



SUMMARY: Jerry, the delivery guy, stumbles in a pharmaceutical company and finds that his DNA is now being transformed by a new secret product.

## HIGH PERFORMANCE, Part One

by Valerie Hope

JERRY COOPER SWORE AS A huge bead of sweat dropped from the end of his nose onto the package, making the ink run and completely obliterating the name of the signatory for the parcel he was bonded to deliver. Looking forlornly up the concrete-and-glass expanse of the giant downtown building where his delivery was scheduled. Probably somewhere on the order of seventy, eighty companies, several thousand offices. If he had to do a door-to-door search, he'd never make his delivery by the time his contract stipulated. Bonded couriers lived and died by delivering when they were supposed to. This would surely cost him his job. Walking like a man condemned, he shouldered the heavy package and walked into the lobby.

He stopped and indentified himself to the security guard in the lobby. "Bonded courier," he grunted, steeling himself for having to ask if anybody was expecting a package today.

"Deliveries in there," the security guard said, not looking up from his *Sports Illustrated* and jerking a thumb in the general direction of a large reception area. Jerry's eyes widened. Could it be possible that only *one* company used all the space in this enormous building? He didn't question his good fortune as he let himself be buzzed through the gate, passed easily through the magnetometer post and headed for receiving.

He was greeted by a smiling, dumpy woman who looked like the love child of Valerie Bertinelli and the Pillsbury Dough Boy. She did have an infectious smile, though, and Jerry couldn't help but return it in kind.

"Are you the courier? R&D has been driving me crazy, calling down here every five minutes to ask if you've gotten here yet," she said in a tone of friendly conspiracy.

"Must be important," Jerry commented.

"Must be," she replied. "But then again, everything that goes up there is important."

"You guys use up this whole building?" Jerry asked in disbelief.

"Sure do," she answered. "Apparently, they tell me there's money to be made in pharmaceuticals."

Jerry chuckled. "Y'know, I heard the same thing."

She smiled again, handing him a laminated visitor pass that he clipped to his collar. She pointed towards a bank of elevators.

"R&D, sixtieth floor. You need to ask for James, he'll take you where you need to go."

"Thanks a lot," Jerry said.

"Not a problem. Have a good day!"

\* \* \*

Pleased with his turn of good fortune, Jerry whistled a merry Irish jig as he rode the glass elevator up the spine of the building, appreciating the view of the city as it spread out underneath his gaze. His ears popped a little before the "ding" and the chrome doors opened to reveal another security checkpoint. A tall, lanky man with glasses and a prominent Adam's apple was chatting with a jovial looking security guard. The lanky man - wearing a lab coat with a security badge that named him Gordon Chambers - looked up and offered a smile.

"My samples!" he said, surging towards Jerry and taking the signature pad excitedly, bouncing up and down a little like a kid on Christmas. Jerry reviewed the signature - an illegible scrawl - and handed over the package.

"Sorry, buddy," the geek said, realizing he'd all but snatched the package out of the deliveryman's hand. "I've been waiting for these for six weeks."

"Important stuff?" Jerry asked.

"Could change the world someday," Chambers replied. "These little babies may be the key to someday reversing the aging process."

"Get the hell out of here," Jerry said.

"He ain't lyin'," the security guard said. "One day one a' these guys gonna come out of that lab back there and say they done went and cured cancer, an' I ain't gonna be surprised at all, brother. They *serious* 'bout they science back there."

"So people would never get no older?" Jerry said, wonderingly.

"Better than that," Chambers said. "If our theory is right, people might actually get *younger*. Imagine, you're an old man and you take this treatment and it can turn you eighteen again and keep you there for the rest of your life."

"You'd still die, though, right?" Jerry asked.

The scientist leaned against the desk, obviously pleased that someone not in a lab coat was taking an interest in his work. "Sure," he said. "Nothing can ever stop that. But you wouldn't die of old age. And you'd have a better shot at beating the old-age killers, like heart disease, stroke, pulmonary disease, that kind of thing. But if you don't take care of yourself, if you don't wear your seatbelt or smoke crack, that sort of thing, you'll still die."

"That's amazing," Jerry said softly.

"Say," Chambers said, a glint in his eye. "You wanna see it?"

Jerry jumped. "I got other deliveries."

"It'll take ten minutes," Chambers said. "C'mon. Nobody's seen it but the techs. I'd like to get your response."

Jerry checked his watch. "I guess I can take my lunch a little early."

"Cool," Chambers said, clapping his hands. "Sign him in as a guest, Eddie."

The security guard started writing in his ledger and slid a visitors' pass across the desk.

\* \* \*

The interior of the lab was a little dark, and very cluttered with expensive-looking, very high-tech gadgets which beeped and blinked and charted and graphed from every corner of the large room.

Chambers placed the parcel containing his precious 'samples' on a metal table in the center of the room and led Jerry over to a series of glass cages. In two of them, side by side, were an ancient-looking golden retriever and orange striped cat. Both were half-blind, rheumatic, toothless and grey in the muzzle.

Behind them, two lab techs worked in clean suits, their breathing amplified through their headgear and little circles of fog appearing rhythmically in front of their mouths on the lexan faceplates. They prepared syringes of something marked XDT-2209B and injected the animals.

As Jerry watched, the two animals lay very still, but gradually - so gradually that Jerry couldn't tell you when something happened, only *that* it happened - the shine and gloss came back to the dull, lusterless coats and the teeth became strong and straight. Their eyes became clear and bright and the old dog's tail began to wag happily. The legs twitched and jerked a little - the cat rolled over and stretched, a strangled meow escaping his lips as he loosened muscles which hadn't been properly stretched in years, probably.

Within twenty minutes, an adorable orange-striped kitten and a bouncy golden retriever puppy were running back and forth excitedly in their cages.

Jerry finally recovered the presence of mind to close his gaping mouth.

"Pretty cool, huh?" Chambers asked proudly.

"That's amazing," Jerry breathed. "How the hell - I mean, does it hurt them? Are there side effects?"

"A few," Chambers admitted. "Accelerated metabolism, for one thing - there's some pretty dramatic weight loss. Also, when the animals regress in age like that, and shed body mass, well, there's the diarrhea factor. All that extra body mass has to go someplace, right? Some vitamin deficiencies. Pretty standard, predictable stuff."

"Wow," Jerry said.

"The biggest issue is that the serum only works when it's irradiated in the blood stream," Chambers said. "We have to hit them with high-energy x-rays once they're injected. And radiation is dangerous. It causes mutations. That's why we have the samples - radioactive isotopes that could activate the drug more slowly, and a lot more safely than using x-rays like that."

"Well, hey, good luck with all this," Jerry said. "But I really have to get going."

"Okay," Chambers said, obviously sorry to have to stop his show-and-tell session. "Thanks for coming in - I like being able to show people what we're doing, and the company can be real assholes about it."

"I can understand that. That shit is probably going to be worth a fortune once you get it ready," Jerry commented.

"Who cares?" Chambers said. "I couldn't care less about the money. This is about people's lives. That's why I got into medicine in the first place, to help people's lives be better. Somebody's gonna get rich over this, but that somebody probably won't be me."

"That sucks, partner," Jerry said. "You should at least get something for your trouble."

"That's nice of you to say," Chambers told him.

"Well, see ya, doc," Jerry said, turning quickly on his heel. He took a half-step and his toe caught on the edge of the static mat. He stumbled forward, throwing his hands out towards the lab table to break his fall, sending bottles and test tubes flying everywhere. Broken glass and strange-smelling liquids spilled across the table. Chambers snatched up his samples quickly to get them out of the way of the spreading pool of liquid. Jerry recovered from where he'd fallen on his right hip and stood, clutching his hand gingerly.

"Are you all right?" Chambers asked.

"Yeah," Jerry said. "Cut my hand on some of that glass. I'm bleeding like hell."

"Let me look," Chambers said. The wound was jagged and bloody, and his palm was wet with the fluids from the table.

"Don't worry," Chambers told him. "Nothing was on that table that could hurt you. You should be fine once you bandage that cut. If you have anything come up, you just call me. This card has my personal number on it."

"Thanks, I will," Jerry said. Still a little dazed, he walked out the door towards the elevators.

Chambers summoned a worker to come in and sweep up the lab. He surveyed the extent of the damage and judged it wasn't bad at all.

The clean-suited technicians came into the room. "We're ready to start the next run of trials using the radioactive iodine, Dr. Chambers."

"Go ahead. Where's the XDT-2209C, the newer batch?" Chambers asked.

"It was on that table right there - what the hell happened in here?" the tech asked.

Chambers was looking towards the elevators in total shock. "Oh, shit."

\* \* \*

By the time he'd finished his deliveries, Jerry didn't feel much like heading out the bar to have a cold one on the way home. He just wanted to flop in front of the television, crack a beer out of the fridge and surf the channels for a while. He'd just gotten his new cable box and he hadn't gotten the chance to really nose around the extended lineup yet. He stopped at a neighborhood grocery just outside his metro stop and picked up a frozen dinner, then walked the two and a half blocks to his apartment.

He cracked a beer and threw his dinner in the microwave, wincing at the pain in his hand and marveling over the transformations of the dog and the cat. He'd gotten to see something that

nobody else had, and it had given him a special, I-know-something-you-don't-know feeling for the whole day.

Feeling a little stuffy, he walked out onto the crappy little balcony of his third-floor apartment for a cigarette. The thing was more of a ledge, really, just enough for a fern and a coffee can for his butts and still have a place to stand. He looked down at the bumper-to-bumper 5 o'clock traffic and smiled. It sucked to go to work at 5 a.m., but it didn't suck to get off work at 2. He was already home with his shoes off when most of the other wage-slaves were fighting to get on the freeway.

He blew out a long plume of Winston smoke and looked at all the damned satellite dishes sprouting out of the sides of every apartment building on the block, like some kind of sickly, mutant flower that looked away from the sun. Hell, it was a miracle that all the microwaves being beamed down from space weren't cooking everyone in sight.

The microwave oven *dinged* inside, signaling dinner. Jerry pitched his smoke and went inside.

\* \* \*

Maybe it was the hours of the morning when he rose, or the stress of the last days before payday. Most likely it was the painkillers for his bad back mixed with the three beers he'd slugged over his nonesuch dinner of microwave Salisbury steak. Maybe it was just a function of being fifty-one and not in great shape. But for whatever reason, Jerry was dozing in front of the television, in and out of consciousness. Sleep just seemed to elude him in his quasi-comatose state - he would zone out for a while and 'come to' with a snap and a gasp, he'd change the channel to something more relaxing and go straight back to la-la land. He wasn't even paying attention to what he changed the channel to, no really knowing how to work the TV Guide system or any of the cooler features of his new cable box. So he'd spring awake in the middle of *The Anna Nicole Show* and not remember anything other than vague images, then he would turn the channel and wake up in the middle of a Britney Spears or a Jessica Simpson video. Taking a brief moment to appreciate the finer features of the two young artists, it put him in mind to view the more sordid channels in his lineup, so he changed the channel and suddenly awoke in the middle of a torrid porno movie where Jenna Jameson took on three guys.

Finally, Jerry could take no more. He rose and stumbled the three feet from his recliner to his bed, flopping face down into his pillow without even turning off the television.

\* \* \*

The alarm rang all too early. Jerry groaned and slapped his way around the top of the table for the 'snooze.' Dimly, he heard the news in the background.

".again, Tom, owners of the Ichiban 9280 and 9280 Deluxe cable receivers are urged to not turn them on and take them back to the cable company for replacement immediately. These units emit a potentially harmful level of radiation when operated for longer than 2 hours. The Ichiban 9280 and 9280 Deluxe cable receivers are being recalled by the factory, Ichiban Electronics, due to safety concerns."

*I wonder if I have one of those kind?* Jerry thought to himself. Even his thoughts sounded like a boozy night-after groan inside his head. He levered himself up out of bed and his arms barely had the strength to hold him there for a second before he toppled over. A burning, clenching

cramp chose that moment to alight in Jerry's gut like a cheap sucker punch. Barely able to crawl, Jerry dragged himself into the little bathroom and onto the toilet as his bowels let go. He thought the emptying would never end as he groaned, held his head tightly and tried not to pass out.

Finally, Jerry was able to make his way back to bed and collapse. He fumbled on the bedside table and found his phone, dialing work listlessly until his supervisor picked up. Jerry made his excuses - he sounded more than horrible enough to convince his boss that he was sick. The next order of business was to find the business card that Chambers had given him the day before, and call it in. The man had *said* to call him if anything weird happened. Jerry definitely qualified this as weird.

\* \* \*

Jerry didn't know how long he'd lain there, sick beyond sick, before there was a knock at the door saying it was Chambers. It felt like it took an hour to stand and unlock the deadbolt, throw the chain and step aside as Chambers, another doctor and two techs loaded down with equipment rushed by him into the room. Jerry felt a little like one of those clips in the movies where one person was moving normally while everybody else around them is moving in fast motion. Jerry managed to get into his recliner - almost setting off another case of the cramps - and let the docs check him over with good patience and what little humor he had left to him.

They took blood and urine and samples of the noisome liquid that was escaping him in what seemed like bucketsful, DNA swabs from the inside of his cheek, vital signs and everything else Jerry could think of. He gave a detailed description of the day, with Dr. Chambers stopping him every once in a while to ask questions about what seemed to be the smallest, most insignificant things of the day - where Jerry was concerned about the packages he'd delivered, his supervisor, the crazy drivers downtown, Chambers was asking him questions about how close he stood to electric power outlets and weird shit like that. None of it made any sense at all, and Jerry was starting to get tired.

He was only starting to nod off in his recliner when one of the technicians came in with a long, printed-out report full of medical gobbledeygook and showed it to Chambers. The two of them had a long, very intense conversation in tones too low for Jerry to interpret, interspersed with long moments of staring at Jerry, wide-eyed and considering. Jerry checked the urge to see if there was something unfortunate hanging from his nose, or whether his fly was down, or his shirt buttoned correctly. He was just about to say something when Chambers looked back down at his report, back up to Jerry, back to the report and then back to Jerry again.

Striding purposefully towards where Jerry sat, Dr. Chambers lifted him from his elbow and helped him stand.

"What's up?" Jerry mumbled, half out-of-it.

"We're gonna go ahead and take you to the hospital. There's some stuff up there that we need to use to find out what's going on with you."

Jerry half-smiled, still more than half dopey on whatever the hell they'd given him to help him relax. Roland, the tech who was casing all the new equipment they'd brought, stood and smiled beside the chair. "C'mon, Mr. Cooper," he said cheerfully - a little too cheerfully. "We'll get you all fixed up."

He stood and it set off a fresh bout of cramps. Jerry bent double, groaning madly, and slumped back into the chair.

"We'll get you a stretcher," Roland told him.

"Probably a good idea," Jerry panted, breaking out in another cold sweat. "What the hell is going on with me, anyway?"

Dr. Chambers came back in the room, looking at a clipboard with a worried expression on his face. "We have no idea what's happening, Mr. Cooper," he said gravely.

"Call me Jerry," Jerry grunted. "Sounds like we're going to be spending some time together."

"Probably so," Chambers said. "I'm Gordon."

"What do you think, Gordon?" Jerry asked, clutching his wrist.

"No way to tell yet, Jerry," Chambers replied, scratching his head. "You've metabolized some of our test serum from the lab, through the cut in your hand."

"So I'm going to be young again?" Jerry asked.

"Probably," Chambers replied with a wry smile. "That's the good news."

"What's the bad?" Jerry asked.

"You got a hold of our new batch," Chambers said. "Called XDT-2209C. Call it 'C' for short. It hasn't been tested yet. It was designed to respond to a much lower amount of radiation than its predecessors."

"I obviously got enough of a zap to make it work," Jerry commented.

"Just walking outside these days is enough radiation to activate it," Chambers replied. "But you had a lot of exposure yesterday. Mostly to microwave radiation. You have one of the cable converters that was recalled, you used a microwave oven. the list goes on and on. You probably got ten or twenty times the amount of radiation it took to activate the serum."

"So what does that mean?" Jerry asked.

"Like I said, Jerry, we just don't know," Chambers said. "When we use this stuff in the lab, it's under very controlled circumstances. The best I can give you right now is to tell you that the C causes mutations when it's overexposed to radiation."

"Mutations?"

"On the cellular level," Chambers said. "It damages the DNA. We don't know what that means yet - we need to run more tests. It could mean anything, from getting darker skin all the way to malignant cancer."

"Oh, shit," Jerry said.

"The upside is that the serum, once activated, helps cellular regeneration. So if you do have the worst-case, you'll recuperate from chemotherapy a great deal faster."

"Was that supposed to make me feel better?" Jerry said, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"I know, buddy," Chambers said, patting his shoulder. "We don't know anything right now. Try not to dwell on the worst that can happen. Wait until we know a little more."

The medics came in with the stretcher. Jerry closed his eyes and tried to breathe deeply as they started his IV and put him on oxygen. He barely felt them lift his body onto the stretcher and wheel him out the door.

\* \* \*

"Dr. Chambers, take a look at this," Dr. Heather Everett, the cellular specialist who'd been called into the case said, not taking her clear blue eyes off of the computer screen where she'd been working.

She pointed to a looping computer animation on the flat-screen monitor as Chambers walked up. "The serum - it's knocked his DNA all to hell. I've been tracking off skin samples for the last seven hours. Look. He's lost entire alleles to this stuff. I'm afraid he's going to have a complete genetic breakdown."

"You mean lose entire chromosomes?" Chambers asked.

"Yes," Everett said. "It's already starting to happen."

"Is there any way to stop this?" Chambers said.

"No," Everett replied bluntly. "But it's possible that I might be able to stabilize it."

"How?"

"It's a long shot," she said. "We use his own DNA and we push it on him as a retrovirus. Then we use chemotherapy agents to stimulate cell regeneration, and use the serum's potential to try and, essentially, grow him a new body."

"That's crazy," Chambers said. "For one, we could never generate the retrovirus in time. He'd be dead before the infusion was ready."

"Not true," Everett corrected. "I worked on this at USAAMRID and CDC. We're able to synthesize RNA from a DNA source within twenty-four hours. It's for viral outbreaks. All we need is to get a sample of healthy DNA from him. Nervous tissue would be ideal."

"You honestly think this is going to work?" Chambers said, looking through the plate-glass window at the sleeping figure of Jerry Cooper.

"It's that or watch his DNA completely dissociate in front of our eyes," she said.

"Poor guy," Chambers said. "He was a really nice fella. He doesn't deserve this at all."

"I can imagine."

"I feel responsible," Chambers said. "I signed him in, I took him back into the lab."

"Then do everything you can to save him," Everett said. "Gordon, we've known each other for how long?"

"I dunno," Chambers said, sighing heavily. "Twenty years?"

"Almost thirty," Everett said. "In all that time, I've never seen you back down from a fight. This is emergency theoretical medicine. Your friend in there is coming apart at the chemical level. We've got something here that could actually save him. Do the math."

Chambers nodded solemnly and picked up the phone. "Roland. I need a DNA sample from Mr. Cooper, stat. Healthy DNA, something from the core."

\* \* \*

Roland Mackenzie was a happy man. He'd been relatively skeptical about using online dating services, but his friend Brian had finally talked him into trying. There had been a pride-swallowing couple of months where no one seemed interested, a few dead ends, but finally - four months after he'd registered - he'd met Melissa.

She was everything he'd ever looked for - pretty, smart, funny and so much in common. They'd dated for a while, the typical dinner-and-a-movie fare, exploring one another and tentatively - both had been badly hurt and there was baggage to be dealt with - trying to overcome their shyness and fear. But many long talks and a great deal of honesty later, and they'd finally done the deed.

Waking up next to her was wonderful, but hard - it had been a while, and they'd made up for lost time in one another's arms. Yes, Roland Mackenzie was a happy man.

A happy man who hadn't slept in thirty-six hours.

He yawned into his coffee and rubbed his eyes, hanging up the phone. Memories of Melissa, and the little baby-soft kisses she'd rained all over his chest, made him smile sleepily.

"You okay, Roland?" his friend, Jack, asked. "You look like hell."

"Late night. Or early morning, I can't decide which. I'm so tired I'm almost left-handed."

Jack chuckled. "Can I help out?"

Roland blinked. "You feel like getting a DNA sample from the patient in Obs Two?"

"Sure, no problem," Jack said.

"Dr. Chambers needs it stat," Roland said. "Separated and everything."

"You got it," Jack said, tapping the doorframe on his way into the hall.

Roland smiled and nodded his head back into his hand.

\* \* \*

Jack whistled merrily as he broke down the sample into raw genetic material, pipetting the dissociator into the sample tube and agitating it thoroughly. Dr. Chambers would have his sample in record time, and no one would know his good buddy Roland had been sleeping on the job. It felt good to do a nice turn for a friend. Lord knew Roland had done enough for him, on those mornings he'd come in off a two-day bender and could barely hold a pencil.

He put the sample into the centrifuge to separate the DNA from the nuclear wall material and turned on the machine. Then he re-sealed the sperm sample he'd taken from the sleeping patient and put it into the biohazard.

\* \* \*

"That was fast," Dr. Chambers said, taking the test-tube from the lab tech.

"You said 'stat', Doc," the tech said. "I assumed you needed it quick."

"I appreciate it," Chambers said, handing the test tube to a skinny woman in a lab coat who came in from the restroom. "Heather, here's what you need. Get going. The helicopter is on the roof to take you to Walter Reed."

\* \* \*

Gordon Chambers managed a few fitful moments of sleep - he had no idea how long, it felt like only seconds - and had just changed into a fresh shirt and splashed some water on his face when the phone rang, telling him that Heather Everett had just returned from Walter Reed hospital with the retrovirus. He checked his watch. It was only eleven hours ago when they'd brought Jerry Cooper in from his apartment. The poor deliveryman had lapsed into a coma, and his EKG was showing real problems. Chambers doubted that he had longer than about four hours to live at this rate. Techs had quietly and unobtrusively brought in a crash cart and put it by the bedside.

Heather Everett pushed past him without saying a word, pulling on a pair of nitrile gloves as she went into the observation room. She unlocked a briefcase and pulled out a prepared 100cc syringe, slipped the cap and stuffed it into the heparin lock in Jerry Cooper's IV administration set. She pushed the fluid slowly, and her lips moved in what could be anything from reassurance to the patient to fervent prayer.

She dropped the syringe into the sharps container and knuckled her back. She shut the door behind her as she re-entered the lab, stripping off her gloves.

"Well, that's it. Poke and hope."

"When will we know?" Chambers asked.

"In eight to ten hours, most probably," Everett replied. "It might be sooner, once we administer some chemo and if his metabolism takes off the way it did in your animal tests."

Chambers rubbed his eyes.

"Go home, Gordon," Everett said. "There's nothing more you can do here. The emergency team is better equipped and trained for this kind of thing."

"I can't," Chambers said. "I still feel responsible."

"Then be responsible for not being in the way. It's up to Jerry Cooper now. Trust your patient. They'll page us if something happens, for Christ's sake."

"I can't go home," Chambers said. "I'm clear across town. I want to be closer."

Heather's cheeks colored a little. "I was thinking about getting a hotel room at that Hilton down the street," she said.

"That sounds like a good idea," Gordon said. "Maybe I can get one on the same floor."

"Maybe," she said, her eyes on her shoes, "you can get one in the same room."

Chambers choked a little on his coffee. "You mean."

"I'm asking," she replied. "I don't feel like sleeping, and I sure as hell don't want to be alone. We were close in med school, Gordon. Being close like that again - well, it wouldn't suck."

He squeezed her hand. "I'll get my coat."

\* \* \*

Strange, disturbing images.

Flashes of fire, pain and helplessness. Thrashing in darkness and agony, screaming with a soundless, airless voice.

A lonely stretch of eternity, a sweat-soaked nightmare of sinking and falling, and then an exhausted, panting collapse, ribcage heaving and air like razors through a windpipe of tattered ribbons.

Images of blue and sickly yellow, length and slenderness where width and solidity reigned, of being pulled apart and reassembled. No breath to scream or protest, no strength to fight against it. No position of relief, no cool breeze as a pleasant surprise on the beastly hot stale burning summer day.

A total lack of place, of connection to the universe. No concept of *where*.

He sank backwards into hell, gasping for breath that wouldn't seem to come.

\* \* \*

Gordon Chambers woke slowly, blinking away the early morning blur. A sound resolved out of the haze of sleep, an insistent, unnatural electronic bleating. His hand refused to obey him as he pawed around on the night table, across the still, warm, soft weight of the woman he'd found release with over and over. His face dissolved into a stupid, self-satisfied grin in remembrance. The pager on the bedside table continued its insistent braying, snapping him from his pleasant reverie.

Sitting up, there was a brief shock at his nudity. He fussed and tried to cover himself for a moment before he realized that Heather had seen him naked and sweating several times last night. He smiled at his own self-consciousness.

His feet thumped dully against the thick carpet of the rented room as he shoved his glasses onto his nose. The over-bright digital clock next to the phone read only 6.00 a.m. He'd only slept a few hours.

Groaning, he dialed the phone.

"Chambers," he grunted, his voice thick and soggy-sounding with sleep.

"Dr. Chambers, this is Dr. Kent on the emergency staff," an annoyingly bright and aware voice said on the line. "You need to get over here right away."

"Why? What's wrong?" Gordon asked, suddenly much more awake.

"I. I can't explain it. You just have to come see it."

"See what?"

Kent lost his patience. "Doctor, just get over here. Now."

"I'm on my way," Chambers said.

He gave Heather a gentle but demanding shake until she came awake with a groan of protest.

"Heather, the lab just called. Something's happened with Jerry Cooper," he said softly.

She came instantly awake. "What? Is he okay?"

"I don't know," Chambers said, pulling on his pants. "They just said to get over there straight away."

She found her own glasses and started getting dressed, worry etched on her face, a mirror of her lover's.

They were out the door and walking down the nearly-deserted sidewalk towards the building. Gordon didn't even really notice the security checkpoints, as his mind raced through every emergency it could imagine and the oh-so-pleasant distraction of the heavy, musky floral scent of Heather Everett. He was nearly apoplectic by the time the elevators swished open with a cheerful *ding*.

He almost ran down the hallway into the lab, Heather trailing along behind him. Kent, a small intense-looking man in green surgical scrubs, regarded them with a wide-eyed, slightly frantic expression. From his file, this was a seasoned ER surgeon and trauma doctor. He'd seen everything under the sun in the Emergency Department at County Hospital, a few blocks away. Anything that could make him look as stunned as he did right now had to be a real doozy.

"What the hell happened?" Chambers demanded, a half-second away from shaking the man physically. "What's wrong with Jerry?"

"I'm assuming," Dr. Kent said, stuffing his hands in his pockets to keep from fidgeting nervously, "that your patient, Jerry Cooper, is male, correct?"

"What kind of stupid-ass question is that?" Heather demanded. "Of course he is!"

"Are you sure about that?" Dr. Kent asked, gesturing towards the observation room. Gordon Chambers looked past the smaller doctor's shoulder in frustration and outright pique.

Past his shoulder, to the slender little blonde who lay in the bed, her hair sweat-matted to her forehead and her slender fingers clutching the sodden sheets.

The young woman who wore a face that, although feminine and astonishingly pretty, was undoubtedly the face of Jerry Cooper.

"Oh, my God," Chambers breathed.

Ω



SUMMARY: Jerry, the delivery guy, stumbles in a pharmaceutical company and finds that his DNA is now being transformed by a new secret product. Part Two

HIGH PERFORMANCE, Part Two

by Valerie Hope

GORDON CHAMBERS SAT DOWN HARD in his chair, staring blankly at the window of Observation Room Two.

"How could this have happened? I don't understand."

Heather Everett put her hand on his shoulder as she sat down next to him. "I don't know," she whispered. "All I can think of is that the DNA sample we used was somehow faulty."

"His Y chromosome was destroyed," Chambers said, his brain finally kick-started. "We stimulated cell reproduction, and the X chromosome was duplicated. The new cells were female. I don't see another way this could have happened."

Heather was looking at Jerry's file, snapping through the pages as she mumbled, "That isn't possible. The sample was from his own *male* tissue. I don't. oh, God."

"What?" Chambers and Kent said at the same time.

"The sample we were sent was from his sperm," she said.

Chambers pulled the file closer so he could see it. "That isn't what we ordered."

"But it's what we got."

Kent blew out his breath. "So his sample could have easily contained a female chromosome."

"We only got half his genetic material," Chambers said. "Sperm only contain half a person's genetic information."

"So the other half - the half the sample didn't affect - can be mutated in any number of ways," Everett continued.

"Perhaps not," Dr. Kent supplied. "The cells were mutating, true. But we had no evidence to suggest that they were not viable."

"What are you saying?" Everett challenged.

Kent shrugged. "I'm no geneticist," he admitted. "But I think you should do an immediate protein panel and a total genetic work-up. That is a living, breathing, functioning human being in there. Something worked in what you did. Find out what you did right and work from there."

Chambers rubbed his eyes. "I'm ruined," he groaned. "The company will see to it this project is shut down and I never practice medicine again."

Everett squeezed his hand. "Gordon."

He slammed his hand on the desk. "I was so close."

Heather's voice took on a hard edge. "You still are. This is a damned miracle you worked in there. Your serum worked. Everything worked, there was just a little accident."

"You think Mr. Cooper isn't going to have a *slight* problem with his new look?"

Heather's face was an unreadable mask. "He won't if he isn't convinced that there's anything wrong with him."

Kent's eyebrows rose. "What are you suggesting?"

"A cover-up, of course," Everett said. "Look, we either try to make a positive out of this or we all face charges of medical misfeasance and malpractice."

"I didn't do anything wrong," Kent said defensively.

"You watched it happen and did nothing," Everett said. "That can easily be argued as a breach of your duty to act. The court isn't going to care if we were trying to save Jerry Cooper's life or not. All our licenses will be at risk."

"I'm not going to lose my license over this," Kent said angrily.

"Me neither," Everett added. "Look, our necks are on the block, and the funding and approval for the wonder drug of the century is hanging in the balance. We have a healthy patient in there who was dying last night. We can make the *only* problem we have here just go away."

"How?" Kent asked.

"All we have to do is convince Mr. Cooper that he's been an eighteen-year-old girl the whole time," Chambers said, still in a bit of a daze.

Everett closed the file. "We start by destroying every record of Mr. Cooper ever being here, and then we start over from scratch."

"What do you mean?" Kent asked.

"We're all doctors here," Everett said, taking Gordon's hand in hers. "We start by signing a birth certificate."

\* \* \*

Gordon Chambers knuckled his back as he shut the door of his Toyota. He'd spent the last three hours removing all the evidence from the lab and transferring a heavily-sedated Jerry Cooper to Heather Everett's small private clinic. His cellphone chirped and he dug it from his lab-coat pocket and pressed it to his ear.

"Heather, what's up?" he asked.

"We have everything set up," she replied. "Roland is on board. I'm sending Dr. Riley to the clinic to give us our excuse, and Kent is handling all the documentation. He signed the death certificate on Jerry Cooper and filed it an hour ago. Jerry Cooper no longer exists."

"This feels awful," Gordon admitted.

"I know, it does for me, too," Everett said. "But you don't know, Gordon - we might be working in our patient's best interests, here. We made a terrible mistake. This might be enough to correct it and give Jerry a happy life."

"I hope you're right," he said. "What next?"

"We need to empty out your discretionary account," Everett said. "We need the money to redo his apartment, make sure Jerry has enough clothes and a place to live suitable for a teenage girl. And we have to hire him a roommate."

Gordon sighed. "I'll call the bank."

"Gordon, be strong. We'll fix this, and Jerry will be better for it."

"He was such a nice guy," Gordon said. "I feel like I'm killing him."

"You aren't," Heather replied. "Killing him would be letting him wake up in a new body with a new life that he never asked for, making him learn how to live and interact all over again. Leaving him to deal with the acres of mental and emotional and developmental problems that are going to arise from this."

"I love you," he said simply.

Heather paused. Her voice was very tender when she replied, "I love you too."

"I'll call the bank," Gordon said, and flipped his cellphone closed.

\* \* \*

"I'm not sure what you're asking," Cassidy Sullivan said, her wide brown eyes a little vague. Heather rubbed the bridge of her nose and tried to explain again to her nineteen-year-old niece.

"This is a very sick girl," Everett explained. "Complete memory loss. She can't remember anything. There's no way for her to re-enter society as she is. She needs a friend, a companion."

"Me," Cassidy said.

"If you decide to do this, yes," Heather said. "You'll hire on to be her best friend. She's a blank slate, Cassidy. Anything you tell her, she'll believe. We have no idea who or what she was before she came to us. It's up to you to give her happy memories and make sure she fits in. It's a big job. You'll have to live together, as roommates. You pretend like you've known each other all your lives. You teach her how to be a young girl again."

"That sounds like I'd be doing something wrong," Cassidy protested.

"I suppose it could sound that way," Heather said smoothly. "But put yourself in her shoes. She doesn't know who she is, how she got here, or what she's like. She doesn't have any friends at all. Wouldn't it be better to have a friend? Even if it was a made-up friend?"

"I guess so," Cassidy said.

"You can be that friend. You can convince her that she's loved and happy. You can help her figure out what she likes, doesn't like - even what she wants to do for a living."

"It sounds like raising a baby," Cassidy said, her nose wrinkling.

"A little bit," Heather explained. "But she'll be able to communicate with you. It will be much easier, and she'll be able to take responsibility for herself very soon. She's a very strong-willed girl. She just needs a little help."

"Why me?" Cassidy asked.

"Because I can trust you, because you're an actress - you can pull this off - and because I couldn't think of anyone else who'd even consider it. You'd be doing us a huge favor. And I'd make it worth your while. We have an apartment already set up for this girl - you can move right in. We'll take care of all your bills and expenses. And when you're done, you get a check for one million dollars."

Cassidy's eyes widened. "A million?"

"Straight into your bank account, Cassidy. You're a millionaire overnight. All you have to do is pretend that you've known this girl your whole life."

"But I don't know anything about her."

"Neither does she," Heather said. She grasped Cassidy's hand tightly. "I don't know where else to turn, honey. It's this or the most horrible state mental hospital you've ever seen."

Cassidy sighed. "And you're sure she won't know I'm lying to her?"

"She doesn't even know what lying is," Heather said. "And we'll back up anything you tell her. Right now, she could believe anything about herself. She's been in and out of a coma for a week. Who knows what she's dreamed."

"Poor thing," Cassidy said softly.

"Will you do it?" Heather asked, sipping her coffee.

"I still don't know if it's right - but I don't think it will hurt her," Cassidy said. "I guess I will. If you really think it's the right thing to do."

"I need better than 'I guess I will,' Cassidy. I need more than that."

"Okay, then. I'll do it," Cassidy said, smiling.

"Good girl," Heather said, breathing a sigh of relief. "We'll monitor everything - if this kind of new therapy works with amnesia patients, you could be a part of medical history."

"Cool," Cassidy said. "So, what's her name?"

Heather tried not to stammer. She hadn't thought that far ahead, and before she could react she blurted, "Jerry Cooper."

"So, when do I get to meet Jeri?" Cassidy asked.

"We can go right now," Heather said, trying not to show her relief. She'd chosen well, she was convinced. Cassidy was a complete featherbrain, and would never suspect that she was being used in the same way Jerry was. And the million dollars from Gordon Chambers' discretionary account would go a long way to keeping her quiet. She scooped up her keys and left, her dim niece trailing behind.

"What do you think we should do first?" Cassidy asked brightly.

"She's forgotten everything," Heather said, handing her ticket to the valet outside the chic little coffee-shop she'd chosen to meet her niece. "So I guess the most important thing for you to do is to show her how to be a girl."

"I already have some great ideas," Cassidy said, bouncing a little on her toes. She'd been skeptical at first, but the more she thought about it, the more she was convinced that this could really be *fun*.

\* \* \*

The darkness wobbled, wavered, shimmered and seemed to part, fading to the edges of vision like dark liquid rolling of the rounded surface of the upturned eyes. A monitor beeped just outside sight. A mouth dry and parched like sand parted, and coughing erupted from a scoured throat.

"Easy, sweetheart, easy," a soft, female voice said, and cool hands settled on a hot, sweaty brow. "Relax. You've been in a terrible accident."

"What happened?" the patient rasped.

"We don't know, sweetheart," the woman in the white coat said, leaning into the hazy field of vision above the bed. "You showed up on our doorstep a week ago, very sick. We weren't sure you were going to wake up."

"I was sick?"

"Very," the woman - the doctor - said. "We treated you here. I'm Dr. Everett."

"I'm... I'm..."

Dr. Everett smiled gently. "Don't worry about it, sweetheart. You had a terrible fever. If all you have is memory loss, then you're a very lucky girl."

"Girl?" the patient asked.

"Of course," Dr. Everett said. "It's kind of obvious."

"I don't remember - I mean, I didn't think I was a girl."

Dr. Everett looked puzzled. "I'm not sure I understand what you mean," she said. "I examined you myself. If you're not a girl, then I probably shouldn't have a medical license. I mean, look at yourself."

The patient did. Under the blanket and flimsy hospital gown, two pert breasts mounded just beneath the fabric. A quick rub of hairless thighs told of no dangling scrotum or penis between legs. Willowy, swanlike arms and lissome, slender fingers touched a sensitive, hairless face.

"I remember - I mean, I *think* I remember not being a girl."

Dr. Everett made some notes on a clipboard, looking concerned. "You were in and out of consciousness for quite some time, sweetie. There's no telling what you may have dreamed, particularly with such a high fever. Your mind can play tricks on you."

"Do you think it did with me?"

"That's the most likely explanation," Dr. Everett replied.

"I can't remember anything," the young woman said.

"You had identification on you when we found you," Dr. Everett said, passing over the laminated plastic chit of a drivers' license which had been paperclipped to the thick file Dr. Everett held on her clipboard.

The young woman took it and stared. The picture was that of a young, slender girl with a happy smile and bright, wide blue eyes. Her hair was short and windblown-looking. None of it looked familiar. Not even the name. Jeri Kay Cooper.

*A part of her mind screamed No! Cade! With a 'D'! And Jerry with two 'R's' and a 'Y'! Short for Jeremiah! This can't be right!*

"Are you sure this is mine?" the girl asked.

"It's your picture, sweetheart, and it was in your purse when we found you," Dr. Everett said. "I'll bring you your purse, maybe it will help rattle your memory loose. We checked with the police, too, and we found your phone number. When we called your house, your roommate answered. She said you'd not been feeling well last week and on Tuesday, when she got home from work, you'd gone. No note, no call, no nothing. She was very frightened. She told us to call her the second you woke up."

"My roommate?"

"Your best friend, too, it seems," Dr. Everett said. "She said you were like sisters, and had known each other your whole lives. Her name is Cassidy Sullivan. Does that sound familiar?"

The girl's face screwed up in thought. "No," she said, at length. "Maybe when I see her, I'll remember her."

Dr. Everett squeezed her hand gently. "Don't rush it, Ms. Cooper. Memory loss is a tricky thing, and it's very rare. Doctors don't know a whole lot about it. But from what we do know, it takes time to overcome. I know it's frightening and probably very frustrating - I can't imagine what you must be going through - but just have patience. Your friend will be here soon, and Dr. Chambers, Dr. Kent and I will help in any way we can. You may never get all your memories back. Just give it lots of time."

The young woman managed a weak smile. "You're really kind, Dr. Everett."

"Years of practice," Dr. Everett said. "And please, call me Heather. All my friends do."

"We're friends?" Cooper asked.

"I feel like we are," Dr. Everett said, smiling a little shyly. "It gets lonesome here, especially at night. While I was here working, and checking up on you, I... this is embarrassing... I *talked* to you. While you were unconscious. I imagined what you'd say back, and I guess I started considering you like a friend. They warned us in med school about doing that - getting too connected with a patient. But you were the only one here, and I guess I just needed somebody to talk to."

The girl blushed. "I like having a friend. I'm pretty freaked out about this."

"I would be, too," Dr. Everett said.

"So can we stay friends? Would that be okay?"

"Of course, sweetie," Dr. Everett said. "Now get some rest. I'm going to call your friend and you'll have some company soon. I'll be here all night."

"That's a comforting feeling," Cooper said.

"I'm glad," Dr. Everett said, drawing the privacy curtain. "Rest."

"Okay, Heather," the girl said, and closed her eyes. She smiled, faintly. Dr. Everett - *Heather* - seemed really nice. She never saw her new friend dispose of the empty syringe into the sharps container, the one that had just administered a huge dose of Versed through her IV line, which was blotting out her memories as she dozed.

\* \* \*

"Jeri Kay! Oh, my God, baby girl, you had me really scared!" a high-pitched voice called out, snapping the young woman from her half-sleep, lulled by the beeping monitor. She rolled over weakly, blinking her eyes in the dim light. A young woman was running in, arms spread wide. She was very pretty - *hotter than hell, actually*, she thought wryly - with long shiny sable hair and big, guileless brown eyes. She was dressed in tight, low-slung jeans with a pink glitter belt, a tight white belly-shirt that exposed her pierced belly-button adorned with a rhinestone dangling frog, and big white platform flip-flops that made a shuffling sound on the tile floor. Pink-tinted wraparound sunglasses were pushed up into her bangs and clicked against Jeri's - Jeri Kay, did she say? - teeth as the stranger threw her arms around her and squeezed tight.

"Hi," Jeri managed weakly.

"You scared me so bad," the young girl said into Jeri's left armpit, not releasing the hug.

"I'm sorry," Jeri said. "I don't remember anything."

"That's what Heather - Dr. Everett - told me. I've been here every night for a week, ever since she called me saying you were here. She says you don't remember anything."

"Nothing," Jeri said sheepishly. "Not even you, sorry to say."

"Not at all?" the girl said, eyes wide with surprise as she sat up. "We've known each other our whole lives. Don't I even look familiar?"

"I don't even look familiar," Jeri grumped. "I can't remember a damn thing. I had this crazy dream about being a man, but that's pretty much everything."

"Oh, honey," the young woman said, her eyes brimming and her chin dimpling. "I'm so sorry."

"We're good friends?" Jeri asked.

"The best," the young woman said proudly. "Ever since second grade."

"Dr. Everett said your name is Cassidy."

"Yeah," the girl said, smacking her gum. "Cassidy Sullivan. And you're Jeri Kay Cooper. We went to Garfield Elementary, Lincoln Junior High and then Lamar High School. Graduated two years ago, together, but I'm still nine months older than you."

"So how old does that make me?" Jeri - Jeri Kay, she reminded herself - asked.

"Eighteen. Your birthday is April 9th. You're an Aries. I was born on January 22nd, so I'm an Aquarius, but just barely. You were born in Houston, Texas, but you moved here when you were five years old, into the house across the street from mine. Your mom's name was Helen and your dad was David. They died in a car accident when you were 11, and you lived with your aunt across town. But we went to school together and we stayed best friends all through school."

"And now?"

"We didn't go to college, we wanted to see what life on our own was like for a while first, and we room together in a cool apartment on Calhoun Street. Your folks left you some money in trust, so there's enough for you to live on for a little while. You don't have a job yet, and even though I audition all the time, I haven't gotten any parts yet."

Jeri Kay shook her head and held up her hand. "Whoa. Too much too fast."

"Sorry, baby," Cassidy said. "I'm just really glad to see you. I brought you this."

She handed over a white overstuffed teddy bear with a big pink bow around its neck, holding a pink stuffed heart that had "Get Well Soon" embroidered on it.

"I know it's cheesy, but it's all they had at the drugstore where I was when Heather called me to say you were awake. And I know how pink is your favorite color and all."

"It is?" Jeri Kay asked.

"Oh, God, you would have forgot all that, too," Cassidy gasped. "I'm sorry, honey, I keep thinking that you're going to remember. I'm such a ditz."

"It's okay," Jeri Kay said, patting her 'best friend's' hand. Something about her did seem familiar, but she couldn't put her finger on it. "Just tell me, okay?"

"Well, let's see. Your favorite color's pink, like I said. You like silly movies and hate ones that make you cry. Your favorite singer is Britney Spears, but you also dig stuff like Nelly and Madonna and disco, and you're completely into techno and dance. Your favorite movie is *Dodgeball* and your favorite TV show is *American Idol*."

Something clicked inside Jeri Kay's head at the mention of television - something about watching television. Images that flashed through her mind, of sitting in her apartment half-asleep and watching...

"I like Jessica Simpson and I watch the *Anna Nicole* show," she said faintly.

Cassidy stumbled in mid-rant and her eyes went wide. "You remember?"

"I... think so. Is it true? Do I like those shows?"

"Yeah," Cassidy said. "You're way into Jessica and Anna Nicole."

Jeri Kay closed her eyes and craned her neck, laying back. "More. Tell me more."

"Um, okay, well, you drive a white Volkswagen Beetle convertible, and you love eating chocolate chip cookie dough. Your favorite things to do are go out dancing, shop, cook, play soccer and work out. You wear White Diamonds perfume and smoke Marlboro Lights 100s. You've always wanted to try rock climbing and as soon as you get a job you plan to save up money so you can get your boobs done and go to Cancun."

"My boobs? Really?" Jeri Kay asked, looking at her pert mounds like she'd only seen them for the first time a few minutes ago. "What's wrong with the way they are now?"

"I dunno," Cassidy said, shrugging. "But you've said you wanted 'em bigger ever since we were freshmen. It was your decision."

Jeri Kay's eyes narrowed and she cupped her smallish breasts in her two hands. "I guess they are kinda small. Maybe I should. Go on."

"You shop at the Food Land on 23rd Street and go to the CVS on Martenson Road. Your hairdresser is named Michael and he works at Urbanz Salon on Calhoun, about six blocks from our apartment. You get waxed and get your nails done at Nail L'Expression on Carpenter, next door to your gym, where you go at least three, sometimes four or five times a week. Twice a week you tan at the Maxi-Tan in the same shopping center."

"I do all that?"

"Hell, yeah, baby," Cassidy said. "We usually work out together, and I go to the same nail place. We found it together when we were juniors, right before prom."

Jeri Kay looked at her hands. "My nails don't look like I take care of them at all."

"Dr. Everett said you'd broken them all to hell. She thinks you crawled up the sidewalk to get to the door. It's okay, though, you usually get acrylics, so you can always get them put back on."

"What was I doing out here?" Jeri Kay asked.

"I don't know, honey," Cassidy answered. "I went out to an audition at seven and you said you weren't feeling good. When I got back - about nine thirty - you were gone. I figured you'd just gone out. But when I woke up the next morning and you weren't there, I got really worried and called the police. Dr. Everett called that night and said you were here."

"You called the police? What did they say?"

"Nothing. They said you had to be gone 48 hours before they could report you missing or some stupid shit like that. I told them you didn't do shit like that without calling, but they didn't give a damn."

"Oh," Jeri Kay said.

"Is there anything else you want to know, baby?" Cassidy asked.

Jeri Kay sighed and stretched. "Not right now. I think I have about all I can process."

"I'm so glad you're okay," Cassidy said, hugging her again.

"I need to get some sleep, I think," Jeri Kay said. "Sorry if I'm sorta weirded out by all of this. I feel like I'm supposed to know you - hell, you know more about me than I do - but I just can't remember. It's really frustrating."

"I tell you what," Cassidy said brightly. "I'll pack you a bag, stuff from your room, and bring it over. Dr. Everett says you're going to stay here a few days. Maybe if you have some pictures and some of your own stuff around, you'll remember more."

"Maybe so," Jeri Kay said. "Thanks."

"Least I can do, baby girl," Cassidy said, kissing her cheek. "What are best friends for?"

"I wish I could remember," Jeri Kay replied honestly, still looking as if she were in shock. "But it's a good feeling to know I've got one."

\* \* \*

Philip Cameron sat back from his computer and rubbed his eyes. He wished the job wasn't such a rush, but how often did graphic artists get jobs out of Hollywood out here? They were shooting on location in a few weeks, and they needed pictures dummied up for the set. The money was right on - several hundred bucks over what he normally would have charged - but the job was big. He'd done a whole photo album's worth of fakes off a set of pictures of a woman lying in a hospital bed, from every conceivable angle. Everything from candid snaps to professional-looking school photos and prom pictures. He dumped them all onto a Compact Flash card and slid the little plastic chit into a protective sleeve and got set to drop it off to the studio contact at a little diner near his apartment. He checked the post-it note he'd scribbled while taking the information down from the phone call three days ago - some guy named Chambers, who'd said Philip had come highly recommended. By whom, Philip had no fucking idea, but damned if he was going to rock the boat at this stage. Especially in this economy, anybody who was willing to pay something in advance to a broke Photoshop jockey like himself was worth not asking too many questions to.

He smiled and printed out his invoice. Graphic art was usually catch-as-catch-can, and this was going to be a very good month, to make up for the two lousy ones he'd just come off of. Smiling with the satisfaction of being able to pay his rent and buy groceries for a while, he folded his hands behind his head and listened to the whirrs and clicks of his jet printer.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay was up and around, shuffling around the luxuriously-appointed clinic in some nondescript blue slippers and a drafty hospital gown that tied in the back. Her body felt wrung out and weak - like she imagined what being run over by a truck would feel like. Dr. Everett had encouraged her to get up and around. She'd made a couple of laps around the clinic, smiling and making mumbled pleasantries to the nursing staff and the few obviously wealthy patients.

Cassidy showed up about ten in the morning, smiling brightly and carrying a stuffed tote back under one arm. The big hug and cheek-kiss seemed much more natural and less overwhelming this time. Jeri Kay found herself smiling widely as she let her best friend lead her back to her room.

Jeri Kay had spent a great deal of time that morning looking at the vaguely familiar face in the mirror. She was a pretty girl, she determined, not knowing exactly where those standards came from. Big, oblique eyes colored a deep sapphire blue, with long lashes that brushed her

cheeks when she blinked. Full, expressive lips and a long, slender nose in a slender, heart-shaped face with even, smooth unblemished skin. She had a small, shy, girlish smile, when she knew was to hide two crooked front teeth which caused her to feel no small amount of dismay, as if she'd been embarrassed about them all her life. Her short brown hair was kind of flat and lifeless, probably as a result of her illness. Her body was petite and trim, with high breasts and smooth curves, a promising set of abdominal muscles and a lovely well-defined "Christmas tree" of softly curving muscles on her slender back. Her ribs were prominent, but not in an unhealthy way. Prominent pink nipples stiffened in the chilly air under her gown, set in pink silver-dollar areolae. Long, well-muscled legs and dainty, small feet. She was in very good shape, and appeared to be very flexible to boot.

She found herself comparing herself to Cassidy. The taller girl was more curvaceous and seemed to move her body in a much more natural, easy way. Cassidy seemed much more comfortable in her own skin, and Jeri Kay found herself a little jealous.

"Hey, sweetie, how are you feeling?" Cassidy said, putting an arm around her friend's slender shoulders.

"Better," Jeri Kay said honestly. "I have a lot more energy today than yesterday. Heather says that I'm young, and I should expect to bounce back pretty quickly."

"I brought you some stuff," she said, patting the tote bag. "Wanna see?"

"Yeah, I really do," Jeri Kay said. "But I don't know if I can sit still. I'm just really antsy and jittery this morning, and I'm not sure why."

Cassidy favored her with a knowing smile. "I bet I do."

"Really? Why?" Jeri Kay asked.

Looking around a little furtively, Cassidy pulled a pack of cigarettes out of her purse and showed them to her friend. "Probably 'cause you haven't had one of these in a while."

"I thought you said I smoked Marlboro 100s," Jeri Kay said.

"You do," Cassidy said, laughing. "These aren't yours, they're mine. Want one?"

"I think so, yeah," Jeri Kay said, letting her friend's smile infect her.

They sneaked out the side door into a shady courtyard set aside for patient convalescence, so Jeri Kay's hospital gown wasn't really an issue. Cassidy lit one of the Virginia Slims for herself and held the lighter's flame out to her friend. Jeri Kay placed the cigarette between her lips with a practiced and all-too-familiar motion and leaned in, sucking the acrid smoke into her mouth to cool. She inhaled deeply and leaned against the wall, letting the smoke out into the air in a long exhalation.

*This is how I started, the first time,* she thought suddenly, and gasped.

"What is it?" Cassidy said.

"It was like this - the first time. The first time I ever had a cigarette," she said, eyes wide. "It was in high school - I can almost remember! Out behind a brick building. A red brick building, and it was kinda cold outside. It was... it was the auto shop. I was with my friend. My friend in high school. Kevin? Kevin something."

Cassidy smiled. "Close," she said.

"Huh?"

"Real close. It wasn't the auto shop, it was the arts building. The auto shop was across from us. It was right after dance class. And Kevin Finn was the boy you were going out with, but you had your first cigarette with me. We were sophomores. I stole them from my mom, remember? We sneaked out during our lunch and smoked it, and almost got sick. We hid out in the bathroom for the rest of lunch period 'cause we were so dizzy. I almost puked."

"Was it? I - God, I can almost remember. I thought it was Kevin."

"It was me," Cassidy said. "Now, you might be remembering other times - you used to meet Kevin behind the arts building so the two of you could make out."

*I made out with Kevin? I seem to remember something. He was there, and so was I, but I didn't think we were going out. I don't remember feeling like that about him. I know we talked about making out, and having sex. We talked about it a lot.*

*Maybe something - maybe we did! I know we talked about it a lot. Did we actually do it? I think we did. Yeah, I definitely think we did.*

"He had brown hair?" I asked.

"Wavy brown hair," Cassidy said. "He was really cute. He played basketball."

Jeri Kay forced her doubts aside, taking another drag off of her cigarette. She'd been sick, after all. A really high fever, and Dr. Everett said things in her head would be scrambled up for a while. Without realizing it, the fully-formed memories popped into her head. Very clear, and completely above suspicion - sneaking her first cigarette after dance class with her best friend Cassidy Sullivan, and meeting her boyfriend Kevin back there to make out. She remembered it very clearly, and she smiled brightly.

"I remember."

"You do? Oh my God, that's so cool!" Cassidy said, hugging her tightly.

The process of memory that had taken over her brain was running unchecked. "I remember it now. I dated Kevin until that summer, and I - oh my God, I fucked him, didn't I? After spring formal, that's when I lost my virginity!"

"You called me the same night to tell me about it!" Cassidy squealed excitedly, jumping up and down and clapping her hands.

Jeri Kay gave full vent to the memories forming unbidden in her head, choosing not to remember that she'd lost her virginity to Alicia Garrett after the spring formal, and she hadn't called anybody, she'd gone to the Sonic drive-in and bragged to her friends on the baseball team. Those were forced away, down, deep and forgotten.

No, she'd given it up to Kevin Finn after spring formal and had called her best friend Cassidy that same night.

"And we both felt so silly about getting sick that we talked to Angie Lewis, who smoked, and asked her what we were doing wrong, and she taught us how to French inhale in her backyard behind her parent's woodpile."

"Yeah!" Cassidy said happily, amazed. None of this had actually happened, but the iPod in her pocket was recording away and she could check everything this evening when she made notes. Until then she could only keep encouraging Jeri Kay to go on, forming her own memories to make up for the blanks in her brain.

She'd been apprehensive at first, worried that she wouldn't like this girl her aunt had paid her to befriend. But as the possibilities of being able to custom-mold a best friend dawned on her, she began to feel a deep and abiding love for this young woman, and looking forward to a bright future. She'd never had many friends before, and she the possibilities were endless.

She hugged her new best friend again and encouraged some more.

Ω



SUMMARY: Jerry, the delivery guy, stumbles in a pharmaceutical company and finds that his DNA is now being transformed by a new secret product. Part Three

HIGH PERFORMANCE, Part Three

by Valerie Hope

DR. HEATHER EVERETT WAS TRULY flabbergasted. She'd read about spontaneous memory formation in some of the medical and psychiatric journals, but she'd never seen it before. Lots of vague stories about people who chemically formed memories in their brains, based on what they saw around them, an advanced form of delusion which happened under stress to replace thoughts too traumatic to deal with. She could easily envision how it would happen - the death of a loved one, transformed in memory somehow into that loved one's leaving in a poignant farewell, something straight out of a Movie of the Week that the person had seen earlier.

But never an entire history. For a moment, Dr. Everett regretted that she couldn't write this one up, it was truly one for the medical journals. But to do that would be to reveal the circumstances behind the "birth" of Jeri Kay Cooper, who was at this moment going through a series of photographs dummied up by a graphic artist across town and automatically filling in the back-story for each of them into a coherent life history. Everett suspected that Jerry Cooper, as a man, probably had a gift for story-telling. He possibly would have made an exceptional author or playwright. And there was no telling in which ways that his brain had mutated after the accident that aged him thirty years in reverse and switched his gender to female.

"Eww, yuck!" she exclaimed over another of the pictures in the shoebox that Everett's niece, Cassidy, had brought from 'home' to share with the amnesiac girl. "Russell Carter! He hit on me *all* the time in high school, and I was always like, *as if!*"

Cassidy - who was shaping up to be quite the improvisational actress - reacted in agreement, even though she had never heard of this person before. Who knows who the real Russell Carter was, someone that Jerry Cooper had known in high school in 1973, perhaps, or a co-worker somewhere. Maybe even another soldier in his infantry platoon in 1976. It didn't matter. They could sort through the recordings of these conversations later and try to find out who these people were, once the cover-up of the medical accident that had made "Jeri Kay" a person was complete.

"Do you remember this one?" Cassidy asked, holding up another picture.

"This was... cheerleading nationals? Junior year?" Jeri Kay asked, looking at the brilliantly faked picture and believing it utterly. She was fresh-faced and happy, hugging Cassidy and another young blonde girl wearing cheerleading uniforms and kneeling behind a tall trophy. Even Cassidy had been youthened in the photograph, with lighter and longer hair and a mouth full of braces. The artist that Chambers had employed was nothing if not detail-oriented.

"I think this was senior year, baby girl," Cassidy corrected gently, making Jeri Kay keep her own story straight. It wouldn't do to have Jeri Kay discover that her own "recollections" were false and start asking questions.

"Was it? You're probably right," Jeri Kay said. "That's you and me and Gretchen Wilson, right?"

"Right," Cassidy said.

"I remember the night after we won, we got drunk on that vodka I sneaked from my aunt and uncle's liquor cabinet and danced with those college guys all night," Jeri Kay said, forming more memories on the fly.

Cassidy's eyes got a knowing look. She'd been playing along all day, and had been growing increasingly alarmed at how fast the young woman was taking control of her life. The arrangement had been that Cassidy would get to tailor-make her own best friend, and to do that, some of the memories that would have to be formed would have to be very specific. She decided to implant one of her own, just to see if it still worked.

"You remember what they bet us that night?" she asked Jeri Kay.

The younger woman's blue eyes became faraway. "I... I don't..."

Cassidy giggled and shoved her friend's arm gently. "You're telling me you don't remember the bet."

"I guess not," Jeri Kay said, a little embarrassed.

"They bet you and me five dollars that we wouldn't make out for five minutes," Cassidy said. "Don't you remember?"

"I... Oh my God! We totally did it, too! I remember we kissed!"

"We so kissed. And when the five minutes were up, we just kept right on going, and the guys who were trying to hook up with us got all pissed and took off back upstairs."

Jeri Kay's eyes were wide. "Oh my God, I *do* remember that!"

Cassidy took her 'friend's' hand. "And you remember later?"

Something about the way she spoke, the look in her eyes - Jeri Kay remembered having a woman look at her that way before. It meant...

"We went back to the room and that was the first time we made love, wasn't it?" she asked quietly.

"You *do* remember. We were so totally nervous, neither of us had even really thought about being with a girl before, and we didn't know what to do, but we were so totally turned on and we couldn't stop ourselves."

"I remember. I think we fell in love."

"We did."

Jeri Kay's tone was plaintive. "And did we ever stop feeling that way?"

Cassidy squeezed her hand tight. "I didn't."

Jeri Kay sniffled and tears formed in her eyes. "I'm sorry I didn't remember."

"It's okay, baby, really," Cassidy said. "You were real, real sick."

"I should've remembered something like that. I should've remembered you."

"You remember me now, don't you?"

Jeri Kay's chin dimpled and she managed a tearful smile. "You're my Cassie."

Cassidy's heart soared as she leaned forward and kissed her brand new lover, her perfect friend, her soulmate that she'd helped make from scratch. The weight of all the abuse by her parents, the repression of her sexuality, the shame over being attracted to girls her whole life and the string of horrible, abusive relationships with boys she'd undergone in an attempt to deny herself seemed to slide off of her shoulders.

She gave the kiss more attention, turning it from tentative to passionate, clutching Jeri Kay's hand tightly and trying to fight back tears of her own. It was going to work, finally, after all the heartache and pain.

And it was going to be *perfect*.

\* \* \*

The room had completely transformed, from the sterile and mechanized ICU facility of before to a girl's room, filled with pictures, stuffed animals and shiny mylar balloons. Dr. Heather Everett and Dr. Gordon Chambers walked in, looking around for their patient. They saw her just out of the sliding glass door which accessed the little deck outside, with the contemplation glade and the fountain that Everett installed to soothe her more wealthy clients.

The man-turned-attractive-young-girl was outside in a fuzzy pink bathrobe and white pajama bottoms with little blue sheep all over them and a pale blue camisole top with the words 'Sleeping Beauty' embroidered across her pert, B-cup breasts. Her hair was pulled back with a 'scrunchie' into a tight ponytail and she was nodding along with whatever was playing on her iPod, brought to her by Cassidy, and smoking one of the long white Marlboro Lights that she'd had brought in as she read a copy of *Allure* with Hilary Swank on the cover.

Heather smiled and opened the sliding door. The movement startled Jeri Kay a little and she spun quickly, pulling the earphone buds from her ears and dropping her magazine.

"Hi," Dr. Chambers said, smiling warmly.

"Hey," she said happily. "Sorry. I was kinda into my music. Didn't hear ya."

"I understand," Dr. Chambers told her, squatting down next to her. "How are you feeling, Jeri Kay?"

"Better," she said. "I have a lot more energy 'n' stuff. Actually, I'm kinda bored around here. I mean, this place is nice 'n' all, but it's still, like, a hospital, y'know?"

"I get it," he said. "Well, then I guess this will be good news. You're going home tomorrow morning."

"No shit?" Jeri Kay squealed, bounding to her feet.

"Cassidy is coming in your car, she'll be here at nine a.m. You're a free woman," Dr. Everett said. "But there's a hitch, young lady. You're coming back here every week for a while for a check-up. It's great that you remember everything, but we still don't know what it is you got that made you so sick."

"Um-hum," Jeri Kay said. "Every week."

"And you have to take your medications religiously," Dr. Chambers said. "We're going to have you on a lot of pills for a while until we're certain you're not going to relapse."

Her nose wrinkled. "What's 'relapse'?"

"Get sick again," Heather told her.

"This is so cool! I can't wait to go home!" she said, bouncing and gathering the white-coated doctors into tight hugs. "Thank y'all, like, so much!"

She tossed her cigarette butt into the bushes and bounded inside, starting to pack immediately as she sang along to some nameless hip-hop number on the iPod that Cassidy had supplied.

Gordon looked at Heather, his lover, and shrugged. "It's remarkable."

"Her personality was a blank slate," Heather explained, snuggling into his arms and laying her head against his chest. "Cassidy has filled it in admirably. She's a walking amalgam of pop-culture influences. The television has helped her sculpt an entirely new, functioning personality - equal parts Britney Spears, Anna Nicole Smith, Jessica Simpson and God knows who else. It's incredible."

"And Cassidy? She's ready to take her on as a roommate for the long-term?" Chambers asked, concern in his hazel eyes.

"I think she is," Heather said. "She's surpassed all my expectations. I only wanted her to give Jeri Kay a place to start, something to give her a baseline that she'd soon outgrow. But I think Cassidy might possibly be the foundation of the whole thing."

"And she doesn't have any hidden agenda?" Gordon countered.

"Of course she has a hidden agenda. But as long as Jeri Kay never discovers the truth about things, what does it matter?" Heather replied.

Gordon sighed. "You can certainly be a cold woman sometimes."

"Just realistic, Gordon. I don't want anything bad to happen to Jeri Kay. It's my fault that all of this happened to her in the first place, if I'd checked the samples more carefully before rushing off. But all of this - I'm not doing it for her. Or Cassidy, either. I'm doing it to protect you and me. And I'll stop at nothing to protect us."

Gordon smiled and stroked her hair, pulling her tight so she wouldn't see the alarm in his eyes. Realistic, she called it. Gordon called it ruthless. And he was a little scared about being so close to her now. But in the end, it would probably be for the best to have Jeri Kay Cooper as far away from the two of them as she could possibly get.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay had bounded into her home with the energy of a dozen girls, tearing through every nook and cranny of the apartment with abandon, forming memories about everything she could find on the fly. In a matter of minutes, she'd ransacked her entire closet and chest of drawers, her makeup drawer and the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, every book, CD, and DVD and most of the kitchen.

"God, I missed this place," she said, flopping backwards on the overstuffed couch with a pint of ice cream in one hand and a cigarette in the other. "And I missed you, baby."

Cassidy positively beamed. "I missed you too, sweetie."

Jeri Kay pouted sexily, every bit the ingenue, and ruffled her hair with one hand. "One thing about losing your memory, though. I totally hate all my clothes. And what's up with the way I look? God, what was I thinking?"

Cassidy laughed and sat down next to her. "I think you look great."

"Oh, come on, Cass - you're a fucking hottie and I totally look like a nerd. I don't know why you, like, let people see me with you in public 'n' stuff."

Cassidy laughed. "Maybe 'cause of that thing you do with your tongue and index finger..."

"I'm being serious, you ho," Jeri Kay said, snorting laughter and covering her face. "I totally hate the way I look."

"Seriously?"

Jeri Kay nodded.

"So, why don't I take you out tomorrow and get you all, like, dolled up? We can head out to the spa, we can go shopping, everything. It'll be my treat."

"You totally don't have the money for that," Jeri Kay complained, but unable to hide her mounting excitement. "I know you don't."

"Bullshit," she shot back. "Look, baby, you're worth it. I thought I lost you. Nothing's too good for my little Jeri-Curl. Besides, it'll be so fun. I can dress you up and make you all pretty, like you were my own life-size Barbie."

"You seriously want to?" Jeri Kay asked, about to jump out of her skin with anticipation.

"I'll call the salon and set up an appointment, first thing tomorrow."

Cassidy barely got the words out of her mouth before she was tackled by 108 pounds of flying, squealing girl.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay had hardly been able to sleep the night before because of the excitement. She'd fidgeted and tossed and turned on the luxurious satin sheets next to her lover for two hours, finally getting up around 4 a.m. for a cigarette. She sat alone, watching television, dozing a little bit and reading *Us* and *Style*. Her dreams were weird - something about being someone else, someone old and grumpy and boring - and she came awake with a snort in the middle of *Baywatch*, watching Pam Anderson's bouncing breasts with admiration, sexual desire and no small amount of jealousy.

She showered quickly, spending only a little time playing with the massaging shower head before lathering up with a loofa sponge and a strawberry-scented body wash that left her skin glowing and baby-butt soft. She tried desperately to do something with her mop of unruly brown hair, finally giving up and just pulling it back. It was barely long enough to even get a ponytail out of it.

She was just pulling toast out of the toaster when she felt Cassidy's arms close around her waist. She leaned back lovingly and craned her neck, kissing her lover's cheek. God, her life was perfect. A great apartment and the sexiest lover in the world, a day to spend together and not a care in the world.

She thought a bit sadly about the old man she'd dreamed about, how he never would have a day like this. *Oh well*, she thought finally. *Better him than me*.

Cassidy poured herself a cup of coffee. "Ready to get hottie-fied today?" she asked brightly.

"Couldn't hardly sleep last night," Jeri Kay said. "I can't wait. I can't even decide what to do first. This is the coolest thing ever."

"Anything to make my baby happy," Cassidy said, lighting a cigarette and passing it to Jeri Kay before lighting another for herself.

Jeri Kay took a deep drag. "I was thinking about making it interesting," she said with a naughty gleam in her eye.

"Interesting how?" Cassidy asked.

Jeri Kay blushed a little. "I know you want to go with me," she said, "but what would you think about meeting me tonight? Then things could be a great big surprise."

"I like surprises," Cassidy said. "I like it. I'll give you my credit card and I'll meet you tonight at nine, over at Ba-Boom's on Hearne Street."

Jeri Kay kissed her. "You won't be disappointed."

"Your hair appointment is in forty-five minutes, baby," Cassidy said, giving Jeri Kay's firm backside a pat. "You don't want to be late."

Jeri Kay bounced up and down on her toes in excitement. "You are gonna be so surprised. I've been thinking about what I'm going to do all night. How much can I spend?"

Cassidy touched her cheek. "As much as you want, baby," she said. "If it makes you half as happy as you are right now, it'll be worth every penny."

"You are so sweet," Jeri Kay said. "I love you."

Cassidy smiled wistfully. "I love you, too. Now scoot."

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay pulled into the parking lot of the upscale hair salon, her stereo booming out Britney's "I Got That Boom Boom." It was a perfect, cloudless, warm day and Jeri Kay had the top down and the radio blasting. She felt young and sexy and alive. She never wanted it to end.

Listening long enough for the refrain, she shut off the engine, still humming the song and dancing along in a subdued fashion. She tossed the last of her cigarette and sashayed into Urbanz salon, a little extra wiggle in her step just because she felt so good.

She was the first appointment of the morning, so there was no waiting. She barely had time to select the latest *Vogue* out of the stack before her little gay hairdresser, Michael, was motioning her to the chair.

"What's it gonna be, JayKay?" he said, putting the smock around her neck. Cassidy Sullivan, one of his best customers, had put a C-note in his pocket to pretend like he'd known this girl for a while, giving some whacked-out explanation about amnesia. He would have done it without explanation. A hundred dollars bought a lot of loyalty.

"I'm totally sick of how I look," Jeri Kay said. "I want something drastic."

"How drastic?" he asked, eyebrows raised.

Jeri Kay smiled and bit her lip, excited and disbelieving that the day was actually beginning. She couldn't *wait* to see Cassidy's face.

"Bleach it," she said. "And then start putting on the extensions. I want it to tickle the top of my ass when I tilt my head back."

"Honey," Michael said with concern, "that's gonna cost about a thousand dollars."

"Wanna hear my two new favorite words?" Jeri Kay asked. "Charge it."

\* \* \*

"Ready?" Michael asked, finger-teasing Jeri Kay's hair and giving her 'last looks.' At her excited nod, he spun the chair around to face the mirror and whipped the smock from around her neck.

"Ta-daaa!"

She gasped. Her hair was a bright, shiny platinum blonde à la Pamela Anderson, streaked with highlights of pure white. The seam between her real hair and the natural extensions was invisible, and she could barely feel them, even though some of the melted plastic joints were laying right against her scalp. The extensions matched her dye-job and highlights perfectly, cascading in shiny waves over her shoulders to rest near her elbows. The extensions added a huge amount of volume, too, making her hair look teased and 'big' with no products or backcombing. The whole presentation put Jeri Kay in mind of Victoria Silvstedt, the Playmate of the Year back in the late 'nineties who showed up in the occasional movie every now and again. She touched it and fluffed it a little - it felt completely natural.

"Oh my God," she breathed, unable to believe the shock-blonde in the mirror was actually *herself*. She felt her pussy flush and grow wet just at the sight of it. Such a dramatic difference. She didn't even look like herself any more.

"You like it?" Michael asked, hopeful.

"It's incredible," she whispered, still touching her glowing blonde locks. "It's *perfect*."

"They're a bitch to care for," Michael warned. "You've got your work cut out for you."

"I don't care," Jeri Kay said. "I totally want to look like this forever. I don't care if I have to get up at fucking four in the morning every day, just as long as I can look like this."

"You're getting way serious about the glam," Michael said. "That's really cool."

"Cassidy's gonna so dig this," she giggled.

"So where to next on the day of decadence?" Michael asked.

"Nails and wax," Jeri Kay said. "And then I'm off to get a whole new wardrobe."

"Ooh, I wish I could do that," Michael said. "You're lucky."

She stood and kissed his cheek. "You don't know the half of it, sweetie."

\* \* \*

It was well after two o'clock when the little white Beetle drop-top roared into the parking lot of the large suburban shopping mall, the Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha" blasting over the high-dollar speakers. Jeri Kay pulled the key out of the ignition and slid out of the driver's seat, relishing the open-mouthed looks she got from a group of teenage boys as she walked - actually, she'd taken to strutting - across the crowded lot towards the shops. Her white-blond hair floated behind her, shining in the sun as she let a long plume of smoke out of her lungs, curling behind her in a long vapor trail. She lent the boys a wide, bright smile - straight and chalk-white from her new porcelain veneers between her newly enhanced collagen-filled lips which gave her a permanent sexy pout. Her cigarette - she'd taken to smoking the extra-long Virginia Slims 120s since they were sexier than her usual Marlboros - was held between fingers tipped with a glamorous, glossy white-tipped French manicure, the acrylic extensions standing about half an inch past her fingertips. After the manicurist and her bikini wax, she'd gotten a luxurious Magic Tan in the spray booth at her salon, giving her smooth, soft skin a healthy amber 'beach bunny' glow that looked positively fantastic set against her white-blond hair. After that she'd spent a wonderful hour in the chair at Ulta, learning a dizzying amount about makeup as she sat for a consultation and a makeover. The trunk of her car was stuffed with makeup and moisturizers, enough to keep her set up for months, in every sexy color she could find. The girl at the counter was nearly giddy with the commission she was going to make. And if she looked half as glamorous as she felt, Jeri Kay decided, then she was damned near the hottest thing on two legs.

She stepped over the curb and onto the sidewalk and felt a little pinching twinge in her middle as the snap of her jean shorts caught against the bottom of the dumbbell in her freshly-pierced navel. Her belly was a little red and swollen, but it hadn't hurt nearly as badly as she'd thought it would and already the swelling and redness were starting to go away. She would never know it was because of the remnants of the serum that had transformed her healing her body at an accelerated rate. Her wounds would always heal quickly and without scars, and she would hardly ever get sick. She wouldn't even get stretch marks during pregnancy.

She cast a quick look down at her scruffy pink "Hottie" t-shirt and her worn jean-shorts and the unremarkable pink flip-flops on her feet. She absentmindedly touched the small silver hoops in her newly-pierced ears and decided that she needed much more sexy wrapping paper for Cassidy's remade 'present.' She intended to make her lover's eyes pop out of their sockets at the sight of her sex-bomb girlfriend tonight, and she was running out of time to finish the presentation. She made a quick mental list, running her new tongue stud across the backs of

her veneered front teeth - Cassidy would love how that particular piercing was going to make her scream tonight in bed. She decided to start from the bottom up and the inside out - first to Dillard's and The Wild Pair for shoes, then to Frederick's of Hollywood for the underwear, next to wherever she could find the sexiest, slinkiest, most revealing outfits she could lay hands on, then finally to Claire's and The Icing for jewelry.

She shoved her cheap blue wraparound sunglasses into her blonde hair as she pulled the door of the main entrance to the mall open and stepped into the air conditioned dimness behind it. She would just have time to head home and change before she was due to meet Cassidy.

\* \* \*

Her arms ached a little at the weight of her bags. The sun had gone down while she'd been inside, cloaking the parking lot in the harsh glare of the mercury-vapor lights that made the world look like it was filmed in black-and-white.

Jeri Kay had made a great show of dumping her old, frumpy clothes into the trashcan, having just pulled the tags off of her new outfit. Her dingy pink flip-flops had been replaced with pink wedge flip-flop sandals with a cork sole and a cute little blue plastic flower on the strap which tickled her toes when she walked. She'd added a flirty little blue linen skirt with a ruffled hem and another ruffle, each trimmed in silver, above, a black "corset" tee with "Spoiled" picked out on the breasts in rhinestones, a cropped jacket of distressed denim over that, a cute little pink-sequined vinyl purse with "JK" on the flap in more rhinestones under her arm and the most adorable black pinstriped fedora perched on her head at a jaunty slant. She wore clear plastic wraparound shades, a five-row rhinestone choker with "Sexy" spelled out over her throat, a clattering assortment of cute 80's-style plastic bracelets on each wrist and big, shoulder-brushing silver hoops in her ears. She strutted as she walked, her butt weaving and swaying with her renewed sexiness and self-assurance. She only wished her breasts were bigger, even with the padded bra she'd bought at Frederick's. But she hoped her arrangements would soon take care of that little black mark.

Dozens of bags - from Bloomingdale's, Foley's, Dillard's, Charlotte Russe, Victoria's Secret, Frederick's of Hollywood, Rave, Wet Seal, The Wild Pair, Nordstrom's, Claire's, The Icing and DSW - tapped against her bare legs as she sashayed happily out to her car. She stowed the immense haul of bags in the trunk and stopped only to light a cigarette before she jumped into her car and roared away, singing along and car-dancing to Britney's "Me Against the Music" as she pulled into traffic, flirting with the boys in the adjacent cars at the stoplights as she headed home.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay elected not to put anything away straight away, since it was almost seven thirty and she had to meet Cassidy in a little over an hour. Her hair and makeup were already done from the salons, so she only took a moment to put on a pair of false eyelashes which made her long, thick eyelashes even longer still and to pluck out a few stray eyebrow hairs. She brushed her hair and extensions out and restored their shine, spraying them liberally and finger-combing until they fluffed out glamorously. She blew herself a playful kiss in the mirror and smiled her perfect enhanced smile.

A moment's uncertainty passed over her. *This isn't right!* something in her head was screaming. *I'm not supposed to be like this! What the hell am I doing?*

Jeri Kay shook her head to clear it. There had been several times during the day that she'd had similar experiences, but she found that if she didn't let herself concentrate, if she just "went with the flow" of her wonderful, happy life, the voice didn't bother her very much. A part of her wanted to know where these strange, unsettling feelings were coming from, but she didn't waste a lot of time on it.

She applied some of the 24-hour lipstick to make her lips a pouty, frosty pink and glossed them liberally as she shed her clothes and stood only in the fire-engine red, lacy thong panties and push-up padded bra she'd bought. She added only a pair of red thigh high stockings with lacy tops and an ever-so-sexy red garter belt to the ensemble. She looked like something out of a centerfold and had to take a second to just drink her image from the mirror in.

*Take that, you stupid voice, she said. Not supposed to be like this? I've been waiting to be like this my whole fucking life! I'm the sexiest little bitch you've ever seen and I'm never going to go back to boring old Frumpy Girl. So bitch and moan all you want.*

The voice didn't respond, and Jeri Kay nodded solemnly with a "that's that" expression. She pouted and vamped in the mirror for a little while and then selected out her short-short plaid "schoolgirl" miniskirt in a sexy day-glo blue plaid with four skinny, studded leather belts over it. She added a white crop-top which displayed her flat belly and a nice expanse of cleavage, and a cute baby-blue leather jacket over that. She kept the rhinestone-studded huge silver hoops she'd worn home from the mall and added a dainty little crystal 'bib' necklace and a bracelet with a huge poofy silver heart on her left wrist. She put the silver and white gold rings she'd bought on every finger, even her thumbs, and took a moment to tug everything straight. Topping it was a cute powder-blue fleece newsboy cap that she set on her shockingly blonde locks at a rakish tilt, almost covering one eye. She took a moment to transfer her lip gloss, cellphone, cigarettes and lighter, ID and money, Cassidy's overworked platinum card, car keys and a "just-in-case" tampon into a purse shaped like a woman's torso wearing a zebra-striped corset.

Looking at her new ladies' Seiko watch with the pink leather band, she got a look at the time and almost gasped. Kicking the bags into the closet, she stepped into her black leather ankle-high boots with the five-inch heel and the two-inch platform and bent in the middle to zip them up (they also had laces, but she didn't want to take the time, and she was still getting used to doing things with her long acrylic nail extensions). She tottered a little as she stood.

*That's weird, she thought. I can't remember ever having trouble with heels before. Even though every memory of wearing high heels was completely fabricated by her delusional state of the last few days, Jeri Kay had no concept that they weren't real. Relaxing a little, she tried some tentative first steps. Finding that if she took smaller steps, put one foot in front of the other, and swung her hips a lot more, she could walk pretty comfortably, she picked up her purse and gave herself one last look in the mirror. The sexiest girl she could imagine looked back at her and winked.*

She only had a vague sense of a time when she'd not been so happy or so in love with herself and her life, but she dismissed it as she climbed into her car and started the engine.

*Maybe it's some past life thing or something, she thought gaily as the Black-Eyed Peas' "Don't Phunk with my Heart" blasted out of her speakers. With a happy squeal of pleasure, she threw the car into reverse and backed out of the driveway.*

\* \* \*

Cassidy was dressed in a black velvet tube dress that set off her curves well, a little gauzy see-through jacket around her bare shoulders and her hair up in a French twist. She smoked a cigarette and sipped an apple martini at the bar, looking through thick, mascara'd lashes at the milling crowd at Ba-Boom's. The dance club was thumping, the darkened dance floor lit in stuttering flashes by the lights, illuminating a dense crowd of sweaty, undulating bodies moving sexually to a very complicated house mix. The bar was only slightly better-lit than the floor, but the garish blue and pink neon which lined the mirrored bar and the walls made it a little easier to see. She checked her watch - nine thirty. Jeri Kay was late, and a part of her was worried. She was very jealous of her time with her tailor-made best friend and lover, and she didn't feel much like sharing any more, after having spent the day going from audition to audition unsuccessfully. Besides, she felt like she needed to keep an eye on Jeri Kay, until she was sure that the girl wasn't suddenly going to remember everything and run away from her.

She sipped her drink and tried to look disinterested at the attractive sandy-brown haired man who was making suggestive eye contact with her from the end of the bar. The last thing she needed right now was somebody feeding her drinks and lies trying to get digits. She tapped her ash into a tray on the bar and began to dig in her purse for a cellphone to call Jeri Kay when a long-nailed, manicured finger tapped her on the shoulder.

Cassidy turned.

"So, do you wanna dance with me or what?" the girl said. Her voice was incongruent with the picture of sexuality and youthful appeal that faced her. Cassidy was about to loose a catty reply to the brazen come-on when recognition hit her - the eyes, the sapphire crystalline eyes...

"Jeri Kay?" she said softly.

"Mmm-hmm," Jeri Kay said, pressing her lips together in an expectant smile and holding her arms out to present herself for inspection. She turned a quick circle and faced her lover again, nearly shaking with anticipation. "You like?"

Cassidy tried to take it all in. The oh-so-trendy newsboy cap and the corset tee, the tiny little 'schoolgirl' skirt and the red silk stockings, the glamour-puss makeup and the thick, silken cascade of shocking platinum blonde. Cassidy's pussy repsonded before her mouth could, giving her a sharp shot of warmth and arousal followed by a heavy muskiness that threatened to soak through her lacy panties.

"Oh my God," she squealed, hopping up and taking her lover's hands. "You look amazing! I can't believe - oh my God! Look at you! Your hair! Oh, my - you even got your bellybutton pierced! I've been trying to talk you into that forever!"

Jeri Kay laughed in happiness, relief and delight. "I'm so glad you dig it!"

"How could I not? Look at you! You look... I dunno! You totally look amazing!"

Jeri Kay giggled and leaned in close, kissing her lover in a show of desire and raw sexuality that made everyone at the bar stop what they were doing and take a look. After a timeless stretch, they parted, breathing the same breaths and staring at each other.

"I'm so glad you like me," Jeri Kay whispered. "I wanted to make you happy."

"You always make me happy," Cassidy said. "I can't get over how you look."

"I'm all yours, baby," Jeri Kay said happily, pulling at her hands. "Now come dance with me. And then take me out and feed me. And after that, take me home and fuck me."

Cassidy stood, picking up her purse. "That's my perfect evening."

\* \* \*

They danced for what seemed like hours. The beats and the press of the bodies around them was arousing and mesmerizing. Their bodies intertwined with one another and with whoever happened to dance close to them, a writing sexual eternity in the strobing lights and rhythm. They were both sweaty, breathless and *very* turned on by the time Cassidy claimed starvation and led Jeri Kay by the hand off the floor.

They necked like teenagers on the sidewalk while waiting for the valet to come back with Jeri Kay's car, making all the people in line (particularly the men) stare enviously. Jeri Kay giggled happily as she rummaged in her purse for a tip and a cigarette, having to dig past the dozen or so phone numbers she'd gotten, scrawled on everything from matchbooks to cocktail napkins. Several business cards fell out onto the sidewalk, and she just ignored them. She could have had any man she wanted in that club tonight. It was more intoxicating than the four cosmopolitans she'd had.

Neither one of them should have been driving, between the cosmo's and the apple martinis, but they were far too excited and in love to care. Jeri Kay lit her cigarette and climbed behind the wheel, taking off to the blasting rhythm of Gwen Stefani's "What You Waiting For."

They stopped about ten blocks away at Le Marquis, an upscale French bistro that was famous for its desserts and for not needing reservations. Even so, the late hour and the Friday night had them waiting in the bar, where Cassidy ordered champagne to celebrate Jeri Kay's new look and new life. They were seated near the front - an excellent table, given to them in no small part because of how attractive they were to the *mâitre-d'*, they were relatively sure. They tore through a pair of green salads and an entrée each - *coq au vin* for Cassidy and *terrine de saumon aux epinards* for Jeri Kay - and were splitting a sinful *crème brûlée* with each other, licking and sucking it off of one another's fingertips and being very amused at the raised eyebrows from the women and the suggestive, covetous leers from the men.

They finished the last of the wine and paid their check, rising and heading out to sidewalk. Not even the complete high they were both on could convince them that, after the two bottles of wine they'd had with dinner, they were okay to drive. The *mâitre-d'* hailed them a cab and they made out in the back.

It seemed like a year before they finally pulled up in front of the apartment, since they couldn't start getting each other naked in the back of the cab. Cassidy didn't even look at the bill she passed to the very turned-on driver - it could have been a hundred for all she knew, and she didn't care so long as he left.

They stumbled through the door, their lips locked together and their arms clutching one another as if they would never let go. Both their bodies were near to singing with desire for one another. Cassidy managed to shut the door with a blind kick as Jeri Kay shoved her down onto the couch roughly. Smiling hungrily, she turned on the stereo - something soft and sexual, Nena's "I'm Not the Enemy" - and began to strip, moving sexily to the heavy beat. She stood

there, finally, wearing only a garter and a red lace bra, her long, wild blonde locks around her like a shawl.

They made love on the couch, leaving one another panting from the screaming, squealing orgasms, driven by a hunger and passion neither of them had even known before. For Jeri Kay, it was the best sex they'd ever had. For Cassidy, it was the best way she could think of to lose her virginity with her new lover. Even though she could never tell her that it was her first time, she knew she would treasure it forever.

They went hand in hand up the bedroom, kissing and touching one another as if they were afraid that they would disappear if they didn't keep contact. Cassidy lay, naked and sweating, across the bed and rolled onto her back, beckoning her lover with a crooking finger to her arms.

Jeri Kay smiled naughtily and blew her a kiss before scampering into the bedroom, wearing only her earrings, garter and shoes like a porn star. She poked her head around the door and purred, "I have another little surprise for you."

"You're my surprise," Cassidy sighed, so happy she could scarcely contain tears. "And I loved unwrapping it. Besides, you got me the little gold cigarette lighter with my initials on it, and I love it."

"You should. You paid for it. Besides, it's not a gift if I also got one for myself."

"I don't care. I love it because you got it for me."

"Well, this surprise is also for both of us," Jeri Kay said. "You ready?"

She came around the corner and Cassidy gasped and giggled. Jeri Kay was wearing a huge strap-on cock of blue "jelly" which bobbed up and down as she slinked towards the bedside. Still nearly shaking with desire, Cassidy rolled onto her side and gave her lover a quick, spirited "blow job" that left the toy glistening and slippery, all ready for the next round of play.

"I love you so much," Jeri Kay said.

"I love you, too," Cassidy said. "Now c'mere and fuck me with that thing."

"Did I tell you I got a job?" Jeri Kay said.

"Today?" Cassidy said, a little shocked. "Doing what?"

"You're looking at the city's newest exotic dancer," Jeri Kay said, striking a sexy runway pose before knee-climbing onto the bed behind her. "I start next week! Isn't that cool?"

"You sure you want to do that?" Cassidy said, a little concerned and taken aback.

"Absolutely," Jeri Kay said as she slid her "cock" deep into her lover's body.

Ω



SUMMARY: Jerry, the delivery guy, stumbles in a pharmaceutical company and finds that his DNA is now being transformed by a new secret product. Part Four

## **HIGH PERFORMANCE, Part Four**

**by Valerie Hope**

"DID YOU LIKE THAT, BABY?" Jeri Kay asked, kissing the salty sweat from her panting lover's shoulder. They were still locked together in the "doggie" position. Jeri Kay was leaning across Cassidy's back, the points of her erect nipples tickling Cassidy's shoulders and the soft blonde curtain of hair draping around Cassidy's head.

"Mmmm, yeah," Cassidy purred.

"Ever been fucked by a stripper before?" Jeri Kay asked, giggling.

"I'm still not sure about that job, baby," Cassidy said. "It might be dangerous."

Jeri Kay waved her off dismissively. "I'll be fine. There's good security there - I asked when I went there this morning after my tanning. Billy - that's the manager - loved me. Besides, I'm really *good* at it, at least that's what Billy says. And I love being up on stage like that. It's super-sexy. And the money, baby - God, it's a lot of money. I can finally get my boobs done, and that should make me even more money. And it fixes it so I can take care of you, you don't have to worry about working for a while and you can do more auditions."

"Still, Jeri, it's just so..."

Brazenly, Jeri Kay rose up and grabbed her lover's hips and began thrusting into Cassidy with the big blue strap-on cock. Cassidy grunted and squealed in pleasure and shock.

"Uh-uh," Jeri Kay said, thrusting harder and liking how in control it made her feel. "I'm going to be a stripper. You're going to be fucking a stripper. Say it."

Jeri Kay's hips were slapping noisily into Cassidy's backside with the force of the thrusts. Between grunts of pleasure and panting breaths, she managed "I'm... fucking... a stripper."

"And you're gonna like it, too," Jeri Kay said, loving the control and the intense pleasure she was giving her lover. "You're going to come home and fuck your sexy stripper girlfriend every night, aren't you? Say it!"

"I'm... gonna... come home... and fuck... my sexy... stripper... girlfriend," Cassidy panted, gripping the sheets in clenched fists as she neared orgasm. She'd never felt this way before, totally controlled by someone that she loved and trusted so much. As alien as it felt, as unfamiliar, she found she loved it. She loved it and she wanted *more*.

"And I'm totally gonna be your sugar mama," Jeri Kay boasted. "Soon I'm gonna be able to give you a day like you gave me today, and we'll be the sexiest bitches on the block. It's gonna be great, Cassie! It's gonna be perfect!"

Cassidy closed her eyes and gritted her teeth as her orgasm neared - not the sweet, sink-into-it ones she usually had with oral sex but a burning, urgent, nearly-painful build-up in her middle that threatened to pull her apart.

She'd so wanted to be the one who decided what was perfect, though. Now Jeri Kay was getting all these ideas of her own - the blonde hair, the new clothes, and now the dancing. She wasn't sure how she felt about it, but she loved being controlled like this. Maybe, if it made her feel this way, it wouldn't be so bad and she wouldn't worry so much.

"A stripper's gonna make you come, baby," Jeri Kay purred. "And after that, you're gonna sit in that chair right there and you're gonna be my first lap dance."

"Oh, God," Cassidy moaned, teetering on the brink.

"Tell me to make you come," Jeri Kay demanded, slowing her rhythm.

"Make me come, baby," Cassidy said huskily.

"Say please," Jeri Kay demanded.

"Please. Please, baby, make me come. I'm begging."

Delighted, Jeri Kay started sawing away, thrusting as hard as she could into her lover with an abandon she didn't know she possessed. Her hair bounced on her shoulders and her breasts bounced deliciously up and down with the force of her thrusts and Cassidy began to howl in ecstasy. Something inside Jeri Kay lit up with joy at making her girlfriend come like this.

*Yes! a voice in her head cried. This is the way it's supposed to be! Oh, God, this is how it's supposed to work! Fuck her! Fuck her till she screams! That's the way we do it!*

Cassidy was a moaning heap on the bed, sweating and sated. Jeri Kay crab-walked backwards, jerking the harness off her rounded hips. Just for a moment, she'd imagined that the cock was hers, really hers, and she was nailing some girl she'd just met like a whore she'd picked up on the street corner. She pulled the strap-on off and tossed it to one side, almost afraid of how it had made her feel.

"Oh, God," Cassidy breathed. "Nobody's ever fucked me like that before."

*I don't have a cock! Jeri Kay was screaming inside her own head. I'm a girl! I'm Jeri Kay Cooper! I was a cheerleader in high school! I sucked Danny Roundtree's cock in the seventh grade! I wear dresses and high heels! I'm a stripper!*

"Are you okay, baby?" Cassidy asked, unsure why her lover was sitting at the head of the bed with her eyes squeezed shut and her fists at her temples.

"I'm okay," she said, breathing out heavily. "Just some weird feelings. I'm not sure I like that strap-on thing."

Cassidy purred. "Well, I sure like it."

Jeri Kay looked at her curiously and smiled. Inside, she found a knot of resolve. Whatever the fuck that stupid voice was in her head, she'd show it. She'd *prove* to it she was a girl.

"Then you put it on," Jeri Kay said, edging it towards her with a booted toe. "And come over here and fuck my brains out with it."

"Seriously, baby, I don't think I can move right now."

Jeri Kay pouted. "You're just gonna leave me hanging?"

"I thought I was going to get a lap dance, anyhow," Cassidy said.

Jeri Kay pulled her upright by the shoulders. "Fuck first, then dance."

Looking at her curiously, Cassidy slipped her legs through the leather harness and situated the heavy, bobbing dick on her crotch. She'd barely gotten the straps straightened out before Jeri Kay was on her stomach before her, sucking the cock passionately, licking the last of Cassidy's juices from the plastic before pistoning her head up and down on the thick shaft, moaning and squealing like a porn star. Unsure why, Cassidy found herself getting very, very turned on by the spectacle, and judging by the musky scent and stiffened nipples, so was Jeri Kay. Jeri Kay rose to her knees after about ten minutes and pushed Cassidy over backwards, kneeling over her. She shifted her weight onto one knee and guided the permanently erect member between the swollen pink lips of her pussy. With a rough push downwards, she impaled herself on the cock, grunting. She began to rock back and forth - getting used to the invader, Cassidy was sure - and played with her breasts, her chin pointed to the ceiling as she moaned.

Jeri Kay's mind was a storm - she'd rushed into sex, not even knowing she wasn't prepared. Her life's experiences were completely fabricated to deal with the reality of being a woman, but she only had the accumulated imagery of her male life - even though she couldn't remember that life - as a guide on how to act and how to deal.

Jerry Cooper had been a withdrawn man, not experienced in relationships and with little to no familiarity with women as a lifelong bachelor. The only guides he had in his limited experience on how a woman was supposed to act during sex were from the typical male sources - pornography. If she had been born a girl, perhaps Jeri Kay would have had a better foundation to build on for how a woman should behave in bed. As it stood, she had no choice but to take her cues from the performances of women like Jenna Jameson, Brianna Banks, Stephanie Swift, Asia Carrera and Raquel Darrian. She made the same noises, the same facial expressions, even used the same techniques as the porn stars she didn't realize he'd watched as a man.

For Cassidy, it was a pure fantasy. She'd sculpted her dream lover, but hadn't really considered what the sex would be like. Cassidy had always, like many women, believed that the sex would just take care of itself. She didn't bother to educate herself or even think much about what she did and didn't like. Only steamy, bodice-ripper romance novels had given her any idea at all of what it was supposed to be like in the bedroom, and all her previous lovers had done nothing but disappoint. Sex had always been an awkward, embarrassing and frequently painful thing for her. She'd thought that a woman lover - particularly one that she'd designed just for herself - would be gentle, patient, slow and devoted, the kind she imagined she'd wanted.

But this woman who was bucking up and down on top of her now, screaming and whipping her hair back and forth, was nothing Cassidy Sullivan could ever have dreamed up. This lover was *far* from gentle or slow. She was a wildcat, a boiling furnace of desire and carnality. She was forceful and direct and completely abandoned to pleasure. Cassidy found herself completely overwhelmed.

And loving it.

She wondered how she ever got along without such a sexual dynamo in her life, fucking her for all she was worth, making her say the most deliciously naughty things, being in complete control of her. She never wanted it to end.

To that end, she grabbed Jeri Kay's hips and began thrusting upwards as hard as she could, wanting to make her lover feel like Cassidy had felt earlier, being completely controlled and safe and completely enslaved to her own passion.

"You like that, bitch?" she asked huskily, pumping her "cock" deep into Jeri Kay.

"Oh, God, yeah," Jeri Kay panted, squealing. "I love it."

"You like that cock?"

"I *love* that cock! It feels so good in my pussy," she groaned.

"Tell me you love it. Tell me you're a dumb little stripper whore. Tell me you're *my* dumb little stripper whore," Cassidy said, loving the sparks of almost-malicious sexual excitement curling through her breasts and clitoris.

"God, I love that cock! I love that cock!" Jeri Kay said. "I'm your dumb little stripper whore, your stupid blonde cock-hungry little stripper whore, please give me that cock, give this little whore more cock, God, I need it, give it to me..."

Every word inflamed Cassidy even more, driving her to deeper, rougher thrusts. Jeri Kay fell backwards onto her hands, rubbing the head of the dildo against the G-spot inside her with the change in position, screaming full-throated as she came once, twice, over and over multiple times until tears ran down her cheeks to mix with the sweat. Jeri Kay collapsed, rag-doll limp, against her, their breasts fitting neatly between each other, but Cassidy kept thrusting, wanting the fierceness and aggression of the sex to continue. Gradually, the fire leached out of her and she lay still, arms around her lover, smoothing the sleek platinum blonde hair and kissing her neck.

"Oh, God, baby, that was incredible," she said.

Jeri Kay kissed her neck, exhausted as an answer.

"Is it going to be like this all the time, with this new you?" Cassidy asked.

"I hope so," Jeri Kay whispered.

"Then I wish we'd done this ages ago," Cassidy said.

"So you're okay with me being a stripper?" Jeri Kay said, sounding very small and girlish. She really needed Cassidy's approval now, now that she'd taunted that pesky voice in her head who was boss by getting fucked nearly raw by a huge plastic cock.

"Yeah, I'm okay with it," Cassidy said, squeezing her tightly. "You're a big girl, you can take care of yourself, I guess - but you can't blame me for being a little worried. Besides, you just caught me off guard more than anything. It was kinda unexpected."

"I guess it was," Jeri Kay said, laughing softly. "I just got so sick of the old me. I didn't want to do anything like she did. I want to be completely different."

"Oh, believe me, you are, honey," Cassidy said.

"And you still love me?" Jeri Kay said, rising to look into her eyes.

"Of course I do, baby," she replied, smoothing her hair behind one ear and kissing her tenderly. "You're my Jeri-Curl."

Jeri Kay rolled off of her and to one side, the thick cock sliding out of her no-longer-virgin pussy with a wet *pop* as she snuggled into the crook of her girlfriend's side.

"I love you, too, Cassie," she said.

"I'm so glad you're happy," Cassidy told her.

"Almost," she corrected. "My titties are still way too small. I'll be happy once I can get 'em done."

Cassidy smiled. "It's that important to you?"

"Yeah," Jeri Kay admitted. She didn't say anything about using a massive pair of mammaries to shut up that damned voice in her head once and for all - nobody would be able to claim she wasn't a girl when she had some big round double-D's in her shirt. "It's really important. I'm not gonna feel like I'm really whole, I guess, until then."

"What if I told you I got a part?" Cassidy said. She didn't want to tell her lover about the money that the doctors had offered her to "pose" as Jeri Kay's best friend. Some fictitious part in something would be just the ticket.

Jeri Kay sprang up onto her elbows, eyes wide. "You got a part?"

"It's not a done deal," Cassidy said, mollifying her lover. "I got a callback and the producer said I was just what he was looking for."

"Why didn't you tell me anything?" Jeri Kay accused.

"Because I don't have it yet, sweetheart," Cassidy explained. "I didn't want to jinx it. But it looks really good. I'm supposed to go see him tomorrow. If I get the part, I get a nice advance. What if we used some of it to get you your operation?"

Jeri Kay's only answer was a passionate kiss.

\* \* \*

"I'm not sure about this," Heather Everett said, looking around the crowd at the coffeehouse uncomfortably. She didn't like discussing Jeri Kay Cooper in public, and she couldn't even tell Cassidy why. Her niece was leaning close, speaking in a low voice, which was good, but Heather was desperate to get the matter closed, cut the check and be done with it.

"Look, you're already gonna pay me for what I've done," Cassidy said. "I'm just asking for an advance. Twenty thousand, that's all, and most of it goes to setting me and Jeri Kay up for a while. That doesn't sound too crazy, right?"

Heather rubbed the bridge of her nose. They'd taken nearly two weeks destroying any evidence of Jerry Cooper's existence. Only one loose end remained, and there was no way to tie it up. Cassidy and Jeri Kay herself knew some bits of the truth.

"Why now?" Heather asked.

"Look, I don't like this any more than you do, but Jeri Kay and I are really starting to get close. She kinda counts on me, and it takes a lot of work to help her out. I mean, paying off my credit card was good 'n' all..."

"Never mind the nine thousand dollar shopping spree you pulled on us," Heather said.

"... but I can't go to auditions or work, having to keep up with Jeri Kay. She's starting a job soon, but still - we need money, 'cause I haven't been working," Cassidy finished.

"Fine, then," Heather snapped, anxious to be done with the whole affair, to get the new drug on the market past the FDA and retire to the Caribbean with Gordon Chambers, far away from cover-ups and girls who used to be middle-aged men. "Twenty thousand, but that's the last time you contact me. I have to get some distance from this, Cassidy. We shouldn't be seen or heard to be communicating with one another."

"How come? It's not like we're doing anything wrong," Cassidy complained, and Heather realized that the younger woman didn't know she was a part of anything criminal. God, she hated lying - she was so bad at it!

Heather backed up. "But if Jeri Kay saw us talking, it could undo all the good work you've done. We have to keep up the appearance that we barely know one another."

"Oh, it's cool, Jeri Kay doesn't even know I'm here. She thinks I'm meeting with a film producer," Cassidy said, as if it explained everything.

"I'm serious, Cassidy," Heather scolded. "If I give you the money, you have to promise me that you're not going to contact me again. I'll contact you when we have the funds available to transfer into your account."

"If we don't ever talk again, how am I gonna get the million you promised me?"

Heather sighed. "I'm still Jeri Kay's doctor, Cassidy. She has appointments with me. When I'm satisfied that this therapy has helped her, that she's out of any danger to herself, then I'll contact you and make arrangements for the money. But you *have* to let me be in control of this. You can't call, you can't email, you can't drop by. Anything - and I do mean *anything* - could be enough to set Jeri Kay off. She's in a very delicate and dangerous stage of her recovery. We don't want anything to go wrong."

"I didn't know anything bad could happen to Jeri Kay," Cassidy said. "I won't call."

"Good," Heather said. "Now give me your account number and I'll try to have the money transferred to you by the end of the week. After this, it's good-bye. Promise me."

"I promise," Cassidy said, and she meant it. From here on out, she and Jeri Kay would be on their own.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay was nervous and jumpy, even knowing that her lover Cassidy was sitting right down front. The three Crown and Cokes she'd downed were helping a little with the nerves, but it still wasn't quite enough.

"First time up, honey?" asked a statuesque brunette with exotic-looking eyes and alabaster skin, coming out of the dressing room hitching up a green velvet sheath dress over her large, round breasts.

"First time ever," Jeri Kay said weakly, peering through the curtain. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

The girl laughed. "I felt the same way the first time I did it," she said. "I'm Jennifer."

She took the offered hand in the elbow-length black velvet opera gloves. "Jeri Kay."

"Cute name," the other girl said. "Listen, Jeri Kay, you're hotter than all hell. The guys are gonna go for you and you're gonna get tipped. Just remember my two rules, okay? First thing is, you can trip and fall on your ass out there and all they're going to see is your tits. Second, it's not about them anyway, it's about you up there. Have fun, be sexy and smile. If you're up there having a good time, nothing else matters and you're gonna make the money."

Jeri Kay smiled gratefully. "Thanks."

"Relax," Jennifer said, kissing her cheek. "You're gonna do fine."

"How long have you been doing this?" Jeri Kay asked her.

"Six years," Jennifer answered. "I love it. I wouldn't do anything else and it's gonna send my baby boy to whatever college he wants. So believe me when I say you're gonna do fine. Girls come and go around here. I know talent when I see it."

"You're really sweet."

Jennifer took a dollar out of the huge roll in her tiny little clutch purse and folded it long-ways. Hooking the strap of Jeri Kay's g-string with one finger, she tucked the dollar into the waistband and gave her a friendly pat on the hip.

"See? You're already getting tipped."

Jeri Kay smiled gratefully as the music outside faded and the DJ's voice came over the sound system: "Yeeow, that was the lovely Serenity, shakin' it up on the main stage and Chocolate on second, she's now available for those table dances, gentlemen, so get friendly with her quick. Welcome to Sweetheart's, home of the two-dollar drink special happy hour and the hottest women on the planet. Now turn your attention to the main stage and the newest addition to our line-up of beautiful hotties, appearing for the first time anywhere, please give it up for the lovely Krystal!"

The beginning beats of Nelly and Christina Aguilera's "Tilt Ya Head Back" started. Jeri Kay - Krystal, she'd chosen for her dance name - took a deep breath, patted the dollar bill in her g-string, and stepped up onto the stage.

The lights hit her eyes like a physical blow, but she supposed it was for the best, since it made the crowd that much harder to see. She'd been practicing for days, watching movies like *Showgirls* and *Striptease* and *Dancing at the Blue Iguana* on DVD and practicing all the dance moves she'd seen. She wanted to find a place to practice pole tricks - she'd bought a book called *The S Factor* which detailed a whole lot of stripper's moves in a workout-type format.

There was sparse applause as Jeri Kay hooked the pole and spun herself around. She didn't feel exactly comfortable in the towering seven-inch heels and the three-and-a-half inch clear Lucite platforms, but she'd spent the weekend in them and got around pretty good. She started her dance - hoping she didn't look like a complete idiot - and just let the music take her over. Her hips thrust and she ground her crotch into the pole - sending little sexual sparks shooting up her body - and shimmied to the music, hoping she looked like the woman in the *Exotic Dancing for Everyday Women* video she'd bought, much less like Jessica Alba in *Sin City*. Jeri Kay closed her eyes and tried to channel all these strippers, picturing their moves in her mind. Between the alcohol, the nerves and the music, the cold air conditioning making her nipples almost painfully hard under the little crop-top she was wearing - the first song of the two-song set was always done with a top on - she managed to let herself go.

She was working the pole like it was a giant penis, rubbing her entire body along its slick length as she dry-humped with her hips, when she opened her eyes and saw six men standing at the edge of the stage holding dollar bills, all folded lengthwise like Jennifer had done. Her vision had adjusted and she could see Cassidy, sitting at a table by herself and smiling widely. Walking near the bar, she also saw Jennifer, who smiled and gave her a thumb's-up and a friendly wink.

Jeri Kay slinked across the polished wooden floor of the stage, sinking to her knees at the edge and pulling the first man's face deep into her cleavage with both arms, rubbing her crotch into his chest. Laughing, she slid along his body and turned around, bouncing her firm butt against him and looking over her shoulder sexily.

There were many, many more men with dollars by the time "Tilt Ya Head Back" ended and the ATC's "Around the World" started and Jeri Kay tossed her top onto the stage near the pole. The bills in her waistband were fanned out like the petals of a strange flower as she writhed and undulated from one man to the next, in the order she saw them. The DJ had to back the song up nearly a minute to give her time to finish with all her customers.

She climbed down and made her way with mincing steps in the skyscraper heels across the carpeted floor, her purse and top in one hand and a fistful of dollar bills as she headed for the smaller second stage. No less than five men had asked her to come by their tables for a table dance after she finished her rotation.

Jeri Kay giggled. At least she'd figured out what she wanted to do when she grew up.

\* \* \*

Jeri Kay pushed back Cassidy's chair and slid into her lover's lap, kissing her cheek as she set down her overstuffed purse, her sixth Crown and Coke, and set her long white cigarette, stained on the end with red glossy lipstick, in the ashtray on the table.

"About time you got here. I've been sitting here for almost two hours," Cassidy complained, having to raise her voice to get over the booming music - DMX's "Up in Here" - and make herself heard.

"Sorry, baby," Jeri Kay said. "I had to do table dances. A bunch of guys came up while I was on stage and asked me to come by."

"How did it go?" Cassidy asked.

"A couple of them didn't want to keep their hands to themselves," Jeri Kay grumped. "I mean, I don't mind so much if they want to touch my tits. But you're the only one I want touching my pussy."

"Are you okay?"

"Oh, hell yeah," Jeri Kay said, waving her hand in dismissal and blowing a raspberry to indicate her lack of concern. "It's no problem getting that under control."

"How are you doing?" Cassidy asked her lover.

"Oh, flying, baby girl," Jeri Kay said, doing a little dance to a particular stretch of the song. "I'm half fucked-up and I'm totally enjoying myself. And then there's this."

She dumped a double handful of money into her lover's lap. Twenties and singles, fives and tens - there had to be a few hundred dollars there. Jeri Kay smiled and laughed at the expression of wonder on Cassidy's face.

"Three hundred dollars in two hours," Jeri Kay boasted. "Not bad, huh? Jennifer - that's my new friend, that girl over there in the green dress - said she's never heard of anybody making that much on her first day. So I'm, like, super-stripper or something."

"You sure are," Cassidy said, hugging her girlfriend tightly. "I can't believe how good you looked on stage. It was all I could do to keep from jumping onto that stage and eating you out right there. You're the sexiest dancer in here."

Jeri Kay blushed. "You are so sweet."

"Listen, Jeri Kay --"

Jeri Kay shushed her by laying a long-nailed finger across her lips. "Remember, baby, in here I'm 'Krystal.' I don't want any of these guys figuring out where I live."

"Right," Cassidy said, looking around suspiciously at the crowd. "Krystal. Look, I have something for you."

"A present?"

"Sort of," Cassidy said, digging in her purse and pulling out a map, some cheap thing that you could buy in a gas station for three bucks. Jeri Kay looked at it strangely, puffing on her cigarette with a beetle-browed look of confusion on her face that Cassidy found completely adorable.

"What the fuck?" Jeri Kay asked.

"Open it," Cassidy instructed. Jeri Kay unfolded the map - it was actually a tourist map, without a lot of the side streets and residential neighborhoods detailed, just the major

freeways and sites of interest. Cassidy must have picked it up for free at the Chamber of Commerce or something. There was a spot, downtown at the intersection of University and Medical Arts, marked with a big red "X" in Sharpie.

"What's the 'X' for?"

"That's where your appointment is," Cassidy said. "Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock with Dr. Shapiro, the best cosmetic surgeon in the state from everything I've heard."

Jeri Kay looked at her lover in complete stunned shock, mouth hanging open.

"I got the part," Cassidy explained.

Jeri Kay squealed and hugged her girlfriend tight, broke, tried to say something and couldn't find the words, so had to resort to hugging her again. Still at a total loss for words, she stood, pushed Cassidy's chair away from the table and began to give her the sexiest, steamiest lap dance she could.

By the time the waitress came around to refresh their drinks, she told Jeri Kay that she had twelve more invitations to other men's tables. Jeri Kay kissed her girlfriend - not too passionately, this was her workplace - and moved into the crowd, going to make the money, to get these horny men their lap dances before her next rotation on stage. She sashayed through the crowd, holding her cigarette up next to her face unable to keep the happy bounce out of her strutting slink.

\* \* \*

Cassidy left to go eat and change, and came back just after the club closed. It was strange to see the place lit with normal fluorescent lighting instead of the harsh club lighting and stage lights, and all the strippers with their hair and makeup done high-glam but wearing worn, comfortable everyday clothes.

Jeri Kay was sitting at a table with two gorgeous women, a tall leggy blonde with a cascade of kinky permed curls extending halfway down her back, and the brunette she'd pointed out earlier, the one who'd been in the green velvet sheath dress. Jeri Kay was smoking and laughing with them, waving Cassidy over with both hands once she caught sight.

"Cassie, these are my new friends." She gestured to the leggy blonde. "This is Morgan - her real name is Dawn - and she started last week, so she's almost as new as I am. And this is Jennifer, who I told you about. Guys, this is my girlfriend Cassidy."

They shook hands and invited her to sit. There was about another twenty minutes before the bouncers cleared the remaining customers out of the parking lot or loaded them into cabs, so the girls were all sitting around chatting or reading or doing crossword puzzles.

"Nice to meet you," Dawn said, picking up her cigarette from the ashtray and crossing her legs. "Jeri Kay was telling us all about you. She's a really cool girl."

"I know," Cassidy said with a shy smile. "I think I'll keep her."

"Your girl is a fucking hustler," Jennifer said, rubbing Jeri Kay's arm. "Tell her how much you made, JayKay."

Jeri Kay giggled drunkenly - she'd already been on her way to in the bag when Cassidy had left and showed no sign of slowing down or stopping - and held up a huge wad of money. "Seven hundred."

"Wow," Cassidy said, wide-eyed.

"Bitch," Jennifer called her fondly. "You know how much I made the first day I ever danced? A hundred bucks. I was so scared I puked twice before I went out on stage and I only made a hundred fucking bucks. And you bring your skinny ass in here and make seven hundred your first night."

"I told you, I'm Super Stripper," Jeri Kay repeated, striking a ridiculous 'muscle' pose.

"She's a sweetheart," Jennifer said to Cassidy. "You two are really lucky to have each other. JayKay hasn't been able to stop talking about you for, like, an hour."

"We're really happy together," Cassidy said.

"Are you seriously gonna buy her new tits?" Dawn asked.

"She wants 'em so bad," Cassidy said. "And I just got a job that will get us the money. As happy as it'll make her, I don't see how I can say no."

"Oh my God, I so need to get a girlfriend like you," Dawn said. "All my boyfriend does is work on his fucking car. He won't even buy groceries."

"Totally," Jennifer agreed. "I'm serious, though, Dawn, you need to jump on the same train as me and JayKay. Go dyke, baby - you don't have those kinds of troubles when you fuck girls."

"But I like dick," Dawn pouted.

"Believe me, baby, Cassie has one that buckles on that's better than any I ever had," Jeri Kay put in. "Two minutes with Big Blue and you'd never think about another guy again."

"Amen," Jennifer said.

"Besides, you can always work it out with your girl to get some dick on the side," Jeri Kay went on. "I was talking to the girl with the corn-rows, the blonde -"

"Kaycee?" Dawn supplied.

"Yeah, I think that's her name," Jeri Kay said. "She said she has a deal with her girl, since they're both bi. They can have dick on the side so long as they don't sneak around and lie about it to each other. That's really cool."

"You have to seriously trust your partner for that," Jennifer said. "I tried it once and we broke up in, like, three weeks. I decided that even though I like dick, it just wasn't worth it. Women are some jealous-assed bitches."

"I trust Cassie like that," Jeri Kay bragged, putting her arm around her lover. "Shit, I bet we could do it, couldn't we, baby?"

Cassidy blushed. "I dunno, honey, probably. We can talk about it later, if you want."

"That's so cute, she's embarrassed!" Dawn said.

Jennifer put a friendly hand on Cassidy's arm. "Honey, I forgot to warn you, you're among strippers now. We fucking talk about *everything*. When you work with your tits out, you don't really, like, have taboos, right? I don't mean to embarrass you, but I do feel like I oughta at least warn you about it."

"It'll take a little getting used to," Cassidy admitted.

"Look, come out with us tomorrow night," Dawn said. "Nobody works Tuesdays, it's totally fucking dead in here and the dances are only ten bucks. Me, Jennifer, Tiffany and Keri always head to this club called Kismet over on 49th Street. It's Tuesday nights are drag queen nights, it's a total fucking blast."

"It's a gay bar?" Jeri Kay asked.

"Yeah, we don't get hit on and their DJ can fucking *spin*, girl. It's a total party. Y'all have to come," Jennifer said.

"I dunno," Cassidy said, looking at her girlfriend. "Sounds like fun to me."

Jeri Kay bounced and clapped her hands. "Cool!"

"So we'll see you there?" Jennifer said, standing and gathering her shoulder-bag, makeup case and purse as the bouncers came back in and held the doors open to the parking lot.

"Totally," Jeri Kay said, as Cassidy nodded.

They walked to the car, holding hands, happy and feeling completely at ease with life. Jeri Kay couldn't imagine being any happier if she tried.

\* \* \*

They'd fallen asleep talking, after a wonderfully wild session of sex. Cassidy had wanted to know if Jeri Kay liked the life she was embarking on, and her lover had given protestation after protestation of how happy she was. She was even talking differently - half 'ghetto' like some of the other girls at the club and more ditzy, full of bubbleheaded sayings and interjections. Like a nerd in school suddenly finding herself with the popular girls and adopting everything about them, the way they acted and talked and interacted. Cassidy didn't mind - it made Jeri Kay happy and was kinda sexy - but she did have the sinking feeling that her 'perfect' girlfriend was slowly slipping out of her grasp. The thought scared her. She made a mental note to spend more time together, to find more ways to be close and intimate besides just sex. It was the last thought she had before sleep claimed her.

Jeri Kay lay awake a little while longer, waiting for the last of the alcohol to wear off and for the bed to stop spinning. Her chest was swollen with happiness and contentment like she'd never experienced. Her girlfriend was great, her job kicked ass, she loved the way she felt and looked, she was making money hand over fist, and she was going to get the big boobs she wanted more than anything else, far sooner than she expected. Her life was perfect. She fell asleep smiling.

The dream was one of those that took a little while to figure out it was a dream. Jeri Kay stood on a long boardwalk or pier, surrounded by fog so dense she couldn't see anything past a few yards. She heard music and laughing somewhere, and she began walking towards it, drawn to

the happiness and conversation like a moth to a bright light. She hadn't walked six steps before a hand grabbed her wrist.

She whirled and came face-to-face with a tall, sad-looking older man with a drooping mustache and hooded blue eyes. What was left of his hair was turning grey and deep lines of hard living were etched into his leathery skin.

"You have something that belongs to me," he said in an even, calm voice.

"I don't have anything of yours," Jeri Kay replied, trying to pull away. The man's grip was like iron.

"You have everything of mine," he said, and now his voice had an edge, almost as if it promised violence.

"I just want to go to the party," Jeri Kay protested.

"I don't care," the man said. "I want my property back."

"I don't have anything of yours," Jeri Kay repeated.

The man jerked and Jeri Kay felt a tearing - it didn't hurt as much as it shocked, and she staggered backwards. The man held her arm in his hand, and he dropped it into a big cloth bag that Jeri Kay hadn't noticed before.

"This is mine," he said. He reached again, and pulled her other arm, dropping it into the bag. "And this."

He pulled, and her hair came out. Then her ears, and her left leg. She lay there, transfixed, not afraid and terrified all at the same time. There was no pain, no blood. He calmly pulled each part of her body off and dropped it into the bag until all that was left was her head.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"Because you stole from me," he said. "I want it all back."

"You can't take everything. You have to leave me something," Jeri Kay said.

"Do I?"

"Yes," she said. "It isn't fair, otherwise."

"Don't talk to me about fair, girlie," he growled. "You don't know what unfair is."

"Look, just let me go to the party," she said. "Keep the rest, I don't care. Just take me to the party and let me stay there."

"I don't want to take you there. I don't want to be there at all," he said.

"How come?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I just don't."

"Tell me why not."

He sighed and stared at her for a long time. Finally, he tossed the bag down beside her disembodied head. "I guess you win," he said. "Go to your damn party."

"Come with me," she begged.

"I don't belong there," he replied.

"Only because you won't give it a try," Jeri Kay countered. "You might like it."

"I doubt that," the man said.

"Look, I'll make you a deal. You come to the party with me and give it a try. If you don't like it, I promise I'll give back whatever I have of yours."

His eyes were narrow and hard. "You promise?"

"I promise," she said. "Put me back together and come with me."

He knelt beside her and dug in the bag, pulling out her torso and setting it beneath her head. She felt her heart beat again and took a deep breath. "I'm going to hold you to this," he told her coldly.

"A promise is a promise," Jeri Kay said. "You're going to like it, I just know it."

"I better, or I'll have to pull you apart again," he said.

Jeri Kay woke up with a gasp, staring at the dark shadows of the ceiling fan and the white bars of the moonlight through the vertical blinds.

And somehow she knew it wasn't a dream she'd just had.

Ω



SUMMARY: Jerry, the delivery guy, stumbles in a pharmaceutical company and finds that his DNA is now being transformed by a new secret product. Part Five

## **HIGH PERFORMANCE, Part Five**

**by Valerie Hope**

JERI KAY AWOKE SLOWLY, OUT of a languid dream of pink satin and softness. It took her a moment to figure out where she was, her eyelids fluttering open slowly. Pain crept in at the fringes of her lovely torpor, and she groaned a little.

"Easy, baby," a sweet voice told her. "Don't make any sudden movements."

Her eyelids fluttered open slowly, trying to filter out the rough light. The blurs awaiting her vision coalesced slowly into a worried but smiling face, her lover's face, her sweet and perfect Cassidy.

"Hey," Jeri Kay croaked.

"Hey yourself," Cassidy replied with a shy smile. "How are you feeling?"

"Rough," Jeri Kay said. "How long?"

"You've been asleep for about six hours," Cassidy said. "The doctor said everything went perfectly."

Excitement pushed its way past the pain. Jeri Kay looked down at the considerable tent under the front of the thin cotton sheet that covered her. Moving gently so as to not dislodge the IV in the back of her right hand, she moved the covers and took her first look.

"They're huge," she whispered.

"I know, right?" Cassidy giggled. "I knew you wanted them big, but *shit*."

Jeri Kay ran gentle hands over the red, swollen flesh of her enormous tits. They definitely had the too-perfect, spherical look of being 'done,' but that was actually what she had wanted. They stood out from her narrow chest proudly, her nipples pointing saucily out into the chilly air. The breasts - supposedly a whopping 36DD after the swelling subsided - were pushed down by a compression garment of strange elastic straps that fit like a crazy bra and the skin was either a bruised bluish-purple or an angry, irritated red. The skin was soft and somehow more sensitive than before. Jeri Kay tried to smile and stopped as razor ribbons of pain shot through her lips. The pouty implants she'd had in her lips to give her the full 'Angelina Jolie' lips she'd wanted were as irritated and swollen as her new tits.

"Poor baby," Cassidy said, stroking Jeri Kay's arm. "I'm gonna have to take good care of you for a few days, aren't I?"

"I didn't know it was gonna hurt so much," Jeri Kay grunted, "but I don't care. They're perfect. I love all of it."

"I'm so glad I could help," Cassidy said. "You look so happy."

"I am happy," she said. "Happier than I've ever felt."

"The doctor says the swelling will go down in about two weeks and you can start getting used to how you look," Cassidy said. "He gave me some prescriptions for you and said I can take you home whenever you're ready to go."

"I'm so ready," Jeri Kay said. "Thanks, Cassie. Thanks for everything."

"I love you," her girlfriend said, smiling and a little teary-eyed.

"I love you, too," Jeri Kay said. "I can't wait until I can do something like this for you."

"I dunno if I want to end up looking like a porn girl like you," Cassidy said, giggling.

"You'd make a great porn girl," Jeri Kay said. "We could be porn girls and live together and have a website where people could pay to watch us fuck every night."

"Not really the kind of actress I want to be," Cassidy said.

"I know," Jeri Kay said. "But it doesn't mean it's not hot to think about. Besides, having tits like this would get you more roles. How's the job going?"

Cassidy swallowed a sip of coffee from a lidded cup to hide her distress. She hated lying to her lover like this, but she didn't have a choice. Heather said that Jeri Kay was at a very delicate stage of recovery and could know nothing about the money and assistance that the doctors were giving her.

"It's not going well at all," Cassidy said, using the lie she's practiced. "It looks like they're going to lose their backing after all. All that work to get the part, and now they can't make the movie."

"Aww," Jeri Kay said. "Sweetie, I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault, baby," Cassidy said, trying to change the subject.

"I know that," Jeri Kay said. "But I can still feel bad for you, right?"

"Let's get your stuff together and get you home," Cassidy replied, fussing with Jeri Kay's clothes and small overnight bag.

Jeri Kay caught her lover's wrist. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Don't give me 'nothing.' What's bothering you?" Jeri Kay pressed.

Cassidy's chin dimpled for a moment as she fought tears, then she composed herself and forced a smile. "It's not the time," she said. "We need to worry about getting you home and comfortable."

"I'm not going to be comfortable until I know what the fuck is going on," Jeri Kay said, getting a little impatient. "Cassie, tell me."

"It's big," Cassidy said. "Real big."

"Sit," Jeri Kay said, pointing to the chair.

Cassidy sank heavily into the chair, listening to the sigh of the naugahyde as air escaped from the seams. She added a sigh of her own and rubbed the bridge of her nose.

"Tell me," Jeri Kay prompted.

"I'm scared to," Cassidy replied. "I'm scared of what you're going to think of me."

Jeri Kay took her lover's hand and stroked it with her long-nailed thumb. "You know I love you, right? It doesn't matter how mad I get, sweetie, that won't change."

"Promise?" Cassidy's voice sounded like a lost little girl's.

"I promise. Tell me what's got you so scared."

"I've been lying to you," Cassidy explained. "Dr. Everett - Heather - she's my aunt. I've known her for my whole life. When you were sick, she called me up and said you'd lost your memory. She explained to me that you needed a friend. It was some kind of new therapy she was researching. She hired me to help you form memories."

Jeri Kay looked dumbstruck. "But we've known each other our whole lives," she said.

"No, baby. We haven't. We just met a few months ago. Heather told me exactly what to do, and it worked. But I wasn't lying about being in love with you. I love you so much, baby. I'm so sorry I lied to you. I never should've let it go this far."

Jeri Kay's voice seemed very far away as she sank back against the pillow propping her back. "Start at the beginning," she said distractedly, staring into space.

\* \* \*

"And you're telling me that none of that - growing up with you, going to school together, any of it - was real?" Jeri Kay said, face neutral and voice oddly flat.

"I guess not," Cassidy said in a very small voice.

"But I remember it so clearly," Jeri Kay said. "Who the hell am I, if I'm not that stuff?"

"I don't know," Cassidy said. After a long pause: "D'you hate me?"

Jeri Kay's shocked expression broke. She smiled, and placed a warm, soft hand over Cassidy's where it clutched the hospital sheet in desperation.

"No, baby girl, I don't hate you," Jeri Kay reassured her. "I'm mad at you, but I don't hate you."

"Is there somehow I can make it up to you?" Cassidy asked.

"I dunno," Jeri Kay replied. "Right now I don't really care about that. I just want to figure out who the fuck I am."

"I can give you someplace to start," Cassidy said, wiping tears from her eyes with a very damp Kleenex. "If anybody knows anything, it'll be Heather. Dr. Everett. Maybe you can find a way to make her tell you."

"Maybe so," Jeri Kay said. "Once I'm through healing, I'm gonna see what I can do."

"Baby, I'm so, so sorry."

Jeri Kay had the distracted look again, but this time there was a hard edge to her voice. "I know you are, baby. Right now I gotta think."

\* \* \*

The hardest thing about being a five-nine platinum blonde with double-D tits was that it became very difficult to blend in. Jeri Kay tossed her Virginia Slims cigarette onto the pavement and stepped over it, a plume of smoke escaping her full, pouty lips as she walked out of the vantage point she'd chosen against the wall of a Border's bookstore on the downtown sidewalk, tucking the *Allure* magazine she'd bought to look like a normal customer under her arm.

She'd bought 'incognito' clothes, something more subdued than her usual clothes, which tended to be skin-tight, brightly colored and revealing. Her perfectly healed masterpieces were downplayed - as much as Jeri Kay hated that - under a baggy white hoodie and her low-rise, flare-leg jeans were much less form-fitting than the pairs she usually wore. She kept the glittery, sparkly stuff to a minimum, opting only for a pair of gigantic silver hoops and a small belt of heart-shaped links around her waist. She wore the ear-buds of her iPod and a pair of dark wraparound shades. Her big, high-glam platinum mane was gathered back into a loose ponytail which still held the remnants of last night's curl and style - Jeri Kay had come to the sidewalk opposite Dr. Everett's office straight from work. She'd not wanted to see Cassidy. The abject apology stuff was wearing thin in a hurry. She'd enjoyed the breakfasts in bed and the hours Cassidy had spent on her knees between her legs with no question of reciprocation, the flowers and the solicitude for the week it had taken her to heal from her surgeries. The doctor had said a month before the swelling and discomfort was gone, but Jeri Kay felt fine. She was careful not to damage her huge, perfect breasts by over-doing, but she was not in any pain and was bored. Cassidy had offered to support her completely so she didn't have to work any more, but Jeri Kay loved her job and was bored stiff after about five days. Last night had been her first night back. The tits were a huge hit. A gangsta roll of cash - almost twelve hundred dollars - stuffed her little clutch purse from work that was tucked in the big canvas tote she had over her shoulder.

The door of the downtown office opened and Everett, wearing a sharp tailored maroon suit with a cream-colored cowl-neck blouse, stepped out into the pedestrian traffic. Jeri Kay pulled on her pink baseball cap backwards and followed.

Everett walked a few blocks to a parking garage and retrieved her lipstick-red CLK500 Mercedes convertible. Jeri Kay had to hustle to get to her little white Beetle parked next to an expired meter on the street. She had to drive like a total retard for a few minutes to find a place about three cars behind Everett.

They were making their way through traffic toward the freeway on-ramp when Jeri Kay's mobile rang out with Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl" as the ringtone. Smiling, she flipped it open and pressed it to her ear.

"Hey, sweet girl," she said airily.

"What's up, skank?" her friend Lisa said on the other end. Jeri Kay wasn't used to hearing her voice without the thumping music of the club behind it. They'd danced together for only a few months, but they were getting to be pretty tight.

"Did you have a good time last night?" Jeri Kay asked.

"Oh, *hell* yeah," Lisa said. "I can hardly fuckin' move."

Lisa had worked hard on the young man who'd come in to the club last night, dancing for him for hours. She'd confided her desire to take the young man home to Jeri Kay while they were at the dressing room mirror later that night. Lisa had been very grateful for the recommendation, since the young detective Kyle Miller had been one of Jeri Kay's regulars. He day-traded well enough to keep himself in strippers and expensive cigars, but Jeri Kay's "stripper sense" had told her that he wasn't so much into the blonde bombshell type. Instead of milking the \$40 or so out of him every time he came in and burning a lot of floor time sitting and talking, she introduced Lisa, a long-legged, pale-skinned brunette with little handful titties and a stomach you could iron a shirt on. It had been lust at first sight - Miller had dropped \$500 on Lisa the first night, and by the second she'd followed him home after closing. Lisa was willing to do a lot to say 'thank you' for the sugar daddy. Jeri Kay's tiny little favor didn't seem like much.

"Kick ass," Jeri Kay said. "How was he?"

"He fucks like a train," Lisa said. "I fuckin' love guys who take Viagra when they don't need to. He's still passed the fuck out on my bed and he's still got a hard-on. I'm totally gonna go wake him up in a minute."

"That's cool," Jeri Kay said. "I'm, like, so glad y'all dig each other."

"Totally," Lisa said. "But hey, listen - he did that thing you asked."

"Really?"

"Yeah," Lisa replied. "He did it in, like, ten minutes. It's fuckin' huge, too. Like, a hundred pages or some shit. I got it in a box here at my place."

"Right on," Jeri Kay replied, bouncing a little. "I'll come by later and get it, cool?"

"I'll bring it to work tonight," Lisa said. "I'm gonna be, um, busy all day."

"Oh, yeah, totally," Jeri Kay said, smiling widely. "Don't get knocked up."

"No worries there, baby girl, after my little boy I went to the doctor and got fixed."

"You're a fucking doll to do this, baby," Jeri Kay said. "But hey - I gotta run. I'll see you at work, okay?"

"Cool, baby. Hey - who is this Everett chick that you wanted him to check out, anyhow?"

"Some bitch who stole something from me once," Jeri Kay told her.

"Oh. Cool, then. See ya!"

"Ciao," Jeri Kay said, clapping her phone shut and tossing it into her open purse. She lit a cigarette off the dash lighter and turned her music up, pulling onto the freeway and goosing her little turbo hard to keep up with the flying Mercedes.

\* \* \*

Everett's house was nice to say the least. A two-acre lot with trees and a pool. Parking up the block at the top of the hill gave Jeri Kay a really nice view of the gate keypad through the

expensive binoculars she'd bought, and got her the code without an issue. She drove by once and walked back, using her camera phone and the cute little zoom lens she'd found to clip on over the regular lens to get pictures of the house and the cameras, all the shit that her customer who worked for an alarm company had told her in response to her innocent, wide-eyed question: "So, like, if you wanted to break into somebody's house 'n' stuff, what kinda stuff would you do?"

He'd told her a virtual how-to of how to break into a house. Funny how three martinis and a pair of big DD tits in their face made men tell a lot more than they intended to. She'd listened very carefully - a difficult proposition in the loud, noisy club - and had hustled off to the dressing room several times to make notes in a cute little notebook she'd picked up.

She returned to her car and took a second to send the camera-phone pictures to her home laptop and light a cigarette. Putting her sunglasses back on, she made a quick try at fixing her wind-tangled hair in the rearview, finally gave up - she was supposed to look like ass today, to try and keep people from noticing her - and started the engine. All she needed now was a really cute breaking-and-entering outfit. She headed back towards downtown, her mind in overdrive.

\* \* \*

She'd hit the hippest part of downtown for her outfit, a dancewear shop where she'd found a super-cute black lycra catsuit, and found a cute black leather newsboy cap and some fingerless black leather driving gloves in a little luggage shop a few doors down. She already had a great harness and belt for the stuff she thought she'd need from REI yesterday, and a bunch of stuff from her list she got from the security guy. She was just walking now, browsing the windows at cute outfits and wasting time until her shift started in three hours.

She was sipping white wine and smoking a cigarette in a precious little downtown café, thinking about Cassidy. God, she was so pissed at her girlfriend. But pissed or no, Cassidy was still her girlfriend and Jeri Kay genuinely loved her. But forgive her? Jeri Kay wasn't sure she could ever do that. Every tender moment, every sexy vignette she would have with the woman she adored from here on out would have an air of falseness about it, a shifty, unsettling sense of being based on a lie. The anger had almost a life of its own, like a black, hot snake curling around her spinal column. It touched everything she came in contact with. If she felt tender towards Cassidy, it was angry tender. Horny was angry horny. She wished she could go back to the way it was before, just happy with it all, but the anger was always there, stopping her, poisoning the way she felt, giving her hard edges and making her cold where she was used to feeling warmth.

Jeri Kay hated the way she felt, and she wanted it gone. She wished that she could have it exorcised like that little girl in that movie.

Her eyes scanned across the street, the way she had a dozen times since sitting down. But this time something caught her eye that she'd overlooked every other time. A little store, tucked in between a tattoo parlor and a little bohemian coffee shop. The sign was simple, red letters on white, with a painting of two gloved hands tied together at the wrists and the name "All Tied Up."

Somehow, Jeri Kay found herself standing up and crossing the street. Something seemed to tell her that her answers were in there somewhere.

\* \* \*

Cassidy waited at the foot of the bed and pulled the covers around herself a little tighter, even though the room was pleasantly warm. She'd stayed up until Jeri Kay had come home from her shift to see if there was anything at all she could do to assuage her tremendous guilt, some way to make her lover forgive her. Jeri Kay had barely looked at her as she went straight into the bathroom with some black mylar shopping bags stuffed with deep purple tissue paper. The light came on under the crack in the door and stayed on for a while, as the muffled sound of the little jam-box in the bathroom playing Portishead came on.

Cassidy fought back tears. No sign, even the slightest hint of forgiveness. Would she have to spend the rest of her life trying to make this up to her? Or should she just break it off and cry herself to sleep for a few months before trying to put it behind her? She was on the precipice of crying when the door opened.

She looked up in shock. It was the body and the face that she loved, the shockingly blonde hair and the big liquid eyes she adored waking up next to. But everything else was different. Scary. Exciting.

Her long legs were encased in thigh-high patent leather with little silver chains around the tops and ankles. A towering platform and heel made her amazon tall. The barest hint of black lace and silk showed above the tops of the boots, with a patent leather garter attached to the tops of the stockings. Jeri Kay's bare pussy glistened with wetness. A skin-tight patent leather corset cinched her flat stomach and tiny waist, and her beautiful round breasts swung free above the cupless cincher. A patent leather collar and patent leather fingerless gloves up to the elbow encased her neck and arms, and her hair was gathered into a sexy horsetail on the very top of her head by a patent leather studded band. A black suede flail hung off a chain loop at her hip and she had a black leather riding crop in her hand, the slapper patting softly against her hand.

"Jeri Kay?" Cassidy half-croaked.

"Shut the fuck up," her lover hissed, and Cassidy felt a surge of energy sharp in her clit. Something about the way she said it made Cassidy almost swoon.

"Stand up and take off your clothes."

Cassidy stood, her flesh trembling with an excitement she'd never experienced before. She unbuttoned her sweater and dropped her denim skirt to the floor, stepping out of it and standing naked before her lover.

"Your tits are too small," Jeri Kay said, walking around her in a slow circle and sizing her up like a head of cattle at an auction. "Your bellybutton needs piercing. Your hair is too short and I hate the color. Your pussy is too hairy. Your fingernails are too short and your teeth aren't white."

"I'm sorry," Cassidy said.

She jumped. A hard smack from the riding crop stung her left butt cheek and made her yelp. But even more shocking than the sting of the crop was the incredible sharp tingling sensation deep inside her pussy. She looked at her lover in wonder.

"Eyes on the floor," Jeri Kay commanded. She resumed her slow circling appraisal.

"I am the top. The *domme*. You are the bottom. The submissive. You are a slave. Property. You don't have an identity. You don't get to use the word 'I' or 'me.' You use the name I choose to give you and no other. You will refer to me as Mistress. Tell me if you understand."

"I understand," Cassidy nearly whispered.

She jumped and yelped again as three sharp smacks on her ass warmed her skin. These weren't like the first one. These *hurt*. But the reaction in her sex was even stronger than before. The dewy, heavy feeling in her pussy was unmistakable.

"Tell me *properly* if you understand."

The voice was very small and tremulous. "Yes, Mistress. Cassidy understands."

"Arms out," Jeri Kay commanded. Cassidy did as she was told, and Jeri Kay fitted a leather collar around her neck. Three straps depended from the collar, one down her sternum and the other two to either side of her breasts to buckle in the small of her back. Dozens of chains connected the straps to each other, so that her breasts were draped in clinking, heavy chains. Jeri Kay buckled it on tightly and then roughly gathered Cassidy's hair into two pigtailed, high up on her head above her ears. Then she brought a pair of platform boots, in a duller matte leather, from the bathroom and zipped them up Cassidy's legs.

"You will do exactly as I say exactly when I say to do it," Jeri Kay explained as she dressed her. "This is uniform number one. You will remember it exactly and immediately put it on when I tell you to. Other uniforms will follow. Understand?"

"Yes, Mistress. Cassidy understands."

"I don't like that name. It makes you sound too classy and too intelligent. You are a dumb, brainless, trashy little slut and you need a dumb, brainless, trashy little slut name," Jeri Kay said. "Don't you think so?"

It took some sharp smacks and restatements of the same question before Cassidy answered, "Yes, Mistress, Cassidy needs a dumb, brainless, trashy little slut name."

"On your knees, wrists crossed behind your back. Now."

Cassidy complied, still half-thunderstruck at the incredible waves of sexual desire flowing through her like rushing torrents of ice and fire. Something about the words Jeri Kay was saying, the words she was making Cassidy say, it was like breathing in icy cold air, clenching inside her chest and making her blood run hot with ecstasy.

"Your little skank pussy is getting all wet. I can smell it," Jeri Kay said. "You fucking like this, don't you, you little whore?"

She could barely make a noise, but managed to breathe, "Yes, Mistress."

"Even though it wasn't real, I remember the biggest slut in our high school was named Brandi. I think I'll call you that to remind you what an easy little slut you are."

"Yes, Mistress. Thank you, Mistress."

"You like your new name, bitch?"

"Yes, Mistress. Brandi loves her new slutty name."

"I decided tonight, Brandi, that I'm going to let you make it up to me," Jeri Kay said. "It's going to take a lifetime of this, but I can tell by your nipples and your pussy that you're not going to mind so much. And there's going to be some changes made. For one thing, you're going to fix some of the problems with yourself that I mentioned. You remember?"

"Yes, Mistress," she replied, the horniness in full control of her. She would have swallowed bleach at that moment if Jeri Kay had told her to. "Brandi's tits are too small. Her teeth aren't white and her bellybutton isn't pierced. Brandi needs to shave her pussy and grow her fingernails. Her hair is too short and it's an ugly color that Mistress hates."

"Very good, Brandi. You're very good at this."

"Thank you, Mistress. Brandi loves you very much and wants to please you."

"I know she does. And Mistress loves Brandi. She deserves a reward for being such a good little slave."

Jeri Kay sat on the edge of the bed and spread her legs wide. "Lick," she commanded. Cassidy - Brandi, now, she couldn't stop being Brandi now if her life depended on it - knee-walked over, arms still behind her back, and bent at the waist to tongue her lover's pussy. Jeri Kay took a deep breath of pleasure, stroking Brandi's hair softly as she pleased her.

"You thought you were so smart," Jeri Kay said. "Thought you could trick me. To remind yourself that you're not smarter than me, you're going to talk like that dumb bimbo Ashlea that you hate so much from college until I tell you otherwise. Understand?"

Brandi stopped licking long enough to say, "Um, like, sure, Mistress. Brandi is sooo into that, y'know?"

"Good girl," Jeri Kay said. "You'll be a big hit at the club when I make you start stripping with me. And every night you'll bring me the money you made in your mouth and kiss my feet while I count it on your bare back. You'll like that, won't you?"

"Totally, Mistress. Brandi will do whatever the fuck you say do 'n' stuff."

"I know she will," Jeri Kay said, her excitement building as her orgasm drew near under Brandi's dedicated ministrations. "Once she's proved her loyalty by becoming a dumb bimbo stripper and getting her tits done, she's going to help me do something important."

"Mmm, like what, Mistress?"

Jeri Kay's fingers tightened in Brandi's hair. "She's going to help recruit her brother and sister for her little slave family. She's going to help her Mistress get revenge."

\* \* \*

Heather Everett had spent a great deal of time trying to forget that Jeri Kay had ever happened. Once she'd called her bank to make the last transfer of money to Cassidy's account, she'd headed down to her favorite little bar on the corner and sipped some expensive champagne to celebrate, and the sexy little red teddy in the bag in her back seat was to celebrate later, with Gordon. She'd grown to love him very deeply, but there was always that secret between them, left unspoken, that left a pallor and a cold weight where Heather desperately wanted a warmth and freedom. Perhaps her instincts were right, that the

relationship was doomed to fail. If that was the case, she intended to stay with it as long as she was able, and milk the most from it while it lasted.

She pulled her Mercedes into the long driveway and gathered up her briefcase and the bag from the lingerie store, jingling her keys in her hand as she walked to the door. Hers and Gordon's work stood to make them both an incomprehensible amount of money, and she looked at her house, already thinking in terms of renovations. She was just considering the tiles she would put in the entryway when she turned her key and shouldered the door open.

She dropped her briefcase and bags in total shock. Gordon was on his knees, looking at her with a pleading look and tearful eyes over the black ball gag stretching his jaw wide. His hands were trussed to his ankles and he was stripped down to only his boxer shorts. His muffled cry of alarm was a bit too late. Heather never turned before the slender tanned hands with the expensive manicure clamped over her mouth and the cold sting of the needle in her arm, followed by the pressure and numbness of an injection, bit into her arm. The floor seemed to convulse and she was let down slowly to the parquet floor she'd only moments ago considered re-doing.

The busy hands continued, removing her charcoal-grey business suit and leaving her only in the lacy black bra and panties she wore underneath. Her wrists were bound to her ankles, forcing her into a very straight-backed kneeling position, and the cold rubber of the ball gag forced between her teeth stretched her jaw wide and made it difficult not to drool. The strong hands dragged her up to her knees and across the floor with a high-pitched squeak of skin on hardwood, to position her next to her lover.

The busy hands released the grip they'd had on her armpits and the woman crossed in front of them. She was short, with a wild curly mane of brassy honey blonde, impossibly large breasts on a slender ribcage and wearing thigh-high PVC boots with a towering platform and heel and a shiny patent leather teddy corset and a high collar. Large, bee-stung collagen-enhanced lips stretched back into a smile over perfectly white porcelain veneers as overlong false eyelashes brushed high, rouged cheekbones.

Heather stared. The differences were glaring, but the similarities remained. The hair was different, and the body and even the carriage and body language, but it was her niece. She tried to say Cassidy's name, but the gag prevented it.

"Is Mistress, like, pleased?" Cassidy asked in a pleading, expectant soprano.

The *click-clack* of heels on hardwood was a staccato prelude to the arrival of Jeri Kay. Her platinum blonde mane was gathered atop her head in a tight horsetail which cascaded over one shoulder in a lustrous fall. She wore heavy eye makeup which, against her pale skin, made her eyes veritably pop off of her creamy face. She smoked a cigarette languorously, a tiny but malicious smile playing over her full, glossy lips. She wore a long black cashmere coat which draped to her ankles, underneath a two-piece patent leather version of Heather's two-piece business suit and thigh-high platform boots similar to Cassidy's. Silk stockings peeked over the tops of them, held in place by garters of delicate gold chain.

"Mistress is very pleased, Brandi," Jeri Kay said. "You may touch your disgusting little pussy now if you like."

Brandi/Cassidy fairly jumped, skittering across the floor on her platforms while bubbling "Thank you, Mistress." From the corner of her eye, Heather could see her niece sitting spread-

eagled on the little bench by her front door, pushing her tight vinyl panties out of the way and masturbating furiously, tiny little moans of pleasure escaping her.

"You have to excuse Brandi," Jeri Kay said coolly. "All this sneaking around and breaking into houses has gotten her really excited. She's been begging to touch herself for hours. I hope you don't mind."

The slow, measured *click-clack* of Jeri Kay's heels on the floor circled around behind her. "I'm sure you're dying to know what brings me here," she mused. "Basically, you shouldn't ever trust a secret like the one you kept from me to a stupid little bitch like Brandi. She couldn't keep it, and now I know everything."

A loud, resounding *flop* on the floor drew Heather's and Gordon's eyes to the thick file folder she'd dropped between them. Pages had spilled out across the foyer, detailing the entire procedure of Jeri Kay's transformation and several documents that Heather thought had been destroyed which detailed the cover-up. Heather's eyes focused on an affidavit from the artist who had 'dummied up' all the photographs in Jeri Kay's apartment.

"You'd be surprised how much information people are willing to give a blonde stripper with big tits who's willing to blow them," Jeri Kay commented. "I have your asses, Doctors. I could ruin you, put you in jail, destroy your careers, whatever the hell I wanted to do to you and the state and federal courts would back me up all the way."

She leaned very close to Heather then, filling her field of vision. The brilliant eyes sparkled as a most unpleasant smile crossed the perfect porcelain face.

"But I think I have a better idea."

She drew out another syringe from the pocket of her coat. Heather thought she might have screamed, but the sound of Brandi/Cassidy's squealing orgasm in the corner drowned it out.

\* \* \*

There were no parties like stripper parties. The booze flowed like water, and clothing came on and off with no regard for typical social mores. Beautiful uninhibited girls could be dancing naked on coffee tables or having sex in corners or playing Xbox or making brownies in the kitchen with equal probability. Jeri Kay loved it, and she loved them, even the ones she thought were bitches or drama queens. She never knew what to expect, and every day with her friends was a surprise.

She walked in from the pool, wearing a barely-there bikini and wrapped with a damp towel, still a little aroused from the tequila body-shots her friend Alexis had done from her bellybutton. She made her way through the lounge and across the foyer of her new home, now done in adobe tile instead of the parquet it had boasted when she'd first acquired the house.

"Great place, JayKay," her friend Kaylee said where she danced in a huge knot of delectable exotic dancers and their boyfriends which seemed to be predominantly Latino and well-muscled.

"Glad you like it, baby," she shot back. "Can't believe my aunt just left it to me."

"Yeah, no shit," Kaylee replied. "Some bitches get all the luck."

"I told you, baby girl, you can stay here anytime you want," Jeri Kay said, shouldering through the crowd and into the kitchen. Three of her friends from the club - *her* club, now, since she'd very quietly bought it just two weeks ago - were having a fight with cans of whipped cream that was rapidly evolving into something much more interesting than a fight. Several men looked on with open appreciation.

"Are y'all enjoying yourselves?" Jeri Kay asked.

"You know it," one of them called back. "Get your sexy ass in here and get you some of this, bitch!"

"A little later, honey," Jeri Kay replied, tempted. "Hey listen, can I get y'all anything?"

"Another round of shots!" one of the whipped-cream girls hooted, stuffing her generous breast and its load of white topping into the waiting mouth of another laughing girl.

"You got it," Jeri Kay said, and pressed the button on her remote with a long thumbnail. She leaned against the wall momentarily, lighting a cigarette, when Heidi came tottering in on her platform heels, the ruffled petticoats holding up the hem of her vinyl French maid's uniform bobbing with her every shortened step.

The woman who had once been Dr. Heather Everett had the requisite waist-length mound of pale blonde hair which was gathered in an up-do which let some the kinky curls escape to frame her perfect china-doll face with the "done" lips and sparkling eyes. The corset sewn into her uniform lifted her perfectly spherical, 36DD breasts high into mouth-watering cleavage.

"Heidi, more shots in here," Jeri Kay said.

"Um, like, right away, Mistress," she bubbled, bobbing a quick curtsy as she started away. Jeri Kay grinned to herself and smoked her cigarette as she waited for her slave to return. None of the people at her party, much less the people in her life, even raised an eyebrow about the live-in slaves that Jeri Kay kept. One thing about strippers - women who worked in such a sexually charged environment around uninhibited people tended to have *very* open minds when it came to sex and sexuality. Jeri Kay had even had some offers from some of her more adventurous coworkers to borrow her slaves, and Jeri Kay was considering it strongly.

Heidi - once Heather, now forever the empty-headed blonde named Heidi thanks to long sessions of hypnotherapy and high doses of sedatives - came tottering back in on her skyscraper heels, looking back over her shoulder as she presented the tray of amaretto shots to the giggling, whipped-cream soaked girls.

"What is it, Heidi?" Jeri Kay asked as she walked back towards the den.

"One of the men in there, Mistress, he, um... he, like, asked me to do some stuff to him," she said shyly, blushing. "To, like, his dick 'n' stuff."

"You've been a very good girl, today, Heidi, I think you should," Jeri Kay said.

"Can I, really, Mistress?" Heidi asked, eyes bright.

"As long as you don't forget to do your other chores, I don't see why not. Where are Brandi and Stefanee?"

"Brandi is upstairs with three girls and their boyfriends," Heidi said, almost bouncing with excitement. "She's doing that, like, thing she does where people bet on whether or not she can make a whole bunch of people cum at all the same time."

"And Stefanee?"

"She's fucking some girl on the pool table while she sucks her boyfriend's dick," Heidi said, smiling. The process of turning Gordon Chambers from the tall, rangy male doctor into the smiling, empty-headed Stefanee with the wasp-waist and the 36DD tits and mane of pale blonde hair had been expensive and long, but it was worth it to have an irresistibly sexy female slave with a dick implanted to ten inches under her skirt around the house. Heidi was still in love with her former partner, and Jeri Kay couldn't find cruelty enough to keep them apart. The best part was that Stefanee was the still horny like a boy, so she was the most inexhaustable and inventive of the lot.

"Can I go now, Mistress, please?" Heidi begged. She liked begging, now, since she'd been transformed.

"Tell Stefanee that if she cums on the felt she has to lick it clean," Jeri Kay said. "Then you can go fuck all the boys."

Heidi gathered up Jeri Kay's hand and kissed it warmly. "I love you, Mistress. You make me so, like, happy 'n' stuff."

Jeri Kay smiled as she ran away into the next room, giggling. "Happy," she mused, looking at her reflection in the glass of the French doors. For a moment, she almost thought that she could see the reflection of a tired-eyed middle-aged man staring back at her, smiling. With the party going on around him, he seemed to be having a pretty good time.

"Happy," Jeri Kay whispered, drawing on her cigarette.

Ω