body developed, little budding curves and swells rich with the promise of ripeness to come. Charli showed all the makings of a singularly exquisite woman-to-be.

Dani brushed on a little lip-gloss, hoping she would appeal to Rabbit, and stood, tugging imaginary wrinkles out of her lounging clothes.

"Relax," Charli chided. "You look amazing, Dani. He's gonna flip out when he sees your hair."

"Shit. My hair," she hissed, grabbing her brush and trying to stroke a little shine into it. It snarled painfully in her ends, making rasping sounds as she tried to tug it through.

Charli stood and took the brush from her gently. "God, is this how I'm gonna act when I get a crush on somebody?" she said, rolling her eyes in the way all teenagers must have had locked in their DNA.

"Probably worse," Dani growled.

Charli's fingers danced, pulling Dani's hair into a quick braid that hung down between her shoulderblades, flopping softly as she turned her head to and fro to regard it in the mirror. "Char, that's *incredible*," she told her sister. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"It's not the drugs," Charli said with a smile. "Had to do it for my sister every day before school when we were little. Mom worked, so we all had to help each other get ready. I'm a speed-braider."

"Gonna keep that in mind," Dani said, hearing the last deadbolt snap and taking a deep breath. "You so have to teach me, 'kay?"

"Sure!" Charli piped happily.

Dani pushed her hands downwards in tandem, slowly and deliberately, trying to ground her swelling excitement. "Here goes," she whispered.

Charli wrapped her in a quick hug from behind. "Don't sweat it," she told her. "At the end of the day, he's still your buddy, Rabbit. You'll always have that to work from."

Dani spun in the embrace and stroked her sister's cheek. "I love you."

Charli started, then smiled brightly. "You do?"

"Yeah, I really do," Dani said. "It's not just on paper, y'know. You really *are* my sister."

Charli hugged her again, fiercely this time. "I love you, too," she whispered into Dani's chest.

"Hey, anybody home?" Rabbit called from the other room.

"Dammit," Dani breathed. "I really wanted to be all glammed up when he got home."

"Save it for later," Charli said. "Like your first date. Then blow the top of his head off."

"Yeah," Dani said. "That'll be fun."

Charli raised her voice. "Hey, Rabbit, we'll be out in a second," she answered. Then, more softly, to her sister she said, "You can't hide back here forever, Dani. Get out there and be with him."

Dani nodded. "Yeah. Good idea."

She walked out into the short hallway and into the living room, looking at the large accumulation of paper and plastic sacks deposited in the entryway. The door opened again in a moment to admit Rabbit once more, loaded with another double-handful of sacks. He stood, knuckling his back and rubbing the back of his neck with alternate hands.

"Oh my God, Rabbit, *look* at you!" Dani squealed, clapping her hands and bouncing on her toes. Her perpetually-disheveled friend looked around at her voice, showing off his new haircut and meticulously-trimmed beard. He wore new, more stylish glasses that didn't cast his kind, expressive eyes so much in shadow. Dani even suspected he'd had his eyebrows trimmed.

She ran to him and gathered him up in a tight hug, then kissed his cheek playfully. "You clean up nice, Rabbit," she told him appreciatively, a hint of a throaty purr in her voice. "I don't ever think I've seen you with your hair *combed*, much less all slick and sexy like this."

He couldn't stop staring. "Look at your hair!" he told her. "You went, like, Marilyn Monroe on us."

She turned this way and that, touching her soft locks. "You like?"

"Yeah, I do," he said. "It's gonna take some getting used to, but it looks really nice on you."

She *faux* pouted, sticking out her bottom lip. "I was going for it looked sexy. Or hot."

“Well, those, too,” Rabbit said, blushing. “I really like it, if it helps.”

“It does,” she said with a shy, flirtatious smile.

“So, uh...” Rabbit said, rubbing the back of his neck again.

“What’s all this?” Dani asked, gesturing to the sacks.

“Just grabbed some stuff,” he told her. “Kinda took stock, figured out what you two might need. Turns out that was a *lot* of stuff. Coat hangers, f’r instance. I only had, like, three in the whole house. You bought all that makeup the other day, I figured you and Charli might want something to organize it, so I got y’all some little drawers and caddies and stuff. New toothbrushes. I even splurged a little bit and got some really fancy coffee. Thought that might be fun.”

“Rabbit – *Tommy* – you are the *sweetest* guy I’ve ever known,” she told him. “I hope you know that.”

“Well, you never really said...”

“No, I wouldn’t’ve,” Dani said. “But I’m saying it *now*.”

Charli came in, looking at the results of Rabbit’s spree with excitement. “Look at all this stuff! Rabbit, what did you do? Oh my *God*, you got a haircut! Damn, Rabbit, you look *hot*!”

He laughed. “Thanks.”

“Holy shit, did you get groceries, too?” Charli asked, pawing through sacks.

“Among other things.”

“Fresh vegetables?” Dani asked when Charli held up a sack of organic carrots. “I didn’t know you knew what a vegetable *was*, much less where to actually *get* them.”

Rabbit laughed aloud, genuine mirth. “Well, that’s from my dietician,” he said. “She gave me a list. Did y’all know that weight loss is like seventy-five percent diet? I’m not round in the middle from not working out, it’s from all the crap I eat.”

“So Rabbit actually went out and bought rabbit food?” Charli asked.

“Yep,” he said proudly. “But the gym shit – turns out I’m not in as bad a shape as I thought. I actually hung in there pretty well, considering.”

Dani leaned in close, feeling Rabbit’s biceps. “Can’t wait to see your results,” she said.

Charli joined in. “Neither can I,” she said. “We can all be a buncha hotties, living together.”

“Sounds like fun. We can have pose-offs and shit,” Rabbit teased. “I’ll download *I’m Too Sexy* and we can practice doing runway turns with each other.”

Charli looked a little bit pensive, disengaging from the teasing a little as she returned to her exploration of Rabbit’s purchases.

“You do look really good,” Dani said.

Rabbit studied the floor intently. “Thanks,” he mumbled.

“What’s the matter, Tommy?” Dani pressed.

“I’m not sure how to react when you say stuff like that,” he said sheepishly.

“Well, ‘thanks’ was a good start, but you could at least sound like you meant it,” Dani opined. “You could also put your arms around me and kiss me hello. I’ve missed you today. I couldn’t wait for you to get home.”

“Seriously?”

Dani snaked her arms around his waist and pulled him close, looking up at him – she never truly realized how tall he was before – and smiling. “Seriously,” she said.

He leaned close and brushed his lips against hers. She slithered a hand up his back and into his freshly-trimmed hair – she actually felt *product* in it, to her delight and surprise – and pulled him a little bit, pressing her lips into him gratefully, melting into him the way she had before, creating a mesmerizing tangle out of herself and him, where she lost track of where she stopped and he began.

She broke, gazing deeply into his eyes – what an amazing shade of blue they were, she noticed, wanting to study them more closely – and her lips breaking into a slow and *very* pleased smile.

“Welcome home, baby,” she whispered throatily.

“Hi,” he said back, smiling back at her.

“Are you two done making out?” Charli said teasingly. “The milk’s gonna go sour if we don’t put it away.”

Dani closed her eyes in mock humiliation. “Y’know, I never would have let Rabbit set us up as sisters if I’d know you planned on being my *bratty* little sister.”

“You love me and you know it,” Charli shot back, grabbing a few sacks and ferrying them into the kitchen, granting Dani and Rabbit a few more precious seconds together. Dani kissed him once more, brief and hard and passionate, then bent to gather up sacks of her own – but mostly just to give Rabbit a very long and informative look at her divinely-muscled backside.

“I guess the brat has a point, though,” Dani said. “Especially if there’s ice cream in any of these.”

Rabbit gave her a crooked grin. “Of course there’s ice cream. Chocolate, too.”

“I have the best boyfriend *ever*,” Dani crowed.

“Seriously?” Rabbit asked, picking up even yet more sacks.

“Seriously,” she said levelly, no playfulness in her voice. “The *best* boyfriend.”

“I like that,” Dani said.

“Me, too,” Rabbit agreed. “I like that a *lot*.”

Rabbit made dinner – his time spent in the prison kitchen, back in the day, gave him a surprising amount of know-how and skill, making him a better-than-average cook – for them all, a green salad followed by broiled fish and fresh asparagus with wild mushrooms and a very nice Chablis that the steward at the upscale grocery store helped him pick out. He made a big show of setting the table, even lighting a couple candles.

They set to with a will, enjoying the homemade food and the companionship, truly enjoying one another. Charli's humor, Dani's wry wit and Rabbit's amazing sense of the absurd kept everyone laughing throughout, even into the expensive Kona coffee which followed the meal.

"Rabbit, that was great," Charli said languidly. "I don't remember the last time I ate that well."

"My baby can cook," Dani said dreamily.

Rabbit nodded sagely over his coffee. "It was fun," he told them. "I'm not saying I want to do that every night, but occasionally..."

"I like this new you," Charli declared.

"Kinda weird," Rabbit confessed. "Never saw myself as much of a domestic. But cooking, cleaning up – that was pretty cool, actually. I'm actually paying attention to my house. I never noticed that this is kind of a nice place."

"It is," Dani said. "Even though you picked it just because it was a good place to hide."

"Yeah, nobody really looks for cybercriminals in suburbia," Rabbit chuckled.

"I could get used to this," Charli said.

"Well, why shouldn't you?" Dani said. "We're kinda becoming a family. A family needs a home, right?"

"Well, I don't know if white-girl suburban paradise is quite what I want," Charli told them.

"We never really talk about that," Rabbit said. "What happens after. When you get your answers, when this shit with Barrientos is over. What happens then?"

Charli shrugged. "We live our lives."

"Yeah, but what lives? Do y'all have any plans at all?" Rabbit pressed.

Dani cleared her throat. "I have little snippets of stuff," she confessed, "but nothing concrete."

"Well, give us the snippets," Charli told her.

"I kinda want to be one of those plastic Barbie types," Dani said. "I think about that shit, y'know, getting big fake boobs and lip injections and veneers for my teeth, and I just start feeling really, really *happy* inside. I don't know what that means, why it's there, but it is."

"So I guess you better find yourself a nice, rich Daddy to marry," Charli teased. "Somebody's gotta bankroll all that work you wanna have done."

"I guess so," Dani said. "But that really isn't how I see myself. I mean, I'd have to go back to dealing, or strip, or something to raise that kind of cash. I don't want to do that. I want to go legit, somehow."

"Why legit?" Rabbit asked. "Look, I never liked that you went back to slinging dope after prison, but you learned a lot in those years. Not so much as a parking ticket since then. Dani, you may not have liked it, but you were a really good drug dealer."

"Yeah, but I was a *cartel* drug dealer," she countered. "I don't want that kind of menace around me any more. Maybe I could grow some weed or something, sell a little Molly here and there to the club crowd, but I don't want to make my living that way any more."

“Why not?” Rabbit asked.

“Because I want to have babies someday,” Dani said softly, her cheeks coloring scarlet. “No way am I gonna do anything that could land my ass in jail, or with a bullet in the back of my skull. Not with a baby at home. No, I need a job. Maybe a college degree.”

“Wow,” Charli said.

“What about you, Jailbait?” Rabbit asked. “You have high school to deal with, or not, but what happens for you when this is over?”

Charli sipped her coffee. “I think finishing school would be a good idea,” she said. “I wasn’t planning on doing that, before. Was gonna drop out as soon as I turned sixteen. But now... yeah, I probably better.”

“What changed your mind?” Dani asked.

“Rabbit, actually,” Charli said bluntly. “He’s got all this crazy know-how with computers, and how shit works. I kinda want a little piece of that, y’know? When he got to talking about how money moves around when he hacked those bank records the other day, I got really interested. I think maybe I might want to study finance or something.”

“Ooh, my baby sister could be a Wall Street shark,” Dani teased.

“I don’t know if I want *that*,” Charli said. “I think I just want the skills to manage my own money.”

“And just how do you plan to make all this money?” Rabbit asked.

“Y’know, Dani only said it as a joke, but it got stuck in my head,” Charli said. “I can’t quit thinking about it.”

“Thinking about what?” Rabbit pressed.

“Becoming a model,” she said, blushing. “Every time I think about that, I just get all warm and tingly inside. I get goosebumps all over me. I think I want to do that. I looked around online, there’s agencies and stuff that represent girls my age. Catalog work, that kinda thing. I really want to get some shots made and take them in.”

“I know a couple photographers,” Rabbit said. “You want me to make some calls?”

Charli nearly flew out of her seat, she straightened so fast. Her eyes turned to her sister, her guardian and conservator, with naked pleading in them. She bit her lip in anticipation, trying not to squeal.

“Sure, honey,” Dani said. “Have Rabbit set it all up for you. I’ll have your back.”

She nearly upset the table in her rush to embrace her sister. “Thank you so much, Dani! I love you!” she nearly shrieked, squeezing her sister in a rib-creaking hug.

Dani laughed, patting her sister’s head and stroking her back. “Did you actually think I’d say *no*, Char? I want what you want,” she told her. “But *after*, okay? I don’t want anything distracting either of us.”

“I get that,” Charli said, composing herself and smoothing her clothes.

“What about you, Rabbit?” Dani asked. “You have plans?”

He rubbed his close-cropped goatee in thought. “You two have me thinking about a lot of stuff I never thought about before,” he said. “I mean, before y’all showed up at my door, I probably would’ve been pretty content to just stay here, ripping off the government and stealing shit I needed for as long as I could. I didn’t have a lot of ambition.”

“Y’know, I never did ask what you found out,” Dani said. “The text you sent me, right before I started changing. You said you had something to show me.”

Rabbit chuckled throatily. “I found a way to erase court records,” he said. “I already did it for myself and your old identities. Clean and actually a lot easier than I expected.”

“You have no criminal record?” Charli asked.

“None,” he said. “I gave myself a couple little things, y’know, like a drunk and disorderly and a couple traffic violations. Just to make me look normal. But my felony conviction, gone. So are yours, Dani, at least from when you were six feet tall.”

“So you’re really starting over,” Dani said.

“More or less,” he said. “I thought about it a lot. I’ve been living locked up in this house for a long time. Substituting my online life for a real one. But having people to take care of and look after, that’s really changed things for me. Strange as it sounds, I think it’s what I’ve always needed. I mean, look at me. I got off my ass and did shit, for the first time in ages. And I really enjoyed it. I wanna keep doing it.”

“Rabbit, I don’t know what to say,” Dani told him, taking his hand in both of hers.

“I’m not fishing for a ‘thank you,’ D,” he said fondly. “I should be thanking you two, when you get right down to it. You helped me realize I was wasting myself living just for me. That I was made for more than that. I like helping you guys. I wanna help more people. Different people.”

His eyes twinkled mischievously. “And if I can rip off the government at the same time, then bonus.”

They stood from the table, migrating outside into the balmy evening so the girls could have cigarettes with their coffee, basking in the trilling of the cicadas and tree frogs in the foliage outside. Fireflies flickered in lazy patterns over the crisping grass. A nice breeze stirred the leaves and their hair, carrying the plumes and clouds of cigarette smoke across Rabbit’s small back yard in tumbling drifts.

Dani wrapped her arms around one of Rabbit’s, cushioning her head on his shoulder. Maybe it was her imagination, but it seemed his muscles *did* feel a little harder to her.

“You two are really cute together, you know that?” Charli commented.

Dani smiled. “I’m glad you think so,” she said.

“Everybody’s gonna think so,” she said. “But it’s true. Y’all are a really cute couple.”

A little *frisson* of pleasure traveled up and down Dani’s spine at being called a *couple*. “That’s really nice.”

“It is,” Rabbit said. He kissed the top of her head and Dani found herself struggling to make her knees work properly for a moment, covering her giggling joy with a deep drag of her cigarette.

“So, wanna make it official?” Dani asked him. “Can I tell people you’re my boyfriend?”

Rabbit chuckled. "Who're you gonna tell?"

"Anybody who'll listen," Dani said.

"And does that mean I have to tell everybody you're my girlfriend?"

"You better."

Rabbit adopted a look of pantomime *gravitas*. "Well, Dani, I dunno. This is all so sudden. I mean, I don't know if I'm ready for that kind of commitment..."

Dani laughed, taking his face between her hands and pulling him close. "Shut up," she said fondly, pressing her lips against his.

Charli cleared her throat, breaking their attention away from one another. "Guys, I hate to break up such an adorable scene," she said, "but we really do need to talk about Barrientos. We've been tap-dancing around the subject all night, and he has tickets for tomorrow's show."

"And I really shouldn't go back to that theater," Dani said.

"How come?" Rabbit asked innocently.

Charli spared her having to lie outright. "She kinda made an impression," Charli explained glibly. "With the blonde hair and the short skirt, she was pretty memorable. Those guys there are gonna remember who she is."

"Yeah, I've been thinking about how tough it'll be for either of you girls to go anywhere incognito," Rabbit said. "So I was thinking I should probably make first contact, y'know, tell him the tale."

Dani laughed, covering her mouth. "Tell him the tale? Have you been watching *The Sting* again?"

"Maybe I'll figure out what the fuck you two are talking about someday," Charli grumped. "But that's a great idea, actually. Barrientos doesn't even know Rabbit exists."

"All I really need to do is steer him, right?" Rabbit said. "Be his buddy, then get him to the bar across the street. Won't be hard, considering what the theater charges for a beer."

"And Dani will be sitting at that bar, dressed to kill, and Barrientos will never see me coming."

"Too dangerous to take him inside the bar," Dani said. "Too public, too many witnesses. I was thinking maybe lead him on, a little, if that won't make you feel too jealous, babe."

"Won't know until I see it," Rabbit said, "but I think I can tell myself you're just acting."

"He don't got nothing on you, anyway," Charli told him honestly. "He's kinda gross."

"Yeah, there's that," Dani said, sneering a bit.

"Okay, so you give him the come-hither," Rabbit said. "Then what?"

"I play the 'let's get out of here' card," Dani said. "Take him out on the street. I'll lie to him about where I'm parked, lead him past that blind alley on Cavanaugh, y'know the one where Grouchy Dave got busted a year ago?"

Charli nodded. "Yeah, that's perfect," she said. "Nobody traffics in that alley any more, there's only one way in or out so you can't run from the cops."

Rabbit nodded. "I'll have something big – a van or something – waiting. Charli runs up and drags him, bam, we wait for the meds to kick in and I drag him back out of sight. We stash him in the van and then get the hell out of Dodge."

Dani nodded. "I have the meds we need," she said, "pharmaceutical grade sedatives. Problem is, they're back at my place, and the cartel is probably watching my place really closely."

Rabbit smiled. "I think I can get y'all around them. How big a window do you need?"

Dani waved a dismissive hand. "Oh, five minutes, tops."

"Let me do a little bit of digging," Rabbit said, "I'm sure I can figure something out." He extricated himself from Dani's grip and moved to go inside.

"Now, don't stay on the computer too long, Tommy," Dani said, the twilight masking the deep crimson of her cheeks.

"It should only take an hour or so," he said. "Why?"

"Because Charli's getting the guest room to herself tonight, that's why," Dani said. "If you're serious about this whole boyfriend-girlfriend thing as I am, then there's a small matter you and I need to take care of."

Rabbit swallowed hard. "Is that what you meant by 'make it official?'"

Dani grinned. "It's not like filling out a form, honey," she teased gently. "I kinda hoped you'd want to."

"Oh, c'mon, Rabbit," Charli piped up. "Please let me have the room to myself. This bitch snores."

"Fuck you, I do *not*."

Rabbit's voice betrayed hope, anticipation, perhaps even a little fear. "Dani can sleep wherever she likes," he said softly.

"Your bed looks really comfy," Dani said brightly. "Me and Charli will do the dishes, okay? See you in a little while?"

"Yeah," Rabbit said, his voice curiously emotionless. "In a little while."

"What did I say?" Dani asked, scrubbing a plate with a soapy sponge and handing it over to Charli to dry with a towel.

"I know if a girl said that to me," Charli said, "y'know, like I used to be, that would have blown every fuse I had. Just teeing it up like that. Maybe you hit the gas a little hard."

"Does that mean he doesn't want to, now?"

She laughed. "I highly doubt it," Charli said. "Honey, the thought of fucking you does *not* suck."

"I thought so, too, but..."

"Like Rabbit has ever had to express his emotions to anybody before," Charli said. "He lived in a cave and never talked to another human being for years. He's *bad* at this, Dani, okay? Give the boy a chance to figure out what he's doing."

She took a deep breath. “When did I become such a fucking basketcase?” she asked.

“Probably about the time you grew tits,” Charli said. “Look, I know I sound like I have it all figured out, but yesterday at the theater, y’know, my ‘job interview’ that you sucked dick through? There was this one boy, Dylan, that I thought was *crazy* cute. I knew I had to keep them all eating out of the palm of my hand, but every time he looked at me I turned into this brainless, giggling idiot who could barely speak English. I don’t have *shit* figured out, Dani. I can just give better advice because it’s not happening to me.”

“Fair enough,” Dani said.

“Believe me, once you start fucking him, he won’t be emotionally distant then,” Charli laughed.

Dani looked at her sister from the side of her eye. “Charli, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Before we changed. Were you a virgin then?”

“Yeah,” Charli sighed. “I’d had a blowjob, once, from a crackhead, but I got so freaked about AIDS and Hep-C that I left before she finished. A girl from school Frenched me and let me feel her up once. But other than that, just my right hand.”

“You don’t come across as a virgin,” Dani said.

“Good,” Charli said, satisfied. “Because those other bitches, the ones who keep texting me? They’re all over me for advice and shit. They all want to be *bad* so much. They needed me to teach them how to roll a joint, for chrissakes. So if they thought I was a virgin, so much for my street cred.”

“I actually hope you plan to stay that way for a while,” Dani said.

“Really? Why?”

“Because there better be more than just looks to the boy who gets your first time,” Dani said. “He better completely understand how special you are. Not just anybody will be good enough for you.”

A tear welled up in Charli’s eye. “Thanks, sis.”

“Still, there’s plenty of cuties to play with in the meantime, right?” Dani countered with a coy wink.

“You read my mind,” Charli said, bumping her sister with an outthrust hip.

Dani scratched an itch on the side of her nose carefully, so as not to smear soap bubbles across her face, and sighed. “This is *not* how I wanted tonight to go.”

“What’d you have in mind? Sexy lingerie, rose petals on the bed, that kind of shit?”

“More like teasing Rabbit so much he jacked me against the wall and tore my clothes off,” Dani said. “I wanted him to want me so bad he couldn’t wait another second to have me.”

“Honey, he’s *there*. Trust me.”

“You think so?”

“I saw the way he looked at you during dinner,” Charli told her. “It looked like he was gonna throw you across the table and get busy with you right there while I ate tilapia.”

“That’s messed up,” Dani laughed.

“Yeah, salmon’s a way more appropriate entrée for watching your sister get laid,” Charli off-handed.

“Probably would’ve needed a different wine pairing,” Dani said.

“Trust me, Dani, he wants you. He’s got to be vibrating in there, thinking about tonight.”

“I just wish I knew what to say,” Dani said.

“I’m no expert, but I think ‘fuck me, Rabbit,’ would probably do the trick.”

Dani shoved her sister’s shoulder playfully. “Yeah, *super* romantic, Charli.”

“Look, you love him, right?” Charli asked.

Dani blushed and looked down, her eyes unknowable beneath the dark curtain of lashes. “Yeah,” she said softly.

“Then you’re gonna know what to say,” Charli said.

“That’s the first thing you’ve said since you changed that’s actually naïve, kiddo,” Dani said. “If anything, feeling like this makes it harder to say what you mean. You’re so worried about things being perfect, y’know? Not accidentally hurting him or making him feel bad. Not looking like an idiot.”

“He will never see you as an idiot, idiot,” Charli replied. “It doesn’t work like that.”

“I wasn’t *great* at this when I was male,” Dani said. “As a girl, I’m just shy of four days old. I’m as inexperienced as those girls from the outlet mall.”

“You’ll do fine,” Charli told her. “He’s lucky to have you.”

“And we’re lucky to have him,” Dani said. “Have you stopped to think how far up shit’s creek we’d be if Rabbit hadn’t showed up?”

“He’s been pretty badass,” Charli said.

“Y’know, you sure don’t sound like a typical teenager,” Dani teased her.

Charli threw her towel onto the counter, twirling her hair around one finger and cutting her eyes up at the ceiling, twisting back and forth while chewing imaginary gum. “So, um... you and bae are totes cute together and that is so lit. So haps for you guys.”

Dani belly-laughed. “That was actually kinda hot,” she commented. “Maybe I should try talking like that.”

“There are all kinds of sites online to teach you how,” Charli said, picking up her towel and drying the salad bowl Dani handed to her. “That’s where I learned.”

“Think Rabbit – I mean ‘bae’ – would like that?”

“I think he’d like whatever you did, to be honest,” Charli said. “Now, honey, you’ve been washing that last dish for about five minutes now.” She ostentatiously plucked it from Dani’s grasp, dried

it, then leaned across her sister and shut off the water to the sink, pulling the dish-scrubber from Dani's hand and setting it meticulously on the drainboard.

"The dishes are done," she said. "Dry your hands, put on some lotion, and go get your boyfriend. You have wasted more than enough time."

Dani swallowed hard. "I guess you're right."

Charli busied herself by putting the dishes away, making shooing motions with her hands when Dani lingered, nervously shifting from foot to foot. Dani allowed herself a bit of time to visit the bathroom and straighten her hair before steadying herself with several deep breaths, then padded across the laminate floor to Rabbit's office and knocked on the doorjamb softly.

"Hey," Rabbit said, not looking up from the streams of incomprehensible data flashing across his dual monitors.

"You almost finished, honey?" she asked.

"Just about," he said, sitting up and pushing back from the monitors a little to stretch. "I got the van sorted out for tomorrow and I'm having your entire building fumigated for roaches tomorrow morning. Should be a piece of cake to slip in there in a pair of pest control coveralls and a respirator. Tuck that blonde mop of yours under a baseball cap and you can walk right in."

"You're amazing," she said, threading her arms around his neck and sliding easily across his lap.

"This? This was pretty simple, actually," he said, waving distractedly at the monitors.

She laughed and kissed his cheek. "Y'know, when the pretty girl says you're amazing, you should probably just agree with her," she told him, leaning her forehead into his close-cropped hair.

"Okay, then, I'm amazing," he said, putting a hand on her hip and massaging gently.

"Well, are you at a stopping point?" she asked.

"Just searching up where to get the coveralls we need," he said. "Nothing major."

"Then take me to bed," Dani whispered. "I don't want to wait any longer."

"Are you sure you want this, Dani?" he asked. "It's only been a few days since you..."

She placed a finger across his lips and fixed him with a smoldering gaze, full of promise. "I want this more than anything, Tommy," she said throatily. "More than anything. Now, please. Take me to bed. Stop saying I'm your girlfriend and *make* me your girlfriend."

He threaded his hands beneath her knees and behind her shoulders, more quickly than Dani thought he could move, and scooped her up effortlessly. She nestled her face into the side of his neck, giggling and happy both at the show of strength and her own relative weakness compared to it. He carried her out of the room and down the hallway, opening his bedroom door with his foot while he kissed her, stepping into the darkness inside.

To be continued...

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Seven

By Valerie Hope

RABBIT SET HER DOWN GENTLY on the bed, never breaking their passionate, snail-tongued kiss. The moment his hands were free, he cupped her face between them, coaxing her to kiss him harder. Her own hands crawled frantically across the muscles of his back, pulling him in. As her hands walked lower, she began to tug at the hem of his shirt, pulling it from its careless tuck into his khaki shorts.

He broke from her kiss, just long enough to let her pull the shirt over his head, then dove straight back in, his kisses hungry and probing. That marvelous, uniquely feminine feeling of having something inside her body intensified when she realized that she now had something *foreign* inside her, something belonging to someone else. She quivered in the face of the raw feeling of it.

She tugged at her own shirt, reluctant to break the kiss again. He panted a little, staring intently into her eyes, and she smiled a very small, very intimate smile. "You really are a great kisser," she told him.

"Is that what you need me to be tonight?" he asked graciously.

She shook her head. "No," she told him flatly, honestly. "I need you to love me."

He hesitated. "That's such a strong word," he breathed, caressing her face.

"I know," Dani told him. "But it's what I want. I can wait, if I have to."

"You blow my mind, I hope you know that," he told her, pausing in between words to kiss her neck and one bare shoulder. "I can't stop thinking about you."

"Me, neither," she said.

She took a quick beat to lever the soft cotton workout top over her head, exposing her breasts to someone other than her sister for the first time in her life. Rabbit didn't disappoint, he gazed lovingly at them and smiled, but didn't dive right for them like she expected. He caressed her shoulders and leaned close, kissing her tenderly and patiently.

"You're so beautiful, Dani," he told her.

"So are you," she answered, rubbing his chest with both her hands.

"Mmm," he moaned happily. "I love the way your nails feel when you do that."

"Then I'll keep doing it," she said, squeezing the taut, rubbery muscles of his pectorals and shoulders.

He kissed her some more, setting a much less frantic rhythm, showing her that fathomless patience she respected so much. Finally, after long minutes of extremely pleasant kissing, his hand traced a warm path from the side of her neck beneath her hair, over her collarbone and

onto her exposed breast. She gasped, then moaned deep in her throat against his kiss. He squeezed ever so gently, making her stiffen and arch, and her nipples hardened into sensitive points against the warm cup of his palm.

Passion took hold of her, fighting the desire to wait and prolong, and she grabbed his chest hard, making him hiss a little in the unexpected mix of pain and pleasure. She bit his bottom lip, gentle but still hard enough to make her point. He pushed her back onto her elbows, lowering his head to kiss across her upper chest before allowing his lips to descend.

She wished she could watch but her eyes wouldn't stay open as he traced her areola with his tongue for long seconds before fastening his soft lips around her nipple and sucking gently. Her hands buried themselves in his hair unbidden, tangling tightly as Dani gritted her teeth, trying to speak but unable to make anything but almost-pained groans escape her throat.

He rotated his mouth from breast to breast, making sure to massage and tease the nipples of the other breast with the pads of his fingers. Dani arched her back until only her head and buttocks rested on the bed, moaning for all she was worth, her breath coming only in ragged, moaning gasps.

She pushed against him, wanting to rise, to regain the use of her hands, but he pushed her back with so little effort that she swam in the feeling of being *small* and *helpless* against him, intensifying her arousal even further. She whined, high and plaintive, as he pushed her back.

"Let me up," she breathed. He did so immediately, and she began working the button of his fly with her long-nailed fingers.

"Want some help?"

"You probably better," she panted, "before I rip 'em off. I want to see you. I want to feel you in my hand." She tugged at his waistband until he released her breast with one hand and unbuttoned his fly for her.

He sprang loose, bobbing gently, warm velvet wrapping hardwood against her wrist. Her eyes widened as she looked, wrapping her hand around the bottom at the base, taking a moment to relish the sight of her long French-manicured fingers enclosing him. A more than respectable length and girth – Dani had only seen a few, her own before the transformation and some limp ones in the showers, and the ridiculously-hung guys in pornos – throbbed gently in her hand. She stroked it softly with a twisting motion, skimming her hand along the skin gently and not gripping tight for now, murmuring softly in appreciation.

"Jesus, Rabbit, you're *huge*," she cooed, just above a whisper.

"Am I? Really?" he asked, bemused.

"Yeah," she said. "That is one *very* big dick."

"You like?"

She nodded. "Yeah," she confessed. "I'm a little nervous, though. I've never had one in me. I'm afraid it's not gonna fit, or it's gonna hurt."

"Dani, we don't *have* to..."

She interrupted him with an intense look. “The hell we don’t,” she said. “Rabbit – *Tommy* – you have no idea how bad I want this. How bad I *need* this. I want you to fuck me more than I want to breathe right now.”

He kissed the side of her neck. “I want you just as bad,” he said. “I’ve tried to think of you like my old buddy Daniel. I really have, ‘cause I thought it might make you feel, I dunno, normal or something. But I can’t look at you that way. No matter what I try, I only see Danielle now. Beautiful, *perfect* Danielle.”

She kissed him deeply, passion spilling out of her every pore. Her gentle strokes on his sizeable cock became more insistent tugs, rougher and stronger. The change inflamed Rabbit, making him kiss her back much harder, probing her mouth with her tongue.

“I had this whole big thing planned out,” he told her. “I was gonna go down on you, and...”

“Not tonight,” she told him. “I want all that. I want to go down on you, too. All of it. But tonight I just want to lie back and feel you inside me. Is that okay?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Hang on, lemme get a condom.”

She sighed. “I wish we didn’t have to,” she told him. “I don’t like the idea of having anything between us.”

“When you put it like that, neither do I,” he said, chuckling. “But we’re in no position to be tripping over a bunch of Rabbit Juniors right now.”

She smiled. “Does it freak you out that I *love* that idea?”

He grinned. “A little,” he told her. “But not necessarily in a bad way.”

“Well, maybe we can put your skills to use and get me a prescription for birth control pills,” she said.

“Yeah,” he replied, “but only after we talk to Barrientos. I wanna know what it’ll do to you. Charli, too, when it comes right down to it.”

She smacked his backside playfully. “That’s my Tommy,” she said proudly. “Always thinking ahead.”

He sat on the bed heavily, kicking his shorts off onto the floor and letting his cock point proudly at the ceiling, cresting well above the level of his navel. Dani grinned lasciviously as he tore the condom wrapper, retrieved from the drawer of his bedside table, with his teeth.

“What are you smiling at?” he asked.

“Imagining you after a couple months with that personal trainer,” she said. “Get you all defined and maybe a little bit shredded? Yum-*my*, baby. I can’t fucking wait.”

“One hottie deserves another?” he asked.

“I don’t really care what you look like, honestly,” she told him. “I like who you *are*. But a six pack would be some really nice icing on that cake.”

He caressed her cheek. “I’ll do it for you,” he said. “I *really* like doing things for you.”

She laid down beside him, her face surrounded by a lush pillow of blonde hair. “Then do *this* for me.”

He knelt over her, looking down at her – a distinctly feminine feeling, being *beneath* – and leaned down, kissing her in an intoxicating mixture of hunger and tenderness that made her entire body quiver. Dani took the momentum of the mind-bendingly feminine sensation of laying back beneath a man and let it lead her to the next step of pure femininity – she spread her legs wide for him.

“You ready?” he asked.

She giggled. “Dummy, I’ve been ready since you set the table,” she told him.

He positioned himself gently, rubbing the sensitive flesh between her labia with the blunt head of his cock – feeling *twice* as enormous to her as it looked, but eliciting amazing sensations and sending waves of delicious pleasure up and down her spine. He coated himself with a generous application of her own wetness, making the contact slicker and even more pleasant, before tucking the head into the puckered opening of her vagina. Her breath caught as he eased himself in a little, stretching her.

“That okay?” he asked.

“More than okay,” she breathed. “That feels *incredible*.”

“Good,” he said, then pressed a little deeper. She screwed her eyes shut, nestling her head subconsciously deeper into the pillow of her hair, biting her bottom lip as he touched parts of her that her fingers never reached. The gentle curve of his cock stroked the roof of her vagina, touching incredibly sensitive spots in their travel, making her moan and squirm beneath him.

“God, Rabbit, you have no idea how *empty* a girl can feel,” she told him, kneading his shoulders with her hands. “And how amazing it feels to be filled up.”

Rabbit looked confused. “But I’m only about halfway in,” he said.

She moan-laughed, the ululation in her body making them both gasp in pleasure. “I don’t necessarily mean physically, baby,” she told him.

“Oh,” he said.

She wormed her way down, tilting her pelvis a little to give him easier access, swallowing another inch or so into herself. A little bit of pain tweaked her midsection, a feeling of resistance.

“What the hell?” she asked.

Tommy smiled at her. “It’s your cherry, honey,” he told her. “You’re still a virgin. Or at least this body is.”

She looked down between them, seeing only the cylinder of his thick, veined shaft disappearing between her legs but trying to see more. “Is it gonna hurt?” she asked.

Rabbit stroked her cheek, shifting his weight onto one hand and making the mattress squeak and groan. “A little, so I’ve heard,” he told her. “All the stuff I read about it says you need to go fast, get it over with. Once the initial pain passes, it’ll start feeling really good.”

“It already feels good,” she told him. “But yeah, quick. Just poke it right in there.”

He laughed. "You're such a romantic."

She craned her neck up to kiss him. "I don't want to feel afraid of this any more," she told him.

"I get it," he said. "Ready?"

"Yeah, just... ouch!" she squealed. He surprised her, thrusting deeply with his powerful hips before she could set any muscles to work against him. A tearing sensation inside her took her breath away, then a moment of painful stretching, then a wonderful few seconds of *getting used* to his length and throbbing size buried deep inside her body. His warm, softly furred balls coming to rest in the crack of her ass. She wrapped her legs around his hips, imprisoning him there while she just breathed, glorying in the feel of having *all* of him inside her. The head of him seemed to swell against her cervix, but pressed into a pocket just above it, full of untouched, pristine nerve endings her fingers couldn't reach. Perhaps the *best* nerve endings she'd experienced so far.

Her eyes welled up a little.

"Did it hurt that bad?" Tommy asked her, speaking in the customary whisper spoken by all couples in their particular position, a whisper designed not to shatter such a perfect moment.

"No," she told him. "I'm just really, *really* happy."

He smiled at her, a little crooked and boyish and thoroughly endearing. "I am, too," he said softly.

"Really? I make you happy?"

"Yeah," he said. "I was afraid to say anything, y'know? Afraid if I opened my mouth, somebody would come and take it away."

She rocked her hips a little, and the swirling sensations threatened to blank her mind. She bit her lip again. "Tommy, tonight... with the dinner and everything..." she said haltingly.

"Felt like we were a family," he finished for her. "I know. I felt that, too."

Using her calves, still wrapped around him, she set a slow, passionate rhythm of small thrusts, deep and pointed vaguely upwards to guide him into that divine pocket of pleasure just above her cervix. She mewled and squealed a little, but the pain of her deflowering completely subsided beneath the new stimuli. Her eyes rolled back in her head a little bit and she buried her face against his shoulder, clawing a little bit at his shoulders.

"That feels so fucking good," she breathed.

"It's supposed to," he told her.

"Fuck me," she said, the tiniest hint of begging creeping into her voice.

He complied, setting a little deeper and faster rhythm, their bodies tilting and pivoting in time with his thrusts to maximize one another's pleasure. Their conversation devolved into the time-honored "first time" commands, consisting of whispered urgings like "faster" and "slower," "right there" and "don't stop" and their kin.

The slow, predictable progression of pleasure building inside her that she expected after her self-exploration that afternoon eluded her, replaced by a much more explosive variety. She didn't gradually climb to the heights beneath Rabbit's thrusting body, she leapt from plateau to

plateau, climbing much faster towards that blissful, screaming release she craved so badly. Each new angle, each change in depth or speed made her jump again, ever higher.

Finally, the webwork of almost-painful pleasure crisscrossing her skin shattered, dropping her bodily into a deep well of release. She clenched around him, arms and legs, and buried her face against his collarbone to muffle an ululating banshee scream of pure pleasure. The muscles of her vagina clenched around him as her legs shuddered, and a flood of liquid poured from her to coat his cock and balls, running down her crack to pool beneath her.

“Oh my *God*,” she breathed, panting, her eyes not quite able to focus. “That... that was...”

“Wow,” Tommy said. “I *really* liked watching you do that.”

“Then don’t stop,” she whispered, “‘cause I’m about to do it again...”

Another shuddering, screaming orgasm ripped through her, stealing her thoughts and breath, making her close up around his body like a clam shell as she bucked and writhed beneath him. This release came with a bonus, a tiny little aftershock a few seconds after the main orgasm abated, one of the sweeter things she’d ever felt. A special little surprise from her new lover and his magnificent cock.

“Tommy, you’re *really* good at this,” she told him breathlessly.

“So are you,” he said. “It’s all I can do to hold back.”

She looked at him strangely. “Why on earth would you want to hold back?”

“Because I like making you cum,” he said with a soft laugh. “Kinda want to keep doing it.”

“We have every night after this one. Days, mornings, back seats of cars,” she said. “I’m yours, you big goof. You can fuck me any time you want.”

“So my girlfriend’s a slut?” he teased gently.

“Only because you made her one,” she said. “And I really like hearing you call me your girlfriend.”

He raised his voice a little, only to the level of normal conversation but in their hushed environment sounding like a shout. “Danielle Mayfield is my girlfriend, everybody. Hands off, she’s mine.”

She kissed his chest. “Yeah, I *am* your girlfriend,” she said. “And really happy about it.”

She raised her own voice. “Because my boyfriend has an *enormous* cock.”

They laughed together, causing him to collapse on top of her a little. His warm weight thrilled her, making her feel small and fragile but *safe*. She wrapped him up again, tilting her pelvis wildly beneath his imprisoning mass, trying to reignite the fire between them.

“C’mon, baby,” she urged. “It’s my turn to make *you* cum.”

He pushed himself back up onto his hands and began to thrust, deep and quick and the slightest bit savage. He sawed into her, numbing her sensitivity and making her crave it harder. She bucked against him, clawing at him like an animal, squealing and moaning. She even bit him gently, on the side of the neck, inflaming him further and causing him to pound into her, their thighs slapping loudly above the squeak of the bedsprings, his balls bouncing softly against her anus.

Her own release built again, unexpectedly. An air of wildness, of abandon, tinged the oncoming orgasm. Rabbit began to grunt, his eyes squeezed shut, a shining film of sweat breaking out on his chest and forehead. The smell of his exertion excited Dani, something musky and masculine about it reaching the innermost feminine recesses of her mind.

They climaxed within seconds of one another, Rabbit first, grabbing her hips roughly and driving himself into her as deeply as he could go, stretching wide the little sensitive pocket inside her. She felt his prolonged spasms, the jets of semen filling the end of the condom, in her body. *In her body*. The thought of a man having an orgasm *inside* her drove her over the edge and she came wildly, almost growling this time as she clenched around him, bucking and thrashing.

He collapsed atop her, spent and sweating, gasping for breath. She wrapped him, kissing his neck and his damp hair, massaging him with both arms and both legs, trying to pull him deeper inside her even as she felt his cock begin to shrink and soften inside herself.

Before she could govern her words, she heard herself say “I love you” between soft, breathless moans.

Rabbit, in characteristic style, took it in stride. “I’m really glad you do,” he said. “*Really* glad.”

“You don’t have to say it back,” Dani said, suddenly embarrassed.

“Of course I do,” he said, pushing his weight off of her and to the side, rolling over so their faces lay only inches apart. He stroked her hair and hooked a warm, slick, heavy leg around hers. “What kind of asshole would I be if I didn’t say it back?”

She raked soft tracks through his hair with her fingernails, breathing in as he breathed out through slack lips. “I’m not trying to trap you, Tommy.”

“I know you aren’t,” he told her. “Dani, believe me. All the pieces are in place. It’s all there.”

“What pieces?”

“Everything I need to love you,” he said. “And I *want* to. I really want to.”

“So what’s stopping you?”

“We barely know each other,” he said. “I mean, we had our little bro thing after prison, but there are so many blanks to fill in before I’m ready to love anybody. I’m the kind of guy who has dealbreakers.”

“Like what?”

“Like if you ever voted Republican, for one thing.”

“I’ve never voted,” she said. “Does that help?”

“If you’re mean to animals,” he said. “Your stance on net neutrality. The OpenSource movement.”

“I love animals,” she said, “and I have no idea what the last two are.”

He shook his head, laughing. “It’s not a test, Dani, I’m serious. We don’t even know what the other one’s favorite color is. Favorite band, favorite movie. Where the other one was born. The other one’s mom’s name. We never talked about any of this. We don’t know much about each other.”

Dani took a deep breath. "I was born in St. Louis," she said. "My mom's name was Karen. My favorite color used to be red, but in light of recent events I'm pretty sure it's pink, now. I never was a big movie watcher, so this is probably gonna sound pretty low-brow, but my favorite movie is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I always thought I would rock an Indiana Jones hat. I'm kinda old school, still – some of the bubblegum pop Charli listens to is cool and fun, but my favorite band is still holding out to be Flogging Molly. Favorite singer is Johnny Cash. I dropped out of Washington High when I was sixteen and started running for Skinny Carlos shortly after that. Got busted for possession with intent when I turned eighteen, wound up in County. You know the rest."

He shook his head. "I don't want a laundry list, Dani."

"I know, I know," she said. "I just don't understand why I'm so sure I know everything I need to know about you. I'm just certain of it. I know exactly how I feel."

"Call it woman's intuition, then," he said. "Honey, I want exactly what you want. And it's gonna happen. But I'm not like you, never was, not even when you were still Daniel. You always just rushed in, never worried about consequences. Like when that guy in County jumped me on work detail. You went straight after him, not even thinking about the four buddies he had to back him up."

Dani chuckled. "Yeah, they really beat the shit out of me."

"You were in the infirmary for a week," Rabbit said. "And I was on my own. If you remember, I wound up in the bed right next to you a couple days later."

"You made your point," Dani said.

He stroked her cheek. "Don't be mad," he said. "I'm just saying, I've always been more careful than you. I go slower. I don't expect you to be the same way, really, but I'm that kinda guy who has steps. I do things in order. Can you at least give me a little time to go through my steps?"

She kissed him, then pressed her forehead into him. "Of course," she said. "I really want you to love me, too. If I have to wait, then I have to wait."

"You make it sound like it's gonna be years," he said. "I'm gonna get there, sooner than you think."

"Okay," she said. "Listen, I don't want to fight."

"Yeah, me neither," Tommy told her. "Especially not after what just happened."

"I was just thinking that," she said. "I loved it, Tommy. I don't know if any girl ever lost her cherry quite as wonderfully as I just did."

"You were pretty spectacular yourself, there, blondie," he said, kissing her gently.

"It's so nice to know my boyfriend has a giant horse cock," she told him.

"Who knew you were a size queen?" Tommy laughed. "And I'm pretty gratified to know that my girlfriend fucks like a Singapore hooker."

She pushed him, snorting laughter, then bit her lip. "I almost said it again," she confessed.

"I don't mind, babe," Tommy told her.

“I love you,” she whispered.

He kissed her in answer, not wanting to leave her declaration totally unanswered. She rolled in his arms, pulling his strong arm around her, and nestled her back into his chest. He wormed a hand between their bodies, pulling off the gooey condom and tossing it into the wastebasket next to the bed, then nestled his face into her hair. She fell asleep happily, feeling his soft breath against her neck.

Dani awoke early the next morning, stirring inside the lovely warm fortress of Tommy’s arms. She reluctantly extricated herself, pulling on her t-shirt from last night as she padded across the hallway to the bathroom to relieve herself. Still not entirely used to the heavy *dropping* sensation of peeing as a female, she focused instead on her plans for the day. In order to sufficiently distract Barrientos, she needed to doll up, and she didn’t trust her own skills or Charli’s to get the job done. She needed to be a centerfold tonight, and that required professionals.

Blotting herself dry – *thank God I’m remembering to do that now, it’s pretty fucking embarrassing when I forget*, she thought – she stood and flushed, then headed out into the kitchen to start the coffee and maybe have one of the high-protein yogurts Rabbit brought from the store yesterday while laying her plans. The smell of brewing coffee greeted her before she even rounded the corner into the living area.

Charli leaned against the counter, sipping coffee and paging through Twitter on her phone.

“Damn,” Charli said wryly, “even your sex hair looks good.”

Dani smiled, nudging her sister aside to grab a mug and pour herself a cup. Wordlessly, Charli shoved the creamer and sugar closer to her.

“I know I owe you details,” Dani started.

“Yeah, you do,” Charli chuckled. “But not as many as you’d think. You guys were actually pretty loud.”

“Who knew I was a screamer?” Dani laughed.

“So, good time?”

“The *best* time,” she said.

“Can’t wait till I can finally find out firsthand,” Charli said.

“Didn’t mean to make you jealous,” Dani pouted.

“You didn’t,” Charli told her. “For reals. I’m super happy for both of you. I didn’t think it would matter to me, but it does. It’s nice to see my sister get herself a really decent man.”

“He *is* really decent, ain’t he?” Dani smiled.

“We’d be dancing on a pole or turning tricks if he wasn’t,” Charli said. “Neither of us should ever forget that.”

Dani liberated a yogurt from the fridge and licked the spoon she’d stirred her coffee with, then sat at the table. A lingering soreness, an oh-so-lovely reminder of last night, greeted her when

she bent to sit. She took a small bite, then leaned back in her chair to grab a small notepad and a pen from the counter.

“Whatcha writing?” Charli asked, bringing her coffee to sit beside Dani.

“Figuring out my day,” she replied. “I have a lot to do.”

“Such as?”

“Find the perfect outfit for tonight,” she said. “Go get a blowout, probably. Maybe get my teeth whitened, touch up my tan, who knows? Get my makeup done?”

“You’re going to all that trouble?”

“Barrientos can’t even *dream* of looking at another girl,” Dani said.

“But every guy in that bar is gonna remember you, you go in all glam like that,” Charli warned.

“Yeah,” Dani said. “That’s why I was thinking about a trip to the wig store. Cops hang a lot of their physical description on hair and eye color. So maybe some brown contacts, a brunette wig. I can still look like Playmate of the Month, but the cops will be looking for a brown-eyed brunette, not a blue-eyed blonde.”

“Smart,” Charli said. “You can even play with your height a little, if you pick the right shoes.”

“And maybe some falsies, y’know, plump up the Girls a little,” Dani said.

Charli grumped. “How’re you gonna get all this done and still do the fumigation thing at your old apartment?” she asked.

“Easy,” Dani said, handing the list ostentatiously to her sister. “I’m sending my personal shopper.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, seriously,” Dani said. “You have amazing style, kid. You’re gonna make me look great.”

“How’re we gonna pay for this? I feel guilty leaning on Rabbit’s cash like we have been.”

“I know, so do I,” Dani said. “I have some cash hidden at my place. I’ll grab it while I’m in there. It’s not a hell of a lot, but it’ll see us through this, at least. And I can probably sell my car.”

“The ‘Stang? Oh, that sucks!” Charli said. “We look *hot* in it.”

“Yeah, I know, I love that car, but it’s super recognizable,” Dani said. “Besides, I’m probably more of a Lexus or Mercedes kind of girl, now. Y’know, trophy wife material.”

“If only you didn’t have to fuck some old dude,” Charli said.

Dani looked at her list. “As long as I’m out of the apartment by eleven, eleven-thirty, I should have plenty of time to get everything done,” she said appraisingly. “What do you think?”

Charli killed off her coffee in a long pull. “I think I better go find something slutty to wear,” she said. “I so want to be some crazy jailbait story my Uber driver tells to all his friends tonight.”

Dani tried not to fidget in her itchy coverall, bought from the uniform supply only a few minutes before. The respirator over her face chafed, wrecking her makeup, and she hated the feel of her thick, soft hair tucked under the sweaty ball cap she wore. Rabbit rubbed the back of his neck next to her, clad in identical attire, holding a pump sprayer and a clipboard.

Across the street, *actual* pest control technicians finished shrouding the little low-rise loft conversion in plastic, sealing the bottom of the weatherproof seal to the concrete with cinderblocks. Waiting until the paid technicians moved around to the side of the building farthest away from them, Dani and Rabbit crossed the street quickly and ducked beneath the unsecured plastic. Dani fumbled her old set of keys from a pocket of the coverall, opening the little side door and ducking inside the darkened building.

She led Rabbit down a few doors to hers – Apartment 3A – and let them in hurriedly. The loft conversion looked just the same as it had the day she began her transformation, albeit beneath a thin layer of dust. She pushed the door shut behind them, freeing her face from the claustrophobic-feeling respirator with a deep, panting breath.

Rabbit clicked a stopwatch from his pocket. “Five minutes,” he announced.

Dani nodded, setting off at a quick pace. She’d rehearsed her pass through the apartment in her head several times on the way over, trying for the most efficient use of their scant time. She gestured Rabbit over to help her move the refrigerator away from the wall, just enough for her to grab the shoelace thumb-tacked to the wall behind it. She withdrew a large, gallon freezer zipper bag full of cash, which she tossed on the little kitchen island. She left Rabbit to push the fridge back into place while she unscrewed the return air grille beneath her air conditioner closet, pulling out another gallon bag of cash. Rabbit followed along behind, replacing the grille while she moved to the bedroom, withdrawing the last little stash of cash from between the mattress and the box spring. Then she ducked into the closet, pushing aside her old male clothing on its hangers, pulling loose a piece of paneling lining the wall to her right. She withdrew a couple of tackle boxes from the little recess behind, and a plastic-and-tape-wrapped bundle of cocaine and another of marijuana. Fishing for a bit, trying to overstretch her new, diminished reach, she grabbed a gallon bag full of assorted prescription pill bottles and a holstered .40 caliber Sig Sauer. She stacked them all onto the bed, then grabbed a few photographs from his old life – the only one she had of her mother, for instance, and then added the little “bug-out” bag she kept on the top shelf of her closet with clean burner phones, fake IDs and some clean credit cards, along with another pistol and a little grub-stake cache of saleable drugs and some more cash.

Rabbit entered the room shortly after, carrying her retrievals from the front. “Is this everything?” he asked, looking at his stopwatch.

“Yep, that’s it,” she announced. Rabbit shook out a large, black garbage bag meant to line a 55-gallon drum. They stuffed everything inside hurriedly, tying the top, and hauled the quite unwieldy bundle to the front door. They paused to put their respirators back in place, then left the way they’d come, Dani carefully and meticulously locking doors behind her.

They ducked back underneath the plastic, now looking every inch dusty and sweaty enough to blend in with the milling crowd of exterminators on the sidewalk outside. They paused to watch the large tanker truck back in, filled with termite poison, just as all the other technicians did, giving Rabbit and Dani ample time to scan the street.

“There,” Rabbit whispered, his voice muffled by the respirator. “Third floor, across the street.”

Dani made a pretense of stretching, knuckling her back, giving her a chance to see the lone window, third from the corner of the little tenement-turned-upscale-condo development so indicative of downtown gentrification. The only window on the east-facing side of the building with its blinds up, letting in the furnace midsummer heat for most of the day. Dani spotted the telltale glint of sunlight on glass, probably a camera lens.

“So they are watching,” Dani breathed.

He patted her hand, wishing he could take it in his own but not daring to blow their cover. “Somebody is,” he said. “Could be DEA, not necessarily cartel. Either way, it’s bad. Good thing we took precautions.”

“Yeah,” Dani said. “Let’s get the fuck out of here, okay?”

“Agreed,” he said, shouldering the trash sack like some bizarre, post-apocalyptic Santa. They trotted across the street, where the company’s van sat open, beneath the field of vision of that ominous third-floor window. Looking around, they saw everyone else’s attention firmly rooted to the coupling of the fumigation hoses, allowing them to duck down the alley to Rabbit’s “borrowed” mini-van. He tossed the trash sack into the back, then the two of them shucked the coveralls quickly, wadding them up and throwing them in a nearby dumpster along with the respirators. Dani shook her hair down gratefully, missing the feel of its soft caress on her shoulders, then put the cap back on. She paused to give her boyfriend – her *brilliant* boyfriend, she corrected herself – a quick kiss and a squeeze on the backside before piling into the passenger seat. Rabbit walked around once, using a little homemade detector to scan for signals in case someone placed a tracker on their vehicle.

She breathed a deep sigh of relief once they entered the freeway. Rabbit took a very circuitous route, doubling back to check to see if they were followed. Finally, she allowed herself to relax, lighting a cigarette and blowing smoke out the cracked window as they picked up speed, away from the city center and hopefully, the cartel or DEA or whomever sat watching Dani’s old apartment.

She dialed quickly and pressed her phone to her ear, waiting for a few moments before her sister’s voice piped up on the other end of the line.

“Hey, bitch,” Charli said perkily.

“Hey,” Dani replied. “We’re done, we’re on the way back.”

“Good,” Charli said. “I started out about ten, fifteen minutes ago. I should only be a couple hours.”

“Great,” Dani said. “But my place was being watched.”

“Uh-oh,” Charli said, betraying nothing to her Uber driver. “Those guys you mentioned?”

“No idea, but somebody,” Dani told her. “Maybe you want to find a way to drop a dime to your sister?”

Charli snorted. “Nah, fuck that bitch,” she said. “We barely talked to each other, everybody knew that. Even if your friends asked her, they’d know in five minutes she didn’t know anything.”

“If you’re sure,” Dani said.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Charli replied. “Sweet of you to ask, though.”

“Rabbit’s gonna drop me at my car, I parked it in midtown at the Med Center,” she told her. “Then I’m gonna start doing my thing.”

“Sounds good,” Charli told her. “Bye!”

The line went dead, and Dani dropped her phone back into her purse. She jerked a long-nailed thumb backwards towards the trash sack. “Hey, Rabbit, there’s somewhere between twenty and thirty grand back there. I want you to take whatever you want, okay, to pay yourself back for what we spent?”

Rabbit shrugged. “Maybe, like, fifty bucks of it was actually my money,” he told her. “I told you, that was all shit I skimmed off of politicians and hedge fund managers and rich fuckers who can afford to lose it.”

“Still, I don’t wanna feel like a freeloader,” she said. “At least take a little, okay?”

He shook his head. “If that’ll make you feel better, fine,” he said. “But I wanna let you know, moving forward, that this is *not* the kind of relationship I intend to have with you, Dani. All keeping score, who-owes-who-what shit. I learned a shit-ton in kindergarten, okay? I *share*.”

She grinned. “I really love that about you,” she told him. “But I want it to be equal, okay? I wanna share, too. If you’ve got it, it’s mine is the rule, like you’re saying, that’s great, just as long as you realize that if I’ve got it, it’s yours.”

“Yeah,” Rabbit said, smiling a small but satisfied smile. “Yeah, that works.”

He shook his head to clear it. “Okay, last order of business,” he said. “What drugs am I looking for?”

“There’s a lot of stuff I could use to drop Barrientos,” she said. “Depends on how long you think he should be out.”

Rabbit tapped his chin. “Figure ten, fifteen minutes to get him in the back and restrained. Another hour or so to get him out of town. I got us a room at a hotel over by the airport, we can probably sneak him in no problem. I have a couple cases for computer equipment he’d probably fit inside, or a cardboard box.”

“So, about an hour and a half, maybe two hours?” Dani said. “Best to use the valium, then. It’ll only keep him down for an hour or so, but we can always re-dose him on the way. Anything else would have him out way too long, or I’d have to give him something to wake him up.”

“Valium, check,” Rabbit said. “How much?”

“I have a ton back there,” she told him. “Let’s give him ten milligrams to start with, bring thirty in case we need it, and some extra syringes and clean needles. There’s a little bag of them in one of the tackle boxes.”

“Is ten a lot?”

“Ten is a crazy big dose,” she said. “But I’m not taking any chances. At least with Valium, you can shake ‘em awake. You got the room for the night, right?”

“What about the rest of the drugs?” Rabbit asked.

“Stash ‘em for now,” she told him. “I’ll decide what to do with ‘em when this is done. I think we can figure out a way to unload them for cash, pretty quick. Hell, Charli can probably sell that weed off to her little teeny-bopper friends in an afternoon if she wanted to.”

“Not a good idea,” Rabbit said. “Last thing we want is for her to get busted.”

“Or we could just smoke it,” Dani chuckled. “It’s *really* good weed.”

To Be Continued...

SUMMARY:

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Eight

By Valerie Hope

DANI KISSED HER BOYFRIEND GOOD-BYE on the sidewalk by her car, trying to coax the desperately-wanted “I love you” from his mouth by sheer force of passion. He played coy, as always, but seemed very appreciative of her groping, probing kiss.

“Can’t wait to see you all glammed up tonight,” he told her.

“Yeah, I’m kinda looking forward to that, too,” Dani admitted. “Never been pampered before.”

“Well, that’s one of those things on my list, babe,” he told her with a knowing smile.

“Mmm,” Dani said. “I could be your little princess.”

“Princess,” he repeated, bemused. “Yeah, I like that.”

“See you later?” she asked.

“You bet, Princess,” he told her, and she thrilled unexpectedly from hearing him call her that. He kissed her once more, brief but promising, and walked back towards the van parked a few slots down from her little red Malibu. She stood for a moment, waving at him and savoring the warm, tingling happiness brought about by her new nickname, before climbing into her hot car, cranking up the air conditioning and cracking a window so she could smoke.

She cued up her little smartphone to the GPS function and selected her first appointment of the day, pulling into traffic carefully and heading away from the bustling Medical Center, towards the nearby Galleria and its cluster of glamorous side-businesses.

She stopped into a little salon first for a quick touch-up of her rich amber spray tan, tipping lavishly from the sizeable sheaf of cash she retrieved from her drug stash. On a whim, she bought herself an unlimited membership and one for Charli as well. She even bought herself and Charli memberships at the upscale gym next door, knowing there was a branch near Rabbit’s house, so they could work out together as well.

After the tanning she drove a few blocks north and ducked into a cosmetic dentistry office, filling out paperwork with personal information generated only days before. A cute little Asian hygienist in pink scrubs led her back for a quick cleaning and a laser whitening. The spreaders abused her mouth terribly and the treatment hurt her gums – an altogether unpleasant experience – but the 10,000-watt pearly white Osmond smile that resulted more than made up for the discomfort.

From there she followed the GPS on her phone to a lash studio, where she luxuriated in a reclining massage chair while a slightly rotund but extremely funny and pleasant-to-be-around girl meticulously attached extensions to her eyelashes, giving Dani dramatic, permanently innocent wide eyes. Dani didn’t even hesitate to pay the money for the membership before she left, loving the soft little butterfly-wing tickle on her cheek every time she blinked and the dramatic, movie-star appearance of wearing them. She purchased a tube of special mascara to go with, dropping it in her purse alongside her touch-up makeup.

Her gums finally stopped aching enough for her to suck, allowing her a quick cigarette as she drove back south to her next appointment at the aesthetician. A substantial chunk of cash changed hands but allowed her back for a quick bikini wax – which didn't hurt nearly as much as she feared it would – plus a session of laser hair removal on her armpits and legs. Then a cryo-sculpting session on her butt and thighs, the scientific explanation eluding her for why the softly vibrating machine zapped her cellulite away, giving her a sleek and smooth appearance. Finally, she wound up in the reclining chair in the farthest back room, trying to forestall her anxiety as a tech in eye goggles and a surgical mask removed her light coating of makeup and set out a tray of needles, the syringes filled with a slightly bluish liquid.

The tech worked quickly, for which Dani thanked heaven, trying desperately not to squirm and cry as the needles went into her top and bottom lips. She couldn't even qualify what she felt as pain – as soon as the needle left her, only to move fractionally away and plunge in again – the stinging subsided, leaving only a numb ache as the lip-filler solidified, blossoming her lips into a lush, inviting pout.

The tech held up a hand-mirror when she finished, and Dani turned her head this way and that, regarding the “duck-face” pout she now permanently wore. She tried to overlook the scabbing and slight bruising around the multiple injection sites, envisioning herself with dramatic makeup, and liked the image she concocted very much. Liked it enough, in fact, to overlook the pain and discomfort she just experienced and want to do it again, and go *bigger*.

She tried several times to get a cigarette lit once she returned to her car, but the lip-filler wouldn't allow her to get a good seal just yet. She managed, but could only take very weak drags right at first. Still, between the long nails and the swollen dick-pillow lips and the skinny, elegant cigarettes, Dani felt very glamorous and sexy. She finally began to *feel* like the Princess that Rabbit described.

She stopped for lunch – just a smoothie, she didn't want to fill up – and sat outside on the sidewalk in the shimmering mid-afternoon heat, trying to get her swollen lips to close around the straw with questionable luck. At least the difficulties with her pout made her giggle, now. Before, she thought she might have condemned herself to a world where she could never give Rabbit head. But her lips softened with each passing minute, just as the technician told her, and soon would feel as normal as they had before her visit.

Dani finished her smoothie while reading a few “progress” texts from Charli and Rabbit, just “we're here” and “we're leaving” and “we're back,” nothing of particular import but letting her know that the plan moved forward. Charli reminded her to be home by seven, so they'd have plenty of time to get to the warehouse district and set up.

She looked at her watch, having to separate an armload of clattering bracelets to reveal the face. She ditched the last dregs of her smoothie in a nearby recycling bin and headed back to her car for the last errand of the day.

The young woman who met her at a nearby home offered her a glass of wine, which Dani gratefully accepted, and led her into a small but lavishly-appointed little makeup studio in the solarium at the rear of the house. A sleek, shiny grey cat regarded her with fathomless green eyes, perched in the windowsill. The young woman, whose name was Jessica, made a few quick assessments of Dani's coloration and skin type before selecting a panoply of products, from moisturizers and exfoliators and primers up to foundation and contour, then eye palettes and liners and lip color. Dani drank in every word the woman said, even going so far as to make a few

notes and shoot a few videos with her phone of certain techniques. Dani did discover that even the high-end products she'd bought with Charli a few days before weren't good enough. At least not for the look *this* particular Princess wanted. No, she would have to spend some serious money in a few days, stocking her personal collection and Charli's with only the best, Urban Decay and Too Faced and M-A-C. Jessica sold her two sets of professional brushes, however, and showed Dani how to clean them and condition them like the professionals did. Dani strutted out, looking like the cover of a magazine, feeling more self-confident and beautiful than she ever had, armed with so much knowledge and technique touching on making herself beautiful that she couldn't wait to try everything out. She looked at her face in the little rearview mirror, astounded at the flawless beauty and glamour that stared back at her. She looked airbrushed. She felt like a goddess.

Dani almost made herself late starting home, so obsessed with staring at her reflection as she was. She even indulged a strange, narcissistic desire and snapped a few 'selfies' just to capture her own beauty, even wishing she had social media accounts like Charli so she could show the world. Looking at her watch, Dani hustled out to her car, looking easily ten times more glamorous than any other woman she saw, and headed home to get ready.

"Holy shit," Charli breathed when her sister walked through the front door of their little suburban fortress. "My God, Dani. Here I am think I should be a model, but you... you *are* a fucking model."

Dani blushed and smiled demurely. "I feel like a princess," she confessed.

"You might be the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," Charli said. "No kidding."

"Thanks," Dani said.

"Is it gonna pose a problem tonight?" Charli asked suddenly. "Are you gonna be able to focus on Barrientos? 'Cause none of the guys in that bar are gonna be able to leave you alone."

Dani shook her head, causing shimmering waves to cascade down the length of her hair. "I think I can handle it," she said. "I'm a girl on a mission."

"Poor Rabbit," Charli commented, motioning her sister back into the bedroom. "he's gonna be so hot for you, and then he has to watch you seduce another guy."

"Another guy he'll get to torture, like, a few minutes after," Dani said. "I think he'll pull through."

Charli giggled. "I didn't think about that."

Charli closed the bedroom door behind them. "Here's what I found for you," she said, opening a sack on the bed. She pulled out a ruched black body-con dress with cutouts and rhinestone clasps at the breasts and shoulders, with little parallel spaghetti straps that walked down Dani's shoulders. Dani squealed in delight, hopping up and down a little, then started pulling off her daytime clothes hurriedly so she could try it on.

Charli beamed, so pleased that her sister liked the dress. She set out the rest of the outfit – stiletto platform pumps and a little designer purse with a silver chain strap, a lace shelf bra in black with matching thong and silicone falsies to pad it out. Brown contact lenses and a twenty-one inch human hair wig in a reddish sable. Charli even got dangling chandelier earrings sparkling with rhinestones and a pretty little silver bracelet pierced with hearts and a large clear acrylic cocktail ring.

“Wow,” Dani said. “You have really good taste.”

Charli smiled and twisted back and forth girlishly. “Thanks,” she said. “I wanted classy but slutty, and just a little bit tacky. Gorgeous girl, but approachable. Not too high-rent that she’s out of reach, y’know?”

“You nailed it, baby,” Dani said, pulling on the bra and craning her hands behind her slender back to fasten it. Charli stepped in to help, finally, and Dani slid the silicone falsies out of their package and nestled them beneath her natural breasts, giving her a two-cup-size boost and a generous valley of cleavage. Dani opted out of the matching panties, not wanting a visible line in the skin-tight dress. She shimmied into it with a back-and-forth marching motion, taking her time to make sure all the straps lay properly and weren’t twisted around. Charli fussed around her, tucking and tugging, making sure her sister looked perfect.

Dani tucked her hair into a quick bun, securing it with some bobby pins from her vanity table, while Charli took the scandalously expensive but completely natural-looking wig from its package and finger-combed it out before turning the cap out. Dani bent forward so her sister could tug the almost uncomfortably tight cap over her blonde hair, tucking any little wisps of platinum blonde beneath the cap with nimble fingers. Dani straightened, flipping the long soft hair over her shoulders, and looked at herself in the mirror. The image of a large-breasted brunette stared back at her, bringing her up short. The darker hair made Dani’s makeup look completely different, more subdued and less garish. Amazing how her coloration made such a marked difference.

She sat at the vanity table, taking forever to put in the tinted contact lenses with her long nails and extended lashes. After several unsuccessful tries, including a couple of frantic hands-and-knees searches of the carpet after she dropped them, she managed to get them in her eyes to stay. Luckily, the process didn’t bring too much in the way of tears and risk the meticulous makeup she wore. Even though Dani had specified waterproof *everything* to Jessica, she didn’t want to risk it.

Charli snapped a picture with her phone. “You look so different,” she commented. “I barely recognize you.”

“I barely recognize me either,” Dani said. “It feels kinda weird.”

“So have a little fun with it,” Charli advised. “Be somebody else for a little while.”

“Ordinarily, that would sound like fun,” Dani said. “But I’m just now getting the hang of being me.”

“I get that.”

Dani threaded the earrings through her lowermost sets of piercings, loving how they nestled in the thick sable hair and tickled the tops of her shoulders when she turned her head. She put the cocktail ring on the index finger of her left hand and bracelet on her right wrist, then climbed up into the nosebleed heels, making her stand very close to six feet tall with their ankle-breaker stilettos. The shoes were surprisingly comfortable – the platform didn’t hold her feet at a painful angle.

Charli busied herself transferring Dani’s personal items from her daytime purse to the little Gucci evening bag – wallet, cigarettes, phone, makeup for touch-ups and her holstered .380 Glock.

“Where are my keys?” she asked, looking over her sister’s shoulder.

“Here,” Dani said, holding them in her two hands. “Rabbit came by earlier, wanted me to give you this.” She opened her folded hands and displayed Dani’s keys – both of them, one for the car and one for Rabbit’s house – on a new keyring, the word “Princess” picked out in rhinestones on a silver backing. Dani’s heart melted yet more, falling an inch deeper in love with him, and she fought the urge to clutch the cheap little keyring to her chest. It was probably found in a gas station, next to the register, but that made it more romantic and special to her, not less. She treasured any reminder that Rabbit was out there, thinking about her, missing her when she wasn’t around.

Dani did a little pirouette. “So? How do I look?”

“Like a walking wet dream,” Charli said. “Honestly, Dani, I don’t know how you can be so beautiful and still be real. You look like you’re Photoshopped.”

“Thanks, brat,” she said fondly.

“You ready for this?”

Dani blew out a long breath. “Yep,” she said. “Let’s get this over with.”

Charli kissed her, barely making contact with Dani’s cheek for fear of smudges, and held her tight. “Knock ‘em dead, okay?” she said softly, the first tinge of nervousness reaching her voice and eyes.

“We got this, Char, I promise,” Dani said. “You and Rabbit get set. I’ll have this dude eating out of my hand and lead him right to you.”

“Yeah,” Charli said. “Piece of cake, right?”

“Piece of cake.”

Dani click-clacked outside to the driveway and slid into her car once again, lighting a cigarette as she backed away. Charli watched her go, then went inside to dress herself all in black, texting Rabbit that the operation moved along as planned. She smoked a quick cigarette of her own, then summoned an Uber to take her downtown to the warehouse district to wait.

Dani tried not to fidget, waiting in the alley in her drop-dead gorgeous outfit, staying to the shadows. Across the street, the movie crowd finally let out, disgorging people onto the street from hands-in-pockets loners to couples to big groups. Somewhere in the middle of the exodus, Rabbit walked through the glass doors and onto the sidewalk, talking animatedly with Barrientos. Dani stiffened. She hadn’t seen the man since her transformation began. The author of everything that happened, barring Charli’s temper tantrum that began the whole affair, walked just a few dozen yards from her.

Rabbit stopped, laughing at some shared joke with Barrientos, and pointed to the bar across the street. The lanky scientist thought about it for a second, then nodded and followed along. The two men passed within feet of Dani’s hiding place, walking in and ordering a couple beers.

Dani texted her sister quickly to let her know, then waited a suitably random amount of time before stepping out onto the sidewalk and sashaying towards the bar with a confidence she didn’t really feel.

She entered the cramped bar, not drawing eyes the way she hoped because of the light early-evening crowd. Most of the patrons sat huddled over their drinks, intent on their own inebriation. A few seconds elapsed before the first of them looked up and saw her, his breath catching at the vision of sexy loveliness click-clacking towards the bar on designer platform heels, her luscious curves only barely contained by the body-hugging fabric of her tiny little dress. The first to notice her nudged his friend, who looked up with a similar reaction. In a matter of moments, Dani felt the cloying sensation of dozens of pairs of hungry, leering eyes caressing her. She tried not to smile. It felt *every bit* as wonderful as she expected.

She glided across the tiled floor, her heels speaking loudly in the sudden hush, walking to the bar and slinging her purse over the back of a bar stool before seating herself, crossing her legs elegantly and touching up her fake brunette hair with long nails. The bartender ignored several other customers before her in line, sliding one elbow onto the slightly greasy hardwood between them, offering Dani a rehearsed and ready smile. "What can I get you?"

She didn't hesitate, not wanting to waste time with her customary bimbo "umm..." reaction that the boys loved. No, tonight she needed to be polished and direct. "Stoli tonic with a twist," she said in a throaty purr. "Thanks, sweetheart."

The bartender busied himself with the drink, ignoring a harried-looking waitress with a tray who tapped her foot impatiently. The customers he'd overlooked didn't seem to mind, staring at her slack-jawed and whispering and nudging one another like teenagers. Dani tried not to smile.

One of the more courageous patrons stepped up, dropping a ten-dollar bill on the bar to pay for her drink cavalierly. "Haven't see you around," he said smoothly, leaning in such a way as to block any view of her from down the bar. "Are you new in town?"

"Passing through," she said. "I'm here for a seminar."

"I'm Gary," the man said.

Dani extended her hand, palm down. "Stephanie," she said, using the name of the last girl she'd fucked in her male life, a one-night stand that turned into a three-night stand, a singularly clingy 'psycho' type with a staggering coke problem who saw Daniel as the answer to all her prayers.

"Pleasure to meet you, Stephanie," Gary said. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a professional fundraiser," she said, sticking to the easy-to-remember cover story concocted by Rabbit that morning. "I'm teaching classes on how to write grants."

"That sounds interesting," Gary told her, trying to maintain eye contact but continuously allowing his gaze to drop to the tempting inner slopes of her breasts.

"No, it doesn't," she said matter-of-factly. "It pays the bills, but there's nothing interesting or glamorous about it. I make my living begging for other people's money."

"Oh," Gary said. "Well, that *does* sound like it kinda sucks."

Her eyes roamed the dim interior of the bar, already bored with Gary's predictable 'game' and wishing he would take the hint and move on. Dani had no doubt she'd have to shoot down more than just the hapless Gary before she made her move on Barrientos, and she wanted to get it over with as soon as she possibly could.

Gary droned on in the background, talking about his own job, and Dani managed an answering pattern of nods and mumbled “uh-huhs” while she located Rabbit and Barrientos. They sat in the corner, near the dartboard, talking animatedly about something or another.

She put a hand on Gary’s wrist, stopping him in mid-sentence. “I hope you’ll excuse me,” she told him. “I have to visit the ladies’. Be right back.”

She took her purse and left her drink on the bar, strutting past the table in the corner on her way to the restrooms. Rabbit sat with his back to her, poor form but not overly sloppy, but the look on Barrientos’ face as she gave him a sexy, liquid smile as she passed, brushing her long hair behind her ear to expose her neck, made him go quite open-mouthed and stalled him in mid-sentence.

She hid out in the bathroom stall for a little while, just a few minutes, trying to think about her approach. Barrientos looked about to jump out of his skin the moment she smiled at him. The awkward and shy scientist would probably run screaming if she came at him directly. So much for the self-possessed, man-hungry sex kitten act. She had to change her tack. Maybe Barrientos needed to feel more in control. It made sense, his being an authority figure of sorts. She decided to change angles, try the “damsel in distress” method, see if she could bring him close enough for the simple stuff, the straight-up sex appeal she didn’t need to rehearse, to work.

She walked out of the bathroom, pretending to text on her phone as she walked, then mock-stumbled over something and bumped into a wall. The entire bar erupted in the sound of scraping chairs as she *faux*-staggered backwards, holding her head. Rabbit got to her first, Barrientos close behind.

“Are you okay?” Rabbit asked, not daring to touch her for fear of giving their intimacy away. “My friend’s a doctor.”

Bingo, Dani thought triumphantly. She allowed Barrientos to assist her to a chair, solicitous of her comfort, and he did a quick assessment, even retrieving a penlight from his shirt pocket to check her pupils, when she said she felt a bit dizzy.

The bartender ignored still more customers to bring her a towel filled with ice and a glass of water. Several random bar patrons stopped by to check and see if she was okay.

“Thanks,” she told Barrientos huskily, giving him her best 10,000-watt smile. “I feel a lot better.”

“We should take you to urgent care,” he said, “you might have given yourself a concussion.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” she said, touching his forearm. She noticed a brief spasm of jealousy flash across Rabbit’s face and squeezed his knee reassuringly under the table, giving him a brief look that said *don’t you worry, I still belong to you*. He answered with a carefully hooded smile of purest gratitude.

Barrientos sat close, still seeming genuinely concerned. “Are you sure you don’t feel nauseated?” he asked her, his intent gaze almost enough to make Dani feel uncomfortable.

“Yes, absolutely,” she said. “In fact, I think I’d like to revisit that drink.”

She waited an uncomfortable second for Barrientos to get the hint. He jumped a little, then stood in a loud scraping of chair and hustled to the bar.

“OhmyGawd, he’s so clueless,” Dani whispered to Rabbit.

“You’re doing great,” he told her.

“When do you plan to make yourself scarce?” she asked *sotto voce*.

“Jailbait’s gonna text me with an ‘emergency’ in about seven minutes,” he told her. “After that, he’s all yours. Now laugh, okay, like I just said something funny.”

She tossed her head airily, overpowering the low hum of bar conversation and clink of glasses with a lilting, tinkling laugh. She patted Rabbit’s arm, saying loudly, “OhmyGawd, you are so funny!”

Barrientos’ eyes shot pure jealous murder from where he stood at the bar. Rabbit noticed immediately, giving Dani a sly wink. “You’re a goddamned *genius*, D,” he said appreciatively.

“Thanks,” she said. “You boys are *really* easy to play, I hope you know that.”

He gave her a wicked side-eye. “You would know,” he said darkly.

Barrientos returned in a rush, bearing a fresh drink for himself and a newly-made vodka tonic for Dani – *props for remembering what I ordered*, she thought – which she sipped coyly. They made idle conversation for a while, just garden variety where-you-from-what-do-you-do-where-did-you-go-to-school stuff, standard operating procedure for the newly-met.

Like clockwork, Rabbit’s phone bleated a text alert. He read it with a perfect portrayal of alarm, sinking a bit in his chair. “Oh, shit,” he groaned. “The fucking server’s down. *Again*. Sorry, guys, I have to go.”

“Oh, *no*,” Dani fake-wailed. “Do you really?”

“Afraid so,” he said, standing. “Don’t ever take a job in IT. You never get to clock out. Stephanie, it’s been *really* nice meeting you. Luis, give me a call, okay? That quantum computing exhibit you told me about sounds like a blast.”

He shook hands, dropping some cash for his drinks on the table and beating a hasty retreat. Dani wasted no time, leaning over the table to provide Barrientos with a very informative view of her cleavage.

“Alone at last, huh?” she teased gently. He made choked monosyllables and straightened imaginary wrinkles out of his clothes.

She giggled. “You are so adorable,” she told him. “I love how flustered you get.”

He cleared his throat. “You do?”

She pursed her lips around her straw suggestively as she sipped her drink. “It’s really genuine, y’know?” she said softly, purposefully making him lean closer to hear her. “Most of the guys I meet, they’re, like, super fake. Lying to me, trying to impress me. I really like how honest you are.”

He broke into a nervous grin. “That’s nice to hear,” he said. “I, uh... I don’t meet many women. I’m actually very bad at this kind of thing. I’ve been accused many times of having such poor luck socially because I don’t ‘play the game,’ whatever that means.”

“Well, don’t start,” she told him. “I find it *unbelievably* refreshing.”

The conversation lulled – Barrientos really *was* bad at interaction and clearly flustered being the object of such a beautiful woman’s undivided attention – and Dani segued clumsily into a different topic, something where Barrientos could feel a bit of confidence.

“So, tell me more about this lab where you work,” she said. “It sounds really fascinating.”

He brightened, pleased to be back on familiar ground. “It’s actually several labs, spread out across the city,” he began. Dani settled into a rapt pose, her eyes wide and unmoving, hanging on his every word. Barrientos ate it up, going on at length about some of his organization’s more notable achievements. He very carefully avoided speaking about new development, probably deep beneath the confines of an ironclad non-disclosure agreement.

She ordered them another round, and another after that while Barrientos waxed rhapsodic about the genuinely interesting world of pharmaceutical research. His speech began to slur just a bit as the alcohol took hold, making him a little less rigid and more susceptible to her charm. Shortly after transitioning from “Dr. Barrientos” to “Luis” to “sweetheart,” Dani began applying gentle touches and suggestive body language, showing him the sides of her neck and leaning close, brushing his forearm with her breasts, “accidentally” rubbing his calves with her ankle under the table.

He responded clumsily to her advances, subsiding into awkward blushing smiles and nervous laughter instead of pressing his advantage. Finally, as it neared midnight, Dani felt herself grow impatient. She finished the fourth drink in her series, but when Luis started to gesture to the bar for another round, she placed a warm hand on his wrist and stopped him.

She looked demurely down, hooding her *faux*-dark eyes beneath her lashes and tracing a little circle in the condensation ring from her glass. “We *could* order another,” she said, “but I have a really nice bottle of 18-year-old Scotch in my hotel room.”

Her eyes rose, making powerful contact. “Would you be interested in that, Luis?”

He began to retreat again, flustered and nervous, but Dani maneuvered to disallow that behavior. “I don’t ask just anybody,” she confessed. “I know you probably think guys are knocking each other over for a chance to go back to my hotel room with me, but you’d be wrong. I’m a lot pickier than most people give me credit for. I wait for guys I really like.”

She leaned almost into kissing distance and ran the tips of her nails through his hair. “And I *really* like you, Luis,” she added just above a whisper.

“I like you, too,” he said, swallowing hard.

“Good,” she told him. “Then come back to my hotel and prove it.”

He fumbled some money out of his pocket and dropped it on the table, then stood a little unsteadily – obviously unused to consumption like he attempted tonight – and offered her an arm in a show of gallantry that made Dani smile and giggle a little. She threaded her arm through his, pressing her breasts into his biceps, and pressed herself close as they walked out to the jealous, disbelieving looks of most of the bar’s patrons.

The night air actually had a little tinge of coolness in it, uncharacteristic for the balmy summers, and Dani felt genuinely grateful for Barrientos’ proximity and warmth. She talked a little about nothing, making up a completely fabricated story about growing up in the Midwest as they

strolled along in the cloying night, spanning the darkness between the street lamps to the songs of cicadas and tree frogs, in the carefree way of new lovers.

He never saw Charli coming. She stepped silently from the alley as they passed by, falling into step behind Barrientos and jabbing him quickly with the syringe in the buttock before melting away into the shadows.

Barrientos yelped, turning and craning his neck behind himself.

“Are you okay, honey?” Dani asked. “What happened?”

“Ouch,” Barrientos said. “Something... I dunno, I think something stung me.”

“Where?”

He pointed. “That really hurts,” he complained, limping a little.

“There’s a bench,” Dani said, pointing. “Sit down. You’re not allergic to anything, are you? I have an Epi-Pen if you need one.”

“You’re very kind,” he said, hobbling to the nearby bench and lowering himself gingerly to the weathered planks. He touched his backside with probing fingers, hissing in pain, while Dani ran down a laundry list of things she could do, waiting for Barrientos to decline each offer, trying desperately to look manly for her.

She remembered Rabbit’s careful description from earlier that day – don’t let the movies and TV lie to you. They’d have you believe that an injection into the muscle produces instant results, like you give them the shot and they’re unconscious in seconds. Intramuscular injections take a good five, six minutes to kick in. And the results won’t be instantaneous, they’ll come on slowly. Barrientos will try to fight the effects, probably. You’re going to have to keep him on the hook for ten to twelve minutes, Dani, before he finally gives in and goes to sleep. That’s a shitload of time.

She continued to press herself close, using raw carnality to distract him, pull his attention away from the slow onset of the drug. He tried to stay witty and disarmingly genuine, even as his speech began to slur even more than the alcohol caused them and his eyes began to flutter, making the quick split-second blinks of his eyes from earlier in the night longer, more languid motions.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Dani asked, taking his hand in both of hers.

“I’m not... I don’t...”

She released his hand and dug in her purse for her phone. “I’m gonna call somebody, okay?”

“No, really... It’s not... That isn’t necessary...”

She dialed and pressed the phone to her ear, hoping that Barrientos couldn’t hear the voice-mail message on Charli’s phone as she acted out a nervous call to 911 for his benefit. He seemed to relax a little bit, listening to her tell the phantom dispatcher on the other end of the line their location, finally hanging up and telling him, “Help is on the way, Luis, everything’s gonna be okay.”

He managed a sloppy, loopy smile at the news before his eyes drifted shut.

“Damn that guy was heavy,” Charli complained as she piled into the front seat of the minivan, wiping sweat from her brow.

“You probably wouldn’t be as tired and sweaty if you hadn’t dressed like *Mission Impossible*, there, Jailbait,” Rabbit teased, gesturing to her all-black ensemble including pea-coat and watch cap, knee high ‘pirate’ boots and black leggings, and black leather gloves.

“Fuck off, I look cool,” Charli shot back.

Dani just collapsed into the back seat, lighting a cigarette gratefully – she’d been dying for one all night – and blowing a billowing cloud of smoke towards the open window. “I’m just glad it’s over,” she breathed. “Think anybody saw us?”

Rabbit shook his head. “I shut down all the traffic cameras for two block in any direction,” he said, “and sent the police after a fake 911 call eight blocks south of here. I didn’t see anybody on the street, and Charli swept the area for homeless before you ever went in.”

“Yeah,” Charli said. “Can you believe Billy Meth is still alive?” Dani laughed at the reference to a very famously flamboyant homeless man who haunted the warehouse district, evading the police so many times he approached legendary status among the street denizens.

“Good for him,” Dani said. “Long live the resistance.”

“How’s our patient?” Rabbit asked.

“Sleeping peacefully,” Dani announced, savoring her cigarette like a lover’s touch.

Dani looked out the window, watching the lights of the warehouse district give way to the brighter, more strident lights of the freeway. The cool breeze through the window refreshed her, and she tugged off the brunette wig carefully, setting it in the bucket seat beside her before shaking loose her platinum blonde mane to cascade over her shoulders. She gathered it in one hand, smoking blissfully with the other, tilting her head into the breeze and letting it evaporate the light sheen of sweat penetrating her makeup.

“You were incredible in there, Dani,” Rabbit told her. “You played it perfect.”

“Thanks, baby,” she told him. “I was really glad you were there, though. I was kinda freaking right at first. Wasn’t sure how to start. I didn’t expect him to be so shy.”

“Yeah, he buries the geek needle,” Rabbit said. “I mean, I’m geeky enough on my own, but this dude completely blew me away. I think this may’ve been the first time he’s been outside in weeks.”

“Poor guy,” Charli said.

“Nope, stop that,” Dani said. “Don’t sympathize. He’s a *mark*, okay? Just a piece of meat who has answers that we need. We start seeing him like a person, this is all gonna blow up in our faces.”

“Dani’s right, kid,” Rabbit confirmed. “We have to play this right.”

“I just remember him from before,” Charli said. “So desperate to bang my original sister. Now I’m starting to think he could’ve done a lot better.”

“From what you’ve told me about her, I’m sure he could’ve,” Dani said.

“Why was he so desperate for cash, anyhow?” Rabbit asked.

“Not sure,” Charli said. “He always played that shit close to the vest.”

“Wouldn’t hurt to try and find out,” Rabbit said. “Maybe something we could use as leverage, if it came to that.”

“So, how’re you planning to lean on him, anyhow?” Charli asked.

Rabbit sighed. “A guy like this would probably cave pretty quick to physical shit,” Rabbit said. “But I don’t think I could go through with it. I mean, if it turns out to be what we *have* to do, I have some guys I could call that owe me favors. But I wanna be better than that.”

“I’m really glad to hear you say that,” Charli said.

“Did you ever doubt it?” Dani chimed in from the back seat. “I didn’t.”

“You are so whipped,” Charli teased. “So what, then, Rabbit?”

“The one thing we have going for us is *you*,” Rabbit said. “I’m the only one who has records. DNA swabs, that kind of shit. Those samples of blood that I took when you first showed up. I pulled some ATM department of transportation footage of your walk to the warehouse and when you came out.”

“Blackmail?” Dani asked.

“I think it’s the best way to go,” Rabbit said. “But it turns out, once this guy hears your story, he may actually *want* to help. He may volunteer.”

“What makes you say that?” Dani asked.

“I hung out with him, got to know him a little,” Rabbit told them. “He’s not a bad guy.”

“Yeah, I never thought he was, either,” Charli said.

“It’s not like we’re extorting from him, either,” Rabbit went on. “We just want answers.”

“So you think maybe appeal to his better nature?” Dani asked. “Kind of a long shot, babe.”

“They’re all viable options, D,” Rabbit said. “We have to play this by ear.”

Dani sighed, looking at the ceiling of the minivan. “I’ve been interrogated enough, y’know, from when I was a guy. I think I can help us get started, at least.”

Charli raked her fingers through her pink-streaked hair. “Okay, then, we let Dani take the lead?”

“Works for me,” Rabbit said.

“Me, too,” she said. “But I’m not doing it in platforms. I’m at least changing clothes when we get home.”

Charli nodded. “And I *seriously* need something to eat.”

“Got it,” Rabbit laughed softly. “Domestic shit first, illegal kidnapping later.”

Dani shifted in her seat, stretching out her legs onto the seat beside her, careful not to muss the very expensive human-hair wig with her calves or kick the equally-expensive designer purse with

her feet as she stretched. “Are we bad enough at this shit to actually stop for drive-thru with a kidnapped scientist in the car?” she asked the ceiling dreamily.

“Gonna have to draw the line, there, babe,” Rabbit said.

“Kidding. Sheesh.”

“Once we get Sleeping Beauty here situated at the house, then we’ll have some time. Somebody could make a run,” Charli said.

“Not situating him at the house,” Rabbit said. “Too risky. We’ll drop by, change clothes, that kind of shit – as long as one of us stays in the car to keep an eye on him. But then I’m taking him to a self-storage place I rented a few years back to do the deed. Just in case shit goes south.”

“What’s it like to fuck a criminal mastermind, Dani?” Charli teased.

“Pretty fucking incredible, actually,” Dani shot back. “My legs are still shaking a little.”

Rabbit blushed enough to be visible in the half-light, rising from his collar in a steady ascent all the way to his hairline. Dani fought the urge to lean forward and hug him around the seat, or press kissed into his neck. The little boyish things about him – his blushes, the way he hummed when he got impatient, the way he shifted from foot to foot when he got excited – melted her heart every time. She liked how adorable she found him.

“Okay, okay, enough mushy stuff,” Charli laughed. “Else Rabbit will pass out from embarrassment.”

“He’s so cute when he blushes,” Dani said happily.

“You two…” Rabbit began, then hesitated and began again. “This isn’t an act, is it?”

“What’s not an act?” Charli asked.

“I thought… maybe you were just trying to blend in,” he said. “Try it on, maybe. But it’s not that. This is real. You two really are girls, aren’t you?”

“I would’ve thought I made that pretty clear last night,” Dani said throatily.

“No, I mean it,” he said. “You have girl bodies, but it goes deeper than that. You have girl brains. Girl habits, girl interactions. Girl *souls*.”

“I guess so,” Dani said. “I certainly *feel* like a girl.”

“Me, too,” Charli confirmed.

“And I think of myself as a girl,” Dani continued. “When I remember my dreams, I remember that I’m a girl in them. When I think of myself, it’s with words like ‘she’ and ‘her.’ I’m not sure when it happened.”

“Or why,” Charli added.

“Well, hopefully our passenger back there can give us why,” Rabbit said. “But other than that, I’m not complaining.”

“You mean you like us as girls?” Charli asked.

“A lot,” Rabbit told them. “I think it may be who you were meant to be. I don’t think any drug can do that, no chemical reaction or side effect. I think the two of you always had this in you. The drugs just brought it out. Made it *fit*, if that makes any sense.”

“It does,” Charli said. “I don’t *think* I was a tranny, before, but it does make sense. It *feels* right, anyhow.”

“Yeah,” Dani confirmed. “That’s for damn sure. Since the moment it started, it always felt right.” A single crystalline tear welled in her eye, causing her vision of the oncoming headlights to swim crazily before she wiped it away with the pad of her finger. Whether it was a tear of happiness or a tear of regret, Dani couldn’t tell.

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Nine

By Valerie Hope

BARRIENTOS GROANED, STIRRING HIS HEAD to and fro to turn his eyes away from the bright shop-light shining in them. Awareness returned to him in fits and starts – first the merciless light, then he tugged feebly at the zip-ties holding his hands behind the chair, then kicked against the same holding his ankles. He groaned, attempting to form words.

“Wh... wha..?”

“Good morning, sunshine,” Dani said, blowing a stale lungful of cigarette smoke into his face, making him cough and sputter. His eyes opened to little slivers.

“Who are you?” he moaned, voice thick.

“Nobody you want to fuck with,” Dani told him. “You’re Dr. Luis Barrientos. Graduated *cum laude* from the University of Chicago with a degree in biochemistry. A Ph.D. in chemistry from Northwestern, got your MD from University of Maryland, did your residency at Cedars. Three years at USAMRIID while in the Army, a few years at Walter Reed before you were offered an associate directorship at BioRenew, four years ago. Promoted to Head of New Projects, February of last year.”

Barrientos looked panicked, eyes widening painfully against the light. “How do you know all this?”

“Started sniffing around a little midtown hood-rat named Jessica Weaver about six months ago. Not sure why, a guy like you could probably do better,” she went on, pacing behind the light, making him squint through the glare to even catch her silhouette. “Your bank records show you spent a *ton* of money on her. What’d she do, give you some sad story about how she couldn’t make rent? Gaze lovingly into your eyes when you cut the check, suck your dick that night, make you feel like the big man?”

“Please tell me what’s happening,” Barrientos said. “Tell me what you want.”

“Maybe she sucked you into some big ticket purchases,” Dani opined. “Your bank records show a lot of cash withdrawals around that time. You tore through your savings, dipped into your IRA. Jessica must’ve sucked one hell of a dick, for you to spend that kind of money on her.”

“You’re not answering me,” he said angrily. “I said, who are you? What the hell do you want?”

Dani laughed, a rich and throaty sound, unconsciously sexy. “I heard what you said, Luis. I just don’t care. We’re here to find out what you did to pad out your bank account after Jessica cleaned you out.”

“How did you know about...?”

“For a Nobel candidate, you sure aren’t very bright,” she said. “Have you not figured out that you’re not the one asking the fucking questions around here?”

“Are you FDA? DEA?”

“Ask me one more question,” Dani warned, the soft silk of her speech taking on a menacing edge, made all the more threatening by the velvet sexiness of her voice. “I’ll have you hooked up to electrodes before you know what happened to you.”

“Okay, okay,” he panted, suddenly compliant.

“Tell me what you did for cash.”

“I didn’t make any cash,” he said. “I started to. I chickened out.”

“Started to, how?”

“I knew a kid. Jessica’s brother. He found out what I did, heard about some of the drugs I’d helped develop,” Barrientos said in a rush. “He told me he could sell them on the streets for big money. Said he was gonna talk to his partner, talk him into distributing. He asked me for some samples. I snuck a few things out of the lab, and we went to talk to his partner.”

“What happened then?”

“They had an argument. It got heated,” Barrientos said. “So I got the hell out of there. I haven’t seen either of them since, I swear to God.”

“What happened to the samples?”

“I left them with Jessica’s brother,” he said. “I told you, when they started mixing it up, I got the hell out of there. I didn’t stop to ask please, could I have my stuff back.”

“And the lab never missed it?”

“You already know I was head of the lab,” he said. “I declared the samples as corrupted. Filed all the paperwork, faked all the test results. As far as the lab knew, the samples got spoiled and we disposed of them.”

“Sounds like you put a lot of thought into it,” Dani accused.

“It’s not exactly *easy* to slip proprietary materials out of a cutting edge research lab,” he shot back. “It’s not something one does on a *whim*, lady. I *had* to put thought into it, or I was gonna lose my job, maybe even get arrested.”

“So those samples, they’re still out there? Floating around on the streets?”

“So that’s what this is about,” he said. “You’re from BioRenew. You’re trying to find the samples. How did you find out they were missing?”

“You must *really* want those electrodes,” Dani said.

“No. No, you’re right, of course. Sorry. I don’t know what happened to the samples.”

“Were they dangerous?” Dani asked.

“Oh, *God*, no,” Barrientos said back. “I would never have put anything out on the street that could hurt anybody, I swear it. It was all stuff already in human trials, with promising results.”

“Such as?”

“I brought them a performance enhancer,” he said. “Retroviral RNA. It gets into the subject’s DNA, rewrites genetic factors. Body fat percentages, bone density, ratio of fast-twitch to slow-twitch muscle fibers, brown adipose cells to white adipose cells. We designed it to enhance the *performer*, not just a single *performace*. It made you *better*, in every way.”

“What else?”

“A very promising aphrodisiac and sex enhancer,” Barrientos said. “It hijacked certain cells of the female reproductive tract, edited them and caused them to flood the bloodstream with a genetically-tweaked, ten-times-stronger version of the body’s own estrogen and oxytocin.”

“And?”

“A mnemonic enhancer,” he said. “Added custom-engineered neurotransmitters to the brain, to increase memory, absorption, retention, comprehension. A learning drug. Early tests in humans and chimpanzees promised amazing results, someone only needing to see or hear something once to have it completely mastered. There were a few problems with selectivity, but we didn’t foresee big problems.”

“Selectivity?”

“We had to dial it back,” Barrientos said. “People were freaking out, having seizures, in the initial trials. They couldn’t *stop* learning. Everything they saw or heard became this huge re-map of the synapses. They’d walk past a cooking show playing on a TV in the lobby, they’d start to master French cooking, but if someone next to them played a game on their phone, they’d start to master that at the same time. Three, four, five things at a time, the brain just shorted out. So we altered the process so that the drug allowed the person to select what they learned. But it had to be an emotional connection. You had to have a certain amount of passion for what you wanted in order to open those neurological pathways to the drug.”

“Anything else?”

“A metabolic booster – a weight-loss drug. Too expensive for the open market, and the FDA got really gun-shy about diet drugs after Phen-Fen. That was going nowhere, we’d probably only get to market the patents for future research. But it worked incredibly well. There was even potential for medical use, particularly post-operative. It drastically speeded up the healing process, made cells divide and reproduce at nearly three or four times their usual rate.”

Dani sighed. “Keep talking,” she told him.

“I brought an anti-aging agent,” he told them. “Created new sites in the skin cells that produced collagen and elastin. We thought we could make billions off of that.”

“Why did it never go to market?”

“A problem with mutations,” Barrientos said. “We based it to be carried by a modified chickenpox virus, something that could invade the cells of the skin and deposit the RNA payload. Somewhere in the middle of animal trials, the virus mutated. And it kept mutating. Started attacking and rewriting other alleles, sometimes on other chromosomes. I didn’t think it would be dangerous – maybe a shift in eye color, a few inches in height one way or the other.”

“Anything else?” Dani asked.

“Those were the only ones I brought,” he said. “It was all I could sneak out.”

“How much did you bring them?”

“I had to sneak them out in syringes,” Barrientos told her. “The vials where we stored them had markers that could be traced. I drew up the medications into syringes and replaced the fluid with saline. Contact lens solution. Each syringe carried about eight to ten adult doses.”

Which means Charli and I both got enough for four to five people, Dani thought. No wonder Charli changed so much faster than me. Younger, smaller, weighed less.

“I figured those guys would cut them,” Barrientos continued. “Dilute them somehow, make the samples I brought stretch. I would’ve recommended it, so that effects didn’t become permanent and mess up their chances at repeat customers. So I didn’t worry about dosage. I figured once it was diluted and cut, the effects would be temporary and rather mild. But I never got that far as to discuss that with them before the fight broke out.”

Dani paced a little while, trying to take mental stock. “So several of those drugs you mentioned messed with people’s DNA, right?” Dani asked at length.

“Yeah,” Barrientos said, squinting into the light. “But not in drastic ways.”

“But what if they were used together, all at once?”

Barrientos’ eyebrow knitted in thought for just a moment before his eyes widened. “How did you know?” he breathed.

Dani stepped around the light, giving him a moment for his abused eyes to adjust. He looked her from head to toe and back again, confused. “Stephanie?”

Dani nodded. “Among other people.”

“What does that mean?”

“You know me as Stephanie, minus the blonde hair,” she said. “My real name is Dani. Short for Danielle. The female form of Daniel. Remember Daniel?”

Charli stepped in, around the light, to stand next to her sister. “I still go by Charli,” she announced. “But it’s a nickname for Charlotte now, not Charles. Still hanging out with Jessica, Luis?”

He jumped so profoundly that the heavy chair squeaked on the concrete floor of the self-storage unit, echoing crazily. Dani broke eye contact, listening to him sputter in complete disbelief while she hung a super-skinny cigarette from her glossed lips and struck a match, exhaling a billowing cloud that danced and tumbled its white edges in the harsh worklight. Charli reached over and snapped it off.

“This isn’t *possible*,” Barrientos breathed.

Charli snorted. “I assure you it is, Luis,” she said levelly. “Not just possible, it *happened*. You met Jessica on the sidewalk outside your work. She was having an argument with her friend Michelle, one of those reality-show arguments that you can hear for blocks. Michelle said Jessica was a slut and a hood-rat. You stepped in to say that kind of language was uncalled for. Jessica gave you the ‘thank you kind sir’ treatment. You bought her an ice cream cone from a push-cart.”

“There’s no way you could know that.”

“Of course there is,” she continued. “Because Jessica went back to her apartment afterwards, and bragged on the phone to another friend she found some rich dude that she planned to fuck and take all his money. I heard the whole conversation from the other room, because I’m her little brother Charlie. You came over while Jessica waxed her legs one afternoon, she yelled from the bathroom and goaded you into telling me what you did for a living. You told me about the experimental drugs and I said I knew a guy who could move product like that, make you a ton of money.”

“I’m the guy who could move product like that,” Dani said.

“When we got in that fight and I stabbed Dani with the syringes, we got those drugs as a cocktail,” Charli said. “We got really sick after you took off. Staggered a few blocks, passed out in a warehouse.”

“Over the next twenty-four hours, we changed,” Dani announced. “Into the luscious pieces of ass you see before you now.”

“And you’re biologically complete?” Barrientos asked. “Anatomically?”

Dani nodded. “I took a rather sizeable cock up to the balls inside me about this time last night,” she said with a fierce hint of pride. “So, yeah, anatomically and biologically complete.”

“A hundred percent female,” Charli confirmed.

“Fertile? Have you menstruated?” Barrientos snapped, all business. He tugged at his bonds. “Untie me, let me have my hands. I need to examine you.”

“You *need* to stop giving orders, there, doc, and start talking,” Dani asked. “You remember what was in those shots. How could this happen?”

He sat back, eyes deep in thought. “We never even tested interactions,” he mumbled, mind going full-tilt, making him sound faraway and a little dreamy. “They were never intended to be used together.”

“Hell of a side effect,” Charli said. “May cause nausea, drowsiness, diarrhea, runny nose, a *pussy*...”

“Easy, Charli,” Dani said. “Let him think.”

Barrientos opened his eyes. “I need my hands,” he said. “I need to write.”

“How do we know you’re not going to run away?” Dani asked.

“From a scientific miracle? From perhaps the greatest discovery of the millennium?”

“Fair enough,” Dani said. She dug in her purse on the table behind her, bringing out a wicked-looking pocketknife and her holstered Glock. Barrientos’ eyes widened.

“The knife is for the zip-ties,” Dani told him. “The pistol is for if you were lying about running away.”

Barrientos swallowed hard. Dani moved behind his chair, working at his bonds, while Charli stepped closer, sliding a little stool across from him and setting down a legal pad and pen.

“Dude’s brilliant, gotta give him that,” Rabbit commented, looking over the sheaf of hastily-scrawled notes that Barrientos churned out over the last two hours. The doctor had asked several times for access to his lab and blood samples, which Dani and Charli flatly refused. Barrientos complained that his work would not be thorough enough without the raw data, but the notes in Rabbit’s hands seemed to belie that assertion. Dani stood behind him, massaging his shoulders, just glad to be close to him.

“What did he come up with?” Charli asked, picking up a sheet and looking at it as though it were written in Egyptian hieroglyphs. “I can’t make heads nor tails of this.”

“It’s theoretical,” Rabbit started.

“Say one word about a blood test to me…” Dani warned.

“He’s right, though,” Rabbit attempted.

“Remember that sex we were gonna have, ever again?” Dani said brightly. Charli chuckled.

“Just give us the theories,” Charli told him.

“He made some rough graphs about how fast the viruses he used to carry the RNA strands worked,” Rabbit said. “Basically, you had these five drugs, right?” He wiggled the fingers of one hand.

“And then you have a cell in your bodies,” he said, holding up a fist with the other hand. He moved the wiggling fingers closer. “It’s all about which drug got inside the cell first. He’s trying to determine what order the changes occurred in your cells.”

“What’d he come up with?” Dani asked, returning to her massage.

“Well, the one thing he’s pretty sure about is that the performance enhancer came in last,” Rabbit said.

“Ironic,” Charli snorted.

“Because it would have triggered the rapid cell division,” Rabbit continued. “Which that metabolic booster would have kicked into overdrive. Ordinarily, it takes a few weeks for our bodies to replace every cell. They die off, right? It’s natural. Our bodies replace them as they wear out. In your case, instead of taking a week or two for every cell in your bodies to die off and get replaced, it happened in about twenty-four hours.”

“But how did it change us into girls?” Dani asked.

“Well, the anti-aging stuff is probably the culprit,” Rabbit told them. “According to Barrientos, the virus that carried it mutated pretty quickly. Best he can come up with, it attacked your Y-chromosome. That’s the chromosome that carries the secondary male sex characteristics. The Y-chromosome is what makes you genetically male.”

“I remember that from biology class,” Charli said. “I didn’t sleep through *all* of it.”

“I did,” Dani confessed. “Keep going, baby.”

“Somehow, the Y-chromosome dropped off. It either became another X-chromosome, or died off and got replaced by the X-chromosome. There’s no way to tell, not without that thing I can’t talk about.”

Dani blew a raspberry, and Rabbit smiled. "And maybe not even then," he continued, reaching over his head to stroke Dani's hair. "Once that metabolic booster hit your cells, they started replicating like crazy. Plus, you had that aphrodisiac pumping your bodies full of estrogen and oxytocin. Synthetic stuff, too, super powerful. Way more potent than what our bodies make naturally. Every new cell that got replicated now had two X-chromosomes and matured in a fucking bath of super girl hormones."

"Wow," Charli said. "So we're not just mutants, or something. We're actual, genetic girls."

"Yep," Rabbit said. "Down to your DNA. You became your own twin sisters, essentially. But with the tweaks from the other drugs, like the enhancers and the super estrogen and the anti-aging chemicals. Your bodies pretty much ate themselves to provide the fuel for all that work, which is why you shrank and lost height and weight like you did."

"Plus, it was probably in our DNA," Charli said. "Jessica's my biological sister, and she was shorter than me even though she was four years older and I wasn't through growing yet."

"Sure, there's factors like that," Rabbit said, "but without a complete genetic workup of your old, pre-transformation bodies, there's no way to be sure."

"I could probably find an old hairbrush or something," Charli said.

"Don't even think about it," Dani told her. "I told you, there were eyes watching my old place. They have to be watching yours, too. We can't go anywhere near our old lives."

"I know, I know," Charli said.

"I'm sorry, honey," Dani said. "I hope there wasn't anything special back there."

"Nah, not really," Charli said. "I didn't have any documents or photographs, nothing like that. An old Little League trophy, but Jessica probably threw that out by now."

"That's lucky," Dani said. "Because those two guys that slung drugs on the streets a week ago, they're gone. Dead. Erased. I'm Danielle Mayfield, and you're my little sister Charlotte. That's all we've ever been."

Charli beamed a smile. "And I'm so okay with that," she said.

"Me, too," Dani said, blowing her a kiss.

"So you don't even want to know if there's a way back?" Rabbit asked, stacking Barrientos' papers neatly.

"I actually don't," Dani told him. "I stopped being freaked out a while back. I've had a chance to really experience this life. Everything is way different, and parts of it are still a little bit scary, but I'm happy. For the first time in my life, I think."

"I don't want to go back, either," Charli said. "I have a future, Rabbit. A real one, not just jail or a cartel bullet in the back of my head. I can go to college. Have a boyfriend who isn't a loser, like my sister always had. Get a job, have friends. A life. I want that."

"So what do y'all want to do about Barrientos?" Rabbit said, looking meaningfully at the little self-storage locker door.

"Let him go," Dani said.

“He’s gonna dog our asses,” Charli said. “He’s got a real hard-on to announce us as some huge scientific breakthrough. Publish papers and make us into lab monkeys. He’s never gonna leave us alone.”

“And eventually the cartel will put two and two together,” Dani said, tapping her bottom lip with the tip of a long, French-manicured nail. “Yeah, we can’t have him talking. Nobody can know about us.”

“I can always change your identities again,” Rabbit said. “Lose you in the system. We’d probably have to relocate, and it might put an end to Charli’s aspirations to be a model, but...”

“No,” Dani said. “I don’t want another identity. I wanna be Danielle fucking Mayfield. I *like* that bitch. I wanna live *her* life, not somebody else’s. Turning into her was hard enough. I’m not doing it again.”

“So how do we keep him quiet?” Rabbit asked. “I assume y’all don’t want him killed.”

“He’s basically a chickenshit,” Dani said. “I think we can scare him into it.”

“Everybody has a breaking point,” Charli said. “Eventually, the cartel is going to throw some money at the problem. We know what he’s willing to do for a buck. You think we can scare him bad enough?”

“I think we might not have to,” Rabbit said. “I got an idea.”

They released Barrientos from his bonds that evening, letting the man sleep on an old folding cot and bringing him food and water, turning on a little swamp-cooler fan to cool off the stuffy storage unit. He seemed much more at ease around his captors, trying unsuccessfully to study them as they came and went, asking pointed questions and making copious notes on his many observations.

Dani came in just as the sun peeked over the eastern horizon, bearing a grease-spotted fast-food sack which she dropped on the cot next to the stretching, yawning doctor.

“Breakfast is served,” she announced, sipping from a Starbuck’s cup as she watched him tear into the food, chewing noisily.

“Thank you,” he told her, mouth full.

“Don’t thank me for *that*,” she told him. “When you have your first heart attack at forty-five, you won’t feel quite so grateful.”

“Strange that you care about that, now,” he commented. “I got the impression that the man you were wouldn’t have given things like cholesterol a second thought.”

“If you haven’t noticed, I’ve changed a bit,” she said.

He nodded. “I think that’s the memory enhancer, working in the background,” Barrientos commented. “Perhaps you saw a commercial for a statin drug, or some report on the news about the effects of cholesterol or the nutritional disaster that is fast food. The enhancer stuck it in your brain. You saw it in passing, probably, and your brain processed it with the drug. It became gospel.”

“Great,” Dani said. “Now I have to worry that if I pass a billboard for a farmer’s market I’m gonna become a vegetarian or something.”

“It’s possible,” Barrientos said. “It depends on how susceptible you are to suggestion.”

Dani struggled to maintain her indifferent façade. Little snippets of memory surfaced. When Charli first announced she wanted to become a model, she’d just been leafing through a copy of *Vogue*. Dani’s first real pang of wanting a baby happened shortly after seeing a billboard for a pediatric hospital. She distinctly remembered thinking about how adorable and perfect the little baby in the photograph looked.

“How do we stop it?”

“You have to realize it’s happening, first, I suppose,” Barrientos explained. “If you know it’s happening, you can fight back against it with your conscious mind. You’re not some mindless puppet, Danielle. You are still mistress of your own thoughts and destiny. But you and your sister are now the kinds of people who only need to see something *once* and you’ve learned it. Those effects will most likely fade over time, but your synapses have been rerouted permanently.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, if you see something that seems like a good idea, or that fits with your desires, even subconsciously, you’ll most likely adopt it,” he told her. “Given the flood of information that we all experience on a regular basis these days, it will probably happen often.”

“But I can choose not to,” she said.

“Of course,” he replied. “It may take a few tries – it might be one of those ‘itches,’ a subject or topic that won’t go away for a while, but eventually you can talk yourself out of it. It’s when you don’t consciously realize that it’s happening, that’s when it can sneak in.”

“I guess that’s just something Charli and me will have to learn to live with,” Dani said. “Among other things. Like periods and menstrual cramps.”

“Yes, that’s very likely,” he said. “Although, I could work on something to counteract the effects.”

“No, thank you,” Dani said flatly. “I’ve had enough of being pumped full of shit you ‘worked on.’”

He fixed her with a steady gaze. “But you do look happy,” he told her.

She blushed a little. “That’s not for you to decide.”

“No, no, of course,” Barrientos said. “It just seems like you and your sister don’t seem to have that many complaints. I would’ve expected to see you both in male – or at the most, unisex – clothing. But I’ve never seen either of you look unfashionable. You’ve both dyed and styled your hair, and you never show up – even at this hour – without makeup. Even the way you walk, designed to draw eyes and attract attention... you both seem very comfortable being girls.”

“Didn’t have a choice,” Dani grumped.

“Of course you did,” he said. “I’ve watched you smoke a dozen cigarettes since I got here. You don’t hold them like a man would, inhale or exhale like a man does, even the brand you chose is slim and feminine. You have both adopted this life wholesale. You could be standing in front of me in jeans and flannel, bulky jackets to hide your breasts, hair cut short and uncombed, no

makeup, no sexy walk, no eyelash extensions or fake manicured fingernails. You even pierced your ears.”

“Protective coloration,” Dani said.

“To a point,” he said. “But you’ve changed things people can’t ordinarily see unless you show them. Why else would you be standing here at dawn, wearing mascara and showing cleavage?”

Dani flushed with a flash of temper. “I’m here, wearing mascara and showing cleavage, because I had to bring you something to eat. Just like I wore a dress last night when I untied you from that chair. And just like I dolled up like a club slut and seduced you into the back of a van to bring you here. Because of circumstance,” she hissed. “Circumstances *your drugs* created.”

“And *your sister* injected you with,” he countered. “Why aren’t you angry with her?”

“Because she’s my sister,” Dani growled.

“She most assuredly isn’t,” Barrientos replied calmly. “You don’t even have the same eye color. You two *made* one another into sisters. Because you wanted to. Maybe even needed to, I don’t know. But you two are actively participating in the process of being girls. You haven’t fought a thing.”

“Maybe I should shoot *you* up full of girl juice and let you see what it’s been like, asshole,” Dani shot back. “Maybe it would help you redefine your idea of *necessity*.”

“Hair extensions aren’t necessities,” Barrientos said.

“They are when you have to seduce some quasi-intellectual prick and drag him to a storage unit and question him,” Dani said. “Don’t sit there and act like you know what I’m going through.”

He held up his hands. “You’re obviously very passionate about this,” he said.

“You’re goddamned right I am,” Dani hissed. “Passionate enough to put a bullet in the back of your skull and dump you in the fucking canal if you don’t shut the fuck up.”

His eyes narrowed, a disbelieving look on his face.

“You’re the one overlooking shit, Doc,” she growled. “You’re sitting there trying to play on my fears and insecurities, acting like you’re in control of shit around here. But if you’re so fucking smart and in control, then how come you haven’t figured out that Charli and I don’t *need* you any more? Why haven’t you figured out that you’re actually a liability to us now?”

“What?”

“We’re trying to disappear,” Dani said. “We couldn’t do it until we figured out what happened to us. You told us, but we had to reveal ourselves to you. Now you’re the only person out there who knows who we are. Who might be able to find us. Honey, the cartel is looking for the people Charli and me used to be. Our old places are being watched. Jessica’s probably being followed. They’ll find you, eventually.”

He blanched, suddenly quiet, the look of superiority gone from his face.

“And you could give us up,” Dani continued, smiling darkly. “Put the cartel on our trail. So when we go outside to talk, you *have* to know by now that we’re figuring out where to dump your body.”

“I wouldn’t talk,” Barrientos whispered.

Dani laughed. “You started talking after ten minutes, to a couple *girls*,” she explained. “You ever see what cartel interrogators do to people? Maybe you should Google it.”

“What are you saying?” he asked, subdued.

“Figure it out, smart guy,” Dani said, turning on her heel – a four-inch heel, one she *didn’t* have to be wearing but *wanted* to – and leaving the storage locker. Charli waited for her outside, leaning against the cinderblock wall.

“You okay, sweetie?” she asked.

Dani sighed. “He took the bait,” she said. “But I almost *did* lose my temper in there. He kinda got to me, a little bit. Said some shit I really didn’t like.”

“Forget that guy,” Charli said. “If Rabbit’s plan goes off, we’ll never have to see that guy again.”

“Can’t come too soon,” she said. “I’m ready to get free of our old lives, baby. This life we have now, it can’t start until we get loose of who we used to be. Barrientos is the last piece of that puzzle.”

“Believe me, I know,” Charli told her. “I want him gone as bad as you do.”

Dani stroked her sister’s flawless face. “You’re gonna be such a great model.”

“And you’re gonna be a fantastic mommy,” she replied.

“Thanks, baby,” Dani whispered. “I needed to hear that.”

“I know,” Charli said with a loving smile. “That’s what sisters are for.”

“That, and borrowing clothes from,” Dani said, forcing herself to brighten. “I don’t remember you getting that skirt. You *have* to let me borrow it.”

Rabbit thumbed the “End Call” button on his phone and sighed, leaning back in his computer chair heavily, making the *faux* leather creak. “That’s the last one,” he said.

Dani sat next to him on the floor, leaning her head in his lap happily on a pillow of her blonde hair. “That’s a relief,” she purred. She turned around and looked up at him expectantly. “Does that mean we have a few minutes to ourselves?”

He leaned down and kissed her tenderly, stroking her hair. She melted into the kiss, as she loved to do, feeling as though her bones went slightly liquid. Her eyes closed and her lips parted involuntarily, allowing him to deepen his contact, touch *more* of her. Dani’s heart sang with the nearness of him, the desire to be naked with him.

“I love you,” she whispered when they parted.

He only smiled and kissed her again, still not prepared to say it back. At that moment, Dani ached to hear those words from his mouth, but stilled herself inside, made herself content just to know he felt *something* for her.

“So now what?” she asked, massaging the tops of his legs and liking the new firmness she felt from his daily workout. It hadn’t been long, but she *knew* she saw a difference in him. A difference she very much enjoyed.

“Well, we got the guys lined up,” Rabbit said. “We have to figure out when and how to move Barrientos. I should have all the papers gathered up by this afternoon.”

“Good,” she said. “I’ll go ditch the old van and pick up the new one.”

He grinned. “You’ll look like a soccer mom,” he smiled.

“Sexiest damn soccer mom in the whole league,” she said proudly.

“Hands down,” Rabbit confirmed, leaning in for one last lingering kiss before putting his hands on the armrests and pushing himself up heavily. “You want coffee? I’m dying, here.”

She nodded. “You read my mind.”

She followed him into the kitchen, allowing herself a very appreciative gaze at Rabbit’s backside. She’d never really given it much thought before, but her boyfriend possessed a *really* nice ass. On a whim, she reached out and grabbed it. He jumped, a little shocked, but didn’t twist away. She managed a very firm and informative squeeze as they walked.

“What was that for?” he asked.

“You have a cute butt,” she said with a nose-wrinkling grin. “I just needed to grab it, that’s all.”

He chuckled. “Is that okay?” he asked. “I mean, is that a thing we’re doing?”

She looked adorably confused. “What do you mean?”

He shrugged. “I mean, I didn’t know... Dani, you have an ass for the ages. No kidding. I’ve wanted to grab yours a million times. But I wasn’t sure...”

She turned, suggestively pointing her backside at him and looking coquettishly over her shoulder. “Grab away, baby,” she told him. “I like that you wanna do that.”

“Seriously?”

“Green light,” she chuckled. He put one hand on each cheek and squeezed delightfully, making her giggle and purr as he kneaded her firm backside, bringing the wet emptiness in her midsection very much to the fore.

She turned in his grasp, carefully replacing his hands on her backside once she faced him, then rose onto her tiptoes and kissed him deeply, probing his mouth with her pierced tongue as he continued the sexy massage of her butt. She let her hands descend happily to his butt, as well, and they stood there for an unknowable amount of time, making out like teenagers and feeling one another up.

He finally broke, a little breathless, but laughing. “That was *fun*,” he told her.

“Yeah,” she said, leaning her head against his chest. She could hear the muffled beat of his heart.

“I really do like that you’re my girlfriend,” he told her. “Especially if it means I can grab your butt.”

“You can grab any part of me you want,” she breathed softly against his chest. “I’m yours, don’t you know that yet?”

“I know it,” he said. “I’m just nervous about believing it.”

She looked him in the eye. "Why?"

"Guys like me don't wind up with girls like you, Dani," he said. "You're damn near perfect. The way you act, the way you look, how incredibly fucking cool you are..."

"You earned it, Tommy," she said. "It's me who doesn't deserve *you*, not the other way 'round."

"How'd you figure?"

"You saved us," she told him. "Me and Charli both. Gave us a home, someplace safe. Helped us out when you seriously didn't have to. Shared everything you had with us, risked everything you had for us. You're an honest-to-God knight in shining armor."

"Aw, shucks, ma'am," he said playfully.

"I'm being serious," Dani told him. "I don't know anybody who would've done what you did for us. And we were buddies, before, from prison, but aside from 'honor among thieves' you didn't owe me a goddamned thing. You could have told us to get lost, and you would've been well within your rights to do it. No, you took us in because you're *good*. You're a good person, the best person I know."

She leaned back against his chest. "I'm honored to be your girlfriend," Dani said. "I'm the luckiest girl in the whole world to have you."

"Wow," he said, stroking her hair.

"I'm trying to be good enough for you," she said. "Charli is, too."

"You don't have to try," he told her. "You're more than enough. You're perfect."

She giggled. "No, I'm not."

"You are to me," he said, and Dani's heart soared.

"You know what I'm gonna say," she whispered. "I can't help myself."

He tilted her chin up with a gentle finger, locking her eyes with his. "Then say it," he told her.

"I love you, Tommy," she said softly. "More than I can ever say."

His eyes softened into half-moons as he smiled. "I love you, too, Dani."

Her breath froze in her lungs. "You do?"

"So much," he said.

She wound her arms around his neck. "Forget the coffee," she told him. "Take me to the bedroom."

"Which bedroom?" he teased gently.

Pure joy spilled from her. "*Ours*," she cooed, kissing him. "Take me to *our* bedroom."

To Be Continued...

SUMMARY: Two low life drug dealers find their lives turned upside down, when the younger, stupider one, shoots them both up with experimental drugs that has the effect of turning them into babes in both mind and body.

DRUGGED DEALINGS

Part Ten

By Valerie Hope

“THIS SUCKS,” CHARLI SAID FORLORNLY as she held her arms perpendicular to her body, waiting for Rabbit’s friend to finish his work. “I like that dress.”

“Seriously?” Dani asked, smoothing down her own dress. “I bought these at Goodwill, Char.”

“So? They have lots of cute stuff at Goodwill,” Charli shot back. “My friend Jordan shops there all the time, and she has some *super* cute stuff.”

Dani sighed. “We can go by there later, I promise,” she said. “In the meantime, I bought these just so we could mess them up. I didn’t want to spend a whole lot of Rabbit’s money on label or something just so it can get all torn up.”

Rabbit’s friend, a skinny buck-toothed woman named Esme, straightened from where she worked around Charli’s midsection. “You’re all done,” she announced, patting Charli’s shoulder.

“Thanks, sweetie,” Charli said, giving her a friendly *no-hard-feelings* smile.

Dani and her sister didn’t say much, while Esme packed her stuff away in a Gladstone bag and hustled out the door. Charli looked after the retreating woman, tapping her lower lip in thought – a subconscious emulation of her sister – and asked “Do you think she’s going to talk?”

“Tommy vouched for her, so that’s good enough for me,” Dani said. “He told me her family’s trying to emigrate from Nigeria, and Rabbit’s gonna use his magic to speed that up for her. Y’know that asshole congressman that’s all anti-immigration? Rabbit stole a few thousand bucks from his campaign fund to help grease the wheels.”

“I love his sense of fair play,” Charli laughed. “He’d rob Big Pharma to buy his grandma’s pills.”

“Yeah, that’s my Tommy,” Dani said proudly. “Hey, don’t just stand there in your underwear, this isn’t a *Playboy* shoot. Get dressed.”

Charli stuck out her tongue playfully at her sister, but tugged on the floral-print dress as requested. She smoothed it carefully over her budding breasts and flat tummy, tugging it around her hips to make it better conform to her ripening curves. “Can you see anything?” she asked, turning this way and that.

“Nope, just that hot little teenage body of yours,” Dani said.

“Cool,” Charli said, giggling and bouncing.

Dani’s phone *dinged* happily, and she checked it. “Text from Rabbit,” she said, the warmth and tenderness evident in her voice when she spoke her boyfriend’s name. “He says the guys are waiting.”

“I hope this works,” Charli said.

“Yeah, honey, me too,” Dani said. “C’mon, we better go. You go get Barrientos, I’ll bring the car around.”

“Right,” Charli said. “Break a leg, bitch.”

“You, too.”

Dani guided the minivan through the deepening gloom, towards midtown and Barrientos’ apartment. She daydreamed happily about a van full of chattering, arguing kids, all looking vaguely like Rabbit, the little soccer mom fantasy making her quite giddy and cheerful. She wondered, idly, what commercial or internet meme or magazine spread put the image of herself as the beautiful but harried mom into her brain. Barrientos told her she could fight against the image, keep it from taking root in her mind, but he never mentioned how to do that if she actually *liked* the image in her brain.

“Make a left at the light,” Barrientos instructed from the back seat.

Dani put on her signal and eased the van into the turn lane, almost saying “Okay, honey,” brightly at the instruction before slamming her willpower against the fantasy that cloyed her soul. She tossed the butt of her cigarette out the open window.

“Mine’s the third building on the right,” he said. “You’re sure it’s okay?”

“If Jessica didn’t tell them about you, you should be fine,” Charli told him. “Your corporate overlords at BioRenew, no idea. They could have tossed your place by now.”

“I can explain to BioRenew,” Barrientos said. “They’re not the concern.”

“And you’ll keep quiet,” Charli said. “Not a fucking word about us to anyone.”

“Of course,” Barrientos said, and both girls clearly heard the lie in his voice.

Dani pulled to the curb in a loading zone, turning on her hazard lights. They all bailed out of the van, even carrying a few empty cardboard boxes to complete the charade. They hustled inside and crammed into the first available elevator. Surreptitiously, Dani slipped one hand into her purse and texted Rabbit to let him know they were coming.

“You have five minutes,” Dani told Barrientos. “Grab everything you might need.”

The scientist nodded as he fumbled his keys into the lock. Dani and Charli hovered near the door, inside the small but lavish apartment, while Barrientos rushed around, gathering important items and stuffing them into an empty gym bag. *Like your skinny ass ever darkened the door of a gym*, Dani thought critically. *Not like my man*.

Barrientos dropped in some important-looking papers and a flash drive, then zipped the bag. Nodding, Charli opened the door and led them into the hallway.

They took only a few steps towards the elevator before a group of three men rounded the corner. They leered evilly at Barrientos and the two women, forcing them to turn on their heels and head the other direction, dragging Barrientos along. Another two men closed off their escape from the other direction.

“Who the fuck are you?” Dani asked, a tinge of panic in her voice.

“This don’t got anything to do with you, *chica*,” the first man said, a stocky, tatted-out Latino with a wicked scar over one eye. “Just shut that pretty mouth.”

“I got something to stuff in there, shut her up,” one of the others said, causing them all to laugh.

“What’s this about?” Barrientos asked.

“Need to talk to you, Luis,” he said. “A friend of mine told me you might be able to answer some questions for me. Remember Jessica? Bitch says ‘hi.’”

“I don’t know any Jessica,” Barrientos attempted.

“*Mierda*,” the lead thug said. “That’s not what she told us.”

“Bitch wasn’t in any shape to lie to us,” another man commented. “You’re Luis Barrientos, right?”

“Yes,” the scientist said softly, eyes darting around, looking for an escape.

“We need you to help us find a couple guys,” the first one resumed. “Couple of *gringos* named Danny and Charlie. Jessica told us you were the last ones to see them. Know where they are?”

“No, I don’t,” Barrientos said, swallowing hard.

“Now, see? Why don’t I believe you?” the first one said. “Probably better go someplace private, Luis. Sit down, have a beer, talk about this like gentlemen, you get me? Guys, go ahead and escort *Señor Barrientos* downstairs. Grab those two bitches, too, we can find something to do with them.”

The men advanced forward menacingly. Dani backed up to the wall, breathing heavily, and drew a gun from her purse, racking the slide and pointing it this way and that, trying to cover all the men in the hallway. “Get back,” she breathed.

“What, you gonna shoot all of us, *puta*?” the lead thug laughed. “Bitch, you need to put that shit on the floor before shit gets real, understand? This ain’t no movie. I will fuck you up and leave you bleeding on the goddamn floor.”

Charli grabbed her phone and began dialing. One of the men opened fire, a single shot. Charli dropped her phone and screamed. Dani fired back, causing the man to the left of the lead thug to spin around wildly. The lead thug and his remaining partner emptied their magazines. Dani and Charli jumped and jerked, erupting in sprays of blood and gore, collapsing against the walls. The remaining cartel goons ran in opposite directions. Barrientos looked at the two dead girls sprawled on the floor next to him and ran, grabbing his little ‘go bag’ from inside and heading for the emergency stairwell.

A long stretch of seconds elapsed before Dani’s phone rang with a text message. From her death sprawl, Charli looked up, her face smeared with ersatz blood, and nudged her sister. Dani stirred and moved, wiping stage blood from her hand on the ruined Goodwill dress, and checked her phone.

“It’s Rabbit,” she said softly. “Barrientos is gone.”

“He probably won’t stop running until he makes it home to Argentina,” Charli said.

Dani stood up stiffly. “C’mon, sweetheart, let’s get the fuck out of here before anybody comes up here to see what all the noise was.”

They held hands, slipping through the same door as Barrientos and trotting briskly down the stairs. They passed the ‘cartel goons’ Rabbit had hired, coming up with scrub brushes and buckets to clean the mess, giving the two girls elated ‘thumbs-up’ signs as they ascended.

Dani and Charli reached the street level a little breathless, ducking out the fire exit that Rabbit disarmed for them into an alley. A nondescript sedan waited there, with Rabbit sitting on the hood.

“Where did you *find* those guys?” Charli asked, taking the towel that Rabbit offered them both.

“Didn’t they look great?” Rabbit laughed. “They’re actually a community theater troupe that I helped out of a financial jam a few month back. Saved their rehearsal space by fucking with a few zoning ordinances and moving some money around.”

“You’re fucking Robin Hood, man,” Charli said.

Dani didn’t paused to wipe the fake blood from her face or arms before leaning in to kiss her boyfriend deeply, giggling with the relief of having it over. “You’re brilliant, is what you are.”

“Well, apparently you sold the fuck out of it up there,” Rabbit told her, wiping her nose playfully with the corner of the towel and making her grin. “Barrientos ran outta here like a scalded chicken.”

“I really hope he keeps running,” Dani said.

“Oh, I’ll make sure he thinks the cartel is still after him,” Rabbit laughed. “There’s lots of little digital things I can automate, keep him thinking people are looking for him. He’ll be running the rest of his life, unless he changes his identity. And if he does that, he can’t publish papers. He can never go public with anything for fear the cartel will catch him.”

Charli laughed aloud, covering her mouth with one hand. “The look on his face. I wish I had video.”

Rabbit reached into his breast pocket and held up a flash drive teasingly. “Security cam footage,” he told her, pitching it to her. Charli caught it between long-nailed fingers. “I knew you’d want it.”

“You are the *best*, Rabbit!” Charli squealed, bouncing.

“Nice to be appreciated,” he said smugly.

Dani leaned close. “Get me home tonight and I’m gonna appreciate the *shit* out of you,” she whispered, letting her hand wander south of his belt buckle for a brief moment. “Three, four, maybe five times. I’m gonna appreciate you till you can’t even *move*.”

He kissed her, his hand tracing a slow path from the back of her thigh, over one lushly rounded buttock and to the small of her back, pulling her close. “Sounds like fun,” he purred into her ear, nibbling her earlobe.

“You guys are being gross,” Charli whined, her eyes betraying the obvious happiness she felt for them.

“Probably better play some music in your room tonight, brat,” Dani said. “Shit’s gonna get *loud*.”

“Yuck!” Charli screamed.

“You love it, Jailbait,” Rabbit teased.

“You’re gonna have to make this up to me somehow,” she complained, sticking out her lower lip in an adorable pout, one which would easily get a rich man to buy her a Porsche once it matured.

“Already did,” Rabbit said. “You have hair at five thirty, makeup at seven, and your portfolio shoot is on for eight. My buddy used to shoot for *Vogue* and *Cosmo*, back in the day. He’ll make you look good, I promise.”

Charli’s eyes went huge. “Are you kidding me?”

“Nope,” Rabbit said with a heartfelt smile. “You’re on your way, kid. Look pretty, get some good shots, and we’ll see about getting you some classes and an agent.”

She launched herself into his arms, too overcome with excitement to even speak. He rocked her back and forth a little bit, chuckling happily.

“You’re welcome, Jailbait,” he said thickly.

“If she ever fucks with you,” Charli said, muffled by his chest, “I will marry you in a heartbeat.”

“I love how good you are to my sister,” Dani said into Rabbit’s ear.

“I hope you’re gonna love how good I am to *you*,” he said softly back.

“Oh, believe me,” Dani purred. “I’ve loved every second of it.”

Charli finally released him, wiping emotional tears from her eyes.

“So, what do you two gorgeous babes want to do first, now that you’re free women?” Rabbit asked.

“I can’t exactly do *that* in an alley, covered in fake blood, with my little sister watching,” Dani said. “So how about ice cream?”

“Sounds better than what *you* suggested,” Charli grumped.

The three settled into a happy routine, tracking Barrientos’ movements to Buenos Aires and beyond, making sure he wouldn’t resurface in the United States any time soon. They crowded around Rabbit’s computer happily, laughing and joking as he dropped multiple little digital hints that someone searched for him, where Barrientos could see but without being too obvious.

Dani eased into the comfortable, exciting dance of showing affection. She loved all the aspects of it, curling up against him to watch television, holding his hand as they walked together, giving him little affectionate kisses for no reason at all. She found that she loved including him in her activities – she never made coffee just for herself now, or always made an extra piece of toast in the mornings. But most of all she loved waking up in his arms, feeling warm and safe and thoroughly loved, staring at morning light through the slats of his venetian blinds and just laying there, still and cocooned by her lover, listening to his slow breathing, floating in a sea of happiness and contentment.

Learning that kind of tenderness from Rabbit carried over into her relationship with her sister, as well. She routinely grabbed her sister into affectionate hugs and planted kisses on her cheek, played with her hair while she read and did sweet, thoughtful little things for her without warning. Dani found herself quite unable to pass any kind of a store or display now without looking for something to get for Rabbit or Charli, a little thinking-of-you to bring home as a surprise.

To her delight, they began doing the same for her, finding little things that suited her – she amassed a tidy little collection of sparkly pink hearts, on barrettes and necklaces and stretch rings, that quickly became a signature part of her everyday look.

Charli quickly got traction after her portfolio shoot. Rabbit used his connections, both legitimate and illicit, to get her into some modeling classes at a top academy and to find her representation at a high-end firm. Her agent, a lean and hawkish woman named Alison, hit the ground running. Charli's phone began to ring with bookings before she even learned catwalk turns at the school she attended.

Dani and Rabbit got to feel very parental, touring schools in the area and trying to find a place for Charli to finish her education. Charli balked a little at the suggestion of the swanky private schools they attended, calling them 'breeding grounds for stuck-up bitches,' but Dani also saw a desire to fit in among the privileged and ultra-rich, something there that appealed to her latent Kardashian tendencies.

Rabbit launched a campaign of small robberies, ripping off smaller amounts from some of his more hated targets with sadistic glee. Congressmen, city councilors, corporations guilty of anything Rabbit considered a crime against the common man (Dani loved his revolutionary streak), megachurches, scam charities, no one stayed safe from his digital onslaught. By the end of the week, Rabbit amassed a pretty sizeable amount of money, squirreled away carefully in mutual funds and offshore accounts, untouchable and untraceable. He took great care and delight in ripping off a fake charity, one that raised money for girls with eating disorders and used it to fund junkets for its employees to St. Bart's and Aruba instead. He presented the money to Dani in a nondescript savings account, marked as "Dani's Boob Fund" on the credit union website.

Which explained how Dani came to be sitting in a lushly-appointed waiting room at a downtown clinic, leafing idly through a copy of *Glamour* while she waited for a consult with the city's top plastic surgeon. Other lifelong bimbos, from jaded trophy wives to aspiring models to obvious off-duty strippers, and the little ingénues and starlets looking for that surgical edge to jump-start their careers, sat in the waiting room around her, pretending to surf their phones or read magazines while giving the dark, jealous side-eye to the other women, judging them and comparing themselves.

Many of those eyes lingered on Dani, with her firm, youthful body and flawless skin, her thick blonde hair and effortless, carefree grace. Dani found herself liking that dark attention. A part of her wanted to rub their noses in her own beauty. The other women reeked of dissatisfaction and ennui, and instead of pitying them, Dani chose to compete with their unspoken air of superiority. Those bitches couldn't bring her down. She was not jaded. Nor was she bored, and she *certainly* wasn't dissatisfied. No, Dani was truly happy. And those other hateful shrews could choke on it, for all she cared. She gave each of them a cheerful smile or a wave, complimented their clothes or handbag, said she loved their hair and asked who did it in response to every hooded look. She made herself impossible to hate publicly, and loved watching the other women force smiles and compliments in return.

The nurse took her back and she disrobed, a little uncomfortable undressing as a woman in front of relative strangers, but the staff at the clinic obviously trained hard to put nude women at ease. The nurse took vital signs and measurements and the doctor came in shortly afterwards – apparently, in this tax bracket, doctors didn't make their patients wait.

“Hi, Danielle, I’m Dr. Sturdevant,” the tall, ruggedly handsome surgeon said with an outthrust hand. Dani offered her own, palm down, and gave him a glittering smile.

“I go by Dani,” she said perkily.

His smile quickened her pulse. She had an *extremely* handsome doctor. “Dani it is, then,” he said. He consulted a tablet computer. “I see here, you’re interested in breast and lip augmentation, possibly even some buttock implants?”

“That’s right,” Dani said. “Kinda the ‘bimbo Barbie’ package.”

He chuckled. “We should run a special,” he said, amused. He gestured her to a seat and pulled on a pair of examination gloves, then smoothly began to examine Dani’s breasts. She felt no desire to keep it anything other than clinical – she only wanted Rabbit to cross that particular line – but the feeling of the gorgeous surgeon’s hands on her breasts felt *really* good. Little flashes of wanting more sparkled in her brain, but she ignored them in favor of monogamy.

“You have a lot of native tissue,” he told her. “Very nice, very healthy breasts. What kind of implants did you have in mind?”

Dani giggled. “I, like, rehearsed all these smooth, sophisticated ways to say it, but they all sounded like I had a stick up my butt,” she told him. “Mostly, I just want them great big.”

He laughed aloud. “I wish more of my patients could be that honest.”

Dani laughed along. “No point in lying about it,” she said. “I actually don’t particularly want ‘natural,’ I really prefer the ‘done’ look. High profile, silicone, the works. Porn star boobs. Same with the lips, too. I know there’s nothing really wrong with the ones I have, but I want the big pouty Angelina Jolie kind. Y’know the ones I mean. Unless you wanna make me say it.”

He held up a hand. “No need,” he chuckled. “I know the term.”

“Think you can help me out?” Dani asked him.

“Pretty sure,” he said. “I’m gonna have my nurse bring out some sample implants so you can start getting an idea about size...”

Dani came home a few hours later, bearing Thai food in a tied plastic sack and a few things from the grocery store. Rabbit was at the gym – her eyes weren’t deceiving her, he *was* dropping weight and his muscles *were* firmer and thicker – and Charli out with friends, leaving Dani alone in the house for a while. She cleaned up a little, letting tiny thrills of pleasure race up and down her body at the pure domesticity, the feeling of being *the little woman*, of her actions. She couldn’t keep the smile from her face at the thought of becoming a little suburban housewife, tending to gardens and PTA meetings and cooking and cleaning, waiting for her man to return home from work, starving for his attention.

She set the table and lit a couple candles, changed into something a little bit slinkier and some higher heels, retouched her makeup back to flawless and sprayed, combed and fluffed her hair into a even higher level of perfection. She blew a playful kiss to herself in the mirror, bubbling over with the sheer joy of being a sexy, vivacious young woman in love. Gravel crunched in the driveway and her heart turned over, skipping a beat. She heard Rabbit’s heavy footsteps coming up the walk.

She met him in the hallway, taking his gym bag for him and going through it quickly, separating out the sweaty clothes and towels and dropping them in the hamper. She slid into his arms for a kiss, grabbing his butt happily in her manicured fingers, moaning softly into his mouth as his tongue probed inside.

“I missed you,” she said happily, threading her fingers into his hair, still damp from the shower at the gym.

“I missed you, too,” Rabbit said happily. “What’s that smell?”

“I got Thai food from that place you like,” she told him. “The basil noodles you like so much.”

“Wow,” he said. “I didn’t get you anything.”

“Other than a home, a new identity, the money for plastic surgery, freedom from the cartel…”

“Yeah, well, that.”

She giggled. “You are really funny, you know that?”

“And you are really sexy,” he commented, finally looking at the skin-tight white tank dress clinging to her every luscious curve. “How did things go with the doctor?”

She favored him with a lascivious smile. “I think you’re gonna be really happy,” she said suggestively.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Let’s just say I might need to get the Mattel logo tattooed on my ankle afterwards,” she told him, squeezing his ass again hard for punctuation. “Because you’re gonna be nailing a real live Barbie doll when the bandages come off.”

He grinned. “That mental image is gonna take a little getting used to,” he said. “But it’s not a bad image. No, not a bad image at all.”

She took his hand, stooping a little bit on her skyscraper heels to do it. “Come eat, before it gets cold,” she bade him, dragging him in her clicking, clacking wake a little. “You must be starving.”

He followed happily, taking in the spectacular view of her from the rear, her firm and flawless bottom twisting and bouncing in the second-skin lycra, her stride shortened by the titanic heels. The hair floating behind her in a shining cascade smelled like peaches, or perhaps apricots.

“Wow, look at you,” he commented. “You cleaned up the place and still had time to look like *that*?”

“I’m a talented bitch,” she said proudly.

“And a little domestic goddess, apparently,” he continued. “You even got the cords for the router tucked out of sight. I tried to do that for months, finally just wrapped them in a bread tie and gave up.”

“It wasn’t that big a deal,” she said. “I wanted to do it for you, so that made it easy.”

“This is kinda unexpected,” he said. “Coming home to you, dressed to the nines, and a clean house, dinner on the table…”

“Don’t you like it?”

“Of course I do,” he said. “I just didn’t expect it. It never seemed to be your style, I guess.”

“Well, what if I want it to be my style?” she challenged gently.

“Seriously?”

She shrugged noncommittally. “I’m not sure. I felt like it, I tried it, and it turns out I really like it.”

“Like it, like ‘this was fun for a night,’ or like it, ‘I want to live like this?’” Rabbit asked.

“Like it, like I’m turned on and happy and so glad to see you, I hope everything I did made you happy...”

He put a finger across her lips. “Don’t be upset, please.”

She let out a pent-up breath and backed away from the edge of an emotional upheaval. “Okay.”

“I just never pegged you for a housewife-type,” he said. “I didn’t mean anything by it. And it was really nice of you. And I *did* like it. But as priorities go, having a clean house and dinner on the table when I get home is not high on the list. Having a happy girlfriend *is*, so I’m a little conflicted about this.”

“So it’s not something you want?”

“Not every day,” he said. “I can clean my own house and make my own food, always have been able to. Never really needed or wanted someone to do it for me. I guess I just didn’t expect you to *want* to.”

“I want a lot of things,” she said, a little lost in thought.

“Like what?”

“Like I want to know your last name,” she said, eyes snapping to his in passionate contact.

He paused, just for a split-second, before saying “It’s McCarthy. Thomas Benjamin McCarthy. Junior.”

She smiled, closing her eyes. “I like that,” she said softly. “I like that a *lot*.”

“What does my full name have to do with anything?” he asked, gently.

“Because I just imagined myself being *Mrs. Thomas McCarthy*,” she said, eyes still closed, a slight smile on her beautiful face. “Your gorgeous wife. Your *little woman*. Your *missus*.”

“And?” Rabbit said, swallowing a little hard from the intensity in her voice.

“And I’ve never felt happier about anything in my life,” she said, opening her eyes.

Rabbit thought about arguing. He thought about giving reasons why not. He thought about counterproposals, potential risks, even a brief thought about running. But he decided to do something far wiser. He caught her face between his hands and kissed her as passionately as he possibly could.

Dani stirred in his arms, an unknowable time later. The take-out dinner lay cold and untouched on the table, the candles burned to stubs by now, but the lovemaking her sweet Thomas bestowed on her left her still-trembling body more alive than she’d ever felt in her life. Every

nerve in her body pulsed in time with the shuddering orgasms, the tidal-waves of pure emotion, the hammer blows of sheer physical sensation he gave her. She knew now, the simple and beautiful truth of it, after feeling what she would allow him to do to her, inside and out. Knew in her bones. She lay back beneath him that night free, unfettered, a young woman with her life ahead of her and boundless possibility.

She woke up *belonging* to him. Body, mind and soul. As completely and irrevocably *Mrs. Thomas McCarthy* as if he'd slipped a ring on her finger and sworn vows in a church.

She no longer wanted to have babies, she wanted to have *his* babies. She didn't want a home, she wanted *his* home. Everything she had, she owed somehow to him – he had saved her from the panic and uncertainty of the transformation, given her stability and comfort and safety where none existed. Dani craved that now, wanted it to continue forever. Yes, she wanted a cute little house and a cute little car and cute little clothes and cute little children. But now she wanted them to come from him. She didn't want a career, even a job, she wanted her *husband* to buy her house, her car, her clothes. She couldn't bring herself to deride the mental image of the *kept woman*. She wanted it. She wanted that to be her life. She perfectly envisioned the path to real happiness being down that path.

She pressed a soft kiss into his forearm where it curled around her shoulders, his warm hand still cupping one of her breasts. It would be a hard sell, talking her beloved Tommy into a life of domestic bliss with a subservient, obedient wife. Tommy was nothing if not progressive – his status as rebellious revolutionary precluded things like a job and a mortgage and a wife who obeyed his commands. He wanted partnership, equality, division of labor. How did she show him that she no longer wanted to be his equal? How could she possibly break the news to him that she wasn't a feminist?

She sighed, nestling closer to him, snuggling her back into his chest. "This sucks," she whispered to the darkness. The darkness offered no sympathy in return.

Hunger and her nagging bladder overcame her desire to stay in his arms, causing her to move his heavy arm with a soft grunt of effort and slide out from beneath his warm, comforting weight. She pulled on Rabbit's discarded t-shirt, a "gimme" shirt from some tech company that dangled to her mid-thigh and enveloped her in his clean, masculine scent. She padded quickly to the bathroom to relieve herself and give her makeup a quick once-over – she applied a little bit of gloss, wrecked from kissing him and subsequently wrapping her soft lips around his generous cock as part of their foreplay.

She went out to the front room, listening to the soft chirp of the crickets in the yard outside as she picked a few pieces of chicken out of her cold *pad see ew* and gobbled them down. She gathered up the food and shoved it neatly into the fridge once she filled up – only a matter of a few bites, the transformation geared her to eat like a bird – and cleared the table, even wiping it down in a flush of domestic perfectionism. The thrilling but iron-hard determination to keep a *perfect* house gave her energy for tidying and cleaning where none existed before. Dani would have a house like something out of *Better Homes and Gardens* if it killed her. Only that level of perfection would satisfy her need.

What the hell is happening to me? she wondered with a mixture of contentment and alarm. It wasn't as though she disliked the thoughts running through her head. But Rabbit confirmed earlier that they probably shouldn't be there. Was this an aftereffect of the drugs? Did she see

some commercial or web banner that implanted this image of the trophy housewife in her brain, stoking its fire until it rose to obsession?

Barrientos told her to fight things like that, push back against them, if she didn't want them. But so much of her *did* want them, *craved* them in fact, that the simple matter of fighting back seemed almost impossible to her.

A key scratched in the lock and Dani straightened – she realized with a bit of a shock that her wiping down of the table led seamlessly into a thorough cleaning of the kitchen counters – brightening immediately at the sight of her sister coming around the corner from the entryway.

“Morning, gorgeous,” Dani singsonged, smiling happily.

“Hey, Dani,” Charli said brightly. “You’re up late.”

“Yeah, I got a little bit sidetracked,” Dani explained.

“Side-*dicked*, you mean,” Charli teased.

“Something like that. Anyway, there’s leftover Thai in the fridge if you’re hungry.”

“Mmm. Sounds good,” Charli said, dropping her purse carelessly on the freshly-scrubbed table. Dani fought the urge to grumble at her, instead only moving it gently to the sideboard.

“How was your night?” Dani asked.

“Great,” Charli said. “Went to go meet with those catalog guys, y’know. The meeting went great. My agent said they really liked me and I should expect a call this week.”

“That’s fantastic! We should celebrate!” Dani cooed.

“I haven’t got the job yet, honey,” Charli said, holding up her hands to restrain her sister’s exuberance. “Afterwards I met Jordan and her sister Sarah, some other girls, at Starbuck’s. We hung out for a little while, just shooting the shit.”

“Did you have fun?”

“I guess,” she said, and her cheeks colored slightly.

Dani pounced on the bait. “Who did you meet?”

“One of the baristas had a little brother, a year older than me. His name’s Steve. *Really* cute. Like, Disney Channel sitcom cute,” she said. “He sat at our table, all cool and stuff, just hung out. Totally not acting interested at all, y’know, so much that Jordan thought he might be gay.”

“I’m assuming he wasn’t,” Dani said.

“No, you taught me what to look for,” Charli said, “y’know, in the lead-up to getting Barrientos. All those subtle little signals, and he was sending them out like crazy. Once I knew his ‘tells,’ I could tell how into me he was. He couldn’t keep his eyes off of me.”

“Nice,” Dani said.

“So, after Jordan had to go, the group kinda broke up, and I snuck off to grab myself a cigarette. Steve followed me. He asked me out,” Charli said.

“And?”

“And, I said I had to ask my sister,” Charli giggled. “I really didn’t, but we’re trying to be a family and everything now, so I figured it would be a good time to start.”

“I’m really glad you did.”

“He wants to take me to see a movie and get coffee after,” Charli said. “Friday night. Can I?”

Dani smiled, the domesticity tickling the new, sensitive spot inside her that found joy in it. “Of course, baby,” she said. “If you think he’s an okay guy, I mean. I trust your gut about stuff like that.”

Charli squeezed her sister’s forearm. “Yeah, he seems really nice,” she said. “I really like him.”

“Is there more to the story?” Dani asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“Yeah, well, I... I sorta kissed him,” Charli said.

“That was fast,” Dani commented.

“It was,” Charli explained. “We were out, back of the store. I was smoking a cigarette, he was leaning against the wall. He asked me out, and I guess I didn’t hide how happy and excited I was.”

“You don’t exactly have a poker face,” Dani teased.

“So I finished my cigarette and kinda got a little closer, y’know. All the eye contact, everything you said to do with Barrientos. Steve was eating it up,” she said.

“Okay, so then what?”

“I touched him, like you mentioned, and showed him the side of my neck, smiled, looked up at him through my eyelashes, didn’t cross my arms, all the standard stuff,” Charli said. “I guess I just didn’t expect him to send the same shit back to me. Leaning in close, eye contact, he even licked his lips.”

“And you got taken in?”

“Like *crazy*,” Charli said. “He has these really intense eyes. He told me I was pretty. Next thing I knew, I had my arms around his neck and was kissing him.”

Dani looked *faux*-stern. “Tongue?”

Charli gave her an exasperated, *very* teenage look. “Who’re you talking to, Dani?”

Dani couldn’t maintain the stern demeanor, breaking into a giggling smile. “Your first kiss! That’s so exciting!” she squealed, clapping happily.

“It was *really* good,” Charli said dreamily. “Is it normal to feel a little dizzy afterwards?”

“Like your legs don’t work right? Oh, yeah,” Dani said. “Tommy does that to me every single time.”

“Anyway, I’m trying to be cool about it,” Charli said. “But it’s not exactly working. I shopped for just the right date dress all the way home on my phone. The Uber driver must’ve thought I was a stuck-up little bitch, I don’t think I said a word to him.”

Dani beamed. “Boyfriend material?”

Charli screwed up her face adorably in thought. "I don't really know him that well," Charli said. "He seems like he could be, but I haven't really interviewed him for that particular job yet."

"Fair enough," Dani said. "I like that you're being careful."

"Anyway, I like him a lot," Charli said. "Maybe we'll reach boyfriend-girlfriend, maybe we won't."

Dani cleared her throat. "Do you think we're slaves to this?" she asked suddenly.

"Slaves to what?"

"Whatever was in those shots Barrientos cooked up," Dani said. "All of them, working together, making us like we are? Do we even *want* this?"

"A boyfriend? Dani, I was so wet you could smell it," Charli told her. "So, yeah, I think I *do* want that."

"And I can't stop thinking about fake tits and cleaning house and having babies," Dani said. "All the time. It should scare the shit out of me, but it doesn't. It makes me happy."

"So where's the bad, if it makes you happy?" Charli asked.

"I feel like there *oughta* be bad, that's what's freaking me out," she said. "Like, I learned Tommy's last name yesterday. That shouldn't be a big deal at *all*. But now I'm floating around with big pink cartoon hearts popping over my head, thinking 'Mrs. Tommy McCarthy, Mrs. Tommy McCarthy, Mrs. Tommy McCarthy,' like some lovesick dumbass."

"You *are* a lovesick dumbass," Charli told her patiently. "When are you gonna see that?"

"But marriage? *Babies*?"

"Lots of girls think about marriage and babies," Charli said. "Hell, *I* think about that stuff."

"Charli, we were guys a *week* ago," Dani said. "Don't you feel like we should be freaked out?"

"But we aren't," Charli told her. "So I'm not gonna borrow a freak-out if there's not one already there. We're girls, now, Dani. We're gonna think about getting married, being pregnant, having babies. That's something that a *lot* of girls want. There's no reason we should feel any different."

"No reason, yes," Dani said. "But I feel like I should feel different. We're not regular girls."

"The hell we aren't," Charli said. "Barrientos said we were. One X and one Y chromosome. Perfect plumbing, all the right parts in all the right places."

"Yeah," Dani said. "I guess you're right."

"So marry Rabbit. If he's trying to be all cool and aloof about it, then talk him into it. Suck his dick every night for a month until he buys you a ring," Charli told her. "Marry him, buy yourself a mini-van, start squeezing out his babies. Make your life about school plays and soccer games and Mommy and Me."

"And fake tits," Dani said. "And, apparently, a really clean house."

"Whatever," Charli said. "Don't judge it, sis. It's who we are now."

"Yeah," Dani said, wiping a tear from one eye carefully so to avoid smudging her makeup.

"Y'know what? You're right. It's *definitely* who we are."

End